Sheffield Hallam University

Appreciative inquiry as a method of transforming identity and power in Pakistani women

DUNCAN, Graham and RIDLEY-DUFF, Rory <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5560-6312>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

https://shura.shu.ac.uk/7453/

This document is the

Citation:

DUNCAN, Graham and RIDLEY-DUFF, Rory (2013). Appreciative inquiry as a method of transforming identity and power in Pakistani women. In: Appreciative Inquiry: a method of working with disadvantaged people, St Mary's Church, 19th March, 2 - 4.30. (Unpublished) [Conference or Workshop Item]

Copyright and re-use policy

See http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html

Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive
http://shura.shu.ac.uk

Appreciative Inquiry as a method of transforming identity and power in Pakistani women

Graham Duncan and Rory Ridley-Duff

Corresponding Author:

graham.duncan@stmarys-church.co.uk

St. MARY'S

Sheffield Hallam University

Appreciative Inquiry as a method of transforming identity and power in Pakistani women

Abstract

This paper describes a three-year action research project that used Appreciative Inquiry to work with marginalised Pakistani women living in Sheffield. The research encountered many of the difficulties and dilemmas that have been previously identified in the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry. However it was also successful in bringing about a significant transformation in the ability of participants to develop critical thinking; enabling them to subvert and challenge the identities that had been constructed for them by sources of power within their community and culture. The paper describes the innovative application of Appreciative Inquiry whilst bringing a new theoretical perspective which responds to the need for Appreciative Inquiry to critically address issues of power as it plays out in the life of a community.

Key words: Appreciative Inquiry, Critical Theory, Power, Transformation, Culture, Women.

Introduction

Pakistani women are among the most excluded in society. Within this group new migrants to the UK who come for marriage are particularly disadvantaged. There is substantial evidence that their financial, emotional and mental well-being is worse than women from any other ethnic group (Platt, 2007; Anand & Cochrane, 2005; Anandi & Platt, 2011). St Mary's Community Centre is an organisation that has worked closely with this group for over ten years, employing a small team of Pakistani community development workers who live locally.

We believed that this persistent disadvantage may be caused at least in part by social and cultural factors: the "critical meso" level identified by Aziz, Shams and Khan (2011) as the arena of community and social power that impedes the empowerment of women in Pakistan despite government policy efforts to bring greater equality. We wanted to research and understand how these factors are present in the UK Pakistani community but were concerned that the process of this research should also have tangible benefits for participants (Reason 1999). The Pakistani community are well aware of their disadvantaged situation and the women who would be the main participants of research are particularly aware of their low status. We were concerned that a research methodology that focussed on need and diminishment would only reinforce these feelings within the community (Ecclestone, 2004) and so undermine this key requirement of Action Research

Therefore we chose Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) as a research methodology that would yield the detailed information about the social and cultural meso level whilst also building the capacity of people in the community. Appreciative Inquiry is an asset based approach which uses structured conversations to discover "life giving properties", particularly the strengths and competences of individuals (or groups of individuals) that have been overlooked by the dominant deficit model which reinforces problems and dysfunction (Cooperider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008).

This paper describes how Appreciative Inquiry enabled the development of a new and emancipatory consciousness (Freire, 1968) amongst people who believed that they were incapable of learning. Central to this transformation was the telling of untold stories which created a new level of critical consciousness and power within the group. The study worked with 39 Pakistani women over an 18 month period. The paper outlines the processes that researchers went through to adapt and contextualise AI as an approach and how the method enabled a group of disadvantaged women to think critically and creatively about their identities and about power. The study suggests links to Transformative Learning (Mezirow 1981) and also responds to Grant and Humphries (2006) work on Critical Appreciative Processes.

Appreciative Inquiry as a Philosophy for Action Research

Appreciative Inquiry is not so much a research methodology, as an underpinning philosophy: an orientation to research and to engaging with individuals and organisations (Bushe, 2012). It has its origins in organisational development and renewal (for example Cooperider, Whitney and & Stavros, 2008; Lewis, Passmore and Cantore, 2008) and is based on the social constructionist premise that the sort of attention you give to a question determines what you find (for example Burr, 2003). Therefore Appreciative Inquiry focuses attention on "the best of what is", or the "life giving properties" within social systems, operating from the premise that solutions are already within organisations, teams, individuals or communities and will be discovered if the right attention is given.

