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**MOVIES.** The use and abuse of substances may be observed in movies from virtually any genre, location, and era. One of the earliest examples of drug use in film is the 1906 French movie *Les Rêves d'un Fumeur d'Opium* (The Opium Smoker's Dream). Substances may play a minor role in a movie, serving to enhance a particular storyline or character. Alternatively, they may play a central role, representing aspects of use and abuse at the individual, community, or societal level. Although the portrayal of substances in movies may have a particular entertainment value, it is important to recognize that they may also shape a viewer's belief system and stereotypes about persons who use and abuse substances.

Research guided by social learning theory shows that "learning is achieved through not only direct experience but also through observation" (Stout et al., 2004, p. 544; see also Bandura, 2002). This suggests that viewer perceptions of persons who use and abuse alcohol and drugs can be directly influenced by the portrayal of substances in films. In a review of more than 50 movies, Cape (2003) found that both positive and negative stereotyping surround the use and abuse of substances. The major stereotypes include the tragic hero, rebellious free spirit, demonized addict/homicidal maniac, and humorous/comedic user. In addition to shaping beliefs, films can provide a historical context, helping the viewer to understand the broader culture and beliefs about substances during a particular time. This entry highlights some of the different genres of movies that portray the use and abuse of substances, the types of characters exemplifying the stereotypes outlined by Cape (2003), and the interplay between different genres of movies and the historical context.

## DRAMAS

Dramas provide fictional accounts of the lifestyle or culture associated with substance use, varying significantly in their realism. They offer the viewer a unique perspective into buying and selling substances, the social contexts in which they are used, and their biopsychosocial consequences, exhibiting significant heterogeneity in realism and accuracy. Some of the earliest movies were influenced by an era of severe moralistic reasoning. For example, Dorothy Davenport produced *Human Wreckage* (Davenport & Wray, 1923), which served as a drug-prevention film following the morphine-related death of her husband Wallace Reid. In this film, drug use was associated with moral deficiency in a propaganda-like manner. It provided definitions of moral behavior in the midst of numerous Hollywood scandals. Such events and the emphasis on morality guided the architecture of the Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry (better known as the Hays Code) of the 1930s. This was an attempt by the Motion Picture Association of America to explicitly define what was acceptable in movies, with the ultimate goal of advancing proper or moral behavior. From the Hays Code emerged films that contained substances as a central theme, with a clear purpose of propaganda.

At a time when very little knowledge about substances existed, these movies helped warn parents and youth about the jeopardy of one's morality when using illicit substances. For example, the films *Reefer Madness* (Hirlliman & Gasnier, 1936) and *Assassin of Youth* (Brown & Clifton, 1937) showed well-adjusted individuals having extreme and sensational reactions when high on marijuana. These films suggested that typical responses include insanity, suicidal behavior, and violence, and connected marijuana use with premarital sex and listening to jazz music, two societal taboos of the time. Similar portrayals of other drugs can be found in films of the same period, such as *Cocaine Fiends* (Kent & O'Connor, 1935). In *The Lost Weekend* (Brackett & Wilder, 1945), the main character engages in a weekend of binge drinking. Subsequent to his intoxication, he becomes involved in criminal activity and serves time as a patient in a psychiatric ward.

*The Man with the Golden Arm* (Preminger & Preminger), released in the 1950s, also illustrated themes similar to those of the early propaganda

films, highlighting the negative consequences of illicit drugs. This film opens with the release of the central character, Frankie Machine (played by Frank Sinatra), from prison, clean and sober from a heroin addiction. Upon returning home, he struggles in a social environment that challenges his sobriety, and he quickly succumbs to heroin use, illegal card dealing, and dodging the police. The insanity, violence, and deviant behavior of the characters in these films match the demonized addict/homicidal maniac stereotype. These films often had subtle or explicit intentions to educate and instill fear associated with using substances. A viewer of the early twenty-first century might find the portrayal of the substances to be humorous, given available knowledge on the actual effects of the substances.

