

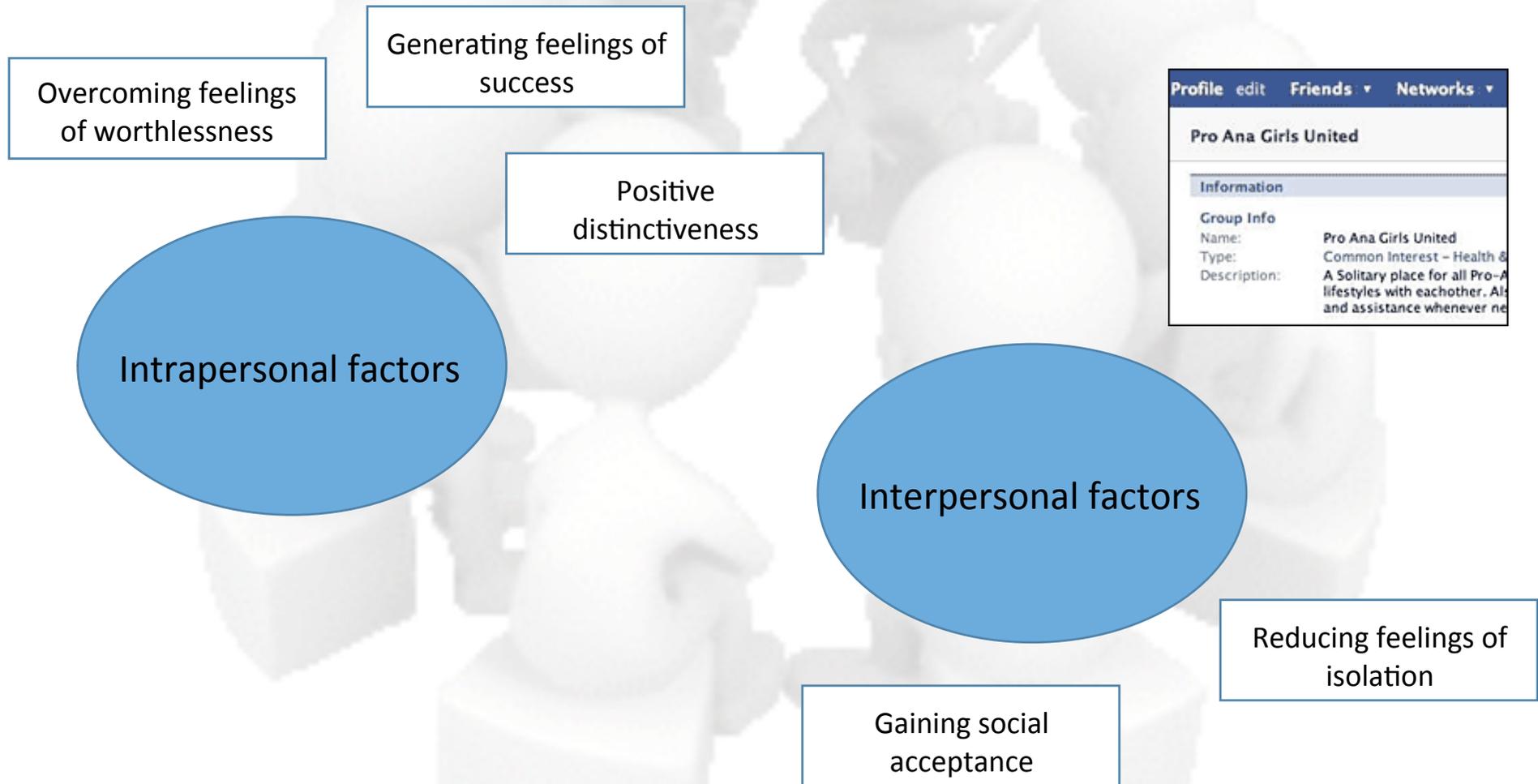
# The role of social identity in eating disorder recovery

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# The Eating Disorder as an Identity



