

# Remembering the Lizard: Reconstructing Sexuality in the Rooms of Narcotics Anonymous

Lesley L. Green, Mindy Thompson Fullilove, and Robert E. Fullilove  
Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health

*The crack epidemic was devastating to poor American communities in part because of the destruction wrought by the system of exchanging sex for drugs, which was a key feature of the crack-use culture. Sex-for-drugs exchanges were often conducted under unsafe circumstances and were linked to the spread of AIDS and other STDs as well as unplanned pregnancies. The existence of this alternative system of sexual relationships threatened the economic viability of established commercial sex work and undermined the status and power of women. Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings helped men and women recover from crack addiction through a well-described 12-step process. Described as "the rooms," these time- and space-specific encounters helped people become sober in the context of neighborhoods that were centers of the drug trade. Because of the key role of sex in the crack culture, transformation of sexual relationships was essential to establishing and maintaining sobriety. The manner in which the rooms of NA influence the sexuality and lifeworld of addicted people is explored using Barker's theory of ecological psychology.*

Addiction is associated with the development of a set of behaviors and thought patterns that enable the addicted person to acquire drugs without regard to the harm such acquisition might cause to self or others. The preoccupation with using drugs can lead to neglect of family and friends, the drive for money to pay for drugs is often associated with stealing from loved ones, and the social nature of getting high privileges relationships with people who are getting high. Commercial sex work and sex outside of marital relationships are likely to accompany addiction to many substances, partly related to obtaining money for drugs and partly due to a freeing of inhibitions that follows the general erosion of concern for others (Kandall, 1998).

The crack cocaine epidemic was accompanied by distinct new patterns of sexual behavior related to the binge nature of crack use (Fullilove et. al, 1993; Fullilove, Lown, & Fullilove, 1992; Inciardi, Lockwood, & Pottieger, 1993; Lown, Winkler, Fullilove, & Fullilove, 1993; Ratner, 1993). Crack binges could be sustained for days at a time, limited more by the money available to the user than by any intrinsic limit set by the drug. Bartering sex for drugs enabled the user to continue drug consumption after cash had been dissipated. In the peculiar evolution of this barter economy, sexual services were sold for quite low prices, undercutting the much higher fees of those engaged in more traditional forms of commercial sex work. Ethnographic descriptions of these sexual activities often identified practices that were at odds with cultural norms, often influenced by the extreme power imbalance that was created between user and dealer by the user's insatiable desire for the drug (Bowser, 1989; Fullilove et al., 1992; Ratner, 1993).

The exchange of sex for drugs was linked to increases in STDs and AIDS as early as 1988 (Edlin et al., 1994; Fullilove, Fullilove, Bowser, & Gross, 1990; Goldsmith, 1988; Schwarcz et. al, 1992). Unintended pregnancies were another consequence of this sexual behavior and contributed to a massive increase in the number of children in foster care (Wachtler, 1990). Crack users were embedded in poor neighborhoods (Lillie-Blanton, Anthony, & Schuster, 1993), and the sexual practices associated with crack use permeated the larger culture of these areas. This had broad effects on commercial sex work, gender power relations, and family stability, to a name a few place-based institutions that were challenged by the crack culture.

Despite the importance of the crack epidemic, the public health system of the U.S. provided very little prevention or treatment funding (Garcia-Soto, Haynes-Sanstad, Fullilove, & Fullilove, 1998; Reinerman & Levin, 1997; Watkins, Fullilove, & Fullilove, 1998). In the absence of targeted intervention strategies, addicted people had to rely on their own resources for recovery. One such resource was the 12-step fellowship program Narcotics Anonymous, which developed new tactics to meet the needs of those with crack addiction. A crucial part of the evolving program was the elaboration of a discourse around the particular ways in which sex and sexuality were part of the period of active drug-taking.

Relationship repair has always been a primary focus of Narcotics Anonymous (NA; Green, Fullilove, & Fullilove, 1998; Peteet, 1993). Men and women attending NA meetings learn through personal narratives how others in recovery make amends and develop new relationships that support their newfound sobriety (Green, 2002; Steigerwald & Stone, 1999). Many of the personal narratives told during NA meetings illustrate how difficult it can be for a person to develop or reestablish positive relationships once he or

Address correspondence to Dr. Lesley Green, c/o Dr. Robert Fullilove, Community Research Group, 722 West 168th St., New York, NY 10032; e-mail: llg5@columbia.edu.

she enters recovery. Many men and women enter the rooms of NA with little or no knowledge of what it means to be involved in a mutually supportive relationship, romantically or platonically. NA deepened and expanded this work to help with recovery in the crack era.

