

2. Reporting controversy in health policy: A content and field analysis

ABSTRACT

This article reports on the research and analysis of editorial attitudes and news reporting in two prominent Sydney newspapers—*The Daily Telegraph (DT)* and *The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*—about the establishment and operation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIC) in Kings Cross from January 1999 to December 2006. The establishment of the MSIC was highly controversial and generated strongly partisan attitudes among politicians, experts, local businesses and the general community. The research compares the editorial stance of these newspapers towards the injecting room and the reporting practices of the newspapers, in particular the range of sources used by the journalists; it deploys a content analysis to identify positive and negative attitudes in the preferred readings of the texts, the usage of sources within the reports and the partisan affiliations of those sources. It reveals stark differences in the reporting of the controversy by the two newspapers, and that the reporting differences were aligned with the respective editorial policies of the mastheads. The interpretation of these empirical findings using field theory is located within the debates in the journalism studies literature about the power relationship of journalistic practices to the interests of sources.

Keywords: content analysis, field analysis, editorial policy, journalists' sources

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KINGS CROSS, an inner-city suburb of Sydney, over many decades has been a central location for the sex industry and illicit drug dealing. It is a high-density, cosmopolitan residential suburb with many small retail and service businesses. In May 2001, a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) was established in Kings Cross to lessen the risk of fatality by overdose among illicit drug users. Medically trained staff at the

facility were to be on hand to supervise the self-administration of drugs obtained privately by the users, to provide education and counselling services and if necessary to resuscitate users who suffered an overdose. The centre was to be managed by a religious organisation, initially a Catholic order of nuns and subsequently the Uniting Church.

The proposal and its implementation provoked considerable controversy. The key issues were whether it was appropriate to allow illicit drugs to be administered on premises operated by the NSW government and a religious organisation, and whether the MSIC should be in the main commercial thoroughfare of Kings Cross.

This research explores the relationship of Sydney's two major metropolitan newspapers to the MSIC debate. *The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)* is a broadsheet newspaper that targets affluent readers in the inner-city, eastern and northern parts of Sydney and is generally liberal on social issues. *The Daily Telegraph (DT)* is a tabloid that demographically targets a less affluent working class readership in Sydney's western and south-western suburbs and tends to be conservative on social issues. The *SMH* editorially supported the MSIC, and the *DT* opposed it.

We investigated the extent to which, in each of the two newspapers, reporting practices were aligned with editorial stance. The results are then discussed with respect to the debate in the literature about the relationship between journalists, their sources and the resolution of a social policy controversy, and how this might best be conceived. We deploy a field analysis, following Schlesinger (1990), Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), Benson and Neveu (2005) and Bacon and Nash (2006).

Timeline of events

1. The Royal Commission into Corruption in the New South Wales Police Force, 1994–1997

Commissioner Justice James Woods recommended the trial of a Safe Injecting Room (SIR), which led to the institution of a Joint Select Committee of the New South Wales (NSW) Parliament. This committee advised against the SIR (*SMH*, 24 February 1998).

2. The Drug Summit, May 1999

In early 1999, the *DT* reported that there were twelve injecting drug users dying by overdose each week in Australia (*DT*, 23 May 1999). In May 1999,

the NSW Parliament convened a ‘Drug Summit’, at which NSW Premier Bob Carr decided to support the trial of an MSIC and decriminalised the self-administration of illicit drugs (ABC Television, *The 7:30 Report*, 21 May 1999). This led to a public debate in which the NSW Parliament, the news media and the public were divided over the MSIC concept.

3. Cardinal Ratzinger’s response, 1999

The MSIC was proposed to be operated by the Catholic Sisters of Charity. In late 1999, Cardinal Ratzinger (subsequently Pope Benedict XVI) compelled the Sisters of Charity to withdraw from the MSIC project, leading to divisions in the Australian Catholic community (*SMH*, 23 April 2005).

4. Opposition to Cardinal Ratzinger’s response

Health care academics from the University of New South Wales, NSW politicians of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), and medical specialists, combined to support the MSIC trial (*SMH*, 3 November 1999).

