Applying the COMMUNICATION THEORY OF IDENTITY to members of Alcoholics Anonymous: A phenomenological analysis of the expression of the recovery experience

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ABSTRACT

The current study interviewed 24 members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to analyze the expression of the addiction recovery experience. The current study also explored the theoretical boundaries of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) (Hecht et al., 2005) by focusing on the expression of identity-building resources drawn from the layers of CTI, and by investigating the nature of interpenetration as well as the nature of between-layer and within-layer identity gaps. Findings showed that members of AA, when talking about their recovery experience, referenced concepts that can be considered identity-building resources such as honesty, gratitude, and selflessness, relationships with sponsors and other members of AA, and relationships with friends and family outside of AA. Members also talked about enacting their recovery by identifying with the community of AA and working the 12 steps. In addition, the current study demonstrated how each of the layers and their attending resources interpenetrated to form a more complete picture of identity during recovery. Furthermore, the current study identified and described personal-enacted, personal-relational, and personal-communal identity gaps for members of AA, along with within-layer gaps, such as personal-personal, relational-relational, and communal-communal identity gaps.