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**MACRO-EFFECT OF MICROINTERACTIONS:
THE ROLE OF INTERACTION RITUALS IN NETWORK BUILDING
(CASE STUDIES OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS AND FAMILY
ANONYMOUS SELF-HELP GROUPS)**

The paper focuses on the analysis of the role that microinteractions play in the emergence of network structures in 12-Step self-help fellowships. The fellowships are considered as networks that consist of groups with overlapping memberships, which are linked together and are sustained via intergroup and intragroup interactions. It is suggested that microinteractions are crucial in building the networks in question. However, the interactional factor itself is usually neglected in the studies of 12-step groups and fellowships. The interaction ritual theory (Randall Collins) served as a conceptual framework in the case-studies of NA and FA groups. Analysis of regular group meetings revealed that their organization fulfills conditions and contains components that can foster successful interaction ritual. Group meetings (trans)form identity, build common 'cultural capital', stimulate 'emotional energy' and internalization of program principles thus supporting personal changes. Various interactions rituals (regular group meetings, group anniversaries, world service conferences, informal interactions etc.) sustain solidarity and group bonds, and help to build relations between groups' members through mutual support and exchange of experience-based information on recovery. As a result, group interaction rituals contribute to network-building at different levels (group, local/city, regional and international), create bridges between members, as well as between groups, and form an international macronetwork of 12-step communities.

Keywords: *social network, network-building, interaction ritual, microinteraction, self-help fellowship, 12-Steps, emotional energy, community symbols, cultural capital, identity.*

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**МАКРОЭФФЕКТ МИКРОВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЙ:
РОЛЬ ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫХ РИТУАЛОВ В СОЗДАНИИ СЕТИ
(КЕЙС-СТАДИ СООБЩЕСТВ ВЗАИМОПОМОЩИ
«АНОНИМНЫЕ НАРКОМАНЫ» И «АНОНИМНЫЕ СЕМЬИ»)**

Статья посвящена анализу роли микроуровневых интеракций в формировании сетей сообществ взаимопомощи Анонимные Наркоманы (АН) и Ано-

нимные Семьи (АС). Данные сообщества рассматриваются как сети, состоящие из групп с пересекающимися составами участников. Внутри- и межгрупповые микровзаимодействия играют принципиальную роль в формировании рассматриваемых сетей. В статье представлены результаты кейс-стади групп АН и АС, в которых в качестве концептуальной рамки используется теория интерактивных ритуалов Р. Коллинза. Анализ регулярных групповых собраний выявил, что их организация включает компоненты, способствующие реализации успешных интерактивных ритуалов. Групповые собрания стимулируют формирование идентичности, «эмоциональной энергии», «культурного капитала» и интернализацию программных принципов, способствующих личностным трансформациям. Различные интерактивные ритуалы (регулярные собрания, юбилеи групп, неформальные взаимодействия и т. д.) поддерживают групповую солидарность и являются средой формирования отношений между членами отдельных групп сообществ посредством проявляемой взаимной поддержки и обмена информацией о выздоровлении. Групповые интеракции способствуют формированию сетей разного уровня (в группах АН) (локальные/городские, региональные и международные) и объединяют как отдельных участников, так и группы в общую международную макросеть. Сообщества «12 Шагов» имеют общие принципы и совместимые символы (язык, слоганы, Шаги, Традиции и т. д.), что способствует также установлению отношений между членами разных сообществ, то есть образованию связей между сообществами.

Ключевые слова: социальная сеть, интерактивный ритуал, сообщество взаимопомощи, 12 Шагов, эмоциональная энергия, символы сообщества, культурный капитал, идентичность.

Introduction

In recent decades one can observe the rapid development of the network approach and its penetration into different areas of sociological inquiry as a promising methodology. The studies of social movements, communities, free associations, etc. have become domains where social network analysis is expanding. However, my principal intention in the present paper is not to present the structural characteristics and relational patterns of the networks studied, but to interpret the micro-level interactions as a mechanism contributing to network-building. The study focuses on the role played by interactions practiced in the 12-step groups of Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Family Anonymous (FA) (primarily by group meetings) in the respective networks and in personal transformation experienced by the fellowship members.

The data analyzed in the article was gathered during case studies of 12-step self-help groups (NA and FA), whose fellows are substance abuse dependents in recovery (NA) and co-dependents of their contact group (FA) (family members, friends, colleagues etc.). 12-step fellowships provide non-professional help for individuals with a wide range of substance abuse, dependency and co-dependency problems. All fellowships are based on the specific recovery program or approach called “12 Steps” and organizational principles of the “12 Traditions”. Alcoholic Anonymous (AA), the

first among the 12-step fellowships, appeared in the US in 1930s and rapidly evolved into a significant ‘movement’ spread worldwide. Developed by AA the 12-Step program and the principles of group activity and organization were extrapolated onto fellowships with other (non-alcoholic abuse) recovery purposes. This resulted in the creation of about 150 ‘parallel communities’ (Johnson & Chappel 1994).

