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Contribution of Reference Agents to Recovery Maintenance: A Social World Analysis of Narcotics Anonymous Affiliation

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF REFERENCE AGENTS TO RECOVERY MAINTENANCE:
A SOCIAL WORLD ANALYSIS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS AFFILIATION

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Christa Jane Moore

May 2005

CONTRIBUTION OF REFERENCE AGENTS TO RECOVERY MAINTENANCE: A
SOCIAL WORLD ANALYSIS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS AFFILIATION

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This research was a very personal undertaking for me. As a counselor in the community, I had worked with recovering addicts in many different settings and in many different situations. It was not until I met the man I would eventually marry, Ron J., that the social dynamics of recovery really began to fascinate me. Ron helped me to see the world of Narcotics Anonymous as more than a mere source of support. Through Ron I came to see a world of struggle filled with people who truly believed in the concept of hope. I thank my husband, Ron, for showing me every day how much hope can alter your life. I also thank my respondents. This thesis is the continuation of your stories. Thank you for sharing them with me.

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF REFERENCE AGENTS TO RECOVERY MAINTENANCE:
A SOCIAL WORLD ANALYSIS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS AFFILIATION

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Few studies have examined the social process of drug abuse recovery. To determine how recovering addicts use reference agents, such as reference groups and/or reference others, to achieve and maintain sobriety within the context of the Narcotics Anonymous (NA) support group experience, this study examines how Newcomers learn the norms and values associated with NA, how Newcomers become integrated into the NA group and internalize acceptable recovery behaviors, and how Newcomers transition to becoming Oldtimers.

In this study, participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviewing (N = 13) based upon convenience sampling were employed. This study elicited six stages of social referencing that Newcomers experience during the process of becoming recovering addicts.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I was wearing borrowed clothes, and I just felt like scum. I just remember standing outside, you know, [on] the steps, and smoking a cigarette and two guys that I didn't even know came up and hugged me. They said, 'Welcome,' and 'I'm glad you're here.' They didn't even know me. How can they say that shit? I got one more hug from the other guy. I went upstairs. I sat down--kinda hunkered down in the corner, and they went through the reading and asked if there were any visitors or Newcomers. I said, 'Yes. My name is Alexander*' and I'm an addict.' They just said, 'Hi. Welcome. We're glad you're here.' It just felt like home. (Alexander, 4 years clean)

"Hi. My name is Christa, and I'm a visitor." I have already joined the circle and, although I am an outsider present for the first time, this is the only identifying information that anyone in the room needs to accept my presence as legitimate. I look around the room at the faces of the men and women who fill the circular pattern of chairs, and I wonder how many of them are Newcomers, entering this social world for the first time alongside me. There are no outsiders here. All who come are welcome. The group asks only that you introduce yourself as a visitor or an addict during your first meeting.

During the meetings I notice that some people look comfortable, and when they speak it is with ease and familiarity. However, others appear unsure, uncomfortable, and in emotional and physical anguish. These Newcomers do not talk. They just watch. They listen. Just like I do.

Newcomers and Oldtimers are the two types of recovering addicts defined by Narcotics Anonymous World Services (1976, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1999, 2004); however, these labels are not just social positions occupied without thought or feeling. Throughout the duration of this study I have witnessed NA members' intense connections with their organization. These are not individuals who simply meet for weekly meetings. The NA members with whom I spoke referred to their NA cohorts as best friends and even as family--their "family of choice," an aphorism used commonly within the social world of NA.

At its core NA is about recovery. However, recovery from drug addiction does not merely imply the end of substance abuse but is instead a fundamental restructuring of individuals' entire lives. At NA the promises of recovery--acceptance and unconditional love--come from people who are the most likely to understand the life circumstances of the Newcomer, the Oldtimers. The Oldtimers are the foundation and the infrastructure of NA. They reach out to the Newcomers with what is commonly referred to as

"experience, strength, and hope," and they suggest to these newly-recovering individuals that by living their lives "just for today" and by remaining abstinent from drugs and alcohol they can live a life with the support and the love of the people who have "been there."

This research was conducted in an attempt to elicit the contribution of reference agents within the confines of the NA social world. I wanted to understand what it was about NA affiliation that most affects so many individual lives? How does the process of orientation by the group and eventual integration into the group occur? Once recovery begins in the group setting and is internalized by a Newcomer, can that individual then continue recovering without the influence of reference agents and still be successful in maintaining his or her recovery? These are just a few of the initial questions that I had when this study began.

This research was completed in two phases. The first phase was observational in nature. By taking a semiparticipatory role during NA meetings, I had the opportunity to watch and to listen to what was being done and said. I examined posture, body language, facial expressions, words, responses, and commonly used phrases or aphorisms. I learned many of the norms of the NA social

world just as Newcomers do by observing and passively participating in this manner.

The second phase of research involved conducting in-depth interviews with participating NA group members. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, I interviewed recovering addicts with varying amounts of "clean time." Clean time refers to how much time has passed for each addict since the date of his or her last substance use. Each interview was initiated by using a key informant who assisted me in making the necessary contacts with each potential respondent. Convenience sampling was the primary method used to gain respondents for the interviews. A more detailed discussion of qualitative methods will be provided in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I quickly decided that the most appropriate conceptual framework to be used for this project was symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionist theory (SI) can be traced to such prominent sociologists as George Herbert Mead (1934, 1962), Charles Horton Cooley (1964), William I. Thomas (1928), Herbert Blumer (1969), and Erving Goffman (1959) whose substantive contributions paved the way for sociologists wanting to more closely examine micro-level social processes that may appear mundane or irrelevant in contrast to larger-scale sociological phenomena. Examples of micro-level social processes include identity formation, the social construction of narrative discourse, and everyday interpersonal interaction.

SI involves a complex explanation of the social world as a place wherein the individuals who make up society use a complex system of agreed-upon symbols and signs to communicate throughout every social interaction. For example, when two people meet for the first time, they may shake hands. Neither of these individuals has to say, "Because I am meeting you for the first time, I am going to

take your hand in mine and pull it up and down as a sign of respectful engagement." These two people have a taken-for-granted understanding of the symbolic meaning that the act of shaking hands implies; therefore, a handshake is a symbol used in everyday social interaction. Two aspects of SI that are closely examined in this study are the social world perspective and the concept of reference agents. The relationship between these concepts is also of significant interest and is discussed at the end of this chapter.

The Social World Perspective

The social world perspective was initially put forth by Tomatzu Shibutani (1955) and was delineated by four distinct characteristics. First, a social world is a "universe of regularized mutual response" (p. 233). The social world of NA clearly demonstrates this characteristic. NA groups meet regularly, and there is mutual interaction between the group and its individual members as well as between individual members outside the group. Second, a social world is an "arena in which there is a kind of organization" (pg. 233). NA is highly organized with established meetings on set days at set times. NA is also seen as both a formal and an informal organization in that there are tiered levels of structure--world, regional, and local. Third, a social world is a "cultural area" (p. 233). NA has its own culture with distinct subcultures. Fourth, the boundaries of a

social world are "set neither by territory nor formal membership but by the limits of effective communication" (p. 233). In keeping with our NA analogies, this fourth characteristic can be seen in convention activity.

Individual NA members attend conventions throughout the United States and the world. The social world of NA remains intact regardless of where the convention is located or the members who are present.

Anselm Strauss (1991) stated as early as 1978 that the social world perspective was underestimated in its potential to explain such social processes as social change and social action. As Strauss explained, SI has several weaknesses. As a micro-level theoretical perspective, SI fails to address macro-level sociological concerns adequately such as group encounters. SI has also been criticized as too narrow in its evaluation of individual determinism. Last, Strauss states that SI tends to ignore the contribution of history to social processes, and, instead, focuses on contemporary life.

