

THE SMOKING AND HEALTH ISSUE IN NEWSPAPERS: INFLUENCE OF REGIONAL ECONOMIES, THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE AND NEWS OBJECTIVITY

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This study examined the possible influence on newspaper coverage of tobacco-related issues by the importance of tobacco in the sample newspapers' economy, the public relations activities of the Tobacco Institute and the importance that journalists place on providing an objective balance of points of views in stories. Modest differences in "support" of tobacco were found in headline slant and in use of tobacco industry sources in major smoking-related stories when newspapers of different regions were compared. Stories show how the tobacco industry attempts to take advantage of reporters' desire to balance stories, but with only limited regional differences.

On January 11, 1964, Surgeon General Luther Terry confirmed what doctors and scientists had known for years: smoking was a primary cause of lung cancer and was strongly linked to emphysema and heart disease.¹

Since then, thousands of studies have only strengthened the case against cigarettes. Government estimates place the annual smoking-related death toll in the United States at 390,000 — or more than one in six deaths from all causes.² Such figures prompted former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop to label smoking "the chief, single avoidable cause of death in our society."³

Nevertheless, 49 million Americans smoke,⁴ and millions more have only a superficial understanding of the health risks involved.⁵ Given this state of affairs, many have accused the mass media of shirking their responsibility to communicate smoking risks. Certainly media

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Media Coverage of Smoking

coverage of smoking has fallen far short of that which would be expected on a public health threat of its magnitude. Why is that? A full understanding requires accounting for the various forces inside and outside media institutions that shape smoking coverage, including news routines, public relations efforts and economic forces (such as advertisers or the local economy). For smoking, as for other issues, these influences are related. Public relations workers exploit news routines, for example, while local economic pressures affect media organizations' susceptibility to the influence of powerful advertisers and public relations efforts.⁶

The possibility of regional economic influence on smoking coverage is quite probable, given the colossal size of the industry. This study searched for such influence in the daily press, comparing smoking coverage across geographic regions through textual and quantitative analysis. In the past, typical studies of economic influence on smoking coverage⁷ have examined the effect of cigarette advertising on magazine content. Our approach differed in three respects. First, we examined newspapers, a medium neglected in this field but one of considerable importance. Second, we sought evidence of regional economic influence on the assumption that daily newspapers have a vested interest in their region's economic health. And third, while past studies focused on the absence of stories about smoking (reasoning that prodigious cigarette advertising silences magazines), we chose to analyze smoking coverage as it exists. In so doing, we hoped to refine the economic influence hypothesis and fill a void in the literature by illustrating how influence is possible beyond simple suppression.

¹Elizabeth M. Whelan, *A Smoking Gun: How the Tobacco Industry Gets Away With Murder*. (Philadelphia: G. F. Stickley Company, 1984).

²American Cancer Society, *Cancer Facts & Figures-1990*. (Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 1990); *Cigarette Smoking and Cancer-Fact Sheet Number 2521*. (Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 1990).

³Ronald M. Davis, "Current Trends in Cigarette Advertising and Marketing," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 316:725-732 (1987).

⁴American Cancer Society, *op. cit.*

⁵See, for example: Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Kenneth E. Warner, "Cigarette Advertising and Media Coverage of Smoking and Health," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 312:384-388 (1985).

⁶For a systematic review of these influences, see Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content*. (New York: Longman, 1991).

⁷See, for example: Lauren Kessler, "Women's Magazines' Coverage of Smoking Related Health Hazards," *Journalism Quarterly*, 66:316-322, 445 (Summer 1989); Meredith Minkler, Lawrence Wallace and Patricia Madden, "Alcohol and Cigarette Advertising in *Ms. Magazine*," *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 8:164-177 (1987); R. C. Smith, "The Magazines' Smoking Habit," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February 1978, pp. 29-31; Joe Tye, "Buying Silence: Self-Censorship of Smoking and Health in National Newsweeklies," *World Smoking & Health*, Spring 1990, pp. 9-11; Elizabeth M. Whelan, Margaret J. Sheridan, Kathleen A. Meister and Beverly A. Mosher, "Analysis of Coverage of Tobacco Hazards in Women's Magazines," *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 2:28-35 (1981).

