



Foundation for Alcohol  
Research & Education

# One Sunday at a time:

Evaluating Hello Sunday Morning

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JUNE 2012

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## About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Our mission is to help Australia change the way it drinks by:

- helping communities to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms
- building the case for alcohol policy reform and
- engaging Australians in conversations about our drinking culture.

Over the last ten years FARE has invested more than \$115 million, helped 750 organisations and funded over 1,400 projects addressing the harms caused by alcohol misuse.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organization's *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol* for addressing alcohol-related harms through population-based strategies, problem-directed policies, and direct interventions.

## About Hello Sunday Morning

Hello Sunday Morning (HSM) is a movement towards a better drinking culture. Our purpose is to provide a platform for individuals to create meaningful change in their lives through a period of sobriety. By sharing their story, each person's experience is a unique and essential contribution to a better drinking culture.

Since 2010 over 4,300 people have signed up to take a break from drinking to blog about their HSM experience. By the end of 2012 HSM aims to find 10,000 people who are ready to take on the challenge.

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## Executive summary

This study aimed to conceptualise and evaluate the social impact of Hello Sunday Morning (HSM). HSM is a blogging website that encourages people to undertake a period of sobriety and reflect on the role alcohol plays in their life. Bloggers or 'HSMers' write blog posts, make videos and take pictures of their experiences as part of their participation. This research report used questionnaires, qualitative analysis of blog posts, and surveys to examine what HSMers blogged about, their motivations, goals and challenges, and how their alcohol consumption and expectancies changed throughout their HSM experience.

Analysis of the blog posts of 1,768 HSMers showed that over time, HSMers changed from being very self-focused, considering their own drinking and the views of peers, to reflecting on the role of alcohol in their lives, to finally taking a broader view of the role of alcohol in society and ways to help and support others in their personal HSM experiences.

### What do HSMers blog about?

HSMers blogged about their drinking practices and culture, and their attempts to change their individual behaviours and influence their peers. HSMers used the blog posts to offer strategies and ideas for changing drinking behaviours and cultures. There were three categories of blog post themes:

- The *Drinking culture* category encompasses themes of Australian drinking practices and culture. One example of this was from HSMer #145:

... they were too drunk to dance or even talk to anyone or else they said some embarrassing things or passed out, vomited or even farted in front of potential friends ... Somehow they manage to forget their night and convinced themselves it was the best thing since sliced bread?

(Days into HSM: 48, Post Count: 6, ID 145)

- The *Life* category relates to the effects of the HSM experience on day-to-day lifestyle and behaviour. Many participants found giving up alcohol was a liberating and enriching experience:

You would think that by putting a ban on booze I would be limiting myself; limiting what I could do and all that. What I've realised is that removing alcohol has done quite the opposite.

(Days into HSM: 88, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

- The *Changes* theme category relates to the impact of personal HSM experiences on HSMers and their social and cultural lives.

So like old times, a 4am deep and meaningful conversation ensued. The only difference being that this time I was sober. This was unbelievably enlightening ... If I'd been drinking we probably still would have had a similar conversation but without the realization and therefore without the benefit that this brings ...

(Days into HSM: 78, Post Count: 46, ID 205)

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## Do HSMers' blog posts change thematically over the course of their HSM experience?

Typically, in the earlier parts of an HSM experience, an HSMer is more likely to describe their drinking practices, be conscious of peers' reactions, be focused on individual goals, and seek advice from fellow HSMers. As their HSM experience progresses the thematic content of their blog shifts, first documenting efforts to make personal change and reflecting on their own drinking practices, to then reflecting on drinking culture and in turn offering their own advice and strategies for change to other HSMers. By the end of their HSM experience, many HSMers became more reflective, giving considerable thought to how their HSM experience has contributed to their personal growth and self-awareness.

The first month of an individual HSM experience was most strongly associated with the *Drinking Culture* category, including the themes *Drinking Culture* and *Going Out*. These posts captured HSMers' early efforts to describe and explain their drinking practices and document challenges and successes in changing their own practices within a broader drinking culture.

Following the first month, HSMers experience the most dramatic change as they reflect on their HSM experiences. Themes of blog posts from the second month, third month and after three months are clustered more closely together moving into the *Life* and *Changes* categories. The *Change* and *Drinking Thoughts* themes provide a bridge between the accounts of drinking practices common in the first month and the more reflective (*Getting On*) and change-oriented themes (*Our HSM*) are more present later in the program.

## The HSM experience: motivations, goals and challenges

As part of their HSM registration, each HSMer was given the opportunity to specify their goals prior to embarking upon their HSM experience. The majority of HSMers (n=1,253; 70.1% of all HSMers) specified up to five personal goals. The top five goals types aimed to:

- improve health (70.5%)
- improve well-being (51.9%)
- change individual drinking behaviours (26.9%)
- learn to socialise without needing alcohol (23.6%) and
- save money (23.3%).

Additionally, at the beginning and end of their HSM experiences, 300 HSMers were invited to complete a questionnaire consisting of several open-ended and categorical questions about their motivations, goals and experiences. 110 HSMers reported their motivation for participating in HSM, which fell into three themes:

- Desire and dissatisfaction: a desire for a better life or dissatisfaction with their current individual and social practices, routines and expectations around alcohol consumption.
- Personal challenge: being motivated by intrinsic and specific personal goals that may or may not be related to alcohol consumption.

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- Intervention: serious mental or physical health issues related to or exacerbated by excessive drinking.

The common reasons reported for not achieving personal goals were a lack of personal commitment, a lack of support from peers and associated pressure in social situations or overly ambitious goals. In some cases, HSM was more than just a program of abstinence; it led to the confrontation of underlying issues which had previously been masked by alcohol use.

## HSM and alcohol consumption

Four tools were tested to develop an evaluation framework for HSM (within the *Consumption and Well-Being Survey*). From the random sample of 300 HSMers who were invited to complete a pre-and post-HSM experience questionnaire, useable data were available from the 15 HSMers who completed a questionnaire both before and after their HSM experiences.

These 15 HSMers were invited to participate in the *Consumption and Well-Being Survey* during registration and within one month of completing their HSM experience. The survey included the Alcohol Use and Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) and Alcohol Outcome Expectancies Scale (AOES) to measure changes in consumption and well-being before and after the HSM experience. Although not statistically significant, the results suggested a reduction in consumption and an increase in well-being over time, as HSMers continued through their HSM experiences.

This testing enables a two-tool *Consumption and Well-Being Survey* to be built into the HSM process to allow for the future collection of representative data.

## Summary

The HSM experience enables HSMers to stake out their own views, be accountable for their own actions, and honour their own achievements and challenges. Throughout the blog, HSMers report and reflect on the impact of HSM on their individual and social circumstances. While it is possible to measure changes in alcohol consumption as a measure of social impact, on-going analysis of the blog can also help to conceptualise how behaviour change is interconnected with changes in life outlook, well-being, and social and cultural norms, values and practices.

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# Background

## Hello Sunday Morning

HSM is a blogging website. The website encourages people to undertake a period of sobriety (typically three, six or 12 months) and use this time to actively reflect on the role that alcohol plays in their life. The 'participants' of HSM are self-selecting and voluntarily participate. Since its inception on 1 January 2009, HSM has grown from one blogger to more than 4,300 bloggers or 'HSMers'. HSMers come from several countries, but are predominantly Australian.

HSM does not operate a clinical service and is not consistent with traditional brief-intervention or population health campaigns. HSM takes a networked approach to health promotion. Rather than create and disseminate messages to an audience, HSM constructs a communication network across blogging and social networking platforms. HSMers communicate with each other as they attempt to change their own drinking behaviours and broader cultural attitudes to alcohol. The blogging community is highly connected and made up of individuals who discuss the process of challenging individual behaviours and cultural practices of alcohol consumption. These community connections are evident in the activity on the website with – on average – five new blog posts posted each day, several with very active comment threads attached to them. Often, blog posts take on a very personal narrative and focus on the specific life events of the HSMer.

