

“Sober fun is radical and empowering”: Discursive
construction of non-drinking on Sober Girl Society’s
Instagram

Essi Tanskanen

Master’s Thesis

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Language and Communication Studies
English
March 2022

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Essi Tanskanen	
Työn nimi – Title “Sober fun is radical and empowering”: Discursive construction of non-drinking on Sober Girl Society’s Instagram	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level Maisterintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Maaliskuu 2022	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 51
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Alkoholittomuudesta on tullut yhä suosittumpaa ja yksi ajankohtainen ilmiö aiheeseen liittyen on sober curiosity, joka kannustaa ihmisiä refleктоimaan suhdettaan alkoholiin. Sober curiosity voidaan määritellä elämäntapaliikkeenä, joka yksilön toiminnan kautta pyrkii sosiaaliseen muutokseen. Tässä tapauksessa tavoiteltu sosiaalinen muutos on vastustaa alkoholin keskeistä asemaa yhteiskunnassa ja tehdä alkoholittomuudesta hyväksyttävämpää.</p> <p>Tässä maisterintutkielmassa tutkin Sober Girl Society:a, joka on britannialainen yhteisö naisille, jotka eivät juo alkoholia tai haluavat vähentää sen käyttöä. Erityisesti tutkin heidän Instagramiaan tarkoitukseni selvittää, miten he rakentavat alkoholittomuutta diskursiivisesti ja miksi. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu 54 Instagram-julkaisusta aikaväliltä touko-elokuu 2021 ja olen analyysia tehdessä ottanut huomioon sekä kuvat että kuvatekstit. Aineisto on siis multimodaalista ja täten käytän analyysimenetelmänä multimodaalista diskurssianalyysia. Näin saan mahdollisimman kattavan kuvan aineistosta ja siinä rakentuvista diskursseista.</p> <p>Tunnistin kerätystä aineistosta neljä keskeistä diskurssia, jotka ovat sosiaalinen tuki, itsensä kehittäminen, haastediskurssi ja resistanssidiskurssi. Jokainen diskurssi omalta osaltaan rakentaa tietynlaista kuvaa alkoholittomuudesta. Lisäksi kyseiset diskurssit pyrkivät saavuttamaan sosiaalisen muutoksen haastamalla alkoholin keskeisen roolin yhteiskunnassa ja tukemalla jäseniä alkoholittomuuden kanssa.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords multimodal discourse analysis, social media, Instagram, sober curiosity, discourse, non-drinking	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

Table of contents

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
2.1	Defining sober curiosity	5
2.1.1	Sober curiosity as a lifestyle movement.....	5
2.1.2	Sober Girl Society	7
2.2	Defining discourse.....	8
2.3	Defining social media.....	11
2.3.1	Social media.....	11
2.3.2	Instagram as a social media platform.....	13
2.4	Previous research on non-drinking discourse.....	15
3	THE PRESENT STUDY	18
3.1	Aim and research questions.....	18
3.2	Data of the study.....	19
3.3	Ethical aspects of the present study.....	19
3.4	Methods of analysis.....	21
3.4.1	Multimodal discourse analysis	21
3.4.2	Tools for analysis	22
4	ANALYSIS.....	24
4.1	Social support discourse.....	25
4.2	Self-improvement discourse.....	29
4.3	Challenge discourse.....	34
4.4	Resistance discourse.....	39
5	CONCLUSION.....	44
5.1	Summary and discussion of the findings.....	44
5.2	Evaluation of the study and future research	46
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	48

1 INTRODUCTION

When compared internationally, alcohol consumption in Finland is high in Nordic countries but average in European context (Karlsson 2018: 24). However, what makes Finnish drinking habits different is that while alcohol is not consumed often, it is consumed in large quantities (Karlsson 2018: 24). As reported by Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (2021), 78% of alcohol consumption is considered as a risk use which means that alcohol is either consumed by risk users or it is consumed excessively. Furthermore, 13% of people in Finland, that is over half a million, suffer from long-term health harms caused by alcohol (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2021). As stated by Tigerstedt et al. (2020: 613), during the 21st century, chronic diseases caused by long-term drinking have become more common in alcohol-related deaths while before, they were typically caused by assaults and accidents.

Nevertheless, despite these statistics, alcohol consumption in Finland has been declining since 2008 (Tigerstedt et al. 2020: 611). As reported by YLE News (June 21, 2020), the survey conducted for the Finnish Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks industry found that almost every third young adult in Finland is sober and the only age group where the consumption of alcohol did not decline was among the 45–54-year-olds. Tigerstedt et al. (2020: 611) align with this finding by claiming that during the 2000s, “the increase in alcohol consumption in Finland was concentrated particularly among middle-aged and older people” while among the underaged, the use of alcohol was reduced. This trend is not only happening in Finland but also elsewhere. Hellman and Kettunen (2017: 267) claim that between the time period 2010 and 2015, there is a clear decline in alcohol consumption in Nordic countries when looking at the total registered alcoholic beverage sales. As they say, “part of this circumstance can be attributed to the trend of increasing youth sobriety that started to show towards the late 2000s” (Hellman and Kettunen 2017: 267).

A movement related to the reduced consumption of alcohol is sober curiosity where people have decided to “avoid alcohol for personal or wellness reasons” while reflecting on their relationship with alcohol (Raypole 2020). There are also other concepts which encourage people to cut their alcohol consumption for a period of time, such as Dry January and FebFast. Cherrier and Gurrieri (2013: 241), who have studied participants taking part in FebFast, report that “FebFast facilitates resistance against the social pressure to conform to alcohol consumption by creating a positive image of alcohol

abstinence". By social pressure they mean that in social situations alcohol can be viewed as a substance that enables social connections and inclusion (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013: 238). As a result, it is more difficult to maintain sobriety or even give it a chance. However, through FebFast, participants were able to maintain their non-drinking status since they felt safe and were surrounded by like-minded people (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2013: 239). Thus, concepts which encourage people to avoid alcohol can promote non-drinking by providing a safe space where the anticonsumption habits are accepted. In this study, special attention is paid to Sober Girl Society which is a community targeted for sober and sober curious women. In relevance to FebFast, it aims to resist the role of alcohol in society while providing a space for people to share their non-drinking experiences.

More specifically, the interest of this study is Sober Girl Society's Instagram. Social media suits Sober Girl Society's purpose well which is to bring like-minded women together. With social media, it is easy to reach people and thus spread awareness and the message of a sober lifestyle. Furthermore, social media provides a platform for connecting and keeping contact which enables a space for getting together and sharing own experiences with others. In addition, social media is always accessible, meaning that the sober community and the like-minded people can be easily reached no matter time or place. Thus, keeping sobriety as a part of your life can become easier via social media as it is easy to surround yourself with other sober people and ask for their support.

While it could be interesting to study how exactly social media supports sobriety, the aim of this study is to look at what kind of discourses on non-drinking are constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram. Previous research on non-drinking has focused on discourses of alcohol resistant identities (eg. Fry 2011), attitudes towards non-drinkers (eg. Cheers, Callinan & Pennay 2021), discursive constructions of non-drinkers from the point of view of alcohol consumers (eg. Conroy & de Visser 2013), non-drinking and selfhood (eg. Pennay, MacLean & Rankin 2016), incorporating non-drinking into social rituals (eg. Bartram et al. 2017) and narratives of non-drinkers (eg. Conroy & de Visser 2014). While there is literature on non-drinking, studying discourses related to non-drinking has not been excessive. Likewise, it has not been studied how non-drinking is constructed on social media. Therefore, there is a scientific interest for this present study.

Furthermore, this study can have significant implications. The object of interest in this present study, Sober Girl Society, is run by sober women and it is targeted for sober and sober curious women, meaning that studying this community will tell how non-drinkers perceive non-drinking. Studying

how non-drinkers perceive non-drinking can tell what is considered salient in reducing alcohol use and this could potentially have effects on alcohol prevention on a societal level. At the same time, I define sober curiosity as a lifestyle movement which means that their goal is to achieve social change which in this case is resisting the role of alcohol. Therefore, this study can give insight into how lifestyle movements attempt to achieve social change through the use of language. In addition, I have also chosen to study this topic because sober curiosity is a recent phenomenon that keeps gaining popularity. While non-drinking has been studied from different perspectives, sober curiosity seems to be a movement that has not yet gained scientific attention. In the media, however, it has been discussed and based on my observations, it seems to be a phenomenon that causes contrasting reactions. Therefore, I wanted to take a closer look at it since after all, it is a movement that encourages people to reduce alcohol use. It should be society's interest to promote an alcohol-free lifestyle as alcohol is one major cause for population's health issues.

The structure of this thesis is the following. First, I will start by discussing the relevant concepts which are sober curious movement, discourse, social media and Instagram. After that, I will present previous research on the topic before moving on to discuss the methodology for this study. The data on this study consists of Instagram posts and they are analyzed with the means of multimodal discourse analysis. Following that, I will present and discuss my findings before concluding the study with a discussion on the findings and evaluation of this present thesis.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I discuss the most relevant concepts for this study. I will start by defining sober curious movement as well as by introducing Sober Girl Society since the data comes from them. The discussion is followed by defining the concept of discourse which has an integral role in the present study and after that, I will take a look into the context of this study, that is social media and more specifically, Instagram. As discourses related to non-drinking is the topic of this present study, I will conclude this chapter with a discussion on previous studies on non-drinking discourse.

2.1 Defining sober curiosity

As sober curiosity is a phenomenon that affects the context of this study, this section starts by discussing it in more detail. That discussion is followed by an introduction to Sober Girl Society as they are the focus of this study.

2.1.1 Sober curiosity as a lifestyle movement

Sober curiosity is a movement which encourages people to cut back on their use of alcohol “for personal or wellness reasons” while reflecting on their relationship with alcohol (Raypole 2020). This can mean for example understanding the reasons behind drinking, realizing what is enjoyable in drinking and what is not, and observing alcohol consumption. The idea behind sober curiosity is to spur critical thinking which could possibly lead to questioning the drinking expectations and habits set by society (Matei 2019).

The difference between being sober and sober curious is that in sober curiosity, occasional drinking is allowed (Raypole 2020). Ruby Warrington, the leading voice of the sober curious movement, states that “the point of sober curious is to differentiate between those of us who have the privilege to be sober curious and perhaps dabble [in alcohol] here and there, and those for whom drinking and alcohol is a mortal danger” (Matei 2019). The sober curiosity movement has received some criticism concerning that some might view it as a trend which results in ignoring how challenging a recovery can be (Raypole 2020).

Rather than viewing sober curiosity as a trend, it could be defined as a lifestyle movement. Haenfler, Johnson and Jones (2012: 14) claim that “lifestyle movements are loosely bound collectivities in which participants advocate lifestyle change as a primary means to social change, politicizing daily life while pursuing morally coherent ‘authentic’ identities.” As stated above, the purpose of sober curiosity is to invoke critical thinking in order to challenge the norms of drinking habits. Thus, non-drinking and reduced alcohol intake can be seen as lifestyle changes which can lead to social change, in this case to viewing non-drinking as an acceptable option. This suits the concept of lifestyle movements since they aim to change habits that have a strong cultural position (Haenfler et al. 2012: 5) and alcohol is one of them.

Characteristic of lifestyle movements is that rather than promoting collective action, participants act individually while understanding that others are making similar individual lifestyle changes as well which then lead to collective action (Haenfler et al. 2012: 5). Thus, lifestyle movements are not concerned with political actions but instead, they focus on daily lifestyle changes (Cherry 2015: 60). In sober curiosity, this means that individuals choose to reduce alcohol intake for their own reasons, but they understand that if there are more individuals who do the same, eventually this leads to collective action and social change. However, while individual action is the primary means, participants can still take part in organized action (Haenfler et al. 2012: 6). This organized action can also function as social support and as Cherry (2015: 64) states, there has to be social support in order to maintain the lifestyle change. For instance, in the case of sober curiosity, there are communities which bring together like-minded individuals to share their experiences and together they can challenge the norms and add up to social change. One of these communities is Sober Girl Society which is an interest in this study.

Another important characteristic of lifestyle movements is that participants aim to develop their identity with an intent to construct an identity that matters personally for them, but which also functions in relation to the collective identity (Haenfler et al. 2012: 5). Since action occurs at the individual level in lifestyle movements, the collective identity may not be that strong in all movements, but the participants can still “participate in an ‘imagined community’ consisted of those they see and hear about taking similar action” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 8). Even if the collective identity is not strong, it is still important since it can encourage individuals to take part in the movement while “creating a sense of meaning and we-ness” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 8). In sober curiosity, this sense of collective identity can be experienced in the communities but also via the influencers who promote sober curiosity.

When it comes to personal identity, participation in lifestyle movements is seen “as a quest for personal ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity’” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 9). Thus, lifestyle choices are significant since the participants experience that being a part of a certain lifestyle movement changes their identity to a better version. According to Cherry (2015: 60), an identity shift is needed in order to fully become a participant of the lifestyle movement and as Haenfler et al. (2012: 9) claim, working toward this personal identity might even be a bigger motivation than the sought-after social change. This is an important notion since it makes it visible that while some change their lifestyle in order to achieve social change, some do it because they feel that it is the right thing for them to do. For

instance, in sober curiosity some individuals may want to reduce the use of alcohol because they see it as a positive aspect of their identity. Challenging the drinking norm is then a secondary aspect. However, as it has been discussed above, the individual acts lead to collective action which then results in social change. While some participants might not realize that they are a part of this collective action, their actions are still adding up to the wanted social change.