This article focuses on the reconstruction of sexuality by men and women as described in personal narratives told at NA meetings. Twelve-step fellowship is based on the premise that "A meeting happens when two or more addicts gather to help each other stay clean." This slogan is crucial to investigating NA meetings from the perspective of place. While meetings might be held in well-established locations, the essence of the meeting is not the setting but the sharing that goes on or, we might say, that "takes place." In that sense, what "takes place" is what constitutes both the place as setting and the place as actor in the drama of recovery.

Barker (1968) coined the concept of *standing patterns of behavior* to refer to places that are constituted by people engaged in the pursuit of a specific activity. He proposed the following:

A standing pattern of behavior is a discrete behavior entity with univocal temporal-spatial coordinates; a basketball game, a worship service, or a piano lesson has, in each case, a precise and delimited position in time and space. Furthermore, a standing pattern of behavior is not a characteristic of the particular individuals involved; it is an extra-individual behavior phenomenon; it has unique characteristics that persist when the participants change. (p. 18)

This paper uses narratives collected at 12-step meetings to explore the manner in which participation in such a standing pattern of behavior influenced sexuality.

## METHODS

### Setting

The data presented here were collected between December 1998 and May 1999. The participants in this study were men and women participating in recovery at Lincoln Recovery Center, a freestanding outpatient drug treatment center that offers a wide variety of services to its clients. Lincoln Recovery Center is located in the South Bronx, a deprived inner-city community characterized by severe physical, social, and economic disintegration, which has triggered high rates of violent crime, substance abuse, and AIDS (Wallace, 1988; Wallace & Fullilove, 1991; Wallace & Wallace, 1998).

The majority of Lincoln Recovery Center's clients suffered from crack cocaine addiction. Many were in treatment because the courts had remanded them there or because they had had their children taken away by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and had to complete a program of treatment in order to have them returned. Lincoln Recovery Center's clients were predominately African American (55%) and Hispanic American (45%; N. Smalls, personal communication, April 30, 2002). Clients described themselves as "hard core," mean-

ing that they were victims of a particularly severe addiction, most often to crack cocaine.

### Data Collection

Data presented here were originally collected during a qualitative study on the spiritual awakening process as it is described in 12-step fellowship meetings. Specifically, 95 12-step fellowship meetings were attended by the research team. Team members attended only those meetings that they were eligible to attend. Some NA meetings are open to people who do not have substance abuse problems, and others are not. One member of our team was in recovery and thus able to attend closed meetings. Each meeting lasted approximately one half hour, and attendance ranged from 15 to 45 people. Brief notes were made of all speech segments that contained a story. Immediately after the meeting, these notes were elaborated to document each story as completely as possible.

Two types of narratives were collected: main narratives (those related by the meeting speaker) and additional comments, which were offered by meeting attendees. Ninety-five main narratives were collected, each told by a different speaker. The 300 additional comments made by meeting attendees may have been given by the same individuals in some instances. Thus, the data set consists of approximately 400 stories, identified by date and gender of speaker.

Due to NA's tradition of anonymity, no data were collected about individual meeting attendees. Stories were stripped of remarks that might identify the speaker. Meeting attendees were predominately African American and Hispanic American, and mixed meetings were attended by equal numbers of men and women. Some attendees disclosed their age during meetings, but others did not. The range of ages reported was 18 to 60. These procedures were approved by the New York State Psychiatric Institute Institutional Review Board.

Team members made observations of the meetings and jotted brief notes of each presentation that occurred during meetings. Immediately after the meetings, we prepared detailed field notes. Stories and interchanges were reconstructed as accurately as possible and entered into Atlas.ti (Muh, 1997), a qualitative data management software. As stated above, no information that could link remarks to a specific speaker was recorded.

Although both partial and complete narratives are presented here, it is useful to know that all the narratives generally followed the same format. The storyteller began by introducing herself or himself and explaining how he or she came to NA. The individual proceeded to tell his or her story, recounting the worst phases of the addiction and giving minute details about the process of "hitting bottom," a state of profound despair that is associated with the birth of readiness to stop using drugs. The final component of the story involved the addicted individual relating where she or he was in recovery from addiction and giving advice to those with less recovery time.

