

EXCESSIVE ANONYMOUS/ THE ANONYMITY OF EXCESS

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We walk into the church basement and are greeted univocally with a "Welcome," by a small group of people. We take our seats. The meeting begins, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Everyone chants and we are holding hands. We take our seats and all eyes turn toward us. One man, the "chair," asks us if this is our first meeting of Artist's Anonymous. We answer in the affirmative. They clap and take turns hugging us—all with compassionate looks on their faces—all telling us that they have been there before and they know what misery we must be going through now.

"It takes so much courage to come to your first meeting," one woman claims. We sit down and everyone takes turns talking.

"Hello everybody, my name's Frank and I am a playwright."

"Hi Frank." We all chant.

Frank is struggling with the first line of the first play he has ever written. Thelma simply calls herself "overly-creative" and as a result, spends most of her time watching television. Ted didn't even know that he was an artist until he walked into the room a few weeks ago. It seems that he goes to all other 12-step meetings, and this one also happened to spark his interest. Now he is also "powerless" over his creativity. The meeting ends with the Lord's Prayer with the addition of "Keep coming back, it works when you work it." They surround us after the prayer, assuring us that it will get better.

"Give time time," they say, "Let go, let God," and "Don't beat yourself up." They claimed that if we don't "get with the program," at first, we should "fake it 'till ya make it."

We visited a variety of 12-step groups. The format and lingo were familiar to us by now.

Twelve-step, self-help groups have proliferated throughout America. One can find help through them for just about any type of affliction, deviation, aberration—or any general anxiety one is experiencing. It is the material from which television commercials are made, fiction as well as non-fiction is being written, and it is making millions. The process of recovery practiced by these groups seems to be the prominent cultural paradigm. Self-help groups, and the attribution of the disease therein will be the subject of this paper.

At first, with the advent of Alcoholics Anonymous, the diagnosis of alcoholism as a disease may have been crucially life-sustaining, or at least a solution to the puzzling question of why alcoholics continued to compulsively abuse alcohol. But the application of the “disease” is now being attributed to everything from working too much, to not working enough, from having sex too much, to not having it at all; in short, from just about anything from which one can abstain from or over-indulge in. This paper is an attempt to explore the relation of our capitalist economy to the advent and perpetuation of support groups. We will examine this recent cultural phenomenon primarily, in terms of the dichotomy between capitalistic consumption and capitalistic conservation.

Alcoholics Anonymous, the matriarch of twelve-step programs, was founded in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith. The “bible” of A.A., commonly known as the “Big Book,” begins with a preface by a physician giving verification to the idea that alcoholism is indeed a disease, and then outlines the circumstances of Bill’s life, his experiences with alcohol, as well as the beginnings of AA.

Bill was a successful stockbroker during the time when the market was booming and when the country was in its prime of excess. Drinking and making money go hand in hand in his story. In the period of the boom, drinking, among other excessive behaviors, was not in any way tabooed by public opinion. On the contrary, it was an indicator of a successful person’s use of the resources of capitalism. It is ironic that during the time when the country was prohibiting the sale and use of alcohol, people refused to obey this law and on the contrary, excessive drinking abounded. Bill states,

The great boom of the late twenties was seething and swelling. Drink was taking an important and exhilarating part in my life. There was loud talk in the jazz places up-town. Everyone spent in thousands and chattered in millions. (Big Book 9)

With the crash of the stock market and in turn, the Depression, alcoholism was more and more connected with the perpetuation of

organized crime (the public viewed disobedience, rather than prohibition as the cause of crime), and was more and more looked upon as an aberration. Excessive behaviors lost their charm when the majority of people could not afford to indulge. Also, it was in society's interest to segregate and label those who were continuing the binge of the twenties, for these people were a reminder of the better times of the past.

