Who is to blame for alcohol addiction?

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LITERATURE & RESEARCH AIMS

Alcoholism is a major public health issue affecting health, social care, security, and economy (PHE, 2016). In order to combat this issue, there have been significant increases in treatment provisions in recent years, yet there still remains very low treatment engagement rate, thought to be approximately 18% (Alcohol Concern, 2016). Although there is a clinical definition of alcoholism and alcohol dependency (WHO, 1993; NICE, 2011), many individuals may not view their drinking behaviours as problematic and consider themselves as requiring treatment. If individuals have a different perception of what constitutes problematic drinking compared to clinicians, it is likely that this can hinder treatment efforts. Given that popular opinions about alcohol can shape the way alcohol use is regarded within society, it is relevant to explore the common descriptions and accounts shared through language which may influence individual perceptions of drinking behaviours.

Limited research has considered the way alcohol use is depicted through text-based documents. However, these studies predominantly confined to one or two sources of data and do not allow for direct comparisons. As such, there is a lack of understanding in regards to how alcohol use is depicted within text-based materials from both the professional and the general public perspectives. This research will identify the common explanations that are available across multiple sources, for different audiences and from different perspectives. Ultimately, this will provide a comprehensive understanding of the many ways in which alcohol use is depicted and how these perspectives are shared through discourse.

Research Questions:
- What are the socially constructed descriptions available to discuss, define, and account for different levels of alcohol use?
- How do the available discourses differ or compare between professionals and general public populations?

DATA

Text-based documents have different audiences and purposes. For example, blogs are often used for therapeutic activities (Lent, 2009), whereas policy documents are designed to help inform and guide professionals (Lucas, 2004). This range of purposes and audiences means it is important to consider a variety of sources for discussing alcohol use to understand the different perspectives individuals may be exposed to.

The table below outlines the data sources and volume of data collected per source. The parameters for data collection differed appropriately dependent on each source.

Professional	General Public
Policy documents (5 documents = 138 pages)	Blog posts (30 blog posts from 6 blogs = 65 pages)
Journal articles (5 articles = 78 pages)	Twitter (11,195 → 2,346 tweets)
Newspaper articles (45 articles - 3 newspapers = 82 pages)	Newspaper article comments (Top page = 446 comments)

METHOD

Since language is used to convey information in both professional and everyday situations, many believe it to be neutral. However, discursive psychologists argue that language is action, it can be used to create different versions of reality that shape our beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Edwards, 2005). Language is used to portray certain points of view, often reflecting wider beliefs and attitudes and further reinforcing these perspectives (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Therefore, the discourses that are put forward have the potential to be highly influential, either reinforcing or changing negative public perceptions of problematic alcohol use.

My analysis will use discursive psychology to focus upon the ways in which alcohol use is discussed and described through different sources. This project will also take into account context and study how these descriptions and accounts differ or compare based upon the source and purpose.
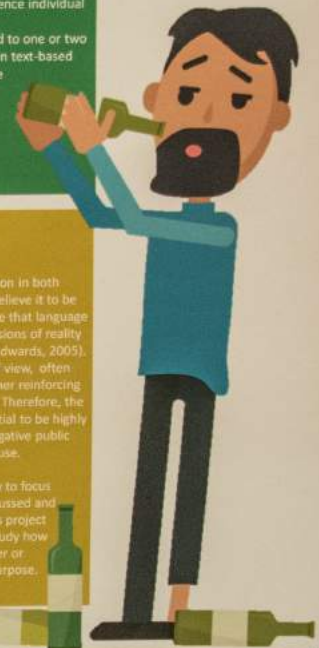
FINDINGS

Activity: Take a tag from below. **Without looking at the answers**, pick which of the options you think holds the most blame for alcohol addiction. Write your reason on the tag and hang it on the corresponding hook. Then open the answers to see if your views match the data and the analysis.

Individual Responsibility

Medical Condition

Policy & Culture

References

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