

1-1-1997

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Sandra Coyle

The Emotional Fitness Center

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Recommended Citation

Coyle, Sandra (1997) "The Social Reconstruction of Emotions: Insights from Members of a 12-Step Community," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 4.

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The Social Reconstruction of Emotions: Insights from Members of a 12-Step Community

Sandra Coyle, Ph.D.
The Emotional Fitness Center, Director
Fort Myers, FL

ABSTRACT

Common among many approaches to the study of emotions that are emerging across disciplines is the fundamental proposition that emotions "are emergent properties of social relations and sociocultural processes" (McCarthy 1994: 269). Consistent with Berger's (1977) assessment of ideas, emotions—their meanings and associated behavioral counterparts—are believed to succeed in history by virtue of their relationship to specific social processes. Hence, as Stearns and Stearns (1994) observed, emotions have histories that are a part of every individual's socializing environment. Emotions, then, are social things that are learned and can be relearned (McCarthy 1989).

As in Power (1984), this paper positions the emotions as a critical component of the socialization process. It then endeavors to establish the equally critical role of emotions in the process of resocialization—the intentional effort to transform one's subjective reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966)—as experienced among members of a 12-Step group for Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs). Following McCarthy's (1994) lead, this analysis proceeds from a social constructionist standpoint as informed by culture theory. As such, it is believed that "emotions are best grasped as objects of investigation within the domain of cultural forms and meanings" (McCarthy 1994: 268). The context of this analysis is the contrasting cultural domains of a family with parental alcoholism and an ACOA community. The goal is two-fold: first, to better understand how culture matters in the way emotions are "differentiated, socialized, and managed socially" (McCarthy 1994: 269); and secondly, to investigate the relationship between an individual's emotional experience, subjective reality, and overarching experience of self.

INTRODUCTION

It has been estimated that each day millions of Americans attend 12-Step group meetings. Modeled after the 12-Step program for Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), such meetings address problematic issues arising for many people in everyday life: overeating, overspending, substance abuse, gambling, and compulsive sexual activity, to name a few. One 12-Step group is of particular interest to the study of emotions, given its explicit purpose to assist its members in getting in touch with emotions that have been denied in the past. Members of this group, Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), share the belief that growing up in a family with at least one alcoholic parent has had damaging effects on their physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being—conditions that continue to affect them in adult life.

While making no attempt to evaluate the veracity of the ACOA community's ideology, the ACOA group is positioned here as a community of intelligibility that poses a major challenge to dominant assumptions held by its members. The ACOA community is viewed as an "emotional culture" (Gordon 1981) aimed at helping members achieve transformational shifts in the emotional, psychological, and spiritual domains of life. The community's culture is established, in part, through its own sort of "generative theory" (Gergen 1994) designed to undermine commitment to one's prevailing system of belief for the purpose of generating new understandings and options for alternative modes of action. From the standpoint of postmodernism, the ACOA community represents a "deconstructing" culture designed to challenge old, problematic constructions of self and the world. It provides a context ripe with opportunities to study the dialectical relationships among emotions, culture and self-identity. For, as McCarthy (1994) has observed,

feelings and emotions have come to serve as one of the principle experiences of self-validation, as the moorings, the moral and spiritual resources, from which to claim an identity and to build a self-conception. (p. 275)

The focus of study here is the difference in the conceptions of self as experienced and recounted by six ACOA group members. This paper treats the stories of these six anonymous individuals as sociological autobiographies in an attempt to better understand the influence of the socius—be it a family with parental alcoholism or a 12-Step group—on a person's experience and explanation of self. Particular focus is placed on the contrast between the conceptions of self constructed amid the "structures of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and "emotional culture" offered by families with parental alcoholism and those constructed within the ACOA community. This contrast is explored through the storied accounts of the emotional patterns of these six individuals before and since their ACOA group participation.

This paper begins by offering Meadian theory as a means for understanding the social genesis of self within a family with parental alcoholism. It then engages in a more in-depth, theoretical discussion of the processes of primary socialization active in an "alcoholic family" and the objective and subjective realities that such socialization can produce. Focus is then placed on the "problem of consistency" that can be experienced during secondary socialization as attempts are made to reconcile the reality bases of self and world as presented within the alcoholic family culture with those presented by the larger social culture. The paper culminates with an analysis of the ACOA community as a collection of social processes capable of encouraging and supporting intentional efforts to change one's subjective--and, hence, one's objective--reality. Throughout the discussion, the essence of this inquiry lies in the role that emotions play in the social construction and reconstruction of reality. It is suggested that a reconstruction of reality necessitates a reconstruction of emotion and that this reconstruction, in turn, necessitates the availability of certain social and conceptual conditions.

A MEADIAN APPROACH TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL GENESIS OF SELF WITHIN A FAMILY WITH PARENTAL ALCOHOLISM

This paper represents an attempt to take a sociological approach to understanding what is generally considered psychological phenomena. Leaning heavily on the social psychology of Mead (1934) and the social constructionist thought of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Berger (1977), this analysis is grounded on the propositional assertions that, first, there is a dialectical relationship between social structure and psychological reality, and second, that there is also a dialectical relationship between psychological reality and any prevailing psychological model (Berger 1977) that an individual comes to hold in her/his mind. In this sense, "psychological reality means the way in which human beings in a specific situation subjectively experience themselves" (Berger 1977: 28). Of particular importance to the discussion at hand is the notion that "psychological reality originates in specific social processes of identity production, so the continued existence and subjective plausibility of such a psychological reality depend upon specific social processes of identity confirmation" (Berger 1977: 28). Extrapolation of this notion would then suggest that significant change in the social processes active in one's identity confirmation could produce change in the psychological reality--and prevailing psychological model--one has come to rely on in one's day-to-day experiences of self and the world.