Regarding the structure of lifestyle movements, they tend to “spread through informal social networks, rituals, and events that infuse meaning and significance upon consumption patterns and other daily habits” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 10). In addition, rather than having a formal leader, lifestyle movements have “cultural entrepreneurs” who can be seen as the leading voices (Haenfler et al. 2012: 11). For instance, sober curiosity is gaining a foothold via social media and informal networks, but it still has figures who can be portrayed as the leading characters. For example, the above-mentioned Ruby Warrington is one of them and she has published a book called “Sober Curious” (Matei 2019). Lifestyle movements are also structured via lifestyle movement organizations, nonprofits and businesses since “they organize and groom leaders, build a collective identity, refine movement ideology, organize public events and social networks, and mobilize adherents to spread movement ideology” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 11). For example, Sober Girl Society, the research target in this study, could be seen as a lifestyle movement organization since while it is a community, it also organizes events and promotes alcohol-free life with a purpose to get more people involved. Thus, it does not only gather like-minded people together, but it gives structure to sober curiosity as well.

To conclude, sober curiosity is a movement which encourages individuals to reduce alcohol consumption while critically observing their drinking habits and relationship with alcohol. Sober curiosity is better seen as a lifestyle movement where the purpose is that via individual action, social change can be achieved. In this case, that is making people to question the societal drinking norms and making them view non-drinking as an acceptable option.

2.1.2 Sober Girl Society

Sober Girl Society is a UK-based community founded by Millie Gooch in 2018 which aims “to show the world that you can still live a fun and fulfilled life after you break up with booze” (Sober Girl Society 2021). The community is meant for sober and sober curious women who can globally connect

via Sober Girl Society's Instagram account or locally by participating in the events. Sober Girl Society also provides tips and resources for alcohol-free life (Sober Girl Society 2021).

As discussed above in this study, Sober Girl Society is an example of a lifestyle movement organization since it does not only bring individuals together, but also promotes and spreads a certain ideology, organizes events and builds a sense of we-ness. These characteristics fit Haenfler et al.'s (2012: 11) description of lifestyle movement organizations. As a community, it gives structure to the sober curious movement by reaching more people and spreading the message of sober curiosity in a coordinated action. In Sober Girl Society, women join together to share their experiences of alcohol-free life. While doing this, they inspire and help others and thus, more people can be reached. In addition, Sober Girl Society itself plans activities and actions which support the alcohol-free life and reach to those who are interested in the ideology. Thus, the sober curious movement gains more visibility through both the community and the individuals.

Special attention in this study will be paid toward Sober Girl Society's Instagram account where resources, support, help and information are shared. As Haenfler et al. (2011: 10) point out, informal networks are integral for lifestyle movements. In Sober Girl Society's case, Instagram offers a way to reach out to more people and spread the message of alcohol-free life. I will be addressing their Instagram in more detail in the methodology section.

2.2 Defining discourse

Discourse is a complex concept that is used in many disciplines and therefore, it has various definitions as well. Fairclough (1992: 63) defines discourse as "a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation." According to him, discourse and social structure are closely intertwined in a way that they shape and are shaped by each other. Similar to this, Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019: 31) acknowledge the social side of discourse and define it as "language use in its context as a part of social action". Blommaert (2005: 3) also views that discourse is "meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use." Thus, while the definitions of discourse vary, the social nature of discourse is central in every definition (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019: 34).

Another aspect to point out in these definitions is that the discourse analysts do not only talk about language use but also bring up notions of social action and semiotic human activity. This is crucial since as Johnstone (2018: 2) states, meaning is not solely communicated via language but through other modes as well. Therefore, when doing discourse analysis, other modes such as gestures, images and colours should be considered as well in addition to language since they all carry meaning. By defining discourse as social or semiotic human activity, emphasis is given on the focus of discourse analysis. According to Johnstone (2018: 2), the interest of discourse analysis is on looking at what happens when people use their knowledge and experiences about language to accomplish different things. This highlights the social nature of discourse as it is made evident that people produce meaning by utilizing the knowledge they have acquired before.

In addition to using 'discourse' in a singular form, it can be used in plural as well, 'discourses'. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019: 35) introduce the Foucauldian view where discourses are seen as conventional ways of meaning-making which shape the object. As Fairclough (1992: 3-4) discusses, this power of discourses shaping objects is visible in the various ways how different discourses construct specific phenomena and how they "position people in different ways as social subjects". These objects of discourse do not exist independently but are constructed within the discourse (Fairclough 1992: 41). This social constitutive side of discourse is integral since it means that discourses have power to shape the world and therefore, they participate in producing knowledge, beliefs, identities and social relations (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 25). In the words of Gee (2010: 109), discourses have a significant role in constituting society because "it is their interactions with each other that determine a good deal of history and the workings of society for good or ill." However, it is important to note that while discourses shape the world, they are also shaped by it: language use is social and thus, there are conditions and consequences which both enable and limit language use (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 14). For instance, in this study I do not expect there to be negative discourses related to non-drinking since the community promotes alcohol-free life and therefore, it would be out of place to present non-drinking as something negative.

Along with discourses being socially constitutive, they are also historically oriented, meaning that a discourse is composed of different discourses under specific social circumstances (Fairclough 1992: 4). According to Gee (2010: 83-84), "meaning is a matter of situated meanings, customized in, to and for context" and in order to understand what the meaning is, knowledge of prior discourses in that context is needed. A term closely related to this is intertextuality which refers to it that whenever

something new is said, it echoes what others have said before and thus, these new utterances carry history and prior meanings with them (Blommaert 2005: 46). This circles back to the social constitutive power that discourses have: these histories which are present in language use “allow the synchronic use of particular expressions to acquire powerful social, cultural, and political effects” (Blommaert 2005: 46). When something is repeated continuously, it will become dominant and as a result, it will have more power than those which are not used as much.

Since discourses have power, it also means that they can be organized into social orders. These social orders of discourse determine which discourses are active and which are silenced, marginalized or forgotten (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 83). Closely related to this is the concept of ideology: when a particular discourse is used, a specific image of the world, events and people is created (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 84). As Fairclough (1992: 89) states, ideology is visible in the orders of discourse “which constitute the outcome of past events and the conditions for current events, and in events themselves as they reproduce and transform their conditioning structures.” In short, when particular discourses are used, they are also enforcing a specific ideology and those discourses that do not fit the ideology are left out. This depicts well the role of discourses in shaping the world and presenting matters from a certain point of view. In this study, this notion is important because it helps to understand why Sober Girl Society constructs certain discourses. They do not only construct non-drinking, but they also communicate a certain ideology. By incorporating specific discourses and by silencing others, Sober Girl Society aims to construct non-drinking from a point of view that works in their favour.

To conclude, the aim of discourse analysis is to study society and culture through looking at how language is used when it comes to meaning-making (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen: 16-17). As it has been discussed, discourses both shape and are shaped by the world. Therefore, the study of discourses also tells something about the world, not just about language. Gee (2014: 9-10) states that since language is a central tool for depicting the world, with the help of discourse analysis it is possible to highlight the issues and complications which are present in the world. In alignment, Blommaert (2005: 4) discusses that the use of discourses is vital when wanting to present something as a problem. Fairclough (1992: 6) also claims that in order to achieve social change, language practices typically have to be changed as well. In sum, discourses have a role in constructing society, culture and other phenomena and therefore, the interest of discourse analysis goes beyond studying just language. For the present study, discourse analysis can then reveal how non-drinking is being constructed as an

acceptable option and how the position of alcohol in society is being challenged through the use of language. Since lifestyle movements aim to foster individual action that leads to collective action, it matters how language is used. By using specific discourses and ways of language it is possible to encourage people to question the role of alcohol and change their lifestyle practices. Without constructing discourses which are tied to a specific ideology, it can be hard to motivate why social change matters. Through studying what discourses Sober Girl Society constructs, it is possible to study how social change is attempted to be achieved and why.

2.3 Defining social media

This section first defines and discusses social media since the findings of this study cannot be fully understood without discussing the nature of social media. That discussion will be followed by an introduction to Instagram which is the social media platform that forms the context in this study. Like above, an understanding of it is needed for interpreting the findings.

2.3.1 Social media

According to Zappavigna (2012: 2), “social media is an umbrella term generally applied to web-based services that facilitate some form of social interaction or ‘networking’.” Dijck (2013: 11) likewise states that “social media can be seen as online facilitators or enhancers of human networks” where connectedness between people is considered important. Similar to this, Seargeant and Tagg (2014: 4) view that central in social media is participation and interaction. Internet and social web are not thus channels solely for sharing information, but they also facilitate interaction between web-users and in result, enable building relationships which can be done for example via “sharing values as a way of communicating our experience of the world” (Zappavigna 2012: 2, 50). As a result, in this study, social media refers to online-based applications which foster interaction and participation.

The social nature of social media also means that the web-users have an integral role since they are involved in the production of content. As a result, the content is not coordinated, stable or similar with each other (Seargeant & Tagg 2014: 3-4). This means that the content depicts the interests of the content creator. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) state, the ways that people use social media can be defined as “User Generated Content” (UGC) which refers to content that is “published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people”, is creative and is “created outside of professional routines and practices.” In alignment, Dijck (2013:

8) views UGC as a type of social media which “support creativity, foreground cultural activity, and promote the exchange of amateur or professional content.” Another type of social media which Dijk (2013: 8) defines is social network sites where the focus is on connections and contact between both individuals and groups. Thus, they provide a platform for bonding with others. boyd (2011: 39) views social network sites as networked publics, meaning that “they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.” According to her, through networked publics people can expand their social circle outside of their closest people and assemble for various purposes (boyd 2011: 39).

While these new platforms and networking services allow bonding, they also transform how people can connect by providing “a number of notably different communicative dynamics and structures” (Seargeant & Tagg 2014: 2). boyd (2011: 43) introduces some prominent features of social network sites and one of them is profiles. As she states, profiles function both as a way to represent self and as a place for interaction. This results in participants working intently on their profiles since through their choices, they can affect how they are viewed by others. Related to this, Zappavigna (2012: 38) mentions that bonding with others happens through the performance of online identities. Therefore, self-representation matters because it does not only construct oneself but also affects other web-users. Thus, identity and community are clearly intertwined: “identity performance cannot be discussed in isolation from the communities with which individuals align themselves and the ways in which those communities establish and maintain the relationships that comprise them” (Seargeant & Tagg 2014: 9). One way to find out the possible communities to which people are aligning themselves is to look at what they are interested in since online communities are based on shared interests, rather than on shared location or background (Seargeant & Tagg 2014: 11).

Another feature that boyd (2011: 43-44) introduces is a list of friends which refers to the connections that people have made in the social network site ranging from past to current and new acquaintances. This notion of friends is important because they are the intended audience. Suggested by boyd (2011: 44), friends should be considered as an imagined audience since then the actions can be adjusted to “fit the intended norms of that collective.” This relates closely to the central dynamic of social network sites which is a notion of invisible audiences. It refers to the fact that “not all audiences are visible when a person is contributing online, nor are they necessarily co-present” (boyd 2011: 49). However, as boyd (2011: 50) points out, in order to behave appropriately, the audience has to be

known and therefore, it might be useful to view friends as an imagined audience since it will give an idea what the norms are. This argument is backed up by Zappavigna (2012: 38) who claims that “the stances we adopt and observations and evaluations we share all exist relative to the meaning-making of the other members of our social network and to all other potential networks of meaning.” In other words, the audience matter since they are involved in the meaning-making as they provide the norms which to follow.

Other central dynamics which boyd (2011: 49) presents are “collapsed contexts”, referring to the collision of different social contexts which can cause difficulties, and “the blurring of private and public”, meaning that it becomes harder to separate these two from one another. As a result, individuals might be sharing something to a larger audience than they had realized. Thus, using social media is not always so simple as it takes time to understand how everything works. It is also important to note that due to the dominant status of social media, the dynamics of social network sites also affect everyday life in addition to digital practices (boyd 2011: 55). For instance, the issues of time and distance are removed as people can interact with each other around the world at any time. For that reason, social media makes a great platform for global connections.

As suggested, there are two types of social media: UGC and social network sites. However, as Dijck (2013: 8) points out, there are instances of social media which cannot be defined only as UGC or social network sites but rather, they can have characteristics from both types. For example, Instagram encourages connectivity with others, but it also fosters creativity.

2.3.2 Instagram as a social media platform

An example of social media is Instagram which is a highly visual platform that focuses on users sharing photos and videos. It was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and it was purchased by Facebook in 2012 for 1 billion dollars (Lagorio 2012). At the moment, it is the fourth most used social network worldwide with approximately 1,386 billion active users (Statista.com 2021). The aim of the platform is to “bring you closer to the people and things you love” (Instagram 2021). That indicates that Instagram suits well for community building based on shared interests which is typically the case with online communities (Sergeant & Tagg 2014: 11).

On Instagram, users can create a profile where they are able to share their photos and videos. Typically, each post includes a visual element and a caption. However, the caption is not a mandatory part for publishing. In addition, Instagram has a story feature where the posts which users make are visible only for 24 hours. In recent years, Instagram has also launched other features such as reels, which enables users to make short videos, a shop page and a possibility to host live streams.

