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The Role of Confession and Storytelling in Recovery: The Merge
of Theology and Communication Theory in the 12-Steps of
Alcoholics Anonymous

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According to the National Institute of Health, alcoholism is the fourth largest health problem in the United States, and over 1,400 college students die each year from alcohol related accidents (Hingso et al, 2002). Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has been regarded as one of the most important movements in the 20th century (Lee, 2004, p. 1). The four editions of the AA "Big Book", a compilation of recovery stories and the guide for the 12-step program, have been read and shared by more than 40 million people, with translations into forty-three languages (p. 2). Alcoholics Anonymous has become one of the only known international programs to treat a psychosocial problem with a spiritual "talking" cure. Auffer (2005) wrote of the success of the AA program:

The twelve steps of AA drew on both religion and psychology to show alcoholism as a synthetic problem requiring a synthetic remedy, and [it] took seriously the quasi-compulsive nature of addiction while rejecting both absolute determinism and the attendant pitfalls of a purely therapeutic approach. (p. 1)

This paper will defend the following thesis: The shared tool drawn from religion and social psychology, central to the success of AA recovery, was simply storytelling. The use of confession and the sharing of "one's story" enfolded the isolated sufferer into the collective narrative of the fellowship of AA. The symbolic convergence of the individual

with the alcoholic archetype served to break feelings of being terminally unique and provided hope for recovery.

The discussion will begin with a history of Alcoholics Anonymous including its growth, structure, and vision, as well as how it works. To understand the underlying structure of AA (often called "the program"), the trends influencing the epistemology of its founders in the areas of religion, psychology, and philosophy will be discussed. Finally, to provide a methodology for analyzing the use of storytelling and confession in the narrative strategy to recovery, the Symbolic Convergence Theory of communication will be applied to AA's Step Five, often considered to be the healing or confession step.

The History of Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous, the primary recovery program endorsed by leaders in legal, medical, and religious communities for the treatment of alcoholism, has a unique position in American politics earned by successfully bypassing dominant "separation of church and state" ideology. The truce in politics seemed to arise from the fact that no program produced the positive results reported by AA. The AA program experienced consistent recovery rates, while other programs utilizing only one approach to treatment, including religious counseling, psychotherapy, and medication therapy, failed in comparison.

Establishment and Growth

The 12-steps of AA were developed directly from the growing use of narrative in the fields of religion and psychology during the 1930s when the fellowship was founded. The central role of

confession, interpersonal disclosure, and identification in the recovery/conversion process reflected the axiology and epistemology of its co-founders, Bill Wilson (Bill W.) and Dr. Robert Smith (Dr. Bob).

The sharing of stories between two desperate alcoholics in the 1930s grew into a recovery program for over two million recovered alcoholics in the year of 2003 with meetings in approximately 150 countries (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952, p. 15). In 2004, the fellowship of AA had reportedly over 104,000 active groups across the world not including all programs modeled after the flagship organization (p. 15). The fellowship of AA has remained a strong, growing entity based on 12 simple traditions and 12 steps of recovery.

Alcoholism became a classified disease, alongside epilepsy and diabetes, under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1989, yet the main line of treatment remained the narrative, spiritual approach of AA's 12-step plan. The program, praised for its simplicity, seemed to defy all organizational models for long-term stability since it had no outside funding, no elected leaders, and no religious affiliation. However, the consistent growth of the movement implied a strong organizing rhetorical vision or a shared saga defining its unity and sustaining its cultural hegemony.

Organizational Structure and Primary Purpose

In order to support the claim that AA has survived and grown based on its use of storytelling and confession, it is important to understand its organizational structure. In other

words, to understand what AA *is* as a fellowship and how it works, one must first clearly understand what the program *is not*. AA was founded and still functions by deliberately avoiding any political or religious affiliation, rejecting formal leadership or professional organization, and refusing outside funding of any kind.

