

Movie Smoking More Common Than Real Life

Some Films, Studios Take Tobacco Off Screen

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James Bond, despite being one of the most heroic characters in the history of film, loves his vices. Endless women, martinis and cigarettes have all been a part of Bond's routine -- along with saving the world.

But that was until 1995, when Pierce Brosnan took over the role in the film "Goldeneye." While Bond still loved the ladies and liquor, he no longer lit up a smoke after polishing off another bad guy.

Only six years prior, the Bond film "License to Kill" was paid \$350,000 by Phillip Morris to have Timothy Dalton's Bond smoke Lark cigarettes, according to internal company documents that were released to the public by Congress. That shift in the franchise's attitude went the opposite direction of the entertainment industry as a whole, according to professor Stanton Glantz of the University of California, San Francisco, who is director of the university's Center for Tobacco Control, Research and Education.

"If you go back to 1950 and look at how much smoking there was in the movies then, when almost half the population was smoking, and then you jump forward to the year 2000 or 2002, which is the last time we quantified it ... it was back about where it was in 1950," said Glantz.

During that time, according to Glantz, the percentage of Americans who smoke dropped from around 45 percent to around 20 percent.

"A kid going to the movies today would think smoking is about as widespread and normative as it was in 1950," said Glantz.

Influence Of Films



Parmount Pictures image

Friend's Wedding?"

An article published in the January issue of Pediatrics by Linda Titus-Ernstoff, a pediatrics professor at Dartmouth Medical School, concluded that young people who start smoking are heavily influenced by the smoking they saw in films during early childhood.

"I'm increasingly convinced that this association between movie-smoking exposure and smoking initiation is real," wrote Titus-Ernstoff. "That's to say, causal. It is quite improbable that the association we see is due to some other influence, some other characteristic inherent in children or parental behavior. The relationship is clearly between movie-smoking and smoking initiation."

The study also found that more than 60 percent of the smoking children were exposed to in films were in PG-13 movies, and about 19 percent were found in G or PG films.

Even Superman took part. The producers of "Superman II" came to a product placement agreement with Phillip Morris to have Superman and the villains throw a Marlboro truck back and forth, according to internal company documents that have since been released to the public.

Who could forget Will Smith's character triumphantly lighting up a cigar after a successful dogfight with an alien in the mega-hit "Independence Day"? Or Julia Roberts' character tearfully sharing a forbidden smoke in a hotel hallway with Paul Giamatti in "My Best

Recent films with a PG-13 rating or under that have promoted smoking in a positive manor, according to Glantz' Web site smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu are "Juno," "National Treasure: Book of Secrets," "Mr. Woodcock," "Rush Hour 3" and "The Simpsons Movie."

Hollywood Kicking The Habit



Tristar Pictures image

In May 2007, the Motion Picture Association of America announced that it would consider smoking a factor in giving a film a more restrictive rating.

But Glantz said this has been nothing more than lip service.

"As far as anything we can tell, it's had no effect whatsoever," said Glantz. "I have not seen any statistically detectable change in the amount of smoking in movies."

The MPAA did not return phone calls when asked to comment on this story.

While the MPAA may not be putting teeth into its own rules, Hollywood has shown signs that it can kick the habit.

James Bond quit smoking. Bruce Willis' character, John McClane, smoked his way through three "Die Hard" films before finally stopping for the fourth installment. In the 1984 comedy "Ghostbusters," several central characters smoked, but did not smoke in the 1989 sequel.

Glantz said that smoking in films decreased steadily from the early '50s until around 1990, when it took a dramatic leap upward. That was at the same time when the tobacco companies agreed not to participate in product placement anymore as a result of pressure from Congress.

Glantz was at a loss to explain why a spike in screen smoking coincided with a ban on product placement.

"The people who smoke in the movies tend to be the power figures, the kind of people kids would want to emulate," said Glantz. "You very rarely see any disease associated with smoking. You rarely see somebody trying to quit, or being frustrated about how hard it is to quit. So, if you look at the imagery, it is much more like tobacco advertising."

Glantz' solution to the problem of teen smoking is to make any film that has smoking in it have an R rating. He says there could be exceptions.

"If you are making a movie about an actual historical figure who smoked, that would not trigger an R rating. So, 'Good Night, and Good Luck' would be an example," said Glantz. "And if you actually show the negative consequences of smoking, which happens about 3 percent of the time, where the portrayal of smoking is actually realistic, those two things would not trigger an R rating."

A recent study by Mississippi State University showed that 70 percent of the American public would support such a system.

There are signs that Hollywood may kick the habit of smoking, at least in youth-oriented films.

In July 2007, Disney announced that it will no longer portray smoking of any kind in any Disney-branded film.

"We're down to the point where it's just a matter of time, and it's just a matter of how many hundreds of thousands or millions of kids start smoking unnecessarily while (the movie studios) drag their feet," said Glantz.



Warner Bros. image