A.A. gets its spiritual beginnings in a non-denominational pietistic movement called the Oxford Group. The Oxford group believed that man was sinful in nature, and that a conversion was necessary to forgive man of his sins. This deliverance could take place through "meetings" and testimony. Although A.A.'s tenets are based on the ideas of meetings, testimony and conversion, they split with this group due to its strict adherence to Christian principles. Wilson states that "aggressive evangelism" would not work on "neurotics of our hue" (Alcoholics Anonymous 126). But Wilson did take with him the idea that alcoholism is a disease with a threefold nature: physical, mental and most importantly—spiritual. As a result, he took the spiritual principles that he found in the Oxford Group, but subtracted from it the specific Christian symbolism.

Alcoholics Anonymous subscribes to the belief that alcoholism is a form of madness. Time and again Bill and others refer to themselves when in the throes of their disease as sick, demented and insane. Although there is no absolute cure (a fact of which we will speak more later), one can find relief through meeting with other alcoholics, and through religion. These ideas coincide with Pinel's principles of cure for dementia through separation and segregation as analyzed by Michel Foucault. Much like William D. Silkworth, the doctor who wrote the preface to the Big Book, Pinel considered religion a major tool of treatment used in confinement. Also, similar to the founders of A.A., Pinel concluded that specific Christian symbolism was in fact antithetical to a cure. The spiritual and moral content, though, was extracted from Christianity. Foucault writes:

Once "filtered," religion possesses a disalienating power that dissipates the images, calms the passions, and restores man to what is most immediate and essential: it can bring him to his moral truth. And it is here that religion is often capable of affecting cures. (147)

The divorce from the Oxford Group sprang from the attempt to escape Christian absolutes.¹ However, not only do these programs continue the search for an absolute moral truth, based on Christianity and the fear of death, further, the concepts of compulsion and recovery are absolutes which are paramount in the twelve tenets of these

movements.

In their search for moral truth, and therefore for relief from their affliction, twelve-step groups claim that a member has the ultimatum of either following 12 steps toward recovery, or of allowing the respective disease to take control, in which case, they claim, death is almost imminent. These steps are the same and are followed, absolutely, in all of the recovery programs—including but not limited to Artists Anonymous, Narcotics A., Gamblers A., Overeaters A., Sex Addicts A., Codependents A., Alonon and so on. It is interesting that death is used in all of these programs as a means not only to explain the absolute necessity of the initial need for the program (“I would have died had I not found Sex Addict’s Anonymous.” Died of what? we asked with no response), but also in justifying the need to continue going to these meetings (“I would die if I left the program of Artist’s Anonymous”). The first step sets the absolute character of compulsion (“We admit that we are powerless over alcohol, and that our lives have become unmanageable,”) and the second sets the guidelines by which the absolute character of recovery will be manifested (“Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves will restore us to sanity”).

The first two steps are interconnected. One cannot exist without the other, because, according to A.A.’s convictions, there is no one who possesses power or control: there are either those who are in recovery through admittance of their powerlessness or those who are in denial, in other words, those who have the illusion of power. The universal character of the disease makes it necessary, once powerlessness is admitted, to find a higher power that has and can allocate the character of the moral route to recovery. Foucault writes, that in treating madness, religion is necessary, because “religion constitutes the concrete form of what cannot go mad; it bears what is invincible in reason” (142). A higher power is needed for a man, then, who cannot control his nature.

Twelve step groups manifest the Nietzschean paradox of man’s will. He claims, “[T]he *will* of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for;...his *will* to erect an ideal . . . and in the face of it to feel the palpable certainty of his own absolute unworthiness” (93). For Nietzsche this combination of admittance of the unworthiness of man, and the attempt to find a perfection that cannot be attained, is indeed sickness. Members of A.A. freely admit that they don’t have free will concerning the substance which has the power over their lives. The substance, therefore, has complete domination over the will. Consequently, the third step of A.A. (“Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over the care of God as we understand Him”) is simply a substitution for one form of powerlessness over the other. They make this decision, though, freely. The fact that members of A.A. freely admit that they

don't have free will, is the contradiction in which the free will of man must be exercised to devoid himself of his own will.

