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Recommended Citation
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Getting Better Together: The Role of Human Capital in the Creation of Group Dynamics in Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon

Abstract

Anthropologists have long been fascinated with how humans interact and connect with one another. In this research paper, I examine two twelve-step meetings - Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous - and their distinct group dynamics, asking how each facet of attendees' human capital foster those dynamics. I find that the accumulation, conversion and deployment of capital that I observed was much more nuanced in practice than human capital theorists such as Bourdieu and Putnam had indicated it would be. Although Al-Anon attendees had higher levels of economic and cultural capital, they struggled to cultivate much social capital. Inversely, while Alcoholics Anonymous attendees were operating with less economic and cultural capital, their social capital was robust and penetrated deeply. Further, I find members' Habitus to be an important factor in determining group dynamics. Apart from its contribution to the exploration of structure and agency and the anthropology of addiction, this research also speaks to the way success and prosperity is measured in the world of recovery and beyond.

Keywords

Human Capital, Social Capital, Twelve-Step Program, Recovery, Group Dynamics

Disciplines

Anthropology | Social and Cultural Anthropology

Comments

Written as a Senior Capstone in Anthropology.

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2020

Getting Better Together: The Role of Human Capital in the Creation of Group Dynamics in Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon

Introduction

"You never graduate" was a phrase I heard repeated over and over again while researching two of the most prominent recovery programs that deal with alcoholism and its effects on those around it. Members of these groups truly do not graduate; many continue attending for *decades*. They often admit that they would not be able to get through the week, the day or even the hour without using the skills the program has taught them. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which is a fellowship for alcoholics, has been around since the early 20th century, and Al-Anon, a fellowship for the friends and family of alcoholics, was established fifteen years later. The groups have extended their reach to every corner of the globe, finding need wherever it may be - and there is a lot of need. These programs do not just spread by word of mouth. Health professionals and therapists instruct Alcoholics to attend AA, and officials at the rehab facilities recommend Al-Anon to the family and friends of their residents. My research gave me insight into the inner workings of these prominent programs.

After spending a semester observing group dynamics in AA and Al-Anon meetings, I decided to pursue an honors thesis that explored what was fostering those dynamics. After doing some preliminary research, I came into contact with human capital theory, which encapsulates the economic, cultural and social capital that make up a person's overall capital, and quickly adapted the concept to my own research. My fieldwork considers, fits into and adds to existing anthropological literature on human capital by showing how a unique grouping of individuals with differing levels cultural and economic capital had varying success in forming deep connections that are part of vast social networks. Ultimately, I discovered that the conversion of the different forms of capital did not follow the model outlined by many human capital theorists.

I will begin by giving context through a review of the literature, followed by an explanation of my personal interest in the topic and then provide an overview of my methods and how I analyzed and assessed my usage of them. Next, I will address the ethics and limitations of my research. Delving into my research, I will first demonstrate how the group dynamics of each meeting differed. Next, I will show how those dynamics were created through the types of capital held and the way it was converted. Finally, I will draw conclusions from my research as a whole.

Review of the Literature

Apart from economic capital, the concept of social and cultural capital as part of human capital is one that many early theorists engaged without definitively identifying it. In his work "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology", sociologist Alejandro Portes (1998) asserts that the idea that "involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community is a staple notion, dating back to Durkheim's emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self- destruction" (2). In fact, many of the earlier theories about how human beings live in a social world are echoed in contemporary ideas about social capital. Sociologist James Coleman (1988), for example, described social capital as being embodied in relations among persons, paralleling the concepts of financial capital and physical capital in the creation of human capital. He outlined three major forms: obligations and expectations (which rely on trust), information-flow capability in the social structure, and norms accompanied by sanctions. As a whole, but particularly in the latter form, there is a distinctly Durkheimian influence.

Perhaps one of the biggest influences in human capital theory is Pierre Bourdieu. In "The Forms of Capital", Bourdieu asserts that besides the form recognized in economic theory, there

are two other forms: cultural and social capital. Bourdieu initially developed these forms of capital as the basic resources for power (Best and Laudet 2010, 3). Cultural capital can exist in three different states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Someone who holds a great deal of cultural capital might have a high level of education or a comprehensive understanding of art or music.

An individual's social capital, on the other hand, is determined by the social network they are a part of and the amount of actual or potential resources they have access to. An individual's volume of social capital depends on the size of the social network and the amount of capital, whether it be economic, cultural or symbolic, that each member within the network possesses. The network of relationships is a product of various investment strategies at an individual or collective level which transform contingent relationships such as relationships within a neighborhood or workplace or even a family, into relationships that "are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friend-ship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)" (Bourdieu 1986, 22).

Important here is the notion of "habitus", which Bourdieu (1990) defined as a variety of factors and principles operating unconsciously to guide social action: "The habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature" (63). Habitus is a concept a number of theorists have explored. Marcel Mauss' (1934) habitus theory aligned with Bourdieu's, but he saw habitus as more of acquired skillset used to take in and move through the world: "In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties" (73). Further, he referred to habitus as "physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions" (85). Max Weber also referred to structure and agency as internalized class conditions and how they

affect actions, like Bourdieu. In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), for example, he analyzed the "protestant work ethic" as being part of a habitus influenced by the structure of the capitalist society individuals lived within. In this paper, I will be relying in part on the term habitus in my exploration of the different forms of human capital and how they guide individuals' social action in a variety of ways.

Another prominent social capital theorist is political scientist Robert D. Putnam. Putnam had a more community-oriented theory about social capital. Two of his major works about social capital are *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* and *Better together: Restoring the American Community*. In *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, Putnam (2000) carried out extensive statistical research on the attitudes and actions of 20th century Americans. Putnam cites the benefits of social networks and civic engagement as fostering norms of reciprocity and encouraging the social trust as well as facilitating coordination and communication, amplifying reputations, and allowing dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. In *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social* Capital, his results showed that, "over the last three decades involvement in civic associations, participation in public affairs, membership in churches, social clubs and unions, time spent with family, friends and neighbors, philanthropic giving, even simple trust in people, all have fallen by 25 to 50 percent" (4), which, he argues, is the source of a variety of social problems in the U.S. (Siisiäinen 2003). Conversely, a high-functioning economic system and high level of political integration is evidence of a region's successful accumulation of social capital (Siisiäinen 2003).

In Putnam's *Better together: Restoring the American Community*, Putnam and Feldstein (2009), develop two areas of social capital: bonding, in terms of bringing people together and bridging, in terms of creating connections across diverse communities. The authors present the

areas of social capital through a variety of stories including a virtual community on craigslist.com and a neighborhood community in Boston. In contrast with his earlier book, the latter takes a more optimistic stance and asserts that, despite the deterioration of the community as a whole within society, there are still opportunities to build social capital and create positive change.

While many of the theories that engage with social capital tend to come from more sociological backgrounds, the study of people, groups and group culture within the field of anthropology has been informed by the application of these concepts. As more anthropological works are explored shortly, it will become clear that as more anthropologists apply the concept of social capital to their work, they find issues with many of the earlier theories of social capital, and offer more nuanced understandings of how it is accumulated and used within a variety of communities and groups.

