

## Myths About Alcohol Clarified Reality Check

### Depiction Suggestions

The following points for consideration regarding the portrayal of the myths and unique problems of alcoholism and alcohol use were developed as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not meant to limit the creative process.

#### Correcting Misperceptions and Social Influences:

- ◆ Attempt to show that there are no miraculous recoveries from addiction. It is a life-long process.
- ◆ Try to avoid implying that drinking is glamorous, sophisticated, or at any time necessary for business or social activities.
- ◆ Try not to have characters use drinking as a solution for any problem (i.e., stress, shyness, anger, depression, and grief).
- ◆ Drinking and romance need not be linked.
- ◆ There are many creative ways to portray that excessive drinking has negative consequences.
- ◆ Try not to have characters drinking unnecessarily or for no particular reason.
- ◆ Consider allowing characters to refuse an alcoholic drink when another beverage might easily and fittingly be substituted.

#### Circumstances Particular to Women:

- ◆ Acknowledge that there are circumstances particular to women who drink. Women might turn to alcohol to:
  1. Relieve their sense of powerlessness at work and at home.
  2. Substitute for a lack of familial support.
  3. Self-medicate for depression.
- ◆ Bear in mind that for physiological reasons, a woman is more likely than a man to get drunk inadvertently.
- ◆ Try to acknowledge that certain circumstances exist that are particular to women who have become addicted to alcohol. These include:
  1. The fear of discovery is greater for an alcoholic woman than an alcoholic man. She fears ridicule for herself and her family and rejection by her loved ones. *Nine out of ten men abandon their alcoholic partner, while nine out of ten women remain with their alcoholic partner.*
  2. Women may fear separation from their children, either through legal edict or in-patient treatment.

3. Treatment, whether in-patient or outpatient treatment, offers additional challenges to many women because of child care needs.
4. Women who abuse alcohol are at particular risk for sexual assault, unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually-transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

◆ Because of the availability of prescription, over-the-counter, and illegal drugs, women are frequently poly-drug users. They are more likely than men to combine alcohol and prescription drugs, a reality that can be reflected when portraying female alcoholics.

◆ Remember that women, and in some cases men, may have additional needs when it comes to treatment programs: access to child care, transportation, medical care, mental health therapy, legal assistance, parental training, basic education, and job training. Traditional treatment programs, originally developed for men, might not provide these services.

◆ Doctors are less likely to recommend counseling or other forms of help to women, a fact which lends itself to a variety of creative scripting possibilities.

***Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues***

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## Myths About Alcohol Clarified

### Fact Sheet

#### Myth versus Fact

**Myth:** "Beer, wine, and wine coolers are not the same as hard liquor."

**Fact:** Beer, wine, and wine coolers can have the same effect on behavior, reflexes, and judgment as so-called "hard liquor" or mixed drinks.<sup>1</sup>

**Myth:** "I can drink more and not be affected. It's just beer."

**Fact:** One can of beer contains the same amount of alcohol as a 5-ounce, glass of wine or a shot of whiskey.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth:** "I know he drinks frequently, but at least he's not using drugs."

**Fact:** Alcohol is a potent nonprescription drug, classified as a depressant and a member of the family of sedative-hypnotic drugs.

**Myth:** "Her mother was an alcoholic, but that won't increase her risks of alcoholism."

**Fact:** A child of an alcoholic has four times the risk of becoming an alcoholic, compared with a child of nonalcoholic parents.

**Myth:** "He has an alcohol problem, but he's in detox now."

**Fact:** Detoxification does not equal treatment. At a detoxification center (hospital unit, nonmedical alcoholism facility, or other institution) the alcoholic's body can clear itself of the alcohol's toxic effects. Long-term treatment,

however, provides alcohol-free environments and can include continued medical care, group, individual, and family therapy, classes about alcoholism, and regular Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.<sup>3</sup>

**Myth:** "Alcohol poisoning can be fatal but only happens to older adults after years of alcoholism."

**Fact:** By drinking a large amount of alcohol in a very short period of time, a person has a higher risk of dying of alcohol poisoning. The people who usually die of alcohol poisoning are teens.

#### Women and Alcohol Problems:

◆ Overall, women drink less than men but are more likely to experience adverse consequences including damage to the heart muscle, liver, and brain, trauma resulting from auto crashes, interpersonal violence, and death.<sup>4</sup>

◆ Research has shown that the dynamics of alcohol and other drug addiction differ greatly between men and women. Social disapproval is stronger against women who drink than it is against drinking men.

◆ Women absorb and metabolize alcohol differently than men. In general, women have less body water than men of similar weight, so women achieve higher concentrations of

alcohol in the blood after drinking equivalent amounts of alcohol.

- ◆ Women appear to eliminate alcohol from the blood faster than men. This may be explained by women's higher liver volume per unit lean body mass, because alcohol is metabolized almost entirely by the liver.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ Women generally drink less, and less often than men. National trends indicate that a smaller percentage of women drink alcohol than men, and a woman's drinking patterns tend to reflect the drinking patterns of her significant other.<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ Current use of alcohol is highest among women ages 26 to 34; binge and heavy drinking are highest among 18- to 25-year olds.<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ While significantly fewer adult women than men use alcohol, cigarettes or illicit drugs, among 12- to 17-year olds, rates of female and male use are similar.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ Never-married, divorced, and separated women generally have the highest rates of heavy drinking and drinking-related problems; widowed women, the lowest rates; and married women, intermediate rates.<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ Nearly 4 million American women ages 18 and older can be classified as alcoholic or problem drinkers, one-third the number of men. Of these women, 58 percent are between the ages of 18 and 29.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Compared to men, women with drinking problems also are at increased risk for depression, low self-esteem, alcohol-related physical problems, marital discord or divorce, spouses

with alcohol problems, a history of sexual abuse, and drinking in response to life crises.<sup>11</sup>

- ◆ Among the personal and environmental factors that increase women's risks for problem drinking are: the influence of husbands' or partners' drinking; the relationship of depression and alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence in women; sexual experience, including reported effects of drinking on sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and sexual dysfunction; and violence victimization, including physical and sexual victimization, in childhood as well as in adulthood.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Alcohol is present in more than one-half of all incidents of domestic violence, with women most likely to be battered when both partners have been drinking.<sup>13</sup>

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