The twelve traditions, published in the book referred to as the "Twelve and Twelve," have defined AA's unique anti-structure since 1939. AA groups explicitly designated God as the main authority over its members and established sobriety as its primary purpose. Groups were self-supporting, anonymous, and neutral on public issues while also avoiding media exposure or public relations campaigns. The fellowship was to be a program of attraction versus promotion where the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking.

Second, AA was not founded as a therapeutic, self-help type of support group nor was it established as a denominational or nondenominational religious group. Alcoholics Anonymous was established as a fellowship of men and women who joined together to share their experience, strength and hope in order to help the suffering alcoholic to achieve sobriety. The program was unapologetically spiritual and required rigorous honesty, close fellowship, and systematic completion of the suggested 12-step plan of recovery.

How It Works

The co-founder Bill W. (1895-1971), a New York stockbroker, spent most of his younger life in and out of asylums as a

hopeless alcoholic. One evening in the hospital, he had a spiritual awakening that relieved him of his desire to drink. Six months later, convinced that only an alcoholic could help another alcoholic, he reached out to his friend Dr. Bob (1879-1950). He convinced Bob that God was the only way of out of alcoholism and that no alcoholic could recover alone.

The two men formed the first AA groups in New York, New York and Akron, Ohio in 1935. They outlined the organizing principles and the twelve steps to recovery in a book, known as *The Big Book*, published in 1939. By 1955, AA had mushroomed into 6,000 groups with over 150,000 recovered alcoholics (Bill W., 1939, p. xv). Today, Alcoholics Anonymous still relies only on the principles outlined in the "Big Book" and the "Twelve and Twelve" and adheres strictly to the 12-step program.

The Twelve Steps of Recovery

Bill W. wrote to the suffering alcoholic about the twelve steps of recovery:

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves.... Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it-then you are ready to take certain steps. (p. 58)

The first three steps involved admitting powerlessness over alcohol and a belief that a Higher Power could restore sanity upon complete surrender.

After a conscious decision to turn one's life over to the care of God in Step Three, the fourth and fifth steps involved moral housecleaning and confession to God and another person the exact nature of one's past behavior. Step Five's self-disclosure and confession aspect, discussed in more detail later, was considered to be the most important, mandatory action in the process of achieving and maintaining life-long recovery from alcoholism.

The sixth and seventh steps examined character defects; and the eighth and ninth steps required making amends to those harmed in the past. The tenth and eleventh steps demanded more action and a resolve to seek only God's will for one's life through increased daily inventory, prayer, and meditation. Finally, Step Twelve explained that in order to maintain sobriety the alcoholic must carry the message to others still suffering from alcoholism and they must apply the spiritual principles of AA to all aspects of their daily lives.

Epistemological Foundation of the Fellowship *Religious Worldview*

The Oxford Group. Bill W. and Dr. Bob were active members of the Oxford Group before forming the fellowship of AA. The Oxford Group was a non-denominational Christian organization, born in Britain, and led in America by two influential clergymen, Episcopal Samuel Shoemaker, Jr. and Lutheran pastor

Dr. Frank Buchman. The primary purpose of the group was to attract people to a new life through a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. The group avoided formal organization and claimed the Holy Spirit was the only needed leader of the movement. The fellowship of AA, modeled after the Christian group, has received criticism for what some claimed to be "the directly religious tilt of the 12 steps, four of which specifically invoke 'God'" (Gelman, 1991, p. 15). John Norfolk, a Maryland man court ordered to AA following a drunk driving conviction, sued and won by arguing: "They were praying and talking about God half the time at the meetings I went to" (p. 16).

Although one would never hear the name Christ or the word Christian referred to in any approved AA literature, the Oxford Group directly influenced the spiritual 12-step program. In fact, the first alcoholic fellowship was named "the James Group" after the book of James in the New Testament. When asked about his inspiration for the program, Bill Wilson recalled: "The early AA got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Group and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America, and from nowhere else" (Friends in Recovery, 1988, p. xxi).

