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The Evolution of Stereotypes about Alcohol Dependency in Film: Gender, Family, & Treatment

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When watching films, people seek reflections and depictions of themselves and their experiences, something that they can understand and relate to. Movies are often looked at to decide, either subconsciously or consciously, how we view society, widespread issues, and one another—Oscar Wilde wrote that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (Wilde, 1891). This is particularly true in how we as a society view mental illness, and what kinds of stigma are reinforced or rejected through the film industry. Accurately portraying any form of mental illness in film can be difficult, as experiences are subjective and no two individuals will have the same story, and there is usually around a two-hour time restriction on how much of the story in question can be told. However, many of the stereotypes that end up being depicted are profoundly negative and harmful, and they can potentially directly prevent people from seeking help. This is even more common in films about highly stigmatized diagnoses, one of the most prevalent of which is addiction, specifically alcohol use disorder, which I will refer to more loosely as alcohol dependency. These stereotypes have been both enforced and prolonged by their appearance in films throughout the years; how films portray alcohol dependency has shaped the way that other media outlets report on it, as well as how the audience views it.

One of the most common mental illnesses depicted on-screen is addiction, specifically alcohol use disorder, which has historically been referred to as "drunkenness" or alcoholism. For some mental health issues, n an attempt to create better representation, many different mental health-centered organizations have put forth guidelines on how to do so on both film and television in a manner that is empathetic and not needlessly triggering, such as the *National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide* created by The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. The guidelines that they have proposed include showing the complex roots of

suicidal thoughts, forms of help that are available, nonjudgemental attitudes, and consulting both psychologists and individuals with personal experience[1]. This is intended to allow for the issue to be depicted with minimal negative stereotyping and a focus on person-centered perspectives. It allows for limited judgement and a better understanding for those who may not be familiar with the issue in question.

However, there are no set, organization-established guidelines such as those for suicide and suicidal thoughts for how to portray addiction, despite the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) having collaborated on the recommendations for suicide depiction. Instead, films utilize a myriad of long-standing stereotypes regarding what exactly alcohol dependency looks like, who is impacted by it, and how they should be treated by both medical professionals and by society at large. “They have significantly shaped public understandings of alcoholism as a disease and the alcoholic as a sick individual. In the process they alter lives, shape public attitudes, and make money for Hollywood” (Denzin, 1991, p. xiv). The impact that film and television can have on adolescent and teen drinking rates has been heavily studied, as well as how that exposure can lead to binge drinking and alcohol dependency later in life, but there has been very little research conducted about how alcohol dependency itself is depicted and the correlation that those portrayals have on public opinions about it and the people who struggle with it.

The Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have been shown to have an increased effect on how much people drink (Killgore et al., 2021). Virtual care has become easier

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[1] *National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide*. National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://theactionalliance.org/messaging/entertainment-messaging/national-recommendations.

to access, but in-person care was restricted heavily during that period. In an isolating time where people's mental health is at risk, it is extremely important that the stereotypes held regarding alcohol dependency are addressed and corrected, and that includes those that are popularized in film, arguably one of the most influential institutions on public opinion and perceptions: "Movies may be considered entertainment but they also have an instructional function similar to the Greek tragedies or morality plays" (Cape, 2003). A decrease in stereotyping and stigma will lead to an increase in people feeling comfortable enough to seek help when they need it, without risking being shamed for it. People unfamiliar with it will also be able to hold a less negatively biased view. There have been some strides taken in representation, but in order to understand what kind of progress has been made in terms of film portrayals of addiction, specifically alcohol addiction, it is important to understand the history of these stereotypes, and how they have permeated the public mind as a result.

