

Good substance abuse portrayal in the media research paper example

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Introduction

Despite efforts of the federal government, schools, and parents in preventing the youth from engaging in vices, the youth still gravitates toward abusing substances such as alcohol, cigarette, and drugs due to the \$25 billion worth of advertisements that are shown during the airing of movies and television programs. It seems that advertisers discovered that the media depiction of substance use would be more effective than traditional advertising. This is because in general, media contents are seen as positive; otherwise, they would not be released for public viewing. Moreover, media depictions would not induce criticisms as much as advertising would. In this regard, the youth gets mixed messages on the use of substances while the media cultivates such contents, considerably contributing to the risks that the youth may engage in (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010).

Schools and the federal government have tried the track of advertising through campaigns against substance use for decades. However, the youth still continuously uses and abuses these substances, particularly alcohol and cigarettes. It was only recently that the effects of media-influenced substance use among the youth are recognized. In this regard, the Master Settlement Agreement considerably restricted cigarette companies in the marketing of their products. However, cigarettes still keep appearing in movies, which significantly contrasts the reality in America where around half of the population reside in a community that restricts indoor smoking (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010).

Furthermore, the condition agrees with the justification that exhibited smoking in the media enacts a casual function in the commencement of the

smoking habit. With this, it is clear that cigarette advertising must be eliminated. Also, the depictions of substance use in the mainstream media must be greatly reduced. With alcohol, it is difficult to restrict advertisements and programs for it because its use is acceptable across many places without health indications for adults. However, underage alcohol use is deemed immediately threatening to the youth. All these findings point to evidence that supports the need for determined actions towards the entertainment industry regarding the media depictions of cigarette use. Moreover, it supports the need for determined actions towards assisting and motivating parents and the youth to further restrict adult media, which provide extreme exposure to substance use (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010).

The findings above provide a summary of the findings of the American Academy of Pediatrics or AAP (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). In order for us to delve into the issue, we would be comparing and contrasting the portrayal of substance use in the media with the information found in class and in the textbook. Also, we would compare and contrast the portrayal of substance use in the media with the criticism of media portrayals found in the AAP paper. In this part, we would utilize the American television series entitled *Breaking Bad* as an example. From here, we would draw conclusions about the portrayal of substance abuse in the media and provide a review of the guidelines suggested by the AAP at the end of their policy statement.

Before comparing and contrasting the media portrayal of substance abuse with the class, textbooks, and criticism in AAP, we would first familiarize

ourselves with terminologies and behavior. We would also analyze and relate sources about drug prevention among the youth and the statistics on substance use in television.

The common substances that are used and abused today are cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs. Normally, people take in coffee, tea, and many other beverages, including wine, which is an alcoholic beverage that accompanies meals and that keeps people energized throughout the day. Likewise, when people want to come down or relieve pain, they use nicotine (consumed through smoking) and alcohol to help them. However, when the body gets used to normal amounts of these substances, they tend to be perceived as becoming less effective. Thus, they seek higher doses to continue their energized days and calm nights. Some substances come in the forms of prescription drugs such as the anti-anxiety drugs and amphetamines, which are supposedly only for medical use. However, illegal drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana are also used rampantly (Nevid, Greene, Johnson & Taylor, 2011).

The abused drugs are classified into three categories. The first group is the depressants. These slow down the activity in the nervous system. Among the examples are cigarettes and alcohol. The second group is called the stimulants. These, on the other hand, heighten the activity in the nervous system. This is the group where amphetamines and cocaine belong. The third group is pertained to as the hallucinogens because they induce hallucinations. Marijuana renders a similar effect; thus, it belongs in this group (Nevid, Greene, Johnson, & Taylor, 2011). Most instances of substance abuse are found in areas that don't have regular access to health care.

Obviously, this is because there is a lack of regulation. This abusive habit starts from a young age, while a child still forms their perception of the world. In a study, the researcher found that a child as young as grade 7 already smoked a calming substance called dope (Simon Fraser University, 2010). Apparently, this kid had learning disabilities and was being bullied as a bad kid in school. As such, using dope was an escape from his stresses for him. It seemed that he learned to self-medicate his problems (Simon Fraser University, 2010).

Media Portrayal in Relation to the Class, the Textbook, and the AAP Criticism

The discussions above came from a textbook. Certainly, it is similar with how substance abuse is tackled in class. The university journal, on the other hand, gives us an example of how people start to engage in substance use and abuse. Here, we infer that while there is a logical lecture provided in class, as well as informative content that 's provided in the textbooks, it may not be enough to veer the youth away from using substances. It is likely because the stresses they want to escape from are actually coming from their school. With this kind of environment, the youth would not be able to embrace learning. Even after school, the youth goes back home where they would be exposed to television and the Internet.