## Research aims and objectives

Throughout 2011, HSM sought to develop ways to conceptualise and evaluate the HSM experience and its social impact on alcohol consumption and related social and cultural practices.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the social impact of HSM. The objectives of the project were to build an evidence-base for the effectiveness of the program.

## HSMers

Firstly, the main body of this report is based on the analysis of HSM blog posts of 1,768 people; which included 846,676 words, generated between 11 January 2009 and 2 August 2011. As demographics were not initially collected as a matter of course, age and gender information is only available for 981 of the 1,768 HSMers (55.5%). This subset data suggest that HSMers are:

- not all young people as is often assumed, with 52.1% (n=511) over 30 years of age and
- more likely to be female (n=581, 59%).

Secondly, questionnaires were conducted with a random sample of HSMers prior to and after their HSM experience. From the 300 HSMers approached, 229 HSMers completed the pre-HSM questionnaire within the first week of registration (76.3% response rate) and 43 people who had finished their HSM experience (14.3% response rate) completed the post-HSM questionnaire within one month of their completion date.

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Thirdly, a *Consumption and Well-Being Survey*, comprising four standardised tests, was administered to 45 HSMers (15% response rate) prior to their HSM experience and 33 HSMers following their HSM experience. Of the 33 HSMers who completed the post-HSM survey, only 15 completed both a pre- and post-survey.

Finally, 10 students from the University of Newcastle (New South Wales) participated in the original case study.<sup>1</sup> The students were between 18 and 21 years of age, including six females and four males. This group completed the *Consumption and Well-Being Survey* to establish a baseline for alcohol use, outcome expectations, mental health and quality of life. Over the course of three months, regular contact was maintained with the students and HSM events were sporadically conducted on campus in conjunction with other events. The purpose of these case studies was to obtain a snapshot of the effect HSM involvement had on the students' lifestyles, attitudes towards alcohol and cultural expectations. This element of the research led to the development of case study videos (available via FARE's *Vimeo* channel: <http://vimeo.com/fare>) and is a minority of the data considered in this report.

## Research questions

The overarching research question is: 'How can HSM conceptualise and evaluate its social impact?' Under this broad rubric, several specific research questions were developed:

- What do HSMers blog about?
- Do HSMers blog about the impact of HSM on their individual and social circumstances?
- Do HSMers' blog posts change thematically over the course of their HSM experience?
- How do HSMers describe their motivations and goals, and the rewards and challenges of HSM?
- Do HSMers' alcohol consumption and expectancies change over the course of their HSM experience?

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<sup>1</sup> The original objective of this study was to engage an additional five students from the University of Newcastle in HSM and create digital mini documentaries of their HSM journeys. However, when HSM recruited in excess of 2,200 new HSMers during the timeframe of the evaluation project, the objectives of the project were extended to build an evidence base for the effectiveness of the program.



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## What do HSMers blog about?

The HSM blog is ‘naturally occurring data’ that captures HSMers’ accounts of their sentiments and changes during their HSM experiences. Naturally occurring data are useful in research because they can be generated without the intervention of the researcher. Data can therefore be collected without affecting the HSMers’ usual practices. By analysing the blog data, it is possible to determine the themes and issues that HSMers address in their blog posts, and crucially, how these themes change over the course of their HSM experience. Analysing the blog assists in conceptualising the social impact beyond decline in alcohol consumption and its directly related effects. The blog offers insight into HSM as it is experienced by HSMers including the impacts HSM has on aspects of an HSMer’s life, health, well-being, and social and cultural world. The blog provides an account of how HSMers reach their individual goals, increase their sense of confidence and well-being, engage in peer-to-peer deliberation about drinking culture, and ‘rewrite’ drinking culture.

## What do HSMers blog about?

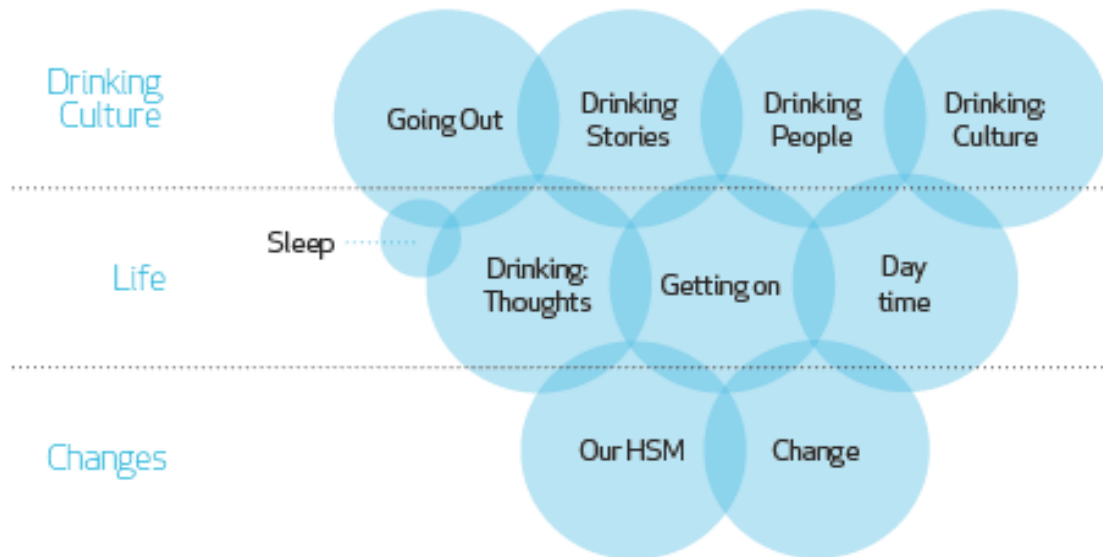
For this analysis, the blog data consisted of 2,190 blog posts from 1,768 HSMers. This set of data consisted of every blog post by every HSMer, posted between 11 January 2009 and 2 August 2011. The main blog analysis excludes posts by HSM’s founder, Chris Raine.

Leximancer was used to organise and analyse the data. Leximancer is a natural language semantics software package (Smith and Humphreys, 2006). The program uses a grounded approach to identify emergent concepts in a body of text and how they are related to each other. Leximancer facilitates analysis that is strongly grounded in the text. It begins with a semantic analysis that identifies concepts by analysing words that appear frequently together and apart. This gives a dictionary and thesaurus for the text. The second phase of the analysis is relational by mapping how concepts are related to one another within the text. Using Leximancer, researchers iteratively generate a map of concepts organised spatially in themes.

Once the map is generated, categorical data can be associated with categories and themes on the map. In this case, each blog post was recorded with information on the HSMer’s gender, age, goals, alcohol consumption, and time-stamped by the number of days the HSMer had been undertaking their HSM experience.

Figure 1 summarises the key themes from the HSM blog posts into three categories: *Drinking Culture*, *Life* and *Changes*.

FIGURE: 1 – KEY CATEGORIES AND THEMES FROM THE HSM BLOG POSTS (LEXIMANCER MAP)



### *Drinking Culture*

The first category is *Drinking Culture*, which encompasses themes that detail HSMers' descriptions, reflections and critiques of drinking practices and culture. These themes are *Going Out*, *Drinking Stories*, *Drinking People* and *Drinking Culture*.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Going Out* theme, HSMers described cultural rituals that revolve around drinking such as after work drinks, twenty-first birthdays and clubbing. In the *Drinking Stories* theme, HSMers recount stories that are either great memories or sources of regret. These blog posts revolve around a single isolated interaction or reflect in detail on a particular event or social space. In *Drinking People*, HSMers describe how their own drinking practices are embedded in a wider drinking culture constructed historically, part of the national identity, promoted by alcohol brands, sports organisations, clubs, and music festivals. In *Drinking Culture*, HSMers document challenges in their HSM experience. These can be individual challenges like overcoming the desire to have a drink and social challenges like being provoked by a friend in a social setting.