Where does this sickness, this universal disease arise from? A.A. claims that it is in the nature of man to indulge, and Nietzsche claims that it is exactly the societal prevention of this natural impulse that causes the sick need for self-punishment, and immeasurable guilt. This need derives from the desire for affirmation, from the desire to belong to a community, from the impulse to bring back the power to choose one's own identity. As Nietzsche aptly puts it, "how accommodating, how friendly all the world is toward us as soon as we act as the world does and 'let ourselves go' like all the world!" (106). To submit oneself to a twelve-step group is to believe that what society tells you, i.e., that you are diseased, is true. But at the same time, through admittance, you regain the power of your own choice. You determine your own affliction, and your own 12 step meeting as relief. And through this determination, you have the power to choose whether or not to indulge in your respective afflictions. An example of this dichotomy between self-determination and societal objectification is the appropriation of societal metaphors by twelve-step groups; the groups freely use the label "diseased" and the concept of Christian morality, but it is a label and a concept that those outside of the group attribute to them, and for them.

Thus, society has constructed a system in which it not only acts as the ultimate diagnoser and controller of the cure, but at the same time it purges itself of the guilt and responsibility associated with these acts. In creating the standards by which one considers oneself to be diseased, and then by requiring self-admittance, the blame for the disease and the responsibility for the cure are totally on the afflicted. This idea is apparently not new. Foucault writes that in the seventeenth century,

[T]he asylum . . . organized [the madman's] guilt; it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of himself, and as a nonreciprocal relation to the keeper; it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the other, a therapeutic intervention in the madman's existence. In other words, by this guilt the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the other; and, from this acknowledgment of his status as object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason. (146)

Thus, a system was devised in which segregation played the role of objectifying the madman for the edification of the "sane," in order to lay the boundaries between what is considered normal and abnormal. Segregation was used not so much as a cure, but rather to solidify

the order of the system. Twelve-step programs embody this idea of segregation as a means of reaffirmation of societal values. The difference in this segregation is that the system doesn't require confinement in order to perpetuate the marginalization of the diseased.

The structure of marginalization has changed as a result of the ways in which one is anchored in a technological society, and the new needs that this has produced. In *One-Dimensional Society*, Herbert Marcuse claims,

The distinguishing feature of advanced industrial society is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation—liberation also from that which is tolerable, and rewarding and comfortable . . . the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste; the need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity; the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong the stupefaction; the need for maintaining such deceptive liberties as free competition at administered prices, a free press which censors itself, free choice between brands and gadgets. (7)

Twelve-step programs are apparently a new need that this industrial society has created and perpetuated. In its beginnings, it was legitimately formed to help those who drank too much stop drinking. Now, with the advent of so many of these groups, for so many supposed afflictions—we feel that its popularity and perpetuation can only be explained in terms of inexpensive, energy-efficient entertainment and release from the daily routine of hard work and complicated relationships. It has become, for many a comfortable, convenient, necessity. As they say in A.A., "Keep coming back, it works," and "Keep it simple, stupid" or "KISS."

We have discussed how society creates "false" needs for its members to keep them in control. Why should society put such a stress on the individual needs of the human being? In *Tendencies*, Eve Sedgwick claims that at the turn of the twentieth century, the term "addicts" as species was invented. She stresses the negative connotation that such term holds and compares it to the less severe term for compulsive behavior such as "someone with a habit." The question that she asks is why such a term was needed and who determined the line where habit turns into addiction. She proceeds to explain that capitalist society has created the border between needs and desires; needs are considered natural (and thus, healthy), and desires are considered artificial (and thus, unhealthy) for individuals. If these desires are abuse, it leads to a medical objectification of the subject that is nearly impossible to escape (Sedgwick 131).

