

The Selective Adaptation of the Alcoholics Anonymous Program by Gamblers Anonymous

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This paper is largely based on a year long observation study of Gamblers Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in northern California. The paper argues, contrary to popular assumption, that Gamblers Anonymous is significantly different from Alcoholics Anonymous. Differences, in members' consciousness for example, are discussed. The paper contends that although there is some *12 step consciousness* in G.A., the dominant consciousness is *page 17 consciousness*. The significant differences are attributed to the selective adaptation of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. Several consequences of these differences, such as the central role of a language of the self in A.A. and not in G.A., are highlighted.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s there was a dramatic increase in support groups. Levoy (1989) and Leerhsen, Lewis, Pomper, Davenport & Nelson (1990) report 500,000 weekly meetings attended by 15 million people in the United States. "In the last 10 years, the number of these self-help organizations has quadrupled, and the topics they cover have been expanded." (Leerhsen et. al., 1990, p. 50) One major form of support group is the 12 step recovery program. The original model for the 12 step recovery program is Alcoholics Anonymous. In this paper the terms self-help and mutual-aid are used interchangeably with support groups.

A popular belief is that all 12 step programs are basically the same. This assumption is also made by academic researchers; Preston and Smith (1985), for example, argue that

With minor alterations and adjustments, the G.A. program is the same as that of A.A.. The "Unity Program" is exactly as the "12 Traditions" of A.A. while changes in the "12 Steps" of the program of recovery may be more a reflection of the time in which they were written than any conscious deviation. (Preston & Smith, 1985, p. 99)

Although some 12 step programs develop their own materials, most 12 step programs, such as Overeaters Anonymous, use Alcoholic Anonymous materials such as the A.A. big book and merely substitute their particular addiction for alcohol or alcoholism (Suler and Barthelomew, 1986).

This is not the case with Gamblers Anonymous' adaptation. Lesieur (1990), for example, has pointed to some differences between A.A. and G.A. and to some of the negative implications of those differences. Lesieur argues:

First, it would be easy to believe that GA is a clone of AA. However, those who are familiar with AA will notice that the Twelve Steps are different in GA. God and spirituality are deemphasized in GA's steps and in the overall program, and the Lord's Prayer is not said at the end of each meeting. One consequence is that there are fewer step meetings in GA, which, in the author's experience, works to the detriment of GA members because it is typically at step meetings that members of self-help groups come to express their feelings. (In GA, old-timers who have not been to step meetings frequently still appear to be "big shots.")

Thus, some GA groups, especially those whose GA members also belong to AA, tend to hold more step meetings and discuss feelings. (Lesieur, 1990, p. 242)

Contrary to Preston and Smith (1985) who see A.A. and G.A. as basically the same, but much more forceful than Lesieur (1990), I shall argue that Gamblers Anonymous is qualitatively different from Alcoholics Anonymous in organizational structure and in member consciousness and practice.

DATA

Between 1989 and 1990, a comparative study of Gamblers Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous was carried out. The author spent ten months doing observational work in northern California. Approximately 100 Alcoholics Anonymous and 70 Gamblers Anonymous meetings were attended. In addition to the 1989/1990 study, this paper draws upon my year long observation of Gamblers Anonymous meetings and nine formal interviews conducted three years ago (Browne, 1989). In the present study an additional nine formal G.A. interviews were conducted. Three of the nine were also members of other 12 step programs. Five formal interviews were conducted with A.A. members. The interviews were semi-structured; they began by asking for standard biographical information, followed by a more open ended portion in which the subjects were asked to relate in their own words their gambling or alcohol stories and their experiences with Gamblers Anonymous and/or Alcoholics Anonymous. The interviews were tape recorded. Interviews ranged in time from one and a half to six and a half hours with a three hour average.

