Individual versus corporate responsibility for smoking-related illness: Australian press coverage of the Rolah McCabe trial

MELANIE WAKEFIELD, KIM McLEOD and KATHERINE CLEGG SMITH
Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, The Cancer Council Victoria, Australia and Health Research and Policy Centers, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL, USA

SUMMARY
This paper provides a thematic frame analysis of Australian newspaper reporting of the outcome and implications of the trial of Rolah McCabe versus British American Tobacco Australasia (BATA). In this trial, a Melbourne woman was awarded A$700 000 damages for smoking-attributable lung cancer when the defendant, BATA, had its case dismissed due to document destruction. In 60 commentaries from Australian national or capital city newspapers between 12 April and 9 May 2002, a total of 79 instances of eight tobacco-related frames were identified. Overall, 43% of the 79 instances were positive for tobacco control, 46% were negative for tobacco control and 11% were neutral. The most common frame that was negative for tobacco control (in 35% of articles) was the conception that smokers exert ‘free will’ in deciding to smoke and should therefore be personally responsible for their smoking and any disease that arises as a result of it. A related, but less commonly employed frame (in 18% of articles) was the expressed fear of a ‘slippery slope’ of litigation, which portrayed smoking as similar to eating fast food or other ‘vices’. The most common frame that was positive for tobacco control (in 35% of articles) was the notion that the tobacco industry was ‘evil’ and, to a lesser extent, that the government should ‘do more’ to control smoking (15% of articles). These findings provide a sobering public health challenge to improve public communication efforts about the powerful forces that conspire to induce people to start smoking and keep them smoking for decades, despite a strong desire to quit. There is a need to fund public education programs and quit smoking services more adequately to address the complex education task of understanding the nature of addiction to tobacco and the enormity of the health risk.

Key words: frame analysis; jurisprudence; legislation; media advocacy; smoking

INTRODUCTION
In 11 April 2002, a Victorian Supreme Court jury ordered British American Tobacco Australasia (BATA) to pay Mrs Rolah McCabe, a 51-year-old woman dying of lung cancer, A$700 000 in damages. The legal case attracted considerable national and international attention, not only because Rolah McCabe was the first Australian to obtain a damages verdict against the tobacco industry, but also due to the remarkable circumstances under which the verdict was reached. After a 16-day pre-trial hearing, Justice Eames dismissed BATA’s defence and entered a judgement for Mrs McCabe without proceeding to trial on liability, on the ground that BATA and its solicitor Clayton Utz had subverted the process of discovery (the process by which relevant
documents are brought before the court to enable a fair and informed decision to be reached) with the deliberate intention of denying a fair trial to the plaintiff, and that the strategy to achieve that outcome was successful (Liberman, 2002). The judgement held that BATA and Clayton Utz had subverted the discovery process by: (i) the deliberate destruction of thousands of documents, beginning in about 1985; (ii) misleading the court as to what happened to the missing documents; and (iii) ‘warehousing’ documents, i.e. having relevant documents held by third parties so as to keep them from discovery, but having access to them should they be necessary to defend a claim.

The Rolah McCabe case occurred at a time when tobacco litigation in the US had experienced a number of significant successes. These included: the November 1998 settlement between tobacco companies and 46 US states, known as the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA); settlements between tobacco companies and individual US states such as Minnesota, Florida and Texas; the Engle class action in Florida in July 2000, ordering cigarette manufacturers to pay US$145 billion in punitive damages to smokers; and several individual cases against companies, including cases brought by Whiteley, Henley and Boeken, which awarded substantial punitive damages to the plaintiffs.

Tobacco control advocates have generally expected that the news coverage of these settlements and cases would serve to highlight the deceptive and misleading conduct of the tobacco industry and emphasize the health hazards of smoking. The hope has been that as more information emerges from the discovery phase of these cases—concerning the industry’s awareness of the health effects of smoking and addictiveness of nicotine, the manipulation of nicotine in cigarettes to deliver the most effective dose to maintain addiction, and the companies’ concealment of these issues—there would be a better appreciation on the part of the public of the need to adequately fund tobacco control programs and to regulate the tobacco industry.

