

SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPLORATIONS OF SELF HELP IN STRUCTURED PROGRAMMES FOR  
INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT SUBSTANCE RELATED CONCERNS

A thesis submitted to the University of Newcastle for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences

August 2017

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## **Abstract**

Self-help groups and self-help processes are widely studied and researched. However, empirical and scholarly interpretations of drug and alcohol self-help groups are dominated by the discourse that individuals are suffering from the disease of addiction. Or, that self-help process can be explained by focussing on the extent to which individuals surrender the “self” to their groups more formal programme of change. This thesis aims to build on these types of concerns but it has also been designed to explore and identify the ways and extent to which self-help groups and self-help processes are mediated by social and cultural concerns. In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, serendipitous ethnographic opportunities were taken to observe and engage with hard to reach self-help users as they congregated with others and 24 qualitative in depth interviews were conducted with respondents from traditional and non-traditional 12 step meetings and settings.

Self-help groups then were essentially found to be micro cultural worlds and the factors that influence the self-concepts, perceptions and appreciations of users in them were complex and multi-faceted. Users of self-help were found to have developed a highly subjective “addicted” sense of self and identity in their groups. But rather than adhere to the traditional conventions of powerlessness and disease, respondents were also found to have developed skills and competences in self-help and self-help processes. In doing so they were able to derive meaning and purpose from using these competences and actively invested in different types of relationships. These types of revelations are read through the application of Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, social and other capitals as an intellectual and conceptual framework. This generated a more dynamic and relational discourse of self-help and self-help processes to emerge.

## **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks go out to the 24 respondents who took part in this study and who gave their time, knowledge and insights to me. I cannot express my gratitude enough to them all for the ways in which they shared their stories with me and spoke so openly and candidly about their experiences. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the groups, gate keepers and forums that provided me with access to these groups in the first place.

I would also like to express my unreserved thanks and gratitude to Professor Elaine Campbell and Professor Robert Hollands for the sheer volume of supervision they provided me with. For helping me during periods of personal and professional meltdown and for always being there to help me find the focus I needed to motivate myself. To my children, Demi, Riley and Oscar and finally to my wife Ruth for her tolerance, understanding and for putting up with me.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction and Aims of Thesis

### 1.0 Background to thesis

About eighteen months prior to applying for my PhD I had found myself having a catch up and coffee with a colleague and friend of mine. For context, I had just finished my Masters' Degree in Community Development and we, my friend and I, had just also just completed a qualitative study into the needs and experiences of Crack Cocaine Users in a local authority area in the North East of England. The focus of our study, or certainly the main features of it, were to explore the factors that influenced user to use crack cocaine, the impact of use and the interactions that occurred between dealers and users in local contexts. During our conversation I had simply quipped to my friend "what about those crack users who we never spoke about, those who stopped using, got out of use or desisted, who tells their stories?", he had simply quipped back "isn't that something you would want to pursue in maybe a book or PhD!". I cannot recall in all honesty how I responded at the time but reflecting back in a more fundamental sense I feel that a seed had been firmly planted.



My more formal academic interest and understanding of self-help<sup>1</sup> groups and self-help processes were developed out of my professional involvement in drug and alcohol treatment, which spans over a 20 year period. Ten years of my professional career was spent working in more traditional types of drug and alcohol settings as a one-to-one treatment worker. I also practiced as a therapeutic group worker in the voluntary sector for a further five years before spending the last five years of my professional career in the National Health Service supporting the development of new types of user-led and more traditional self-help groups.

Within the capacity of this latter professional role, I was asked by a local Primary Care Trust to conduct an audit and needs analysis of local self-help groups. This work was brought about because the Government's interim Drugs Strategy, *Reducing Supply, Restricting Supply and Building Recovery* (2008) was being implemented and local user and self-help groups were being subsumed into the expansion of what was essentially the traditional drug treatment system. During this time the door was increasingly beginning to open to new and existing types of self-help groups to emerge and for existing groups to in expand the reach of their provision. But I myself was also frustrated at the ways in which my more senior colleagues thought self-help groups could simply be developed and reproduced in our locality area by getting groups of "desperate" enough users together. My own professional

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<sup>1</sup> When I use the term self-help in this thesis I am specifically discussing drug and alcohol self-help groups. Where I make reference to other types of groups such as "Eaters Anonymous" discuss them by their full name.

experiences thus far had led me to believe that self-help groups evolve more organically and could not simply be 'organised'.

In conducting this local audit/needs analysis on behalf of the PCT I was able to engage with a significant number and types of different user led and self-help groups. In doing so I also found that many local groups were affiliated with larger national organisations like Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous (NA and AA). A smaller but still significant number had been set up by individuals themselves or smaller groups of users and acted independently. The latter types of groups that I encountered during this period interested me and I was keen to explore the origins of these groups and the histories of the individuals who had set these groups up. I was also fascinated with the ways in which these groups had managed to come together and by the ways in which they were able to meet the needs of their members. However, it was always the former more traditional and specialised types of 12 step groups or those with a discernible technologies and programmes of change that intrigued me more (Humphreys, 2004). At this point then, it is important to acknowledge that I am a very much a supporter of the work self-help groups undertake and that this thesis was inspired by the individuals and groups that were encountered during my professional career. It is also useful to recognise the methodological imperative that I started this thesis with significant connections to different types of self-help groups and a significant amount of professionally orientated insider knowledge of self-help groups and self-help processes (Smith, 2007; Denzin, 1997).

As a therapeutic group worker I had practiced in self-help groups with a structured programme of change. But I had never encountered such a complex yet vibrant language, and sets of rituals, philosophy and ideologically driven processes as I did in these more traditional 12 step environments and settings. I was also aware of two very dominant discourses which prevailed and informed the majority of scholarly, empirical and professional accounts of self-help groups and self-help processes. The first related to the discourse that those whom attend these types of self-help groups were either suffering and/or afflicted by the disease of addiction (Kelly, 2003). The second related to the notion that individuals were simply able, or more likely, to resolve their substance related concerns in self-help groups by surrendering the “self” to or by following their group programme of change (cf Kelly, 2003, May, 2001).

The existence of these discourses fuelled my initial academic interests and the empirical focus of this thesis. They led me to enquire how those with the most significant forms of substance use problems and concerns, related to, understand and experience these more traditional types of self-help groups. From my own professional practice, experiences and observations, I understood that the general character or demeanour of individuals and the extent to which they followed their group’s programme of change were important in determining the outcomes that individuals were able to achieve. My academic interests however were also fuelled by the need to understand the ways and extent to which social and cultural concerns mediated and influenced the self-concepts, perceptions, appreciations

and behaviours of users in these types of contexts (Rapport, 1993; Reissman and Carroll, 1995; Kurtz, 1997; Humphreys, 1997, 1999, 2004, 2011).

In scholarly and empirical accounts of self-help less is known and understood about the ways in which and the extent to which self-help groups and self-help process are mediated by social and cultural concerns. However, a significant amount of what is understood about self-help has been derived by the work of empirical theorists who have focussed on the objective influences which function to structure individuals and shape social action in self-help contexts (Humphreys et al 1999; Hatzidimitriadou, 2002; Yeung, 2007). Or by exploring the more subjective changes that occur and the realignment, reforming and restructuring of the self-concepts and identities that users develop as they either move away from subcultural contexts and/or into self-help groups. This thesis aims to bring an altogether more relational, holistic and dynamic interpretation of self-help and self-help processes and utilises Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, social and other forms of capitals as both a conceptual and intellectual framework from which to do so.

### **1.1 Aims of the thesis**

- To explore how users with the most significant substance related concerns and problems experience self-help groups and self-help processes.
- To explore the ways in which self-help and self-help processes are mediated by social and cultural factors in groups with a structured programme of change.

- To develop an alternative more relational and dynamic interpretation of the self-help processes that occur when individuals engage with others in different self-help groups.

## **1.2 Key Findings**

In the following thesis it will be argued that those who experience the most significant substance related problems and concerns take more time and find it generally more difficult to establish themselves as a self- help group member. This is partly because of the informal obstacles like languages and processes that all self-help groups have, but more significantly because of the transposed and more subjective dispositions that individuals bring with them to self-help. For self-help users the process of becoming an established self-help group member is an incremental process and was depended upon a number of different considerations. These include the extent to which individuals could learn to appreciate the legitimate culture of self-help and the extent to which they can start relationships of mutual acquaintance with others. But more fundamentally, these include over the longer term, the extent to which they can accept and or identify with the self-concept of “addict”. Those who did go on to develop a sense of identification with the self-concept of being an “addict” are also more likely to make a long term commitment to the activities and continuation of their group.

The factors that influence the self-concepts, perceptions, appreciations and behaviours of users of self-help groups are significant and complex. This is largely because there are so

many formal/informal factors influencing users and the extent to which individuals engage in self-help groups and the self-help processes will to a large extent depend upon their own affiliated need. The more conventional view in self-help is that the damage done to the “self” as a user is often thought to be compounded by a negative recognition of difference and the “addict”, and is perceived to be permanent in nature (Valverde, 2008). However, within this thesis the concept of being an “addict” will be discussed as a positive means of providing users with both a way of understanding and explaining their previous substance use and a universal platform for evaluating, and planning for living in the real world. Over time those that participate in their groups for any length of time go on to develop a very particular “addicted” identity. But in doing so they also develop a more nuanced appreciation of the legitimate culture of self-help and become more competent at providing spiritual guidance to others. They also went on to promote the concept of “addict” to others within their group because it made sense for them to do so and because they derived meaning and purpose from doing so.

In this thesis it will also be argued that individuals did not enter self-help groups with in-depth knowledge about self-help groups and self-help processes. During their initial period of involvement however, newcomers are afforded a period of grace to settle in and more established members will share their understanding and practical knowledge about self-help and self-help processes with them. In these types of situations newcomers reported that they benefitted from getting involved in self-help and developed their own knowledge about self-help groups and self-help processes by observing the exchanges that occur between

others. They then went on to practice self-help by sharing their own knowledge and understanding with others in their groups and report that they derive meaning, purpose and esteem from doing so.

In self-help groups the format for accruing, sharing and exchanging practical knowledge and understanding with others varies significantly from setting to setting. But those who make an active contribution to their group by sharing the practical knowledge and understanding with others are able to access the different virtual and actual resources that reside in relationships of mutual acquaintance. These types of exchanges and relationships are identified as being fundamental to users in the short to medium term, as they seek to resolve their own substance related concerns. By practicing self-help individual respondents develop more specific competences, skills, knowledge and understanding about self-help processes and are able to resolve their own substance related concerns. In doing so however, they also become recognised and known to others for the self-help “expertise” or abilities and competences they possess and were then able to attract others; those with less experience about self-help and self-help process into relationships of sponsorship<sup>2</sup>. Those who engage in these types of relationships reported that they derive a sense of meaning, purpose and increased personal competence from doing so. But they also went on to accrue positive social approval and recognition from others as they endeavoured to maintain and exercise control over their substance use and lives.

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<sup>2</sup> One to One tutelage.

### **1.3 Summary of Contribution(s)**

Empirically this thesis contributes to the continuing discontent that surrounds highly individualised and diseased or pathogenic discourses that prevail in contemporary accounts of self-help and self-help processes (Cloud and Granfield, 2008: 1981; cf May 2001; Hughes, 2007). Particularly those discourses and perspectives that have led to the abstraction of individuals and generally ignored or obscured how the social and cultural realities, processes of self-help and social conditions influence substance use and recovery (Cloud and Granfield, 2004). It also provides a more variegated social and cultural account and context (see below) for exploring the ways in which individuals actively engage with others and are then able to get out of their use within self-help groups whilst actively seeking to work towards resolving their substance related concerns and problems. Theoretically it provides a more creative and relational account or interpretation of self-help processes and how the objective factors and subjective experiences of users shape the perceptions, appreciations and attitudes that they develop when they engage with others in their groups. It also provides a more dynamic and holistic account of the ways in which individuals engage with each other in self-help, how relationships are structured and how transactions and resources are managed in and between users and members of self-help group. Theoretical this thesis also bridges and transcends of a number of dichotomies that exist; between structure and agency, the past and the present, essentialism and reductionism that exist in social and cultural explanations of self-help and self-help processes (Kurtz, 1997).



Empirical and theoretical findings from this thesis also have implications for those who develop and implement policy, drug and alcohol practitioners and self-help groups themselves. They also have implications for the way empirical research into self-help is focussed and orientated in the future.

#### **1.4 Overview of Thesis**

##### **Chapter two**

In this chapter I will seek to set a context for what follows by exploring how the paradigms of the diseased and rational self are discussed in the context of substance use and self-help. More specifically I will illustrate and outline the structured programmes of change that exist in traditional 12 step settings and the more specific environment of rational recovery. I then go onto describe the ways in which these programmes of change are believed to shape or transform the “self”. I will conclude this chapter by engaging in a sympathetic critical appraisal of these highly individualised paradigms as a way of setting the context what follows in the second chapter and the remainder of this thesis.

##### **Chapter Three**

In this third chapter I aim to explore and critically analyse how specific types of social and cultural processes, concerns and conditions have been considered by scholar and empirical

theorists across different types of self-help groups. This chapter will be constructed around specifically selected sociological theories; structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism and introduces the paradigms of the “structured” and “conceptual” self. The utilisation of these concepts will enable me to bring together the work of different theorists across substance use and self-help. This maintains a focus which builds a more structured, coherent and I feel credible framework and context for the theoretical framework that follows (Crotty, 1998). I go on to conclude this chapter by setting a context for my own alternative paradigm of self-help which I feel provides a more in depth or fleshed out version of the ways in which self-help users actively resolve their substance related concerns.

#### **Chapter Four**

In chapter four I begin by broadly exploring the concept of social capital and then the intellectual underpinnings of three seminal social capital theorists: Robert Putman, James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu. I will focus on the work of Coleman and Putman and where appropriate illustrate the relative merits of their concepts but then focus more specifically on Bourdieu because his concept of social capital has more to offer heuristically and is more relevant in what follows. In taking up this focus I recognise throughout this chapter that Bourdieu has one of the most abstract and complex and yet intellectually driven and theoretically fleshed out versions of all social capital theorists (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000; Portes, 1998; DeFilippis, 2001). Correspondingly, as I go onto explore each of his concepts, capital(s) and habitus, in turn; I will discuss the theoretical merits of them and the

advantages that can be derived from their utilisation from which to explore and explain self-help and self-help processes.

## **Chapter Five**

In this chapter I will outline and give an in-depth overview of the key theoretical and methodological decisions that will be made in conceptualising, designing and implementing this thesis. I also will provide an overview of how the research was implemented and then go onto describe and discuss the more practical concepts of gatekeeping and gaining access to users in the semi open/closed world of traditional and non-traditional 12 step self-help groups and contexts. I will discuss the ways in which I was able to make the most of the serendipitous ethnographic opportunities that were made available to me during this fieldwork to observe and engage with users of self-help in a more meaningful way. As the chapter progresses I will also go on to deal with the finer details, about how key decision around sampling and data analysis decisions were made. This chapter concludes with a discussion relating to the ethical considerations that were made and informed this studies parameters and practices.

## **Chapter Six**

This mini chapter is designed to provide a more biographical and detailed account of the individual members of the respondent group. It will include details about the types of substance use that users engaged in, their experiences of different self-help groups and their

engagement with self-help at the point of interview. This chapter will seek to build on the basic demographic details about respondents that are discussed in Chapter five and all of names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. Some of the smaller and finer details about respondent's lives will have been changed or omitted so as they cannot be identified.

## **Chapter Seven**

In this, the first of two empirical chapters, I am primarily concerned with providing a more social and cultural account of self-help and self-help processes. I will explore how those users with the most significant forms of substance use and substance related problems and concerns relate to and experience self-help groups. In undertaking this task, I am also concerned with exploring how the self-concepts, perceptions, appreciations and behaviours of individuals are influenced and shaped within the context of self-help groups and I utilise Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the self, as an intellectual framework from which to do so.

## **Chapter Eight**

In this second empirical chapter I seek to build on much of the discussion that has preceded it by taking a more detailed look at the relationships and interactions that take place in and between self-help users in different self-help settings. More specifically I am concerned with

exploring the types of relationships that individuals develop and invest in and the ways in which these relationships mediate self-help groups and self-help processes. In a more theoretical context then I utilise Bourdieu's concepts here to explore the ways in which the resolution of substance related concerns are mediated by the accrual and use of different form social and other capitals that individuals develop in relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **Chapter Nine**

In the final chapter of this these I will begin by focusing on the empirical and theoretical contributions this thesis adds to existing discourses of self-help, self-help groups and self-help processes. In the process of doing so I will also discuss the implications this thesis has for policy makers, practitioners and self-help groups. I will then go onto conclude this thesis by making suggestions about the possible focus of future research in the study of self-help groups.

## Chapter Two

### Diseased and Rational Models of Self-Help

*“By definition, you have to live until you die. Better to make that life as complete and enjoyable an experience as possible, in case death is shite, which I suspect it will be”* **Mark Renton** *Trainspotting*

#### 2.0 Introduction

In this thesis I will explore how self-help processes and the resolution of substance related problems are mediated by social and cultural concerns in self-help groups. In doing so I am also seeking to move on from the theoretical assertion and dominant discourses that substance related concerns can be explained by focussing on the personality and characteristics of individuals. Or from exploring the ways and extent to which individuals engage with their group’s programme of change (cf Kelly, 2003). At this point it is important to recognise that a significant amount of what is known about self-help has been derived from the empirical study of more traditional forms of 12 step group programmes; in particular Alcoholics Anonymous (Kelly, 2003). Not that these types of groups have changed much since their original inception, circa 1935, they have not. They have simply been there or have made themselves and their users readily available and accessible to empirical theorists (cf Humphreys, 2011).

In this opening chapter then I will seek to provide a context for what follows and I do this by exploring how the paradigms of the diseased and rational “self” have been understood in the

context of substance use and self-help. In doing so I intend to explore the theoretical underpinnings of both these “self” paradigms and engage in a critical appraisal of the programmes of change in more traditional types of 12 step groups and in the context of Rational Recovery. More specifically I aim to illustrate and explore the process and transformation of the “self” that is believed to occur in these types of groups and settings and the ways in which individuals are then believed to be able to resolve their substance related problems within them. I then go on to conclude this chapter by engaging in a critical appraisal of these highly individualised self-paradigms and in doing so I set a context for an alternative and more social and cultural paradigm.

Fundamentally speaking, I recognise here and in this thesis that engaging with and utilising the concept of the “self” can be a challenging process and I am keen to avoid making the mistake that others have in making it a more elusive concern. Here I am generally recognising Baumeister (1999) concern that the “self” is beset by definitional, conceptual, theoretical concerns and one that has a multiplicity of meanings in different discipline areas. I will recognise that there has been increasing scepticism about the use of the concept to explore and theorise different types of individual functioning and social action. However, with these concerns in mind, my use of the concept of “self” is driven by the idea “theories of the self” provide important theoretical building blocks for exploring and providing a more in-depth understanding and analysis about different forms of social worlds and the individuals whom inhabit them (Baumeister, 1999).

## 2.1 Diseases of the Mind and Body

One of the most dated and historical, yet central and durable concepts of addiction and self-help in the present day, relates to the idea that substance consumption and use can be conceived as disease (Stolberg, 2006). Before I begin to illustrate and review the concept of addiction and disease it is worth pausing to recognise that there is not just one diseased model. Over the last thirty years or so a number different proponents of the same diseased model have been presented by different theorists. Which whilst sharing general agreement about the fundamental nature of the concern, have also emphasised strikingly different elements of it (Thombs and Osborn, 2013). The main theoretical perspectives that inform this diseased conceptualisation, have been summarised as, a pharmacological consequence (May, 2001); as a consequence of an individual's predisposed physical vulnerability (Kimura and Higuchi, 2011); as an expression of biographical events such as emotional psychology (Shields, 2011); and as an embodied biological concept that constrains individual agency and social action (Elliott, 2013).

The idea that addiction is a disease and that individuals can have a physical/biogenetic predisposition to chemicals and/or addictive behaviours is dealt with in a relatively unproblematic way in a wide range of theoretical contexts and self-help groups. In the first instance, it is often thought that exposure to drugs and initial consumption is important. In this paradigm it is extensively argued that exposure to a single drug can result in extensive changes to the structure and functioning of the brain, which also create a forms of pathological learning; learning to crave (Angre and Angres, 2008). As this learning progresses and becomes



established an addiction is believed to manifest as a powerful force, these can be connected to further deficits in learning, motivation, memory and decision making: which are also believed to accompany this disease process (Angres and Angres, 2008). In this particular diseased paradigm issues such as individual agency or reflexivity and the social context in which use occurs are often ignored or deemed unimportant in comparison to other processes that are occurring (Peele, 1985). The “self” then is also understood to be very much bounded and structured by physical predispositions and biological compulsions to then also repeatedly seek and replicate the originally pleasurable drug experience or avoid the distress of not having the drug (Angres and Angres, 2008).

In moving the conceptual framework of substance use from a physical to a more cognitive form of pathology it is also recognised that the shift from non-user to dependent user is more gradual and often conceptualised as a movement from recreational to dependent drug use (cf Johnson, 1980; Talbott, 1989; Milan and Ketchman, 1983). However, this point conceded, the majority of disease theorists still retain the idea that first and sustained exposure to substance is an indicator of later dependency (Baler and Volkow, 2006). In this latter concept substance use is still very much viewed as a disease, but is understood to be driven by the dualistic discourses of susceptibility and individual culpability. More specifically, it is the continued and repeated use of substances which is deemed to erode the cognitive functioning of the brain, and so in turn behaviours become more reflexive and then less amenable to change or inference (Baler and Volkow 2006). Correspondingly, within this context it is simply not the case that biomedical or neurobiological theorists ignore the social, cultural or environmental elements and factors

of substance use. Rather “they just tend to give these factors less weight, than for example, laboratory test results” (Thombs and Osborn, 2013: 31). In doing so they also reinforce the idea that social and cultural theory more generally lacks credibility because it does not fully engage with accounting for the pharmacological role that different types of substances play in the context of addiction (Peele, 1985a).

Rather than being driven only by physical and biological forces to consume substances alone, it is also often recognised that individuals in a diseased context do have a level of self-consciousness and reflexivity. However, it is often thought that these individual abilities can be objectively overridden either by a pathological loss of reason or lack of self-will (May, 2001). More specifically it is argued that diseased individuals are deemed as unable to control and regulate the “self” and their own actions and that compulsion to use erodes the same neutral scaffold that enables normal self-control and appropriate decision making (Baler and Volkow, 2006). Similarly, it is also argued from this perspective that substance use exacerbates already pre-existing pathological conditions in the individual and any ability they had to act in a rational way is deemed to be overridden by the need to satiate cravings or relieve the impact of not having them (Piazza and Le Moal, 1998). The points being illustrated above all relate to the notion that whilst there are a number of different disease concepts and variations in impact, the outcome for all diseased users is often very much the same were addiction is concerned: “repetitive behaviours in the face of negative consequences” (Angres and Angres, 2008: 698). In all instances (physio/pathological) then it is argued that these negative consequences are the fate of the poor and unfortunate diseased few. The forces that are believed to be structuring

the “self” are so powerful that they can be fundamentally irreversible and understood in similar terms to having a chronic disease (Baler and Volkow, 2006). In an altogether more sociologically driven context it is argued that the “self” is an embodied, concrete and unitary concern and as such structured and bounded by disease or “biological forces that place constraints on human agency and social action” (Elliot, 2007:104). In these latter types of chronic situations and diseased contexts it is also argued that the forces structuring the “self” can be so powerful that an alien self-replaces the existing self. To such an extent, that individual social actors then find it so difficult to distinguish between the former and the latter that they are then less able to reinstate their true self (Turner, 1976).

There have been numerous empirical and theoretical concerns raised around the disease concept of addiction and the physical and pathological concepts associated with its use. In the first instance, theorists such as Hughes (2007) have argued the disease model fails to reconcile both the site and mechanisms of addiction, and have only been partially successful in adequately identifying the physical pathology of both the addict and addiction. Secondly it has also been noted, but in a more generalised context, that addiction is an ill-defined and rudimentary concept as only a very small number of drug or alcohol users actually go on to develop “*bona fide* state of drug addiction” (Baler and Volkow, 2006:560 original emphasis, cf Seddon, 2006). Fundamentally speaking, however, it has also been recognised by a number of social and cultural theorists that disease and addiction are socially constructed concerns (Peele, 1985, Cloud and Grandfield, 2008); there are many different and variations within definitions of them and that social action cannot simply be organised in relation to a hierarchy of medical

entities (Thombs and Combs, 2013). Given all of these criticisms it is not surprising that there has been an increased call to move away from theoretical concerns of self-formation and addiction as a diseased, solitary and psycho pathological concept (cf Hughes, 2007, Measham and Shiner, 2009). Similarly, in looking forward to what is to follow, it is also evident that what is needed more generally for my own purposes is a theoretical paradigm that incorporates non-narcotic and non-drug concerns and integrates individual perspectives alongside other social and cultural concerns (Peele, 1985).

## **2.2 Self-help and the Diseased Self**

Since the early 1800's a whole raft of self-help organisations have been developed around the concept that drug and alcohol addiction is a disease, this includes organisations such as the Washingtonians 1804-1860, the Oxford Group 1920 and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) 1935 and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) 1940 (cf, Humphreys, 2011). At this point a comprehensive review of these organisations, their development and different approaches would be interesting but is not necessary. However, that said what is interesting is the central concepts or dominant features that are claimed to proliferate the practices of these organisations in the past and others such as AA and NA in the present day. Addiction in these types of contexts is generally recognised as resulting from disease or a lack of self-governance and emphasis is given to helping those suffering from a pathological loss of reasoning and who need protection, for example from the "demon drink" (Troughton, 2013). Similarly, a key feature that also proliferates the diseased context of alcoholism in this context of self-help also relates to a lack

of individual self-control and the emergence of the “true [self] – gamma-alcoholic”, who manifests as an inability of the individual user who unlike others cannot, moderate, regulate or indeed choose to get drunk voluntarily as a matter of choice (Jellinek, 1960).

It is apparent that the concept of the diseased “self” and individual personal responsibility is very much present the philosophy of 12 step organisations in the present day; “AA/NA slogans and literature encourage members to pray to have the serenity to accept the things they cannot change” (Sered and Norton-Halk, 2011:313). In this context the diseased user is also thought to have lost self-control and addiction can be understood as a process in which self-will has run riot. In this latter context it is argued that addiction is caused in part by an excess of the self, self-pity, self-satisfaction, self-gratification, self-importance (Wilcox, 1998). In which, paradoxically, any excessive attempt at maintaining self-control through alcohol consumption only results in further but more complete loss of command over drinking (Wilcox, 1998).

The process of self-transformation in the context of AA and NA also centres on the notion of addiction as a disease in which the individual must surrender the self, via the now famed 12 steps and make a radical shift and move towards transcendent and spiritual awakening (Kurtz, 1997). Interestingly, this individual transcendence can only be achieved with the help of others and involves replacing “one’s own belief in an omnipotent self with belief that there is a greater power than the self” (Kurtz, 1997:37). Disease in this context is also often thought to be used as a metaphor by individual users themselves to describe and convey the problems they face in

terms of their use. Thombs and Osborn (2013:32) for example, illustrate the concept of disease in the context of addiction and self-help by explaining that users are simply trying to express that their drug use feels like having a disease because it is characterised by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and a lack of self-control. These are feelings these theorists associate with the victims of other diseases, such as cancer, emphysema and heart disease. More specifically in this context it is also argued that individuals are largely able to resolve their substance related concerns by reinventing or reclaiming the “self” and by following their group’s mandate or programme of change (cf Kearney, 1998; Banonis, 1989).

#### **2.2.1 Narcotics Anonymous: 12 Steps (NA, 2013)**

1. “We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction; that our lives had become unmanageable”.
2. “We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity”.
3. “We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him”.
4. “We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves”.
5. “We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”.
6. “We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character”.
7. “We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings”.
8. “We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all”.

9. "We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others".

10. "We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it".

11. "We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out".

12. "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs".

More critically, organisations like AA, NA and CA (cocaine anonymous) are recognised as generally condemning as denial, the efforts of individuals to explain their addictions and other problems in terms of social structure or outside forces (Sered and Norton-Halk, 2011). Alcoholism and drug dependency from this perspective then is seen as a personal responsibility and as a consequence users of AA and NA are deemed to require adopting a set of principles in the form of the 12 steps. They are also deemed to be prone or required to adopt a very particularly subjective and long lasting if not permanent "alcoholic-addict" identity and a very particular way of understanding the nature of their addiction and how they should resolve their substance related concerns. All of which critically, does not recognise the role of structural factors and how they affect use, nor do they engage with broader social and cultural factors or concerns, but "takes a one person at a time approach" (Yeung, 2007:57).

Outside traditional 12 step groups the idea that self-help and self-help processes can be explained by focussing on the personality and characteristics of individuals or the extent to which they engage with their group's structured programme of change is also well established in the context of rational "self" and Rational Recovery. The theory and philosophy that underpin this alternative paradigm of the "self" run contrary to those discussed in the previous section on the diseased self. But this organisation and the paradigm of the rational "self" do have their own unique brand of individualism running through them as far as explaining the fundamental nature of addiction and the resolution of substance related concerns (Humphreys, 2011).

### **2.3 Rationality, Reflexivity and Rational Choice**

In the context of substance use and self-help the notion of rational choice also holds an immediate intuitive appeal and attractiveness for many theorists as a basis for theory "because it is such a complete conception of action that we need not ask no more questions about it" (Boudon, 1998: 817). It is a theoretical concern that focussed on the individual and their current setting and rejects myopic<sup>3</sup> factors and the individuals past experiences in social action. Essentially speaking, rational choice in the context of substance use and self-help is a concept that promotes the notion of the happy addict, choosing their addiction and following their route to recovery after careful consideration of the alternatives and at no point ever doubting their

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<sup>3</sup> Imagination and foresight!



actions (Stigler and Becker, 1980 cited in Orphanides and Zervos, 1995:740). Even where it is recognised in the context of substance use that individuals are in positions of structural vulnerability or socially and culturally bounded contexts: they are simply believed to be inflicting apparent self-harm and engaging in self-destructive behaviours because they choose to do so.

In the context of substance use it is also often simply argued that individuals rationally choose intoxication and binge using as a stable preference to avoid 'cold turkey' and withdrawal (Thombs and Osborn, 201). In terms of changeability or conversely stability individuals in the context of rational choice are portrayed very much as unitary, autonomous and highly reflective, self-reflexivity and self-consciousness, "knowing ones inner self, abilities and limitations are crucial factors for maintaining control over drug use" (Rodner, 2005: 337). In these particular contexts users are often assumed to be known to themselves as concrete individuals who have more enduring biographically rooted self-concepts and are identified as individuals who exercise control over how they master and overcome substance related challenges and concerns (cf Measham and Shiner, 2009).

Rational choice theory may very well be seen as an attractive proposition to many theorists, but in the context of substance use and self-help it must also be seen that "being attractive does not necessarily imply that a theory is acceptable, valid or true in all circumstances" (Boudon,

1998: 817). Theoretically and more critically it has also been argued that rational choice<sup>4</sup> lacks contextualisation and that concepts such as the social construction of the self and the public self are often overlooked by rational choice theorists in the process of self-formation. In this context the social constructionism of selfhood relates to “the meanings and understanding associated with the public self, the self that is visible and known to others and encompassed by what we come to accept within the cultural category of personhood” (Callero, 2003:121). In moving forward, two separate yet critically connected issues are apparent here, the first relates to relationships of power and the idea that in the context of rational choice there is no consideration given to “understanding how the collectively instituted conceptions of the public self and the means by which these conceptions are produced and the disciplinary techniques of power that are deployed in the process” (Cahill, 1998 cited in Callero, 2003:121). The second relates to how the social self is constructed and the notion that the self is not and cannot be formed by rational thought alone “the public person is not made in the image of a unique self; rather it is an interpretive picture of a unique self-made in the image of the public person” (Cahill: 1998:131).

In applying rational choice as a theory of practice to the field of substance use numerous empirical studies have also shown the limitations of the concept both as a theory of self-formation and addiction. In a very general way it has been argued that individual social actors are unable to make rational choices prior to their involvement in substance use as they are

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<sup>4</sup> See next chapter in which I widen the scope of discussion and lack of context in rational choice to symbolic interactionism.

often deemed too naïve to drugs, but also because they are not able to predict the outcomes of their actions. For example, in the beginning stages of substance use it has also been shown that the majority of users engage in a process of experimentation and a factor that is often overlooked by rational choice theorists is that “inexperienced individuals are initially uncertain of the exact potential harms associated with an addictive good” (Orphanides and Zervos, 1995:740). Secondly, it has also been noted that whilst using drugs, all drug users will have attitudes, perceptions, abilities and utilities that change over time, in which, “they can often be charged with failing fully to foresee those or even recognise that they have occurred” (Akerlof, 1991, cited in Orphanides and Zervos, 1995:740). Synonymously, and in an altogether more practical context, many individuals, in a whole range of social milieus, have been shown to have often found themselves in situations, social and cultural contexts having absolutely no idea what they are doing there or indeed how they managed to arrive or get there in the first place (Field, 2009).

In looking into the detail of what social action and individual reflexivity actually involves in the context of substance use, a number of other theorists have argued that whilst individuals use substances their practices can become habit forming and repetitive because the individual involved is not always [his] usual self. From this perspective, it is simply argued that the individual’s preferences are not rigidly fixed over time, instead individuals flip-flop between different altered states and sets of preferences (Orphanides and Zervos, 1995). Given these and the criticisms above it is not surprising that there has been an increased call to reject the idea that the rational mind alone defines the whole self and an alternative response has been

to abandon the rational framework altogether in the context of substance use (Orphanides and Zervos, 1995). Calls to abandon rational choice theory altogether may be a little premature, as it can be seen that even during times of perceived self-harm or self-destruction via substance use individuals can indeed be acting as independent actors making rational choices based on the situation and circumstances they find themselves. What is needed is a theoretical framework that moves beyond and away from the notion of the rational, unitary or concrete individual and “extends beyond the immediate definition of the situation to include the historical, social and cultural context and settings, wherein unarticulated assumptions about the nature of the self and person have their origin” (Callero, 2003:121).

## **2.4 Rational Recovery and Self Help**

Theoretically speaking the idea that individuals are in possession of a core, unitary self, endowed with an essential nature and an independent consciousness has been criticised as a “simple political artefact of European Enlightenment” by a number of theorists, such as Foucault, Derrida, Laclau, and Baudrillard (Callero, 2003: 115). Yet despite these criticisms it is apparent that the central idea of the rational actor and rational action is very much alive and well in the empirical practice of self-help, examples include the aptly named “Rational Recovery” (RR) and “Save Our Selves” (SOS). Interestingly, in terms of history and origin each of these self-help organisations were set up as a reaction to AA and other 12 step groups, each rejects the spiritual and religious factors associated with addiction and that addiction is a

disease and that individuals should acknowledge powerlessness over addiction (Humphreys, 2011:87). However, in taking up this position these self-help groups and organisations have their own unique “brand of individualism” when explaining the fundamental nature of addiction and the resolution of substance related concerns (Humphreys, 2011).

A detailed review of the idiosyncratic philosophy and programmes of change utilised by both these groups would be interesting, particularly RR terminology and concept of primal and irrational parts of human nature “the beast” (cf, Humphreys 2011). However, at this point it is simply important to recognise in the context of RR that individuals are also expected to follow and accept a 12 step and philosophically driven programme of change.

#### **2.4.1 Rational Recovery: 12 steps (Trimpey, 2014)**

1. “I finally face intolerable consequences if I continue to intoxicate myself”.
2. “I know my drinking/using is voluntary and solely for the purpose of pleasure, and because of that, my desire for addictive pleasures is an immoral disposition”.
3. “I will never use again, and I will never change my mind”.
4. “I hear the voice of my addiction rage against my decision, and recognize that my AV is the voice of my healthy body demanding unspeakable, destructive, addictive pleasures”.
5. “I know that God, Mother Nature, or the “Committee of Two” gave me free will, the ability to choose between good and evil”.

6. "Endowed with free will, I am willing to endure any emotional distress which abstinence may bring".
7. "I realize that all of my problems are caused by my self-intoxication and with abstinence they will fade and disappear. This brings me certainty of success and great emotional relief".
8. "Because my addiction blinded me to the feelings of others, I will ask my family and others I care about how, and how deeply, I have harmed them".
9. "I abjectly apologize to my family for my incorrigible self-intoxication because I knew all along but did not care that my quest for addictive pleasures was placing them in danger and causing them to suffer".
10. "I surrender ideas of justice as a condition of reconciliation. I will continue to assess harm, assuming responsibility for all of the family's problems, and apologize when I can".
11. "I am not my body, but a self-identity in my mind. I have firm and final control over my physical behaviour, and I can guarantee everyone I'll never commit certain immoral acts".
12. "I now see both the animal and conscious realms of human existence, and know that human civilization is a fragile vessel of human consciousness on a sea of animal desire".

it is apparent that both RR and SOS emphasise the power of their program, individual self-control and personal mastery "in defeating addiction which is seen as an exercise in rational, individualistic self-control rather than a process of spiritual change or mutual support" (Humphreys, 2011:83). In the latter concept SOS the apparent "brand of individualism" is not solipsistic as the levels of mutual support among social actors is recognised; in terms of RR cross talk is not forbidden and members are encouraged to speak directly to each other in meetings and exchange ideas: largely to encourage self-reliance. However, unlike more traditional types of 12 step self-help groups and meetings these types of self-help groups tend to frown upon

members having supportive exchanges outside meetings, and discourage lifelong affiliation (Humphreys, 2011). In an altogether more critical context it has been recognised that all self-help groups, including Rational Recovery, are more than, or cannot be understood as just a collection of rationally independent operating and unitary individuals. Or indeed just a group of individuals following and adhering to a pre-set, albeit philosophically driven, programme of change and happily towards problem resolution (Kurtz, 1997). Correspondingly it is also important to recognise that individuals simply do not enter a self-help group and are able to take what resources they need (whatever they may be) and leave, there needs to be a trade-off and recognition that social and cultural concerns in self-help and self-help groups mediate and affect the individuals ability to resolve their substance related concerns (Humphreys et al 1999).

## **2.5 The Pillorying of Self Help Groups**

In moving forward from this point it is also important to recognise that organisations such as AA, NA, CA and Rational Recovery have been discussed as particularly appropriate examples of how groups of individuals can organise themselves and come together to focus on protecting their interests whilst meeting the specific and exclusive needs of their members. To do this AA and other 12 step groups in particular have developed a policy of having no political opinion on outside issues of any kind, being fully self-supported and declining outside contributions (Kelly, 2003). Taking up this position, however, has brought 12 step organisations like AA, NA and CA

a continued and incessant pillorying over the years, from a number of different groups, philosophers, scholars and empirical theorists (cf, Humphreys, 2011).

By way of illuminating these and other areas of concern in self-help, theorists like Yeung (2007) have argued that self-help groups, “rather than constituting a liberated subjectivity outside of a resistance to power, self-esteem and positive thinking, movements like this extend the reach of governance by compelling persons to act for themselves” (Yeung, 2007: 66) In these types of context it is argued that the function of all self-help groups is to “actively teach individuals to self-govern, self-adjust and willingly self-modify with the aim of embodying a model of functionality: the happy active and participatory democratic citizen” (Yeung, 2007: 66). However, in a more sympathetic and grounded version of the political orientation of organisations such as AA, theorists such as Humphreys (2011). Have argued that whilst these criticisms have merit AA itself neither inhibits or constrains individuals from acting or speaking out about politics, for [him] the link between self-help and political activity is an orthogonal<sup>5</sup> phenomena (Humphreys, 2011).

