

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

THE IMPACT OF SMOKING IN THE MOVIES ON YOUTH SMOKING LEVELS

Although the state settlement agreements with the cigarette companies prohibits any payments by the cigarette companies to place their products in movies or television programs, the amount of smoking in U.S. films has increased significantly since the settlement agreements were signed in 1998.* Why this increase has occurred is not clear. But it is perfectly clear from numerous research studies that smoking in movies and related product placements work to increase smoking levels among kids.

Smoking is much more prevalent in movies than in real life, and is presented in a much more positive way.

- An analysis of a random sample of the top-five grossing films in the United States, each year, found that smoking in movies fell from the 1960s to the 1980s then increased during the 1990s, with the increase continuing in 2000. In 2000, there were, on average, 10.9 instances of smoking per hour in the top-grossing films compared to 7.3 instances per hour in 1960.¹ In contrast, adult smoking rates declined from the mid 1960s through the 1980s and have been basically flat or declining since.²
- A review of 601 films from 1988 to 1999 that were either top-grossing or had popular teen stars found that only 2 of the 272 R-rated films (fewer than one percent) did not have smoking and only ten percent of the PG or PG-13 films contained no smoking, with the number of instances of smoking averaging one in G films, three in PG films, four in PG-13 films, and 8.5 in R films.³ A study of top-grossing movies from 1985 to 1995 found that 98 percent had references that supported tobacco use but only 38 percent had negative references regarding tobacco use (with these characteristics relatively stable over the entire time period). At least one main character used tobacco in 46 percent of the films.⁴ Over that same time period, actual adult smoking rates declined from 30.1 to 24.7 percent.⁵
- A 2001 study of the top 25 United States films for each year from 1988 to 1997 found that more than 85 percent of the films included tobacco use, with tobacco-product brands appearing in 28 percent. Brands were almost as common in films for adolescents as in films for adults (32% vs. 35%), and were also present in 20 percent of films rated for children. The amount of brand visibility did not change after the tobacco industry adopted a voluntary ban on paid product placements in 1991, but there was a big increase in brand appearances through “actor endorsements” (brand visible while being handled or used by actor), which increased from occurring in only one percent of all movies to appearing in 11 percent.⁶ This same film data showed that 87 percent of the films showed tobacco use (averaging five occurrences per film), with less than six percent showing any negative reactions to smoking and only 3.4 percent of the major characters who smoked showing any negative consequences from their tobacco use.⁷

* “III.(e) Prohibition on Payments Related to Tobacco Products and Media. No Participating Manufacturer may, beginning 30 days after the MSA Execution Date, make, or cause to be made, any payment or other consideration to any other person or entity to use, display, make reference to or use as a prop any Tobacco Product, Tobacco Product package, advertisement for a Tobacco Product, or any other item bearing a Brand Name in any motion picture, television show, theatrical production or other live performance, live or recorded performance of music, commercial film or video, or video game (“Media”) . . .” [Master Settlement Agreement, November 23, 1998, http://www.naag.org/upload/1032468605_cigmsa.pdf.]

- A review of the top 500 movies from 1991 to 2001 by California teenagers found that three quarters included tobacco use, with an average of 10.5 smoking incidents per movie. In 79 percent of the movies with smoking, one or more leading actors smoked; in 55 percent, good guys smoked; and in 40 percent bad guys smoked.⁸ [From 1991 to 2001, actual smoking rates among adults declined from 25.7 to less than 23 percent.]⁹ Of all the movies, 27 percent had anti-tobacco messages; but 43 percent had pro-tobacco messages. While the percentage of movies with tobacco use in them has been stable from 1998 to 2001 (and lower than prior years), the percentage of films with pro-smoking messages has increased from a 1991 to 2001 low of 42 percent in 1998-99 to record highs of 73 and 78 percent in 1999-2000 and 2000-01. In an earlier version of this study, looking at 250 movies from 1991 to 1996, a third of the movies were found to include scenes where tobacco use was portrayed as having qualities described by the youth reviewers as sexy, exciting, powerful, sports-related, sophisticated, and a means of celebrating.^{10†}
- A study in 2000 of 50 movies featuring 10 popular actresses found that leading female actors were just as likely to smoke in PG/PG-13 Movies than in R-rated movies (although the male actors were more than twice as likely to smoke in the R-rated movies); and the PG/PG-13 movies were less likely than the R movies to contain negative messages about smoking.¹¹ A review of tobacco use among 43 stars appearing in films from 1994 to 1996 found that 65 percent used tobacco at least once and 42 percent portrayed smoking as an essential character trait in at least one or more films.¹²
- A 1999 study of 50 G-rated children's animated films released from 1937 to 1997 found that 56 percent portrayed at least one or more episodes of tobacco use, including 100 percent of all releases in 1996 and 1997. 76 characters in the 50 movies smoked (usually cigars), with good characters just as likely to smoke as bad characters.¹³