Central to AA's principles, the Oxford Group's teachings operated with the assumption that human beings are sinners, but they can become changed through confession. They believed that the changed soul had direct access to God, and that the changed soul was obligated to change others. In addition, Bill W.

incorporated into AA's philosophy the Oxford Group's five procedures, which were: giving to God, listening to God's direction, checking guidance, restitution, and sharing, both confession and witness (xx). The foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous rested on the Oxford Group's four absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, and Absolute Love (Selby, 2000, p. 8).

"Religionless" Christianity. Christian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959) who was martyred in Nazi Germany for his opposition to Hitler wrote:

If a drunkard signs a pledge, or a rich man gives all his money away, they are both of them freeing themselves from slavery to alcohol and riches, but not from their bondage to themselves.... Go rather and be reconciled with your brother, renounce the sin, which holds you fast. (pp. 65-67)

AA founders approached sobriety as spiritual conversion and a release from the bondage of self versus simply putting down the drink. The notion of the suffering servant and the power of redemption through confession were the religious teachings of theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) and the leaders of the Oxford Groups in the 1930s. Their mission was to awaken a dead God in the daily lives of the average citizen. The concept of "religionless Christianity," promoted by Bonhoeffer during the time period following WWI, was popularized in a move toward secular Christianity where God was

an immanent presence concerned with the needs of the poor and suffering.

Bonhoeffer, who started prison ministries in American inner cities, believed that each individual had the privilege of bearing a predestined "cross" or trial of suffering to serve Christ. In the case of Bonhoeffer, he was jailed by Hitler and later killed in opposition to the Nazi perversion of scriptural interpretation. Therefore, his "cross" in essence allowed him to reach other prisoners in the name of Christ.

For Bill W. and Dr. Bob, their "cross" was alcoholism. They embraced this suffering as a vehicle to a new life completely surrendered to God through the brokenness inflicted by their drinking. Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" was strongly reflected in AA's focus on humility and servanthood. The German theologian and the members of the Oxford Group viewed religion as something you *do or live*. They rejected pious, rote church rituals. Bonhoeffer described this "cheap grace" as "the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, [and] absolution without personal confession" (p. 44). Mostly, the Christian movements maintained that "costly grace" required action, confession, and a life-long commitment to discipleship.

Niebuhr and Narrative Theology. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), a classmate of Bonhoeffer at Yale, was the final obvious religious influence on the AA recovery program. Niebuhr, a narrative theologian, wrote the Serenity Prayer recited at the opening of AA meetings across the world. The prayer was written

by Niebuhr and casually given to his neighbor who passed it along to Bill Wilson. The prayer was adopted in a shorter version in 1939 and published in AA's Big Book. The longer form included AA's central concepts of approaching sobriety "One Day at a Time" and embracing suffering as means to a new life. A portion of the short and simple prayer read:

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. Living One Day at a Time: Enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to peace...Amen.

Narrative theology, gaining popularity in the 1920s and 1930s was a radical approach to faith where the transcendence of God was found within the story or narrative. Niebuhr preached that revelation occurred when an individual vocalized their internal history in the form of a story.

Narrative theologians maintained: "one's community is indispensable in the process of revelation, for it functions as the bearer of the narratives and the symbols, which when internalized by the individual become the occasion for revelation" (Grenz & Olson, 1992, p. 274). The Big Book, AA's primary text, was essentially a book of stories.

The first chapter began with "Bill's Story" followed by a description of the recovery program. The remainder of the book was devoted to personal narratives of all types of recovered alcoholics. The Big Book's devotion of 410 pages to personal narratives attested to the strong belief in the power of

storytelling and open confession in the healing process by the founders of the AA fellowship.

Narrative theology was the bridge leading to the communication side of the AA structure. The concept of fellowship and community was indispensable to recovery. The role of communication and community in AA mirrored narrative theologies approach to truth and self-discovery:

A community is a group of people who have come to share a common past, who understand particular events in the past to be of decisive importance for interpreting the present, who anticipate the future by means of a shared hope, and who express their identity by means of a common narrative. (p. 283)

It has been argued to this point that Alcoholics Anonymous was not developed as a religious program; yet evidence clearly demonstrates the impact of theologians, and narrative theology in particular, on the formation of the AA fellowship. However, Dr. Bob and Bill W. deliberately broke from all Christian titles in the formation of their program in order to attract all types of suffering alcoholics.