It is important to recognise that core concepts of self-help, individual self-control, self-regulation and self-government are also very much seen as technologies of modern citizenship (Rose, 1993). In this context those whom are deemed not able to exercise these selves such as drug and alcohol users are often “lumped together as social problems, are diagnosed as lacking

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<sup>5</sup> Lacking any real connection to the other concept.



self-esteem and charged with anti-social behaviour” (Cruikshanks, 1993:330). In this context it is almost impossible to escape the overtly politicised nature of self-help, referenced in this form as a “social vaccine”, “whereby self-confidence and positive self-regard are thought to inoculate individuals against the lures of crime and violence and substance use to create a true democracy” (Cruikshanks 1999, cited in Yeung, 2007:66).

Since the 1980’s, through to the present day there has been considerable and significant changes in how self-help groups engage with users, much of this has resulted from the ways that particular types of drug and alcohol users are targeted and treated “to regulate and bridle their own passions, control their own instincts and govern them self” (Elliott, 2008:104). In a somewhat darker and sinister account of the social processes involved in formal drug and alcohol treatment, institutional detox and residential centres, power, discourse and micro politics are often thought to be regulated and played out via “liberation therapists” in organisations that are often normatively represented and perceived as humane interventions for substance users (Callero, 2003: Cruikshanks, 1993). Similarly, over the last two decades a number of self-help organisations have been able to meet the needs of their members inside institutions such as hospitals and prisons, however, more recently some individuals have also found themselves attending self-help groups as part of statutory court order (Moos and Tinko, 2008).

In terms of how governance, power and self-formation interact in this context, emphasis is often given over not to social and cultural concerns but to professional techniques assessment and professionals processes in which the individuals involved are subjectively treated to accept responsibility for their problems (Moos and Tinko, 2008). In these types of contexts it is accepted that “the self is coerced into existence, not to become an agent but as a mechanism to control where systems of discourse work from the inside out by creating a self-regulating subject” (Callero, 2003:118). Fundamentally, the social isolation and the lack of meaningful contact to others experienced by individuals trying to resolve their substance associated problems also tends to “focus the ill person’s attention upon the self, sets the ill person apart from others and takes place in the privacy of an institution [or home]” (Charmaz, 1983:178, my emphasis). Obviously there are a number of inherent concepts such as power, agency, consciousness and reflexivity that need to be critically analysed and resolved in terms of the general nature of self-help, self-help groups or for that matter any wider settings in which the diseased or treated individuals find themselves (Skeggs, 2004, Callero, 2003).

Generally speaking, and in temporarily setting these concerns aside, there are a number of concepts here that do have validity. Theoretically at least, many individuals do enter self-help including AA, NA CA and Rational Recovery from formal treatment and detox or residential institutions. In some context it is argued that individuals will “draw upon past social experience, cultural meanings and knowledge to engage in mental dialogue about the meanings of present physical and social existence, specifically, the emergent indications of identity elicited by illness” (Charmaz, 1983:170). Similarly, there is also agreement that under particular

circumstances the “self” can be structured by forces that act upon the individual during times of “chronic illness” or “crisis” but that this also provides opportunities from which to study self-formation. More generally this is because in self-help groups and during periods of illness or crisis “self-concern typically becomes more visible and ill persons often become more highly aware of previously taken for granted aspects of self because they are gone or altered” (Charmaz, 1983:170). Importantly, in a number of scholars and empirical theorists, such as Paul Du Gay (1996) in “the enterprising self” have also been able to illustrate and explore how particular technologies of subjectivity have also been shown to “promote positive production in social life” (cf Valverde, 1998).

The points being alluded to here, above and in the opening chapter all relate to what follows and the wider concern that all self-help groups share a number of features that are often overlooked or not considered in governmental, professional, scholarly and empirical interpretations of self-help and self-help processes (Humphrey’s et al 1999). In the chapter that follows these relate to the social and cultural organising features of self-help groups and self-help processes that are also overlooked or ignored. More specifically they relate to the ways in which individuals in attending self-help are enabled to congregate with others with similar concerns and problems (Humphreys et al 1999). To make meaning and find purpose in life by giving and receiving support both inside and outside their groups, and become integrated into a wider non-drug using friendship networks (Humphreys et al 2011). Interestingly, a number of other points that are also overlooked in empirical accounts of self-help relate to the ways in which social and cultural processes in groups improve the relationships between users. And the

ways in which self-help groups, like AA, NA and CA in particular actively encourage their members to repair relationships with others inside and outside the group by encouraging them to seeking restitution for previous wrongdoings (Humphreys et al, 1999). The majority of what is known about self-help, self-help processes and self-transformation, certainly in the context above, has been derived from the work of scholarly and empirical theorists whom have focussed on the individual, the characteristics they are deemed to possess or their personality. Or their attributes and the functioning and self-transformation of individual users that occurs as they engage as individuals with their groups own programme of change (Humphreys, 2011; Kurtz, 1997). In the next chapter I seek to move away from the highly individualistic and unitary concepts of the diseased and rational self and look more critically to engage with socially and culturally defined and constructed paradigms of the “structured and conceptual” self. By way of concluding this chapter it is important to recognise that I am not seeking to join in the pillorying of self-help groups or self-help process. Nor am I completely challenging the notion that concepts like self-determination, self-reliance and self-production. I also do recognise that self-help group programmes of change are important in the wider context of substance related problem resolution. What I am seeking to do here is to set a context for exploring the ways in which self-help groups, particularly those with a programme of change, and the process of individual substance related problem resolution are mediated by more social and cultural concerns.

## Chapter Three

### Social and Cultural Paradigms of the Self and Self Help

#### 3.0 Introduction

In this third chapter I move on from discussion and critical analysis of the highly individualised concepts of the rational and diseased “self” and the idiosyncratic practices of specific self-help groups such as AA, NA and Rational Recovery. In doing so I begin to explore and critically analyse how specific types of social and cultural concerns and conditions have been considered across different types of self-help groups. In undertaking this task I am primarily seeking to explore how social and cultural concerns are considered in the context of problem resolution from substance related concerns. I recognise that I cannot explain these processes as I did before, by simply discussing the characteristics, internal attributes and/or behaviours that individual social actors are believed to possess. I also recognise more generally and theoretically that social and cultural explanations of self-help processes are considerably more complex and abstract in orientation than the individualistic concepts I have previously discussed (Cohen, Underwood and Gottlieb, 2000).

To achieve the aims of this chapter I engage with specifically selected sociological theories; structural functionalism<sup>6</sup> and symbolic interactionism and construct this chapter around the paradigms of the “structured” and “conceptual” self. In approaching what follows in this way I feel I am able to bring together the work of different theorists across substance use and self-help whilst maintaining a focus which builds a more structured, coherent and, what I consider to be, credible framework and context for what follows (Crotty, 1998). This chapter concludes by drawing together and summarising the key themes that have emerged from the critical discussions that have taken place. In bringing this chapter to a close I also tentatively seek to set a context for my own alternative paradigm of self-help in Chapter 4 which I suggest provides a more in-depth, relational and fleshed out version self-help and self-help processes.

### **3.1 Structural Functionalism and the “Structured” self**

At its broadest point the Sociological concept of Structural Functionalism is predicated upon the notion that society is structured and made up of a number of or components (Bernard, 2000). A number of theorists have argued that the concept of Structural Functionalism is better understood as representing a particular period of methodological development rather than a specific school of thought in the social sciences. However, outside these observations, the structural functionalist approach, at a macro level, is useful for building theories of social action by exploring the structure and functioning of society or more specifically the influences

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter I use these concepts because they are relevant in what follows, but also because they allow me to bring a balance to this chapter whilst exploring how the structure and functioning of self-help groups have been understood and how social and cultural concerns have been considered in the context of substance related problem resolution.

of its component parts; norms, customs, traditions or institutional practices (Chillcott, 1998). At the most basic and yet broadest level the concept of structural functionalism emphasises, “the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system” (Urry, 2000:23).

In the more specific context of this thesis, the paradigm of the “structured” self is rooted in structural functionalism, as such it is theoretically underpinned by the notion that it is the “structural properties of society or a group have effects upon the way people, think, feel and act” (Giddens and Pierson, 1998:77 in Gauntlett, 2007:62). It is a paradigm of substance use and self-help which recognises the importance of the structure and functioning of groups which individuals are members of and the crucial role these two concerns play in shaping social action and individual functioning (Brewer, 1991). In utilising the concept of structural functionalism to explain substance use, theorists have often argued, at a macro level, that it is a lack of connection or bond between the individual and wider society and the lack of consensus about what is acceptable behaviour, in micro contexts, that leads to substance use (Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2000). Within the paradigm of the “structured” self, substance use and self-help more generally, theorists have tended to focus on the collective experiences of users and how adherence to different social and cultural concerns, roles, rules and norms shape social action. In doing so, however, they have also focussed more specifically on the ways in which concerns such socialisation and the expectations of others, act as “controls” in the specific positions and relationships that individuals find themselves in (Swartz, 2002). Correspondingly, when applying the paradigm of the “structured” self as a theory of practice

to substance use and self-help, theorists have also failed to engage with or given little recognition to the more subjective experiences of individuals in explaining social action. Critically speaking they have also often simply argued or implied that social action can be explained in an individual context by the ways in which social actors adopt a “they-self” recourse and simply act in accordance with the conventions, positions and relationships in which they find themselves (Heidegger, 1978; Allan, 2007).

Within the paradigm of the “structured” self, there is significant differentiation in the way in which different theorists have sought to engage with and explain how social and cultural concerns and condition function to shape social action in different subcultural contexts. In realist and critical contexts alike, it is often simply argued that social action can be regulated by a relatively stringent and rigid set of roles, rules or norms; that act as of “controls” and function to facilitate or stimulate particular types of substance use. For example in the context of “problematic alcohol use” and “conduct norms” it is argued, that individuals will get intentionally “*wasted, smashed, totalled or bombed*” because this type of behaviour is part of a ritual that is essential to group solidarity (Thombs and Combs, 2014:239 *original emphasis*).

In these types of theoretical situation, social action and the individual social actor’s engagement in substance use is largely believed to be dictated by the immediate social context and the cultural conventions of the positions in which they themselves (Barnes, 2000). Interestingly, even when it is identified that drug users could be engaging in substance use



and in subcultural contexts and these types of activities as a conscious, intentional and meaningful activity (Measham and Shiner, 2009). It is often simply counter argued within the paradigm of the “structured” self that those whom engage in these types of activities are largely unaware of their values and priorities, how they relate to their use and often elevate social relations over serious self-introspection and self-assessment (Thombs and Osborn, 2014).

Within the context of structural functionalism and the paradigm of the “structured” self it is not the case that social action can be assessed or explained as an ad hoc response to external social and cultural influences (Barnes, 2000). Correspondingly, in a number of different theoretical contexts the social and cultural influences that are believed to shape social action are thought to be more “softer” and subtle but yet complex and fundamentally significant in nature to the individual (Gauntlett, 2007). Within this particular theoretical setting it is the day to day experiences of users and the values, expectations and beliefs that emanate from membership of particular social and cultural groups that are deemed to be more important in shaping social action (Bourdieu, 1990; Weinberg, 2011; Mooney, et al 2000). For example, in the *Socially Integrated User*, Rodner (2005) argued that poly and tertiary drug users, whilst consuming a whole range of drugs (cannabis, amphetamine, ecstasy) have very particular beliefs and values about what types of substances and substance use was acceptable; or off limits in the contexts in which they found themselves.

Within these latter types of situations and scenarios it is also often suggested that drug and alcohol users, like everyone else in life, are particularly keen to avoid any risks associated with being socially embarrassed, excluded or isolated from the social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves (Gauntlett, 2007). In developing concepts such as the “sick role” theorists like as Talcott Parsons have also used variations of structural functionalist paradigm to explore the dangers involved for those who are unable to adhere to their societal commitments or role obligation (Parsons, 1951, 1956, 1958). In this particular context those who are unable to fulfil their roles and obligations because of illness or sickness are deemed to be either dysfunctional, not wholly committed or disloyal to society. They are also deemed to be at risk of being labelled deviant and open to normative sanctions or in extreme circumstances exclusion (Matthias, 2014). The points being made here in relation to role adherence reinforce the notion that these latter types of concerns, whilst being described and understood in practice as being “softer” in nature are also known to be more significant to social action and more likely to “keep individuals in line” (Gauntlett, 2007:56).

The extent to which social and cultural processes and concerns shape social action will depend on the stringency, intensity and nature of social and cultural concerns and the particular level of involvement and inclusiveness an individual has and feels towards particular groups or settings (Brewer, 1991). In more stringent, critical and subcultural contexts it is also argued that the enduring involvement of individuals in particular types of groups and settings results in individuals developing alternative or discordant social and cultural values and beliefs, see Allan’s (2007) review of “differential association” (Sutherland, 1937); “social network theory”

(Valente, 2010) and “primary socialisation theory” (Oetting and Donnermeyer, 1998). Within these types of contexts it is often argued that these “discordant” values and beliefs are developed as individuals withdraw from what are considered more conventional social and cultural contexts and are associated with concepts like “toxic cultural norms”, “negative social capital”, and more problematic types of criminal behaviour and substance abuse (Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2000; Field, 2009).

As a theory of practice, it is often argued that discordant values can be clearly observed as dispositions when individuals start to adhere to the “code of the street”; resolving disputes via violence or associating drug use with “toughness and style”; seeing substance and drug related crime as a reasonable occupation (Cloud and Granfield, 2008:1974-1975). In some theoretical contexts (Dasein in this example) it is argued that individuals can develop “natural inclinations” towards substances and substance use; largely because it is “what the like of use do” in particular social and subcultural settings (Heidegger, 1978 cited in Allan, 2007: 87). Essentially speaking, in these types of contexts it is often argued that individuals lack genuine self-understanding and default to a “they-self” recourse which involves engaging in particular types of social action because “everybody else is doing it” (Heidegger, 1978 cited in Allan, 2007: 87). It is also argued that individual social action in these types of contexts can begin to bear the stamp of the historical and social context in which it were learned and that dispositional ways of thinking and acting can come to make up, what are essentially the basic elements of the self (Burkitt, 2008; Allen, 2007).

Within the theoretical framework of structural functionalism it is widely recognised that individual social actors may not be happy about the types of positions or relationships that they find themselves in (Unruth, 1979). It is also recognised that individual social actors in this theoretical framework may also be reluctant to engage in particular types of activities (Gauntlett, 2007). Within the more specific context of the “structured” self-paradigm it is also argued that when individuals are faced with the existence of potentially alienating types of scenarios or situations they either seek out advice from others about what is deemed appropriate or act accordingly (Unruth, 1979; Brewer, 1991; Becker, 2015; Heir, 2005; Gauntlett, 2007). Or if they perceive or weigh-up that they are no longer benefitting from their involvement; depending on the pattern of ways in which relationships are organised and their “needs-self-dispositions” are structured, remove themselves from the situation in which they find themselves (Bulmer, 2005).

In moving forward from this point it is important to recognise fundamentally that the application of structural functionalism as a theoretical concept has been credited with moving explanations of substance use on from those associated with dependency and physical addiction to more social and culturally considered concerns (Weinberg, 2011). However, it is also often criticised for not explaining the early stages or onset of substance use and how substance use escalates from use to abuse. From a theoretical point of view, structural functionalism is also deemed to be lacking credibility and application were social relationships are also constituted or structured by issues of power (Peele, 1985; Callero, 2003).

Within the paradigm of the “structured” self a significant amount of what is understood or known about social action, substance use and self-help is derived from exploring the collective experiences and social relationships that exist between users in different subcultural and group settings (Seddon, 2006). When applied as a theory of practice to the collective experiences of users in subcultural contexts the “structured” self fails to fully engage the “bigger picture” of why individuals find themselves in the positions that they do in the first place (May, 2001). In this particular paradigm it is also often difficult to identify if individuals find subcultural contexts and substance use an attractive offer from the outset and are drawn in or if they are simply pushed or driven towards them (Seddon, 2006; Brewer, 1991). Also, within the context of the “structured” self any recognition of individual reflexivity and agency fades into obscurity and little significance is given to understanding the subjective experiences of individuals (Archer, 2003). In this latter context the meaning that social actors themselves attribute to their own behaviours, their motivations and subjective perceptions of social action are also lost (Gauntlet, 2007). This can also lead to a misunderstanding, or intentional neglect of the ways in which particular types of social action “toughness and style”, discussed earlier in the context of problematic substance use are deemed to be meaningful and purposeful for the individuals whom engage in these types of behaviours (Stephens, 1991; Archer 2003).

The notion that individuals simply behave in accordance with roles, rules and norms or the expectations of others has also been challenged by a number of empirical theorists (cf; Bourdieu, 1990; Garfinkel 1967; Wittgenstein 1958). Within more empirical contexts theorists

have also illustrated that individual social actors can and do find themselves in severely constrained or intense subcultural situations, yet, they are still able to exercise agency, reflexivity and choice. Even if this type of social action is simply about choosing how they use drugs, who they use with and the types of drugs they use (cf, McDonald and Marsh, 2002; Shiner and Newburn, 1997). In these contexts, a key finding, if you like “is that individuals respond differently to the structural difficulties with which they are faced and make active choices about the actions they take” (Seddon, 2006:691).

Finally, what is particularly interesting and relevant here is the way that different structural functionalist’s have tended to study similar types of groups and drawn a very different conclusion about the purpose and nature of substance use, individual function and social action (Seddon, 2006). This had led some to commentate that the extent to which and the ways in which social and cultural concerns and conditions function to shape social action will be dependent upon and relate to what it is the individual theorist is endeavouring to prove (Stephens, 1991). The point being made here is simple yet fundamental, the exploration of the relationship that exists between users and social and cultural functioning of groups does provide illuminating, interesting, sometimes insightful accounts of social action. Yet in pursuing the paradigm of the “structured” self, empirical theorists are often only left with “abstract” and uncritical gazes and often un-contextualised accounts of collective social action in different subcultural contexts (May, 2001).

### 3.2 The “Structured” Self in Self Help

Given what has preceded, it is unsurprising to note, that there is widespread agreement that social and cultural concerns and conditions function to structure individuals and social action in the context of drug and alcohol self-help (Humphreys et al 1999; Hatzidimitriadou, 2002; Yeung, 2007). Unlike the previous section, however, social and cultural concerns and conditions in this section are generally discussed as the more positive features of interactions that occur as users congregate and seek to resolve their substance related concerns (Humphreys et al 1999). Within the context of self-help it is important to recognise that there is significant differentiation in the ways that social and cultural concerns and conditions are believed to function and exert influence over users (Hatzidimitriadou, 2002). However, outside this differentiation there is also consensus that the key to resolving substance related concerns is the re-socialisation of those whom are believed to have become disenfranchised or distanced from conventional societal values and beliefs (Smith, 2007).

Theoretically speaking there is significant differentiation in the ways that different empirical theorists in self-help have sought to engage with and explain the ways in which group philosophies, precepts, religious and spiritual values and group interactions are believed to create a context for adult re-socialisation (Trice, 1957; Trice and Roam, 1970; White, 1998; Humphreys, 2011). Synonymously, within the more specific context of the “structured” self-paradigm a significant number of theorists have focused on the more formal ways in which

social and cultural conditions and concerns function to shape collective and individual social action. For example in discussing the concept of “powerful social norms” and the need for individuals to be “honest and supportive of others” within self-help groups (Denzin, 1987 cited in Humphreys et al 1999:55). Theorist like, Denzin (1987) have argued that the social values and beliefs that emanate from social norms in self-help; simultaneously serve to provide individuals with a sense of how to behave in groups whilst improving the quality of relationships between users (Humphreys et al 1999).

Within the wider theoretical context of self-help this type of empirical focus or argument is similar in many ways to that of “group climate” or “social ecology theory” developed by different theorists (Moos, 1974; Moos, Finney and Maude-Griffin, 1993). Interestingly, in this latter context, it is also argued that every self-help group, like individuals have personalities that bring a unique quality, coherence and unity to their members (Kurtz, 1992). In terms of impact upon individual social action and functioning these types of concerns and conditions are clearly social and cultural in orientation and are widely believe to function as both an important corollary of wider self-help processes and problem resolution (Smith, 2007; Humphreys et al 1999).

In a very similar context to that above, others like, Reissman and Carroll, (1995) have also illustrated how more subtle and abstract social and cultural concerns and conditions created by group “ethos” function over time to shape social action. Within the context of the



“structured” self-paradigm, group “ethos” relates directly to the group “essence” or the powerful “constellation of norms and sentiments that underpin and dictates individual and group behaviour” (Reissman and Carroll, 1995:5 cited in Kurtz, 1997:11). In this latter context it is argued that these softer “controls” – “norms and sentiments” also function to ease relationships between users and increase the quality of relationships they develop. But they also serve to reaffirm to individuals, and reconnect them with more traditional core values and beliefs about the importance of community, spiritual values and self-resilience (Kurtz, 1997). Overall, the suggestion being made here is important to recognise, intended or not, that somewhere along the way, prior to self-help, individuals had lost or become withdrawn, disenfranchised or distanced from conventional societal beliefs and values (Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2000; May, 2001).

Within the wider context of the “structured” self-paradigm there is significant and wide spread agreement that those whom adhere or “convert” to conventional societal values and beliefs have a better chance of resolving their substance related concerns (Cloud and Granfield, 2008). Correspondingly, in terms of impact on individual functioning, concerns such group “ethos”-“norms and sentiments” are considered powerful enough to be constituted as an alternative (to traditional treatment) way of understanding self-help and substance related problem resolution (Rapport, 1993; Reissman and Carroll, 1995; Kurtz, 1997; Humphreys, 2011).

Self-help concepts such as “ethos” and “ideology”, which are often considered core concepts of the approach, are also viewed as part of a wider series of structuring concerns that disposition or “convert” individuals into taking up a very particular and longer lasting “alcoholic” subjective position (Yeung, 2007:56). For example, in discussing self-help and AA as a social world Smith (2007) argued that the key to individual success in self-help depended on the individual’s ability to accept and follow the philosophical (surrender the self) underpinnings and programme of change in the group they were attending. However, in doing so [she] also argued that social integration into the social world of AA led to the conversion or self-transformation which fostered and led to on successful (see below) recovery (Smith, 2007). Correspondingly, in this particular context it was argued that social integration into self-help and the conversion process; spiritual, religious, intellectual amongst others, was so powerful that “members would come to re-define themselves within their new life situations, take up a new self-concept, a new role definition, new values and norms about drinking and other social behaviour” (Smith, 2007:66).

In looking forward from this point, of particular interest in Smith’s (2007) social account of problem resolution is the way in which [she] like others (Reismann and Carroll, 1995, Yeung, 2007) is able to show how individuals simultaneously convert to an (see conceptual self) addicted identity whilst also being able to become their own self-help “and self-experts”. Over time it was argued in this particular example that individuals also develop self-understanding and technical knowledge about self-help and skills in helping others as senior group members (Smith, 2007).

In an altogether more theoretically and epistemologically driven context it is important to recognise that there are a significant number of benefits associated with the exploration of the collective experiences of users and social and cultural concerns and considerations within the context of self-help. For example, empirical explorations, like those above, have been shown to yield more valuable insights in social phenomena than can be gained certainly more than would be, by just engaging with highly subjective and individual perspectives alone (Gauntlett, 2007). Similarly, in the more critical context of collective group functioning it is also important to explore how social and cultural concerns and conditions are believed to function to act as controls in shaping collective and individual social action (Brewer, 1991). Fundamentally speaking, it is just simply more important to recognise that individuals acting within groups, and groups themselves behave, feel, think and act in very different ways to which they would if individuals were acting in isolation or independently (Gauntlett, 2007). Interestingly though what is also particularly intriguing about the concept of individuals converting to conventional societal values and beliefs is the ways in which a number of theorists, whilst making reference to them then go onto sidestep, omit, or fail to engage with or actually give a definition of what [it] entails; in the real world or the lives of self-help users.

In many ways structural functionalism and the “structured” self-paradigm have moved the focus of empirical self-help research onward from the work of large meta-analysis theorists whom generally ignore the importance of social group processes in explaining social action and substance related problem resolution (Adamsen and Rasmussen, 2001). However, in doing so they have also generally tended to theoretically overemphasise the functional

importance social and cultural concerns and downplayed the more critical aspects of group dynamics and intersubjective aspects of social practice in different self-help settings (Bottero, 2010). Correspondingly, in the contexts of the “structured” self and self-help we are often simply left to assume that that individuals do not need to “negotiate in their day to day interactions” with others (Bottero, 2010). Similarly, it is often simply implied that individuals enter a self-help group, “get a sense of how to behave” and then mutually adjust in accordance with what are essentially described as series of “objectively structured relations” (Bottero, 2010:13). In discussing the ways in which social theorists have tended to underutilise more critical approaches to understanding self-help, Yeung (2007) has also argued that all we are left with, wrongly, is the idea that groups like AA (see opening chapter) simply “restore anew” the wayward citizen, enable users to be “good again” and the return the “functioning individual” back to society (Yeung, 2007:68).

At this point it is not my intention to indulge in all of the relative epistemological and theoretical merits and detractions of applying a structural functionalist perspective to self-help. However, it is important to recognise, in an altogether more critical context that social and cultural concerns and conditions that are experienced by individuals in self-help are fundamentally maintained and constituted as collective accomplishments between interdependent social agents (Bottero, 2010). These social and cultural conditions and concerns do require, quite sophisticated, coordination and standardisation to operate and to meet the needs of self-help users. In this context then it also needs to be recognised that

individuals do come together and in doing so “profoundly affect each other as they interact” (Barnes, 2000, 64 cited in Botterro, 2010:13).

Fundamentally speaking it is also important to recognise that individuals can and also do develop a sense of how to behave and can appear to have radically changed their values and beliefs because of their involvement in self-help groups; some after a very short period of involvement (Denzin, 1993). However, within this context it also needs to be recognised, as a minimum, that these changes are also known to result, or be brought about, from the ways in which individuals act towards each other in conscious, intentional and more meaningful ways (Allan, 2007). Correspondingly, it is by also exploring and incorporating the more subjective experiences of self-help users that we are able to uncover the more meaningful aspects of social action. In doing we may then be able to explore the ways in which individuals understand their own world and the ways users are known to be able to utilise their position to get more or benefit from the propitious circumstance in which they find themselves by attending self-help (Stephens, 1991; Allan, 2007; Archer 2003).

### **3.3 Symbolic Interactionism and the Conceptual Self**

The highly influential concept of Symbolic Interactionism is rooted in interpretative sociology and is comprised of a variety of different, diverse and often conflicting perspectives (Allan, 2007). The origins of the concept were highly influenced by the tradition of philosophical pragmatism and the work of Dewey, Pierce and James. Yet all symbolic interactionists as

theorists share a subjective interest in exploring the relationship between the individual and the social world. Outside the theoretical differentiation that exists all symbolic interactions tend to view social actors as “authors of their own worlds” and more often than not they are concerned with understanding the process of “intersubjective interpretation and the symbolic construction of the social world” (Heir, 2005:87). However unlike structural functionalists discussed in the previous section, symbolic interactionists tend to neglect broader influences and concerns with the structure and functioning of society. This essentially means the concept of symbolic interactionism is useful for focussing on the more subjective ways in which individuals construct their social worlds and “make meaning in their lives, derive meaning from them and attribute meaning to them” (Heir, 2005:87).

In the contexts of this thesis, substance use and self-help the paradigm of the “conceptual” self is theoretically rooted in interpretivist sociology and (versions of) symbolic interactionism. It is a paradigm of substance use and self-help which is predicated upon the notion that individuals primarily use substances because they derive significance and meaning in their lives from doing so. And that substance use as social behaviour can only be understood as a by-product of the “manner and ways in which individuals uniquely relate to their local situation” (Allan, 2007:42). Correspondingly, in applying the paradigm of the “conceptual” self to explain social action in the context of substance use, symbolic interactionists have primarily focussed their attention on exploring and understanding the micro experiences and interactions that occur between users in local contexts. Or the ways in which self-identity is formed and reformed as individuals move in and out of substance use, different subcultural

contexts and deviance more generally (Allan, 2007; Anderson, 1998). In the applied context of this paradigm theorists have generally tended to reject what are often considered to be the over deterministic idea that social structures simply function to shape individual social action. Arguing, alternatively that external social and cultural concerns are only admissible insofar as they enter into the interpretations of individuals. Who it is argued are pursuing more purposeful and emotionally driven forms of social action in different local contexts (Allan, 2007). Correspondingly, as a theory of practice it is often accepted by theorists within this paradigm that they fail to provide a context or fully appreciate at times the significance or implications that subcultural concerns such as rules, styles, rituals and language have on individual functioning and social action (Anderson, 1998).

Heavy end substance use is dealt with in a largely unproblematic way in the context of the conceptual self. For example, in the "Street Addict Role", now considered by some as a classic ethnography of heroin use, theorists like Stephens (1991) have argued that individuals use drugs, at least initially, because they receive recognition, validation and status from doing so. Within this particular example, Stephens (1991) argued that recognition, validation, meaning and status were all derived from the ways in which youths were recognised to be able to "face down the dangers" and/or "stand up to the challenge of the potentially serious dangers of heroin" (Stephens, 1991:72-74; cf Fiddle, 1967; Hendler and Stephens, 1977; Hanson, et al 1985). In the wider theoretical context of symbolic interactionism it is also widely accepted that substance use and social action is very much a voluntary, meaningful and intentional activity (Agar, 1973; Preble and Casey, 1969; Lalander, 2003; Meashan and Shiner, 2009). This

is often seen as one of the more positive features and attributes of the symbolic interactionist repertoire; especially so when individuals are known to have felt bereft of a positive sense of self then go on to make meaning and find purpose in the local situations that they find themselves (Seddon, 2006; Allan, 2007). The only practical down side, if you like is that by pursuing substance use, as a way of avoiding a meaningless life (op cite) is that individual social actors also need to find a “social climate conducive to substance use” and then “sources of positive appraisal” that make particular types of drug use appear attractive or desirable (Allan, 2007; 42).

Theoretically speaking, it is important to recognise that symbolic interactionism more generally is part of the wider “appreciative turn” within the sociology of substance use and self-help. With regard to substance use many empirical studies have sought to move on from exploring and explaining substance via the mechanisms of structural and functional social breakdown in different social and cultural settings (Weinberg, 2011). To more appreciative and descriptive accounts of drug cultures (cf. Bourgois and Schonberg 2009) the settings in which use occurs (cf. Sutter 1969; Wiseman 1970), the ritual practices of users (cf. Waldorf et al. 1991); and of course, the self-identities of drug users (cf. Denzin 1993; Becker, 1967; Stephens, 1991).

In moving forward, but staying with Stephens (1991) for the purpose of illustration, it is also important to recognise the way that [he] like others symbolic interactionists was able to draw



upon and apply different theoretical frameworks to explain how an individual's substance consumption can escalate from use to abuse in subcultural contexts. Or, in a more specific and focussed context how he was able to map the process of self-identity formation, management and change as individuals drifted in to (in this example) substance use, offending behaviour and deviance (Allan, 2007).

The relevance of Stephen's (1991) ethnography of heroin use and heroin users lies in the way he incorporated both "dramaturgical" and "ethnomethodologically" inspired considerations into explaining individual functioning and social action in the *Street Addict Role* (cf Denzin, 2005). With regard to the theoretical concept of "dramaturgical" social action Stephens argued that drug users would deliberately and actively seek out opportunities to engage with others and use "narcotics" as a way of enact or "performing" the "street addict role" (Goffman, 2005). This "performing" or these "performances" are seen as a key form of active meaning making and a way for individuals to gain further positive feedback, validation and status. However, in taking up this position Stephens, (1991) also argued "ethnomethodologically" that by engaging in the everyday interactions of the "street addict role" individuals became more predisposed to get involved in further offending, drug dealing, drug use and drug related lifestyles. In taking up this latter position, he also argued, like many others (see below) that individuals could fall victims to their own social environments; re, start to think, feel and act in more habitual or dispositioned ways (Allan, 2007).

In an altogether more theoretically driven version of this latter concern the “I in this example simply becomes me” and individual social actors went on to develop a very unique and particular way of organising and defining the self (Allan, 2007; Charmaz, 1983). As Stephens (1991) himself argues, at the point of addiction these unfortunate individuals, became “junkies” and “existentially more committed to thinking about themselves as street addicts and behaving as such” (Stephens, 1991:83). At best individual social actors within the “conceptual” self-paradigm are simply assumed, wrongly in many contexts, to find themselves having to choose from the ever diminishing self-conceptualisations or roles that are available to them in subcultural contexts in which they find themselves (Brewer, 1991).

Within the wider context of the “conceptual” self-paradigm and symbolic interactionism the notion that individuals can become dispositioned and/or victims of their own environment and self-identity is also dealt with in a largely unproblematic manner (Moyer, 2001). Within these types of paradigms, it is often argued that particular types of social and subcultural contexts can be complex and can act as “total institutions” to individual social actors (cf Goffman, 1965: 162-163). In a similar context to the example above [Stephens] others such as Dunlap et al (2002) have utilised the concept of “total institutions” to explore the intergenerational transmission of substance use and violence among young women in sub cultural contexts. Basically, Dunlap et al (2002) and colleagues argued that once their social identities were formed these young women stopped learning and in doing so no longer had the ability to act with total “free will”. What these types of empirical theorists and scholars often fail to recognise is that youth transitions are affected by the “complex interplay between

individual agency, local (sub) culture and social structural constraints” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2008: 5 original emphasis). In these particular contexts the loss of “free will” related to the ways these young women were deemed to still have the ability to interpret their own subjective situation, yet, had also simply learned to accept their “situation and make the best of it” (Allan, 2007: 42). The situations these young women found themselves in was compounded by the ways they “cut off” from the outside world. Correspondingly, they were also deemed to be in no danger of being confronted by any existential crisis or “critical moments” that would have required a more reflexive response and therefore more vulnerable to implicit biases of subcultural labelling and stereotyping (cf Shildrick and MacDonald, 2008).

Within the theoretical context of symbolic interactionism there is also widespread agreement that once a negative label, for example “drug addict” is accepted it is simply internalised by the individual and incorporation into their own identity (McIntosh and McKeagany, 2000). In a similar scenario, within the parameters of self-help it has also been simply argued that by de-labelling to a more socially acceptable label “allergic to alcohol” rather than “addicted” for example can result in a more positive impact on individual’s status within groups, self-concept and identity. However, it is important to recognise that the feedback individuals receive from others in the context of substance use and self-help is still important as a meaning making activity. Critically speaking however, in both of the context above; labelling and de-labelling, it is apparent that by internalising “labels” individuals simply start to become subject to evaluating the self in a criteria set out for them by others (Rose, 1999; Trice, 1970: Trice and Roman, 1970).

It is important to recognise that whilst symbolic interactionism is not a unified body of thought, the application of [its] principles to substance use has moved the focus of enquiry away from those associated with chemical dependency and active addiction to a more social context (Peele, 1985; Weinberg, 2008). However, in a similar but more critical context, as a theory of practice symbolic interactionists do not engage well with the concept of early substance use, initial deviance or when individual social actors relationships are construed and constituted within relationships of inequality and power (Callero, 2003).

In an applied context it is important to recognise that the idea of the “conceptual” self is a useful paradigm from which to begin to explore meaning making in local contexts and map how self-identity is constructed, maintained and changes in local contexts. However, it also needs to be recognised that there has been a significant amount of criticisms directed towards the premise that individuals simply evaluate the “self” via labelling and a criteria set out by others (Rose, 1991), or choose a self-identity from those that are available to them in subcultural contexts (Brewer, 1991). Symbolic interactionists themselves, like Brewer’s (1991) *“The Social Self”* have argued that individual social actors will avoid self-concepts, categories and self-identities in subcultural and smaller group contexts that are too personalised or too inclusive (Brewer, 1991). Other, empirical theorists have also simply argued that whilst social actors can and do engage in substance use in subcultural contexts, they also retain significant links to conventional social worlds, use legitimate and legal means to fund use and can engage in controlled use for significant periods of time (Bourgeois and Shonberg, 2009; Zinberg and Jacobson, 1976; MacDonald and Marsh, 2002). The fundamental point being made, or at least

suggested, by all of these theorists relates to the notion that self-definitions and self-identities may not be as fixed or rigid as some would be symbolic interactionists would have us believe in both the context of substance use and self-help (Brewer, 1991).

One final criticism, perhaps the most critical, relates to the symbolic interactionists axiomatic commitment to view all social action as a conscious, meaningful and intentionally driven in order to provide users with meaning and value Weinberg (2008). Within this context it has also been identified that some features of symbolic interactionism, when applied to the context of problematic substance use and self-help, run counterintuitively to empirical evidence and the significance that users themselves ascribe to drug using experiences (Weinberg, 2011). For example, in the context of substance use and self-help symbolic interactionist have been known to discuss “relapse” as a conscious and intentional process that occurs as individuals oscillate between using and non-using self-concepts and using and non-using identities (Ray 1961 taken from Wienberg, 2011). This positionality, it has been argued, implies that “addiction” is a voluntary concern and as such fails to engage with the visceral components of active addiction. More importantly it also runs counter to the significance that users themselves attach to the concept “addiction” as motivation for seeking out therapeutic interventions and involvement in self-help in the first place (Weinberg, 2011).

### **3.4 Self-help and the Conceptual Self**

The application of symbolic interactionist theories and methodologies to self-help have been strongly associated with a call for re-assessment of how “success” (the resolution of substance related concerns) is understood in different self-help contexts (Smith, 2007; Kurtz, 1997). In many ways the “appreciative turn” that has occurred because of symbolic interaction in self-help has challenged the overriding consensus that individual change and success is largely dependent on the extent to which individuals simply follow or adhere to the guidance (see final section) of their group or programme of change (Kurtz, 1997; Thune, 1977; Denzin, 1987). Instead, a more socially and culturally orientated focus is emphasised, which also recognises the ways in which self-help groups provide opportunities for individuals to make meaning and develop a sense of coherence about the “self” (Antze, 1979).

Further, consideration is paid to how self-identity is managed and changes over time, as individuals seek to reduce their substance consumption or resolve their substance related concerns with others. Within the paradigm of the “conceptual” self the key to an individual reducing or terminating their substance use is simply understood as being dependent upon the extent to which individuals can form or reform a new and more acceptable self-identity (McIntosh and McKeagany, 2000). What is particularly interesting in this paradigm is the variety of different ways in which symbolic interactionists have engaged with the process involved in self-identity formation, change and management in self-help. In many ways it is similar to the ways in which different types of self-help groups have promoted the notion that

to “succeed” individuals must move either from diseased to non-diseased “identity” in Rational Recovery, and from a non-diseased to diseased “identity” in traditional 12 step groups.

