

Scene Smoking

CIGARETTES, CINEMA & THE MYTH OF COOL

a documentary film by Terry Moloney

Smoking in Film and Television

Hollywood Insiders Speak Out About Artists' Rights, Social Responsibility, and the First Amendment



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE FOR COLLEGE

Scene Smoking

From fashion styles to music trends, young people often emulate celebrity behavior that they see on-screen, including the use of tobacco. In ***Scene Smoking***, a one-hour documentary, professionals from the entertainment and health fields discuss real-life choices they've made and what they think about the depiction of tobacco on-screen. This film brings together some of Hollywood's most powerful voices in a frank discussion of artists' rights, social responsibility, and the First Amendment.

The First Amendment protects artists' rights—yet many artists, once they leave school and are faced with the realities of earning a living, discover that several outside factors influence their work. Movie studios demand edits to ensure a certain rating, television networks issue standards and practices guidelines dictating language and subject matter, and even Congress regularly demands ratings that tell parents exactly what's in a particular film or TV show.

The video can be used in a number of different subject areas, including film studies, directing, screen writing, media studies, acting, photography, communications, journalism, public relations, political science, ethics, law, public health, and health education. This guide provides college and university professors with instructional strategies that can be used with the video.

Fast Facts About Tobacco and Its Use in the Media

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, accounting for more than 440,000 deaths each year. Although major strides have been made in reducing tobacco use among U.S. adults, rates of tobacco use among teens remain high: in 2001, 28.5% of high school students used some form of tobacco.¹ Tobacco use and addiction usually begin in adolescence.^{1,2} Among U.S. adults who ever smoked daily, 82% tried their first cigarette and 53% became daily smokers before 18 years of age.^{2,3} The costs associated with tobacco use total more than \$150 billion a year—\$75.5 billion per year in medical expenses and \$81.9 billion in lost productivity.⁴

Although the behaviors and attitudes of family and friends are the main influences on adolescent decisions to use tobacco, the media—films, television, and the Internet—also influence these decisions.⁵⁻⁸ According to recent studies,

- Current movie heroes are three to four times more likely to smoke than are people in real life.^{5,6,9}
- Young people in the United States watch an average of three movies a week, which contain an average of five smoking episodes each, adding up to about 15 exposures to smoking a week. Young people may be exposed to more smoking in movies than in real life.⁶
- A teen whose favorite star smokes is significantly more likely to be a smoker.⁸

- Approximately two-thirds of films seen today show tobacco use, including films that are rated PG or PG-13 and intended for young audiences.¹⁰
- Films depicting tobacco use are increasing and are reinforcing misleading perceptions that smoking is a widespread, socially desirable, and normal behavior, and they fail to convey the long-term consequences of tobacco use.⁷

Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down!, a project of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails in which teens reviewed the 500 top domestic box office movies between 1991 and 2001, reported the following findings in *Tobacco Use in the Movies, Annual Report Card 2001*:

- Tobacco was used in 75% of all movies reviewed. Most tobacco use took place in enclosed areas, usually around nonsmokers.
- 43% of the movies showed scenes in which tobacco use could be interpreted as attractive, with qualities described by teens as sexy, exciting, powerful, cool, sophisticated, rebellious, and celebratory, whereas 27% of the movies included some type of anti-tobacco statement.
- Top-billed actors, as defined by the Internet Movie Database, lit up in 59% of all movies reviewed.

For more information on this study, visit the following Web site: <http://www.saclung.org>.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Pretest: Administer *Scene Smoking—Your Opinions* (on pages 5 and 6) to assess students' knowledge, attitudes, and opinions about artists' rights, the First Amendment, social responsibility, and tobacco use in films and on television. Have students discuss their responses.

Post-Viewing Activities

I. Discussion Questions

1. Does the First Amendment protect filmmakers' and actors' freedom to depict anything they choose?
2. What might be some constraints on artists' rights (e.g., Motion Picture Association of American [MPAA] ratings, Broadcast Standards & Practices)?
3. What role does social responsibility play in tobacco use depiction in films? Censorship?
4. What is accurate, appropriate depiction of tobacco use; what is inaccurate, inappropriate depiction of tobacco use?
5. Would on-screen tobacco use create any health issues on the set?
6. If a tobacco company offered funding for a film project that you were working on, would you take the money offered? Why?
7. In general, if smoking were removed from a scene in a movie, would the scene be the same or different? If different, how? Give an example.
8. What is your opinion of actors being paid to use a particular brand of cigarette in a film?

9. What characteristics does smoking create on-screen? What other ways could they be shown?

II. Situations to Consider

- In *My Best Friend's Wedding*, Julia Roberts portrays a food critic who chain-smokes throughout the film. The film is a PG-rated family comedy. Discuss other choices the actress could have made to demonstrate tension. Is smoking a necessary choice in this film? Does the actress have the right to make this choice despite the intended audience?
- Director Michael Bay consistently makes blockbuster films that have no tobacco portrayals. *Pearl Harbor* was widely criticized for having no smoking in it despite the era featured. However, smoking rates were lower before the United States entered WWII than they are today. Discuss the director's right to make such choices and the need for accurate research when depicting tobacco historically.
- In the film *Volcano*, John Carol Lynch decided NOT to smoke even though his character was written as a smoker. Discuss the acting choice to resist smoking rather than to light up and the benefits and downfalls associated with such a choice.