The two identity-confirming domains of social processes, or "cultures," of interest here are the family with parental alcoholism and a 12-Step community for Adult Children of Alcoholics. It is assumed that the institutional world

transmitted by most parents to their children "already has the character of historical and objective reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 60). This analysis also assumes that such "character" is infused with and shaped by an indisputable emotional quality that serves to solidify and add permanence to the objective reality it projects and maintains. Here it is suggested that alcohol-dependent parents will, however unwittingly, project and maintain an objective reality that reflects the elements (e.g., constituents of the psychological model) that have predisposed them to their misuse of alcohol and their resultant emotional comportment. In Denzin's (1993) profile of the alcoholic self, these "emotions of self" are identified as "chiefly resentment, guilt, anger, and fear" (p. 58), which underlay the individual's entire emotional repertoire.

In applying Mead's (1934) theory of the social genesis of the self, one could posit that a child of an alcoholic becomes, to some degree, a reflected entity of the alcoholic parent. She will, in her own unique way, come to reflect the attitudes first taken by her alcoholic significant other(s) toward herself. She will become that which she becomes addressed as by her alcoholic significant other. As she identifies, cognitively and emotionally, with her significant others in the alcoholic family culture, she will adopt as her own the representations and meanings of the alcoholic's objective world. The generalized other, as represented by the alcoholic family, will eventually become crystallized in her consciousness, thus encouraging what is perceived to be real outside to correspondingly become real within. It is in this manner that the objective reality of the alcoholic parent becomes, to some degree, "translated" into her subjective reality. The dialectical nature of this phenomenon becomes evident as her subjective reality begins to act in turn on her objective reality—thus confirming the alcoholic's version of what is real while minimizing any threat to that reality. Later, the ACOA community is introduced as an alternative emotional culture that offers both social and conceptual conditions conducive to a radical alteration of its members' subjective and objective reality.

PRIMARY SOCIALIZATION AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF EMOTIONS IN THE ALCOHOLIC FAMILY

I did not know about myself before. Because of my mother's demanding and her outbursts when she would get drunk, you know. She would get nasty and mean, and yelling and screaming at everybody. All of that made me feel as though I was worthless. I took on all those feelings for so long. —Carol¹

¹ All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

To treat families characterized by parental alcoholism as a distinct culture, it is necessary to attribute to them distinctive approaches to creating and sustaining symbolic systems of thought, meaning, and behavior. Such approaches become evident when the constitutive processes of socialization employed by a social unit are examined. For purposes here, the processes of primary socialization employed, in what heretofore will be referred to as the alcoholic family, involve the identification of a "world of objects" (Blumer 1969: 11), meanings, rules, rituals, and emotional experiences conducive to maintaining the reality and practices of the alcoholic parent(s). While not intending to make villainous the alcoholic or imply the existence of any sort of generalized approach to socialization common among all family units with parental alcoholism, this study recognizes that, as suggested in Carol's remark above, there are emotional antecedents to the condition of alcoholism that impact the systems of thought and behavior patterns of the alcoholic and those with whom s/he interacts.

The alcoholic parent(s) is positioned here as the emotional linchpin of the alcoholic family culture. While an exhaustive account of the alcoholic identity and its potential impact on the family lies outside the scope of this paper (see Denzin 1993; Steinglass, Bennett, Wolin, and Reiss 1987; and Coyle 1996 for examples of such accounts), it is acknowledged that emotional and behavioral predispositions often accompanying alcohol dependency can contribute to the creation and maintenance of a negative "atmosphere of feelings" (Denzin 1984). Additionally, behavioral inconsistency and problematic emotional comportment—referred to here as *emotional immaturity*—common among alcoholics are believed to provide a negative "looking-glass reflection" (Cooley 1902/1964) for family members of alcoholic parents.

The co-existence of a negative looking-glass reflection and a negative atmosphere of feelings within the alcoholic family can adversely affect the process of primary socialization—a relational process undergirded by emotionality. When viewed as symbolic interaction, emotionality "can be seen as arising out of the self-interactions that individuals direct toward themselves and out of the reflected appraisals of others" (Denzin 1984: 54). As family members begin to take the role of the significant alcoholic other, their self-feelings, self-conceptions, and negotiated meanings begin to reflect in some fashion the emotional and cognitive social acts directed toward them by the alcoholic other. Following Shott (1979), it is contended that the emotional and cognitive predispositions of the alcoholic parent shape the family culture and influence how family members come to interpret their emotions and, to some extent, what they actually feel. Shades of this contention can be heard in one of Kate's recollections:

Someone tells you what to feel, someone tells you what to do, someone creates a picture of what is important. In other words, no one asks you what you feel or what you think! And if they do, or in fact when you do say what you're feeling, because your feelings are different, they're spanked away. So with that you have been squashed and you never really find out what it is you feel on any subject.