Strauss suggested that conducting sociological research utilizing a social world perspective strengthened SI and that it may come to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-level sociology. As such, Strauss offered six suggestions for a social world perspective. First, Strauss suggested that social worlds can be studied on any scale, micro or

macro, and that social worlds intersect within and across each of these levels. Within the context of NA, Strauss' first suggestion can be seen in the example of the social world of NA intersecting with the social world of education. Although these two social worlds at first appear very different in size and purpose, they intersect at a variety of points. For example, parents, teachers and administrators may be NA members. School children, themselves, may also be NA members or members of NARANON, an extension of NA that specifically supports the families of recovering addicts. Moreover, NA guest speakers may be asked to speak to school children in a D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program about the dangers inherent in substance abuse.

As a second suggestion, Strauss (1991) stated that a study of social processes is intrinsic to an examination of any social world. Strauss aptly stated, "While I am not overlooking the possibility that processes can be discovered independent of a focus on social worlds, the social world perspective makes processual study virtually mandatory" (1991, p. 241). Strauss adds that the social world perspective draws parallels between the social processes and structural features of the social world in question. This second suggestion is one that I have taken to heart in

conducting this study and is also one that will be mentioned in more detail in Chapter V.

A third suggestion put forth by Strauss involves increasing the focus on the history and development of social worlds. Strauss emphasizes that social worlds, just as so many other areas of sociological interest, are not static entities. They are ever changing, shifting, growing, or becoming outmoded. Within NA, new home groups are forming while others are breaking down. Members come and members go. Again, to use Strauss' own words,

Studies of social worlds train our attention on the history of that social world; that is, what are its origins, where is it now, what changes has it undergone, and where does it seem to be moving? Is it evolving, disintegrating, splintering, collaborating, coalescing? (1991, p. 242)

Strauss' fourth suggestion was that interactionism should be consistent in its examination of both group constraint and group creativity. The fifth and sixth suggestions that Strauss offered are similar in focus, and, therefore, will be discussed together. Strauss addressed the methodologies that could be utilized to examine social worlds properly as well as to expand general theory. Strauss stressed that interactionists' reliance upon the qualitative strategies of fieldwork and interviewing could be augmented by an examination of historical documentation surrounding social worlds. Strauss also states that a study of social worlds may be a viable topic for creating a

general theory rather than creating particularistic theories about specific social worlds of interest.

Reference Others

Social objects that have an agreed-upon meaning are symbols according to SI (Ritzer and Goodman 2004, pp. 352-53). Language is the most fundamental set of symbols, but other examples include religious or cultural symbols such as the cross or the American flag. People can also take symbolic attributes that have shared meaning. Symbolic interactionists call these people reference groups or reference others.

Reference others consist of those persons in our lives such as our family members, our friends, and our coworkers whose sentiments and acts affect us, whether the effect is favorable or unfavorable (Kelly 1968; Reisman 1976; Schmitt 1972; Shibutani 1968). Reference others, it is suggested, are always present, if not physically, then at least in our minds. Reference others take on their symbolic meaning through socialization (Vernon 1973). Socialization is based upon the human ability to reference the social behaviors enacted by everyone around us every day. We use social referencing to learn about the propriety (or the impropriety) of our actions within given social settings.

Reference groups (collectivities of reference others) also appear in our lives as cliques, friendship circles, and

support groups such as NA (Kelly 1968). The term "reference groups" offers two distinct usages: first, reference groups supply support and common affiliation for individuals with shared attitudes, and, second, reference groups provide a group standard against which one can judge oneself so as to shape consequent behavior (Kelly 1968, p. 91). For the Newcomer, the NA group becomes a foundation of support and a wellspring of information and potential peer relationships. Meanwhile, NA simultaneously supplies the model after which the Newcomer comes to shape his or her recovery behavior.

Furthermore, reference groups serve two types of functions in shaping individual attitudes and behavior. Reference groups serve primarily a normative function by setting the standards for normative expectations within a group. Recovering addicts are not aware during their first NA meeting of how to engage the group or other group members appropriately. These addicts learn the normative expectations of the NA group by socially referencing social interaction within the group setting. Reference groups serve secondarily a comparative function by being a basis of behavioral comparison for the individual. Newcomers act in ways that they have witnessed Oldtimers behaving.

Yet a third usage of reference groups exists that may be added to the previous two supplied by Kelly (1968). Shibutani (1968) relates that not only may reference groups

be used as bases of comparison and sources of acceptance, but they may further be used as sources of perspective assumed by an actor. While group affiliation may be either vicarious or direct, the perspective by which the world is viewed by the group becomes a reference for the individual so that he or she comes to see the world in the same way. For recovery to be successfully maintained, Newcomers must come to see their world in the same way as does the NA group.

In addition to the reference group perspective, reference theory has another variation known as the reference others orientation (Schmitt 1972). Schmitt proposes that three types of reference relationships exist within the context of the reference others orientation. First is the normative relationship that, much like Kelly's normative function of reference groups, involves identification and internalization of norms that the individual may share with reference others. The second relationship, the comparative, again expresses the individual's desire to behave in a manner best fitting in regard to the actions of the reference others. Newcomers often come to associate with other group members outside the NA group setting. As peer relationships form, the Newcomers' recovery behavior may be dually reinforced, first by acceptance into the group and, second, by acceptance into

mutual relationships. Therefore, Newcomers identify and compare themselves not just with the NA group but also with other recovering addicts who come into their lives as extensions of the NA group.

Reference groups/others that are viewed as social objects may also be empirical or nonempirical (Vernon 1973). An empirical reference (ER) is used to recognize physical objects or aspects of the empirical world while a nonempirical referent (NER) does not have to be physically present to have an existence or a symbolic substance. Simply put, NA members use the group as an ER while attending group meetings or group functions; however, once group norms are internalized and a recovery identity is formed, NA members can imagine how the NA group as a NER would react if present to their behavior.

Reisman (1976) postulates that individuals are affected by reference others on the basis of whether they themselves are inner-directed or other-directed. For inner-directed individuals those closest to them become the source of reference for acceptance, comparison, and perspective. These reference others are, in most cases, parents, siblings, and close friends. However, for other-directed individuals, the source of reference may be found in those whose presence occurs often, but with whom they are not intimate. These reference others may be coworkers,

teachers, peers, and classmate. Reisman further maintains that, as individuals grow older, they shift from inner-directedness to other-directedness such that a shift also occurs in the reference others to whose perspective they adhere.

To summarize, reference others serve normative and comparative functions for the individual as well as offer perspectives from which the individual views the social world (Kelly 1968; Shibutani 1986; Schmitt 1972). Reference others may also have an empirical or non-empirical presence (Vernon 1973). This attention may be further affected by whether the individual is inner-directed or other-directed in his or her choice of reference others (Reisman 1976).

Many different facets of reference others have been discussed, and all are equally vital to the intended purpose of this project. Whereas most theoretical discussions involving reference others have been in the context of reference others as agents of socialization, this study looks more specifically at reference others as a "data source" to which Newcomers refer for their recovery process. I am unaware of other research that has attempted to refine reference theory in such a manner.

Social Worlds and Reference Agents

The relationship between social worlds and reference agents has not been thoroughly examined, and, though touched

upon in this study, will not be adequately addressed herein. However, within the context of NA reference agents supply the boundaries that maintain the integrity of that social world, keeping it intact. NA is designed to be a source of reference for recovering addicts. If not for that purpose, the social world of NA would not exist. Therefore, the perpetual transitioning of referencing groups and others to attain and maintain sobriety within NA on the local, regional, and world scales supplies the basis for the continuation of NA as a social world.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is an offshoot of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a Twelve Step treatment program developed in 1935 as a base of support for recovering alcoholics (Alcoholics Anonymous 2004). NA was formed as a separate recovery entity in Los Angeles, California when six AA members decided to leave their AA group and begin a support system for abusers who used narcotics instead of or in addition to alcohol (Wells 1987). NA differs from AA in at least two fundamental ways. First, NA holds that alcohol is one of multiple substances that may be abused rather than the primary substance of misuse. Second, NA literature reflects addiction as a disease rather than as a dysfunction.