I primarily attended open meetings, but I also observed three closed A.A. meetings and I was invited to four closed G.A. meetings. Open meetings in Gamblers Anonymous vary in nature. In New York for example, open meetings are more likely to be arranged by the intergroup, and several designated members from both G.A. and Gam-Anon tell their story. These meetings are conducted partially to inform the public about G.A. and Gam-Anon. The California open meetings are similar to open meetings in A.A. There were three such G.A. open meetings in the study area. These meetings take place every week and anyone can walk off the street and attend. All the gamblers

give therapy and there are typically no members of Gam-Anon present. They are similar to G.A. closed meetings except that they are open to the public. I was not allowed to observe one closed G.A. meeting and I left two A.A. open meetings because the chairs, the person who tells their story, were uncomfortable with my presence.

In addition to regular attendance at Gamblers Anonymous and Alcohol Anonymous, I also attended three meetings of Overeaters Anonymous, three Co-Dependents Anonymous meetings, three Adult Children's of Alcoholics meetings and two Debtors Anonymous meetings.

FINDINGS

As Lesieur (1990) points out, Gamblers Anonymous is not a clone of Alcoholics Anonymous. But, there are a number of similarities. They are both self-help groups that practice the principle of anonymity; additionally, both use the disease model of addiction and advocate abstinence as their goal.

There are several differences between Gamblers Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous. First, except for celebration meetings, Gamblers Anonymous meetings are considerably smaller than Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Although the size varies by location, the average G.A. meeting attended had about seven members whereas the average A.A. meeting had about forty members. Three years ago, the G.A. meetings I attended, several of which were the same meetings, averaged ten members. The smallest A.A. meeting attended had eighteen members.

Gamblers Anonymous started 22 years after Alcoholics Anonymous which was founded in 1935. So, one would expect A.A. to be larger than G.A. In 1982 A.A. had an estimated 50,000 groups while G.A. in 1988 had 1,000 groups; that makes A.A. 50 times larger than G.A. At the same age, however, A.A. was 13 times larger; at 32, A.A. had 13,279 groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1985). One should not conclude from these numbers that A.A. is a better program than G.A. because that evaluation would require analysis of several complex variables; this analysis does not seek to answer that question. The growth or lack of growth of G.A. is, however, a continuing problem for the organization (Preston & Smith, 1985). Gambling in the society is

growing rapidly while G.A. is growing slowly if it is growing at all.

Lesieur (1990) gives the following growth trajectory for G.A. in the United States: in 1960 there were 16 chapters, in 1970 there were 130 chapters and in 1988 there were 600 chapters. In northern California the number of G.A. chapters remained about the same between 1987 and 1990, but the number attending meetings has dropped considerably. Informal discussion with informants in other parts of the country suggests that retention and/or growth is a problem for Gamblers Anonymous. A further look at the other differences between A.A. and G.A. may shed some light on this problem.

There are several minor differences between the two groups that are apparent on closer inspection. First, Gamblers Anonymous meetings are generally longer than A.A. meetings; depending on the type of meeting, A.A. meetings are normally either one hour or an hour and a half while G.A. meetings can last from an hour for a small group to as long as four hours. This is in large part due to the practice in G.A. of giving everyone a chance to give "therapy" in G.A. lexicon or to "share" in A.A. lexicon. Alcoholics Anonymous also has many meetings per week and throughout the day. In the northern California area there are approximately 20 weekly G.A. meetings, while in A.A. the east bay which only includes Oakland, Alameda, Emeryville, Berkeley and El Cerrito, there are over 300 meetings per week. Gam-Anon meetings are usually held on the same night and location as the Gamblers Anonymous meetings while in A.A., Alanon meetings were not typically held at the same time and location as A.A. meetings.

Second, there are several lexicon differences. As already mentioned, in G.A. one gives therapy whereas in A.A. one shares. Another lexicon difference is that in G.A. one "jumps" while in A.A. one has a "slip" or returns to drinking. Third, like Debtors Anonymous, G.A. has a pressure relief group that Alcoholics Anonymous does not have. A pressure relief group is given by G.A. members, called Trusted Servants, and is referred to as "the moment of truth." Members are supposed to reveal their entire financial situation and other personal, employment, and legal problems they have as a result of their gambling careers. Although the meeting is supposed to have more than a financial focus, the primary advice given at such a meeting is financial: how to budget one's money and how to approach loan sharks and institutions to which one owes money with a manageable repayment plan.