One of the key claims made for Appreciative Inquiry is that it differs from other organisational development methodologies because it creates new **thought processes** and **transforms systems**, whereas traditional methods seek merely to create new behaviour whilst keeping the existing system intact (Bushe & Kassim, 2005). The claim that Appreciative Inquiry can transform social systems is clearly of interest to researchers looking to find ways of addressing the meso level systemic disadvantage experienced by Pakistani women.

Bushe (2012) comments that as more books have been written about Appreciative Inquiry it has had the effect of taking a "profound philosophical perspective" and turning it into a series of simplistic steps designed to find "the positive". He outlines three waves of criticism that have been directed at Appreciative Inquiry, primarily because its focus on finding "the positive" means that it is naïve about power. In a previous issue of this journal Grant and Humphries (2006) also argue that Appreciative Inquiry must take a more critical account of wider societal influences and advocate the development of a bridge between AI and critical theory to create what they term "critical appreciative processes".

The interaction of Appreciative Inquiry and power is a key theme of this paper and so we first discuss the basis on which we conceptualised and worked with issues of power to develop a critical application of AI that is closer to its philosophical underpinnings and responds to the criticisms outlined above. Foucault (1975, 1976) argues that power is experienced at all levels of society and through every human interaction. There is nothing that can be done to eliminate or negate the influence of power other than to be aware of it and adapt appropriate strategies. In particular he discusses the way in which individuals encounter and are shaped by power exercised in communities through the process of surveillance as the actions/movements of individuals are monitored by the community and then judged. After a while, Foucault maintains, the surveillance/judgement process becomes internalised and shapes consciousness so that compliance need no longer be enforced physically. Freire (1968) takes a similar view and discusses the processes by which the demands of the oppressor are internalised by the oppressed who become willing subjects of the system that is controlling them.

Habermas (1987) offers a different image of power - that of colonisation. Just as an imperial power controls subjects by invading and replacing their language and world view, so the system colonises the lifeworld of individuals, preventing the lifeworld from renewal and gradually taking it over. However Habermas' view of power also offers philosophical support for AI (Grant, 2007;

Grant & Humphries, 2006). He is more optimistic than Foucault that individuals can overcome the limiting effects of power through carefully constructed dialogue which he calls Communicative Action. However for Habermas such Communicative Action is an ideal state that can only take place when the two interlocutors treat each other as equals: something that is rare in reality.

Habermas and Hannah Arendt influenced each other's thinking about the way in which the construction of dialogue can form a response to power (d'Entreves, 2006). Arendt concentrated on what happens when people come together to share the stories of their lives: a process emerges that she terms Narrative Action (Benhabib, 1996). For Arendt, Narrative Action shapes the consciousness and identity of the story-teller, she argues that the identity of a person "becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life" (Benhabib, 1996 p. 127). The work of Narrative Action is the construction of identity and in this process power is created. Arendt writes that this power:

> "springs up between people when ….. word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities"
>
> (Arendt, 1958, p. 200).

Thus story-telling creates a form of power and identity that resists the colonising influence of the dominant narrative. In Narrative Action the powerless begin to define who they are and resist subjugating definitions of "who one is". Such story telling is defined as action because it is a process of invention, of construction that takes place when people form a "web of relationships and enacted stories" (Benhabib, 1996, p.125).

Arendt also argues that a selective approach to the past is a necessary response to power, contending that "it is necessary to redeem from the past those moments worth preserving, to save those fragments from past treasures that are significant for us. Only by means of this critical reappropriation can we discover the past anew, endow it with relevance and meaning for the present, and make it a source of inspiration for the future" (d'Entreves, 2006). There are clear parallels

between this “critical reappropriation” of the past and the emphasis of Appreciative Inquiry on selecting “life giving properties” as a topic of Inquiry.