Today's NA

Since its inception in 1953, NA has seen progressive growth (Wells 1987). Beginning in the early 1970s, NA began to spread from California to other major cities in the United States (Narcotics Anonymous World... 2004). NA meetings began in Australia around this time and progressively spread to other countries as well. As of 1978

approximately 200 groups were officially registered to hold NA meetings in three different countries. Approximately one dozen different countries were registered in 1983. According to the Narcotics Anonymous World Service Organization's Annual Report for August 2002, at least 19,724 groups hold 30,303 meetings in 106 countries worldwide.

NA Members

Members of NA represent a vast degree of demographic heterogeneity. People from all walks of life come together in the rooms. Men and women, young and old, upper and lower class, all unite for a common cause--the struggle against addiction. In 1998 a survey of the NA World Convention was taken that represented approximately 34% of the addicts in attendance. The results of that survey estimated the following demographic representation:

- The ratio of men to women in attendance was 56% to 44%.
- Forty percent of the survey participants were 31 to 40 years old. In the other age categories 32% were 41 to 50 years old, 16% were 21 to 30 years old, 8% were older than 51 years, and 4% were less than 20 years old.
- Seventy percent of the survey participants categorized themselves as Caucasian. In the other ethnicity categories 14% were categorized as African-American, 9% were categorized as Hispanic, and 7% were categorized as "Other."
- The majority of survey participants (75%) were employed on a full-time basis. Eleven percent responded as being employed on a part-time basis, 6% responded as being unemployed, 4% responded as being disabled, 3% responded as being homemakers, and 1% responded as being retired.

- The average recovery time represented by the survey participants was 7.2 years with a range of less than one year to 37 years of clean time.

The Steps: How It Works

The Twelve Steps were written as a guide for the recovering addict (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1991). Originally written by the founders of AA, "the Steps," as they are referred to by the addicts in the meetings I observed and by the respondents whom I interviewed, have been adapted to include NA-specific verbiage. Through informal discussions with my key informant and with other addicts I have learned that completing the Steps is similar to the process of guided journaling. Once one or more of the Steps is completed, the personal responses are then shared privately between the addict and his or her sponsor. The intimacy of this type of interpersonal discourse may help to explain the sacred nature of the sponsor-sponsee relationship. The Twelve Steps on which NA is based include the following concepts:

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

(Narcotics Anonymous World... 1976, p. 2)

The Traditions: Why They Work

The Twelve Steps are coupled with the Twelve Traditions of NA serving as guidelines for the norms and behaviors of NA members and groups. According to the unofficial publication, *The N.A. Way of Life* (1991), the Twelve Traditions define the customs that have developed over time that dictate the expectations for NA groups and members.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
 6. NA groups never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
 7. Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
 8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
 9. NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
 10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
 11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.
- (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1976, p. 3)

Sheila, a recovering addict with five years clean, illustrated the difference between the Steps and the Traditions when she described their purpose.

Oh, I think the purpose of the steps is to get to know who you really are because the whole time that you are using you really don't know who you are, and you're stuffing down all these feelings and thoughts. And, they help you to consider who you are, why you do the things you do, what you need to do different. They also help you to have a relationship with your higher power and help you to carry that message out.

I see the traditions as being really important because without them I don't think NA could exist. I mean it teaches us that you only have to have the desire to be a member. I mean, you don't have any certain social status; you don't have to be worse off than someone else. I think that it

teaches us that anyone can join who wants to do something different. It also teaches us that unity is very important and that without that we can't really recover, and it teaches us that it's really important, you know the anonymity part because some people in there are professionals. And, if you go out and say you saw this person at an NA meeting last night and maybe their employer doesn't realize they're in recovery or some people are real closed minded about that and may jeopardize their career, and it teaches us to amend our personalities and get along with each other.

Spiritual Principles: When It Works

Together the Steps and the Traditions form the spiritual principles of NA (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1991). Spiritual principles represent the means through which recovering addicts cannot only attain and maintain successful recovery, but also attain peace of mind and success in other areas of their lives such as family and careers. Like the Steps and the Traditions, twelve concepts shape the spiritual principles underlying the belief system of NA.

1. Hope
2. Surrender
3. Acceptance
4. Honesty
5. Openmindedness
6. Willingness
7. Faith
8. Tolerance
9. Patience
10. Humility
11. Unconditional Love
12. Sharing and Caring

Sponsorship

The concept of sponsorship is key to the recovery

process. A form of one-on-one mentoring between two recovering addicts, sponsorship represents the level of intimacy and connection that can be achieved via participation in NA. NA encourages sponsorship for all recovering addicts (Narcotics Anonymous World... 2004). Sponsors and sponsees meet on a regular basis and review step work as well as difficult life situations sponsees experience. Sponsors teach sponsees about confronting the world by living a clean lifestyle. Sponsors also provide suggestions for coping with "life on life's terms." Few guidelines exist for sponsors; however, one rule is generally recognized and followed: men sponsor men, and women sponsor women.

Newcomers

As previously mentioned in earlier chapters, Newcomers are those addicts who are new to NA. However, Newcomers are also those addicts who are continually working on building their clean time. As a key informant stated, an addict continues to be a Newcomer until his or her clean time equals his or her using time. Other respondents view the concept of Newcomers in different ways such as Alexander, 4 years clean, who said, " I'm still a Newcomer right now. I will be considered a Newcomer until I've got five years."

Whereas Alexander viewed the gap between being a Newcomer and becoming an Oldtimer as a definitive period of

five years, Kevin, an addict with five years clean, provided the following perspective on Newcomers:

If I was sitting at a meeting after five years and everyone else had less time, like 30, 60 days, they might think I was an Oldtimer, or at least someone would. But the average for meetings around here seems to be as far as multiple years as 7, 25, 12 years. Like, you've got somebody like Bob. B. come in from California has, like, he has been coming since 1961 and has been clean ever since, like, 40 years. He may look at others with 18 years as Newcomers. I think it's all perception.

Oldtimers

Although some dissension exists regarding when someone becomes an Oldtimer, NA literature concretely refers to the concept of Oldtimers (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1988, 1999, 2004). Oldtimers are more specifically characterized as those addicts with a substantial amount of clean time who offer their experience, strength, and hope to Newcomers. Oldtimers are responsible for maintaining the organization of NA at the local, regional, and world levels. They are the stabilizing force of NA.

Homegroup Affiliation

The organizational structure of NA includes the World Service Organization at the highest level; regional service organizations at the regional level; and area service committees, all of which serve organized home groups at the local level (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1999). A home group is defined as a core group of NA members who meet on

regularly scheduled days and times every week. Home group affiliation is an integral aspect of committing oneself to NA and, ultimately, to one's own recovery process.

Service Work

Service work is the most active form of commitment to NA. The concept of service work was designed to give addicts a concrete means of experiencing the spiritual principles of NA (Narcotics Anonymous World... 1988, 1999, 2004). Service work allows recovering addicts the opportunity to "practice" helping others within NA so that they can learn how to coexist within communities outside NA.

Argot

As mentioned previously in Chapter II, an important aspect of every social world is culturally-specific language recognized and shared by its participants--argot. Within the social world of NA, argot is rich and intricately woven throughout every form of communication. Argot is a key element of group cohesion and of subsequent identity transformation. Indeed, Rafalovich (1999) surmised that the use of NA narrative based primarily upon a discourse using context-specific argot was the true foundation of identity transformation for recovering addicts.