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<sup>2</sup> *Drinking culture* is the name of both a theme and a theme category.

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## Life

The second theme category is *Life*, encompassing themes related to undertaking an HSM experience. *Daytime* captures either people's regrets about days wasted hungover, or excitement and enthusiasm for doing new things with the day and the weekend. *Daytime* captures the HSM idea that HSMers do not say 'no' to alcohol, they say 'yes' to their HSM goals. *Drinking Thoughts* relates to HSMers' reflections on their drinking practices and motivations. The *Getting On* theme details HSMers' efforts to 'get on' with their lives now that they are not drinking.

## Changes

The theme category *Changes* includes themes related directly to articulating the change process and the HSM experience. *Change* refers to HSMers' documented changes in their health, well-being, outlook, study patterns, professional goals, and creative pursuits. In this theme, HSMers' blog posts often articulate the project of building a different sort of social and cultural life. HSMers document their efforts to change, the strategies they employed, and the negotiation with peers that took place. The *Our HSM* theme refers to HSMers' engagement with their experience. It includes evolving self-assessment and ownership of their personal HSM experience and sharing what they have learned with other HSMers as they move through this personal experience. Their own successes and challenges become a resource for other HSMers.

Importantly, within a single blog post an HSMer may incorporate, or move between several of these themes. They might move from describing a drinking ritual or practice to think about the consequences of that ritual to their efforts to change through their HSM experience.

Excerpts from the blog posts are presented in the following sections to illustrate some of the key categories and themes. Each of these excerpts is an indicative piece of text drawn from the data and related directly to that theme on the Leximancer map in Figure 1.

## Going Out

*Going Out* captures HSMers recounting their experiences going out drinking or not drinking. The 'first night out sober' is a typical HSM blog post that occurs early in the HSM experience. In the account below, HSMer #6, 12 days into their HSM experience, describes their first night out sober in relation to their usual drinking practices:

I never dance when I'm sober. Sorry, rather, I never used to dance when I was sober. I woke up Saturday morning feeling tired, but not sick. How good! Saturday night and I headed to a house party. Actually it was more Saturday afternoon when I got there. I was a little nervous about going to a house party this early and not drinking. Afternoon sessions usually get pretty messy. But it was great. The guitars were out and we had a massive 10 person sing along to Beatles and Doors covers. I ended my night about midnight.

(Days into HSM: 12, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

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The same HSMer also recounts an interaction with a peer at a party about why they weren't drinking:

At one point I was standing, obviously without a drink in my hand, observing everything going on. Someone asked me whether I was driving. I said I was and asked why he'd asked me that. He said it was because I had a driving look on my face. I found that interesting. I made a mental note to try and make sure that no one asks me that question again.

(Days into HSM: 12, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

Posts about 'going out sober' recount both the individual's perceptions of drinking culture, their own experience, and peer interactions. In the account below, HSMer #1,048, 19 days into his HSM, describes a night out at a dance club and his attempts to resist the ritual consumption of alcohol within his peer group. As he is handed shots and Canadian Club (CC) by his peers he finds ways to give them away. The account captures the frustration and enjoyment of being sober in the dance club:

First night out – ... at the met! First half of the night was rough, something so familiar about the feeling it was nearly impossible not to go straight to the bar. Like a default patter [sic]. In, up to spy, shot, CC, shot, dance, air synths, repeat 3-7. I know this isn't going to be the last time I have this conflict either. The first shot was the hardest, kinda like leaving a friend hanging on a high five, and enduring the awkward pause while they check if you're serious or not. First hurdle clear and almost instantly a CC appears in my hand, if this is a test... It's bullshit! I bleed CC!... After a period of contemplative drink warming I find an over for that one too... This water is really refreshing! I really need to pee – lots... It's 3am, The rolling wave of techno that has been building up for the last 3 hours has finally crashed! And it's fkn rad! I know where I would be under any other circumstances, and I'm not too far off it actually, just a little more aware of it all. (and physical [sic] able to write that last paragraph). Argh! Amazing!

(Days into HSM: 19, Post Count: 13, male, ID 1,048)

In the account below HSMer #205, 78 days into his HSM, as part of a long post describing a weekend away with friends organised around the consumption of alcohol, describes a conversation he had with a friend that he would normally 'never have had sober':

So like old times, a 4am deep and meaningful conversation ensued. The only difference being that this time I was sober. This was unbelievably enlightening. We talked about how times had changed, things have changed and people have changed. We looked back over the years and what really struck home was how this words of wisdom given a few years ago really do hold true. To be able to have an almost identical conversation to that of 3 years ago and to in that moment realise how although I didn't believe him when he said everything would be okay, he was actually right. It was as if I was holding a before and after snap shot before my eyes. It was another light bulb moment. If I'd been drinking we probably still would have had a similar conversation but without the realization and therefore without the benefit that this brings. Similarly, I question whether before my HSM I would have had this conversation sober? Probably not.

(Days into HSM: 78, Post Count: 46, ID 205)

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In these excerpts each HSMer describes being challenged, overcoming those challenges, and ultimately enjoying or appreciating the experience of being sober in a context where they would normally be consuming alcohol. In each case, the HSMer suggests that by going out sober they can enjoy themselves in new ways and have different conversations.

### *Drinking Stories: challenges and failures*

HSMers also use their blog posts to document challenges and failures or ‘slip ups’. In the excerpt below HSMer #895 details a ‘relapse’:

Okay, so I kind of relapsed this weekend. My girlfriends and I had our annual girl’s [sic] weekend and I drank with them on Friday night. It was a conscious decision made by me, not peer pressure. We drank, caught up, talked and danced the night away at the pub downstairs from our hotel. Saturday morning however, was hideous – and it reminded me why I started this challenge in the first place. What a waste of a day!

(Days into HSM: 40, Post Count 4, ID 895)

Rather than see the relapse as having ‘failed’, the reflecting on the relapse on the blog leads HSMers to reconsider and recommit to their HSM goals. HSMers also appeared to use the blog posts to honestly acknowledge challenges and slip ups. HSMer #804, seven days into her HSM, detailed consuming alcohol after a fight with her boyfriend. In a post seven days later she documented her on-going challenges and achievements:

Well, I haven’t had a drink for over a week and I don’t feel like I’m craving it every day! I also haven’t had a drink of coke for about 3 weeks! I’ve still been a bit up and down after my boyfriend broke up with me, but it’s getting easier too. I’ve been walking every day after work. Yesterday I went for a massive walk before work and I felt great all day!! So, I’m trying to get ready early again today so I can get another walk in this morning. I have been feeling extremely anxious still and it’s really not about anything in particular, but just a horrible physical feeling. Walking and yoga is helping, but I woke up at 4 am this morning feeling anxious again. So, I guess that is why I needed to join this website: to learn how to get rid of my anxiety without using alcohol.

(Days into HSM: 15, Post Count: 18, ID 804)

The blog appears to be used by HSMers as a space to acknowledge challenges and ‘relapses’, to be honest and accountable, and to reflect on the place of alcohol in their life and identity. These uses of the blog correspond with accounts HSMers relayed in a series of in-depth interviews where they explained how they used the blog to reflect on the role of alcohol in their life.

HSMers also used their blog posts to reflect on the challenges of doing HSM or not enjoying going out sober. HSMer #88 posted:

I spent my 25th birthday sober. Yes. Sober. If the first sentence sounded inexplicably morose in your head, (not dissimilar to a doctor giving a patient bad news), we could be related. If the words that followed were steeped in melancholy, well! Pull up a chair and sit by me. We’ll drown our

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sorrows in a couple of G + T s. Hold the G. When it comes to words, there is nothing as cruel as the word lisp, or more sobering as the word sober. Except for me. Sufficiently depressed? This should just about bring you into my headspace the night before my 25th.