Alcohol dependency has always been commonly shown in the background of films, or as a storyline in limited detail. Substance abuse-centered films became more prominent after the Prohibition and following World War II, and often depicted men and women with debilitating mental illnesses who were resigned to a dire fate (Room, 2015). The idea of alcohol misuse serving as a symbol of personal failing can be attributed to the culture around the time of the Prohibition and the repeal (Denzin, 1991, p. 4). Heavy drinking was the norm in early film, specifically for male characters, but those ideas took a turn around the 1940s, with films such as *The Lost Weekend* (1945) an example of changing attitudes. In popular culture, "The most decisive decline occurred between the decades 1930–1939 and 1940–1949" (Linskey, 1970). There are certain established tropes and stereotypes that exist and that films enforce about who

experiences alcohol dependency, what their families look like, and how (or whether) they receive treatment. One of the larger cultural shifts that is evident in films throughout time, is the extent to which alcohol dependency is thought of as a question of willpower, of choice—are people the ones to blame for their addiction, or is it an outside force that leads to it? Is it a combination of factors, a result of societal pressure? The earliest films do not particularly delve into the idea of alcohol dependency being a mental illness or a disease, instead it being a condition of varying origin, but as medical and public view began to shift, so did the portrayals, though not always in an accurate or beneficial manner.

In a study examining films released between 1910 and 1980 focusing on alcohol dependent characters, Room defined two primary depictions of alcoholism in film. One is"the comic drunk", and the other is "the doomed protagonist of the 'drunkard's progress'". One might think of the latter as a "tragic drunk", as their story typically ends in some sort of tragedy, most notably their death. The comic drunk's alcohol dependence serves as comedy fodder, their antics while intoxicated established as something to laugh at throughout both television and film. This is often due to physical or slapstick comedy such as falling down while inebriated. These "quirky" behaviours cement them as a zany side figure (such as Otis, the "town drunk" on *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968)). One notable example of such in film is the "eccentric" millionaire from *City Lights* (1931, dir. Charlie Chaplin), whose constant state of intoxication, and even his suicide attempt made while under the influence that Chaplin's character stops, are played for laughs. When it comes to characters and films such as this, where alcohol and comedy go hand-in-hand, "they enact the belief that alcohol can produce positive effects for certain drinkers, even when the drinker is defined as an alcoholic, or a chronic drunk" (Denzin, 1991, p.

21). As attitudes about alcohol use have changed over time, this trope has become less common. Although characters in film, mostly comedies, still embark on drunken adventures—one may think of the success of the *Hangover* trilogy—they are not usually labeled as "alcoholics"; rather, they are shown drinking heavily for what is considered to be a socially acceptable purpose, such as a party or a vacation.

The negative depiction of the doomed protagonist or "tragic drunk" is a dramatic look at the moral failure that it was believed alcohol dependency indicated, and the resulting punishment for the "alcoholic" as atonement for their sins. The "drunkard's progress" is considered to be the depiction of the alcoholic's unavoidable journey through "the high life to degradation and death" (Room, 2015); "This drinker's decline would be charted, shot by shot, until he or she died, got sober, or was laughed off screen" (Denzin, 1991, p. xiii). The individual is shown reveling in their alcohol use and the lifestyle accompanying it, until their quality of life begins to decline and they suffer a social and sometimes literal death as a consequence for their actions. This can be seen, for a popular example, in all four versions of *A Star Is Born* (1937, 1954, 1976, & 2018, dir. William A. Wellman, George Cukor, Frank Pierson, & Bradley Cooper, respectively). Each film follows a couple, a man already established in either the film or the music industry, and a woman who is seeking to break out into said industry, who meet by chance and fall in love, as he becomes increasingly wrapped up in alcohol dependency. Even in the latest remakes, despite the improvements in compassionate and accurate depictions, in every iteration the male lead has the same storyline. Heis living a life of celebrity and partying until his relationships and mental state begin to crumble and he dies as a result of his substance misuse, whether by suicide or reckless behaviour under the influence.