In capitalism, society creates the notion of free will to extend the buying power. Since basic needs are already satisfied through a

capitalist system, it has to create new needs. Further, in a capitalistic society, free will has a paradoxical nature—on the one hand man is allowed monetary freedom, but on the other hand his very nature is considered inherently corrupt and therefore needs a spiritual higher power for guidance. This is where the free-market justifies itself. It is not the market itself that supplies its own rules—but a higher power which allocates a certain amount of free will to supply and perpetuate the free-market.

However, to keep order, society needs to put some limit to free will, and thus constructs the concept of compulsion: in order to explain the difference between the first and the last. A capitalist society tells us that free will is exercised rationally in order to satisfy needs (and needs are absolute; there is no choice, one has to fulfill them in order to survive) and compulsion satisfies desires, which always belong to the category of irrational, unhealthy excessive, pagan-like behavior. Moreover, with the excess of production in a capitalist system, excessive consumption is needed for a successful economy; and in the age of excesses of products, the differentiation between “bad” desires and “good” needs becomes complicated by the necessity of selling products. In order to solve this problem, society creates false needs—such as watching television (perpetuation of market economy). Doing drugs, or drinking excessively, however, are considered desires that will lead to a metaphysical consumption of the being—addiction (antithetical to a market economy). When one is in the throws of compulsion (addiction), economic contribution is completely stifled. Not only does one consume products that are not regulated and taxed by the market economy, one is not a productive consumer of this economy. The substance, not the economy, has the individual completely within its grips.

Obviously, there are substances that can be physically addictive. Sedgwick claims, though, that since both over-eating, under-eating (anorexia), and controlled intermittent eating can be attributed to the same food addiction, “the locus of addictiveness cannot be the substance itself and can scarcely even be the body itself, but must be some overarching abstraction that governs the narrative relations between them” (131). Since the advent of the concept of addiction, it has been taken up and used by the “overarching abstraction,” the market economy. The terminology of the market place is even incorporated within the steps themselves. Step 4 claims, “We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” The assumption here is that we are made up of goods that can be stockpiled and counted; in other words, our morality, our very being, is up for barter.

Further, all behavior is potentially addictive. Sedgwick proves this in her analysis of the exercise addict in which she claims that it would be precisely the exerciser who would be the pinnacle of the will

to choose health. But as we have seen in the 1980's, there is even a concept that to exercise too much is addictive.

The concept of all things being equally addictive can only be a product of a market society. Georges Bataille argues that in an aristocratic society, compulsivity was not only extolled, it was considered a natural form of human behavior. It is normal for humans to consume the natural form of excess which surrounds us in nature—this is indeed our obligation. But, the “modern bourgeoisie is characterized by the refusal in principle of this obligation” (Bataille 859). He goes on to say that,

The rationalist conceptions developed by the bourgeoisie, starting in the seventeenth century, were a response to these humiliating conceptions of restrained expenditure; this rationalism meant nothing other than the strictly economic representation of the world . . . The hatred of expenditure is the *raison d'être* of and the justification for the bourgeoisie. (861)

It is in this very form of repression that all compulsive behaviors are deemed addictive. It is not accidental, therefore, that Bill W., the founder of A.A. was a stockbroker, whose motivation for proclaiming himself diseased and starting a support group was the conviction that his excessive behavior is antagonistic to the rational of a successful, productive, economical businessman.

Although one is tempted to speak of capitalistic societies in terms of the dichotomy between rich and poor, the perpetuation of the market-place relies on similarity, or slight differences for competition. From here it follows that twelve-step groups are truly a product of a capitalist society: not only are they created in order to perpetuate repression, but also in their form they rely on the equality of everyone in the face of addiction and in the trust on the importance of recovery (which is a form of repression). The main purpose of A.A. is “to produce productive members of society” (Big Book 71). In other words, society creates these programs in order to alleviate the differences that would cause an aberration in consumption. Once a person is in recovery, s/he can contribute to the economic world. But, although the differences between who is diseased and who is not in terms of buying power are alleviated, those who are addicted are still systematically self-marginalized. Once again, Foucault's analysis of the economic necessity of confining the madman in the seventeenth century, applies perfectly here. He claims,

[F]or the first time, madness was perceived through a condemnation of idleness and in a social immanence guaranteed

by the community of labor. This community acquired an ethical power of segregation, which permitted it to eject, as into another world, all forms of social uselessness . . .

