**EP. 8 Pop Culture Script**

The sources of popular culture like mass media often influence how people shape their own identity. These advanced communications like TV, music and movies allow for a greater transmission of ideas. Influencers and celebrities can dictate ideas of substance usage through their performances or social lifestyle. When we gravitate towards such cultural pieces, we may be influenced to follow suit on what others do like using substances. People typically learn through personal experiences and behavior is influenced by what they witness. So, when we see substances used through different mediums, our perceptions shift, making it become acceptable to use.

Hey, welcome back to episode eight 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 students to be safe, be responsible and be smart when using substances. In today’s episode we’ll discuss how pop culture influences the use of substances through different mediums like music, television and social media.

First, let’s listen to how music can influence substance use.

Musical lyrics may encourage substance use. When listening to songs, we tend to create imagery of what the song is depicting. Often, we paint images that associate or inform what’s acceptable, normal and recreational behavior.

An example is country music. As a genre it’s prominent in advocating alcohol use to have a good time or subdue emotional feelings from relationships. Think of Thomas Rhett’s song, “Beer can’t fix.”

Here’s a few lines:

Ain’t nothin’ that a beer can’t fix

Ain’t no pain it can’t wash away

From the moment that it hits your lips

Makes those clouds look a little less gray

The song echoes that alcohol is the solution to the listeners’ problem. As the song goes on, a verse indicates stress as another reason to drink after a bad workday rather than finding a healthier, more beneficial way to cope.

Another suggestion to drink is from being heartbroken within the song lyrics. Mentioning to “Turn that frown into a smile real quick; it might take one or it might take six; Drank it down, it’ll do the trick.” Again, drinking emotions away isn’t the best solution. Maybe if there's a heartbreak, talk to friends or family, keep busy and give yourself space, rather than relying on alcohol use to deal with the pain.

This is one of many examples where alcohol is the idol within a song where it promises to take human suffrage away, in exchange to enjoy drinking.

Songs can provide the reality of a celebrity who is living with a substance addiction. Despite their wealth and success, they’re not immune to the effects of drugs and alcohol use, rather, they share songs of humanity and realities of substance use.

An example of a song that captures more of reality is, “The A Team,” by Ed Sheeran. It’s about a woman who struggles with cocaine addiction. Ed Sheeran describes the woman as “breathing in snowflakes” and “going mad for a couple of grams.” Ed Sheeran shares the reality of addiction where many are itching for more and more as their body has a reliance on cocaine. Ed Sheeran admitted that he was tempted by substance use because it’s so common in the music industry. Even he had to take some time away from making music to cut down on his own drinking and strive for a healthier lifestyle.

Television offers a different look on substance use. Since TV is in the form of episodes, there’s a repetition of seeing certain substances which can normalize the behavior. The light-hearted depictions can skew a viewer’s vision of the role substance plays in reality. This is especially common in comedies where substance use is the main plotline while ignoring or minimizing the health effects.

Let’s use Peter Griffin from Family Guy as an example. An episode called, “Underage Peter,” where Mayor West bans all alcohol from people aged fifty and under. Peter uses Brian, the talking dog, to get alcohol for him since dog years are different from human years. This episode puts emphasis on underage drinking through a comedic lens where older adults struggle to cope without alcohol, leaving them to act like they’re underage again and must find alternative ways of sneaking and gaining alcohol. This illustrates the dependence of alcohol where adults must bend and break rules to gain access to the alcohol.

Again, this is one example where using comedy to minimize the health effects of substance can blind viewers of the real world. As this is an animated show, it can easily play alcohol as a hilarity and uses it to the creator’s advantage for comedic episodes.

Movies promote a portrayal of substance use that is subtle yet effective in a viewer’s engagement. Often, when showing the effects of a substance being used it gives the audience a positive connotation when changing a character’s emotion or attitude.