In the 2018 version of the film, one could argue that there is a great deal more research and effort shown in the portrayal of Jackson Maine (Bradley Cooper) and both his alcohol and drug addiction than there is in the 1937 version of Norman Maine (Fredric March). This is a dichotomy that is representative of our changing ideas about alcohol use disorder and the implementation of conducted research in film. Despite both films ending with his suicide, what with the evolution of our knowledge about alcohol dependency, Jackson is given more of an explanation for his alcohol use. In turn, the audience has a more thorough and empathetic look at his attempts to recover and his internal struggles—a look that is not given to Norman. The 1937 version pays more attention to how Norman's alcohol dependency has impacted his career and his self-esteem in that regard, whereas the 2018 version focuses on how it, along with various other life stressors, has impacted his relationships and his opinion of himself overall. This is highlighted with Ally (Lady Gaga), his wife and a burgeoning popstar..

At the end of the 1937 film, Norman wades out into the ocean to commit suicide with a near-heroic, romantic swell of music. He is shown swimming off and disappearing into a beautiful sunset, leaving his clothes and his troubles behind on the beach to be washed away by the waves. This is his way of making up for what he has done, for his alcohol dependency. It is his way of setting his wife, Esther (Janet Gaynor), free, to live out her blossoming career rather than stay home and take care of him; it is his triumphant moment. She is clearly heartbroken, but there is not a great deal of time spent examining her grief for his loss, or the true impact that Norman's death has on her beyond a funeral scene and one where she speaks with her grandmother about continuing on her career. In contrast, in the 2018 film Jackson's death is not framed in any sense as heroic or beautiful, although we can presume that he is, in his own mind,

also atoning for his actions and freeing Ally from the “burden” of himself. The scene itself is an upsetting reality, a man in pain who has been trying to get better, but is overcome with guilt and hurt. There is no music, heroic or otherwise; there is only a near-suffocating silence, and the aftermath of his death where the audience witnesses the extent to which Jackson’s suicide has affected the people who loved him, most primarily Ally and his brother, Bobby. It is a short scene, but an important one, where Bobby reassures Ally that Jack’s suicide is nobody’s fault. Even this small addition can serve as a comfort to people who have found themselves in similar situations and are subsequently blaming themselves for not doing enough.

In addition, the roots of Norman’s alcohol dependency are not explored. It is thought of as a result of his spiraling career, though his drinking and therefore his difficulty getting and keeping work are also shown as the reason why his career is spiraling. The film makes it clear that Hollywood is not what he had imagined it would be, but ideas about why exactly that is are not examined in-depth, nor are any aspects of his personal life or childhood beyond his past relationships to women and his employers. Jackson, on the other hand, is given far more of a backstory: the film highlights his strained relationship with his brother, his diagnosis of tinnitus that is worsening and affecting his ability to hear and play music, which is his primary outlet for his emotions, his father’s alcohol use disorder and neglectful and abusive tendencies as well as their impact on him growing up, and his history of suicidality from when he was as young as twelve. This recognizes the genetic and environmental components to alcohol dependency, and gives the audience more context as to why Jackson potentially began drinking in a way that the original film does not. However, it must be emphasized that despite this progress, the film still culminates in his death.

These kinds of films seem to assert themselves as a warning, but rarely show the actual intricacies of the disease (which was not even considered a disease at the time, in the case of the first two *A Star Is Born* films—the American Medical Association (AMA) did not recognize alcohol dependency as an illness until 1956 (The Recovery Village, 2022)). While there are certainly cases in real life of alcohol dependency that result in tragedy, only or mostly portraying the tragic stories rather than the hopeful stories can create a larger narrative in which there is no way for the person struggling with alcohol dependency to truly imagine themselves healing or even "redeeming" themselves. It also can keep people from believing that they can improve their image in the eyes of those that they love, who they are typically portrayed as cruel and neglectful toward at best and violently abusive toward at worst. This may risk causing people who are struggling to feel that there is no possibility of recovery for them, and other people to feel that those with alcohol use disorder are undeserving of recovery if they are only hurtful and destructive to the people around them.

