

COOL AGAIN? IMAGES OF SMOKING IN NEW TV SERIES

Abstract. *The article analyses images of smoking in contemporary TV series. The aim is to discern a variety of connotations these images evoke in relation to the question of smoking initiation. The research is based on semiological analysis of the 10 most popular TV series in April 2015 according to the IMDb meter. The results show that smoking is presented in the analysed series in very diverse ways. In general, it appears the main factor determining the portrayal of smoking is the targeted audience. While smoking is predominantly absent or marked as something bad in series aimed at younger audiences, it is included or even glamourised in series aimed at mature audiences.*

Key words: *smoking, movies, TV series, semiology, audiences*

Introduction

Smoking in the movies is a frequent topic of scientific research. Primarily, authors are interested in the possible effect on smoking initiation of viewing smoking in movies. The results of most research show there is a relationship between the two in the sense that viewing smoking in the movies adds to the greater possibility of adolescents starting to smoke (compare: Dal Cina, 2012; Glantz et al., 2012; Pechmann and Shih, 1999; Primack et al., 2012; Sargent et al., 2002; Song et al., 2007).

Although these findings are important, there is a noticeable gap in our understanding of the effects of smoking on the big screen. First, the majority of existing research has focused on the mere number of occurrences of smoking in the movies and their possible effect on smoking initiation. The problem is that such a more or less statistical approach loses the variations hidden beneath the pure frequencies. For example, smoking in the movies probably does not have the same effect on the audience if the bad guy is the one who is smoking (as opposed to the good guy). The type of situation in which smoking takes place also matters: is it a regular situation (characters in their daily routines), glamourised (a hero 'doing his or her thing', e.g., defeating the enemy, saving the community etc.), or extraordinary (a character

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doing something they usually do not do). In the last case, smoking could mean an exception and is probably not as influential as in the scenes where smoking is linked to the leading characters' normal behaviour or their heroic actions. Further, researchers should be interested in how the *mise-en-scène* is constructed when smoking occurs. Is it cosy, pleasant or attractive in any other sense? Or is it, conversely, unpleasant, cold, contested and undesirable? In the latter case, smoking will appear less attractive than in situations when it occurs in pleasant surroundings. Finally, it is also important how the characters who smoke are presented visually. Are they shot in a way that makes them attractive? Was the camera angle high (suggesting they are weak) or low (making them appear strong)? Were they shot from a distance or from near (close-ups encourage emotional identification with the character)?

In short, the images of smoking in movies invoke a range of different meanings. When researchers analyse the effect of smoking in the movies on audiences in general, they therefore only discern certain general correlations and consequently call for limits (or a complete ban) on smoking in the movies, while the influence could be much more complex. At least two things are thus needed. One is more precise audience research in which people are asked about making their own sense of particular situations in the movies that involve smoking. The other is textual analysis, which would complement audience research with an analysis of the complexities of meanings produced by the texts (movies). In the article, I will focus on textual analysis in the hope that in the near future this will be complemented with thorough audience research.

The second level at which I contend research of smoking in the movies needs to move forward relates to the changing role of movies. Whereas during most of the 20th century, movies were probably the most important form of popular entertainment (Aquila, 2014: 1), in the 21st century they have to compete with a multitude of other pastimes, including television, video games, the Internet etc. (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2008: 425). It is telling that movie theatres have recently witnessed a notable decline in attendance levels. For 2014, preliminary estimates indicate that only 1.26 billion cinema tickets were purchased, the lowest number since 1995 (Han, 2015). Yet this does not mean that individuals are not watching as many movies as they did before. Today, there are many possibilities for watching movies at home (regular TV, pay TV, DVDs, Blue-Rays, movie streaming, downloading etc.). The changing context of movie watching, whereby movies are increasingly consumed in the home environment, has also contributed to several significant changes in the form of the movie itself. The most important is the hybridisation of TV series and movies. Although up until recently they were diverse forms of visual entertainment, for the last decade or so they have been increasingly hybridised (Newman and Levine, 2012: 4–6). The most

prominent example is a form of TV series that appropriates various elements of film language and is made by movie directors (Krečič and Novak, 2011: 21; Valič, 2011: 54–57). The first notable series of this type was *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) created by David Lynch (then a respected independent movie director), and many others followed – *The Sopranos* (David Chase, 1999–2007), *The Wire* (David Simon, 2002–2008), *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, 2008–2013), *Boardwalk Empire* (Terence Winter, 2010–2014), *Game of Thrones* (David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, 2011–) etc. (Cvar, 2015: 60).