Alexander, a recovering addict with four years clean, discussed the use of common aphorisms within the social world of NA during a follow-up interview. He stated,

Yeah, just like anything else it [NA-specific language] makes you feel different. The biggest kick out of the language that I get is that people that I've never met before, upon meeting them in a context outside recovery or outside the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous or even Alcoholics Anonymous, I can listen to the way they speak and I can pick certain context clues in their speech, and I'll go, "Do you go to meetings?" Nine out of ten times they'll say, "Yeah. How did you know?" And, I'll say, "Well, I hear you say this and it just clued me in that you went to meetings." I guess quote unquote it's a "secret code" for all us who practice the 12 Steps and go to meetings.

Literature

The message of NA is spread throughout the world in its many forms of organizational literature. From books to pamphlets, from websites to newspaper ads, information about meetings and living substance-free can be found in a variety of forms and locations. NA can attribute its popularity and high membership rates to its prolific efforts to reach addicts through various forms of media.

Previous Research

NA offers itself up as a guide to the recovering addicts who wish to navigate the course or the process of recovery. The word *process* implies a series of stages or steps through which one must go to achieve a desired goal. NA designates "steps" that must be "worked" to recover from the disease of addiction. In a more sociological light, however, the social world of the NA group offers a process of relabeling oneself as a recovering drug addict. How does one make the transition from active addiction to non-

addiction? How does one make the transition from being a Newcomer to becoming an Oldtimer?

In his classic sociological study of marijuana use, Howard Becker (1973) stated that individuals who used marijuana became users through their associations and experiences with other marijuana users. Becker found that individuals learned how to become marijuana users through a process whereby three essential steps had to occur. First, novice marijuana users had to learn how to effectively "use" marijuana. They had to learn via the instruction of practiced users how to take in and hold the marijuana smoke to achieve the high. Second, Becker noted that novices had to learn to identify the specific physical, mental, and emotional sensations that were the direct effects of marijuana use. The third fundamental step in the process of becoming a marijuana user involved the novice users perceiving the sensations caused by the drug as pleasurable. This step was particularly vital as the experience of a "bad high" or "trip" could deter the novice from continuing using marijuana.

Just as learning to use drugs such as marijuana is facilitated by the mentorship and the shared experiences of practiced users, learning how to recover from drug use is also a process that must be fostered by those who are practiced recoverers. Denzin's (1993, pp.14-15) evaluation

of the recovery process of alcoholics who were members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) asserted that three stages were essential for the inception of the "AA self" to occur. The first stage was called the "Preparatory Stage" wherein Newcomers began to imitate the statements, attitudes, and behaviors of other practiced AA members. During this initial stage minimal understanding of the process of AA-guided recovery may be sustained by the novice who does not yet associate his or her sense of self with being a member of AA.

The second stage was the "Interactional Stage" wherein the novice began to identify strongly and take on the attitudes and behaviors of specific members of the AA group. By this stage the novice may have a sponsor and a sponsor family with whom he or she can closely identify; however, the novice recoverer may continue in an overarching concern for his or her individual sense of self over the AA group collective. Denzin (1993) further noted that during this second stage the learning of argot used in the social world of AA may facilitate the internalization of attitudes that support a transition in the novice's concept of self.

The last stage Denzin offered was the "Participatory Stage" that signified the falling away of egocentrism and the taking on of a full identification of the self as an AA member. No longer a novice, the now-participating AA member

takes on the generalized attitude of the collective AA group.

More contemporary studies have examined the contribution of "shared narratives" to concepts such as identity transformation and group cohesiveness in the context of twelve-step treatment organizations such as AA and NA (Arminen 1991; Cain 1991; Dilts, Clark, and Harmon 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, and Espton 1997; Rafalovich 1999; Rappaport 1998; Steffen 1997). Rafalovich (1999) provided an extensive explanation of the process of taking on the identity of a recovering addict. Rafalovich's theory is grounded in the idea that NA group members collectively form a "normative narrative community" wherein the sharing of life stories draws members closer together because of similar addiction experiences. Rafalovich asserted that a "generic life story" can be found underlying each NA member's telling of his or her addiction experience, and that generic life story includes three parts: "...life before drugs; life during drug use; life after discovering Narcotics Anonymous, or the 'recovery' segment." (1999, p. 134) This narrative becomes the foundation for the identity transformation required for becoming a recovering addict. As Rafalovich stated, "These moments of perceived commonality are the building blocks of identity

transformation, rooted within an understanding of a sameness of circumstance." (p. 136)

Rafalovich further extrapolated that the process of identity transformation evident throughout the generic life story included three primary components:

1. *Leveling*. Leveling is the process whereby all NA members become viewed as equal because all members are affected by the disease of addiction.
2. *Reflecting*. Reflecting refers to the process by which recovering addicts begin to compare, or mirror, their recovery identity to that of other NA members instead of nonaddicts. Rafalovich pointed out that reflecting is also an effort to distinguish the social world of recovering addicts from that of recovering alcoholics.
3. *Working*. Working is the process of fully subscribing to the principles of NA to the extent that a recovering addict is not only participating in NA but also beginning to transmit the message of NA to others sincerely.

Rafalovich also discussed the process of *false working* whereby recovering addicts closely follow the tenets of NA without yet having a full understanding of or appreciation for the NA message. A common aphorism that exemplifies the technique of false working is,

"Fake it 'til you make it," implying that imitation of active recovery behavior is better than no recovery behavior at all.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

As stated in the introduction, I initiated this study because I was interested in finding out how recovering addicts attain and maintain sobriety and how they make the transition from Newcomer to Oldtimer. I was also interested in the formation of reference other relationships with NA peers that form as extensions of the reference group. How do Newcomers so quickly become integrated into the social world of NA? How significantly does reference other affiliation with NA peers affect the process of integration into that social world?

I implemented a primarily qualitative approach to gather data rich in detail. Quantitative methods tend to be highly generalizable, whereas qualitative methods focus on very specific settings and participants so as to supply texture to the interactions that are being described by the researcher (Berg 1998; Singleton and Straits 1999). By gathering data on NA using qualitative methods, I was able to evaluate group dynamics, NA peer interaction, and

individual attitudes and behaviors in a manner that was more natural and less invasive.

Sample Design and Measurement

Participant observation was the primary research tool used for this study. Participant observation is a qualitative research method whereby the researcher becomes a participant of a social world in an effort to learn more about that subsection of society. Participant observers may be known or unknown to the people who interact within the setting of interest, or they may be fully active in the setting as opposed to passively observing interactions. During this study I was semipassive in that I joined the group circle of NA but did not share personal information during the meetings. I participated in group activities such as shared readings, fellowship handshakes and hugs, and recitation of group sayings such as the Serenity Prayer.

I attended NA meetings that occurred on different days and in two different locations. I attended group meetings on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday that occurred at 7:30 p.m. I entered the meeting under the guise of being a support base for a friend, who was my key informant. The meetings lasted one to two hours, during which time I did not openly take notes or leave the room to take notes due to the sensitive and deeply private nature of the disclosures that

individuals shared. Upon leaving the meetings, I took notes in my car while watching the smokers interact.

I was assisted in gaining access to the NA meetings and in gaining a better understanding of observed behavior and NA-specific narrative by a primary key informant. In addition, I conducted informal interviews outside the NA meeting setting. I was not able to tape record these sessions; however, more formal in-depth interviewing was employed as a secondary research tool for this project using a semistructured formal interview technique. Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents. For qualitative research, interviews usually continue until consistent patterns begin emerging from the data; therefore, I initially targeted up to 15 respondent interviews. I completed 13 interviews, and, perhaps due to the consistent message of NA, could see that recurring patterns were evidenced by the data.

Data Compilation and Analysis

Handwritten notes were transferred and expanded on a computerized running data log maintained for the ease of additions and corrections. The data were then entered into a transcription and coding program. The focus of the data coding was to identify the reference behaviors between Newcomers and Oldtimers.