III. Follow-up Evaluation

Administer *Scene Smoking—Your Opinions* again during a later class session. Have students discuss how their opinions, knowledge, and attitudes changed after viewing the documentary.

Two of the people in this documentary should be especially noted for their contributions:

DR. JEFFREY WIGAND is the highest-ranking executive in the tobacco industry to come forward with important public health information that was withheld by the tobacco industry. His story is told in the movie *The Insider*. Find out more about him on <http://www.jeffreywigand.com>.

JACK KLUGMAN, an actor well known for his television roles as a medical examiner in the television drama *Quincy, M.E.* and as a slovenly sportswriter in the comedy series *The Odd Couple*, now has difficulty speaking. Part of his larynx has been removed because he has had throat cancer caused by years of smoking.

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Teaching Notes

Viewing Objectives

- Discuss the rights and freedoms defined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and their influences on the production of film.
- Differentiate between censorship and social responsibility.
- Distinguish between normalization, glamorization, and responsible and irresponsible use of tobacco in the media.
- Describe how social responsibility relates to artistic freedom and the depiction of tobacco use in the media.

Terminology

- **Artistic Freedom:** Artistic expression that is protected by the First Amendment.
- **Censorship:** The removal or suppression by a government or other ruling body of what is considered objectionable in books, films, and other material.
- **First Amendment:** Prohibits the government from passing laws that restrict the freedom of speech and protects the public's right to receive a variety of information free from government censorship.
- **Glamorization:** Presenting tobacco use as glamorous and conveying desirable qualities such as popularity, success, and attractiveness.
- **Media Literacy:** The ability to use critical thinking skills in accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media.
- **Normalization:** Presenting tobacco use as a routine, natural, and acceptable part of everyday activities.
- **Product Placement:** An arrangement between tobacco and film-production companies to have a specific brand of tobacco used in a film or by an actor. Tobacco product placement is prohibited by the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between the tobacco industry and 46 states.
- **Social Responsibility:** Going beyond one's obligations to obey the law; having a desire to do the right thing and being prepared to give good reasons to justify one's actions.

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Scene Smoking Your Opinions

Directions: Circle the best answer and be prepared to defend your choice.

1. What is your perception of tobacco use in film?
 - A. The amount of smoking realistically reflects smoking in society.
 - B. Smoking is minimal in films and is only used for necessary dramatic effect.
 - C. Depiction of smoking in films happens more frequently than smoking in the general public.
 - D. No opinion.
2. Product placement of cigarettes, which is the process of arranging for an actor to use a particular brand of cigarettes in a film, was banned in 1998. Since that time, do you think that smoking in films has
 - A. Increased?
 - B. Decreased?
 - C. Stayed the same?
3. Do you think tobacco companies have used films to market their products over the past 10 years?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
4. The film industry's depiction of tobacco in the last decade has been
 - A. Responsible.
 - B. Irresponsible.
 - C. No opinion.
5. How do you feel about the tobacco industry's influence in Hollywood?
 - A. I'm against it.
 - B. I'm not bothered by it.
 - C. I've never thought about it.
 - D. They have the right to advertise their product just as any other industry does.
 - E. I don't think they have any influence in Hollywood.
6. Do you believe that what people see in film affects their knowledge?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
7. Do you believe that what people see in film affects their attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
8. Do you believe that what people see in film affects their behavior?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
9. Do actors who smoke in films influence young people's smoking behavior?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
 - C. It depends on the situation.

Scene Smoking Your Opinions (continued)

10. When an actor smokes on-screen, it is most often because
 - A. The director thinks it's a good idea.
 - B. The writer put it in the script.
 - C. The actor thinks it fits the character and situation.
 - D. The actor smokes in real life.

11. Who do you think should have the final say of whether or not a film should show smoking? (Circle one)
 - A. Producers/Studios.
 - B. Actors.
 - C. Parents.
 - D. Directors/Writers.
 - E. Advertisers.
 - F. MPAA.
 - G. Government.

12. In your opinion, should production sets have a policy concerning smoking on the set?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.

13. Which one of the following best defines **social responsibility**?
 - A. The protection of free speech.
 - B. To have an inclination to do the right thing.
 - C. The right to receive and provide information free of censorship.
 - D. It is a synonym for the First Amendment.

14. Which one of the following best defines **artistic freedom**?
 - A. A form of expression that is protected by the First Amendment.
 - B. Portrayal in a realistic manner.
 - C. I know it when I see it.
 - D. An absolute right to freedom from government intrusion.

15. In your opinion, which of the following people or groups play a role in making recommendations on what should or should not be in films? (Please circle all appropriate answers.)
 - A. Producers/Studios.
 - B. Actors.
 - C. Parents.
 - D. Directors/Writers.
 - E. Advertisers.
 - F. MPAA.
 - G. Government.