

Recovery and Spiritual Change: Are They Related?

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The Life Transitions Study

- What were we trying to find out and why
- How did we measure recovery and spiritual and religious change
- Collecting information and analyzing it
- Who did we talk to?
- Some major findings
- Caveats
- Acknowledgments

Why might spiritual or religious (SR) change be important in recovery?

- Most people have a spiritual or religious life :
 - 93% believe in God.
 - Almost 90% believe God watches over them.
 - Only 14% have no religious preference (as of 1998).
 - Over 50% pray at least once a day.
 - Over 80% state they look to God for strength and work with God.
- Alcoholics Anonymous, an effective intervention, encourages connection with a higher power and the use of prayer and meditation and working on forgiveness, service, gratitude, and connection.
- Most individuals in recovery and many treatment professionals consider change in one's spirituality/religiousness to be important, if not crucial.
- Carl Jung's theory about alcoholism: *spiritus contra spiritum* or *spirits against spirit*.

Is there any evidence?

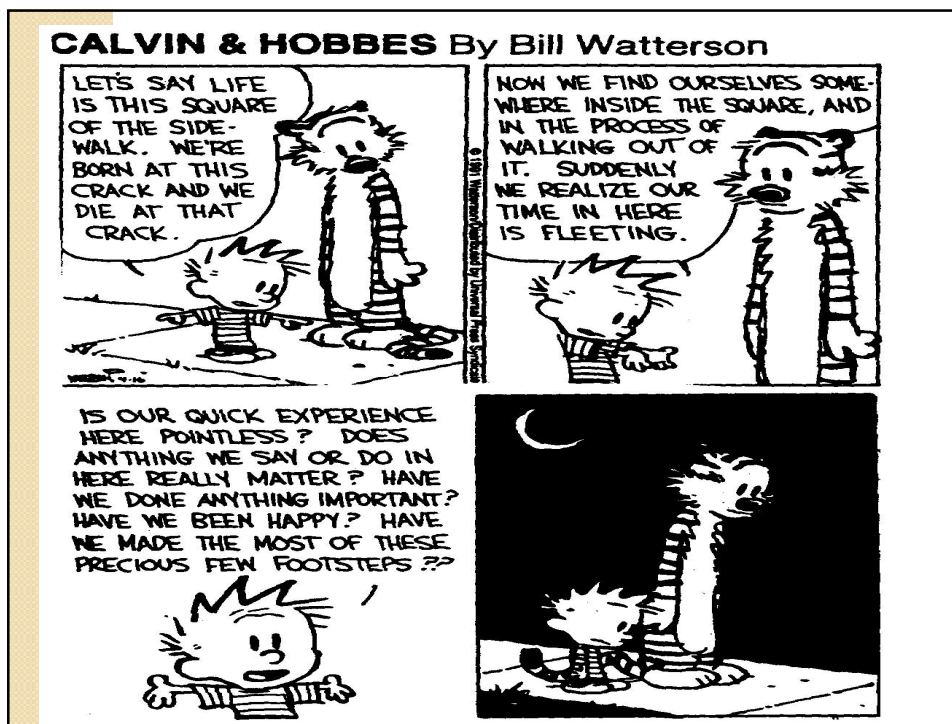
- Lower levels of alcohol & drug use among those with religious affiliation/participation.
- Some evidence that alcoholics and drug addicts are religiously/spiritually alienated.
- Significant evidence that Alcoholics Anonymous works.
- Anecdotal evidence that spiritual/religious change has been important in individuals' recovery.
 - The experience of Bill W., founder of Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Stories from the recovery community
 - *Quantum Change*
- Evidence that spiritual awakenings (or life-changing spiritual/religious experiences) play a role in recovery.
- Quantitative evidence of change in existential sense of meaning/ purpose in alcoholics from pre-treatment to post-treatment.

