

Lighting Up the Movies

Tobacco Use in Hollywood Films

A Report by the Grand Rapids Institute
for Information Democracy
2002

GRID

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Methodology

The Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy viewed 50 films released on video between January 1, 2002 and June 30, 2002. We chose the most heavily marketed films released on video - films that had significant promotions while in the theatres and upon release on VHS and DVD. *For a listing of films reviewed, see page 3.*

We documented the number of films that tobacco use occurred in, by which characters and in what context. We studied the differences between films based on targeted audiences (youth and adults) and between gender use of tobacco.

The following GRIID staff were involved in this project: Erica Freshour, Rob Dodde, John Kroondyk and Jeff Smith.

Youth Anti-Tobacco students involved in this project: Meaghann Matyas, Erin Freshour, Alejandro Pena, Alex Fluegel & Taryn Dover.

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For a video version of this report and other tobacco related media resources contact GRIID. (see side bar)

Contact Us

Grand Rapids Institute for
Information Democracy

www.griid.org

459-4788x122

Director - Jeff Smith
jsmith@grcmc.org

711 Bridge St. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

*GRIID has a lending library of books,
videos and curriculum
materials.*

Films Reviewed

<i>Slackers</i>	<i>Kate & Leopold</i>
<i>Life as a House</i>	<i>The Musketeer</i>
<i>American Psycho 2</i>	<i>Don't Say a Word</i>
<i>Bubble Boy</i>	<i>Hearts in Atlantis</i>
<i>Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back</i>	<i>Behind Enemy Lines</i>
<i>Riding in Cars with Boys</i>	<i>Training Day</i>
<i>Soul Survivors</i>	<i>Monster's Ball</i>
<i>The Glass House</i>	<i>Rollerball</i>
<i>Serendipity</i>	<i>The One</i>
<i>Hardball</i>	<i>Kiss of the Dragon</i>
<i>Snow Dogs</i>	<i>The Majestic</i>
<i>How High</i>	<i>Original Sin</i>
<i>Orange County</i>	<i>Black Hawk Down</i>
<i>Harry Potter</i>	<i>Ocean's Eleven</i>
<i>Jeepers Creepers</i>	<i>Rat Race</i>
<i>Max Keeble's Big Move</i>	<i>Domestic Disturbance</i>
<i>13 Ghosts</i>	<i>I Am Sam</i>
<i>Not Another Teen Movie</i>	<i>Mothman Prophecies</i>
<i>Zoolander</i>	<i>The Others</i>
<i>Corky Romano</i>	<i>AI</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>K-Pax</i>
<i>Vanilla Sky</i>	<i>Ali</i>
<i>Bones</i>	<i>Spy Game</i>
<i>From Hell</i>	<i>Bandits</i>
<i>A Beautiful Mind</i>	<i>Black Knight</i>

The use of tobacco in Hollywood films is nothing new, but ever since tobacco commercials were banned from TV in the 1970's, tobacco companies have been looking for other ways to target new smokers.

Teens and pre-Teens have been the primary target for this new campaign, so that by the 1990's 9 out of 10 Hollywood films dramatized the use of tobacco. According to the research by Dr. Stan Glantz "28% of the films — including one in five children's movies — showed cigarette brand logos." (See <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/>)

There was hope that with the tobacco settlements, targeting of youth in films would diminish, but a new study by the Massachusetts Public Research Group entitled *Tobacco at the Movies: Tobacco Use in PG-13 Films*, found that "smoking in the most popular, youth oriented, PG-13 movies is up since the tobacco settlement." (<http://masspirg.org/reports/TobaccoattheMovies.pdf>)

Not only did tobacco companies pursue the film industry, Hollywood studios were also anxious to make deals, as is reflected in this memo from 20th Century Fox

"Twentieth Century-Fox would like to enter into an 18-month agreement that would offer Philip Morris a unique publicity opportunity in our feature films. We would guarantee you product placement in the final version of our feature films during the 18-month period. We would offer your products exclusively for the period of the contract. You would have script approval for the placement of your products."

1984 memo to Philip Morris

By the late 1990's tobacco placement in youth targeted films became the norm. A film like Titanic had both the lead male and female characters smoking at very key moments in the film. Tobacco executives love these kind of movies because young audiences will not only see a film like Titanic more than once in the theatre, they will also rent or buy the video. The end result is that young audiences will see the stars of the film smoking over and over again.



To see if the trend of frequent tobacco use in Hollywood films still persists, we conducted a study of films released on video during the first six months of 2002. We

"Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer, and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while still in their teens....The smoking patterns of teens are particularly important to Philip Morris."

Philip Morris

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0008.pdf>

looked primarily at tobacco use that was targeted at younger audiences, but we also looked at how male and female characters conveyed messages about smoking in significantly different ways.

Youth Targeted Films

We identified 21 films that were targeted at youth audiences - adolescent through college age (see page 5). Of those 21, 13 had main youth characters smoking. That means that 42% of the films we studied were youth targeted with tobacco use. In addition, there were also several films that, even though didn't target youth exclusively, tended to attract younger audiences because of the genre. Films like *Vanilla Sky*, *From Hell* or *Bones* would have higher percentages of a youth audience, because younger audiences are likely to watch movies with stars they

continued →

Youth Targeted Films

idolize like Cameron Diaz, Jonnie Depp, Martin Lawrence or Snoop Doggy Dog. Younger audiences are also attracted to high action films like *Kiss of the Dragon* or *Rollerball*. Considering that mixed generations will view these movies, the percentage of the films studies with tobacco use that may impact youth is actually much higher - approximately 65%.