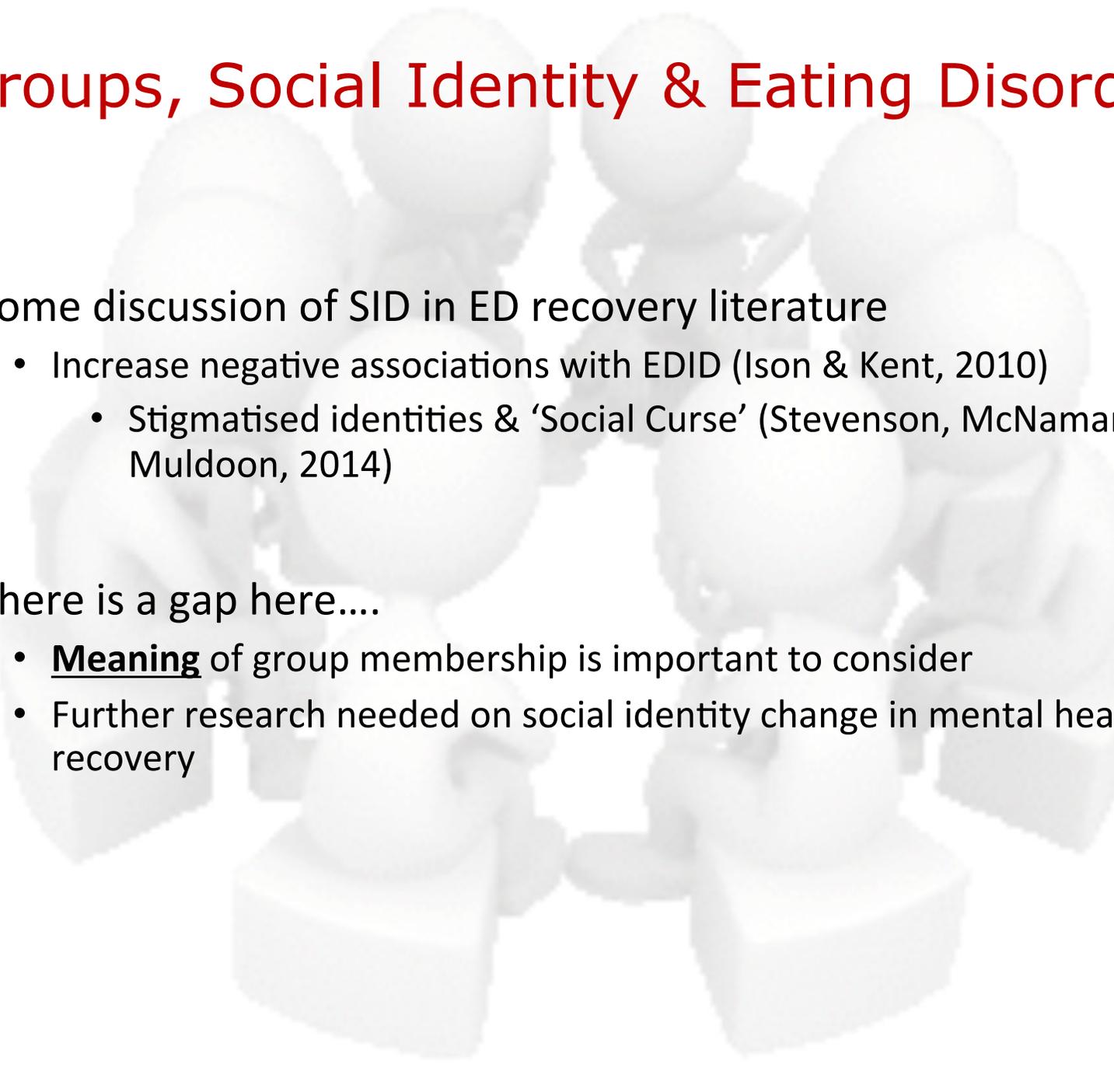
Schmitt & Treasure (2006) Maintenance model of Anorexia Nervosa

# Recovery means identity change

- Focus remains at individual level
  - Develop a “more mature personality” in therapy (Abbate-Daga et al., 2013)
  - Social relationships outside of therapy ignored
- Role of social identity and groups
  - Focus on maintenance of disorder
    - ED as “contagious”
    - Avoid similar others!



