

**THE AFFILIATION MOTIVE AND READINESS  
TO JOIN ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

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Numerous alcoholics have responded to Alcoholics Anonymous upon first exposure, often without subsequent "slips." Still others react neutrally, or even antagonistically, and remain unattracted to the group and its program for sobriety. The contrast is frequently startling. On the one hand, Jim P., after going to his first meeting, attends steadily, readily adjusts to the continuous give and take of the casual A.A. atmosphere, and appears to give up his drinking without unusual difficulty. The observer gets the impression that in the A.A. group he has satisfied his emotional needs more effectively than he was able to do through his alcoholism. On the other hand, Bill M. tries the same group under quite similar conditions but reacts adversely, showing only a mild and superficial attraction. He goes a few times but tends to keep to himself at meetings; finds a host of competitors for the A.A. group such as job requirements, family commitments and church affiliations; and soon begins to drink again.

What accounts for this contrasting behavior? A previous study (1) has attempted to compare the experiences and attitudes of affiliates and nonaffiliates during three phases of the affiliation process: before going to any meeting at all, at the time of initial contact with a group, and after attending meetings for a few weeks. In two areas, particularly, there was sharp differentiation between the two groups. The affiliates, in contrast to the nonaffiliates, regarded themselves, before they ever attended a meeting as persons "who often shared their troubles with others." Furthermore, after attending meetings for a few weeks, the affiliates - in much greater numbers than the nonaffiliates - were attracted to the casual, informal interactions that occurred before and after the formal A.A. meeting. These two findings suggested that a stronger emotional need for social acceptance existed among affiliates than among nonaffiliates. Apparently an "affiliation motive" was aiding those who successfully joined A.A. but was relatively weak in those alcoholics who did not.

The present investigation attempts to explore further the extent to which those alcoholics who easily accept A.A. have a stronger emotional need to establish and maintain positive, affective relationships than alcoholics who find it difficult to affiliate.

This question has been touched upon by a few investigators but only indirectly. Hanfmann (2) alone has developed a specific hypothesis about the affiliation motive in A.A. members. Although it is based on intensive analysis of the life history of only one subject, her conclusions are of value here. Her subject, "Sam," had affiliated with A.A. upon first contact and had had no slips up to the time of the study - a period of 3 years. During his childhood Sam had turned to peer groups for security and identity. Acceptance and belonging in these informal cliques had assumed a central position in his life: "All his strivings became organized around the need for affiliation." He became indifferent to individualistic and competitive striving and substituted, in their place, a code of fair play and mutual help among male peers. Consequently he had a ready-made style of interaction that did not require any adjustment when he first attended an A.A. meeting. "Satisfactions obtained from his new group (A.A.) are basically the same as those he always obtained from the give and take of companionship."

A few other observations regarding the affiliation motive among A.A. members may be mentioned. McCarthy (3) hinted at the presence of such a selective factor in noting that identification between A.A. members and potential members is easily established but "there must be significant common elements in personality for identification to persist - the very democracy of nonselectivity in A.A. may at times work to the disadvantage of the individual." He did not, however, indicate the content of these significant common elements. Button (4) believes that "perhaps one reason for the lack of enduring and convincing benefits to some alcoholics from A.A. is their inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships," while Bell (5) cautions against blanket referral of patients to A.A. because the alcoholic "may or may not find within this organization the satisfactory deep interpersonal relationships that he should have had many years before." Comments by members of A.A. are in agreement with the opinions of professional workers. The members often refer to their former drinking companions as a "fraternity of drunks" and to former drinking groups as "A.A. in reverse." In short, both professional observers of A.A. and members themselves seem to have

formulated a hypothesis that alcoholics who join A.A. have a decisively stronger motivation to develop and sustain close positive interrelationships with other persons than those who, having the opportunity, do not join.

## METHOD

### *A Thematic Apperception Index of Affiliation Motive*

A method for estimating the strength of affiliation motive, based on Murray's Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), has been devised by Atkinson, Heyns and Veroff (6). The basic data of the TAT consist of the stories told by a subject in response to a series of unstructured pictures. The narratives are scored for expressions of concern about establishing, maintaining, anticipating or disrupting affective relationships between actors in the stories. Seven categories in any given story can be scored for indications of affiliation motive projected into the unstructured picture. These are scored as follows (6):

(1) *Affiliation Imagery* is scored when a story contains evidence of concern, in one or more of the characters, about establishing, maintaining or restoring a positive affective relationship with another person.

(2) *Need* is scored when someone in the story expresses a desire for the establishment, maintenance or restoration of an affiliative relationship.

(3) *Instrumental Activity* is scored when there is evidence in the story that a person is doing something (including thinking) to bring about an affiliative goal state. (Only successful instrumental activity [I+] was scored in the present study.)

(4) *Anticipatory Goal State* is scored whenever someone in the story is anticipating affiliative goal attainment or frustration. (Only positive anticipatory goal states [Ga+] in contrast to thoughts about pain of rejection or separation, were scored in the present study.)