Data coding is a method of case analysis that allows the researcher to analyze data by separating it into categories chosen by the researcher (Berg 1998, pp. 223-41). The categories, which will be discussed in Chapters V and VI, emerged from the data and were the foundation for the findings of the research. Coding and sorting the data into categories facilitated identifying and recognizing emergent patterns.

I used a tape recorder with a counter so that pivotal quotes could be numbered and logged into the data file in addition to the participant observation data. The interview data were systematically transcribed into a running data log in the same fashion described for the participant observation data.

Respondent Information

The respondents who participated in this study represent different age groups, varied ethnicity, and diverse lifestyles. Of the 13 respondents seven were men, and six were women. Seven respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30, and five respondents were between the ages of 31 and 45. Although persons of varying racial heritage were approached for formal interviews, 12 of the respondents were Caucasian and one was African-American. Five were married, five were parents, and eight were employed on a full-time basis. The average amount of clean time represented by this

sample was 5.08 years with a range of six months to 20 years clean. All respondents were members of home groups located in the same city as the university in which this study took place.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The results of this study provide insight into the social process of becoming a recovering addict. Six discernable stages of identity transformation can be drawn from observations and the narratives provided by the 13 respondents. Each stage is defined by three core aspects of the social referencing process:

1. Action. The concept of action refers to the recovery-specific behaviors of individual recovering addicts.
2. Time. The concept of time refers to the temporal transition period that it takes to move through the stages of identity transformation as well as the points in time when the behaviors indicative of each stage begin to manifest.
3. Structural Implications. The concept of structural implications refers to the programmatic infrastructure of NA that is accessible to recovering addicts through formal organization, formalized literature, and both formal (group meetings) and informal (recovery-based peer

interaction) communication. This concept suggests that the individual actions of Newcomers as well as the timing of each of the stages simultaneously supply structural aspects of NA and are reciprocally affected by the structural aspects that are created.

These three aspects of the social referencing process that define the stages of becoming a recovering addict within the NA social world share a dialectical relationship with one another. That is, all three occur simultaneously and reciprocally shape the nature of each other.

Although based on a small sample of respondents, the following six stages were also evident during formal group meetings that I attended as part of the participant observation stage of the study as well as informal discussions with group members who chose not to be formally interviewed. Table 1 delineates the six stages.

Stage One: Coming In

Stage one, "Coming In," is often perfunctory, given the life circumstances such as court orders or inpatient treatment that result in an addict entering the rooms for the first time. Both recovering addicts and NA literature refer to the concept of "hitting bottom" when referring to entry into the social world of NA. Based upon participant observations and respondent interviews, the process of

Table 1. Six stages of social referencing as defined by the concepts of action, time, and structure.

Stages	Action	Time	Structure
Coming In	Initial participation in NA	Onset of sobriety efforts 1-4 weeks	"The Newcomer is the most important person at any meeting because we can only keep what we have by giving it away" NA Basic Text, p. 7
Becoming Familiar	Informal, inconsistent participation versus attendance	First 1 to 3 months of sobriety efforts	Getting a sponsor Initiating Step work
Taking on the Role	Consistent participation & attendance Clearer understanding of NA narrative and literature	First 3 to 6 months of sobriety efforts	Regular contact with sponsor Beginning to incorporate spiritual principles as learned through step work Introduction to and participation in service work and NA functions
Investing	Full participation & regular attendance Homegroup affiliation Normative use of argot Familiarity with NA literature	First 6 to 9 months of sobriety efforts	Regular contact with sponsor Normative incorporation of spiritual principles Commitment to scheduled service activities and functions Taking on sponsees
Transforming	Same as Investing Recruitment of Newcomers	First 9 to 12 months of sobriety efforts	Same as Investing Completion of or commitment to completion of steps
Grounding	Same as Transforming Secure in recovery identity Solidification of NA principles and beliefs Sponsor tree affiliation Sense of becoming an experience NA member (Oldtimer)	One to multiple years of sobriety	Same as Transforming Stabilize home group meetings Ensure meetings are Newcomer-friendly Participation in formal organization of NA at multiple levels of tiered structure (local, regional, state, and/or world) Participation in locally/regionally-recognized network of established NA members

hitting bottom can be emotionally and physically painful. During the meetings I observed multiple recovering addicts sharing about losing everything and everyone dear to them-- their health, their homes, their jobs, and their spouses and children. Often the severity of loss resulted in hitting bottom. Alexander, an addict with four years clean, supplied an ample description of hitting bottom:

You can hit bottom and [you] can hit bottom clean, and you can hit bottom in your addiction. It's simply that moment of clarity I was talking about before the end result. The moment of clarity is the end result of hitting bottom to where you've gone the lowest you can go, and the only way you can go is up. When you have to change what you are doing otherwise you're going to self-destruct.

Simon, an addict with 16 years clean, also described his personal experience of hitting bottom:

I remember being in the jail cell, the new jail, and they did unusual things, like have me by myself. Because usually they would put you in the drunk tank. You were in there with the drunks, and for some reason this one time, this was the last time I was in jail. I was in that jail cell by myself, and I never understood why that happened because it was very odd for me to be in there by myself. But I remember thinking how horrible my life was, and I can't believe that I was back up there again, and this is too terrible, and my mother's going to die. They are going to call my parents, and they're not going to believe this and all this different stuff. I was crying and wanting them to let me out and I won't do it again and then there was this moment where it was like a movie projection on this one concrete wall in there. I was sitting there all curled up, and I looked at this wall, ...there was this movie of my life up until this moment. It was horrible. All the things that I had done. All the drugs, all the people, all the horrible, humiliating, disgusting things that had happened and I had done

and had been done to me. Then it kind of showed that, if I continued the way that I was going, I was going to die. There was absolutely no doubt about it. If I left that cell and continued the way I was going, that I would be dead before 26. And then it showed another scene, or reel or something, that if I choose a different path when I left that cell, then I could possibly live longer and have a much better, happier life. And I said this is not real; this is not happening. I'm not telling anybody. But, of course, that's when I got out, and the judge gave me the option of going back to the jail cell or going to treatment, and I said well, I just had this unsolicited movie, and I think I'll go to treatment. So, that's what I ended up doing.

Regardless of the cause for entering the rooms, "Coming In" is defined by specific action, time frames, and NA-specific structural implications. The NA Basic Text (1988, p. 1) states, "The Newcomer is the most important person at any meeting because we can only keep what we have by giving it away." Every respondent who was interviewed for this study mirrored that sentiment, such as Maggie who said,

Most people come in with their first day clean, or they have their first day clean when they get in there so I was a suffering addict when I came in even though I had two years clean. I feel like that message, the purpose is to carry the message to addicts who are still suffering... People who are still struggling to staying clean, people who are struggling on how to live and carrying that message may be as simple as going up and hugging somebody and letting them know that you care about them or maybe as complex as sitting them through the night so they don't get high. It depends.

Those individuals who are new to the meetings are easily recognizable to recovering addicts with established clean time. Because I have professional experience working

with recovering addicts, these individuals were recognizable to me as well, but even more so as I attended more meetings and became more familiar with normative behavior. Newcomers sat uncomfortably in their chairs and looked down. They often had tight posture with their arms crossed and their bodies drawn inward, as if their inner selves were curled into a fetal position. Sometimes I would see a new face and notice the sweating and the shaking characteristic of withdrawal. The one behavior that I never failed to see, however, was the welcoming sentiments, handshakes, and hugs that were given to these new faces by the members of the groups. And, in response, I always saw relief on these Newcomers' faces. Gloria, an addict with more than fifteen years of recovery time, shared her experience with coming into NA.

Q: How long did it take you to feel comfortable attending a meeting?

A: Feel comfortable, huh? I think I felt pretty comfortable during that first meeting [and] from that point on. Now, as far as being able to sit still, they would have to go get my coffee because I shook so bad that I would shake the coffee out on top of them. Physically comfortable I wasn't for a long time, but emotionally comfortable I was about half way through the meeting. I was just real lucky that way.