Historically speaking self-help groups have provided a fertile empirical context for symbolic interactionists to explore the different ways in which individuals make meaning, manage and change self-identity as they seek or move towards resolving their substance related problems and concerns (Smith, 2007). For example, in the previous section, we touched briefly upon the idea that individuals were able to de-labelling from highly stigmatised self-concepts associated with more problematic use. Then move towards developing more socially acceptable and shared definitions “allergic to alcohol” labels and self-concepts by engaging in self-help (Strauss, 1978). In discussing the theory and rationale of de-labelling in self-help in more detail (Trice, 1970, Trice and Roman, 1970; and Grove, 1984) symbolic interactionists have recognised the minor role de-labelling played in context of other social and cultural processes that were occurring in self-help. They also recognised that the de-labelling processes have little impact on how users were perceived, in society, outside their groups, however, they do recognise the significant role that labelling played in the individual taking on a new self-concept (Trice and Roman, 1970; Smith, 2007). More interestingly given the context of this section and what follows, is the way in which Trice and Roman (1970) like others, were able to recognise the status enhancing affects and benefits that were drawn in feedback from others as individual social actors publicly accepted particular labels within particular self-help contexts (Trice and Roman, 1970; Smith, 2007).

Within the context of the “conceptual” self, paradigm there is also shared and widespread agreement that individuals can gain status, make meaning, whilst essentially managing their self-identity by helping and supporting others in self-help settings (Kurtz, 1997; Humherys, 2004). There are numerous ways in which the notion of helping others has been postulated across and within different self-help groups and settings including; “helper therapy principle” (Shroeder, 1995); “the helpers high” (Luks, 1991) and “the helping role” (Reismann and Carroll, 1995).

Outside this theoretical differentiation there is also significant agreement that simply performing the helpers’ role and practically helping others provides individual social actors (the helper) with a whole range of benefits. An increased sense of personal competence, a perception of equality, opportunities for self-reflection/learning and significant social approval from others has been discussed as within self-help (Skovholt, 1974). However, it is also important to recognise that individuals in such situations are also deemed to be subject to evaluating themselves in a criteria set out by others and simply behaving in accordance with the expectations and requirements of their role (Rose, 1999; Reismann and Carroll, 1995). Interestingly, in effect it is often simply argued in these types of contexts that individuals who start to behave as a “non-addict” acquire the appropriate “mind-set” and start to see “himself or herself as behaving in a new way and may adopt the role as his or her own” (Reismann and Carroll, 1985: 163). In taking up the argument that structural functionalism and symbolic interactionists have more of a shared heritage in some contexts, with regards to dispositioned



social functioning and action, than many theorists are willing to admit, theorists like Denzin (2005) may actually have a point!

Within the paradigm of the “conceptual” self and symbolic interactionism more generally it is widely accepted that the individual’s ability to terminate their substance use is believed to be largely dependent on their ability to change, develop and maintain an alternative, “addicted” or “non-addicted” identity (McIntosh and McKeagany, 2000). In the wider context of natural recovery or self-remission from substance use without formal help or formal drug treatment it is recognised that this process can take time as individuals oscillate between their non-addicted and addicted selves and identities (Cloud and Granfield, 2007). Interestingly, however, in the example given in the opening chapter of this thesis; Rational Recovery, it was argued that individuals moved on from use by developing a very specific and non-addicted self-identity which emphasises self- production, self- reliance and self- determination (Kurtz, 1997). Correspondingly, in moving from a non-addicted to an addicted identity, in the context of 12 step groups it is argued that the individual’s ability to succeed will depend on their ability to sacrifice the self and essentially accept they are addicts (Smith, 2007). What is particularly interesting within these alternative addicted/non addicted discourses/paradigms is the way that users themselves are always able to utilise and benefit from their new self-identity; as a way to reinterpret aspects of their using lives, reconstruct the self and for providing convincing explanations about their recovery (McIntosh and McKeagany, 2000). The point being made here, is that behind the common stereotypes and self-identities of the “diseased addict” that are seen as negative by mainstream standards, lie a body of knowledge,

a user and a set of self-concepts or self-identities that enable individuals to attain success and credibility regardless of if they are or are not an addict (Agar, 1973).

It has also been argued that the changes that occur to an individual's social identity within self-help cannot be attributed solely to participating in self-help meetings alone (Kurtz, 1997). In developing the paradigm of self-help as a "normative community", as an alternative to self-help (above) as "human service" theorists like Rapport (1993) claimed to have observed that user's self-identity changed in accordance with the ways in which they identified with the organisations "narrative" about itself (Rapport, 1993). Within this very specific example Rapport (1993) utilised ethnomethodological methods (conversation analysis) and argued that over time, "as the organisation's story becomes a part of one's identity, one's own story, a person comes to understand his or her identity in terms of that story" (Kurtz, 1997:11). In taking up this position Rapport (1993) argued that individuals did not necessarily join a self-help group for "treatment" per say and that self-help groups were like any other type of social or voluntary organisation; a "normative community" in this context. However, in doing so, intended or not, he also suggested that all individual's possessed the same types of behaviours and characteristics, self-identity, because they belonged to the same types of self-help group or found themselves in the similar small groups contexts as others (Brewer, 1991).

Suffice to say that outside a basic agreement that participating in self-help is significant and meaningful and relates to an individual's local situation and self-identity there are very few

points of unification within the wider theoretical contexts of symbolic interactionism and the paradigm of the “conceptual” self (Allan, 2007). However, more positively speaking for those whom apply symbolic interactionist principles to self-help are left with a wide and rich repertoire of theoretical frameworks to choose from and draw upon to explain individual functioning and social action (Weinberg, 2008). As a theory of practice those whom utilise different theoretical features of symbolic interactionism are able to explore how substance use de-escalates in different self-help contexts for example, de-labelling (Trice, 1970, Trice and Roman, 1970; and Grove, 1984) role taking (Reisman and Carroll, 1995); and self-identity change (Smith, 2007). Correspondingly, it is important to recognise that the application of symbolic interactionism to self-help has enriched our understanding of the attendant meaning which non drugs users ascribe to the localities, self-help and worlds in which they live (Weinberg, 2011). It has also provided a theoretical framework from which to explore how individuals are able to work towards resolving their substance related concerns by transforming or reforming, managing and changing their self-identity (Allan, 2007).

Finally, it is also fundamentally important to recognise that within all of the contexts above, individuals are still believed to define themselves either by criteria set by others or as choosing a self-concept or role from those that are available to them (Brewer, 1991). It is also important to recognise that symbolic interactionists have engaged with the idea that individuals need to work and rework different types of social relationships as they develop a more positive self-concept and seek to maintain and manage their new self-identity. However, in doing so they have also tended to de-emphasise, in the majority of contexts, the importance of social and

cultural concerns and conditions; rules, styles, rituals and the fundamental part these types of concerns play in providing the social microcosms or environment which are needed for (Allan, 2007, Anderson, 1998). More fundamentally, they [symbolic interactionists] like structural functionalists and those concerned with the “structured” self, also fail to apply any level of critical analysis or interpretation to the ways in which transactions are managed between different group members and users in self-help (Leibermann, 1990; Kurtz, 1997). Taken together the theoretical concepts and concerns of structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism have moved explanations of substance related problem resolution and self-help on. From those empirical theorists who have sought to explain self-help and self-help processes by focussing on the individual characteristics of users and the blind following of a spiritual or religious programmes of change (cf, Kelly, 2003; Humphreys, 2004; Humphreys, et al 1999; Kurtz, 1997, Denzin, 1985). To more qualitative social and cultural context which consider and place; the structure and functioning of groups, primary and secondary socialisation or (re)-socialisation, meaning making in local contexts and the formation and reformation of self-identity at the heart of self-help and problem resolution.

It is important to recognise that structural functionalists, whilst providing insightful perspectives, have tended to elevate an understanding of the collective experiences of users and the relationships that exists between users in the context of adult re-socialisation. This has been prioritised over engagement with the more intersubjective ways that individuals experience or perceive self-help or “learn the game”; by this I mean interpret the world of self-help and different situations within self-help contexts (Allan, 2007). Symbolic

interactionists have also tended to recognise that the resolution of substance related concerns requires skill, dexterity and on some occasions requires individuals to work and rework relationships with others. They [symbolic interactionism] have also tended to focus on the individual's preoccupation with self-management and self-identity at the cost of providing a context which considers how individuals need to adapt to and get involved in the constant social production of everyday interactions and rituals within context of self-help. More importantly, when taken together both these theoretical concepts, discussed as the "structured" and "conceptual" self, also fail to critically engage, or de-emphasise, how relationships and transactions are managed in and between users in self-help (Kurtz, 1997).

In moving forward, it is important to recognise that individuals whom enter self-help do not resolve their substance related concerns by accident or socialisation alone, nor, are they simply pushed into developing a self-identity because of the positions and relationships that they find themselves in. These types of concerns, socialisation and meaning making in local contexts and self-identity are important features of self-help and the resolution of substance related concerns, much in the same way that engaging with a self-help programme of change are. However, as minimum individuals within self-help also need to find ways of being together in such a way that provides them and others with a sense of meaning and belonging, whilst enabling them as individuals to work towards their own resolving their own substance related concerns. My primary aim in the next chapter therefore is to provide a theoretical basis, through the analytical lens of social capital, which enables the development of a more fleshed out or in-depth analysis and understanding of self-help and self-help processes.

Further, I will endeavour to engage in a more critical but sympathetic appraisal of how relationships and transactions are managed in and between users as they set about resolving their substance related concerns.

## Chapter Four

### Understanding Self Help Through Social Capital Theory

#### *An Ambiguous Emergence*

*“Some concepts slide gently into the consciousness of social researchers, or gradually emerge over decades as a natural successors of earlier thinking. Social Capital, by contrast, is remarkable not only for the speed with which it has come to figure in a broad range of social science activity but also for the controversy it has aroused...is it a Trojan horse for economic imperialism on the one hand, or an insidious communitarianism on the other, or alternatively just a piece of vague liberal softheadedness? Does it muffle feminist debate, or open opportunities to raise the profile of gender issues. Is it perhaps an Anglo Saxon device, with no application elsewhere, Jacqueman 2006 poses the question and answers.....no”(Tom Schuller, 2007)*

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The concept of social capital has an immediate intuitive appeal and over the last twenty-five years there has been a resurgence in its use, reference is frequently made to the heuristic value and flexibility of the concept: “much of which has been the subject of scholarly debate” (Schuller, Field and Baron, 2000:3). Much of the current appeal associated with the use of social capital and its application has been driven by the notion that its application focusses on the more positive features of group sociability and social relations. Many empirical theorists are attracted to the utilisation of the concept because of its fungibility and flexibility in explaining and exploring almost every aspect of social relations, social interactions and the everyday life of groups. All positive features aside the application and use of the concept of social capital is also highly problematic as it is beset by definitional, substantive, ideological and epistemological difficulties (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

To provide a structure for what follows in this chapter, I begin by broadly exploring the concept of social capital and then the intellectual underpinnings of three seminal social capital theorists: Robert Putman, James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu. In doing so, I briefly engage in outlining and critically analysing a number of the main features of the former two theorists; Coleman and Putman's work. Where appropriate I also illustrate how their intellectual and theoretical concerns connect with the critical discussion that has preceded in the opening two chapters of this thesis. I separate these three social capital theorists in this way because I think that Bourdieu's concept of social capital has more to offer heuristically and is more relevant in what follows. However, in taking up this position I also seek to set a context for what follows and Bourdieu's own work by illustrating where relevant, how the former two theorist's ideas around social capital have also been applied both in the context of substance use and self-help. In focussing in more specifically on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, I begin by exploring his take on social capital, its origins and intellectual underpinnings whilst exploring the relationship it, social capital, has with his other forms, symbolic and cultural, of capital(s) and his concept of habitus; Bourdieu's version of the "self".

In taking up this focus I recognise throughout this chapter that Bourdieu has one of the most abstract, complex and intellectually driven and theoretically fleshed out versions of all social capital theorists (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000; Portes, 1998; DeFilippis, 2001). As I go onto explore each of his concepts, capital(s) and habitus I also discuss the theoretical merits of them as concepts and the advantages that can be derived from their utilisation to explore and explain self-help and self-help processes.



#### **4.1 Social Capital: Intellectual Origins.**

To begin, there are three seminal figures Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putman, who are largely credited with the “conceptual paternity” of the concept and much of the scholarly impetus associated with social capital (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000). In terms of contribution to the development of the concept, social capital was very much the main feature of much of Putman’s (1941-present) work: whilst for Bourdieu (1930-2002) and Coleman’s (1926-1995) social capital was a smaller part of a much wider theoretical set of concerns (Gauntlett, 2011). In the context of what follows it is important to note that all three theorists did have different intellectual bases and origins for their theoretical development of the concept, “half-jokingly referred to as politico-psycho-anthropological” by Lemenn, (1996) cited in Schuller, Baron and Field, (2000:13).

Outside this differentiation, there was agreement among Putman, Coleman and Bourdieu that social capital was a resource in its own right, was unequally distributed in society, and could be associated with processes that promoted or maintain inequalities (Field, 2009). In moving forward from this point it is also important to note that whilst each of these three theorists shared some ideas about the fundamental nature and features of social capital, each of them also had their own very specific ideas about how the social world was organised and operated, what social capital was and how it could be defined, accrued, transformed and utilise to explain social practices and phenomenon (Maton, 2012).

#### **4.1.1 Robert Putman**

For Robert Putman, social capital was simply produced as a by-product or result of participation in civic society and was defined as a “feature of social life-networks, norms, trust- that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putman, 1996). Within Putmans’ paradigm of social capital social actors were often depicted as reflexive and self-aware, they were also often portrayed as being able to move relatively unchallenged in different social worlds and contexts. In this particular social capital paradigm, it was also often contested that if individuals were willing to abide by shared agreements and objectives, often morally driven, then they would simply benefit from their participation in social relationships with others (Skeggs, 2004, Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000). Unsurprisingly, some of Putman’s key theoretical concerns associated with the “self”, social capital and the applicability of his social capital paradigm to explain social action have been widely criticised. More often than not these criticisms are directed at the ways in which his paradigm of social capital does not translate easily where social action is isolated, unequal, or where personal vulnerability or any reference to deviant behaviour is concerned (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000).

Outside these criticisms, many of Putman’s concerns are relevant, particularly those associated with social capital, sociability, trust and social norms which have strong intellectual antecedents in both self-help theory and literature (cf Banks, 1997). As critically illustrated in the preceding chapter, the exploration of these types of concerns have enabled many scholars

and empirical theorist to develop a deeper understanding of the structure and functioning of self-help groups, the collective experiences of users and the individual “expressive” benefits that are often associated with group participation and involvement (Banks, 1997). Synonymously, much of Putman’s later theoretical work around the concept of social capital was also focussed on developing the idea that there were different types of capital “bonding and bridging” that resided in different social contexts and settings (Schuller, 2007). According to Putman bonding and bridging capital were discussed as having the following features, bonding is exclusive in nature, strengthening ties with homogeneous groups and enhancing access to internal resources, bridging concerns strengthening ties between heterogeneous, socially diverse groups and enhancing access to external resources (Putman, 2000). Critically speaking, it was not Putman himself who initially conceptualised the distinctions between different types of bonding and bridging social capital; this was work he himself credited to others (Halpern, 2005). However, what has become apparent since the conceptualisation of bonding and bridging capitals is the way these types of concepts are now widely utilised and adapted to explain and explore many different types of social relationships and networks (Halpern, 2005).

In discussing the theoretical antecedents of Putman’s capitals, theorists like Halpern (2005), have sought to locate facets or features of his intellectual ideals in wider historical and philosophical contexts. For example, in taking up analysis of Hegels’ notion of “impersonal altruism”, Halpern (2005) has argued that Hegel could be seen to anticipate many of Putman’s social capital distinctions and the benefits that could be drawn from different types of social

relationships. In doing so he [Halpern] argued that prior to Putman, Hegel had already identified and made distinctions between the strong bonds that existed and could be found in inside families and communities and with those that develop between strangers as they come together to cooperate “impersonal altruism” and share resources more successfully (Halpern, 2005:20). In taking up this somewhat elaborate comparison, the point being made by Halpern (2005) does have some relevance to what follows. But only insofar as it serves as a warning that the concept of social capital cannot be used to paint over core concepts which have already been explored by other theorists, scholars and philosophers (Portes, 1998). In turn and in a very similar context it is important to recognise that many of the more critical concerns associated with social capital and the use of Putman’s paradigm have also come, not from his own work, but from the ways in which “others” have utilised his concepts to explain or “re-label” already existing social processes (Portes, 1998:5, cited in Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000:7).

In recognising the points made above and moving forward it is important to recognise that the distinctions between different types of social capital are often utilised by theorists to explore the nature and functioning of different types of relationships and their importance to individuals as they engage and disengage with self-help groups. For example, and by way of illustration, theorists such as Folgheraiter and Pansini, (2009:257) whom have interestingly discussed self-help groups as “gyms of sociability” and have made positive use of the concepts of bonding and bridging capitals to explain and illustrate the importance of initial bonding that is made with others in the self-help group and the bridging to wider society that occurs, usually

with family and non-using peers, as individuals seek to resolve their substance related concerns (cf Smith, 2007).

#### **4.1.2 James Coleman**

Much of Putman's intellectual work around the "self" and social capital was informed by the work of James Coleman. Theoretically speaking it has been identified that Putman's reflexive self seems to be very much a more modern version of Coleman's rational actor, (Skeggs, 2004). For Coleman, rationality, the rational actor and rational action was very much at the heart of social capital "if we begin with a theory of rational action, in which each actor has control over certain resources and interests in certain resources and events, then social capital constitutes a particular kind of resource available to an actor" (Coleman, 1998:98). Coleman's own theoretical development of social capital was very much conceptualised by fusing the separate intellectual traditions of sociology and economics together and is often viewed as being a little more theoretically "fleshed out" than that of Putman. However, in critically analysing his own work, Coleman himself did concede that fusing these two intellectual traditions; sociology and economics together was not easy. In this latter context he himself also recognised and conceded that "it was necessary to begin with a conceptually coherent framework from one and introduce elements from the other without destroying that coherence" (Coleman, 1998; 97).

Like Bourdieu [to follow] it took Coleman some time to define the main features of social capital but when he did, he described it as having three definitive features. Interestingly, all of these features can also be found equally in drug and non-drug using worlds, self-help or any social context for that matter! In this paradigm, then social capital encompassed and included; joint obligations and expectations, information channels and adherence to social norms (Coleman, 1998). Generally speaking, Coleman dealt with the concept of social capital in a relatively unproblematic way and social capital was largely deemed to result from activities designed for other purposes. In his own words, he claimed that social capital could be defined by its function “it consists of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure (...) making possible achievements of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman, 1998: 98).

Critics of Coleman are often drawn to the vagueness of his ideas around the concept of social capital and recognition that like Putman his social capital is often associated with “painting over” or accounting for, already existing social process. In an altogether more positive context, Coleman did start to define specific forms of social capital and in doing so he did identify that social capital could also be seen as an asset which held value for disadvantaged groups in society; not just the privileged (Field, 2003). However, outside these more positive contexts, fundamental criticisms are often directed to the weaknesses of his interpretations and his dependence on individual rationality in explaining the mechanism involved in social action and capital. For example, and in addition to the concerns raised in the opening chapter

of this thesis around the rational individual and rational choice more generally; others have argued that “on the one hand, being a member of a social structure can be a form of social capital in itself - and the resources acquired through membership could be another” (Portes, 1998 cited in Schuller, Field and Baron, 2000:7).

In much of his later work Coleman did seek to refine and seek to locate social capital in a broadly more critical framework and set out to analyse issues such as social stratification via the empirical application of his concepts to non-elite groups such as children, students and families (Schuller, Field and Baron, 2000). In applying this more critical context he still retained his vagueness around different forms of social capital, but in doing so he also took his own concepts forward by defining, identifying and exploring the connections between different forms of human and social capitals (Field, 2010). In developing these types of concerns, Coleman was able to demonstrate the fungibility of the concept and argued that some forms of capital were more useful and valuable in some contexts and useless or indeed harmful in others (Coleman, 1998). More importantly, he was also able to illustrate that social capital could and was just as much of an asset for disadvantaged groups and not just an instrument of the privileged (Field, 2009).

In moving forward, it is important to recognise that Coleman also shared a number of theoretical concerns and ideals about social capital with Pierre Bourdieu. For example, both of these theorists agreed that different forms of capitals existed, both agreed that capitals

were exchanged with others, both agreed that social capital was an instrumental concern and that it was accrued by an initial investment (Halpern, 2005; Field, 2009). Outside this shared agreement, it is important to note that Coleman developed the idea that the exchange and accrual of social capital was rooted in rationality and rational choice. But for Bourdieu the accrual and transformation of social capital was constituted upon the basis or the notion of cultural materialism (Field, 2009).

It is important to recognise that for Pierre Bourdieu the concept of cultural materialism had both analytical and evaluative features. In the first instance, its analytical form “it was used to describe a whole system of significations by which a society or sections of it understands itself in relation to the social world” (Wilson, 1995:27). The second and more evaluative use of the concept was contingent upon the more historical concepts of social capital and “associated more specifically with the arts and literature and is described as the reservoir of superior values which one might come to possess through access to them” (Wilson, 1995:27). Fundamentally speaking then Coleman engaged with the concept of social capital as a benign concern that held value for all regardless of privilege or disadvantage whilst Bourdieu engaged with capital as a circular concept “which basically boiled down to the idea that privileged individuals use social capital to maintain their privileged positions” (Field, 2009:31).



## 4.2 Bourdieu's General Ideas around Capital(s)

In this section of the thesis I aim to provide a general but concise overview of the main features or tenets of Bourdieu's concepts of capitals: I return to these concepts again in the latter section of this chapter<sup>7</sup>. In developing the concept of social capital Bourdieu himself was concerned with exploring a wide range of concerns which included social spaces, the structure and functioning of the social world and how non-monetary forms of assets or resources were formed, transformed and exchanged within different settings and contexts (Moore, 2012). More specifically he developed the concept along with other forms of cultural and symbolic capital to explore and explain the ways in which culture could be understood as a dynamic and creative yet structured concept (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2002). It took Bourdieu almost 25 years to define each of his different forms of capitals as separate and distinct forms and concepts. Prior to this they had been used as metaphor or more generally applied to supplement other concepts such as Habitus or Field (Schuller, Field and Barron, 2000). When he did, eventually define the concept, he simply argued that social capital "was the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words, to membership of a group" (Bourdieu, 1986:9).

In developing his other forms of capital(s) Bourdieu was also fundamentally endeavouring to theorise a number of larger societal issues that concerned him and in light of his focus, all of

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<sup>7</sup> I am setting up this section to introduce the concept of habitus which intellectually underpins Bourdieu's Capitals.

his forms of capital(s) including social, cultural and symbolic were discussed and deemed to be transubstantiated forms of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). He himself argued on a number of different occasions that it was in fact impossible, “to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 2006:105).

The concept of cultural capital<sup>8</sup> was also a key and expansive feature of Bourdieu’s scholarly and empirical work, it was also often equated or utilised to explore the different forms of cultural competences-this included knowledge, appreciations, tastes, perceptions and ability to appreciate legitimate culture-which individuals and groups developed over time in different settings and contexts (Bourdieu, 1986; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Cloud and Granfield, 2008). In a very similar context (see later sections also) Bourdieu’s other form of capital “symbolic” had the interesting distinction of being a composite of the other forms but was also discussed by Bourdieu as having the peculiarity of hardly ever being recognised in the social world (Everett, 2002). This form of capital was also contextualised as being intrinsic to the particular social setting or context in which it was constituted and was usually discussed and utilised to explore the ways in which status, recognition or distinctions elevated elite or privileged groups above others and “conferred social advantage” (Moore, 2012: 99). According to Bourdieu himself symbolic capital was not a type of Capital itself, per say, it was

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<sup>8</sup> In his Forms of Capital(s) (1986:3) Bourdieu also conceptualised Institutional and Objectified forms of Cultural Capital in addition to the Embodied form I utilise here.

“what every form of capital becomes when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition” (Bourdieu, 2000: 242).

Bourdieu argued that each of his forms of capital(s) whilst distinct from each other also shared a number of common features with their corresponding concepts. Each was acquired over time via inculcation and could be objectified and embodied. All were transposable across different settings and contexts and believed to bring value to the individual social actor or group whom possessed them (Moore, 2012). Each could also be utilised for their heuristic value in exploring the empirical workings of different social worlds and it is hardly surprising then, that Bourdieu is often credited with having the most fleshed out and theoretically driven version of all social capital theorists (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000; Portes, 1998; DeFillipis, 2001). However, before moving on to the more intellectual underpinnings of Bourdieu’s capital(s) it is first and foremost important to recognise another feature of Bourdieu’s key epistemologically driven concerns. This is the concept of habitus which was an underpinning feature of Bourdieu’s forms of capital(s), *Habitus: Bourdieu’s version of the self* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

#### **4.3 Habitus: a theory and a heuristic tool**

Bourdieu himself was opposed to the concept of the self: in a traditional sense (Skeggs, 2004). In his own typically complex prose Bourdieu argued that the “self” was a bourgeois fabrication that could only be understood as in oppositional terms to conscious action and will power,

instead he transposes “habitus” to centralise the ideal of the self (Skeggs, 2004). Habitus then, to Bourdieu, was the grand design or organising feature of the self, it was essentially believed to be structured over time, without much conscious reflection on behalf of the individual, via socialisation and the social and cultural processes that occurred in social structures that individuals belonged to; class, gender, occupation (Maton, 2012). Bourdieu himself discussed the basic, but fundamental formation and the structuring of the Habitus as the ongoing internalisation of social processes and facts, the objective made subjective or more intellectually as “the social embodied” and “the socialised subjectivity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127-28).

For Bourdieu then, the Habitus was a fundamental structured phenomenon but in practice it was also designated and functioned a way of being, best described as, “*a habitual state, and in particular, a predisposition, tendency or inclination*” (Bourdieu, 1977; 214 his emphasis). In this more elaborated context, Habitus was believed to be structured by both the material and social conditions that individuals found themselves in but also by the individuals themselves as they generated their own practices in the form of feelings, perceptions, appreciations, beliefs and dispositions (Maton, 2012). In shaping the concept of Habitus in this way, it has been argued that Bourdieu was theoretically concerned with bringing the personal or individual into the social (Maton, 2012). Or as he himself discussed it, exploring “the dialect of the internalisation of externality and the externality of internality” (Bourdieu, 1977:72). Fundamentally, Bourdieu also brought the personal into the social by arguing that dispositions did shape social action but they also came full circle and served to reproduce or certainly

served to maintain the social structures in which they had been developed; it, the “self” was both “structured and a structuring structure” (Bourdieu, 1994: 170). Finally, Bourdieu argued that that individual functioning and social action could only be understood by exploring both the objective social structures and regularities and the subjective meaning making of individuals in their own particular social worlds (cf Maton, 2012).

Bourdieu himself originally articulated the concept of Habitus in what is considered by some, as the “highly influential”, commentary *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Parreson, 1977). In this particular work Bourdieu himself utilised the intellectual underpinnings of Habitus alongside his forms of capitals, to theorise the ways in which social and cultural conditions reproduced inequalities and relationships between different groups and classes (Schuller, Field and Baron, 2000). In a wider and more scholarly context he also developed the concept of habitus for its heuristic value, not as theory that needed to be validated but as a tool for “theorising and conducting empirical research regarding a variety of social phenomena” (Hurtardo, 2010:54). More specifically and importantly in the context that follows, it has also been noted that he developed the concept of habitus to overcome a number of different dichotomies; between, past and present, structure and agency, and the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity which he believed to transcend scholarly accounts of social action, phenomenon and the social world (Schuller, Field and Baron, 2002; Gauntlet, 2007, 2011, Maton, 2012; Ritzer, 2010).

Since its conceptualisation the concept of Habitus has been utilised, adapted and applied as a way of eliciting research questions and the empirical workings of a significant and profound range of issues and debates in a wide number of discipline and subject areas; sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, education (Maton, 2012; Hurtado, 2010). Some have argued that Habitus has become a lexicon in a number of discipline areas and more recently the concept has also been utilised to explore and explain the life situations, experiences and actions of individuals in highly homogenised groups, subcultural and subsets of subcultural contexts and settings (cf, Vilellone, 2004; Maigan, 2014; Tripathi, 2014; Bourgiouis and Shonberg, 2007; Barker, 2016). For example, theorists such as Justin Barker (2015) have utilised the concept of Habitus to explore both the complexities of youth homelessness and to decipher its relationship to individual functioning and social action in the context of marginalisation and insecurity.

In taking this form of empirical analysis Barker (2016) has been able to illustrate how marginalisation can create a sense of insecurity in young people, which is, in turn subjectively internalised and then manifests as young people then go onto recreate insecurity in their own lives. More specifically and theoretically, Barker (2016) argued that young homeless youths developed a "Habitus of Insecurity". In doing so he also argued that social action in the context of homelessness, marginalisation and insecurity could best be understood as a process of naturalisation which occurred as young people subjectively aspired to what they were socialised to see as objectively probable "for the likes of them" (Barker, 2016).

Importantly, in taking up the opportunity to apply the concept of Habitus in this way, Barker (2016) like Bourdieu more generally, did not concern himself, in any way with focussing in on how those whom were deemed to be marginalised or bereft of their position or status were able to improvise or re-invent within the structure of their daily living experiences and routines (Gauntlett, 2007, 2011; Jenkins, 2002). Or the ways in which dramatic, single or subtler processes experienced as homeless could bolster individual action and actually turn social actors away from what were seen to be “destructive and disordered lifestyles” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2008: 7). He was however, like many others more recently able to utilise Habitus to explore how individuals and groups, construct objective structures, perceive them and act in accordance with their social world without actually neglecting how their perceptions are constrained by different social structures (cf Ritzer, 2007; Maigan, 2014; Tripathi, 2014; Ruddick, 2014; Vilellone, 2004; Barker, 2016).

Theoretically, it is important to recognise that the application of Bourdieu’s habitus to self-help is overshadowed by a small number of intellectual and conceptual concerns. In the first instance then Bourdieu’s concept of Habitus is often criticised for its complexity, its abstract nature and for the ways individuals are portrayed and deemed as lacking awareness, spontaneous reflexivity and agency (Gauntlett, 2007, 2011). In the second instance it is often simply identified that Bourdieu is essentially deterministic and/or relied far too heavily on the transposed nature of dispositions to explain individuals functioning and social action (Gauntlett, 2011, Davey, 2010, Jenkins, 2002). However, outside these types of issues and concerns, it is also important to recognise that the application of Habitus is useful for exploring

and explaining the objective social regularities and subjective meaning making of individuals in self-help (Barker, 2016). It is also a concept that is useful for bridging a number of dichotomies which are known to transcend scholarly and empirical accounts of self-help. And for reducing the chances of being drawn into the highly reductionist and essentialist ways of thinking about important self-help processes and the ways that individuals are believed to resolve their substance related concerns. In this latter context I am making reference to the highly reductionist or essentialist trappings of theorists in self-help contexts who have focussed on concepts such as individual functioning or the concept of group fit and the “ideal member”. Group fit and the notion of the “ideal member” is concerned with the premise that individuals can simply be fitted or slotted into the group for which it was designed “such as being an alcoholic in a group designed for alcoholics” (Kurtz, 1997: 67).

Intellectually, the heuristic application of habitus to self-help then, also predisposes a more relational context and critical account of individual functioning and social action over time as individuals engage with others in self-help and in different self-help process. This latter focus is particularly relevant in what follows for explaining and exploring how those with limited social and other forms of capital experience self-help initially and how their perceptions, appreciations of the self or habitus changes over time and under different field conditions. That is, fundamentally of course, if we accept the basic ideological premise that in entering self-help, the majority of individuals may be confronted with an environment which is significantly “distant from the one in which they are (*or where*) currently objectively fitted” (Bourdieu, 1990:62 cited in Maton, 2012:135 my emphasis).



#### 4.4 Social Capital

For Bourdieu social capital existed in three actual or virtual forms as practical resources, material resources and symbolic resources<sup>9</sup> in all contexts and settings. (Bourdieu 1986). He himself often utilised the concept alongside his other forms of capital(s) and habitus to explain how societal power relations and how non-economic forms of resources were associated with class domination and reproduction (Gaventa, 2003; Navvaro, 2006). However, in doing so he also argued that the intellectual application and utilisation of social capital in its own right was a useful way of exploring the ways in which power, resources or different types of assets were mediated by relationships of recognition and mutual acquaintance in different contexts and settings (Bourdieu, 1986).

Importantly, Bourdieu also argued that the concept of social capital held significant heuristic value for exploring the formation and functioning of different groups and networks of connections: networks of connections were mostly those recognised in symbolic relations between groups (Bourdieu, 1986). As a basic premise then, Bourdieu argued that the exchange of social capital, practical, material and symbolic resources, in groups and networks transformed the things being exchanged in groups into signs of recognition. In turn he also argued that the recognition that social capital existed in groups encouraged relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition to flourish which in turn defined, affirmed and reproduced the group (Bourdieu, 1986). Correspondingly, he also argued that the forms of

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<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu also used this typology of resources as a way of exploring the wider types of relationships that individuals had with others, relationships could also be practical, material and symbolic (Bourdieu 1986:9).

capital being exchanged within different groups and networks would also define the constitutive limitations of the group and what types of exchange could and would take place (Bourdieu, 1986).

For Bourdieu individual social actors were dually custodians of their own social capitals and guardians of the group's capital(s). This latter concern "group capital" was known or discussed by Bourdieu as containing a larger volume of capital(s) that any individual could hope to possess in his or her own right (Bourdieu, 1986). He argued that social capital could and would be obtained or accrued as benefits in an almost unconscious manner as individuals participated in different context and settings. However, he also argued, somewhat cynically that social actors would set about vying with others to maximise the benefits they could derive from the groups that they were involved in (Moore, 2012). In a somewhat darker context, he suggested that all groups would have various forms of institutionalised delegation for concentrating the totality of its social capital and processes for expelling, excommunicating or discrediting embarrassing individuals from their ranks (Bourdieu, 1986).

The points being illustrated here, in this latter context, are all related to the notion that for Bourdieu, the reproduction of social capital and its accrual for individuals presupposed a dynamic unceasing effort of sociability and endeavour to negotiate and engage in a continual "series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed" (Bourdieu, 1986:10). For Bourdieu, then relationships of recognition were largely underpinned by the

notion that individuals with either status in their group (see symbolic capital) usually derived from having large amounts of existing social capital or personal attributes (see cultural capital) were able to transform even the most circumstantial relationships into either lasting connections or assets (Bourdieu, 1986). Correspondingly, relationships of mutual acquaintance, all of which have the potential to become relationships of recognition, were underpinned by the notion that individuals had to constantly invest and reinvest in sociability and exchanges with others to accrue any assets that were or are directly usable in the long or short term (Bourdieu, 1986).

Theoretically, there are a small number of concerns which relate to and have been raised about the ways in which Bourdieu rationalises the formation, purpose and functioning of groups and the instrumental way he conceptualises relationships of recognition and mutual acquaintance between individual's in different groups and networks (Jenkins, 2002). Some have gone so far as to actually suggest that there is always a significant undertone in Bourdieu's work that individuals are incapable of liking each other (Jenkins, 2002). Outside these generalised criticisms it can also be seen that, the application of Bourdieu's social capital to self-help certainly lives up to its billing of providing a more dynamic and holistic reading of social action and phenomena in different contexts and settings (Schuller, Baron and Field, 2002). More specifically and intellectually the application of Bourdieu's social capital to self-help also presupposes a more holistic and dynamic reading of the different types of social relationships that exist in self-help and the social and cultural patterns of distinctiveness that underpin them (Moore, 2012). Correspondingly, in taking up Bourdieu's recognition that

social actors in groups can and do come together, invest in relationships with others: and that they fundamentally affect each other as they do (Bottero, 2010). Those whom apply his concepts will be able to probe deeper into the relationships that exists between users in self-help and the strategies and investments social actor utilise and make with others to achieve their substance related goals. An exploration of these latter types of concerns may call for a more cynical or critical interpretation of relationships that exist between users in the context of self-help. But surely, this is and must be a more attractive offer than simply maintaining the status quo or adhering to the notions previously discussed elsewhere in this thesis that individuals rationally enter and take what they want from self-help. Or similarly, adhere to or surrender the self<sup>10</sup> and atone religiously to the roles, rules and norms set out for them by others (Swartz, 2002).

#### **4.5 Cultural and Symbolic Capital**

Bourdieu utilised the concept of cultural capital in two very distinct ways. In the first, as way of exploring the rather arbitrary ways in which cultural values, lifestyles, tastes and membership of particularly affluent social group's conferred (e.g. education) advantage (Tazanakis, 2011; Moore, 2012). In the second and more applied context as a way of exploring and explaining the qualitative differences in the forms of knowledge and consciousness of individuals within different groups and settings. In both of these contexts Bourdieu also contested that the concept of cultural capital was of heuristic value when exploring how social

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<sup>10</sup> Here I am making reference to the surrendering of the self which dominated 12 step self-help groups and the notion that resolution of substance related concerns can only be achieved in this way.

and symbolic capital(s) in groups and settings were mediated by the individuals “cultural and informational competences and the individual’s ability to recognise legitimate culture” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:80).

Theoretically speaking, the concept of cultural capital was the most closely connected, certainly in its embodied form, of all Bourdieu’s forms of Capital(s) to the concept of Habitus. In connecting these concerns Bourdieu, like a number of other serious thinkers, Durkheim, Weber and Merleau-Ponty, was primarily concerned with how the Outer (the social) became the Inner self when it came to explaining individual functioning and social action. Theoretically his work around the concept of habit and habitus<sup>11</sup> has been identified as being similar to that of James (1976); Garfinkel (1967); Schultz (1972) and Berger and Luckman (1971). Correspondingly, Bourdieu’s own concern with disposition and social action is also fundamentally similar, yet significantly different, to a large number of social and cultural theorists within the context of substance use and self-help. Similar, in particular to those theorists whom who have contested that “sociability cuts both ways” and that individuals can be “held back” by the different attitudes, perceptions and appreciations they acquire and develop in particular homogenised groups, settings and context (Portes, 1998:18). Different because, what sets Bourdieu apart from these other scholars and empirical theorists is the fundamental nature of Bourdieu’s dispositions and the ways in which they are believed to be

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<sup>11</sup> The context and principles of Habit and Habitus are similar here but Bourdieu utilised the latter to recognise that habit, unlike others, was always underpinned by a generative principle or structure “I say Habitus so as not to say Habit” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:122).

incorporated into the individual. Or in Bourdieusian terms, embodied and transposable, re: capable of becoming active or transferrable from one context, setting or field to the other (Maton, 2012; Navarro 2006).

Importantly then, for Bourdieu cultural capital, was largely associated, at least initially but not exclusively (see below) with the prolonged immersion of the individual in specialised contexts, settings or Habitats such as the arts, sciences and the upper regions of French society (Navarro, 2006). Intellectually speaking, cultural capital was defined as an outer manifestation of the inner Habitus and whilst it took many forms in Bourdieu's empirical work it always came back to the "specific cultural competences" and dispositions that individuals developed in different contexts and settings (Bourdieu, 1986:5).

Bourdieu himself also discussed and utilised the concept of cultural capital in a number of different ways in his empirical and scholarly work. In his *Forms of Capital(s)* (1986) cultural capital was outlined as a specific competence or knowledge, in this context he gives an example of it as "being able to read in a world of illiterates" (Bourdieu, 1986:5). In *Distinction* (1986) the concept of cultural capital took a different and more complex form; it related to the individual's "cultivated gaze" and ability to appreciate legitimate culture and understand, navigate and legitimise their position in different groups (French society) and contexts (Moore, 2012:102). Fundamentally speaking, the points being illustrated here relate to the notion that whilst cultural capital was a complex concern it always predisposed the future

accumulation of social capital: in the form of material and practical resources. More importantly, like social capital, in its own right it was also predisposed to act as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this latter context and much of Bourdieu's scholarly work cultural capital, like social capital, was used as a synonym for status or symbolic capital. But, and this is important, only if and when the cultural competences being exhibited were symbolically recognised as being legitimate competence in a corresponding context (Thompson, 2012, Moore, 2012). In Bourdieu's own words the bearers of symbolic capital would be "visible and admired" in groups and their status would give them "continued justification" for involvement and justification for continuing to pursue the "lifestyle associated with this form of capital" (Bourdieu, 2000:242 cited in Jarvinen and Gundelach, 2007: 57-58).

