

2013 Movies, Ratings and On-Screen Tobacco in Ontario

The US Surgeon General report on youth and young adult smoking concluded that there is “a causal relationship between depictions of smoking in the movies and the initiation of smoking among young people.”ⁱ

The decades-long history of the tobacco industry’s collaboration with Hollywood, including paid product placement, is well documented.ⁱⁱ

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death, killing 13,000 Ontarians every year.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2013:

- 779 million tobacco impressions were delivered to Ontario audiences in-theatre by movies rated for children and teens, representing 87% of all tobacco impressions in theatres (Table 5).
- 54% of all top-grossing movies featured tobacco images (Table 3) of which, the majority (86%) were rated for children and teens (G, PG, 14A) in Ontario (Table 4).

Given that Ontario’s film ratings give children and teens greater access to movies with tobacco content than do ratings of the same movies in the United States, the risk of smoking initiation, nicotine addiction and tobacco-induced disease is likely to be higher for young people in Ontario than the United States estimate.^{iv}

The Solution

The World Health Organization, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and many other leading public health authorities endorse an adult rating for any new movies with tobacco content.^{vi,vii}

Ontario youth exposure to on-screen tobacco can be significantly reduced by assigning an adult (18A) rating to new movies with on-screen tobacco, with exceptions for portrayals of actual people who used tobacco (as in biographical dramas and documentaries) and depictions of the serious health consequences of tobacco use.

Currently, movie rating systems in North America do not include tobacco as a rating factor.^{viii}

In 2013, the Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB) noted in their online film database a “tobacco use” detailed observation for only 46 of 73 movies with tobacco (Table 3) and added a “Tobacco Use” content advisor to only 3 of 21 movies with 50+ tobacco incidents (Table 3).

Methodology:

The Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB) and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) movie ratings of top-grossing films released in Ontario Canada for January-December 2013 were analyzed along with the movies’ tobacco content and estimated in-theatre tobacco impressions (an index of total audience exposure).

The sample included 135 top-grossing movies released to theatres in the “domestic” (USA and Canada) market, January-December 2013 (Table 1)^{ix}. Top-grossing movies are defined as having ranked among the top 10 movies in box office gross earnings in any week of their first-run theatrical release. Ontario and USA movie ratings were established from the OFRB^x and MPAA^{xi} respectively.

Tobacco incidents in each movie were monitored by Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! (TUTD), a project of Breathe California Sacramento-Emigrant Trails (USA). Tobacco impressions in the domestic film market was calculated by the University of California, San Francisco, Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education, and are assigned to Ontario and the USA on a population basis.

Table 1: Sample	Total
Top-grossing movies in Ontario in 2013	135

Table 2: Ratings	Total
93% of all movies were youth-rated (G, PG, 14A) by Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB)	125/135
57% of all movies were youth-rated (G, PG, PG-13) by Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)	77/135
7% of all movies were adult-rated (18A) in Ontario by OFRB	10/135
43% of all movies were adult-rated (R) in USA by MPAA	58/135
78% of all movies rated "lower" in Ontario by the OFRB than in USA by the MPAA	105/135
0% of movies rated "lower" in USA by the MPAA than in Ontario by the OFRB	0/135
83% of movies adult-rated in the USA were youth-rated in Ontario	48/58
17% of movies adult-rated in USA were adult-rated in Ontario.	10/58

Table 3: OFRB Tobacco Observations and Advisories	Total
54% of all top-grossing movies included tobacco incidents	73/135
63% of movies with tobacco incidents were labeled by the OFRB "tobacco use detailed observations"	46/73
11% of movies with tobacco incidents were assigned an OFRB "Tobacco Use content advisory"	8/73
14% of movies with 50+ tobacco incidents were assigned an OFRB "Tobacco Use content advisory"	3/21

Table 4: Tobacco Incidents & Youth Ratings in Ontario and USA	Total
86% of movies with tobacco incidents were youth-rated in Ontario	63/73
34% of movies with tobacco incidents were youth-rated in USA	25/73
50% of all youth-rated movies in Ontario featured tobacco incidents	63/125
32% of all youth-rated movies in USA featured tobacco incidents	25/77
79% of movies with tobacco incidents that were adult-rated in USA were youth-rated in Ontario	38/48

Table 5: Tobacco Impressions delivered to Ontario and USA movie theatre audiences.	Total
892 million tobacco impressions (paid admissions X tobacco incidents, per film, per capita) in Ontario	892 million
20.8 billion tobacco impressions (paid admissions X tobacco incidents, per film, per capita) in USA	20.8 billion
87% of tobacco impressions were delivered by youth-rated movies in Ontario	779 million/ 892 million
45% of impressions were delivered by youth-rated movies in USA	9.3 billion/ 20.8 billion
13% of tobacco impressions were delivered by adult-rated movies in Ontario	113 million/ 892 million
55% of impressions were delivered by adult-rated movies in the USA	11.5 billion/ 20.8 billion

ⁱ US Department of Health and Human Services (2012) *Prevention tobacco use among youth and young adults: A report of the Surgeon General*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of Smoking and Health. Atlanta, Georgia (USA). 602 www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/index.html

ⁱⁱ Smoke-Free Movies website www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/bigtoobacco.html Accessed Mar 6 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Health and Long-term Care website www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/smoke-free/legislation/default.asp Accessed Mar 6 2013.

^{iv} Babayan A, Luk R, Schwatz R. (2014) *Exposure to Onscreen Tobacco in Movies among Ontario Youth, 2004-2013*. Toronto ON: Ontario Tobacco Research Unit <http://otru.org/exposure-onscreen-tobacco-movies-among-ontario-youth-2004-2013/> Accessed July 2014.

^v Glantz SA (2012) Attributable risk for smoking due to exposure to smoking in movies. University of California, San Francisco

^{vi} Smoke-Free Movies UCSF list of Endorsements <http://Smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/solution/index.html#endorsements> Accessed Mar 6 2013.

^{vii} Smoke Free Movies Ontario list of Endorsements www.Smokefreemovies.ca/content/letters-support-0 Accessed Mar 6 2013.

^{viii} Polansky JR, Mitchell S, Glantz SA (2010). *Film-Flam: How MPAA/NATO movie labels hide the biggest media risk to kids*. UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research & Education. www.escholarship.org/uc/item/8hn866t

^{ix} Top-grossing Movies Released in the Domestic Market (Canada and US), 2004-2013, in Alphabetic Order by Year http://otru.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/OTRU_Movie_List.pdf Accessed July 2014

^x Ontario Film Review Board www.ofrb.gov.on.ca Accessed Mar 6 2013.

^{xi} Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) www.filmratings.com Accessed Mar 6 2013