However a key practical question arising from Arendt’s work is how such a “critical reappropriation” of the past may be developed in people who are oppressed. Many practitioners find it difficult to apply the principles of Critical Theory to the reality of the lives of the people who need it. Wiggins (2011) discusses the gap between critical theory and popular education, and particularly the inaccessibility of critical theory to ordinary people. Kincheloe (2008) and Taylor (2009) contribute to this debate by developing the epistemological case for a holistic and accessible approach to critical reflection: one which is less reliant on rational and analytical discourse and which emphasises affective and relational ways of knowing. Taylor asserts that critical reflection is “often prompted in response to an awareness of conflicting thoughts, feelings and actions [which] at times can lead to perspective transformation” (p. 9).

Kincheloe (2008) draws on the work of Dewey (1916) and Gramsci (1988) to define a “critical complex epistemology” based on the understanding that both the logical and emotional dimensions of the human mind are used to produce new and critical knowledge, Indeed he argues that people cannot “know” without feeling, and that therefore critical scholars must engage with the emotions of the people that they want to help. Therefore Taylor’s and Kinchloe’s work speaks to the dilemma posed by Wiggins (2011) and aligns with Arendt in setting critical reflection as an outcome of authentic and emotionally engaged dialogue which is rooted in relationships

The rest of this paper explores the steps by which women experienced a transformation of their understanding of power and identity through engagement in Appreciative Inquiry. It addresses the need to link critical theory and AI identified by Grant and Humphries (2006) and suggests future work in the application of Appreciative Inquiry.

Method

In recent issues of this journal van der Meulen (2011) and Letiecq and Schmalzbauer (2012) discuss the respective advantages and disadvantages of being insider or outsider researchers when attempting to engage with hard-to-reach groups of people. It is clear that if research is to reflect the reality of the subjects then some insider positioning is important, partly to enable the development of trust and partly to ensure that a reflection of reality is given that resonates with participants

Therefore the research team was composed of six women recruited from the local Pakistani community. The researchers all had similar backgrounds, having experienced arranged marriage at a young age. For most this had prevented Further Education because their arranged marriages took precedence. Only one had managed to negotiate the delay of her marriage until she completed Higher Education.

All the researchers had a deep frustration with the way in which the Pakistani community was limited by cultural and religious factors. They had a negative view of the culture and a trait-based understanding of women in it. It was important that such attitudes and motivations were exposed to reflection and so the whole research team undertook four days of research training delivered by Rory Ridley-Duff our research partner at Sheffield Hallam University. This training was vital in enabling the research team to be close enough to the participants to interpret their voice with authenticity, but sufficiently distant to reflect critically on findings (Bohman, 2012).

The research participants were women from the Pakistani community who had moved to the UK in order to be married. The majority had not met their husband (or only known him for a few days) before coming to Sheffield. All had come from rural areas of Pakistan, had received very little formal education and their lives had been taken up with domestic duties. They spoke very little English, even after years in the UK. They dressed traditionally and were conservative in their lifestyles. Participants were invited to join the research and were known to St Mary's because they attended

English classes or were recruited through playground contacts. The participants were informed as to the purpose of the research and were each offered a £25 gift voucher for completing the research.

The data gathering was focussed around a series of activities that were designed to generate positive and productive conversations. The precise content of the session changed slightly from cycle to cycle, but followed roughly the following pattern. The sessions were 3 hours long, with lunch provided. This required considerable commitment from participants. However the energy and level of participation was always very high. The women were completely unfamiliar with any sort of group work and so initial sessions were fairly slow and hesitant and activities took a lot longer than the research team had anticipated.

The research activities and their theoretical rationale are described Table 1.