Importantly, Bourdieu himself also argued that in any field<sup>12</sup> of social practice there would be gradation between those with higher levels of cultural capital and those without: the former were described as being in possession of a "well-formed *habitus*" (Moore, 2012:101). In a much more generalised but theoretical context, Bourdieu argued that gradations in cultural capital, in and between groups and individuals were connected in part to the logic of transmission (Bourdieu, 1986). Within the context of the logic of transmission it was argued that cultural capital, like social and symbolic, was often acquired without any "deliberate inculcation and therefore quite unconsciously" (Bourdieu, 1986:5). But it was also partly

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am using Field in its more basic context as a structured social space that was subject to its own theodicies, rules and logic of practice (Bourdieu, 1998)

related to the notion that individuals could set out to accrue cultural capital by sacrificing time, investing in others and showing socially constituted libido or “desire” to engage in relationships (Bourdieu, 1986:4). Fundamentally speaking then, in his scholarly but not empirical work Bourdieu implied that the concept of a Habitus “well-formed” was one which is rich in cultural capital and was “underpinned by a specialisation of consciousness and a recognised mastery of some technique” (Moore, 2012:99).

#### **4.6 Locating Bourdieu in Self Help**

It is important to recognise that a number of different social, cultural and subcultural theorists have engaged with or expanded upon Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital for its heuristic value in different semi-closed contexts and settings. For example Cloud and Granfield (2008) in developing the concept of “recovery capital”, have elaborated upon Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital by exploring the ways in which beliefs, appreciations and values of individuals developed in non-conventional social and cultural settings impinge on the individual’s ability to resolve their substance related concerns. Others such as Thornton (1995) in developing the concept of “subcultural capital” have utilised the concept to explore how dance styles/club culture evolves. Bourdieu’s ideas have been utilised in this latter context to explore and theorise the ways in which youth are able to utilise their ability to appreciate legitimate culture and then “define themselves in relation to their peers and the role the media plays in constructing such subcultures” (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:81).



The points being made here, relate in the first instance to the notion that the application of cultural capital has powerful heuristic value for exploring how individuals perceive, experience and understand legitimate culture. The second relates to the ways in which the concept can be conceptually applied to explore how the accrual of other assets, be they material, practical or symbolic are mediated by the cultural competences that individuals and groups develop in different contexts and settings (cf Thornton, 1995; Forman, 2004; Michel and Amos, 1997; Jarvinen and Gundelach, 2007). It is important to recognise here that the focus of this thesis is not to develop a new type of recovery capital or self-help capital. It is more concerned with applying the basic core concepts of these concerns for their heuristic value in developing a more theoretically fleshed out, deeper and relational understanding about the ways in which individuals experience self-help.

Before we do so however, it is important to recognise that Bourdieu's concerns with the concept of cultural capital and the development of cultural competences in different social and cultural settings is also fundamentally similar to Shirley Yeung's (2007: 60) notion of "specialists" and Annette Smith's (2007) "experts" within the context of self-help. In developing the concept of self-help "specialist" Yeung (2007) argued that individuals developed cultural competences and appreciations in self-expertise by engaging in self-exploration, participating in meetings, self-narration and helping others in self-help meetings. In doing so Yueng (2007) also shared agreement with Smith (2007) that by immersing themselves in self help individuals developed competences in helping themselves and others understanding self-help, self-help process and what it took for themselves and others to

resolve substance related concerns. More specifically, like Bourdieu, Yeung (2007) argued that there was a logic of practice and that almost anyone whom participated in self-help and engaged with a programme of change (see chapter one) could be deemed a self-help “specialist”. However, Smith (2007) alternatively argued that cultural competences were underpinned by appreciations, specialist knowledge and a mastery of some technique. In the context of her empirical work the mastery of technique included the individual’s expertise and knowledge about all aspects of self-help and self-help process but also about how individuals should conduct themselves in meetings, how they presented themselves at meetings and in their own lives; she labelled these individuals senior recovering members (Smith, 2007).

In bringing this section to a close it is important to recognise that neither of these two empirical theorists Yeung or Smith were particularly concerned with exploring the ways in which self-help users utilised the status they derived from their involvement or different cultural competences and knowledge they developed to resolve their own substance related concerns. However, they certainly do go some way towards taking Bourdieu’s intellectual ideas about how graduations of high and low levels of cultural capital can be illustrated and understood in the context of self-help. More importantly, they have also left the door open by providing a context for others to explore the ways in which cultural capital can be used to providing a grounding for the further exploration of the competences and skills that individual have been known to develop in self-help groups.

It is important to recognise that by applying Bourdieu's concepts to self-help I am using his forms of capital(s) + habitus in a slightly different way and with a slightly different focus from which he did. His was to illustrate and theorise "how privileged and elite groups used non-monetary assets to maintain and reproduce cultural and social relations" (Bourdieu, 1986). And more generally to explain the objective social positions that individuals occupied in society or found themselves in, in different context and settings. Mine is to utilise his concepts for their heuristic value in enabling me to explain and develop a more material and cultural and holistic and dynamic reading of self-help and self-help processes that occur as individual social actors seek to resolve their substance related concerns.

In this thesis it is important to recognise that I am primarily concerned with utilising Bourdieu's concepts of social and other capitals to explore and theorise self-help and the processes that occur with different self-help groups. In doing so I am also seeking to underpin this approach by utilising with the concept of habitus because of its intellectual and theoretical relationship to his concepts of capitals. The utilisation of habitus in the context of this thesis is concerned with developing a more dynamic and relational account of how the concepts, appreciations, attitudes and perceptions that self help users develop are influenced and shaped in self-help groups. It is important to recognise that Bourdieu is often criticised for the focus of his work<sup>13</sup>, the abstract and complex nature of his work and the deterministic ways in which he

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<sup>13</sup> Here I am making reference to Gauntlet, (2011) argument that Bourdieu's concept of social capital and wider concerns had the potential to be a powerful tool in explaining and illustrating social change in different contexts but he himself chose to focus on elite groups and issues like exclusion and domination.

conceptualises individual functioning and social action (Gauntlet, 2011; Jenkins, 2002). But outside these criticisms this thesis will illustrate that Bourdieu still has a lot to offer scholarly and empirical accounts of self-help.

By applying Bourdieu's social and other forms of capital(s) to self-help I am also able to develop a more creative and relational account of individual functioning and social action over time as individuals engage with their group and seek to resolve their substance related concerns with others. Theoretically I am utilising Bourdieu's intellectual ideas and his forms of Capital(s) as many others have in other discipline areas, to bridge a number of dichotomies<sup>14</sup> which transcend scholarly and empirical accounts of self-help: many of which were discussed in the opening two chapters. By utilising and applying social and other capital(s) in this way I am also able to explore the ways in which the resolution of substance related concerns and problems are mediated by the accrual and exchange of capitals in relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986).

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<sup>14</sup> Here I am largely alluding to Bourdieu's concerns with the past and the present, structure and agency, essentialism and reductionism, and the concerns I raised with the diseased and rational self in the opening chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Researching Self Help Groups: Serendipitous Ethnography**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In the following chapter I will focus on providing an in-depth overview of the key methodological decisions that were made in conceptualising, designing and implementing the following research project. Whilst seeking to provide justification for the chosen epistemology, methodology and theoretical perspectives that underpin it. I will begin this process by first providing an overview of how the research was implemented and then go on to describe and discuss the more practical concepts of gatekeeping and gaining access to users in the semi open/closed world of traditional and non-traditional 12 step self-help groups and contexts. As the chapter progresses I will also go on to deal with the finer details, about how key decision around sampling and data analysis decisions were made (Frankel and Devers, 2000). This chapter will then be concluded by a discussion relating to the ethical considerations that were made and informed this studies parameters and practices; all of which were subject to ethical approval and scrutiny from Newcastle University.

#### **5.1 Epistemological Positioning**

Epistemology deals with philosophical questions around the nature, scope, sources and theories of knowledge (DeRose, 2009). In the context of human enquiry, the concept of

epistemology is focused upon providing “a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are adequate and legitimate” (Crotty, 1998:8). All epistemological concerns (objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism) are by their very nature complex and whilst many empirical researchers seek to avoid the concept of epistemology altogether, in the following research it is recognised that epistemological assumptions have a significant impact on the way research is conceptualised, developed and conducted (Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2011).

Constructivism is often set as counterpoint to objectivism, wherein knowledge and meaning “exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness” (Crotty, 1998:8). It is argued that all knowledge, and therefore meaningful reality is, “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998:42). Positivists’ have argued that constructivism lacks value-free, detached observations and is the weaker science. Despite these criticisms, constructivism seems to be the favoured philosophical standpoint of many qualitative theorists, wherein it is recognised that one cannot escape the social world in order to research it. Summarily, in the research methodology that follows it will be argued that knowledge is not something that is inert or waiting to be uncovered but is to all intense purposes constructed by social actors as they interact with others in the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

The following research methodology is also rooted in interpretativism and primarily seeks to explore self-help and individual change as a socially and culturally driven concept and process. Interpretativism itself appears in many different guises of cultural meaning making and social research and in what follows it will be argued that it is essential to view human action in the context of the social world, whilst “getting inside the head of the individuals or groups that we study to understand their meanings about what they are doing” (O’Rielly, 2012:52-3). Herein, culture is also explored as a paradoxical concept which can simultaneously provide a “meaning matrix that guides the lives” of respondents, and as “something that must be approached with a good measure of caution and suspicion” as it can shut individuals off from an abundant source of untapped significance (Crotty, 1998:71). It has also been argued that the interpretivist approach can be unambiguous; insofar as it reinforces the notion that there is no universal truth or valid knowledge, only interpretations, that can be drawn from the social world; “useful, liberating, fulfilling rewarding interpretations, yes ‘True’ or ‘Valid’ interpretations, no” (Crotty, 1998:48 original emphasis). However, this point aside, the focus of what follows is not concerned with validity or absolute truth that is synonymous with the natural sciences. The following research project is concerned with the more useful and illuminating interpretations of self-help as they are socially and culturally derived and historically situated in the context of my respondents own; and to an extent my own experiences (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997).

Theoretically the following methodology is rooted in symbolic interactionism, qualitative field enquiry and it seeks to explore self-help from a more social and cultural perspective.

At the heart of this focus it is recognised that important social and cultural interactions occur in self-help that simply cannot be captured by using more quantitative methodological frameworks (Smith, 2007). In this context it is also argued that self-help cannot be understood in terms of “simple casual relationships or by the subsumption of social events under universal laws” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:7). This is largely because in what follows human actions are “believe to be based upon, or infuse, by, social and cultural meanings; that is by intention, motives, beliefs rules, discourses and values” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:7). More pragmatically and fundamentally in the context of this thesis it is argued that self-help and self-help groups cannot be understood simply by analysing their more formal structures, features or activities alone (Gellman, 1964).

The utilisation of a more naturalistic approach is often seen as useful in enabling theorists to explore the processes of group and individual social change by “understanding the new shared definitions and symbolic meanings that come about” in the context of self-help (Smith, 2007:7). Thus this approach provides a way of exploring and understanding how different individuals involve themselves and participate in the social world of self-help. For example, their orientation to it, how it is experienced, the nature of their relationship with it and commitment to its values, activities and ongoing continuance. Correspondingly, research of this type and depth requires an “intimate familiarity that can only be achieved through [ethnographic] participant observations and other qualitative methods” (Smith, 1997: xv my emphasis).



A key strength of the ethnographic approach also relates to the notion that the application of ethnographic principles and methods allows the investigator to “construct an account of the culture under investigation that both understands it from within and captures it as external to, and independent of, the researcher, in other words as a natural phenomenon” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:9). In this context a key challenge all ethnographers face with regards to researcher conduct is to cultivate a sense of strangeness and distance themselves both intellectual and analytical in order to gain insight and understanding of the cultural setting (Coffey, 1999). According to the conventional wisdom of ethnography where the field-site is familiar, as mine is, it has been noted that fieldworkers can be disadvantaged by their existing knowledge, understanding and ability cultivate strangeness.

In an altogether more theoretical and epistemologically driven context it has been argued that whilst the concept of ethnographic strangeness is persuasive and appealing it is also often, a naïve, oversimplified, misleading concept that renders mute the ethnographic presence (Coffey, 1999). Further, it has also been argued that where the field-site is familiar the ethnographic self, “actually engages in complex and delicate processes of investigation, exploration and negotiation” (Coffey, 1999:22). Summarily, it will be argued in the context that follows that where the field site is familiar, strangeness can be cultivated by the utilisation of different ethnographic methods and fieldwork practices, cultivated naivety which provides an analytical cutting edge-allowing the researcher to pose original

research questions and capture the complexity of social life (Coffey, 1999:21; Lofland and Lofland, 1994).

Theoretically then, it can be seen from the discussion above that in the concept of naturalistic enquiry a key strength and value of the ethnographic approach observations and interviews relates to identifying variations in cultural patterns across society and groups and identifying their significance for understanding social processes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In the context of this research it was envisaged that an iterative-inductive approach would be applied to develop and understanding of how social and cultural process were experienced and negotiated across different types of self-help groups (O’Rielly, 2012). The key here was not to over simplify the complexity of everyday lives of self-help users, rather it is about using the fieldwork techniques of ethnography to provide more thickly and deeper conceptualised understanding of the process involved (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

## **5.2 Getting into Self-Help Groups**

To engage potential self-help groups and individual respondents and recruit them into this study the North East Regional Drug Users Forum (DUF) was approached. The DUF occupy a designated position in the wider self-help community and its members were very much gatekeepers to a number of different types of self-help groups (O’Rielly, 2012). At the time of the research the DUF had around 200 members and its main functions were to provide

an opportunity for different user-led and self-help groups from across the region to network to come together, share information and work towards their common interests. This group was largely made up of ex-drug and alcohol users and representatives from different recovery groups and organisations; technically however, anyone was able to attend the DUF, including drug and alcohol workers and professionals, so long as they abided by a basic set of engagement and confidentiality principles.

Following on from negotiation with the DUF management group a presentation about the research scope, aims and objectives was given during a scheduled forum meeting. Immediately after the presentation the members or representatives of two different self-help groups and one support group in the region came forward and expressed an interest to be involved in the study. For the purposes of this study and confidentiality the first group was named the Innovators this was largely because they were a non-traditional 12 step group which adhered to the notion and philosophy that they were “addicts”. Yet this group did not follow the 12 steps in a traditional way. Rather they had innovated their own version of the steps into their group’s structure and programme. Further, this group was not affiliated to a larger parent organisation. The second group, the Traditionalists, were so named because they were essentially a more traditional and well established 12 step Narcotics Anonymous group and were subsequently affiliated to number of different types of local groups and a larger national and worldwide organisation. The third group, the Hustlers group, were named so because they had a pool table in the room that they met in and would congregate socially before and after meetings. This was the group that was

started by an ex-member of The Innovators and one in which users identified with the notions and philosophy of addiction found in traditional twelve step settings. They were not affiliated to a larger group and did not follow a structured programme of change but their members were very experienced in attending groups in traditional and non-traditional 12 step contexts more generally. See appendix one, for a further breakdown of the groups, their members and their philosophical underpinnings.

To gain access to individual group members and self-help users in these different contexts and settings, similar presentations about the aims of the research were given at local self-help group meetings. This included a NA public and open meeting, and again questions were fielded from potential respondents as they were in the DUF. Whilst information sheets and contact details were again given out, this resulted in only a small number of individuals making contact to be involved. It was evident that recruitment was going to be more difficult than originally envisaged. In returning back to the gatekeepers of these groups for support with recruitment, it was suggested to me by them that a more “savvier” approach was needed and more success would be achieved if the offer of interview was experienced by group members to be more authentic and attractive.

It was suggested by a senior group member and insider that recruitment would be made easier by first engaging with self-help users before and/or after meetings. The importance of becoming known by the group and building up a trusting relationship with individuals before seeking to recruit them was highlighted. I began to spend time with each of the

groups that had been incorporated into the study over a six-month period. This approach led to more significant and in-depth relationships being developed with both the group members and the gatekeepers that provided access to them. In this context significant use was also made of the serendipitous opportunities that presented themselves during the fieldwork to participate as an observer in different types of self-help group and to observe users of self-help and they congregated and interacted together in more informal contexts. The only settings and contexts that were attended during this period were the formal ones which were preceded by a formal request<sup>15</sup> or where it was felt that it would weaken the strength or productivity of field relations if the invitation was refused. Field notes were kept during these fieldwork observations which led to the development of a list of concepts and issues, which would then be discussed at follow up meetings with gatekeepers or key informants.

Recruitment was greatly benefitted from my presence before and after groups and subsequent respondents were recruited when approached by me or via the named representative of the group. Some snowball sampling occurred and respondents also suggested other members of their group as well as members of other groups and networks. In total 18 respondents were recruited, from these different groups. Following their recruitment, a topic guide (appendix two) was developed, consent (appendix three) was sought and respondents were engaged in semi structured interviews. These interviews which were conducted at a negotiated location that was both safe and convenient for

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<sup>15</sup> This could include a celebration event that had been organised like a birthday celebrating clean time.

everyone involved: all interviews were then recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed as the study progressed. All of those who were recruited during this extended period of time met the study eligibility criteria: they were over eighteen, attending self-help, able to give consent and had been drug free for six months prior to the study start date or at the point of interview. No payment, subsidy or incentive was offered to or sought by respondents and the point being recognised here is that all respondents, users and gatekeepers whom took part gave their time willingly and enthusiastically once recruited.

As the fieldwork progressed and developed it became apparent that the respondents which had been engaged were still very much embedded in self-help groups and processes or had been involved in attending self-help for a short<sup>16</sup> period of time. In this context a number of different themes started to emerge from the data and it became apparent that the experiences of respondents whom had been in self-help for longer periods of time needed to be understood. Correspondingly, respondents had also indicated during interviews that exiting self-help was an important part of their journey. However, none of those that were interviewed up to this point had experienced the moving on process. In returning back to the DUF management group this time, I managed to gain access to a graduate of self-help, whom no longer attended meetings himself but whom was still connected to and affiliated with a number of other longer term, including ex-users, of different self-help groups. In this latter context the graduate gatekeeper in question was then able to negotiate access

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<sup>16</sup> This was a highly subjective concern and by short term I mean up to three years.

to a network of respondents whom had experienced significant substance related problems and concerns and whom also had significant existential experiences of more traditional types of 12 step self-help groups. In promoting this study he was able to share the project information sheet and contact details to his network of peers and recruitment followed shortly after. Characteristically, each of the individuals recruited in this way had been “drug free” and met my eligibility criteria; they had all spent a significant amount of time in different types of self-help groups and were keen to share their stories about their experiences. Over a further five-month period six of these “graduate” respondents were recruited for semi structured interviews, which brought the total number for this study to twenty-four. The data generated from these interviews was analysed thematically along with the interviews with respondents who had not yet exited or left self-help (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

### **5.3 Serendipitous Ethnography**

When fieldwork commenced it was envisaged that semi structured (see section 5.6) interviews would be the only method by which data would be generated in this study. Serendipitous observations later became another mechanism which was used to collect and analyse data but at this point it is important to recognise that the research commenced with the following aims and objectives.

- To explore the types of issues and concerns problematic drug users faced in becoming members and maintaining membership of self-help groups.
- To identify what factors influenced the perceptions appreciations and perspectives that individuals developed in their respective groups.
- To gauge what extent and what ways did individuals engage with and affiliate with others in the groups.
- To explore the types of relationships individuals, develop and entered into within their respective groups.
- To explore how self-help groups functioned to enable individuals to resolve their substance related concerns.

From the outset of this research serendipitous ethnographic opportunity that presented themselves were undertaken to engage in a more productive way with groups, individual users and data collection. Contextually these opportunities involved attending self-help groups, meeting regularly with group representatives and engaging with users as they congregated in more informal meetings both before and after their groups. Ethically and theoretically, it was understood and recognised that the formal presence of a non-group member or stranger could have an impact on how the group members experienced the group and behaved and acted towards them and each other in these contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, in placing these concerns aside temporarily, it is important to recognise that the utilisation of this approach is recognised here as a more productive way of enabling qualitative fieldworkers to get out there and spend



some time learning about different individuals and groups as they engaged in different contexts and settings (O’Rielly, 2012).

Prior to undertaking my fieldwork my esoteric knowledge and subjective understanding of self-help had been developed as a professional; delivering what was essentially a curriculum or planned programme of self-help activities (Humphreys, 2004). Ontologically I knew that I was not experiencing the group or the processes in the same way as respondents, but in this context I had little difficulty in developing a sense of “anthropological strangeness” as I experienced and observed the groups unfold in the field. In a more theoretical context this sense of “strangeness” was achieved by applying the concept of game theory to the fieldwork observations that were made of respondents as they engaged with each other in their groups. The concept of “game theory” was actually inspired from an early conversation that had taken place with a key fieldwork gatekeeper and it provided a schema or framework from which to engage and structure initial fieldwork reflections. The actual detail of the approach was inspired by Crotty’s interpretation as “rules of the game-the boundaries and parameters of it-what people were allowed and required to do-and the prizes for success or wooden spoon for failure” (Crotty, 1998:77).

Critically speaking and in a similarly theoretical context it is important to recognise that a small number of qualitative theorists are not wholly convinced that serendipitous activities constitute actual ethnographic fieldwork (O’Rielly, 2012). However, others recognise that they bring added value in extending data collection beyond interview whilst allowing more

complex and nuanced fieldwork understandings to evolve (Jenness, 2010). Summarily, in the context of this fieldwork it was only by engaging in these types of serendipitous activities that observations were made of the more concrete experiences of life in the context of self-help and new understanding of how values, beliefs and social rules were used as resources within it (Nicholls et al, 2014). Interestingly enough Bourdieu himself used the concept of “learning to play the game” as a way of conceptualising how individuals developed particular cultural competences (appreciating art) and appreciations and then went onto recognised the value of them in different social and cultural settings (Bourdieu, 1986, 1977). Importantly, being seen by group members and engaging in discussions with them within this context allowed me to develop credibility with the group and was crucial in the success of respondent recruitment.

The role of observer-as-participant was taken when making observations of the interactions that occurred between users in different contexts and settings and throughout the early stages of this research. At this point it is important to note that at no point during any observations or visits to the groups involved did I hide or seek to withhold the fact that I was actively involved in the group as a researcher. That said, there were occasions when I did attend formal self-help meetings in a semi covert way, by this I mean I had permission from organisers, who were also present to attend, but my intention and the purposes of my visits were not known to everyone in the room. The decision to attend these open meetings was taken with sensitivity and careful consideration. All of which was also underpinned by a strong adherence and awareness of ethical considerations: see this

section 5.8 in Ethical Considerations and pages 129-131 in relation to this specific concern. For context, the group meetings I attended were open to family members, visiting professionals and those considering joining a group for the first time: there is a clear announcement made at the opening of these types of meetings to remind self-help users they are open to non-members. I did not make extensive fieldwork notes during the meetings, but I did make fieldwork notes later in my diary which were used to inform discussions that I later had with different fieldwork gatekeepers. The data generated from these types of observations were significant in enabling me to observe some of the group rituals, dynamics and interactions that respondents identified during interview. However, they also allowed me to reflect upon group process, interactions and generate ideas which I needed clarification on or needed to explore further with respondents to fully understand what was occurring.

As the doctoral study was undertaken as a part-time student, additional fieldwork time was afforded to develop these types of fieldwork relationships. Moreover, it was by engaging in these processes that a sense of purpose and reflexivity was maintained whilst avoiding the development of any serious misunderstandings of the behaviours that had been observed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As we will see in the findings that follows there are many different concepts, concerns and rituals that could easily be misconstrued in more traditional types of self-help groups if they were not explained and explored in these contexts. In taking up the position of observer-as-participant, a significant level of

analytical rigour was maintained and schematically framed understandings of the complex array of social events and interactions that were being played out in different self-help contexts were made (Crotty, 1998).

As the fieldwork played out a significant amount of time was spent with self-help users as they themselves engaged in the more informal group activities that occurred after their formal, planned and structured group sessions. Like Denzin (2007) in his ethnographic study of AA, involvement in these different types of social and self-help context and settings was limited to those that were preceded by a formal invitation (see later sections on ethics and utilitarianism). During this period of fieldwork, the majority of the work that was undertaken was focussed on exploring the “imponderabilia” of the setting and the observation of users as they spoke and interacted with each other whilst just going about their lives (O’Rielly, 2012). Inevitably participation in these contexts was also limited to involvement in those activities that involved other users and did not include their families or non-drug using peers; the concerns of whom were only explored anecdotally in later interviews.

The actual timing and process of engaging with users in the informal context of post group activities began to run concurrently with the more structured implementation of other fieldwork interviews, as my involvement within the culture developed. And whilst the engagement of individuals in these more informal contexts was by no means a central method of data collection it did provide a way to deepen the data and to re-examine and

explore different types themes that were emerging from different fieldwork sources (Nicholls et al, 2014). In an altogether more practical context and by way of giving an example of the benefits of this approach, complex concepts like individual and group language could be explored in more detail. With regard to “language” and colloquialisms it is widely recognised that storytelling, the use of metaphor and shared language are key meaning making and relationship building processes in self (Humphreys, 2009; Yeo, et al 2014). In developing an understanding and presenting this as a novice during interviews, a repertoire was built up with users. It also afforded the opportunity for respondents to correct my misunderstandings and misinterpretations, becoming part of a new meaning making process which created shared understand with respondents in interviews.

Theoretically all of those respondents that were engaged with in these informal contexts were by definition encultured informants, in so far as they had insights, were willing to help and simply enjoyed sharing their knowledge (Spradley, 1979 cited in O’Rielly, 2012:46). In these types of relationships, the exchanges that occurred in them were an important part of data collection and it was recognised that the key to them was engaging with respondents in a manner that reassured them whilst maintaining objectivity and not establishing an over rapport with any one particular group or individual (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Coffey, 1999).

In these types of relationships, the researchers own identity and the groups’ or individual’s perceptions of their intentions can be methodologically significant in their own right

(Coffey, 1999). With all of these considerations in mind and with the recognition that any of these respondents could be interviewees, it was also important to endeavour to develop a sense of rapport and empathy with different individual group members (Lester, 1999). This approach is also driven by the notion that the establishment of empathy and rapport are critical to gaining in depth information, particularly where individuals have a strong personal interest or stake (Lester, 1999). Synonymously, it was only by engaging in these types of complex and conceptual fieldwork concerns, intention and with concepts like users and respondent identity, that I was able to manage marginality. Thereby engaging in a constantly reflexive processes around my own “self” and the social and intellectual position and perceptions I adopted and made as I conducted my fieldwork (Coffey, 1999).

#### **5.4 Sampling**

Within qualitative research it is important to ensure that good purposeful and theoretical sampling has taken place and there were a number of different sampling strategies were considered, implemented and used in this study (Richie et al 2014). Initially a basic sampling profile that met the inclusion criteria of this study applied. In developing this I was attempted to recruit adults (aged 18 years and above) who attended self-help groups and had been drug or alcohol free for at least six months. Two different types of self-help groups were accessed to ensure a level of sampling “stratification” of respondents from those groups with different and discernible philosophies and/or programmes of change (Creswell, 2013). As the study progressed, it also became apparent that a more diverse sample would be achieved if respondents were sampled based upon different substances

of choice as well as a variation in the amount of time that individuals had been involved in recovery and self-help groups. This further diversification was required to explore and unpack concepts and themes that were emerging from the early thematic data collection and analysis (Richie et al, 2014).

To achieve maximum variation, I enlisted the support of group sponsors who promoted the research again in their groups. Snowball sampling was used to get those I had already interviewed to identify and recruit others from their group on my behalf (May, 1997). During fieldwork individual respondents and self-help users were also canvassed about their potential involvement in the study as they congregated and met in the more informal contexts and settings after groups. In the latter stages of the study, self-help graduates were purposively sampled into the study sample. The graduate sponsor from the DUF provided access to the graduates; a group of great interest within the research due to their high status within the recovery community and perception by other members that they have 'quality recovery'. This group was a "symbolic sample representation" as they also epitomised much of the aspirations of those whom attend self-help: they had all been problematic drug users, had attended to their own needs via self-help and were now embedded and engaged in more conventional ways of living (Richie et al, 2014).

It is recognised that snowball sampling and sampling via such embedded gatekeeper can lead to researchers being drawn into the existing social networks and social horizons of those who are recruited into the study as well as those providing gate keeping and

sponsorship (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, these strategies were important for generating sociological knowledge about how smaller friendship groups and relationships between users were organised in self-help settings and contexts. Further, insight could be gleaned as to how self-help groups were structured and to some extent sampling also gave an indication of the motivation and intentions of those who attended different types of self-help groups (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Ultimately, this approach led to a greater level of respondent diversity and the final cohort of (n=24) respondents consisted of: (n-13) were male and (n-11) female and aged 26-52) years of age (mean age was 37 years old). Twenty-two respondents described their ethnicity as White British and (n-2) as White Irish. Seven respondents reported their previous use to be primarily alcohol and (n-17) as primary heroin/crack users. At the point of interview, the shortest period of time a respondent had been in recovery was six months and the longest was ten years.

It is of interest why the gatekeepers made such effort to support the study. Many were highly influential in the success of respondent recruitment; providing invaluable vouchsafe for my work. Reflecting back, now that my fieldwork is finished and my data analysed I see this role of gatekeeper, whilst acting as an advocate for self-help users, was a purposeful and meaningful activity for the gatekeeper. Indeed, this desire to raise awareness of recovery and support active addicts and graduates to 'tell their story' is very much in-line with the ethos of self-help. Something I will explore in greater depth within my findings.



## 5.5 Interviews

Semi structured interviews were the main method by which data was collected during this study and in total (n=24) respondents were interviewed during the 18-month duration that I was engaged with self-help users and groups. Qualitative research interviewing in its various forms is viewed as one of the most commonly used research methods (Mason, 2002). There are many positive features and benefits of utilising in-depth interviews in fieldwork enquiry wherein, “researchers talk to those who have knowledge or experience of the problem of interest and through such interviews researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (Rubin and Rubin, 2012:3). Indeed, the choice to utilise qualitative interviewing within this study was driven by epistemological, theoretical, practical and ethical concerns (Mason, 2002).

Epistemologically the research is rooted in constructivism. Inherent in this philosophical approach are a number of assumptions, features and principles that informed the research process. That is, knowledge is situated, it is gathered through dialogical interactions and is co-produced rather than excavated in a process involving the researcher and the interviewee (Mason, 2002; Kvale, 1996). In utilising a constructivist approach it is important to address concerns and criticisms associated with the concept of situated knowledge, as well as intellectual concerns associated with the active role I played in the generation and construction of knowledge (Yeo, et al, 2014). From a more critical and theoretical perspective, interview data that is generated in the context of constructivism is

often viewed as being unstable and is often viewed as not saying anything about any other reality than that of the interview itself (Yeo et al 2014). In recognising these and the concerns associated with “situated knowledge” it is important then to explore both situation and conceptual knowledge that occurred within this study. Here contextual knowledge is concerned with utilising interviews to explore respondents’ views and opinions on general research topics and areas as well as their reasoning and judgements made in light of specific events, situations and experiences that had actually taken place outside in the context of self-help (Mason, 2002).

It is also too easy to overstate the criticisms associated with semi structured interviews the role of emotionalism in the construction and co-production of knowledge. In this context emotionalism relates directly to the idea that the interview process produces data that is viewed romantically, uncritically or as an authentic representation of the participant’s life, without acknowledging the contextual and interactive nature of it (Yeo et al 2014). To counter these types of issues and concerns contextual knowledge was also used to generate data that had meaning beyond its situated context. In this context interviews were generally recognised as a symbolic interaction that was occurring between individuals but it was also recognised that the reality that exists in the social world beyond the interview can be obtained in qualitative interviews (Miller and Glassner, 2011: 133). Synonymously, it is only by exploring conceptual data that a solid basis for engaging in what has classically been described as good qualitative fieldwork enquiry, “the subject’s definitions and situation should find full specification and the interview should bring out

the value laden implications of the response” (Merton and Kendell, 1946 cited in Gilbert, 2001:138).

Given the need to explore and construct both situational and contextual knowledge it was important that a more flexible and sensitive approach to engaging respondents is applied. By recognising these considerations, the application of semi structured interviews offers up a more legitimate and meaningful way in which to do so (Mason, 2002). Subsequently all of the interviews that were conducted during the study were semi structured by a thematic guide that had been developed from existing empirical evidence and analytical hunches that had been gleaned from my own experiences and those of the gatekeepers I engaged with (Spencer et al 2014; Fielding, 2002; May, 1997). Because of the iterative-inductive nature of the fieldwork it was also deemed to be important that a significant level of empathy and rapport was built up with respondents prior to them being interviewed. Utilising my own “subjective” and “ontological” experiences enabled me to engage respondents in a more meaningful way whilst reassuring them about my intentions.

Engaging with and recruiting shorter term and current members of self-help groups was a relatively straightforward concern: see section 5.2 Getting into Self Help Groups. Recruiting and engaging with longer term members and those who had left self-help was an altogether more difficult and problematic affair. In the first instance this latter process required gatekeepers to “gift” me access to their networks and connections and then “vouchsafed” for me prior to interview (cf Lalander, 2003). Each of these latter types of

interview, six in total, with longer term members required an initial introductory meeting between me, the gatekeeper and the respondent. In this context we would meet at a predetermined destination, usually a local coffee shop, and I would explain the study and the parameters of it before going onto an agreed venue to conduct the formal interview. Reflecting back, I would suggest that it was my willingness to involve gate-keepers so heavily in the study, my willingness to attend meetings voluntarily and to be seen to be generally prepared to put myself out to understand self-help from the point of users that opened up this unique access to interviews with this “hard to reach group”.

Following on then, establishing a good level of empathy and rapport with respondents prior to interview is often viewed as critical in obtaining an increased depth to data and information. Concerns like rapport, understanding and empathy are considerations and this is especially so when the participants involved have an active and personal stake in the subject that is being discussed (Lester, 1999:2). Correspondingly, interviews and interactions with respondents that were too rigid or based on a totally pre-scripted or structured format would not have allowed the fieldwork to do justice to the depth of understand of social processes, social change, organising and meaning that was required to build a deeper and more fleshed out understanding in the context of self-help (Mason, 2002).

Qualitative theorists are driven towards adopting the method of semi structured interviews because the data they want is not available or accessible in any other form (Mason,

2002:69). However, using this approach, researchers are able to engage in more meaningful way with respondents and explore broad substantive data as it relates to the study whilst guiding respondents through the themes and topics that were generated by their own accounts and experiences (Yeo et al 2014). Semi structured interviews provide a platform for reflection and generation of new knowledge as the interviewer engages with respondents. It is only by adopting this way of working and having a minimal structure that maximum depth was achieved with respondents whilst exploring their own values, past experiences, circumstances, feelings, circumstances and beliefs (Yeo et al 2014). Summarily, it is only by utilising semi structured interviews that an exploration of the social and cultural resources respondents used in meaning making could be understood (Fielding, 1998; May, 1999). Whilst ensuring ethically, that respondents had more freedom and control over the interview situation and a fairer and fuller representation of the interviewee's perspectives emerged (Mason, 2002).

## **5.6 Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection and analysis were not distinct phases of the field work that occurred in this research project, and these concepts were embedded in the principles and practices of this study right from the very start to the end and writing up results (Spencer et al 2014). Data collection involves a significant amount of skill and much personal endeavour when

engaging with respondents, “going back, looking for information, missing people and opportunities” and can involve multiple intellectual challenges “following links, chasing up ideas and looking for other people and facts that are relevant to your topic” (O’Rielly, 2012:183). However, thorough out the duration of this fieldwork a clear focus was kept of the subject area and a strong level of abstraction and processing of the data was maintained when it was collected. Essentially then data collection and analysis processes were interlinked and the analytical approach utilised is best understood as a broadly linear process that was iterative and involved different analytical processes at different points in the fieldwork (Spencer et al 2014).

From the outset of this study the triangulation of various ethnographic methods provided a window into the understandings, feelings and perceptions respondents and thematic analysis was utilised to, interpret, manage and report meanings in the data that was collected (Spencer et al 2014). In undertaking thematic analysis I was able to simultaneously maintain low-inference with the data I collected, whilst developing both descriptive and analytical codes as they emerged from the various data sources I had utilised (Gibbs, 2007). Descriptive codes relate to surface features of data that is referenced and grouped in terms of difference and similarity whilst analytical codes are those which segment data into more abstract theoretical concepts and themes (Spencer et al 2014).

Thematic analysis is often viewed as a more generic method rather than an approach in its own right (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). However, the utilisation of the concept in this study was particularly useful to develop a deeper set of analytical codes around the more abstract and interpretative themes and concepts that were emerging from my data collection in the different contexts and settings, or self-help groups that I engaged in (Braun and Clarke, cited in Spencer et al, 2014:272). In this context cross sectional and non-cross sectional thematic analysis was applied to the descriptive and analytical codes that had been developed during the first data sift. Cross sectional analysis was utilised to search for and retrieve systematic comparisons or to identify connections between similarly labelled data and themes across the data set as a whole. The latter concept: non cross sectional data organising involved looking at particular cases within my sample that required their own sets of themed categories (Spencer et al, 2014). It was as a result of adopting this form of analysis that data was systematically work thorough and progression towards integrating a higher order and understanding to the key themes that were relevant to the overall research questions were able to emerge (Coffee, 2012).

## **5.8 Ethical Considerations**

The key principles and content of good ethical practice have remained the same for a number of decades now and are regularly discussed in theoretical literature (Bryman, 2012). Ethical approval from Newcastle University was sought and a set of universal guidelines were designed to support the professional and ethical fieldwork practice that

followed. Good ethical practice should be a priority for all fieldworkers and hopefully some of the discussion that has preceded this point is evidence of this. However, these points aside, in this concluding section of this methodology chapter I would like to take the opportunity to expand, elaborate and clarify some of the key ethical considerations and decisions that were made about this study.

Informed consent is a core principle of social research and was a recurrent theme throughout this research, in this context information about the study was given to respondents using a blend of different approaches. In presentations to self-help groups, over the confidential phone line that had been set up for respondents to contact and in a basic study information sheet given to participants (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014). Prior to interview all respondents were required to give full written consent after reading the study information sheet, which included sections on: their subsequent rights to participate or withdraw, what participation would involve; duration and recording and more general arrangements for individual/data and confidentiality. Gaining written consent with groups such as those engaged in this study can be problematic for researchers (Singer, 2003). However, this process was a key part of the governance arrangements which allowed me to explain and frame the parameters of the study whilst formally articulating user's rights (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014).

Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, extensive practical steps were taken throughout the fieldwork to maintain respondent's confidentiality and protect anonymity.



This was largely achieved by recruiting via a confidential telephone line and negotiating interview venues around safety and each individual (and those of the fieldworker) respondent's needs. However, despite these efforts and endeavours in this area a small number of respondents chose to contact me either via their groups named representative or the graduate gatekeeper. Rather than rejecting these respondents involvement outright on the basis of universalism, it was decided to enable participation by justification of "*principled relativism*" and decisions made about an individual's involvement in the study were made as they occurred, on an individual case by case level (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012, Jacobs, 1980). None of those respondents who made contact through their groups named representatives or gatekeepers or generally expressed an interest to be involved were denied the opportunity to get involved and contribute towards the research.

