

That's Entertainment!

That's Entertainment! contains three activities that teach youth about how tobacco and alcohol use are promoted in entertainment programming.

Media Mapping—Entertainment builds upon the previous media mapping activity, turning attention to entertainment media messages.

Character Assessment explores the use of tobacco and alcohol products as props in entertainment media to portray stereotypical characteristics such as rebelliousness, sophistication, and independence. The role of celebrities (**character identification**) promoting these products is also examined.

Entertaining Health integrates the first two activities by having youth create their own entertainment program that effectively either (1) “deglamorizes” tobacco and alcohol use or (2) “spoofs” the portrayals of these products in entertainment programs.

Objectives

Youth will:

- identify their exposure to tobacco and alcohol messages in entertainment media,
- identify the positive and negative role models for tobacco and alcohol use which occur in entertainment media, and
- identify how entertainment media “normalize” and “glamorize” tobacco and alcohol use.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

High Media Use by Youth.

Television viewing is one of the most common leisure time activities of teens, who average roughly 21 hours per week. Listening to the radio, CDs, and cassette tapes accounts for another 20 hours per week. Watching rented videos and reading newspapers, magazines, and books for pleasure may add as much as 14 more hours to youth's weekly media use.³³

Media Influence. Though much of our media use focuses on being “entertained” rather than “informed,” entertainment programming still sends powerful messages about what society values—what it sees as normal and glamorous. The values, beliefs, and behaviors of popular actors and actresses and the fictional characters they portray contribute to social norms of acceptable behavior. The media may not fully define standards of behavior, but they cer-

Entertainment programming that portrays tobacco and alcohol use as having positive benefits—or which fails to illustrate negative consequences of such use—clearly contributes to the normalization and glamorization of these products.

Character Identification. We are most influenced by celebrities with whom we “identify” and/or those we want to be like because they possess traits and attitudes we value. If celebrities or the characters they play smoke, chew tobacco, or drink alcohol, our attitudes toward tobacco and alcohol likely will become more accepting, or at least softened.

Tobacco in Entertainment Media.

Tobacco use is actually shown infrequently in television programs. When it is shown, the characters are more likely to be men than women and appear in serious dramas, crime, and action-adventure programs.

While it is rarely shown in situation comedies, smoking is very prevalent in films. One study in 1990 reported that 87% of PG-rated films, 100% of PG-13 films, and 89% of R-rated films showed characters smoking cigarettes. Negative consequences are rarely shown in any entertainment media. Rather, smoking generally is associated with success, sexuality, vigorous physical activity, independence, and toughness.³⁴

Alcohol in Entertainment

Media. Alcohol use is extremely common in the entertainment media. Since 1969, the number of references to alcohol (talking about it, showing characters drinking it) has increased steadily. There are more instances of drinking in dramas than in situation comedies. Drinking is also commonly shown in daytime soap operas and in prime-time programming. Though young people are rarely shown drinking on prime time, drinkers tend to have important roles such as being the leading male characters with desirable attributes.³⁵

KEY CONCEPTS

Background: Peripheral action that occurs in the background to provide a realistic context for the foreground action (e.g., people drinking at the bar of a restaurant).

Character Development: Use of tobacco and alcohol as props to convey specific character attributes such as being attractive, aggressive, hip, cool, savvy, independent, etc. These often rely on stereotypes such as the Socialite, the Partyer, the Rebel, the Depressed, the Alcoholic.

Character Identification: The extent to which one feels a strong similarity with or attachment to a character, often leading to a desire to be and act like that character.

Characters—Main: The central characters who are the primary focus of an entertainment program. Usually have key roles in the story and provide most of the dialogue.

Characters—Supporting: Characters who are not the focus of an entertainment program, but who are used to provide additional interest, action, and excitement through interaction with main characters.

Characters—Background: Characters who typically have no speaking roles, serving only to provide a realistic setting. For example, people sitting at the back of a restaurant who are never identified, have few or no lines, and are never seen again.

Foreground: Focal point which centers viewers' attention on the central action and primary characters in scenes.

Product Depictions: Showing tobacco and alcohol products as background props or being used by characters.

Product Placement: Visible use of a brand name product in an entertainment program (essentially a built-in ad).

Role Model: A person who is looked up to by youth and therefore influences their attitudes and behaviors.

Script: The text of a TV show, film, or commercial or public service message, including the lines to be spoken by actors and a description of the action and setting.

Spoof/Parody: To reverse the original meaning of a message through sarcasm and exaggeration.

Stereotype: An oversimplified portrayal of how a person or group of people look, act, and think.

Storyboard: A series of rough sketches that show the plot, action, characters, and setting. Used in electronic media (television, films, animation) before actually producing the media message.

Storyline/Feature: Focus of a program (e.g., teen alcoholism, drunk driving, nicotine addiction).

Media Mapping—Entertainment

Talking Points

- Review the five ways in which tobacco and alcohol messages appear in entertainment media (*character development, product depictions, storyline, product placement, and advertising*).
- Entertainment media *normalize* tobacco and alcohol use when they repeatedly present images of these products. This includes the number of times tobacco and alcohol are shown in a given program *and* the total number of programs overall that include portrayals of these products.
- Entertainment media *glamorize* tobacco and alcohol when these products are used by characters and celebrities who are popular and successful, or are shown as “necessary” elements of any social activity (e.g., parties, dancing, having fun, enjoying music).
- An analysis of a program’s advertisers tells you what **target audiences** they are trying to attract. Advertising provides additional normalization and glamorization messages.