5. United Nations’ position

The United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (UNINCB) demanded that the NSW Government stop the MSIC trial, much to the chagrin of some politicians (Illawarra Mercury, 26/2/2000). Former Australian United Nations (UN) diplomat Duncan Campbell suggested that another UN body—the Commission on Narcotic Drugs—was more sympathetic to SIRs (*Courier Mail*, 8 April 2000).

6. Wayside Chapel’s injecting room.

The Uniting Church, which, to counter public apathy in the late 1990s about the health of drug users, had very publicly organised an illegal injecting room in the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross, took over organising the MSIC. According to the MSIC Medical Director, Dr Ingrid Van Beek, the aims of the MSIC were to decrease overdose deaths, unsafe injecting practices and their visibility in public areas, and to provide drug users with access to health services and information (*DT*, 6 April 2001).

7. Opposers of the MSIC take their case to NSW Supreme Court

Opposers of the MSIC in Darlinghurst Road in Kings Cross took their case to the NSW Supreme Court but the case was dismissed (*SMH*, 6 April 2001).

8. MSIC quietly opens

On 6 May 2001, the MSIC opened discreetly in Kings Cross (*SMH*, 7 May 2001).

9. Debate in NSW Parliament

Politicians on both sides of the NSW Parliament threatened to cross the floor during a 2005 vote on the MSIC issue (*SMH*, 5 September 2005). Peter Debnam (who opposed the MSIC) replaced John Brogden (who supported the MSIC) as the Liberal NSW opposition leader (*Wentworth Courier*, 7 September 2005).

10. No 'honey pot' effect

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (NSWBCSR) concluded that there was no clear statistical relationship between the MSIC and drug dealing in the environs of the MSIC (*Sydney Central Courier*, 26 October 2005). The MSIC continued to operate with minor news coverage in 2007.

Theoretical framework

Nash and Bacon (2006, pp. 108-111) reviewed the literature on power relations between journalists and their sources, and followed Schlesinger (1990) in proposing to decentre the role of the media and deploy a Bourdieusian field analysis of the relationships between the media and other social fields, using the conceptual framework of field, capital, habitus, orthodoxy/heterodoxy and autonomy/ heteronomy. They argued for Mann's (1986) categorisation of fields against Bourdieu's. They argued that this provided a productive way to transcend the conceptual impasse between Hall's influential primary definer/secondary definer hierarchy (Hall et al., 1978, pp. 53-60), and Ericson's pluralist model of journalists' power vis-à-vis sources as 'authorised knowers' (Ericson et al., 1989). In particular, it met Schlesinger's requirement that a theoretical model should be able to address social power, but encapsulate contestation among powerful sources (Hall's primary definers) and variation over time (Schlesinger, 1990, p. 68).

We do not propose to recapitulate the 2006 discussion here, rather to test the empirical efficacy of the field analysis approach. The MSIC controversy provides a good case study because it involves interaction between a number of fields (the political, symbolic, economic and coercive) and contestation within the fields and sub-fields. Within the symbolic or ideological field in particular, there was contestation between the two newspapers in the media sub-field, and within the Catholic Church and between the Catholic and Uniting Churches in the religious sub-field. The political field was divided and subdivided at the parliamentary level, but united at the policy implementation

level of health professionals; the coercive field was divided within the police sub-field between pro and anti-MSIC positions; the economic field was united in the form of local Kings Cross businesses and in conflict with elements in the political, symbolic and coercive fields.

We commence with an account of the editorial positions adopted by the two newspapers, and then present a multi-dimensional content analysis of the media presentation and depiction of their sources, for whom the media representation was secondary and instrumental to their goals within their own fields of power. We follow this with a discussion of the strategic positioning and deployment of cultural capital by players within the various fields, and conclude with an evaluation of the approach as an insightful mode of analysing journalistic practice and power relations.