Finally, Gamblers Anonymous has relatively few step meetings. Like Lesieur (1990) I think that this is important and may work to the detriment of the members. In A.A., the steps are the central focus and they are the primary tools passed along from one member to another. In G.A. the steps do not hold that central place.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES

There are three areas of significant differences between A.A. and Gamblers Anonymous. Before discussing these differences, it is useful to present the differences in the steps and traditions of the two programs (see Tables 1 and 2). As stated before, there is a deemphasis on God and spirituality in G.A. The A.A. steps and the corresponding G.A. steps are outlined below. In referring to their steps and traditions, G.A. uses "the recovery program" for the steps and "the unity program" for the traditions.

Gamblers Anonymous is significantly different from Alcoholics Anonymous in three areas: in organization, in the respective conception of the problem or addiction and in the nature of members' consciousness.

TABLE 1
Comparison of A.A. and G.A.'s 12 Steps

<i>The 12 Steps of A.A.</i>	<i>The 12 Steps of G.A.</i>
1. We admitted we were powerless over <i>alcohol</i> —that our lives had become unmanageable.	1. We admitted we were powerless over <i>gambling</i> —that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to <i>sanity</i> .	2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to <i>a normal way of thinking and living</i> .
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of <i>God, as we understand Him</i> .	3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of <i>this Power of our own understanding</i> .

4. Made a searching and fearless *moral inventory of ourselves*.
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*.
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.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever 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.
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 *alcoholics*, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

4. Made a searching and fearless *moral and financial inventory of ourselves*.
5. Admitted to *ourselves* and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have *these defects of character removed*.
7. Humbly asked *God (of our understanding)* to remove our shortcomings.
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 whenever 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.
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 *made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs*, we tried to carry this message to *other compulsive gamblers*.

TABLE 2
Comparison of A.A. and G.A.'s 12 Traditions

<i>12 Traditions of A.A.</i>	<i>12 Steps of Unity of G.A.</i>
1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon <i>A.A. unity</i> .	1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon <i>group unity</i> .
2. <i>For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.</i> Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.	2. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for <i>A.A.</i> membership is a desire to stop <i>drinking</i> .	3. The only requirement for <i>Gamblers Anonymous</i> membership is a desire to stop <i>gambling</i> .
4. Each group should be <i>autonomous</i> except in matters affecting other groups or <i>A.A.</i> as a whole.	4. Each group should be <i>self-governing</i> except in matters affecting other groups or <i>Gamblers Anonymous</i> as a whole.
5. <i>Each group</i> has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the <i>alcoholic</i> who still suffers.	5. <i>Gamblers Anonymous</i> has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the <i>compulsive gambler</i> who still suffers.
6. <i>An A.A. group</i> ought never endorse, finance, or lend the <i>A.A.</i> name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.	6. <i>Gamblers Anonymous</i> ought never endorse, finance or lend the <i>Gamblers Anonymous</i> name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every <i>A.A. group</i> ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.	7. Every <i>Gamblers Anonymous Group</i> ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. *Alcoholics Anonymous* should remain forever *non-professional*, 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 personalities.

8. *Gamblers Anonymous* should remain forever *non-professional*, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. *Gamblers Anonymous*, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. *Gamblers Anonymous* has no opinion on outside issues; hence the *Gamblers Anonymous* 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 television*.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation *of the Gamblers Anonymous program*, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Sources: A.A. Grapevine, Inc. (1984); Gamblers Anonymous (n.d.)

Organization Structure

Perhaps the most significant change Gamblers Anonymous made in the 12 steps, 12 traditions is in Tradition Two. Gamblers Anonymous' second tradition or "steps of unity" states that "our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern," whereas A.A.'s second tradition states, "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." Gamblers Anonymous leaves out the idea that the ultimate authority

for the group is God as He may express Himself in the group conscience. In A.A., this idea translates into an organizational structure that A.A. members describe as an inverted pyramid where the power lies with each group and those in service or leadership positions merely administer the wish of the groups. The organizational structure is set up to guard against the leaders becoming too powerful. Terms of office, for example, are limited, and it is very difficult to change the basic tenets of the organization.

