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Cinematographic communication as a tool for everyday health promotion

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In the last decade, the box office success of "City of God" (2002), followed by "Elite Squad" (2007) and its 2010 sequel ("Elite Squad: The Enemy Within"), has led Brazilian cinema to approach the subject of drug use as a social, economic, political, and cultural problem. A few weeks ago, two new movies portraying thematic alcohol and drug use opened in theaters across the country. The drama "Artificial Paradises", by director Marcos Prado, and the comedy "So, Have You Eaten?" (2011), by Felipe Joffily, exemplify Brazilian cinema's role as a medium for debating drug use—a medium that nevertheless avoids discussing drug use's concomitant health concerns.

At the beginning of the decade, a report by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001) revealed that approximately 10% of urban populations worldwide abuse psychoactive substances, independent of age, gender, education level, and purchasing power. This information might justify the interest of the film industry in this subject, especially because the Health Ministry considers drug use to be a serious public health problem.

In "Artificial Paradises", Prado sought inspiration in the homonymous book published in 1860 by the French poet Charles Baudelaire to describe the difficulties faced by two middle class youths attempting to confront everyday life without artificial solutions (ultimately demonstrating that no "solutions" are free from consequences). In Joffily's comedy, the use of alcohol and other drugs emerges as a powerful agent that heightens the tone in scenes of sex and seduction.

Independent of the directors' individual approaches to this subject, both films manifest a cultural identity described by Gabriel García Márquez (MÁRQUEZ, 2011): as "the totalizing power of creation: the social profiting from human intelligence". Such a power compels us to approach this subject via paths that problematize its typical portrayal by the medical field, which emphasizes abstinence and isolation and views users as criminal and antisocial.

Gabriel García Márquez expressed the above sentiment in a speech delivered in Cuba in 1985. The purpose of the speech was to qualify the necessary proximity between science and art. Almost three decades later, these words can inspire us to engage with film as a forum in which health issues can be problematized by calling attention to behaviors, practices, and social meanings. Similarly, his words may inspire us to use communication media in health promotion efforts to unify and mobilize both technical and popular knowledge in formal and non-formal learning environments.

It is also worth paying renewed attention to the Health Ministry's Policy for Integral Assistance to Users of Alcohol and Other Drugs (BRAZIL, 2004), which emphasizes Brazil's historical delay in dealing with the use of alcohol and other drugs. Reemphasizing this policy would communicate that it is no longer possible to dismiss the social, psychological, economic, and political implications that could contribute to a global understanding of this subject. Because drug dependence affects individuals differently based on the factors present in their contexts and circumstances, cross-sectional actions are needed to guarantee the right of all users to health.

The literature suggests that the use of films as educational tools for promoting Brazilian public health policies dates to the 1930s. The National Institute of Educative Cinema (NIEC; Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo) was created in 1936 to facilitate scientific education and scientific and technological dissemination. A few years later, in 1942, the Public Health Special Secretary (PHSS; Secretaria Especial de Saúde Pública) was established to make films for health education in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation (GUIMARÃES *et al.*, 2010).

Films produced by health institutions or commercial and/or independent producers have demonstrated their ability to place socially relevant subjects within the purview of the varied and complex everyday functioning of the Unified Health System (UHS; Sistema Único de Saúde). Moreover, films can lend visibility to problems in the system's everyday functioning beyond that provided by the medical and epidemiological framework of statistical data. In other words, watching an image in motion is not the same as watching the world in motion, but viewing these images makes us look in a given intersubjective direction (FOTORELLI *et al.*, 2006) at the life construction processes of other individuals.

"Artificial Paradises" and "So, Have You Eaten?" are not the only recent Brazilian movies to relate human issues to the use of alcohol and drugs. The British film "Weekend" (2011), by Andrew Haigh, depicts the drama of a homosexual couple that has just met; in this film, reflection alternates with drug abuse. If this subject is global and sparks general interest, could the UHS become involved in this movement? Although these movies are likely watched by few people, they reinforce a cultural model in which healthcare carries little weight. Therefore, expanding the application of these films and problematizing past approaches, particularly by emphasizing the potential contribution of art to health care, appear to be the best ways to strengthen a culture of health that is more compatible with the aims of the UHS.

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