By the point of transition into Stage Two, Newcomers have been attending meetings for one to four weeks. They are more familiar with meeting protocol, such as sharing in readings as requested and initiating and/or accepting

affection in the forms of handshakes and hugs. The expectation is that they are to listen and learn from experienced members; therefore, sharing during the meeting is not yet an appropriate action in which the Newcomer may engage.

Stage Two: Becoming Familiar

Stage Two, "Becoming Familiar," describes the point at which a Newcomer is beginning to see how the pieces of the NA social world connect to one another. He or she has an elementary understanding of basic NA concepts such as clean time and "Just for Today" as well as NA meeting protocol and normative expectations. Alexander described the concepts of clean time and "Just for Today" in the following manner:

Clean time is just the amount of time you have between now and the last time you used.. ['Just for Today']-- that's a phrase that comes out of the literature. It simply means, ...it's Narcotics Anonymous version of one day at a time that we got from AA. It just means that just for today I don't have to use again no matter what. So, if I live in the here and now, I don't have to worry about all the crazy stuff I did yesterday in my active addiction, and I don't have to worry about the future. I can just stay in today, just for today.

During Stage Two, a critical difference exists between meeting participation and attendance. The Newcomer that has just "come in" may choose to be present for meetings, but may not yet feel comfortable participating in the meetings; therefore, participation during meetings may be informal and inconsistent. The Newcomer may also ask a seasoned NA

member to provide sponsorship as well as initiate service work. To draw parallels between Becker's (1973) and Denzin's (1993) stages of identity formation, Stage One through Stage Two characterize the initiation of social referencing that Newcomers use to both effectively learn how to "use" recovery as well as imitate the statements, attitudes, and behaviors of other practiced NA members. Although Newcomers have minimal understanding of the process of NA-guided recovery, they have not yet incorporated the sense of being an NA-member into their core identity.

Two of the respondents spoke specifically about becoming familiar and comfortable with their participation in NA. Simon, an addict with 16 years clean, stated,

It was very nice to have those familiar people, get to know them, and I began to feel more. About 60 days or so, 60 to 90 days. I was still fairly new but the sponsor that I had at the time took me under his wing, significantly so, and introduced me to Narcotics Anonymous principles, the Twelve Step mending and all that stuff.

Another addict, Lori, with more than a year clean also talked about becoming familiar with NA.

Q: Do you know how long it took you to feel comfortable going to meetings?

A: Oh, goodness. I guess about two or three months.

Q: Why do you think it took so long?

A: I was the type of person that I didn't want to talk about how I felt. I kept it all inside, and I know that the people in meetings, they share about how they feel, and I didn't want to have to

have any part of it at first. I just wanted to listen and get out of there. Then I got to hearing some people really talk about what they're going through, really break down about it, like cry or get upset, whatever. And, then I thought, you know, if they've got the nerve to do, then I should have the nerve to do it. So, finally one day I was telling them, "My name is Lori and I'm an addict, and this is what I'm going through," and I've cried, and from then on I was okay.

Stage Two occurs between the first and third month of NA affiliation. Individual action that characterizes Stage Two includes more consistent meeting attendance, but informal and/or inconsistent participation. For example, Newcomers may begin to attend meetings more frequently, and may even have a set meeting schedule at this point. However, participation during the meeting in the forms of sharing personal narratives or quoting aphorisms or recognized sentiments along with the group (such as the Serenity Prayer) may be lacking in consistency. Normative expectations for the Newcomer that have structural implications include getting a sponsor and initiating step work. Ken, an addict with one year clean, discussed how he came to understand "the deal."

A: Do you know what the deal is?

Q: What's the deal?

A: You pray. You study. You write. You share and you get raw in service.

Q: How do you know that's the deal?

A: Because people with long term clean time, that's what they do.

Q: And, how did you learn that?

A: Um..., through experience and through study and through a sponsor. ...He tells me that's the deal and his sponsor with 18 years tells me that's the deal.

Stage Three: Taking on the Role

Stage Three, "Taking on the Role," is intentionally Meadian in its connotation. George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed that the process of identity formation involved the ability to perceive oneself as one imagines being seen by generalized others during social interactions--as both subject and object simultaneously. As Mead explained,

Only in so far as he [sic] takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he [sic] belongs toward the organized, cooperative social activity or set of such activities in which that group is engaged, does he [sic] develop a complete self. (p. 151)

Therefore, in order for the Newcomer to begin to take on a recovery identity, he or she must first be able to see himself or herself as a recovering addict from the vantage-point of the NA group as a generalized entity. Rafalovich's (1999) reference to the aphorism, "Fake it 'til you make it" is analogous to the social referencing process described in Stage Three. Newcomers may begin to take on normative NA behavior because that is their perception of what others in the program expect of them. In contrast to Rafalovich's assertions regarding NA narrative as the underlying agent of

identity transformation, this study indicates that narrative is one of multiple components of social referencing that facilitates the process of becoming a recovering addict.

By the onset of Stage Three the Newcomer has gained a clearer understanding of NA narrative and literature during his or her participation in NA. He or she is beginning to interact with other group members in a more normative fashion and is also beginning to adopt NA-specific argot as a fundamental part of communication. The Newcomer not only attends NA meetings but is beginning to participate by sharing his or her life experiences during the meetings or asking for the advice of the group for coping with difficult life situations.

The normative behavior inherent in the structural implications of NA promotes regular contact with a Newcomer's sponsor and an introduction to and participation in service work and NA social functions. Newcomers are also beginning to incorporate spiritual principles as learned through step work in areas of their lives outside the NA social world. April, an addict with five years clean, discussed her service work participation.

A: I do what is called H & I which is Hospitals and Institutions, and it's a lot like addicts of NA, where we go to treatment facilities and jails. Where people can't get out to NA meetings and I go to [a local treatment facility] which is an adolescent psychiatric hospital every other week and take a meeting out there.

Q: Why do you do service work?

A: I do service work because, ...for two reasons: one, it's because I've been taught that I need to give back freely what has been given to me and it also helps me to stay clean.

Q: How does it help you to stay clean?

A: Well, because, number one, of the commitment that I made, and also when I go in I still see people in the throws of active addiction or struggling to stay clean. It lets me remember where I came from, and It helps me realize I don't want to go back.

Stage Four: Investing

The Newcomer is a fully participating member of NA by the onset of Stage Four, "Investing." He or she attends multiple meetings each week and has chosen a home group for primary NA-membership affiliation. Selecting a home group seemed to be a critical aspect of Stage Four because the respondents were very clear about the reasons each of them chose the home group to which they committed themselves. April provides an example of the process of home group selection.

It was the meeting that was kind of small and intimate, and it was a "home" [emphasis on the word home made by April] group as well, like, as far as people attending, meetings that was small and intimate. But also the group members themselves--there were just literally a handful, and they all had much more years of clean time. And, when they shared, it wasn't just some crazy crap, you know, it was, like, sincere emotions, solutions and problems. And I just felt comfortable there, and it was a convenient time, and it worked for me so I just chose it because of that.

The use of argot and other forms of NA-specific discourse are also becoming a natural part of everyday interaction both inside and outside the group setting, and the Newcomer has formed a genuine familiarity with NA literature and normative expectations. Simon, 16 years clean, shared,

There are five things that they always said were important, and I don't always get these, but one of them was go to meets, call your sponsor, work the Steps, pray and get involved in service activities, and I can't believe I did it. Okay, and so those were the five things that they would ask you to do; and if you did those things and you did those on a regular basis, then you would stay clean. So, why do part? ...They told us that we had to take our lives, which, such as they were, and try to adapt Narcotics Anonymous to that life. ...We need to adapt our lives to Narcotics Anonymous so those five things were suggested that you do; and if you do those, find a balance and do those five things, you should be able to stay clean and have a successful life.