The organizational structure in Gamblers Anonymous, on the other hand, is top heavy. G.A. members, those in service (those who hold positions such as secretary, treasurer, or intergroup representative) and trustees, point out that Gamblers Anonymous is like any other organization. In G.A. the leadership positions are very political and powerful positions. Power and status pervades the organization.

Another important organizational difference, related to the second tradition, is the different notions of group conscience held by each organization. Any member can call for a group conscience, a group discussion on an issue that affects the groups as a whole. In Gamblers Anonymous, to implement a group conscience requires all members to agree whereas in A.A., although there is some variation, to implement a group conscience does not require unanimity; it requires substantial agreement. This difference highlights the potentially political nature of Gamblers Anonymous. At the group level this could work to the detriment of the groups. If one member disagrees and is the only dissenting voice in a group conscience, he or she can get their way, thus submitting the group to his or her will. In A.A., on the other hand, care is taken to assure that one member does not impose their will and way on the group. In fact, according to my informants for A.A., "self-will run riot" (A.A. Grapevine, 1988, p. 32) is at the root of the addict's problem.

This difference has the consequence of exclusion in Gamblers Anonymous and inclusion in A.A.. In Alcoholics Anonymous, the group conscience process has a more didactic purpose. The discussion proceeds by looking at all sides of an issue or problem. Members who will vote for an issue will on occasion argue the down side to make sure all aspects of the issue are covered and also to educate the newcomers to the fact that they have choices. This is not to say that the A.A. process is devoid of any politics; this is merely to point out that A.A.'s structure guards against one person imposing their will on the group and at the

same time allowing many point of views to be expressed, while G.A.'s conception of group conscience does not guard against this possibility. In A.A., having a higher power such as God as ultimate arbiter unexpectedly allows minority positions to be voiced.

Conception of the Problem

The second major difference between G.A. and A.A. lies in their respective conceptions of the problem of the addiction that members confront. In G.A. the dominant position is that gambling is the problem. And although some hold the view that gambling is merely a symptom of the real problem it is not the dominant view. In A.A., on the other hand, the dominant position is that although alcohol is important, it is not the major problem the alcoholic has. Alcohol, for A.A., is an epiphenomenon; the real problem is the self-centered, self-loathing or self-praising "self." From members' shares and stories, initially there is a focus on alcohol but as the member remains abstinent, there is a shift of focus to the "self-centered self."

Members' Consciousness

The final significant difference between A.A. and G.A. lies in the nature of members' consciousness. In A.A., members have 12 step consciousness whereas in G.A., members have, what I call, *page 17 consciousness*. In Gamblers Anonymous, many long time members tell newcomers that the program basically boils down to following page 17 of the "combo book." The combo book is a short, pocket sized, summary of the G.A. program which is read in almost all Gamblers Anonymous meetings from cover to cover; it is in effect G.A.'s "bible." Many members carry this pamphlet with them. Page 17 reads as follows:

TO ALL GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS MEMBERS, PARTICULARLY
THE NEW GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS MEMBERS:

1. Attend as many meetings as possible, but at least one meeting per week.
2. Telephone other members as often as possible between meetings. Use the Telephone List!

3. Don't tempt or test yourself. Don't associate with acquaintances who gamble. Don't go in or near gambling establishments. Don't gamble for anything. This includes buying from the stock market, commodities and options, buying or playing lottery tickets, raffle tickets, flipping a coin, or entering the office sports pool.
4. Live the Gamblers Anonymous Program ONE DAY AT A TIME. Don't try to solve all your problems at once.
5. Read the recovery and unity steps often and continuously review the Twenty Questions. Follow the steps in your daily affairs. These steps are the basis for the entire Gamblers Anonymous Program and practicing them is the key to your growth. If you have any questions, ask them of your Trusted Servants and Sponsors.
6. When you are ready, the Trusted Servants will conduct a Pressure Relief Group meeting or evaluation for you and your spouse (if married), and adherence to it will aid in your recovery.
7. Be patient! The days and weeks will pass soon enough, and as you continue to attend meetings and abstain from gambling your recovery will really accelerate. (Gamblers Anonymous, n.d., p. 17).

