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'Think before you tweet': A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the constructions of female alcohol consumption on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the discourses surrounding female alcohol consumption on Twitter. Statistics have revealed that in recent years women are drinking similar amounts of alcohol to men (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Yet females are still discussed in negative terms regarding their drinking behaviours. Day et al. (2004) uncovered that women who consume alcohol are often considered to be compromising their femininity. Similarly, Griffin et al. (2012) highlight the contradictions faced by women who drink. The literature regarding female alcohol consumption tends to neglect social media websites, for this reason Twitter was deemed an interesting and novel source. Twitter has reportedly 232 million active users (Kemp, 2014), and can therefore be regarded as a popular form of modern communication. A total of 107 'tweets' were collected by means of a key word search and analysed using a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The FDA revealed that Twitter users constructed female drinking behaviour in typically negative and detrimental terms; constructions included females who drink as *undesirable, out of control* and a causal factor for *sexual assault*. The 'tweets' employed patriarchal, generalising and blaming discourses, and as a result were found to create a problematising subjectivity for women.

KEY WORDS:	**WOMEN**	**ALCOHOL**	**FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**	**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**	**TWITTER**

Background

Researchers have acknowledged that young women in Western countries are drinking noticeably greater amounts of alcohol in recent years (Lyons and Willott, 2008). Statistics have revealed that young people (aged 16-24) were more likely to have drunk heavily at least once during the week, with male proportions weighing in at 26% and females 28%, indicating similar figures for males and females (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Despite these statistics females are repeatedly referred to in the media regarding binge drinking, with a great deal of the content emphasising the negative nature of this activity in females. The recent literature concerning alcohol consumption in females frequently compares this behaviour to that of males and highlights the unfair nature of how media coverage deems that engaging in this type of conduct may compromise femininity.

Research by De Visser and McDonnell (2012) highlights the double standards employed by young people with regards to alcohol consumption and how these contrasting principles can affect their drinking behaviours. Participants completed an online questionnaire concerning recent alcohol consumption, gender role attitudes and beliefs about the gendered nature of alcohol consumption. Certain participants were then selected to take part in an interview process. The researchers revealed that despite actual drinking levels being similar between males and females, there still existed gender double standards. They noted that it was perceived as being more acceptable for men to drink beer, be drunk in public and to binge drink compared to women. The researchers also observed that participants adjusted their drinking behaviours in order to fit in line with a desired gender identity. The research by De Visser and McDonnell is important as it highlights the double standards enforced with regards to alcohol consumption between males and females, this can be detrimental as it has the potential to reinforce gender inequalities.

Similarly, Griffin et al. (2012) executed research into the contradictions faced by women with regards to sexuality and intoxication. They noticed that women are expected to be involved in drinking culture, however, not to the extent that they begin to 'drink like men'. Another contradiction involved the expectation to look and act sexy within the night club setting but not to become a 'drunken slut'. On the other hand, those who refrained from getting excessively drunk described this as a safety precaution against unwanted male advances; these individuals were then faced with overcoming the perception of being boring. These dilemmas were suggested to cause a difficulty in occupying the space of femininity. Griffin et al. (2012) made the important acknowledgment that anti-drinking campaigns in the UK have attempted to frighten women into exercising feminine respectability by cautioning that heavy drinking can compromise their sexual reputation. They concluded that these discourses reinforce a patriarchal view of gender and drinking and fail to recognise the gratifications that women experience through alcohol consumption. This research contributes valuably to our understanding of the struggle faced by women to inhabit a contradictory ideal; it also observes that campaigns aimed at worrying women can have detrimental effects.

Likewise, Lyons and Willott (2008) note the inconsistencies present within discourses surrounding drinking behaviours between men and women. They found that it was deemed acceptable for men to be drunk in public; however women needed to be sent home, emphasising the hypocritical nature of ideas surrounding

female alcohol consumption. In addition to this the researchers found that there was a difference in discourses concerning 'other' women, those perceived as old or exceptionally drunk were viewed in negative terms as they were positioned by young women from the sample as being 'deviant' and going against moral codes. Lyons and Willott discuss the positions of women in society with regards to drinking; they conclude that it is difficult for women to occupy the position of a heavy drinker as well as the position of being female due to the 'hierarchical gendered dichotomies' found in traditional female discourse, which positions women as being valued less than men. This research is important as it emphasises that gender is a significant factor in our interpretations of alcohol consumption.