Given the small sample size, the interconnected nature of relationships between individuals in different self-help groups and my relationship with gatekeeper's steps were also taken to reduce the possibility of accidental and inadvertent breaches of confidentiality. Such breaches of confidentiality are those "that could occur where there are connections between participants and where the line of questioning taken in one interview is influenced by what is heard in another" (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014: 98). During planned meetings with gatekeepers, which were also used for project updates and to explore emergent themes and topics, consideration was also given over to the gatekeeper's knowledge and proximity to respondents and finding a balance between disguising and distorting the data in its original form. Ultimately, the identities of individual

respondents were protected from each other and gatekeepers by being more reflexive and creating a number of different research case studies, rather than discussing any one individual view opinion or perspective.

In conducting the fieldwork a number of formal self-help group's settings and informal social contexts were accessed to provide information, promote the study and to recruit respondents. In this context I also gave extensive consideration to reduce the impact my involvement and proximity would have in these social context and utilised the concept of "utilitarianism" as a theoretical framework to weigh up the potential harms and benefits before deciding what course of action would produce the best acceptable outcome for everyone involved (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). This was a challenging, intense and important period of fieldwork engagement for me but in attending informal social contexts I was able to build up my own pedagogic understanding of field issues, stimulate reflexivity by exploring themes and topics in different contexts and build up rapport with individual respondents prior to interview.

In taking up these different types and levels of fieldwork relationships with respondents it was recognised that concerns around power and equality, "pseudo-intimacy" and professional conduct would have to be attended to (Shaw, 2008). To not have considered these concerns would have attracted criticism associated with a disturbing ethical naivety to fieldwork practice (Duncombe and Jessop, 2003). Whilst the interactional and intellectual benefits associated with building more effective relationships with respondents

was recognised, it was also important that care was taken when engaging respondents in the way as it is recognised that “participants can easily be seduced into in comfortable and disclosive engagement which may not be what they expected, consented to or afterwards are glad to have experienced” (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014: 98). In a similar context I knew that to “develop a role” for myself and engage respondents in these informal contexts I would have to field more intense enquiries, I had already experienced this in formal group context, about my “self” and my intentions, more so that I would have outside traditional participant-researcher relations (Coffey, 1999). In taking up these challenges and concerns and in attending to ethical conduct, it was important that I was more reflexive with individuals about my intentions and role throughout my fieldwork, my expectations of them and able to draw upon the professional boundaries as I engaged respondents in different social contexts (Duncombe and Jessop, 2003).

In preparing for my fieldwork I had been also able to anticipate, by reviewing literature and my own professional practice, that my respondent group could potentially be attending interview and disclosing highly sensitive data around issues such as self-harm and potential child protection issues (cf Barnard, 2012). With regard to safeguarding issues, I had a prepared script for respondents in which I discussed and agreed with respondents how I would deal with concerns around their own safety or the safety of others as a result of information they disclosed during interview. This would have involved me reporting my concerns back to the University, as I have done in the past but not on this occasion, recording my concerns and if need be liaising with university and external services directly.

I took steps to ensure that respondents were clear about my role in dealing with the disclosure of sensitive personal data or non-role as it was and turned out, be “neither judge, therapist nor slab of cold stone” (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014: 84).

At the end of each interview respondents were offered the opportunity to ask questions about the study, provided with details about how the data would be stored and used, offered copies of their recordings and transcriptions and a formal debrief around any issues that were raised in their interviews. None of those who were engaging in the study requested a copy of the recordings and transcripts and whilst a small number asked for feedback on their “story” this was kept to a minimum. All of those who engaged in the study were given an information sheet with local and national services should they need them.

I also recognised that I had an ethical obligation to protect myself from the now well documented adverse environmental and fieldwork consequence and dangers that have been associated generally with qualitative field enquiry (Jacobs, 2006). In a very practical way I set about reducing risks by risk assessing the different settings prior to engaging respondents. I simply utilised venues and settings that were known to me and in which respondents could remain anonymous. I drew upon my fifteen years of experience in working one-to-one with drug and alcohol users and in being “self” aware. Moreover, I knew I could rely on the support of my supervision team and a raft of other professionals if needed.

## 5.8 Chapter Summary

In the context of what has preceded I have sought to give a theoretically informed, ethically transparent and reflective account of the decisions that were made in the designing and implementation of this research study. In doing so I have set also out what I feel are the important features of my fieldwork and provided justification for the chosen epistemology, methodology and perspectives that underpinned and informed it. At this point it should be apparent that self-help groups are complex social and cultural environments and each have their own languages, formal and informal social and cultural processes, rituals and technologies which influence the ways that users understand and experience self-help. Correspondingly, it is also important to recognise that to begin to get close to understanding the ways that social and cultural concerns influence the meaning making of individuals in self-help group a more qualitative interpretation is needed.

In this study and chapter I have illustrated the ways in which this was achieved by making the most of my approach as well as the serendipitous opportunities that arose to engage with respondents in different types of contexts. It was only by engaging with users in these different ways that I able to start get closer, practically, theoretically and intellectually to respondents, the data and in doing so build a deeper and fuller understanding of the processes involved as individual seek to engage with self-help. All of which involved being reflexive and responsive to the needs of the users I engaged with, the aims of my study, my

own needs and in choosing the correct or most suitable forms of methods, sampling profiles, contexts to observe and types of analysis to engage in.

In the section of the thesis that follows this one I will seek to provide a short biographical but anonymous summary of each of the respondents to conceptualise a little more about the needs, experiences and aspirations of those whom I engaged with. Following this I will then present my data analysis and findings in two larger findings chapters; in the first of these findings chapters I seek to give more theoretical and contextual account of the experiences of self-help users as they engage with others in their groups. At this point it is probably prudent to reiterate that the research was primarily concerned with exploring how those with the most significant substance-related problems and concerns experienced and understood self-help and self-help processes. In a more theoretical context I overlay Bourdieu's concept and intellectual concerns with habitus as a way of providing a context for exploring and explaining the factors that influence the perceptions appreciations and behaviours of social actors in self-help groups.

I move on from this focus into the second chapter of findings by focussing more of the relationships that exist between users in self-help and go onto utilise Bourdieu's concept of social and other capitals. I use this conceptual framework to explore the different types of resources that exist for users in different forms of self-help groups and the role these capitals play in the resolution of substance related concerns. In this chapter, I am also concerned with exploring how the accrual of social capital and the resolution of substance

related concerns are mediated by relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition in different type's self-help groups.

## Chapter 6

### Respondent Biographies

This chapter is designed to provide a more biographical and detailed account of the individual members of the respondent group. It includes details about the types of substance use that users engaged in, their experiences of different self-help groups and their engagement with self-help at the point of interview. This chapter builds on the basic demographic details about respondents that was discussed in Chapter 4 and all of names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. Some of the smaller and finer details about respondent's lives have been changed so as they cannot be identified.

#### Paddy: 7 Years in Self help

Is in his early thirties, having used from the age of thirteen he describes himself as a career drug user and claimed to have found his "vocation in life" when he discovered heroin. At the point of interview he had been clean "abstinent" for seven years, prior to this he accessed many different forms of treatment which included, 121 work, structured counselling and mutual aid and support. He completed a 12 step residential programme and now works full time in a substance misuse setting, setting up and facilitating non twelve step self-help groups. He is currently employed on a full time basis as a drug and alcohol user advocate and is married with children. He still attends groups on a weekly basis to "put a little back in". He was also the gatekeeper for the 12 step Group.



#### Zeb: 2 Years in Self help

Is around thirty years of age, he used heroin for ten years and has now been clean “abstinent” for two almost years. He has had periods of non-drug use before but always ended up “falling on his arse” because he said he was living life wrong “nightclubbing” his way to recovery. He and his partner have a child and been together for ten years, both of them are in recovery but they are currently questioning their future together as their relationship and perceptions of each other has changed. He currently attends a self-help group two to three times a week and claims he will always “be an addict”. He is also attending training and engaging in voluntary work with other drug users.

#### Ned: 2 Years in Self Help

Is in his mid-forties years and has used drugs for thirty years. He is originally from Glasgow and used heroin throughout the 1980’s and 90’s. He has had numerous attempts to stop using drugs in structured and unstructured treatment including mutual aid and support and has been abstinent before for 5 years and relapsed “because he stopped listening to himself”. He lost both his parents within six weeks of each other last year but despite these personal difficulties he has been drug free for two years now. He attends a non-twelve step mutual aid and support group once a week as he claims he cannot “surrender his addiction to a higher power”. He is also working full-time as a carer for a small charity and provides support to individual’s drug users and their families.

### Big G: 3 Years in Self help

Is around thirty and has been drug free for almost three years. He is an ex injecting heroin user and described his drug use as being at “war”. He has lived in a number of non-twelve step therapeutic communities and has been drug free in the past for four years. He claims all he wants to do is be a “productive member of society” and use his life to help others who like himself have been in foster care, residential care and prison. He also claims his biggest barriers to recovery are trust and intimacy and he attends 12 step self-help groups twice a week whilst working full time in a homeless young person’s unit.

### Sarge: 3 Years in Self help

Is in his early thirties and has been abstinent for almost three years. He was an injecting heroin user for eight years and prior to his use he was a regular in the Armed Forces for three years. Whilst using drugs he experienced what he described as severe mental health problems and during his first group meeting he got upset and walked out claiming this was “not how he envisaged or wanted to live his life”. He has been in full time employment now for eighteen months as a mental health and substance use support worker. He still attends 12 step groups, meetings and other social events on a weekly basis.

#### Steely: 4 Years in Self Help

Is in his mid-forties and is from the midlands who has been clean for 4 years. He is a career drug user and was using during the 1980's and 90's. He also dealt in different types of drugs before settling on the supply of cocaine and heroin but he claims he went onto fall foul of drugs by committing what he described as the cardinal sin of using his own product. He had a violent past and was banned from many premiership football grounds. Both his sons are currently (at the time of writing) incarcerated on long term sentences for violent offences. Up until his admission to residential detox and rehab he has financed his own drug use by dealing and running his own business, his previous attempt had been funded privately. At the time of interview was a volunteer in self-help support and mutual aid groups and seeking full time employment. He has attended 12 step groups religiously in the past but is now a graduate.

#### Theresa: 6 Years in Self help

Is in her early fifties who has been abstinent for six years. She had been using heroin for more than thirty years. In the past she has been in all types of structured drug and alcohol treatment including a therapeutic community and moved away from her home town after being beaten into a coma for six weeks, over a drug dispute. She has a grown up family and grandchildren and moved away to complete a traditional twelve step programme. She now works full time developing and facilitating non twelve step mutual aid and support groups for those who wish to stop using drugs and alcohol. She was also the founding member of non-traditional 12 step group that I engaged with in my fieldwork.

#### Kelly: 1 Year in Self help

Is in her late thirties and describes herself as an alcoholic and addict despite having been abstinent for one year. She currently attends two different groups; none are traditional 12 step. In the past she has sought out support from different types of self-help groups including eaters anonymous. Prior to her participation in self-help she had been house bound and afraid to leave her house as she could not bear to speak to or see anyone. She recently started working full time but had to give it up as she found the whole process so overwhelming but has been able to return to part time work because of the group. She is also committed to helping others and herself resolve their substance related concerns she spend the time when she is not at work supporting other users on a one to one context.

#### Liam: 1 Year in Self help

Is a drug and alcohol user in his early forties. He describes himself as being close to deaths door just before he started to attend his group and has been admitted to hospital on numerous occasions as a result of his drug use. He was originally signposted to his group by a nurse before he completed a six month stay in a residential therapeutic community, he later returned to his group having successfully completed his stay. He claims he is not interested in the past and wishes only to find trust and companionship. He is currently a full time volunteer at five different voluntary and charity projects, he attends two of the non-traditional 12 step groups I engaged with during my fieldwork on a weekly basis.

#### Lou: 6 Months in Self help

Is an alcohol user in her early forties who has been abstinent for six months. In her recent past she was employed in a professional capacity as a nursery teacher and she also fostered two children whom she later adopted. During interview she claimed that alcohol crept up on her and she went from being a social drinker to bingeing on a weekend at first with her partner then on her own. She claims that she does not like to speak in groups and prefers to listen. She attends two to three groups a week, she was referred to the group by a nurse at accident and emergency and has never been in formal treatment. She came to self-help with the full support of her elderly parents and family and suffers from ongoing panic attacks and paranoia.

#### Red: 2 Years in Self help

Is an engineer in his forties who has been abstinent for two years. He had been in the armed forces in the past and was a general manager for a large manufacturing firm. At the highlight of his career he had responsibility for managing over 200 staff and managing nine departments. He was discharged from the armed forces and diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder having been in active service and came to self-help after a round of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. He has two university degrees and claims he was a functioning alcoholic but did not realise this until his first marriage broke down and he met another alcoholic. He works full time and attends two groups a week and will attend the group as much and as often as he can.

### Rachel 1 Year in Self help

Is a mid-forties self-professed alcoholic who has been abstinent for one year. She was a secondary school teacher in the past and claimed she had also been a functioning alcoholic. During interview she suggested her alcoholism was connected to her diagnosed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and prior to accessing self-help had been confined to the house for over a year. At the height of her use she would regularly drink at least two bottles of wine in one “sitting” and “torture” her family by changing her bed six times an hour during the night. She also claimed that her symptoms were so severe that she would often vomit if she touched an object unintentionally. She was “dragged to the group” by her husband and she now regularly attends two to three times a week.

### Jack: 6 years in Self Help

Is in his mid-thirties as describes himself as an ex crack and alcohol user. He moved to the North from the South of England. He had spent an extended period of time as street homeless and spent most of his time begging and shoplifting, he was also heavily involved in street robbery against night clubbers and other homeless people. He had completed a 12 month stay in a non-twelve step therapeutic community but he now regularly attends meetings and is currently in full time employment as a detached street worker for a large national charity. He spends most of his working life exploring the city centre and outlying areas engaging the street homeless and rough sleepers.

### Tomma: 3 Years in Self Help

Is in his early thirties and has been drug free for three years. He previously injected heroin and used to reside in a small fishing village in Scotland. He claimed at interview that there was one reason why he and his brother chose to use drugs and this was to cope with their early childhood experiences. He is not abstinent and drinks alcohol at least twice a week, despite being an ex-user for which he required a nine months stay in a residential drug and alcohol unit. He claims he does not have a problem with alcohol use, however, he does attend narcotics anonymous but refuses to engage in the group's programme of change. He attends these groups twice a week for ongoing support.

### Pablo: 9 Years in Self Help

Is in his late thirties and has been drug free for nine years. He describes his life as typical of heroin users very chaotic, consisting of crime, offending, prison and homelessness and going around the cycle of use on a constant basis. Growing up, he claims his family was non-existent in his life and all the family he had was a younger sibling who was also a heroin user. He attended and completed a detox and rehab in 2003 and claims he never looked back, he has never relapsed or went back to his drug of choice. He has children with his long term partner who is also an ex heroin user. He now works full time as a residential drug and alcohol worker and develops and delivers groups work sessions to other users. He considers himself a graduate of self-help.

Jess: 8 years in Self help

Is in her late twenties and had been a problematic injecting heroin user in the past. She is Pablo's (above) civil partner and was part of the travelling community up until the point she started using drugs. She had completed a 12 step programme of change in a residential setting and now lives back in her home town with her partner. She is also the main carer for her father and her three younger siblings who are also heroin users. She had previously funded her use by shoplifting and robbery and more recently, just before she went into detox was getting involved in more violent types of offending. She has recently worked in hospitals as a specialist drug and alcohol worker in a busy A and E department but was getting ready to go on maternity leave because she was pregnant with her first child. She also considers herself a graduate of self-help.

Billy Boy: 10 Years in Self help

Is in his early thirties and has been drug free for ten years. He had used drugs from the age of twelve and started using heroin from the age of sixteen. He used to live in a notorious and deprived protestant housing estate in the west of Scotland. He was drawn into the world of older users as a child and he found this both a protective and exploitive period of his life. Towards the end of his use in Scotland he was subjected to extreme bullying by his peers and the loss of his mother who he claims was an alcoholic. He has no connections to his home town now and has started over in the North East. He has a family of his own now works full time in criminal justice setting supporting other users through a community integration



project. He describes himself as an ex user and claims he is recovery as he has not used heroin. He also develops and delivers self-help groups in local communities but considers himself a graduate of self-help groups.

Penelope: 6 months in Self help

Is in her mid- twenties and has been drug free for six months. Despite using heroin for six and a half years she claims she was not a real drug addict. This view is informed by her perception that she did not inject, offend and stopped using heroin for eighteen months on her own. She also claims that as a drug user she relied heavily on her mother and grandmother to meet her needs, often rising from bed at 6pm and never taking or collecting her daughter from school. She sold drugs to other users and this allowed her to maintain her lifestyle and she has recently completed a six month programme in a residential drug and alcohol project. She claims she was rejected by other drug users when she stopped dealing and found this difficult as she thought she had good relationships with people, she attends regular twelve step meetings.

Craig: 11 months in Self help

Is in his mid-thirties and has been drug free for eleven months. He is a father of four and describes himself as leading a double life in which he moved between being an addict to having responsibility and being a father. He describes his injecting cocaine and amphetamine use as problematic and claims he would only start to enjoy buzzing after three days without sleep, he would then “buzz” and hallucinate for 5-6 days at a time. Despite his dual life, he

has always had employment and worked as a roofer, he claims the root of his addiction lies with blaming others as he was abandoned as a child and spent a large part of his early life moving from foster care to become a looked after child. He once got involved in a shop robbery and later handed himself in with the goods he had stolen because he felt ashamed of his actions. He views self-help as a technical concept which involves learning and using tools of reflection and does not attend groups anymore.

Sharon: 8 years in Self help

Is in her early thirties and has been drug free for eight years. She lives with her partner who is also an ex user and is currently pregnant with her second child. She describes herself as a miracle child as she was born to elderly parents and was not a planned birth. She claims she had a privileged upbringing and did not want for anything as a child, horse riding, days out and clothes. She got into drugs and used solvents, cannabis, heroin and crack from the age of fourteen and was on a methadone prescription from the age of sixteen. She attended a twelve step residential rehab and claims to have found it difficult to relate to older alcohol using women and other people who were around her at the time. Despite these stated difficulties she has still managed to develop a relationship, have children and secure a full time job as a self-help support worker. She is a graduate of self-help.

Petra: 3 years in Self help

Is in her early forties and has been drug free for three years. She claims she was largely unaware of her addiction and the way she interacted with drugs until she was involved in developing a local support project. She has worked for most of her adult life as a publican and did not see that losing her house, her job and almost her son resulted from her cocaine and alcohol use as the behaviour as an addict. She regularly attends groups for self help and support and claims it has taken her a long time to get over her superiority complex. She feels women have a difficult time in self-help as she identifies she has to be constantly aware of how she portrays her domestically abusive ex-partner as many men relate to his behaviour in the group setting. She attends a traditional 12 step group on a twice weekly basis.

Harry: 3 years in Self help

Is in his late thirties and has been drug free for 3 years. He has three children to his estranged wife, who has now remarried. In discussing his own alcohol use he claims he did not have a chance in life as he and his brother who is an injecting drug user are children of parents who met in a secure psychiatric ward. He claims that he equated his happiness to excitement and found that when he did eventually get into drug treatment, he had no problems adjusting as his life was full of epiphanies on a daily basis. He claims he has been given a gift and is enshrined in twelve step philosophy as this gives him purpose in life; he attends self-help groups on a weekly basis.

#### Steve: 2 years in Self Help

Is in his late forties and has been drug free for 2 years. He has spent a lot of his adult life in prison, he claims he was wrongly imprisoned on the first occasion and this has fuelled his offending. He describes himself as a career drug user having used all the “drugs available in the UK to the max” he claims his drug use was always manageable to himself and did not find out till later that his behaviour was problematic. He has also spent a lot of time in prison and claims when he was introduced to the concept of recovery he rejected the idea that individuals could actually stop using drugs and alcohol. He has a twenty year old daughter and now attends 12 step meetings regularly and works as a volunteer helping homeless drug and alcohol users find a foothold in society.

#### Helen: 3 years in Self Help

Is in her early forties and has been drug free for 3 years. She describes herself as a recovering alcoholic, at “her worse” she would start drinking cider and wine and then progress onto vodka until she passed out. She claims she had found it difficult to come to terms with her addiction and has been in and out of treatment on four or five occasions. She also claims her alcohol use left her extremely vulnerable and ostracised from her family and children. She entered detox and completed residential rehab and has not looked back since. She was previously a member of the non-traditional group that I engaged with during my fieldwork but she does not attend groups now but she does coordinate, develop and deliver non twelve step self-help.

## Chapter Seven

### The “self” in Self Help

#### 7.0 Introduction

In this, the first of two findings chapter, I am primarily concerned with providing a more social and cultural account of self-help and self-help processes. I begin to do this by exploring how those users with the most significant forms of substance use and substance related problems and concerns relate to and experience self-help groups. In undertaking this task, I am also concerned with exploring how the self-concepts, perceptions, appreciations and behaviours of individuals are influenced within the context of self-help groups. In this chapter I utilise Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as an intellectual framework from which to do so. In Chapter 8 that follows this one, I will go on to utilise Bourdieu’s concept of social and other capitals to explore how the resolution of substance related concerns are mediated by the accrual and exchange of capital(s) in relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986).

To begin then it is important to recognise that self-help groups are essentially theorised as mini social worlds in this thesis. By this I mean self-help groups are highly permeable and that individuals can come and go with relative ease; membership is usually voluntary (Smith, 2007). As a mini social world, self-help groups do have fairly defined technologies

and languages which are passed on to their members via various forms of social process, rituals and means of communication (cf Collins, 2005). But there is also a significant “absence of a formal hierarchy within them, the influence of leadership is weak within them and social roles are largely informal” (Smith, 2007:3, cf, Gellman, 1964; Shibutani, 1961). With these types of concerns in mind, I open this chapter by briefly reflecting upon some of the observations I myself made of an open 12 step meeting during my fieldwork. In doing so I am also setting a context for what follows by illustrating some of the basic processes and interactions that occur when individuals come together in self-help.

### **7.0.1 Attending to Fieldwork**

It’s a cold Friday night in November and I find myself on a street corner, with two complete strangers waiting to be picked up to go to a large and well established 12 step fellowship meeting. These types of meetings are run weekly by NA and are typically attended by those considering whether to engage with or in self-help. But they are also known as open meetings as members of the general public, user’s families and visiting professionals<sup>17</sup> can attend to observe them. I’ve been to this particular meeting about half a dozen times but it’s the first time these two strangers: who turn out to be social work students, have ever been to any type of self-help meeting. I only know this because they volunteer this information to me and in doing so they also vocalise that going to a meeting for the first time must be a really daunting experience. After a short conversation we are met by our

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<sup>17</sup> This is usually drug and alcohol workers, those whom are interesting in learning about the philosophy of the group and researchers such as I.

escort and walk a very short distance to the church hall in which the meeting is being held. Our escort, who is also the groups trusted member<sup>18</sup>, turns and ask us if we are all ok and then half turns to my two companions and says to them “before we go in, it’s important for you to know that you’ll be hugging a lot”. He laughs, but he also subtly reminds us all that we are guests and as such we are not allowed to speak or contribute to the meeting.

We all get hugged, everyone does, but I also observe one of the social workers, who doesn’t yet appreciate the legitimate culture of self-help, extend a hand, as you would do in a more general context, to the first group member he encounters. The social work students hand is motioned away by this member and he then engages in a somewhat clumsy sort of embrace. The student social worker looks slightly nervous and embarrassed at what has happened but he then proceeds to repeat the process, hugging, with all of those members who are already in the room.

The hall we have entered is about forty feet long, it is well furnished and lit, it also has a built in kitchen and when we get in there a few of the early arrivals are busy clearing the tables and chairs away from the centre of the room. As other members enter they acknowledge those members that are present and like a well-oiled machine; without having to be asked they just join in and set about preparing the room for the meeting. This involves moving the tables away and arranging the chairs into two circles: one smaller one

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<sup>18</sup> He has completed a 12 step programme of change and has a role in facilitating meetings.

on the inside within a larger outer one. The chairs are arranged like this is because of the size of the hall and because about 100 members are expected; as always however, there is a “top table” within the inner circle. This table is reserved for the group’s most senior members and it is where they will sit for the duration of the meeting. There is also a table with a large amount of group literature and books on NA and NA philosophy; these can be purchased for a small nominal donation. This table reminds me of an old fashioned book stall and sitting beside it there is a more senior group member. This particular member has an official role in the group; part of which includes ordering literature and advising newer members on what types of literature they need or should be reading.

One of the groups more established members who I am known to motions me over to sit beside her. A young homeless<sup>19</sup> youth sits down beside us and strikes up a conversation by asking me the questions that everyone is allowed to ask. Individual confidentiality is paramount in self-help, but users of self-help are allowed to ask and exchange basic information with each other. The youth asks me what he’s permitted, which includes, my name, where I am from and if I’ve been to the group before<sup>20</sup>. Without prompting he then reciprocates and tells me who he is and how long he has been coming for: he’s one day clean and experiencing physical and emotional dysphoria but he’s got a sponsor and tells me he’s ok. I say hello and then turn back to the other member who had motioned me over, I do not feel the need to tell this young lad that I am a visiting professional or why I’ve

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<sup>19</sup> He has his bedding a sleeping bag with him.

<sup>20</sup> He doesn’t ask if I’ve been before he asks if I’m a new or returning member



come to be here. But I do respond appropriately and as expected, I say “it’ll come together for you just keep coming”, he replies “you know it’s true” and smiles.

When the chairs are all set out one of the groups more senior members goes around placing the group rules, prayers and literature on different seats. This literature will be read out at the start of the meeting and some users quickly sit on these seats. This I know this to be the case because I’ve been informed by my gatekeepers that the prayers or literature have significant meaning for these users as individuals or because they simply like reading them out. As the meeting is brought together the group are reminded that this is an open meeting and that there are visiting professionals and family members whom are present. This prompts almost everyone present to start to look around at everyone else. I recognise a few of the faces present, I nod in acknowledgement to others that are known to me and wonder at the range of demographics that are in attendance at the group.

At this point the main speaker, whom I’ll refer to as Karen, starts to share her life story. As I survey the room I observe some members just sitting and staring at the floor, others huddle in small groups chatting quietly, some are even on their smart phones and I am reminded of how complex the setting is to understand and how the interactions that occur between members are. Everyone in the group seems to be doing their own thing but no one seems to be concerned: that’s because, those that are sitting quietly are believed to be in contemplation, those chatting in small groups are sponsors and tutees explaining

concepts and those on their phones are making notes to discuss at a later point with their peers.

Karen's sharing of her life story lasts for about an hour and then the group stops for a break; there is a mass exodus out of the building for a cigarette and to top up of refreshments. The second half of the meeting has more to do with the group's official business and the timetabling of meetings and events for the coming week. At the end of the meeting a hat comes around, it is literally a hat, and individuals are invited but not expected to make a donation. This group like every other is self-funded and the member I am sitting beside takes this opportunity to remind me that £1 is the suggested donation for this group. The meeting is then closed and everyone spends around fifteen minutes going around the room embracing and wishing others well: the young lad appears in front of me again, we embrace and he asked if I'm going onto the next meeting. This is a large group and they run three meetings back to back on a Friday and Saturday evening between 7pm and 1 am at three different venues for their members. I tell the lad I'm not going: he says goodbye and leaves and I join in tidying the room with others and putting it back into order. My night is drawing to a close his is just beginning; he has two more meetings to attend.

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### **7.1 Overcoming Initial Barriers and Dispositions**

Entering self-help can be a relatively difficult task. All of the respondents that I engaged with during my fieldwork reported that they felt a sense of social disorientation and had to

overcome a number of objective “informal obstacles” to do so. The nature of the social disorientation and the “informal obstacles” that respondents faced varied, as they do in all social and cultural contexts and settings, from self-help group to self-help group (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Parker and Stanworth, 2015). They were, however, discussed by the respondent group as stemming from a variety of sources which included the open disclosure or spontaneous sharing of intimate problems in front of others and the types of language being used (Sandmaier, 1980; cf, Unruth, 1980). In the quotations below, Tomma is discussing the difficulty he experienced listening to others making intimate disclosures and then having to speak in front of others. This concern was expressed by the majority of respondents when reflecting on their experiences during the early period of their involvement in the group. Harry is also discussing the more practical difficulties he himself had in understanding and making meaning or sense of the language used in self-help meetings:

*“To start with it was a complete nightmare, you knew you had to talk and it was coming round to you, I was going what do I say? What do I say? You’re just not used to talking to people not used to talking about you, it was horrible” (Tomma)*

And:

*“At first I found it quite freaky, I found it quite freaky and quite scary and as I said that’s why I dipped in and out for so long, I just did not understand what they were talking about! They were talking about the twelve steps; they were talking about the god of your understanding, about a higher power and applying the steps. It just did not make sense to me at that time” (Harry)*

In the context of my fieldwork these largely objectified group concerns or “informal obstacles” only influenced, they did not have a definitive impact on the individual’s ability to affiliate with their group. However, their existence could exacerbate other more subjective concerns that respondents had when entering their group or endeavouring to become an established member (Parker and Stanworth, 2015). More specifically and fundamentally, it was the perceptions, appreciations and attitudes that individual respondents had developed prior and brought to self-help that inhibited their ability to enter or affiliate in their groups (cf Bourdieu, 1977; Maton, 2012). In the context below, Pablo who was typical<sup>21</sup> of the group of Graduate Group of users I engaged with is discussing his perceptions of why it took him and others who were like him, so long to make the transition and become an established group member (Unruth, 1980):

*“If you have been a chaotic drug user for so many years then you live a certain life, you live a certain way. So it is pretty hard to walk in after a certain chaotic life to be that structured to take all that in” (Pablo).*

In many ways Pablo subjective experiences of substance use and substance related concerns prior to self-help were similar to many of the respondents that I engaged with. Insofar as he had experienced more significant forms of substance related concerns and been enmeshed in drug using sub cultures as an active drug user. Like many others then,

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<sup>21</sup> A typical Graduate Group member would have been a career drug and alcohol user, they used from an early age and would have been in contact with crime agencies and involved in subcultural contexts, prior to accessing self-help. They would have been in and out of formal drug treatment and at the point of entry into self-help would have had little involvement with others in more conventional types of social worlds. (see individual biographies)

he had also embraced what was discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis as “the code of the street” (Cloud and Granfield, 2008) prior to accessing self-help. In discussing his journey and his progression towards becoming an established group member with me at interview<sup>22</sup> Pablo discussed at length how he had found it difficult to adapt to self-help because of the transposed dispositions he brought with him. In doing so he also suggested that he found particular self-help processes and concerns: like confrontation, tough love<sup>23</sup> and personal challenges in groups difficult to deal with in a constructive way (Jordan, 2001). He argued,

*“People get away with doing things [in self-help groups] that you wouldn’t do outside...you have to learn all that” (Pablo).*

The processes of “learning it all” took time for respondents. Others who had found themselves accessing self-help in or from prison/institutions, like Steve below also found it difficult to overcome the perceptions and appreciation that they brought with them to self-help. During interview, Steve, expressed a more negative initial perception of self-help than Pablo, in doing so he also stated a significant difficulty in identifying, engaging with and adapting to self-help process’s.

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<sup>22</sup>At interview Pablo had informed me that he had sold heroin and crack cocaine for three years and just prior to going into self-help had been stabbed repeatedly for not handing over his drugs during a street robbery. He claimed he did this on a point of principle because it was not the done thing to surrender your drugs willingly.

<sup>23</sup> Tough love in self-help relates to when individuals fail to take responsibility for their own actions and are challenged for their attitudes, behaviours or perceptions by others.

*“I just thought it was a fucking cult” (Steve)*

Later and more specifically:

*“I had actually done eighteen prison sentences and that instilled in me a belief that... erm... that reputation and street cred (...) I lived in institutions I used to visit<sup>24</sup> that kind of stuff, always the reputation, all the bravado, all of that kept me safe (...) I hear people say that they talk of GOD put them off going to meetings and scared of being involved in fellowships. It wasn't that for me, it was people talking about their feelings. I had never ever come across that, it's like if I ever went to prison and said to my pad mate I'm feeling a bit emotional today he would have taken me canteen<sup>25</sup> off me he would (laughs) get on the bottom bunk<sup>26</sup> get on that bed! (Steve)*

Those respondents whom found the transition easier to negotiate or more generally took less time to enter and affiliate with others in self-help tended to be those whom had spent a period of time either in some form of structured treatment, in group settings or rehab prior to their involvement (Moos and Timko, 2008). This small number of respondents, like Liam below, often claimed that they were able to identify with others through the stories

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<sup>24</sup> In self-help visiting certain concerns like this means discussing the concern at length and analysing it with other members of the group.

<sup>25</sup> Canteen, here Steve is referring to his personal allowance of cigarettes, biscuits, chocolate and/or toiletries.

<sup>26</sup> The bottom Bunk is reserved for more inexperienced prisoners, less able, less violent and first offenders or the top bunk goes to more experienced prisoners, longer term prisoners or those with a particular status.

that they heard when they first entered their groups; they also took significantly less amount of time to feel like they belonged or had settled in.

*“It took me about two weeks to get into the swing of things to feel comfortable with the group cause it was held twice weekly then and still is (...) I would say I think that I felt comfortable, and looking back I think I was struck by the fact that they were relatively normal people, I knew it was a drug and alcohol related self-help group but nobody was out of their face” (Liam)*

Interestingly, others such as Rachel below claimed to find it easier to because she was comfortable (Sandmaier, 1980) speaking in groups or more specifically in front of others because she had done so in the past as a teacher:

*“Well the first thing was sharing in the group and it was a very small group then there was only about ten of us, and I think because I was a teacher it was easier to talk in front of people if that makes sense so I just basically told them about my life story and about my obsessive compulsive behaviours and... it was the first time” (Rachel)*

None of the respondents that I engaged with during my fieldwork however had managed to make the transition to established group member at the first time of trying. All of them had entered a self-help group at some point and then subsequently, excluded themselves from their group that they were endeavouring to affiliate with. The majority, particularly

those whom had more severe substance related problems, like Pablo, Tomma and Steve did so because they felt that they did not meet even the basic conditions for existence in their new social world (Smith, 2007). These basic conditions included being able to talk about their feelings and emotions, exhibiting and caring for others or being able to deal with the challenges of others in an appropriate way. More theoretically, the “self” or habitus of all of the respondents that I engaged with, illustrated more profoundly by Pablo and Steve, during my fieldwork, were simply “out of sync” when they sought to enter and affiliate with others in self-help. This was evident and can be illustrated in the context of my fieldwork by the ways in which the “habitus” of these respondents was still “generating practices for some time after the original conditions which had shaped it had vanished” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997 cited in Maton, 2012:58).

*“For the first six weeks I would not challenge one other person you know cause I said you ‘re all grasses you have all been brainwashed there is no way I am going to get all like you ‘se, you know I could not see it for what it was” (Steve)*

#### **7.1.1** Learning to appreciate the legitimate Culture of Self-help

More positively, however, the respondents I interviewed informed me that when they chose to re-enter self-help again, they never did so as strangers (Unruth, 1980). With regards to this particular theme respondents would often discuss at interview how their



ability to become established members largely depended on the extent and depth to which they had become previously involved in self-help groups. Or as Bourdieu would argue how their journey towards group membership was eased when they started to identify with others in relationships of mutual acquaintance<sup>27</sup> and after they had begun to learn, relate to and understand the legitimate culture of self-help (cf, Unruth, 1980; Smith, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986).

Below Paddy is discussing how his experiences of attending a 12 step<sup>28</sup> meeting in prison 10 years earlier had enabled him to begin to appreciate the legitimate culture of self-help. This in turn then eased his transition to becoming an established group member in his current group.

*“When I got there it [NA meeting] it was the same, that’s fundamentally it, it was the same as I had remembered when I was sixteen (...) after the meeting I came out and was more acceptable to it. I didn’t come out of the meeting and think this is it. But it was another seed or a little bit more water on the seed that had already been planted” (Paddy)*

Kelly is making a similar point to Paddy about the process of becoming a member but she also identified that she had attended other types of 12 step groups, in the form of Eaters

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<sup>27</sup> These relationships were based on those with others in the wider group and others whom generally shared or illustrated similar basic beliefs, values and intentions not to use drugs (see next chapter).

<sup>28</sup> This standardisation, whilst there is local variations, of meetings is one of the key strengths of the 12 step approach insofar as members can know what to expect, anywhere in the world really when they enter a group. It is the rituals of these types of groups that Randal Collins (2005) claims enable particular types of groups to laud their resources over others less developed groups.

Anonymous, prior to her current group. By doing so she claimed she was more prepared and found the thought of memberships appealing because her previous experiences had informed her what to expect.

*“I had been to groups before for eating disorders so I knew the value of other people who had been through the same thing. That appealed to me you know somebody who actually understood because I did not have anybody within my own circle who had been through the same thing!”*

Other respondents like Ned and Lou, below, claimed that they were able to start to work towards becoming established members because they identified with others in the groups that they attended (Humphreys, 2000).

*“I think it was just about relating to people you know (...) and when you hear someone doing a share<sup>29</sup>...bang...it just hits you: wow (...) so there was a lot of relating (...) knowing that I wasn't alone, that I did have people that I could relate to” (Ned).*

And:

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<sup>29</sup> A share, see next section on self-assessment and self-evaluation, is where a more senior member shares their life story and their understanding of how their journey relates to the 12 steps.

*“Phew, wow, I thought maybe I am not the only one who’s going through this, because I did feel isolated at times, as I say people were expressing their views about their experiences of alcoholism. I just thought you are my kind of people; I’ve hit the right chord here. You listen to stories and you think I’ve done that” (Lou)*

Almost every respondent I engaged with discussed the concept of “getting identification” and the importance of this in relation to becoming an established group member. This theme “gaining identification” was a theme of self-help that was also identified as significant by Smith (2007) as she explored the ways in which newcomers bonded to established members in similar 12 step self-help contexts. Even those who had been in self-help for a significant period of time and those that had graduated from their groups still recalled how their other group members reinforced the need to “keep coming back” to get “identification” when they were finding it difficult to integrate as a new member.

*“Aye there was still a lot to get my head around- I didn’t feel part of at first and I was explaining that to people, and expressing myself on the phone [to sponsor].....[pauses for a moment and points index finger skywards] just keep on going back, that’s what they said to us you know. Just keep on going back and you will get a level of identification one way or another”. (Big Gav)*

It is evident from the experiences of the respondent group that the process of just becoming a self-help group member was a complex concern and incremental process for respondents. It was also a transition which required adaptation and adjustment to individual functioning. But more theoretically it was also a process that was mediated by the individual's ability to begin to identify and make meaning with others whilst developing a basic understanding of the legitimate culture of self-help process and groups (Bourdieu, 1986). More importantly, however, the stories of Paddy, Kelly, Steve and Harry in this section are also illustration of the mismatch<sup>30</sup> that can occur when the "self" or Habitus and the dispositions an individual brings to the social field of self-help did not fit, with the evolving field in which the individual find themselves situated in (Bourdieu, 1990, 1991).

