

Remarks by Jay A. Winsten, Ph.D., at MPAA  
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I'm going to focus on a different kind of evidence of Hollywood's impact on behavior: the experience of the Designated Driver Campaign, which the Harvard School of Public Health's Center for Health Communication spearheaded, starting in the late 1980s, in collaboration with all the major studios and leading television networks. The Designated Driver Campaign demonstrated Hollywood's capacity to be a powerful force for good. When Hollywood depicted the use of designated drivers in a positive light, tens of millions of people changed their behavior.

The drunken driving issue was catapulted onto the national agenda in the early 1980s by MADD and other advocacy groups, resulting in tremendous media exposure and a gradual reduction in alcohol-related traffic fatalities. By the mid-1980s, however, the work of groups like MADD was no longer fresh and newsworthy; media exposure plummeted, and the slow downward slope in alcohol-related traffic fatalities that had been observed in the early 1980s ground to a halt, with fatalities increasing in 1986 and remaining flat through 1988. No media attention, no reduction in fatalities. There was a need

for a fresh new idea to rejuvenate the anti-drunken driving movement.

The designated driver concept was invented in the Nordic countries, and we were attracted to it for several reasons: It provided a simple, and positive, media message. It promoted a new social norm and expectation that the driver doesn't drink. It lent social legitimacy to the non-drinking role. It encouraged people to plan ahead. So, it embodied lots of complexity beneath the surface, all wrapped up in two words of media shorthand. We set out to package and market a new product to the American public: the designated driver.

Initially we focused on advertising, and recruited ABC, CBS, and NBC as partners. They produced and sponsored PSAs promoting the designated driver concept; the PSAs ran frequently in prime time. We also generated extensive news coverage. However, I'd meet periodically with my most important professional mentor, Dr. Frank Stanton, former CBS president who recently passed away, and he repeatedly advised that I was "missing the boat" by ignoring entertainment programming—especially prime time television, where different demographic groups closely follow particular shows and identify with particular characters, creating powerful

opportunities to model socially desirable behavior. As I began to look into it (my training was far afield, in molecular biology), I discovered a treasure trove of research on social learning theory that backed up Dr. Stanton's ideas.

When I told Dr. Stanton I was ready to pursue the Hollywood approach, he made a key introduction to Grant Tinker, who had just recently left the chairmanship of NBC and returned to Los Angeles as a TV producer. Grant Tinker took the project under his wing, and opened doors throughout the creative community. I met with 250 executive producers and chief writers of nearly every prime time show, and made a simple request: To consider, on an occasional basis, and only if, from their point of view, it worked creatively for the show, incorporating a line or two of dialogue to reflect the evolution of a new social norm about drinking-and-driving that was already beginning to occur in the U.S., thereby adding momentum to those changes. And, specifically, I asked them to depict the use of designated drivers. Their response was overwhelmingly positive.

During four TV seasons, beginning in 1988-89, more than 160 prime time episodes incorporated the designated driver message. *The New York Times*

cited estimates that the campaign was generating over \$100 million in air time each year. Public opinion polls conducted by Gallup, Roper, and the Wirthlin Group found sharp increases in the use of designated drivers; before long, a majority of the American public reported either serving as a designated driver or being driven home by one. And, remember that flat curve of annual alcohol-related traffic fatalities? It turned sharply downward in 1989, and fell by 25% over the next three years. Based on available polling data, we concluded that the Designated Driver Campaign was one contributory factor in the sharp downward trend in fatalities.

The Designated Driver Campaign was focused on the content of television shows, where decision-making authority is closely held by a small group of producers and writers. In contrast, the issue of smoking in films is much tougher to tackle through educational/advocacy approaches alone. Decisions about depicting smoking in films are made at many levels—writers, producers, directors, assistant directors, prop masters, art directors, wardrobe directors—at far-flung locations throughout the world. And, it's tougher to convince filmmakers to forgo depicting smoking when, for a variety of creative reasons, they want to do so. So,

educational/advocacy efforts alone are not likely to suffice to eliminate smoking from youth-rated films.

I'd like to close by cited some statistics on the dimensions of the problem of smoking in films. This data has been collected by the American Lung Association chapter in Sacramento. In 2004-05, 66% of the top-50 grossing films contained depictions of smoking. Of PG-13 films, 68% depicted smoking. The average frequency of depictions was 12.8 incidents per hour of running time (the highest incidence in 10 years). PG-13 films averaged 14.2 depictions per hour (the highest since 1994-95); R-rated films averaged 20.4 depictions per hour.

The average age of initiation of smoking is 13. And, because nicotine is as addictive as heroin, most teenage smokers who try to quit, fail. So, imagine a 13-year-old child watching PG-13 films, and being bombarded 14 times per hour with powerfully seductive images of smoking by their favorite stars. There is no way that an anti-smoking public health campaign aimed at young people can possibly compete with Leonardo DiCaprio smoking on the big screen in Titanic (rated PG-13). Films are not "the" cause of smoking by young people. But, as Professor Samet explained, they certainly are a factor, along with such factors as parental and peer smoking. So,

Hollywood is part of the problem, and we need you at the table as part of the solution.

Educational/advocacy efforts and PSAs can certainly be helpful, but will not suffice. What's needed is a movie ratings policy that creates an incentive for filmmakers to consider, and worry about, the depiction of smoking as a factor in the determination of a film's rating. As Dean Bloom underscored, the goal should be the elimination (with rare exceptions) of smoking from youth-rated films.