The empirical enquiry

Editorials

We identified editorials that focused on the MSIC in Kings Cross or SIRs in the *DT* and *SMH* from January 1999 to December 2006. There were six relevant editorials in the *DT* and six relevant editorials in the *SMH*. All of the *DT* editorials were opposed to the MSIC, and all of the *SMH* editorials supported the MSIC, so there was a clear, unequivocal and diametrical contrast between the editorial positions taken by the two mastheads to the issue. These positions identified the orthodox perspectives within those newspapers on this issue. The *Daily Telegraph* was quite unabashed in its stance, editorialising in 1999 that '[t]hroughout the course of the debate on the merits of the legally sanctioned injecting rooms for drug users, *The Daily Telegraph* has maintained an intractable opposition to any such proposal' (*DT*, 28 July 1999, p. 10). *The Sydney Morning Herald* did not declare itself to be in campaigning mode, but editorialised on the merits of various aspects of the issue as they arose in the news pages.

News and feature articles

Electronic database (Factiva and Newsbank) searches were conducted for *DT* and *SMH* news and feature articles that contained references to the MSIC over the period January 1999 to December 2006. Opinion pieces and letters to the editor were excluded because the research was focused on reporting practices. The results of this electronic search were then cross-checked with the newspaper archives of the State Library of NSW to ensure the ar-

ticles were published, confirming that over the period, a total of 167 published news and feature articles were substantially about the MSIC issue or reported something significant about the MSIC issue. Of these, 106 articles were published in the *DT* and 61 in the *SMH*, with an average word length of 306 and 520 words respectively. However, despite this discrepancy, the total word count for the two papers was similar (Table 1), explained by the tendency of the *DT* to publish more and shorter news reports and the *SMH* to publish fewer and longer articles.

We then analysed the articles for the following characteristics:

- negative and positive references to MSIC
- references to anti and pro-MSIC interest groups (IG)
- word count of anti and pro-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing

Because of the strongly polarised nature of the controversy in news terms, all of the references to either the issue or the sources could be identified as positive or negative, and none were identifiable as neutral. It is for this reason that the episode is so revealing in terms of the relationship between reporting practices, editorial line and sources.

Negative and positive references to MSIC

Each positive/negative reference was scored as one positive/negative unit and negative and positive references for each article were then added to give a total score, referred to here as the ‘M-score’. A negative M-score indicates an overall anti-MSIC preference and a positive M-score suggests an overall pro-MSIC preference in the reports. The *DT* articles in this sample had more anti-MSIC references while the *SMH* articles in this sample had more pro-MSIC references. The *DT* articles had an M-Score of -76 while the *SMH* articles had an M-Score of 75 (Table 1).

There is a remarkable symmetry in these results, which resonates with the symmetry of the editorial positions of the two mastheads, and establishes that

Table 1: Negative and positive references to MSIC

Newspaper	No. (%) of articles	Word count	% of total	Average words	M-score
DT	106 (63.5%)	32,469	50.6	306	-76
SMH	61 (36.5%)	31,706	49.4	520	75
Total	167	64,175	100	-	-1

the orthodoxy in news reporting aligned with the orthodoxy in the editorial leader articles. Despite the almost 2:1 difference in the number of articles, the number of words is almost the same, and the levels of partisanship in the reports are effectively equivalent and opposed. Neither masthead can claim to be less partisan than the other, though of course either of them could argue that their partisanship legitimately reflected the social and medical merits of the issue. Within the newsroom, this partisanship had to be accommodated within the parameters of ‘objective’ or fair and accurate journalism, balancing the evidence provided by authoritative sources on both sides of the debate. It is at the level of accessing sources and presenting their evidence that journalists construct their ‘web of facticity’ (Tuchman, 1978) for verification of their truth claims.

References to anti and pro-MSIC interest groups

We analysed each of the relevant articles to identify references to interest groups:

- positive references to anti-MSIC interest groups;
- negative references to pro-MSIC interest groups;
- positive references to pro-MSIC interest groups;
- negative references to anti-MSIC interest groups

The following parameters were established for the coding:

- Positive or negative references to MSIC were not recounted as positive or negative references to interest groups. Organisers of the MSIC were included as an interest group.
- Sources were judged as anti or pro-MSIC on a statement by statement basis over the eight years of the study. Some sources were listed as both anti and pro-MSIC at different times.

