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Sociology 1970 4: 181

DOI: 10.1177/003803857000400203

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SECTARIAN CHARACTERISTICS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

ROBERT KENNETH JONES

Abstract The practice of drawing too sharp a line between transcendental and non-transcendental belief systems is to be criticized, for there is often an overlap between them. Alcoholics Anonymous displays sectarian characteristics in its internal structure and behaviour. From available information on the development of Alcoholics Anonymous an appreciable level of religious commitment among members might be expected, but a study of groups on Merseyside did not find this. Many members felt the tone of A.A. to be too religious. Previous studies concerned with religious affiliation and alcohol consumption suggest a relationship between the two. A characteristic shared by such movements as sects and Alcoholics Anonymous is the high degree of involvement exhibited by their members. The underlying common structure of apparently dissimilar movements deserves further examination which it is hoped will throw light on sect structure and secular value-oriented organizations.

SOCIOLOGISTS tend to distinguish sharply between transcendental and non-transcendental belief systems. The distinction has certain heuristic advantages, although, when pressed, sociologists concede that there is a continuum of belief systems from the strictly empirical to the completely metaphysical. What is perhaps sometimes obscured by the tendency to discuss belief systems as polar types, however, is the similarity of organizational and behavioural patterns that is found in certain secular and religious institutions. Thayer's (1965) popular description of fringe politics in Britain, for example, often echoes accounts of fringe religion. Fringe movements in politics are sometimes described as 'sects'. Essien-Udom's (1966) analysis of Black Nationalism has shown it to be both a political and a religious movement. Susan Budd's (1967) articles on Humanist societies have brought out their sectarian elements. Again, Wilson (1961), following MacRae, has shown an analogy between Marxism and Christadelphianism.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a movement which reveals distinct similarities to religious sectarianism both in organization and belief. There are, however, significant differences to which attention must be paid. An examination of these may confirm or modify our conception of sect structure and that of value-oriented non-transcendental movements. The analysis which follows draws on the extensive body of research on Alcoholics Anonymous and on my own work among Alcoholics Anonymous groups in Merseyside.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous, or A.A., is a world-wide organization founded in America. Its World Directory of 1968 lists 8,484 groups in the U.S.A., 1,411 groups in Canada, and 2,784 groups in the rest of the world. With various prison and hospital groups the total number of groups is 13,000, with a membership of 350,000. Accuracy in these sorts of membership figures is obviously difficult to obtain, but the General Service Office¹ gives the estimated total membership as *more* than 350,000. The number of groups in the British Isles is approximately 250, with 2,400 members.

The founders of A.A. were Dr. Bob of Arkon, and Bill W., a former stock-broker of New York.² Both were approached by the Oxford Group (Moral Rearmament). The beginnings of the A.A. movement were undoubtedly centered in religious experience. Early meetings had bible study, and there was some influence of the Dean of Bible at Wooster College who brought to the group's attention the restitution theme in the Sermon on the Mount. By 1937 relations with the Oxford Movement were severed. Among the early members were Joe, an upholsterer; Tom, a sheet-metal worker; J. D., a newspaperman; Bob, a 'cookie' salesman; Phil, an insurance man; Earnie, Dick, and Earl. Ritchie (1948) in his survey finds the Twelve Steps not unlike some of the principles of the 'Washingtonians',³ the Salvation Army, and the Oxford Group (Eister, 1950), these groups having advocated the following of certain of the principles long before the founding of A.A. There is some suggestion that it was the 'Washingtonians' who first argued that the inebriate should be seen as a sick person, an idea which has been adopted wholeheartedly by the members of A.A., although Jellinek (1960) gave the idea a medical respectability. Ritchie maintained that the Oxford Group had the greatest influence and that A.A. took over the Group's ideas of self-analysis, restitution, the group confessional, group association, and the reliance on (some form of) God (Pittman, 1967). Undoubtedly the key influences have been confession, surrender, guidance through the 'quiet times', and sharing. A.A. members would hold, however, that the similarities were more apparent than real, as A.A. 'is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution' (A.A., 1952).