At the end of every meeting, members were given an

opportunity to confess any "burning desires," that is, desires to use drugs, use people, hurt oneself, or hurt others. Members often confessed wanting to use drugs or to engage in activities that might lead to use. More often than not, these confessions were made by newcomers and resulted in members giving individuals explicit advice about what to do with their burning desire. Many confessions involved newcomers who were experiencing highly emotional situations that they felt ill-equipped to handle.

### *Analysis*

We used an iterative process throughout the analysis phase of the project. The unit of analysis was the NA story, described above. Once the story had been entered into Atlas.ti (Muhr, 1997), we identified and applied a series of codes. The coded material was then examined to compare and contrast stories. For purposes of this paper, we selected codes related to sexuality, relationships, and the process of meetings and examined the coded material for themes. We compared drafts of the paper to the raw data to assess the accuracy and fairness of the report. These steps of coding, ascertainment of themes, and writing were repeated until we felt that a reasonable representation of the data had been made.

## RESULTS

### *What Takes Place in NA Meetings*

"Using" is a central concept that emerged in these narratives of drug use, but the concept also embraces the sexuality that accompanied the drug use. People described themselves as using drugs, using people to get drugs, and using sex. In this volatile mix, relationships were based on utility and self-interest. The following story is a classic narrative of a using relationship:

One of the addiction counselors was attracted to me, he called me at my grandmother's house where I was staying and talked me into moving in with him. He thought he could save me. He treated me well, bought me clothes, food, but I couldn't see him as anything more than another trick, someone to feed my drug habit. I stayed with him until the day he said he wanted to try crack with me. He had 10 years clean. I felt that if he started smoking he wasn't going to give me any more drugs and that knowing what crack had done to me I couldn't let him get started so when he asked me for some I gave him toilet paper in a vial, I knew once I did this that I had to leave. I robbed him that night of some money and even though we had gone shopping that day for clothes and shoes for me, I left the house in slippers, headed to Hunts Point and stayed there for 5 years.

The woman's view of her lover as "another trick"—a way to get drugs, rather than a real person—is the central problem. Seen in the perspective of that time, sex for drugs and robbing were necessary to support her drug use, and hence justified. In fact, the woman was more than generous in her treatment of her trick, because she left before he relapsed.

Recovery involves both giving up the "right" to use others and reassuming responsibility for one's actions. The

result is a wish for new kinds of relationships and the skills to enact those new desires. The woman in the following story offers an insight into this shift:

The basic [NA] text does not tell us not to get into relationships in the first year. It tells us not to make any major decisions in the first year and that relationships can be disruptive to your recovery. Know your motives because they tell us "the men with the men and the women with the women," but we do have people in recovery who like members of the same sex and this could be a dangerous area when picking a sponsor. Step work is the backbone of this program and if you truly want to recover you must do step work and make some changes in all areas of your life, including your relationships. Through doing some work I found out that using is not only about drugs. When I first came here I would still sleep with my baby's father and get money from him to do my hair and stuff and I realized that was just a form of using and that I didn't have to do those things anymore. So I got some information and supported myself.

Twelve-step fellowship meetings are expected to provide a safe place of recovery where addicted people feel totally free to express themselves. Though the content of the meetings varies, each meeting is an occasion for "sharing and caring" among addicted people. Individuals in recovery are encouraged to trust others and to be open about their addiction and their character flaws.

In general, the meetings we attended opened with the following traditional activities: the Serenity Prayer, Who Is An Addict?, What is the Narcotics Anonymous Program?, Why Are We Here?, How It Works (the 12 Steps), and a recitation of the 12 Traditions (Narcotics Anonymous, 1988). After opening remarks, a speaker was introduced who gave the main address of the meeting. After the address, participants could make comments. As noted above, prior to the end of the meeting the question of burning issues was raised. This was a time to respond to pressing needs of participants. When that was done, the meeting was closed with the Serenity Prayer.

People who spoke at NA meetings would introduce themselves by saying, "My name is [first name] and I am a grateful recovering addict." Others in the room would respond, "Hi, [first name]." The famous and fundamental anonymity was not faceless or nameless or cold. In fact, the proceedings we observed were intimate, passionate, and connected. Within this dynamic setting, the frank and open conversation used some specific strategies to foster recovery.