While the users of Instagram can share parts of their life, they can also follow and connect with others. Each user has a profile page where they can see their own content, but each also has a separate feed page where they can see the posts shared by the accounts that they follow. The posts can be liked and commented on unless the content creator has restricted their use. Furthermore, Instagram also has a private messaging function. Thus, it provides a lot more than just a platform for sharing photos and videos. Instead, it is also a networking platform where people can connect with each other while creating various types of content.

As stated above, *visuality* is a central aspect of Instagram since the visual element is required for publishing. This results in “a highly visual culture that frequently conveys meaning through photographs, with text and hashtags used as needed for context” (Laestadius 2016: 575). Since the visual elements carry meaning as well, the users have to make conscious decisions about them (Laestadius 2016: 575). Zappavigna (2016: 273) states that while Instagram allows users to share something quickly without thinking about it too much, users still typically spend time on thinking about the design. As she points out, Instagram even has a built-in photo editing tool which emphasizes the importance of the visual element. The visual element is also the first thing that a viewer notices in the post which indicates that in order to attract attention and engagement, its design has to be considered. In addition, when looking at each user’s profile page, the posts form a grid where only the visual elements are visible and the caption can be read when each post is viewed individually. Thus, the visual elements do not only matter for each post, but they also create a perception for the profile pages. As a result, the visual elements on Instagram truly are dominant.

When it comes to studying Instagram, Laestadius (2016: 588) points out some observations that need to be considered. First, it is important to realize that “Instagram should be treated as its own distinct platform” (Laestadius 2016: 588). This means that understanding the functions and affordances which Instagram offers is crucial since they distinguish it from the other social media platforms. They also result in a specific kind of culture which explains why Instagram is used in particular ways. Thus,

understanding the context is important. Second, the different elements and modes in the posts need to be studied together since they all carry meaning jointly (Laestadius 2016: 588). Focusing only on one element or analyzing the elements only separately do not account for the whole meaning. For this reason, multimodal analysis is needed because it acknowledges the roles that each mode has in meaning-making. Third, “content must be situated within its cultural and platform context and should not be seen as representative of the general population” (Laestadius 2016: 588). Here again the importance of understanding the context is crucial. The content only tells something about its social environment, not about the whole world generally. Lastly, the use of visual data imposes ethical considerations (Laestadius 2016: 588). This means that in order to study data from Instagram, the ethical questions have to be taken into account. In this study, there is a separate section for ethical considerations where it is explained how this present study meets the needs of ethical studies.

In conclusion, Instagram is a visual social media platform that enables users to share content but also to connect with each other. Based on the discussion above on social media, Instagram can be defined both as “User Generated Content” and a social network site. The content is created by users but it still contains some of the features of social network sites presented by boyd (2011), such as profiles and connections. This is important to realize because as stated above, the context matters. Thus, Instagram should be seen as a place that fosters creativity but also emphasizes bonding with others. For this reason, I can expect the data to be creative and visually appealing while constructing a sense of connectedness.

2.4 Previous research on non-drinking discourse

Discourses on non-drinking is a topic that has not been extensively studied. However, there are some studies that have paid attention to it. One of them is Fry’s (2011) research that focuses on looking at what kind of discourses are drawn upon by young adults who do not drink. Fry (2011: 354) reports that there are three distinctive discourses which the participants use: health, self-worth and respect. While health was seen as an important aspect of non-drinking, participants still emphasized other aspects as well when describing their motives not to drink. One of them is self-expression which refers to the participants viewing non-drinking also as a way to express themselves rather than viewing resistance to alcohol merely as a healthy option. (Fry 2011: 355.) By choosing not to drink, the participants are also aiming to achieve something else. This means that non-drinking is viewed as something that suits their values, identities and behaviour. For instance, Fry (2011: 359-360) reports that non-drinking can be experienced “as an intrinsically satisfying activity” which allows non-

drinkers to construct social and personal identities alongside their non-drinking identity. In other words, non-drinking is experienced to align with their values and aspirations and therefore, it is considered as a way to express the full desired self (Fry 2011: 360).

Fry (2011) also pays attention in her study to “limited abandoners” which refer to those who practice non-drinking for a short period of time but do not resist alcohol completely. They might be motivated to abandon alcohol for a specific period of time in order to reflect on their behaviour and relationship with alcohol. For them, the concept of community seems to be important since it creates “a space to share a commonality, identity with other fasters, and a sense of purpose” without having to be afraid of others not accepting their behaviour. (Fry 2011: 358-359.) Thus, it is viewed that by non-drinking, participants are able to belong to a certain community where they can feel accepted. In addition to that, Fry (2011: 361) reports that the limited abandoners view non-drinking as something that enables them to connect with “a new sense of self”. In other words, it is viewed that non-drinking can help to discover new sides of yourself which relates back to the discourse of self-expression discussed above. Similar to this, Pennay, MacLean and Rankin (2016: 67) have studied an Australian platform called Hello Sunday Morning where the idea is to cut alcohol for a while. They report that non-drinking indeed can lead to a change in “lifestyle goals and the development or rediscovery of a ‘better’ self” (Pennay et al. 2016: 71). Furthermore, limited abandoners view that through non-drinking they are able to express pride and self-respect, meaning that alcohol resistance is viewed as something that is good for self (Fry 2011: 361).

In contrast to the studies discussed above, Conroy and de Visser (2013) look at how alcohol consumers construct non-drinking. They report that non-drinking is viewed as something that requires an explanation: others are curious to find out what are the reasons behind alcohol resistance while speculating how it will affect “contexts where alcohol is consumed” (Conroy & de Visser 2013: 1436). This indicates that non-drinking is viewed as going against the norm since first, it is expected to be justified and second, alcohol consumers have concerns how it will affect the environment that they are in. As Conroy and de Visser (2013: 1436) report, alcohol consumers see non-drinking as something strange that does not fit the norms of the social context. According to them, this results in keeping distance to non-drinkers but interestingly, however, alcohol consumers simultaneously view that non-drinkers require respect from them. A similar paradox can be seen when a participant in the study states that non-drinking results in a “failure to join in with a group activity”, thus suggesting that non-drinkers are not social (Conroy & de Visser 2013: 1437). In alignment, another participant

views non-drinking as a threat to friendships since drinking is experienced “as a shared social activity” (Conroy & de Visser 2013: 1438). However, the former participant also points out that non-drinkers actually are more social since they do not need alcohol for socializing (Conroy & de Visser 2013: 1438). It seems that alcohol consumers have conflicting views on non-drinking and it is seen as something peculiar and threatening but at the same time, it is viewed as something that in the end is a good thing.

Similar to Conroy and de Visser (2013), Cheers, Callinan and Pennay (2021) study how non-drinkers are perceived by others. First, non-drinkers are seen as a threat to fun, indicating that their presence will “ruin the fun” (Cheers et al. 2021: 390). In alignment with Conroy and de Visser’s (2013) findings, non-drinking is seen as going against the norm and thus, a reason for it is expected. Related to this, some are also afraid that since non-drinkers are not intoxicated, they are able to remember what has happened and this results in some viewing non-drinkers as judgmental. (Cheers et al. 2021: 391-392.) Second, non-drinking is perceived as a threat to connection. That refers to the participants viewing being under the influence of alcohol as a way to show true self and therefore, non-drinking is seen as “limiting authentic social connection” (Cheers et al. 2021: 393-394). This finding relates back to Conroy and de Visser (2013) who report that non-drinking is a barrier for participating in social activities. Third, non-drinkers are perceived as a threat to self since some might experience their non-drinking as a reason to start reflecting on one’s own relationship with alcohol because drinking is experienced acceptable when others do it as well. When someone decides not to drink, it makes drinkers question their own behaviour. However, while these perceptions are negative, non-drinking is also seen as “the ‘impressive’ and ‘healthier choice’”. (Cheers et al. 2021: 395.) Again, we can see here the conflicting views on non-drinking: it is something negative and positive at the same time.

To conclude, there are different discourses through which non-drinking can be perceived. While non-drinkers themselves view alcohol resistance as a way to be healthy, to express their desired self and to be a part of a community, alcohol consumers see non-drinking as a risk to self, fun and social environment. Since the data in this study comes from a community that promotes an alcohol-free lifestyle, positive discourses are to be expected. However, it is still important to discuss how non-drinking is viewed by others since it helps to understand the role that alcohol has in society. Based on the studies that I have presented, non-drinking is seen as a phenomenon that needs explanations. Thus, there is a need for social change since non-drinking is not fully accepted. At the same time,

these negative perceptions on non-drinking also form a context for discussions on non-drinking and affect how to talk about it. For this reason, while I expect that a positive image of non-drinking is being created in the data of this study, I also anticipate that the data somehow acknowledges these negative perceptions as well.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the methodology for this study. I will start by describing the aim and research questions which is followed by a discussion on the data and its limitations and collection. After that, I discuss the ethical considerations of the present study and explain how I have taken them into account. Lastly, I will conclude the chapter by presenting my analysis method which is multimodal discourse analysis.

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to analyze how non-drinking is constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram account, @sobergirlsociety. More specifically, the attention will be on looking at what kind of discourses related to non-drinking are composed in the posts. This means that I will concentrate on how non-drinking is discursively constructed by Sober Girl Society, and what are the consequences of the different discourses used when it comes to formulating non-drinking. My research question is the following:

- How is non-drinking discursively constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram?

This specific Instagram account was chosen because the previous research on non-drinking discourse has mostly focused on finding out how alcohol consumers view non-drinking. This account belongs to a community which consists of sober and sober curious women and thus, it will be interesting to look at how non-drinkers construct non-drinking. Since the community promotes an alcohol-free lifestyle, this study will also give insight into what is considered salient in non-drinking. In addition, this study will demonstrate how social change is attempted to be achieved in lifestyle movements.

3.2 Data of the study

The data for this study comes from Sober Girl Society's Instagram account, @sobergirlsociety. It is used for connecting sober and sober curious women globally while simultaneously providing tips and resources for alcohol-free life. The account has different kinds of posts, such as advertisements, inspirational quotes, memes, encouragements for discussion and informational posts. From the visual point of view, the account relies mostly on images. However, it is important to point out that instead of the images being photographs, most of them are graphic images containing text and illustrations.

The data was collected from May 2021-August 2021 and it includes 54 posts in total after the exclusions. My focus is on feed posts which appear in the account's profile, containing a visual element and optionally a caption. Due to time limitations, the amount of data had to be restricted. I decided to exclude comments, the story feature and video posts. Thus, I am focusing only on the image and caption. In addition, in those posts that include multiple images, only the first one has been analyzed. While all the images contribute to the meaning equally, constraints had to be made and the first image is the one that is visible in the feed, thus suggesting that it is important. Limitations also include posts that were reposted from community members, posts that included photos of community members and those posts that were unrelated to the research question or contained material from outside sources. In addition, advertisements were also left out since they have been created for commercial purposes.

Since the Instagram account in this case is public, it was easy to access it. The data has been collected by taking screenshots because that way, the original design is preserved and it allows viewing the data the same way as the intended audience would. In addition, by taking screenshots I have ensured access to the data throughout the progress of the study in case the posts would be deleted from the Instagram account.

3.3 Ethical aspects of the present study

Studying social media is a gray area when it comes to ethical considerations. In this study, the Instagram account where the data is collected is public. This means that it can be accessed without a profile and thus it is visible for everyone. However, there are also posts by community members which are reposted on Sober Girl Society's feed and while they are visible as well, I have excluded them since there is no certainty that the original content creators would approve them to be used for

this study. For the same reason, I have excluded comments. While it could be argued that comments can be anonymized, I felt safest to leave them out since sharing experiences of non-drinking can be a sensitive topic for some and collecting these experiences without consent for a scientific purpose might not be comfortable. However, some of the published posts include tips from community members and those I have decided to include since the creators have been aware that their tips will be published on the Instagram account and they are already anonymized by Sober Girl Society.

An issue arises with copyright as the directive 96/9/EC by the European parliament states that “databases which [...] constitute the author’s own intellectual creation shall be protected as such by copyright.” This means that while the account is public, the content is still protected by copyright. However, the same directive also states that for scientific research purposes exceptions to the restricted acts can be made “as long as the source is indicated and to the extent justified by the non-commercial purpose to be achieved”. For this reason, the account in this study is not anonymized since due to copyright, the content creator must be identified.

Collecting data from social media also poses a challenge since it requires personal data to be processed. In this study, the community’s name, their Instagram account username and Instagram posts, including text and images, from May 2021-August 2021 are collected. These are all personal data. Due to that, I have created a research notification and a privacy notice which I have delivered to Sober Girl Society and to the university. In them, I have described the purpose and process of this study as well as how I am processing the data. The data has been collected by taking screenshots and it has been stored in my home directory located in University of Jyväskylä’s network drive which can be accessed only by me. The data will be erased once the study has been concluded. These measures were taken to avoid any problems with research ethics despite the account being public.

In addition to these measures, I have also contacted Sober Girl Society prior to conducting this study and received their consent to collect data from their Instagram account alongside their permission to publish their name in this thesis.