The alcoholic family culture is treated here as one that can create and reflect problematic versions of "commonly recognized spheres of understanding...[and] shared, repeatedly communicated and routinized interpretive schemes" (Hostein and Gubrium 1994: 243). It is seen as one producing an emotional culture that, "affecting individuals' evaluation of their own emotional experience [as Kate expressed above], may condition judgments of others at least as strongly" (Stearns and Stearns 1994: 263). The alcoholic parent is understood as one whose emotional immaturity cannot accommodate a disposition toward interpersonal sympathy or empathy. The socializing culture of the alcoholic family can in turn be seen as one often involving the "punitive socialization of emotion" (Malatesta, Culver, Tesman, and Shepard 1989). As Tomkins originally suggested, children socialized under such conditions are likely to acquire emotional disorganizations or "affective biases" (cited in Magai and McFadden 1995: 278). Such biases then manifest as an imbalanced emotional repertoire, which accommodates only a narrow, inflexible use of affect. Vic speaks of his experience with such shades of emotional immaturity and their ability to endure throughout adulthood:

There was never any consistency in my life as a child except that I was always told, 'You were bad; you were naughty; you were sinful.' And all I was doing were the things that all kids do. But for those things, my parents and the people around me would always say, 'Good little boys don't do this.' I used to react with my anger and rage—they became my defense mechanisms. Even now when I react to something negative it takes me back to my childhood and I can feel myself starting to react the way I did as a child.

When emotions are viewed as *socioemotional* constructions, emotional performances—whether in the form of expressed or repressed emotion—are necessarily circumscribed by and reflective of the broader, culturally-determined patterns of relationship. Within these patterns of relationship emotions become "social objects" (McCarthy 1989) with a "dual capacity to serve as objects of action and as signs that enable action to proceed" (McCarthy 1994: 275). And as Bruner (1990) and Averill (1986) have observed, the one being socialized is entering a world in which the meanings of acts and social objects have already been established; they are already in place, deeply entrenched within the culture and its language. Accordingly, the

social construction of emotions and the socializing processes inherent in the socioemotional context of the alcoholic family reflect the internalization of the meanings, beliefs and values of the significant alcoholic other.

The developing attitudes involved in emotions--and their associated behavioral expressions--are also learned as part of one's introduction to the beliefs, values, norms, and expectations dictated by the alcoholic family's socioemotional tenor. "Emotion rules" (Averill 1982) evolve that determine the usage of emotion, the way emotion should be experienced and expressed, and way in which emotional display should be managed--all of which are designed, however unconsciously, to support and protect the world of objects, meanings, and interpretations of the alcoholic. Consequently, "emotional schemas" (Averill 1982), or belief systems, are constructed to guide the appraisal of situations, organize responses, and direct the self-monitoring of behavior in the interest of minimizing any threats to the alcoholic's subjective or objective reality. As such, the alcoholic family can become a microculture in which microsocial patterns of interaction produce "systems of intelligibility" (Gergen and Gergen 1988) that are insufficient to foster even moderate degrees of socioemotional competence--or *emotional maturity*. (See Salovey and Mayer 1990, for their related model of "emotional intelligence," as discussed at length in Goleman 1995.) Deficient systems of intelligibility, as cultivated within the alcoholic family, often prove themselves to be problematic when members attempt to "fit" into the larger culture. Lori's story provides an account of such an experience:

I didn't know what was wrong with me and my family but I knew something was different. I always felt different. I liked being in my friends' homes because I knew they were different. I remember being like an observer there so I could learn how to be "normal." I didn't know how to fit in because stuff just wasn't like Ozzie and Harriet in my house. I couldn't bring anyone home because mom might be passed out on the floor.

Later, Lori speaks of the beliefs and emotional patterns she developed to compensate for feeling so "different:"

I became very control-oriented. I thought things were either black or white, right or wrong. I had to be right. I was also very reactive and judgmental. I didn't have much of a sense of self-worth and I certainly did not have much of a sense of self-acceptance. I felt like I had to react to everything anyone ever said. It just did not enter my head not to. I used to think that by reacting and trying to be controlling--by using my anger--was how I gained control.

Terry's story provides another glimpse of emotionality and self-identity as socially constructed in an alcoholic family culture:

Silence was golden in our family. But I think another reason I didn't express my feelings was because I wasn't really certain that what I was feeling was real. I think I had a tendency, when people put me down, to accept that they were probably right. I can remember being cynical as a child about life and not expecting good from life. I kept on a front that I expected would keep me safe. Then somewhere along the line I got confused about what was the mask and what was the real me.

In addition to serving as examples of how culture impacts emotionality, the stories shared so far by Carol, Terry and Lori also highlight the linkage McCarthy (1994) has made between emotions and authenticity:

The emotions have become preeminent objectifications of subjective experience, precious vehicles for rendering one's life and one's identity meaningful (p. 275).... Emotions are vital aspects with which the self establishes or discovers its authenticity; emotions have become a "language" in which the self discloses and confirms its identity. (p. 276)

Critical to this discussion so far is the understanding that "primary socialization ends when the concept of the generalized other (and all that goes with it) has been established in the consciousness of the individual" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 137). As in the cases of the participants in this study, establishing in consciousness the concept of the generalized other, as presented by the significant alcoholic other, can produce emotional schemas incapable of allowing a meaningful rendition of one's life, identity, and place in the world. The following section of this paper discusses secondary socialization and the ways in which, for these individuals, the world of one's parents that was internalized as the world became so problematic in adult life that each began seeking ways to radically transform her/his own subjective reality. The final section then examines the processes of "resocialization" (Berger and Luckmann 1966) undertaken by these individuals. In so doing, our inquiry into the impact of culture on emotionality continues as we begin an examination of how emotions can in fact be socially reconstructed.

SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION AND THE PROBLEM OF CONSISTENCY

The process of primary socialization involves the internalization of a reality that, for a child, is necessarily "apprehended as inevitable" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 147). The child is not yet equipped to make discernments between the reality presented within the cultural orientations of the family of origin and alternative constructions of reality. Secondary socialization begins as the child is exposed to and begins to internalize institutional or institution-based "subworlds" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 138). Through secondary

socialization, the individual acquires knowledge necessary to assume contemporary social roles. It is assumed that in the process of secondary socialization the individual is exposed to new constructions of reality and is afforded opportunities to experience new internalizations. However, a fundamental problem is also recognized:

secondary socialization...always presupposes a preceding process of primary socialization; that is, it must deal with an already formed self and an already internalized world...[and] the already internalized reality has a tendency to persist...There is, therefore, a problem of consistency between the original and the new internalizations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 140).

Terry's story informs us about her difficulty dealing with this problem of consistency:

I got negative messages all during my childhood. To think of life as being happy and the world as a good place was like blowing hot air. I never, ever took a look at the fact that I could be happy by just not looking at the dark side of everything. I know I got a lot of these ideas from my family that happiness is elusive and you may never get any—not even a speck. I didn't get any encouragement and I never gave encouragement. My pattern was to say, "Oh, that will never work. There's no point in trying."

Later when I got out into the "real world" and saw people with "unnegative" attitudes, I thought it was real childish to have a cheerful attitude. Then I began to think that those negative, discouraging things were actually cool, you know, sophisticated. As a result, life became a constant struggle for me. I wanted to have my own way and live that way. Of course, it never worked. But I fought constantly to make it happen. I fought either myself or somebody else all the time for some goal that I am not even sure I knew what the goal was. I became defensive and thought of it as rebelliousness. I also used to think that I was the only one having all the difficulties and that others didn't have any. That had a tendency to make me feel powerless.

Terry's story illustrates how self-defining and persistent initial internalizations of reality can be. It also illustrates how, absent an emotionally charged identification with the significant others presenting the new, potential internalizations, life can proceed in a constant struggle to achieve some workable solution to the problem of consistency between one's habitual approach to life (e.g. adopting a rebellious nature) and approaches now observed in others (e.g. having a cheerful attitude). As Berger and Luckmann (1966) purport, "the facts that the processes of secondary socialization do not presuppose a high degree of identification and its contents do not possess the quality of inevitability" (p. 144) can work to one's advantage in that they can permit learning experiences that are rationally discerned and emotionally controlled. However, as Terry's story exemplifies, the emotional control

exerted by some throughout the process of secondary socialization is limited to the narrow margins of the emotional repertoire developed during primary socialization. This can create the experience of "going around in circles," as Kate's story illustrates:

I was convinced that I had a perfect childhood. I felt very good about myself and the world around me. I felt very much in charge. I was really surprised about the ups and downs I was having in my life. I couldn't understand why someone like me, who wasn't afraid to take risks, kept running into bad luck all the time. For example, why I was choosing all the wrong partners for me—I've been married at this point a total of six times.

I also couldn't understand why I couldn't keep my really good friends. I was always the one who made the chicken soup and would drive 100 miles to bring it to a friend. Yet, I never made any requests of my friends. I always had difficulty letting other people do nice things for me. I learned that from my mother. It's her way of staying in control. I also used it as my way of staying in control. But as a result I always ended up in one-sided affairs—always me giving but losing in the long run.

Processes of secondary socialization become affectively charged only when commitment to a new reality becomes perceived as necessary. At that point a relationship needs to be established between the individual and a socializing agent or group, which then becomes "correspondingly charged with 'significance'...and take[s] on the character of significant others" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 145). For Kate, certain processes of secondary socialization became affectively charged when, to her "astonishment," her "perfect daughter" ran away from home and ended up in a treatment center for juvenile drug abusers. For Roy, the catalyst for commitment to a new reality was the trauma incurred when he, too, had to admit his son into a drug treatment facility. For Carol, it was emotional despair and her experiences upon admitting herself into a mental health treatment center.

In the cases of Kate, Roy, and Carol, intensely important, emotionally-laden circumstances served as a catalyst to seek out a new reality-defining institution and/or social group. While treatment center personnel initially assumed this function, each was eventually encouraged to join a local 12-Step group. As Roy recalls,

I was crying all the way home after we left our son in the hospital. I thought that maybe in support for him I might be able to stay off the sauce for a while. I better set a decent example. Eventually I went to ACOA and began to find a lot of the information and material we covered to be like a positive way to improve my attitude and my life. I could relate to a lot of it. I used to approach life like John Wayne—if John Wayne doesn't like it, he doubles up a fist, swings a chair, and straightens 'em out. I thought it might be good for a change to be around people who don't drink booze and make fools of themselves like that.

For others, the memory of a particular trigger event is less prominent. Lori claims

there wasn't any one crisis or catalyst that I can remember that sent me to ACOA. I just knew it was time. I was hurting so much emotionally. I even felt like I was going to die. I had to do something.

For Vic, the initial, new-reality-defining social group that evoked a strong affective identification was formed by the participants in a 24-week Inner Child Workshop. As he recalls,

I felt like I kept losing myself; I kept losing my direction. I quit my job and from that point I really began to search into the person that I was, and how I got to be what I was, and parts of myself that I did not like. I started asking myself, 'was that really me or was that something that I had learned?' The inner child work made me look at myself and I began to accept myself as I really was—the good, the bad, and the ugly! Then I decided to try to understand the parts I didn't like about myself, why I didn't like them, where they came from, and what it was all about. I met numerous other people that were interested in the same things that I was so I had a new circle of friends. I had new people come into my life and so my life began to take on a new direction. That's when I began attending ACOA meetings.