The phenomenon of ‘anonymous communities’ and their various aspects were analyzed thoroughly. However, despite these extensive studies, the interactional aspect of 12-step groups activity is still under-investigated, especially from the microsociological point of view. Sociologist Norman Denzin (2009 [1987]) in his research on “the alcoholic society” provides a rare sociological reflection on AA fellowship. In general, analysis focuses on the different features which promote or mediate recovery, such as program ideology/philosophy, spirituality, the concept of illness, Higher Power, etc. Despite some contradictory data on the effectiveness of 12-Step groups (Fiorentine 1999: 94–96), multiple studies support their positive outcomes. (See the review of 12-Step groups’ effectiveness by Kyrouz, Humphreys, Loomis 2002; Toumbourou et al., 2002; Fiorentine 1999; Kelly 2003: 646–648). Antze (1976) studied the AA ideology* as a complex of program principles that exist as an ‘antidote’ to dependent’s attitudes. Spirituality is regarded as a recovery factor that gives a meaning to life (Prezioso 1987; Galanter 2007). Bateson (1972) noticed that the key concept of Higher Power is linked to an epistemological transformation of the relationship between an individual and the outer world into a complementary pattern (“Power greater than ourselves”).

The AA rhetoric was considered as a guide for action just as the rhetoric of transformation in religious healing (Swora 2004). Ronel (1998) regards the NA community as a subculture that plays an intermediary role between the deviant addict subculture and the dominant social context, by forming norms and attitudes that facilitate social re-integration.

Summarizing the results of various studies on the mechanics of 12-step groups, Kelly (Kelly 2003: 653–654) underlines two types of variables — the intraindividual variables (frequency of attendance, motivation, coping techniques, self-efficacy) and the interindividual variable (belonging to a friendly network, work on the steps, sponsorship). Levine (1988) identifies “social network” as one of several aspects of support in mutual help groups. Social network is also considered as a mediator of the effect of AA involvement (Kaskutas, Bond, Humphrey 2002). Kurtz (1990), among the numerous recovery factors in self-help communities, highlights membership and community, i.e. a group offers ‘an entire social network’ and ‘interdependent collective that values community over autonomous individualism’. Thus, the very ‘networkness’ of fellowships is also considered as a factor of individual positive changes.

“Interactivity” projected into the situations of here-and-now interactions of group meetings occupies a special place in the 12-step program. Regular interactions with peers are essential and considered to be the core recovery principle. Attendance at group meetings was proved to play an important role in recovery (Kissin et al. 2003)

* Most studies are devoted to AA community. Since the AA ideology, program and organization were borrowed by other communities, some of these studies’ results are relevant in research of other 12-step fellowships.

and maintenance of recovery after a clinical treatment (Fiorentine 1999; Gossop et al., 2003), although some studies indicate that participation is more important than attendance (Weiss et al. 2005). Existing studies consider either the causality between the frequency of attendance and positive outcome, or the role of specific meeting components, such as storytelling and testimonials (Cain 1991; Rappoport 1993; Rafalovich 1999; Humphrey 2000). However, interactive process itself has been scarcely investigated or has even been neglected. A study of meetings in GROW mutual-help-groups (Roberts et al., 1991) is an exception. However, organizational principles in GROW and 12-step groups have major differences, therefore, this study is only of methodological interest within the framework of this article. The basic interactions of 12-step groups have, en masse, attracted little academic attention.

Theoretical and methodological basis

Interaction ritual theory of Randall Collins is employed as an analytical framework in the case-studies of self-help groups of Narcotics Anonymous and Family Anonymous fellowships. The particular analytical angle of the theory, which emphasizes the primacy of microlevel interactions and regards the individual characteristics and social structures as made up and grounded in the repetitive interactional experience which constitutes the chains of interaction rituals (Collins 1981a; 1983; 1987) allowed me to interpret the role of the interactional aspect of the groups' activities in a new way — namely, as a determinant of members' personal transformation* and as a mechanism of network building, that is, the expansion and reproduction of relations.

According to Collins' theory, interaction rituals set the conditions for social identity construction, internalization of group symbols and establishment of social bonds with a group and for the group's integrity (Collins 1990; 1993; 2004). Thus, microinteractions have macroeffects. The theory presents major components, internal mechanics, scenarios of face-to-face interactions and their possible resultants (Collins 1988a; 1988b; 2004; Collins & Hanneman 1998; Kim 2006). Simulation models of interaction rituals elucidate the interactional process and give an idea of regularities and correlations among variables.