## **7.2 Becoming and Addict**

The extent to which individual respondents affiliated to their group also depended more significantly on the extent to which they were able to make meaning of, or identify with their groups key ideological principles. During the early stages of their involvement in self-help all of the respondents I engaged with were exposed to their group's ideological position in open or sharing meetings<sup>31</sup> (cf, Humphreys, 2009; Smith, 2007; Alcoholic Anonymous, 1983). During interviews the respondent group were keen to point out that

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<sup>30</sup> The concept of mismatch is concerned with the concept of Hysteresis (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), in the context above I utilise it as a basic construct to illustrate and reinforce Bourdieu's own ideas that the Habitus can be stubborn, resistant or ill formed and will reject, adapt to or be maintained when individuals enter different social and cultural contexts and settings (Maton, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> These are the types of groups I discussed in the opening section of this chapter.

that their group's ideological premise was not a doctrine or thesis that had to be followed religiously, nor was it set as criteria for membership during the early stages of involvement (Kelly, 2003). But at interview they did indicate that the group's ideological principles significantly influenced the way they related to others and perceived and understood their substance use. At this point then it is useful to set a context for discussing this particular theme by illustrating and reflect upon the ways in which group ideology is presented to users of self-help in open meetings. The following illustration is taken from the fieldwork observations that were conducted in traditional 12 step open meetings.

Open meetings occur in self-help group's on a weekly basis. As was illustrated in the opening section of this chapter, they are open to everyone including professionals and family members. But they are also the first meeting a newcomer or potential new group member will attend. These types of meetings are designed to allow newcomers and potential members to experience a self-help group, understand the structure of meetings and familiarise individuals with the ideological position of the group, philosophy and programme of change<sup>32</sup>. An open self-help meeting usually commences with a trusted member opening the group with a welcome to everyone present. All of those that are seated, usually in a circle, will be asked to read out the principles of the group, ground rules and other NA literature such as the Serenity Prayer.

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<sup>32</sup> Or as one of my gatekeepers told me *"to show people it can be done" or "that it works"*.

With everyone sitting in a circle the groups trusted member will then introduce themselves and the more senior member who is presenting their share or life story; this sub group will be seated at the top table. This will usually include the individual who is celebrating an anniversary of clean time<sup>33</sup> or a member who is nearing the end of the group's programme of change. In these types of groups the individual who is sharing will give a detailed account of their lives, sometimes this is discussed as a life story, their experiences with substances and illustrate some of the problems and concerns that they experienced as a drug or alcohol user. They will also present a case or illustrate how they engaged with the groups programme of change and ideology as an individual endeavouring to resolve their substance related concerns. The group usually then breaks and when it returns the individual who is sharing then relates the group's philosophy, the 12 steps and the principles of NA to the resolution of their substance related problem and concerns.

During this period of time other senior members that are present are expected to and will then give feedback. There is no advice or cross talk allowed during this period and they, the senior members, generally thank the individual for sharing and then pick points to elaborate upon. For example, they may ask can you clarify how step one<sup>34</sup> helped you in your recovery what step are you at now, what is your next focus. All newcomers present are then invited to discuss if they can relate to or identify with the share and the approach that the individual doing the share adopted. They, newcomers, are also then invited to

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<sup>33</sup> The amount of years they have not used drugs or alcohol for.

<sup>34</sup> Step 1 "*We admit we are powerless over our addiction and that our lives have become unmanageable*" (NA, 2013).

relate the sharer's story to their own experiences and the meeting closes with a further loud round of applause and the groups trusted member will pass out details of groups and meetings: including group social event that are occurring in the near future.

Overall, the majority of the respondents that I engaged with during my fieldwork had been attending their groups on a weekly basis for a minimum of six months, many had been attending for over two years, and some for as many as ten years. It therefore came as no surprise that each was also working towards or had already established a very subjective and particular position on themselves in relation to their group's ideological principles (Yeung, 2007). In the context below, Zeb, who it must be noted was an established and longer term member of NA at the point of interview, is both illustrating the ideological<sup>35</sup> position his group held and discussing his own subjective interpretation of this:

*"This is what narcotics anonymous prescribe to, they call it a disease<sup>36</sup> (...) we prescribed to having a disease- have a thinking process that will instantly defend and keep me using (drugs). I have a disease within myself and I don't feel at ease with myself that is the best way I can explain it, if you split the word up dis....ease that's the best way I can explain it"*  
(Zeb).

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<sup>37</sup> "Our minds play tricks on us, due to the nature of our disease, and we use spiritual principles as guidelines to escape our old ways" Narcotics Anonymous Way of Life (2012).

During her interview Kelly also discussed the concept of her group's ideological position in relation to understanding the nature of her substance use. But in doing so she also identified that engaging with others in groups resulted in seeds being planted which shaped her perceptions, appreciations and later manifested in more concrete ideas around the self-concept and identity she developed.

*"Its all about addiction anyway (...) at the beginning it was just about people planting seeds in my head and I would go home and think (...) I hadn't really thought about that until somebody else said it that was one of the great values of the group. There are so many people and it's so varied there are so many stories and people from different backgrounds that you pick up so much (...) I know that you can be taken down different paths without you even intending to so generally it teaches you"* (Kelly)

At interview Liam was also discussing the influences that the group had on his self-concept but in doing so he also identified that a significant amount of thinking or self-analysis and self-evaluation was triggered by but his group's discussions and continued away from the actual group itself:

*"Cause the groups don't finish in here, they don't finish when you walk out the door the groups go in your head for the next-.for the rest of the day and longer you know"*



What was particularly illuminating and relevant about the processes of identifying with others and the group's ideological position, with regards to this section, was the variation in the ways and the amount of time in which it took individuals to do so. Theoretically, Bourdieu himself did argue that the habitus, or self, was constantly transforming and over time, would be formed and structured more generally "in a corresponding way to the conditions of which it was a product" (Bourdieu, 1984:170 in Maton, 2009:59). However, in doing so, he did also argue that the habitus could be subject to re-formation and fundamental change over a shorter period of time. This more rapid process of change to the habitus occurred when significant objective and external field changes occurred, or when individuals entered new fields for the first time (Bourdieu, 1977). These variations in the structuring and formation of the individual's self-concepts or the habitus of respondents were illustrated in the experiences of self-help users. For some respondents, like Theresa<sup>37</sup> the recognition that she was in some way an "addict" or belonged in her group was experienced in a largely subtle yet spiritual and transcendent way.

*"There was recognition, ah think you could say a moment of clarity, eureka or light bulb moment. You know some words must have been used, in this just for today<sup>38</sup> and I said right something just something prompted my human brain" (Theresa)*

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<sup>37</sup> Was the single founding member and facilitator of the Innovators Group

<sup>38</sup> Just for today is a phrase that is used to reassure individual whom are worried about the future and it is also used in discussing the principles of the group, for example: Just for today I will accept I am an addict! Just for today I will exercise humility in all my affairs.

Will: *So how did that change over time?*

*"I went to a meeting every night after that for four weeks (...) I would listen to others and think eh my god I've done that as well. I would recognise something in what they were talking about, where they had been to. (...) things like that, you know looking into other people's stuff and actually recognising that other people are the same as me. It was very profound, it kind of felt, and I remember at one point thinking, this is where I belong these are my brothers and sisters" (Theresa)*

For others, like Paddy, who was embedded in drug using cultures prior to accessing self-help the process of identifying with the notion that he was in some way an "addict" took significantly longer and was a more sedentary process (Bourdieu, 1977).

*"When I first came to recovery there were other areas of my life that were chaotic I was still committing crime all that stuff was still going on the fantasy stuff, making money I was chasing pounds and I was swapping one for the other.... I kept going to the meetings and kept going and met people who I aspired to (...) I wasn't doing anything wrong I started to feel good, I was clean I did not have drugs to I was trying to stay clean but...I wasn't willing to hand over everything every aspect of my life and it come to a point in my life when I was twelve months clean (...) it was like I had one foot in this aspect of my life which was active*

*addiction<sup>39</sup> and still involved in thieving and making money and then the other foot which was in recovery (...) For me it is really good today that I made the decision to give it a go and put both my feet into recovery to give it a go and I kind of just rolled from there” (Paddy).*

At the point I interviewed him Paddy had been going to meetings twice a week for seven years. What was particularly relevant about his account of recognising that he was an addict or in “active addiction” as he termed it was the way in which he seemed to be able to make important and rational decisions about becoming a group member. This rational decision making, which was discussed in the opening theoretical chapter of this thesis, can be illustrated in Paddy’s narrative where he states “I made the decision” to get involved and made a commitment to “put both feet in recovery”. The point being raised here, which is key to what follows, relates to the notion that the extent to which an individual subjectively identifies with and accepts the self-concepts that are available to them in self-help groups will depend on the extent to which it makes sense for them to do so (cf Charmaz, 1983; Brewer, 1991). However, in the context of my fieldwork it was the objective social and cultural context and processes of open self-help groups that influenced and shaped the perceptions and appreciations that individual had about the more fundamental positions they held in life (Bourdieu, 1984).

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<sup>39</sup> In the context of my fieldwork the term “in active addiction” was used by respondents when they were discussing the past and their experiences as drug or alcohol user, in the present day or the context of self help they were “non-active addicts” because they were not thinking or engaging in behaviour that they did as a user’s.

With the exception of Theresa then, those respondents who had experienced more significant substance related concerns and problems took more time and longer to identify with and related to their groups ideological position. However, when they did, they were also far more likely to identify with the idea that they were “diseased” or an “addict” in a more significant way. Importantly, in these contexts individuals did not identify with the concept of an “addict” because they were trying to express their experiences in the way that Thombs and Combs (2013:32) explained in the opening chapter of this thesis, “as the victims of other diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, emphysema, etc” (Thombs and Osborn, 2013: 32). They did so because the concept of the diseased or addicted self, enabled them to tell convincing stories about their recovery and was a useful way for them to reinterpret and make sense of aspects of their previous drug using lives (McIntosh and McKeagany, 2000). These latter points can be identified in the narrative of Zeb and Sarge who like many others in the respondent group utilised this self-concept to explain and rationalise their actions and experiences before they entered their groups.

*“me drug using was very chaotic so was all the stuff I was doing to get me drugs and eh it wasn’t pretty and it wasn’t glamorous and towards the (...) some of the stuff that I had to do to get me drugs (...) I was basically in isolation by the end of my drug using, in a box room injecting drugs by myself” (Zeb)*

And;

*“[why was I] was I prepared to live in a squat on Christmas day rather than spend Christmas day with me family. Because I didn’t know....I say I didn’t know but I did I had gone so far into substance use that I didn’t feel comfortable around my own family I felt more comfortable sitting with someone who was using drugs” (Sarge)*

### **7.3 Engaging in Self Help as an Addict**

Overall the majority of the respondent group that I engaged with during my fieldwork identified with the notion that they were “diseased” or an “addict”. This also meant that they were also much more likely to be involved in the wider and further types of activities that were made available to them by their respective self-help groups. The nature and types of activities that self-help groups are able to offer their members and users will differ from group to group and depend of the actual and virtual resources that they have available to them (Humphreys, 2009, Collins, 2005). But in the context of my fieldwork they included formal sponsorship programmes and a number of different themed self-help sessions which included: participation meetings<sup>40</sup>, study meetings<sup>41</sup>, question and answer meetings<sup>42</sup> and topic meetings<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> *“The leader opens the meeting up for members to share on any subject related to recovery” (NA, 1998).*

<sup>41</sup> *“There are a number of different types of study meetings. Some read a portion of an NA approved book or pamphlet each week and discuss it—for example, a Basic Text study. Others have discussions focusing on the Twelve Steps or the Twelve Traditions. I discuss newcomer and question and answer meetings at a later point” (NA, 1998).*

<sup>42</sup> *At Q&A meetings, people are asked to think of questions related to recovery and the fellowship, write those questions down, and place them in “the ask-it basket.” The leader of the meeting pulls a slip of paper from the basket, reads the question, and asks for someone to share their experience related to it. After one or two members have shared, the leader selects another question from the basket, and so forth (NA, 1998).*

<sup>43</sup> *The leader selects a particular recovery-related topic for discussion or asks someone else to provide a topic (NA, 1998).*

Access to these types of meetings, listed above, in self-help is restricted to those group members who can relate to and identify with the ideological premise that they are “addicts”. This restriction or criteria for entry to these meetings was put in place to ensure that those in attendance could feel more secure in the knowledge that others attending share a similar perspective or self-concept. In more traditional or larger 12 step meetings like NA senior or trusted group members are charged with reinforcing this criteria for membership, “the leader or chairperson often reads a statement explaining why the meeting is closed and offering to direct non-addicts who may be attending to an open meeting” (NA World Services 1997). In open meetings, as I have discussed, respondents reported that individuals who wished to attend and contribute to the group discussion or pass a comment to another user had to start their feedback by making the declaration “I am [name] and I’m an addict....I’d just like to say” and so on. But in themed self-help meetings self-help users did not have to make any declaration about themselves. In this context it was assumed that everyone in attendance identified with the concept of being an “addict”. This is assumed because those in attendance do not openly criticise the use of the concept or indeed others who used it in discussions (Yeung, 2007).

In self-help groups, self-help users will usually either attend those meetings that they themselves have identified are relevant to them, or those that had been suggested to them by a more senior group member. Within self-help groups then it is also not un-common for those who had experienced more significant substance and alcohol related problems

and concerns to try and attempt to attend 30 meetings in 30 days or 90<sup>44</sup> meetings in 90 days. This process of attending meetings, in this way is a historical feature of the original 12 step processes and groups. This approach had originally been conceptualised and designed to enable newcomer's self-help to embed themselves in their group's philosophy and fellowship. In the context of my fieldwork around one third of the respondent group that I engaged with attended 90 meetings in 90 days when they first had become involved in self-help. Below Sarge is recalling his experiences of this process as a self-help user, how he then embedded himself in his group and how this pattern of meeting attendance fitted in the context of the rest of his own journey:

*“after I made that connection (Identified that he was an addict) I done what they suggested and attended 90 meetings in 90 days, get a sponsor, work the steps, get involved with service not just inside the meetings but also outside, build a social network up for yourself, so that's what I done and it worked” (Sarge)*

Steve (below) is discussing the same theme but his quotation is being used here to illustrate the types of activities that a typical self-help group member would be undertaking during the early days of their involvement:

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<sup>44</sup> About one third of the respondents that I engaged with followed this meeting format and introduction to self-help.

*“I attend meetings, I have a sponsor, I work the steps, I get up in the morning I have a routine were I do some literature, I pray a little bit to my higher power” (Steve)*

At this point it is important to pause and recognise that Steve was very much embedded and engaging in self-help at the point in which he was interviewed. During our conversation I was intrigued by his comments about his “higher power” but I did not push him or ask him to explain what his understanding was. As our discussion progressed he did go onto volunteer that he did not really know what this “higher power” actually entailed himself although he did know what it was not. Importantly, it would seem that Steve was comfortable with this uncertainty.

*“we all have to believe in something not god with a stick with a goat and a beard and all that, I haven’t got a clue, maybe it is not for me to know” (Steve)*

Steve’s comment here are illustrations that there are some seemingly important aspects of self-help and self-help processes which individual self-help users and respondents, did not seem to fully understand. In his own empirical work Bourdieu coined the term ***doxa ignoranta***<sup>45</sup> to describe similar situations he encountered during his own scholarly work. He himself did suggest that individuals could be unaware of the objective nature of their own experiences or “in a primal state of innocence because of what cannot be said for a lack of an available discourse” (Deer, 2009:120). However, the point being made here is

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<sup>45</sup> Learned ignorance.



that there were occasions during my fieldwork when the respondent group simply did not need to know or need to fully understand the specifics of how and what was working for them in self-help...it was just was working!

In a similar theoretical context it is important to recognise that the objective conditions that influenced respondent's perceptions, appreciations and functioning in self-help meetings could not simply be discussed or separated in the ways that empirical theorists and scholars have in traditional social and cultural contexts of self-help. This was primarily because respondents in this study were found to be influenced by a number of different forms and types of both formal and informal, social and cultural influences (Parker and Stanworth, 2015). In the context below Pablo, a graduate of self-help groups at the point of interview discussed how he generally remembered his experiences of meetings.

*“Well you are learning how to behave, simple things like learning how to put structure back into your life, you're learning sometimes what you should not do cause other people have done it and it will lead to. Do you know what I mean? You are learning how to deal with things that you need to deal with and the person sitting next to you might have been through exactly the same thing so you are constantly learning. I think one thing that is important I don't know if it off the subject but it is about, you're changing the way you think you are changing your thought process and that happens automatically. I didn't go in with it in my mind to go I know I need to change my thought process, but it happens (...) it changes that thought process.”*

The point being made here is that those whom participate in self-help groups, will engage with a programme of change, like those discussed in chapter one of this thesis, for addressing their substance related concern. But in doing so they will also need to interact with other more complex and established social networks and social and cultural influences which will also affect their perceptions and appreciations far more broadly (Humphreys, 2004). During interviews those respondents that were still in self-help were generally more reluctant to discuss the inner working and processes of the themed meetings and self-help groups that they attended. In part this was because of the strict code of ethics and confidentiality<sup>46</sup> that all 12 step group members adhere to (Yeung, 2007). But outside these self-imposed restrictions respondents were able and willing to discuss the objective ways in which they perceived their groups shaped their own perceptions, appreciations and subsequent actions over the longer term:

*“It help me to see myself in a different way, so that whatever happens outside I kind of look to myself for the answers (...) you can change yourself and it has taught me to look to myself more, the times that we sit and talk and sometimes there are twenty odd people and you are sitting talking (...) for me it’s difficult to describe because it is such a valuable tool of recovery it really is” (Kelly)*

More specifically:

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<sup>46</sup> But also because I was advised by my gatekeepers that discussions of this kind may have made respondents uncomfortable or unresponsive during interviews.

*“for me personally it keeps me safe (the group) and I have to be aware of what I am about and what my life was about previously my life was about (...) I was really confused about who I was what I was doing and where my life was going so I used and it kind of dawned on me that I need to stay close (...) it dawned on me that what these people was saying was actually true” (Sarge).*

Outside the more objective social and cultural process that influenced (above) them in self helps respondents also identified that their perception of what was right for them, like Kelly, and their position in the social world, like Sarge, was also influenced over time by more informal processes and their own subjective interpretations of what was what expected of them because of their status in the groups that they attended (cf Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986).

### **7.3.1 Adhering to Group Expectations**

Because of the status in their groups affiliated members were expected to be committed to the ongoing activities and continuation of their group and to be participating and living the life of a “non- active addict” both inside and outside their group. In the context of my fieldwork expectations of group members was a highly subjective concern but the concept of the “non -active addict” was underpinned by the notion that individuals should not be behaving as they did whilst in “active addiction”. In the context below Kelly is discussing

the basic principles of an “addict” being a “non-active addict” and how individuals need to learn about behaving or approaching life more generally in a different way:

*“so you have a whole new set of challenges (...) Dealing (...) in a different way to how you would before and your personality kind of changes because you’re not an addict- well you’re always an addict- but you’re not an active addict so you are different (...) you will be building up relationships”*

In self-help the respondent group were not particularly sceptical of the more traditional label of addict, as we have seen, but they were more likely to publically accept, identify with, relate to and accept the concept of a “non- active addict” (Trice and Roman, 1970; Smith, 2007). Connectedly respondents also argued that in self-help “non-active addicts” as a minimum requirement should embrace the “spirit of fellowship” for as long as they were a self-help member. In the quotations below Sarge and Liam were discussing their understanding of group expectations and what the spirit of fellowship meant to them.

*“that’s how NA works it is based on the therapeutic value of one addict helping another and for me the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without paramount<sup>47</sup> to any other type of treatment” (Sarge)*

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<sup>47</sup> I’m taking the work paramount here to mean, important or more important than any other form of treatment.

And;

*“it’s about an addict supporting another addict and so on”* (Liam)

Ned is also discussing his understanding of what was expected in the “spirit of fellowship” but did so in an altogether practical way:

*“you can’t just come to meetings and take, take, take that’s not allowed you also have to give back”* (Ned)

It is evident from the quotations of Sarge, Liam and Ned that those whom attend self-help meetings as affiliated members will go onto develop a more appreciative gaze (as above) and understanding of group influences, expectations, self-help and self-help processes. Or in more Bourdieusian terms a greater understanding of the legitimate culture of self-help and how to start to “learn to play the game” (Bourdieu, 1986). But the point being made here is that up until the point that they do depart or leave their group respondents will generally behave in accordance with the conventions of their group and the more subtle expectations associated with the self-concept of the “non-active addict”. If indeed, as we shall see in chapter 7, which that follows this one, they wish to accrue or continue to enjoy the practical, material and symbolic benefits that their membership affords them (cf Bourdieu, 1986).

In a similar and equally important way affiliated group members are also expected to be living the life of a “non-active addict” outside their group. This was also a highly subjective concern but there was also generally agreement among self-help users that behaving like a “non-active addict” included; not associating with other users or in or around others in subcultural contexts (cf Brewer, 1991). In many ways adhering to the behaviours associated with concept of the “non-active addict”, like being abstinent and not using drugs and alcohol, were discussed by the majority of respondents as a bit of a “no brainer”:

*“I will always be an alcoholic, always be an alcoholic cause I know (...) and it’s the GODS honest truth. If I just had one drink now that would be me drinking again, I know it would be (...) I know if I had one drink then that would be me right down that line again (...) yep back to what it used to be like” (Helen)*

With regards to this particular theme it is important to recognise that in self-help some users find it much easier to apply the types of principles and practices of the group to their lives outside of this setting. In this study these were those respondents and users whom were still in contact with more conventional social worlds and networks as they entered self-help. Not only where these respondents were generally more able to avoid the trappings of associating with other users in subcultural contexts. But they were able to call

upon their friends<sup>48</sup>, family and wider social networks, during their attempts to resolve their substance related concerns like Helen and Kelly discuss below:

*“Yeah my friends yeah I’ve got two friends, one of them we started nursery school together they stuck to me through thick and thin, they never left me and (em) when things were really bad [her son] would ring my friend Amanda and she would come up and put me to bed (...) and something like that you know and they stood by me through thick and thin them, they was the was the only friends I really had” (Helen)*

And;

*“I never got out of bed till about six o clock on a tea time, I didn’t do anything for myself, me mam and nana did everything for me, if I went anywhere I would have to be took, I didn’t take the bairn to school or pick her up or anything I was a mess, an absolute mess (...) . But I think when you see people that have moved from their home area their whole family and they do all of that because they really want their recovery and I only live along the road (...) anyway I have got support, I have got the house and I have got the bairn and that motivates me” (Kelly)*

Those respondents and users who experienced more significant forms of substance use and substance related concerns generally took longer to form and develop links to more

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<sup>48</sup> Also see “one day at a time” section in next chapter.

conventional and newer social network. Where these types of transitions were elongated or took more time, these respondents were influenced but also able to function in their groups and plan for living in the real world by generally abiding by the expectations and principles that had been set out for them but their groups (Bourdieu, 1986).

### **7.3.2 Self Help Principles in Practice**

Most self-help groups do have their own written sets of principles and practices which their members are expected to follow inside and outside the group. These are given to users in print form by a more senior or affiliated members or as we discussed in the opening section of this chapter purchased at meetings for a small donation. However, in all self-help settings, group principles and expectations shaped social action in more subtle ways as they were also embedded, as we discussed in chapter three of this thesis, in the “ethos” or essence of the group (Reissman and Carroll, 1995:5 cited in Kurtz, 1997: 11; cf Moos, 1974; Moos, Finney and Maude-Griffin, 1993). Principles are also subjectively adapted over time and developed by users themselves as they seek to make meaning of them and apply them to their lives in an effort to resolve their own substance related concerns. In the quotation below Zeb is discussing the concept of his groups written principles and how they provided him with a general way of planning for and evaluating living in the real world.



*“Well it aye-ah mean the best way I can liken it to ah put a bed up the other day and there is instructions in there and there are principles in order for that bed to go up and for you to sleep on it. Now I didn’t follow the principles and I couldn’t put the bed up-until in the end I had to go in and I had to surrender and went where the instruction is. Do you know what I mean how do I do it? And that is basically the essence of what we do....show us how to do it and what is the principles that enable us to do it”. (Zeb)*

Outside the more formal forms of principles of self-help it was the more subtle sets of principles that were embedded in the ethos of the group, and the users’ own subjective interpretations of them that were the most influential on the social and subjective action of users. For example and by way of illustration, in the context below, Zeb is now discussing one of his own subjective principles, how he applies them and how they enable him to resolve his substance related concerns. He discusses this particular concept as leading a more *“productive life”*

*“every time I want to be self-seeking or I want to be selfish or be dishonest, there is now a gap where it goes (...) I do the opposite or do nothing and the opposite is a principle.....if I don’t live by these principles I’ll end up going back and will use drugs you know” (Zeb)*

And;

*“There is a set of principles (...) what you implement in your life which enables you to have a productive life and be a productive member of society. I practice these principles in my life not just in meetings because you know: going back to that, you can talk the talk but if*

*you are arguing in the coffee shop queue or whatever, getting angry, you know that doesn't amount to recovery, so..." (Zeb)*

During interviews a small number of respondents did identify that they did not always adhere to or rigidly apply the principles of their group to their daily living experiences. Below, Ned is discussing how he refused to do so and in his own words "*forget his own arse*". During interview Ned had been discussing how another member of a self-help group had told him to ignore and avoid other users whom were still in active addiction. He later went onto discuss how refusing to do this led to him "*falling on his own arse*" and relapsing.

*"I was told to basically cross the street if I see somebody I knew that was still actively using and to do everything and anything to avoid anybody that I knew from my days as an addict. Now that was completely opposite from what I felt personally (...) obviously I did not want to be hanging about with people like that but I certainly was not going to cross the street to avoid them do you know what I mean. And that was one of the things I was advised to do... eh well what simply comes to mind there is forgetting were your old arse came from that's the simplest way I think I can put it".*

Theoretically speaking then it is important to recognise that both objective and subjective factors will influence and shape individual functioning and the self-concepts that

individuals develop in self-help groups (Bourdieu, 1986). In the complex social and cultural context of self-help groups, those whom go onto become affiliated group members are more likely to identify with and adhere to the self-concept of the “addict”. They will also behave in accordance with the expectations associated with it. In the context of heavy end substance use the damage done to the self as a user is compounded by a negative recognition of difference and is perceived to be permanent in nature (Valverde, 1998). However, the concept of being an “addict” albeit a “non-active addict” is very much a pivotal concept which provides users not only with a way of evaluating and planning for their future but also as a concept for living in the real world (cf McIntosh and McKeganey, 2002). A key point being made here is that the extent to which an individual engages with self-help and behaves in accordance with the principles and practices of the expectations of their group will depend on their own affiliated needs. But if they do, affiliate that is, it will be because they have also taken the time to weigh up, as Trevor argues below: *“that the shit was good”* before they did so.

*“Look! I’m the kind of drug addict that needs to know the shit was good before I bought it, and I had a good look at it and I said I am going to give this a year (...) and that’s what I done and after analysing it for a while I came to believe that this stuff works and many other stuff which is similar to it works as well”* (Trevor)

#### **7.4 Developing a more Appreciative Gaze of Self Help**

As the respondent group went onto become affiliated members in self-help they started to develop a more nuanced and appreciative gaze of self-help processes. They also started to appreciate more about the legitimate culture of self-help and why their participation within their group was important to both themselves and others. In a more theoretical context the process of learning and understanding about these types of concepts was connected to and underpinned a number of themes that were discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, both (Smith, 2007; Yeung, 2007) concepts of self-help “expertise” and self-help “specialists”

In many ways much of the subjective understandings and appreciations that respondents developed about the legitimate culture of their group and “who they were becoming to others” were influenced by their own existential experiences and observations of more senior members. This was usually more profoundly felt as individuals first entered their respective self-help groups. With regards to this particular theme, almost every respondent made some reference during interview to how they were inspired, wanted to be like and recognised the more established members that they encountered. Red: because he found it really difficult to comprehend a life without alcohol, Billy Boy: because of how more senior members presented themselves and the clean time they accrued, Pablo: because of

their behaviours and conduct within groups and Sarge: because of the “non-active addict” lives they were leading outside it.

*“There was a couple of people in the group who had been a couple of months down the line at the time, the longest one had been in recovery for five months. To me like five months was like talking science fiction it was that far in the future I could not remember the last time I had spent five days...never mind five hours without having a drink”. (Red)*

And;

*“I think it was just because of the way they presented and that and the way they came across (...) you will find that you will find it difficult to find a current user that doesn't have respect for someone that is clean for a number of years and they won't hold anything back. Really they won't say they don't deserve it, I say fair play, that's great I love to do that ....that's my experiences” (Billy Boy)*

And:

*“I was looking at them (senior members) and thinking I want to be there in a months' time I want to be where he is in three months' time I want to be doing what he is doing and in six months' time I want to be stood there giving a speech”. (Pablo).*

And:

*“I started to have purpose, I could see where my life was going I could see were other people had been where I had been and now they were not. Now these people had jobs and they*

*had families back in their lives, they were treating people right, were active in the community and I found this really attractive to anything that I ever had before". (Sarge).*

During interview these members had also recognised over time that they were now the source of inspiration to others but also more importantly for them how helping others enabled them to help themselves. In the next chapter, chapter 7, I will discuss the concept of altruism and the different types of relationships that existed between users in more detail. Also how the concept of altruism and these types of relationships mediated the resolution of substance related concerns. But for now it is important to recognise that affiliated members, like Kelly below, had a more nuanced understanding of why it was important for them and others that they attended meetings.

*"I think this is really important for me to keep going to this group because it keeps me well and for people who are in recovery to be there for those who are just coming in the door and who are struggling because you know we can all say we were like you we were exactly like you and we have managed to stop off the drink for however long and it gives other people hope you know (...) its like we were once like you we are ordinary people and if we can do it then everybody can do it, it gives you hope that you can" (Kelly)*

Others like Paddy and Harry were more specific about the benefits they drew but also gave back to the group by attending their group and engaging with others.

*“Basically what I do now is I don’t go to meetings just to take I go there to give what has been freely been given to me in order for me to keep it (...) I give away-in order for me to keep what I have been given I have to give it away, that’s just not in meetings (...) giving talks whatever (...) I need to carry the message to other user, you know”. (Harry)*

And;

*“its important for me to be a productive and to be a role model for people who come in, that’s so that they’ll come back again and they will get the chance I got” (Paddy)*

In the context of my fieldwork there were also a small number of self-help users that had not seemed to have developed the awareness and appreciations that respondents like Paddy, Harry and Kelly had in relation to self-help and self-help processes. These respondents did understand enough about the legitimate culture of self-help to be able to function as a group member. But like Steve earlier in the context of his “higher power”, they also seemed untroubled and unconcerned by working out what self-help was all about and why it was working for them. In the context below Liam is illustrating this concern:

*“I am sitting here as proof if you like that somehow it does work.....god knows how (laughs) but again (my name) going back to the acceptance I don’t care how it works I can just see that it does work. Now I am reaping the benefits and I don’t need to know how it works and I think if I did know how it worked me and you would not be sitting here we would be lapping it up as millionaires wouldn’t we in some tropical paradise” (Liam)*

In many ways I could not work out during interview or even after if Liam was being a little provocative with me in his answer or if he was simply exercising and practicing the principle of humility. In the context of self-help more generally users are and were expected to show humility: hold a modest view about their own self-importance, play down their role in their own successes and their own subjective knowledge and understanding. However, outside Liam's own subjective motivations towards me it is important to recognise that his demeanour at interview about not needing to know why self-help worked or indeed how it did was shared by a small number of other users. Typically speaking those whom shared his demeanour in this context had experienced significant substance related concerns and problems as a user but they had also engaged in more structured and traditional forms of drug treatment before they entered self-help. At interview they claimed to have resolved their substance related concerns either shortly before or shortly after arriving in their group and their motivation to join their groups was also about expanding their own social networks. In the context below Red, whom fell into the latter category, spoke about not needing to know about how self-help worked for an extended period of time during his interview:

*"Its eighty \ twenty it's the old maths rule, any sort of problems the basic rule is any sort of problems eighty percent of problems you have are caused by twenty percent of the causes (...) So eighty percent of my benefits happened in when I first started to deal with some of my big issues initially you know. (...) I have always been known to keep my nose out of things cause when I went in there and got myself upset (...) and the group said you need to learn*



*that sometimes get off your white charger you can't save the world save yourself you cannot save the world (...) and that (not getting involved) stood me in so much stead you would not believe it".*

The key points being raised and being theorised here are that any self-help user whom attends a group for any significant length of time will essentially go onto accrue an increased understanding, perception and appreciation of the legitimate culture of self-help groups and self-help processes (Yeung, 1997; cf Bourdieu, 1977). The extent to which individuals need to accrue these cultural competences in this form will depend on a large extent to their own subjective affiliated needs. But, those who do so will also have a clearer and deeper understanding of the unwritten rules or their group Doxa. Here Doxa, is concerned with an understanding of the social factors and cultural processes which drive and guide decisions, determine what is of value and shape social action and practices of social actors in different social contexts (cf Deer, 2008, Bourdieu, 1977). Finally then for this chapter, those respondents who had a deeper and more appreciative understanding of self-help and self-help process were also able and more likely to provide spiritual guidance to others both in and outside their group.

#### **7.4.1 Providing Spiritual Guidance to Others**

Within the respondent group affiliated self-help group members were recognised as being committed to the ongoing continuation of the group and its activities. They were known

for investing their time in facilitating and managing closed and themed structured meetings for newcomers, potential new members and less experienced self-help users (Smith, 2007). But they were also recognised as being more competent in providing spiritual guidance to those whom were seeking to become affiliated members themselves. A significant amount of the active service<sup>49</sup> affiliated members provided to others came under the umbrella of sponsorship, which I will discuss as a theme in the next chapter, and was concerned with providing spiritual guidance to their tutees on a one to one basis. In this chapter section spiritual guidance is concerned with the way in which affiliated members provided opportunities for less experienced user to engage self-evaluation with a view to enabling them to make sense of their group's ideological position, that of "addict". As well as their group's programme of change and how the concept of "addict" or "addiction" related to them as individuals. At this point it is important to recognise that affiliated members were widely recognised among the respondent group because of the competences they exhibited (see previous section) and the knowledge and self-help expertise they were known to possess (Yeung, 2007). As Billy Boy suggests below:

*"I value and believe what he says to me because he has more experience than what I have got. He has been in recovery a lot longer than me. He has gone through the process of the 12 steps and applying them to his life he's still doing it today: so when he says something to me, I take it quite seriously. Sometimes I listen to what he says and other times I don't I*

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<sup>49</sup> Providing service to others is how sponsorship is discussed by users in self-help.

*just think that I know best again and then I can learn from those experiences and-he was warning me about some behaviours I was doing and he said you know you are going to take yourself to a painful place. And at the time I wasn't listening to him and I carried on with it and the behaviour I was doing and it took me to a place that was painful so what he was saying to me was true. But I wasn't listening to what he was saying and it turned out the way he said and it was exactly what he said".*

In discussing the process of providing spiritual guidance to others at interview affiliated members themselves pointed out that their role was about creating opportunities for individuals to engage in self-evaluation and for them as more experienced members to impart their own knowledge, advice and guidance to others. But in what follows it is important to recognise that all affiliated members, as we have discussed, hold very specific perceptions about their own self-concept, identity and the fundamental "nature" of addiction. Below, Theresa is discussing her own fundamental beliefs about "addiction" and being an "addict". In doing so, she is also discussing the importance of discussing the concept of "addiction" directly with her tutees and being clear but subtle about what "addict" entails right from the start:

*"it does not matter what it is, it could be food it can be sex it, can be shopping if it is an addiction, it is an addiction. It doesn't have to be drugs it doesn't have to be alcohol, it could be anything-I don't like it when people say like-this-that and the other. Once it is*

*there<sup>50</sup>, in the beginning and it pans out, so as long as you can get them thinking that way right from the beginning, I find that them who it just does not sit with them just disappear but that's ok, that's ok (...) I would be very careful not to- I would be very careful how I went about it-I would hate to shame or judge anybody so I would be subtle"*

In the respondent group, affiliated members did go on to identify that a significant part of their role was about providing spiritual guidance directly to respondents and creating opportunities for individuals to engage in opportunities to develop self-awareness, self-determination and exercise self-control. But in doing so they also identified or at least indicated that providing spiritual guidance was also about making the concept of their status, position, recovery and that of an addict a more attractive offer to others. As Paddy and Sarge discuss,

*"learn to be open (...) not controlling or dictate to people that you must do this you must do that (...) for real it's something that develops it is about that openness again and being self-aware being aware of your own control issues of your own issues. Just enabling someone to warm to you, to trust you because there are some damaged people that come in, damaged people you know" (Paddy)*

And:

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<sup>50</sup> Embedded in them mind of the user

*“Recovery has got to look attractive, attraction is a big thing in the step fellowship around attraction people don’t go and promote things in 12 step fellowships, there is no need to it is based on attraction rather than promotion” (Sarge)*

Importantly, in the context of my fieldwork it was not unusual for affiliated members to go on and continue to accrue competences in providing spiritual guidance to others by investing in relationships themselves with more senior and experienced self-help group members. In the context below Harry is discussing the hieratical ways in which the competences that affiliated members develop are passed down through the group, from member to member in the context of sponsorship.

*“Yeah, we have a sponsorship system you know where people will ask you to sponsor them or you’ll ask them, I have a sponsor he has a sponsor, his sponsor is a sponsor and it’s a world-wide thing-.erm and there is a lineage of recovery. My sponsor is seven years, his sponsor is thirteen” (Justin)*

In self-help larger types of groups will usually have an abundance of more senior and affiliated members to call upon to be sponsors and a well-structured and more hierarchical scheme for tutelage (Humphreys, 2009; Collins, 2005). But the point being made here is that affiliated members and the process of providing spiritual guidance to less experienced members is also highly influential upon the self-concepts, appreciations and understanding that social actors develop within self-help groups. Those who generally go on to become

affiliated members and provide spiritual guidance to others do so because of their own affiliated needs and they are often those who come to self-help having experienced the most significant substance related problems and concerns. But it is important to recognise that relationships that are developed in and between the affiliated member providing spiritual guidance and the tutee are essentially relationships of recognition. Insofar as each individual whom gets involved in them recognises that they shared a similar self-concept and that each will benefit from their mutual involvement with the other (Bourdieu, 1986). In a more Bourdieusian inspired context then, those who provide spiritual guidance to others or promote the concept of “addict” can be critically construed to be very much responsible for the continuing endorsement of their own group’s brand of ideological principles and protecting the fundamental interests of their members (cf Bourdieu, 1986).

In looking forward then it is also important to recognise that individuals do not arrive at self-help groups with knowledge and understanding of the contexts they are entering, the resources that are available to them, what they need to do to be able to resolve their substance related concerns. In a highly simplified context the concept of sponsorship in self-help groups provides novice users with access to the indigenous knowledge and skills or capitals and competences of more senior members and in turn sponsorship offers senior members further opportunities to pass on their knowledge and skills whilst drawing upon the more meaningful and purposeful aspects of being altruistic. In the chapter that follows, I will begin to look more closely at the concept of social and other forms of capitals and

then endeavour to explore and theorise the ways in which the resolution of substance related concerns is mediated by their accrual in different types of self-help relationships.