Organizational Structure

As an organization there is a lack of rigid control and centralized authority. Local groups are autonomous. A.A. has as little organization as possible. A group has an elected office of secretary, and a large group a committee, both of which rotate. The 'governing principles' were first sketched by Bill W. The structure of

A.A. comprises various units, and in America, in addition to local groups, we have the following pattern:

"Alcoholic Foundation (Since 1957: The General Service Board of A.A.)	<i>Purpose:</i> administrating national affairs of A.A.
Central Office	<i>Purpose:</i> literature distribution, letters, etc.
Works Publishing Company	<i>Purpose:</i> publishing A.A. literature
<i>Grapevine</i>	<i>Purpose:</i> newsletter
District Office	<i>Purpose:</i> arranging contacts, speakers
Control Committee	<i>Purpose:</i> advising
Clubs	<i>Purpose:</i> recreational
Auxiliaries	<i>Purpose:</i> anxiety alleviation for wives, etc.

A.A. organization in Britain is at present in a state of change,⁴ and no decision about its ultimate shape has yet been reached. The Area and Group Representative Committee was the governing body for England and Wales and this committee appointed a General Purposes Sub-Committee which looked after the day to day organization of the Fellowship. The Central Service Office was responsible for the literature and service to groups. The next step in the chain was the Intergroup, equivalent to the American District Office, which comprised a number of Area Groups, each Intergroup having a representative to the Area and Group Representative Committee. Scotland and Ireland adopted different structures so it has now been suggested that a Standing Committee be established to unify needs and policies.

A.A. has some of the characteristics of Etzioni's normative organization: organizational orientation is marked by an intense level of commitment, and agreement rests primarily on internalization of directives the acceptance of which is regarded as legitimate. The controls used include rituals, social and prestige symbols,⁵ resocialization and leadership. Although there was some charismatic element in A.A.'s original organization, it now has no distinct leadership of any kind which contrasts with religious sects many of which rely heavily on a charismatic role (Wolpe, 1968).⁶ A.A. displays a democratic-type social structure which rules out any necessity for external sanctions. This contrasts with religious organizations which rely on normative powers to attain conformity to directives.

Both A.A. and sectarian affiliation to some extent share the same characteristics of voluntary association. The theories of voluntary associations have ranged from the two-fold classification of expressive and social influence groups, the three-fold designation of instrumental mixed and leisure, to degree of accessibility, status

conferring and function. Other typologies have ranged from consummatory, instrumental and mixed designation, to behavioural, ideological, experiential, and consequential. Both A.A. and certain sects are instrumental-expressive, possessing low accessibility and low status.

Cultural and Religious Aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous

There are overt manifestations of religious structure in A.A. procedure. Most groups in Britain open with a minute of contemplation, followed by a talk, and ending with a self-confessional period. There is frequent audience participation similar to that found in evangelical sects, frequent talk of God, and reference to the 'miracle' of sobriety. These procedures of course vary considerably from group to group. Members have a principle, which we might call 'Nicodemus enumeration'; 'birthdays' are counted from the date of initiation at which time the member was 're-born'. The organization has adopted the prayer of the eighteenth century Friedrich Öttinger: 'God give me the detachment to accept those things I cannot alter; the courage to alter those things which I can alter; and the wisdom to distinguish the ones from the others'.

The official handbook of A.A. (Anon, 1955)⁷ contains frequent religious intimations,⁸ and such phrases as 'Higher Power' occur often. Chapter IV is entitled 'We Agnostics'. Often sudden revolutionary changes are described; there is a suggestion of 'God-consciousness' followed by a vast change in feeling and outlook, not necessarily intended by A.A. The experiences are more of the 'educational variety' rather than sudden, because they develop slowly over a long period of time. A favourite phrase of A.A. is 'a Power greater than ourselves', although members are at pains to point out that this is not necessarily confined to a religious interpretation. Bales (1945) suggests that there is a tendency for A.A. members to look back to the 'founder' for guidance and to regard him with respect and reverence:

Many religious sects and popular movements start in this way, and it is likely to be a major crisis in their existence when the key figure is removed, as eventually he must be, by death if for no other reason. If he has been able to transfer his 'magic', or in other cases his 'sacred' character, to a set of ideas, sentiments and procedures, perhaps expressed in a body of writings, or to some other impersonal source that can outlive him, the organization has a chance to survive.... Steps have already been taken to meet (this particular crisis in Alcoholics Anonymous). The 'magic' has been transferred to 'The Book', *Alcoholics Anonymous*, apparently with a considerable degree of success. One quite often hears of members who have become sober by the aid of The Book alone. The Book is the charter of the organization, and the *Twelve Steps* are the core of its established procedure.