The Christian epistemology was evident in the structure and narrative concepts represented in recovery, however the analytic schools in psychology and philosophy also contributed equally to the AA philosophy. Specifically, American pragmatism was on the rise, symbolic interactionists gained popularity, and all descendents of Sigmund Freud (1859-1940) changed the face of psychology throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

AA's Narrative Approach to Recovery

The Influence of Carl Jung on Bill W.

In the 1930s, Bill W. credited psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961), a student of Freud, for having a significant influence on the emergence of the AA healing program (Jackson, 2001, p. 30). The notion of the "wounded healer" articulated by Jung became the therapeutic approach to alcoholic recovery (p. 31). One recovered alcoholic carrying the message to another alcoholic served several purposes.

First, Jung believed that Christ was the ultimate suffering servant and that man was starved for the symbolic life represented by Christ. Second, the shared experience of pain by the healer served to provide vulnerability, sincerity, and empathy to the one being healed. Finally, the sharing of similar stories functioned in the individuation process where the individual consciousness became integrated with the collective consciousness of the group.

It is important to note Jung's approach to Christianity and the mission of the founders of AA, Bill W. and Dr. Bob. The mission of the recovering alcoholics in purging Christian terminology from the 12-steps to recovery was in the literal sense only. The founders believed that the suffering alcoholic would be turned away by the perception of a religious affiliation and they believed that many people hitting a level of desperation had sworn off the church and its ability to compassionately help them.

Bill W. and Dr. Bob, whether consciously or unconsciously, represented the teachings of Jung about Christ in their symbolic approach to a spiritual life. Jung believed that the symbolic figure of Jesus Christ gave meaning to life and served as a reflection of the Self. He believed that the Christian myth and the rediscovery of a symbolic God would alleviate the plague of stale, rational approaches to religion. Just as Jung believed that the archetype of Christ as the suffering servant and redeemer represented the Self, the founders of AA believed that the archetype of the recovered alcoholic represented the hope of a new Self for those still suffering with their addiction.

The AA archetype and the Christian archetype both represented the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth by focusing on the wounded healer, the suffering servant, and the redeemer from a past life of sin. Both Jung and the founders of AA believed that the use of confession and storytelling were the only path to psychological change. For them, the community and its symbolic interaction with the individual shaped the personal consciousness to the ideology of the collective consciousness.

American Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism

The uniquely American concepts of Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism were recognizable in the structure of the AA program. In particular, American Pragmatism promoted by William James (1842-1910) viewed truth as that which pays off or something with "cash value" (James, 1995, p. 84). AA's utilitarian approach to religion promoted the spiritual life as a means to an end. If one became spiritual, there was a pay-

off: sobriety. Furthermore, the only way to become spiritual was through the use of human communication and symbolic interaction between members of the "AA culture."

Around the time of AA's infancy, between 1915 and 1935, the Chicago School of Sociology was in its golden era (Rogers, 1994, p. 170). The prevailing influence significant to AA philosophy would appear to be the notion of Symbolic Interactionism conceived by Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Symbolic Interactionism, rooted in pragmatic philosophy, was a broad perspective that asserted:

Human communication occurs through the exchange of symbols and their meanings. Human behavior can thus be understood by learning how individuals give meaning to the symbolic information that they exchange with others.... these meanings arise out of social interaction with one's fellows, and these meanings are modified through the interpretive process by the individual. (p. 170)

The broad theory of Symbolic Interactionism has evolved today into many human communication theories examining the role of symbolic language and narrative on the formation of the individual personality and belief system.

In order to apply the concepts discussed throughout this paper, the current communication theory of Symbolic Convergence can be applied to a step in the 12-step process of AA. The application will serve the instrumental purpose of understanding the role of confession and storytelling in the healing process. On another level, the analysis is intended to identify the

underlying epistemology of the co-founders in the meta-narrative embedded in the 12-step rituals, particularly as it reflects the religious and sociological belief systems outlined in this paper. Finally, the application provides support for the main thesis that Alcoholics Anonymous "works" and is sustained through its reliance on confession and storytelling in the narrative approach to recovery.