One area of study within anthropology is the comparison of influence as social capital and generosity and mutual support as social capital. Contrary to the more generalized notion that individuals with more influence and power have more social capital, many anthropologists have found a more nuanced reality in a variety of settings. Power and Ready (2018) studied support ties among adult residents of two villages in rural India in an effort to gain insight concerning the role of reputational standing in each village in mediating access to social support. Ultimately, they argue that social maneuvering across economic, gender, caste, and class distinctions is not out of a desire for prominence, but rather an effort to create interpersonal connections. Similarly, while studying Latina immigrants' social networks, Fiits and McClure (2015) found that, within the groups they studied, while some members were utilized in the more traditional sense as sources of support and capital it was the notion of *confianza*, embodying notions of reciprocity,

confidence, trust, and respect that played a vital role in the women's ability to establish their social networks and subsequently gain social capital.

Another major area of focus for anthropologists and their use of social capital is in the exploration of structure versus agency. Both human capital and habitus play a crucial role in understanding structure and agency. Theorist Max Weber (1922) encapsulated the concept of structure and agency in his use of "life chances" and "life choices". Agency is the action undertaken by individuals and structure is a greater force that empowers or constrains that action (Sewell 1992). Anthropologists use these concepts to understand how individuals operate within greater structures, and in some cases, detect some of the ways their subjects might try to use their agency to change the status quo but actually end up reinforcing it (Bourgois 1995; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010; Trainor 2010).

In the essay "Willing to Work: Agency and Vulnerability in an Undocumented Immigrant Network", Gomberg-Muñoz (2010) follows ten undocumented immigrants working as busboys in Chicago-area restaurants. Gomberg-Muñoz' analysis of the habitus of her subjects'--their willingness to work overtime, the way they push their coworkers to work hard or even just throw beer cans to one another instead of simply passing them off--shows how structure is internalized into the habitus of her subjects. In the same essay, Gomberg-Muñoz does a bigger picture analysis as she explores the ways white-collar professionals dictate the lives of "low-end" service workers. The majority of her fieldwork takes place in Chicago, and she explains how, "In postindustrial 'global cities' like Chicago, highly educated and highly skilled workers have flourished economically, boosting demand for workers in low-end service industries like hospitality and maintenance." (298). Her analysis shows how the capital, or lack thereof, that her undocumented subjects hold and its translation into their habitus helps to maintain the structure.

The reader is guided to question if the social action of her subjects is their choice, or if they are being guided by larger forces.

Similarly, Trainor (2010), who relies heavily on Bourdieu's theory of capital, touches on the conversion of capital in her essay on how the parents of special education children from different backgrounds navigate the school system and advocate for their children. During her research, it became clear that capital was neither acquired nor exchanged as automatically or unintentionally as Bourdieu asserts in his theory of the different forms of capital. In one case, two different mothers, who were both college-educated, held a great deal of disability-related cultural capital in the form of books, websites, and other materials, and had enough economic capital to access private doctors for their children. Additionally, they held a high level of social capital through their strong social networks of other parents. Despite this amassed economic, cultural and social capital, it was not easily exchanged or converted; both mothers reported years of struggling to get their concerns heard about their children and were humiliated or had their efforts belittled many times. Trainor's research shows how, even with high levels of human capital in every aspect, parents' agency was still greatly restricted; there were other factors that barred a seamless conversion. Her findings contribute to a theory of human capital that is nuanced in every way—even in its conversion.

Alan Smart (1993) also uses his fieldwork on foreign investment in the People's Republic of China to engage with Bourdieu's concepts of capital and its conversion. Smart similarly finds there to be a disconnect between Bourdieu's theorization about the conversion of capital and reality. In his research, Smart discusses *guanxi*, or social connections and asserts that, when it comes to gift exchange, the actual content of the gift is not its most fundamental feature, nor the gift-debt that is established, nor the relationship between the two parties (389). The gift's most

fundamental feature is the ability to “conform to the demands of the gift as a social form with its own etiquette” (389). Smart’s assertion echoes Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital in its embodied state. Bourdieu (1986) theorized that embodied cultural capital cannot be transferred to others like money or property can because it is part of the person who holds it. In Bourdieu’s words “it declines and dies with its bearer” (18).

Other anthropologists’ research into social capital analyzes the many intermediate positions within social networks where brokerage roles can be taken, and how those roles are used to mediate relationships but simultaneously offer little benefit to the position holder (Peeples et al. 2013). Still other anthropologists simply analyze the benefits of holding any kind of position within a social network and how different people utilize their social capital, such as ensuring food security or reducing vulnerability through social networks of mutual aid (Fly 2016; Vásquez-León 2009).

Since the focus of my research is on individuals and groups dealing with addiction, it is important to examine how these issues of human capital, structure vs. agency, and capital conversion show up in the anthropological literature on addiction. Perhaps one of the most prominent names in the anthropology of addiction is Philippe Bourgois. In many of his works, Bourgois’ overarching theme is structure versus agency. In *Righteous Dopefiend*, Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) draw from theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault in their analysis of their fieldwork following people experiencing addiction and homelessness in San Francisco. Bourgois and Schonberg assert the term “lumpen abuse” which is essentially a package of both lack of economic, cultural and social capital and structural marginalization. Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the different forms of capital and Foucault’s tireless analysis of mechanisms of power and how it flows throughout society indubitably lead Bourgois and Schonberg to create

this term that brings together the many forms of oppression and marginalization their subjects experience. Through thick ethnographic description, Bourgois and Schonberg take the readers through one experience after another where their subjects hold no agency underneath the lumpen abuse so ever-present in their lives. The rich text illustrates the painful inevitability of the cycles of addiction and poverty.

The cycle of addiction that Bourgois and Schonberg explore is a major focus within the intersection of the anthropology of addiction and human capital theory. Anthropologists within this specific subfield of research tend to focus on one or a few individuals and use their experiences to illuminate the many intricate aspects of their lives that work against them. Angela Garcia, for example, writes about one individual at a time, using their narratives, familial histories of addiction, and her own analysis of the structures they operate within to paint a full picture of their lives (Garcia 2014; Garcia 2008). In her essay "The Promise: On the Morality of the Marginal and the Illicit", for example, Garcia (2014) follows Bernadette Martinez, a 30-year old woman experiencing addiction. Garcia paints a picture of Bernadette's roots, which are rife with addiction and mental health issues. Garcia's powerful ethnographic description helps illustrate the lack of control Bernadette has over her situation, or her lack of agency within the greater structure she operates within. In one of the powerful lines of her conclusion, Garcia illustrates Bernadette's position succinctly: "the self is at once agent and victim, thus blurring the lines between care and hurt, freedom and restraint" (62).

In the article "I'm Stuck": Women's Navigations of Social Networks and Prescription Drug Misuse in Central Appalachia", the fieldwork of Buer et al. (2016) centers around young women living in Central Appalachia who are in and out of addiction. The many forces that are working to keep the women "stuck" are highlighted: economic struggles, fellow drug users who

threaten to use the state against the women, cultural values that encourage the women to remain in abusive marriages and an inability to form healthy social networks. There are also many anthropologists who have specifically focused on twelve step recovery programs. In "(Re)Working the Program: Gender and Openness in Alcoholics Anonymous", Kornfield (2014) observes black attendees of a women-only meeting in Chicago. Kornfield observes changes in levels of openness among female attendees in the presence of male attendees, as well as unique usage of agency in creating a unique form of recovery, which ultimately led her to draw powerful conclusions about gender dynamics, and structure and agency.