Stage Four is also characterized by several structural aspects. Regular contact between the Newcomer and his or her sponsor is encouraged, and normative incorporation of spiritual principles is now apparent in the active participation of the Newcomer in NA. NA literature also discusses the importance of forming a commitment to service activities. During Stage Four the Newcomer may begin taking on sponsees. According to informal interviews and observations made during meetings, there are at least two philosophies about the appropriate time for Newcomers to take on sponsees. One philosophy stipulates that Newcomers must have at least six months clean before taking on

sponsees. The second philosophy is that Newcomers should complete working the Twelve Steps before sponsoring other Newcomers. Because the speed at which Newcomers complete the Steps varies from person to person, the most accepted philosophy regarding taking on sponsees is the six-month stipulation. Nevertheless, taking on sponsees does not yet imply that Newcomers have completed the transition to becoming Oldtimers.

Stage Five: Transforming

As described within the "Investing Stage," Stage Five, "Transforming," continues to involve increasing participation in the social world of NA. Of the 13 respondents included in this study nine had more than one year clean; therefore, these nine individuals could share their experiences that characterize Stage Five as well as Stage Six. Stage Five occurred between nine and twelve months of NA affiliation. The Newcomer has completed or is committed to completing the 12 Steps by this point and has taken on sponsees. The Newcomer is also committed to service work and participates regularly in NA functions and activities that occur outside NA meetings. He or she actively recruits other Newcomers by welcoming new people they see at meetings and functions and by disseminating the message of NA to those whom they recognize as in need of recovery support.

Both Denzin (1993) and Rafalovich (1999) discussed aspects of identity transformation that are analogous to Stage Four. Denzin described his second stage, the "Interactional Stage," as one wherein Newcomers begin to take on the attitudes and behaviors of specific group members, and, like Rafalovich, asserts that the use of argot, or NA narrative, facilitates the internalization of attitudes that support a transition in the concept of self. Rafalovich's discussion of "Working" adds that the Newcomer's use of NA narrative serves to bolster the sincerity of Newcomer participation. While both discussions form a foundation for describing the process of identity formation as it relates to individual action, neither firmly examines the structural implications for the timing of social referencing during the "Transforming Stage."

Stage Six: Grounding

Stage Six, "Grounding," marks the point at which recovering addicts become secure in their recovery identity. Their belief in NA principles has been solidified, and their normative incorporation of NA-specific narrative is now a fundamental aspect of their core personality. The Newcomer may have a sense that he or she is becoming a veteran recovering addict. While views on the process of making the transition from a Newcomer to an Oldtimer varied among the 13 respondents, 12 of the 13 respondents shared the feeling

that they had experience, strength, and hope to offer to other Newcomers. Simon, a 16-year veteran, aptly stated his experience as being perceived as an Oldtimer.

I don't want to be an Oldtimer, but my sponsor says that I'm an Oldtimer now, and that I need to accept this. ...It's so hard for people to stay clean. It's funny, if you come around for a long time and watch, get to see, how there's like a, ...a whole lot of people that have between a year and a day. Like, it's really heavy here, and, then, you'll have people that go, two-year bunch, and three-year bunch, and five years and six and seven, then ten. But, then, when you get past that you start getting into high double digits, in higher double digits, ten seems to be, ...about 15, odd.. You tend to feel that when you want someone to stand up that has the most time, if you're in a small group, it's you all of a sudden. And, you're like where did all these other people go that were locked in with you? Where are they now? Why, all of a sudden am I the oldest one in this room? And, it's just that reputation that people tend to want to latch onto. Not the quality of my life, but the quality of time I have spent there and that doesn't necessarily mean anything.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The social world of NA is highly dependent upon the power of reference agents. While active addiction is an individualized experience for all addicts, NA offers a highly systematized, structured program that relies heavily upon mentorship and reference-other affiliation. Newcomers look to Oldtimers to define the norms and the boundaries for their recovery. Oldtimers look to Newcomers to give substance and validity to this social world in which they are so grounded. All of the 13 individuals who were interviewed stated that their drug use was learned through referencing others just as their recovery experiences utilize the group as a source of reference. Simon, 16 years clean, provided an interesting perspective of this process of identity transformation.

Well, I can see that [transformation] happen in a lot of different ways. When you've been around a while and you can see a variety of people come through and then they have abstained. Some come in and they just start talking from the moment they walk in the door and talk constantly. They talk at every meeting. They're always talking. If there are any announcements to be made, they've got three or four. Usually they aren't there very

long. You won't see them for a while, maybe a year or two even. But then, something happens like that, and then they're not prepped to handle it because they've spent more time talking than listening and learning. Through some of the guys I've sponsored, if I sponsor a guy like that, the first suggestion that I give him is to shut up, stop talking. You don't get to talk anymore. If you need to talk, you'll call me and talk to me on the phone, but don't talk at the meetings. But there are some people who can almost slide in under the radar. They don't say anything and you almost wouldn't notice them, but they're soaking it up. I've been around long enough now where if you pay attention you can almost see them. The ones who don't say anything, and if they do say anything, it might be two words, like, "Hi. I'm an addict and I'm glad I'm here." That's it. But something happens to that one that don't seem to happen to the talkers or the ones that like to speak... There's a light that comes on and then you, all of a sudden, one day sitting in a meeting, and they will share, and, if you'll listen to them, they will sound so profound and almost that desire, hunger almost, because they see what is possible and they want it. They want that.

Transition from Addiction to Recovery

Making the transition from active addiction to recovery is not an easy task or an enjoyable one according to the actions and statements of the individuals attending the meetings that I observed as well as from the reports of the respondents. Being a Newcomer is not only difficult because of the overwhelming physical and emotional discomfort but also because of the sense of intimidation that many Newcomers initially feel when considering joining NA.

Q: Tell me about your first NA experience.

A: It was real scary, 'cause, there were just, like, all these people who were saying they were addicts,

and, like, it was just a whole different world for me. I did not even comprehend what was going on. (Brad, 57 days clean)

Getting to know individuals within the program is one way to access the social world of NA. Familiarity leads to broader understanding. During the conception and development of NA, the concept of sponsorship was created so that Newcomers would have a living bridge accessible to assist them in crossing over from the social world of active addiction to the social world of active recovery.

We always went to the person who had the best shit when we were on the streets, and I always tell others that we should do as much for ourselves while in recovery. Find the person with the best shit and ask him to be your sponsor. If you don't, well..., all I can say is, "See ya!" (anonymous speaker ending NA meeting addressing sponsorship)

Acceptance of NA

What is interesting is how willing many individuals are to resign control of their lives to the will of the program of NA when they have been "at the mercy" of substances for such extensive periods. They replace one "addiction" for another. Some recovering addicts seem more aware of their susceptibility than do others as being a Newcomer represents a period of vulnerability and openness to the ideas and structure of NA.

I have to hear all of this on a daily basis. Just shoot me. You know what I'm saying? Jeesh! I'm just tired of people saying, "You have to do this, this, this, this, and this." Jeesh, Louis! When

do you have time to, ...to be with your family? You know what I'm saying? Like, ...I don't know..."
(Eloise, 4 years clean)

Many people who do not have strong relationships with their family do come to see NA in a familial light that may further serve to explain NA affiliation as a powerful agent of reference. As I observed during the participant observation phase of this project, many individuals spoke openly about their broken families and their splintered relationships. Therefore, NA can be viewed as a very intimate and personal source of reference for recovering addicts.

Q: What or who has been most helpful to you during your recovery?