In many films, the seemingly only way for the alcoholic to repent and escape an otherwise inevitable death is through religiosity or other virtuous behaviour (Room, 2015), which often manifests as helping others who are working toward their own sobriety. This is namely in Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meetings. This idea of such actions being the way that someone who is dependent must "take responsibility" reflects the sentiment that because they caused their own condition, chances at recovery and redemption are something to be earned. Even now, those struggling with alcohol dependence are viewed as more responsible for their condition than those diagnosed with other mental illnesses, and are thought of as inherently more dangerous (Schomerus et. al., 2010). One study came to the conclusion that the public also has a

higher desire to distance themselves socially from people who are dealing with alcohol dependency (Killian et. al., 2021). If the majority of depictions of alcoholism primarily show destructive and abusive individuals who torment those around them, it is no surprise that this is an outcome that has continued to hold up, even in a more modern time where people are far more aware of the various causes of addiction.

Norman K. Denzin, in his book *Hollywood Shot by Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema*, describes an interpretation of the role of the "alcoholic" in films released between 1932–1989. The alcoholic is posed often as a sickened, tragic figure who is an affront to morality, an "often insane, violent person who violates the normal standards of everyday life" (Denzin, 1991, p. xiii). Denzin also establishes the trope of the "alcoholic hero", a character who goes through three stages: the first in which he has no control over his alcohol use, the second in which he lives the "drunkard's experiences", and the third in which he "meets AA and its disease theory of recovery" (Denzin, 1991, p. 45). These stages follow Western morality standards, and if the character fails to meet them it can result in their demise, often at their own hands. It was largely used in early alcoholism movies, as a way of redeeming the "alcoholic" and creating a story that ultimately serves as a battle between man and morals, between the sinner and the sin, as many films in earlier years did.

Later on, in the 1990s and 2010s, alcoholism became more of a public spectacle and fodder for gossip and entertainment. Celebrities were on the covers of tabloid magazines for public intoxication and being charged with DUIs, and were subsequently laughed at and humiliated or berated rather than seen as people in need of help. This can be tied back to Room's explanation of depictions of alcoholism, with those laughing and ridiculing people who are

viewing the celebrities in question as the comic drunk, or those condemning their character without regard for their humanity viewing them as the doomed drunk. “It is assumed that positions expressed in these magazines are broadly consistent with or at most slightly in advance of beliefs held by their leadership, in keeping with the need of such magazines for wide readership acceptance” (Linsky, 1970). In order for these tabloid magazines to stay relevant, it can be assumed that their audience holds, to some degree, similar attitudes to those that the publications perpetuate. When alcohol dependency is the subject of those attitudes, it can do significant harm to those experiencing it.

Alcohol dependency stereotypes in film, and in real life, vary based on a myriad of factors, but one of the more blatant variations comes based on the person’s gender: the male alcoholic versus the female alcoholic. The two are portrayed very differently in their experiences. Female alcohol consumption has long been viewed in a more negative light than that of males, and women struggling with alcohol dependency rarely play comic drunks. If a female character in a film is dependent on alcohol, she is typically deeply unhappy and cynical. The differences are particularly emphasized in the realm of sexual activity and behaviours—“for women, drinking went with sexuality, but for men, it replaced it” (Room, 1989). Female alcohol dependency in media is often tied to sexual promiscuity (Taddeo, 2016), and this attitude has had a devastating effect on the way that we treat intoxicated women in real criminal cases, primarily in assault cases.

It is extremely common for the blame to be placed on women who were drinking when they were assaulted. One report on the subject cited a case in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where a woman was raped by six men while intoxicated and received death threats when she

reported it, as well as people claiming that her intoxication meant that she deserved to be assaulted (Blume, 1991). This is just one example of such a common occurrence. Films tend to enforce this stereotype of alcohol dependency in women manifesting as promiscuity and adultery, and therefore ultimately representing a failure of morality. This trope is not applied nearly as often when the alcohol dependency portrayed is that of a man. This is not to say that men are not shown as tragic figures; they are simply more likely to be shown dealing with alcohol dependency in general, and therefore are shown more within different stereotypes. Women more often fulfill the role of the concerned spouse, the one who the male doomed drunk takes his anger out on, or rolls her eyes lovingly at the comic drunk. However, as stated, when female alcohol dependency is portrayed, it is rarely in a comedic light.