Some crucial theoretical ideas have to be mentioned:

- Interaction ritual possesses the following characteristics and ingredients: physical co-presence of two or more individuals at the same place; participants' understanding of interactional boundaries separating participants from outsiders; common focus of attention and mutual concentration on the focus of others; emotional experience, mood shared by all participants (Collins 1988b: 44; 1993: 206–209; 2004: 48). Two other variables could be added — local situation and event (Collins & Hanneman 1998: 220).

* By 'transformation' I imply the number of individual changes or acquirements (new identity formation, emotional support and 'leveling', acceptance of program principles, group symbols and cultural capital, etc.) which contribute to recovery as well as group bonding.

- The main resultants of interaction rituals are: cultural capital, group solidarity, sense of belonging to a group, membership, group-representing symbols; sense of morality and emotional energy ('confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action') (Collins 1988a: 193, 357; 2004: 47–49).
- Situation-dependent variables correlating with each other determine the course of interaction ritual and its derivatives.
- A collective symbol in the center of interaction (an object, individual, idea, principle, etc.) represents a community of people. It is a symbol of a group, with which individuals identify themselves. The more often an individual participates in emotional interactions organized around the symbol the stronger bonds are formed between the individual and the group, the more important becomes his/her identity as a group member and the more adherent to a group symbol he/she becomes (Collins 2004).
- During focused interaction, common cultural capital (relevant talk topics and verbal symbols of membership) is formed. It may be represented by a bank of group symbols that are actualized during interaction and identify individual as a group member. Cultural capital is defined by two variables — similarity of cultural capital and its quantity (Collins & Hanneman 1998; Collins 2004).
- Following the principle of "emotional-energetical tropism", individuals are motivated to engage in interactions, producing high emotional energy (Collins 1993: 223).
- Group symbols must be periodically "recharged" in rituals that (re)produce solidarity. Otherwise, they gradually lose their significance and relevance for the individuals involved.
- Emotionally charged symbols and common cultural capital facilitate initiation of interaction and establishment of a common focus. This, in turn, determines success of a ritual, i.e. induces the sense of group solidarity and high emotional energy (Collins & Hanneman, 1998; Collins 2004).

Collins and Hanneman (1998) employed a simulational model to present various interaction scenarios determined by situation-dependent set of variables. They have also formulated a number of axiomatic principles of interrelations of variables. I used these principles and scenarios to analyze group interactions in the studied groups.

The empirical data on the features of fellowship networks and the interactions was gathered during the case-studies of two groups of NA and a group of FA fellowships in St. Petersburg (Russia). Groups were chosen due to their status in the local communities as groups with high recovery yield and the reputation of successful groups. Since the study is focused on the analysis of microlevel interaction organization, preference was given to ethnographic methods (Stahler & Cohen 2000). Non-participant and participant observations were employed in the study of interactions (regular group meetings and groups' anniversaries) in NA and FA groups.

Ten in-depth interviews (2–3 hours in length) with members of NA and FA groups were an additional source of qualitative data. Fellowship texts — The 12 Steps, The 12 Traditions, books, pamphlets, recommendations, and introductory publications by NA and FA — were also analyzed in the course of the study. The information that allowed mapping the structure and organization of the fellowships (ties across groups,

principles of membership, basic practiced interactions, etc.) was extracted from the data collected.

Analysis of group meeting as a principal organized interaction ritual in 12-step fellowships

In this section, I analyze the structure and internal mechanism of the group meeting as an interaction ritual. The significance of interactional activity is emphasized by the 12-step approach to changes/recovery. The latter consists of two main components — the *ideological* component (the 12 Steps, principles of recovery, the concept of disease, the notions of powerlessness, The Higher Power, etc.) and the *interactional* component (different forms and types of interactions provided). “Changes in feelings, attitudes, and behavior will occur when the individual internalizes and uses a socially shared ideology that offers a useful interpretation of the person’s situation” (Levine 1988: 178). Acceptance and internalization are supported by the process of interaction.

The work on the 12-step program is tightly linked to participation in group interactions. Participation is not an optional activity, but a program requirement that realizes the principle of recovery through interactions with people who have the same problem (Alcoholics on themselves, 1996)*. There is a concept that once a member ceases to attend meetings, a relapse is inevitable (Kissin et al. 2003: 322).

In this paper I focus on the regular group meeting as a ‘generic’ interaction frame in 12-step fellowships which is also a constituent of other organized interactions in the fellowships. The group meeting is an *intentionally organized interaction ritual* which does not happen spontaneously but follows its once defined, prearranged scenario. The NA and FA regulations are almost identical and define those who may attend meetings and the proper way of participation.

The group meeting contains all formal prearranged elements of an organized interaction ritual: co-presence; similar cultural capital, common symbols and identical experience; a common focus of attention; shared mood; boundaries of inclusion-exclusion. The meeting setup corresponds to the principles that promote successful interaction rituals so that every participant could join the interactive rhythm. The interaction components are interrelated. Here are the basic ‘ingredients’ of the regular group meeting corresponding to the variables outlined in the Collins-Hanneman model (for the general model representing the relationships between the variables of the group meeting as interaction ritual see Figure 1):

(1) Participants’ **physical co-presence and proximity** are determined by the fact that a meeting has an organized and intentional character with time and place specified in advance.