This to a large extent illuminates the role played by the editor of the Handbook. We know that in many sects lacking formal leadership roles, control of the movement came to those who controlled publications; (it should be added that there is no evidence in A.A. that control was deliberately sought in this manner.)

Publications are important because they decide to a large extent the external image of a movement, while in a large movement the printed word becomes more significant as influence by direct association becomes difficult.⁹

One of the points of obvious overlap between A.A. and religious sects is the therapeutics of fellowship. Lacking any distinctive leadership an idea or abstraction has been substituted for the concept; this we can call metaphysical leadership. The condition of membership for A.A. is simply 'the desire to stop drinking' and there are no doctrinal requirements, members being free to believe what they will.¹⁰ Nevertheless, A.A. and sectarianism display certain characteristics in common. Stewart (1955) suggests, as does Lindt (1959), that the initiate/sponsor relationship with its love-object/rescue-fantasy, plays an important part in the group membership of A.A. This is also true of many sects. Stewart also suggests that as one of the characteristic tenets of A.A. is the acknowledgement of a superior power atheists or agnostics find it harder to recover than members who attend church. This was partly borne out by the Merseyside study in which a majority of A.A. members found the content of meetings too 'religious' or 'spiritual', although there is little doubt that this would vary according to area. There is a religious factor in the dynamics of fellowship of A.A., and this appears to be both useful and effective in the recovery process. A.A. 'leaders' insist on their amateur status and never act as agents of control. Decisions are essentially group decisions, and as members of the same Fellowship there is no overt differential of status, although distinct patterns of deference do exhibit themselves in the interaction process. Self-confession to the group is as much a pattern of an A.A. group as of any evangelical or sectarian meeting.

Lindt (1959) showed that an A.A. therapy group has an atmosphere of euphoria just like any group experience, which can be seen as a direct parallel to the sectarian euphoria of Southern American groups as described by Sargent, and Melanesian sects as described by Worsley, Barber, and Lanternari.

A word must be said about the psychological process of conversion and surrender common to both A.A. and sectarianism.¹¹ This is a very obvious point where A.A. exhibits a similar characteristic pattern to sectarianism. The changes which govern any particular shift are legion. Some alcoholics, like some religious converts, express a feeling of utter despair, while others experience some crisis of personal situation or behaviour. There is, (a) the need to hit rock bottom, (b) the need to be humble, (c) the need to surrender, (d) the need for the primary ego to be reduced (Tiebout, 1949). There is very often a crisis moment preceding joining, which is in a sense the culmination of a process of strain. Some appear to undergo a process of regeneration. The A.A. group itself, like any sectarian group, is an unusually close primary community, which offers itself as a new reformist subculture. The conversion feature Tiebout says is 'a psychological event in which there is a major shift in personality manifestation', a switch from negative to

positive attitudes as follows:

<i>Formerly</i>	<i>Presently</i>
tense	relaxed
aggressive	natural
demanding	realistic
conscience-ridden	conscience-free

and they occur in alcoholics generally when self-images of grandiosity and defiance are relegated. The conversion situation and its results are to some extent a positive therapeutic achievement, certainly in movements similar to A.A. On the other hand sect members often betray a hostile world attitude. Not all sects, of course, place an emphasis on an emotional shift, or a conversion experience. It is true of more orthodox fundamentalist groups. It is what Ian Ramsey calls a 'paradigm-shift', and involves seeing things in a new light, and the adoption of alternative conceptual systems. The language used to describe it is almost identical with that used by scientists. It is a 'gestalt switch', *i.e.* it must happen all at once.

To surrender, in Tiebout's (1961) usage, is to listen and not fight back, and he describes an act of surrender at a patient's attendance at an A.A. meeting: 'when I got there something happened—I don't know to this day... what it was, but when I took a look at the men and women there... I knew they had something I needed'.

It may well be that A.A. should be considered a quasi-religious organization; there would then be no difficulty in accounting for its religious features. The main objection to such a view is that A.A. categorically states that it is in no sense a religious body. Nevertheless the structural features of A.A. procedure *do* resemble rather closely those of certain sectarian organizations.