Defining spirituality and religion

- *Spirituality*: an individual's feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a *search for the sacred* (i.e., a divine being, ultimate reality, transcendent truth, or existential meaning) *and for a connection* to those phenomena.
- *Religion*: the social context of that search and connection (i.e., social institutions, rituals and prescribed behaviors), usually tied to a particular cultural context.

Primary SR Measures

- Perceptions of God: Loving & Controlling God Scales
- Beliefs & Behaviors: Religious Background & Behaviors
- Current spiritual/religious experiences: Daily Spiritual Experiences
- Values and beliefs: Meaning, Values & Beliefs
- Forgiveness: 3 scales -- Fetzer Forgiveness; Mauger's Behavioral Assessment System (Forgiveness of self & Forgiveness of Others)
- Religious coping strategies: Positive and Negative Religious Coping
- Existential meaning/purpose: Purpose in Life



What is recovery?

A hot topic – no agreement, inclusion of abstinence varies.

“Recovery from alcohol and drug problems is a **process** of change through which an individual achieves **abstinence** and improved **health, wellness, and quality of life**” (CSAT, 2007, p. 5).

Hard to measure this.

CSAT, SAMHSA, 2007

Assessing some dimensions of recovery

- Remission = no longer meeting DSM-IV criteria for alcohol dependence.
- Abstinence patterns at the final interview: (1) less than 30 days sober, (2) 30 days to a year sober, and (3) a year or more sober.
- Quality of life – social connections, mental and physical health, employment, housing, etc.

Methodology – a longitudinal survey

- A longitudinal study of 364 alcoholic individuals.
- Every 6 months, we interviewed these same individuals about drinking, recovery efforts, health/mental health indicators, spirituality, religion and other dimensions of their lives.
- At final interview, 2 ½ to 3 years after baseline, 276 people (75.8%) remained in the study.

Who was in the study?

- Respondents were recruited from:
 - Chelsea Arbor Treatment Center (CATC; n=157)
 - Ann Arbor VA outpatient clinic (VA; n=80)
 - A moderation-based program (Mod; n=34)
 - The local community through advertisements; these respondents were not in treatment at baseline (CS: n=93)
- Study recruitment criteria
 - Verified diagnosis of lifetime alcohol dependence
 - Use of alcohol in the last 90 days
 - Over 18 years of age
 - Not suicidal, homicidal, or psychotic
 - Literate in English
 - Those in treatment had to have 1 week of treatment, but less than 4 weeks.

Who were these 364 people?

Gender, % male	65.7%	Prior alcohol tx?	52.7%
Age, years	44.0	Age at 1 st alcohol problems	25.8
Education, years	14.3	Family history of alcohol problems	86.5%
Marital status:		Alcohol problems (SIP) score	21.0
Never married	28.8%	Want to be abstinent?	72.0%
Married/cohab.	38.2%	Ever attend AA?	68.1%
Sep/Div/Wid	32.9%		
Ethnicity:			
White	81.9%		
Black	10.4%		
Other, incl multi	7.6%		
Not employed	44.0%		
Income			
<\$15,000/yr	29.5%		
>\$85,001	22.0%		