A turning point for most participants took place when they were willing not only to face the exact nature of their addiction but also to reveal their "dark side" to fellow NA members, a process often referred to as "housecleaning." The recovering individual is encouraged to thoroughly and honestly take a personal moral inventory, admitting to himself or herself, to his or her Higher Power, and to at least one other NA member the exact nature of his or her wrongs. Ultimately, he or she is expected to make amends with all persons harmed by his or her addiction. Five distinct processes—listening for solidarity, hearing one's own story, sharing, trying new behaviors, and doing homework—act together to help those in recovery through this

painful process.

*Listening for solidarity.* The first process is that of listening. Newcomers are encouraged to listen and not speak. While listening, newcomers learn that others have been through similar experiences. Hearing the stories of others helps the addicted person see that others experienced similar humiliations during active addiction and provides a blueprint for corrective behavior. An NA member may learn to be a better friend, spouse, and/or son or daughter by listening to the stories of others. Given the severity of negative life events experienced by most addicts, this becomes an important motivation for staying in the rooms of NA. One man recognized a need to hear that he was not alone in his suffering:

When I came into this process I needed to hear the war stories because if I had heard people who had expensive cars or telling stories meant to sound like they were having a good time, I probably wouldn't have stayed.

Listening creates a sense of solidarity with the group. This is an essential first step, because it is the step of unconditional love. Without the sense of acceptance that accompanies being in the presence of people who really know about the "life" of drug addiction, it would be much more difficult for the individual to face the negative parts of addiction. Getting high is one way of managing the pain that accompanies knowing what happened. Unconditional love, such as that offered by NA, is a powerful alternative that can enable people to tolerate self-awareness: The message of the speaker's story is that "I've been there, too; you're not alone."

*Hearing one's own story.* At the same time, the more experienced members try to pierce the denial of newcomers so that they can begin to hear the wrong and harm in the classic story of using. The teaching story is used to accomplish this task and does so by foregrounding the harm in a manner that defamiliarizes the story and allows it to be experienced in all its hateful aspects. Thus, the addict is slowly alienated from using.

In the teaching story, the narrative is constantly interrupted to allow for a running commentary. This commentary interrupts the rhythm of the story to insert a new, and unexpected, analysis. In the following example, the storyteller is able to reflect on many aspects of his behavior while using drugs. He decodes each action, allowing us an insider view of his world. He is also stating the group's shared understanding of the process, as captured in his comment, "An addict always tries to take everything for themselves." This is a particularly vivid teaching story, but it is not at all unique. We have inserted spaces at each of the interpretive points.

I went to the projects looking for the local lizard. My plans were to get the drugs, the woman and go clubbing. Of course this is not how it turned out, because once you get started using all bets are off. In the Basic Text it says, "We were living like animals," and that's what I mean when I say I went to the local lizard.

This woman was skinny with sunken cheeks, hair half permed and I don't know when was the last time she had washed. Yet that's where I went to look for drugs.

When I called her over and she asked me what I wanted all I said was the rock [crack] and when she asked me how much, all I did was show her the \$100s and she rushed me to her house where she proceeded to throw everyone she had in there out. Because immediately upon seeing all the money she started calling me her man. An addict always tries to take everything for themselves. Because of the disease, their main objective is to use drugs and people.

I sent the woman out with \$50 and she came right back with the drugs only because I had allowed her to see the other money. I used for a couple of hours, after the first hit the Lizard started looking like Pam Grier and I turned into Denzel Washington and every time this illusion began fading I would proceed to use again. After a couple of hours and a couple of \$100s, I decided to leave the house and go to the store to get some beer. The girl was frantic not wanting me to leave with the drugs and the money, so I told her I would return. I was so high I was just looking to use one drug to come down from another. As I was heading to the store to get the beer I felt a pain in my arm. I didn't pay any mind to it but the next thing I knew I felt a pain like I was being stabbed and I fell to the ground, fracturing my jaw, blood coming out of my mouth. I couldn't move, my lungs had collapsed. I tried to move my arm to take out the drugs from my pockets and the money, I was lying in a pool of blood one eye was lying inside of blood the other was the only one I could see out of, after I removed the drugs from my pockets I passed out.

I saw a white light and I felt like that was it for me and I asked God for help (the emergency God we always turn to in times of trouble).

Then I heard the beeping of the hospital machines and realized I was alive. The first thing I saw was an Indian doctor who asked me did I know where I was. I told him in a bed, and all I could ask was when I could go home. The doctor told me I was in serious condition I had been in a coma for about 7 days. This was my bottom and I knew God had saved me for a reason.