According to Christenson, Henriksen and Roberts (2000), 20% of television episodes depict illegal drugs; 22% feature cigarettes; and 77% have alcohol. They compared this to a previous study and found that substance use is less featured in television than in the movies, (Henriksen, & Roberts, 2000). Thus, we would expect higher percentages of substance use being featured in the

movies. On the other hand, around 60% of commercial advertisements feature alcohol use (Henriksen, & Roberts, 2000). In this regard, the media content generally presents more negative than positive statements on substance use (Christenson, Henriksen, & Roberts, 2000). These findings are similar with the findings from AAP (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010).

Alcohol remains the top substance depicted on television (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). Meanwhile, cigarettes are more common in the movies than on television (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). Illegal drugs, on the other hand, are rarely seen on television (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). The difference with the recent study is that the negative statements are less than in the older study (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010).

The youth becomes familiar with substances through the information they obtain from their classes and from their textbooks. On the other hand, they develop their perceptions of how substances are used through its depictions in the media. While the information in classes and textbooks discusses the purpose of substance use and in turn, its consequences, the depictions in the media seemingly reflect reality, which the youth would more likely identify with. In this regard, not only is the media portrayal more relatable and in turn more influential than the classroom and textbook information, it also becomes aspirational. The American television series *Breaking Bad*, for example, seemingly glamorizes the lifestyle that comes with substance use. The series *Breaking Bad* is among the controversial productions in the media, which depict multiple cases of substance abuse. The series focuses

on the abuse of substances such as marijuana and methamphetamine or meth. The use of these drugs is outlawed in most American states. The depiction of these drugs in the series indicates that the abuse of the drugs is a growing problem.

Jesse Pinkman, who is among the main characters in the series, is addicted to marijuana, and is presented in various parts of the series as living comfortably. Instead of focusing on the adverse impacts of substance abuse, this series seems intent on portraying drug abuse and trade as being lucrative and therefore, desirable (Ewing, 2013). Adolescents and young adults can respond to the apparent calls made in the series to embrace drug abuse. This is because they admire the life of the characters who use drugs in the series. This reality highlights the uphill task that law enforcement agents and anti-drug campaigners face.

The series also contains scenes that involve those who abuse drugs and others who supply them attempting to evade capture by the law enforcement agents. Although the production's aim is seemingly to present the risks that drug abuse poses, the inclusion of these scenes serves to convince individuals that it is possible to evade capture by the police. The series also features scenes that present drug trade as a clandestine enterprise. The series achieves this by including scenes that show characters trading in drugs using a fast food chain of restaurants (Mathews, 2013). The inclusion of these scenes is an apparent attempt to indicate that substance abuse and trade are not as perilous as presented.

Conclusion

The comparison between the media portrayal of substance abuse to the information provided in class, textbooks, and in the criticisms of the AAP shows how ineffective the latter group is. Consequently, it shows how influential media portrayal is in the marketing of substance use to the behavior of the youth. In this regard, the fight against substance abuse is a flop in the face of the multibillion-dollar efforts of advertisers to get their products across the market.

Through the findings from various studies, we found that the reason behind substance use and abuse is likely from schools. It is from the school that people develop the internal stresses, which urge them to self-medicate through the use of substances. Instead of seeking help from such an institution, they escape from it. Consequently, they find other venues they can belong in, particularly through the media such as the television. This reinforces the idea that media contents and portrayals are generally seen as positive and do not induce criticism. Thus, it appeals more to the young audience.

In addition, the media reflects reality. Thus, these kids perceive them as real, relatable, and aspirational. We would like to emphasize the aspirational effect of media portrayal. Just like in the TV show *Breaking Bad* where the substance user was portrayed as having a comfortable life, the youth would likely aspire the character's condition simply because a comfortable life is a good life. Today, the negative statements on substance abuse are becoming less and less, which provides an opportunity for the advertisers to highlight their products. The media portrayal of substance use and abuse in this age is

indeed glamorized.

The balance is clearly tipped off in favor of substance use and abuse. What the advertisers did is to almost take over an individual's life through the media. They leveraged the time people spent in engaging with the media and the bitter experiences they gained from a crucial point of their education, the school. In this regard, the writer thinks that the succeeding efforts and campaigns must also attempt to encompass the entirety of a person. With this, the writer agrees with how the AAP guidelines are structured - that is, involving not just the educational institutions but also every aspect of society.

The AAP has provided a total of 17 guidelines. 6 are for anticipatory guidance; 1 for community advocacy; 6 for legislative advocacy; and 4 for the involvement of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, drugs, and entertainment industries in encouraging responsible behavior (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). The anticipatory guidelines encourage parents to supervise their children with media use and contents. Next, community advocacy encourages local schools to include media education in the curriculum. Legislative advocacy, on the other hand, encourages the legislators to regulate the operations and funding of campaigns against substance abuse. The last guideline encourages the media industry to have a heightened sensitivity towards the issue (The Council on Communications and Media, 2010). It may not have been explicitly indicated in the AAP guidelines, but the medical and healthcare institutions are one with the campaign as well. In particular, pediatricians, the medical professional in-charge of the youth, are the ones to lead these guidelines.

References

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