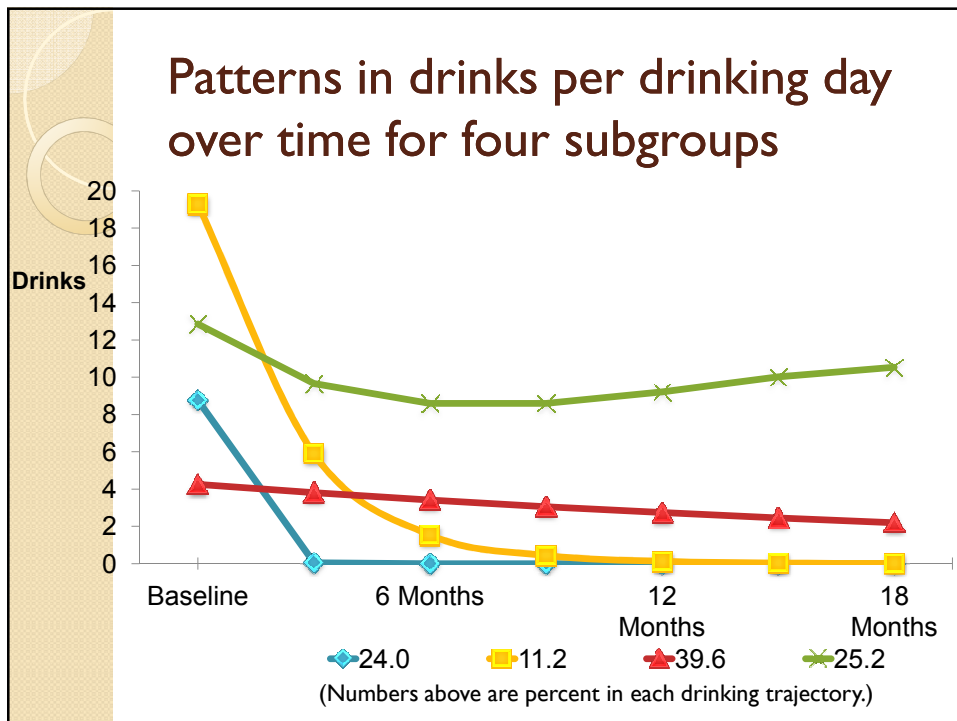
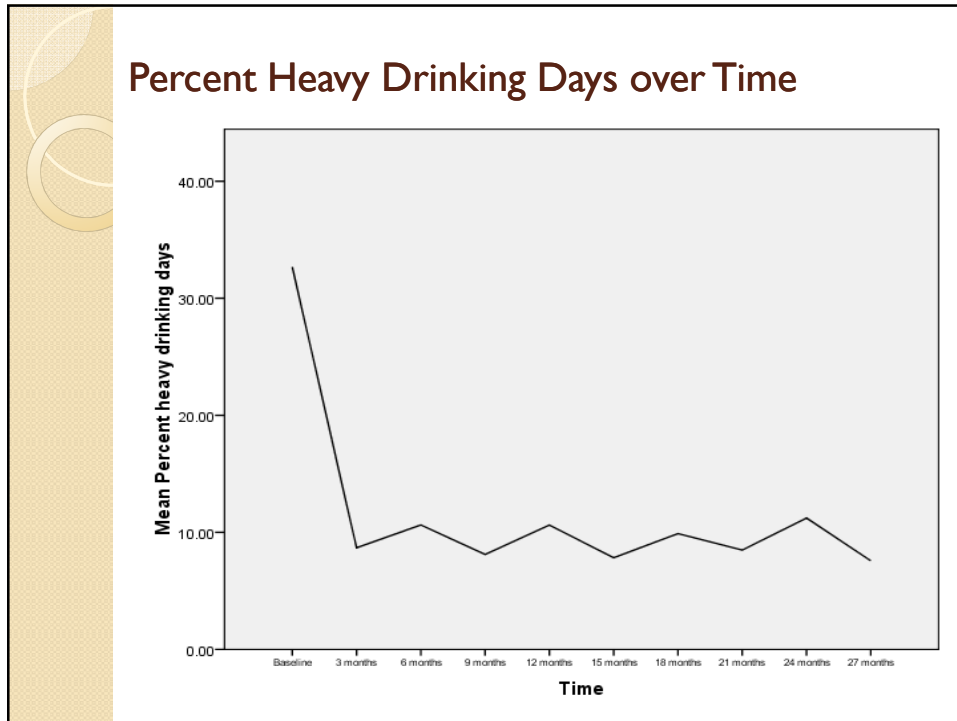
Drinking in last 90 days at baseline from Time-Line Follow Back (Means & SD)

TLFB Variable	Total Sample	CATC	VA	Mod	CS
Percent days abstinent (PDA)	56.1%	59.8%	71.2%	35.5%	44.6%
Percent heavy drinking days (HDD)	32.7%	33.6%	24.2%	34.9%	37.6%
Drinks/drinking day (DDD)	9.5	9.3	12.6	4.6	9.2
Days since last drink (DSLDD)	25.4	33.3	40.7	6.9	5.7

Differences between sites are significant.

