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Addicted Media: Substances on Screen

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Concern related to the depiction of alcohol and drug traffic/usage in films dates back decades, with the Hayes Production Code severely restricting their depiction on screen between 1930 and 1967: "The illegal drug traffic must not be portrayed in such a way as to stimulate curiosity concerning the use of, or traffic in, such drugs; nor shall scenes be approved which show the use of illegal drugs, or their effects, in detail... The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown" [1]. The Production Code did not address cigarettes, however, probably because the Code preceded the large growth in popularity of cigarettes and active efforts to market cigarettes using popular media.

In the context of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, however, the Production Code did not mesh with the prevailing societal norms, which in part contributed to its demise. In 1968, the movie industry replaced the Production Code with the current voluntary ratings system that currently exists for movies [2,3]. Although the current movie ratings sometimes indicate depiction of drugs or alcohol as a reason for the rating, they do not systematically provide information about the depiction of substances, and they rarely provide any information about tobacco depiction/use [2–4]. In contrast, the video game rating system includes specific content descriptors for substances but lacks clearly communicated criteria for when the rating board does and does not apply them [5–7]. Current television ratings provide no information about substances, with the content designation "D" indicating dialog [8], not drugs, as many parents incorrectly expect [9].

Parents must rely on nonexistent or imperfect information about the depiction of substances in popular media, and they must expect that their kids will

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experience messages about substances from media and recognize that these messages may influence their children's perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about substances. This article provides a comprehensive review of much of the existing peer-reviewed published literature about the depiction of substances in the media and its potential impacts, particularly on children. The article organizes the body of research by focusing on the information obtained in media content analyses to synthesize the vast body of research that collectively demonstrates the widespread and overwhelming presence of substances in media viewed by children and adolescents. The article then highlights reviews that provide insights about the potential impacts of these depictions. With some current demand that any movie that contains smoking receive an "R" rating (eg, http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu), the discussion of this article highlights the challenges of creating and encouraging healthy media for children while also allowing maximum freedom for individuals who are involved with the media.

Methods

To identify media content analyses related to substances, the author conducted an extensive literature search for published peer-reviewed articles that contained the words alcohol, drug, tobacco, substance(s), and movie, motion picture, television, video game, magazine, or media and synthesized them. For purposes of this effort, "substances" refers to alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs but does not include pharmaceutical products (unless the intent for misuse as a drug is clear), medicinal herbs, tonics, or ambiguous tonics or brew. Although this article aims for comprehensive coverage of the existing US peer-reviewed, published literature, it does not exhaustively include every study because of space limitations.

Results

Content analyses

Review of the literature identified hundreds of papers in the peer-reviewed literature related to substances in media. Notably, several US researchers contributed significantly to our understanding by dedicating a significant portion of their research to the topic (eg, Drs. Warren Breed, William DeJong, Stanton Glantz) [11,12,15,16,30–32,40,47–53,59,65–68,77,97]. This study identified more than 50 original content analyses published in peer-reviewed journals that reported some information about the depiction of substances in various media.

Print media

Several studies explored the information in newspapers and newsweeklies [10-13] and women's magazines [14] that documented the depiction of substances in print media targeted at children and adolescents. Several additional

studies characterized substances shown in advertisements in newspapers [15,16] and popular consumer magazines [17], and they explored the features of smoking [18–23] and antismoking [24] print ads. Overall, these studies clearly show significant numbers of depictions of substances in print media targeted at children, adolescents, and young adults.

A recent study that counted and classified types of alcohol advertisements in magazines reported a significantly higher placement rate for beer and liquor ads in magazines with higher numbers of adolescent readers [25] and minority readers [26]. An analysis of alcohol control policy issues found similar coverage in black-oriented compared with mainstream newspapers, with less coverage of economic alcohol policy issues in black-oriented papers, which possibly suggests less salience of these issues in communities served by these papers [27].

