

Media representations of tobacco and drugs



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Since the establishment of television as a media, the industry of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol have been placed in plain sight. Tobacco was glamorized, along with alcohol, and as time went on so became the realm of drugs as well. Drugs in advertising, entertainment via movies and shows, and on the internet were shown everywhere. It was not abnormal to see a specific brand of tobacco product visible from the shirt pocket of a 60's television stare. Of a table in the scene of a movie showing a specific brand of alcohol. However, as time progressed legal drugs like prescription medications also became widely advertised and shown on prime-time cable television on almost all channels. The ubiquitous distributing of media and the realm of receptiveness, consciously and unconsciously, made doing it this way a prominent role of success in introducing these things to all ages viewing the tube.

Drugs because to changes in regard to being promoted through commercials and on non-commercial television. After lawsuits and fights for these to be changed, television has slowly become commercial free and less conducive to advertising. Movies and shows were halted from depicting certain brands anymore. The goals achieved, initially, in the form of product placement in between shows, movies, and documentaries, in commercials, began to change and other methods and steps had to be taken. Drugs like cigarettes and those that began to have age restrictions could no longer be publicized and glamorized in movies and television shows alone due to the controls that have been implemented over the years. Despite the regulation, however, companies have begun to strategically target the youth and young people through avenues outside of the traditional television commercial.

Though not done for specific companies any longer, they began to be shown in movies, shows, and documentaries strategically. These tactics are done in ways that counteract the work being done by our teachers, parents, and the federal government to stop drug use in society.

The Policy Statement highlights that these media sources are not doing it in the traditional form of advertisement, as stated before. It is being done in a strategic way in movies and shows in the same way a commercial would, by using actors and actresses, but depicting their use as a side note and outside of what we would normally focus on. While tobacco advertising and marketing has been limited, for example, these companies and others are now doing it in a way that is much better and more widely accepted than was done in the advertising industry. The article highlights just how items like cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs, legal and illegal, have gained the spot of front stage, in the minds of developing youth. The article recommends ways for Pediatricians to counter these obstacles and to promote more awareness of just how media is influencing the use of drugs in this population, most at risk, pediatrics.

Some risk factors the article categorized was family structure, private room access, and friends and peers (Strasburger, 2010) to name a few. The research and statistics in this article show a direct correlation between the information being shown on the television and the actions within the discussed population. For example, advertising alone is responsible for 30% of the population using tobacco and alcohol. During the Budweiser Frogs campaign, a large population of nine and ten-year-olds could identify them as well as they could Bugs Bunny. These commercials were simple. They just

<https://assignbuster.com/media-representations-of-tobacco-and-drugs/>

sat frogs on a log and said the syllables of the popular brand and it worked, through humor, to inspire the idea of use. In another study, a cohort of 3500 students in South Dakota, 75% of fourth graders and 90% of ninth graders could identify the ferret icon used by the company as well. The goal of the Policy Statement done by the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that if the drug-prevention tactics included more education on media literacy and promoted more skepticism toward media, it is believed that there could be a successful deterrence to the use and abuse of these drugs in this population (Strasburger, 2010).

Prevention is the main goal in the fight against drugs. It is believed that it will start with the pediatric population. Once the impact is made, the continuance of these actions will promote a new culture. Despite the ideas and glamour being publicized within media, the next generation will know the truth about drug and their uses and will know and understand the realities associated with them. Some of the recommendations of the article promote awareness within the family, as the first line of defense, but also engages the community, legislatures, and within the entertainment industry themselves. While the article is geared towards the pediatrician, the pediatrician is encouraged to have discussions with these entities about risks and findings that were seen to be assets for the use of drugs versus against it. Included in this paper will be the discussion of risk factors and how media, as a primary feature, can impact the fight against drug use. Secondly, we will discuss risk deterrents and how true information, education, and understanding, in media, can showcase a reality within drug abuse. Finally,

how we can call out the media and address their goals and motivations within the new advertising strategies we see today.

Dave Chappelle, a stand-up comedian, had a skit on his popular show depicting just what we would expect on a way to deter the use of drugs in pediatrics. He was called as a guest, in his character, Tyrone Biggums, to address a classroom of elementary school-aged children. At face value, it addressed the arena of which the programs like Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D. A. R. E) and others aim to prevent the most, through educating the young people. While watching this episode of the show, we see many things present. While seemingly addressing the issue to the group, it was instead a direct attack on the minds of the people on the show, the audience it was geared to, and the audience or vulnerable population, discussed in the article. It instead it mocked prevention.

This media, as a primary feature altered the potential success of the presentation by using a celebrity and humor to desensitize the mind on the topic. Dave Chappelle plays the role of this addicted drug addict who is supposed to be addressing a class of students at a local middle school about his experiences in a bad way. The narrator even says, “ to promote drug awareness (Comedy Central, 2014).” However, we quickly see, through the use of humor, that the motivation is completely different. Drug use and abuse were historically seen as a negative part of society. Drugs like tobacco and alcohol were looked at a social and normal activity. However, drugs like marijuana, cocaine, or heroin had a highly negative stigma. By the 1960’s and beyond, however, within the younger generation, became normal and a rebellious thing (Levinthal, 2014). In this episode, Tyrone Biggums is labeled

<https://assignbuster.com/media-representations-of-tobacco-and-drugs/>

as the “ coolest crackhead in town.” Within the population where fitting in is important and self-worth is based on acceptance, we see the foundation being laid for their acceptance of this abnormal entity.