These various explorations of human capital in anthropological works show the many intricate pieces that fit into the accumulation, use, and conversion of human capital in a variety of contexts. Additionally, each analysis adds to a fuller understanding of human capital and the nuances of its deployment. As exemplified by the articles analyzed in this literature review, anthropologists find there to be much more complexity in the development and usage of human capital when researching specific groups and communities, and ultimately focus on forming tailored conclusions. One possible explanation for the disconnect is that the majority of human capital theory comes from the field of sociology, where, in comparison to anthropology, there is more of an emphasis on theory that applies to society as a whole. While broadly applicable concepts are just as important as more specific ones, there is a danger in forming theory that is highly generalized. Especially in the case of human capital, a closer look and effort to apply the concept quickly finds inadequacy in existing, generalized theory.

Research Context and Methods

I began attending the Al-Anon meeting first and was considering studying how alcoholism affected family and friends in depth. However, when I pinpointed an AA meeting one

week later that I could attend, I jumped at the opportunity. At my first meeting, I observed some major contrasts that spanned across several aspects of the meeting: there were differences in the organizational structures, the types of people who attended, the way members interacted with one another, as well as what was shared and how it was shared. Most important to my research was the overall difference in the feeling of the meeting. After my first semester of research, I made the decision to continue and dive more deeply into *why* the dynamics were so different. As I considered what deeper factors might cause the different dynamics, I began focusing on generalized characteristics such as the socioeconomic levels of members, their religious and spiritual affiliations and the gender makeup of each meeting. This paper will show that AA and Al-Anon have contrasting group dynamics due the differing types of human capital.

Al-Anon and AA meetings were of particular interest to me because the Al-Anon program has had a huge impact on members of my own family; it has always been something quite familiar to me. My mother would always use her readings and wisdom that she got from meetings she attended to help guide me in my everyday issues that were unrelated to alcohol, and she would always indicate how important the program, meetings and her sponsors[1] were in her life. Instead of just researching Al-Anon and looking into the program and its members in more depth, I felt that also observing AA would give me insight into something that contrasted significantly with Al-Anon, while still being based on the same building blocks. I personally understood the importance of Al-Anon in many people's lives before embarking on my research, and I now have more insight into the impact that AA has.

[1] A sponsor is another member of the program with more experience that helps guide one through the steps and traditions, and with other daily issues. They maintain contact, often daily, through the phone and have in-person meetings regularly.

During my research, I employed several different methods. First and foremost, I used participant observation research during seventeen hour-long Al-Anon meetings and sixteen hour-long AA meetings. I did not take notes during the meetings because I felt this would cause discomfort for members; these meetings are an opportunity for members to share intimate details of their lives and heal with one another all under the safety of anonymity. Instead, I made jot notes immediately after the meetings and then expanded on them later that night or the following day. When I coded my notes initially, the most important terms that repeatedly surfaced were friendship/relationship, community and personality. The second time I coded, I found terms such as structure/agency, gender, religion/spirituality and socioeconomic level to be the most prominent. These terms helped me focus my further research, draw conclusions and ultimately form my thesis.

Along with participant observation and jot note methods, I utilized kinship charts to keep track of who the alcoholic(s) was in relation to many of the regular members of Al-Anon[2]. In total, I charted the kinship of nine members of Al-Anon. This allowed me to notice trends in the type of people who attended as well as which members connected with each other based on how their alcoholic was related to them. In a couple cases, kinship charts included members of the same family in both the AA and Al-Anon meetings I attended.

I interviewed five members from the Al-Anon meeting and five from the AA meeting. In the Al-Anon meeting, I interviewed three older women who attend the Monday night meeting as their home meeting[3], chair the meetings[4] often, and have a prominent role in business decisions

[2] I noted the relationship to the alcoholic if it was offered during a meeting or interview.

[3] A home meeting is someone's main meeting, or their most routinely attended meeting.

[4] A chairperson's duties vary from meeting to meeting, but they are essentially the person in charge. In the Al-Anon meeting I attended, the chairperson facilitated all of the beginning and closing readings, chose the topic for the meeting, and began the discussion based on that topic.

and making group announcements. I also interviewed two newer members, both middle aged women who had never chaired. In the AA meeting, I interviewed an older male attendee who had attended for many years and held a position chairing another meeting on a different day. I also interviewed an older woman who had been attending for many years. I interviewed a middle-aged man who had been in and out of recovery. Lastly, I interviewed the two young women who chaired the meetings during the two semesters I attended. Once I completed my interviews, I felt that I had selected members who could provide me with a full picture of the many perspectives that existed within the two meetings. I worked to vary factors such as age, gender, leadership roles and time in recovery. I asked my interviewees questions about their meeting history and recovery journey, how aspects of their positionality like gender, age and religious or spiritual identification have affected their recovery, how their connections compare in and out of their twelve-step community and more. These questions and others aimed to assess what drove the difference in dynamics that I observed in meetings. Not all of the questions I asked ended up being useful in the broader context of my project, but they all helped me form the conclusions I came to.

I also employed the folklore method in my early research to look further into what was driving the differences in literature usage I was observing in the meetings. I used some of my observations from field notes as well as online AA and Al-Anon resources to gain insight into the different literature available to members in each meeting. Lastly, I used the mapping/proxemics method to illustrate the setup of the AA meetings.

In beginning the research process, I made sure to secure my role with both groups so that I could carry out my project and do it in the most respectful and ethical way. During the research process, I maintained the anonymity of members within the group. This meant, when I ran into

member of AA at Walmart and another from Al-Anon at the local theater, I greeted them. But, when my friends asked how I knew them, I would not reveal that information. When it came to writing field notes, I never used names and instead used descriptors to remind myself and identify each member. Finally, I changed the names of attendees in my field notes and interview notes in addition to specific details of some of the stories that members shared so that they could not be associated with any person from the group.

Through participant observation, jot notes, kinship charts, interviews, folklore and mapping/proxemics, I was able to back the conclusions I made with strong evidence. However, there were limitations. To begin with, I observed a closed Al-Anon meeting and an open AA speaker meeting. Attending the closed Al-Anon meeting was partly by mistake - information online stated it was an open group. Luckily, the members voted to allow my observation. But the larger issue is that I was comparing two different types of meetings. While the comparison was not a perfect one, it was something that I worked to compensate for during my interviews; I asked about other meetings members attended, how they compared and more. Another limitation was my inability to explore race, because, in both meetings, I only ever observed one person of color, and they were not always regularly attending. Lastly, I was unable to interview a male member of Al-Anon. In Al-Anon, I had focused more on interviewing members with a range of ages, points in recovery and leadership roles than members of different genders. It was not until halfway through the spring semester, when I was finishing up my last interviews that this became a priority, and unfortunately, it was during the same time that COVID-19 emerged, barring me from the area I carried out my research in and ultimately leaving me without that perspective from Al-Anon.