In addition to how the alcohol dependency itself is depicted, there are certain stereotypes regarding how the treatment processes for it are depicted in film. When one thinks of treatment options for people experiencing alcohol dependency, their minds tend to gravitate toward rehabilitation centers and A.A.. It is important to take into consideration that recovery holds a great deal of accessibility issues. Many people cannot afford to go to a rehabilitation clinic, and insurance does not always cover the costs. A.A. is a free program, but it does not necessarily resonate with everyone. In modern films, A.A. meetings are shown frequently in films where there is a recovery storyline, though it is not always portrayed accurately. The one aspect that is nearly always included is arguably the best-known exchange from A.A., aside from the Serenity Prayer:

“My name is ____, and I’m an alcoholic.”

“Hi, ____.”

However, these film portrayals tend to shy away from the more spiritual side of A.A., and rarely show the rehabilitation process in-depth (Room, 1989). The recovery process is often reduced to hitting rock bottom, which is a widespread idea of recovery groups—that the addict must hit their worst possible point before finally deciding to seek help—and attending a meeting. Films do not typically focus much on the withdrawal stage of recovery, the detox, or the intensive treatment of the underlying issues that contribute to the person's substance abuse. They approach the topic from the lens that the dependency itself is what needs to be treated, rather than the individual's state of mind and stressors outside of their substance use. Granted, they only have so much time to establish a character's recovery, and it cannot occur within the timeframe of a couple of hours. However, neglecting this aspect of treatment can potentially lead to treating the symptom as opposed to the causes, and to others viewing someone's drinking as their primary issue.

In A.A. rhetoric, "'being alcoholic' goes beyond being sick or allergic; being alcoholic is an identity as opposed to a behavior" (Warhol, 2002, p. 97). This is a line of thinking that is consistent with the image posed by a large percentage of films about alcohol dependency, though of course A.A. is recovery-focused as opposed to focusing solely on the behaviours of the individual while in active addiction, as many movies do. However, while this "identity rather than behaviour" mindset is one that helps many people, it may alienate and put others who do not agree at a disadvantage when it is one of the most affordable and widely promoted recovery programs, including in film. In films, if recovery is shown at all, it is typically in montage toward the end.

The perspective on and attention given to recovery within the earliest and most recent *A Star is Born* films shows a glaring difference. The 1937 film spends three minutes on showing Norman's recovery in the sanitarium, and in that time, they devote it to Norman discussing his career opportunities (or lack thereof). Nine minutes of the 2018 version show Jackson's recovery, but they are a highly essential nine minutes that show a step toward genuine healing of his and his wife's strained relationship, and a deeper understanding of one another. When he begins to weep while apologizing, Ally reassures him that "It's not your fault, it's a disease". In 1937, Esther says to Niles, "Oh, it's awful to see this happen to someone you love, and know in your heart that it can't get any better." She outright dismisses any idea of Norman recovering, as opposed to Ally, who continues to believe in Jackson regardless of the outlook. Two films that follow the same storyline have a very different way of discussing addiction and the amount of hope involved in recovery, despite reaching a similar conclusion.

When a Man Loves a Woman (1994, dir. Luis Mandoki) is one of the films that does show the recovery process in more detail, within a rehabilitation facility. Alice Green (Meg Ryan) is addicted to alcohol and, after hitting one of her young daughters and falling through a shower door—her "rock bottom"—goes to a rehabilitation facility with the support of her husband, Michael (Andy Garcia). She is seen in detox, group therapy, and managing her recovery from home. How it affects her family is portrayed, particularly its effect on Michael, who is unsure of his place in their family without the dysfunction. Alice and her children are shown attempting to rebuild their relationship and the trust between them through tactics that she has learned in recovery. The film highlights how the aftermath of recovery can shift a family dynamic, as opposed to just when the addiction is active, without demonizing Alice for her illness or

choosing to recover. However, it is important to consider that when recovery is portrayed, it is often only shown as accessible for white, upper or upper middle class individuals, as every film included in this review depicts. In *When a Man Loves a Woman* specifically, "while the audience is encouraged to identify with white substance abusers, none of this empathy is shared with minorities" (Hersey, 2005). This lack of diversity in stories about addiction recovery reinforces the existing stereotypes about who is "able" to recover.