Some Sectarian Characteristics of Alcoholics Anonymous

There is now quite general agreement concerning the characteristics of religious sects. Wilson (1961) defines sect as 'that small religious group in which membership is voluntary and conditional upon some mark of merit—understanding the group's teachings, or experience of some personal religious ecstasy—upon the basis of which association can arise'. The sect is small and exclusive, and its voluntary membership is generally adult; authority is charismatic rather than hierarchically sanctioned. This is not to suggest that pure charisma is to be found in sects; as in A.A. some sects display a poorly articulated leadership role, others a formerly instituted leadership role, neither of which need necessarily be charismatic.

Some characteristics are exclusively sectarian: separation from society in general and withdrawal from or defiance of the world and its institutions and values; exclusiveness both in attitude and in social structure; an attitude of ethical austerity, bordering on asceticism. Niebuhr saw the sect as a religious 'conflict society' in opposition to an institutional church (society). Leadership, also, often has a charismatic quality. Not all sects display all these characteristics, and Wilson's

definition seems to cover *all* manifestations of sectarian groups. A particularly important element of overlap between A.A. and sectarianism is the emphasis upon a 'conversion'¹² prior to membership (the alcoholic must at least have the *intention* of relinquishing drink). Indeed, in the Merseyside groups 88 per cent admitted having experienced some form of 'conversion'. Other elements are: symbolism; voluntary joining; spirit of regeneration (the sect, like A.A., is an important 'reforming' agency); single-mindedness and fervour of the adherents; exclusive bodies imposing some test of merit (the intention of abstinence in the case of A.A.); members kept under scrutiny and the pattern of their lives regulated in particular ways; sharing of central functions among the senior members; denial of any division of labour; equal total commitments; subjective fellowship and participation in mutual love; community and fraternity; the sect member both chooses and is chosen. A less certain element is membership by achievement; the longer the abstinence the higher the status within the A.A. group; some sects, too, place an emphasis on achievement in the form of the recruitment of members. As mentioned above, many members count their 'birthday' from the time of initiation. Just as the sect tends to dominate a large part of the life of its members, to A.A. followers the group becomes a reference often for as many as seven nights a week (see Appendix: length of membership and frequency of attendance). This is more than just a social pattern. The group accepts a totalitarian ideology which reorganizes and reorients the ideas, values and sentiments of its members. In a sense there is a parallel to be seen with the established sect, for the individual moulds and fits himself into an already existing way of life.

Some similarities of characteristics between A.A. and sectarian bodies have already been indicated. As formal organizations both A.A. and sects exhibit a set of purposeful rules and objectives which both prescribe and allocate certain obligations and status rights, and which to a large extent determine group activities. Most sects and A.A. groups function with 'the minimum degree of structure necessary to the successful functioning of the group as a social organization' (Bales, 1945).¹³ Characteristics of a *formal belief system* that A.A. possesses along with many sectarian groups are: (a) the nature of the organization—structure loose and not strictly defined (which is not true of Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists, for example) and the self-confessional aspect; (b) teleological reference—a structured system of goals, methods and taboos; (c) criteria of formal inclusion (Budd, 1967). The characteristics of *formal organization* that A.A. possesses are: (a) an unclear distinction along the formal/informal continuum. Indeed formal organizations often display informal characteristics, e.g. there need not necessarily be trained personnel in a formal organization, and there are none in A.A. There is no formally recognized structure of organization although there do exist unofficial patterns of power. (b) A.A. has little or no bureaucratic structure, the movement being independent of all other bodies, including other anti-alcoholic bodies, although there is often co-operation. Each A.A. group is an

independent unit (c) A.A. has no distinct leadership and no particular allocation of roles. Generally, the longest standing group member acts as chairman or speaker. Again, long standing is the determinant in the initiate/sponsor relationship. (d) communication in the organization structure is symmetrical, there being roughly equivalent wholesale group participation. (e) power and authority, also, is group centred, the group itself taking the role of decision maker.

Obviously, this is an extreme statement. There may be some sects that share the last five characteristics considered peculiar to A.A. Some sects may have a tight and well defined organizational structure with no self-confessional aspect. Again, some sects might display patterns commonly thought to be confined to A.A., such as informal patterns of power as opposed to formally structured organization, functionally independent units, lack of distinct leadership roles, symmetrical communication patterns and group decision making. It will appear there is some considerable interplay between A.A. and sect characteristics, and parallel organizational and behavioural patterns begin to be apparent.