Only one study provided insights about the depiction of substances in popular children's literature. The first content analysis to explore the depictions of tobacco in children's picture books reported a decline in the depiction of tobacco over time, dropping from 2.4% of pages in a sample of books published before 1960 to 0.4% in books published after 1980 [28].

Movies

outliers or the beginning of the era of films that featured tobacco. with a larger sample size would reveal whether these films truly represented [32]. The authors also extended the results back to 1950, but their insights depended on dropping 3 out of 20 films (15% of their sample) because these tobacco in films released between 1990 and 1996 [31] and then up through 2002 and found a consistent rate of tobacco use in films over the three decades, with reported that movies did not represent accurately actual US smoking behaviors in R-rated movies but greater alcohol consumption in non-R-rated movies. increase in the depiction of smoking over time [29]. Using 5-minute intervals of assessed the depiction of illegal drugs, legal drugs, tobacco, and alcohol in the most of the studies focusing on tobacco use in films. The first analysis that films contained "essentially continuous smoking," which suggested that analysis three times as much smoking among elite characters than in the actual population A subsequent analysis of top grossing films released between 1960 and 1990 film for analysis, the study also reported increased smoking and illegal drug use 20 top box-office films released each year between 1977 and 1988 found an [30]. Subsequent updates of these data suggested an increase in the depiction of As a medium, movies received considerable attention from researchers, with

Other recent content analyses of tobacco depiction in popular movies showed depiction of alcohol or tobacco in more than half of the animated G-rated feature films [33,34]. Although analyses suggested that the depiction of substances in these films declined significantly over time [33], the number of depictions in current G-rated animated films still remains at a level that may surprise some parents, and all of these depictions represent deliberate additions of substances to the films, because artists must draw them in. A recent study of more than 1200 films rated G, PG, PG-13, and R and released between 1996 and 2003

reported that 95% of films contained some depiction of substances (ie, tobacco, alcohol, or drugs visible on screen regardless of whether they were in use), whereas the Motion Picture Association of America mentioned alcohol or drugs in its rating reason for only 18% of the films and did not mention tobacco use as a rating reason for any of these films [4]. The authors noted that most of the films that depict alcohol or drugs also depict tobacco, and they reported depiction of tobacco in 79% of all the films.

tification of their favorite stars as ones who smoked in this sample of films [43] between adolescents with favorable attitudes toward smoking and their iden-65% of the stars used tobacco at least once. The study reported an association 43 "stars" in all films in which they appeared between 1994 and 1996 found that study published in 2001 that included a content analysis of tobacco use by films stars smoking in movies might encourage youth smoking [42]. A similar stars, and the authors suggested that this might provide preliminary evidence that percentage of actors who smoked on and off screen among their top ten favorite once-versus teens who had never smoked-identified a significantly higher reviewed 38 films from 1994 to 1996 found that teens who had smoked at least the actors' off-camera tobacco use on on-camera use [41]. In 1999, a study that tobacco portrayal suggested heterogeneous perspectives and some influence of in 1983 for agreeing to use one particular brand of cigarettes in no less than five payments for featuring cigarettes (eg, Sylvester Stallone, who received \$500,000 financial ties [40] and highlighted specific high-profile actors who received large relationship between the tobacco industry and Hollywood suggested significant product placement [38,39]. Notably, a study that explored the development of the evidence of a decrease in brand depiction after a voluntary ban on tobacco brand appearances found brands depicted in 28% of popular films, with no tobacco and a strong correlation of character smoking with other risk factors feature films). A study that explored Hollywood insiders' understanding of ferences with respect to tobacco use by popular actors [37]. A study of specific (eg, alcohol use, drug use, illegal activities) [36], and significant gender dif-(eg, anti-tobacco) events in films [35], more than 85% of popular films depicting Other studies reported finding more pro-substance than anti-substance