3.4 Methods of analysis

This section discusses multimodal discourse analysis which is the chosen method of analysis for this study. I will also provide a discussion on the tools of analysis which are utilized in this study as well as describe the analysis process.

3.4.1 Multimodal discourse analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis is interested in looking at how the uses of different modes in a specific situation jointly make meaning (Kress 2012: 37). Thus, attention is not only on one mode but rather, “all modes are framed as one field” for meaning-making (Kress 2012: 38). These modes have different materiality and affordances but each has a role in carrying a meaning (Kress 2012: 39). As Van Leeuwen (2015: 449) points out, instead of meaning being tied to a specific mode it is tied to culture which means that in principle, each mode can carry “any given communicative function or meaning”. However, due to different affordances which modes have, they cannot exactly express the same (Van Leeuwen 2015: 450). Therefore, the roles of different modes should not be ignored when looking at how meaning is being made.

Since meaning can be constructed through different modes, design becomes a central focus in multimodality. Kress (2010: 28, italics in the original) defines design as “selections and arrangements of resources for making a specific *message* about a particular issue for a particular audience.” These selections are based on the choices that the producer views as appropriate for the intended purpose (Kress 2012: 41). The choices carry meaning potentials, that is in other words, they carry specific meanings in specific contexts (Ledin & Machin 2018: 17). Thus, choices are not randomly made but it is considered what they can communicate. Design consists of these choices and aims to communicate “an individual’s *realization* of their *interest* in their world” (Kress 2010: 6, italics in the original). Thus, looking at design reveals what is the interest of the producer: they have selected and arranged a group of semiotic resources to make their interest visible. However, these choices do not only reveal the producer’s interest but also what is considered as the norm when it comes to communicative acts with different intents (Ledin & Machin 2018: 22). This circulates back to the idea of social constructivism: meanings shape and are shaped by the world.

The concept of discourse is specifically visible in this discussion of choices. Machin and Mayr (2012: 20) report that when producers make these choices on semiotic resources, they simultaneously “encourage us to place events and ideas into broader frameworks of interpretation that are referred to as ‘discourses’.” This means then that the interest of multimodal discourse analysis is more specifically to discover “what kinds of ideas, values, identities and sequences of activity are being represented or implied” (Machin & Mayr 2012: 26). By incorporating specific modes and design choices, producers construct a particular discourse about the topic of their interest. As Kress (2012: 36) reports, coherence is also an important concept in this context. According to him, design results in a text and one of the characteristics of text is coherence which is “social in their origins and, being social, they point to meanings about ‘social order’” (Kress 2012: 36). In other words, texts are produced in relation to their social environment and thus reflect the social orders of that context (Kress 2012: 36). For this reason, it is possible to study what discourses the semiotic resources intend to construct because they are built upon their social environment.

In sum, multimodal analysis does not only focus on analyzing the different modes but studies how they carry meaning together while simultaneously expressing the interest of the producer and reflecting their social environment through a specific discourse. Therefore, it suits well when we want to study both semiotic resources and society. I have chosen multimodal discourse analysis for this study because my data consists of Instagram posts which are multimodal: they contain text and an image. In order to realize the meaning of the Instagram posts, the different modes have to be taken into account. If the focus would only be on one mode, the analysis would not be detailed enough. Multimodal discourse analysis allows me to study the different modes both separately and together and see how they complement each other with an intention to communicate a specific message. At the same time, multimodal discourse analysis gives me tools to study how discourses can be constructed through the use of different modes.

3.4.2 Tools for analysis

In this study, the different modes that are focused on are text and image. Therefore, the analysis will focus on lexical and visual aspects. In accordance with Ledin and Machin (2018: 3), it is important to note that the analysis focuses on the different semiotic resources which make up the image and the text. In other words, the interest is on studying what resources the images and texts contain and what is their role instead of only looking at the images and texts as such. In addition to studying the role

and meaning of each resource, I will also study how the different lexical and visual aspects carry meaning together in each post.

When it comes to lexical analysis, Machin and Mayr (2012) introduce some semiotic resources which could be studied. Easiest way to start the analysis would be to look at “the basic choice of words used by a text producer” which simply means observing “what kinds of words are used” (Machin & Mayr 2012: 32). While this may seem simple, it is still an important step since words are used to construct discourses, the world and interests (Machin & Mayr 2012: 33). Words can also be used in different ways. There might be overlexicalisation which refers to the rich use of certain words and their synonyms, or suppression or lexical absence, meaning that texts do not contain terms and words which could be expected (Machin & Mayr 2012: 37-38). Studying these aspects is important since they relate to the producer’s interest and ideology. With certain words, or with their lack of, the producer aims to communicate a specific view of the discussed matter. The same aligns with the use of structural oppositions. In that case, the producer uses words which express opposing concepts, such as young and old, but usually only the other opposite is mentioned, thus creating a sense of difference from the non-mentioned opposite (Machin & Mayr 2012: 39). Lastly, attention can be paid to style. For instance, Machin and Mayr (2012: 44) discuss looking at if lexical choices are informal or formal, or are they being mixed. Each of these resources relate to the producer wanting to express their ideology through language.

Ledin and Machin (2018) introduce tools for visual analysis. Again, the simplest way to start is by looking at denotation, that is studying what the image depicts. In other words, it means “identifying the form of expression used, the meaning potentials chosen, for this particular instance of communication” (Ledin & Machin 2018: 48). After identifying the meaning potentials in the image, attention can be paid to connotation which means studying what these meaning potentials actually mean “both as regards individual elements and as regards the wider meanings created by the combination of the semiotic resources” (Ledin & Machin 2018: 48). Similar to the lexical analysis, interest is in looking at what discourses and ideas these visual semiotic resources are constructing in the particular context.

Connotation can happen through objects, colour and settings. In visual communication, objects are used to signify something while colour “can be used to link elements that would otherwise be of different kinds, create bonds or contrasts, evoke mood and associations”. (Ledin & Machin 2018: 49.)

More specifically, different aspects of colour can be studied, such as modulation, saturation, purity, range and coordination (Ledin & Machin 2018: 50). Each of them carries meaning potential and can be used to express a certain message. Settings simply refer to looking at “‘where’ things are depicted as taking place” (Ledin & Machin 2018: 51). These are things that I will be looking at in my analysis as well.

There are also other visual semiotic resources which carry meaning potential. For instance, Machin and Mayr (2012: 54) discuss salience which refers to the way that “certain features in compositions are made to stand out” and thus carry symbolic value. Salience can be expressed for example through the use of cultural symbols, size, colour, tone, focus, foregrounding and overlapping. It is an important aspect as it shows what is important in the message: it is used to draw the viewer’s attention. (Machin & Mayr 2012: 54-56.) In addition to salience, typography is also an important visual semiotic resource. When it comes to studying typography, attention can be paid to weight, height and width, expansion, curvature, proximity, regularity, slope and flourishes (Ledin & Machin 2018: 76-78). Furthermore, line spacing and alignment carry different meaning potentials as well (Ledin & Machin 2018: 79-80). As it can be seen, studying even the smallest details is crucial when looking at meanings. Therefore, the detailed analysis is needed in order to understand how specific meanings can be constructed through the means of different semiotic resources.

In this study, I have analyzed the lexical items by looking at the word choices and their connotations. Regarding the visual resources, I have identified what different kinds of resources are used and what is their meaning. After having interpreted the meaning separately for each resource, I have studied their joint meaning in each post. Once the different themes and meanings have been identified, both separately and together, I have organized them into categories which I have then placed as subordinate under bigger themes. Then, I have reflected on what is the common perspective in these bigger themes and by doing that, I have attempted to identify the constructed discourses which aim to communicate a specific view on non-drinking.

4 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis. As it has been stated above, my data consists of 54 posts on Sober Girl Society’s Instagram from the time period May 2021-August 2021 and they have been analyzed with the means of multimodal discourse analysis. During the analysis process, I

was able to identify four dominant discourses that were present in the posts: social support, self-improvement, challenge and resistance. Next, I will discuss each discourse in more detail and present examples.

4.1 Social support discourse

One of the dominant discourses on Sober Girl Society's Instagram is social support. That is expected since the aim of this account is to provide a space for sober and sober curious women to share their experiences and advice. Previous research also demonstrates the importance of community when it comes to living without alcohol or reducing alcohol in an environment where drinking is the norm. Fry (2011: 358-359) states that through community non-drinkers feel connected with each other. In alignment, Pennay, MacLean and Rankin (2016: 72), who have studied the Hello Sunday Morning program which encourages participants to cut alcohol for a period of time, report that the support coming from the community is considered vital when it comes to building one's non-drinker identity and selfhood. In addition, Conroy and de Visser (2014: 542) claim that non-drinkers need a space where their non-drinking is tolerated so that they can still live their social lives. Thus, creating a sense of community and belonging for non-drinkers is important. Therefore, Sober Girl Society constructs social support discourse in order to build a sense of community with an intent to provide a space for sober women where they can connect with each other and feel accepted. By using this discourse, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a lifestyle habit where the notion of community is essential.

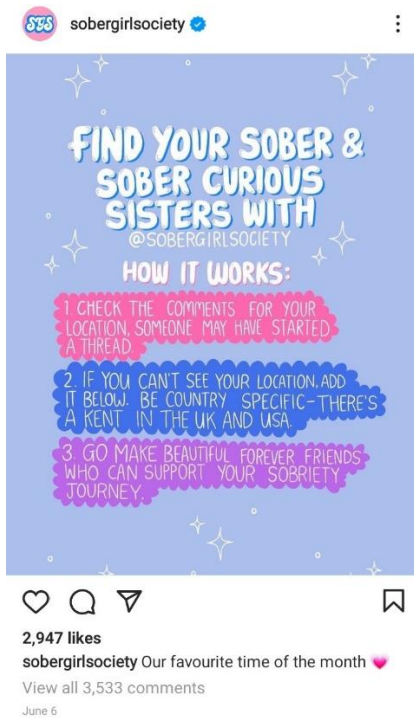


Figure 1, a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from June 6, 2021.

Social support discourse is clearly visible on Sober Girl Society's Instagram and it is achieved through different means. For instance, in the beginning of each month Sober Girl Society posts a "Find your sober & sober curious sisters" -post (figure 1) which encourages people to comment their location and that way, to find other sober women nearby whom to connect with. Looking at the visual, Sober Girl Society uses bright colours which aim to catch attention. In addition, the heading "Find your sober & sober curious sisters" is written in bigger letters which functions as a salient feature and the rest of the text is written in a playful typography which also stands out. By designing this post to catch attention, Sober Girl Society communicates that the message of the post is important. At the same time, the function of this post is to bring like-minded people together and by making the post salient, Sober Girl Society attempts to provide a place that attracts people to connect with each other. Thus, Sober Girl Society aims to construct non-drinking as a habit that brings people together.

The sense of community is also communicated via word choices. For example, sober women are referred to as "sisters" which relates to sisterhood and constructs a sense of tight-knit, meaningful connection. It is also encouraged to "make beautiful forever friends" where the notion of "forever" indicates that the connections brought by non-drinking will last. The notion of "friends" is also an important one as it refers to friendship and suggests that non-drinking is not only a way to connect with new people but that those people can become an important and permanent part of one's life. In

these posts, the visual is similar but the caption is different. However, the caption always emphasizes the importance of community somehow, as in image 1 where “Our favourite time of the month (heart emoji)” refers to the monthly post and suggests that since it is their favourite time of the month, it is meaningful. Informing members regularly about options on connecting or emphasizing the importance of support coming from others constructs a reality where social relationships are valued. The fact that Sober Girl Society brings up the notions of connectedness, support and friendship on a regular basis communicates that community and social life are important values. Therefore, members could be motivated to be active because they see that those values are given a strong emphasis. This way, Sober Girl Society ensures that its Instagram posts attract attention and activity which is needed for it to seem like a community that is able to reach people and gather them around.

Social support discourse is also constructed in regular “community tip” posts (see figure 5 and 8 for reference) as well as in word choices, such as “feeling part of something”, “join us for a laid back evening of booze-free fun, connection and friendship” and “a safe peer support-led space”. Additionally, social support discourse is communicated via including the members. There are multiple posts which encourage members to partake in discussions or which ask for their contribution. Often that is done with questions, such as “Which is your favourite?”, “What empowers you when you are not drinking?” and “What are you currently reading?”. All of these questions aim to activate members to share their own views and experiences since as Cherry (2015: 64) reports, when attempting to maintain the new lifestyle, social support is needed because the lifestyle change may affect “many areas of one’s life, including practical aspects”. Therefore, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking via social support discourse because it is not enough to provide information on non-drinking, but the participants also need support for managing everyday situations. In addition, sharing allows members to make their own contribution and by doing that, they can feel a better sense of belonging as they have a role in the community. If the members did not have a chance to participate, they could feel that they have no purpose in the community and thus leave it. Therefore, activating the members is crucial for keeping the community alive. While the sense of belonging and community helps members to maintain their own non-drinking selfhoods (Pennay et al. 2016: 72), it is also needed for the community to function.