It is noteworthy that new TV series combining elements of older TV series and movies (for the sake of clarity, I will simply call them new TV series) are very popular. This can be seen in the rising viewing figures, the growing prestige of the Emmy Awards (for excellence in the television industry), the sharp increase in production budgets, and the proliferation of TV channels and producers (Cvar, 2015: 60). What is important for research on smoking in movies is that movies are no longer the most influential audio-visual form of popular entertainment, meaning that similar research that exists on movies should be conducted on the other prominent media, especially the new TV series.

Currently, the topic of smoking in TV series is seriously under-researched. Among the very few exceptions is Greenberg's (1981) research on smoking, drug-taking and drinking in top-rated TV series; research by Piepe et al. (1986) on the presentation of smoking in TV soap operas; research by Cullen et al. (2007) about the quantity of tobacco use in network television programming popular among US youth; Xiaoli Nana's (2011) study on the influence of television viewing and sensation seeking on adolescents' unrealistic perceptions about smoking and smokers; and Beullens and van den Bulck's (2014) research on the role of music television viewing in predicting adolescents' smoking status in Belgium. These few exceptions are obviously inadequate to be able to provide anything like a comprehensive understanding of the role of smoking in the new TV series. In addition, two studies are dated while three others, conducted by Cullen, Nana, and Beullens and van den Bulck, did not focus specifically on the new TV series. To fill the gap in our knowledge, I analysed smoking in the new TV series. My research question was: how is smoking presented in these series? More precisely, I was interested in the images of smoking in the new TV series as well as their possible meanings.

Methodology

In order to analyse the possible meanings of smoking in the new TV series, I use semiotics. Semiotics is a method devised by Roland Barthes, who wanted to find out what various texts signify. Text refers to any type

of cultural artefact that produces meaning. Therefore, in semiotics texts are not only written texts but also photographs, songs, advertisements, posters, clothes, movies and so on. Barthes' approach was based on the principles of structural linguistics introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, who argued that signs are made up of sounds or images (signifiers) and the concepts these sounds and images refer to (signifieds; de Saussure, 1997: 79–84). Crucially, de Saussure believed the relationship between signifiers and signifieds is arbitrary. According to him, each signified could be marked by any signifier. The meaning of signs is therefore not natural but related to the wider system of binary oppositions, which means that an analysis of linguistic signs should always be synchronic in the sense it is primarily interested in the relationship of various signs at a particular historical moment, instead of diachronic analysis of how particular signs have acquired their meaning over time (de Saussure, 1997: 126–137).

Barthes (2000: 97–102) appropriated this method to analyse cultural artefacts. He argued that cultural artefacts also have meanings (just as words in language), except these meanings are produced on two separate levels. First, there is denotation. This is the descriptive and literal level of meaning shared by more or less all members of a culture. Second, there is connotation. On this level, meanings connect signifiers to wider cultural codes and frameworks. According to Barthes, these two levels are closely related since a sign of the denotative level (signifier and signified) becomes a signifier on the connotative level. Thus, pig, which denotes the concept of a useful pink farm animal, may connote a nasty police officer, a male chauvinist or a slob/fat person (Barker, 2000: 69).

In order to analyse the meanings of particular texts, researchers must identify the denotative and connotative meanings and show how these meanings are related to wider cultural and social contexts. To do that, researchers must first gather the texts and then describe and interpret them. In the final stage, the researchers must draw out the cultural codes and make generalisations about what the texts mean (Stokes, 2008: 74–75). Some critics have argued that, because the analysis is largely subjective, semiotics is not reliable in the traditional social science sense. This might very well be true; however, the aim of semiotics is not to pinpoint the precise or true meanings of texts. Each element in the signification process can mean many things at the same time (in semiology, this is called polysemy), meaning that the precise or final meanings are more or less unobtainable in practice. Semiotics aims to simply enrich our understanding of texts (Stokes, 2008: 72). This is also an important contribution to the knowledge of culturally constructed reality and is probably more productive than reducing texts to their simple manifest content and quantifiable categories as usually happens in quantitative research (Fürsich, 2009: 240–241).