Symbolic Convergence Theory

Rhetorical Vision and Shared Consciousness

Symbolic Convergence Theory, developed by Ernest Borgmann, John Cragan, and Donald Shields, maintained that individuals created their perception of reality by sharing stories within a particular culture. These shared stories, or narratives, were established through symbolic interaction within small groups, and they were "chained out from person to person and group to group" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 157). The theory demonstrated that people formed their personal identity through interpersonal bonds created by story-telling. Symbolic exchanges forged a shared identity among members of a particular group or culture.

Symbolic Convergence Theory, also known as *fantasy-theme analysis*, focused on the role of communication in persuasion and conversion. Fantasy or narrative themes, reflected in the language or symbols used by a particular group, defined their rhetorical vision. Rhetorical visions pulled people together in the following way:

As rhetorical visions get established through the sharing of fantasy themes within a limited group, they fulfill a

consciousness-creating function. They make people more aware of a certain way of seeing things.... In other words, they build or maintain a group or community's 'shared consciousness.' (p. 158)

Definition of Key Concepts

Symbolic Convergence Theory identified three underlying structures, or *master analogues*, that "compete for our attention and vie for truth":

1. *Righteous analogues* attempt to tell us how to live our lives, morally, what is right or wrong.
2. *Social analogues* tell us how we should relate to other people.
3. *Pragmatic analogues* tell us how to do things, offering practical, efficient solutions. (p. 158)

Within each larger rhetorical area, fantasy themes consisted of characters, plot lines, scenes, and sanctioning agents.

Symbolic Convergence and AA's Step Five

AA's Step Five

AA's Step Five in the twelve steps to recovery suggested: "[We] admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952). The action in this step was defined as the key to lifelong sobriety and peace; and failure to expose "those tormenting ghosts of yesterday" would ultimately result in failure in the healing process (p. 55). The selection of one's confessor was an important aspect of recovery. Bill W. selected Father Ed

Dowling, while Dr. Bob took his fifth step with Bill W. as his sponsor (Hamilton, 1996, p. 31).

Common practice, in modern AA, usually involved confession to another alcoholic who possessed at least one year of continuous sobriety. The AA "sponsor", selected by the recovering alcoholic, supported the individual in the completion of all twelve steps. They were considered to be a spiritual confidant and a non-judgmental, trusted vault for the disclosure of one's darkest regrets and transgressions.

The Righteous Analogue

According to Symbolic Convergence, the righteous analogue attempted to tell one how to live morally. In a secular sense, the practice of confession was viewed as a release from obligation. In a religious confession and pardoning, the person was absolved from "the debt of sin and hence its punishment" (Minnis, 2003, p. 322). AA's Step Five was the first overt religious ritual in the step process. It confirmed the belief of the founders that recovery was preceded by a spiritual conversion. The chapter titled "We Agnostics" in the Big Book declared this reformed paradigm to be a non-negotiable element in recovery. Bill W. (1939) wrote:

We agnostics and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems...When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be? (p. 53)

The act of confession was modeled after the Christian repentance process dating back as far as St. Augustine (354-430 AD). Augustine believed that solitary confession was not enough, rather man had to expose his sins to man for complete healing (St. Augustine, 2004, p. 190). The Book of James in the New Testament also was reflected in this step. The first AA "James Group" followed the scriptural instruction in James 5:16 that read: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (Selby, 2000, p. 117).

Even though AA's co-founders intentionally avoided the overt promotion of Christianity, the emphasis on confession as a means to healing symbolically made a clear statement about the ecclesiastical nature of the 12-step process. According to Michael Foucault, Christianity was "a confessing religion" where one was obligated to acknowledge transgressions and "to bear public or private witness against oneself" (Humphries, 1997, p. 131). He believed that at the heart of this practice was "a break with one's past identity" (p. 131).