Part I: Group Dynamics

Throughout the entirety of my research, one thing that was uniform was the distinction between how I felt during AA meetings and how I felt during Al-Anon meetings. During Al-Anon meetings, the mood was quieter and more somber. The group was smaller, so there were fewer people filling the space, and rules were also kept to more rigidly, which kept banter at a minimum. Al-Anon attendees never got there more than ten minutes early – I was almost always the first person to arrive. Before and after the meeting, Al-Anon attendees maintained small talk that rarely got very personal, unless it was concerning their alcoholic[5]. The AA meeting was much larger, and I was never the first to arrive; I routinely arrived into a room already full of people. AA attendees used the time before and after meetings to connect with every person they could. Some members shook every single person's hand before sitting down. After the meeting, many of the attendees would stay in the room for 20 and 30 minutes just to mingle. In the AA meetings, there was more laughter and joking, and attendees who fell out of line were gingerly steered towards the rules.

Before I began attending meetings, I thought I knew what to expect. I had assumed that I would be upset, saddened and possibly even disturbed by the AA meetings, and that the Al-Anon meetings would be much tamer in comparison. Even my friends who knew about my research had similar impressions. The first few times my friends would pick me up from the AA meetings, they would ask, "Was it depressing?". However, I found myself responding "no" again and again. At variance with my prediction, I found myself leaving AA meetings in a good mood; each meeting had a great sense of community, deep friendships and speakers' stories were engaging and triumphant. After Al-Anon meetings, I found myself feeling drained; many

[5] This is how Al-Anon attendees referred to their loved one with addiction.

meetings were full of expressions of defeat and shame, and member's problems often felt unresolvable.

In fact, the only time I was ever brought to tears was during an Al-Anon meeting. It was during the last couple of months of my participant observation, so it was one of my last few meetings. About 15 minutes into the meeting, a woman whom I had never seen before entered the room. Shortly after her arrival, and after a member or two had shared, she offered her thoughts on the topic. She shared a few words about being resentful towards her daughter and her alcoholism before explaining that she did not have to feel that anymore because she had buried her daughter earlier that week as a result of her alcoholism (Maynard field notes 11/11/20). She started sobbing, and the two women on either side of her squeezed her and rubbed her back. Everyone was in shock, and a few people, including myself, began crying. When I got outside, I completely broke down.

Part II: Why Those Dynamics?

Establishing Types of Capital

All of the experiences and observations that spoke to the difference in group dynamics seemed counterintuitive. Why was I leaving the Al-Anon meetings feeling quiet and drained, and the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings uplifted and happy? During my second half of my fieldwork, I began to dive into my questions and focused on making more specific observations, such as aspects of positionality and the background each member came from, instead of how they interacted with one another or shared about the topic. Using my observations and the literature I had studied; I identified the types of human capital that members of each group held.

Economic Capital

I identified members of Al-Anon as having higher economic capital than those of AA. Members of Al-Anon often shared of expensive rehabilitation programs they sent their loved ones to, or at least offered to them. Additionally, one member spent a few months of each year at the condo he owned in the nearest big city, and at least two others “snow birded” to warmer places. Many members of AA, on the other hand, held hospitality-sector jobs in the hotel or restaurant business. One member offered me his business card which listed his business as woodworking, and another routinely came in with his workman’s bag, which jangled full of tools. In addition to these observations, the majority of each week’s speakers included stories about job loss and unemployment as a part of their recovery journey.

Cultural Capital

I identified members of Al-Anon as having higher cultural capital than those of AA. I found that Al-Anon attendees had greater involvement in local arts and political groups; I would consistently run into one member at a local theater and learned that she volunteered there, and another member was in a political group with a professor from my college. Another reason I identified members of Al-Anon as having more cultural capital was their identification with organized religion. The use of faith and spirituality in recovery programs is well documented and studied. It is the case across the board that individuals in recovery tend to place a great level of importance on prayer, belief in a God, and a strong sense of faith (Pardini et al. 2000; Connors and Dermen 1996; Ellis and Schoenfeld 1990). However, despite the simple concept of having a higher power as being of utmost importance in twelve-step meetings, there is considerable variety when it comes to members’ self-identification. There seems to be a trend in recovering individuals choosing to define themselves as spiritual, even though they oftentimes share many

of the same core behaviors and beliefs as individuals who define themselves religious (Pardini et al. 2000). In my observation, I found that there was more of an identification with organized religion in Al-Anon than in Alcoholics Anonymous. Two of the regularly attending older women wore crosses around their necks. Another middle-aged woman in the group routinely referenced her “Christian God”. Another used pre-meeting time to ask what advice she could offer to her priest who had just lost someone to alcoholism. Al-Anon members’ connection to the defined space of a Christian church implies a history of integration into an institution that is a cornerstone of our society.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, by contrast, there was a more nuanced understanding of religion. One woman I interviewed, Macy, had a complicated thought process when it came religion. She was as a “high-functioning alcoholic”, or as she liked to describe herself, she had a lot of “not-yets”. She could not make it through the day without drinking, and when she first became sober was shaking for days. However, she had maintained well-paying jobs and kept her property and her family through it all. Interestingly, she found both AA and her church community through sobriety. In her words, “I knew I had experienced a miracle, I had experienced God’s mercy when I was able to get sober” (Interview with Macy, 2/12/20). However, throughout her years of attendance of AA, she began to find a new understanding of her communities: “At church, on a Sunday, you show your best self. You fit in with your neighbors, and you show that everything is okay. But, there’s so much more pain than what you would know from the one hour Sunday morning drive by” (Maynard Interview Notes 2/12/20). It did not take long for her to realize that some of the most spiritual people in the church were meeting in the basement. The nature of AA meetings welcomes all presentations of self and offers a space for members to delve into their spirituality. It has to, because, As Macy put it, “It’s

life or death” (Interview with Macy, 2/12/20). Another, younger male attendee I interviewed from AA put it bluntly: “Religious people are scared of hell. Spiritual people have been through hell” (Interview with Jared, 1/31/20).

Social Capital

While members of Al-Anon seemed to have higher economic and cultural capital, I identified members of AA as having higher social capital than those of Al-Anon. In AA, I observed countless instances where speakers shared of close relationships outside of meetings. During one meeting in October, there was an older, white female speaker. While sharing her journey with alcoholism, she reflected on how her AA community helped her through yet another hardship, which I recorded in my field notes:

> After being in program for a while, she found out she had brain cancer. After her diagnosis, she couldn’t believe how much support she received from other members of AA. They drove her to the hospital for appointments an hour and a half away, waited with her through them and brought her home cooked meals. During the same time, her roof was falling apart, and AA members fixed it for her (Maynard field notes, 10/19/18).

When another member was sharing about visiting her during her recovery in the hospital, she recounted how a nurse asked if she was paying for people to visit her. She told the nurse “Nope,” it was just fellow AA members pouring in to visit her. This member’s AA community did not only exist within the rooms of AA. It began there, but members’ support extended far past their recovery.

After the bulk of my questions had been asked during an interview with one of the chairwomen, whom I called Cindy, we continued making small talk. She explained to me how she lived nearby, and how she had actually just moved. She recollected how much of an unnecessary hassle the move was because she was moving right next door to where she lived in the first place. However, she explained, it was made much easier thanks to another member of

AA who helped her throughout the entire process by helping her to carry boxes and watching her son (Interview with Cindy, 11/10/18). It quickly became clear to me that members of AA had a vast social network they could draw from for help and support.