Recovering is already difficult enough when one is not considering how stereotypes factor into the impact of media images of those seeking help. It has been proven that people who are receiving treatment often have trouble reconciling their illness with the media-built images that they have been exposed to about addiction (Hill & Leeming, 2014). Addiction is an illness that many people struggle to identify, especially within themselves, and being bombarded with such poor representation cannot aid well in adjusting to that identification. When the images that you are exposed to are so overwhelmingly negative, it can become a defense mechanism to separate yourself from those images, which in turn can lead to a reluctance to admit that your symptoms match those of addiction. This self-stigma is even more amplified by childhood trauma, which is already a variable that can contribute to substance abuse and leads to stronger identification with negative stereotypes (Stolzenburg et. al., 2018).

In addition, even mental health professionals can and do harbour these stereotypes about alcohol dependency, potentially having a negative impact on their clients' recovery attempts. One study recorded that among their sample, "Not only do they [alcohol dependent individuals] provoke feelings of helplessness and hopelessness in many therapists, but they may also conjure up images of Skid Row 'drunks' encountered during internship days" (Hanna, 1978). If

"alcoholics" are thought of even by professionals as incapable or unworthy of change, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. As stated, it took until the 1950s for alcohol use disorder to be officially recognized as an illness rather than simply a way that some people lived. Even now, many people view it as a behaviour that can be stopped by sheer will. It is forgotten that if it were as easy as "just stopping", the majority of those struggling with it would, given how it can affect every aspect of their lives as well as their relationships.

An often left out aspect of addiction in film, particularly earlier films, is its impact on families: "Missing in these films was the presence of a domestic life, or a household associated with the alcoholic's family" (Denzin, 1991, p. 95). In initial movies about alcohol dependency, it was portrayed as a largely individual disease with the central storyline being almost entirely focused on the person dependent and their immediate consequences. Though their relationships were shown in decline, how the people around them were affected was less considered. However, as perceptions of addiction have evolved, as have studies on how it affects family systems, there has been a resulting increase in films that depict those effects. More modern media depictions, such as the HBO series *Euphoria*, go into greater detail about how the family structure is shifted by addiction in family members, but the inclusion of detail is a somewhat recent development.

However, one earlier film that does attempt to explore the way that alcohol dependency impacts the family is *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962, dir. Blake Edwards), with the dynamic between Kirsten and Joe, as well as with their daughter Debbie and with Kirsten's father. *Days of Wine and Roses* is one of the first films that come to mind for many people when they think of "alcoholism movies", and for good reason. It is an especially harrowing, borderline

melodramatic tale. It follows two people, Joe Clay (Jack Lemmon) and Kirsten Arnesen (Lee Remick), as they meet through work and fall in love. Joe, a public relations worker, is used to drinking on the job and as a form of socializing, whereas Kirsten does not drink prior to their relationship. The two bond over alcohol and begin to spiral, as their alcohol use takes a significant toll on their professional and personal lives. The film spends a great deal of time navigating its ideas of the process of getting sober, relapsing, and codependency. Debbie's experience is not as highlighted, as the film primarily focuses on the enabling relationship between Kirsten and Joe, and how they as individuals and their relationship change as they are increasingly impacted by their addictions. The film does, however, show the lack of safety in the home for their daughter, both mentally and physically—to the point that Kirsten sets their apartment on fire while drunk with Debbie present.