Religious Values, Alcohol Consumption, and Sectarian Affiliation

It is appropriate here to give some indication of research which has thrown light on religious, including sectarian, characteristics of alcoholics and A.A. (*e.g.* Landis, 1946). There have been a number of studies which relate alcohol consumption to religious beliefs and affiliation, and particularly to sect membership. Religious values have been shown as directly relevant to the recovery period in alcoholism. Some have implied that the religious content of A.A. is a vital contribution to its success. However, as we have already mentioned, there is some evidence that members find the tone of A.A. too religious. There is some suggestion in what follows that there is a connection between ascetic Protestantism and abstinence. This is especially manifested in the Protestant sects. If A.A. does have some of the characteristics of sects then part of its success may lie in this very fact.

Woodruff examined the Christian conversion of the alcoholic in the context of the Protestant parish fellowship. He studied a group of twenty alcoholics who had been abstinent for a year and who had experienced some form of Christian conversion. They were aged from thirty-nine to sixty-two and predominantly middle or lower-middle class. He formulated four categories of conversion: (a) psycho-social—involving improved interpersonal relations and entailing no religious interpretation; (b) restrictive Christian—involving substitution of religious causes for compulsive drinking; (c) limited Christian—in which the individual makes intellectual religious affirmation but no personal commitment; (d) comprehensive Christian—total surrender of self to religious ideals.

Eckhardt (1967) found from a study of case histories that the highest values for the recovery period were religion, friendship and generosity. Thorner (1953) traced the relationship between ascetic Protestantism and alcoholism, and found a tendency for those with ascetic religious beliefs to be less tolerant towards drinking activity

than those with Catholic beliefs, for example. He cites evidence which suggests that there is strong support for abstinence movements among the more ascetic Protestant sects, and indeed the nineteenth century temperance movements were originated by the Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Baptists, all tending to be ascetic in emotional content. Thorner suggests that the Interpersonal Relationship system of A.A. sustains sobriety which is a primary goal. Parallels with ascetic Protestantism are as follows: *unio mystica*, high premium on emotional discipline, and a call for help.

Riley and Marden (1947) suggested a religious pattern of alcoholic drinking from an American National Sample:

Incidence and Frequency of Drinking By Religious Affiliation

	Abstainers (per cent)	Occasional Drinkers (per cent)	Regular Drinkers (per cent)
Protestant	41	46	13
Catholic	21	52	27
Jew	13	64	23

Reily and Marden, 1947: p. 270

It is to be taken into consideration that drinking increases with urbanization and that rural areas are predominantly Protestant. Myerson (1944) found Mennonites, Quakers, Christian Scientists, and Unitarians as being particularly sober. Sessions (1957) suggests that there is rebellion by alcoholics against religious orthodoxy, and a favourable response to 'ego-religion' (individual conscience-centred) as opposed to 'super-ego religion' (traditional authoritarian-centred). He further suggests a 'spiritual' rather than a medical or religious approach to alcoholism.

Machover, Puzzo, and Plumeau (1962) found no significant difference in the religious values of alcoholics as compared with non-alcoholics. Skolnick (1958) found that 4 per cent of Jewish students experienced social complications on account of drinking compared with 39 per cent of Episcopalian students, 50 per cent of Methodist students, and 57 per cent of nonaffiliates of abstinence background. That is, abstinence teachings, since they associate drinking with intemperance, inadvertently encourage intemperance in those who come from a background in which abstinence is stressed, but disregard the injunction not to drink. Frequent religious participation, even among students who drink, seems to diminish social complications.

Several studies have associated religion with drinking patterns, Straus and Bacon (1953) finding few Mormons were drinkers, and Tiebout (1946) suggesting that the religious content of the A.A. programme is the essential factor in the success of that organization. Walters (1957) studies the background of fifty alcoholics, 42 per cent of whom considered themselves Christian. More parents of the alcoholics were church members than parents of the control subjects. The controls were chosen from the neurological, surgical, medical, and psychiatric wards of the same

hospital, and matched for age and race. There was little difference between the two groups in early religious activity and church affiliation. More of the fathers of the alcoholics were heavy drinkers than fathers of the controls. Most of the alcoholics continue to hold their childhood beliefs about religion without any real change. In the Merseyside groups about the same number claimed they were Christian as in the Walters study.