Interestingly, some members of Al-Anon made similar observations. One of the other interviews I carried out was with an older woman who had been attending Al-Anon for just about a year. She also had a spouse in AA. After we finished up most of the interview, she inquired about how my research was going and what it was about. I explained the basics of it, and she probed about what conclusions I was drawing. I relayed how there seemed to be closer relationships in AA than there were in Al-Anon. In my interview notes, I wrote: “She looked up, seeming to ponder what I had told her and then she looked at me and nodded. She pointed out how one of the very first times that her husband attended an AA meeting, he told her how they had to help someone move something because her husband had a pickup truck that would be helpful” (Interview with Trisha, 11/7/18). The immediate connection that she made with what I had theorized helped confirm some of the conclusions I was beginning to make.

In Al-Anon, I observed fewer relationships that extended past the Al-Anon space. There was only one instance when I observed members mentioning meeting outside of the group and it was still Al-Anon related. Two prominent women in the group had carpooled to “Twelve Steps in Fifteen Minutes”, an Al-Anon event that walked attendees through breaking down an issue with the twelve steps in fifteen minutes. While the women had met outside of the meeting, it seemed like it was just out of convenience.

I also utilized kinship charts in my research of relationships between members. Because I used kinship charts to map who the alcoholic was in relation to Al-Anon attendees, I thought it would be an easy way of tracking how friendships were forming in accordance with the charts.

But, besides relating to one another through stories shared during the meeting, I witnessed only one attempt at connecting with each other outside of the meeting. A couple who routinely attended for their daughter's addiction, Fred and Mary, were relating to another regular, Emma, who had an alcoholic son. During the meeting, Mary shared that she and her husband were about to go on vacation and were nervous about how lonely their daughter would be and what she would do while they were gone. Emma was explaining how lonely her son was and how she wished he could make friends. At the end of the meeting, I was gathering my things when I overheard an interaction between the couple and Emma. I remember feeling uncomfortable as Emma hesitantly asked the couple, "This might sound weird but, my son is so, so lonely. And since your daughter doesn't have any friends, maybe they could hang out?" Emma, who was normally one of the most strongly opinionated and assertive members, was suddenly acting timidly towards a couple who was much newer to the group than she was. The couple paused before answering. They tiptoed around an answer, and Emma interjected, "I mean, not even like as a date but just as friends." The couple hesitated again and offered that the age difference might make the situation odd. Their daughter was in her late twenties and Emma's son was in his late thirties. The whole interaction did not lead to a definitive answer and left both parties hanging uncomfortably (Maynard field notes, 11/12/18). The interaction showed how the relationships in the Al-Anon meeting did not extend naturally into other aspects of members' lives like they did in AA.

Conversion of Capital

After absorbing all of my observations and revisiting human capital theory, I found a disconnect between how the literature was treating capital conversion and how it was taking place before my eyes. Theorists such as Bourdieu and Putnam asserted smooth conversions of

social and cultural capital to economic prosperity for individuals and societies as a whole. My findings failed to match this model and aligned more closely with the nuances of human capital conversion many of the anthropologists' findings indicated.

Conversion of Economic Capital to Social Capital

Many times, I observed a lack of economic capital being converted into social capital, and the habitus produced from higher economic capital translating to lost opportunities to grow social capital. Many members shared of economic hardship, either when they had the floor as the speaker, or casually, before and after the meeting. In one instance, before an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting began, a younger woman, Brenda, hurried over to another young woman, Alicia, who had just walked in and looked rather upset. Brenda immediately asked her how she was doing and questioned the look on Alicia's face. Alicia then launched into a detailed story about how, during her job as a waitress, a customer had complained about their food, and she was stuck paying the 100-dollar check. Brenda was shocked and began sharing her own experiences about rude customers. After they had related, Alicia exclaimed, "And right around Christmas, too," and Brenda embraced her (Maynard field notes 12/6). Their shared economic struggle turned into an opportunity to relate and create a deeper connection.

Another way I saw this conversion play out was through childcare in the meetings. The chairwoman from my first year of fieldwork, Cindy, brought her toddler son with her to every meeting I attended, and his behavior was always uncertain. Some meetings, he slept silently on a small blanket she placed next to her. On a few occasions, he would waddle around the room and chew on people's shoes. A few other times, he would not stop crying. Members aided Cindy in dealing with the entire range of her son's behavior. The same young man who helped Cindy move would take the baby into the back of the room when he was fussing. He held and

comforted the baby in the back area of the room for almost the entirety of four meetings. It indicated that Cindy placed a lot of trust with him and that he was willing to sacrifice his meeting to help out his friend so that she could focus on facilitating the meeting.

Another regular was a wrinkly older man who always wore a baseball hat. He held Cindy's son for the entire duration of one meeting while the child slept (Maynard field notes, 10/18/18). When he was having a tougher time and Cindy had to care for the child on her own, another regular, a petite older woman whom I called Shirley, would take Cindy's seat in case she was still occupied by her son by the time the closing was to begin. Cindy often made it back in time, but, one time, Shirley did end up reading for her. My field notes from the day read:

> The chairwoman's son was especially rambunctious today, so Anne took him into the back area to play with him. But after a while, he was not content playing with her, and his crying became too much. Cindy took the child from Anne's arms and cradled him in an armchair positioned in the very back of the room. Anne sat back down while Shirley took over Cindy's position as chairwoman. By the time the readings came around, the chairwoman was still comforting her son, so Shirley led the closing (Maynard field notes, 11/9/18).

Appearing as an almost rehearsed routine, the women worked together seamlessly to support Cindy and her duty as a mother while maintaining the continuity of the meeting.

The following fall, the new AA chairwoman, Whitney, and her husband more often than not brought their young son and toddler daughter. The children would entertain themselves in the back half of the room, but often came up to show their mother and father pictures they had drawn or toys they had found. Other members would dote on them or go play with them if they got rambunctious. And when it was the mother's second sobriety anniversary, her sponsor talked, through tears, about how she and her children had become a part of her family.

In Al-Anon, I never witnessed children in the meeting, mostly because the majority of the members' children (many of whom are the alcoholics in members' families) are grown.

However, there were two instances when childcare issues were mentioned. During one meeting, Damaris was sharing about letting go[6] and mentioned her early days in recovery when her husband was deep in his alcoholism: “I used to yell and make a big scene at my husband when he wouldn’t come home in time to look after the kids and I would miss my meetings. But when I learned to accept that it was out of my control, I knew that I needed to find childcare because I needed my program” (Maynard Field Notes 11/18/19). In this case, it was just an issue of not knowing what was needed, but she still did not feel comfortable enough to bring her children to the meeting. There were other cases, however, that spoke more to the consequences of coming from a socioeconomic status that differed from the rest. One member, Samantha, was an infrequent attendee, but still regular enough that she appeared throughout the two years I was in the meetings. She was older and the only person of color in the meeting. I had always wondered why she was consistent enough that she was well recognized by everyone but attended infrequently enough that it was a surprise if she showed up. One day, my curiosity was answered. As the topic of conversation veered towards the importance of the meeting and the importance of consistency in recovery, she raised her hand to share how, even though she often could not make it because of childcare issues, it made such a difference when she did.