Table 2 sets out the results, which indicate that the partisanship on the issues extended to the interest groups involved, but with an interesting variation: the *DT* was less extreme in the scale of its negativity towards the interest groups opposed to its editorial stance, with a ratio of 40:26 for and against in mentions that aligned with its editorial stance, whereas the *SMH* had a ratio of 102:12 for and against in mentions that aligned with its editorial stance. Overall, despite producing slightly more than a third of the articles on the issue, the *SMH* referred to interest groups almost twice as much as did the

Table 2: References to interest groups (IG)

Newspaper	Positive ref to anti-MSIC IG or negative ref to pro-MSIC IG	Positive ref to pro-MSIC IG or negative ref to anti-MSIC IG	Total
DT	40	26	66
SMH	12	102	114
Total	52	128	-

DT, and because of the almost 10:1 ratio in the partisanship of their sources, there was in total a preponderance of support for the MSIC among the sources quoted. Again, these figures should not be read as simple indications of bias in the reporting, but may reflect on the number and status of sources and interested opinion in the debate. We will discuss this further below.

Word count of anti and pro-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing

Table 3 gives the word count of quotes and paraphrasing for each of the references, both pro and anti-MSIC. Word count was used rather than column inches to improve the reliability of the results. Again the partisanship is clear and matches editorial positions, but with some interesting nuances. Firstly, the *DT* gives slightly more words to quotes and paraphrasing than the *SMH* does, even though it refers to only slightly more than half the number of interest groups. That is to say, the *DT* references fewer sources but gives them on average more words, while the *SMH* refers to almost twice as many sources, but gives them on average fewer words than the *DT* does to its sources. Secondly, the *DT* is much more even-handed in the number of words it gives to the pro and anti positions, whereas the *SMH* gives almost three times as many words to the pro-MSIC sources as it does to their opponents. Again, this does not necessarily indicate that either one of the mastheads is misrepresenting the situation through bias—it may well be that

Table 3: Anti and pro-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing

Newspaper	Anti-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing	Pro-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing	Total
DT	5635 (53%)	4976 (47%)	10611
SMH	2452 (27%)	6485 (73%)	8937
Total	8087	11461	19584

there are more authoritative sources available to be quoted in support of the MSIC than against it, or on the other hand, that the *DT* is in effect being more even-handed and allowing the proponents to argue their cases at length.

To summarise the evidence thus far, the two mastheads are diametrically opposed in their editorial positions, and those starkly partisan positions are reflected in the news and features reporting on the issue as it unfolds. However, while the bias in the total number of references in the reporting seems to be equivalent and polarised (the M-score), the *DT* is more even-handed than the *SMH* in the number of words it gives to the opponents of its editorial position, while the *SMH* references and quotes many more sources than the *DT* does, and those sources are overwhelmingly aligned with the position taken by the *SMH* editorials. The *DT* gives its lesser number of sources more words to express their positions, while the *SMH* accesses more sources but gives them on average fewer words.

We then conducted a more detailed analysis of the categories and status of the sources being referenced, in order to establish how each masthead's reporting is aligned with what might appear to be the distribution of opinion in the various social groupings concerned with this issue.

Categories of sources of the quotes and paraphrasing

We identified the following 13 categories of sources for all the quotes and paraphrasing: politicians, New South Wales Police, judge or prosecutor or lawyer, Kings Cross business, Kings Cross resident, news media, United Nations and overseas organisations, health professional (non MSIC), health professional (MSIC), church or religious organisation, academic, drug user, and other. Numerically, the significant sources were politicians, NSW police, businesses, the UN's International Narcotics Control Board, health professionals and the churches and associated religious organisations. Table 4 depicts their relative presence in the reports in terms of words quoted or attributed.

The significance of these figures needs to be interpreted carefully. As far as the media were concerned, the major players in the debate were the politicians, the Kings Cross businesses, health professionals associated with the MSIC and the church organisations that were involved in the planning and management of the MSIC. Of these, politicians had well over twice the number of words as any other category of source, so we can say that for the media (more so for the *DT* than the *SMH*) this was primarily a political story.