Conclusions

I have maintained that certain of the characteristics of sectarian groups are not confined to those groups alone. The parallel or overlapping which is felt exists between transcendental and non-transcendental institutions, organizations, belief systems, etc., tends to be obscured, and it might be helpful if we regarded the two 'polar types' as a two-directional continuum:

sect ↔ secular associations

There is some suggestion that sectarian characteristics are to be found in various secular movements, and I have indicated that such sect-like characteristics are also to be found in organizations such as A.A. which makes no pretence at an overall ideological formulation. There is little doubt that closer examination would reveal similar characteristics in groups such as Neurotics Anonymous or Weight Watchers International. It is not the case that we can fit human behaviour neatly into categories which allow no overlap. Just as there are transcendental theistic or supernatural belief complexes which are, and are being, secularized (the Unitarians, for example) so there may well be secular complexes being transcendentalized. The difference between the transcendental and non-transcendental to a large extent is in the interpretive patterning of human behaviour rather than in whatever overt or covert claim for legitimation of such groupings.

An evident criterion by which 'secular' and 'transcendental' voluntary associations may be connected is by their *totality of concern*. Alcoholics Anonymous, Daytop, etc. have the appearance of sects partly because of their total nature of involvement. Sectarrians and A.A. members let these values determine other life stances and commitments. Denominations, on the other hand, conform more to the pattern of segmentary associations of a secular kind.

This preliminary article has outlined the possibility that secular organizations may have similarities to transcendental systems. A.A. in many respects resembles sectarian bodies of a certain sort both in structure and organization, and this further suggests that irrespective of whatever claim to identification each particular organization in fact makes, similarities can be discerned. Not only do secular movements often resemble, in structure, transcendental movements but secular movements have been known to develop into transcendental movements and vice versa. This is not to suggest that the identification is complete, nor that the

distinction between the secular and transcendental is not a useful one, but in terms of sociological analysis we must accept that often those movements which appear dissimilar frequently possess an underlying similarity of structure. Difficulties remain. For example, the criterion of validation in a transcendental system is invariably super-empirical while a non-transcendental system formally rejects such validation. Manifest differences may, however, conceal latent similarities, and similarities of structures and functions may camouflage differences in motivations and goals. The secularization of a movement such as Unitarianism entails a redefinition of its terms of validation and legitimation. The Church, also, as a transcendental institution is increasingly involving itself in social and parochial work, as though the shift is becoming located in the empirical rather than super-empirical sphere.

APPENDIX

Summary of research carried out on Alcoholics Anonymous groups

Two questionnaires were distributed to groups in Merseyside, one containing questions on affiliation, class, membership procedures, etc., and the other designed to elicit a series of attitude responses to religious statements, ten of which were *fundamentalist* and ten of which were *liberal/progressive*. From a total of fifty completed sets of questionnaires the following results were obtained.

A.A. members, partly because of their stress on anonymity, are suspicious of outsiders and answer questions only with a great deal of reluctance, and only really when they have gained confidence and familiarity with the questioner.

General

Number	per cent	
44	(88)	admitted 'conversion', and said that A.A. offered 'a new way of life'.
45	(90)	admitted that A.A. has a 'regenerating' influence.
13	(26)	positively indicated that the Twelve Steps were too religious in content.
44	(88)	thought that the older, more established members led the meetings.
34	(68)	did not think that the leaders required any special training.
40	(80)	thought their ideas similar to other members.
36	(72)	had heard of Moral Rearmament.

Class affiliation

Actual Education	Class in which members placed themselves			
	Upper Class	Middle Class	Lower Middle	Working
Secondary	0	5	10	10
Grammar	1	9	3	1
Further Education	0	0	1	0
College	0	3	0	1
University	1	3	1	1

According to the Registrar General's Classification of occupations they were placed as follows:

Class I	5
Class II	7
Class III	21
Class IV	5
Class V	3

The remainder (housewives, retired unspecified, etc.) were unclassified.

Age and marital status

The majority of the group were male, married and with one or more children. There were few members over sixty. There were eleven single males. The most heavily represented age-group was the 41-50.

Religion

Number	per cent	
17	(34)	denied attending any religious meeting place
14	(28)	claimed they were non-Christian
32	(64)	claimed they were Christian

(Differences in totals are accounted for by refusals to answer certain questions.)