### **Chapter Summary**

Those whom experienced the most significant substance related problems and concerns took more time and found it more difficult to establish themselves as a group member. This was largely because of the informal obstacles that all self-help groups have and more significantly because of the transposed and subjective dispositions that individuals brought with them to self-help. For all of my respondents the process of becoming an established self-help group member was an incremental process. It depended upon the extent to which individuals could learn to appreciate the legitimate culture of self-help, start relationships of mutual acquaintance and identify with the concept of the “addict”. Those whom did go onto develop a sense of identification with the concept of being an “addict” were then more likely to make a long term commitment to the activities and continuation of their representative group.

The factors that influence the self-concepts, perceptions, appreciations and behaviours of users in self-help contexts are significant and complex; largely because there are so many formal/informal factors influencing them. But the extent to which individuals engage in self-help groups and in self-help processes will to a large extent depend upon their own affiliated needs, if they feel they are benefitting from their involvement and if it makes

sense for them to do so. In a more traditional context the damage done to the “self” is often thought to be compounded by a negative recognition of difference “addict” and is perceived to be permanent in nature. However, in this chapter the concept of being an “addict” provided users with a context for understanding their previous use, a way of telling stories about their use and a universal platform for evaluating, and planning for living in the real world. Over time those participate in their group develop a very particular “addicted” identity or habitus but they also went on to promote and perpetuate the concept of “addict” in the group and among less experiences users by providing them with spiritual guidance.



## Chapter

### Social Capital(s) and Self Help Relationships

#### 8.0 Introduction

In this second empirical chapter I seek to build on much of the discussion that has preceded and I do this by taking a more detailed look at the resources that exist and the relationships and interactions that take place in and between self-help users in different self-help settings. In a more theoretical context then I utilise Bourdieu's concepts here to theorise the ways in which the resolution of individual substance related concerns are mediated by the accrual and exchange of different form social and other capitals in relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

#### 8.1 Understanding Basic Self Help Processes

It is widely recognised that entering a group and becoming a member can be difficult. All self-help groups, certainly those with a longer chronology, have evolved and developed different functions, formats or processes to ease new and potentially new members in (Hatzidimitriadou 2002). For example, in more established and traditional self-help meetings a set amount of time is always set aside in which only newcomers can speak, ask questions or discuss matters that are relevant to or concerning them. As they continue to be involved newer members will be prompted or at least encouraged by others to

contribute and speak<sup>51</sup> by others but during the initial period of their involvement newer members are given space to settle in and essentially learn the rhythm, tempo and processes within their group (Maton, 2012).

*“Newcomers tend to be more quiet and wait, sometimes they don’t speak in their first group and it can take them a little while, but there is no pressure” (Liam)*

Newcomers to self-help are also welcomed to their groups and longer serving affiliated members will unconditionally share understanding with them whilst providing more practical knowledge and advice about self-help and self-help processes (Banks, 1997, Smith, 2007; Humphreys et al 1999). This unconditional sharing of understanding between members was recalled by the respondent group as an important part of the self-help journey and the settling in process (Smith, 2007; Tooms and Moos, 2008). This was particularly so for those respondents who had experienced more significant substance related concerns and problems prior to accessing their group. Below Rachel is discussing some of the more subjective concerns she had faced as a drug and alcohol user but she also discusses how the understanding she received from others was fundamental during the early days of her involvement:

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<sup>51</sup> The size of group was also an issue here in some groups there can regularly be 50 members present and it just was not feasible. In larger self-help groups individuals are only allowed to speak or share for up to three minutes (NA, 1998).

*“They didn’t laugh at me for being obsessive compulsive, because everywhere I had went before, everyone I had ever told –they all go ha-ha (...) this was the first time I had been in a room with other people were they had said yes we can understand were you have that need to do that and it was like WOAH! I am not alone anymore and that was a good first step as far as I was concerned” (Rachel)*

Outside the understanding that was expressed and the practical knowledge that was offered to them individual respondents also adopted their own more subjective strategies from which to start to learn about their group and different types of self-help processes (Smith, 2007). Those whom had come to self-help with the most significant substance related concerns and problems, often chose to sit back, or at least take some time to observe what was unfolding in front of them. This was largely because types of strategies had served them well in the past, in other social contexts, and to a large extent they also did so now in the context of self-help.

*“in the first couple of weeks I just sat back and listened to people and just watched and soaked it all up, all I could get (...) I got to know a lot (...) all types of things. When I was in jail I had kept myself to myself and I knew not even by communicating-watching the body language-the way to act, the way to speak, the way to look-who to go to and who not to connect to” (Zeb).*

And:

*“No, no, you sit back and you observe-you got to take it all in and have got to see what is supposed to happen and how it works. You have got to remember when you first go in, it is completely different (...) I just sat in the corner for the first few weeks and observed I didn’t open my fucking mouth (...) I was like a rabbit in the headlights I was just like a sponge taking it in” (Billy Boy)*

A small number of respondents also adopted a more pragmatic and radical approach and simply *“jumped in”* or endeavoured to get involved in self-help. This was before they had actually given themselves the opportunity to grasp even basic knowledge or appreciations about how self-help groups functioned. In the quotations below both Theresa who had been a self-help group member for seven years and Sharon, who had left self-help a couple of years prior to interview, still recalled their first experiences of *“jumping in”* and trying to get involved in self-help with some trepidation:

*“I did not have a fucking clue (...) I remember at the women’s meeting I kind of shared some of my stuff and when it came out you know, when you just spew something out<sup>52</sup> I could see some of the women looking at me and I was thinking aw shit! I don’t think I should have just done that it was kind of massive stuff know what I mean, so I had to go back and speak*

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<sup>52</sup> In a wider context this type of behaviour or disclosure is appropriate and acceptable, it was candidly referred to by many respondents as *“dumping your shit”* or *“spewing all over”*-Theresa problem here was that she did not understand what was deemed appropriate in her group and had discuss an issue she should have discussed on a more personal level with her 121 sponsor.

*to someone on a one to one know what I mean about it cause it traumatised us. At first all the looks cause I didn't realise myself because it was there it was out and it was like wow I had opened Pandora's box that had really unnerved us so I spoke to my one to one about it.....I was very unnerved by it I had unnerved myself because what I thought was acceptable was not!" (Theresa)*

And;

*"I had no idea, my god I was straight in (...) Yeah I was quite open and vocal even from the first group, I can remember the first womens group, crying and very agitated (...) I was saying you haven't got a clue-very emotional- keeping going on about past things domestic violence and different relationships and (...) I was going on you'se haven't got no idea and I think I walked out about twice (...) I was very angry and I was an adolescent girl at the time thinking well you don't understand us you haven't got a clue, quite odd they were trying to support me but I was very angry (...) ah ha<sup>53</sup>" (Sharon)*

Contextually then Theresa and Sharon had found themselves in the highly structured context of a 12 step women's only group. They had also endeavoured to participate and contribute to their groups without the basic level of knowledge and understanding or appreciation of what was occurring and what was acceptable in their respective groups. Each of these two respondents, as individuals was able to go on and become established

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<sup>53</sup> At this point Sharon rolls her eyes at me and shakes her head in recognition that she didn't get what was obviously occurring to her: she was being supported.

members of their respective groups. The point being illustrated here, in the stories of Theresa and Sharon and Zeb and Billy Boy, is that just participating in a self-help group, is a complex and difficult concern. It was certainly a process which required the individual respondent to have a significant level of practical knowledge and appreciation of self-help and self-help processes. Or as Bourdieu would argue significant levels of existing embodied social and cultural capitals as the process also required the individual to have both knowledge and ability about how to apply themselves in an appropriate and acceptable manner (Bourdieu, 1986).

Take for example take the basic process for providing feedback or sharing understanding to and with another group member. This is both a key process in self-help groups and requisite of affiliated membership. Contextually it is important to recognise that individuals do not give and are not allowed to give advice to others in self-help as they would in a conventional way, below Sarge is discussing the process and philosophy behind giving feedback or sharing knowledge and understanding with others.

*“I don’t and I can’t give anyone advice-I say this is what I done it’s a suggestion-I don’t say you need to do this or you need to do that, I give them my own personal experience and I say this is how I done that before, if you want to try applying it then give it a shot, so it is entirely up to you”*

The point being made here is that even the most basic process, that of providing feedback and sharing knowledge and understanding with others in self-help takes a particular level of knowledge, skill and individual competence. With regards to this aspect of self-help the individual seeking to provide assistance must be able to understand the point another users is trying to make, then have a similar experience or story to draw upon. They must also be able to understand how their own subjective experiences are similar or relevant and then be able to share their story in a way that provides a level of understanding, makes sense or helps the other progress (Humphreys, 2000). Below Liam, who unlike Theresa and Sharon, took the time to develop his own knowledge and understanding by observing others, discusses the process.

*“You start to talk a little about yourself (...) then you say, yes I can relate to what you are saying and put some input back into others (...) that’s certainly how it was for me it was almost an evolution from joining a group to becoming what I would like to think was becoming a full participant within that group” (Liam)*

In the quotation above, Liam is describing the process engaging in his group and providing feedback to others in very simplistic terms. But it is important to recognise that in doing so he was also illustrating or suggesting that he was able to increase his own esteem, status and more contextually was able to progress towards becoming an affiliated member by doing so (Banks, 1997). Interestingly, however, with regards to this particular process, the

respondent group did identify that there was one real objective barrier which limited respondent's ability to get involved, participate and progress in self-help in the way that Liam describes. This occurs when less experienced or newer members refrained from getting involved in their group discussion or offering feedback to others because they deemed more senior members to be more experienced and skilled in self-help than they are. Below, Rachel is discussing her experiences of this as a new member, she initially describes the reasons why she held back from contributing to her group in the way Liam did. But in doing so she also reinforces the notion that more senior and experienced members did exhibit particular competences and had understanding about self-help processes that set them aside from other or less experienced or competent members. This is a very similar concept or theme to Shirley Yeung (2007) "self-help specialists" and Annette Smith (2007) "self-help experts" that were explored in the second and third theoretical chapters of this thesis. Essentially then Rachel argues below, giving advice to a more senior member about self-help processes is like *"teaching your grandma how to such eggs"*

*"I think like I said before people just relate to what you are talking about, even, if the might not have been in that similar a situation they just know that it is just part and parcel of drinking (...) I am sure that if I day say anything in there for advice<sup>54</sup> I am sure it would be more than welcome and they would take on board whatever I said. But I just- I feel*

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<sup>54</sup> In these types of contexts respondents can turn to their sponsor for spiritual and practical guidance; like Lou did.



*comfortable just listening to other people and sympathising as well (...) well it's like eh-it is like teaching your grandma to suck eggs like really" (Rachel)*

To engage in self-help, in a meaningful way, individuals need to have knowledge and understanding about self-help and self-help processes, they also need to have a particular level of practical mastery or competency in engaging with others. At this point it is important to recognise that senior members, as will be explored<sup>55</sup> in a later section, are able to benefit from helping and providing universal support to newer members. Or as Bourdieu would argue able to transform the most circumstantial of relationships with others in self-help into different types of assets (Bourdieu, 1986).

Newcomers to self-help groups are able to accrue practical and actual forms of social capitals in the form of understanding and knowledge about self-help processes simply because of their participation in self-help groups (Bourdieu, 1986). In doing so it is those newcomers who take time to learn about self-help and observe others exchange knowledge and understanding with each other that are able to start practicing self-help at an earlier point in their journey. As individual starts to learn about this process they also start to develop their own of competence in providing assistance to others and are then able to benefit or accrue other forms of capitals from their involvement in self-help. In the

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<sup>55</sup> See section 7.4 Relationships of Recognition.

particular example given in this section Liam was able to increase his esteem and status or symbolic capital within the group by simply helping others (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **8.2 Sharing Knowledge and Understanding with Others**

Within all self-help groups there is standardisation in the format and process for sharing and exchanging practical knowledge and expressing understanding<sup>56</sup> with others. That said, there is also significant differentiation in the actual formatting and structuring of groups and variations in the ways that knowledge and understanding is accrued and exchanged between members. In smaller types of self-help groups individuals are often afforded time and the opportunity to speak as an individual and receive highly personalised feedback and support. This usually occurs on a one to one basis, during open discussion time and is facilitated on a round robin format<sup>57</sup>. In these smaller types of group settings the senior member that is facilitating the group would just begin this process off by asking for a volunteer or member to start the discussion. As Rachel discusses below senior members would also be sensitive to the fact that some members may need to speak more than others:

*“They will generally say does anybody want to go first or if people need to leave early then they tend to be the ones who speak first. Or if somebody has had a really bad week or a*

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<sup>56</sup> See Liam’s example and discussion in the previous section.

<sup>57</sup> Each member is given the opportunity to speak and takes turns as the focus of the group moves round the room.

*really good week and they want to get it out first and then we tend to go around in order after that” (Rachel)*

In larger types of self-help groups, individuals were not always afforded the opportunity to exchange or accrue individual feedback in the way described above. But during interviews respondents reported that they were still able to accrue different forms of knowledge and understanding about self-help and self-help processes by listening to others who had similar experiences or concerns and by observing the exchanges that occurred between other group members (Humphreys, 2000). As Pablo and Billy Boy respectively discuss below:

*“When people have been in similar experiences, a similar situation as I said before, it’s easier to take advice because you understand it more. You relate to it more, me talking to someone who was going through something that I went through- they are listening to me better than others would maybe-that’s what I think” (Pablo)*

And;

*“It’s about other people’s tricks that have worked for them-it’s on the same basis A will say something and I’ll say that’s never going to work for me and B will say something and I might think some of that might work for me, the whole thing might not work for me but I can pick a little bit of that out” (Billy Boy)*

Interestingly, the respondent group also identified that they developed knowledge about self-help and self-help processes by listening to and observing the mistakes that others made either in the group or in seeking to resolve their own substance related concerns.

As Billy Boy went onto argue at interview:

*“Right so if I do this or that, that’s what I am getting, so you are thinking right I’m not going to do this or that. I’ll try and not do that so it’s kind of watching and listening and absorbing from other people’s mistakes (...) aye you learn from other people’s mistakes aye!”* (Billy Boy).

One of the points being made here, which was also discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, is that individuals whom enter and engage with self-help groups as an affiliated member will be following a designated and philosophically driven programme of change (Humphreys, 2009). However, in doing so they will also be relying upon engaging with others in groups to accrue more specific forms of practical knowledge about self-help and self-help processes.

During interviews the respondent group also reported that they were willing to share their knowledge of self-help, self-help processes and express understanding with others simply because they shared the same self-concept or identity (Brewer, 1999). In this more

objective setting, the concept of being an “addict” was discussed by users of self-help groups as providing their group with a sense of collective identity. Therefore a basis from which they could develop a common sense of purpose and relationships of mutual acquaintance with others (Bourdieu, 1986). Below Kelly is discussing the importance of group identity and the sense of belonging derived from being an “addict” in the group context, she also has an interesting if subjective take on the types of relationships that individuals engage in:

*“you’ve got that common bond of addiction which means that you don’t-like a natural friendship you start with the superficial things and you may get closer and work your way down whereas we have probably shared the biggest secrets and we wouldn’t tell other people outside so you’ve already got that common bond (,,,) you know stuff which is so deep and personal about somebody but you may not know their second name (...) you get to know people and the nitty gritty about people and you build it up that way. There are a lot of people I don’t even know their first names and all that superficial stuff it does not matter it’s who they are to you-you know!” (Kelly)*

### 8.2.1 Maintaining a Good Standard of Self Help

One of the points being illustrated above is that the collective or shared self-concept of being an “addict” was enough to enable individuals to come together and share different forms of capitals as assets in relationships of mutual acquaintance (cf Rose, 1999; Reisman and Carroll, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986). But in a more critical context it is also important to recognise that the respondents group were also keen to protect the collective knowledge and understanding that the group possessed for their members to utilise (Banks, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986). With regard to this specific concern Bourdieu himself that argued that all groups, networks and institutions would possess or contain a larger volume of capital(s) that any individual could hope to possess in his or her own right (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context below Theresa is discussing her subjective interpretations of the collective capitals or knowledge, skills and attributes which she believed resided in her own self-help group (Smith, 2007; Yeung, 2007) In doing so she describes the attributes, behaviours and characteristics that her group has whilst making comparisons to another group who she believes have less (cf Brewer, 1991)

*“they are really balanced, they are very balanced in their recovery. There may be like a little blip but they are like really powerful people, they know what to do they have very good tools in the bag they are not going to-what would be huge for (Names other group) and would probably blow them off the face of the earth where they may go and use something*

*like that (...) they are able to pull out every tool that they have to talk about it share about it you know they will find a solution whereas (other group) might just trip- they have not got the tools they need.*

In scholarly and empirical interpretations self-help groups with poor status or a poor reputation have been known to find it difficult to recruit and maintain involvement and investment from newer members (Humphreys, 2004). These are also groups that are known or perceived to be lacking in a cohort of more knowledgeable, skilled and competent senior members (Humphreys, 2011). During interview respondents did not spend a lot of time or exert much energy in discussing the negative experiences of self-help groups in this manner. However, they did occasionally discuss different self-help groups they had encountered and rejected in the past. Below Red is discussing how he found and rejected a self-help group that was glorifying the use of substances;

*"I think there was people where I think they were not telling the truth or glorifying alcohol use and or drug abuse (...) but yes it was the glorification of how much they could drink or how many times they could wake up in the gutter I just thought naw that's not necessarily the way for me to go forward (...) It was almost as if they were bragging about it that they could drink ex amount of whatever it was that they were drinking vodka or beer or meths....thats an extreme but it just seemed to me it was pointless saying it was almost a*

*game...I can drink more than you but I just felt that if you've got a problem then it is not a game" (Red).*

What was interesting about Red's experiences was that he was essentially trying to enter this group which actually followed the same principles and philosophy to the one he was currently attending (Parker and Stanworth, 2015). Following on Helen, who later formed her own support group because of her own negative experiences in a particular group, is discussing a group which she attended that was just generally unwelcoming to newcomers. She also went on to discuss a group had a poor reputation for not supporting others when they relapsed.

*"there was this man there he came in and he said what you doing (...) he said that's my chair I always sit there (...) that's my chair where I sit. I thought is that any way to speak to somebody who has just come along on their first night and he was a nasty thing he really was (...) he had been going a long, long time cause that was his seat, he had been going for years and years but he just presumed that that was his seat (...) I mean if the first night you went along if you had been drinking they still welcomed you in (...) but if you went in the next week or the week after that and you were still drinking they didn't like it they would like shun you and not speak to you. They would always have somebody to share and they would make an effort to say oh so and so has come back today but he has had a drink and you know well try your best for next time don't come back next time try not to have a drink"*



There are a number of important points being raised here, the first relates to the idea that self-help users and self-help groups will develop, have a vested interest in and will be keen to protect the collective capitals and the reputation of their group (Brewer, 1991). The second point is that the functioning and continuation of all self-help groups depends on the fine balancing between being able to recruit and retain newer members. Then having a cohort of more senior and experienced members whom are keen to engage in appropriate self-help processes and to take opportunities to engage in altruism (Humphreys, 2009). In a more Bourdieusian inspired context it is also important to recognise that “culture conditions in messy ways” in different contexts and even self-help groups can have the potential to become a messy realm of both creativity and struggle in which individuals strive to maintain status, sometimes at the expense of others (Parker and Stanworth, 2015: 110).

### **8.2.2 Being a Productive Member and Understanding Member**

Empirically then, it is important to recognise that respondents and users of self-help groups are bound ethically and morally from discussing their own groups, their process and the attributes of other members in a non-positive or negative way. Any diversion from this position is generally frowned upon and was discussed by the respondent group as “taking another member’s inventory” (Gellman, 1964; cf Willcox 1998, Yeung, 2007). However, during interviews members of the respondent group did report that they would be reluctant to develop relationships, engage with or share their knowledge and express

understanding with particular types of self-help group members. This was a highly subjective and contentious theme in my fieldwork but members of the respondent group included in this latter criteria, members who did not respect the group, members who caused disruption to the functioning of the group and members who took away and did not bring anything<sup>58</sup> to the group. Below, Kelly is expressing that she should not be discussing her own subjective options of these types of concerns so openly. But she does also use the collective expression of “we” which suggest that a number of her group have discussed the concept and share the concern she is explaining.

*“I know this is going to sound awful but I am going to say it anyway there are three or four people who are in denial (...) I just do not think that it is their time, you have got to have and you have really got to want recovery, and I think some people come and they are not doing it for themselves and I think you have got to”*

In discussing this theme other members of the respondent group also claim that they were reluctant to engage with those who were undecided about making a commitment to the group. They also claimed were able to recognise newcomers or members who were in self-help for the wrong reasons. Below Helen discussed her own subjective experiences and interpretations of this.

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<sup>58</sup> Here I mean provide understanding to others and practical knowledge about the resolution of substance related concerns, see below!

*“They don’t want to interact with people-they don’t want to talk much or you can tell maybe they are in denial about their problems or they don’t think they have much of a problem or there are people who come and say well I just want to be a social drinker and you think.....ok! (...) it is not your place to kind of judge these things but I do see a lot of people there are tons of people I’ve seen over the years who never come back (...) People do get the message<sup>59</sup>, that it is ok to come back and some do but a lot of people don’t but..... it’s totally up to them”*

Longer term graduates and those whom had left self-help at the point of interview were still respectful when discussing others they had encountered in self-help. They discussed at interview how they would not share their knowledge, express understanding or invest in relationships with others who did not make an active contribution to their group. Below Billy Boy recalled smaller sub groups of users he encountered within a larger self-help group who were joking around and just not taking the group seriously.

*“there was jokers and there was always people who you thought like- and-you thought why is he here and he is not here for his own benefit, he is here to do it for his own parents and she is here for this or whatever, or they were in relationships and not taking it serious so*

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<sup>59</sup> Not getting the message here relates to the idea that individuals do not accept that they are “addicts”.

*you knew they were making life difficult for themselves (...) they were just taking the piss (...)* I just didn't have<sup>60</sup> it in me" (Billy Boy).

Tomma is also discussing a similar type of concern but is being more specific about an individual who he encountered in a smaller self-help group. This individual participated in the group but was deemed by Tomma as just taking because he who did not contribute to the group discussions, was reluctant to get involved and did not invest in any relationships with others.

*"Well groups are confidential and what is said and happens in groups should stay in them (...) if he wanted to talk then he got respect we listened to him as well, he didn't go into depth about the problems he had-the problems he faced-he would not talk about them-ken whit I mean. I challenged him on it (...) tried to get him to have a go but- no he wouldn't do it.*

*Will It sounds like there is a process there were you are supporting people and it is a very very nurturing process and a supportive environment. I'm not going to say he wasn't taking it seriously but it was like-he wasn't giving at the same level.*

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<sup>60</sup> I am taking this latter quotation "I just didn't have it in me" as recognition that Ritchie just did not have the emotional energy to start to engage with these individuals and just left them alone.

*“Yes he wasn’t coming in with his bit, there was no feedback and he always sat away -from the start he was always the last to go, he would get done whatever he could in the last ten minutes. He would just talk shite really-just getting the time filled in eh, but we gave him the respect that he needed and he gave us ours but he didn’t talk he didn’t do nothing on himself” (Tomma)*

Others, like Pablo were less than complimentary about those whom didn’t actively contribute to the group and intolerant of those who wasted group time.

*“I don’t want to sound disrespectful or anything like that but- I don’t know- it’s difficult, some people you just don’t like- they talk shite”*

At this point of is important to pick up on a point made by Billy Boy (see previous page) and it relates to the idea that some members did not take the group seriously or joke in groups. The point Billy Boy was making was that having a joke at the expense of others or detracting of distracting the group was unacceptable, clearly other members like those in this section found these types of behaviours distracting and disrespectful. But having an appropriate sense of humour was deemed by the majority of the respondent group as an important requisite for being a self-help member. Not only were self-help members expected to be sociable and have a sense of humour. They were also expected to be able recognise the

therapeutic healing value of being able to have a laugh or the ability to laugh at themselves and about the situations that they found themselves in. As Kelly and Helen, like many others were keen to point out:

*“it’s not all doom and gloom you know”*

And;

*“its fun and you can have a laugh”*

At interview the respondent group were also keen to and did discuss the ways in which humour and having a laugh was a key part of the self-help process. Interestingly, this theme was deemed to be more prevalent in smaller types of self-help groups where individuals had usually developed primary types of relationships with others. Obviously individual and group humour was a subject that was approached with caution as Kelly and Harry discuss below, but it was also a feature of groups which helped individuals deepen their connections to and understand each other.

*“I was sitting with [name] I was saying to him I don’t think I have fucking laughed like that ever, do you know what I mean. And we were both saying it, he was a tough lad from [place] he had had his ear bitten off, tattoos and I thought-what the fuck is happening here.*

*Here is a bloke who I would avoid when we were using and here we are and I'm thinking what's going on" (Harry)*

And;

*"there is so much fun in it there is so much humour, it's like someone may come in and tell a story of what they did when they were drunk or something and it just helps you lift the mood a bit. You can see the funny side of things and we do have such a laugh-especially (...) it also depends on the person if somebody-is not at the stage of seeing humour in the situation- it helps you understand people better" (Kelly)*

The process and format for sharing and exchanging practical knowledge with others and understanding between members will vary in self-help from setting to setting and group to group (Hatzidimitriadou, 2002). At this point it is important to recognise that the concept of "addict" did provide the basic premise that makes the exchange knowledge and understanding between group members possible. However, it was the exchange of knowledge and understanding, or social capital that defined, reaffirmed and reproduced relationships and membership of the group (Bourdieu, 1986).

It is also important to recognise that the accrual of social capital in self-help is dependent on and will be derived from the unceasing effort of sociability on behalf of the individual. It will also be dependent upon the individuals own competence and ability to negotiate and

engage in a continual “series of exchanges in which recognition was endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” with others (Bourdieu, 1986:10). In self-help those who do not engage in their groups, exchange social capitals or make an active contribution towards them will not be excised in the ways that Bourdieu contested they would. In this context Bourdieu argued that all groups would have various processes for expelling, excommunicating or discrediting embarrassing individuals from their ranks (Bourdieu, 1986). However, those who do not make an active contribution to their group were found to have limited resources to call upon from others as they went onto actively seek to resolve their substance related concerns and problems.

### **8.3 Drawing on the Investment in Others**

Colloquialisms, slogans and phrases like “one day at a time” - “keep it in the day” - “act as if” - “keep it simple” and “living life on life’s terms” were used extensively by the whole respondent group during interviews. In a number of scholarly and empirical accounts of self-help these types of slogans and phrases have been discussed as actual mediators of substance use; particularly in AA, NA and CA. Theoretically this is largely deemed to be because they explicitly teach active cognitive and behavioural<sup>61</sup> coping responses which individuals can initiate when they feel unpleasant urges or when they simply want to use drugs (Humphreys et al 1999). Most of the respondent group identified at interview that they found it difficult to understand the use of these types of phrases and slogans in the

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<sup>61</sup> It is also recognised that shared language and repertoire in self-help is an important feature of meaning making and identification between users.



beginning of their involvement but some did discuss them as being beneficial in the ways described above:

*“we have these phrases that we use-keep it in the day-yesterday is history tomorrow is a mystery- there are several others that get bandied about in the group (...) to begin with I was thinking god what a load of claptrap really but then when you are sort of in the zone you kind of think ah that’s what they mean (...) you start to become more relaxed you start to get back your mental faculties and you start to become in control again and those phrases percolate through it changes the way that you think about things”. (Lisa)*

Contextually I’m sitting in the second half of open professionals meeting in a traditional 12 step setting, the group are in the dedicated slot for newcomers to share and speak to the rest of the group. The group member sitting directly beside me puts his hand up and on a nod from the groups trusted facilitator says *“hi I’m Dave, I’m an addict”* the group responds *“hi Dave”*. *“I’m a week clean”* he goes on (round of applause) *“and I’d just like to say that it is working. I was on my way here tonight on the bus and the guy I buy my gear off got on”*. *“I don’t mind saying I started to panic and I thought how the fuck do I get out of this, chin him I thought, he spotted me and I thought, no, right stab the bastard”*. *“I got up as he came towards me and off in the distance I heard the bell going off on the bus, keep it simple I thought....so know wat I did?”* *“I just got up and got off the bus”*. At this point the whole group bursts into laughter and applause for Dave.

The point being illustrated here is that the teaching and use of slogans and phrases, like Dave's "keep it simple" as cognitive and behavioural responses is similar in context to the resocialisation of users that was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis and is believed to be a catalyst for individual change in self-help (Trice, 1957; Trice and Roam, 1970; White, 1998; Humphreys, 2011). However, in the context of my fieldwork these types of phrases and slogans "one day at a time"- "keep it in the day"- "act as if"- "keep it simple" and "living life on life's terms" were more likely to be used by affiliated members when they were discussing their progression in self-help and dealing with non-substance specific issues and concerns.

### **8.3.1 Using Self Help to Deal with Everyday Life Problems**

During interviews those that were affiliated self-help members identified that they were surprised in self-help by how little time they actually spent dealing with or learning about their substance use as specific concerns. They would then often go onto discuss how their self-help related needs had changed and moved on to learning to "deal with life", "real life situations" the "day to day things" and the resolution of their broader substance related concerns and problems. Like Rachel, Red and Lou are discussing below:

*"Its not always about talking about drugs or alcohol it tends to be all the stuff underneath (...) but I think we have all come realise that it is life problems rather than the substances like what we have taken to deal with life erm.....it tends to be like a lot of life stuff that comes up things that would have made us drink or take drugs before (...) so you can talk about all kinds of things really even when you are into recovery cause there are still a lot of underlying issues"* (Rachel)

And;

*"I think it's like when you first come off the drink you are not living, you are just not drinking right! But then without the alcohol the real life starts hitting you, you start getting into situations in life like illness and that family or having to deal with life generally"* (Red)

And;

*"Well it is not always about alcohol, well it is cause it is related, people have (...) you know it very open forum really it doesn't have to be you know some people never talk about alcohol problems (...) It is more general day to day things it is week to week things"* (Lou)

At interview respondents were also keen to point out that they benefitted from exchanging practical knowledge and expressing understanding with others in these contexts and around these types of concerns. For some respondents like Red below, whom it must be recognised had been in self-help for a significant amount of time, the benefits that were

drawn from being an affiliated member were the most important and beneficial part of being involved in his group.

*“that is where the group if you like really came into being different it wasn’t the stopping drinking bit I had stopped drinking it was the being able to deal with life and knowing what to do when everything just seemed to be going into chaos. You learn a lot of life lessons there and that’s why a lot of people don’t understand it as a group it’s about learning to deal with life as much as it is not drinking” (Red)*

In discussing the processes of dealing with non-substance specific concerns the respondent group were also keen to point out that they shared and exchanged understanding and practical knowledge both in and away from the main group. Theoretically speaking Bourdieu himself did argue that social capital in groups would define and reproduce the group but in doing so he also argued that the types of social capital and its forms would define the types of exchanges that could actual take place (Bourdieu, 1986). One of the more interesting, yet basic ways respondents expressed understanding with others and exchanged practical knowledge was via text messaging and over the telephone, in between meetings:

*“we do text each other quite a bit really and check-up you know (...) some people organise little outings (...) but we do try and support each other outside the group as well” (Paula)*

The actual process of sharing and exchanging telephone numbers in self-help was one of the more socially and culturally interesting rituals or aspects of my fieldwork (cf Collins, 2005). In self-help groups individuals are actively encouraged to use their group as a “bridge to normal living” this involves sharing their contact details and providing assistance to others inside and outside the group. With regards to this the respondent group informed me that members will usually share their contact details with those who they feel a connection to or identify with. Contextually though it is important recognise that individuals cannot and are not allowed to ask for the phone number or another member, it must be offered by the owner. During interview the respondent group did point out that there were a number of practical reasons why they not share their telephone number openly or with other members. Some self-help users lived a distance away from the main group and could not respond to requests for help or assistance from others. Others had families or were employed and just did not have the time. One respondent was simply unable to share his number because he was on a curfew for his anti-social behaviour order and could not leave his house to meet others between 6pm and 6am if he was needed by another member.

Outside these personal and practical factors those who were more senior members or established were careful how many times they shared their telephone number because they did not want to develop a poor reputation by not responding. With regard to this specific theme it was widely recognised within the respondent group that if you are contacted by another member who needs assistance then you were obligated to respond and fulfil your duties and responsibilities. In the quotation below Big Gav does not suggest or discuss that individuals whom don't respond lose credibility but he does identify that with the status of affiliated member comes responsibility.

*“say for instance I am really, really struggling I would phone up someone and say want to go for a coffee, and nine times out of ten the person will put everything down and go for a coffee”*

Will: *is there an expectation that someone will be there for you!*

*“Aye but that comes naturally anyway ...that comes naturally as you progress in the group”*

Having the telephone numbers of other affiliated users and access to practical knowledge and understanding from others in between groups was significantly important for individuals who found themselves in smaller groups. Largely because in these type of settings the groups were only able to offer their members a limited amount of meetings to

access (cf Collins, 2005). Below Liam is discussed the concept of having relationships, connections to others and resources to call upon as a lifeline in between groups:

*“One day in particular I had bad situation which started on a Monday night after I had left the group (...) on the Tuesday my head was all over the shop really, I was really finding it difficult. I had been off the drink a couple of months by this time and I was so tempted so I thought just get through the day and it was like a lifeline”*

Respondent also reported that the exchange of understanding and practical knowledge was important when they were faced with dealing with more subjective and potentially difficult types of nonspecific substance related concerns: Below Lou, whom had only been in self-help for six months at the point of interview is discussing her own subjective experiences of being able to deal with non-specific yet still dangerous situations, for her, because of the resources she had access to.

*“I haven’t been so bad at the moment so I haven’t rang, but other people have texted me cause I was at a funeral not so long ago (...) I was a little anxious but a couple of people texted me and said you know you will be alright if you feel wobbly and you think you are going to sneak a drink then give me a call-you know as extra support”*

All of the affiliated members that engaged with claimed that they were able to deal more readily with issues and concerns that they encountered in their daily living experiences because of the actual and virtual resources or capitals that they had access to from other group members. Some had also been able to return to more conventional forms of living and claimed to be able to do so because they perceived their group provided them with the platform to be able to do so. As Kelly identifies:

*“I know if I have a slip up I can come straight back here, it’s like. if you fuck up you can come straight back here, there is no shame in it, you can come back and everyone will be supportive and help you with it. For me its difficult to describe because It’s such a valuable tool of recovery it really is (...) the group helps you become stronger to deal with life out there and you can move forward”*

Theoretically it is important to recognise that individuals will enter self-help out of self-interest. But in doing so will go on to develop relationships of mutual acquaintance with others which enables them to enter into networks of favours and obligations whilst exercising more control over events that mattered to them (Banks, 1997). Obviously the nature, type and depth of assets or capital(s) that any individual respondent could accrue from these types of relationships, as I discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, will depend on the number of favours they were owed and strength of obligations that others felt towards them (Banks, 1997). In a more theoretical context then Bourdieu’s assertion



that the resources and assets an individual can call upon will depend on the number of connections they had and the forms of other capitals that were possessed by others whom they were connected to (Bourdieu, 1986) has significant here relevance here.

Outside the relationships of mutual acquaintance that individuals developed with others in the group respondents also identified that they the developed more meaningful and primary connections with others outside the group setting. During interviews these respondents indicated that these more intimate types of relationships<sup>62</sup> were more likely to develop when respondents spent time together. Or when they had discussed intimate concerns, felt an emotional connection and exchanged individualised reciprocal forms of embodied capitals with each other (Bourdieu, 1986, 1977; cf Thoists, 2011). As Theresa identified:

*“I had this pal (...) sometimes you know I’d want to run away in my head and I would want to bolt like- phew [makes noise of aeroplane taking off] and we would sit down and go through the conversation going on in my head and break it down to where it was all coming from, it was very therapeutic (...) for another human being to help me like that it was very powerful” (Theresa)*

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<sup>62</sup> These types of relationships are similar to sponsorship (see next sections) but they are not officially sanctioned as such within the group.

In developing and maintaining these more intimate and primary forms of relationships respondents were also more likely to meet together in didactic or smaller sub groups away from the main group. They also travelled to and from the group together and would meet to socialise in between meetings away from larger and more organised events. I myself was invited and able to attend some of the smaller social gatherings and was able to develop greater understanding of them and the social and cultural interactions which occurred in and around these types of settings. By engaging with this sub set of the respondent group in this way I was able to ascertain that these smaller sub groups were in many ways simply extensions of the more and larger group.

But I was also able to identify that these types of groups were particularly important for those of the respondent group whom were keen to develop friendships and abstinence specific social networks but had little way of doing this by conventional means (Humphreys, 2004). These types of relationships and networks were similar to those which Cloud and Granfield (2008) discussed in the context of “recovery capital” as providing users with further opportunities for meaning making that were consistent abstinence and non-problematic use. In a more Bourdieusian inspired lens I was able to ascertain that the exchange of social capital was key to the development and maintenance of relationships of mutual acquaintance which respondents could utilise or draw upon, over the short to medium term as they sought to resolve their substance related concerns (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **8.4 Signs and Relationships of Recognition**

Clean time is widely accepted as a sign of individual success and is recognised as a symbol of competence in self-help between members. It is accrued from the first moment of the first day that individuals stop using their substance of choice; which can occur prior to accessing self-help or from the moment that the individual enters their self-help group (AA, 1983; NA 1999). The importance of clean time in self-help is communicated to self-help users in group literature and clean time rituals and ceremonies are also incorporated into the planning and delivery of self-help groups. In all 12 step settings and groups clean time rituals are relatively straightforward affairs and were incorporated into every open or sharing meeting. During my fieldwork, as I described more generally in the opening section of the previous chapter, I was able to attend and observe a number of these rituals.

### **8.4.1 Clean Time Rituals**

In self-help meetings and settings the groups trusted member or facilitator will begin the clean time ritual by ask if there are any special announcements that need to be recognised within the group. After these announcements are made<sup>63</sup>, if there are any, the groups trusted member will start to call out two years, eighteen months, twelve months, nine months, six months, ninety day, sixty days, thirty days and finally...just for today<sup>64</sup>. Whilst

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<sup>63</sup> There was only even was one occasion when an announcement was made during the time I attended meetings. This was from a visiting member who claimed he was visiting the meeting because his friend had recommended how brilliant it was: he said he had really enjoy the meeting and was amazed at the numbers of members present.

<sup>64</sup> 1 day.

these clean time denotations are being called out individual users of the group will go up, to enthusiastic applause, to collect the coloured key ring that represents the clean time they have accrued. As they count down, the loudest and longest applause is always reserve for those with the least clean time. The key rings are coloured in a way that is meant to represents different stages of a more spiritual and enlightened journey. So for example self-help users in traditional types of groups and settings that are one day clean are given a white key ring; as white is the internationally recognised colour of surrender. By accepting a white key ring self-help users are deemed to by symbolically accepting membership of the group and deemed to be surrendering the self to their group's ways, its philosophy, ideology and practices (Yeung, 1997).

Outside this types of rituals the respondent group also reported that their appreciation of clean time and their subjective understanding of the relevance of it, in terms of competence, was also fuelled by their own existential experiences of endeavouring to acquire it and maintain it. As Billy Boy discussed briefly below:

*"I think it is because people know how hard it is to do it and when they try to do it themselves"*

At this point it is relevant and important to recognise that not every member of the respondent group discussed the concept of clean time in a positive way. Longer term and graduate members such as Billy Boy and Ned below claimed they has observed clean time

being used inappropriately in some groups. This inappropriate use of clean time occurred when more senior members used the concept to reinforce their status or to underpin that their opinions and expertise was more valid because they possessed it.