Think about Pirates of the Caribbean. This is one of my favorite movie series as I grew up watching them as a kid, but one thing stood out to me; the use of rum. A PG-13 movie where pirates go on crazy adventures for fantasized treasures, but fall dependent on rum. The opening of the second movie has Jack Sparrow and his crew out of the alcohol and must go below the ship’s deck to find more. Astonished, he finds the rum is either all gone or dried up. The crew members look gloomy as they don’t have their drink of choice which hints dependence.

Within the same movie, the crew is attacked by the kraken. A giant octopus creature that tears ships in half. To defeat it, the crew put all gunpowder barrels and rum in the middle of the ship to use and explode when the kraken got near. But when orders are given to get the rum, the whole crew freezes as they don’t want to give up their alcohol. They insist on following orders and reluctantly follow through.

This shows that subtle ways alcohol is stuck into movies. Though it provides a good laugh, it glorifies the use of rum to enhance Jack Sparrow’s crew in a positive manner.

An example of a movie that sheds light on the reality of addiction is *28 Days*. It’s about Gwen Cummings, a big-city news columnist who has issues with drinking. She even shows up to her sister’s wedding with slurred speech and knocks over the cake. The next day, she’s hungover and takes a stolen car, only to crash it into a house. She has to choose whether to spend time in prison or 28 days in rehab.

At the rehab center, there’s many characters introduced, each with a different addiction problem. As viewers, we get to see the struggle of reluctant participation, giving up on the program or some who power through and overcome the addiction.

Sandra Bullock plays the film’s protagonist that shows her battle and working hard to overcome her inhibitions and defeat her alcohol abuse problem.

Now, we all have our favorite influencers or celebrities. We feel we have commonalities with them or we respect their way of living. Some post constant pictures of using substances whether it’s alcohol, marijuana and other drugs. They may use these substances in social environments and connect with others through usage of these different substances.

This kind of content shown through pictures and videos normalizes and glamourizes behaviors of substance use.

When influencers expose their audience to substance usage, it may encourage them to use the substance too. It’s deemed an okay item to use by the influencer, so it must be okay to use by the followers.

Celebrities and influencers aren’t the only ones that may influence substance use. Fellow peers online who post stories of them at parties could influence the viewers to use substances to have a good time. It could even influence peer pressure where one see’s everyone partying and must join in by using the substances too.

Big blue-chip companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have the idea to generate clicks into profit. When social media first evolved, it was looked at positively, as an open area where users could feel free to share anything. Well, that positivity is slowly turning into negativity. Companies recognized positive posts as a finite resource where it could go only so far in generating clicks. Negative content is seen as an infinite resource because conflict will always generate non-stop discussions with no ending.

So, maybe you’ll see advertisements encouraging substance use or advertisements promoting the negatives with substances. Either way, online platforms will often use their algorithm to send the negative content your way to get a reaction out of you.

Despite this, Good can come from online platforms. Forums, groups and message boards create imagined communities. Though peers live far apart or want to remain anonymous online, such groups provide an alternative outlet for those seeking a social space to share similarities from hobbies to struggles.

Support groups are offered online where users can remain anonymous if they choose and are aimed to manage substance use. Such groups could be used in a good-faith manner where it’s positive support from other users. Other groups may promote abstinence or moderation of substance use with each other and all users strive to reach a goal.

The Alcohol and Other Drug Services here at Grand Valley does offer some online options if needing to reach out about substance use and wanting to remain anonymous.

One meeting is Alcoholics Anonymous. It’s a 12-step program for individuals who are wanting to share their experience, strength and hope with each other to solve their common issues and help recover from an alcohol problem. The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking.

The other group is called narcotics anonymous. It’s another 12-step program that welcomes any individual who is trying to overcome any substance use problem.

For more information head to gvsu.edu/aod/recovery.

That concludes episode eight of, “In the Mix” Remember different mediums do promote the encouragement of substance use to amplify entertainment value. Again, I’m Zachary Plisko, see you in the next episode.