Actual church attendance

	Catholic	Protestant	Jew
More than once a month	8	6	0
Once a month	0	2	0
Festivals only	1	11	0
	3 lapsed Catholics	15 non-participating Protestants	1 non-participating Jew

Length of membership of A.A. and frequency of attendance

Length of Attendance in days per week	One Year	Two Years	Three Years	Four Years
1	3	1	2	7
2	5	7	2	5
3	4	3	0	5
4	0	0	0	0
5	2	0	0	1
6	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	1	0

Attitude questionnaire

The Opinion Statements ranged from 'Every word in the Bible is true' as an example of a Fundamentalist position to 'The whole religious story is a myth' as representative of a Liberal/Progressive position.

The ten 'Fundamentalist' questions (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19) and the ten 'Liberal' questions (3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20) were randomized and scored. The scores for the ten 'Fundamentalist' were subtracted from the total scores for the 'Liberal', which meant the more positive the score the more 'Liberal' the attitude. The scores now approximated to a normal distribution ($\bar{X} = 3.34$ and $s = 7.5$). No correlations were found between the scores and any of the questions on the information sheet. There was, however, a slight tendency to 'agree' and 'strongly agree' in the attitude questionnaire. This 'direction of wording effect' could mean the results were less focused than intended. There was an acquiescence response set, *i.e.* a tendency

to agree with items which might have been the result of a response extremity, that is, continually choosing an extreme, or a self-deceiving selection bias.

Notes

I am indebted more than I can say to Dr Bryan Wilson (All Souls, Oxford) for his patient generosity and help. Mr George Smith (Department of Social and Administrative Studies, Oxford) helped by criticising a very early draft of this paper. My thanks are also due to Mr Basil Turton and Mr Jeffrey Heaton, both of whom gave some assistance either in the analysis or distribution of the questionnaires.

1. Information supplied by H. Toms, General Secretary, Central Service Office.
2. The use of 'first names' or Christian names is a device intended to produce anonymity and enforce group cohesiveness.
3. A.A. reluctance to engage in public controversy stems from the example of the Washingtonians, who were a group of alcoholics who originated in Baltimore in about the 1850s. When their membership had passed the 500,000 the Washingtonians allowed themselves to be manipulated by politicians and reformers. For example, they divided on the issue of slavery.
4. I am indebted to W. Kenyon, Executive Secretary, Merseyside Council on Alcoholism, for this information.
5. One of the A.A. symbols used by some of the groups is an empty pint beer glass which is placed on the speaker's table.
6. I include here various African sects. It is true, of course, that leadership functions are often *not* charismatic, e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Christadelphians, Plymouth Brethren (all branches), Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, have a thoroughly institutionalized charisma. There are, however, *some* sects which are purely charismatic, e.g. the Father Divine Movement. It is quite possible that both charisma *and* leadership are not attributes of individuals but arise from the relationship established between 'claimant' and 'believer'.
7. In 1940 the Alcoholic Foundation, founded in 1938, decided to take control of the Works Publishing, Inc., which was formed to publish 'Alcoholics Anonymous'. By 1942 the \$8,000 for paying off the shareholders was raised and the Foundation became the sole owner of the A.A. book.
8. In the early days of the Book's writing there was some controversy regarding the content. The Liberals displayed no objection to the use of 'God' throughout the book, but preferred 'spiritual' to 'religious'. They refused to consider any other theological or doctrinal issues. The radical left wing were largely atheists and agnostics and consequently opposed to any religious or spiritual content whatsoever.
9. I am particularly indebted to Dr Bryan Wilson for this information. He pointed out that the editor of *Christadelphian* became in effect the leader of the movement—although not formally. In the Christian Science Church the directors took legal action in 1917 to gain control of the publishing house to consolidate their leadership. A similar story is to be seen with James Taylor, Jnr. in the Exclusive Brethren.
10. A step towards a more bureaucratized structure of organization was undertaken in July, 1955 at the Twentieth Anniversary Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous, and expressed in the Conference Charter.
11. 'Nearly every A.A. has a spiritual experience that quite transforms his outlook and attitudes. Ordinarily, such occurrences are gradual and may take place over periods of months or even years.

A considerable number . . . who have had the sudden variety of spiritual experience see no great difference so far as the practical result is concerned between their quick

- illumination and the slower, more typical kinds of spiritual awakening'. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 63.
12. Not necessarily a 'felt' change but more of a declared assent to sect values, e.g. teachings, beliefs.
 13. This is not wholly true of sects, who often distribute 'offices' not all of which are by any means essential.

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