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Answer to the comments

**Discussing how the danger of losing radicalism, amongst AA and NA groups, can be avoided.**

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First, we would like to thank the colleagues who commented on our article, for their interesting observations and remarks concerning our analysis, referring to the danger which AA and NA groups confront: The loss of their radical character, acquired since they were first established. We think that the views expressed by the commentators expand even more the perspectives of a discussion, related to the 12-step self-help groups. Important issues have been pointed out, which we will briefly discuss below.

***The need of expanding the research agenda regarding AA and NA***

During mostly the last decade, an important number of research studies have been produced, regarding the 12-step self-help groups. Still, this number, in relation to the influential power of those groups on the lives of millions of addicted people worldwide, remains restricted. Thus, there is a strong argument on the necessity of a substantial expanding, concerning the research agenda of 12-step self-help groups. In this context, we fully agree along White's suggestions, regarding the research questions which must be added to the related future studies.

As far as the research field, referring to the 12-step self-help groups, is concerned, we would like to highlight the fact that, up to the present, related reviews indicate a substantial number of studies focused on AA groups only. We believe that the future research should focus on NA groups as well, in order to, possible differences between those two types of groups, could be explored. According to our opinion, there are two basic issues that support their possible differences and support the necessity for a

further research, which should be focused on NA groups. The first factor relates to the exceptionally rapid, worldwide development of NA groups, right after the 1980's decade, in comparison to, a gradual development of AA groups, since 1940 (NA, 2011; AA, 2011). We assume that the anarchic-wise and rapid development of any group, – similar to what happened to NA groups – might lead to misinterpretations and lack of comprehension of their collective history and traditions. As we argued in our article this phenomenon could, by its turn, contribute to a weakening of the groups' defensive mechanisms, against the cultural pressures they often experience. The second factor refers to, the very nature of addiction from illegal psychoactive substances, which, in most cases is connected to an equivalent lifestyle, associated with delinquent behavior and an accompanying subculture. In addition, the problem of illegal-drug addiction mostly occurs during an especially young age, which blocks the normal transition from adolescence to adult life, therefore leading to a void in psycho-emotional development. We think that, speaking of a self-help group formation, formatted by people who have already completed a life-circle and are now experiencing a coordinated life (as happens among AA members, most of the times), is one thing, and speaking of a self-help group, which is formatted by people who have never achieved a normal psychosocial adjustment (as it happens among NA members, most of the times), is different. Nevertheless most of the problems which are mentioned in our article, concern NA groups in most cases and in less cases AA groups.

We would like to pose one more issue to the current discussion about the research perspectives in the self-help groups' field: Are there more or less suitable research methodologies in social sciences in order to comprehend in depth the group's structure and functions? According to our opinion, based on our experience from the Self-help Promotion Program in Greece - which bases its function on the participatory action research – we believe that the study of self-help groups requires an invention of new research approaches for a better understanding of their nature. Besides, this is the reason why the discussion about the necessity of implementing alternative research methodologies in studying self-help groups is recently expanding all over an international level (Borkman, 2006-2007; Chesler, 1991; Isenberg et al., 2004). It's the very nature of self-help groups itself, which places the group members themselves, to the center of the action. This fact, as well as the experiential knowledge acquired by the members of those groups, should raise new questions for

the researchers. An alternative approach in studying self-help groups can't be restricted to the pursuit of a suitable methodology for analyzing the relative data. More specifically, using qualitative methods (apart from the quantitative ones) for interpreting the data is a useful but not efficient tool. More important, is to acknowledge the necessity of adopting more participative – along with the group members – research methods, such as a participatory action research. The mutual and horizontal collaboration along with the members, both for the planning, implementing and evaluating of the outcome, could lead social sciences to new perspectives and research questions.

***AA –NA groups and professional approaches: A historical relation, which, however, needs boundaries, in order to have a future perspective***

In many cases, we subscribe to Leighton's and White's observations about the positive aspects of the co-existence of self-help groups, along with professional treatment programs. For example, we think that Leighton's point- concerning professional programs which enhance the participation in self-help groups, could change the profile of their members- as very substantial. The inherent boundaries of those groups-regarding the process of a constant psychosocial support for the addict – particularly during the first stages of his/her quitting attempt – could be fulfilled by a peripheral professional intervention. Such an intervention favors people of a lower social capital, while it increases the possibility for them to remain and participate in the groups. In this way the profile range of the self help groups' membership is widened. Besides, this was one of the founding aims of the Self-Help Promotion Program (Lainas 2007; Zafiridis, 2001).

As the commentators of our article have also pointed out, the relation between self-help groups and professional programs, together with the emerging danger of both professionalization of their members and commercialization of the recovering process, could be a great threat for the future of those groups. What has also emerged from the comments on the present article is that the frequency, in which those phenomena occur, is related beyond the specific characteristics of the groups to the cultural and historical conditions of the time. However, this issue should certainly be put under consideration by the self-help groups (so that they can protect themselves from these phenomena), by professional associations of specialists and by the addiction treatment policy makers. We believe that, not defining with clarity, the

context in which self-help groups and professionals can meet and collaborate with each other, could contaminate the message to a great extent as long as the dynamics of the anonymous movement.

***Are AA and NA groups trapped in their own successful development? Threats and perspectives regarding the 12-step self-help groups' turning point***

It's an undoubted fact that the self-help groups (initially AA, NA follows), have affected the lives of millions of addicts, as well as the field experts' notions of the nature and the treatment of addiction. Also, White's historically confirmed position that we should not underestimate the endurance of both AA and NA movements is completely correct. However, we believe that, particularly at the present time, the threat for losing their radicalism is emerging, exactly because of their successful development, in correlation with the social pressure they confront, due to the constantly increasing number of addicted people.

In several countries, AA groups are one of the most – if not the most – preferable choice for the treatment of addiction. The social representation of their success and also the legitimatization in the public's conscience as a reliable help-providing setting, could, in our opinion, cause several dysfunctions to everyday practice. These dysfunctions relate to an emerging number of new members, which make their proper welcoming and support by the oldest members impossible. They also relate to the fact that many of the new members have little or no motivation at all, due to their court-ordered non-voluntary participation. The constantly increasing phenomenon of the professionalization of many 12-step group members which is also related with the legitimatization of these groups in public's conscience, could, as we already argued, contribute to a creation of several dysfunctions. Finally, a less obvious consequence of the successful development of self-help groups, diachronically, is an effect on their members' psyche, to experience the existence of the groups as organizations which provide addiction treatment services instead of settings which enhance personal growth through mutual support.

The sure thing is that the future of these groups is in the hands of the groups themselves. This is something we can all agree on. We believe that an in-depth account of the factors that have all these years contributed to the successful development of the 12-step groups and an emphasis on the principles and the values that have formed the setting of 12-step traditions, as well as on the lessons that we can

learn from the very history of these groups, is the most reliable path in order to be possible for them to continue their course, as a significantly important social movement in the history.

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