Table 4: Words attributed to categories of sources

Newspaper		DT	SMH	Subtotal	Total
Politicians	Anti-MSIC	2020	635	2655	-
	Pro-MSIC	1996	1761	3757	6412
NSW Police	Anti-MSIC	336	0	336	-
	Pro-MSIC	47	299	346	682
Businesses	Anti-MSIC	1496	1153	2649	-
	Pro-MSIC	14	0	14	2663
UN (mainly INCB)	Anti-MSIC	628	230	858	-
	Pro-MSIC	0	0	0	858
Health professionals	Anti-MSIC	0	0	0	-
	Pro-MSIC	620	1719	2339	2339
Churches & religious org	Anti-MSIC	464	295	759	-
	Pro-MSIC	755	1200	1955	2714
Universities & academics	Anti-MSIC	100	26	126	-
	Pro-MSIC	192	800	992	1118

The *DT* gave approximately equal numbers of words to both sides of the debate, whereas the *SMH* gave almost three times as many words to pro-MSIC politicians as to their opponents, and overall gave almost one and a half times as much coverage to the politicians as did the *DT*. It is important to note that the Labor Party was unified behind its government's decision to support the MSIC, while the Opposition Coalition parties (Liberal Party and National Party) were divided between a small-l liberal wing supporting the MSIC (including John Brogden, Opposition Leader from March 2002 to August 2005) and a conservative wing opposing the MSIC (including Peter Debnam, who replaced Brogden as Opposition Leader for 2005-2007).

The Catholic and Uniting Churches were intimately involved with the MSIC. Originally, the Catholic Sisters of Charity were going to operate the Centre until then Cardinal Ratzinger (subsequently Pope Benedict XVI) intervened to prevent them (*SMH*, 7 July 2000). The Uniting Church subsequently took it up, after having originated the concept with an unauthorised centre in the late 1990s (*DT*, 29 November 1999). Both papers gave more words to the pro-MSIC position in the churches, the *DT* by something less than twice as much, the *SMH* by four times as much.

The UN's International Narcotics Control Board spoke out against the MSIC, and was given twice as many words to do so in the *DT* as in the *SMH*. The NSW Police were quoted a little but equally on both sides of the argument, though the *DT* gave the police opponents ten times as many words as the police supporters, whereas the *SMH* quoted only police supporters and no police opponents. The University of NSW and some academics supported the Centre, and the *SMH* gave them 30 times as much coverage as it gave academic opponents, while the *DT* restricted the ratio to twice as much in favour of the MSIC's supporters.

Selection and positioning of sources within reports

The positioning of sources within the narrative structure of a report may have some significance for the preferred reading of its meaning. Typically, in a news story the first source quoted is the originator of the news event being reported, while second and subsequent sources commenting on the news event may agree or disagree with the first source's interpretation. Generally, the first source has the opportunity to define the preferred meaning of the report, while second and subsequent sources are reactive to their definition (Bacon & Nash, 2003, p. 16). Table 5 displays the percentage of first and second source's attitudes to the MSIC, and also the number of reports that quoted no first or second sources.

Both newspapers used significantly more pro-MSIC sources as first sources to lead their reports than anti-MSIC sources, although the discrepancy was much more marked with the *SMH* than the *DT*. This is probably because the news events that prompted the reports were originated by the government's or management's actions in establishing and developing the centre. This may appear to contradict the usual placement of sources in a story narrative (Bacon & Nash, 2003, p. 16), but may be interpreted as the exception that proves the rule, because it may indicate stories where the reporter is constructing the

Table 5: Selection and positioning of sources

	Anti-MSIC	Pro-MSIC	No 1st or 2nd source
DT 1st source	29%	52%	19%
DT 2nd source	22%	29%	49%
SMH 1st source	20%	72%	8%
SMH 2nd source	16%	57%	26%

preferred meaning against the interpretation offered by the most authoritative sources. In the *DT*, the second source was almost as likely to be an opponent of the MSIC as a supporter, whereas that was the case in less than a third of the cases in the *SMH*. In almost half the *DT* stories there was no second source, and in a fifth of cases there was not even a first source, which would be expected of briefer news reports in the *DT*, whereas longer reports, as in the *SMH* coverage, would require more usage of sources.