Objectivity and the Ritual of Balance. Despite the conventional wisdom that objectivity is a quixotic goal, journalists nevertheless strive to appear neutral in all disputes. Tuchman⁸ has argued that following "objective" procedures serves a defensive purpose for media organizations. Reporters, seldom having the time or expertise to verify the truth, rely on an appearance of impartiality to fend off criticism. This "strategic ritual" of objectivity — as Tuchman calls it — becomes a routine, often manifested in balancing stories: as a defensive strategy, journalists dutifully report the claims of both sides of an issue, making little or no editorial comment on either.

Smoking coverage is no exception. As Neuberger⁹ observed nearly 30 years ago, "Like the tail of a kite, no story about the risk of smoking goes anywhere without a tobacco industry rebuttal trailing along behind." Several scholars¹⁰ have argued that the balance routine proves dysfunctional on the subject of smoking, for while the case against smoking is ironclad, the tobacco industry "can cite no authority higher than their own propagandists and a shrinking handful of medical flat-earth men."¹¹

Influence of Public Relations Efforts. Although evidence on the effect of public relations efforts on press coverage is mixed,¹² interest groups on either side of the smoking issue still attempt to promote their views in the press. Public health advocates try to draw media attention to smoking risks while industry spokespeople dispute such findings. All too often, the tobacco industry comes out ahead in these public relations battles, simply by painting the issue as a "debate."

Notably, these public relations efforts help satisfy the requirements of the strategic ritual of balance. To create balance, journalists need opposing sources on any number of issues. Public relations workers are well aware of this need and exploit the objectivity routine by being highly quotable and highly accessible. For example, the Tobacco Institute — the cigarette industry's public relations arm — has advertised its toll-free number in journalism trade publications, encouraging reporters to call for "the other side" of smoking issues.¹³

⁸Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology*, 77:660-679 (1977).

⁹Maurine Neuberger, *Smoke Screen: Tobacco and the Public Welfare*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 26.

¹⁰See, for example: Bagdikian, *op. cit.*; Neuberger, *op. cit.*; Whelan, *op. cit.*

¹¹David Owen, "The Cigarette Companies: How They Get Away With Murder, Part II," *The Washington Monthly*, March 1985, pp. 48-54.

¹²See, for example: Robert B. Albritton and Jarol B. Manheim, "News of Rhodesia: The Impact of a Public Relations Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly*, 60:622-628 (Winter 1983); David B. Sachsman, "Public Relations Influence on Coverage of Environment in San Francisco Area," *Journalism Quarterly*, 53:54-60 (Spring 1976); S. Holly Stocking, "Effect of Public Relations Efforts on Media Visibility of Organizations," *Journalism Quarterly*, 62:358-366 (Summer 1985); James W. Tankard, Jr., Kent Middleton, and Tony Rimmer, "Compliance with American Bar Association Fair Trial-Free Press Guidelines," *Journalism Quarterly*, 56:464-468 (Autumn 1979).

¹³Whelan, *op. cit.*

Influence of the Regional Economy. The economic environment undoubtedly affects newspaper content as well. As businesses, newspapers are inextricably linked to the local economy; their two forms of financial support, advertising and issue sales, are largely functions of local economic health. For that reason, Molotch¹⁴ argues that a city newspaper must invariably promote growth. Moore¹⁵ found such economic boosterism at work in Flint, Michigan, where the *Flint Journal* consistently put a positive spin on stories about the city's largest employer, General Motors.

How might this regional economic influence appear in stories? We have argued that such influence constitutes one part of the system of forces constantly shaping media content. Instead of acting directly on content, economic influence encourages favorable coverage by making newspapers more susceptible to pressures from other forces in the system. Thus, we expect that economic influence from a major regional industry makes papers within the region an easier mark for public relations efforts; those efforts, in turn, exploit the objectivity routine in a way favorable to commercial interests. The result? Coverage favors the major regional industry.

The nation's tobacco-growing region would seem an ideal place to find such influence. As the region's primary cash crop, tobacco provides indirect economic support for all the newspapers in the region. More importantly, that cash crop is constantly under attack as a health threat. Consequently, papers in that region should be torn between two views: a responsibility to their readers requires thorough coverage of the latest smoking risks, yet that coverage directly indicts a major local industry. This conflict should bring any regional economic influence into sharp relief.

Smoking Coverage in the Daily Press. What kind of smoking stories might best reveal influences on content? Clearly, articles which impugn or threaten the tobacco industry would be fertile ground. We chose three such areas to examine: (a) stories mentioning the Tobacco Institute; (b) coverage of the American Cancer Society's annual Great American Smokeout in 1987 and 1988, when the Tobacco Institute promoted simultaneous counter-events to the Smokeout; and (c) coverage of David Burns, a scientist who, at the urging of the tobacco industry, was removed from an Environmental Protection Agency panel studying the hazards of "passive smoking," or inhaling others' cigarette smoke.