The combo book used to be also known as the "white book," or now also as the "yellow book." There is a minority of G.A. members with 12 step consciousness; from my contact with G.A., most obtained this perspective from going to other 12 step groups or being sponsored by someone in G.A. that belongs to another 12 step group. The dominant consciousness of G.A. members is *page 17 consciousness*. Page 17 is very practical advice focused on helping the gambler stop gambling. Page 17 assumes that the primary problem the gambler faces is gambling. Although members are advised to read the steps often and follow them in their daily lives, Gamblers Anonymous has few step meetings or other means of incorporating the steps into members' lives and consciousness.

In A.A., the steps hold a central place in members' way of life and consciousness once they take to the program. In addition, there are many step meetings. Members refer to the steps frequently in their stories and in sharing at meetings. The primary role of one's sponsor is as someone to work the steps with. Oldtimers in A.A. advise newcomers that the key to the A.A. program is working the steps. In G.A. the sponsor is more of a friend and confidant. 12 step consciousness is basically transmitted through working the steps the way the Alcoholics Anonymous big book suggests. Gamblers Anonymous, at one point in

its history, made use of A.A.'s literature on the steps; G.A. used material from the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (the 12 and 12) (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1981). The 12 and 12, however, is the advanced "course" on the steps and traditions and presupposes that members have done the steps the way the A.A. big book suggests. So, G.A. "took" the graduate course without taking the undergraduate course.

In my view, the key step in the transmission of 12 step consciousness is step 4. It is in writing out one's moral inventory with one's sponsor's direction, and listening to other members share their experience, strength, and hope, that members are socialized into the 12 step perspective and consciousness.

Twelve Step Consciousness

Four elements to 12 step consciousness stand out when listening to the shares of members "who have got it." First, any problem that is being dealt with is located in, what I shall call, the *self-centered self*. One reason members give for their action is selfishness; they speak of their "self-centeredness." This can either be the *self-loathing* or *self-praising self*. The self-loathing member thinks that he is less than others. A person with low self-esteem has a self-loathing self. The self-praising member, on the other hand, thinks she is "more than," or better than others. The self-praising member is sometimes described as "playing God." Second, the member elaborates on the emotional aspects of their reaction, and attributed fear to be the root cause of the problem. The model for locating one's problems in the emotional self-centered, self-loathing or self-praising self is found, in my reading, on page 65 of the Alcoholics Anonymous big book (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976). In chapter 5, "How it Works," members are instructed on how to write a "searching and fearless moral inventory." It is not unusual to see members with pads or note books writing out this inventory. In A.A. it is typically written with suggestions from one's sponsor. Members list their resentments, what they think the cause of that resentment is and how it affects them. The following item is the first example listed on page 65 of A.A.'s big book:

<i>I'm resentful at:</i>	<i>The Cause</i>	<i>Affects my:</i>
Mr. Brown	His attention to my wife.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Told my wife of my mistress.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Brown may get my job at the office.	Security. Self-esteem (fear)

(Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976, p. 65)

Members in A.A., with the assistance and support of their sponsors, write out their moral inventory and in the process learn to locate problems in the self-centered, emotional self. Members gain distance from their own reactions and learn to distrust their first reaction, their "alcoholic reaction" to problems. Members also gain this perspective just by being present at meetings when others share their experience, strength and hope. While sharing in meetings, members "who have got it" unconsciously frame their comments, their shares with 12 step consciousness. They locate problems in the emotional self-centered self.