A: I think just having people I can be open with and share with and get love and give love to and just that connection between people who are part of the NA group and that, just, NA being that bond that ties us together. (Brad, 57 days clean)

Becoming a recovering drug addict may be very similar to Becker's (1973) social process of becoming an active substance abuser. One must reference the actions, statements, and belief systems of those around him or her to come to understand the nature of the social world he or she is entering. The Newcomer must also come to understand that recovery is pleasurable, and that pleasure is interpreted through sponsorship, home group affiliation, and NA-peer interaction both within and outside of the group setting.

All of these reference agents assist the Newcomer in interpreting recovery as a positive and worthwhile experience.

A New Paradigm for Describing the Stages toward Recovery

This study, while building upon pivotal aspects of Becker (1973), Denzin (1993), and Rafalovich's (1999) work, differs in at least three ways. First, all three seem to focus primarily on individual actions and interactions as foundations for their stages, whereas this study also examined the concepts of time and the structural implications of both action and time. Modeling, imitation, and mirroring are concepts that receive much discussion throughout Becker, Denzin, and Rafalovich's works. While the salience of these concepts to the social learning process is not being disputed, the primacy of imitative action as a social referencing process is.

Second, the use of argot, discourse and/or narrative seemed to underlie each of theorists' perspective as one, if not the only, primary dimension of identity transformation. This study recognized the significance of NA narrative as a powerful source of reference, but as only one of multiple sources of social referencing. The mentoring components inherent in sponsor-sponsee relationships, NA peer interaction, and the commitment to service work are prime

examples of highly influential reference agents. The structure of the NA organization as can be seen throughout the literature and the formalization of meetings also lends itself as a strong source of reference.

Third, all three theorists provided stage models that were general in scope. While multiple stages were discussed by each theorist, none of the stages were clearly defined, especially in regard to time elements. How long does it take for marijuana users to learn that using is pleasurable? Becker does not specify. At what point in his or her recovery does a member of AA enter Denzin's participatory stage? What types of recovery action have already occurred before a recovering addict enters Rafalovich's working phase? This study attempted to provide a more detailed model of identity transformation with strong emphasis on the specific aspects that marked each stage transition. Therefore, while this research recognized the contribution of past theory, it also attempted to expand upon past research in an effort to build a more grounded theory of the process of social referencing.

The power of reference agents as well as the strengths of a social world perspective seems to be underestimated in theory as well as in research. Separately each concept has a foundation of work on which to base grounded theory although past examinations of reference others and reference

groups seems to be dated. I propose that combining the two lines of reference theory into the concept of reference agents strengthens the overall perspective at a substantive level.

The relationship between reference agents and social worlds is also of significant interest. This study indicates that within the context of NA reference agents are imperative to maintaining the integrity of the social world of Narcotics Anonymous as a whole. Without Oldtimers, Newcomers would not be able to attain or maintain recovery. Without Newcomers, Oldtimers would not exist. The social referencing process was pivotal in the creation of the social world of NA as well as in its maintenance at every level of organization. Further research focusing on the relationship between these two sociological phenomena would be beneficial to both micro- and macro-level concerns.

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Demographic Information

1. How old are you?
2. What was the population of the town in which you were raised?
3. How far did you go in school?
4. What are the origins of your heritage?
5. Tell me about your family.
6. Do you work? What do you do? How long? Why that occupation?
7. Are you married? If yes, for how long? How many times?
8. Do you have any children? How many?

Substance Abuse History

9. How old were you when you first started using?
10. Why did you begin using substances?
11. What substances did you use? Why? How so?
12. Did anyone in your family use substances?
13. Do you remember your first high? Tell me about it.
14. Did you use alone or with other people? Who? How did you meet them?
15. When did you realize that you were an addict? How did you come to this realization?
16. Do you now associate with any of the people with whom you used substances?
17. How long has it been since you last used substances?

The Newcomer Experience

18. How did you learn about Narcotics Anonymous?
19. How did you make the decision to attend your first meeting? Why?
20. Tell me about your first NA meeting.
21. How long did it take you to feel comfortable attending the meetings?
22. Did you always attend regularly? Why? Why not?
23. When did you ask someone to sponsor you? Why? How so?
24. How long have you been attending NA?

The Program

25. Describe for me the mission of NA. What about the steps? What about the traditions?

26. Do you do any service work for the program? Why? Why not?
27. How closely do you align your own beliefs to the steps and traditions of the program?
28. Has NA helped you get or stay clean? Why? How so?
29. Does NA work? Why? Why not?

The Programmers

30. Tell me about your sponsor. Why did you choose that person?
31. Tell me about your sponsor heritage?
32. Do you associate with anyone else from NA on a regular basis? How so? Why?
33. Do you consider anyone from NA to be a friend? If so, how close are you to him or her? If not, why not?
34. Do you like attending meetings? Why? Why not?
35. How did you learn how to behave during the meetings?
36. Do you ever share your thoughts or feelings with the group? Why or why not?
37. Would you be where you are in your recovery without the group?
38. Do you have a home group? Which one?
39. How did you come to choose a home group?

The Transition from Newcomer to Oldtimer

40. Are you a Newcomer or an Oldtimer?
41. When do you stop being a Newcomer and start being an Oldtimer? Why? How?
42. Do you sponsor anyone? Why? How?
43. What does sponsorship mean to you?
44. What do you think when you see new faces in the rooms?
45. Will you attend NA for the rest of your life? Why or why not? How?
46. Will you successfully recover from drug use? Will you always be recovering?
47. Do you help other people in NA with their recovery efforts? Why? How?
48. What or who has been most helpful to you during your recovery? Why? How?

Where to Go from Here

49. What do you want to do with your life now that you're in recovery? Why? How?
50. How is that different from what you wanted for yourself while you were using?
51. What are your current goals for recovery? Why? How?

52. How will you accomplish those goals? Why?
53. Can you accomplish those goals alone? Why or why not?

Wrapping It Up

54. Do you have anything you would like to share before we finish?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

In Completion of Master's Thesis
Western Kentucky University 2003

-----Respondent Consent Form-----

Project Title: Contributions of Reference Agents to
Recovery Maintenance: A Social World Analysis of Narcotics
Anonymous Affiliation

Investigator: Christa J. Moore, Sociology Department,
(270) 784-3916
(include name, department and phone of contact person)

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University (and -- if applicable -- any other cooperating institution). The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of reference others upon the recovery process of recovering drug addicts. This research is being conducted in an effort to fulfill the requirements for the completion of a Master of Arts in Sociology.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** You will be asked several questions regarding the research topic-your story. Your responses will be recorded on audiotape cassettes if you participate in in-depth interviews or on paper or email if you participate in completing a formal survey. These questions will be of a personal nature.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** The possible discomforts and risks of this study to respondents such as yourself may include emotional reactions to retelling or reliving prior substance abuse or substance-abuse related traumas.
4. **Benefits:** The possible benefits of this study to respondents such as yourself may be twofold. First, it may be as important for you to tell your story as it is for me to hear your story. This experience may be one that can assist you in your recovery process. Second, knowing that your story will be used in an effort to change the life events of other persons whose experience may be very similar to yours can be very empowering. You are capable of positively changing the lives of others.
5. **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality of your identity is guaranteed. Your name will not be used anywhere other than on this consent form which will be seen only by me. Pseudonyms, or a name other than your own that cannot be related back to you, will be used in all places where names are necessary.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** It is important for you to know that your responses are completely voluntary. At any point in the interview you are free to refuse to answer any question. You are also free to end the interview if at any time you change your mind about continuing to answer questions.

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

By signing this consent form, you as a respondent will agree to give me, the researcher, the right to use your responses in the completion of a master's thesis and for publication purposes. This consent form further represents your understanding that your responses will be accessible only to me and my research director. You understand that you will receive a copy of this consent form, and you realize the researcher's intentions for conducting this interview. The interview process has been explained, you have had an opportunity to ask questions and to receive answers to any questions, and you agree to participate voluntarily on the basis of the information you have been given. Please feel free to request additional information by contacting Christa