Smoking in Movies Increases Youth Smoking

- In a 1999 survey of more than 4,900 school children aged nine to fifteen in Vermont and New Hampshire, those who had been exposed to more incidents of smoking in the films they recalled seeing were much more likely to have tried smoking (even after adjusting for other factors associated with smoking and smoking initiation or experimentation). The kids were asked which of 50 movies from a randomly chosen list of recent movies they had seen, and only 4.9 percent of kids who had seen zero to 50 incidences of smoking in the movies they had seen from that sample had tried smoking, compared to 13.7 percent who had seen 51 to 100 incidences of smoking, 22.1 percent who had seen 101 to 150, and 31.3 percent who had seen more than 150. In other words, those with the heaviest exposure to smoking through the movies they attended were more than two and a half times more likely to have tried smoking than those with the least exposure to smoking in movies.¹⁴
- A 2002 study reported that a survey of more than 3,700 middle school students found that among those who had never smoked the more movies they had seen with smoking the more susceptible to future smoking they were and the more likely they were to have positive expectations about smoking and to think that most adults smoke.¹⁵ Similarly, a 1999 study of 800 ninth graders (14 and 15 year olds) watching either original movie footage with smoking in it or the same movie with the smoking edited out found that those watching the

† A parallel study of tobacco use in television from 1998 to 2001 found that one quarter of 848 network program episodes aired from 7 to 11 p.m. included tobacco use, with an average of 3.7 tobacco-use incidents per hour, with 55 percent of the leading actors using tobacco. Overall, 36 percent of the programs had anti-tobacco use messages and 44 percent had pro-tobacco-use messages. [American Lung Association of Sacramento, *Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! Television Summary: 1998/1999/2000/2001 Data Summary and Comparison*, 2002, www.saclung.org.]

movie with the smoking included had enhanced perceptions of smokers' social status and increased intentions to smoke.¹⁶

- A 2002 study of more than 4,500 students in 5th through 8th grades found that kids whose parents let them watch R-rated movies (which have the highest levels of smoking) are more than 15 times more likely to have tried smoking than those whose parents do not let them watch such movies (35% vs. 2%).¹⁷ Even after controlling for other factors that influence youth smoking, those allowed to watch R-rated films were still almost four times as likely to have tried smoking than those whose parents did not allow them to watch R-rated movies.
- A 1996 survey of more than six thousand adolescents in California divided them into ever-smokers and never-smokers, with the never-smokers rated as susceptible to becoming smokers and nonsusceptible, based on various personal characteristics directly linked with smoking. The ever-smokers were much more likely than never smokers to have favorite movie stars who smoked frequently on and off screen, and the never-smokers who had the same favorite movie stars as the ever-smokers were more likely to be susceptible to smoking rather than not susceptible (even after controlling for other predictors of adolescent smoking and various other variables).¹⁸
- A 1996 survey of 6th to 12th graders in rural New England schools found that the more their favorite movie stars smoked in their films the higher the kids ranked in a smoking index ranging from non-susceptible and susceptible nonsmokers to experimenters to current smokers, and those kids who had not yet smoked but favored high-smoking stars were more likely to have a favorable attitudes toward smoking.¹⁹
- In New Zealand, 12 and 13 year-olds perceived that smoking in movies was highly prevalent and recognizable and believed that regarded on-screen smoking imagery to reflect reality accurately. They also held exaggerated views of smoking levels among both their peers and adults.²⁰ Other research has shown that perceptions among youth that smoking levels are higher than they actually are, either among their peers or among adults, is directly linked with higher youth smoking levels.²¹

Anti-Smoking Messages in Movies Reduce Youth Smoking.

- A follow-up to the previously described experiment with 800 ninth graders found that showing an anti-smoking ad prior to movies with smoking scenes nullified the pro-smoking effect of those movies (basically changing smoking from an attractive "forbidden fruit" to a tainted product).²²
- In Australia, viewers of the movies *The Insider* (which featured unethical conduct by the tobacco industry and information about the negative health effects from smoking) and *Erin Brockovich* (a similar anti-big-corporation movie without any anti-tobacco themes or information) each had strong and pervasive negative views of the tobacco industry. But after seeing the respective films, viewers of *The Insider* had even more negative views of the tobacco industry than the viewers of the other film. Over the short term, those who saw *The Insider* (including smokers, former smokers, and nonsmokers) also had more sharply reduced intentions to smoke in the future.²³

Hollywood attitudes and practices re tobacco use and showing it in movies varies, and tobacco use can appear in a movie because of the script, the director, or the actors.

- In-depth interviews with a sample of 54 writers, actors, directors, producers, studio executives and others in the movie industry found widely divergent views on the extent of tobacco use and how it is portrayed in movies, the effect of tobacco use in movies on youth

smoking decisions, whether movies should restrict portrayals of tobacco use in movies, and the necessity of portraying tobacco use in movies for certain creative purposes. It also found that tobacco use in films can originate with the writers, actors, or directors, and is included most often, according to the respondents, to elucidate character or portray reality (with actors' tobacco use on screen influenced by their off-screen tobacco use).²⁴

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For more on this issue, see the *Smoke-Free Movies* website, <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/index.html>, a project of Medical Professor S. Glantz, University of California at San Francisco; and the *Thumbs Up! Thumbs down!* website, <http://www.saclung.org/thumbs/index.htm>, of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails.

