

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS CULT OR CURE

George E. Vaillant, M.D.

Brigham & Women's Hospital
Harvard Medical School



NO DIFFERENCE

	STABLE ABSTINENCE n = 48	CHRONIC ALCOHOLISM n = 55
8+ Alcohol Problems	42%	42%
Multiple Alcoholic Relatives	65%	53%
Antisocial < Age 14	13%	7%
Antisocial as Adult	17%	20%
< 10 Grades of School	42%	47%
Heavy Smoker (80+ pack/yr)	27%	18%

NON-CLINIC Rx	EVER ABSTINENT N=49	SECURELY ABSTINENT N=21
1. SUBSTITUTE DEPENDENCY	53%	67%
2. COMPULSORY SUPERVISION		
a. Sustained confrontation	24%	0%
b. Medical consequences	49%	48%
3. ENHANCED HOPE/SELF-ESTEEM		
	12%	19%
a. Increased religious involvement	37%	38%
b. Alcoholics Anonymous		
4. NEW LOVE RELATIONSHIP	32%	38%

RELIGION

CULTURE/MEMES

COGNITIVE/
NEOCORTICAL

GOD IS TO BE PLEASED

EXCLUSIVE

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS
PRIZED

SPIRITUALITY

BIOLOGY/GENES

EMOTION/LIMBIC

GOD IS LOVE

INCLUSIVE

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS
EXCLUDED

Lord, make me an instrument of your *peace* . . .

Where there is injury, let me sow *forgiveness*;

Where there is doubt, let me sow *faith*;

Where there is despair, let me give *hope*;

Where there is sadness, let me give *joy*;

O Divine Master, grant that I may

not try to be comforted but to *comfort*;

Try not to be loved but to *love* . . .

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

PAUL MCLEAN'S TRIUNE BRAIN

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

AA WORKS FINE!

	COLLEGE COHORT		CORE CITY COHORT	
	Abstinent n = 9	Chronicity n = 32	Abstinent n = 57	Chronicity n = 44
AGE FIRST ALCOHOLIC	34 ± 9	42 ± 10	28 ± 9	31 ± 11
YRS. OF ACTIVE ALCOHOLISM	20 ± 11	23 ± 10	18 ± 9	22 ± 10***
PROBLEM DRINKING SCORE	9 ± 3.0	6 ± 2***	9.7 ± 3.8	8.3 ± 3.3*
AA MEETINGS	137 ± 155	2 ± 9***	143 ± 327	8 ± 30***

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001 Students t-test

WHAT IS AA?

- 1. Our leaders are trusted servants; they do not govern.**
- 2. We own no property.**
- 3. We are not a religion.**
- 4. The minority opinion is important.**
- 5. No one holds the same job for very long**

RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT SCALE

1 = a) Age 45, 65 and 70 *never*
attended services;

b) At 55, 65,75 God and religious
services of “*no importance*”;

c) At 60 “*no real involvement*”
with religion for 20 years;

5 = men with “*deep*” or “*weekly*”
or “*high*” religious involvement
at age 45,55 ,60,65,70, and 75

ASSOCIATION OF OBJECTIVE GLOBAL RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT (SCALE 1-5) AT AGE 60-80 WITH “SPIRITUAL ITEMS” (RATED 1-5)

	r
Time spent in private meditation	.66
To have a deepening spiritual life	.50
I experience presence of a higher power	.66
Spiritual beliefs underlies my life	.58

	Religious Involvement n=224	Global Mental Health n=162
--	--	---

Warm Childhood	.08	.28**
Close Relationships (Age 50)	.07	.30**
Alcoholism	.00	-.33**
Neuroticism (NEO Age 65)	.04	-.23*
Close Marriage (Age 20-70)	.10	.32**
Close to Children (Age 80)	.00	.39**
Years Disabled (By age 80)	.04	-.33**

*p < .05

**p < .001

RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT (AGE 45 - 75)

DID NOT PREDICT PHYSICAL HEALTH

Religious Involvement	Adult Adjustment
Age = 45-75	Age = 45-75
n = 222^a	n = 222^a

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Objective Health (Age 50)	.02	.24***
Objective Health (Age 65)	-.04	.31***
Objective Health (Age 80)	.03	.13^a
Years Disabled or Dead < 80	.03	-.27***
Still Alive in	.02	.12^a

2006

TALKING THE TALK	Religious Involvement Age 45- 75	Adult Adjustment Age 50- 65
I believe that people are born to do good	.30**	.00
I believe in a universal power, a god	.58***	-.06
I believe unselfish love brings real peace of mind	.27**	-.04
in the last day, I have spent 30 min. in prayer / meditation	.56***	-.14

**WALKING THE
WALK**

**Religious
Involvement
Age 45-75**

**Adult
Adjust
Age 50-65**

**I have cared deeply
about someone for ten
or more years**

-.04

.31**

**I always feel the
presence of love in my
life**

.13

.33***

**I feel isolated even in
the presence of others**

.01

-.33***

**People usually let you
down**

.06

-.29***

p = .07 **p < .01

*****p < .001**

“LOW STRESS”

N = 71

**Few Independent stressful life events
(age 20-65) AND
And none experienced depression**

“MISERY”

N=49

Suffered from Major Depression (n =18)

OR

**Many stressful events independent
of behavior (e.g. death or illness of a
child, partner, or spouse) (n = 25)**

OR

Both (n = 6)

SPIRITUALITY VS. PSYCHOTHERAPY

	DEPRESSED OR HIGH STRESS N= 49	LOW STRESS N=71
BOTH	20.5%	0%
SPIRITUALLY INVOLVED	43%****	34%
PSYCHOTHERAPY	16%	4%
NEITHER	20.5%	62%

***** CHISQUARE = 10.1, df 1, p < .001**

Items from Robert Cloninger's Scale of Self-Transcendence

**I often feel that I am a part of the spiritual
force on which all life depends.**

**Sometimes I feel a spiritual connection to
other people that I cannot express in words.**

**I have had moments of great joy in
which I suddenly had a clear deep
feeling of oneness with all that exists.**

SPIRITUAL ITEMS (N=83)

**I often experience emotions evoked
by beauty.**

I believe that each person has a soul.

I believe people are born to do good

I believe in a universal power, a god.

**I believe unselfish love is the best method
for securing real peace of mind**

**In the last 24 hours, I have personally
spent 30 minutes in prayer, meditation
or contemplation**