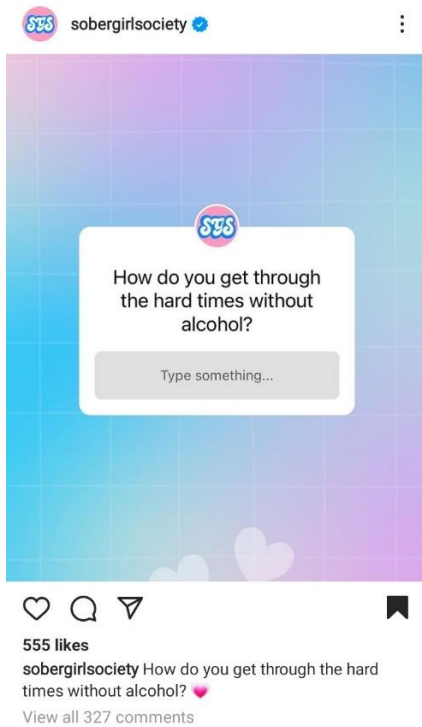


Figure 2, a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from August 31, 2021.

A post from August 31, 2021 (figure 2) clearly depicts the importance of interaction. Looking at denotation, the visual depicts a similar ask box which is used in Instagram stories. The content creator can include a question in the box and the followers can type in their answers. In this post, the question asked is "How do you get through the hard times without alcohol?". Since it is a visual in the feed, one cannot type their answer into the box but those who are familiar with Instagram, understand that the post aims to imitate the ask box and thus encourage them to share their own experiences in the comment section. In other words, the connotation of the image is to provide a space for sharing. Thus, interaction and social support discourse are constructed not only through word choices but also via the visual as well. Social support discourse is also formed through the fact that this post does not include answers by Sober Girl Society but rather, the post relies on the discussion which members have in the comments. As discussed above, structuring a post this way allows members to contribute to the discussion and by doing that, they will feel more connected with the community. It is important for members to feel like a part of the community because as it has been defined, characteristic of a lifestyle movement is that it attempts to achieve social change via individual action which leads up to collective action (Haenfler et al. 2012: 5). Therefore, social support discourse can be constructed to demonstrate that individuals are not acting alone but that they are a part of a community that aims to make change. This can be motivating since it is made clear that there is collective action and opposing the role of alcohol might not seem as intimidating because there are others involved in it,

too. As Pennay et al. (2016: 72) point out, through a sense of community non-drinkers are able to create a collective narrative that works against the norm of drinking. Thus, it is important that non-drinkers feel connected since that way, they are able to resist the norm and attempt to achieve social change which is a crucial part of the lifestyle movements.

Furthermore, in this case social support discourse is also present due to the nature of social media. As Zappavigna (2012: 2) states, “the social web is about using the internet to enact relationships” and therefore, it can be expected that social support discourse is present. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the concept of community would not be important when it comes to non-drinking. Clearly, it is considered important and meaningful in non-drinking since there are posts which aim to bring people together. Moreover, the fact that a community like Sober Girl Society exists in social media where the aim is to foster social relationships, indicates that providing non-drinkers with opportunities for connecting is a desired aspect.

In the light of previous research, community seems to be an important concept for non-drinkers and it has been reported that a community gives support to maintain non-drinking (Pennay et al. 2016: 72). Therefore, it could be argued that Sober Girl Society aims to incorporate social support discourse in their Instagram posts because they are attempting to build a community. With a community, it is easier for non-drinkers to maintain their lifestyle as they are surrounded by like-minded people who are also on a sober journey. Since for many alcohol consumers non-drinking seems to be a lifestyle that requires an explanation, non-drinkers are in need of a space where they can live their social lives without having to ask for acceptance (Conroy & de Visser 2014: 541-542). This is the need that Sober Girl Society aims to fulfil with social support discourse.

4.2 Self-improvement discourse

A characteristic of a lifestyle movement is that participants change their lifestyle in order to achieve a change of identity because they view it as a way to become a better self (Haenfler et al. 2012: 9). In other words, participating in a lifestyle movement is perceived as self-improvement. On Sober Girl Society’s Instagram, self-improvement discourse is constructed which aims to display non-drinking as something that is good for you. Non-drinking is thus depicted by Sober Girl Society as a habit that brings positive changes into one’s life concerning different areas such as health, free-time, personality and behaviour. With this discourse, Sober Girl Society is able to create a positive image of non-

drinking and by doing that, non-drinking is promoted. Furthermore, the use of this discourse provides opportunities to demonstrate how non-drinking can be incorporated into one's life.

Sober Girl Society incorporates self-improvement discourse through different themes in their posts. One of the themes is “replacing alcohol with new activities” which aims to demonstrate that there are other options than alcohol when it comes to spending time. For instance, a post from August 22, 2021 (figure 3) includes a visual that says: “When you took up random hobbies in early sobriety and now you're a salsa-dancing botanist who can read birth charts and crochet”. The different activities (“salsa-dancing”, “botanist”, “birth charts” and “crochet”) construct non-drinking as a lifestyle habit which provides more free-time and enthusiasm to try a wide range of activities. The variety of activities also construct non-drinking as a quest for finding things that are enjoyable. Rather than settling for the first activity, this post suggests that being a non-drinker means aiming to do things that truly are pleasurable.

As Bartram et al. (2017:740) point out, new activities are sought in place for drinking rituals and typically these activities tend to represent “the identities that participants desired to express following their change in drinking”. Törrönen et al. (2019: 17) back up this argument by saying that drinking is often replaced with new activities because it “becomes a durable choice when it is rooted in meaningful habits and practices.” Therefore, it could be argued that Sober Girl Society constructs self-improvement discourse in order to support members along their sober journey by helping them to incorporate non-drinking into social life. By demonstrating that there are ways to replace alcohol, Sober Girl Society attempts to encourage members to find new activities which suit them. This is important because in the light of previous research, replacement activities help to maintain the non-drinking status (Törrönen et al. 2019: 17) and in order to fight the drinking norm, Sober Girl Society needs members who succeed in living without alcohol. As Cherry (2015: 64) states, lifestyle changes have an effect on different areas of life and therefore, if a lifestyle movement participant wants to maintain their new lifestyle habit, they need to learn how to incorporate it in a variety of situations. Based on this, I argue that Sober Girl Society includes the theme “replacement drinks” on their Instagram because they want their members to stay sober while still doing meaningful, social activities.



Figure 3 (left), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from August 22, 2021. Figure 4 (right), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from May 11, 2021.

In addition, self-improvement discourse is also activated via posts that emphasize non-drinking bringing other positive changes into life. For instance, a post from May 11, 2021 (figure 4) includes a visual with a statement “Ditching alcohol makes space for better things to enter your world”. Already that constructs non-drinking as a way to improve yourself, but it is also evident in the caption that says “Goodbye hangovers, hello lovely Sunday mornings spent pottering about the house, eating toast and reading books.” The caption gives concrete examples of how exactly non-drinking can make your life better. To emphasize that non-drinking is good for you, the caption concludes with a statement “An excellent trade in our opinion.” That last sentence creates a comparison between non-drinking and alcohol and aims to display non-drinking as something clearly better. By doing that, a negative image of alcohol is being created. Similarly, in the previous post (figure 3), alcohol consumption is presented in a negative light through constructing alcohol consumption as a habit that makes it more difficult to achieve personal desires which is evident in the caption that states “And that’s on not being hungover.” As Pennay, MacLean and Rankin (2016: 71) point out, a negative image of alcohol is usually the result of non-drinkers experiencing alcohol-free occasions as better and more enjoyable and thus, the meaning of alcohol is transformed which then leads “to a shift in their lifestyle goals and the development or rediscovery of a ‘better’ self.” Displaying non-drinking as a better option on Sober Girl Society’s Instagram could be a way to contrast it with alcohol and

influence people to change their views on alcohol. When the meanings attached to alcohol change into negative ones, non-drinking becomes a more attractive option and it is perceived as a way to become a better self. Thus, in other words, with self-improvement discourse Sober Girl Society attempts to promote non-drinking in order to attract more people.

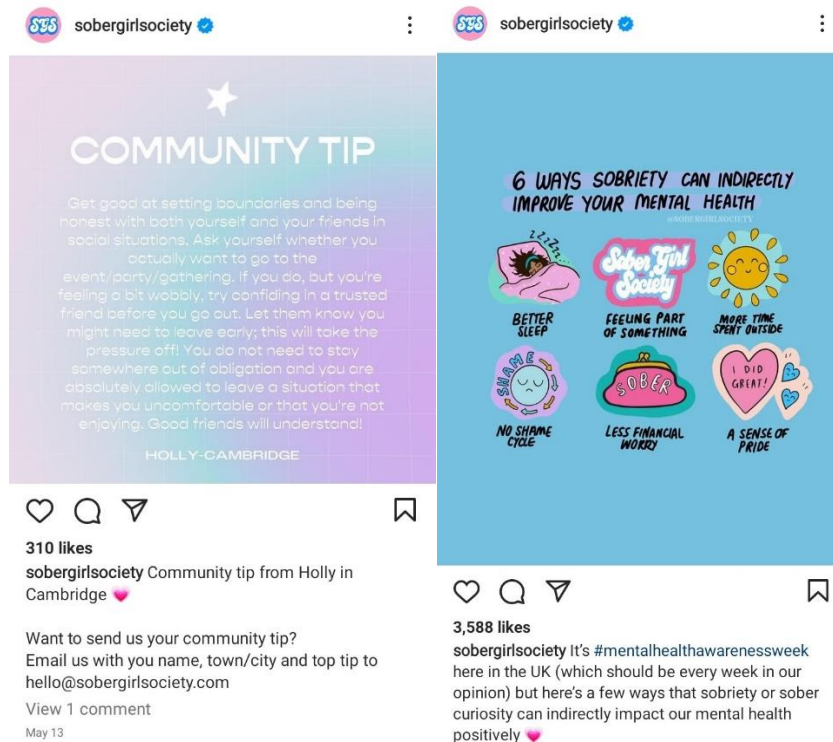


Figure 5 (left), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from May 13, 2021. Figure 6 (right), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from May 12, 2021.

Additionally, self-improvement discourse is present in posts which aim to communicate that staying true to yourself is important. Those posts encourage non-drinkers to listen to themselves and do as they wish. Getting to know yourself is valued and it is a part of self-improvement since it is not about pleasing others but rather, it is about doing what is best for you. For example, a post from May 13, 2021 (figure 5) includes a community tip that focuses on handling social situations sober. There are a lot of expressions which aim to communicate that listening to yourself and “doing you” is important, such as “Get good at setting boundaries and being honest with both yourself and your friends”, “Ask yourself whether you actually want to go” and “You do not need to stay somewhere out of obligation and you are absolutely allowed to leave”. Each of these expressions aims to guide non-drinkers to do what is best for them and to show that it is acceptable. Sober Girl Society uses this discourse to construct non-drinking as a habit that is related to an authentic identity. Atkinson (2012: 197), who

has studied how private consumption choices affect social change, reports that socially conscious consumption is perceived “as an opportunity to reflect their true selves” and “as a way to regain an authentic identity”. That is to say that the consumers who choose socially conscious alternatives, such as buying organic food, see it as a way to become who they truly are. In addition, authentic identity is also something that the participants in lifestyle movements aim to achieve (Haenfler et al. 2012: 9). Thus, Sober Girl Society attempts to construct a reality where non-drinking is perceived as means to be authentic.

A big part of self-improvement is also health which is evident on Sober Girl Society’s Instagram as well. For instance, a post from May 12, 2021 (figure 6) focuses on ways how sobriety can indirectly improve mental health. The ways include things such as “better sleep”, “more time spent outside” and “no shame cycle”. The post has been published during “Mental Health Awareness Week” but health is still clearly something important for Sober Girl Society as they state in the caption that mental health awareness week “should be every week in our opinion”. Linking non-drinking and health together is an expected result since it has been brought up in previous research. For example, Fry (2011: 354) reports that non-drinkers use discourse of health to motivate their non-drinking and in alignment, Pennay et al. (2016: 71) claim that discourse of health is integral for non-drinkers when creating a non-drinking identity. The health aspect is also something that alcohol consumers associate with non-drinking. Cheers, Callinan and Pennay (2021: 395) state that while alcohol consumers tend to perceive non-drinking as something negative, they also acknowledge that it is a healthier choice not to drink alcohol. I argue that Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking through the health aspect because it creates an opposite to alcohol consumption and builds a reality where alcohol is harmful for health. Sober Girl Society uses a structural opposition to claim that non-drinking is healthy and by not mentioning alcohol consumption, they imply that it is opposite of non-drinking. By constructing non-drinking as the healthier option, Sober Girl Society attempts to promote it through suggesting that it is the better choice for you. At the same time, Sober Girl Society demonstrates what there is to be gained with non-drinking and this way motivates individuals to cut alcohol.

To conclude, self-improvement discourse constructs a reality where non-drinking is seen as a lifestyle choice that helps to become a better version of yourself. On Sober Girl Society’s Instagram, self-improvement is shown to be related to healthiness, new activities, positivity and listening to yourself. With this discourse, Sober Girl Society attempts to build a positive image on non-drinking that would attract people to cut alcohol. In other words, this discourse is specifically used for promoting non-

drinking. Thus, self-improvement discourse seems to be important because it does not only motivate the existing non-drinkers but can possibly introduce new people to sobriety. As a lifestyle movement, sober curiosity needs individuals who are willing to change their lifestyle habits so that there are more individuals participating in the collective action. When there are more people, the more people become aware of the issue and the wanted social change. For this reason, it is crucial that a positive image of non-drinking is created because then it will seem an attractive option and more people will join the cause.