Our experience of press coverage relating to damages lawsuits should, however, suggest that caution is necessary with such an assumption of the positive effects of the coverage. People who sue tobacco companies have frequently found themselves to be the focus of wider public discourses about the issue under consideration in the trial. The media attention surrounding the circumstances and the outcome of the Rolah McCabe case was intense in Australia, and received considerable news coverage around the world. The examination of such news stories provides an insight into how the public and media commentators perceive smoking and tobacco companies and, importantly, help to frame the debate for policy makers and the public. Studying patterns of news commentaries in particular can help advocates to understand what issues are ventured as important in the public arena and, as such, provide important lessons for public education and advocacy. News reportage and commentary is neglected as a significant ‘background’ that needs to be brought into the foreground of explanations of how community and political attitudes change toward supporting tobacco control legislation and program support (Wakefield and Chaloupka, 1998; Chapman, 2002a).

Frame analysis is one method that is being increasingly incorporated into tobacco control research as a means of explaining the ways that dominant news discourses evolve and come to define the meaning of a problem (Christofides et al., 1999; Lima and Siegel, 1999; Malone et al., 2002). One theoretical argument underpinning frame analysis is that particular aspects of a wider reality are selected in the effort to make these selected emphases more salient, in order to promote problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and preferred courses of action (Entman, 1993; Menasche and Siegel, 1998). Accordingly, this paper analyses news reportage of the Rolah McCabe case using a thematic framing analysis.

**METHODS**

As part of an ongoing media monitoring strategy, Quit Victoria uses a national newspaper clipping service to obtain copies of all newspaper articles in national, major state-based and regional Victorian newspapers that mention the words ‘smoking’, ‘tobacco’ or ‘quit’. Of the articles obtained, we selected newspaper articles for 1 month after the day the outcome of the Rolah McCabe trial was announced, namely the period from 12 April to 9 May 2002. Articles that had at least one paragraph directly relating to the trial were deemed to be eligible for this study. The articles were drawn from national and capital city daily newspapers as follows: National (Australian/Weekend Australian and Australian
Financial Review); Melbourne (Age/Sunday Age, Herald Sun and MX); Sydney [Sydney Morning Herald, Sun-Herald (Sunday) and Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph]; Canberra (Canberra Times/Sunday Canberra Times); Brisbane (Courier Mail/Sunday Mail); Adelaide (Adelaide Advertiser/Sunday Mail); Perth (West Australian/Sunday Times); and Hobart (Mercury/Sunday Tasmanian).

In total, 105 articles in these newspapers had at least one full paragraph concerning the Rolah McCabe case. Of these, 60 were commentaries (columns, editorials, letters and cartoons), constituting 57% of coverage of the trial for the period specified. Every commentary focused specifically on the Rolah McCabe case and its implications, rather than mentioning it in passing. Initially, each of the 60 commentaries was read independently by two coders in order to identify the frames that were evident in the articles. The two coders then came together to discuss similarities and differences in their identification of frames that were positive or negative for tobacco control, or offered a mixed view or a neutral position in relation to tobacco control. Because a single article often presented a balance between frames, it was decided that each article could be coded for up to two dominant frames. Once agreement was reached on frame definitions, both coders re-coded the articles using these definitions, finding agreement in 80% of articles. A further meeting between coders was held in which a consensus was reached for articles where there had been disagreement with respect to the frame(s).

In addition, frames were classified as positive, negative or neutral for tobacco control. Frames that were positive for tobacco control advocated greater regulation for tobacco companies and/or greater funding for tobacco control. Frames negative for tobacco control worked against greater funding and regulatory options for tobacco control. Frames classified as neutral for tobacco control dealt with extraneous issues that had no clear bearing on tobacco control objectives.

RESULTS

Of the 60 articles, 40 (67%) were letters, 13 (22%) were columns, three (5%) were editorials and four (7%) were cartoons. Within these 60 articles, 79 instances of eight frames were identified; 70% of articles were coded as having one frame and 30% were coded for two frames.

Table 1 describes the frames appearing in the articles, according to whether they were positive, negative or neutral for tobacco control. Overall, 43% of the 79 instances were positive for tobacco control, 46% were negative for tobacco control and 11% were neutral. Table 2 indicates the frequencies of each of the frames. Overall, letter writers generated 81% of the 36 articles with a frame that was negative for tobacco control, but only 50% of the 34 articles with a frame that was positive for tobacco control and 33% of the articles with one of nine frames that were neutral for tobacco control.