Day et al. (2004) executed research into the discourses surrounding women and alcohol consumption in the media. The research focussed on relevant articles from British broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. One of the key themes identified from the discourse analysis included women striving to be like men and compete with them through drinking behaviours. Day et al. suggested that this discourse positioned women as engaging in a form of 'inferior masculinity'. In addition, female alcohol consumption was portrayed negatively through the recurrent reference to the compromise to women's femininity through drinking, with particular emphasis on appearance and motherhood.

The analysis also directed attention to the contemporary term 'ladette'. Jackson and Tinkler (2007) describe the term 'ladette' as a modern construction which represents women's growing equality with men in modern society. Contrastingly, Day et al. (2004) perceive that the word 'ladette' itself positions women below men. The researchers imply that this denies women the ability to describe behaviour and identities irrespective of masculine behaviours. Although Day et al. mainly focus on the negative portrayals of women in the media with regards to drinking; they also briefly acknowledge a rise in de-gendered discourse mainly within broadsheet newspapers, the researchers suggested that this aids in reducing sexist understandings of alcohol consumption and gender difference. The research comes from a feminist perspective and understandably focusses on the wealth of literature which depicts females in an unjust light, however in order to gain a rounded view it may be beneficial to acknowledge more texts which present this issue in a gender neutral way.

Applying theory

When talking about representations of gender it is valuable to draw upon the theory of social constructionism. This theory asks us to look critically at the way in which we understand the world, and suggests that the categories we use may not be entirely accurate (Burr, 2003). Burr gives the example of sex and gender; our observations of the world lead us to believe that there are two categories of human beings, male and female. Burr invites us to questions whether the concepts of 'male' and 'female' are derived entirely from biological understandings or whether they are bound up in gender, the cultural notion of masculinity and femininity. This theory provides potential ways to reduce the perceived gender divide regarding alcohol consumption, as it provokes thought into why it is less acceptable for women to consume alcohol in comparison to men. Research such as Day et al. (2004) has shown that many articles regarding this topic draw upon the perceived compromise to femininity for

women who drink; this theory would question what femininity actually is and whether it is in fact a culturally formulated phenomenon.

Social constructionism identifies language as a key form of social action. Discourse analysts declare that language is a means of communicating meaning which plays a vital role in a person's construction of the world (Durrheim, 2011). Foucauldian discourse analysis deems that discourse is important in wider social processes such as power and legitimisation (Willig, 2008). Willig describes power as being sustained and performed through discourse, which therefore has important connotations for the effect that language can have and the problems which may arise from the language used on Twitter to convey female alcohol consumption.

Another theory relevant to this topic is that of social representations theory. Representations have a symbolic nature and interact between the individual and the social world in order to attribute distinct social meaning to objects and facts (Wagner and Hayes, 2005). This theory defines socially represented objects not by their traits but by the relationship between people, objects and events. Ideas can also be considered social representations but Wagner and Hayes (2005) propose that this is only possible if the idea is shared by the majority of members of a culturally distinct group. The social representational system involved in the social identity of groups allows for the discrimination and marginalisation of outsiders, this may be the case with regards to the representations of women and alcohol use as the people who convey negative attitudes towards this issue are placing women outside of a particular social group for which drinking alcohol is seen as acceptable.

Howarth (2006) writes that social representations involve taking on a particular presentation of the world in which we live and reinterpreting that in order to fit with what is already known. Howarth describes that this process provides us with a way of understanding phenomena which is socially significant, this therefore informs what reality is 'inter-subjectively' agreed to be. According to Howard different representations rival in their claims to reality, this is considered to be of critical significance due to the fact that this can lead to the exclusion of other realities.

Social Media

The subject of female alcohol consumption is a well-documented topic in the media, in addition to traditional forms of media such as newspapers it is recurrently discussed on social media. Social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter have developed a novel way for people to communicate with one and other (Roblyer et al., 2010). These websites allow people to post information about themselves and comment on news, ideas and opinions. Cover (2012) suggests that social networking websites can also be utilised as a way of formulating, developing and sustaining identities.

Twitter is one social networking website which has grown in popularity over the past few years, it is currently estimated that Twitter has 232 million active users (Kemp, 2014). Twitter enables users to follow people's conversations and to post small amounts of information no longer than 140 characters called 'tweets'. The 'tweets' can either be posted publically indicating that they are visible to all Twitter users, or privately meaning only approved followers may view the 'tweet' (Bruns, 2012). As Twitter allows users a small 140 characters per 'tweet', it may be challenging for

users to elaborate on their opinions and therefore problematic for them to sufficiently convey their viewpoints.