The opening scenes of the show quickly run through activities of this character showing violence like theft, crime by himself, against children, and others to support his habits. Drugs and the surrounding environment of drug use has a lot of connections to violence. Pharmacological violence where someone under the influence of drugs is violent towards themselves or others. Economically compulsive violence, as shown in this episode, is geared toward the need for money or things to sell to get more money and buy drugs. Also surrounding the user, and those violated, are the systematic violence perpetrated by the dealers, rivals of dealers, and the punishments of people around drug users who will kill or hurt snitches (Levinthal, 2014). This was highlighted by Tyrone saying, “ if you tell anybody, I’ll kill ya...I’ll kill ya (Comedy Central, 2014)!” This type of education and awareness, which is shown in a humorous way, is not accurate and hides the reality of just want situation this character is in. Yet he is referred to as “ the coolest crack head in town” while performing these actions.

Tyrone then is introduced by the teacher to the children and his initial reception by these children is horrified and overwhelmed by his presentation. His appears to be homeless, dirty, and unkept. He greets the children with the opening statement, very sarcastically, that “ I should not be standing in front of you today...drugs have ruined my life... I started using drugs when I was little, just like you...” As he points to a little student in the class. According to the Academy of Pediatrics article, research revealed that <https://assignbuster.com/media-representations-of-tobacco-and-drugs/>

a key factor of substance abuse in adolescents is exposure to other people who use drugs (Strasburger, 2010). In this classroom and to those viewing this could be the exposure they need. Tyrone, played by Chappelle continues describing his experience, with friends, who would smoke marijuana at home after school. Directly advertising marijuana as a key drug.

Marijuana has been cited as making people feel extremely hungry after smoking. Usually, craving food and sweet tasting treat. The textbook and many people commonly call this the munchies (Levinthal, 2014). Tyrone highlights this feature of the drug in his presentation. When he describes eating all the cookies, food children like, but he again interrupts the good with a sarcastic, “ it was terrible... terrible.” Quickly making reference to a risk and interrupting it with cookies was the idea of it being mixed or contaminated with another substance like “ embalming fluid” makes the presentation dishonest as well.”

The total presentation was geared as an education on how to use drugs and obtain drugs against the authority of parents and using crime to obtain it. He began to describe Acid or LSD as the next step to his progression. He described having fun with familiar characters like Bugs Bunny, Scooby Doo, Mickey Mouse, and all the favorite cartoon animals spent time with him for 16 hours. Kids are shown as taking notes on how to go into their parent’s room and steal money from their purse, travel through the town on a city bus, and go to a dealer and get the drugs they wanted to use and experiment with to have the same effect. Not to mention, sometimes these drugs actually are decorated with some of these characters too. So if a child

found a square of acid, it might be enticing to lick because of its presentation of characters on it.

Another feature of this media was how Tyrone discussed making it easier than going and buying something but rather just experimenting everywhere. He describes, “ drugs are all around you... use the permanent markers... take the cap off and sniff it (Comedy Central, 2014).” A chemical or normally occurring object is now used for huffing. According to research in 2011, 12 percent of eight graders reported using inhalants before (Levinthal, 2014). The tactics of awareness promotes abuse. Is it a coincidence that this is being highlighted in a comedy sketch? The teacher is heard saying that these students are just 10 and 11 years old and already learning about these things which the crowd audio is heard laughing in the background.

The message being portrayed in this media presentation is a highlight of how a lot of early exposures are occurring in media. Television uses campaigns intentionally or unintentionally to attract adolescents. The depiction of this media and the comparison with the article are clear and confirm just what methods are being used. They use humor to distract from the consequences or seriousness of drug use. They also use celebrities to distract from the problems and struggles that plague many people who use drugs. It is not accurate most of the time and while some information is accurate, the distractions of cookies and treats, fun with favorite characters, or ease of access to drugs everyone, prevent the minds from seeing the truth.

The impact of this media, as a primary feature, on children is clear. The child who sat in that classroom which the show was being recorded is influenced

on the uses of drugs, how to gain access to drugs, and the fun that taking drugs can be. This character or celebrity, be praised as an icon inspires the naive mind on how they can be the coolest, most recognized, or accepted entity in their town, despite using drugs. They may form the opinion that it is not that bad, trying it one time won't hurt, it is funny or fun to do it, my peers will like me, and the list goes on and on. The implications of shows, movies, and documentaries taking the place of traditional advertisement are risky and counter the work being done by our teachers, parents, and the federal government to stop drug use in society.

The Academy of Pediatrics highlighted that certain interventions are important as deterrents. One recommendation is that unsupervised media access and use plays a factor of exposure. HBO, Showtime, and Comedy Central, where this media was from, are highly filled with this type of media. Censoring viewing of these programs in homes and not allowing televisions to be in rooms where kids can watch these unhindered have been shown to contribute to drug abuse.