Television

The role of substances depicted on television also raised many questions and led to a large number of content analyses, with most of them focusing on alcohol. One study assessed the depiction of alcohol in the top ten prime-time fictional series programs on television from 1979 to 1980 and reported a range of 3 to 16.5 incidents of alcohol consumption per program hour for the top ten shows, but almost no smoking or illicit drug incidents [44]. A content analysis of 14 daytime soap operas aired over 4 consecutive weeks in 1977 reported 3 alcohol-related events per program, with drinking most frequently depicted in homes [45]. In 1982, a content analysis of a representative week of major network programming and commercials (ie, ABC, CBS, and NBC) from 1975 coded all drinking events, including alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, and reported a low overall rate

of alcohol consumption but slightly more alcoholic beverages consumed during prime time than nonalcoholic beverages [46].

consumption acts per program hour [54]. criminal activity or with portrayals of gangs. Finally, analysis of a sample of consumption and that these depictions generally occurred in the context of sample of programs and focusing specifically on youth, DeFoe and Breed [53] in 64% and consumed in 50% of episodes, at a rate of more than eight alcohol 3 weeks of prime-time fictional programs from 1986 revealed alcohol depicted reported that underage characters accounted for less than 2% of televised alcohol alcohol shown in 80% and consumed by a character in 60%—at a rate of more study reported references to alcohol in 90% of the 127 programs viewed, with crisis [50]. Looking at alcohol depictions from fall 1984 prime-time dramas, one occurred only when characters drank to escape reality, the program might and drinking problems but suggested that because negative consequences opera programming for "All My Children" found realistic depiction of drinking over these three decades. A study that assessed nearly 5 years of daytime soap responses to these problem drinkers by other characters [52]. Using this same drinkers out of more than 1400 episodes and characterized a wide range of prime-time programs from 1976 to 1986 identified only 74 scenes with problem encourage the perception that alcohol helps in social facilitation or in managing a dies from 1976 to 1977 reported that characters in these programs were more toward drug use [47]. An analysis of top television dramas and situation comecomedies that presented marijuana use as harmless and humorous and suggested than ten consumptions of alcohol per program hour [51]. A study of top-ranked DeFoe [49] observed an increase in alcohol use and a decrease in tobacco use Based on a review of television programming between 1950 and 1982, Breed and failed to depict negative consequences associated with drinking too much [48]. likely to drink alcohol than all other beverages combined and that these shows that these types of depictions, although rare [55], could impact public attitudes drinking and smoking on television. The first study identified several situational Studies by other researchers reported similar findings and provided some Breed et al [47-54] performed several studies in the 1980s that assessed

additional insights. A 1987 analysis of week-long samples of prime-time and weekend daytime network television dramas shown from 1969 to 1985 reported an increase in alcohol depiction over the time period, with 37% of major characters shown drinking and an association noted between drinking and sexual behavior [56]. A 1988 qualitative analysis of alcohol depictions in 77 prime-time episodes from 1984 suggested that alcohol-related behavior serves as a cue to viewers for character attributes, for example, with preferred alcoholic beverage providing an indication of social class and lifestyle [57].

Content analyses of tobacco depiction on television document the presence of smoking in some prime-time programs. Although no existing content analyses seem to go back to the beginning of television programming, many early programs depicted popular media stars smoking (eg, Lucille Ball, Milton Berle). An analysis of a composite sample of 2 weeks of 1984 prime-time programs reported

one act of smoking per hour, with more smoking by lead characters and in dramas compared with situation comedies [58]. A study that analyzed the depiction of tobacco and alcohol advertising shown during 166 sports events televised between 1990 and 1992 (nearly 444 hours of programming) noted viewer exposure to alcohol and tobacco advertising from on-site promotions and sponsorship recognitions and highlighted the near absence of moderation and public service announcements [59]. This study also reported more commercials for alcohol than for any other beverage, with beer commercials dominating [59]. Based on analysis of 3 composite weeks of 1992 prime-time programs on major networks, one study reported 24% of programs depicting tobacco, with most depictions promoting its use (92%) and a higher rate of smoking depicted by characters on television than in the actual population [60].