Kahn, Spencer and Glaser (2013) indicate that this rapid form of communication may lead to an increase in impulsive and not very carefully thought out 'tweets', such 'tweets' immediately reach the users followers and often involve a hurried judgment of current real-world events. Kahn, Spencer and Glaser suggest that the format of Twitter has the potential to lead to a rise in prejudicial statements, due to a heightened feeling of anonymity on Twitter in comparison to other social media websites such as Facebook. Additionally, the social constructionist theory dictates that an individual's understanding of the world is dependent on temporal and situational factors (Burr, 2003). This theory may help us to understand the influence that social media has on constructing people's identities and opinions as social media websites play a huge role in modern society.

Research Aims

Through the analysis of discourses surrounding female alcohol consumption on Twitter the aims of the current research are as follows:

- To examine the ways in which female alcohol consumption is constructed on Twitter.
- To discuss the representations of women on Twitter with reference to the theory of social constructionism and social representations.
- To question the potential impact of the limited word allowance on Twitter.

Methodology

This qualitative piece of research focussed on the representations of female alcohol consumption on Twitter. The research considers the way in which this concept is constructed online through 'tweets', therefore utilising qualitative methodology. Lapan et al. (2012) describe qualitative methods as an observation of the kinds of things present in the world. This method of inquiry puts less emphasis on establishing cause and effect compared to quantitative methods, and is more interested in finding meaning as opposed to determining definite generalisable conclusions from the data set. For this reason the current research employs qualitative methods as it does not aim to find an exact conclusion, but instead strives to understand the way that meaning is attributed to certain phenomena and how this is interpreted (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). For this particular piece of research the focus is on the way in which female alcohol consumption is construed and given meaning through Twitter.

Due to the qualitative nature of this research a discourse analysis was deemed an appropriate form of data analysis as this fits in line with the research objectives. Discourse analysis can be beneficial as it recognises the cultural and historical relativity of the ways in which we make sense of the world (Gill, 2000). Wood and Kroger (2000) dictate that discourse analysis allows us to identify conversational practices which may be problematic or identify discourses which are perceived as

unproblematic but ought to be considered problematic in a given culture. The implications detailed by Wood and Kroger help to justify the use of discourse analysis in this research project; as through the analysis this research intended to identify potentially problematic discourses present on Twitter regarding female alcohol consumption. Similarly, discourse analysis was further reasoned as appropriate as it acknowledges the cultural and historical relativeness of our understandings of the world (Gill, 2000). This method of analysis takes into account the situatedness of discourse, and therefore recognises that the use of Twitter may be more widely utilised in specific cultures compared to others which may be less inclined to make use of online communication methods.

Data Collection

Twitter was selected as the source of data collection for this project; this medium was chosen in order to keep the research current and relevant to modern-day life. Twitter can be interpreted as a widely used form of communication in today's society as it has reportedly 232 million active users to date (Oreskovic, 2013). For this reason it seemed appropriate to assume that this source would yield relevant and current data reflecting modern viewpoints. The data was collected by inputting keywords into the Twitter search bar which related to female alcohol consumption and lifting any relevant 'tweets' for the analysis. Hewson (2007) indicates that the use of internet data collection can be beneficial due to the ease at which a volume of relevant data can be sourced, which may be more difficult and time consuming to collect in offline settings.

Data Analysis

After a total of 107 'tweets' were collected they were analysed using a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Discourse analysis has been described by Paltridge (2012) as looking at trends which arise in language as well as the social and cultural context from which the language arises; Paltridge suggests that discourse analysis goes beyond language to look at the ideas and beliefs in which people communicate through language. Discourse analysis has come to denote an expanse of qualitative psychology concerned with the analysis of language and text, due to the extensive nature of this term it is subject to different interpretations (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008).

FDA was chosen as the particular form of discourse analysis to be used in this research, due to the fact that this method acknowledges the link between discourse and power, as well as the subjectivity of the discourse concerning the relationship between discourses and how people think or feel (Willig, 2008). Some researchers offer different guidelines concerning the steps involved in conducting an FDA. Willig (2008) identifies six separate stages:

- Discursive constructions: the means by which discursive objects are constructed.
- Discourses: the differences between constructions and their relevance within wider discourses.
- Action orientation: the functions and gains generated through constructing the object in the specified way.
- Positionings: subjects positions.