In order to analyse the meanings of smoking in the new TV series, I apply semiotic analysis to a sample of new TV series. The sample consists of the 10 most popular TV series at the moment of analysis (selected on 15 April 2015), excluding series set in the pre-smoking past (the absence of smoking is not a cultural sign but a historical fact). Selecting the most viewed series will allow me to focus on the texts that are most popular and therefore most influential and expressive of the meanings of smoking in contemporary TV series production. I selected the sample of TV series with help of IMDb. IMDb is the most referenced Internet site for all kinds of information related to movies and TV shows. The site also hosts MOVIEmeter, which collects data about the popularity, earnings, attendance, viewing numbers etc. of various movies and TV shows. To calculate the relative popularity of particular movies or shows, MOVIEmeter uses proprietary algorithms that take several measures of popularity for people, titles and companies into account. The primary measure is who and what people are looking at on IMDb, which means the rankings are based on the behaviour of a sampling group of more than 200 million unique monthly visitors in the real world and that these rankings are thus very informative (IMDb, 2015).

According to MOVIEmeter (IMDb 2015a), the most popular TV series on 15 April 2015) were as follows: 1) *Game of Thrones* (David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, 2011–); 2) *Daredevil* (Drew Goddard, 2015–); 3) *The Walking Dead* (Frank Darabont, 2010–); 4) *True Detective* (Nic Pizzolatto, 2014–); 5) *Better Call Saul* (Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould, 2015–); 6) *The Flash* (Greg Berlanti, Geoff Johns and Andrew Kreisberg, 2014–); 7) *Arrow* (Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim and Andrew Kreisberg, 2012–); 8) *Vikings* (Michael Hirst, 2013–); 9) *Outlander* (Ronald D. Moore, 2014–); and 10) *House of Cards* (Beau Willimon, 2013–).

Three of these series are set during periods before smoking was known or widespread: *The Vikings*, *Game of Thrones* and *Outlander*. Since during these periods smoking was not yet a popular habit or known, the absence of smoking in the series is a matter of historical credibility rather than a creative decision that would in any case be expressive of the meanings of smoking in the present. Thus, these three series are irrelevant for my research and are replaced by the next three series in the IMDb rankings: 11) *Mad Men* (Matthew Weiner, 2007–2015); 12) *Once Upon a Time* (Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis, 2011–); and 13) *Bloodline* (Glenn Kessler, Todd A. Kessler and Daniel Zelman, 2015–).

Ten TV series provide too much material for analysis in a single article. Consequently, I analyse only the first episode of the first season of each TV series (10 episodes altogether). This allows me to work with material that is of manageable size and still informative. Namely, the first episodes are usually made as attractive digests of the series as a whole: The episodes

introduce the key topics, characters, motives, settings and so on, with the result they can be taken as strongly representative of the episodes that follow.

Results

Daredevil

The Daredevil TV series is based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. The series was created for Netflix by Drew Goddard and chronicles the adventures of a blind lawyer who fights crime at night (IMDb, 2015b).

In the analysed episode (*Into the Ring*, 43 minutes), there is no smoking whatsoever. There is only one passing reference to smoking when Foggy Nelson, Daredevil's associate, explains that he has obtained access to the pair's first case by bribing a police officer with a box of cigars for his mother. As only a passing remark this reference is not very important but, if we try to infer its meaning, smoking in this case is not presented as something very attractive. The reason is that the police officer is an African American, which means the scene read in the context of the general absence of smoking in the episode suggests that smoking is practised only by marginal social groups (old, African Americans). The young, white, successful etc., apparently know better and do not smoke.

The Walking Dead

The Walking Dead is produced by American Movie Classics. The series is based on the comic book series of the same name and focuses on Sheriff Deputy Rick Grimes who leads a group of survivors in a world overrun by the walking dead (zombies) (IMDb 2016g).

In the analysed episode (*Days Gone Bye*, 67 minutes), there are no instances of or references to smoking at all.

True Detective

True Detective is a crime drama series produced by the premium cable network HBO. The first season is narrated from the perspective of former Louisiana State Police homicide detectives Rustin 'Rust' Cohle and Martin 'Marty' Hart, who are being interviewed by the police about their pursuit of a serial killer 17 years before.