alcohol ads [69] and reported differences in these messages with corporate versus questioned the effectiveness and responsibility of the moderation message in announcements aimed at preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS [68]. The analyses about alcohol-impaired driving [66], the nature of the Massachusetts Tobacco of television advertising characterized the focus of public service announcements estimates of 51%, 28.9%, and 6.1%, respectively) [65]. Recent content analyses tobacco, or illicit drugs, respectively, compared with US population prevalence prevalence of substance use by TV characters than exhibited by the US popucharacters on prime-time TV during 1995 to 1996 reported significantly lower women [64]. A 2002 study that quantified the prevalence of substance use among portrayals of pregnancy and alcohol from white, middle-class women to minority news broadcasts from 1977 to 1996, one study reported a shift in the nature of the with negative personality characteristics [63]. Based on 36 national network although programs typically associated adolescents consuming alcohol alcoholic beverages as the most frequently portrayed food or drink, accounting of prime-time programming from major networks from 1994 to 1995 identified announcements about illegal drugs [62]. Analysis of alcohol portrayal in 2 weeks and alcohol than networks' news stories, documentaries, and public service more camera shots of the chests, buttocks, legs, or crotches of women than men in television beer commercials that aired from 1991 to 1992 found significantly Control Program [67], and the messages about drug users in public service lation (ie, 11%, 6.1%, and 0.8% of TV characters who consumed alcohol, for a significant percentage of the food and drink consumption by adolescents, 22, 1990 reported nearly 40 times as many commercials that promoted drugs [61]. An analysis that evaluated televised content for the week of September 16 to tions of substances in current programming. A study of the portrayal of women Recent content analyses provided indications of significant amounts of depic-

Billboards

In addition to reassessing the content of existing media, researchers continue to evaluate the content of new media as they emerge. After placement of restrictions on advertising, several researchers performed content analyses of tobacco

advertising on billboards [71–74]. For example, a study of tobacco and alcohol advertising on billboards in Chicago found that billboards in minority neighborhoods showed three times as many tobacco ads and five times as many alcohol ads as billboards in white neighborhoods [71].

Music and music videos

A 1997 content analysis of tobacco and alcohol depiction in music videos aired on four music channels during peak adolescent viewing times in 1994 found more smoking depicted on MTV than on other networks and in rap videos than in other genres [75]. The study also reported that videos that contained sexual content portrayed more alcohol use behaviors and alcohol content and that lead singers smoked twice as much and consumed alcohol three times as much as background performers [75]. Another study provided some historical perspective on illegal drugs in song lyrics and noted a shift in the 1990s, with some artists singing about drug hazards and harms and providing some pro-social messages [76].

'ideo games

Analyses of video games found relatively few depictions of substances in games rated "E" for "Everyone" [77], but a significant number of games rated "T" for "Teen" (15% of a random sample of 81 games) depicted alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs [6]. One study found that most of these depictions did not receive content descriptors for substances from the Entertainment Software Rating Board [6] (only 1 game or 1% received this label), and another study presented specific examples of games that did not receive content descriptors in which players were required to acquire substances to advance in the game [7]. An analysis of tobacco industry marketing documents reported on the aggressive advertising, brand-sponsored activities, and distribution of samples in bars and nightclubs aimed at increasing smoking in the 18- to 24-year-old age group [78].