Kirsten and Joe are prime examples of media tropes about alcohol dependency on a more general scale, with Kirsten ultimately fulfilling the role of the doomed protagonist or "tragic drunk", and Joe the "alcoholic hero". He redeems himself by attending and trying to convince her to attend A.A. meetings, though by the end of the film he has not managed to do so. He is passionate about "drunks helping each other stay sober", and thus in helping others, he is rewarded by the audience's approval. Kirsten is established as far more in denial than Joe, refusing to call herself an alcoholic, actively attempting to sabotage his recovery, and at one point insists that drinking is what makes a man, a man. Her motivation to start drinking after years of not doing so is because the man that she is interested in, Joe, drinks. Although, to the film's credit, it notes how having an "addictive personality" factors into the development of alcohol dependency by making a point of mentioning Kirsten's obsessive affinity for chocolate

early on, a fact that Joe's sponsor mentions to him again later. This is a film that abandons the comic drunk stereotype entirely, instead serving as a sort of public service announcement.

Their varying experiences, as well as how they began drinking—the man for work, the woman for her husband—also tie back into the gender differences in portrayals of alcohol dependency: Kirsten is noted to be picking up men from bars, as opposed to Joe's mostly angry rather than sexual behaviour when intoxicated. There is one scene where Joe is shown in a sexually charged, aggressive state, but the woman that he is pursuing is his wife as opposed to another woman, and what he is ultimately ashamed of is slamming the door while their child is sleeping. This difference contributes to the idea of alcohol making women sexually promiscuous, and it serving as a sexual substitute for men. It should be noted that in this particular instance, the man is the one who is "strong enough to recover" and the woman is not, potentially due to (in her words, while heavily inebriated) how lonely she is. She is crucified over the impact that her illness has on her child to a degree that Joe is not when he is in active addiction, and he is left to fulfill the "motherly" role throughout his sobriety and inform Kirsten that she is needed as a mother.

Over the course of the film, the audience sees Joe degraded and humiliated, with his "rock bottom" moment of trying to steal from a liquor store following a relapse ultimately resulting in his sobriety. *Days of Wine and Roses* acknowledges alcohol dependency as a disorder rather than a choice, with Kirsten in denial claiming that it is a matter of "self-respect and willpower" and Joe disagreeing. In terms of recovery, A.A. is heavily featured in Joe's story, and he is seen detoxing. His behaviour while in detox is almost ridiculously animalistic, grunting and screaming, a contrast to the smooth and well put-together man introduced at the beginning of the

film. He spends some time in detox before being approached by his future sponsor, who introduces him to A.A.. In one scene, his sponsor reads from the Big Book, which was first published in 1939, and explains to the room and, therefore, to the audience, their philosophies. It includes the membership requirements (simply a desire to stop drinking) and the purpose of their community. This is an example of one film that, while it certainly has its share of flaws in how the recovery process is portrayed, does go out of its way to show the audience that there are ways to get help. It is an entire scene dedicated to explicit information, rather than reducing alcohol dependency to something that one must employ their willpower to stop, or else suffer with forever.

However, where it falls short, specifically in its family dynamic portrayal, is that Debbie does not serve much of a purpose beyond a plot device. It is mentioned that she cries for her mother, and she has perhaps two minutes total of screentime, asking if her mother is ever going to get well. Children, and especially young children, are treated as a sort of collateral damage in a sense in alcohol-centered films. They exist first and foremost to show their parent's or parents' level of sickness, in terms of how severely they are abused or neglected. This is heightened when it is a female character who is alcohol dependent—"if she is neglecting her motherly duties, she truly must be sick!" In both *Days of Wine and Rose*s and *When a Man Loves a Woman*, the degree to which Kirsten and Alice are struggling is shown in how they treat their children, from physically harming them to endangering their life. They are rarely developed characters who the audience gets to understand outside of their caretakers, though they are provided with more agency in the latter film.