¹ Kacirk, K. & S. Glantz, "Smoking in Movies in 2000 Exceeded Rates in the 1960s," Letter, *Tobacco Control* 10: 397-98, 2001, <http://tc.bmjournals.com>. See, also, Hazan, A., et al., "Popular Films Do Not Reflect Current Tobacco Use," *American Journal of Public Health* 84: 998-1000, June 1994; Teti, T. & S. Glantz, "Smoking in Movies Remained High in 1997," Letter, *Tobacco Control* 7: 441-42, 1998.

² CDC, NCHS, *National Health Interview Surveys*, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm.

³ Sargent, J., et al., "Effect of Seeing Tobacco use in Films on Trying Smoking Among Adolescents: Cross Sectional Study," *British Medical Journal* 323: 1-6, December 15, 2001, <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/323/7326/1394.pdf>.

⁴ Everett, S., et al., "Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Top-Grossing American Films," *Journal of Community Health* 23(4): 317-24, August 1998.

⁵ CDC, NCHS, *National Health Interview Surveys*, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm.

⁶ Sargent, J., et al., "Brand Appearances in Contemporary Cinema Films and Contribution to Global Marketing of Cigarettes," *Lancet* 357(9249): 29-32, January 2001, http://pdf.thelancet.com/pdftownload?uid=llan.357.9249.original_research.14762.1&x=x.pdf.

⁷ Dalton, MA, et al., "The Incidence and Context of Tobacco Use in Popular Movies from 1988 to 1997," *Preventive Medicine* 34(5): 516-23, May 2002.

⁸ American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails, *Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! Movie Summary: 1991-2001 Data Summary and Comparison*, 2002, www.saclung.org.

⁹ CDC, NCHS, *National Health Interview Surveys*, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm.

¹⁰ American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails, *Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! Teens Take a Look at Tobacco Use in 1991-1996 Movies*, March 1998.

¹¹ Escamilla, G., et al., "Women and Smoking in Hollywood Movies: A Content Analysis," *American Journal of Public Health* 90(3):412-4, March 2000, www.ajph.org.

¹² Tickle, J., et al., "Favourite Movie Stars, Their Tobacco Use in Contemporary Movies, and Its Association with Adolescent Smoking," *Tobacco Control* 10: 16-22, 2001, <http://tc.bmjournals.com>.

¹³ Goldstein, A., et al., "Tobacco and Alcohol Use in G-Rated Children's Animated Films," *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)* 181(12): 1131-36, March 1999.

¹⁴ Sargent, J., et al., "Effect of Seeing Tobacco use in Films on Trying Smoking Among Adolescents: Cross Sectional Study," *British Medical Journal* 323: 1-6, December 15, 2001, <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/323/7326/1394.pdf>.

¹⁵ Sargent, JD, et al., "Viewing Tobacco Use in Movies. Does It Shape Attitudes that Mediate Adolescent Smoking?," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22(3): 137-45, April 2002.

¹⁶ Pechmann, C. & C.F. Shih, "Smoking Scenes in Movies and Antismoking Advertisements Before Movies: Effects on Youth," *Journal of Marketing*, 63:1-13, July 1999.

¹⁷ Dalton, B. et al., "Relation between Parental Restrictions on Movies and Adolescent Use of Tobacco and Alcohol," *Effective Clinical Practice* 5(1) January/February 2002, <http://www.acponline.org/journals/ecp/janfeb02/dalton.pdf>.

¹⁸ Kistefan, J. et al., "Do Movie Stars Encourage Adolescents to Start Smoking? Evidence from California," *Preventive Medicine* 28(1): 1-11, January 1999.

¹⁹ Tickle, J., et al., "Favorite Movie Stars, Their Tobacco Use in Contemporary Movies, and Its Association with Adolescent Smoking," *Tobacco Control* 10: 16-22, 2001, <http://tc.bmjournals.com>.

²⁰ McCool, J, et al., "Adolescent Perceptions of Smoking Imagery in Film," *Social Science and Medicine* 52(10): 1577-87, May 2001.

²¹ See, e.g., Olds RS & DL Thombs, "The Relationship of Adolescent Perceptions of Peer Norms and Parent Involvement to Cigarette and Alcohol Use," *Journal of School Health* 71(6):223-8, August 2001.

²² Pechmann, C. & C.F. Shih, "Smoking Scenes in Movies and Antismoking Advertisements Before Movies: Effects on Youth," *Journal of Marketing*, 63:1-13, July 1999.

²³ Dixon, H., et al., "Public Reaction to the Portrayal of the Tobacco Industry in the Film *The Insider*," *Tobacco Control* 10: 285-91, 2001 [study done in Australia], <http://tc.bmjournals.com>.

²⁴ Shields, D, et al., "Hollywood on Tobacco: How the Entertainment Industry Understands Tobacco Portrayal," *Tobacco Control* 8: 378-86, 1999, <http://tc.bmjournals.com>.