In sharp contrast to the previous series analysed, there is plenty of smoking in the first episode of *True Detective* (*The Long Bright Dark*, 58 minutes).

For the most part, this relates to one of its main characters, Rust, who is a heavy smoker. Rust successfully establishes his right to smoke at the police station, where he is interviewed at the very beginning of the first episode. One of the detectives interviewing him tries to prevent him from lighting up a cigarette, saying, "You can't do this here no more". Rust replies, "You want to hear this or not?". Since the detectives are interested in his account of the events, they have no choice but to let him proceed, such that Rust smokes constantly while recounting his and Marty's investigation 17 years before. This is by no means a small amount of time. The episode is almost entirely narrated by Rust and Marty, so approximately one-half of the events are described by a chain-smoking character.

Even more importantly, in the series Rust is portrayed as the good guy. Although he is aloof and eccentric, he is much more likable than his mundane partner Marty and makes all the key contributions to the final resolution of the case. Further, Rust is physically attractive and always shot in a way that makes him a silent but unquestionable authority on the scene. He is also portrayed as extraordinarily intelligent and – in spite of all his vices (he also tends to drink a lot) – a highly moral person.

If a character who is constructed as 'cool' as Rust is smokes then smoking in the series inevitably acquires various positive meanings. For one thing, smoking becomes associated with the character's 'coolness' generally, but in the process of association smoking also might start to reflect more specific traits. In the case of Rust, these are intelligence, individualism, resourcefulness and so on. Since these traits are defined in our culture as positive, in *True Detective* smoking is clearly constructed as something very attractive.

However, several minor details complicate this picture. The first is the scene in which Rust is in a car and takes something that is apparently a large dose of a tranquilizer or a similar type of medication. Since at the same time he is smoking, his passion for cigarettes in this instance is associated with desperate – neurotic – attempts to calm down instead of some general 'coolness'. The second detail relates to the fact he starts to drink heavily in the middle of the interview, which also puts him in a slightly ambivalent interpretative context. It would thus be possible to argue that Rust is not constructed as an entirely positive character and that the positive meanings of smoking are not the only ones produced in the *True Detective* series. Yet we should not overemphasise these elements. Obviously, Rust is not a simple character, but to a large extent his attractiveness stems from his unconventionality, which means that drug (or medication) abuse and drinking in this context do not necessarily signify something entirely bad. That smoking is presented in the series as a more or less attractive practice is also stressed by the way in which Rust smokes. Namely, he not only smokes all the time but also smokes in an emphasised and passionate manner, usually in a way that

is usual for smoking marijuana instead of tobacco (this detail has been frequently pointed out by various commentators; for example, Skinner, 2014).

Several other characters smoke during the episode; yet, they are marginal figures who appear in the backgrounds of the scenes. These include detectives at the police station and anonymous guests at the club where Rust is interviewing a pair of prostitutes. Since none of these characters is framed by the narrative as in any way meaningful, they do not contribute much to the meanings of smoking in *True Detective*. These meanings are consequently almost exclusively derived from the sympathetic portrayal of a single character, Rust, who is so prominent in the symbolic universe of the series that with this portrayal *True Detective* constructs an image of smoking that is highly attractive.

Better Call Saul

Better Call Saul is a television series created by Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould for a consortium of production companies. The series is a spin-off of the famous *Breaking Bad* series in which small-time lawyer Saul Goodman (aka James Morgan 'Jimmy' McGill) was a secondary character. In *Better Call Saul*, he is the centre of the narrative, with a twist that the story is set six years before the events in *Breaking Bad*.

In the first episode of *Better Call Saul* (*Uno*, 54 minutes), there is only one instance of smoking. It happens when Jimmy comes out of a building where he had an unsuccessful meeting. He is very angry so he first violently kicks a dustbin and then takes a cigarette from the mouth of a woman who is smoking in front of the building and takes a few puffs. Although he draws the cigarette smoke very passionately, it is highly debatable whether this scene portrays smoking as something attractive. At this point in the series, Jimmy is still an unlikable character: He is unsuccessful, manipulative and neurotic, and presents himself as somebody he clearly is not (a successful lawyer). Since an audience usually identifies only with likable characters, his instance of smoking is not likely to encourage many to light up themselves. In addition, in this scene smoking does not even signify anything appealing. It is basically related to distress and failure (Jimmy's unsuccessful meeting), meaning that from this point of view it is not very likely the scene will have many problematic effects on viewers.