The Interne

With widespread access to the Internet, researchers appreciate the importance of assessing the depiction of substances on websites [79–88]. A study focused on identifying and characterizing information on hallucinogens identified 81 sites in December, 1998 that provided thousands of pages on obtaining, synthesizing, extracting, identifying, and using hallucinogens, with almost no information from highly reliable (eg, US government agency) sites offering cautionary material [79]. A subsequent study highlighted the significant role of the Internet as an unmonitored, unregulated, and untouched (by the Master Settlement Agreement against tobacco companies) vehicle for delivering protobacco messages and found that consumers could order products directly from approximately half of the 318 pro-tobacco sites reviewed, with only 23% of these sites attempting to verify age and only 11% including health warnings [80]. A similar study that assessed the tobacco content of 30 pro-tobacco websites in April, 1999 reported no restrictions on access to any of these sites, an age-related

warning on only one third of the sites, and no sites that allowed the user to purchase cigarettes, although 2 sites sold cigars and 2 sold smoking paraphernalia [81]. The study further reported depictions of cigarettes on 63% and cigars on 17% of the main pages of websites, with 24% of sites showing a brand image, 35% providing a brand name in writing, and nearly 15% of sites showing nudity [81]. A study 2 years later reported that minors successfully purchased cigarettes using a credit card (93.6% of 47 attempts) or money order (89% of 36 attempts) from 55 websites identified by the authors as selling cigarettes online and that none of the vendors or delivery services attempted age verification [82].

Significant non-peer-reviewed analyses

Several key reports that do not appear in a search of the peer-reviewed published articles but frequently appear in references in these articles also documented the extent of the depiction of substances in popular television, movies, music, and music videos [89–92]. These studies allowed for some comparisons of the amount of depictions in the different media [89]. They also provided a wealth of information about the nature of the depictions, for example, documenting the large percentages of alcohol depictions in movies and music that associate alcohol use with wealth and sex [90] and the lack of the depiction of harmful consequences associated with illicit drug use [91,92].

Potential impacts of these depictions

Several prior reviews summarized the decades of strongly suggestive evidence of media depictions of substances that influenced children's perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors [93–97]. The reviews collectively suggested that exposure to glamorous or normalized depictions of substances in media increases youth initiation and perception of the acceptability of substance use, although no study definitively answers the question: How would substance usage rates change in the absence of media messages about substances? The clear implication for clinicians is that the media present an important risk factor that should be a topic of discussion during well-child annual examinations.

Several reviews of the impact and effectiveness of counteradvertising emerged in the last decade [98–102]. These reviews, combined with evaluations of media literacy programs [103], suggested that the media can teach kids about avoiding substance use. Measuring the strength of media effects continues to be problematic [104], and assessing the role of media in the broader social context remains the elusive challenge as researchers try to understand the roles of parents [105–107], peers [108], musical preferences [109,110], and sociocultural [111], psychosocial [112], and other factors, such as skepticism [113] or disengagement from school, that associate with youth susceptibility to tobacco promotions [114,115]. Some studies suggested that tobacco marketing may be a stronger influence on youth initiation of smoking than exposure to peer or family smokers or perceived school performance and other sociodemographic factors [116]. Other studies suggested that tobacco advertising and promotion activities can

undermine the influence of parents [117], encourage all youth to smoke [118], and even induce nonsusceptible never-smokers to start the process that leads to addiction [119].

We must acknowledge, however, that the multi-billion dollar annual substance advertising budgets clearly work and continue to play a role in influencing perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about substances, as they have for decades [120–127], with two historical analyses demonstrating the impacts of the tobacco industry's early marketing campaigns and targeting of women [126,127]. The money spent on promoting substance use has led to extensive brand recognition, even by young children [18,128–134]. A recent estimate suggested that the nearly \$60 million spent in 2000 to advertise cigarette brands popular with youth in magazines led to ads that reached 80% of young people more than 17 times each and noted that the Master Settlement Agreement did not significantly change spending or youth exposure to these ads [135]. All of the literature taken as a whole suggests that we should expect that researchers will continue to observe increased rates of youth substance use initiation with increased exposure to media [136–139].