Further, Foucault shows the difference between classical madness and madness in the modern world, by stating,

. . . no longer . . . the madman comes from the world of the irrational and bears its stigmata; rather . . . he crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethics. (136)

Those who have rebelled once against societal norms are kept safely within groups whose process of recovery is never complete. In twelve-step groups, one is never recovered—one is always in need of the groups, and always in the process of recovery. Thus one's identity is self-referentially realized and stabilized ("once a drunk, always a drunk"). In this way society also perpetuates addiction. The fear that the rebel will one day be released from the group to create havoc among society has created the need for the never ending, always present among itself nature of the disease. Consequently, a twelve step group is organized as an innocent vaccination against any type of civil disobedience. Society compromises—it allows a few drunks to organize in order to discuss their drunkenness, but of course away from the rest of society. The government will also give a few dollars here and there to allow them their new chosen addiction (recovery). As long as the system is intact and enclosed (as it is kept not coincidentally by the members of the groups themselves), it only alleviates the problem of organized rebellion by permitting the expression of such rebellion in humble, ineffectual amounts. As Marcuse notes,

There is a great deal of "Worship together this week," "Why not try god," Zen, existentialism, and beat ways of life, etc. But such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer contradictory to the status quo and no longer negative. They are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet. (14)

A.A. and its offshoots can be included in such a program of protest. Further, twelve-step groups are efficiently constructed in involving different possible sites of protest, since if you rebel in one way against the accepted way of living, you can always find other sites for your dissatisfaction with society. Thus, the economy of AA groups contrasts directly with the economy of a capitalist society.

Firstly, these groups are indeed communal—everyone works together and shares with other people one's problems, one's joys, one's stories. Such story-telling sessions hark back to a primitive, pre-industrial way of life, when one could not survive by oneself, when one needed a community in order to survive. Within the alienating power of industrial civilization, within the stress on individualistic virtue of self-sufficiency in capitalist society this urge for rituals, for ceremonial sharing, this need for community cannot but be considered an aberration, a protest against the society.

Members of A.A. define themselves as a community of people, who "have a way out on which [they] can absolutely agree, and upon which [they] can join in brotherly and harmonious action" (Big Book 19). The singularity of their interest, their action, their community provides them with a stable identity and voids them of little differentiation between individuals. They are disengaged from the world, from reality by leaving behind all the differences they once had ("we are average Americans. We are people who normally would not mix.") and by joining the group that in itself contains no differentiation. The non-hierarchical pattern of their community is a second feature that distinguishes their group from the world around them. The members congregate in rooms of hospitals, church basements, living rooms, and other non-imposing spaces. They sit in a circle and begin the meeting with a reading chosen by the "chair" of the group. This person does not rule or govern the meeting, s/he simply directs the form—but with the understanding that this form is not an ediction, it can always be modified by any of the members. Also, the chairperson is never fixed, it always changes for each meeting. The members then each take turns sharing. Each person has an equal voice and an equal amount of time to share and it is in this way that the decentralization of the group is in constant perpetuation.

Sedgwick reminds us of the specific characteristic of the group which again contradicts the absolutes of the capitalist economy: "the temporal fragmentation, unconstrained by identity-history and intention-futurity" (133). It is manifest in the all encompassing slogan: "One Day at a Time." This existential way of thinking is in direct contrast to the capitalist mode of acquiring fragments from the past, to bring to the present, for their use in the future. This type of thinking in effect not only erases what has happened yesterday, but precludes any commitment to the future. Also, it helps to perpetuate the constant need for the meetings: what one has learned in yesterday's meeting, is not necessarily applicable today—also, if you did not have the desire to use your respective drug of choice yesterday, it does not mean that you won't today. Each day is a new day, and with that a new being. Although within the meta-dialect of the meetings themselves, there are constant references and stories to the past—referred to as

“drunkalogues”—people are constantly proclaiming that they have been “born-again,” that they are completely different people than what they used to be. The only thing that connects the present to the past is the ever constant demon of the disease, which is personified as “cunning, baffling and powerful.” This powerful entity can be temporarily contained, but it is always ready to strike, to take charge of the subject. The individual is therefore now constantly temporalized. Prior to the exorcism of the disease-demon, the individual was inextricably bound with her/his past and future; now the person is temporally located in the present—with the possibility of new identities to be formed daily.

