

SMOKING IN THE MOVIES IN THE 1940s

This study examined tobacco use in a random sample of 20 of the top revenue films from 1940–1949. The compiled data from this time period was combined with data from an earlier study of tobacco use in films made during 1950 to 2002 by Glantz et al. We measured the prevalence of tobacco use, recorded per incident, per viewing hour. We obtained movie data of the top 20 1940s films from the Worldwide Box Office Internet site. All films were coded by a single coder. In earlier research, it was validated that coding by a single coder provided accurate results as opposed to comparing results of multiple coders. The purpose of this study was to determine and prove that the presentation of smoking in motion pictures is not accurately portrayed.

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INTRODUCTION

Smoking in the movies has been associated with its popularity among teenage and adult populations. Since the beginning of silent films, smoking in the movies was accepted by the population at-large.

Hollywood producers defend smoking in the movies as a reflection of life in the decade of the movie. This project's aim was to assess if smoking in the movies accurately portrays the smoking levels during each decade. We intend to expand a current dataset (Glantz et al), which records information from 1950 through 2002.

METHODS

A list of the 50 top grossing films from the 1940 decade was collected from the Worldwide Box Office Internet site. From this list, 20 movies were randomly selected to ensure the reliability of the data. From the list of 20 movies, a random order was given to ensure the reliability of the data collected.

Each movie was viewed twice, in the order it was assigned. The first time the movie was viewed, it was to gain an understanding of the movie. The second viewing was utilized to begin the coding process. All coding was done by a single coder because earlier tests have shown that a single coder obtains more accurate results than multiple coders.

In this case, coding is the identification of a tobacco-related incident. The coder records the time when the incident first appears, along with who

was smoking, where the individual was located, what kind of tobacco product was being utilized or portrayed, if there is any tobacco paraphernalia associated with the scene, whether the individual smoking receives positive or negative feedback from individuals surrounding them, and finally, the ending time of the smoking scene.

A scene was defined as a continuous chain of interlocking events. An example would be a car chase or a conversation between individuals. If there were multiple smoking incidents in a single scene, they were counted and coded as separate events.

Once all 20 movies had been viewed and coded, we analyzed the smoking incidents per hour. These will be the unit of measurements used throughout my research.

RESULTS

The results show that smoking in movies was a very common event during the 1940s. Of the 20 movies, 50% had between 10 and 20 smoking incidents per hour. More specifically, 25% had between 7 and 20 smoking incidents per hour. Another 25% had between 10 and 17 smoking incidents per hour. Twenty-five percent of the movies had >20 smoking incidents per hour. Finally, 25% of the movies had <10 smoking incidents per hour. These rates rank the 1940s as number one for having the highest amount of smoking incidents per hour.

As found by other researchers, smoking incidents per hour steadily declined with each decade until reaching the 1980s when 15 smoking

incidents per hour were found. From the 1990s through 2002, smoking incidents in the movies skyrocketed to almost the levels of the 1940s. In the 1990s, 50% of the movies had 8 to 18 smoking incidents per hour.

With that in mind, if we compare Hollywood's thought that the movies

reflect current life in that era, then the data for the average smoking for each decade should be parallel with the data from the smoking incidents per hour. Based on data collected, this was not the case.

In the 1940s, the average cigarette consumption per smoker was ~2,000/

per year in the general US population. After the 1940s, smoking in the US population jumped significantly, while smoking incidents in the movies declined. During the 1980s, smoking was at its all-time high, with an estimated per smoker consumption of ~8,000/per year consumption.