The Tobacco Institute. Formed in 1958, the Tobacco Institute is a Washington-based trade group supported by 11 major cigarette companies.¹⁶ Besides lobbying Congress on various tobacco-related issues, the Institute also serves as a public relations firm for the industry.

¹⁴Harvey Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," *American Journal of Sociology*, 82:309-332 (1976).

¹⁵Michael Moore, "How to Keep 'Em Happy in Flint," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 1985, pp. 40-43.

¹⁶Edward Zuckerman, *Almanac of Federal PACs 1990*. (Washington: Amward Publications, 1990).

From its inception, the Tobacco Institute has proposed to foster "public understanding of the smoking and health controversy."¹⁷ In practice, this has meant exploiting the routine of balance. Aside from positioning itself as the pre-eminent opposing source on issues of smoking and health,¹⁸ the Tobacco Institute has gone so far as to write indignant letters to newspapers that fail to contact them for a rebuttal on smoking stories.¹⁹

The Great American Smokeout. Now in its 14th year, the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout is an annual public relations event encouraging smokers to quit for at least 24 hours. The largest health promotion event in the country, the Smokeout in November of 1990 had almost 19 million participants — 38% of the nation's smokers.²⁰

In recent years, the Tobacco Institute has become increasingly proactive toward the Smokeout, seeking to mute its anti-smoking message. Two days before the Smokeout in 1987, the Institute took out full-page advertisements in seven newspapers to announce its "Great American Challenge": the Institute, asserting that cigarette smoke was not a major indoor pollutant, offered to pay to test the air quality in the American Cancer Society's non-smoking offices if the results could be publicized.²¹ In 1988, again two days before the Smokeout, the Institute purchased 17 full-page newspaper ads to proclaim its "Great American Welcome" — a proposed network of restaurants and businesses that would welcome smokers.²²

The David Burns case. Early in the summer of 1990, the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that involuntary exposure to cigarette smoke causes as many as 3,800 lung cancer deaths each year. In July, the EPA began selecting researchers for a 16-member panel to review its draft report. From the outset, the EPA enlisted Dr. David Burns, the nation's foremost expert on passive smoking and an outspoken opponent of cigarettes.²³ In his own words, "It's no longer open to debate ... this agent causes cancer."²⁴

In August, the Tobacco Institute sent a letter to EPA administrator William Reilly protesting that Burns' "involvement with the anti-smoking movement" would prevent him from conducting a "reasonable" review of the report.²⁵ After a Virginia congressman also wrote protesting Burns'

¹⁷Ronald J. Troyer and Gerald E. Markle, *Cigarettes: The Battle Over Smoking*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 97.

¹⁸Whelan, *op. cit.*

¹⁹Jim Schlosser, "Institute's Miller Is a Busy Man These Days," *Greensboro News & Record*, Sept. 12, 1988, p. c3.

²⁰American Cancer Society, 1990 Great American Smokeout press release.

²¹The New York Times, Nov. 19, 1987, p. a20.

²²The New York Times, Nov. 26, 1988, p. 31.

²³See, for example: Armando Acuña, "UCSD Scientist to Fight for Spot on EPA Panel," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 20, 1990, p. b3; Greg Johnson, "UCSD Expert Is Smoking's Archenemy," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 1989, p. b1.

²⁴Greg Johnson, "Smoking Is Losing, Claims Leader in War on Old Habit," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 21, 1989, p. b2.

²⁵Armando Acuña, "EPA Takes UCSD Scientist Off Smoking Panel," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. b1.

appointment, Burns was removed.²⁶ Burns took his case to the media, and the subsequent publicity resulted in Burns' reappointment to the panel a week later.

Unlike the Great American Smokeout, this case casts the Tobacco Institute in a reactive role — that is, the Institute must defend itself against accusations of undue influence. Additionally, the David Burns case involves high stakes — of jury-rigging and collusion — making coverage of the story even more susceptible to the forces discussed above.

Applying the regional economic influence model to the three chosen areas of smoking coverage, we would expect to find substantial differences in those stories when compared across regions. Notably, though, we do not propose to establish whether economic influence does or does not exist — it does. In a capitalist system, the media are business entities whose survival depends on economic resources. Rather, we examine whether economic influence — particularly from region to region — is powerful enough to override other influences that might tend to standardize content nationwide, such as the shared routines of newswork or the publicized health risks of smoking (which should not vary appreciably across regions).