* “Peer-to-peer” principle and the mutual help of people having a common problem were the primary reason for the foundation of the Alcoholics Anonymous. The AA community story states that the co-founders, Bill W. and Robert Smith, helped each other to stay sober, substituting drinks with talks.

(2) Participants are aware of the **interactional boundaries** that separate them from non-participants. Physical boundaries and meeting rules set the limits of involvement. Traditionally, all participants introduce and identify themselves in a specific format implying their membership*. If a person speaks at a meeting, he/she is considered a member as only fellows have a right to make statements (with an exception of the open meetings).

(3) **Common focus of attention and mutual awareness of it.** Participants' attention is concentrated on the topic determined for the day of a meeting (daily reflections, The Steps, The Traditions, The Slogans, etc.) and on the speeches of other participants. Topics discussed at the meetings are Durkheim's sacral symbols as community representations that members are associated with. The topics, slogans and aphorisms are inscribed into a common ideological frame. Meetings reproduce collective symbols in the recurrent topics. Since addiction/co-dependence is considered as an incurable disease, the regular return to the program's propositions, recommendations, etc. allows one to resist the disease and avoid a relapse. During interaction rituals, the symbols are cognitively re-actualized and "emotionally recharged". Regular attendance and participation provide continuous interaction with community symbols and promotes individual conformity, acceptance and internalization of community values and symbols.

*"I attend to not forget the knowledge" (I**. 7).*

(4) **Common emotional background, mood shared by participants.** In the course of a meeting, participants enter a common emotional mood by reacting to the relevant topics and the words of the other members. Meeting topics could cause various feelings (sadness, joy, etc.) and participants are free to express them. The similarity of past experience promotes similar emotional responses.

While one's negative experience causes empathy, which is a sign of group solidarity, positive experience (i.e. effective applying of the program principles and recovery) raises the group mood. The mutual focus of attention and common mood reinforce each other. "The key process is participants' mutual entrainment of emotion and attention, producing a shared emotional/cognitive experience" (Collins 2004: 48).

(5) **Emotional energy.** Emotional energy is the central concept of the theory and is considered to be the main motivational force for engaging in interactions and as a principal engine in the formation of interaction ritual chains. The common focus of attention, members' awareness of it and the common mood stimulate emotional effervescence and the formation of emotional energy, a positive emotional bond with the program ("recharge the group symbols"), the sense of enthusiasm, confidence, readiness to change, strength, and motivation. This is a long-term resultant of interaction rituals that individuals carry around with themselves afterwards (Collins 1993; 2004).

* Usually participants introduce themselves in the following manner: "Hi, my name is_ and I'm a dependent (an addict)/ co-dependent (a relative of an addict person)".

** Here and in what follows 'I' stands for 'Interview' and 'O' is for 'Observation'.

Being present at group meetings as well as delivering a speech, speaking itself facilitates participant's emotional transformation, making him more active and motivated.

"It is necessary to attend [a group meeting], otherwise the enthusiasm disappears (...) If you don't go — you lose something (...) When you don't attend, it feels like the program is useless, but when you come you realize that it works" (I. 8).

"I can come to a meeting and leave it disappointed. Or I can come without a desire to come and leave it inspired" (I. 3).

"Sometimes I come to a meeting and feel bad. I sit for fifteen minutes and feel a boost (...) I am sitting at a meeting, everybody's speaking out and I realize that I am feeling better and I know that if I speak out I will feel even better" (I. 1).

An opportunity to talk about oneself and one's problems is an important factor of emotional transformation. A similar experience, understanding and support from other members lead to a "catharsis" (Levine 1988:174). Meeting people with a similar experience and getting an opportunity to talk about it brings an emotional relief.

"I attend the group meetings to reduce pain" (FA, O. 4)

Denzin in his relevant reflection on AA claims that it 'provides a common field of shared, interactional experience that a problem drinker is immediately able to enter into... find [himself], perhaps for the first time, experiencing an interaction with others that is grounded on true and authentic emotional understanding' (2009 [1987]: 60). For a group member, an emotional transformation is associated with the re-actualization of group symbols through speeches of other members, the self-identification with them, who are "like himself".

"Others' positive experience and support stimulate the changes. I expect to come to a meeting and receive a positive charge, to see people who want to change. I've been coming here for two years, I see changing people and I realize that I change myself — this is the charge." (I. 7).

(6) **Rhythmic coordination and synchronization.** Common focus of attention and emotional mood lead to rhythmic coordination. Synchronization and coordination are established and reinforced by such meeting activities as the joint recitation of Serenity Prayer, sequential reading of the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions by all members, applauding, cheering every speaker and other ritual aspects of the meeting. The group meeting rules prohibit interruption of a speaker, as well as any comments or remarks which could destroy the mood and the rhythm of interaction.