The proportion of words attributed for pro and anti-MSIC sources (Table 3) by the *SMH* is very close to their proportion of first and second sources, whereas revealingly, the *DT* gives a greater proportion of its quotes and paraphrases to anti-MSIC sources, which contrasts with the proportion of their first and second source status. This would suggest that the *DT* is tending to interpret the meaning of the news events in ways contrary to the preferred interpretation of the sources that are initiating the news events. Because the polarisation in reporting this controversy is so stark, the ‘balancing tactics’ used by the *DT* reporters are clear, but in the normal run of news reporting on complex and nuanced issues, it may well be that the balancing is more subtle and discursive, which was the thrust of Miller’s critique of Hall’s ‘structure of dominance’ in meaning definition (Miller, 1993).

Number of times a category of source is quoted

Sources were counted every time they were quoted or paraphrased in the sample of articles, but each source was counted only once each per article. Table 6 displays the results.

Putting these results together with Tables 3 and 5 would suggest that the *DT*, in order to achieve an overall balance of sources (Table 6) and words (Table 3) in opposition to the MSIC, while at the same time quoting pro-MSIC sources first in their stories on 52 percent of occasions, actively sought out counter-interpretations by opponents of the MSIC. This conclusion becomes even more pronounced when one considers the large proportion of *DT* stories

Table 6: Number of source appearances in quotes or paraphrase

Newspaper	Anti-MSIC	Pro-MSIC
DT	103	93
SMH	46	102
Total	149	195

that had no sources (Table 5) and the shorter average length of *DT* stories (Table 1). This contrasts with the tendency of the *SMH* to align the appearance of sources with the number of words they are given and their position in the stories.

This analysis could be interpreted as the *DT* pursuing a more robust form of discursive journalism, where a range of views are available for the reader to interpret, or alternatively, it could be interpreted as the *DT* giving more space to an interpretation that lacks widespread support in the concerned communities of sources, ie. police, health professionals, churches, etc. To explore this further we need to identify the numbers of sources pro and anti-MSIC in each significant category of sources. We know from Table 4 that the health professionals were unanimous in their support for the MSIC, and we also know from the press reports that the religious divisions were largely located within the Catholic Church, pitting the Vatican and Cardinal Pell against the Sisters of Charity. Table 7 displays the results for the remaining categories of significant sources.

These results suggest that there were ample proponents and opponents of the MSIC among political and police sources that the journalists could quote, that businesses and the International Narcotics Control Board were very strongly opposed, and academics were very much in favour. Table 7 reveals that the two mastheads selected both their categories of sources and the preferred interpretations within those categories in ways that aligned with

Table 7: Usage of sources

	Newspaper	DT	SMH
Politicians	Anti-MSIC	36	15
	Pro-MSIC	39	34
NSW Police	Anti-MSIC	9	1
	Pro-MSIC	3	6
Businesses	Anti-MSIC	30	15
	Pro-MSIC	0	0
UN (INCB)	Anti-MSIC	8	2
	Pro-MSIC	1	0
Universities & academics	Anti-MSIC	2	2
	Pro-MSIC	7	15

their editorial preferences, and where a category tended to take a position that opposed their editorial line, they reduced the usage they made of that category, and vice versa where the category supported their editorial position.

Summary of results

Analysis of the editorials established that the *DT* and the *SMH* had a clearly defined anti-MSIC and pro-MSIC editorial stance respectively. This orthodoxy was reflected for each masthead in the orientation of the news and feature reports to the issues, and this stance was achieved through a complex interplay of choice of sources, number of words attributed to sources, positioning of sources within a story and the attribution of a positive or negative attitude to issues by the sources.