Method

Six states produce a vast majority of the tobacco grown in the United States; in order of descending production, those states are North Carolina, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia.²⁷ For our purposes, all newspapers in those states were considered tobacco region papers.

The VU/TEXT²⁸ newspaper data base was searched for stories on David Burns and the Great American Smokeout of 1987, the first year with a Tobacco Institute counter-event. Articles from two regional newspaper data bases — the West and the Southeast, the latter consisting primarily of tobacco region papers — were analyzed for textual similarities and differences. (The West region was chosen for comparison because comparatively little tobacco is grown there.) For purposes of illustration, Smokeout stories from 1988 were also examined.

The VU/TEXT system was also used to determine the number of stories each newspaper ran in 1988 containing the phrase, "Great American Smokeout," as well as the number of stories each paper ran containing both "Great American Smokeout" and "Great American Welcome." A similar search was performed on 1990 newspapers²⁹ using the terms "Tobacco Institute" and "American Cancer Society."

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Agricultural Statistics 1989*. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), p 93.

²⁸In 1991, the VU/TEXT newspaper data base contained 72 papers from across the country. (The data base contained slightly fewer newspapers in 1987 and 1988.) To augment the sample, a few articles were found in the NEXIS newspaper data base using the same search terms.

²⁹An attempt was made to add 1989 stories to the total sample, but many of the newspapers used for 1990 did not yet contribute to the data base in 1989.

To control for newspaper size, tobacco region newspapers were matched with similar papers outside the tobacco region using both circulation and city population.³⁰

Results

The David Burns Case — Differences in Text. By and large, newspapers communicated the David Burns case through five Associated Press (AP) stories. The first story, which ran on October 19, began this way:

A strong lobbying effort by the tobacco industry and a friendly congressman have succeeded in removing a respected scientist from an Environmental Protection Agency panel on secondhand cigarette smoke.

"I've never seen anything like this" in 12 years, said Steven Bayard, manager of the EPA project to assess passive smoking's health risks.

"I'm disturbed about this," he said Thursday. "I think it was lousy. I think it shows undue pressure, personally, from the tobacco companies and from the Congress."³¹

Notably, the first story directly attributes the dismissal to the efforts of the tobacco industry and describes Burns as highly regarded — which suggests an ulterior motive on the part of the tobacco industry. The piece soon falls into the familiar balance ritual of charge and counter-charge, although a context is provided for some claims, such as those of Rep. Thomas Bliley. "Bliley is a strong tobacco industry ally," notes the article.³² "Philip Morris is the largest private employer in his congressional district."

If regional economic influence was present, we would expect David Burns coverage to differ markedly in the Southeast. In particular, since this was a wire story, we would expect to find signs of systematic editing in the tobacco region papers — perhaps deleting "respected" before "scientist," or removing other material contrary to tobacco interests — all in the name of better balance.

Such was not the case. Most tobacco region papers ran the story unaltered, and where selective editing was suspected, it was never clear-cut. For instance, the *Charlotte Observer* deleted the third paragraph — in which Steven Bayard asserted "undue pressure" — and a sentence

³⁰Circulation figures were taken from Karin E. Koek and Julie Winklepleck, *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media 1991*. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991). While tobacco region newspapers were matched on the basis of circulation and city population, only the circulation matches will be discussed. (Matching by population produced similar results and confirmed the validity of the matching method.) In addition to controlling for newspaper size, this sample matching procedure should also control for other confounds (such as the possibility of newspapers deleting certain stories from their data base contribution), since those artifacts would not be expected to vary by region.

³¹Paul Raeburn, "Lobbying Removes Scientist From Smoking Panel," *The Houston Post*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a4; Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Industry's Lobbying Gets Scientist Removed From EPA Panel," *The Oregonian*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a17.

³²Raeburn, *The Oregonian*, *op cit*.

praising Burns in the eighth paragraph.³³ And the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, in recasting the lead to focus on their local representative, deleted the word "respected" before "scientist" and failed to causally link the dismissal to lobbying efforts.³⁴ Yet, in both cases, a preponderance of the story's negative assertions toward the tobacco industry remained unaltered.