These story excerpts illustrate how strongly affective identification with novel socializing personnel led these six autobiographers to ponder the possibility of alternative versions of reality as well as alternative conceptions of their own self. There is also an implied acknowledgment of the need for prolonged exposure to a new social group, a new "generalized other" (Mead 1934) with which to embark on this investigation. We turn our attention now from the processes of secondary socialization to the social phenomena involving the processes of resocialization, where the goal is an actual transformation of subjective reality. We will be discussing the necessity of a new culture of embeddedness and the role that emotions play in such transformation.

RESOCIALIZATION AND THE SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF EMOTIONS IN AN ACOA COMMUNITY

Secondary socialization achieves the status of resocialization only when an individual intentionally seeks to radically transform her/his subjective reality. It involves a dismantling of the preceding structure of subjective reality and a means for reconstructing and maintaining a new version of reality—including one's conception of self. However, before such dismantling takes place, latter processes of secondary socialization often lead one to a social unit with an alternative version of reality that one can identify with, internalize, and, eventually, inhabit. At this point, the individual seeking an

alternative reality is likened to one experiencing the woes of "unsuccessful socialization," which is "understood in terms of asymmetry between objective and subjective reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 163).

In the context of this analysis, the experience of such asymmetry, however unconscious, is comparable to experiences of inauthenticity--the experience of not knowing oneself. Applying Cooley's (1964 [1902]) looking-glass proposition, such experiences of inauthenticity among children of alcoholics can be linked theoretically to trepidant self-feelings that develop through the persistent imagining and internalization of the alcoholic other's often-distorted perceptions and evaluations of them. Following Ward and Throop's (1992) understanding of Mead's theory of the emotional self (cited in Erickson 1995) as the "primal core of human individuality...built out of our experience of our own actions" (p. 126), it is suggested that parental alcoholism can create an "atmosphere of feelings" (Denzin 1984) in which the experience of one's own actions becomes problematic and emotionally debilitating. Assuming that the "very mechanisms that give rise to emotional experience provide the core experiences out of which the individual arises" (Ward and Throop 1992: 80), individuals arising out of the mechanisms that give rise to emotional experience in the alcoholic family are likely to experience both feelings of inauthenticity and asymmetry between one's objective and subjective realities.

The discussion that follows is intended to provide the clinical sociologist with a suggested approach for working with clients who are experiencing difficulties that might have origins in an emotional heritage similar to that of the alcoholic family. The discussion is based on Berger and Luckmann's (1966) three-stage recipe or prescription for alternation of reality. Their prescription is enhanced by attributing more prominence to the role of emotion. It is suggested that resocialization--the attempt to attain symmetry between one's objective and subjective realities--requires, first, an examination of one's emotional heritage and a commitment to change the ways in which one's unique emotionality is experienced and expressed.

STAGE 1: AFFILIATION WITH AN EFFECTIVE PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURE

When viewed in terms of unsuccessful socialization, difficulties in adult life can make one feel imprisoned in the objective reality of one's society while that reality is subjectively present in an alien and truncated manner (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The asymmetry that one can experience between one's socially-defined reality and that of one's own subjective reality often has "no cumulative structural consequences because it lacks a social base within which it could crystallize into a counter-world, with its own institutionalized cluster of counter-identities" (Berger and Luckmann 1966:

165). The rise of such 12-Step programs as ACOA is changing this aspect of our social reality.

The ACOA community is positioned here as an *effective plausibility structure* with the overarching purpose of providing a social base within which those unsuccessfully socialized adults, in search of a counter-world and counter-identities, can unite. The ACOA community offers its own unique flavor of "institutionalized psychologism" (Berger 1977), which straddles its own dividing line between the public and private spheres; between one's objective and subjective reality. The ACOA community's psychologism is grounded in a spiritually-oriented ideology and communicated through its distinct "community narrative" (Rappaport 1994), which exposes its members to a prevailing vocabulary constitutive of novel terms, meanings, interpretations, and explanations. (See Coyle 1996, for an extensive discussion of the ACOA community narrative.) It is within this prevailing vocabulary that all community discourse takes place while leaving members free to employ its vocabulary in ways that promote their own meaning-making. As Terry recalls,

Joining ACOA was like having to learn a whole new language. I learned that I came from what I would now call a "dysfunctional" family. I think I would define it as a family that does not provide for the needs of the children—the emotional needs of the children. People need to see how things like that affected them—how it gave them that little "warp." And what it did to put a stop to the good in their life. I know I was not happy before I came to ACOA. Then one of the things that people in ACOA would say to me is that God wants you to be happy, joyous and free. That is not the way I thought prior to joining ACOA.

Along with its community narrative, the ACOA community establishes its own "atmosphere of feelings" (Denzin 1984) in which personal safety, anonymity, comfort, encouragement, and unique ontological implications (e.g., those particularly related to the spiritual foundation of the community) are of paramount importance. Terry speaks of her surprise when entering the group:

I was terrified to speak at meetings when I first entered the program. I was so used to people putting down what I said or thought. I overcame that fear as I began to talk and then noticed that people acted like whatever I said was just fine. They don't necessarily agree with it but they all seem to honor the fact that that's what I happen to think at the time. You're encouraged to take what you like and leave the rest. It gives you a fair deal of freedom to have other people just listen to what you have to say without interruption. There is an encouragement in ACOA to change things about your life. There's an atmosphere where the majority of people are saying, "Give it a try." Living becomes a whole different pattern then.

