

# Keeping Our Eyes Open

By Ben Jacques

I'm a fan of old movies, and often watch Turner Classic Movies on TV. Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, Marcello Mastroianni in *La Dolce Vita*, Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, John Travolta in *Grease*.

But I often wonder how anyone in America could grow up without smoking, when our on-screen heroes—how they charmed us—would light up whenever and wherever.

It took me a long time to stop smoking. I remember smoking at work, during committee meetings. I remember a graduate school professor who smoked in class, and allowed us to do so as well. I even remember when you could smoke on airplanes.

Thankfully, times have changed. But smoking in films still goes on. Johnny Depp, Penelope Cruz, Robert DiNiro, Angelina Jolie—you can still see them lighting up on screen.

The same is true for drinking. Our hero is anxious. He opens the liquor cabinet. Our heroine is jilted. She drowns her grief in booze. Then there is the comic drunk genre, from Dean Martin to Adam Sandler, triggering chuckles and guffaws.

And of course there is our suave, sophisticated super spy, James Bond, imbibing his famous "shaken not stirred" martinis as he moves from one thrilling adventure to another.

Yes, movies are fun. But consider this.

Two British doctors spent six months in 2013 analyzing James Bond's drinking in the Ian Fleming novels. Their conclusion? 007 is an alcoholic.

Their study, published in the *British Medical Journal* in December 2013, concluded:

"James Bond's weekly alcohol intake is over four times the advisable maximum alcohol consumption for an adult male. He is at considerable risk of developing alcoholic liver disease, cirrhosis, impotence, and other alcohol-related health problems, together with being a serious risk of injury or death because of his drinking."

And about those shaken-not-stirred martinis, the doctors wrote: "We conclude that James Bond was unlikely to be able to stir his drinks, even if he would have wanted to, because of likely alcohol-induced tremor."

But do any of us movie lovers take what we see on screen seriously?

Here's what a senior lecturer in social sciences at the University of Bristol, UK, wrote in a recent article in the journal *Pediatrics*. She was reporting on her study of movies and teenage drinking:

"Those who watched the most alcohol use in films also were almost twice as likely to binge drink and more than twice as likely to drink weekly than those who had seen the least alcohol use. Teens who saw a lot of drinking in movies were also twice as likely to have alcohol-related problems."

There has also been a link between movies that include smoking and smoking in young people. A 2014 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report presents these findings:

"Watching movies that include smoking causes young people to start smoking. The more smoking on screen, the more likely they are to start smoking."

The CDC also reported that although the percentage of smoke-free, youth-rated movies doubled from 2002 to 2014 (32 to 64 percent), those movies that did include smoking portrayed almost twice the number of smoking incidents.

The CDC has called for R ratings for all movies that include smoking, predicting that this would reduce the number of teen smokers by nearly 1 in 5 (18%) and prevent 1 million deaths from smoking among children alive today.

We all know the devastating results of smoking and tobacco-related products to our health. We also know that excess alcohol consumption is a societal and health problem throughout the world. As the British physicians studying James Bond's drinking behavior note: "Around 4 percent of deaths worldwide are related to alcohol, with 2.5 million deaths a year attributable to its use."

These are the sober realities. But don't let that stop you from enjoying your movies this summer, on the big screen or at home. But you might want to think about what you see, and what your children see. You might want to keep your eyes open.

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