Differences in Headlines. Although regional economic influence was not reflected in differences in text, economic influence was suggested by notable differences in headlines across regions for identical AP stories (see Table 1). Particularly for the first David Burns AP story, headlines from tobacco region newspapers framed the issue in a way more favorable to tobacco interests than did non-region headlines. Editors in the tobacco region might lack the time to systematically edit wire stories on smoking in response to economic influence but might slant the headlines on those stories to favor local industry.

Table 1 compares the headlines for the first AP story on Burns, and consists of every version of the story found using the Southeast and West regional VU/TEXT data bases. Interestingly, only two of five tobacco region headlines³⁵ directly attributed the dismissal to industry efforts. The *Lexington Herald-Leader*, for example, asserted only that Burns' removal was "linked to" lobbying efforts — a considerable understatement given the text of the AP story.³⁶

By comparison, six of eight headlines in the non-tobacco region directly attributed the dismissal to industry efforts. Moreover, the language used in the non-tobacco region headlines generally favored the industry less than language used in the tobacco region: "passive smoking expert"³⁷ versus "scientist opposed by Bliley,"³⁸ and "tobacco lobby ousts scientist"³⁹ versus "tobacco lobbyists triumph"⁴⁰ [italics added].

Thus, headlines — the element most easily controlled by local editors — produced the most notable, though not heavy-handed, differences across regions.

The Great American Smokeout — Coverage in the Southeast. Regional economic bias could appear in several guises: scant or negative

³³Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Backers Get Scientist Taken off Panel on Secondhand Smoke," *The Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. 6a.

³⁴Paul Raeburn, "Scientist Opposed by Bliley Is Taken off Smoking Panel," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. b6.

³⁵Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Lobbyists, Lawmaker Get Scientist off EPA Panel," *Daily Press/The Times-Herald*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a4; Raeburn, *The Charlotte Observer*, *op. cit.*

³⁶Paul Raeburn, "Removal From EPA Cigarette Panel Linked to Tobacco Lobby," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a6.

³⁷Paul Raeburn, "Passive Smoking Expert Forced Out," *The Sacramento Bee*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a27.

³⁸Raeburn, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *op. cit.*

³⁹Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Lobby Ousts Scientist," *The Times-Picayune*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a3.

⁴⁰Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Lobbyists Triumph: 'Anti-Smoking' Expert Removed From Panel," *Greensboro News & Record*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a2.

coverage of the Great American Smokeout, a soft-pedaling of the Smokeout's implicit health message, or, in 1987 and 1988, heightened coverage of the Tobacco Institute counter-events.

| Inside tobacco region: | Outside tobacco region: |
|---|---|
| Removal From EPA Cigarette Panel Linked to Tobacco Lobby ⁴¹ | Passive Smoking Expert Forced Out ⁴⁶ |
| Scientist Opposed by Bliley is Taken Off Smoking Panel ⁴² | Tobacco Industry Changes EPA Panel ⁴⁷ |
| Tobacco Lobbyists, Lawmaker Get Scientist Off EPA Panel ⁴³ | Tobacco Industry Lights a Fire Under Scientist. EPA Dumps Analyst From Panel Studying 'Passive Smoking' ⁴⁸ |
| Tobacco Backers Get Scientist Taken Off Panel on Second-Hand Smoke ⁴⁴ | Tobacco Industry's Lobbying Gets Scientist Removed From EPA Panel ⁴⁹ |
| Tobacco Lobbyists Triumph: 'Anti-Smoking' Expert Removed From Panel ⁴⁵ | Lobbying Removes Scientist From Smoking Panel ⁵⁰ |
| | Panelist Removed After Lobbying by Tobacco Industry ⁵¹ |
| | EPA Drops Smoking Expert ⁵² |
| | Tobacco Lobby Ousts Scientist ⁵³ |

TABLE 1
Headlines for
the Initial
Associated
Press Story on
David Burns

As above, the textual analysis revealed limited evidence of regional economic influence. Similar kinds of articles on the 1987 Smokeout were

⁴¹Raeburn, *Lexington Herald Leader*, *op.cit.*

⁴²Raeburn, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *op. cit.*

⁴³Raeburn, *Daily Press/The Times-Herald*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴Raeburn, *The Charlotte Observer*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵Raeburn, *Greensboro News & Record*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶Raeburn, *The Sacramento Bee*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Industry Changes EPA Panel," *San Jose Mercury News*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. 17a.

⁴⁸Paul Raeburn, "Tobacco Industry Lights a Fire Under Scientist: EPA Dumps Analyst From Panel Studying 'Passive Smoking,'" *Rocky Mountain News*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. 47.