# Groups, Social Identity & Eating Disorders



- Some discussion of SID in ED recovery literature
  - Increase negative associations with EDID (Ison & Kent, 2010)
    - Stigmatised identities & ‘Social Curse’ (Stevenson, McNamara & Muldoon, 2014)
- There is a gap here....
  - **Meaning** of group membership is important to consider
  - Further research needed on social identity change in mental health recovery

# Current Study



- Aim:
  - Explore how shared identity can promote eating disorder recovery
  - Examining group dynamics *in situ*
- Method & Analysis:
  - Transcripts of 18 online support group sessions involving 75 users over a 6-month period were thematically analysed
  - Each session lasted 90 minutes
  - 2 facilitators and average of 7 participants per session

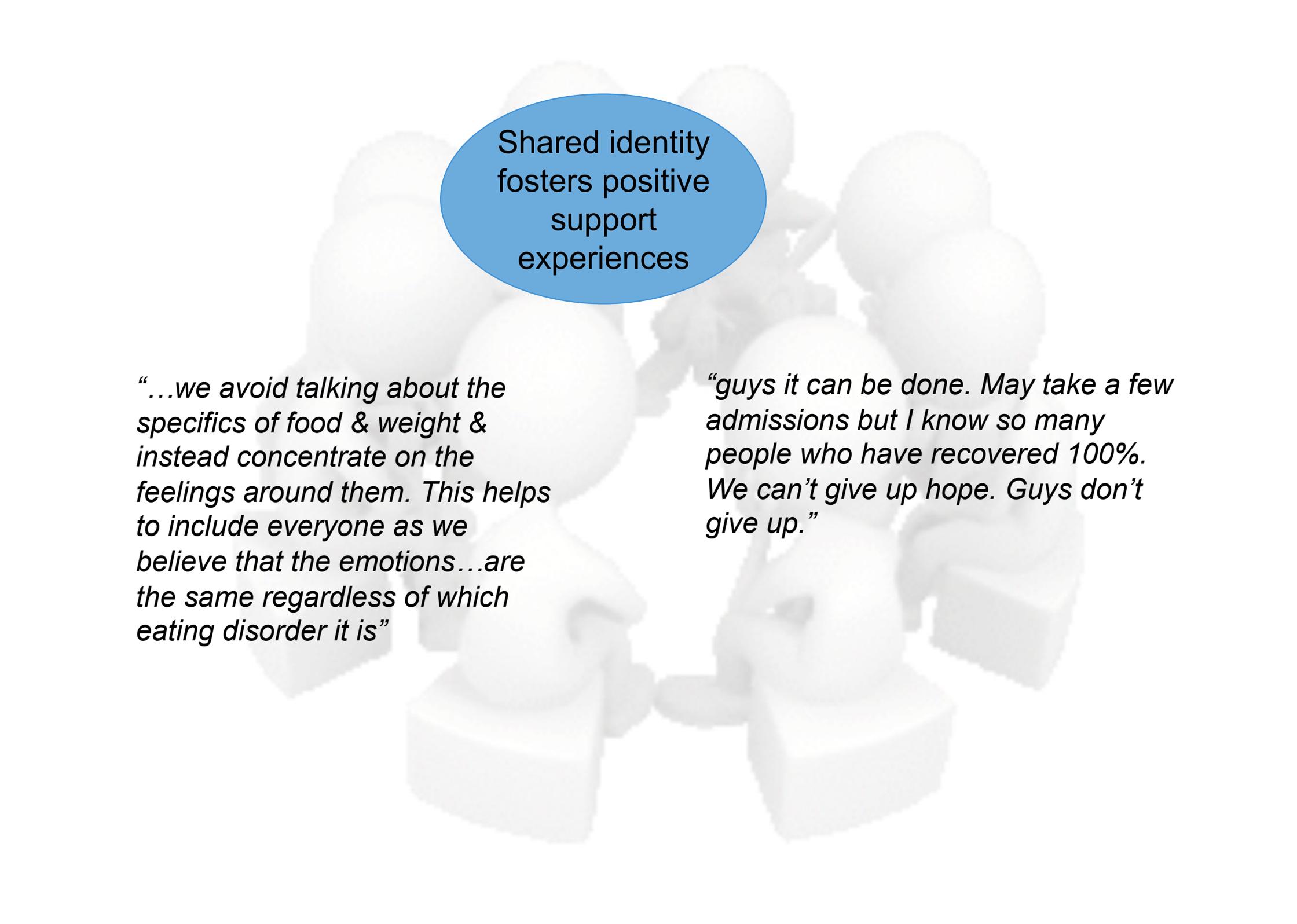
*“Nobody seems to understand the hold it has over u, they seem to think you are choosing to have the ED.”*