(Days into HSM: 57, Post Count: 9, female, ID 88)

Although she intended to complete her HSM and didn't relapse, she used the blog to acknowledge and explain a night out she found difficult without drinking.

### *Drinking Culture: peer-to-peer deliberation*

HSMers use their blog posts to document the reactions of their peers. Some of these accounts are about face-to-face reactions (as seen above with HSMer #6) while other accounts document the reaction of friends on Facebook. Below, the HSMer recounts a number of peer responses to her announcement of her HSM on Facebook. In the in-depth interviews with HSMers, some of them felt their friends really did support them and were just joking, others felt their friends were more serious. In the excerpt below, the HSMer details responses but concludes that her friends do support her:

I mentioned my 12 week Challenge on Facebook - and was flooded with responses such as "yeah good luck with that, nil alcohol....pffffff" AND I'm having some white wine while cooking spag bol right now, sucks to be you!" AND "Very ambitious [...]! I've tried to have fun without alcohol. Unsuccessfully." AND THE BEST OF ALL. "What I am seeing here is that not many people have faith in you!! What sort of reputation do you have with wine etc? You go girl. I'm with you. Not sure about the super fit thing but I can do the no alcohol thing on my head!! Cheers to you - with a non-alcohol refreshment of course! XX". Yes, I have a reputation with wine, with having A LOT of it in a sitting....I look forward to having 2-3 drinks at most per night on weekends and none most nights of the week when this 12 weeks is over. I look forward to clarity on my binge drinking, how it affects my life and how not drinking like that anymore can change things for the better. I'm supported by my loving B.F (who doesn't really drink Alcohol...and sometimes finds it hard that I drink too much) and despite the Facebook chatter I'm also supported by my friends.

(Days into HSM: 29, Post Count: 2, ID 45)

The excerpt above detailed exchanges between the HSMer and her existing peer group. Often this deliberation is about why that person is participating in HSM and what they are gaining from it. Blog posts also demonstrated how HSM creates peer-to-peer deliberation within the 'in-group' of the HSM community. The excerpt below gives a common account of how an HSMer used the blog posts of other HSMers to inform their own experience:

One of the things I have enjoyed most about the Hello Sunday Morning blog is reading other people's thoughts on life. I've enjoyed reading about their personal struggles, their triumphs, things they've learned. All in all it's adding up to a wealth of insight into existing. And like I said before, it's not stuff you necessarily talk about everyday over a drink. This might be pretty obvious but it made me realise just how much I can learn from the people around me.

(Days into HSM: 94, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

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Writing on the first day of her HSM, HSMer #1,445 explained the variety of reactions from her friends:

Today I told some of my friends that I had joined HSM and the responses were mixed... some thought it was a good idea, others seem disappointed in me... as if I am going to be boring etc when we are out... one of the disappointed ones I think is my partner, which makes me a little sad... Alright so tomorrow is Friday (Clap, Clap Genius!) I am not worried very much because I will be going to my parent's farm and will be very busy riding horses etc... and my Mum doesn't drink much either so I know she'll be happy for me. I am hoping some of my friends will join up soon. Then I can follow them :D

(Days into HSM: 1, Post Count: 6, ID 1,445)

HSMer #33, attempting HSM for the second time recounted:

Many of my friends have thought it was a weird thing for me to do - "you're not an alcoholic! You don't need to give up alcohol", "as long as you drink in moderation", "I drink more than you!"... And these things may all be true but I know that this is something I need to do, for myself.

(Days into HSM: 70, Post Count: 7, ID 33)

In these accounts their peers offer them a series of colloquial 'theories' to discredit their participation, but in each case the HSMer sets out on their own terms. The blog posts demonstrate how reactions and negotiations with peers and partners are complex and multi-faceted. HSMer #1,004, four days into her HSM, explains that she hasn't told her boyfriend yet and is apprehensive about doing so because she is worried 'he will want to do HSM too'. She uses the blog to ask, 'has anyone else felt like this?' and to reflect on the feeling:

I think I have spent the past few days thinking this over and it still makes little sense. I guess maybe inside I feel like I will not be proving anything to myself, if someone else does it too (especially if they don't really care for drinking that much). For him 3 months off wouldn't be much of a stretch and I feel like it would take something away from how important this feels for me.

(Days into HSM: 4, Post Count: 2, female, ID 1,004)

Peers, partners and friends appear as concepts on the blog in a variety of narratives. Some recount friends who are supportive, others who are dismissive, many blog posts recount conversations with friends about HSM and drinking culture. The blog posts also details the complex role alcohol plays in people's relationships.

### *Drinking Thoughts: reflecting on drinking*

HSMers use their blog posts to reflect on personal drinking practices and motivations. In the excerpt below HSMer #248, 31 days into their HSM experience, reflect on their usual drinking practices and then poses a number of reflective questions:

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Drinking is something I do when I'm by myself and feel like I've failed at something, feel like I can't make a right decision or when I'm feeling disappointed or hurt, just feeling uncomfortable feelings I suppose. Those are the times that I binge drink. It is an emotional thing. In the last couple of weeks, I have been asking myself a lot of questions about why that is? Why is that my automatic reaction to those feelings? Why instead of accepting failures, hurts and disappointments come along and then using my ability to say Yes, that didn't turn out how I wanted it too, but so what, I can try again. I can do something different to change the outcome, why do I use alcohol to cope? Why instead of choosing to think positively and react with positive coping skills do I choose the negative? I don't really has [sic] the answer. I think it is a learned behaviour and habit, I know from a young age I learnt that if you are feeling down, have a drink, it will calm you down, make you feel better.

(Days into HSM: 31, Post Count: 3, ID 248)

HSMer #41 explains that, upon reflection, they drink to reward themselves or as an escape and they express a desire to develop other rewards and relaxation strategies. HSMer #200 explained that upon reflecting on their drinking behaviour, and repeated failed attempts to stop drinking, that they would need to do HSM for a period longer than three months.

HSMers' reflections develop throughout their HSM experience. HSMer #20, writing 167 days after beginning their HSM experience reflects on how they 'connected those three months of sobriety with change, personal growth, health, purity/clarity of mind and being pro-active' but was 'anxious about going back to drinking':

Eventually this led to an influx of wild emotions and interesting thought streams that in the beginning I welcomed; but in the end found to be somewhat overwhelming and draining at times. You see, I found that when I did drink again I was disappointed. Alcohol had lost its magic. I was frustrated and confused, chasing the euphoria of letting go that I once so adored. Now I am grieving for my lost friend; alcohol, but as I am learning, death can also be a very beautiful thing.

(Days into HSM 167, Post Count: 13, ID 20)

HSMers reflect on their drinking, but also how their drinking is connected to misgivings and disappointments about their life, goals and achievements. HSMer #16 explains how she can't 'actually remember the last time I went out dancing, or out to the city, sober'. And that she had 'come to the conclusion... that I had not achieved any of the goals, or dreams I had set out for myself in the last three years'. She was aware that 'no one thought I could do it. Not even some of my best mates'.

### *Drinking Culture: drinking and relationships*

In the blog, HSMers detail the role of alcohol in their relationships. Some of these accounts document the role alcohol plays in facilitating relationships. HSMer #6 explained that:

When we drink, we say what we mean and what we're feeling without really thinking about it. We're more honest. Sometimes this is a bad thing. Sometimes we say stuff to people we don't know that well and we regret it. We say stuff that we just need to get off our chests and we say it



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at the wrong times. But sometimes it's really good. Sometimes we say what we mean to people who mean a lot to us when we didn't have the courage to say it when we're sober. We shouldn't need alcohol to be like that. That is one of the things I said I wanted to learn how to do during Hello Sunday Morning. I'm trying my best.