- Practice: the ways in which constructions and subject positions can open up or close down action opportunities.
- Subjectivity: the consequences of adopting subject positions and the way that this influences subjective experience.

Dissemination

This piece of research involves a discourse analysis of the constructions of female alcohol consumption from language used on Twitter; this was then discussed with reference to social constructionist theory and social representations theory. Due to the nature of the research and the chosen methodology, the research project may provide valuable insight into the understandings of feminist psychology and could therefore be disseminated into a journal such as the Feminist Review or Feminism and Psychology.
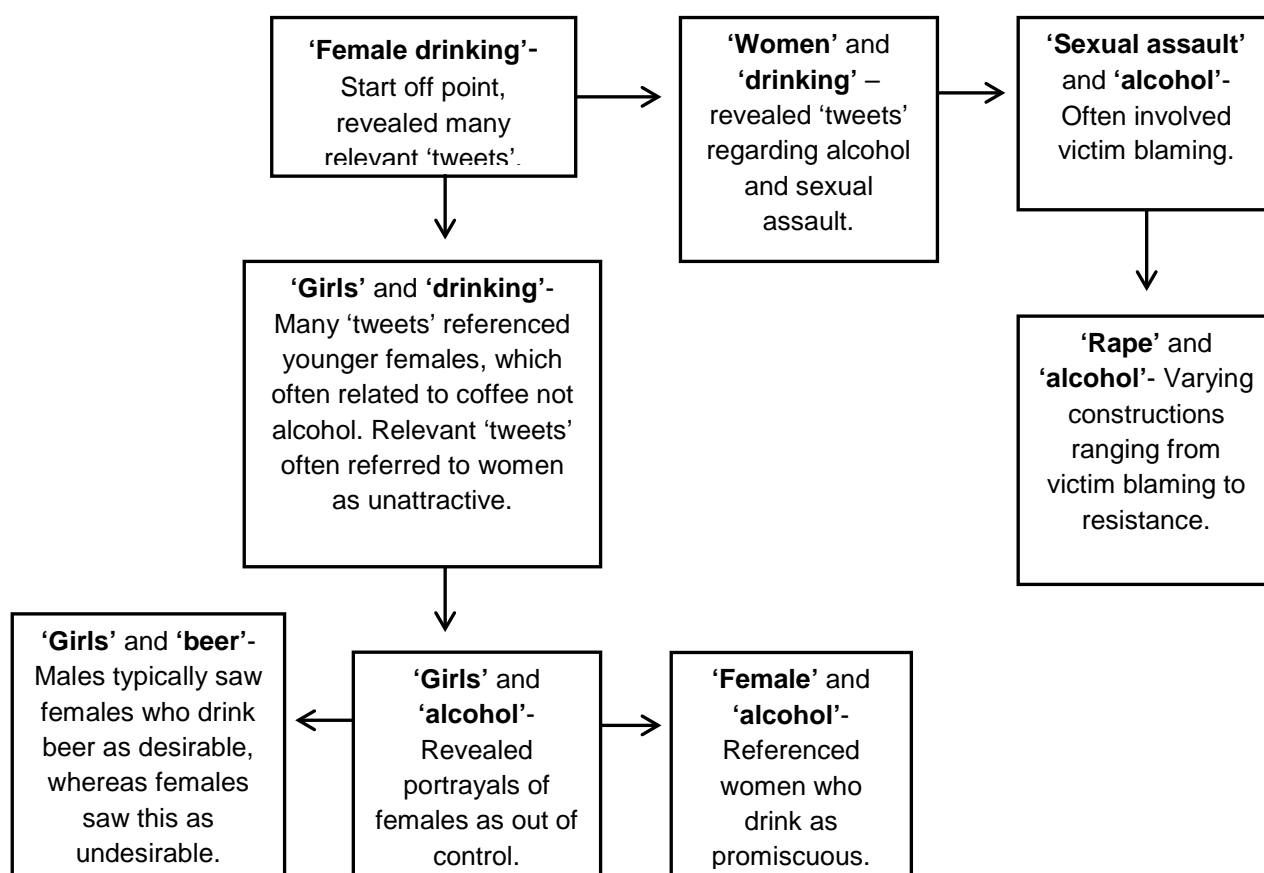
Ethical Considerations