While for one example, it was just a matter of knowing and scheduling childcare and another was not having the ability to get access to it, bringing children was clearly not an option. And even though, for some, like Molly, Al-Anon meetings were a much-needed escape from their household full of children, for others, it was something they desperately needed to keep their recovery on track and could not gain access to because of childcare issues. This is not to say that this is the case for *every* Al-Anon meeting; I have countless memories of the childcare room

[6] Letting go is a central concept in Al-Anon. It refers to giving up control and letting your “higher power” take over.

that I would play in with other children during my mother's Al-Anon meeting. However, the childcare rooms were always very separate and tended to by a paid babysitter. I assert that the contrast spoke to different standards that are worked into and upheld by different habitus. For individuals with higher economic capital, bringing children to work or social groups is not common and possibly inappropriate; finding childcare is more of an obligation. For individuals lacking economic capital, however, finding childcare may not be a priority or even feasible.

Conversion of Economic and Cultural Capital to Social Capital: Judgments and Reactions

I also saw a blend of economic and cultural capital failing to convert to social capital in Al-Anon. I found that members of Al-Anon held more shame and judgment than members of AA. Interestingly, many of them are well aware of these, what they call, "character defects"[7]. One time, when Samantha led the meeting, she started by quietly singing a song before introducing her topic:

> She explained the four aspects of brokenness she had identified. She identified control, envy, shame and despair and shared corresponding emotions and stories….For envy, she shared about feeling jealousy of coworkers and friends' children and all that they had achieved while her child was struggling. For shame, she explained feeling shame for her daughters' actions and for despair she explained you can get frustrated and upset but you can't let it get to the point of despair (Maynard field notes, 9/9/18).

Similarly, Carla explained how she perceived her daughter's unwillingness to change as a maturity issue (Maynard field notes, 9/3/18), but two weeks later identified her perception of her daughter as "a mess" as problematic, and that changing her attitude could be a way for her to make amends (Maynard field notes, 9/17/18).

In other cases, however, the tendency to judge and shame came out more bluntly and in a less self-aware manner. During one meeting, Martin explained how he attends AA meetings to

[7] Character defects are referenced constantly in twelve-step programs. They refer to traits that hinder recovery and are in general unbecoming.

observe once in a while. I described his reference to steps eight and nine[8] thus: "Alcoholics do a lot more damage, severe damage than those attending Al-Anon do, so he thinks the making amends step is something they might have to work on more towards other people" (Maynard field notes, 9/18/18).

A lot of Al-Anon is centered around controlling the need to control; the focus is on letting go. In a way, control to Al-Anon is alcoholism to AA. So, many of the opportunities for judgment within the meeting that were looked past were usually control related. For instance, one woman shared about asking a locksmith to lock the basement door from the outside to stop her daughter from sneaking out. Her story was met with laughter (Maynard field notes 9/9/18). While there was more acceptance of issues that centered around control, the more frequent tendency to judge and shame, which I assert to be products of a habitus formed by higher levels of economic and cultural capital, created a barrier to forming social connections.

I found there to be much less shame and judgment in AA. There was no anecdote or experience that could faze attendees. Members shared about losing their jobs and families to their addiction, becoming homeless, experiencing jailtime, overdosing in front of their families and coming close to death. The speaker at the very first AA meeting I attended was a young woman dressed in slouchy lounge clothes and her hair in a messy bun. While sharing, she admitted to overdosing multiple times, once in front of her children, and being told that she essentially died when she woke up at the hospital the next day. But she also shared how, through it all, she was simultaneously holding a position as a dance coach for younger girls. When the floor was opened up for responses from the listening attendees, a plump, older man specifically pointed out how she was a coach throughout all of the horrible events and how truly amazing it

[8] Step eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. Step nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

was the she did it despite all of the other things happening in her life. “And I can barely hold a job!” he exclaimed. The room burst into laughter (Maynard field notes 9/7/18). During another meeting, a woman shared about being triggered in the grocery store by items like mouthwash, a product that mimics the motion of taking a shot. Another woman responded and confessed how, similarly, the vodka sauce in the grocery store had given her a startle. The women laughed about their similar experiences together (Maynard field notes 9/21/18). AA members' inability to pass judgment and find fault in one another's actions created an environment that welcomed any and all opportunities for social connections, ultimately helping them accumulate high amounts of social capital. These instances of small victories and uplifting one another are reminiscent of other research concerning social capital. In their research into Latina immigrants' social networks, Fitts and McClure (2015) assert that, even in the face of entrenched institutional barriers, woman used relationships they built in informal educational spaces to form small, yet significant, personal successes.

One of the members I formed the closest relationship with was Tom, a long-time attendee of AA. The first time I encountered him was at my third AA meeting. He had salt and pepper hair and wore worn blue jeans. He immediately introduced himself and asked me if it was my first meeting. When I explained my purpose, he brightened up. His daughter had done similar research in a psychology class at her college. We remained friendly throughout my attendance and later, he happily agreed to an interview. When I asked about some of the personalities he had observed in meetings and if certain ones had made his experience more difficult, he relayed how the occasional drunk or high person would make their way into a meeting, but that you did not kick them out unless they were being extremely disruptive. “Is that disturbing when that happens, because you're in recovery?” I asked during our interview. Instead of reacting with

anger, he explained how, with humility, it was easy to find acceptance and understanding: "No, because, you've been there, and they're only coming there to get better. We can't turn them away if they've made it to a meeting to try to get better. You have to remember where you started" (Interview with Tom, 11/2/18).

In another instance, I observed a disruption caused by a new attendee of AA. Right as I entered the meeting and sat down, I noticed a new older man with a green cap and a few bulky bags at his feet. He was looking around with intense eyes before looking forward again and saying, "Life's a bitch!" It was before the meeting had begun so no one said anything in response. Then, he exclaimed, "Can you believe I've been sober for five years?" The group was ready to get started so, to quiet him, a few members murmured a "Congratulations," followed by "Shhhh …" so that the meeting could begin (Maynard fieldnotes, 9/21/18). While it was not an enthusiastic response, it was not disrespectful or angry. Ultimately, they were more focused on the continuation of the meeting that they had come for. Again, AA attendees' refusal to be fazed created an environment that fostered innumerable social connections, ultimately helping to build social capital.

During my earlier fieldwork, I interviewed Dorothy, an older female member of Al-Anon, who illuminated members' responses to people whose behavior was disruptive:

> Audrey: Has there ever been a meeting you felt negatively about, or you didn't really get as much out of it as you were wanting to?
>
> Dorothy: Yes, actually there have been. There used to be a woman who came to our group and she had some mental health issues and it made it difficult for me to be able to focus on my recovery. I felt myself getting distracted and annoyed that she would go on and on about every single point that someone brought up. It was just very difficult to deal with and I was trying to be open minded and give her a chance because she did have a problem with somebody who drank - her father - but it just presented so many challenges both to me and to the other people in the group….But that was really hard, and you try to be kind, but then you realize you do need to make boundaries that, you know, I have a choice, that if I wasn't

> comfortable with that I could choose to leave that meeting and go to another meeting, so that would have been my choice. But that was just a difficult, difficult situation (Interview with Dorothy, 10/22/18).

