

## Field Trip Assignment

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Between January first and January fourth I attended three Alcoholics Anonymous meetings as a non-addict for a class assignment with an intention of being able to better understand the lives and experiences of addicts who found themselves dependent on alcohol. Alcoholics Anonymous offers hope to alcoholics with the fellowship of shared experiences (van Wormer). Like many people, the extent of my knowledge of these types of meetings was limited to the skewed perspective of TV and movies. I feel it is also important for me to disclose that as much as I tried to leave my own personal bias at the door, I come from a long line of mental illness, addicts, and alcoholics and had a very clear and negative image of the type of person I viewed an addict to be. Through my experiences going to these meetings, I was able to rethink my idea of what it means to be an addict and how influential the decision to recover can be in the life of an alcoholic.

The first meeting I attended was on new years day in the morning. The meeting was held in John Randolph Hospital in the wellness pavilion. It was a small meeting with only 5 people in attendance. When I first walked in I was justifiably nervous. I was the only woman in the room and no one was less than twice my age. My feelings of anxiety quickly faded away as I was greeted with snacks, coffee, and a welcoming atmosphere. One attendee, Matt, was especially helpful to me throughout the process of my first meeting. Matt was the primary facilitator of the meeting and provided me with many resources in the form of informative papers and pamphlets about the organization. This meeting really helped me look at addicts in a different way. It showed me that addicts are so much more than the choices they made that led them to their addiction. They are professionals, veterans, parents, and even social workers. The stigma associated with addiction forces addicts into a lonely and dark place away from recovery, but

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organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous provide a safe and welcoming environment to promotes their recovery.

At an attempt to knock both meetings out in one day I drove to a church in the town over to go to my second required meeting. When I arrived, the doors were locked and there were only two other cars in the parking lot. I stood in the parking lot with two other attendees waiting for the key to the building for about fifteen minutes before giving up and leaving. It seems that a lack of communication and organization was inevitably the reason why this meeting was unable to happen. Although I was not able to attend this meeting, I was able to spend a few minutes talking to the two members that did show up. They clearly were both incredibly frustrated with the situation but they still remained inviting and kind during the encounter. Although there may have been other factors involved, such as sickness and holidays, I would note that the lack of organization associated with Alcoholics Anonymous is relatively disheartening. While I was standing in a cold parking lot I couldn't help but wonder how I would have felt if I really was an alcoholic. What if I had decided that 2019 was my year to get sober and this meeting was my first step? What if I was going to this meeting as a last-ditch effort not to relapse? I believe these meetings can be an incredibly influential resource for addicts but if the consistency of meetings can't be trusted, then the full potential of this organization is not being reached.

The last meeting I went to happened to be the largest and most eventful of the three. This meeting had twenty people of different ages, sexes, and genders in attendance. During this meeting, they read a passage from the Alcoholics Anonymous - Big Book, which also happens to have been cited many times in our textbook as a book filled with stories to show other alcoholics that recovery is possible. The story was of a man whose life of alcoholism ruined his carrier and

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inevitably landed him in prison. The story closed with an insightful quote that I feel truly embodies the spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous. He said “From experience, I've realized that I cannot go back and make a brand-new start. But through A.A., I can start from now and make a brand-new end. (Alcoholics Anonymous)” So often we hear people say that would give anything to go back in time and never take that first drink, but the fact is you can't go back, none of us can, but we can make a choice every day to live a life that promotes healing and happiness for ourselves and those we surround ourselves with.

Due to both of these meetings falling under the same umbrella of Alcoholics Anonymous, many occurrences remained the same from meeting to meeting. For instance, both meetings began with a reading of the preamble and the serenity prayer (which is recited by most of the individuals). Then various members read literature specific to Alcoholics Anonymous including "The Promises," "How It Works," and "Twelve Traditions". The second meeting had a reading from the Alcoholics Anonymous - Big Book before sharing, whereas the first meeting I attended went straight into group discussion. The most significant difference was the size of the meetings and the type of people in attendance. The first meeting was small, with only five members all middle-aged to older men. The second meeting was far more diverse all in age, gender, and race. Throughout my time in attendance at both meetings one thing remained constant - the overwhelming acceptance and welcoming I received from both the facilitators and the members of the group. Many people at both meetings went out of their way to talk to me and help me better understand the organization by sharing stories of how Alcoholics Anonymous saved their lives.

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I think the moment that impacted me the most took place at the first meeting. There was a middle-aged man there that said he was both an alcoholic and an addict. The book tells us that the official policy of AA states that drug addicts are welcome at open meetings but not at closed meetings (van Wormer). He looked like the type of person you'd think you would see there. It would only take one look for you to see that this man had lived a very difficult life. He started talking about what being sober means for him. He said, "it's like all those years I was drinking and doing drugs, I would go to the party and listen to the music but I never could make it out onto the floor, and now that I'm finally sober I'm finally able to learn how to dance". I found this quote so perceptive. This made me realize the role organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous plays in these peoples lives. They don't just help addicts get sober, they teach them how to live a successful sober life. They teach them how to dance again.

At the end of the day, I am incredibly grateful for this project for introducing me to a new way of thinking about addiction. Before taking this class I found myself a little shaky about my decision to pursue a career in social work. Mike, the man from my first meeting, told me that after all his struggles with addiction he went back to school to be a substance abuse counselor. He encouraged me to continue with social work because of the potential we have to promote welfare in the world. There are a lot of people that have the potential to do incredible things, but that has been overtaken by the circumstances of their life thus far. Social work, specifically work in substance abuse helps guide those individuals back into the productive and happy life they were meant to live. These three meetings changed my perspective on addiction. They allowed me to stop seeing these people as lost causes, and start seeing them as the kind, determined and persistent people they became when they chose recovery over addiction.

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### References

Alcoholics Anonymous. (2014). Alcoholics Anonymous: Big book reference edition for addiction treatment

van Wormer, Katherine; Davis, Diane Rae. Addiction Treatment (Substance Abuse). Cengage Textbook. Kindle Edition.