(7) **Cultural capital.** On the verbal level, cultural capital consists of things that people talk about and can invest in future interactions, which are at the same time symbols of membership (Collins and Hanneman 1998: 219). The idea of 12-step fellowships is to gather people with a common problem. In this regard, the cultural

capital of participants is almost homogenous. The more there are common relevant topics for interaction, the easier it is for participants to engage in interaction, to maintain a common focus of attention and emotional response. Collins (2004) claims that individuals are attracted by situations in which they can more easily employ their cultural capital and symbolic resources in order to focus the verbal activity and to produce further solidarity. A group meeting is an interaction where individuals can broadcast the commonality of cultural capitals and this amplifies the identification of individuals with a group and the importance of their membership. Two components may be highlighted in the members' cultural capital — the *pre-group cultural capital* (determined by an identical addiction or co-dependence experience) and the *group/program cultural capital* (determined by a recovery experience and familiarity with the program ideology). The similarity of the pre-group cultural capital facilitates “entry” of a newcomer into a group, secures concentration of attention during the meetings, emotional reaction and acquisition of group/program cultural capital. Participants possess not only *similar cultural capital*, but a *large quantity of accessible cultural capital*. The emergence of new cultural capital is expressed in the usage of the program language / jargon (mottos, slang, notions, slogans, the Steps, the Traditions) as group symbols, in the application of program's frames of interpretation, in the incorporation of the group narratives into personal stories (Cain 1991; Humphreys 2000; Rappaport 1993; Ronel 1998). Assimilation of group cultural capital associates with the formation of a new identity of “the anonymous” (i.e. a member of ‘anonymous’ fellowship) and “the recovering”. The NA and FA communities are “parallel” and complementary*. By attending meeting of parallel communities, members of the same family acquire common program cultural capital that facilitates closer relationships, effective interaction and eliminates communication gaps.

(8) **Saturation.** The high value of variables such as “cultural-membership-capital.similarity” and “cultural-membership-capital.quantity.usable”*** (Collins and Hanneman 1998; Kim 2006) (see Figure 1), emotional reaction to participants' words and one's own emotional energy are able to maintain the focus of attention for a significant period of time.

(9) **Local situation.** The physical environment of a meeting is favorable for successful interaction. Traditionally, members sit in a circle to facilitate communication, visual access makes it is easier to concentrate on each other, monitor reactions etc.

(10) **Event.** Here, it is irrelevant to define the “event” as an external variable that initiates an interaction. Rather, it is a frame-factor. It seems that a meeting can be considered as an event, a particular frame with a specific recurrent scenario. Individuals have expectations when they come to a meeting. This anticipation and compliance with the frame's internal logics are important factors of interaction.

* Relatives and friends of addicted NA members are advised to attend the 12-step groups for co-dependants, FA / Nar-Anon / Al-Anon etc.

** This variable reflects the quantity of topics / things to talk about, which remains usable or accessible as time above threshold grows (Collins & Hanneman, 1998: 220).

(11) **Time above threshold.** The initial levels of common mood and focus of attention are strong enough to cross the barrier restricted by the time above a certain threshold.

Using the micro-model of interaction ritual developed by Collins and Hanneman the meeting interactions can be presented as a process driven by the interrelations among variables and their feedbacks. Figure 1 outlines the general model of a meeting which includes prearranged elements and sink signs which means that focus of attention, common mood, and rhythmic coordination dissipate over time if they are not sustained by inflows.