This research did not directly involve interaction with participants; however it did involve lifting 'tweets' from the social media website of Twitter, therefore certain ethical issues were still taken into account. Zimmer (2010) states that although data can be collected from social media websites the confidentiality of individuals must still be considered. In addition to this, Whiteman (2012) suggests that online identities must be regarded as human and as a result they must be granted the right to privacy. The British Psychological Society (2013) outlines a set of ethical guidelines to consider when undertaking internet-mediated research, one of which includes the distinction between public and private online information. Where data is to be considered public efforts must be taken to ensure the confidentiality of such data. For this research, although it can be presumed that the information posted in 'tweets' is posted with the intention of public viewing; it was not realistic to attempt to gain informed consent for each and every 'tweet'. Therefore, in order to follow certain ethical considerations each 'tweet' that was utilised in this piece of research was fully anonymised. This was achieved by blocking out the users name and any personal information which may have led to the identification of the Twitter user. A sample of the anonymised and coded 'tweets' can be found in the appendix section of this report (see Appendix 1). An ethics form was also completed and approved by the research supervisor (see Appendix 2).

Analysis and Discussion

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is the chosen method of analysis for this piece of research. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, this method focuses on the exploration of language and subjectivity (Willig, 2008). Willig notes that this form of analysis acknowledges the role that discourse plays in developing subject positions, as well as the wider social processes of legitimation and power. FDA allows for the analysis of a varying range of materials, in this research the FDA is utilised in order to analyse 'tweets'. The 'tweets' are language-based and originate from Twitter, those which have been selected for the analysis have been made readily available for the viewing public and consist of matters relevant to the research question. In order to gather the 'tweets' a key word search was implemented, which involved inputting relevant words into the Twitter search bar,

starting with more general words such as 'female drinking' and subsequently leading into more specific searches such as 'alcohol' and 'sexual assault'. (See Figure 1)

'Female drinking'- Start off point, revealed many relevant 'tweets'.

'Women' and **'drinking'** – revealed 'tweets' regarding alcohol and sexual assault.

'Sexual assault' and **'alcohol'-** Often involved victim blaming.

'Girls' and **'drinking'-** Many 'tweets' referenced younger females, which often related to coffee not alcohol. Relevant 'tweets' often referred to women as unattractive.

'Rape' and **'alcohol'-** Varying constructions ranging from victim blaming to resistance.

'Girls' and **'beer'-** Males typically saw females who drink beer as desirable, whereas females saw this as undesirable.

'Girls' and **'alcohol'-** Revealed portrayals of females as out of control.

'Female' and **'alcohol'-** Referenced women who drink as promiscuous.

Figure 1: Key word tree

Willig (2008) identifies six stages involved in an FDA. Although still working within the stages outlined by Willig, the analysis merged stages 1 and 2 together in order to create a more comprehensive account of the constructions of female drinking behaviour on Twitter. Stages 4 and 5 were also combined to create a coherent interpretation of positionings and practice.

Stages 1 and 2: Twitter and the construction of female alcohol use

The first stage of the analysis consists of identifying the ways in which the discursive object is being constructed throughout the text (Willig, 2008). The discursive object discussed in the sampled 'tweets' concerns female drinking behaviour. Stage 2 referred to as 'discourses' by Willig deals with the location of the various constructions of the discursive object within wider discourses.

Several constructions arose following the analysis. The first includes the construction of female drinking behaviour as *undesirable*. This was presented in numerous 'tweets', female drinking behaviour was frequently constructed as being 'unattractive'

and detrimental to women's romantic appeal. The construction of female drinking behaviour as *unattractive* is presented in the following 'tweets':

> *'Sorry girls, but drinking and getting drunk is easily one of the most unattractive things ever.'* (Male)

> *'Girls get 3 things from drinking: sloppy, slutty and fat.'* (Male)

Another example of the construction of *undesirability* is with reference to romantic relationships, illustrated in the following 'tweet':

> *'Girls who aren't at parties, clubs or drinking every weekend are the type of girls worth being in a relationship with.'* (Male)

These 'tweets' along with various others construct the discursive object as being an undesirable behaviour, be it in terms of unattractiveness or with regards to jeopardising potential romantic relationships. Through their construction of alcohol consumption as *undesirable* for women, these 'tweets' imply that this behaviour is acceptable for men alone, and therefore employ patriarchal discourses. The theory of social constructionism may be drawn upon here; this theory encourages individuals to think critically about 'taken-for-granted knowledge' (Burr, 1995). Crossley (2005) argues that constructionists see people's tendency to discuss in reified terms social 'things' such as patriarchy or the media, as a product of human interdependence and interactivity. Crossley dictates that such constructions can also be deconstructed or constructed differently, and the process of social science is to examine the ways in which these constructions are executed within society. In this instance the notion of patriarchy is implemented interdependently and reinforced within discourses on Twitter through the marginalisation of women.