(5) *Environmental Obstacle* is scored when obstacles in the environment block activity directed toward an affiliative goal.

(6) *Affective State* is scored when some statement indicates an emotional state associated with an affiliative activity. When someone experiences joy and satisfaction in affiliation, the affective state is positive (G+); when pain over separation or rejection is present, the affective state is negative (G-).

(7) *Affiliation Thema* is scored when the main plot of the story has to do with establishing, maintaining or restoring an interpersonal relationship characterized by friendship, mutual interest and sympathetic understanding.

The same authors have prepared a manual (7) which standardizes the assessment of the affiliation motive and provides a uniform basis for scoring. With minor exceptions, the presence of any one of these imaginative categories in a story results in a score of one point; thus the maximum possible score for any one story is seven. The affiliation score for any particular subject is the sum of scores obtained on all eight stories. The authors of the method realized that it is

"little more than an index of the extent to which the persons who wrote the stories were thinking about affiliation-related behavior sequences..." and recommended that "subsequent analysis of relationships to behavior be based on comparisons between those in upper and lower halves of the distribution."

### *Sample*

In order to apply this technique, two relatively extreme types of alcoholics had to be found and their cooperation obtained. The first type—affiliates—were those alcoholics who had stopped drinking immediately after exposure to A.A., attended meetings regularly thereafter, and experienced practically no slips. They could not be "old timers" in A.A. since long-time membership itself might have produced affiliation motivations which were not in existence at the time of joining. Consequently, only members who had been active for 1 to 3 years were used in this group. The second type—nonaffiliates—consisted of alcoholics who had been repeatedly exposed to A.A. and had gone several times to a few meetings, only to give it up. They might eventually become members, but their resistance was apparently much higher than that of the first type.

Affiliates were secured in the process of collecting the work histories of members of A.A. who had volunteered their experiences for another study.<sup>2</sup> These men were members of A.A. in New York City and in Syracuse, N. Y. Each subject who had been in A.A. less than 3 years, reported one slip or none since joining, and believed he had "taken" to the group immediately, was asked to take the TAT in addition to supplying his job history. Thirty-seven subjects were found and tested between March 1957 and June 1958. The average length of A.A. membership was 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  years with a standard deviation of 8 months. Sixty-eight per cent of the men had had no slips up to time of contact.

The nonaffiliate group was selected from male alcoholic patients in 2 upstate New York hospitals. Subjects in this group had known about A.A. for at least 3 years before the present study, and they estimated that during this time they had gone to a meeting once every 6 months or less. They stated that they were not attracted to A.A. groups. Alcoholics in this category were asked to take the TAT between October 1956 and August 1957. Of 40 men contacted, 37 agreed to cooperate and were tested on the hospital wards.

The affiliates tended to be somewhat older than the nonaffiliates; average ages in the two groups were 48.7 $\pm$ 4.3 years and 46.2 $\pm$ 3.6 years respectively. Significantly more affiliates than nonaffiliates had high-status jobs. The bulk of the latter were truckdrivers, bakers, printers, painters, and the like, while the A.A. members tended to be lawyers, sales managers, middle-management executives and journalists.

### *Procedure*

Eight pictures of the Murray Thematic Apperception Test (3BM, 4, 6BM, 7BM, 10, 13MF, 18BM, 20) were selected for eliciting stories from these two groups of alcoholics. Standardized directions were given to each subject regarding the broad outline of his story plot: "Who are they?" "What is happening?" "What led up to it?" and "What is the outcome?" A 5-minute time limit was used. Subjects were prompted only if they failed to consider one of the basic questions around which the story was to be built. The nonaffiliates' responses were recorded by hand; a tape recorder was used with the affiliates. The author administered the test to all subjects.

<sup>2</sup>"The Work Experiences of Alcoholics," in preparation.

A code number was given to each subject and his 8 stories were typed on separate sheets with his code number. The 592 stories of the 74 respondents were then randomly intermingled so that the scorer was unable to identify which stories came from affiliates and which from nonaffiliates. The author and a research associate,<sup>3</sup> using the scoring manual developed by Heyns and co-workers, independently scored each story for affiliation content. The correlation between the two sets of scores was +.86, representing satisfactory inter-rater agreement. In subsequent statistical analysis, the scoring of the author was used in cases of scoring conflict.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison on affiliation scores between affiliates and nonaffiliates were made by assigning eight scores to each subject, one for each category based on the total of eight stories. Then, by dividing the distribution on any particular category as near the median as possible, the number of scores above and below this median for each group could be compared. The results are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1.—*Strength of Affiliation Motive in 37 A.A. Affiliates and 37 Nonaffiliates as Indicated by Number of Scores in Each Group Above and Below Median Scores for Affiliation Motivation Based on Scores in Imaginative Categories from Eight Stories*

