

# ASHES, Vol. 8(10) - What do mom and dad think? Perceptions of parental smoking attitudes and youth smoking intentions

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Many people worry that the media negatively influences the youth of today. Movies and television frequently bombard us with content that includes violence, drug use, promiscuity, and other risky behaviors. Although to some, tobacco and cigarette smoking might seem like less dramatic issues, their frequent portrayal in TV shows and movies as, stylish, tough, sexy, and cool is worth attention. This week ASHES reviews a study by McCool, Cameron, and Robinson (2011) that analyzes the association between adolescents' perception of parental attitudes and the way they respond to themes and images of smoking/tobacco in the media.

## Methods

- Researchers presented a group of 515 adolescents (ages 11-13) with 4 media clips (i.e., 2 segments from a drama series each featuring a female smoker (one young, one older), 1 anti-smoking commercial with a 20-30 year old female smoker, and 1 news segment featuring a smoking issue).
  - For each clip researchers asked participants to provide: (1) character appraisals of the smokers, such as (on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)) “stylish, tough, sad, smart, bored, sexy, stressed, healthy, weak, popular, hard, angry, intelligent, and cool”; and (2) empathy expressions, for example, “How much did you like the smoker in the clip?”
    - Researchers grouped the character appraisals into two categories: positive image, and negative emotion.
- The researchers also asked the adolescents to complete a computer-based questionnaire assessing their:
  - Level of media exposure;
  - Perceived parental attitudes toward smoking; and,
  - Smoking intentions.

## Results

- Multivariate regression analyses determined that a variety of factors (i.e., media exposure, media environment, positive appraisals, empathy, and perceived parent anti-smoking attitudes) shared strong predictive relationships with youths' smoking intentions.
- The results of a [mediation analysis suggest a partial mediating relationship](#) (see Figure 1). Specifically, participants who perceived their parents to have stronger anti-smoking attitudes held less positive appraisals of smokers represented by media, and those less positive appraisals predicted less intention to smoke.

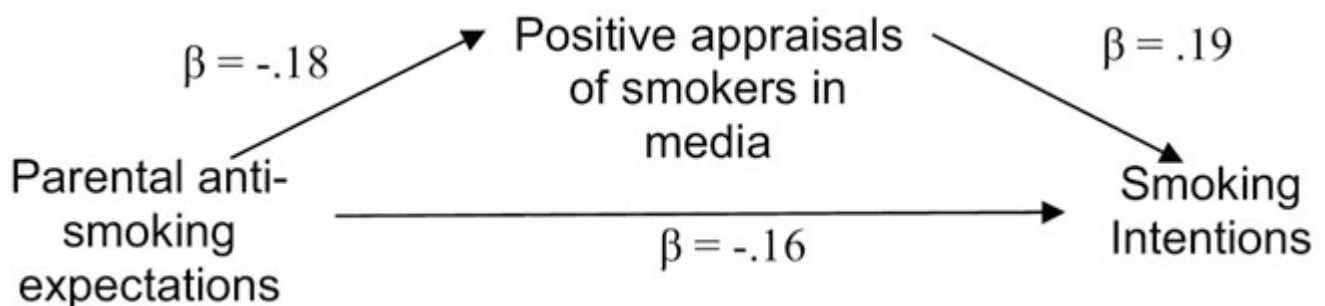


Figure. Meditational relationship involving perceived parental smoking attitudes, youth positive appraisals of smokers in media, and youth smoking intentions. Click image to enlarge.

## Limitations

- This study was conducted with 7th graders from a city in New Zealand, so results might not be generalizable to other groups.
- Responses were self-reported and primarily opinions and perceptions, which might not be reliable indicators of actual behavior.
- The focus of the study was on behavior intentions, not actual behavior.
- The study only used female smokers in clips, and youths' perceptions of male smokers might be different/differently influential.

## Discussion

This study illustrates the importance of parent's expressed smoking expectations. The researchers concluded that parental influence over how adolescents perceive smoking imagery in the media might be strongest when expectations about tobacco use at home are unambiguous. Parents who express clear antismoking expectations might reduce smoking motivation by lessening the empathetic or

positive appraisals of smokers. However, future research needs to assess both children's and parent's perceptions of parent's expressed attitudes about smoking to investigate whether the relationships found in this study are limited to children's perceptions of parental behavior.

-Emily Shoov

## **Reference**

McCool, J., Cameron, L. D., & Robinson, E. (2011). Do parents have any influence over how young people appraise tobacco images in the media. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48*(2), 170-175.

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