

## Alcohol in the Media: The More You See, the More You Drink

---



For the first time, research has shown that watching images of alcohol and drinking in the media actually encourages viewers to drink more. Scientists in The Netherlands and Canada recently published their findings from a study conducted among 80 male

university students, who were randomly assigned one of four groups to view movies and commercials with varied levels of exposure to alcohol messages, from intense to moderate to none at all.

Pairs of the participants were invited to watch a movie with commercials in a comfortable, home-like setting that included a variety of snacks and a refrigerator stocked with beer, wine and soda. The volunteers were allowed to eat and drink whatever they wanted as they watched, and they were discreetly filmed to monitor what and how often they drank. Those who watched the highest intensity of alcohol portrayals in the movie and commercials drank nearly three bottles of alcohol during one hour of viewing, on average – while those who watched a neutral movie with non-alcohol commercials drank only one and a half bottles, on average.

### Revealing a direct link

"This is the first experimental study to show a direct effect of exposure to alcohol portrayals on TV viewers' immediate drinking behavior," said professor Rutger Engels, who was the lead researcher for the study. "Implications of these findings may be that, if moderation is strived for, it may be sensible to cut down on the portrayal of alcohol in programs and commercials, especially those aimed at young people."

Additional research will certainly be conducted to further investigate the effect of alcohol portrayals in the media on behavior. But this study's findings certainly suggest the need for greater consideration of alcohol images and their potential effect on young people when it comes to media. One possible remedy might be parental cautions for movies that portray drinking – what others could be considered? It's a question that policymakers may be considering, given the results of this study.

### Sources:

"Ads, movies with booze encourage instant drink." *HealthDay News*, 4 March 2009.

"Alcohol on screen drives viewers to drink: study." *Reuters*, 4 March 2009.

"Alcohol portrayals in films and advertisements make people drink more." *News-medical.net*, 3 April 2009.