In the *Big Book* the members all together write: “. . . there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is *indescribably* wonderful” (italics are ours 17). The choice of the word “indescribable” reflects upon how hard it is in the form of common language to explain what they have, since this wonderful something is so drastically different from the real world. For example, if the world considers it to be normal to have no addictions, at the twelve step group meetings to have no addiction is not a virtue. Being normal is a derogatory term at those meetings, because if a person proclaims that s/he is not diseased, the group diagnoses that person as being in denial. This marginalized group does not permit any stepping off from the pattern of what is considered normal in their system. When we visited Alonon, one woman said that she has not had any problems and that she came just to see how others were coping with their's. Women who came religiously to the group for years, and still claimed that they were just beginning to understand the enormity of their problems, gave each other sly glances. The room immediately was filled with the air of annoyance with her ridiculous out-of-the-ordinary behavior. The group joined in silent disapproval; she was marginalized.

Desire, as we have already stated, within our society is marginalized, and the repression of the desire, through the use of will power is forever an individualistic goal. Desire, in twelve-step groups, is a primary function of the group. In order to continue to belong to the group, one must proclaim the constant state of desire, but at the same time must deny the desire to take control. A person who considers himself to have completely repressed the desire is considered by the group to be in ultimate denial. Although the desire is ever-present within the addict, its power can be diffused through sharing with the group. In twelve-step groups, the desire is unleashed—its fetish is alleviated. It becomes from the unspoken and repressed an open presence that cannot hide itself within the group without knowledge. This is where the language of the group attains its power, this is also how these apparently sophomoric metaphors like “Easy Does It,” “Let Go, Let God,” “One day at a time,” and “Hugs, not drugs,”

have actually been substituted for reality. Reality, for members of these groups, is a constant state of desire. Most of the members who go to one twelve-step meeting, go to many of these meetings. They always speak of the constant state of compulsivity. Cross-addictions are the norm—if they are addicted to alcohol, say, then they are addicted to people (co-dependent). If they are addicted to people, then they are addicted to sex; if they are addicted to sex then they are addicted to food, and so on in a never ending imbroglio, in which the center of desire can never be located and is constantly negated by the discourse of the groups. As a result, not only are these certain slogans used within the meetings themselves, they are in constant use by its members. The members use these phrases as mottoes not only for recovery, but for life outside of the meetings. Life, and everything in it, is a possible source of compulsive desire. Identity then, is solidified and formed—one day at a time—through the combination of desire, and language. This meta-dialogue signifies the simplicity of a life in the process of recovery. It also signifies the testimonial life of the group.

In conclusion, twelve-steps groups maintain a structure of desire that is simultaneously being repressed and modified by capitalism. In their initial design, they were constructed as an enclosure for small aberrations of desire. This potentially harmful desire was meant to be contained in small marginalized groups in which it would be disempowered. However, these groups are growing and proliferating in rapid numbers. They are gaining power. Fourteen million *Big Books* are expected to be sold this year alone. There are groups for every sort of ailment possible. Any person, no matter how powerful, has the ability to organize a twelve-step group. Indeed, the language of the group is disseminating into popular culture. The groups have become such a part of everyday life that *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Simpsons*—deem them enough of an important and known phenomena to successfully make jokes at their expense. They are so powerful and so common that they are being used to sell products—anywhere from selling Hyundai cars to chewing gum. (A group of men and women sit in a circle. They are listening with concerned looks on their faces. The person to whom all heads are turned is raking his fingers through his hair. He hesitates—he clears his throat, he stutters a few times. Finally, he finds the words to admit that his son has a problem. Compassionate sighs resonate throughout the room. Another disheveled woman speaks out; she claims that she is also emotionally suffering due to her child's irresponsibility. The third person adds that she thinks her own child is in danger of being corrupted by a group of teenagers who she is sure are "using." What could possibly be responsible for the distress of these people? a viewer wonders. The end of the commercial confirms, with a shot of a group of rebellious