Summary and discussion

The reality that the media reflect actual practices in society means that they will depict unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, unless media producers make a point of eliminating them or counteradvertisers succeed in producing the dominant message (which would represent an impressive shift given the lack of any observed public service announcements on tobacco or alcohol in a study of 1989 advertisements in a composite day of programming [140]). The remarkable rise of tobacco use that accompanied the widespread growth and diversification of entertainment media provides a powerful example of the ability of the media to influence perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Although many physicians and researchers have continued to call for greater control of media messages about substances targeted at children and adolescents [141–145] and the American Academy of Pediatrics has issued several policy statements [146–148], we have not seen recently the medical community take as strong a position on media depictions of substances as it has on media depictions of violence [149]. The same observation also applies to the government, with recent discussions about the marketing of violent entertainment to children by the Federal Trade Commission [150] similarly focusing exclusively on violence and not considering the impact of marketing of substances in popular entertainment media targeted at children. Clinicians must emphasize the risks of substance use with patients at every opportunity and encourage patients to evaluate media content critically and pay attention to media ratings.

Some recent efforts that have focused on changing the movie ratings eventually could make it easier. For example, some efforts focus on changing the ratings so that they provide an indication of any depiction of tobacco in a film

(ie, smoking movies receive an automatic "R" rating) [151]. According to a recent study, that change could imply that in the absence of changes in the behavior of producers, 79% of films could be rated R just for smoking alone [4]. If that same demand were generalized to depiction of all substances, it would imply that more than 95% of films could be rated R for depiction of substances [4]. Although we can reasonably expect that such a change in the rating system could lead some media producers whose products target young audiences to remove tobacco and other substances from some percentage of future productions, the reality of the large body of existing media containing depictions of substances still would present an important issue for parents. Efforts to educate parents about the depiction of substances in media and develop and expand media literacy programs should remain in high demand.

A significant issue that arises in the context of providing rating information about substances comes from the nature of the depictions, with current depictions including a spectrum from minor or background characters to lead characters and from pro-substance to anti-substance depictions. The questions about definitions arise quickly (eg, Which substances count? Do they have to be identified as real substances, or is it enough that they produce effects like real substances? Does the character actually have to use the substance or does presence of the substance itself require parental warning? For tobacco products, must they be lit?) In the context of making progress toward a system that could provide parents with better information to enable them to discriminate between healthy and unhealthy depictions of substances in media, efforts to work toward standardized definitions offer some promise for progress.

and understand the lack of depiction of the real consequences of substance use in help patients see the potential short- and long-term effects of substance use the list of the leading causes of death in the United States, clinicians must examinations. With diseases and injuries associated with substance use topping media in their patients' lives by asking questions about media use in physical information about exposure. Clinicians can begin to understand better the role of as they also attempt to understand children's media diets and combine these with the existence of the Internet, the challenge for researchers becomes even larger share the same incentives. Recognizing that all media interact, particularly with to bring all of the media together in a standardized approach (eg, a universal that it does not make sense to talk about individual media in isolation, and efforts of the body of literature of content analyses of substances in media demonstrates provide about substances and the reality of the convergence of media. A review others must grapple arises from the reality of the mixed messages that media labeling or rating system) offers the most promise for ensuring that all media One of the difficult questions with which researchers, parents, teachers, and

Focusing on the lack of a national strategy to protect children from media messages that promote unhealthy and harmful behaviors while simultaneously protecting individual freedoms to create and choose media should emerge as national priorities for action, not only among clinicians but also in the commu-

nity. Although further research is needed to understand the role of substance depictions in the media, the existing evidence shows widespread depiction of substance use and raises the question of how to fight this apparent addiction [152–159]. The larger theme that emerges centers on the need to promote media that value youth instead of devalue them [160] and the ability to use media to help children make better choices about the numerous risks that they face [161]. Clinicians must take a leading role in asking patients about their exposure to substances and ask not only about use but also about depictions in their environments, including the media and their attitudes. Clinicians must help to find ways to correct patients' misperceptions of the risks of substance use and ensure that children hear about the potential health consequences of bad choices. Individuals interested in an online guide to the media that may provide a useful resource for distributing to parents can check the guide to media on the KidsRisk website [162].

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