

Self-regulation of Speed Themes in Australian Motor Vehicle Advertising: Perceptions of 204 Young Drivers

Prof. Simon Chapman¹ (Presenter); Dr Stephanie Blows²

¹School of Public Health; ²Institute For International Health, University of Sydney

Biography

Simon Chapman, is Professor in Public Health at the University of Sydney. He is a sociologist with a PhD on the semiotics of cigarette advertising, author of 10 books and major government reports and 160 papers in peer reviewed journals. His books include *Over our dead bodies: Gun law reform after Port Arthur* (Sydney: Pluto 1998); *The Last Right? Australians take sides on the right to die* (Sydney: Mandarin 1995); *The Fight for Public Health: Principles and Practice of Media Advocacy* (BMJ Books 1994 with Deborah Lupton); *Tobacco in the Third World: a resource Atlas* (International Organisation of Consumers' Unions 1990) *Great Expectorations: Advertising and the tobacco industry* (London: Comedia, 1986); and *The Lung Goodbye: tactics for counteracting the tobacco industry in the 1980s* (IOCU 1983). His main research interests are in tobacco control, media discourses on health and illness, and risk communication. He teaches annual courses in Public Health Advocacy and Tobacco Control in the University of Sydney's MPH program.

In 1997 he won the World Health Organisation's World No Tobacco Day Medal; in 1999, the National Heart Foundation of Australia's gold medal; and in 2003 he was voted by his international peers to be awarded the American Cancer Society's Luther Terry Award for outstanding individual leadership in tobacco control. He is editor of the British Medical Journal's specialist journal, *Tobacco Control*.

He is a life member of the Australian Consumers' Association and was its chairman 1999-2002.

He was a key member of the Coalition for Gun Control which won the 1996 Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission's community Human Rights award.

Abstract

A voluntary code developed in 2002 was promoted as a means of proscribing the use of speed as a selling point in car advertising. Many people believe that the speed theme remains a dominant advertising theme. This paper reports results of a study of 204 18-35 year old Sydney drivers' perceptions of themes used in 26 recent televised car advertisements selected because of obvious speed themes. Eight comparison advertisements were also evaluated. In the 26 apparently speed-featuring ads, drivers described speed as a theme that was "very obvious" [range 96% to 24% of ads]. The voluntary code has "weasel" clauses that allow a cynical adherence to the code while permitting advertisers to promote speed at will. The code should be discredited as a serious means of controlling the promotion of speed in motor vehicle advertising and legislation controlling such advertising introduced.