Those individuals who become active ACOA community members are those who, like Terry and the other five participants in this study, have experienced some degree of personal self-relevancy with respect to the ACOA community's language and emotional atmosphere. Emotions, when thought of as "embodied thought" (Franks and Gecas 1992), can be viewed as the facilitating medium upon which such self-relevancy is achieved. Emotions, then, connect the individual and the community. As "social things" (McCarthy 1989), emotions (particularly in an ACOA group) become known to members through the stories the group constructs about them (Wentworth and Ryan 1994). It is suggested here that the effectiveness of any plausible structure aimed at the alternation of reality is dependent on its ability to present discourse that is both cognitive (e.g., offering self-relevant ideas, interpretations, and explanations) and emotionally compelling. For as Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested, alternation of reality requires resocialization and "the processes of re-socialization...must replicate to a considerable degree the strongly affective identification with the socializing personnel that was characteristic of childhood" (p. 157). When new ACOA members identify with the community's version of reality and make a commitment to internalize that reality, movement from secondary socialization to resocialization occurs.

At this point, the ACOA community, as an effective plausibility structure, becomes a social base serving as the laboratory of transformation (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 157) for its members. The plausibility structure afforded by the ACOA community

will be mediated to the individual by means of significant others, with whom he/[she] must establish strongly affective identification. No radical transformation of subjective reality (including, of course, identity) is possible without such identification, which inevitably replicates childhood experiences of emotional dependency on significant others. These significant others are the guides into the new reality...The individual's world now finds its cognitive and affective focus in the plausibility structure in question (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 157, emphasis added).

Hence, the necessary relationships between cognition and emotion, and community and transformation are established allowing resocialization to proceed. The plausibility structure of the ACOA community begins to become the individual's world, calling into question and gradually displacing other worlds and other systems of belief. A gradual disaffiliation from one's previous world begins as ACOA members segregate, both physically and conceptually, elements and inhabitants of their "old" and "new" world. Carol shares her experience with such segregation:

Before ACOA, I used to stand around and let my mother and my

family put me down. I used to sit with my mother when she was drinking and we'd get into fights. Now I've learned to not even be around my mother when she's drinking. And when she tries to lay some guilt trip on me, I just don't accept it anymore. I have made my boundaries apparent.

In ACOA, for the first time in my life, I have been able to meet people who care and will listen to me. It is like meeting my own kind. I choose now to leave the stress and turmoil of my family and go to a meeting where I can relax and feel the warmth that the program has. It's just a letting go—letting go of old behavior, letting go of old beliefs.

As discussed next, a principle aspect of such "letting go" is the conversational apparatus of the social group and the changing partners in the new, significant conversation. While it is maintained that subjective reality is transformed in conversation with new significant others, it is also suggested that, to be significant, the conversational apparatus must evoke and sustain the emotional engagement of its participants.

STAGE 2: NEW BODY OF KNOWLEDGE & CONVERSATIONAL APPARATUS

As Mead (1934) observed,

the only way in which we can react against the disapproval of the entire community [in this case, the alcoholic family of origin] is by setting up a higher sort of community [e.g., the ACOA community] which in a certain sense out-votes the one we find...But to do that [one] has to comprehend the voices of the past and of the future (pp. 167-68).

The power of the ACOA community narrative lies in its ability to offer members plausible explanations of their problems, a new system of belief, conceptual tools for reinterpreting the past, and a promise of a better future. Unlike other 12-Step communities, ACOA groups focus on the need to

stop reacting to the world in our adult lives in the same way[s] that we reacted to our alcoholic families as children...We learned them as children and they probably helped us to survive in our alcoholic families. Today they get in the way of our living (unpublished meeting preamble).

Its lay discourse on psychological matters is sufficiently sophisticated to explain how parental alcoholism can impact and have enduring effects on one's life. It presents a challenge to its members' taken-for-granted world and invites members to reinterpret past and current issues in their lives within the legitimating apparatus of the new reality it presents. The stories of ACOA members lend credence to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) suggestion that

This reinterpretation brings about a rupture in the subjective biography of the individual in terms of "B.C." and "A.D.," "pre-

Damascus" and "post-Damascus." Everything preceding the alternation is now apprehended as leading toward it..., everything following it as flowing from the new reality....The biographical rupture is thus identified with a cognitive separation of darkness and light" (pp. 159-60).

Carol speaks of this experience:

I am living in the light now and my family is still in the dark. They don't want to know what's going on in my life now—the good things that I'm doing. They're just not on this other side that I'm on now.

As Carol continues, we can hear the role of emotion in maintaining this separation and in fortifying the new, emerging self:

It was a very painful thing that I went through—setting boundaries between myself and my family. Today I do not concern myself about what they are thinking or feeling or doing. I know that I relate to other people differently and they relate to me totally different. When I go to an ACOA meeting I'm treated with more respect. Now, when I act nasty or rude like my mother, I know it's not me. It's that kind of behavior I'm working on changing. I'm liking this new person, the real person that I am is coming through. ACOA is helping cultivate my own character and my personality.

I learned I don't have to live in fear anymore. Now I am just living my life and trying to be in the most peaceful manner that I can be in. For the first time I'm learning not to take on the feelings of other people. I no longer feel worthless. I'm learning to know that when someone says something really dysfunctional or judgmental that I don't feel, something will come over me. I have a pain when I know something is not right. Then I look at this pain and say, 'What is this? This person is not relating to me in a healthy way.' So I need to detach myself. I never used to do things like that before ACOA.