In this case, Dorothy had more difficulty in dealing with the struggling member and ultimately found less acceptance for their behavior. In my second year attending, a newer member, who was less familiar with the rules against advice sharing and direct responses, often ended her sharing with a question. Each time, her questions were met with silence. Slowly, she adapted, and found ways to pose questions and imply a post-meeting correspondence. However, this process took time and sitting in the room while she looked around waiting for responses made each second take an eternity to pass. Both instances are examples of how members of Al-Anon had more trouble accepting individuals whose behavior fell out of line with what they might have deemed as acceptable, which ultimately stifled the growth of their social capital.

I speculate that these demonstrations of habitus have to do with both economic and cultural capital. Individuals with higher economic capital may be more used to a world where rules are more rigid and rule-breakers face sanctions, and also where a certain level of put-togetherness is upheld and projected to the outside world. Additionally, my findings surrounding religion and spirituality, which indicated a nuanced perception of religion and spirituality in AA and more participation in organized religion in Al-Anon, helped me understand Al-Anon members' habitus. Many of my observations of behavior in Al-Anon aligned with an effort to keep up appearances that members may have absorbed in church. However, just because many members of Al-Anon held more cultural and economic capital did not mean their opinions and styles always impeded connection to others. In fact, it was the Al-Anon meeting that decided to throw out the Lord's Prayer to create a more inclusive space. Although I did not see the effects pan out, it had potential to generate more social capital for at least the meeting itself.

Conversion of Economic and Cultural Capital to Social Capital: Separations

Another way I found the Al-Anon habitus - which stemmed from higher economic and cultural capital - to obstruct accumulation of social capital was their tendency to label and categorize themselves and others. This process created barriers to growing social capital. For example, I have shared narratives illustrating some of the shame and judgment many members of Al-Anon felt towards their alcoholics or people experiencing addiction in general. I saw this as a way of creating a separation between "them" and the "other". In the case of Samantha, who felt shame about her daughter and felt envy for people with more successful children (or at least, perceived success), there was a separation between people with addiction and those without, as well as a separation between people experiencing addiction indirectly and those not experiencing it at all. In effect, this expression alienated Samantha from her daughter *and* from people with "more successful" children.

In another instance, members of Al-Anon created separation between members within the meeting itself. Carla, Emma and the couple Fred and Mary, who all have children with addictions[9], were discussing how especially hard it is for them to have children with addiction. They were explaining how it is one of the worst ways to be related to your addict because it means watching the person you are in charge of raising and loving and taking care of, suffer. Each member added their own take on the subject or an anecdote. While it was a valid sentiment, and important for them to work through, it was a categorization that excluded other members, and created a barrier between building up social capital.

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[9] Members of Al-Anon do not always have specifically alcoholic loved ones. Many come to seek support for a plethora of other addictions their loved one may have: drugs, gambling, overeating, and so forth.

A final way I observed Al-Anon members creating separation was between their alcoholic and their alcoholic's addiction. More than once, members used the meeting space to discuss how they had learned about addiction and its effect on the brain and how that had helped them cope. Going around the table, they shared of scientific articles, videos and documentaries that helped them understand how addiction was truly a disease. One woman explained how one documentary showed how addiction literally changed the brain chemistry of the addicted person. All of the sources helped attendees separate the person from the disease and helped them find more of an explanation. Interestingly, a couple of members brought up how "other people don't get it". This recurring topic helped me understand how Al-Anon attendees had trouble dealing with the stigma associated with addiction. In all three instances, separations that attendees asserted blocked, or at least disrupted the formation of social connections. The distinctions made either separated members from their alcoholic, "other people" or even from other Al-Anon attendees within the meeting space. I assert that this inclination to create separation comes from a habitus produced by higher levels of economic and cultural capital. These forms of capital have the potential to create more of a desire for categorizations and explanations. I came across a similar concept being explored by Trainor (2010) in her research of parents of special education students. She found that, when it came to diagnoses and labels of special needs, in contrast with other groups, "European American parents across socioeconomic groups described the sense of relief they experienced when finding out the nature of their children's 'problem'" (252). The parents in Trainor's study found meaning and comfort in this truth. Her ethnography illustrates a similar pursuit of definitive answers.

In AA, opportunities to create separations were not taken. Early on, I had speculated that differences between type of addiction, age and gender could hinder social connections. My

hypothesis was quickly disproved. During one of my interviews with Jared, a younger male member of AA, he told me a story about accidentally attending a Crystal Meth Anonymous, or CMA meeting, before launching into the way addicts judge one another: “Alcoholics judge heroin addicts and heroin addicts judge meth addicts” (Interview with Jared, 1/31/20). He explained how there were substances that are worse to get addicted to than others, but really it was all the same. Plus, he added, many people who come into the rooms of AA have tried other drugs, either pairing them with alcohol or by mistake. He looked at me and said, “But really, *everyone* is allowed to judge glue sniffers,” and we both burst out laughing (Interview with Jared 1/31/20).

When I began to explore age as a means or separation, I found a few examples of a desire to seek out similarly aged members and relate through more superficial aspects of their lives, but few differences that penetrated deeply enough to create genuine issues for connection. During one meeting, for example, Whitney’s husband poked fun at her as she sat beside him, and commented on how weird it was that she was so content “hanging with all these old dudes who were like 75 and were going to see their grandkids and stuff” (Maynard field notes 2/7/20). Another time, the speaker enthusiastically shared about his passion for an event geared towards younger members of AA that provided a space for them to mix and connect (Maynard field notes 2/7/20).

During interviews, each member of AA spent little time on my questions about age. During two of my interviews with younger members of AA, they both explained how ultimately, younger and older members of AA all experience the same alcoholism, so there are more experiences, feelings and issues that are common than different (Interview with Whitney, 2/13/20; Interview with Jared 1/31/20). Even things like technology, which one might think

would separate younger members from older ones, did not present many issues. While I observed more technology use among younger members, I learned from my interviews that phone calls were still the most prominent form of communication among members. Whether it was with close friends from the meetings or more official sponsor-sponsee relationships, phone calls allowed members to catch up and express emotions about issues they were having. As a result of the way technology has developed over time, even if younger members preferred texting, the nature of their sponsors' older age and the generational divide meant that phone calls were the mode of communication they ended up using. During my interview with Whitney, for example, she expressed annoyance about just wanting to send a text but having to get on the phone and call her sponsor, who preferred calls over texts. *She* knew a text would get the job done, but her older sponsor did not see them as being adequate (Interview with Whitney, 2/13/20).

Besides feelings of annoyance over calling versus texting, I did not find technology to create much of a divide between age groups. While there was talk of one short-lived group chat that resulted in some older members feeling excluded, social media and technology in general did not play large roles in the meeting. This can, in large part, be attributed to the anonymity principles in twelve-step programs. My interview with Whitney helped me understand the intricacies of using social media within the context of AA. She explained to me how a lot of the older members frown upon platforms like Facebook because they feel it violates the anonymity principle of 12-step meetings. There are absolute no's, like posting pictures of sobriety chips, but often, it is less clear cut. For example, Whitney explained, "Even if you don't make it obvious, you can sometimes tell because you can see mutual friends and you can make those connections that way" (Interview with Whitney, 2/13/20).