Overall, the 30% of articles with two frames were mostly consistently positive, negative or neutral for tobacco control. However, seven of these articles used a combination of either oppositional or unrelated frames. Where a positive and negative frame was used, we assigned the article a ‘mixed’ view. Where a neutral frame was used with a positive or negative frame, the valenced frame took dominance. Thus, considering all 60 articles, 33% were positive for tobacco control, 48% were negative for tobacco control, 8% were of mixed view and 10% were neutral.

Frames that are negative for tobacco control

Free will: smokers choose their habit

This frame represents the smoker as an informed individual who actively chooses to start and continue smoking. Overall, 35% of articles contained this frame, making it the most commonly used frame that was negative for tobacco control. In the main, this frame was articulated by the lay public, rather than journalists, with 18 of the 21 instances of the frame appearing in letters to the editor. Smokers described the agency they attribute in relation to their own smoking, as explained in one letter:

I smoke a packet of cigarettes a day. I know that smoking is harmful. I know that by smoking I dramatically increase my risk of getting cancer as well as a list of other smoking-related ailments. Yet I still choose to smoke. What’s more, I enjoy smoking. I enjoy all those injurious little tars and resins. It is my choice to smoke. I have exercised my free will and accept the negative health consequences. (D’Cruz, 2002)

The idea that one ‘chooses’ to smoke necessarily entails accepting personal responsibility for the
consequences of smoking. The notion that smokers are powerfully addicted to cigarettes is minimized or even disregarded in this frame. As one smoker stated:

I have been smoking for 56 years and thoroughly enjoy it, but I am not going to sue the company which supplies my cigarettes if I die because of this habit. We are not forced by them to smoke; it's our responsibility. 

(Wilkinson, 2002)

This reasoning was extended to judgements made of Rolah McCabe, who was seen as having been awarded ‘a massive payout against a company marketing a legal substance. Whatever happened to people taking responsibility for their own actions?’ (Leeman, 2002). It was maintained that Mrs McCabe should have been aware of the health effects of smoking, but chose ‘to disregard the bombardment of TV, radio and

---

**Table 1: Frames used in press coverage about the Rolah McCabe trial**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame title</th>
<th>Frame description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frames negative for tobacco control</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free will: smokers choose their habit</td>
<td>Smoking is a choice: no one forces people to smoke. Citizens should be responsible individuals who accept they are ultimately accountable for their health and well-being. The general public has been well educated about the health risks of smoking, so people who smoke are fully informed about the possible consequences of their habit. Quitting smoking is a matter of engaging willpower and using the resources that are available, such as nicotine replacement therapies. Smokers are citizens making an informed decision to smoke, and as such have rights that should be respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The slippery slope of litigation</td>
<td>A culture of litigation will develop in Australia if the Rolah McCabe payment becomes a norm. If tobacco companies can be sued for the consumption of tobacco, next it will be alcohol and food manufacturers. Where will it all end? This is an undesirable trend in Australia: one that will feed the hip pockets of lawyers and raise insurance for everyone else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government profits from tobacco consumption</td>
<td>The government acts as a ‘hypocritical fiscal middleman’ between the tobacco industry and the consumer, deriving huge profit from the tobacco excise. Being financially implicated makes the government complicit with the tobacco industry in deaths resulting from tobacco use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frames positive for tobacco control</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice: smokers can’t help their habit</td>
<td>Tobacco companies use slick and persuasive marketing to promote their product. The individual is not to be blamed for responding to these messages and becoming hopelessly addicted to tobacco. Tobacco companies, not the smoker, should be held responsible if smoking results in disease and death. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance, and quitting a struggle for most smokers. This frame applies when the article is focused on the smoker, not the industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should do more to control smoking</td>
<td>The government is urged to take action to stop people smoking: it is suggested that tobacco companies could be sued or tougher legislation enacted. The government should use its power to regulate the tobacco industry. Providing health care for smoking-related disease is a cost borne by the non-smoking taxpayer. The government is called on to represent the concerns of constituents who are subsidising the health care of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil industry</td>
<td>The tobacco industry uses clever marketing techniques to promote tobacco in full knowledge of its addictive and lethal properties. It is not surprising they shredded documents to cover up their strategies for addicting more people to tobacco—this is an industry that promotes smoking as sexy and profits from a product that kills people. This frame also includes any sarcastic or humorous response to the tobacco companies’ behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frames neutral for tobacco control</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due process of law</td>
<td>The clarification or questioning of legal processes during the Rolah McCabe case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Articles where the frame is not sufficiently defined to fit into any of the seven other frames.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
newspaper advertising alerting everyone to the perils of smoking’ (O’Riley, 2002).