Similarly, women who participate in drinking behaviours were constructed as being *out of control*:

> *'I hate girls that can't handle their alcohol, if you can't drink without being sloppy, having meltdowns and needing attention, don't drink.'* (Female)

Male Twitter users also constructed female drinking behaviour in this way:

> *'Nothing more annoying than girls that can't control their alcohol.'* (Male)

Within the construction of women drinkers being *out of control*, reference was also made to the heightened promiscuity in women who drink:

> *'Hey girls, drinking wine is only classy when you simply enjoy a glass. Not when you finish a bottle and act like a belligerent hooker.'* (Male)

The constructions of female drinking behaviour as *unattractive, undesirable* and *out of control* all draw upon generalising discourse and construct the discursive object with regards to women as a whole implying that all women act in this manner. Lyons and Willott (2008) found that control and respectability discourses were utilised in order to categorise others as legitimate or illegitimate with regards to drinking behaviours. They found that women were conditioned to exercise a certain level of control and responsibility; this resulted in hindering drinking practices as women felt they were inhibited from going out and getting drunk. This research fits in line with

the current findings as women who were seen as *out of control* were not seen as legitimate within drinking spaces.

An alternative discursive construction of female drinking behaviour included the interpretation that engaging in such behaviour is associated with *sexual assault*. This was presented in varying ways, some 'tweets' constructed female drinking behaviour as a risk factor for sexual assault, for example:

> *'For necessary social transformation on rape the youth must pledge to give up alcohol, drugs, promiscuity. These are long term requirements.'* (Male)

Whereas others used Twitter as a platform for displaying *activism* and often displayed anger at the association made between alcohol consumption and sexual assault:

> *'The problem of binge drinking, among women and men, is its own problem. Treat it as such. Don't use it as a reason to blame rape survivors.'* (Male)

> *'Reminder: Rape is caused by rapists. Not alcohol. Not short skirts. Not walking down the street. Rapists. The end.'* (Female)

The constructions which linked female alcohol consumption to sexual assault took two contrasting stances; some drew upon blaming discourses to structure their opinions of alcohol and sexual assault. Whereas others utilised activist discourses to signify their fury that such associations were being composed and in turn formulated a resistance for these harmful constructions centred on victim blaming.

The majority of the analysed 'tweets' exemplify negative and detrimental constructions of female drinking behaviour, including those which portrayed female alcohol consumption as *undesirable, out of control* and associated with *sexual assault.* The sole construction which did not depict this behaviour as detrimental was that which disputed against the popular construction of female drinking behaviour as resulting in sexual assault. Despite this, this construction was expressed as a resistance to other more negative constructions and was not particularly empowering or encouraging to women.

The theory of social constructionism can be utilised to interpret the constructions found within the current research. This theory indicates that knowledge is constructed between people through social processes. Burr (1995) suggests that what individuals understand as the 'truth' is a result not only of our objective view of the world but of social interactions. In this sense Twitter can be seen as a social process, people use Twitter to communicate their viewpoints regarding female drinking behaviour through language. This in turn influences the way in which others formulate and therefore construct their understanding of female alcohol consumption.

Stage 3: Implications and outcomes of detrimental constructions

The third stage of analysis identified by Willig as the action orientation stage involves determining what is gained from constructing the discursive object in a particular way, and the function of such constructions (Willig, 2008). By constructing female drinking behaviour as *undesirable*, this creates a gain for the authors to view themselves as superior to the people that they are referring to. Additionally, those

who described women as *uncontrollable*, especially female authors of such 'tweets' have resulted in creating support for their own behaviour of potentially not being 'sloppy' and therefore reinforce the perceived intolerable nature of drunk women's behaviour. Research conducted by Griffin et al. (2012) uncovered that females engage in 'classed othering', this serves the purpose of creating a distinction between themselves and other female drinkers who are recognised as unfeminine and irresponsible. This was also seen in the sampled 'tweets' as females were found to condemn other uncontrollable female drinkers as a means of reinforcing the acceptability of their own behaviour, and distancing themselves from such individuals.