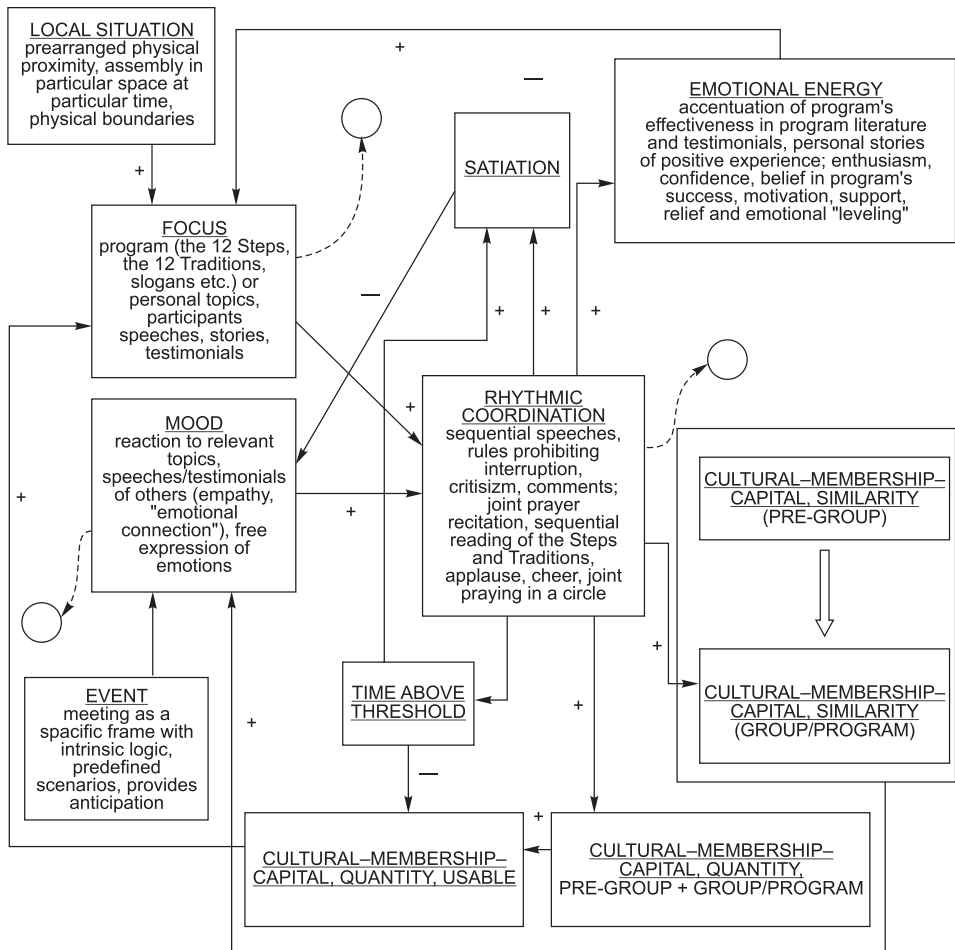


Figure 1. The general outline of a meeting as an organized interaction ritual (Collins & Hanneman 1998: 221)

The most important functions and resultants of group meetings are:

- Transformation of mood and emotional energy — emotional “leveling”, enthusiasm and motivation to work according to the program.
- Sense of solidarity of participants having a common problem and united by a common goal.
- Mutual support and empathy.
- (Re)actualization and emotional recharge of group symbols (12 Steps, 12 Traditions, program propositions, slogans, etc.)
- Emergence of common cultural capital sustaining the internalization of program principles and ideology.
- Formation of new identity of a fellowship member.

The group gathering is organized as a potentially successful face-to-face interaction ritual. That means that the possible resultants are optimized (via meeting organization, rules of participation and restrictions). From this perspective, it is reasonable to assume that the regular group meeting and its various derivative forms possess a practical significance. These interaction rituals invest in the intended personal changes through emotional correction, provide emotional energy and motivate one to follow the program’s path to recovery. They encourage internalization of the program principles as group symbols linked with the community, and the formation of a new identity and reinforce bonding within the group.

Interaction rituals and network-building in Narcotics Anonymous and Family Anonymous

12-step fellowships are networks with a worldwide membership whose basic organizational unit is the group, which is also the initial primary network. Here, by ‘group’ I understand the number of individuals who regularly interact in a predefined way and within uniformly organized settings. Group networks and links between them constitute fellowship network structures. At the local (e.g., city) level, the fellowships (NA or FA) are represented by several groups (the total number varies from city to city), which provide regular meetings.

Every group exists relatively independently, however, it follows the common principles and requirements established by the core Organizational Committee and presented in the program literature. Despite this, group networks do not function as completely isolated structures. Affiliation with a group is unconditioned and is a matter of personal choice. The membership implies free attendance and participation in any group meeting around the world. If the data is presented in abstract terms, then at the local / city-level of the fellowship there is usually an individual X who may affiliate with only one group A, an individual Y who may attend meetings of groups A and B and a person Z who affiliates with groups B, C and D, etc*. As a result, group memberships are non-permanent, not strictly defined, but rather fluctuating and significantly overlapping. Therefore, every 12-step fellowship is a network constituted by groups

* These variants are just illustrative and do not represent all possible variants of group affiliations and the number of co-affiliations.

whose members may affiliate with several groups simultaneously. This produces overlapping memberships and links members even without personal ties and direct connections in a common web of relations. If presented graphically, a group is not a separate detached graph, but an embedded element of the whole fellowship network structure. Despite the common attributes groups have, they still escape a total uniformity and differ in the established local conventions, emotional climate and individual characteristics of participants (gender, age, education, etc.), which strongly influences the choice of a primary group (referred to as “home group”). Thus, the personal ties established between group members and bonds with a group are also of different strength and subjectively perceived significance.

The structure of the networks in question is constituted by several components representing sub-networks. These components may be analyzed at different scales of size and geographical distribution that I analytically name ‘levels’ with no assumption of any hierarchical order and qualitative differences between them.

