

Anti-Tobacco Ads 'Inoculate' Teen Filmgoers in UCI Study

■ **Research:** Professor Cornelia Pechmann plans to submit the findings for publication by the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

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IRVINE—Showing teenagers anti-tobacco advertisements just before they watch a feature film seems to "inoculate" them against glamorous depictions of smoking, a UC Irvine researcher concluded in a recent study.

UCI marketing professor Cornelia Pechmann said her study, which has not yet been published, provides evidence about the effectiveness of such ads in "reminding children about the dangers of smoking" at a time when public health experts say teen smoking is on the rise.

The study, finished over the summer, involved 800 Orange County ninth-graders from eight high schools. In the first part, 600 students were shown a 30-second anti-smoking ad and then portions of the hit 1994 film "Reality Bites," starring Winona Ryder and Ethan Hawke and depicting Generation Xers musing about their uncertain futures. They were also shown scenes from the 1990 cult favorite "Wild at Heart," which centers on two young lovers on the lam.

Half the students were a control group that did not see any scenes showing smoking. Those who watched the smoking scenes were more apt to find smoking "exciting and fun" than those in the control group, Pechmann said.

In the second part of her study, 200 teenagers were shown "Reality Bites" in its entirety, with half first viewing a 30-second anti-smoking spot. Those who saw the ad and then the movie overwhelming expressed negative views about smoking.

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ing, Pechmann said, while those who saw only the movie expressed far more positive thoughts about lighting up. None of the students in the study were smokers, she said.

"I am not advocating that movies be censored," Pechmann said. "I think we need to simply give young people both sides of the story. Movies just give them one side."

The research, she said, is particularly noteworthy in light of the reported increase in teen smoking. According to a 1995 Centers for Disease Control study, 35% of all high school students reported smoking in the month before they were surveyed. In 1991, the figure was 27.5%.

The ad Pechmann used was produced by the state Department of Health Services and shown often on MTV this year and other shows popular among young people as part of an ongoing public awareness campaign. Known as "Clifford," it shows a teenager wearing a gas mask and humorously lamenting his poor relationship with his girlfriend because she smokes.

Pechmann suggested such ads be shown before movies that include several smoking scenes; 30% of "Reality Bites" scenes depicted at least one character smoking, Pechmann said. Jersey Films, which produced the movie, referred questions to director Ben Stiller, who could not be reached. Spokesmen for the Tobacco Institute, the principal lobby for cigarette manufacturers, did not return telephone calls.

Pechmann's study comes in the midst of debate over Hollywood's depiction of smoking. Since 1990, studios have refused to accept payment for the on-screen use of tobacco, so the portrayal of smoking is largely up to filmmakers, many of whom claim artistic freedom.

Dr. Stanton Glantz, a professor of medicine at UC San Francisco who has studied the use of tobacco in films over three decades, called Pechmann's study "very important."

"The fact that the ad was able to counter [smoking images] is remarkable," said Glantz, who contends that over the years filmmakers have been more inclined to show smoking in glamorous ways.

Pechmann's study was funded by the state Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program, which devotes 5 cents of the state's 35-cent tax on cigarette purchases to research on the effects of cigarette smoking. She is preparing to submit the study to the *Journal of Marketing Research* for publication next year.

Pechmann's pool of subjects was evenly divided by gender, with 65% white, and the remainder African American, Asian American and Latino.

For adolescents, she said, the advertisements "are like an inoculation. They are inoculated from pro-smoking influences, and they do that by reminding kids what they already know: They don't want to smoke."