The construction of female alcohol consumption as leading to sexual assault serves the purpose of blaming the victim for their attack; this allows the author to attribute responsibility to the rape victim. For example in the following 'tweet' written by a female Twitter user:

> *'Serial rapists commit 9 of 10 campus sexual assaults- a problem obviously solved if only the women stopped drinking!'* (Female)

This 'tweet' implies a conditional nature of sexual assault, indicating that if women abstain from drinking then they would not be victims of sexual assault. This results in blaming women for putting themselves at risk of becoming victims of sexual assault. This also implies an element of choice for the rape victim; if they chose not to drink then they would not be entered into a certain circumstance putting them at risk of sexual assault.

On the other hand those who used Twitter as a platform to speak out against this blaming discourse succeeded in promoting a contrasting viewpoint and potentially gained in this respect from being able to voice their activist opinions. One Twitter user wrote:

> *'The common denominator in most rapes is not young women drinking, the common denominator is rapists.'* (Male)

This 'tweet' functions to shift the blame back onto the perpetrator of sexual assault and away from the victim. The theory of social representations is applicable to this notion. Augustinos, Walker and Donaghue (2006) illustrate that this theory sees the individual and society in a 'dialectical relationship', the individual is a product of society as well as an active agent who can promote change within society. This theory therefore elucidates as to why some Twitter users conveyed female drinking behaviour as a causal factor for sexual assault as this view is often reinforced within society through the wealth of literature regarding this subject (Cole and Logan, 2010; Ullman et al., 1999; Ullman and Najdowski, 2010). Alternatively, those who displayed resistance for the connection between female alcohol consumption and sexual assault can be seen as undertaking the role of an active participant, by promoting a change within society to end victim blaming.

Stages 4 and 5: Positionings and practice

Stage 4 takes a closer look at the subject positions offered by the constructions of the discursive object (Willig, 2008). Discourses can construct objects in addition to subjects, this refers to making 'available positions within networks of meaning that

speakers can take up' (Willig, 2008:116), speakers can also place others within such networks of meaning. Stage 5 as outlined by Willig, involves looking at the constructions and the subject positions apparent within them and investigating how this may open up or close down opportunities for action.

Through the construction of female drinking behaviour as a risk factor for *sexual assault*, the authors are positioning themselves as superior to rape victims. By blaming the rape victim they are positioned as being responsible for the rape incident. This therefore closes down the opportunity for women to be viewed as victims of such incidents and rashly implicates women's alcohol consumption as a causal factor for the sexual assault. Day et al. (2004) reinforce this idea, through the finding that women are classed as being susceptible to male aggression when intoxicated. The researchers note that women are discussed in the media as being victims of male aggression but are also constructed as partially responsible; they note that this notion highlights the ways in which discourse sustains practices which neglect to support women who are victims of male violence.

In addition to this, the construction of female drinking behaviour as *undesirable* positions women outside of a network for which drinking is seen as acceptable. Women are positioned as unwanted and unattractive should they choose to engage in drinking behaviours, indicating that they should refrain from consuming alcohol. In line with this, Day et al. (2004) found that British newspapers discussed female drinking behaviour as a compromise to their femininity with particular emphasis on the detriment to their appearance. Day et al. observed that newspapers recurrently discussed female drinking behaviour and the effects that this has on motherhood. This links to the findings here that women are not seen as worthy of being a wife if they engage in drinking behaviours. As a result this closes down women's opportunity to be seen in an attractive light should they wish to engage in drinking behaviours and consequently reduces the likelihood that they will be desired by men.

The construction of female drinkers as *out of control* resulted in positioning women as inferior and unruly. This is portrayed in the following 'tweet':

> *'Honest question…Girls what is the draw to drinking? You aren't fun and you act like idiots when you do, sincerely, what am I missing here?'* (Male)

This 'tweet' generalises women and questions the motives behind their drinking behaviours. This positions them as outsiders from a group for which drinking is acceptable as they are labelled 'idiots' and are considered incapable of controlling their behaviour. The language utilised here implies that alcohol consumption is an exclusively male behaviour; consequently reflecting a patriarchal view of drinking behaviours as women are viewed as illegitimate and inferior and are therefore excluded from partaking in this activity.

Alternatively, 'tweets' which actively resisted the construction of female alcohol consumption as a causal factor for sexual assault, may be seen as opening up opportunities for activism or resistance on Twitter. Such 'tweets' used Twitter as a platform to convey opposition for the association between female drinking behaviours and sexual assault. These 'tweets' also have the power to open up opportunities for other women to feel able to communicate their discontent regarding issues that they feel strongly about.