When I was released I went back to my room and packed up and moved to a shelter. I went back to the treatment center with the attitude anything I could do to stay clean I would. I had finally surrendered.

When I returned to the treatment facility my counselor told me he was aware of what had happened to me and welcomed me back. He said the important thing was that I came back. I couldn't even lift my head to meet my counselor's eyes, I felt so ashamed. All he asked me was what was I willing to do. And I answered "whatever." That's what I did I took the suggestions, I attended meetings, I read my basic text and I internalized the steps and traditions into my life, I stuck with the winners and I stay in the basics to remind myself that I'm only one step away from being right back where I came from.

I am grateful to my God for a new life and for people in the rooms for helping me stay clean. This is an indispensable program if you want to live, you must be honest with yourself and God in order to get the serenity you strive for in your life.

When sober, men and women look back on these experiences with shame and horror. Having sex with the lizard or being the lizard—the dehumanized, unwashed, drug-crazed, objectified or objectifying man or woman—is inconceivable to the sober mind, as are many things that

happen during active addiction.

At some point, as the alienation proceeds, the addict will be able to *hear* his own story. This is a particular kind of hearing, in which the listener comes in contact with the anguish caused by addiction. As this message sinks in, using and getting high become less desirable. The link between hearing one's story and accepting the anti-high message is clear in the following passage:

There was this bus driver who sat in the front and when he would ask me to sit in the front I thought he wanted me sexually and all it took was for me to see his uniform and figure he made money so I kept coming to the meeting to sit next to this man, until one day I heard my story and I heard if you don't pick it up you can't get high. [italics added]

Thus, the recovering person makes a cognitive shift from the logic of using to the logic of sobriety, which we might conceptualize in the following way: logic of using = "I got high and I did [unacceptable behavior], therefore I better get high again"; logic of sobriety = "I got high and I did [unacceptable behavior], therefore I should stop getting high." Over time, people investigate every area of life, searching all the ways in which they are using others. Payment of educational loans, as in this story, is an example of shifting to the logic of sobriety:

I owed \$12,000 dollars to Higher Education and my sponsor told me in order to really live this program you have to be a responsible individual so today I only owe \$3,000 and I'm working on the balance. I feel good about it.

*Sharing.* When people had some weeks or months of sobriety under their belts, they were expected to begin to share their own stories. One participant described this as, "...digging deep inside yourself, exposing all your demons, sharing your demons with someone else, asking God to remove them, making amends with friends and family members, and practicing how not to let your demons back into your life." The pain of digging into memories and the fear of revelation created an internal confrontation between denial and revelation. One person said,

My disease did not want me to reveal that I had been in jail for attempted homicide, and that I had sex with other men. My sponsor told me to sit across from an empty chair and speak to God and tell him the exact nature of my wrongs. I did and felt God there with me and a great weight lifted from my shoulders. I felt relieved that I no longer had anything to hide.

As people shared they got feedback from others. During feedback at the end of one meeting, two people responded to the message with the following comments:

I understand where you are coming from. At first I asked, "Why do you have to tell God, He already knows." Yet when I did confess my wrongs to God I felt so much better. Revealing things to another human being is necessary so that you don't stifle yourself in your recovery. Sharing with another person and with God is a form of freeing yourself. I found sharing myself with my sponsor to be a moving experience. We found that we had similar stories,

which helped my sponsor guide me more effectively.

*Trying new behaviors.* Although honesty was expected in NA meetings, there was a general understanding that a certain amount of clean time was needed before most addicted individuals could actually be honest. Most came to the rooms of NA attempting to put on a façade of self-control and independence. This façade was quickly shattered by either relapse or the unconditional love experienced in the fellowship. Both men and women related stories of having to make decisions to open their lives to others in the rooms and get the help they needed in order to stay sober. The following quote illustrates the importance of allowing others to help in the recovery process.

For the first 8 to 9 months of my recovery I would attend meetings but wouldn't get to know anyone. I finally started opening up. I got some good people in my life, and I'm thankful for that.

The NA room is thus a location for practicing new behaviors, such as asking for support. It is also a place to practice restraint, to resist using others.

*Homework.* A final tactic practiced in the rooms was assigning homework. The following interchange offers an insight into this process.