(Days into HSM: 17, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

Following this theme, HSMer #46 explained that they were going to make a 'concerted effort to engage people in as much conversation sober as I would when I was intoxicated'. The blog posts illustrate HSMers' efforts to transform not just their drinking but their relationships.

### *Drinking People and Change: recording the experience*

As their HSM experience progresses, HSMers use their blog posts to document their successes and challenges. They articulate specific social moments and exchanges that exhibit the feelings of achievement or stress in attempting to change their drinking practices and culture. Many of these accounts are about being sober in a situation where peers are drinking. Other accounts document progress towards individual goals like saving money, studying or losing weight. They also document changes in emotional well-being, creativity and relationships with family since they stopped drinking. As they record their own experience, they also connect these back to their peer group's drinking practices.

HSMer #145, 48 days into their HSM experience, reflects on their friends' embellished recollections of nights spent out drinking and how they have learned to enjoy going out without drinking:

It's also interesting to see the next morning the responses people have from the night sometimes yes it is a great night but so many times the night is described as the best thing ever. I was there and I was sober sure it was fun but a lot of the time they were too drunk to dance or even talk to anyone or else they said some embarrassing things or passed out, vomited or even farted in front of potential friends (I won't mention names haha). Somehow they manage to forget their night and convinced themselves it was the best thing since sliced bread? A lot of the time there are just a list of regrets and the comment I hear a lot is I've got to stop drinking. Just have to stop drinking so much. But easier said than done!!! I know I've been to two festivals since I've been not drinking and out a fair bit I have the best time. Recently I went to Parklife in Brisbane I was so tempted to do something but I ended up spending the day COMPLETELY sober no drinks, no drugs.

(Days into HSM: 48, Post Count: 6, ID 145)

In these blog posts HSMers assert new norms and values around drinking culture; these often challenge their previously held beliefs and practices. Repeated statements such as 'the fact that', 'the fact is', 'I realised', and 'the point I'm making' are employed as they make a case for why they hold their newly formed views about drinking culture, and why they are challenging the norms of their peer group.

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HSMers can also record successes in achieving personal goals they set. HSMer #41, reflecting on their HSM experience recorded:

When I started to this [sic] I made the commitment of getting my finances under control. Which I have! The end of my debt is in sight :) which before I did this was something I thought I would carry around for years.

Another HSMer explained that:

When I decided to do this HSM thing you would naturally think that I was preventing myself from doing things, namely drinking. You would think that by putting a ban on booze I would be limiting myself; limiting what I could do and all that. What I've realised is that removing alcohol has done quite the opposite.

(Days into HSM: 88, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

Beyond achieving a personal goal, HSMer #6 also detailed how their HSM experience had helped them transform personal relationships and pay attention to how they might contribute to a social world and culture that wasn't dependent on the consumption of alcohol.

### *Change: reflecting on HSM*

The HSM blog is an open platform that documents the experiences of the many HSMers. HSMers use the blog to create the content and messages in HSM. Messages would not exist without HSMers generating blog posts and using social media to create and circulate them. Those HSMers use the blog posts to explain challenges and strategies they use to get through their HSM experience. Often these posts adopt 'in-group' talk where HSMers talk directly to other HSMers offering them advice and encouragement. Reflecting 386 days into their HSM experience, HSMer #72 wrote, 'thank you to everyone who has taken this journey with me and to all those people seeking and experimenting on their own HSM, I wish love upon your spirits and light upon your paths'. In these parts of their blog posts, HSMers go beyond talking about and reflecting on drinking culture to document their efforts and successes in changing their drinking practices and the place of alcohol in their identity and social life.

In the excerpt below, HSMer #7, writing 99 days into his HSM explains how through HSM, he 'consciously made an effort to step back and analyse my own behaviour'. He also goes on to articulate how HSM acts as a 'rite of passage' that is otherwise missing in our culture. He connected HSM to a wider critique of Australian society and culture:

In many cultures there is some kind of ceremony or tradition to acknowledge the step into adulthood. Something to act as a turning point in a young person's life. Something that clearly outlines what is expected of them and when it is expected. This also justifies a shift in behaviour and prompts them to begin to behave in an adult way. We don't have anything like this in our culture. We have an 18th birthday to celebrate being old enough to drink and to vote. Apparently we celebrate our 21st birthdays as a coming of age ceremony of sorts, but I think we would all agree that these days it is more about getting together with friends and family to

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drink and get showered with special gifts. This is where I feel Hello Sunday Morning fits in. I think that every young person should take part in HSM as a coming of age celebration. Every young person around Australia, and maybe even throughout other western countries could commit just three months of their lives to stepping back and re-evaluating their own behaviour. If we all knew a little more about ourselves and had a little more insight, if we all had our priorities straight and were true to ourselves then there would no longer be the need to regularly drink copious amounts of alcohol. Many other cultures around the world have morals and traditions that inadvertently prevent people from behaving as recklessly as we do. Sometimes I am a little embarrassed by our carelessness. We live in one of the luckiest countries in the world, I feel we need to acknowledge and appreciate this more by behaving in a way that is respectful to others and to ourselves. Tomorrow I am going out with friends and I plan to have a few drinks. I now know that I won't get paralytic and I won't be hung over. I won't drink for the sake of getting drunk, rather I plan to drink slowly and enjoy my drinks. When I start to feel that I am losing [sic] self-control, instead of donning my who cares, you only live once, down a few more and make a night of it cap, I will just stop and enjoy the evening for what it is.

(Days into HSM: 99, Post Count: 10, ID 7)

The excerpt demonstrates how HSMers' reflections on their HSM experience often go beyond their changes in alcohol consumption. Changing alcohol consumption becomes a catalyst for changing other aspects of their life, and reflecting on alcohol consumption not as the problem, but as a symptom of more fundamental problems and shortcomings in our social and cultural life together. Through the blog posts, HSMers could articulate these nuanced perceptions of HSM, its role in their lives, and its possibilities.

Following a similar idea, HSMer #200, three days into his HSM experience and reflecting on the reactions of his peers to HSM, considered the wider cultural context:

When they realised I wasn't drinking they were confused. Are you working early?, are you sick?, are you on medication? No, no and no. And then came the question I should have been but wasn't prepared for. HA! How bad did you mess up? Come on, tell us! No one stops drinking unless they really f\*ck up. Not wanting to get wasted meant I was abnormal and no one was willing to let me off the hook. Twenty years ago, if someone weren't [sic] drinking it was no big deal it was normal. It really makes me think about when this shift in society's (specifically amongst young adults) drinking culture happened. What changed and why do people now think it is totally fine (often expected) to drink themselves silly? I suppose HSM is a glimmer of hope that this binge drinking epidemic is gradually losing its grip.

(Days into HSM: 3, Post Count: 4, ID 200)

He goes beyond his friends' questions to consider how HSM presses back on a normalised culture of excessive drinking. One of the HSMers reflects on HSM and documents how the blog's function as a peer-to-peer resource of advice and ideas for undertaking a period of sobriety.

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HSMer #6 explained on their blog:

One of the things I have enjoyed most about the Hello Sunday Morning blog is reading other people's thoughts on life. I've enjoyed reading about their personal struggles, their triumphs, things they've learned. All in all it's adding up to a wealth of insight into existing.