According to the data gathered, the following network levels can be distinguished in the NA fellowship:

- primary level — network of a single group;
- local/city (metropolitan) level — overlapping group networks within a city, including Area and Metropolitan Service Committees;
- regional level — overlapping local networks within a region with representative structures such as regional service committees (e.g., West of Russia, Siberian and Far Eastern, Ural and Western Siberian regional networks) and Zonal Forums;
- global/international level — overlapping networks in different countries* regional networks represented by World Services and their conferences.

In the case of NA this general network structure correlates with the fellowship’ organizational structure composed by such elements as groups, local metropolitan and regional service committees, regional assemblies with delegates from groups and local service committees, and world service conferences with regional representatives.

In the St. Petersburg segment of FA fellowship, only primary and local/city network levels were identified, which means that, at the present stage of development, there are no connections with regional network, the city network is not integrated in the broader FA fellowship network.

It is suggested in the article that interaction rituals are the mechanism that builds and expands a network from the single-group level, where personal relations and group bonds are established, through local connections between two and more groups in a city via regional intergroup bridges, up to the global fellowship macronetwork. Organized interaction rituals exercised in the fellowships with the group meeting scenario at the core permeate the whole network and operate at different levels.

The case study of NA groups revealed the following interaction rituals: daily regular group meetings, interaction with sponsors/sponsees, group anniversaries, local and regional service committees’ anniversaries, world service committees’ conferences with delegates representing regional networks from different countries. Fewer forms of

* In the NA fellowship structure, the country level is missing, regional delegates serve as the primary contact between NA’s World Services and the local NA community.

interaction were detected in the FA group: weekly group meetings, group anniversaries, interaction with sponsors/sponsees, tea-drinking interactions, sponsor-sponsee interactions, informal interpersonal communication (see Table 1)*.

Table 1

Forms of interaction rituals observed in Narcotics Anonymous and Family Anonymous

	Narcotics Anonymous	Family Anonymous
Small scale face-to-face interaction rituals ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sponsor-sponsee interactions; • informal interaction with other group members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sponsor-sponsee interactions; • informal interaction with other group members; • tea-drinking interactions.
Collective (group) interaction rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • daily group meetings; • speaker and business meetings; • group anniversaries; • local and regional service committees' meetings ('assemblies') and anniversaries; • world service committees' conferences². 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weekly group meetings; • speaker meetings; • group anniversaries.

¹ I distinguish small-scale face-to-face interactions (mostly informal conversations between 2-5 individuals) and collective interactions with larger number of participants based on the interaction 'scale' employed by Collins (2004).

² Informal group-sponsored interactions such as "sober" dances" are identified in the study of AA and NA groups in the US (Humphrey et al. 1999).

Interpersonal face-to-face interactions between the sponsor and the sponsee, traditional after-meeting tea-drinking interactions and other informal communication between the group members form personal relations and direct ties associated with an intensive flow and exchange of information on recovery and emotional support. These interactions are an important component of the 12-step group culture, but they are not prescribed (except for advised sponsor-sponsee interactions) and represent "natural rituals" in Collins' terms (Collins 2004: 50), i.e. interactions without formalized predetermined procedure.

The collective intragroup meetings (regular daily or weekly, speaker, business, etc), and intergroup ones (group and city communities' anniversaries are interactions, local service committees' meetings) between different groups' members result in the

* In NA, only the open group meetings (available for non-members) and group anniversaries were observed. The data on other interactions was collected from alternative sources — literature, communication with group members, etc. In FA, closed group meetings, group anniversary, speaker meetings and tea-drinking interactions were observed directly.

formation of single-group and local/city networks. The participants of these interaction rituals are fellowship members with single or multiple group affiliations.

Participants of the regional communities' anniversaries, 'regional assembly' and conferences of the World Services represent local and regional networks and serve as hubs connecting them into an integral international-level fellowship network. The joint participation of regional representatives in the interaction rituals bridge different components of the global network. Such meetings are virtually the only opportunity to connect the co-existing and geographically distant network components that are unlikely to be connected naturally by themselves, e.g. groups in St. Petersburg and New York City.

At the core of collective intra- or intergroup interactions (particular group or a regional community's anniversaries, World Service conference meetings) one finds an ordinary regular group meeting scenario with almost identical stages and organizational features. E.g., anniversaries are mixed interactions which combine two parts — group meeting in the beginning with significantly more participants than are usually involved in the daily/weekly group meetings and then after-meeting informal interaction. The group meeting with its predetermined attributes is the primary interaction frame of the fellowships that projects into the other intentional interaction rituals.