A shift from bombarding the viewer with the harmful effects of substances to a more tolerant view occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, during an era of counterculture, experimentation, and political unrest. A complete breakdown in social functioning due to substance use was no longer the norm. Such films featured the tragic hero stereotype, with the main characters retaining likable qualities despite their struggles and poor choices associated with substances. For example, *Easy Rider* (Fonda & Hopper, 1969) showed the main characters Captain America (played by Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper) traveling across the United States in search of freedom and financial gain by selling drugs. On their journey, Captain America and Billy fight locals who view the "hippie" drug salesmen as a detriment to their communities. The viewer is led to sympathize with the protagonists, rather than feeling disdain toward their drug dealing. The broader social and political context of such films, intertwined with the Vietnam War, made them appealing to a wide audience.

Another important social and political shift occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, with the end of the Vietnam War and a growing body of scientific evidence on drugs becoming available. Nancy Reagan championed the "Just Say No" campaign, and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program was implemented. Zero tolerance policies and harsh drug laws began to be enforced. This change in knowledge and beliefs gave rise to a much different portrayal of substances. It is not

clear to what extent these policies shaped the portrayal of substances in the movies, especially with a greater emphasis on artistic and creative directorship. However, this period marked a return to portraying substances negatively with much realism. For example, *Ulee's Gold* (Gowan & Nunez, 1997) illustrates the troubling consequences that drug use can have on an addict as well as his family and friends. It bears noting that Peter Fonda starred in this film as well as *Easy Rider*, providing a stark contrast between two cultural moments. The audience becomes witness to a character's severe detoxification and to the dangerous people who are often associated with the drug scene. *Trainspotting* (Macdonald & Boyle, 1996) portrays the dark side of heroin dependence, including severe withdrawal symptoms, hallucinations, drug seeking behaviors, overdose, relapse, and troubled social relationships. *Go* (Freeman & Liman, 1999) depicts a group of young friends who use and sell Ecstasy at rave parties. These friends must confront the realities associated with drug dealing, including threats of violence and the need to engage in high-risk behaviors.

Besides showing the consequences of movies, it is important to note that many dramas also focus on issues related to recovery and treatment. As in the other films discussed, these films also reflect the current knowledge and beliefs at the time they were filmed. For example, the earlier *Days of Wine and Roses* (Manulis & Edwards, 1962) shows the struggles associated with recovering from an addiction. The film illustrates a married couple's personal, social, and professional struggles associated with their alcohol dependence. Alcohol is portrayed as being a major contributor to reckless and dangerous behavior when the intoxicated wife nearly kills herself and the couple's child after accidentally setting a fire in the family's apartment. The film closes with the husband achieving sobriety through the assistance of Alcoholics Anonymous and attempting to persuade his wife to join him in the journey to recovery. This was the only treatment option of the time. A more recent film, *28 Days* (Topping & Thomas, 2000), shows a woman, Gwen Cummings (played by Sandra Bullock), forced to make a choice between jail or 28 days in a rehabilitation center after she gets in a car accident while driving drunk. She fulfills her sentence at a rehabilitation center, with the treatment

process involving the serenity prayer, a twelve-step program, and family therapy. Treatment and recovery films such as *28 Days* can have an impact on the way the viewer perceives people who seek help for their addiction. Hersey (2005) argues that this type of film may unrealistically portray individuals seeking treatment and the treatment process itself. The main characters tend to be white and upper-middle-class, and undergo treatment in expensive settings that are generally not reflective of typical treatment options, such as outpatient treatment.

### COMEDIES

Although some films attempt to portray the negative consequences of substance abuse, many films take a different approach. That is, they glorify substance use and misuse using a comedic perspective. They tend to avoid showing the negative consequences of substance abuse or do so in a humorous way. Although the War on Drugs has had a lasting effect on the themes expressed in drug-related dramas, comedic films have more flexibility in their perspective and tone. Both the shift in societal perspective during the 1980s and current scientific data have illustrated the devastating physical consequences of narcotics such as cocaine, heroin, and opiates, making a comedy based on these substances unlikely. Comedic drug films tend to focus on the use of alcohol or marijuana, often distorting their true effects.