(Days into HSM: 94, Post Count: 12, ID 6)

HSM is an open platform that allows HSMers to blog about their own priority issues: whether they are challenges, strategies and/or achievements. HSMers are able to adapt the HSM concept to fit with their personal circumstances, peer group and cultural world. For instance, HSMer #586 reflecting at the end of her HSM wrote:

These past three months has been just another experience for me, another learning curve I guess, and in some ways has made me feel more comfortable with who I am. HSM wasn't something that I chose to do because I thought I had a problem with my drinking. I chose to do it as another experience, to see what it would be like and to see if I would find out anything new about myself and try to get some more motivation and focus in my life, which I did. All in all, this has been a positive experience for me, a time where I have just been able to think clearly and have to really confront and deal with issues and situations without alcohol. It does feel nice to feel as though your thoughts and ideas aren't blurred by alcohol and everything that you experience, the interactions and conversations are all real and not just drunken gibberish. Good luck to everyone else doing HSM, it's worth it ;)

(Days into HSM: 91, Post Count: 8, female, ID 586)

Some of the blog posts detail meaningful changes not just around the consumption of alcohol but also in the achievement of personal goals and sense of well-being. HSMer #33, 81 days into their HSM experience, wrote, 'something incredible has happened over the last week. I've become passionate about my life again'. They went on to explain:

I think a huge thing for me is being happy within myself without having to please others or have other people around me all the time. If they are true friends they will understand if I say no and I shouldn't feel guilty. Also if I don't make it out than I shouldn't feel any less included. If I start to truly believe this, then I would have had a successful HSM. So at the moment things are going well and I am very glad that I am trying HSM again. Hope you all have a good weekend!

(Days into HSM: 81, Post Count: 7, ID 33)

As HSMers talk with their peers, reflect and write their own experience, and read each other's blog posts, they build up a group narrative that 'theorises' HSM. HSMer #1,122 wrote about the wider cultural effect HSM has, 'my decision immediately forces others to question their own decisions'. He goes on:

It's easy to get swept up in a culture when everyone else is doing it; hell, I think Chris once used a similar phrase on the HSM front page when attempting to describe this idea to others. But the mere presence of an opposing view - in this case, not drinking - is enough to make people stop

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and think about their own choice. That thought process might only last a few seconds in some cases, but the point is that it's a shock to an individual's [sic] regular decision-making process. That, in a nutshell, is how I understand HSM, and why I think it works. If you plant enough of these dissenting seeds across the country, people might feel less inclined to drink to excess just for the sake of it. If there's a handful of HSMers in every social group across Australia at any one time, the effect could be huge. Or maybe not. I don't know. No-one does, really; not even Chris Raine, I suspect. The beauty of the idea is that the individual doesn't have to oppose drinking. I don't. I enjoy drinking; to excess, even, on occasion. But the fact that I'm not drinking for three months, and telling everyone around me about it during that time, forces introspection. We are social animals; we're finely attuned to the body language and actions of those around us (less so when drunk, to be fair).

(Days into HSM: 25, Post Count: 4, male, ID 1,122)

In these accounts, HSMers reflect on how their HSM experience enables them to stake out their own views, be accountable for their own actions, and honour their own achievements and challenges. Throughout the blog, HSMers report and reflect on the impact of HSM on their individual and social circumstances. While HSM can measure changes in alcohol consumption as a measure of social impact, on-going analysis of the blog can also help to conceptualise how behaviour change is interconnected with changes in life outlook, well-being, and social and cultural norms, values and practices.

## Do HSMers' blog posts change thematically over the course of their HSM experience?

The blog posts were coded, using the HSMer's start date; against how many days into their HSM experience the post was made. Using Leximancer, the blog posts were then cross-referenced by four time categories and the content themes. The four time categories were month one, month two, month three, and over three months. This enabled analysis of how the content of blog posts changed over the course of HSMers' experiences.

The analysis demonstrates changes in the thematic content of the blog posts across the three months (see Figure 2).

The first month is most strongly associated with themes related to the description of drinking practices and culture (such as *Drinking Culture* and *Going Out*). These posts capture HSMers' early efforts to describe and explain their drinking practices. As seen above, blog posts in these themes also document challenges and successes in changing their own practices within a drinking culture.

After the first month, the most dramatic change occurs in the blog posts' themes. HSMers move away from accounts of drinking practices towards more reflective and change-oriented content within the themes of *Change* and *Drinking Thoughts*.

The second month is associated with the *Getting On* and *Our HSM* theme where HSMers document their efforts to change, create strategies, and negotiate with peers.

The third month is associated with the *Our HSM* and *Life* themes. *Life* is conceptually related to the *Change* theme and, in Figure 1, sat within it. In these themes HSMers adopt ‘in-group’ talk, describing the impact their HSM experience has had on their life, and what strategies they can offer to other HSMers. To be able to make these assessments and contributions HSM must have had an impact on the role they perceive alcohol has in their social life and identity. The excerpts under this theme suggest that later in their HSM experience, HSMers take a more extrinsic or outward looking view, of drinking culture. They seek to offer advice, become leaders or change-makers.

Further analysis found that HSMers who post more frequently were more likely to provide advice on HSM and drinking culture in general. This suggested they became ‘leaders’ within the HSM network.

FIGURE: 2 – THEMATIC PROGRESSION OF HSM BLOG POSTS OVER TIME



## How does the frequency of blog posts affect the blog themes?

Analysis of the blog postings of a cross section of the HSMers (n=627, 35.5% of 1,768) found that the majority (n=353, 56.3%) only blogged once or twice: typically before and after their HSM experience. Of those who posted once or twice, most were very focused on their own personal journey, discussing issues relating to the *Changes* theme category: why they decided to engage in the HSM experience and the benefits of completion.

Of the HSMers who blogged monthly with three or four posts (n=128, 20.4%), they continued to focus on personal experiences. Most posts sat within the *Life* category, particularly the *Getting On* theme: HSMers in this group outlined their goals and aspirations and discussed some of the challenges they faced during their HSM experience.

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HSMers who posted on the blog five to ten times (n=114, 18.2%) generally blogged weekly. Their blog posts typically fell within the category *Drinking Culture*: particularly the experiential themes of *Drinking Stories* and *Going Out*. These blog posts were less introspective and more focused on peers and the drinking that occurred within their social settings.

Finally, the minority of this sample of HSMers (n=32, 5.1%) blogged more than 10 times during their HSM experience and often continued to blog after completion. They were more likely to have committed to longer HSM experiences (six to 12 months) and their posts include issues within the *Changes* theme category: *Our HSM* and *Change* and the *Drinking Culture* category (*Drinking People*). This group gave consideration to issues beyond their own personal goals and experiences, to give regard to the role of alcohol in broader Australian society.

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## The HSM experience

An online questionnaire was emailed to new HSMers within a week of their registration and again within one week of completing HSM. From a random sample of 300 HSMers, 229 responses (76.3% response rate) were received to the pre-HSM questionnaire within the first week of registration and 43 responses (14.3% response rate) to the post-HSM questionnaire sent out to HSMers who had finished their HSM experience within one month of completion.

The questionnaires asked a series of open-ended questions about individuals' motivations for commencing HSM, the effects they anticipated their HSM experience would have and the degree to which they felt accountable to their HSM goals. HSMers were also asked for self-assessments on their relationships with friends and family, performance in study, improvement in work life, saving money and participation in community-based activities such as volunteering.

## What are HSMers' motivations for starting HSM?

At the beginning and end of HSM, a random sample of 300 HSMers was invited to complete a questionnaire consisting of several open-ended and categorical questions about their motivations, goals and experiences. At the beginning of their HSM experience, 110 HSMers reported their motivations for participation. These motivations were inductively coded to identify key themes. Analysis identified three motivational themes, as outlined below. Importantly, HSMers could not always be identified only with one theme; many HSMers' stated motivations encompass multiple themes. These themes were also reflected in 17 in-depth interviews conducted with HSMers in 2010 as part of a separate case study undertaken at the University of Newcastle and in the opening blog posts of HSMers.