The group meeting itself is a locus of possible link or intersection of memberships, it is a situation in which individuals meet, communicate, form relations and thus establish connections between different group networks. Co-participation builds new edges between individuals involved and the set of connections they represent. Thus, the fellowship interactions, especially the regular group meetings contribute to network building. However, I consider group meetings as the ties-producing mechanism not simply because they organize individuals in a particular place, and provide physical co-presence and co-participation. The central idea of the paper is that meetings, as interaction rituals, generate and distribute 'interactive' resources (emotional energy, fellowship/program cultural capital, group symbols) that prolong relations and maintain the significance of the membership — thus preventing a node failure. The group meetings gather individuals and involve them in the interactional process with outcomes/resultants that are functional in personal transformation and also invest in the networking. The most important resultants on the intragroup-intergroup levels are (re)production of group bonds and solidarity (individuals are solidarized by a common goal and experience), formation of identity of a fellowship member and the fellowship/program cultural capital. Group bonds and identity, sustained by emotional energy, prevent the dissolution of bonding and alienation from the network. Generated emotional energy supports the individual's endeavor of change, however, in order to be sustained and prolong the feeling of confidence and enthusiasm, emotional energy should be 'recharged' in the subsequent interactions. On the microlevel of analysis, acquired cultural capital, common set of symbols, conventions, talk topics, etc. can be invested in the following interactions to reproduce the existing relations and build new ones.

Inter-fellowship connections are also worth mentioning although they are out of the scope of the present paper. All 12-step fellowships have common principles and compatible symbols (language, slogans, Steps, Traditions, concepts etc.), which facilitate the interactions of those participants who are affiliated with different

fellowships. The exemplars of the latter are the co-participation of recovering dependents and co-dependent family members (e.g. NA and FA), in group meetings of the 'parallel' fellowships, which bridge group networks of different fellowships.

The last, but not least important, remark concerns personal peer networks evolved around each member. An empirical study by Humphrey et al. (1999) demonstrates the dramatic changes in friendship networks of NA participants which are predominantly constituted by fellowship members. These friendship networks are of twofold importance. Firstly, as an important mediator in recovery (Humphrey et al. 1999) and, secondly, as a crucial constituent in the fellowships' networks and their dynamics. Although the emergence of friendship networks has not been studied thoroughly, it is reasonable to claim that interaction rituals practiced in the 12-step communities provide the contexts or settings, and the mechanics which promote the formation of relationships.

Conclusion

In the present paper, the network-building is analyzed from the perspective emphasizing the principal role of micro-situations and interactions. Hence, the usual focus on the individuals or actors and their interpersonal relations shifts to the situations, in which co-present individuals interact. This analytical stance reconsiders individuals as 'transient fluxes charged up by situations' (Collins 2004) thus bringing the interactional dynamic and its outcomes to the center of the research inquiry. Group meetings observed in the fellowships contribute to individual transformation and network-building through the interactional process itself and its outcomes. This perspective reveals cognitive and emotional processes beyond the admitted rational information exchange and psychological support. It brings back the missing interactional component, the face-to-face encounters operating at the microlevel, although with long-term macroeffect, into the research field of 12-step groups' transformative capacity and network genesis. The change of analytical starting point from the individual to the situation or interaction uncovers the hidden potential of face-to-face encounters and communication.

Different interaction rituals which have a group meeting scenario at their core operate at local/city, regional and world levels of the fellowships and invest in network-building in two ways. Firstly, in their capacity as occasions providing physical co-presence, co-participation and communication of individuals involved and, secondly, as situations of organized interaction with particular internal dynamics and intentional outcomes. It is shown that various meetings with single-group participants, those affiliated with several groups and representatives of regional branches of a fellowship integrate these participants into an extended network of relations. Here meetings are situations of physical co-presence, proximity and interaction of individuals representing different clusters of connections within a fellowship.

In the analyzed cases, it is important to emphasize the intentional and organized character of the interactions and the significance attributed to them within the fellowships. The prearranged components of the meetings constitute a set of conditions required to optimize their outcomes. The setup of group meetings as intentional

interaction rituals satisfies the following principles that make these meetings crucial in network-building:

- The more specific and unique are the topics of interactions the closer relationships they establish (Collins 1981b: 98–99).
- The more similar are participants' cultural capitals the longer, more focused and emotional their interactions become.
- The focused interaction that employs similar cultural capital produces common verbal symbols and amplifies the common cultural capital (Collins & Hanneman 1998; Collins 2004).
- The more often an individual takes part in group interactions, the more conformal and loyal he/she becomes towards group symbols and the more relevant the group identity becomes for him/her (Collins 2004).

Observed interaction rituals are situations where “commonness” (emotions, symbols, solidarity, identities etc.) linking individuals together is created and reproduced. Common experience such as shared mood, emotional entrainment, commitment to symbols, cultural capital, etc. constitute the resource for further interactions, (re)produce group bonds and expand the networks in terms of the number of established connections and individuals involved and their geographical distribution. From the point of view of Collins' interaction ritual theory, the 12-step fellowships, with their flexible memberships, can be interpreted as sequences or crossing chains of recurrent interactions with circulating cognitive symbols representing the 12-step ideology and regenerating emotional energy.

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