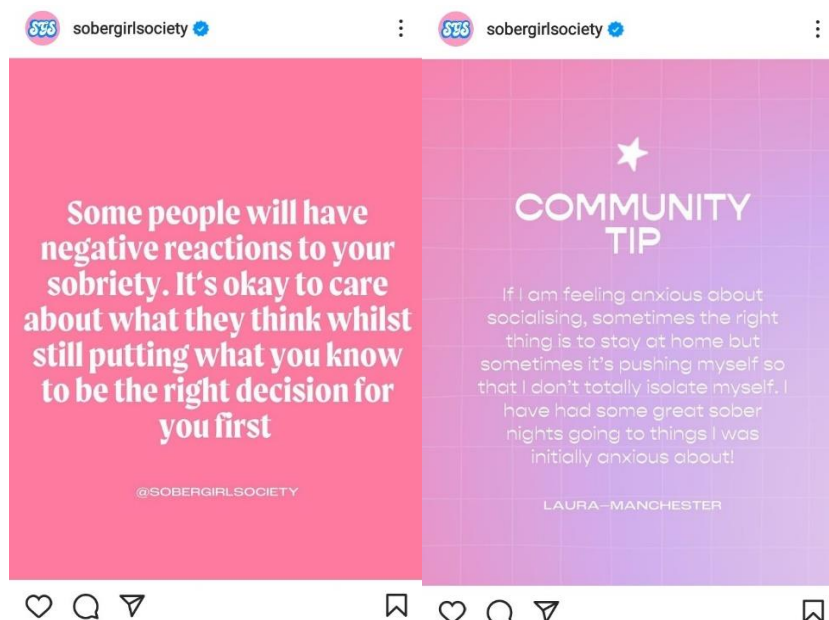
4.3 Challenge discourse

Conroy and de Visser (2014: 540) report that the non-drinking participants in their study had identified non-drinking as challenging. That can be expected since after all, non-drinking is a lifestyle choice that affects many areas. On Sober Girl Society's Instagram, the difficulties and challenges related to non-drinking are clearly visible as well. Rather than perceiving non-drinking as unproblematic, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a lifestyle choice that is not easy. As Cherry (2015: 64) states, maintaining new lifestyle habits requires actions. According to Conroy and de Visser (2014: 547), maintaining a non-drinking status can be achieved through learning how to manage the challenges caused by non-drinking. Therefore, I argue that there is challenge discourse present on Sober Girl Society's Instagram which does not only aim to discuss the issues and challenges but also attempts to provide solutions on how to deal with them. By incorporating this discourse on their Instagram, Sober Girl Society aims to be transparent about the process of staying sober while supporting their members to overcome their challenges and maintain sobriety.

One challenge that is associated with non-drinking is the reactions by others. Conroy and de Visser (2014: 541) describe that accepting non-drinking can be hard for others which is visible for example in questioning the motives behind choosing not to drink, not respecting the choice, or even sabotaging by spiking drinks. The challenge of others reacting negatively to sobriety is also present in the posts by Sober Girl Society. For instance, a post from June 21, 2021 (figure 7) includes a visual with a statement "Some people will have negative reactions to your sobriety." Since it is presented as a statement, it gives the impression that it is a fact and by doing that, Sober Girl Society builds an image that this is a certain consequence of non-drinking. In other words, Sober Girl Society informs the members that this is something they will most likely experience. At the same time, non-drinking is constructed as a lifestyle choice that will gain attention from others. I argue that Sober Girl Society presents the challenge to the members because they aim to be transparent and authentic. By doing

that, the members are aware of the challenges while still being able to trust Sober Girl Society. Authenticity is required for gaining trust which is needed for the members to stay in the community.

However, this post does not only inform members about the challenge, but it also provides support through the use of challenge discourse. As Conroy and de Visser (2014: 547) report, strategies for managing the challenges are helpful when it comes to staying away from alcohol. In the post, it is stated that “It’s okay if you still worry what others will think about you not drinking”, thus suggesting that there is nothing wrong with caring about others’ opinions. I argue that Sober Girl Society has chosen to use this expression because it constructs a reality where it is acceptable to have challenges and care about them. Rather than ignoring the challenge, it is made acceptable to give attention to it. Sober Girl Society includes this in the post because it allows them to provide a solution for it. Their advice is that while people might be reacting negatively, you should still do “the right decision for you”. Thus, dealing with this challenge entails acknowledging the negative opinions of others but still prioritizing your own choice. As it has been discussed in relation to self-improvement discourse, non-drinking is a habit that helps to express the authentic identity and allows to reflect your true self. Sober Girl Society motivates members to stay sober by reminding them what there is to be gained with non-drinking. They construct non-drinking as challenging, yet worth the trouble.



1,628 likes

sobergirlsociety We're often told to 'stop caring about what others think' but as human beings, it's a concept that is often trickier than we think to master.

It's okay if you still worry what others will think about you not drinking as long as it doesn't actually prevent you making the right decision for you 💖

[View all 27 comments](#)

June 21, 2021

785 likes

sobergirlsociety Community tip from Laura in Manchester 💖

Want to send us your community tip?
Email us with your name, town/city and top tip to
hello@sobergirlsociety.com

[View all 10 comments](#)

Figure 7 (left), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from June 21, 2021. Figure 8 (right), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from August 4, 2021.

Another challenge associated with non-drinking is that it can cause negative emotions, especially in situations where alcohol has been previously consumed and is still consumed by others. Pennay, MacLean and Rankin (2016: 70) describe that the participants in their study who tried non-drinking for a period of time reported that in situations where alcohol has an integral role, they were experiencing “feelings of loss and sadness” since they could not fully participate in the activities. A post from August 4, 2021 (figure 8) acknowledges that there can be negative emotions associated with non-drinking and it constructs non-drinking as a lifestyle habit that can cause anxiety in social situations. This connects with Pennay et al.'s (2016) observations that social situations might be experienced differently when not consuming alcohol. Another negative aspect which is visible in the post is that since socializing is experienced with anxiety, it can lead to staying at home and isolating oneself. This constructs non-drinking as even more challenging since by attempting to manage the first challenge, another challenge is created. By incorporating this perception, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a challenge to social life. At the same time, Sober Girl Society acknowledges the role that alcohol has in society and social situations. While that positions non-drinking in a negative light, it is still needed because it makes it visible that it is due to alcohol's position that non-drinking is hard to enjoy and maintain. If the role of alcohol was not as dominant as it is, sobriety would be easier to maintain since it would be more acceptable. By constructing this view, Sober Girl Society aims to motivate why social change is needed.

While this post constructs non-drinking as a social challenge, it still provides a solution for it as well. In this case, the solution is “pushing myself” to go out and socialize since in the best case, it can lead to “some great sober nights”. Showing that negative emotions are not a barrier for having fun is important for maintaining a non-drinking status. In Pennay et al.'s (2016: 71) study, those who experienced negative feelings with non-drinking and perceived non-drinking as less enjoyable, perceived their life as boring without alcohol. If non-drinking is considered boring, it can be hard to

continue with it. Therefore, it is important to showcase that sobriety can also lead to enjoyment and fun if given a chance. Sober Girl Society needs to do this because in order to achieve social change, members have to be able to maintain their sobriety. Thus, while challenge discourse constructs non-drinking as a difficult lifestyle habit to maintain, it also aims to motivate members to stay sober. By including a suggestion on how to deal with the challenges discussed in the posts, Sober Girl Society attempts to give support because it is not only good for the members, but it also helps Sober Girl Society to have active members who are needed in order to achieve social change.

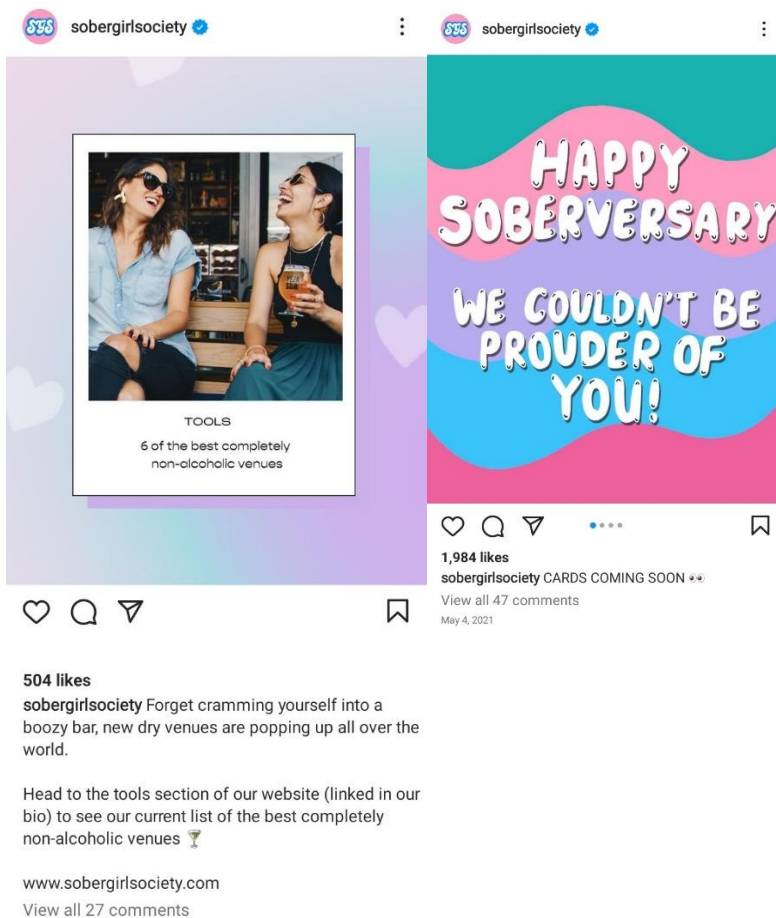


Figure 9 (left), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from May 25, 2021. Figure 10 (right), a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from May 4, 2021.

As social situations pose a challenge regarding non-drinking, one way to cope is to have replacement drinks. As Bartram et al. (2017: 734) report, having a non-alcoholic drink instead of an alcoholic one is a way to participate in a social practice without changing its meaning or the behaviours which are present. Replacement drinks are also visible on Sober Girl Society's Instagram and there are posts which include resemblances to alcohol, such as a post from May 25, 2021 with an image of a woman

having a drink that looks like beer (figure 9). The image is accompanied by a text that says “6 of the best completely non-alcoholic venues” which indicates that the drink in the image is non-alcoholic since they are used together. Presenting that there are also non-alcoholic options of alcoholic drinks and alcohol-free venues available shows that there is still a way to enjoy having a drink. In addition, the women in the image are laughing and having a good time which then suggests that it is possible to have fun and socialize without alcohol. Thus, with this post, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a way to have fun. While social situations can be different when sober, it is still possible to enjoy them for example with alcohol-free drinks as this post suggests. By providing a solution to coping with social situations, Sober Girl Society ensures that non-drinkers have a possibility to enjoy social life as well. They have to construct sobriety as fitting for social life in order to make non-drinking an attractive choice.

The discourse of challenge is also present from another point of view. On Sober Girl Society’s Instagram, non-drinking is often constructed as a reason for celebration and pride. Viewing non-drinking as something worth celebrating indicates not only that it is something good and positive, but that it is also challenging and maintaining it is therefore an accomplishment. For instance, a post from May 4, 2021 (figure 10) includes an example of a card which Sober Girl Society sells. The card contains words “Happy soberversary” and “We couldn’t be prouder of you!”. The word “soberversary” connects to “anniversary” which is often viewed as a reason to celebrate and using it constructs non-drinking as an accomplishment since it refers to the day when the consumption of alcohol has been quit. Likewise, the statement “We couldn’t be prouder of you!” builds a sense of accomplishment since it views non-drinking as a reason to be proud. By using concepts like “soberversary” and “pride”, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as challenging to maintain because when one succeeds with it, there is a reason to celebrate. Thus, while this example gives a positive view of non-drinking, it simultaneously constructs a reality where non-drinking poses challenges which have to be overcome. However, this example differs from the others discussed in this section by not directly defining the challenge but rather leaving it to be interpreted. A reason for that could be that Sober Girl Society does not want to emphasize the challenges too much but rather, places more emphasis on the solution. In this case, “soberversary” functions as a motivation to keep staying sober because it constructs non-drinking as an accomplishment and therefore, it can provide feelings of being successful.

Since non-drinking is a lifestyle change, it will affect many areas of life and pose various challenges. With the challenge discourse, Sober Girl Society discusses different challenges related to non-drinking. While at first glance this can seem negative, it is still a needed discourse because Sober Girl Society does not only describe the challenges but also provides solutions for them. In other words, Sober Girl Society aims to support non-drinkers by constructing non-drinking as a habit that can be incorporated into one's life. This is important because in order to resist the role of alcohol and achieve social change, non-drinkers have to maintain their new lifestyle habits. If the challenges are not discussed, non-drinkers are not prepared for them and if there are no solutions, challenges can feel too overwhelming. Being aware of the challenges and having knowledge on how to deal with them will help in maintaining non-drinking. At the same time, Sober Girl Society constructs a trustworthy image of itself by being transparent about the challenges. This is crucial as well since when members feel like they can trust Sober Girl Society, they will stay in the community. In addition, it increases trust regarding the proposed solutions and that is needed because Sober Girl Society's aim is to support. Lastly, challenge discourse is needed to fight the narratives of alcohol which position non-drinking as negative. By constructing non-drinking as challenging yet manageable, Sober Girl Society perceives non-drinking as a way to enjoy life because the challenges can be overcome.