Some findings from the study

- Changes in drinking
- Changes in spirituality and religiousness
- Changes in SR and subsequent drinking
- Perceptions of AA's helpfulness
- Life-changing spiritual or religious experiences
- Loss of faith and gender differences



Some Baseline Spiritual/Religious (S/R) Characteristics

Believe in God	74%
Do not believe in God	8%
Agnostic; don't know/can't know	18%
% without a current religious preference*	35%
% brought up in a religious tradition	70%
% currently practice that religion	23%
% involved in a religious congregation	25%

*In a 1998 national sample, only 14% of the US population had no religious preference.

Rating one's religiousness and spirituality

1=Not at all; 4=Very

	LTS sample	GSS-1998 (national sample)	p
To what extent do you consider yourself religious?	2.26	2.65	.000
To what extent do you consider yourself spiritual?	3.01	2.72	.000

What is the relationship between change in SR and subsequent drinking?

- Which SR dimensions change from baseline to 12 months?
- Does significant change in a SR dimension predict drinking at 15 months, controlling for AA involvement and how much people were drinking at baseline?

Are there 12-month changes in spirituality and religiousness? Yes.

Measure	Baseline	12-month
Loving God	25.13	25.40
Controlling God	10.89	10.42
Belief scale	3.81	3.89
Private Religious Practices	16.11	16.77
Daily Spiritual Experiences	54.29	56.64
Meaning, Values, Beliefs	17.33	17.44
Fetzer forgiveness	9.02	9.34
Mauger forgiveness of self	7.42	8.81
Mauger forgiveness of others	10.34	10.84
Positive Religious Coping	23.07	23.58
Negative Religious Coping	12.64	11.69
Purpose in Life	93.17	97.12

Drinking levels at 15 months are predicted by increases in these SR variables:

- Private Religious Practices
- Daily Spiritual Experiences
- Forgiveness of Self

- Purpose in Life (marginally significant)

- Not predictive: perceptions of God, beliefs, religious coping, forgiveness of others, meaning, values & beliefs.

Controlling for baseline drinking and AA involvement.

Perceptions of AA's helpfulness: Research Questions

- What proportion of alcoholics in a mixed sample of treatment seekers and non-seekers perceive AA as helpful or unhelpful?
- Which respondents found AA helpful or not helpful?
- Do perception's of AA's helpfulness or unhelpfulness relate to drinking outcomes?
- What elements of AA are perceived to be helpful or not helpful in managing drinking problems?

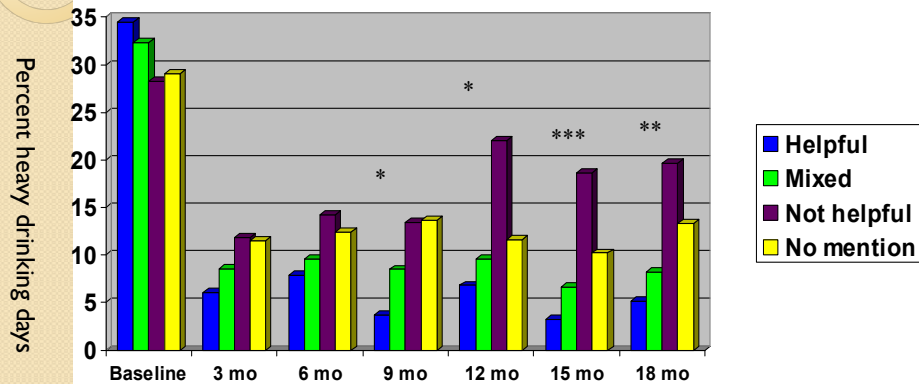
AA-related responses to the question: “What do you think helps people with alcohol problems?”