*“...like it’s a choice we make but it’s not – who wud want this”*

Getting the ‘right’  
support for  
recovery

*“...I don’t want to burst their bubble and tell them I’m not okay. But either way they won’t understand, they can’t.”*

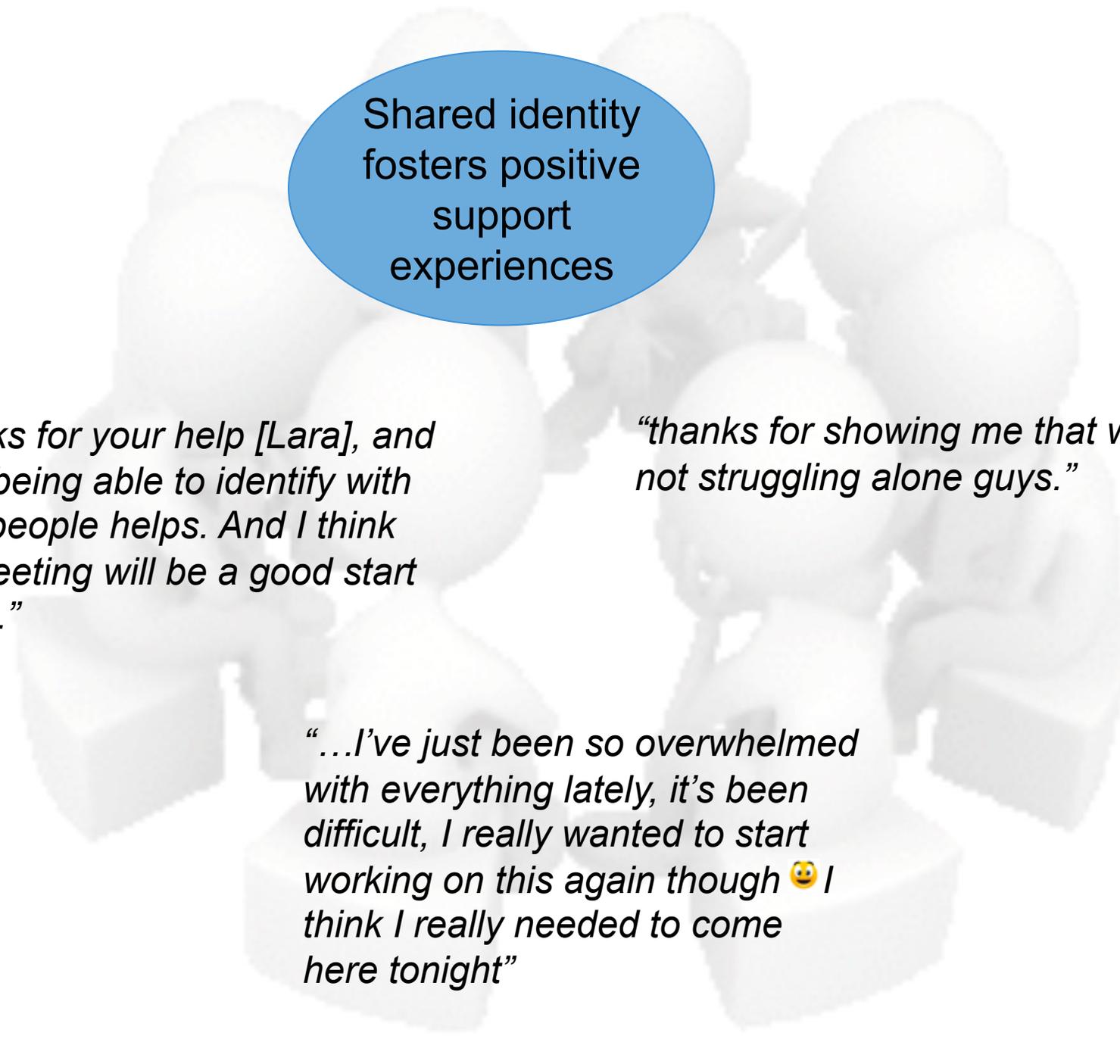
*“...everyone here wants everyone else to get better, we all understand what everyone is going through and know how difficult it is to talk about it. I think anyone in need of support is in the right place.”*