⁴⁹Raeburn, *The Oregonian*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰Raeburn, *The Houston Post*, *op. cit.*

⁵¹Paul Raeburn, "Panelist Removed After Lobbying by Tobacco Industry," *St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. 15a.

⁵²Paul Raeburn, "EPA Drops Smoking Expert," *The Fresno Bee*, Oct. 19, 1990, p. a7.

⁵³Raeburn, *The Times-Picayune*, *op. cit.* While the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* story appeared in the Southeast regional data base, it was considered outside the tobacco region and included with the West region stories.

found both inside and outside the tobacco region, and stories on the Tobacco Institute's "Great American Challenge" were infrequent in both regions. Selective editing was not apparent in the wire stories, nor were the headlines noticeably slanted.

However, Table 2 shows that tobacco region newspapers were collectively less likely to run stories mentioning the 1988 Great American Smokeout, featuring only 31 stories to the non-tobacco region's total of 38 — a finding consistent with our hypothesis.

TABLE 2
Number of 1988 Stories Mentioning "Great American Smokeout" (GAS) and "Great American Welcome" (GAW)

| TOBACCO REGION | GAS only | GAS w/ GAW | NON-TOBACCO REGION | GAS only | GAS w/ GAW |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| <i>Atlanta Constitution/</i> | | | <i>Arizona Republic/</i> | | |
| <i>Atlanta Journal</i> ⁵⁴ | 4 | 3 | <i>Phoenix Gazette</i> | 11 | 0 |
| <i>Richmond News Leader/</i> | | | <i>Ft. Lauderdale News/</i> | | |
| <i>Times-Dispatch</i> | 2 | 1 | <i>Sun-Sentinel</i> | 14 | 1 |
| <i>Charlotte Observer</i> | 12 | 0 | <i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i> | 5 | 0 |
| <i>The Columbia State</i> | 0 | 0 | <i>The Fresno Bee</i> | 4 | 1 |
| <i>Lexington Herald-Leader</i> | 8 | 1 | <i>The Wichita Eagle</i> | 2 | 0 |
| | 26 | 5 | | 36 | 2 |

Note. Newspapers are matched horizontally by circulation. Total tobacco region circulation = 1,230,213. Total non-tobacco region circulation = 1,150,380.

The economic influence model would also predict a larger percentage of co-appearances between the Smokeout and the "Great American Welcome" in the tobacco states; that is, tobacco region newspapers would be more likely to oblige the tobacco industry and legitimize the "Great American Welcome" by linking it with the well-established Great American Smokeout. Although tobacco region papers were more likely to mention the "Great American Welcome" in tandem with the Smokeout (5 stories versus 2), and although those co-appearances represented a larger percentage of Smokeout stories in the tobacco region (16% versus 5%), it was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 [1] = 2.22, N = 69$).

Coverage nationwide. Beyond modest regional differences, however, Smokeout coverage nationwide illustrates the influence of public relations efforts through the exploitation of news routines. Indeed, in 1987 and 1988, the countervailing efforts of the American Cancer Society and the Tobacco Institute can be seen as a veritable duel for media attention. The American Cancer Society promoted the Smokeout

⁵⁴For some cities, VU/TEXT collapses two newspapers into a single search file. Such dual-newspaper files from inside the tobacco region were compared with similarly-sized dual files from outside the region.

with various photogenic kickoff events, like newborns wearing Smokeout T-shirts. The Tobacco Institute, on the other hand, promoted its own counter-events in the daily press and sought to portray the Smokeout as an attack on smokers.

Why did the Institute do this? Because such tactics encouraged the strategic ritual of balance, which worked to the industry's advantage. Reporters seemed more than willing, for instance, to write a pro-Smokeout piece on children releasing balloons with anti-smoking messages attached. But, to the extent that the Institute successfully framed the Smokeout as a source of conflict, journalists quickly took cover behind the balance routine, as this *New York Times* lead illustrates: "A tobacco trade group has offered to test air quality at the American Cancer Society's offices, saying it would show pollutants other than cigarettes foul the indoors. But the society called the offer a 'public relations ploy.'"⁵⁵

Journalists used the balance routine to stand back and let the two sides fight it out, as in this 1988 excerpt involving the "Great American Welcome":

"We're seeing an increasing shrillness on the part of vocal anti-smokers pushing for legislative restrictions," said Brennan Dawson, a spokeswoman for the Tobacco Institute, the industry trade group that organized the campaign. ... "We're going to protect our customers' rights, and our own rights." ...