**The slippery slope of litigation**

In 18% of articles, mostly written by letter writers, fears were expressed that a culture of litigation would result from the Rolah McCabe lawsuit. The case was seen as indicative of ‘“the blame and claim” culture that had led us to the personal liability insurance crisis in which we now find ourselves’ (Olive, 2002) and ‘symptomatic of a broader trend in Australian society to reject a notion of individual responsibility; a trend to reject individual responsibility and assign blame to the deepest pockets’ (D’Cruz, 2002).

Writers expressed fears that Australia would follow the litigious path of the US. They explored potential litigation scenarios, portraying smoking behavior as no different from eating high-fat foods. For example, ‘If someone indulges themselves eating hamburgers or other fast foods and ultimately becomes obese, perhaps leading to heart disease, can they then sue hamburger retailers?’ (‘Rex’, 2002). And again, ‘I’m going to sue Cadbury. I blame them for my weight problem. I eat too much’ (‘Sweet tooth’, 2002).

As with the preceding ‘free will’ frame, the role of personal responsibility is emphasized and the role of addiction in preventing people from quitting smoking is ignored. As one letter writer advises: ‘We need to learn to take responsibility for our actions before the habit of litigation makes our daily existence a nightmare’ (Price, 2002).

**Government profits from tobacco consumption**

Overall, 7% of articles, equally letters and columns, focused in a satirical way upon the profit the government derives from tobacco consumption, through its policy of taxing tobacco sales. For example, it was contended by one writer that smoking will never be banned because the government is seen to ‘want the enormous revenue from the tobacco excise’ (McGuinness, 2002). As another columnist suggests, ‘If the price of a fag is death for her [Mrs McCabe] and $700 000 for me, what must we make of governments that make billions by setting themselves up as fiscal middlemen?’ (Sweetman, 2002).

Because the government receives revenue from the sale of tobacco products, some writers challenged the government as being complicit with tobacco companies in promoting smoking: ‘Why are people suing only the tobacco companies? Should the tobacco companies not seek to have their co-conspirator, the Government, joined as a co-defendant in each case?’ (Hodgson, 2002). This frame stops short of demanding tobacco control action by the government, but rather adopts a cynical approach to the purely revenue-raising function they perceive is being applied by the government in respect of tobacco products.
**Frames that are positive for tobacco control**

**No choice: smokers can’t help their habit**

Overall, 7% of articles contained this frame, most of which were columns. Within this frame, the smoker is represented as battling an addiction.

I find it interesting that there still are people who try to defend cigarette manufacturers by saying that smokers only have to say ‘no’. The very nature of addiction means that people don’t have control of their actions. (Burnett, 2002)

The columnists emphasize that smoking addiction is not the result of a choice and highlight the role that sophisticated tobacco company marketing plays in people becoming addicted to tobacco. One writer refers to ‘cigarette companies’ claims that it’s as safe as houses—with home warranty insurance, presumably’ (Williams, 2002). Another columnist relates to the powerful messages tobacco company advertising generates, allowing for a sympathetic representation of Rolah McCabe:

No advertisement, to my memory, ever said smoking was tough. I just knew it was because all the action heroes in the movies smoked. And, Mrs McCabe may well have noted, so too did all the vamps and heroines. In the battle between common sense and misplaced vanity, the odds were stacked against the individual, particularly when faced with the wiles of marketers and the science of advertising. (Sweetman, 2002)

**Government should do more to control smoking**

The 15% of articles in this frame were predominantly letters from the public demanding that the government take legislative and/or legal action to reduce tobacco smoking in Australia. A range of measures was suggested: ‘People, particularly very young people, should be strongly and clearly discouraged from taking up smoking. But at present there is no legislation in this sense. It’s about time something is done!’ (Gartner, 2002). More active attempts to seek redress through the legal system were also suggested: ‘I would be the first to applaud if governments were to sue the tobacco companies, as has happened in the US’ (Olive, 2002).

