Governing wayward consumers: Self-change and recovery in debtors anonymous

Adam Morenberg, University of South Florida

Graduation Year
2004

Document Type
Thesis

Degree
M.A.

Degree Granting Department
Sociology

Major Professor
Laurel Graham.

Keywords
narrative, governmentality, self-help, support group, 12-step

Abstract
Previous research on self-change in support groups has focused on the ways individuals accomplish self-change in the "local cultures" of the support group settings. This ethnographic study of the 12-step self-help group Debtors Anonymous (DA) departs from that tradition by focusing on the ways that DA members achieve self-change by employing "recovery" strategies learned from the group in their everyday lives. DA members enter the group during financial crises, and often believe they cannot manage their own personal finances. By learning techniques of financial management taught by the group, DA members gradually gain "sobriety" and financial management skills. This analysis highlights the important role played by various technologies of self-construction in DA members' recovery efforts.

Drawing on narrative and governmentality theories, this analysis shows how DA members accomplish self-change by learning to become self-monitoring and self-restrained financial managers and consumers.

Scholar Commons Citation
Morenberg, Adam, "Governing wayward consumers: Self-change and recovery in debtors anonymous" (2004). Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/1168

Joining Debtors Anonymous, a 12-step, self-help fellowship based on Alcoholics Anonymous, helped her turn things around, she says. Like other members of Debtors Anonymous in this story, Samantha follows group guidelines by using only her first name in the media. "If I debt, I die," she tells fellow debtors at a meeting in Lake Forest, "because if I debt, it just spirals me down into being homeless again." Like members of Alcoholics, Narcotics, Smokers, Gamblers and Overeaters Anonymous, compulsive debtors, as they call themselves, say they practice the destructive behavior.