The last two elements of twelve step consciousness can be viewed as the process of getting out of that emotional self-centered self through two means, a spiritual means and an action means. In A.A. the spiritual means is broadly defined although the underlying process is similar for each form of spirituality. From my observations of A.A. meetings in northern California, members expressed at least three forms of spirituality; the traditional God, the group, and the "true self" or "inner child." The form of spirituality varies by time and place, but the underlying process is one of turning over or surrendering of the alcoholic self (Tiebout, 1953, 1954). Surrendering to the traditional God is sometimes fairly passive but can have an active component; that is, one should do the "footwork" before turning it over or surrendering. The other two forms of spirituality are more active. With the group as God one has to tell the group or members of the group about ones' problems and be willing to do what is suggested. Members have to seek out and consult other members or share their problems at a meeting. The action is accomplished when talking it out (Robinson, 1979). Twelve step groups have suggested that members having difficulty with the traditional God use the group-as-God initially. The assump-

tion is that the person will eventually embrace a traditional conception of God. The conception of the group-as-God has become a permanent spiritual tradition in A.A. Many members do not embrace a traditional God. The third spiritual notion is more psychological. Members get in touch with and operate under the influence of the "inner child" or true self. This self, as in the other spiritual traditions, is in contrast to the alcoholic self. Members frequently go to other groups and/or therapy in order to get in touch with this true self. Like the group-as-God tradition, the inner-child-as-God tradition, although much less widespread, is growing in A.A. Wendy Kaminer (1990) describes inner-child theory as an

eclectic synthesis of Jung, New Age mysticism, holy-children mythology, pop psychology and psychoanalytic theories about narcissism and the creation of a false self that wears emotions without experiencing them. (p. 27)

The growth and development of these latter traditions in A.A. is in part responsible for the continued growth and inclusionary nature of A.A.

The fourth and final element of A.A. or twelve step consciousness is *taking action*. This is the final step of getting out of the emotional self-centered self. The program is not only an intellectual program, it is also a practical one. Members have to take action: tell their story; follow up on what is suggested to them; do the footwork; make amends. Twelve step consciousness can be summarized as locating any problem in the emotional self-centered self and getting out of that self spiritually and practically.

Gamblers Anonymous Consciousness

In G.A., members typically do not locate their problems in the emotional self-centered self. In fact, those who locate problems in that emotional self-centered self are ostracized by the group. Members who express 12 step consciousness are labeled as trying to be saints. Striving for sainthood is a violation of what some see as the central point of anonymous programs: the realization that members are "not God" (Kurtz, 1979). G.A. members also do not talk as openly about their feelings as is the common practice in other 12 step groups. The dominant, page 17 group is quite dogmatic and intolerant of other

paths to recovery. They frequently comment that they got better using page 17 and if it is good enough for them it is good enough for others.

Another element of G.A. consciousness which is captured in the deemphasis on God in the G.A. steps and traditions is its notion of spirituality. G.A. rejects two of the three conceptions used by A.A., the traditional conception of God and the "inner-child" conception of God. G.A. uses the group-as-God conception the way it was traditionally used by A.A., that is, as a temporary conception. Gamblers Anonymous defines spirituality in the combo book as follows:

The word spiritual can be said to describe those characteristics of the human mind that represent the highest and finest qualities such as kindness, generosity, honesty and humility. (Gamblers Anonymous, n.d., p. 1).

Gamblers Anonymous has a humanist and social conception of spirituality. The irony is that that conception is dogmatically and rigidly enforced. G.A. members forcefully reject the traditional conception of God, but they employ a more liberal conception dogmatically. As with the G.A. members with 12 step consciousness, those committed to the traditional God are sometimes marginalized.

Like A.A. and other 12 step groups, Gamblers Anonymous uses the disease model of addiction and advocate abstinence. Members in G.A., for example, speak of themselves as "sick" gamblers. But unlike other 12 step groups, Gamblers Anonymous does not also have an epiphenomenal view of the substance or activity used or engaged in. For Gamblers Anonymous members, the cause of their sickness is gambling. But for members of Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, alcohol is merely the symptom of their problems; alcohol is epiphenomenal to other causes of their addiction. Gamblers Anonymous is gambling focused whereas Alcoholics Anonymous focuses on more than alcohol.