The stigma surrounding alcohol dependency is not exclusive to the individual experiencing it. Even children of parents who are alcohol dependent are stereotyped by both peers and professionals, more likely to be grouped with “mentally ill teenagers” than “typical teenagers” (Burk & Sher, 1990). There is a program specific to children who come from families with alcohol dependency called Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), founded in 1973, to highlight the issues that they experience despite not having been dependent on alcohol themselves. It is also open to children from generally dysfunctional families, as they may fulfill similar roles in their family dynamic as children with alcohol dependency in their families. It is somewhat like the program Al-Anon, which was founded in 1951, but ACOA is focused on children and their unique experiences specifically—it is most comparable to Al-Anon’s counterpart program, Alateen. Some factors of the experiences that ACOA places importance on, according to the organization’s “laundry list” of traits of an adult child, include: dependency on others, fear of abandonment, approval seeking, low self-esteem, and a tendency to shy away from conflict out of fear (Tony A., 1978).

This is consistent with much of the existing literature about the children of people with alcohol dependency, though their experiences were rarely shown in early films about alcohol dependency. If they are shown, it is typically a side note in the story of their parent’s or parents’ dependency, and does not cover the impacts once their parent(s) recovers or if the children leave the home. There is a lack of literature regarding programs like ACOA, and a lack of representation of those programs in film. *When a Man Loves a Woman* does show a support group for people whose significant others are alcohol dependent, but this is not common in most films of that nature. If they show recovery, they only show recovery of the person in need of

direct help for alcohol use disorder, rather than help for their loved ones who may experience indirect yet potentially long-term effects. It is difficult to come by accurate information through film on how to seek help when you are a relative of someone who has alcohol use disorder. Perhaps if it was shown, those resources would become more widely known. Film may not be the only way to find such resources, but it is one of the more readily accessible forums that we have to look to for insight and certainly one of the most popular, whether we are aware of its influence or not.

This review seeks to identify how stereotypes of alcoholism have changed in terms of public perception, if they have at all, by looking at various films from different decades between 1930—2020. With more nuanced onscreen depictions of substance abuse emerging, general attitudes may be shifting, despite the same stereotypes cropping up in other productions. It is important to understand how these attitudes have evolved over time, and how we can encourage them to evolve in the future. It is also essential to making progress to determine how many of these film stereotypes are still relevant when it comes to how we think of alcohol use disorder and those struggling with it today, as well as how any advancements in the depiction of alcohol dependency has resulted in a decline of stigma. As Jackson's brother Bobby says in the 2018 version of *A Star is Born*, "it's the same story, told over and over, forever, and all the artist can offer the world is how they see those twelve notes"—the stories specifically may not be the same, but they ultimately do convey similar messages, and what exactly those messages are is essential to telling these stories effectively, accurately, and sympathetically.

Despite the improvements that have been made in terms of how alcohol dependency is portrayed, there are still remnants of the long-standing stereotypes that were present in early

films echoed in modern ones. The “comic drunk” continues as a comedy staple, though they are less of an established “alcoholic” and more so a person who binge-drinks in generally appropriate settings. The doomed protagonist, or “tragic drunk”, is a trope that lives on as well, though they are now given more depth and backstory, often involving a family history of addiction or some kind of trauma. Nonetheless, regardless of increased awareness about how depictions of mental illness can impact people who are diagnosed with those illnesses, the characters continue to meet the same ends on-screen as they have over decades of movies. This reinforces the narrative that there is little hope for recovery.

Films now do treat alcohol dependency as an illness, albeit a destructive one, but they tend to label the individual as sick and nothing else, reducing them to their addiction. In addition, they make recovery a much simpler process than it is in reality. It is essential to make sure to develop whole characters, who are more than their disorder and are created with a personality beyond the confines of a destructive stereotype or someone to laugh at. If there are more portrayals of family dynamics that can heal, a reduction in such stark, particularly sexual-based gender stereotyping, and more effort is put in to show available resources in an accurate manner, it will have a positive impact on how people struggling with alcohol dependency are seen, and how they see themselves.

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