Shared identity  
fosters positive  
support  
experiences

*“...we avoid talking about the specifics of food & weight & instead concentrate on the feelings around them. This helps to include everyone as we believe that the emotions...are the same regardless of which eating disorder it is”*

*“guys it can be done. May take a few admissions but I know so many people who have recovered 100%. We can't give up hope. Guys don't give up.”*



Shared identity  
fosters positive  
support  
experiences

*“Thanks for your help [Lara], and [Jay], being able to identify with other people helps. And I think this meeting will be a good start for me.”*

*“thanks for showing me that we are not struggling alone guys.”*

*“...I’ve just been so overwhelmed with everything lately, it’s been difficult, I really wanted to start working on this again though 😊 I think I really needed to come here tonight”*

*Chloe I didnt feel guilt, i just binged cuz I couldn't deal with whatever was going on in my life*

*Ruth [...]See i binge [Chloe] cause of things in my life but then feel so guilty after it. you try to not think about the guilt but then your thinking about not thinking about it. How do you feel after a binge [Chloe]?*

*Chloe just felt like shit really and i wanted the food out of my system as fast as possible. When I purged I felt great – id accomplished something. Im actually in recovery [Ruth], counselling will help you. Im just testing this forum tonight, but maybe its not the right group for me.*

Shared identity  
fosters positive  
support  
experiences

*“...I know the pathway is never straightforward and that I should continue to fight, but it feels so desperately unsafe. I realise that it’s all about fear of losing identity etc but when you put the issues of getting fatter on top of that it makes it all so much harder...”*

*“Wouldn't be so amazing to wake up and be free from it, always wish I could just be normal and be like everyone else”*

Recovery is not  
a return to  
normal

*“I too ask the question, does recovery mean that one day I will be 'normal' with normal eating habits, but I now don't believe it will happen. Not to dishearten anyone.....what I mean is, stop searching for the time when everything will be perfect, and then being hard on yourself for not reaching that perfection.”*

*“...For me its managing to the best of my ability and not to be defined by my illness”*