### Theme 1: Desire and dissatisfaction

This theme refers to HSMers who reported they were motivated by a desire for a better life or dissatisfaction with their current individual and social practices, routines and expectations around alcohol consumption. For instance, one HSMer wrote:

I worked in a bar for eight years and excessive drinking had just become normal. I was desperate to chase my dream of theatre and this needs every second of my time – I needed to wrestle my time and my life back from nights out and hangovers. I wanted to replace temporary happiness with the chance to build up the long lasting kind...

Another HSMer noted that:

I realised that it was actually my relationship with alcohol that was standing in the way of every important goal I had and still have in my life.



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Another HSMer described dissatisfaction with the norms and routines of drinking:

I have always struggled with drinking just because it was a social norm, and not always because I wanted to.

Similarly, another HSMer reported:

I was compelled to show others that being constantly drunk isn't what it's all about.

Some HSMers articulated their motivations in terms of a life they were dissatisfied with or the desire for a better life with alcohol only as a mitigating factor. They expressed the perception that drinking was part of a life they wanted to improve somehow. Other HSMers expressed motivations that placed alcohol consumption as an intrinsic or determining factor in a life they were dissatisfied with as well as acknowledging physical and mental health problems. Further research could help to demonstrate how these differing motivations impact on the HSM experience of individual HSMers.

## Theme 2: A personal challenge

HSMers also reported being motivated by intrinsic and specific personal goals that may or may not be related to alcohol consumption. These included goals like improving health, losing weight, saving money to travel, or finishing study. For instance:

I wanted to be fitter and healthier and see what my life was like without alcohol.

And another who wrote:

It sounded like a personal challenge that could only be good for me, my health, my perception of alcohol and my bank account.

## Theme 3: Intervention

HSMers also reported being motivated by serious mental or physical health issues related to or exacerbated by excessive drinking. For instance:

Waking up with unexplained injuries, in a stranger's house, missing my phone, woke me up to the idea that there was more to my weekends, and helped me make the choice I'd been putting off.

Or another who wrote:

I was being heavily impacted on, mentally, because of my drinking. I have a diagnosed mental illness and was using drinking to self-medicate. I knew that alcohol use was just contributing to my deteriorating mental health state.

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## What are HSMers' goals?

As part of their HSM registration, each HSMer was given the opportunity to specify their goals prior to embarking upon their HSM experience. Table 1 (overleaf) summarises the goals of 1,253 HSMers (70.1% of all HSMers). HSMers were able to specify up to five personal goals in an open-ended format which were then coded into 15 goal categories.

Table 1 lists in descending order the number of HSMers to nominate goals in each goal category. The top five goals types were to:

- improve health (70.5%)
- improve well-being (51.9%)
- change individual drinking behaviours (26.9%)
- learn to socialise without needing alcohol (23.6%) and
- save money (23.3%).

TABLE: 1 – HSMERS' GOALS, BY CATEGORY

Goal Category	Number	Percentage of HSMers whose goals fell within this category (%)
Improving physical health	858	70.5
Improving mental health and sense of emotional well-being	631	51.9
Changing a specific individual drinking behaviour	327	26.9
Learning to socialise without alcohol or change alcohol consumption in relation to social pastimes	287	23.6
Save money	283	23.3
Simply to complete the challenge	271	22.3
Improve relationships with friends, partners and family	223	18.3
Have an impact on drinking culture	122	10.0
Achieve an individual personal goal	101	8.3
Improve confidence	96	7.8
Achieve or undertake a creative pursuit	86	7.0
Study harder, complete qualification and improve grades	86	7.0
Achieve a goal related to profession or career	63	5.2
Sleep more and sleep better	32	2.6
Save money to travel	31	2.5

(NOTE: the total number and percentage exceeds the number of HSMers as some HSMers specified up to five goals, with some of these falling within more than one goal category)

The goals identified by HSMers demonstrate an array of perceived benefits from undertaking HSM beyond simply reducing alcohol consumption. Some of these goals overlapped thematically. For instance, a user might express several health related goals. In such cases, as listed in Table 1, users would only have been counted once as having a health goal.

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## What is the most challenging part of an HSM experience?

Following their HSM experiences, 32 HSMers (of 43 respondents; 74.4% response rate) provided information via the questionnaire on their success in achieving their goals and the challenges they faced. Of the 32 HSMers, 27 (84.4%) completed their HSM experience without drinking. Nineteen reported achieving all of their goals and 13 reported achieving some of their goals.

Those who reported achieving only some of their goals indicated this was due to three main impediments.

- The first group of impediments related to laziness or a lack of personal commitment.
- The second group of impediments included social circumstances like peer pressure, changing relationships or changes at work.
- The third group of impediments included setting goals that were not clear enough or unrealistic.

Regardless of whether HSMers achieved their goals or not, the questionnaire asked them report the most challenging aspect of HSM. Thirty-three HSMers listed challenges that related to:

- Social situations and routines where alcohol consumption was normally routine like a family dinner, sharing a glass of wine with a friend, social events like barbecues, and going out with friends.
- Committing to the whole period of abstinence once it became routine and the 'novelty' wore off.
- Confronting aspects of life that previously alcohol had played a role in repressing or masking. Without alcohol, as one HSMer noted, it was necessary to 'deal with hard aspects of my life which I had been ignoring'.

Several HSMers reported that confronting and overcoming these challenges was ultimately the reward of participating in an HSM experience.

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## HSM and alcohol consumption

The core focus of HSM is HSMers (and by proxy, their immediate and online social circles) reflecting on their relationship with alcohol. A number of studies have found a link between people's beliefs about the effects of alcohol on behaviour, moods and emotions and with drinking in adolescents and adults (Leigh 1989; Brown et al. 1987). Further, research into the relationship between beliefs and drinking behaviour confirms a reliable relationship, which implies that these expectancies play a role in the initiation and maintenance of drinking (Maisto et al. 1981; Brown et al. 1987; Leigh 1989). Alcohol-related outcome expectancies are defined as 'beliefs about the effects of alcohol on behaviour, cognition, moods, and emotions' (Leigh 1989, p. 432). While positive expectancy includes the positive and negative reinforcing properties of alcohol, negative expectancy embraces the anticipated negative consequences of alcohol use.

### Consumption and Well-Being Survey

HSMers who completed the qualitative questionnaire were invited to complete a survey pre- and post-HSM comprised of four tools commonly used in assessments of alcohol consumption and well-being. These four surveys were:

1. The Alcohol Outcome Expectancies Scale (AOES)
2. The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Tool (AUDIT)
3. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (21 Question version) (DASS21)
4. World Health Organization – Quality of Life (Brief version) (WHO-QOL-BREF)

In this report some preliminary results using the AUDIT and AOES instruments are presented.

### Alcohol Outcome Expectancies Scale (AOES)

To measure HSMers' beliefs, for comparison before and after the HSM, the AOES was utilised. The AOES is a 34-question measure of the degree to which individuals expect alcohol to produce a variety of general and specific effects. This scale contains the four positive outcome expectancy scales: social facilitation, fun, sex, and tension reduction and the four negative outcome expectancy scales social, emotional, physical, and cognitive performance. Both positive and negative expectancies presented good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .94 and .88, respectively) in the original publication (Leigh & Stacy, 1993). The AOES has been used in similar studies to predict concurrent self-reported alcohol consumption (Critchlow, 1987; Leigh, 1989; Leigh and Stacy, 1994), draw links between sensation seeking and alcohol use (Urban et al., 2008), predict correlations between positive associations and speed of consumption (Johnson and Fromme, 1994) and future alcohol consumption (Christiansen et al., 1989; Stacy et al., 1991).

### Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Tool (AUDIT)

It is hypothesised that as beliefs around alcohol consumption change in HSMers, so their level of consumption is altered. In this study, the AUDIT is used to measure HSMers' perceived alcohol

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consumption. The AUDIT was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a simple method of screening for excessive drinking and to assist in brief assessment by clinicians and researchers. The AUDIT is the mostly widely used and recognised measure for determining severity of alcohol use. It consists of 10 questions scored from 0 to four (questions 9 and 10 have three scoring categories as opposed to five). Scores are added together and the total score can be compared with the cut-off scores provided to identify hazardous and harmful drinkers, and those with alcohol dependence. A cut-off score of eight or more indicates a hazardous or harmful pattern of drinking.