Targeting Strategies

We documented numerous ways in which the film industry portrayed youth smokers - through glamorizing characters, using humor, and normalizing tobacco use.

One of the major myths about smoking is that it will make you attractive, yet most youth characters in the films we studied used “Beautiful People” - films like *Life as a House*, *Glass House*, *American Psycho II*, *How High*, *Riding in Cars with Boys*, and *Serendipity*. Both the male and female characters in these films look fit, attractive and show none of the symptoms of regular tobacco use - discoloring of the teeth, etc. The scenes that show these actors smoking are often accompanied with romantic lighting and mood music, like the scene on the right from *Soul Survivor*.



Without Tobacco Use

Harry Potter
Jeepers Creepers
Max Keeble's Big Move
13 Ghosts
Not Another Teen Movie
Zoolander
Corky Romano
O

With Tobacco Use

Slackers
Life as a House
American Psycho 2
Bubble Boy
Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back
Riding in Cars with Boys
Soul Survivors
The Glass House
Serendipity
Hardball
Snow Dogs
How High
Orange County

Humor is also a powerful way to get young audiences comfortable with smoking. Numerous films used humor with smoking - films like *Slackers*, *Bubble Boy* and *Orange County*. The movie *Snow Dogs* even has some of the dogs smoking while sitting in beach chairs. The film *Jay & Silent*



Bob Strike Back employed humor on numerous occasions while the two main characters smoked. Here is a scene where Jay & Silent Bob are in a diner talking trash about cops.

Lastly, the most common way in which youth smoking in films is employed, are scenes where youth are doing what is most natural - hanging out with friends, coping with stress, and acting rebellious.

Many of the youth targeted films had scenes with groups of youth sitting around, or driving and smoking in groups - *Riding in Cars with Boys*, *Glass House*, *Soul Survivors*, *American Psycho II*, *Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back* and *Slackers*. The scene on the right from *American Psycho II* has 2 college students smoking outside on campus.



Slackers, *Orange County* and *How High* each had scenes where the actors smoking were engaged in an act of “rebellion.” In *Slackers* one of the main characters is seen standing on a toilet in the men’s room, blowing smoke up at the smoke detector. The best example of the “rebel” image with tobacco use would be in the film *Life as a*

House. Here the main youth character clearly has set himself apart from his fellow students. In this scene he is chilling out in the school parking lot.



“The ability to attract new smokers and develop them into a young adult franchise is key to brand development.”

Philip Morris 1992

Can I Have a Cigarette?

The Gendered use of Tobacco

Both men and women smoked in the capacities that we have already mentioned - as beautiful people, rebels and in group situations. When it came to films that were targeted at older audiences, the differences between how men and women used tobacco was significant.

Male characters who smoked in the 50 films we surveyed tended to fall into 2 categories - sinister men or men in positions of power. Men who played the role of criminals often smoked - *Domestic Disturbance*, *Rollerball*, *Don't Say a Word*, *Hardball* and *Monster's Ball*. This typecasting of men we love to hate, who just happen to smoke is best depicted by 2 different Somali warlords in the film *Black Hawk Down*. In the scene on the right, one of them smokes cigars that he boasts are Cubans.

Most of the time that men are shown smoking in the study they project a sense of confidence and wisdom. This is the case in the following films: *Orange County*, *Serendipity*, *Hearts in Atlantis*, *Original Sin*,



The Majestic and *Monster's Ball*. In each of these films the men who smoke are in positions of power and prestige. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the Oscar winning film *A Beautiful Mind*.

All throughout *A Beautiful Mind* men are smoking - the young students who are being told that they will be great leaders some day - men who love to compete at games and over women - and men who hold government positions.

When it came to female characters who smoke, there is a major shift in emphasis. Almost none of the women smoking in the films we studied showed any sense of confidence or control. The only female characters who did so were a woman depicted as a prostitute in *Domestic Disturbance* and a female character who deceives a man to get his money in *Original Sin*.

Women most often were seen in the films we studied when they suffered some sort of abuse (*Hearts in Atlantis*) or stress over relationships - *Serendipity*, *Kate & Leopold* and *Monster's Ball*. One of the examples is Drew Barrymore's character in *Riding in Cars with Boys*.

Throughout the film she smokes in stressful situations,

primarily when she is depressed about a relationship. The first real scene with her as a young woman depicts her at a party, crying in the bathroom because of rejection. Her future husband comes in and gives her a cigarette, but she is so distraught that every time she tries to light it she blows it out. Scenes like these not only normalize smoking as a stress reliever, they encourage it.



Take Action

It seems clear that both the tobacco industry and Hollywood have decided that not only is it OK to continue to target youth with pro-smoking messages, it is quite profitable. If we are going to counter-act these powerful institutions we need to not only understand what techniques they use, but we need to expose it!

Web links

<http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/>

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org>

<http://www.thetruth.com/>

<http://www.fablevision.com/smokescreeners/>

Get Involved Locally

A local Student-led group, You Decide, meets regularly to challenge the lies of big tobacco by producing their own media.



Contact Them at www.youdecide.net