The content analysis suggests that *DT* articles were more likely than the *SMH* articles to have negative references to the MSIC and related interest groups, and anti-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing. It suggests that the *SMH* articles were more likely than the *DT* articles to have positive references to the MSIC and related interest groups, and pro-MSIC quotes and paraphrasing. The *SMH* articles used more pro-MSIC first and second sources than anti-MSIC first and second sources, which matched the *SMH* articles pro-MSIC editorial stance, whereas the *DT* articles seemed to be more balanced in publishing of first and second sources in the articles analysed. However, the *DT* gave more words overall to anti-MSIC sources, and the converse was true for the *SMH*. Breaking down the attribution of words by source category, the *DT* gave more words to anti-MSIC sources except for religious, academic and health professional sources, whereas the *SMH* attributed more words to pro-MSIC sources in all categories except business (and only marginally so for police sources).

Overall these results suggest:

- there is a strong correlation between the editorial stance of the newspapers and the news and feature reporting of the papers on this issue
- that the partisanship in the reporting was achieved through the active selection of sources and the allocation of words available to the sources in quotes and paraphrase
- that this partisanship was achievable in the face of the origination of news events by parties in conflict with the editorial stance of the newspapers.

Discussion

We discovered no recorded allegations of bias or partisanship, or indeed of failure by the journalists to observe their professional responsibilities for fair and accurate reporting of this controversy. Nonetheless, while we have not interviewed any of the journalists or sources involved in this episode, we assume that they would have been intimately aware of the nuances and orientation of their own and their competitors' activities in the newspaper coverage (Baker, 1980). This suggests that journalists have a satisfactory range of options available to them in exercising their professional responsibilities to report truthfully and accurately, while observing an editorial orthodoxy in point of view. Or to express it in Bourdieu's terms, journalists have the cultural capital within the field of newspaper reporting to be able to manoeuvre successfully within the dynamic structure of the field to achieve the preferred outcomes of their employers (the controllers of economic capital), and maintain their own cultural capital as competent professionals.

Objectivity in this view is not so much a strategic ritual (Tuchman, 1972), as a set of rules about verification and accuracy, which both defines the parameters of the journalistic field and yet allows sufficient latitude for journalists and mastheads to be able to distinguish their own point of view and achievements from those of their competitors. Journalists in our research had considerable latitude to select both categories of sources, and individuals within those categories, to suit their purposes. When confronted by a news event that was initiated by a source that was opposed to their preferred interpretation, they were able to seek out other sources (counter-definers in Hall's usage [Hall, 1978]) and give them enough words in the story to counteract the first source's perspective on the news event.

This understanding and experience (cultural capital) in their professional practice is manifested in journalists' habitus, when in real time they select sources, pose questions and select the parts of answers they need to compose reports that meet their own and their editors' requirements, without contravening the professional requirements to be fair and accurate in reporting truth claims by sources. There may be an argument to be had as to whether this achieves the semblance rather than the substance of truth, but that is precisely the nub of debate and a matter for judgement. Within the sub-field of each masthead's newsroom, there was an orthodoxy about the perspective to be taken on the issue that was clearly defined by each paper's unequivocal editorial stance. Journalists were self-evidently able to read the policy protocols

in their own place of employment and reconcile them with the professional codes of their field of practice (news reporting), to act as agents in the field to their own advantage and that of their employers.

This reconciliation of the house policy with their professional codes was identified by Soloski (1989) as essential to successful practice by journalists. While journalists need points of reference outside their own field for verification purposes of their truth claims, they are clearly the masters of their own game in the symbolic field. Baker demonstrated with his research (1980) that journalists are not only acutely sensitive to house policy on news agendas, but that journalists maintain subtle rankings of their peers' cultural capital according to their capacity to reconcile house policy with their professional codes. This concurs with Ericson's view that journalists exercise more power than sources in negotiating the characteristics of the news product (Ericson, 1989), and while Hall disagreed with that conclusion, he also acknowledged the journalists' power as 'secondary definers' (Hall, 1978).