So-called stoner films center on the use of marijuana and typically have outlandish plots and humorous protagonists. Their titles often make explicit references to marijuana use, as evidenced by the films *Half Baked* (Simonds & Davis, 1998), *Dazed and Confused* (Daniel & Linklater, 1993), and *Up in Smoke* (Adler & Adler, 1978). *Half Baked*, like *Go*, features main characters involved in the drug-dealing business; unlike *Go*, however, the characters in *Half Baked* are never perceived to be in serious danger or trouble as a result of their involvement in this drug culture—despite a minor plot appearance from police and a greedy drug king. The hallucinations experienced by the characters in *Half Baked* are also quite different from those in more typical films with an antidrug message in that the *Half Baked* characters generally have fun and enjoy their humorous experiences while high.

Another common type of comedy portrays young characters eager to experiment with or use substances—partying. This genre of drug film typically involves using a large quantity of substances, especially alcohol, with kegs of beer and shots of hard liquor being commonplace. Parents are generally not main characters in these films as the majority of the film actually centers on the party and youth themselves. Much like stoner films, party films do not portray the negative consequences associated with substance use, or the consequences become a central point of the comedy. *National Lampoon's Animal House* (Reitman & Landis, 1978) is a classic party film. Such films frequently take place in a college, depicting the use of alcohol as a social lubricant and catalyst for many gags.

Comedic films often have characters that reflect the humorous/comedic user or rebellious free spirit stereotype. More times than not, the substance use or culture is the vehicle for humor. This is particularly evident when substances are a component of a party setting, as they tend to minimize any negative consequences associated with their use. A potential danger of this type of film, as suggested by social learning theory, is that the viewer misunderstands the actual consequences.

### DOCUMENTARIES

Documentary or non-fiction movies are another means for portraying the use of alcohol and drugs. These movies allow the audience to view the experiences of an actual person or group of individuals rather than through a fictional account or storyline. For example, *Children Underground* (Belzberg & Belzberg, 2001) depicts the existence of impoverished Romanian youth who abuse inhalants and live in the subway system. The viewer learns about the consequences related to the youths' addiction to inhalants, including prostitution, stealing, begging, and other physical and mental health problems. The documentary *REHAB* (Okazaki & Okazaki, 2005) provides an insider's look into a 30-day rehabilitation facility for persons with various types of substance use disorders and histories. The people featured in this documentary share their struggles in recovery through anecdotes and day-to-day interactions during and after treatment. The documentary also highlights the challenges that individuals may face in their efforts to achieve and maintain sobriety.

Documentaries may lend themselves to a variety of stereotypes, depending on the viewpoint and story portrayed. In these examples, and many others, the tragic hero stereotype was exemplified. Although documentaries may attempt to depict true-life accounts of people or events, it is important to recognize that there is a fine line between an objective portrayal and propaganda. Beliefs about substances are arguably influenced by social, political, and moral values. Thus, documentaries may have an underlying motivation to advance a particular system of beliefs while maintaining a position of objectivity.

### IN CONCLUSION

Tremendous diversity exists in the portrayal of alcohol and drug use in movies, including but not limited to the depiction of consequences, contexts surrounding use, and the extent to which use is sensationalized. The portrayal may be intended for purposes of entertainment. However, there are sometimes unintended consequences, such as advancing stereotypes about persons with substance use disorders and minimizing the actual risks of use, especially binge drinking. As alcohol and drugs are ubiquitous, particularly in American culture, the depiction of use and misuse can be expected to continue playing an important role in movies.

See also Internet: Impact on Drug and Alcohol Use; Media; Music.

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