Another recommendation is that discussions after watching things can deter the environment of understanding in the population. Explaining that while the character seems to have it all, while they seem to be funny and accepted, while they are highlighted in the way they are in the show they may not be depicting them the way they truly are. Creating a skeptical view of just how true these depictions are in this show is a good way to hinder the inquisitive adolescent from trying the drug in the first place. True information, education, and understanding in children or within any population can be a deterrent within drug abuse.

When developing a successful prevention program, the goal must be to identify the foundational and best cornerstone to the program, the family. One thing that stands out within entertainment today is the production of what constitutes a family structure. Historically, the family had a father who worked outside the home, a mother who worked in the home, and children that were raised and guided with discussions at a dinner table every evening or within family time. On television now, children are not generally seen with parental figures. From Disney to Nickelodeon based shows, the design is kids experiencing life by themselves. It was alluded to in the media presentation as well. Go into your parent's room, steal from them, take a bus, go downtown and so on. It matches our society somewhat as well. Within the contemporary home, we find many demands on the integrity of the family. These demands include single young parents, large bills, busy work, childcare, and many other things distract us from the dinner table or the education of the family. These same risk factors are what population use inhalants as highlighted in the textbook. They are associated with the young or very young. They are usually around eleven to thirteen years old and those that are dealing with emotional challenges in their lives and seeking escape. Those with disorganized homes where parents are absent and too busy or are drug users themselves (Levinthal, 2014). These risk factors are the perfect grounds for unsupervised television and media viewing and unhindered interpretations as well.

The article further takes the tone and recommendation of primary prevention effort with the idea of stopping initial use. The idea of primary prevention is impacting those individuals who have never had an experience or who have

a minimal experience to drug use or abuse (Levinthal, 2014). Using education and hindering media exposure is geared toward this goal. For example, it is said that preadolescents whose parents forbid them from viewing R rated movies were less prone to starting to smoke tobacco products (Strasburger, 2010). Research showed that being exposed and having a television in the room, or unsupervised viewing increased the risk (Academy). Primary prevention is the goal. Primary prevention does not always prevent initial use by media but also through education in media literacy and life awareness with these types of exposures around them as well (Levinthal, 2014).

Overall, the responsibility, which is a team effort needs to include the companies and those who are providing the media worldwide. The media we run into has grown substantially. Radio was regulated under the Radio Act of 1912. It was further done in the Radio Act of 1927 and continued to be adjusted all the way into television with the Telecommunications act of 1996. Under this act, there were stipulations on what things could be easily accessed by people. Examples included things that should not be shown to minors even online. It established a rating service where categories were established for viewing audiences and how parents could be aware and kind their children's viewing. The media outlets and media, in general, need to be held responsible for their actions and intentional and unintentional motivations of exposures. Similar to the arena where disclaimers are shown regarding similarities to real people or events, there needs to be a standard of expression that things are not accurately represented.

While drug dealers are real, while drug addicts are real, highlighting the glamour of use of these habits, sales, drug abuse, and any other action that promotes a distorted view of reality needs to be addressed. All around the county and world advocates encourage their legislatures and representatives to incorporate cautions. The coffee cup is hot. The floor is slippery. Do not enter. The entertainment and media industry needs to be made aware of findings related to their influence on the developing minds and actions of pediatric ages and the risks of drug use and abuse. One example highlighted in the article is that antismoking, antidrug disclaimers should be shown before movies that show them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics researched and presented an article that highlights statistics related to the health of our future. Young people, children, adolescents, and teens that are exposed to drugs like cigarettes, alcohol, prescriptions medications and illegal drugs are highly likely of using them themselves. Media has played and continues to play a huge role in these exposures and the epidemic of drug use and abuse in populations around the world. From commercials in between shows, movies, and documentaries on regular television to those exposures being shown in the programs themselves. These exposure compromise truth and reality to entice the viewer into using these products.

Measures need to be taken to address this within the population. Measures have begun with teachers, parents, and the federal government to stop drug use in society but it is not enough and is being countered by strategic placement in an almost unregulated environment. In school, there are programs like DARE. In homes, there are methods being utilized like no

<https://assignbuster.com/media-representations-of-tobacco-and-drugs/>

televisions in rooms, co-viewing and discussion, and many more. Anti-smoking campaigns, drink responsibly campaigns, and initiatives are all around battling the epidemics of abuse, however, the media industry is waging war just as much as these.

Media is a powerful tool for change. Since its beginning, it has been used in radio, television, and now even the internet. By implementing some minor adjustments things can get even better.

- Deffree, S. (2012, July 2). 1st American TV station begins broadcasting, July 2, 1928. Retrieved November 9, 2018, from <https://www.edn.com/electronics-blogs/edn-moments/4376579/1st-American-TV-station-begins-broadcasting-July-2-1928>
- Strasburger, V. C. (2010). Children, Adolescents, Substance Abuse, and the Media. *Pediatrics*, 126 (4), 791-799. doi: 10.1542/peds.2010-1635
- Comedy Central (2014, May 23). Retrieved October 20, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eHMgXlugIU>