"Our answer to the 'Great American Welcome' is that they are welcoming smokers to lung cancer, emphysema and cardiovascular disease," said Irving Rimer, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society.⁵⁶

Note that for the Tobacco Institute, smoking opponents are not "anti-smoking," but "anti-smokers" — that is, they oppose the people, not the behavior. In other Smokeout stories the Institute was less subtle in its labeling, as when President Walker Merryman commented on the American Cancer Society: "Their methods try to paint smokers as social pariahs."⁵⁷

Across the nation, reporters covering the Smokeout in tandem with an industry counter-event hewed closely to the balance routine and gave the American Cancer Society and the Tobacco Institute approximately equal billing. Thus, the Tobacco Institute was able to exploit the strategic ritual of balance and position itself as "the other side" of the Great American Smokeout "conflict."

⁵⁵Associated Press "Tobacco Group Ad Spurs Rift With Cancer Society," *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1987, p. a20.

⁵⁶Douglas C. McGill, "Tobacco Industry Counterattacks Campaign Theme: 'Welcome' Smokers," *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1988, p. 31.

⁵⁷Judith Egerton, "Fighting Fire With ... Tobacco Ads Counter No-Smoking Drive," *The Courier-Journal*, Nov. 17, 1988, p. b12.

The Tobacco Institute. We also expected heightened coverage of the Tobacco Institute in the tobacco region apart from any connection to the Smokeout. Just as economic influence would encourage tobacco region papers to legitimize industry counter-events by linking them with the well-established Smokeout, economic influence would also encourage those papers to legitimize the Tobacco Institute by linking it with the well-established American Cancer Society.

But notably, the latter would only apply in cases where it was advantageous to tobacco interests. All things being equal, regional economic influence would discourage coverage of the American Cancer Society — thereby muting its familiar anti-smoking message. But, in cases where mentioning the American Cancer Society is unavoidable (e.g., the Great American Smokeout), economic influence would encourage including the Tobacco Institute as an opposing source, to counterbalance the anti-smoking theme. In cases where the focus of a tobacco region story is the Tobacco Institute itself, economic influence would demand exclusion of the American Cancer Society — indeed, cancer should only be mentioned if absolutely necessary.

Expressed in testable terms, we would expect to find three things if regional economic influence is operating: (a) tobacco region newspapers devote more coverage to the Tobacco Institute than other regions, (b) tobacco region newspapers devote less coverage to the American Cancer Society than other regions, and (c) co-appearances of the Tobacco Institute and the American Cancer Society in stories represent a *smaller* percentage of total Tobacco Institute stories and a *larger* percentage of total American Cancer Society stories for tobacco region newspapers.

Table 3 illustrates that, collectively, the tobacco region papers did indeed devote more coverage to the Tobacco Institute in 1990, running 227 stories that mentioned the Institute as compared to the non-tobacco region's total of 131. Obversely, tobacco region newspapers were less likely to run stories that mentioned the American Cancer Society (1,872 articles versus 2,573).⁵⁸ Furthermore, the proportion of Tobacco Institute stories to American Cancer Society stories was much greater in the tobacco region than in the non-tobacco region ($\chi^2 [1] = 60.1, N = 4,743, p < .01$).

The third expectation — that co-appearances of the Tobacco Institute and the American Cancer Society would favor industry interests in the tobacco region — was tested twice. First, the number of tobacco region co-appearances was taken as a proportion of tobacco region stories that only mentioned the Tobacco Institute (17 to 210), and that proportion was compared to its non-tobacco region counterpart (13 to 118). Second, the number of tobacco region co-appearances was taken as a proportion of tobacco region stories that only mentioned the American Cancer Society (17 to 1855), and that proportion was compared to its non-

⁵⁸Because the American Cancer Society is a multi-faceted organization, the number of hits in Table 3 undoubtedly includes stories that do not directly address smoking (e.g., obituaries). But assuming such stories have an equal rate of occurrence in either region, the totals should still be comparable across regions.

region counterpart (13 to 2560). In both cases, the proportions were not significantly different ($\chi^2 [1] = .62$, and $\chi^2 [1] = 2.62$, respectively), although the pattern was in the expected direction.