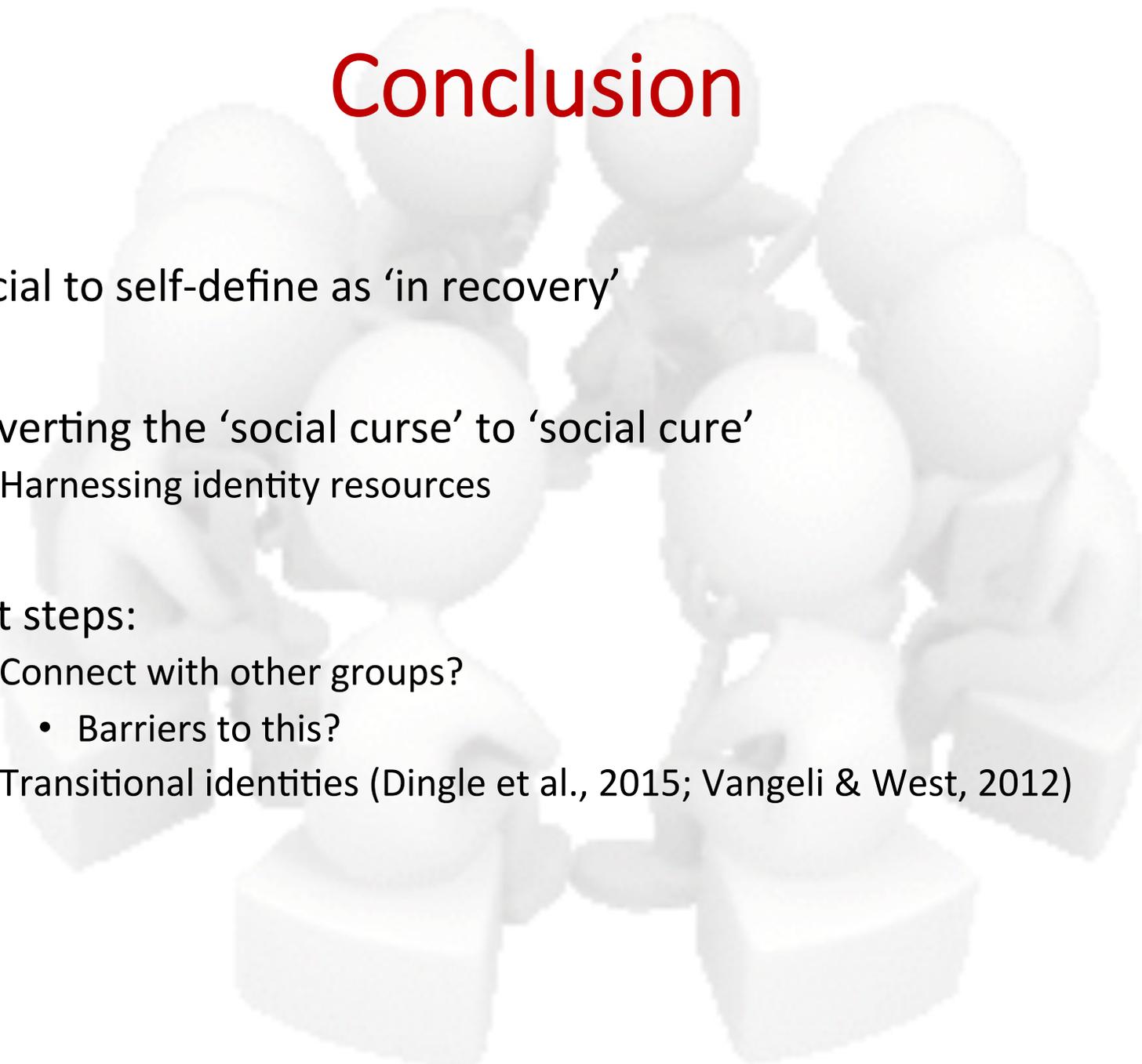
Recovery means  
reaching out to  
others

*“...Recovery is a very long process with lots of up’s and down’s, you can recover with perseverance and with HELP, I don’t advocate going it alone on recovery at all...”*