The Flash

The Flash was developed by producers Greg Berlanti, Andrew Kreisberg and Geoff Johns for Bonanza Productions, Berlanti Productions, DC Entertainment, and Warner Bros. The TV series is based on the DC Comics

character Barry Allen, who acts as the costumed superhero The Flash. The show is a spin-off of the TV show Arrow and exists in the same fictional universe. The series follows Allen, who uses his superhuman speed to fight various criminals.

In the analysed episode (*Pilot*, 46 minutes), there are no instances of or references to smoking.

Arrow

Arrow is produced by the same companies as The Flash. The show is based on the DC Comics character the Green Arrow, a billionaire playboy who, five years after being stranded on a hostile island, returns home to fight crime as a secret costume hero with a bow and arrow.

In the analysed episode (*Pilot*, 48 minutes), there are no instances of or references to smoking.

House of Cards

House of Cards is a political drama developed and produced by Beau Willimon for a consortium of production companies. The show premiered on the streaming service Netflix. The series is set in Washington, D.C. and follows the changing fortunes of Frank Underwood, an influential but highly manipulative figure in the fictional Democratic political administration.

In the first episode of *House of Cards* (*Chapter One*, 55 minutes), there is one instance of smoking. It occurs when Frank comes home after having learned that he has been passed over for the position of secretary of state, which he expected to receive for his contribution to the election of President Garrett Walker. Underwood is very angry. When his wife Claire goes to sleep, he opens a window and lights up a cigarette. His wife hears him and gets up to join him. She tries to console him but also makes it clear she expects him to fight back.

The meanings of this scene are not univocal. On one hand, smoking is related to Underwood's attempt to calm down and could be understood as consolation for a loser. In both these senses, smoking does not appear very attractive, but it is possible to deduce from the circumstantial evidence (a beautiful wooden box of cigarettes that stands on the table next to the window) that Frank and Claire actually have a ritual of occasional smoking by the window. From this point of view, cigarettes appear to be much more than just a random tool used by the protagonist to calm down after a bad day at work. Cigarettes are connected to the idea of *joie de vivre*, enjoyment of life, which in our culture is understood as something positive; thus, in this context smoking emerges as a desirable thing to do. These connotations of

smoking are amplified by the fact that the pair apparently does not smoke regularly (we see them smoke only in this scene). For them, smoking seems to be just an occasional pastime, which means they negotiate two demands that are presented to contemporary individuals, care for health and imperative of enjoyment, in a way that they get both: They do not smoke so much that it would be a health hazard, but they smoke enough to give them additional pleasure in their lives.

In addition, the couple's entire lifestyle is presented as something very attractive. They are powerful, they live in a beautiful house, they do more or less what they want, and so on. In this sense, they are constructed as a social ideal, with the outcome that their activities appear attractive as well. This obviously also applies to the smoking, although Frank and Claire are not entirely conventional protagonists. Admittedly, they are very charismatic and attractive; yet, at the same time, they are manipulative, cold and ruthless. Therefore, audiences probably do not react to the husband and wife the way they usually do with the conventional 'good guys', with whom they identify completely. It is more likely the audience establishes a relationship to Frank and Claire that is ambivalent, ranging from admiration and identification to repulsion and distancing. In this sense, even if the pair's smoking is portrayed as attractive in the series, it is not necessarily understood as such by the audience since the characters themselves are too complex to encourage simple identification.

The abundance of associations Frank's and Claire's ritual of smoking provokes means that their smoking does not function as something a priori desirable or undesirable in the series. Smoking is a complex signifier that is most likely to trigger diverse reactions among the audience not only in the sense that different individuals will understand it in different ways (depending on their interpretation of other elements of the series, e.g. whether they see the couple's immoral ways as repulsive or attractive, or at least acceptable) but also in the sense that each individual will understand it differently in different contexts. When smoking is connected to ruthless individualism, for example, the habit will most likely be interpreted as something undesirable, whereas when connected to an attractive high-class bohemian lifestyle, it will probably be understood as something positive.