Such accounts aid in attempts like Gergen's (1994) to

press this reconstructive project forward to encompass the emotions, to refigure the emotions as events within relational patterns—as social actions that derive their meaning and significance from their placement within rituals of relationship (p.219).

As such, emotions, like cognitions, can be scrutinized for cultural biases and, as in Carol's case, changed—or resocialized. It is here that the dialectical relationships between emotion and cognition, and between the individual and community gain paramount importance. Theoretically, before internalizing the "new" reality presented by the ACOA community, Carol took for granted her family's punitive emotional performances and the specialized meanings that they assumed within the cultural setting of her family (which, in Carol's subjective reality, were experienced as feelings of worthlessness).

In order to achieve her current ability to scrutinize and segregate herself

from her family's unacceptable emotional performances, it was necessary, first, for Carol to internalize the alternative construction of emotions and emotional performances as embedded within the patterns of relationship experienced within the ACOA community. The impact of culture and history on the social construction of emotions--their vocabulary, meaning, and allied performances--implies that a change in cultural setting can provide the necessary segue for the social reconstruction of emotions. Vic provides another example of how emotional acts are created in relationship and how the ACOA community has provided a means for reconstructing former, problematic emotional acts:

In ACOA I started to understand myself, what these feelings were, and what was going on with me. I became strong enough to let myself really experience the amount of shame that I carried from childhood. I was able to deal with it again as an adult and re-experience it. There are just a lot of things that happened to me before and I've now had the opportunity to analyze them and sit back and say to myself, 'Now what am I feeling? Am I feeling abandoned?' Now when something happens that triggers those old feelings of abandonment, instead of doing my old anger and rage routine, I can stop myself because I know now where those feelings are coming from. I don't have to react the way I did as a child. I'm learning to handle situations now as an adult.

Lori's story highlights the power of discourse within the ACOA community in assisting the resocialization of her emotions:

I feel like I have learned something at every single ACOA meeting. I might not use it right then but some situation to which it relates will crop up later. I kind of just store it in my head. When people start talking at meetings I just absorb everything like a sponge. You just walk in the door and hear what you needed to hear. There's a sense of community--of understanding--the acceptance that is in that room I can't get anywhere else. By hearing other people's stories about the way they handle difficult situations, I was learning that I didn't have to react to everything and everyone the way I always used to. That has been such a gift to me. I can remember vividly, it was like a light bulb going on in my head. I have changed the way I react to people and circumstances. I've changed my perception from that all-or-nothing thinking. I'm learning to express myself in more effective ways. That has made a world of difference. It's the big breakthrough I've gotten from ACOA.

In this stage of the resocialization process, a dual role of emotions has been emphasized. First, sustained community membership is dependent upon the establishment of an intense emotional connection between the individual and the group. It is this connection that serves as the medium upon which the community's culture--its body of knowledge, conversational apparatus, and atmosphere of feelings--is transported. Second, it was suggested that as new

cognitions are internalized, their ability to impact one's social acts in everyday life becomes a function of the degree to which the allied emotions are resocialized. The critical role of the community in sustaining emotional resocialization becomes more evident in the next and final stage of resocialization.

STAGE 3: REINTERPRETATION OF THE OLD REALITY WITHIN THE NEW

As Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited,

To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility. This is where the... community comes in. It provides the indispensable plausibility structure for the new reality (p. 158).

Hence, it is the community that provides the collective understandings, rules, rituals, and emotional culture necessary for reality-maintenance. At this point, the ACOA community becomes an "ethically informed proposal for alternative modes of social life" (Gergen 1994: 131). It also appears successful in facilitating what Gergen (1994) has referred to as the "social relocation of the mental" (p. 218). The ACOA community narrative, coupled with the community's emotional culture, appears to help members reconstruct the meaning of mental terms—like "anger" and "fear"—in ways that place them in the sphere of relationship. This can be heard in Vic's story as he attempts to reinterpret his old reality within the new:

Dealing with my feelings—particularly my anger and my feelings of abandonment—I believe that is what life is all about. It's about staying in the now and learning to view others the way I now view myself. It makes my relationships with other people much easier. I don't have to judge them. It has changed the way I am in all my relationships—especially with my family. When I associate with my family anymore I don't have to get angry and judge them, you know, as being 'sick', or 'co-dependent', or 'alcoholic', or anything else. I see through that anymore. I understand these things now as mechanisms that we use as denial tools that keep us from being who we really are. I don't find that being part of our society, the way I used to be, is a way for me to live anymore. I have to live with what I now believe to be my best truth.

In this stage, the community also serves as a supportive resource for the prevention of what Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to as the problem of "reality-slipping" (p. 146). By this they are acknowledging how even a "transformed subjective reality" requires techniques for "making stick" the new reality and for resisting competing definitions of still other realities that may be encountered socially. When an individual reaches this stage of resocialization, she seems to experience what Freire (1973) called "critical

consciousness:" the ability to experience a sense of connectedness with realities and to engage with it as a participant rather than merely as an observer, or worse, a victim. There is a new propensity to question, discern and adapt in ways aimed at successful resolution of contradictions that one's social reality may present from time to time. The process of collective dialogue becomes critical in this stage of co-construction and reconstruction of one's subjective and objective reality. Such constructive processes are recognized as a product of both dynamic, discursive social interaction and the emotional conditions encompassing such discourse. Terry's story reveals such a recognition:

I know I have a tendency to decide at certain points that I'm better, and that I'm, well, that my life is just fine now. I don't need to go to those dumb meetings. I believe that is a real killer every time! If I don't go to meetings, my mind will revert back to my old patterns. One of my old patterns was to work all the time and not take time for myself. Another pattern was to be very critical and judgmental of others. Going to meetings gives me the incentive to be looking at myself to find which parts of me I still don't like. Then I can see what I can do to get rid of them—to get back into alignment with what is natural and feels good to me in my life now.