Stage 6: Subjectivity

The concluding stage of the analysis deals with the exploration of the link between discourse and subjectivity (Willig, 2008). Willig deems that discourses create certain 'ways-of-seeing' and 'ways-of-being' in the world and so inform our social as well as psychological realities. This stage involves the way that subject positions can have an impact on the subject's thoughts, feelings and experiences.

The analysis revealed that certain discourses employed on Twitter have the power to create a problematising subjectivity for women. Day (2010) observed that coverage regarding women's drinking behaviour depicts females as problematic and reinforces that drinking is a 'male vice' and therefore inappropriate for women. The current research also found that patriarchal discourses were employed in order to formulate a view of women's alcohol consumption as unacceptable. The result of depicting women in this way is that they are regarded as deviants and improper for engaging in alcohol consumption.

Consuming alcohol is constructed as a voluntary activity in which women may choose to engage in or risk being tarnished as *undesirable*, *out of control* and a contributor for their own *sexual assault*. Such constructions of female drinking behaviours can have a potentially detrimental effect on women. In addition to this, these discourses have the power to alter the way in which women think about their drinking experiences and may deter them from engaging in such behaviours in the future due to the prevalent negative connotations associated with this activity. The constructions of female alcohol consumption on Twitter suggest that participating in this behaviour is a holistic identifier, in the sense that once a woman engages in drinking practices she is defined by this and enters into a homogenised category of women who are ostracised as a consequence of their desire to consume alcohol.

On the whole, women who are depicted in these 'tweets' experience marginalisation and are seen as problematic within society. Such women may have negative feelings resulting from the predicament that they are entered into due to the unwanted criticism that can ensue from their desire to consume alcohol. This marginalisation of women ties in with the theory of social representations. Howarth (2006) illustrates that social representations help to form our inter-subjective reality and therefore help us to understand the world in which we live. Howarth notes that social representations can also have implications for the social order. In the case of the current research the social representations of gender serve to reinforce the gender differences in the social order, placing women as inferior to men with regards to drinking habits, and therefore reinforcing the perceived illegitimacy of female alcohol consumption.

Summary

In conclusion this research uncovered that the majority of the discursive constructions of female alcohol use on Twitter were negative and damaging to women. The constructions included women as *undesirable*, *out of control* and responsible for their own *sexual assault*. These constructions were communicated by males as well as females and employed various types of discourse, including patriarchal, generalising and blaming discourses. Such constructions created a

problematising subjectivity for women as they were depicted as illegitimate and inferior to men.

As Twitter allows users a short 140 character window to portray their viewpoints, this along with the heightened sense of anonymity provided by Twitter have been suggested to lead to an increase in prejudiced and judgemental statements, due to the less thought-out nature of 'tweets' (Kahn, Spencer and Glaser, 2013). The current research project supports this notion with specific reference to female alcohol consumption as constructions tended to involve detrimental and negative assumptions. Consequently, this illustrates the tendency for Twitter users to compose judgemental 'tweets', as a result of the limited character allowance available for 'tweets' which may in turn have generated an inability for users to elaborate upon their viewpoints.

Evidenced through the analysis of discourses on Twitter, the current research emphasises the fact that drinking behaviours are still interpreted in gendered terms. However, it may be interesting for future research to look at other social media websites such as Facebook to assess the ways in which female drinking behaviours are constructed differently within different mediums.

Reflexivity

Willig (2008) highlights two forms of reflexivity, epistemological and personal. Willig states that epistemological reflexivity is concerned with the way in which the researcher influences the project as a theorist. She suggests that we should ask ourselves the extent to which the research question, design and method have influenced or limited what can be found. In the case of the current research, the use of Twitter enabled the collection of valuable data; however it excluded other social media websites where female alcohol consumption may also be discussed.

Additionally, personal reflexivity involves reviewing the ways in which our own values, interests and social identities have shaped the research. My personal social identity of being a female in my early twenties influenced my choice of research question, as I can relate closely to this topic. The fact that I am a Twitter user myself also had an influence on my choice of data collection method as I am familiar with the website and I felt that this would help me to remain engaged throughout the research process. Initially I was concerned about the lack of human participants involved in my research study, however as the study progressed I was reassured that Twitter would provide sufficient data for me to conduct a detailed analysis. Despite my initial anxieties regarding human participants, the research provided me with worthwhile experience of conducting research and as a result I gained a greater sense of confidence within myself as a researcher.

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