Mad Men

Mad Men is a television series created by Matthew Weiner for the Lionsgate Television production company. The show is comprised of seven seasons and 92 episodes. It follows the business of the Sterling Cooper advertising agency as well as the personal lives of its employees (the most important of these is Don Draper, initially the agency's creative director).

If in many series analysed there is not a single instance of smoking, in *Mad Men* one would be hard pressed to find a scene in which smoking does not occur. The first episode's title and topic are all about smoking. The title is *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* (53 minutes) and refers to the challenge Don Draper faces: to find a new marketing strategy for the Lucky Strike cigarette brand after the media started to publish compelling evidence that smoking is dangerous for one's health. Even more importantly, almost all the characters smoke in *Mad Men*, and they do it all the time. People smoke in elevators, advertisers smoke in their offices, secretaries smoke behind their desks, guests smoke in restaurants and bars, and so on. The episode is set in the early 1960s so all this smoking (and drinking and cheating on wives) tries to construct an image of an era before the contemporary obsessions with health hazards and political correctness. With the explicit focus on hedonistic excess, the episode certainly manages to do so, although this excess is more an idealisation of the recent past than an accurate representation of the 1960s. People smoked (and drank etc.) much more than they do today, yet in this episode hedonistic excess is emphasised entirely out of proportion.

In fact, throughout the series, smoking is presented as one of the most important elements of contemporary urban cool. The characters are presented as living almost perfect lives. Therefore, naturally their habits – among them smoking – appear to be attractive, too. This is also the case with the main character, Don Draper, with a slight but important difference that he is presented as even more attractive than everybody else (he looks good, he radiates authority, he is very intelligent etc.). In this sense, his smoking appears to be especially appealing, but that is not all. Namely, not only does Don Draper smoke constantly, but also his smoking is shot in a way that it looks profoundly glamorous (the use of low camera angles, stylish framings, attractive lighting etc.).

Thus, *Mad Men* constructs smoking as a very attractive practice. The only detail that slightly complicates this impression is that the series is mythologised, meaning the audience might understand it as the king of fairy tales: attractive but not real (and in this sense also not really relevant). Smoking in the series might, correspondingly, exercise a limited influence on the audience, but this detail might very well be lost in the multitude of other visual and narrative elements which glamorise smoking in all possible ways.

Once Upon a Time

Once Upon a Time is a fairy-tale series produced by the ABC Studios and Kitis/Horowitz production companies. The show focuses on a young woman with a troubled past who is drawn to a small town in Maine where fairy tales are to be believed (IMDb, 2016h).

In the analysed episode (*Pilot*, 45 minutes), there are no instances of smoking or references to it at all.

Bloodline

Bloodline is a television series created by Todd A. Kessler, Glenn Kessler and Daniel Zelman for Sony Pictures Television. The plot follows a family of adult siblings whose past secrets and traumas are exposed when their black-sheep brother, Danny, returns home.

There are two instances of smoking in the first episode of *Bloodline* (*Part 1*, 59 minutes), both related to the unfortunate character of Danny. The first is when Danny, on his way to a family reunion, suddenly decides that his trip home was not such a good idea after all. Consequently, he gets off the bus a few stops before his destination and drops by an old friend. At the friend's place, Danny drinks beer, smokes and thinks about his complicated relations with his family. The second occurrence of smoking takes place at the reunion party (which Danny ultimately attends), when Danny retreats to a secluded spot and lights up a cigarette.

Since in both instances only Danny smokes, the meanings of smoking in *Bloodline* are closely tied to this character. Danny is complex. On one hand, there are indications he is a gentle, well-meaning or even noble character. There are also some temporal jumps in the episode suggesting he might have been a victim of family quarrels. On the other hand, he is quite unpleasant: unreliable, unpredictable and with a tendency to 'always get himself in some kind of trouble', as one of his brothers says in the voiceover. Crucially, this problematic side of Danny's character predominates. The audience is consequently invited to understand Danny as a troubled person, which means the meanings of smoking in the series are related to the negative connotations that Danny – at least in the first episode of the first season – predominantly evokes. Smoking in this context does not appear as something particularly attractive.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that in the analysed episodes smoking is constructed in ways that evoke very diverse meanings and connotations. To begin with, there are series with no smoking or references to smoking at all (*The Walking Dead*, *The Flash*, *Arrow* and *Once Upon a Time*). Further, there are series in which there is some smoking or references to smoking, but they are related to predominantly negative meanings (*Daredevil*, *Better Call Saul* and *Bloodline*). Another group consists of only one series, *House of Cards*: here, smoking has ambivalent connotations. Finally, there