I had a little difficulty with the God concept. I called my sponsor and asked him "What does this mean, that I pray and God will remove all my character defects?" My sponsor told me "No, being aware of your character defects and not giving into them on a daily basis and asking God to guide you is how you practice the 6th step." In other words God doesn't make your character defects just disappear, you have to work at it. This is why they say the 6th and 7th steps are action steps.

This same man went on to give the following example of how he practiced steps 6 and 7 on a daily basis.

Every time I want to release frustration I go play basketball, yet I sometimes forget that there are a lot of different personalities out on that court and that I am not in control, so when I get angry I start cursing out the other ballplayers which sometimes leads to confrontations which could and mostly does lead to fights. I didn't like backing down and sometimes I would get into people's faces, people that were suppose to be my friends. After doing these things I would feel really lousy, and would have to get humble admit I was wrong and apologize. You see after you have been living the program and you are aware of the things you aren't suppose to do, when you act out they do not sit well with you. After getting into arguments with others, I would call my sponsor and most of the time get the answers I needed and have a chance to talk out my feelings. Being humble is being highly spiritual. Being humble is a gift in recovery, it means you are on the right road and when you practice spiritual principles the rewards you get are great.

### *Sex in the Context of "Living Life on Life's Terms"*

Everything that takes place in the rooms is designed to shift the addict away from the addiction scenario, in which using others is the order of the day. During the period of active addiction, sexuality can become a tool for the acquisition of drugs and a source of immediate gratification. At the extreme, sexuality might itself be seen as an impedi-

ment to using. One man described that he had stopped having women in his life, not even tricks, "because I couldn't give anyone anything, not even my mother if she asked. It was all about my using."

Recovery always included a reorganization of sex and relationships, accepting the need to "live life on life's terms." Responsibility, kindness, humility, and openness were all key features of this sober state. Restructuring sexual relationships depended on the accumulation of listening and sharing in the rooms. One man, expressing his gratitude for recovery, shared that he was glad to be "awake on a Saturday morning and not having to suck on something to suck on something else." Fieldnotes recorded this story as well:

All night I dreamed about sex and drugs, continuously I could see myself just getting high and having sex. Through my dreams I realized that sex is like a drug to me. It's another form of my addiction and I must talk about it to expose my disease. Sex and drugs went hand-in-hand for me, and today I don't want to return to that cycle. I'm going to make another meeting after this.

Homework and working the steps were also crucial parts of renegotiating the sexual self in the process of recovery. This lengthy but illuminating story was recorded in fieldnotes:

I felt like I had arrived home when I got here. I lived in abandoned buildings. I found a boyfriend who took care of me in these abandoned buildings, and proceeded to prostitute myself until I was performing oral sex for as little as 50 cents. All I knew was that I had to use. I even let somebody shit on me for money for crack. My disease told me if I stopped smoking I would die... Nothing stopped me from using. At the end I looked so bad truck drivers wouldn't stop for me. I didn't eat except from garbage cans because I couldn't spend money on anything but crack. The bones were sticking out of my neck and people started thinking I was a man. I used that to my advantage. I put socks in my groin area to act like I was a man and prostituted myself to gay men for anal sex.

When I left detox this was the first meeting I made. I sat up front and listened. Listening is a gift. It wasn't easy because my sick thinking was always working on me. I got a sponsor and a God of my understanding. In the beginning I only thought of getting with the men, but after being in the process for a little while, I noticed that the other women weren't doing this and I didn't have to either. I got some women in my life who gave me unconditional love and taught me how to wash everyday. I had a problem with hygiene: After so many years of not washing, I was comfortable that way. The women taught me how to be a lady, how to maintain good hygiene habits, and how to be loving and caring without sex.

In this story, the massive addiction-related alterations in sexuality, from participation in underpriced sex work to loss of gendered appearance, are slowly reworked in the context of meetings. Listening, alienation from her "sick thinking" (the logic of addiction), and relationships of unconditional love gave this woman space to revalue her self and reacquire fundamental skills like self-cleaning. Pretending to be a man in order to get money for drugs and learning to be a "lady" while sober are markers of the change in her perception of sexuality, which was over-identified as a tool for the acquisition of drugs but took on more complex meanings during recovery.

As suggested by this story, the reconstructed sexuality is based on interdependence and a search for goodness. The illusions described in the lizard story are replaced by the reality of quite ordinary people, who have to pay bills and would like some pleasure. One participant said,

I came to this meeting because my girlfriend has been guiding me in my recovery. Now I feel I want to make meetings by myself. I want to go out with a girl that still uses, because the sex is outrageous, but now I have a taste of what life is like without using. I want a drug free life. I may need additional therapy besides the rooms, but I'm going to continue making meetings.