Based only on my observations in AA, I did not find that gender created much of a divide. Further research and theorization, however, helped me understand why I was observing a lack of a gender divide, but also shed light on a less than perfect picture beneath the surface. One fascinating observation I made was how seasoned female AA attendees took on more traditionally masculine traits in the meeting space. For example, women in the meeting used loud voices, were highly assertive and were crass in their storytelling and interactions in general. Additionally, their backstories reinforced their hardened persona; narratives of overdosing and jailtime levelled the playing field with their fellow male alcoholics. It was through these observations that I found members of Al-Anon searching for uniqueness and difference, while members of AA focused on their commonalities. I assert that the alcoholism that members share, and all of the experiences and effects that came along with it – which, for many *includes* the loss of human capital – led many of them to a situation where other aspects of their positionality became much less important than their shared identity as alcoholics and their focus on recovery. It was almost as if, in AA, being an alcoholic was *the* most important aspect of their identities.

All of these observations are not to present an overly simplistic picture. Indeed, some aspects of members' positionality *did* present problems. While I found that Whitney, for example, did not mind being in recovery with men, she further explained that she actually preferred it because the women in many of the groups can be very "catty" (Interview with Whitney 2/13/20). When Whitney used this word, I was extremely surprised; from all of my observations, meetings and sponsorships were focused on recovery and support and there was definitely no drama. However, what Whitney said next had me laughing at my naivete. She began to tell me of older female sponsors who would "get back" at other women in the group by telling their sponsees to not associate with those other women or their sponsees. Interestingly,

that manipulation of power was a leveraging of recovery capital. Whitney told me that her sponsor and some of her peers' sponsors had, more than once, advised her and her peers against hanging out with certain members because they were "really struggling" (Interview with Whitney 2/13/20). Effectively isolating some of these women in their recovery could cause issues for their wellbeing, look bad on the older women sponsoring them and had the potential to put their sobriety at risk. Interestingly, this did not match some of the anthropological literature I came across that explored gender in AA. Kornfield (2014), for example, who conducted research on female AA attendees in Chicago, found that women adjusted their levels of openness in the presence of male attendees, and found sisterhood in their women's group. This contrast speaks to variation between meetings.

Women also faced harassment from male members in the AA meeting space. During my interview with Macy, she told of how a recent change in her life had produced new problems: "I recently separated from my husband, and that has been really interesting. Now I don't have my wedding ring. When I had it, I was someone else's property. There's not that barrier, and I've gotten approached . . . I have to be like, back the hell off! I don't even want to right now, but even if I did, if it ended badly, would the meeting be awkward?" (Interview with Macy, 2/12/20). This is to say that not all aspects of members' positionality blends perfectly; some undesirable realities still present issues. However, a unique quality of uniformity was produced by the shared experience of being an alcoholic.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, I explored the conversion of differing levels and types of human capital in twelve step meetings in order to understand their unique group dynamics. From the beginning of my attendance in AA and Al-Anon, I noticed a plethora of contrasting elements, but it took

careful participant observation, field note taking, folklore studying, kinship charting, mapping and interviewing to deduce what those main differences were. Although Al-Anon attendees had higher levels of economic and cultural capital, they struggled to cultivate much social capital. Inversely, while members of AA were operating with less economic and cultural capital than the Al-Anon attendees up the stairs, their social capital was robust and penetrated deeply. I attributed these differences to conversion that functioned differently from what theorists postulate. Habitus stemming from higher economic and cultural capital kept Al-Anon members at arm's length from one another; perceived rules and standards did not allow for flexibility and the tendency to separate and compartmentalize created barriers between attendees. Once members of AA dove into sobriety, the experiences resulting from alcoholism that they endured afforded them an honesty that created a welcoming and comfortable environment that fostered deep connections; they related through hardship, accepted mistakes and misbehavior, and ignored separating characteristics. Much like many of the anthropological examinations of human capital, the accumulation, conversion and deployment of capital that I observed was much more nuanced in practice than human capital theorists had indicated it would be.

Bourdieu asserts that each type of capital is compounding to the rest. For example, he asserts that the ability of the bourgeoisie to maintain their social position is not just innate because of their possession of capital. It is the investment in education for their children and cultural experiences that reinforce that position (Bourdieu 1986). My research finds a more nuanced picture of the conversion of different types of capital, and that the presence of one form of capital does not imply the presence of others. This conclusion is not to say that more traditional situations, where conversion is smooth and the presence of one form of capital helps

the accumulation of the rest, do not exist. It is to suggest that there are many groups and communities that function according to different rules.

Bourdieu equates capital to power (1986, 243). I assert that there is a difference between power that holds something over another person and something that is powerful in a meaningful way. The capital that I observed in Al-Anon was more powerful in that it allowed for connections to more resources. However, that power and the habitus that came with it created barriers to the formation of social capital. The capital in AA had power in its meaning. The lack of cultural and economic capital in the AA meeting created a unique ecosystem that fostered a wide-reaching social network with deep connections. If we are assigning amounts of capital to humans, the least we can do is acknowledge the many different ways that value can be quantified and exist in our world. It is here where anthropology plays a unique role; anthropologists specialize in uncovering the *meaning* behind the group dynamics and aspects of culture that they observe.

The analysis herein speaks to a variety of discourses. Many aspects of the study fit into the discussion of structure and agency and how it shapes behavior. Members of Al-Anon were bound by engrained rules and principles that members of AA were not constrained by, and it ultimately led to considerable differences between the two groups. This research also speaks to the way success and prosperity is measured in the world of recovery and beyond. Finally, apart from contributing to methods for measuring recovery, my research adds to the anthropology of addiction by providing an analysis of the habitus associated with histories of addiction.

Serenity Prayer (same in both Al-Anon and AA)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

Al-Anon Preamble	**AA Preamble**
The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions. Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.	Alcoholics Anonymous Is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience; strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we a self supporting through our own contributions. A.A. Is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Al-Anon 12 Steps	**AA 12 Steps**
1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*. 4. Made a searching and fearless moral	1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.* 4. Made a searching and fearless moral

inventory of ourselves.	inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.	5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.	6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.	7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.	8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.	9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.	10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. 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.	11. 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 others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.	12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Al-Anon 12 Traditions	**AA 12 Traditions**
1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.	1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group	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 relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend. 4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole. 5. Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA *ourselves*, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics. 6. Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always co-operate with Alcoholics Anonymous. 7. Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. 8. Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers. 9. Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.	conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. 3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking. 4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole. 5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. 6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose. 7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. 8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers. 9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. 10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. 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

10. The Al-Anon Family Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our 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, films, and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members. 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.	personalities.

Al-Anon and AA Closing Statement

In closing I would like to say that the opinions expressed here were strictly those of the person who gave them. Take what you liked and leave the rest. The things you heard were spoken in confidence and should be treated as confidential. Keep them within the walls of this room and the confines of your mind. A few special words to those of you who haven't been with us long: Whatever your problems there are those among us who have had them, too. If you try to keep an open mind you will find help. You will come to realize that there is no situation too difficult to be bettered and no unhappiness too great to be lessened. We aren't perfect. The welcome we give you may not show the warmth we have in our hearts for you. After a while, you'll discover that though you may not like all of us you'll love us in a very special way, the same way we already love you. Talk to each other, reason things out with someone else but let there be no gossip or criticism of one another. Instead, let the understanding love and peace of the program grow in you one day at a time.

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