looking teens chewing gum, that the perpetrator is actually Cinnamon Burst Chewing Gum. The commercial is successful because the story is plausible).

Although all of these groups are seemingly disparate, they are organized around the same tenets, using the same 12 steps, and their formats are identical. This common ground is a good potential for organization of all those who are diseased. We can notice how the view of the disease changes with years. The more people become diseased, the more people join the groups, the more those groups become incorporated into the normality of daily life. It is normal, nowadays, to have an abnormality. Addiction ceases to be shameful (though, of course, the anonymity of those groups directs to the opposite view). It is no longer socially unacceptable to be diseased. On the contrary, if you are addicted, you gain sympathy, and if you are a recovering addict, it's considered cool, hip, and contemporary.

On the other hand, to be in a twelve step group is to be a member of a marginalized minority. This is due to the fact that the members of the group unite on the basis of lack of freedom of choice—which is a similarity that all marginalized groups in this country share. In a country where freedom is the fundamental basis of existence, in a country where absolute freedom is the overriding metaphor—the lack of it is deemed as a disease. Sedgwick claims in discussing smokers:

[B]y a willingness to stigmatize themselves...by making common cause with the most disempowered social group in demands for, shall we say reliable, access to the addictive substance; for affordable or free, high-quality, non-judgmental health care available to all who have been, still are, or risk becoming addicts (i.e. to everyone) . . . it is only by making something like this claim to or acknowledgment of, the pathologized addict identity that smokers, as a body, could, paradoxically, empower themselves, in legal, economic, and ideological condensation against the tobacco companies, as well as in areas where their interest may coincide with the companies. (141)

The judicial system in our country is the battleground from which marginalized groups not only gain power, but also public recognition of this power. Recently, a lawsuit by Alonon against the Navy claimed that it actually caused someone to be addicted to alcohol. Other such cases, where people are being tried for discrimination against addicts, or are claiming temporary insanity due to their disease, are constantly being tried in court.

The empowerment in the economy that the groups achieve is an interesting sort of a union. Unions are basically ideologically social-istic: twelve-step groups learn how to organize themselves and achieve power from their demands for certain respective privileges

like the freedom not to be discriminated against, freedom to work, and so on. This socialistic tendency is perhaps due to the initial socialistic nature of the formation of these programs. Capitalism produces an alienation of the individual as well as it suppresses the desires that it deems unworthy for its perpetuation. As a result, socialistic spaces of desire were created to provide the local, harmless satisfaction for the need for community. As a result of the over-abundance of necessity for this community, groups have been growing and becoming a threat. Due to this growth, capitalism tries to take it back into control by making it a monetary enterprise. The self-help industry in general, has become a big business. Melody Beattie's book *Codependent No More*, has sold over 650,000 copies. *Adult Children of Alcoholics* by Janet Woititz has sold over two million copies. Health Communication Corporations has sold two million books dealing with recovery in 1991 alone (Kaminer 25). Treatment centers have become an industry. Those are only several examples of the way capitalism has a hand into a recovery movement. However, we maintain that aspects of the recovery movement signify the ways in which socialist ideals are increasingly permeating our society.

Notes

¹In a letter to a member in October, 1940, Bill writes: "The principles of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love are as much a goal for A.A. members and are as much practised by them as by any group of people; yet, we found that when the word absolute was put in front of these attributes, they either turn people away by the hundreds, or gave a temporary spiritual inflation resulting in collapse."

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