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The Trending Killer

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The Trending Killer

By Diana Ventura

Hit after hit, drug after drug, overdose after overdose: a serious drug problem exists in the music industry. The industry has been a pocket for fostering drug addictions for countless years, mainly targeting the hip-hop field. Many rappers fall ill to this vice with no support or hopes of finding their way out of this downward spiral. Instead of helping these rappers overcome their addictions, record labels will abuse the artists' struggles and use it as a means of music promotion and financial gain. Because of a label's power and clout, I believe that if anyone can change an artist's call to substance abuse, it would be the labels. It should be the record label's responsibility to take in the artist and change all their vices into virtues; the artist should be given the opportunity to seek help without it ruining their career or image and without the label's monetary gain from the artist's downfall.

Famous and amateur rappers alike have a tendency to fall victim to drugs, and it appears as though the pressures of fame only propels the addiction. The problem that this early exposure imposes on a rapper's career is a dependence and growing addiction on a certain drug. Once the drug becomes a part of the daily life, it then becomes a part of the rapper's public image. Fans will begin to follow the artist, listen to their music, and associate them with the drugs they take and the vices they carry. The labels want this attention; they want the negative image to be created and held by the artists. For the industry, their "...entire business model is predatory. And it's predicated on allowing artists to destroy themselves under the guise of creative expression" (Connor). The record labels see the way the fans interact with the artist's image and will do whatever it takes to hold their attention, even if that means implicitly

promoting drug use. These labels see the artist struggling but refuse to do anything to help them because this struggle is what makes good music. Mac Miller is a prime example of the drug issue that exists in today's music society. He died of an opioid overdose and, like many other rappers, his struggles were represented through the lyrics of his songs (Connor).

The labels were aware of his struggle, but they argued that they do not involve themselves with outside personal affairs. They created this idea that it was okay to romanticize drug use, but for Mac to have this addiction, that was out of their control. The label profited on Miller's pain and suffering by ignoring his health issues and encouraging new music to be released, instead of focusing on getting him help.

Although the labels, and the industry as a whole, profit tremendously off songs about drugs and the overall struggles of the artist, an artist's wellbeing should be their primary focus. The relationship between a label and an artist is so tightly wound around revenue and making a living that I believe the only way to truly make a change in this issue is by changing the label's influences. The label should be able to understand that they need to show their support for their artists and be able to offer help when their artists hit rock bottom. From Elvis, to Prince, to Tom Petty, to Lil Peep, this drug problem has taken the lives of many (Browne). Labels should be able to see the negative effects of drugs on artists and stop benefiting off the pain of these human beings.

Instead, they should create support systems that can both maintain the art form and improve the individual. TDE, a record label owned by Anthony "Top Dawg" Tiffith, has been able to achieve this balance between an artist's personal decisions and still having the artist signed. Artist Isaiah Rashad suffered from addictions to Xanax and alcohol, but instead of just being released from the label, Tiffith did something different. Tiffith "...prioritized Rashad's

sobriety and emotional well-being over the pressures to generate hit records and revenue. But he also held Rashad accountable for his actions by providing an incentive: None of his music would be released until his affairs were in order” (Connor).

If other labels were able to follow a similar model and focus on the artist’s struggles, they would be able to save many more lives. Concern from the label, which holds a high level of power, can make a difference. Artists need this kind of support; they need to know that someone cares and worries about their well-being, not just their money and fame. Labels can provide that sense of support if they can create an incentive that benefits both sides. Labels can choose to hold onto records or hold onto recordings until the artist goes and gets some help. Not only would it benefit the artist internally, it would also benefit the label externally, because they would not lose their investment as the artist gets professional help to end their addictions. However, it is not just the label’s duty to help the artists with their drug abuse--the artists need to also make a positive change in their lyrics.

Artists themselves can also have a substantial influence on drug use within the industry. The end to normalizing and romanticizing drug use should not just be the label’s problem and resolution, but should also fall on the artists to change the image of drugs in the industry and in society as a whole. For instance, the artist Future, “...glorifies drug use way more than he participates in it” (Grant). Future, and many other artists, see that drugs are popular and that they are part of a rapper’s image, so they encourage drug use through their songs.

Although they themselves may not participate in those vices, rappers will continue to rap about drugs because it makes them money and gives them more clout. If other well-known artists like Future stopped rapping about the lifestyle of drugs, the popularity and desire to do those drugs could potentially decrease. Rappers like J. Cole are trying to change the image of drug use

to showcase what the reality is like and its effects on the body. With his release of the album *KOD*, Cole discusses how many people fall victim to drugs and become addicted to those drugs (Grant). He argues that the drug abuse in this industry is heavy and the trends make the problem even bigger. This album was a dig at the rest of the industry; Cole was trying to relay the message that these drugs affect people negatively, and that drug use is not something that should be normalized. Taking a cue from J. Cole, artists can help end the glorification of drugs in the industry, by spreading more positive messages and not mentioning drugs in their lyrics at all.

There are many flaws that exist within the music industry, and not every flaw can be fixed. However, since drug abuse has been supported and encouraged in the industry, this problem can be addressed. The record labels have so much influence in this industry that this problem could be reduced if they focused more on the artist's health, rather than being focused on making money through exploiting the artist's vices. Artists are killing themselves for the fame and money, and labels need to respond to help these artists before it is too late. Too many lives have been lost; how many more artists will die before labels change their ways?

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