

In which we reassure a “scared” young director that his film will not be “censored” for smoking.

Two press quotes from director Francis Lawrence before the release of his first film, *Constantine*:

“The studio would like it to be PG-13...I don’t know where it’s going to land, based on intensity...It’s definitely not an NC-17 movie. There’s no graphic sex, there’s no graphic violence unless it’s sort of against fantastic creatures and things. I don’t have blood spurting everywhere. It’s not a splatter movie in any way.” And...

“There’s that movement to rate a movie R if there’s smoking in it. I think that’s ridiculous; I mean, it’s just people’s choices to hurt or not hurt themselves. Then you’ll do it with drinking, then you’ll do it with sex; it’s just this weird sort of censorship that’s kind of scary.”

Scary? Anyone who has made a film since 1968 knows it’s routine to calibrate violence, sex and language to get an R or PG-13.

The studios’ desire to make money by releasing movies to the widest possible audience may irritate directors. But nobody seriously calls it “censorship.” It’s voluntary; the government isn’t involved. U.S. filmmakers and their backers are free to make any movie they want. With more or less “splatter.”

More or less explicit sexual content. They can even use the word “fuck.”

Do studios care about selling tickets? Of course. Do they care about ratings? Certainly. Ratings, like the stars and the story, influence ticket sales. Smoking on screen *doesn’t* sell tickets. But it’s proven to sell cigarettes.

In fact, out of corruption or stupidity, films with smoking will recruit more than half of all new young smokers this year.

While the MPAA rating system is mainly designed to protect the studios from political attack, it can also protect young audiences from the #1 killer in America.

Ironically, Mr. Lawrence’s film, rated R for “violence and demonic images” under current guidelines, would *not* receive an R for smoking.



CONSTANTINE (R: TIME WARNER) races lung cancer to save the world. He smokes, as the trailer and publicity photos show, and coughs blood. The MPAA rated the film R for violence, not for smoking. So would we. Our proposed policy would rate future movies R for smoking except when dire health consequences are shown, as here, or the smoker is an actual historical figure.



SON OF THE MASK (PG: TIME WARNER) features a smoking cartoon, a smoking cowboy, and a child who wins his dad’s affection with cigars. Innocuous? The cumulative effect is actually lethal.

Why? Because the film also shows the dire health consequences. Films depicting an actual historical figure who smoked (like Winston Churchill or Frida Kahlo) won’t get an R, either. Nor will any movie completed before the new rating guideline goes into effect, like *Casablanca* or *Chicago*.

Result? Future films rated R for other reasons might include as much smoking as they do now. But films that would otherwise be rated G, PG (like *Son of the Mask* at left) or PG-13 would no longer promote smoking to the very ages most likely to start smoking.

In contrast to R-rating “demonic images,” R-rating tobacco is a reasonable, science-based proposal to avert 60,000 U.S. deaths a year. Support for it is growing.

Disingenuous arm-flailing in Hollywood only means that nobody has come up with a real objection.

Let’s have an honest discussion.

Read the R rating proposal at SmokeFreeMovies.ucsf.edu



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The R-rating and other Smoke Free Movie proposals are endorsed by the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Legacy Foundation, the Society for Adolescent Medicine, L.A. County Department of Health Services, and other public health authorities. A project of the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education. We welcome everyone in the film industry to share ideas. Write: Prof. Stanton Glantz, Smoke Free Movies, UCSF School of Medicine, San Francisco, CA 94143-1390.