IMAGINATIVE CATEGORY	MEDIAN SCORES (Range, 0-8)	NON- AFFILIATES		AFFILIATES		$\chi^2$	P
		Above	Below	Above	Below		
Affiliative							
Imagery (Im)	3-4	5	32	15	22	6.8	<.01
Need (N)	2-3	4	33	13	24	6.1	<.02
Successful							
Instrumental							
Activity (I+)	1-2	5	32	9	28		
Positive							
Anticipatory							
Goal State (Ga+)	0-1	2	35	3	34		
Environmental							
Obstacle (Bw)	0-1	7	30	19	18	6.3	<.02
Affective States:							
Positive (G+)	1-0	8	29	7	30		
Negative (G-)	1-2	6	31	19	18	8.2	<.01
Affiliation							
Thema (Th)	1-2	5	32	10	27		
Total Score*	8-9	4	33	15	22	8.6	<.01

\* Based on all categories combined.

Three specific results can be seen in this table. First, there is a significant difference in total score between affiliates and nonaffiliates. Second, four of the eight imaginative categories show this difference; four do not. Finally, in each category a large number of affiliate scores fell below the median point. In only two categories - environmental obstacles and negative affective states - did a bare majority of affiliates score above the dividing point. In other words, even though there is a significant difference between affiliates and nonaffiliates, the difference is due to the paucity of affiliation motive among the nonaffiliates in contrast to a moderate amount among the affiliates. Neither group showed an unusually high amount of affiliation motivation by the measure used, but the affiliates did produce a significantly larger number of imaginative stories in which the motivation for social acceptance appears more frequently.

With this background limitation clearly in mind, the other two findings can be put into perspective. Apparently the presence of affiliation concern in the emotional makeup of an alcoholic aids him in accepting an A.A. group. This is implied in the significant difference in the total scores, which strengthens the validity of Hanfmann's original hypothesis and the cited opinions of McCarthy, Button and Bell. At the same time, however, it seems likely that the presence of concern over social acceptance in an alcoholic's personality, while it may act as a substantial aid to affiliation, does not assure it by any means. Affiliation with A.A. is an accumulative process, not a single event, in which numerous factors interact to bring about a definite attraction; obstacles such as false expectations, "will-power" models (1), poor sponsorship and family competition can blunt the emotional potential to join.

An interesting pattern of affiliation concern among the A.A. members can be seen when the four imaginative categories in which differences between groups were found and examined. The stories of affiliates more often contained an actor or actors who desired friendship and acceptance from others (scored Need). This tendency was coupled with plot situations in which actual physical separation played a prominent role (Environmental obstacle) and the actors experienced pain of separation or rejection (Negative affective state). Apparently those alcoholics who readily accepted A.A. tended to project into the unstructured pictures a stronger concern over friendship and acceptance by others than did those alcoholics who found it difficult to join A.A. Furthermore, this emotional

orientation in the TAT stories of the A.A. members had a negative flavor. They showed a definite anxiety regarding rejection and physical separation that may have made them particularly susceptible to the informal acceptance found in many A.A. groups.

It must be pointed out that because of the method of selection of the A.A. sample this group represents only such A.A. members as will volunteer for research. This selective factor may have affected the amount of affiliation motivation found in the sample.

### **SUMMARY**

Some alcoholics readily affiliate themselves with Alcoholics Anonymous while others are not attracted to the group. The research reported here attempted to test the hypotheses that those who easily accept A.A. have a stronger emotional need to establish and maintain positive affective relationships than do those who find it difficult to join. Various observers of A.A., especially Hanfmann, have suggested such a difference between affiliates and nonaffiliates.

The development of a method for estimating the strength of affiliation motives ( Atkinson, Heyns and Veroff), based on Murray's Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), provided a technique for exploring this hypothesis further. Stories told by subjects in response to an unstructured series of pictures were scored for expressions of concern about establishing, maintaining, anticipating or disrupting affective relationships.

Two groups of male alcoholics were used: 37 affiliates - self-defined alcoholics who, when first introduced to A.A., affiliated readily; and 37 "nonaffiliates" - alcoholics who had been repeatedly exposed to A.A. but had consistently rejected it. The chief difference between the two groups seemed to be occupational - the affiliates having higher-status job backgrounds. Each of these 74 subjects responded to 8 TAT pictures administered by the author. The resulting stories were identified by code numbers, randomly intermingled, and scored for affiliation motive by the author and a research associate working independently. A substantial inter-rater agreement was found.

The distributions of affiliates and nonaffiliate scores in each of eight imaginative categories were then compared. This revealed an over-all difference in degree of affiliation motive between the two groups, with four of the eight

indexes showing a difference. Affiliates manifested more affiliation concern; neither group, however, showed very much of this motivation. Consequently the conclusion was reached that the presence of a substantial amount of affiliative concern in the personality structure of an alcoholic increases his potential for affiliation. Other influences, however, have to join with this personality factor to bring about actual affiliation. Furthermore, false expectations, will-power models, and competition from other groups can counteract this emotional potential to join.

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