The reconstruction of sexuality, however, is not a one-step process. The tensions of real relationships can be a trigger for relapse. One woman commented,

I'm on medication and ever since I started taking this medication I've been having these drug dreams that I'm shooting up. I've been drinking but not using cocaine for 5 years but because of a relationship with a married man, I went back to using. I have 22 days clean and I want to use something else.

In 12-step fellowship, people, places, and things that trigger relapse are given enormous attention. Whether it's the joy of uninhibited cheap sex or the pain of an unfulfilling relationship, sexuality is profoundly linked to relapse triggers, and this is especially true of crack addiction because the use culture involves a great deal of sexual activity. Sex in the context of "living life on life's terms" involves a gradual acceptance of both the pain and ordinariness of sober life. One person related the following:

I'm grateful to be in the fellowship again and I no longer have any more reservations. When I came to recovery I tried to recover from the waist up and I would pick up women who were still using to use them sexually. But this time I rode those feelings out and I feel that I understand that it's all about using for me. A drug, something, someone and I don't want to use today.

## DISCUSSION

Every day, and all around the world, ordinary spaces of all kinds are transformed into the "rooms" of NA. Barker's (1968) classic work on ecological psychology includes such gatherings under the rubric of standing patterns of behavior. Like a baseball game, a 12-step meeting has rules and players. It intersects with many other standing patterns of behavior that exist in society: it is not church, though it is spiritual; it is about drugs, though it does not endorse their excessive use. In the ecology of all such rule-bound gatherings, the rooms take a unique place.

In particular, we find that the rooms assume enormous importance in structuring the lives of people in recovery. This is not the kind of authority that Barker refers to when describing the power of the principal's office to run a school. Rather, the power of the rooms lies, we hypothesize, in the existential and spiritual domain. It is the ability to alter the logic of engagement with activities that go on outside of the rooms that gives NA meetings their power. People, places, and things are judged by a new

logic: "If I do/go/see \_\_\_\_, will I start using again? If yes, I won't do/go/see \_\_\_\_. If no, I will do/go/see \_\_\_\_." The shift to this new logic is, in turn, powered by the ability to experience the consequences of addiction. Remembering that under the influence of drugs one had sex with a "lizard" generates the motivation to stay sober. Recognizing the harms done to others supports the shift to engaging in new kinds of relationships, free of "using."

In the crack use culture, using sex to get drugs or, conversely, using desperate people for low-cost pleasure were the order of the day. In the rooms, recovering people learned a new sexuality. It is important to underscore that the rooms we observed were not concerned with sexuality as particular acts or particular partnerings. People affected by the sexuality of crack use culture in the Bronx have seen—and often done—everything. The recovery culture used that experience as the basis for new kinds of decisions that had to do with the nature of interpersonal connection rather than the "who" and the "what."

At the heart of the process of reconstructing sexuality was learning to discern the difference between sex as using and sex as not using. In general, the former consisted of intense but illusory pleasure, while the latter, however pleasant, was linked to real life. Thus, sex as not using was responsible to self and others. It was obvious from the many stories of struggle that this responsible sex was a difficult goal to attain, in no small part because it was sex in the context of a relationship to another human being. When the pain of the relationship was intolerable, the allure of drugs became greater. It was possible to flip back to the older logic, "That was yucky, I better get high." On the other hand, being free of the lizard inspired intense emotions, perhaps best captured in the phrase, "My name is \_\_\_ and I am a grateful recovering addict."

The rooms of NA, by creating the setting for a tightly scripted discourse on addiction, not only structure what transpires during the meeting but also organize the recovering person's lifeworld. Participation in the standing behavior pattern of NA influences the choice of all other people, places, and things. A remarkable corollary of this is that people can recover from addiction in neighborhoods like the South Bronx, where drug use is ubiquitous and the use culture permeates every aspect of daily life.

This analysis extends our understanding of sexuality and place by suggesting that the settings that rule the logic of sex will have the greatest influence on sexuality in all settings. Other behaviors may be similarly influenced. Although the stream of behavior is shaped by the succession of places in which the person finds himself, it may be very important to understand the deeper logic that determines entry into any particular behavior setting.

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