- Of the 286 respondents interviewed at 18 months:
 - ◆ 20% made no mention of AA
 - ◆ 42% had found AA helpful to them
 - ◆ 18% gave mixed comments about AA’s helpfulness to them
 - ◆ 19% (55) had found AA unhelpful to them

Who found AA helpful?

- Prior history of alcohol treatment
- Family history of alcohol problems
- High levels of alcohol-related problems
- More severe alcoholism
- Want to be abstinent
- Had attended AA before
- No differences by demographic variables

Those who did not find AA helpful, are more likely to be drinking heavily at 12, 15, and 18 months.



*** Significance: $p < .001$

** Significance: $p < .01$

* Significance: $p < .05$

Note: Heavy drinking days for men ≤ 5 standard drinks, for women ≤ 4 standard drinks.

What did people say is helpful about AA?

- The fellowship – sharing, talking, listening, having someone to talk to, being around others who've been there, sober people to be with.
- The program -- steps, meetings, sponsors, admitting the problem, Big Book.
- Other mentions -- spirituality, advice, guidance, "it helps you not to drink."

Based on 173 respondents' comments.

What is not helpful?

- Can't relate to others in groups/meetings, don't like groups in general
- Looks too much at negative, too much complaining, too depressing
- Don't believe in God/Higher power; too religious
- Thought I could handle it on my own
- Dislike model, structure, language of AA
- Court-ordered people
- I'm not "that" bad, not like "those" people
- People talk too much about drinking
- People are hypocritical/phony
- Needed more than AA
- Vague: "waste of time"
- Other comments mentioned by 1-2 people: makes people want to drink, don't want to admit being out of control, people with non-alcohol issues, too male, too cult-like, dogmatic, never wanted to stop drinking, court ordered, looks too much at the past, stories are repetitive

Denominator = 107 people who found AA unhelpful to some degree

Spiritual/religious events: Life-changing SR experiences and loss of faith

- At each time point, we asked respondents if they had ever had a life-changing spiritual or religious experience, a gain in faith, or a loss in faith.
- At baseline,
 - 47.4% had a life-changing SR experience (vs. a national sample in which 39.1% did so).
 - 41.8% reported having experienced a loss of faith (no national data).

What are these life-changing SR experiences?

- Danger: “I should/could have died”
- Deliberate efforts to connect with God/Spirit/the Transcendent
- Other experiences, ranging from the mundane to going to AA, talking with someone, being in nature, creative work.
- Experiences were generally positive (at peace, consoled, felt a presence, connected, accepting, physical sensations)
- Some experiences were negative (scared, judged, alienated, questioned God, angry at God)

Those who report at baseline that they have had a life-changing SR experience use less alcohol

Ever had a life-changing SR experience?	Percent Days Abstinent	Percent Heavy Drinking Days	Drinks/ Drinking Day	Days since last drink
Yes (n=172)	60.6%	27.6%	9.6	27.7
No (n=191)	51.9%	37.4%	9.5	23.3
Total	56.1%**	32.7%**	9.5	25.4

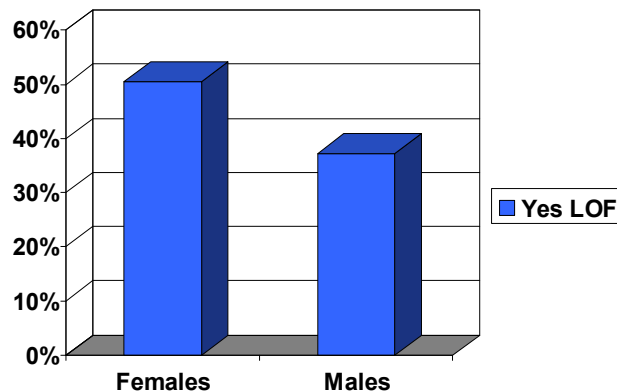
** Indicates difference between “yes” and “no” is statistically significant at .01 level.