*“I don’t like ex users in (...) who come across and say this is me and I (...) so much clean time, before they even tell you their name. Do you know what I mean-and it is like aye- it becomes their identity and it does my tits in” (Billy Boy)*

And;

*“I think again at the beginning....I think at the beginning I think it was just the attitude of some people, that I am better than you type of attitude that some people had you know. I’ve been clean x amount of years so and I know more than you that type of thing (...) but it was rare, it was rare don’t get me wrong it wasn’t a thing that the vast majority of people did it was a very, very small minority of people” (Ned)*

One of the fundamental points being made here is the being competent in self hep and being competent in helping others did not naturally follow on from accruing clean time or being able to resolve your own substance related concerns. As Billy Boy went onto discuss.

*“Just because you’re further down the line (...) Just because you have been there and done it does not mean that you are always right”*

#### 8.4.2 Individuals Competences

More generally the respondent group, including Pablo and Ned below, discussed the concept of clean time in a positive way. Those who did so would also simultaneously argue that those who had accrued clean time were also competent and skilled in self-help, self-help processes and helping others. These competences and skills were illustrated in one context by the ways in which those with clean time were able to share their knowledge and understanding of self-help processes in a way that enabled others make sense of their own substance related concerns.

*“I got an awful lot out of it by listening to the person cause the person who was doing the top table was clean, I think they had been clean for was it about thirteen years at the time they had been clean for” (Ned)*

And;

*“you’re speaking to people who could give you good advice people who had been there and been clean longer (...) you are thinking you listen, whether rightly or wrongly you listen to people who have been there longer than you (...) as I said before it is easier to take advice because you understand it more you relate to it more” (Pablo)*

During interviews members of the respondent group discussed the skills, knowledge and competences or cultural capitals that they developed as being part of their own personal

or “toolbox”. In the context below Lou is explaining to me at interview how the concept of the “toolbox” is understood.

*“we have a system that is called the tool box and you look in and you have a little mental tool box and you put all the things in that you want that prevent you from wanting to drink, you know like you have got friends to ring, I am lucky I can rely on family and again with the paranoia-do I want to feel like that-and we put lots of things in our own tool box that we can get out and say right! This is my spanner but you know it is like-my paranoia-but you don’t want that so you got your tool in your hands and you don’t want to do it, so you like sort of mentally fix your brain and you think no I am not going to do that and no I am not going to have a drink and then you know you put it back in your box” (Lisa)*

Lou then went onto discuss her own subjective interpretation of the extent to which the concept was evident in her group and the extent to which the concept was utilised by others:

*“it is a universal thing within the group people just treat it in their own way (...) .But you use your own tool box the way you want to everybody is different and everybody sort of has a different strategy towards it” (Lou).*

During interviews more experienced and senior group members than Lou also identified that they were able to identify the skills, knowledge and attributes others possessed and when and under what circumstances they could call on them for practical knowledge and understanding from them. In doing so they also suggested that the process of helping others was underpinned by personal mastery, cultural capital and the application of some technique a level (Bourdieu, 1986).

*“it’s like I say there is a range of different people that you can approach at certain times (...) there was certain peers you could talk to about stuff and certain peers you couldn’t because, there were certain peers in there I couldn’t go and talk to cause I knew they wouldn’t be able to respond to it the wouldn’t be able to handle it (...) they wouldn’t respond to that well they wouldn’t know how to handle that, whereas that same person I could go up and ask information about how to do x, y, and z (...) You had a good bank and a good mix of experience and ability” (Billy Boy)*

In a wider and more theoretical context Bourdieu himself would argue that clean time rituals, like those incorporated into the planning and delivery of self-help group constituted institutionalised processes for protecting, concentrating and focussing the totality of the group’s capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). With regard to this particular perspective and aspect of self-help it has been argued that clean time and clean time rituals in self-help are viewed as an internal scale of group and individual social capital and status “that is of a status and hierarchy-to the extent that a nine month chip signals more significant personal investment



in the organisation the a one-to two month chip<sup>65</sup> (Yeung, 197:61). However, one of the more specific points being made and illustrated here in this section is that the concept of clean time was widely discussed and recognised among the respondent group as a symbolic representation of what was deemed to be of value and important to them. In this context it is important to recognise (see next section also) that it was the exchange of social and symbolic capitals in self-help which transformed the things being exchanged into signs of recognition between users in their groups (cf Bourdieu, 1986).

It is also important to recognise that the accrual of individual clean time does not necessarily result in the individual also accruing competences and cultural capital or make them self-help experts in the ways which Yeung (2007) suggested. In this context it was argued that anyone who participated in self-help for any significant amount of time<sup>66</sup> could be classed as a self-help expert. It is apparent that the development of individual competence in self-help, self-help processes and the ability to help others as Smith (2007) argued were only developed by investing time in building relationships with others. These process of helping others, essentially to resolve their own substance related problems and concerns, was also underpinned by a level of practical knowledge and a significant level or mastery of some technique (Bourdieu, 1986).

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<sup>65</sup> Key rings are being discussed as chips here as the research was conducted outside the uk.

<sup>66</sup> This was never specified.

### 8.4.3 Relationships of Recognition

In self-help and self-help groups the accrual of clean time and being known as a competent self-help user were important for those whom were interested in taking up opportunities to engage in or provide sponsorship or mentorship to others. Choosing the right sponsor was an important therapeutic and culturally sensitive process in its own right. To be able to choose a sponsor the individual or potential tutee would have to have a level of understand about their own needs and their own aspirations. They would also need to be able to identify and then approach a suitable competent and skilled partner or more senior member to provide sponsorship (Humphreys, 2009). In the context of sponsorship the relationships that developed between tutee and sponsor were also very much relationships of recognition because of the ways in which novice users recognised that more experienced users have skills, attributes, competences and status that they needed and aspired to possess (Bourdieu, 1986). Contextually, it is important to make reference to the point that potential sponsors are not permitted to offer their services<sup>67</sup> to newcomers as the relationship of sponsorship has to originate or be instigated from the tutee.

During interview<sup>68</sup> the respondent group identified that they could simply be attracted to others and into certain relationships of sponsorship with others because of the sponsors

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<sup>67</sup> Respondents would often approach another senior members would then broker sponsor relationships for tutees with their peers. My gatekeepers also informed me after my fieldwork was completed that a senior member could not refuse to take on a sponsor if they were asked directly, none of my Gatekeeperrs had ever heard of a senior member refusal to sponsor.

<sup>68</sup> We touched on some of these concerns in the previous chapter in the context of providing spiritual guidance to others.

personal conduct in groups, attributes and the skills and competences they possessed. For Zeb below identifying a suitable sponsor felt like very natural process, which for him developed over a period of time. He chose his particular sponsor because, like him, he was serious about his recovery.

*"I connected with him when I came out of treatment and I got clean and he has took me through the steps and there are people who I am attracted to. Some people I am not it is normally people who are serious about recovery (...) I just its-you just-its just a feeling thing. You know I am attracted to some people! It's like magnets I suppose when you're are doing the same thing or you are dead serious you've attracted each other. Were as other people I repel I will give them a wide berth and I am like that do you know"*

For others choosing a sponsor was a far more rational and detailed process which involved looking out for the right individual with the specific sets of experiences, skills, knowledge and attributes that corresponded to their needs. For these respondents the process of finding a suitable sponsor took significantly longer and could result in the tutee in question actually missing out or not taking up the opportunity to do so, as was the case for Petra below:

*“The people were really lovely they, most of them were really lovely, but I just felt like I wasn’t getting it-I didn’t get a sponsor or work on anything in AA cause there wasn’t anybody who....well no one resonated with me”.*

Petra’s inability to identify a suitably qualified and experienced sponsor did not mean that she was unable to identify a more senior members of her group and engage them to access the skills and attributes they possessed. Like others, such as Billy Boy prior, she simply became more competent herself at building a whole range of relationships with more senior members and was able to utilise these if and when she needed. Prior to interview Petra had actually been discussing her inability to identify a sponsor the previous evening.

*“I was talking about this last night there was a woman who came over to me the first time I came in to an NA meeting who was um, she had had a lot of similarities to what I was, there was a lot of similarities there and she made an effort with me. There was some of the men there who I already knew like [name] and a couple of others that I knew from and they just, yeah I just kept getting little text and phone calls and it was good, it was different”*

#### **8.4.4. The Benefits of Being a Sponsor**

During interviews the respondent group identified that the sponsoring relationship in self-help provided less experienced users with access to the indigenous knowledge and skills or

capitals and competences of more senior recovering self-help members (Smith, 2007). However, those senior members who provided sponsorship also identified that they were able to derive meaning, purpose and increased feeling of interpersonal competence by providing sponsorship to others. In the opening section of this chapter<sup>69</sup> it was argued that more senior self-help members would provide universal knowledge and understanding to new members and therefore be able transform the most circumstantial of relationships with others in self-help into different types of assets by doing so (Bourdieu, 1986). However, in the context of my fieldwork the meaning and purpose that was derived from providing one to one sponsorship was deemed to be significantly more profound for senior members: *"phenomenal"* in some contexts, as Paddy discusses.

*"Yes I mentor people today, yeah and that's about being a role model, I think it gives me a sense of responsibility and it gives me an opportunity to practice, practice being, being productive and responsible, you know I am not perfect I make mistakes like every human being but when I take on that responsibility for someone I am mentoring (...) they get to be open and they get to be honest, they have this trust and they are not afraid to make a mistake in life to say you know what I'm doing this what do you think do you have any suggestions of this decision (...) the feedback and the response is phenomenal"*

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<sup>69</sup> See section 7.1

Sponsoring processes are similar in outcome to those discussed in the second theoretical chapter of this thesis “helper therapy principle” (Shroeder, 1995) “the helpers high” (Luks, 1991) “the helping role” (Reismann and Carroll, 1995). But in the context of my fieldwork the respondent group also identified that they were able to develop a more significant sense of interpersonal competence from helping others. In doing so they were also identified that they received positive forms social recognition and approval over the longer term from others by doing so (Banks, 1997). Billy Boy, below discussed these types of benefits at length during interview.

*“Aye recognition, recognition of what had happened and at the same time getting (...) like I said to this day it gives people a purpose and a responsibility that they had never had before (...) were you have came from running about the streets scoring thing- to do this thing and that thing to going and having respect from peers it is something that people have never had before so you get up, you’ve got order, you’ve got structure (...) a role to do you feel important” (Billy Boy)*

They also identified that they were able to help themselves by helping others but were also able to engage in further personalised learning opportunities with their tutees by doing so (Banks, 1997).

*“I took advantage, I used both to me advantage, supporting you know the people and using my past experiences and opening up with my past experiences to support them as well do you get what I mean. I was supporting them (...) I was co-counselling them but I was doing it myself (...) cause I was opening up and talking about my past experiences and explaining my likeness and how I can see where they are coming from my own experiences. So I was doing both one them and co-counselling myself by opening up” (Shane).*

To understand the significance of the actual or virtual resources and benefits that were drawn from providing sponsorship; interpersonal competence, positive recognition, social approval and status it is important to recognise how different this was from the daily living experiences of users prior to accessing self-help. This was particularly so for those respondents who had entered self-help with the most significant forms of substance related concerns and problems prior to accessing self-help as Pablo discusses.

*“my contact with people a typical day, would be if I was lucky enough to have drugs and that before I would have been to sleep. If not I would have still been awake from the night before, I would have went out thieving the first thing would have been to get a fix. Straight away that would have been the first thing. So I would have got a fix and had a hit and then gone out and got the next fix, that was just continuous. would have only to have been to have been done with drugs, there would have been no, I would have had no personal contact with anyone it would have all revolved around drugs, getting drugs, buying drugs,*

*selling drugs, money for drugs whatever it would be. (...) for me when you are in that life it's not about relating to anyone cause it is all about yourself, completely it's all about yourself it doesn't matter who it is kids, family so called friends" (Pablo)*

By engaging in relationships of recognition or sponsorship with less experienced self-help users more senior members are able to use their competence or cultural capital in self-help, self-help processes and helping others to resolve their substance related concerns (Bourdieu, 1986). By providing assistance to others they are also able to make meaning and find purpose whilst increasing their own levels of interpersonal competence, positive recognition, social approval and status from doing so. Those who provide sponsorship to others in self-help and those who are more likely to benefit from providing sponsorship are those who have experienced the most significant sorts of substance related concerns and problems prior to accessing self-help. In a more Bourdieusian inspired lens these self-help users are able to utilise the informational and cultural competences they develop to engage others in relationships of recognition and actively work towards resolving their own substance related concerns and problems over the longer term.

## **Chapter Summary**

Newcomers to self-help are afforded a period of grace to settle in and more established members will share their knowledge about self-help, understanding or social capitals universally with them. Those who observe others exchanging knowledge and



understanding in groups are able to practice self-help at an earlier point and are then able to accrue cultural competences about self-help and in self-help processes. They are also able to utilise this form of cultural capital to increase their own esteem and status and are able to progress within their respective groups. In self-help groups the format for accruing and exchanging practical knowledge and understanding or social capitals with others varies significantly from group to group. The concept of “addict” does provide the group with a sense of shared identity, a more common sense of purpose and a platform for sharing knowledge and understanding. However, it is the exchange of social capitals that defines, reaffirms and sets the context from which more productive relationships of mutual acquaintance develop. Those who are deemed to be sociable and actively invest in relationships or bring something to their group are those who are able to access higher volumes of resources, over the short to medium term and as they move towards resolving their substance related concerns.

Over time individual respondents go onto to accrue clean time, informational and cultural competences in self-help and self-help processes and are able to attract others towards them in relationships of recognition/sponsorship. They are able to do so because they accrue status within their groups as self-help “experts” and are able to attract others to them because of the attributes and competences they are known to possess. Those who experience the most significant forms of substance related problems and concerns are those who are more likely to engage in relationships of recognition with others. They report that sharing social and cultural capital in these types of contexts provides them with

an increased sense of personal competence, meaning and purpose in life. But they also recognise the importance of the social approval and recognition they accrue from others by doing so and the importance of these concepts as they go on to actively resolve their substance related concerns over the longer term.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusions**

#### **9.0 Introduction**

In this final chapter I will bring this thesis to a close by focusing on the empirical and theoretical contributions this thesis adds to existing discourses of self-help, self-help groups and self-help processes. I will discuss the implications this thesis has for policy makers and practitioners in the context of working with self-help groups and conclude by making suggestions about the possible focus of future research in the study of self-help groups.

#### **9.1 Empirical contribution(s) of the thesis**

Understanding of self-help and self-help processes have previously been derived from the work of scholars and empirical theorists who had focussed either on the individual's personality and the characteristics of users (cf Kelly, 2003). Such central concepts like individual self-determination, self-reliance and self-production have furthered knowledge in this area and contributed to the position on self-help group programmes of change within the wider context of substance related problem resolution. However, as it was argued and suggested in the opening chapter of this thesis, less is known about the ways in which self-help and self-help processes, like those above, were mediated by social and

cultural concerns in particular types of drug and alcohol self-help groups; those with a structured programme of change (Humphreys 2011).

My research has shown that self-help groups are essentially micro social worlds. By this I mean that individuals were relatively free to come and go but access was restricted to those who identified with the self-concept of addict, those who were committed to resolve their substance related concerns and the wider functioning and continuation of the group (Smith, 2007). As micro social worlds each group also had their own language, means of communication, rituals, ideological premises and social processes which largely functioned to pass on the technologies of self-help between and to members (Smith, 2007). In this thesis it was also identified and illustrated that the micro social world of self-help is a complex concern and that both objective factors and subjective influences shaped the very particular self-concepts “addict”, identity and dispositions that users developed in self-help. Contrary to the dominant discourse it was found that self-help users do not simply accept the fact that they were “addicts” because they had surrendered the “self” to their group’s ideological premise. Nor do they simply that they are “addicts” because they feel they have a disease in the ways that sufferers of any other terminal illness are believed to (Thombs and Osborn, 2013). Rather, it was found that self-help users actively identifying and engaging with the concept of “addict” initially because it provided them with a way of making sense of their past and their experiences as active users and because it provided a context for planning and living in the real world (McIntosh and MacKeganey, 2002). As affiliated self-help members it was also found that users of self-help would go onto

promote the concept of “addict” to others within their group because it made sense for them to do so and because they derived meaning and purpose from doing so.

In chapter 7 more specifically, it was theorised that by engaging in self-help groups, individual self-help users are able to engage in further opportunities for self-assessment and self-evaluation. However, it was also identified that over time users of self-help go onto develop a more appreciative gaze of self-help processes and in the process of doing so become more skilled and competent at practicing self-help with others. By utilising the individual competences or skills they developed as self-help users, individuals are able to develop and invest in relationships of mutual acquaintance with others to accrue and exchange knowledge and understanding in their groups. This enables users to call upon different types of resources and relationships over the short to medium term as they are endeavouring to maintain and exercise control over their substance use and lives (Cloud and Granfield, 2004).

Empirically it was also found and illustrated that those who experience more significant types of substance related concerns are also able to utilise their competences, skills and status as self-help “experts” to attract others towards them in sponsorship. By engaging in these types of relationships with less experienced self-help users, longer term members are able to derive an increased sense of interpersonal competence and derive meaning and purpose in their lives. But over the longer term they are also able to accrue more positive

forms of social approval and recognition from others that they utilise and call upon as they sought to maintain and exercise control over their substance use and lives. In this thesis it was found that the resolution of substance related concerns is largely a function of the resources that individuals are able to access and the relationships that they have invested in, developed and maintained with others in their groups. Moreover, these resources come together in self-help “in a tangled web tangible and intangible personal attributes, physical and socio-environmental structures, cultural dispositions and related life circumstances that all affect one’s capacity to overcome substance misuse” (Cloud and Granfield, 2008: 1981).

The empirical findings from this thesis then add and contribute to the continuing discontent, which some theorists have described as the “fetishism” that surrounds highly individualised and diseased or pathogenic discourses that prevail contemporary accounts of self-help and self-help processes (Cloud and Granfield, 2008: 1981; cf May 2001; Hughes, 2007). Particularly those discourses and perspectives that have led to the abstraction of individuals<sup>70</sup> and generally ignored or obscured how the social and cultural realities, processes of self-help and social conditions influence substance use and recovery (Cloud and Granfield, 2004). They also provide a more variegated social and cultural account and context (see below) for exploring the ways in which individuals are actively engaged with

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<sup>70</sup> See section in this chapter on Policy, Practitioners and Self Help Groups.

others and able to get out of their use within self-help groups whilst actively seeking to work towards resolving their substance related concerns and problems.

## **9.2 Methodological contribution(s) of the Thesis**

An ethnographic methodology and approach was utilised in this thesis to move away from the highly positivistic and quantitative approaches: meta-analysis, randomised control trials and effectiveness studies, that dominate the empirical world of “why self-help works, for whom and why” (Kelly, 2003: 639). But also and more significantly because the utilisation of this approach and these methods; observations and interviews, enabled me to engage with self-help groups in a more meaningful way. Whilst providing, as can be seen from chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis a more insightful, deeper and illuminating socially and culturally derived interpretation of self-help and self-help processes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2009). At this point it is important to recognise that a number of empirical theorists have been critical of the utilisation of ethnography, both as an approach and as a way of exploring and explaining self-help groups and self-help process. For example, there are those who have drawn attention simply to the amount of time ethnographic fieldwork, analysis and writing up take to complete (cf O’Byrne, 2007; Fine, 2003; Myers, 1999). Others have also argued, somewhat more theoretically, that the ethnographic approach is limited as it is too subjective and ambiguous in nature: and that data often lacks generalisability and scientific validity! (Crotty, 2008; O’Rielly 2012; Silverman, 2011).

Outside these criticisms, many of which I alluded to in chapter 5 of this thesis, the utilisation of the ethnographic approach and observations that were made of self-help groups and users during fieldwork did provide a context for developing a “cultural portrait” of self-help groups and self-help processes (O’Byrne, 2007: 1382). Or, put more simply, a basis for exploring the different social and cultural self-help settings: rituals, ceremonies, processes and interactions that occurred in groups and between members (cf, Collins, 2005). In the short term observations became a mechanism by which users of self-help groups could be observed “in situ” as they attended self-help. But they also provided a way for observing many of the concepts and processes of self-help that respondents themselves discussed during interview (Myers, 1999). Over the longer term then and more significantly, observations of settings and interactions between users also became an important fieldwork mechanism for analysing and developing a fuller appreciation and understanding of what was actually occurring in the self-help groups that I attended (Myers, 1999).

By attending to fieldwork in this way and by engaging with users and attending meetings, more productive and meaningful relationships were also built with gate-keepers and individual self-help using respondents. As alluded to in chapter 5, my willingness to attend a small number of meetings and involve myself with key gatekeepers resulted in me developing a unique level of fieldwork credibility with them. In turn, these deeper and unique types of fieldwork relationships also resulted in gatekeepers being more prepared to “vouchsafed” for me; and as a result access was gained to longer term and more difficult to reach ex self-help users (cf, Lalander, 2003). In the second instance my attendance at



meetings and my engagement with users before and after meetings also enabled me to build up fieldwork relationships with self-help users (Lester, 1999). On a very practical level I was utilising my position and relationships with users, as I discussed in chapter 5, to build rapport and get inside the heads of users to try and understand the meaning derived from what they were doing (O’Rielly, 2012). But in doing so I was also seeking out a more “emic” and comparable perspective from self-help users to the “etic” one I had developed myself from my own “interpretations of their culture” (O’Byrne, 2007:1382). Overall then the utilisation of ethnography and this type of engagement, as can be seen from the empirical chapters of this thesis, enabled me to go on and developed a deeper and more unique insight into the experiences of users and more “thickly contextualised” materials from which to draw upon to explain self-help (Denzin, 1993: 11).

Like Norman Denzin (1993) in *“The Alcoholic Society: addiction and recovery of the self”* and many other empirical theorists past and present who have utilised the ethnographic approach to explore self-help, I am not suggesting that this thesis represents a totality of my respondent’s experiences (cf, Kelly, 2003; Denzin, 1993). However, what I am suggesting is that this thesis sets a methodological and theoretical context and way forwards for those who are committed to illuminate, reveal and understand the lived experiences of self-help users and they come together and engage in self-help. And no matter how limited or incomplete, or limited methodologically in relation to the positivistic conventional wisdom, those who wish to base their interpretations of self-help and self-help processes on more thickly contextualised materials that are temporally, historically,

biographically, socially and culturally grounded in the experiences of self-help groups and users (Denzin, 1993).

### **9.3 Theoretical contribution(s) of the Thesis**

In chapter 3, the second theoretical chapter of this thesis, it was argued that in theorising and exploring self-help and self-help processes a number of social and cultural theorists had ignored or overlooked the subjective experiences of users and focussed on the ways in which the structure and functioning of groups shaped the self and social action. Theoretically it was argued that these particular scholars and empirical theorists had tended to focus on the largely objective concerns such as roles, rules and norms and then the re-socialisation that occurs, albeit to varying extents, as users engage in self-help groups. Counter to this it was also argued that many theorists, whilst recognising that objective and external social and cultural concerns were apparent in explaining social action. Tend to argue that objective influences and concerns are only considered admissible insofar as they enter into the interpretations of individuals in self-help whom were pursuing more purposeful and emotionally driven forms of social action (Allan, 2007). In doing so, such theorists had alternatively tended to focus on the more subjective experiences of self-help users and the ways in which self-identity was either shaped, formed and reformed as individuals moved in and out of substance use, different subcultural contexts and self-help (Allan, 2007; Anderson, 1998).

The theoretical application and utilisation of Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital(s) + habitus in this thesis were fuelled in part from the recognition of the limitations of these types of approaches and concerns and the reductionist or essentialist ways in which these theorists had engaged in explaining self-help and self-help processes. However, Bourdieu's concepts were also utilised and applied, as a way of theorising the empirical findings of this thesis because of their heuristic value. The heuristic value of applying Bourdieu's social other capital(s) + habitus within this thesis related to notion that he had the most theoretically fleshed out version of all social capital theorists. And more significantly because the application of this and his other wider concepts was associated with a more relational, dynamic and holistic interpretation and reading of social action and cultural phenomena (Schuller, Baron and Field, 200).

In chapter 4 of this thesis attention was directed towards the wider theoretical and empirical criticisms that have been associated with the utilisation of Bourdieu's concepts and the limitations of applying them in the more specific context of self-help. It is important to recognise that Bourdieu himself was empirically and theoretically concerned with identifying how elite groups and institutions in society maintained and reproduced their status and privileged positions (Bourdieu, 1986, 1977). Or more generally used the concepts that were utilised in this thesis to explain the objective social positions that individual occupied in society or found themselves in. Mine was to utilise his concepts to enable the development of a more social and cultural reading of self-help and self-help

processes that occur as individual social actors seek to resolve their substance related concerns.

The application of Bourdieu's concept of habitus to the empirical findings of this thesis then provided an altogether more creative and relational account of how the objective influences and subjective experiences of users over time shape the self-concepts, identity, perceptions and appreciations that users developed in self-help groups. The application of social and other capitals also provided a theoretical and detailed context for exploring and explaining the ways in which individuals engage with each other, how relationships were structured and how transactions and resources were managed in and between users and members of self-help group. The overall application of Bourdieu's concepts in this thesis has provided a dynamic and holistic framework for explaining and exploring self-help and self-help processes. They have also been utilised in the context of this thesis to bridge of a number of dualism and dichotomies that exist; between structure and agency, the past and the present, essentialism and reductionism accounts that have prevailed in social and cultural explanations of self-help and self-help processes (Kurtz, 1997).

#### **9.4 Relevance for Policy and Practitioners**

Central and local government policy initiatives had created opportunities for different types of self-help group to become involved in developing their own provision and the commissioning, delivery and expansion of existing structured treatment services (HMSO,

2009). In a policy context the self-help agenda has now been subsumed into the wider recovery agenda and range of sweeping reforms across crime agencies, employment, housing and public health policy areas. Emphasis here is correctly based on recognising the wide range of difficulties that individual drug and alcohol users face in accessing appropriate treatment and their ability to move on and maintain a resolution of their substance related concerns over the longer term. With regards to self-help it has been identified that self-help groups still have an important role in policy delivery and play a pivotal role in providing opportunities for drug and alcohol users to resolve their substance related concerns. In these types of contexts local commissioning groups have been challenged to build relationships and work together with national and local self-help groups (HMSO, 2015).

Arrangements for the local commissioning, structure of drug and alcohol services and partnership working with self-help groups, still remain within local commissioning groups. However, the funding local commissioning groups receive from which to commission local services has fundamentally changed since this thesis was conceptualised. Funding for traditional drug and alcohol services is no longer awarded nationally; it is now awarded on the ability of local drug and alcohol services ability to effectively engage with and retain users in more traditional forms of structured drug treatment services for twelve weeks.

There is no mention or recognition of the tensions that these types of outcome based commissioning arrangements will have on relations between self-help group and the wider drug treatment system in *The Third Annual Review of the Drug Strategy: A Balanced Approach*, HMSO (2015). It is recognised in the recent Effective Support for Self Help/Mutual Aid Group Study (ESTEEM, 2013) that local commissioning groups recognise the wide range of benefits and contribution that self-help makes to reducing costs in health and social services. With these tensions in mind it is reasonable to assume that commissioning arrangements and need to retain users in more formal type's treatment will continue to be influential on the ways and extent to which self-help groups are involved and utilised in local drug treatment structures.

More significantly and fundamentally, given the findings of this thesis, it is important that local commissioning groups and those who pay for local services, recognise that self-help groups are essentially micro social worlds. Moreover, that these types of self-help groups cannot be replicated by getting groups of desperate enough users together; they take time to develop to function and rely on the commitment and investment of users who are typically viewed as lacking in traditional forms drug and alcohol services and treatment systems. Self-help groups also need to be given the time and the space from which to explore and articulate the discourses of their own members and support in a number of areas from which to do so. This includes support with organisational development, developing nurturing relationships with groups, recognising expertise, credibility and

increasing the influence of self-help groups and users in local decision making (ESTEEM, 2013)

Empirically it has been shown in this thesis that those with the most significant forms of substance related problems and concerns can benefit extensively from their involvement in self-help groups and self-help processes. This also has significant implications for individual professionals and drug and alcohol practitioners who are working in more formal drug and alcohol services. It is widely recognised those professionals and practitioners who work with the most problematic users can be the only link that active users have back to conventional worlds and other types of services and provision which include self-help (Folgheraiter and Pasini, 2009). To work effectively and specifically with self-help groups professionals and practitioners need to start the process by critically exploring their own role, the traditional types of boundaries, professional limits and areas of responsibility they have with those they work with in these types of contexts. As well as the issues and concerns such as confidentiality, information sharing and more practically as those social workers I met on of my fieldwork trips did, the actual recruitment processes for involvement in groups (ESTEEM, 2013).

Professionals and practitioners also need to be able to accept and work with the idea that self-help groups are peer led and run by their own members in such a way that they also challenge professional discourses on helping relationships. Professionals and practitioners

seeking to utilise self-help also need to be able to plan their action in a “more relational” context. In the context of self-help this “relational practice” encapsulates recognising and knowing about the opportunities that exist for drug and alcohol users in self-help group and making sure conditions exist which fully empower the individual they are working with to engage with them (Folgheraiter and Pasini, 2009; 254).

## **9.5 Recommendations for the Focus of Future Research**

Self-help groups are well researched. In this thesis it has been argued that highly individualised, pathogenic and diseased or addicted accounts dominate scholarly and empirical interpretations of self-help, self-help groups and self-help processes. Social and cultural qualitative theorists have offered a deeper interpretations and understanding of the structure and functioning of self-help groups and the subjective experiences of users as they engage with them. Yet their scholarly and empirical interpretations of self-help and self-help processes are also often highly reductionist or essentialist in orientation. The utilisation of ethnographic, more specifically serendipitous ethnographic methods and the application of Bourdieu’s concepts to theorise the empirical findings of this thesis represent an epistemic and theoretical commitment to engage with self-help users, groups and understand self-help processes in a deeper and more meaningful way.

The utilisation of serendipitous ethnographic opportunities in future research opens up opportunities for empirical theorists to step down a little and actively engage with self-help



users as they in turn engage in and with others in self-help groups (O’Rielly, 2012). By utilising this approach in the future, empirical theorists can endeavour to build more productive relationships with the users and gatekeepers of self-help, develop and explore core concepts in fieldwork whilst deepening their understanding and interpretation of individuals, self-help groups and self-help processes. The further benefits of utilising Bourdieu’s concepts of social and other capital(s) + habitus here in this thesis and future research relate to the ways in which it provides an intellectual context for providing a more creative, relational, dynamic and holistic interpretation of the experiences of self-help users and self-help processes. The more specific benefits of utilising Bourdieu’s concepts in future research also relate heuristic value of the concept in generating new and more creative insights in different social phenomena and social action. Put simply Bourdieu’s concepts need to be applied in situ on a case to case basis in the contexts and setting in which they are found. He provides the intellectual framework and grounding but doesn’t define what these capitals entail or involve in particular contexts (Maton, 2012).

The application of Bourdieu’s concepts in future empirical work would be particularly relevant for exploring and explaining social and cultural processes and individual change in different types of self-help groups. This would include those groups of users who are not affiliated to larger organisations, those that have managed to come together independently and those that actively support their members without adhering to or recognising a more formal programme of change. More specifically, however, further empirical and theoretical insights and benefits can be drawn from the utilisation and

application Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, to further explore its role and relationship to concepts such as altruism and the benefits of engaging in self-help processes such as sponsorship in self-help groups.

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## Appedix One: Information on Groups

### The Innovators

The first self-help group which I refer to as the Innovators had been running as a group for five years at the time of the fieldwork, the group had approximately sixty members, spread over two sub groups, stage one and stage two, and they held daytime meetings twice a week. The average meeting attendance was between twenty and thirty people. The group used the premises of a large national children's charity and was open to anyone who shared a willingness to abstain from all drug and alcohol use. The group recruited other users via word of mouth, advertisements and by promoting the service in different local institutions, residential detox units and hospitals. Typically, individuals would enter the group in stage one, then after their first anniversary (a year to the day that they had stopped using drugs), they would progress to the stage two group. Interestingly individuals could also be fast-tracked to the stage two group if the named representative and founder of the group deemed it appropriate. Stage two users were able to attend the stage one group as they were perceived as being able to impact positively upon individuals at earlier stages of recovery. However, stage one members could not attend stage two meetings.

The group consisted of equal numbers of male and female members and was made up of individuals who had previously used alcohol, prescription and illicit drugs. There were no injecting drug users apart from the group's founder during the period of the fieldwork. Demographically this was a highly differentiated group with a range of personal characteristics: professionally qualified teachers, senior managers and graduates, the long term unemployed and individuals who had no work experience whatsoever. Those whom attended the group identified with the concept that they were "addicts" in a similar way that users would in a traditional 12 step contexts. They did not follow the 12 step programme of change however. Instead they were required to use the stage one groups to deal with their addiction and substance use concerns and the stage two groups as a bridge to normal living. The actual meetings that this group provided were either facilitated by the groups founding member, Theresa<sup>71</sup> herself or a senior member of the stage two group and attendees were encouraged to and did make use of opportunities to engage with other members both inside and outside the group. Typically, group members would arrive for the meeting in small social groups [of two to three members] and offer unconditional one-to-one support over the phone to each other in between meetings. Outside structured and formal meetings, individuals were quite particular around whom they chose to meet with and why, but group members did also meet regularly outside the group in smaller groups.

## **The Traditionalists**

The second group which I refer to as the Independents had been operating for over seven years and could only be described as a traditional 12 step fellowship, the group met three times a week, in premises that were rented and subsidised by users themselves. They had over 100 members, who were all part of one group that met over three locations. The group was open to drug and/or alcohol users providing they “had the desire to stop using” (NA, 1991). The group also had a number of different formats for meetings: some were open to anyone including non-drug and/or alcohol users. But the majority were closed and only available for those whom identified and recognised that they were an “addict” at the beginning of every closed meeting the person facilitating the group will remind users of this and signpost others to alternative open meetings. All of the meetings of this group were facilitated by senior group members who had completed the group’s programme of change and whom were deemed skilled and knowledgeable enough to undertake the task. All of those who attended the meetings in this capacity were in step 12 of the programme wherein they are occupied with the task of helping others.

Two-thirds of the group were male and the majority of users were problematic heroin and/or crack users. Almost the entire group expressed motivation to achieve and sustain abstinence. The group had a very strong cohort of long-term users whom had been actively “clean”; not used drugs or alcohol for a number of years. Group members arrived for and left after meetings in small groups and were actively encouraged to either undertake NA services by developing a role for themselves within the group or a more formal role providing service and working for the larger organisation. The majority of those who attended the group maintained personal relationships with other group members outside the formal meetings and met on a regular basis. Each of those who attended would also engage in a sponsor as part of their involvement this would usually be someone with more “clean time” who would help the individual in question by providing spiritual and practical guidance about all self-help and substance related concepts.

## **The Hustlers**

The third group which I refer to as the Hustlers as they had a pool table in their meeting room had been running as a group for three years and had approximately forty core members. This number rose to over one hundred if all satellite groups were included. Average meeting attendance at the core group ranged from ten to twenty individuals and the group met three times a week, they had two evening sessions and one daytime session. The home group was based in the premises of a small regional based charity that had been set up to support drug and alcohol users who did not want to enter into formal treatment and/or detox provision. The group had originally been developed to provide assistance for alcohol users and later changed its ethos and focus when it



became apparent that individuals were attending with both complex poly and tertiary drug and alcohol concerns.

Like the Innovators the Hustlers were open to anyone who wished to stop using drugs or alcohol and advertised their group in local institutions, detox and inpatient units. Helen the group leader and founder spent all of her free time recruiting group members by advertising her group to drug and alcohol services and drug and alcohol professionals. She also facilitates regular weekly meetings in a number of different residential settings and as a result she recruited users to the group upon their discharge from hospital, residential or detox unit. The group was predominately made up from male members but a third of the regular attenders were women and because of their route into the group many members were long term users with deteriorating mental and physical capacities. It was also not uncommon for group member to be homeless or socially isolated or to be also attending a number of different types of groups. All of the groups were facilitated by Helen or one of the groups longer term members: there was a cohort of group members who had been with Helen from the very early stages the group's development. All of the group members were encouraged to make use of social activities before and after the group and the core group had access to a large kitchen and two pool tables. Members would usually come to their groups early and leave later after they had socialised with others. But they would often attend meetings on their own and did not tend to socialise with each other outside them. A small number of the group did meet outside the group but this was because they attended the same types of groups not as an individual conscious intention.

## **Appendix Two: Topic Guide.**

### **Becoming and Being a Group Member**

**Tell me a little about your life before self-help?** (prompt; levels of use, substance of choice, relationships with others, social and emotional health, family, employment).

**Tell me about your experiences of self-help before you came to this group?** (prompt; what was your perception, how did you find out about it, experiences of other groups and treatment).

**Tell me about your first and early experiences, what was it like?** (prompt; What were/are the barriers and facilitators).

**Tell me about your group, what is it like?** (Prompt; history, membership, structure, size, orientation, philosophy, beliefs, purpose).

### **Meetings and Groups Functions**

**What are group meetings like, can you describe a typical meeting?** (prompt; ground rules, focus, process, interactions, facilitator).

**What is it like being a group member?** (prompts; what are there things that are expected of members, are there positive and negative features).

**What types of activities would a typical group member be involved in?** (prompt; are you a member, how do you know, how is a member different from a non-member).

**Do individuals have formal responsibilities in your group/meetings?** (prompt; senior members).

**Does your group work?** (prompts, how does it, why and in what ways, do you meet outside the group).

### **Identification and Engagement**

**Can you tell me a little about what your experience of the group has been like?** (prompts; positive/negative, relationships with others, changes to perceptions and appreciations, changes over time).

**Has the group worked for you?** (prompt; in what ways, what factors have influenced your thinking and actions).

**What are the key benefits you have drawn from being involved in the group?** (prompts; feel better about yourself stopped using, developed awareness, developed friendships).

## **Affiliation**

**To what extent are you involved in your meetings and groups?** (prompts; attendance, role, work on behalf of the group, responsibilities to others).

**Has your affiliation and commitment to the group changed over time?** (prompts; short term plans, current role, future plans).

**What is your current situation now?** (prompt; levels of use, substance of choice, relationships with others, social and emotional health, family, employment).

**Questions;**



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## Social Capital and the Benefits Derived from Forum Involvement Consent Form

Please read the below points carefully and initial in the right-hand box if you agree to the below specific aspects of participation within this research project. It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part – please take time to think about your decision, and feel free to ask any questions.

**Title of Project:** Social Capital and the benefits derived from service user forum involvement for ex drug and alcohol users in the North East of England.

**Name of Researcher (student):** William.H.R.McGovern

**Names of Supervisors:** Prof. Robert Hollands, Dr Elaine Campbell.

1. I confirm I have read and understood the information sheet for the study detailed above
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty
3. I confirm that I agree to the interview being audio recorded
4. I am aware that the audio recording will be listened to and transcribed by the researcher William McGovern and after the completion of the research, the audio recordings will be destroyed
5. I understand that the transcript will be anonymised such that there will be no identifiable features within it – any names used will be pseudonyms, and any specific references to other individuals or events will be altered such that there will be no way of being personally traceable
6. I understand that sections of my written interview transcripts may be used or 'quoted' within the final project write up and in any other published writings about the study
7. I am happy for the anonymised transcripts to be used in any future research project to which they be of value too
8. I understand and acknowledge I have had the opportunity to consider the all information given, ask questions and have received satisfactory answers
9. I agree to take part in the above study

**Participant Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_