| TOBACCO REGION | TI | TI w/ only ACS | ACS only | NON-TOBACCO REGION | TI | TI w/ only ACS | ACS only |
|---|-----|----------------|----------|----------------------------------|-----|----------------|----------|
| Atlanta Constitution/Atlanta Journal | 15 | 1 | 153 | Arizona Republic/Phoenix Gazette | 29 | 2 | 825 |
| Richmond News Leader/Times-Dispatch | 56 | 6 | 141 | Fl. Lauderdale News/Sun-Sentinel | 12 | 3 | 156 |
| Charlotte Observer | 49 | 3 | 538 | Pittsburgh Press | 14 | 2 | 114 |
| Memphis Commercial-Appeal | 3 | 0 | 256 | Seattle Post-Intelligencer | 11 | 1 | 35 |
| Norfolk Virginian-Pilot | 5 | 0 | 211 | The Fresno Bee | 16 | 3 | 340 |
| The Columbia State | 7 | 2 | 56 | San Francisco Examiner | 10 | 0 | 31 |
| Lexington Herald-Leader | 41 | 0 | 170 | The Wichita Eagle | 7 | 1 | 496 |
| Greensboro News & Record | 17 | 2 | 87 | Albany Times-Union | 9 | 0 | 77 |
| The Knoxville News-Sentinel | 0 | 0 | 18 | Atlantic City Press | 4 | 1 | 154 |
| Roanoke Times & World News | 5 | 2 | 65 | Gary Post-Tribune | 4 | 0 | 134 |
| Newport News Daily Press & Times Herald | 12 | 1 | 160 | Annapolis Capital | 2 | 0 | 198 |
| | 210 | 17 | 1855 | | 118 | 13 | 2560 |

Note. Newspapers are matched horizontally by circulation. Total tobacco region circulation = 1,915,961. Total non-tobacco region circulation = 1,822,368.

Thus, in sum, the possibility of regional economic influence can be said to have been strongly supported by the first two prongs of our test for Tobacco Institute coverage in the Southeast (heightened coverage of the Tobacco Institute compared to coverage of the American Cancer Society), and only mildly supported by the third prong (co-appearances that favor the interests of the tobacco industry).

In this study, we have attempted to turn a spotlight on those forces orchestrating media coverage of smoking, especially those operating at the regional level. This study found signs of regional economic influence from the tobacco industry in three areas: (a) a pro-tobacco spin on headlines for the David Burns story in the tobacco region, (b) comparatively less tobacco region coverage of the Great American Smokeout in 1988 and slightly more coverage of the "Great American

TABLE 3
Number of 1990 Stories Mentioning "Tobacco Institute" (TI) and "American Cancer Society" (ACS)

Discussion

Welcome," and (c) comparatively much more tobacco region coverage of the Tobacco Institute in 1990 and much less coverage of the American Cancer Society.

One might logically ask, "Why shouldn't the Southeast feature the Tobacco Institute more prominently?" After all, tobacco is a major cash crop in the region. We would argue that far from a local tobacco growers' cooperative, the Tobacco Institute is one of the world's best public relations firms, bent on increasing the profits of its paymaster, the cigarette industry. Clearly, allowing the Tobacco Institute an open forum cannot reasonably be said to educate the public, but instead can be seen as a means of bowing to economic pressure under the guise of newsworthiness.

Overall, the lack of more striking regional differences in smoking coverage suggests that shared news routines and wire stories exert a standardizing influence on coverage. Still, it could be that Southeast region papers express support for the tobacco industry in forms outside the scope of this study, such as fluff profiles of Tobacco Institute employees.⁵⁹

And we cannot dismiss tobacco's economic clout as an influence on content nationwide. For example, in exploiting the objectivity routine, the Tobacco Institute creates a "false balance" between tobacco interests and public health, an influence on content which is national, not regional. This issue deserves more study than we can provide here, but suffice it to say that just as the objectivity routine proved dysfunctional during the accusation-ridden McCarthy years, so it would seem the balance routine proves dysfunctional on the subject of smoking and health.

Here, we have considered economic influence in conjunction with the routines of news work — in particular, the strategic ritual of balance. According to the hierarchical model of influences on content suggested by Shoemaker and Reese,⁶⁰ economic influence and routines influence belong to different levels, but combining their explanatory power helps connect analysis across levels. Thus, the routines of newswork become in this case a channel through which economic influence is manifested. By isolating such manifestations of influence as slanted headlines, selective editing, or "balancing" of sources, and integrating those findings within a theoretical perspective, we hope to provide insights into what shapes daily press coverage of smoking as well as to provide a framework for future study on other important public issues.

⁵⁹Schlosser, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰Shoemaker and Reese, *op. cit.*

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