4.4 Resistance discourse

In Pennay, MacLean and Rankin's (2016: 72) study, some of the participants constructed their non-drinking selfhood through discourses of resistance. What that means is that the participants viewed alcohol and its role in society as negative and perceived non-drinking as a way to oppose the drinking norm. As a lifestyle movement, the goal of sober curiosity is to achieve social change which in this case is making non-drinking an acceptable option while resisting the position of alcohol in society. Sober Girl Society incorporates the discourse of resistance on their Instagram with an aim to promote non-drinking by going against the drinking norm and showing that it is still possible to enjoy the same things sober. Through this discourse, Sober Girl Society attempts to construct a reality where non-drinking is accepted and valued. At the same time, Sober Girl Society aims to motivate people to question the role of alcohol and as a result, to achieve the wanted social change.

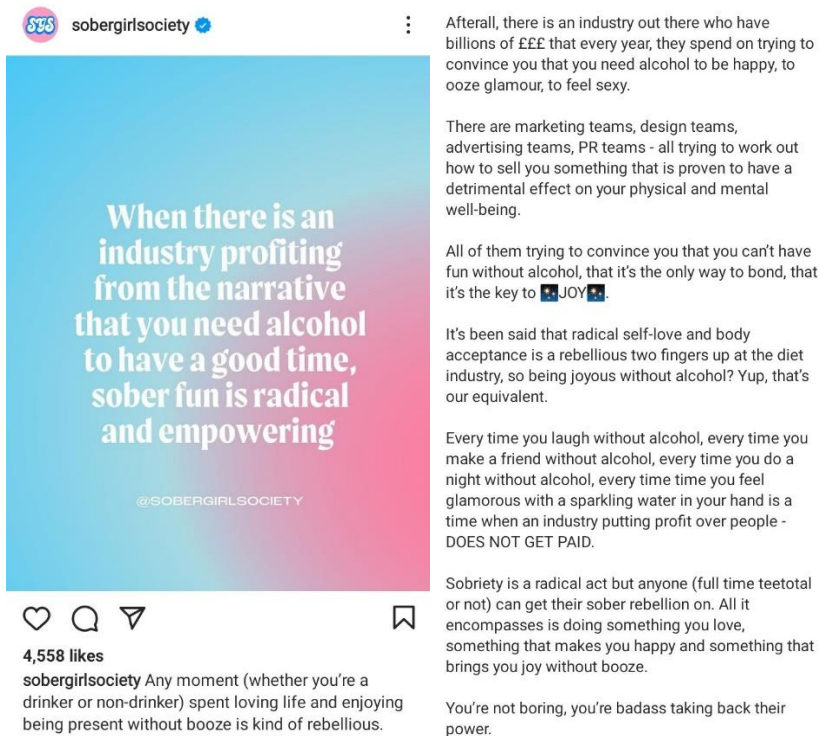


Figure 11, a screenshot of Sober Girl Society's Instagram post from May 24, 2021.

Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as radical, rebellious and empowering. For instance, a post from May 24, 2021 (figure 11) includes a visual with a statement “When there is an industry profiting from the narrative that you need alcohol to have a good time, sober fun is radical and empowering”. This statement contains the drinking norm (“need alcohol to have a good time”) which is juxtaposed with an expression “sober fun”, thus constructing the drinking norm as false by claiming that it is possible to have a good time even when sober. In addition, non-drinking is constructed through words and expressions such as “radical and empowering”, “a radical act”, “sober rebellion” and “you’re badass taking back their power” which result in viewing non-drinking as a way to go against the alcohol industry and its narratives. By incorporating these expressions, Sober Girl Society emphasizes the role of non-drinking as the less dominant option and aims to construct it as a habit that goes against the mainstream. Simultaneously, non-drinkers are portrayed as brave and strong ones who are capable of resisting the role of alcohol as they take part in “a radical act” and “sober rebellion”. For some, that portrayal could possibly function as a motivation to maintain a non-drinking status as it clearly demonstrates what can be achieved in society through non-drinking.

Furthermore, throughout the caption the alcohol industry is being presented as an industry that aims to convince people to associate certain things with alcohol, such as “to be happy”, “to ooze glamour”

and “to feel sexy”. Using the word “convince” constructs a view that the narratives presented by the alcohol industry are not trustworthy since otherwise, people would not have to be convinced but rather, they would believe the narratives without questioning them. The word “convince” then constructs non-drinking as a habit that enables those things as well. Moreover, the alcohol industry is presented in a negative light as it is labelled as “an industry putting profit over people” which builds a view that making money is more important than selling the truthful picture of alcohol. By positioning the alcohol industry in a negative light, Sober Girl Society attempts to encourage people to question the role of the alcohol industry and its narratives. At the same time, by positioning alcohol in a negative light, Sober Girl Society creates a structural opposition and implies that non-drinking is positive. Thus, while Sober Girl Society attacks the alcohol industry, it simultaneously promotes non-drinking and encourages people to reduce their alcohol consumption. In addition, through suggesting that being sober enables same things as alcohol consumption, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as something that does not limit you. That is a needed perception since it entails that being sober does not stop you from enjoying life.

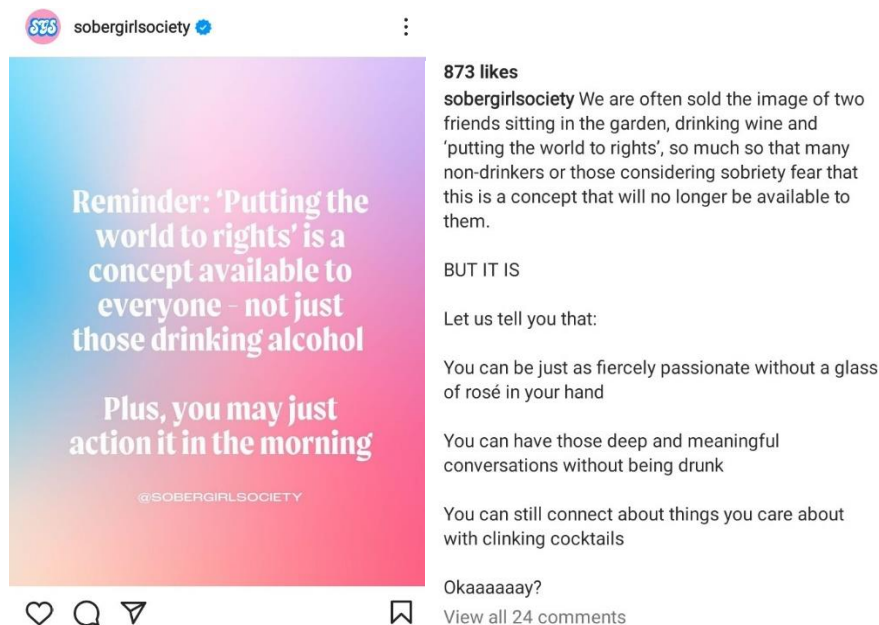


Figure 12, a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from June 14, 2021.

Another post that resists the role of alcohol is a post from June 14, 2021 (figure 12). Like the example above, this one juxtaposes alcohol consumption with non-drinking as well and claims that being sober does not stop you from doing the same things that you did while drinking. In this case, the activity is “putting the world to rights” which means having a conversation usually focused on how to solve

society’s problems. As the caption states, this activity is typically presented in the form of an “image of two friends sitting in the garden, drinking wine” and due to that, it might be viewed as an activity that is suitable only for drinkers. However, this post aims to transform that view with a statement “BUT IT IS” which refers to the activity being available for non-drinkers as well. Writing in capital letters gives a sense of passion to the statement which emphasizes Sober Girl Society’s attempt to construct non-drinking as a lifestyle choice that still allows the enjoyment of the same activities. In addition, Sober Girl Society does that by contrasting the narratives of alcohol with non-drinking and as a result, the power of the drinking norm is also weakened because the narratives are challenged. By showing that sobriety does not stop from doing certain things, Sober Girl Society attacks the alcohol industry and attempts to dissolve the narratives. Thus, non-drinking is not only constructed as a lifestyle habit that does not stop experiencing different things, but it is also constructed as rebellious since it challenges the norms. This is a needed construction as it first, showcases that sobriety will not take things away from your life and second, aims to weaken the position of alcohol and this way, attempts to achieve social change. Incorporating this discourse can also motivate people to reduce their alcohol consumption as they see that in the end, they are still capable of enjoying the same things. In addition, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a way to enjoy these same things even more as it is claimed in the visual that “Plus, you may just action it in the morning” which suggests that non-drinking enhances one’s actions. As a consequence, a more attractive image of non-drinking is created.

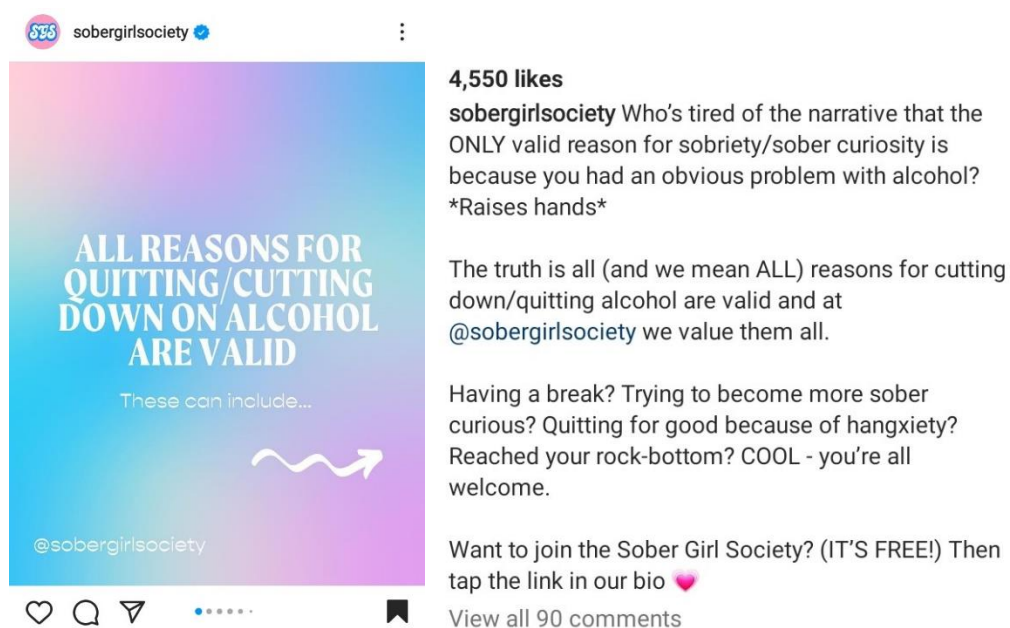


Figure 13, a screenshot of Sober Girl Society’s Instagram post from August 6, 2021.

The discourse of resistance is also present in a post from August 6, 2021 (figure 13) which questions “Who’s tired of the narrative that the ONLY valid reason for sobriety/sober curiosity is because you had an obvious problem with alcohol?”. Rather than going directly against the alcohol industry, Sober Girl Society attacks the view that society holds of sobriety which is that the only acceptable reason for sobriety is having problems related to alcohol consumption. As Cheers, Callinan and Pennay (2021: 392) report, the participants in their study concluded that due to the expectations of society, there has to be “a very valid reason not to drink”. Likewise, according to Cherrier and Gurrieri’s (2013: 238) findings, “good justifications for abstinence were limited to a history of personal or familial alcohol dependence, pregnancy, or driving.” Based on these findings, alcohol is viewed in society as such a norm that non-drinking is seen as possible only when there is an important reason behind it and Sober Girl Society emphasizes that view through writing “ONLY” in capital letters. With capital letters, Sober Girl Society attempts to catch attention to the issue and demonstrate what is wrong with the view that society holds of non-drinking. By going against this narrative, Sober Girl Society attempts to construct non-drinking as an acceptable choice no matter the reasons behind it while simultaneously challenging the views hold by society. Thus, at the same time as Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a lifestyle habit where everyone is welcomed, it also resists the role of alcohol. Through claiming that there are other reasons behind sobriety, Sober Girl Society aims to construct drinking as a more multidimensional habit that affects various things. By doing that, Sober Girl Society attempts to make others change their views on alcohol and as a result, views on non-drinking would be changed as well. Making people view drinking and non-drinking differently will eventually lead up to social change as people start questioning the narratives of alcohol.

In conclusion, resistance discourse is the one that most clearly attempts to achieve social change. As Sober Girl Society aims to make non-drinking more acceptable, it is not a surprise that they incorporate a discourse which attacks the alcohol industry and the role of alcohol in society. With this discourse, Sober Girl Society paints a negative image of alcohol which results in a positive image of non-drinking. In addition, with the discourse of resistance Sober Girl Society directly addresses the issues with alcohol and by doing that, they give more presence to them and possibly make more people aware of the role of alcohol in society. That is needed because in order to make non-drinking an accepted norm, alcohol must be resisted. Thus, the aim of this discourse is to demonstrate why alcohol should be resisted while promoting non-drinking by constructing drinking as negative.