are series that present smoking as something glamorous or even desirable (*True Detective* and *Man Men*). Taken together, the number of series in which smoking is marked as problematic is the highest: if we combine the series that do not present smoking at all (for the apparent reason that smoking is understood as bad) with those that present smoking as something unattractive, as a practice of losers, we obtain seven series, while there are only two cases in which smoking carries predominantly positive connotations (in one series, the meanings of smoking are ambivalent).

The results allow us to make several conclusions. The most obvious relates to the predominance of negative meanings of smoking in the TV series, which seems to suggest that health concerns strongly influence mainstream TV productions. One should be careful, however, not to read too much into this finding. The reason for this is that the research I have conducted is not quantitative and thus the number of analysed series is too small to draw too far-reaching conclusions from the frequencies alone. The number of series that portray smoking as attractive or unattractive is informative, of course, but far from being conclusive evidence of the representational and signifying practices in contemporary TV series in general. The second finding is therefore more important, which is related to the semiological analysis of the very images of smoking in the TV series. Here, analysis has shown that the inclusion of smoking in TV series does not mean that smoking is necessarily presented as something very attractive and that it will automatically lead to smoking initiation among the audience. In the analysed series, smoking is related to diverse meanings and interpretative frameworks such that smoking will likely have equally diverse impacts, largely dependent on these interpretative frameworks. This point is important in the context of the existing research on the impact of the images of smoking in the movies on smoking initiation, where it is all too often assumed the images of smoking will somehow automatically induce audiences to start smoking themselves.

The third conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis results is that there is an interesting regularity in the representations of smoking in the series. On one hand, the series that seem to be targeting primarily mainstream and younger audiences (*The Flash*, *Arrow*, *The Walking Dead*, *Once Upon a Time* and *Daredevil*) generally avoid presentations of smoking, while the series made chiefly for adult audiences typically include smoking. How smoking is presented in these latter cases depends. In some cases, it is related to various negative connotations; in other cases, it is presented in a favourable light and, in the case of *House of Cards*, several positive and negative connotations are attached to smoking at the same time. In this context, it would appear the main factor determining whether smoking is included in a series is the target audience. In a more general context, this means that

production companies are trying to deal with the health concerns related to smoking in a TV series in a way that takes them into account and at the same time evades them. Since the strongest concerns are related to the possible effects of viewing smoking on TV on smoking initiation, production companies have eliminated smoking references from TV series that are directed to younger audiences. By doing so, the production companies have created a seemingly safe visual environment for younger audiences; yet, at the same time this has allowed them to include smoking in the series made for older audiences. Since these shows are not meant for younger audiences, the inclusion of smoking does not appear to be problematic, while at the same time it contributes to the greater realism and perhaps even attractiveness of these series.

This last argument allows us to make a final point. Namely, if the series that include smoking without portraying it as something necessarily bad are the series made for predominantly mature audiences, this would suggest that, in fact, smoking is not as unimportant in the contemporary TV series as the mere frequencies imply. The reason for this is that, generally, the series made for more mature audiences have higher cultural status than those made for teenagers or even younger populace. The case in point are the series in my sample where those made for predominantly mature audiences (*Mad Man*, *True Detective*, *House of Cards* etc.) are received much better by critics (IMDb 2016; IMDb 2016a; IMDb 2016b) and also have a significantly greater influence than those made for the predominantly younger audiences (*Arrow*, *Once Upon a Time*, *The Flash*, *Daredevil*) (compare: IMDb 2016c; IMDb 2016d; IMDb 2016e; IMDb 2016f; besides the content, a very telling detail is the significantly smaller number of reviews written about these series). This means that, even if there is a greater number of series that portray smoking as something negative or do not include it at all, the series with smoking included seem to be more influential. How precisely this plays out in practice is a topic for further research, but the least that can be said based on the findings of the present research is that the meanings and probable impact of images of smoking in contemporary TV series are extremely complex – well beyond the simple question of whether smoking is included or not.

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