Letter writers defended the Australian taxpayer, who was seen to have ‘borne the bulk of the financial costs caused by the industry’s lethal product’ (Olive, 2002). One writer claimed the Australian taxpayer would only be compensated for payments towards the costs of treating illnesses relating to tobacco ‘when the government has the intestinal fortitude to stand up to this multinational!’ (Funnel, 2002). The government was called upon to take responsibility for the way that it is perceived to have contributed to tobacco companies’ ability to produce and market tobacco products. One writer warned, ‘If the federal Government, which we democratically elect, continues to allow people to smoke after this legal decision, surely they will be just as liable as any cigarette company’ (Jarvis, 2002).

**Evil industry**

The tobacco industry was negatively portrayed as an ‘evil industry’ in 35% of the articles, thus this frame is level with ‘free will’ as the most commonly used frame overall. This frame appeared in similar proportions in columns, editorials and cartoons (11 occurrences), and also in letters (10 occurrences). Interestingly, three of the four cartoons in the articles used this frame in delivering sarcastic representations of tobacco company behavior.

This frame focused upon exposing the perceived unethical workings of the tobacco industry in both general terms and in relation to the Rolah McCabe case. The tobacco industry was described as ‘making millions from peddling death and disease—and lying about it’ (Williams, 2002), with full knowledge that their ‘finest blends kill over 4200 Australians before age 65 each year’ (Chapman, 2002b). One writer flatly stated, ‘This is the industry that has knowingly been flogging a toxic, addictive and ultimately lethal substance to children for years’ (Carr-Gregg, 2002).

In the ‘evil industry’ articles, document shredding and concealment were presented as being consistent with behavior generally practised by a disreputable industry. Tobacco company documents were described as telling ‘a story of knowledge concealed from the public, of false reassurance offered to smokers, of products that were developed to be more addictive, yet sold as a healthy alternative to quitting’ (Penman, 2002). The case was portrayed as furthering an already tarnished company profile, as one journalist bluntly conveyed, ‘The Rolah McCabe case has left the giant British American Tobacco’s reputation smelling like your clothes after a night in a smoky bar’ (‘Smokescreen of Death’, 2002).
Frames that are neutral for tobacco control

Due process of law

A small proportion (10%) of articles were concerned with elaborating on the legal processes of the Rolah McCabe case. The majority of such articles interpreted the legal processes as unflattering to British American Tobacco’s reputation. As one columnist described:

So outraged was Justice Geoffrey Eames, he refused to hear arguments about whether British American Tobacco (BAT) could be held liable for 51-year-old Rolah McCabe’s terminal lung cancer. Instead, he found that BAT’s ‘document retention policy’—a quaint euphemism for the destruction of sensitive or embarrassing material—had already ensured McCabe would never receive a fair trial. (Jackman, 2002)

Another columnist offered a measured legal analysis of the case:

In years to come, advocates in higher courts will argue Justice Eames’s consequence for breaking the rules was discipline too strictly administered. Others will claim it was an entirely appropriate sanction, a timely reminder that rules should be respected. (Lobez, 2002)

The ongoing legal implications of the case were explored in one editorial, which asked ‘What are the implications for other actions pending against tobacco companies? How prevalent is the practice of “document retention” that might affect other trials in other places?’ (‘Documents up in Smoke’, 2002).

DISCUSSION

This study found that news coverage of the Rolah McCabe case evidenced views that were more often negative than positive for tobacco control. The most commonly employed frame underlies a sentiment that was negative for tobacco control—the conception that smokers exert free will in deciding to smoke and, as such, should be personally responsible for their smoking and any disease that eventuates from it. Another less commonly employed, but related, frame was the fear that a culture of litigation would develop that would inevitably lay the blame for other disease at the doorstep of any party other than the individual.

The sentiments evident in the news coverage of the Rolah McCabe case are in accord with the kind of arguments put forward by tobacco companies in tobacco trials between 1954 and 1996, prior to the release of tobacco industry documents. During this period, tobacco companies in the US and elsewhere were remarkably successful at convincing judges and juries that the smoker was entirely at fault for ‘choosing to smoke’ in the face of ‘known’ health risks (Daynard et al., 2000). These views, still strongly voiced in Australia in 2001, underline the power of victim-blaming rhetoric, attributing the responsibility for smoking solely to the individual (Chapman, 2002c).

