The celebration of St. Patrick’s Day began as a feast in honor of St. Patrick, a saint of Ireland. Christians were allowed to set aside Lenten restrictions on food and alcohol consumption on this holiday which is why excessive drinking is the most prominent link to the celebration. Now, the feast day enriches all of Irish culture, history and traditions. This is only one way culture and tradition has used alcohol to allow heavy consumption in an accepting manner.

Hey, welcome back to episode ten of, “In the Mix.” A podcast provided through the alcohol and other drug services here at Grand Valley. As always, I’m here to inform listeners to be safe, be responsible and be smart when using substances. On today’s episode, we’ll discuss why people drink from a traditional standpoint whether it’s through celebrations of holidays or alcohol use through social means.

First, we'll go over a brief history of alcohol and its place in society over time.

Alcohol has played a vital role in human culture since ancient times. It’s been passed on through different societies as it was used for many purposes through agricultural means.

The process of alcohol began with farmers noticing the fermentation process of fallen fruit. Through trial and error of using different fruits and grains; formulas resulted in alcoholic drinks. First, alcohol consisted of honey and yeasts. Origins vary, but evidence shows from a jar that had alcohol residue that it dated back to 7,000 to 6,000 B.C in northern China.

As for the United States, water was deemed unsafe when the English migrated to America, so colonists would brew beer using malt shipped from England. The establishment of alcohol as a primary drink as it was deemed healthy as a digestive aid and source of strength around the 1790s.

The booming use of alcohol consumption allowed new rituals and social roles to take place.

Knowing the social role alcohol plays, it also is associated with celebrations as an element of festivity. This creates a positive notion that alcohol is the acceptable choice of beverage to “enhance” celebrations as it defines the nature of an occasion. Think of champagne. It’s known as the drink of celebration for formal gatherings like a wedding or graduations.

Or think about birthdays; especially hitting age 21. It’s an exciting age to become an adult. Reaching the age to legally drink serves as a rite of passage by many. The ritual associated with this celebration is binge drinking whether it’s at a party or bar. Also, the increased availability makes it more enticing to drink. Even the mere presence of alcohol could lead to increased consumption. Going to a party store, restaurants, and tailgates are more examples of alcohol more readily available for all.

Drinking is essentially a social activity in most cultures and there’s designated environments where there’s a community of people drinking that’s subject to rules and norms. Drinking can’t take place ‘just anywhere’, there’s a regard for who, what, where, and with who.

Groups of different backgrounds gather at bars, pubs, and clubs with the role of alcohol serving as a common social tool.

After business hours, co-workers may go to the local bar or pub as society deems these places as venues where friends can gather, consume alcohol, decompress, and talk about the workday.

There’s a sense that alcohol is dedicated to certain environments and everyone builds groups for their drinking and social pleasures. Think of Mojos in downtown Grand Rapids. It’s a club that’s split into two environments. The bottom floor is dedicated to those wanting to sit down, enjoy live music and an easily accessible bar. Often the crowd is older adults. On the other hand, a long line awaits to go upstairs where there’s a DJ, wood floor to dance on and a lot of young adults waiting for a long time and cutting each other in hopes of getting an alcoholic drink. Though it’s all one building, each floor has a distinctive environment that has accepted norms. One floor for partying and one floor to relax.

Drinking is also a communal activity that serves as a vacuum of communications. Alcohol is used as a bonding device where alcohol stimulates social bonding and reduces negative emotion in the moment. The increased smiles and enjoyment through use of alcohol makes people more sensitive to social behaviors and connect with one another unlike any other drink.

We’ve discussed the socialization alcohol brings, but there’s also desire and motives. One is the “personal-effect motives.” This is labeled for those drinking to cope and use alcohol as a tendency to escape, avoid or regulate negative emotions. We all as college students have varying schedules whether it’s work, school or clubs. The stress increases intensely at times where things fall out of control and alcohol is seen as the stress reliever or coping mechanism.

The other motive is for social effect. This encompasses drinking for social purposes and having a good time with others. Happiness is deprived from the glass or aluminum where the substance lies. It’s a tool to achieve greater enjoyment in a given moment while in a sociable setting. However, researches have battled back and forth whether drinking truly makes people happier. Overall, choices are made to drink safely and responsibly as we rationalize with ourselves how much to drink or what to drink or not drink at all. Though the influence of social behavior entices people to drink, make an internal decision on drinking.

At the end of the day, alcohol is a confirmation tool to experience fun. The harms of drinking are well known, but those thoughts are diminished as people want to achieve a form of happiness. Despite this, it’s worth noting other reasons behind drinking like peer pressure. Refer to episode one of season two where I discuss the harms of peer pressure and why it’s commonly occurring within the college environment.

Though much of this episode has looked at the use of alcohol in a certain environment tailored to certain social norms, there’s also the use of media exposure that helps influence the normalization of drinking.

Celebrity endorsements play a part in exposing use of alcohol. Such advertisements are always on cable TV to show that drinking a specific brand of alcohol the same as the celebrity is a call to follow action. The company uses the celebrity’s social status to invite them to drink their brand of alcohol. Think of Post Malone’s commercial with Jagermeister. He lip syncs his song, “I’m Gonna Be” while a large crowd of people follows him to a bar. He holds up a class of Jagermeister and it cuts to a full screen graphic of the drink.

What about slogans? “The most interesting man in the world” was a frequent commercial that featured Jonathan Goldsmith who is an actor in more than 500 TV shows and movies. His catchphrase which is spoken in a lower, masuline tone is featured in the commercial to attract men to drink the beer.

Refer to episode eight for more insight on pop culture and media influence on substance use. It's a personal favorite of mine where I explored the use of alcohol in Pirates of the Caribbean.

Now, I’ll briefly go over a few tips to keep in mind when drinking.

Know your limits. Everyone has different limits to drinking as it’s determined by age, weight and gender, but knowing how much you can handle drinking allows for a safer consumption of alcohol. If starting to feel the effects from drinking, set down your drink and have a glass of water.

Eat before or during drinking. Alcohol is mostly absorbed in the small intestine. The longer alcohol stays in the stomach, the slower it’s absorbed and slower it affects the body. Food prevents alcohol from passing quickly through the intestine and prevents the intensified side effects of drinking like ability to think or coordinate body movements.

Keep count of drinks. It’s easy to lose count and drink more than you realize.Set a limit and stick to it. If fellow friends drink more than you, avoid drinking in rounds with them. Try to finish one drink before starting another. Also, to keep safe when drinking, try drinking 1 drink per hour. To do this, try incorporating water to quench thirst, opt for lower alcohol content drinks and sip rather than taking big gulps.

If you want more, relevant tips and information, follow the Alcohol and Other Drugs Instagram pag @gvsuaod.

That concludes episode ten of, “In the Mix.” Remember, tradition and culture brings alcohol into fruition, but keep in mind the tips mentioned in the episode about drinking. Again, I’m Zachary Plisko, see you in the next episode.