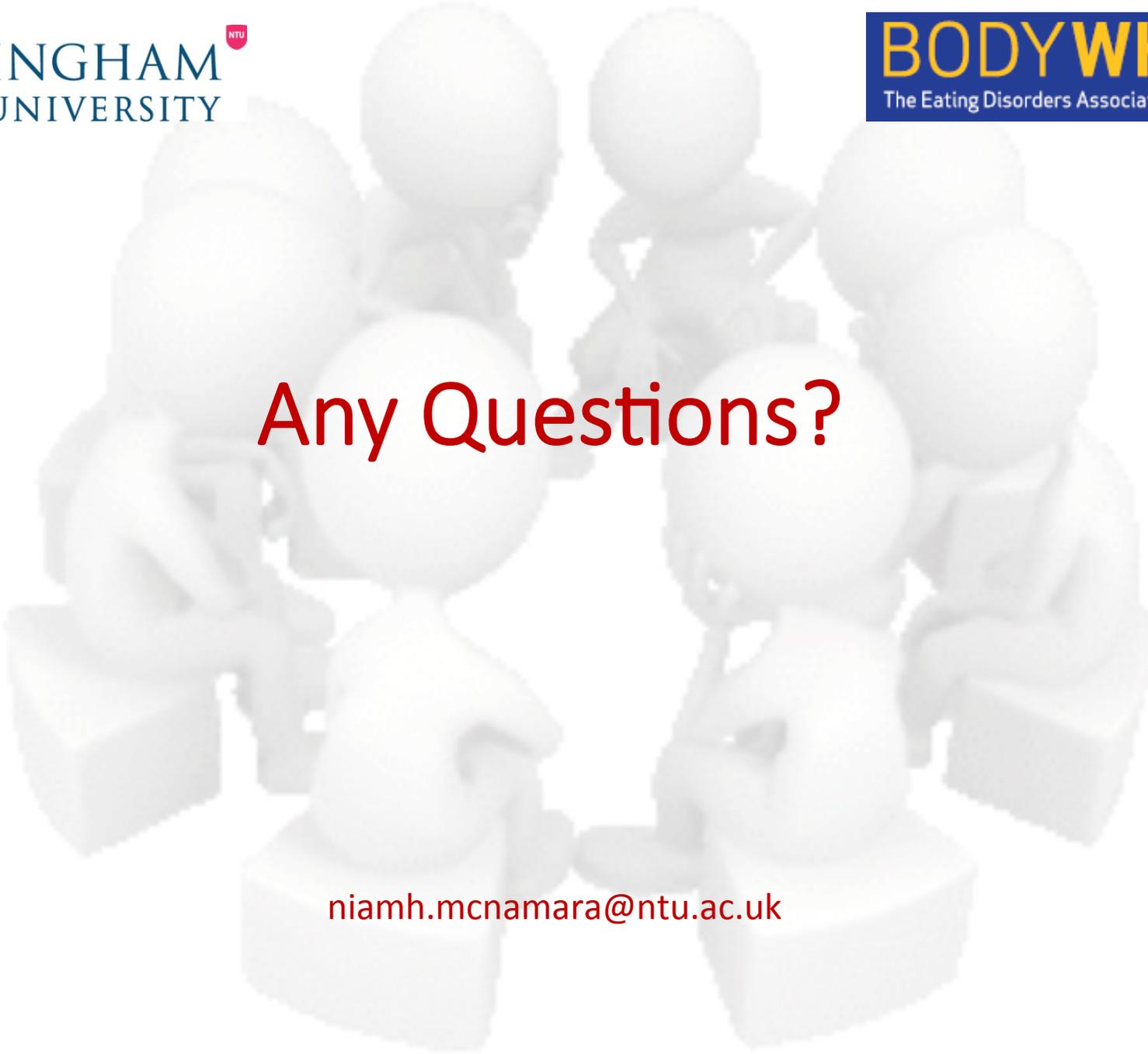
*“I went to my GP in February and told her everything, doctors are amazing with keeping things between you and them....”*

*“...if you don’t talk to your GP then in my opinion you can’t recover”*

# Conclusion



- Crucial to self-define as ‘in recovery’
- Converting the ‘social curse’ to ‘social cure’
  - Harnessing identity resources
- Next steps:
  - Connect with other groups?
    - Barriers to this?
  - Transitional identities (Dingle et al., 2015; Vangeli & West, 2012)



Any Questions?

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