5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will summarize the findings and provide suggestions for their practical applications. In addition, I will also discuss the present study and its strengths and weaknesses. To conclude, I will provide suggestions for future research.

5.1 Summary and discussion of the findings

The aim of this study was to look at what kind of discourses on non-drinking are constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram. The data consisted of 54 posts which were analyzed with the means of multimodal discourse analysis. This means that during the analysis, both the visual and textual aspects were taken into account. In addition, the theoretical concepts of discourse, social media and sober curious movement were utilized in the analysis process.

As a result of the analysis, I was able to identify four discourses related to constructing non-drinking on Sober Girl Society's Instagram. They are social support discourse, self-improvement discourse, challenge discourse and resistance discourse. Each of them has a specific function that they aim to achieve. The objective of social support discourse is to build a sense of community while providing opportunities for connecting with other sober women and as a result, non-drinking is constructed as a lifestyle habit that needs support from others. This finding aligns with previous research which has suggested that having a community is an important factor for individuals who are aiming to maintain their non-drinking status (Pennay et al. 2016: 72). In addition, social support discourse suits the nature of social media which offers a platform for connecting and bonding with others (Zappavigna 2012: 2). By incorporating this discourse, Sober Girl Society aims to build a community where members can live their social lives without having to ask for acceptance while receiving support on their sober journey. Moreover, having a sense of community emphasizes that individuals are not acting alone but that there is collective action in fighting against the drinking norm.

Self-improvement discourse on the other hand aims to construct non-drinking as a way to become a better self. A characteristic of a lifestyle movement is that lifestyle changes are closely related to identity shift and becoming an authentic version of yourself (Haenfler et al. 2012: 9) and therefore, Sober Girl Society includes a discourse that emphasizes this side. By constructing non-drinking as a positive habit that helps to become a better person, a negative image of drinking is simultaneously created. As a result, Sober Girl Society attempts to attract people to cut alcohol by showcasing what

there is to be gained with non-drinking. Thus, self-improvement discourse is used also for promoting as it does not only motivate existing non-drinkers but also attempts to make more people interested in non-drinking. In addition, through self-improvement discourse Sober Girl Society aims to support members to maintain their non-drinking status by demonstrating how non-drinking can be incorporated into one's life.

Another discourse that helps to maintain a non-drinking status is challenge discourse. By incorporating this discourse, Sober Girl Society aims to be transparent about the challenges related to non-drinking while supporting members to overcome their challenges. Thus, this discourse is not as negative as it first seems since it also provides solutions on how to deal with challenges. As Conroy and de Visser (2014: 547) point out, learning to manage challenges is an important step in maintaining a non-drinking status. With this discourse, Sober Girl Society constructs non-drinking as a habit that comes with challenges, but those challenges can be overcome and managed. That is needed because in order to achieve social change, the new lifestyle habits must be maintained. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate how to manage the different challenges since if non-drinking is experienced as something negative, life without alcohol will not seem appealing (Pennay et al. 2016: 71).

Resistance discourse relates heavily to displaying alcohol's role and the alcohol industry as negative. Through the use of this discourse, non-drinking is constructed as radical and rebellious as it goes against the alcohol industry and the role that alcohol has in society. Sober Girl Society incorporates this discourse on their Instagram because as a lifestyle movement, the goal is to achieve social change. As a consequence of opposing the role of alcohol, this discourse also aims to make non-drinking more acceptable and positive. With this discourse it is constructed that it is still possible to enjoy the same things without alcohol and thus, sobriety does not pose any limitations. This finding of resistance discourse aligns with Pennay et al.'s (2016: 72) study where some of the non-drinkers construct their non-drinking selfhood by opposing the drinking norm.

This study has practical implications. First, the analysis has revealed what non-drinkers consider salient in non-drinking. Thus, using the discourses that are constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram for example in alcohol prevention could be a worth to try since if they can motivate non-drinkers to maintain their non-drinking status, they could also motivate alcohol consumers to reduce their alcohol use. Second, having a community like Sober Girl Society resists the dominant role of alcohol in society. The discourses used on their Instagram aim to change views on non-drinking and

this way, they aim to make non-drinking more acceptable. As it was stated in the theoretical framework of this present study, the world is constructed with language. Thus, when language practices are changed and non-drinking is established as something positive, it will also eventually change the world as the dominant language practices are being resisted. This study can help individuals to perceive non-drinking in a new light, but it can also give inspiration and support for other sober communities on how to resist the role of alcohol through the use of language. Lastly, this study demonstrates how sober communities can use social media for their agenda. It is possible to introduce individuals to sobriety and sober curious movement through social media while staying in contact with existing non-drinkers and helping them along their sober journey. The discourses identified in this study can also suit other sober communities.

5.2 Evaluation of the study and future research

The chosen theoretical framework and methodology functioned well for this study. Multimodal discourse analysis was needed because the data came from Instagram which is a highly visual platform. Therefore, I needed a method of analysis that enables studying both visual and textual aspects. With the tools of multimodal discourse analysis that was possible and I was able to dive deeper into the data. In the theoretical framework, I introduced the concept of discourse and applied that during the process of analysis since I was interested in looking at how non-drinking is discursively constructed. The concept of discourse is closely related to constructing social reality and for that reason, I chose it as one of the central concepts. In addition, my theoretical framework discussed sober curious movement and social media which were both crucial for this study as they introduced the context and helped to understand some of the findings.

The strength of this study is that it is well constructed. I have formed a clear research question and based on that, I have chosen the appropriate data and limited its amount in order to make sure that the study can be completed in the given timeframe. My focus has stayed on the research question and I have only paid attention to the things that are relevant for this present research. Thus, this study forms a logical piece of work. In addition, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible with my research and I have included an ethical consideration that discusses the matters that relate to studying social media. Furthermore, another strength that this study has is that it provides information on an important societal topic. Moreover, it gives insight into a topic that has not yet been excessively studied.

The weaknesses of this study include the small size of data. Due to time constraints, the amount of data had to be limited and this resulted in collecting a small sample from only one sober community. Therefore, the findings do not give a comprehensive view on how non-drinking is discursively constructed but rather, provide an insight into a specific community. In addition, the analysis focused only on Instagram's feed posts and the rest of Instagram's functions were limited. Furthermore, video posts were left out. Thus, the analysis would have been more detailed and perhaps richer if the scope would have been extended. However, the chosen restrictions functioned well for this present study and I was still able to answer the research question. Moreover, the present study is well targeted and logically constructed.

Another weakness is that the object of this study is a UK-based community. While it aims to function globally as well, it is still firmly rooted in UK culture and thus it is hard to say whether sober communities in other locations would construct the same discourses related to non-drinking. However, I believe that this study gives a good overview on the discursive construction of non-drinking and since sober curiosity is a popular global phenomenon, I anticipate that non-drinking can be constructed similarly in other locations, too. After all, Sober Girl Society has still managed to attract a global audience which suggests that their communication resonates with many.

For future research it could be fruitful to expand the amount of data in order to get a more detailed understanding on the topic. Furthermore, it could be interesting to compare different sober communities and see whether they construct the same discourses. Moreover, this study focused on looking at how a community constructs non-drinking on social media. Therefore, it could be interesting to study how individuals compose non-drinking on social media and how their constructions compare with this study.

To conclude, this study has given insight into what kind of discourses on non-drinking are constructed on Sober Girl Society's Instagram and why. While the focus is on a specific community, the findings can still reveal what is considered appealing and important in non-drinking as well as how social change can be achieved with the means of language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

Sober Girl Society. Instagram posts from May 2021-August 2021.

<https://www.instagram.com/sobergirlsociety/>

Secondary sources

- Atkinson, L. (2012). Buying in to social change: How private consumption choices engender concern for the collective. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644, 191-206. DOI: 10.1177/0002716212448366
- Bartram, A., Elliott, J., Hanson-Easey, S. & Crabb, S. (2017). How have people who have stopped or reduced their alcohol consumption incorporated this into their social rituals? *Psychology & Health*, 32(6), 728-744. DOI: 10.1080/08870446.2017.1300260
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press.
- boyd, d. (2011). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Papacharissi, Z. (eds). *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites*. New York: Routledge. 39-58.
- Cheers, C., Callinan, S. & Pennay, A. (2021). The 'sober eye': examining attitudes towards non-drinkers in Australia. *Psychology & Health*, 36(4), 385-404. DOI: 10.1080/08870446.2020.1792905
- Cherrier, H. & Gurrieri, L. (2013). Anti-consumption choices performed in a drinking culture: Normative struggles and repairs. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 33(3), 232-244. DOI: 10.1177/0276146712467805
- Cherry, E. (2015). I was a teenage vegan: Motivation and maintenance of lifestyle movements. *Sociological Inquiry*, 85(1), 55-74. DOI: 10.1111/soin.12061
- Conroy, D. & de Visser, R. (2013). 'Man up!': Discursive constructions of non-drinkers among UK undergraduates. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 18(11), 1432-1444. DOI: 10.1177/1359105312463586
- Conroy, D. & de Visser, R. (2014). Being a non-drinking student: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Psychology & Health*, 29(5), 536-551.
- Dijck, J. v. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021): Näin Suomi juo. <https://thl.fi/fi/web/alkoholi-tupakka-ja-riippuvuudet/alkoholi/nain-suomi-juo> (January 12, 2022).
- Fry, M. (2011). Discourses of consumer's alcohol resistant identities. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 23(4), 348-366. DOI: 10.1080/10495142.2011.623506
- Gee, J. P. (2010). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (3rd edition). New York: Routledge.
- Haenfler, R., Johnson, B., & Jones, E. (2012). Lifestyle movements: Exploring the intersection of lifestyle and social movements. *Social Movement Studies*, 11(1), 1-20. DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2012.640535
- Hellman, M. & Kettunen, T. (2017). Nordic alcohol statistics 2010–2015. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 34(3), 267-282. DOI: 10.1177/1455072517719626
- Instagram (2021): About us. <https://about.instagram.com/about-us> (October 12, 2021).
- Johnstone, B. (2018). *Discourse analysis* (3rd edition). Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.
- Kaplan, A.M. & Haelein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media, *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.

- Karlsson, T. (2018). Mitä tilastot kertovat suomalaisten alkoholinkäytöstä ja sen haitoista? In Mäkelä, P., Härkönen, J., Lintonen, T., Tigerstedt, C. & Warpenius, K. (eds.) *Näin Suomi juo - suomalaisten muuttuvat alkoholinkäyttötavat*. Helsinki: Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos. 15-25.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2012). Multimodal discourse analysis. In Gee, J. P. & Handford, M. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge, 35-50.
- Laestadius, L. (2016). Instagram. In Sloan, L. & Quan-Haase, A. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (1st edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Inc 2016. 573-592.
- Lagorio, C. (2012). Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Founders of Instagram. *Inc.* [online]. <https://www.inc.com/30under30/2011/profile-kevin-systrom-mike-kriegerfounders-instagram.html> (November 16, 2021).
- Ledin, P. & Machin, D. (2018). *Doing visual analysis: From theory to practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Machin, D. & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: a multimodal introduction*. London: Sage.
- Matei, A. (2019). The rise of the sober curious: having it all, without alcohol. *The Guardian*. July 1, 2019 [online]. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jul/01/sober-curious-alcohol-abuse> (October 26, 2021).
- Pennay, A., MacLean, S. & Rankin, G. (2016). Hello Sunday Morning: Alcohol, (non)consumption and selfhood. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 28, 67-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2015.10.008>
- Pietikäinen, S. & Mäntynen, A. (2019). *Uusi kurssi kohti diskurssia*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Raypole, C. (2020). A beginner's guide to the 'sober curious' movement. *Healthline*. October 14, 2020 [online]. <https://www.healthline.com/health/alcohol/sober-curious> (October 26, 2021).
- Seargeant, P. & Tagg, C. (2014). *The language of social media: identity and community on the Internet*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sober Girl Society (2021): About us. <https://sobergirlsociety.com/about/> (October 12, 2021).
- Statista.com. (2021): Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2021, ranked by number of active users. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (November 16, 2021).
- Tigerstedt, C., Mäkelä, P., Karlsson, T., Härkönen, J., Lintonen, T. & Warpenius, K. (2020). Change and continuity in Finnish drinking in the 21st century. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 37(6), 609-618. DOI: 10.1177/1455072520954324
- The European Parliament (2019). Directive 96/9/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 1996 on the legal protection of databases. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01996L0009-20190606> (October 13, 2021).
- Törrönen, J., Roumeliotis, F., Samuelsson, E., Kraus, L. & Room, R. (2019). Why are young people drinking less than earlier? Identifying and specifying social mechanisms with a pragmatist approach. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 64, 13-20.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2015) Multimodality. In Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. E., Schiffrin, D. & Adger, C. T. *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd edition). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 447-465.
- YLE News (June 21, 2020). Survey suggests young adults drinking less than ever before. [online] <https://yle.fi/news/3-11411252> (January 13, 2022).
- Zappavigna, M. (2012). *The discourse of Twitter and social media*. London; New York: Continuum International Pub. Group.
- Zappavigna, M. (2016). Social media photography: Construing subjectivity in Instagram images. *Visual Communication*, 15(3), 271-292. DOI 10.1177/1470357216643220