In A.A. and other 12 step programs, members embrace a conception of problems that allows continuing self management, regardless of the problem. In G.A. on the other hand, members have difficulty connecting their continuing social, psychological, and life problems with gambling. Many give up after awhile. The different ways of handling problems are quite evident in members' shares or therapies. The A.A. member applies 12 step consciousness and proceeds with

tackling the problem while the G.A. member will tell their problem to the group in great detail week after week. Typically, they do not accept responsibility for their part in the problem; instead they continually try in vain to link it to gambling. Because they are abstinent, many eventually conclude that G.A. must not be very helpful for other problems. In G.A. an informal referral network to professional help develops for members in this "stage of recovery."

A.A. and other 12 step groups provide a framework, a consciousness that can be used for any problem while G.A.'s framework or consciousness is specific to gambling. In A.A. and other 12 step groups, members are socialized to distrust their first reaction, their alcoholic reaction, and are encouraged to develop and act on a second reaction, a non-alcoholic reaction, a non-alcoholic self. The conception of a tainted self and the development of a functional self is at the root of the process. Gamblers Anonymous uses the disease conception of addiction to take away the stigma of the tainted self but does not have an effective program for developing a functional self. This difference can be seen in the wording of step 2; A.A.s state, "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," whereas G.A.s state, "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living." A.A.s step 2 assumes a state of insanity on the part of the alcoholic, a very personal, relatively permanent, or at least difficult to overcome state whereas G.A.s step 2 assumes an abnormal way of thinking and living, a partly personal, more social state that appears to be relatively easier to overcome. The personal element is merely an abnormal way of thinking that is caused by gambling; it is not deeply rooted in the self. It is also much easier to define a normal way of thinking and living than it is to define sanity. The result is that in G.A. each member defines "normal way of thinking and living" in their own way. One popular way is that if one is relatively happy, that is a normal way of thinking and living.

I am not evaluating the effectiveness of A.A., G.A. or other 12 step programs, and I am not saying that A.A. is better than G.A. I am merely pointing to the central role that a language of the self plays in A.A., in contrast to G.A. I have also identified some of the consequences of this language of the self for the members and for the organizations.

DISCUSSION

What is clear from this study is that Gamblers Anonymous is markedly different from other 12 step fellowships in organizational structure and in the consciousness of the respective members. Gamblers Anonymous is more of a mutual help abstinence club than a 12 step fellowship. Gamblers Anonymous largely lacks 12 step consciousness and the organization is hierarchically structured. These features help to explain the relatively slow growth of the organization when other 12 step fellowships are growing dramatically.

By not connecting gambling problems to the self, Gamblers Anonymous, I think, fosters a "men's club atmosphere" (Lesieur, 1988). Compulsive gambling is not conceptualized as rooted in the self, so little effort is put into changing the self. This atmosphere is not conducive to retaining women and minorities.

This study also contributes to a debate in the gambling literature about the nature of self-transformation in Gamblers Anonymous. Brown (1985) argues that this transformation is quite similar to a religious conversion while Turner and Saunders (1990) argue that this construction is done through a medical relabeling process.

This study suggests that both perspectives are correct. In addition, however, this study shows that Gamblers Anonymous's selective adaptation of the 12 steps limits the choice of the new self by emphasizing a secular, medically oriented path while denouncing other, more spiritually oriented paths.

There have been efforts within G.A. to address the selective adaptation of A.A.'s 12 steps. Informants point out that there have been several attempts to change the G.A. 12 steps and the proposal to return to the A.A. 12 steps has been brought before G.A.'s Board of Trustees. Informants even report attempts to use A.A. material in G.A. step meetings. This, however, has met with organizational sanctions. According to informants, a Gamblers Anonymous meeting using the A.A. "Big book" was closed because of pressure from the area intergroup. Another reliable source points out that a modified version of G.A.'s 12 steps has been used by the Brecksville Veterans Affairs Medical Center from 1982. This author has recently observed more interest in the steps with the increased availability of the new Gamblers Anonymous (1989) big book, *Gamblers Anonymous: A New Beginning*.

How did these important structural and organizational changes

come about? Is page 17 consciousness the dominant one in G.A. meetings in other areas of the country or world? Are the small group dynamics centered around the oldtimers and the newcomers as Turner and Sanders (1990) argue or around the page 17 faction and the twelve step faction as I have argued? There is clearly a need for further research on Gamblers Anonymous.

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