What are LOF experiences?

- Disillusionment: gradual loss of involvement in faith/religion (27.6%)
- Alienation/Rejection from religious congregation, doctrine, priest, or God (11.8%)*
- Death of family member or close friend (23.7%)
- Other negative events (ex. divorce, abuse, affairs, natural disasters, war, accidents, mental illness) (22.4%)*
- Using alcohol or drugs (10.5%)
- Other or vague responses (3.9%)

* significantly more common among women

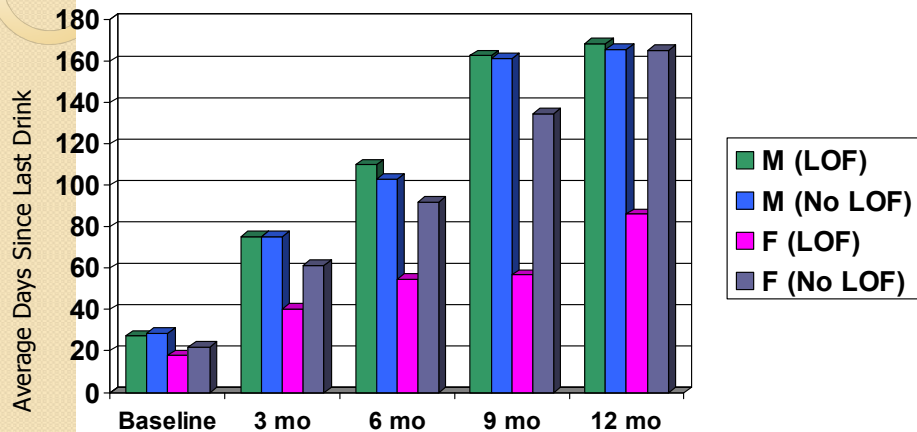
Gender differences in baseline reports of Loss of Faith (LOF)



* The difference between groups is significant ($p < .05$)

Price, Robinson, & Brower, 2009

Days since last drink by gender and LOF, over the first 12 months



Age of onset of alcoholism and age at LOF

- For men, no significant correlation between age of onset of alcoholism and age at LOF ($r^2=.07$, ns).
- For women, significant and strong correlation between age of onset and age of LOF ($r^2=.54$, $p<.001$)
- Exploring the data more closely indicated that for women, the LOF occurred shortly before the onset of alcoholism; for men, LOF occurred after.

What have we learned?

Changes in alcoholics' spirituality and drinking outcomes

- Alcoholics may be religiously alienated, but don't necessarily appear to be spiritually alienated.
- Changes in three dimensions of spirituality are associated with subsequently less drinking: private SR practices, forgiveness of self, and daily experiences of spirituality. Increases in purpose/meaning in life may also contribute to less drinking.

AA's helpfulness

- AA is perceived as helpful to some degree by 60% of the sample.
- Those who find it helpful were more likely to have experience with prior recovery efforts and to want to be abstinent.
- Perceiving AA as helpful is associated with better drinking outcomes.

Life-changing SR experiences and Loss of Faith

- Life-changing SR experiences appear to be more common in alcoholics than in the general population.
- Women alcoholics are much more likely to report having had a loss of faith than are men.
- Those women who experienced a loss of faith struggle harder in recovery than women without a loss of faith or men.

Caveats (warning)

- This is only one study, only one particular sample of alcoholics.
- We don't know if these findings would generalize to all alcoholics or to addicts or to non-midwestern/80% white samples.
- What would we find among alcoholics who don't think they have a problem?

Acknowledgements

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