Action Steps

- 1 Have youth discuss their favorite *entertainment* media (e.g., movies, television, magazines, music).
 - ? **What do they most enjoy about these media? What do they look for in deciding which to watch, read, or listen to?**
 - 2 Have them discuss the lifestyles and values emphasized in these media.
 - ? **What behaviors are normal/ abnormal? Glamorous/ unglamorous? Which behaviors and characters are most valued?**
- Explore the health implications of the norms and values exhibited in these media.
- 3 Explore the extent and nature of tobacco and alcohol messages they have seen in their favorite media. Discuss the occurrence of product depictions, product placement, character development, and storyline.
 - 4 Distribute *Handout 11: Media Mapping—Entertainment*. Have youth track the entertainment media they use for two days, identifying those with tobacco and alcohol messages. Use *Handout 4: Glamorization Appeals* to identify the appeals that are emphasized in the entertainment messages they find.

Focus

1. Explore how frequency of tobacco and alcohol use in entertainment media normalizes these products.
2. Explore how positive portrayals of tobacco and alcohol use glamorize these products.

Time:

45 minutes

Materials:

Handout 11: Media Mapping—Entertainment
Handout 4: Glamorization Appeals

Character Assessment

Talking Points

Define foreground and background; main, supporting, and background characters; and character identification.

Discuss how these are used in media programs to create normalizing and glamorizing images of tobacco and alcohol use.

Tobacco and alcohol are commonly used props to portray specific character traits or qualities (e.g., tough, rugged, sexy, successful, and independent).

Character identification increases the influence celebrities and the characters they play have on us.

In this activity, we will look at the tobacco and alcohol messages we get through the entertainment media.

Discussion Steps

Have students name celebrities, musicians, and fictional characters they like. Discuss why they like these characters and celebrities.

What are their appealing traits and characteristics? What influence does the actor or actress who plays the character have on how youth feel about the characters?

2 Explore the health behaviors (e.g., exercise, nutrition) of these characters.

? **Do any of them smoke, chew tobacco, or drink alcohol? If so, does this influence how youth feel about the character?**

? **How do the characters feel about tobacco and alcohol products?**

? **Is use of tobacco and alcohol consistent with the character's image? Is it critical or necessary? Does it make the character more or less attractive?**

? **Do the celebrities who portray these characters use tobacco or alcohol themselves?**

3 Distribute and review *Handout 12: Character Assessment*. Play a selected video segment from a popular program or movie that shows tobacco and/or alcohol use. Try to use a program that youth watch regularly and enjoy. Instruct youth to pay particular attention to how tobacco and alcohol products are shown (such as in the background or foreground by main or secondary characters).

4 Use *Handout 5: The Seven Critical Media Questions* to analyze the product portrayals contained in the video clip.

Focus

Examine how depictions of tobacco and alcohol use by characters in the entertainment media contribute to the normalization and glamorization of these products.

Time:

45 minutes

Materials:

Handout 12: Character Assessment

Handout 5: The Seven Critical Media Questions

Video segment of a popular TV program which shows tobacco and/or alcohol use.

Entertaining Health

Talking Points

- In the last activity, we saw how entertainment media can contain both subtle and not-so-subtle messages about tobacco and alcohol use. Today, we will focus on using entertainment programming to send messages that promote “healthy” behaviors.

Action Steps

1 Divide youth into “Production Teams.” Have them develop a storyboard, script, or story outline for an episode of their favorite television program (such as a talk show, a comedy, a drama). The program should send one or more messages that discourage tobacco and/or alcohol use (see “*Branding*” Health, page 46, for more information on designing health messages). They can choose a number of options, including:

- “spoofing” or “deglamorizing” tobacco and alcohol products.
- “normalizing” and/or “glamorizing” healthy lifestyles or behaviors that are inconsistent with tobacco and alcohol use.
- portraying how important characters respond to offers or pressure to use tobacco or alcohol.
- rewriting the script for the video clip used in the previous activity.

Distribute *Handout 13: Entertaining Health* to help them develop their storyline and approach.

OPTIONAL: Show Video–Part II and closing segment as examples of what other young people have done to discourage tobacco and alcohol use.

2 Spend one 45-minute session having youth develop their scripts and storyboards. Spend a second 45-minute session having them present their scripts to the group. These can either be described, acted out, and/or taped depending on the time available.

Each presentation should include a discussion of how their scripts either (1) deglamorize tobacco and alcohol use or (2) glamorize lifestyles and behaviors that are inconsistent with tobacco and alcohol use. Be sure to have youth provide one another with feedback on their scripts and storyboards.

ACTIVITY EXTENSION: Have a local theater group act out the scripts or have the students perform a selected script. Have a local radio or television station record and air the performance.

3 Be sure to analyze the results of the *Media Mapping*.

Focus

Apply entertainment techniques to normalize and glamorize health and fitness, or alternatively, to deglamorize tobacco and alcohol use.

Time:

90 minutes. (This could be a two-period activity.)

Materials:

Handout 13: Entertaining Health

Video–Part II

Activity 2-4: “Branding” Health



Notes