It is this sort of "emotion work" (Hochschild 1979) that is likely to continue to characterize this stage of the resocialization process as experienced by these individuals. Elsewhere (Coyle 1996), I have suggested that "individuals who undergo such dramatic changes between primary and secondary socialization will continually be involved in resocialization efforts to some degree" (p. 321). Terry's story supports Stearns and Stearns's (1994) model regarding the time-lag between changes in social feeling rules and real, individually experienced emotion. It supports the recommendation for establishing emotion as an "independent variable" (Franks and Gecas 1992) that can work to maintain and change relational structures.

One final and compelling observation is the extent to which the "A.D." or "post-Damascus" segments of the ACOA's stories reveal experience and use of the concept of a "real" or true self to differentiate between the self now regarded as more authentic and emotionally engaged and "old" self as constructed within and conditioned by the former social demands and expectations of the alcoholic family. There seems to be an experience of what Morgan and Averill (1992) refer to as "true feelings" and a tendency for these individuals to "define who they are in relation to 'inner' needs and capacities, looking inward for markers of 'authentic being' that may let them know themselves" (p. 96). The story excerpts shared here also lend support to Morgan and Averill's (1992) hypothesis that "'true feelings' may represent a significant intersection of self and culture, a point where we may fruitfully

glimpse the recursive shapings of social and individual worlds that inform all psychological phenomena" (p. 96). The foregoing analysis represents this inquiring sociologist's effort in exploring one place in our society in which self and culture intersect and produce compelling effects of interest to the advancement of a sociology of emotions.

CONCLUSIONS

As McCarthy (1989) noted, a sociology of emotions cannot proceed until we sociologists explicate the particular cultural and ideational contexts in which human emotions are constructed. Such a contextual approach becomes even more critical in order for emotions to be qualitatively, and cross-culturally, compared or contrasted. Hence, as social constructs, emotions "are rendered meaningful only within a society's forms of knowledge" (McCarthy 1989: 67). A sociological perspective, then, provides an important avenue for understanding the social origins of emotion and its dissemination by particular groups.

This study positioned the alcoholic family and the ACOA 12-Step community as two differing cultures with forms of knowledge that appear to encourage very different fabrications of emotions by their members. In the spirit of constructionist inquiry, it is important to assess the gains and losses to one's everyday life that follow from each cultural perspective. While no attempt was made to advocate one culture over the other, the lives of these six individuals seem to have been enriched by their ACOA community experience. In contributing to the advancement of a sociology of emotions, the stories shared by these people highlight the primacy of emotionality in the instigation of and ongoing support for processes of resocialization and self-transformation. They provide those of us in this field with increased confidence when making bold statements like, "Culture matters in the realm of emotions and here's how..."

The foregoing discussion is also an attempt to acknowledge the primacy of emotion over language in even constructionist forms of social inquiry. This is not intended to refute the obvious emphasis that language deserves in emotion studies. Rather it suggests that all narratives of self and world be viewed, first, as constructions of selves *preconditioned* by the relational and emotional contexts of a broader culture, which, in turn, is located in a particular time in social history. This study extends an invitation to the advancement of an "emotionology" (Stearns and Stearns 1985) through which the taken-for-granted objective worlds presented by our society's various microcultures are critically evaluated for their impact on the attitudes and standards that they create and maintain toward emotions and their appropriate expression. Such an emotionology would investigate the impact that various culturally-laden prescriptions of emotionality have on broader spheres of

individual and social life.

The important dialectical relationships of concern here were those involving culture and emotionality, and emotionality and the experience of self. Following Berger (1977) it was assumed that the subjective experience of self is a function of yet another important dialectical relationship: that involving one's social structure and the psychological models and subjective reality it produces. When an individual perceives a need to alter her/his subjective reality, for whatever reason, change must occur in one's psychological models and the ways in which one's unique emotionality is experienced and expressed. In order for new psychological models and a new subjective reality to develop, the individual must be exposed to and become embedded in a novel social structure that can facilitate their production. The ACOA community was positioned here as a social structure conducive to the efforts of resocialization. For the participants in this study, the ACOA community provided a social structure that established the necessary relationships between cognition, emotion, and community. Studying resocialization within an ACOA community provided a glimpse of these necessary and dialectical relationships in progress.

For the clinical sociologist working with children of alcoholics (or individuals from similar emotional heritages), a three-stage approach to resocialization was presented. This approach places prominence on the role of emotions in any resocialization effort by recognizing the need to address both emotional problems associated with feelings of inauthenticity and experiences of asymmetry between one's objective and subjective realities. The clinical sociologist might also find it helpful to examine actual models of the process of emotional resocialization as developed by Fein (1990) and this author (Coyle 1996: 316A). A discussion of other strategies for incorporating this expanded understanding of the process of emotional resocialization and their potential uses among clinical sociologists is a topic for yet another paper in this important area of study. It should be mentioned in closing that while the ACOA community provided a context ripe for the study of emotional resocialization at the micro level, the larger social patterns encouraged or prevented by such a microculture require further study.

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