But if we decentre the media as Schlesinger (1990) suggested, then we can see that the other agents in this controversy were active not only in the symbolic field of media representation, but also in their own specific fields. When then Premier Bob Carr decided to reverse his previous opposition to the MSIC, he would have been fully cognisant of where support and opposition to this policy was likely to emanate from, and he would have been under no illusions as to what perspective the tabloid press would adopt. The then Leader of the Opposition in the NSW Parliament, John Brogden, supported the proposal, thereby adopting a minority position in his own party. So Carr's parliamentary opponents were divided. The health professionals who would be called upon to implement the policy were solidly in favour of the proposal, with further support from their colleagues at the University of NSW. So the political field, comprising both parliamentary and executive wings of government, was divided but opposition was weak and leaderless. In the coercive field, highly relevant because the illicit use of drugs contravened the law and is a prime focus of law enforcement activity, there was division in the NSW Police Force, so it too was neutralised.

The government sought to deploy the cultural capital of the Catholic Church in support of the policy by contracting with the Sisters of Charity to manage and operate the MSIC, but there was conflict within the sub-field of the Catholic Church that stymied that ploy. The Uniting Church was able to step in and deliver similar cultural capital to the project, though not perhaps as

efficacious politically as the support of the more conservative Catholic Church would have been. Conversely the divisions within the Catholic Church acted to neutralise the opposition of the Vatican and Cardinal Pell, so there was a silver lining for the government in the black cloud of the Church's official opposition. The unqualified opposition of both the local small business community and the UN's International Narcotics Control Board was contained and easily accommodated because on this issue, the views of neither group was likely to be politically relevant at the ensuing elections. Nonetheless, the government managed the development of the MSIC through two trial periods till it was able to confirm the establishment at a point in time well before the 2007 election, thus minimising electoral opportunities for the opposition. Subsequently, other MSIC were established discreetly in locations around Sydney, and the politicians and health professionals would be entitled to feel that they managed successfully the process of their controversial establishment, including the media coverage.

This thumbnail sketch of the broader terrain of fields intersecting in this instance, with the political field of policy development and implementation demonstrates how heteronomous the fields of social relations are. They intersect and impinge on each other in multifarious ways, and indeed successful agency in any one field may well depend on the deployment of capital and agents from other fields. Certainly Bourdieu was correct in his depiction (1993) of the journalistic field as heteronomous, which he interpreted as a weakness in the journalistic field. We believe that Bourdieu is misconceived when he valorises the autonomy of fields, perhaps as an extension of his commitment to the autonomy of the field of French high culture. All fields, in our view, and particularly the symbolic field, are heteronomous in their operations.

As our research demonstrates, journalists are necessarily active in selecting sources from among and within the various external fields of relevance to any particular story they are researching and reporting, and their representation of those other fields becomes in turn relevant to the deployment of power within those fields. It is on this basis that alliances among agents that transcend the borders of any one field start to emerge, and indeed in this particular case one can observe a conventional 'progressive vs. conservative' split on social policy, that pits conservative politicians, the Vatican, business interests and elements of the police against more progressive politicians, religious organisations, health professionals and academics. As pointed out in the introduction,

the two newspapers identify themselves on either side of this attitudinal axis, and like the agents in each of the other fields, the journalists were able to identify approaches to practice for themselves that reconciled their professional accountabilities with their institutional and employment accountabilities.

Conclusion

This controversy, through the very starkness of the contrast in orthodoxy between the two mastheads, in both editorial attitudes and news reporting perspectives on the MSIC, and when combined with the clarity of the institutional alignments in the associated fields of politics, policing, health and religion, has afforded a productive case study to test the value of field theory in empirical analysis. The media content analysis demonstrated the range of latitude within which journalists can manoeuvre in fulfilling their accountabilities to their professional codes and their employers' demands. But it also demonstrated how ultimately, the media are but one set of players in a controversy that engages other fields, and how the dominant force in the political field, the government of the day, was able to align itself with agents in other fields, including the media, to achieve its desired policy outcome. The media was a player, but not the most important one, as *The Daily Telegraph* seemed to acknowledge early on in the piece when it editorialised at the commencement of the first trial period in 1999: 'The government having taken this step, it is futile to oppose it further... (s)o let the trial commence (*DT*, 28 July 1999, p. 10).

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