

# HOW THE PRESS FRAMED NEW YORK CITY'S SMOKING BAN: AN ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

**Catherine Siebel**  
PhD Candidate  
University of Illinois – Chicago

Presented at the 2006 meetings of the  
American Sociological Association  
August 12<sup>th</sup> - Montréal, Québec, Canada

## ABSTRACT

In August of 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City announced a proposal to ban smoking in all NYC workplaces, including bars and restaurants. This initiative, conceived as a tobacco control measure that would protect workers' health, was hotly contested – and ultimately successful. Several major cities across the nation were considering similar laws at the time, and New York was viewed as both a bellwether and a test case for other places. As a result, the ban garnered a great deal of national news coverage. This project has two goals: to identify the salient frames used in newspaper coverage of the ban, and to challenge the tacit assumption that frames remain constant across media outlets. First, using an inductively-derived, theoretically-driven coding protocol, this project identifies the resonant frames that the press drew upon in its coverage of NYC's smoking ban. Coverage was organized around four major frames: Economic Impact; Influence on Health, American Ideology; and Image of Cool. The second half of the project looks at variation in coverage across newspapers, both through the frames themselves and the journalistic practices that are used to promote those frames. Differences among coverage in New York City<sup>1</sup>, Midwestern states<sup>2</sup>, and two states in which smoking bans were enacted before New York City proposed a ban<sup>3</sup> will be explored.

## **THE ECONOMIC IMPACT FRAME**

### ◦ **Cost to Smokers, Bars & Restaurants, Society**

◦ **59%** of all articles; **47%** of NYC Articles; **61%** of Delaware & California Articles; **63%** of Midwest Articles.

### ◦ **Example**

“[With the smoking ban now in effect,] once again the people of this city will head to New Jersey. Why shouldn't we? Their bars will welcome us with open arms.” [*New Jersey Reaps Benefits of Mayor's War on Smoking*, Staten Island Advance, 4/10/03].

## **THE HEALTH FRAME**

### ◦ **For Smokers, Bar Workers, Patrons, General Non-Smokers**

◦ **63%** of all articles; **44%** of NYC Articles; **74%** of Delaware & California Articles; **71%** of Midwest Articles.

### ◦ **Example**

“To the mayor, who has said he would like to see smoking outlawed in all bars, restaurants, and outdoor cafes, the smoking bill is a worker protection measure and the most important municipal legislation he has sought since taking office.” [*Councilwoman Sees No Vote on Smoking Ban This Year*, NYT, 11/13/02].

<sup>1</sup> New York City includes newspapers from: New York City; Brooklyn; Staten Island; The Bronx; Queens; and Long Island.

<sup>2</sup> “Midwest” uses the Census's demarcation: Indiana; Illinois; Michigan; Ohio; Wisconsin; Iowa; Kansas; Minnesota; Missouri; Nebraska; North Dakota; South Dakota.

<sup>3</sup> California and Delaware

## **AMERICAN IDEOLOGY FRAME**

- **Free Enterprise, Right/Freedom to Smoke, Right to Breathe Clean Air, Government Interference**
- **56%** of all articles; **50%** of NYC Articles; **65%** of Delaware & California Articles; **57%** of Midwest Articles
- **Example**

“Smoking may be a health hazard, but 25 percent of Americans do it, and we have rights just like other minorities in the United States. In America, the majority rules, but the minority also has rights.” [*Lifeguard*’ *Mike Should Butt Out of Smokers’ Business*, New York Post, NYC, 8/16/02]

## **THE ‘IMAGE OF COOL’ FRAME**

- **New York City as Cool & Divers, Smokers as Sexy & Classy, Pro-Ban People as Goody Two-Shoes, Smokers as Renegades and Pariahs.**
- **45%** of all articles; **36.0%** of NYC Articles; **65%** of Delaware & California Articles; **47%** of Midwest Articles
- **Examples**

“About 400 communities nationwide have adopted smoking bans in restaurants, according to the American Nonsmokers’ Rights Foundation. But none has New York’s history of smoking from the smoke-filled back rooms of Tammany Hall and the old neon cigarette signs of Times Square to the ‘loosie’ – a single cigarette sold in bodegas for as much as \$1...” [*Mayor Pushed Through Tough New Ban: Big Apple Goes Smoke Free*, Tribune-Star, Terra Haute, IN, 3/30/03].

“The owners had invited regular customers for one last hurrah to revel in the sort of night out that will go by the wayside Sunday, when the city banishes virtually all indoor smoking except in cars, private residences and a few pre-existing cigar bars. The room had the aura of a gentleman’s club, with rows of books in nooks along the walls, quiet and solicitous service, frequent puffing and an almost reverential sipping of the high-end spirits.” [*Dying Days of a Way of Life*, Newsday (Queens), 3/28/03]

“‘First they cleaned up Times Square, then they said you couldn’t dance in bars or drink a beer in the park. Now you can’t even smoke when you go out on the town,’ said Willie Martinez, 37, who sat, chain-smoking, in an East Village bar. ‘This is like no-fun city’.” [*This is like no-fun city*’, by Timothy Williams, Bismarck Tribune, 3/30/03]

“‘Now we’re being shut out of our smoky little joints,’ lamented Lyle Greenfield, a music producer who comes to the All State four nights a week. ‘What leper colony will we be sent to next?’” [*Time’s up: Cigarettes are put out in N.Y. bars*, Des Moines Sunday Register, 3/30/03]