Despite public education efforts to date, it is daunting to acknowledge that the public trivialises the addictiveness of smoking by comparing it to a habit akin to eating chocolate or fast food, as evident in the ‘slippery slope’ frame. As pointed out by Chapman (2002c), ‘The acres of documentary evidence now available on industry nicotine manipulation … evoke nothing less than imagery of scheming industrial chemists setting out to maximise addiction’. The addictive nature of smoking is emphasized by population survey results, which show that ~90% of smokers want to stop and that almost 80% of Australian smokers have tried in the past year but have been unsuccessful (Tan et al., 2000). On any single unaided quit attempt, >95% of smokers will fail [US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 1990].

The strength of this discourse of ‘free will’ emphasizes only too well that public education efforts still have a long way to go in helping smokers to understand the nature of addiction to tobacco and the enormity of the health risk. To the extent that smokers view their own smoking as an issue of personal responsibility, their receptiveness to taking up effective smoking cessation programs and products may be low. The tendency for smokers to grossly underestimate health effects of smoking relative to other risk behaviors, to find it difficult to personalize the risk (Hanson and Kysar, 2001) and to discount the addictiveness of smoking, means that the public education task is extremely complex. Adequate funding for sustained and coordinated public communication campaigns, and efforts to require tobacco companies to inform consumers better are required.

In contrast, frames that are positive for tobacco control highlight the unacceptable conduct of the tobacco industry, or, to a lesser extent, the need for governments to do more to help people quit smoking and deal more effectively with the
Previous surveys have found that the public holds the tobacco industry in low regard. For example, a population survey of >800 South Australian adults in late 1998 found that tobacco company executives were rated the lowest out of seven professional groups with regard to honesty and ethics, with 74% of respondents judging them to have low or very low standards (Wakefield et al., 1999). In the US, despite several years of televised corporate image advertising, Philip Morris scored second to last in 2001 in a survey of corporate reputations conducted by the Reputation Institute and Harris Interactive (Alsop, 2001). These findings may have been aided by mass media public education efforts that highlight the deceptive and misleading practices of the tobacco industry (Farrelly et al., 2002). There may be a role for these kinds of public education messages in Australia.

This analysis identified differences with regards to the source of views that were negative or positive for tobacco control. Letter writers generated 81% of the articles in which a frame that is negative for tobacco control was given prominence, but only 50% of the articles with a positive frame. Outrage at perceptions of lack of personal responsibility may be more likely to elicit letter writing, whereas outrage at the tobacco industry may be more difficult for the public to muster in an era when unethical corporate behavior has been examined so closely (Barry, 2002; White, 2002). In addition, it may be the case that the victim-blaming invective lends itself better to articulation in the shorter news pieces, which typically comprise letters to the editor, while concern about tobacco industry behavior may be a more complex issue to convey in such a succinct fashion.

Commentaries from the media (columns, editorials and cartoons) were predominantly positive for tobacco control (17 positive frames compared with seven negative frames), whereas commentaries from the public (letters to the editor) were predominantly negative (17 positive frames compared with 29 negative frames). Since only two of the media commentaries were written by known tobacco control advocates, one interpretation of this is that tobacco control advocates may have ‘won over’ journalists to a greater extent than the letter writing public. However, it is unknown to what extent letters may have been purposively generated by tobacco lobby groups, and, of course, editorial selection processes conceal the underlying volume and slant of letter-writing views.

It is important for tobacco control programs to build measures of the prevalence of these public sentiments into their monitoring and evaluation systems, including population surveys. In essence, such measures in part reflect the success or otherwise of public education campaigns and media advocacy for tobacco control, but also tap the effectiveness of public relations efforts by tobacco companies.

In summary, this study indicates that a discourse of personal responsibility for smoking and smoking-related illness may still pervade Australian culture. However, portrayals of the tobacco industry as ‘evil’ and requiring more attention by policy makers is equally evident in news coverage. Tobacco control advocates need to take heed of these widely used public discourses in framing future arguments for improved funding for tobacco control and in designing public education programs.

**Address for correspondence:**
Melanie Wakefield, Director
Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer
Cancer Control Research Institute
The Cancer Council Victoria
1 Rathdowne Street
Carlton
Victoria
Australia 3053
E-mail: melanie.wakefield@cancervic.org.au

**REFERENCES**