Internal validity of the AUDIT instrument has been completed in detailed studies by the WHO and reproduced by many studies, for example Conigrave et al. (1995) found that the AUDIT proved a valuable tool for screening for hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption. The AUDIT has been used in numerous studies and is utilised by government health services (including Queensland Health) and Police Diversion Initiatives (e.g. Queensland Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative) as a reliable measure of self-reported alcohol use.

## Preliminary data collection and analysis

Forty-five HSMers (from a total of 300) completed the surveys prior to their HSM experience and 33 completed surveys following HSM. This low response rate was compounded by the fact that, of the 33 who completed the post-HSM survey, only 15 HSMers completed both a before and after survey (within the first week of registration and one month after their HSM experience). Due to self-selecting and the small response rate, it was not possible to conduct statistically significant analysis of this data. This meant analysis of responses to individual tools and correlation between tools could not be conducted to determine how changes in consumption were related to changes in well-being.

A further limitation was the asynchronous use of tools. HSMers were invited to complete the surveys in their first week of registration and a month after their HSM experience. This inconsistency meant that HSMers very close to the finish of their HSM experience for instance may report different alcohol consumption and expectancies than those who had been finished for up to a month.

The data collected from the 15 HSMers who completed pre- and post-survey questionnaires suggested changes in consumption and well-being. The average AUDIT score of those who participated in the survey prior to their HSM experience was hazardous (17.14). The average AUDIT score of those who completed the survey after their HSM experience was moderate (11.64).

This change was also reflected in the AUDIT scores of the 10 HSMers of the Newcastle case study, whose AUDIT scores were, on average, hazardous (13.67) before HSM and low risk (7.00) after HSM. Responses to the AOES, WHO-QOL-BREF and DASS21 tests also indicated improvements in well-being after completing an HSM experience.

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# Implications and further research

## Outcomes

### Implications from the blog analysis

From the analysis of the blog posts, the following preliminary propositions can be made. The blog facilitates peer-to-peer collaboration, negotiation and deliberation. In-depth interviews conducted in 2010 also suggested that the use of social networking sites like Facebook in collaboration with the blog facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges (Walczak, Shah, Kelly, Sun & Los, 2011). Rather than seek to disseminate a set message to an audience, HSM creates a communicative space where HSMers disseminate health messages to their peers via their own experiences and stories. HSMers 'rewrite' and 'repurpose' the program's strategies into their own language and cultural experiences. HSMers use social media to document their individual challenges and changes, and to share with their peer groups and broader society their experiences, encourage different drinking behaviours and norms, and critique cultural practices.

The combination of blogging and social networking creates a sense of community; HSMers feel they are part of a 'group' that shares experiences and strategies for negotiating the challenge. The identification with a group increases their self-confidence, well-being and social capital. The platform provides support, and sometimes a counter-weight to their peer network.

The combination of blogging and social networking makes HSMers accountable. Through the blog they have to publicly declare their goals and aspirations. This public visibility makes them feel socially accountable. They need to 'own' their experiences, express their challenges, and account for their progress.

Through the blog, HSMers create an imagined community characterised by particular narratives, norms and values. The blog posts are a platform through which HSMers identify with and feel connected to the norms and values of the HSM community. HSMers use the blog as both a personal reflective space and as a space for sharing ideas, strategies and critiquing drinking culture in general.

HSMers' blog posts change over the course of their HSM experience. They shift from descriptions of drinking culture and the setting out of individual goals, to documenting challenges and achievements, to reflecting on drinking practices and culture, to offering strategies for negotiating change. The blog posts are collaborative resources that offer support, accountability and guidance to HSMers.

### The HSM experience

The qualitative questionnaire data gives insight into the self-reported motivations, goals and challenges HSMers face. The key themes and goals indicated that HSMers were motivated to change their behaviour to improve their quality of life. This was reflected in cited goals to improve HSMers' health, well-being, social life and/or financial position. The common reasons for not achieving these goals were

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a lack of personal commitment, a lack of support from peers and associated pressure in social situations or overly ambitious goals. In some cases, HSM was more than just a program of abstinence; it led to the confrontation of underlying issues which had previously been masked by alcohol use.

## HSM and Alcohol Consumption

Despite not having statistically significant data to analyse changes in consumption and well-being, the use of the AOES and AUDIT delivered valuable insights. The data collected suggested a reduction in consumption and an increase in well-being over time, as HSMers continued through their HSM experiences. The selected tools appear appropriate for assessing changes in consumption and well-being over the course of an HSM and at set intervals of three, six and 12 months post-HSM and in the period after. Some of the tools, such as the WHO-QOL-BREF and DASS21, however are onerous to complete and perhaps more suited to a clinical setting, rather than an online survey. This may explain the low response rate. With this in mind, future analysis of consumption should use the AUDIT and AOES to provide the best combination of consumption and well-being data with relatively simple and user-friendly instruments.

## Summary and next steps

The research project has played a role in assisting HSM to conceptualise and evaluate the program by understanding HSMers' experiences. As a result of the research, HSM has:

- A stronger understanding of HSMers' motivations, goals and challenges. The qualitative questionnaire data gives insight into the self-reported motivations, goals and challenges HSMers face. As these data can be collected as part of the HSM process, they provide a strong basis for on-going analysis of the HSM experience and its social impact.
- Trialled appropriate tools for use with HSM to measure changes in alcohol consumption and well-being.
- Progressed the development of an approach to determine a representative sample of the HSM population and collecting representative data.
- Developed techniques for using the blog posts as a resource that offers insight into how HSMers experience the program. The blog posts of HSMers offer rich insights into how the process is documented and experienced, and the changes that take place over the course of the process.
- Explored ways for potential HSMers to gauge their readiness to commit to their own HSM experiences (Walczak, et al. 2011). HSM is considering providing information on its site on the Transtheoretical Model of behaviour change (Prochaska, diclemente, & Norcross, 1992; cited in Walczak et al., 2011) to assist potential HSMers to determine if they are ready to take action and participate in HSM. Strategically posed questions relating to each stage of behaviour change prompts the potential HSMer to consider what they could do to move through the first three stages (pre-contemplation, contemplation and preparation) and be ready to successfully undertake their own HSM experience.



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The aim of this project was to evaluate the social impact of HSM. The project successfully identified useful ways of conceptualising and evaluating social impact through blog analysis, HSMer questionnaires and surveys.

The limitation of the project was not being able to collect representative consumption and well-being data. However, appropriate tools have been identified for measuring consumption and well-being in the future. As a result of the project, on-going methods have been identified for evaluating social impact by monitoring the blog, undertaking qualitative questionnaires, and collecting consumption and well-being data.

Throughout the project, data were easier to collect when they were 'naturally occurring' or 'built in' to the HSM process. For instance, the blog data were generated by HSMers as part of their participation. To this end, the qualitative questionnaire information is now built into the HSM sign up process. Attempts to collect consumption data occurred either face-to-face when meeting with small groups of HSMers (such as the Newcastle case study) or by email invitation. These methods of data collection were not as effective as the built-in qualitative data collection which was facilitated by the HSM blogging.

To reliably assess changes over time in consumption and well-being throughout the course of HSM, it is recommended that the AUDIT and AOES surveys are conducted at sign-up, and then three and 12 months after HSM (or similar). By inviting all HSMers to provide consumption data in this way, HSM would develop statistically significant data. In the alternative, if HSM wanted to survey consumption as a snapshot at any given point in time, it would need to generate a statistically significant stratified random sample that took account of key demographic factors in the HSM population.

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