Within the master religious analogue, the fantasy theme was arguably Christian. The characters were the confessor and the trusted spiritual mentor. The sanctioning agent was the "wounded healer" or "suffering servant" of the symbolic Christ. The social setting was believed to be one where God was present in Spirit. The action was the sacrament of penance involving personal confession, communion with God, and the forgiveness of sin. This symbolic ritual enfolded the recovering alcoholic in

to the spiritual life of AA culture as modeled by Christ and other recovered alcoholics in the fellowship.

The Social Analogue

Social Analogues tell the individual how to relate to other people. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung claimed that "Protestants are much more likely to end up on the psychiatrist's couch than Catholics who practice the sacrament of penance" (Macquarrie, 1966, p. 484). Jung's approach to psychology involved self-discovery through self-disclosure. Confession and disclosure of one's authentic self allowed the individual to identify and connect with shared characteristics possessed by people of a unified culture. In the case of the alcoholic archetype, many qualities were considered to be shared traits among people from extremely different backgrounds.

Alcoholism was viewed as a disease of isolation where the individual developed a bifurcated sense of self in order to hide addiction. Bill W. (1939) wrote: "More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. He is very much the actor. To the outer world he presents his stage character" (p. 73). Step Five was the beginning of authentic communication and the joining of the outer persona with the internalized sense of self. The AA philosophy maintained that the alcoholic was only as sick as their secrets (Hamilton, 1996, p. 149).

Self-disclosure was an important aspect of interpersonal theories of communication with a focus on "honest communication" in interpersonal exchange. Carl Rogers (1902-1987) claimed that "the goal of communication is accurate understanding of self and

others and that understanding can only happen with genuine self-disclosure" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 249). Rogerian style counseling, theoretically similar to Jung's "wounded healer" approach, identified three necessary conditions for relational health.

The first element in Roger's theory, exercised in AA's Step Five, was "congruence" or the alignment of the outer display with one's inner sense of self. Practicing humility and honesty in the recovery process of self-disclosure provided the alcoholic a pathway "out of isolation and loneliness, and a move toward wholeness, happiness, and a sense of peace" (Friends in Recovery, 1988, p. 92). The other two elements of Rogerian counseling involved "unconditional positive regard" and "empathetic understanding" by the healer toward the confessor (Wickman & Campbell, 2003, p. 178).

AA's emphasis on alcoholics helping other alcoholics to recover created an ideal structure for relational health. Within the social analogue, the narrative theme characters were two suffering alcoholics. The scene was in a comfortable, safe environment conducive to interpersonal intimacy. The plot line or action was self-disclosure and relational trust. The sanctioning agent was the collective AA fellowship.

The fellowship's meta-narrative, the sorted stories of all those walking the path before them, validated the unifying characteristics and deviant patterns of the desperate alcoholic archetype. At the same time, a new archetype provided hope for a future without the isolation and pain of addiction. After

completing the redemption process and the remaining steps to recovery, the confessor was given a vision of becoming a future wounded healer to others still suffering from alcoholism.

The indoctrination process within the religious and social analogues fulfilled the pragmatic process in the narrative approach to healing. The individual joined the collective fellowship and adopted a new blueprint for living. In turn, they inherited a symbolic, pragmatic analogue for handling future relationships, conflicts, and the daily pressures of life without alcohol.

Conclusion

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous was not established as a Christian organization with clear denominational doctrines. At the same time, AA was not founded as a therapeutic, psychoanalytic support group. The fellowship, according to the vision of Bill W. and Dr. Bob, functioned simply by one alcoholic sharing their story with another alcoholic. The use of confession and storytelling allowed the isolated alcoholic to become part of the spiritual, recovering community. The narrative provided a model for sober living with an emphasis on rigorous honesty, self-evaluation and the confession of sin.

The AA fellowship provides a non-traditional model for other religious and political organizations by demonstrating the significance of have a unifying narrative. Symbolic convergence achieved through a clear rhetorical vision and the sharing of one's story appears to be a key element in AA's unusual longevity, growth, and effectiveness.

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