Table 1 - Activities and Theoretical Rationale

Activity	**Purpose and Impact**	**Theoretical basis**
Setting ground rules. In week 1 these were suggested by researchers. In future weeks increasing ownership was given to participants	To reinforce the need for confidentiality and create a context of trust in the group. The ground rules were rehearsed each week and were a crucial enabler, creating a different space free from the gossip and judgement which have a powerful impact within the community.	Aziz et al (2011) affirm the importance of constructing a separate space within which dialogue can occur.
Ice breakers	To help establish trusting relationships within the group. The icebreakers were very important and were planned so that levels of disclosure increased as weeks went on. For example early icebreakers would be name games or group tasks. Later ice breakers may involve picking a question from a hat which required more personal disclosure.	Wiggins (2011) notes that icebreakers are important because “laughing and acting “childlike” serves to equalise differential levels of power between participants” (p. 42).

Activity	Purpose and Impact	Theoretical basis
Family tree	Drawing a family tree and representing each character through drawings, or cutting pictures out of magazines. Group discussion. This is important to set out the people who set the social context. It gives the women the chance to define the identities of others. It was often humorous as women had the chance to construct slightly subversive identities of their family (e.g. sticking a "For Sale" sign on the image of their husband).	Foucault (1975, 1984) notes that activities which involve "transgressing" are an important response to power.
River of Life And group discussions	Participants constructed a narrative of their life using the image of a river winding its way through fertile fields, rapids and rocks, shallows and so on. Participants were encouraged to think of the times of happiness, strength and resilience. Researchers also constructed their own river of life alongside the women, to model disclosure and to create an equality and openness with the women. This was a crucial aspect. Once the narratives were constructed they were shared with the group. The women found this activity challenging, but extremely rewarding. There was a step change in trust and disclosure and high emotional content.	Enabling participants to define their own identities to speak with their own voice about their lives, for the first time ever. The emotional biographical nature of the stories created an environment for critical thinking (Taylor, 2009) and for critical complex epistemology (Kinchloe, 2008).
The Hot Seat	Participants took turns to sit in the hot seat and then the group was allowed to ask them 3 questions about their life story. The participants learned how to ask questions that probed below the surface.	Disclosure creates trust.

Activity	Purpose and Impact	Theoretical basis
Arshi's story	A fictional case study of a Pakistani women who had just been married and arrived in Sheffield and was isolated, controlled and depressed. The participants were encouraged to discuss how they could respond to this situation. This exercise created a great deal of energy and insight and allowed the women to engage in a more objective power analysis, contributing to the development of their critical thinking.	Kincheloe (2008) emphasises the need to draw on emotions, passions and life experiences to enable the development of critical thinking.

The sessions (and subsequent 1-1 interviews) were all conducted in Urdu by the researchers. Extensive field notes were taken of the AI sessions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Data was entered into "Nvivo 8" software.

This information was supplemented by Action Learning sets facilitated by the research partner and which gave researchers an opportunity to explore both their practice and their feelings. This was an important aspect of keeping the right distance with participants. These sessions were taped and transcribed. Finally the research partner conducted probing interviews with each member of the research team to explore their learning and reflections. These interviews were also taped and transcribed.

Coding was conducted concurrently with data collection using Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) so that concept development was firmly located in the empirical data and use of academic literature was limited to facilitating interpretation of the concepts that emerged during field work. Open coding was carried our concurrently with data collection. Axial coding to identify as common themes and concepts was carried out once data collection was completed.

Results and Discussion

At an early stage contradictions and problems started to emerge from the methodology adopted. The problems were largely because we were naïve about the criticisms of AI outlined above and focussed too closely on trying to find "the positive". At the beginning of the research researchers conscientiously tried to create and maintain a 'positive' tone in the facilitation of discussions and tone of the interviews. If the women's stories were tinged with hardship and 'negativity' researchers would gently steer them back to the 'positive' in their situation, or open up a conversations that might lead in a more 'positive' direction. The researchers found this difficult and unnatural. It was intrusive to intervene when stories recalled painful emotions. This difficulty is consistent with the experience of other practitioners who describe similar problems in adopting a 'positive' approach to AI (Bushe, 2007; Grant & Humphries, 2006).

The discomfort with 'pure' AI methodology came to a head during a review of stories emerging from the first group of women. It was clear that many were suffering considerable distress. This was the first time that they had been able to tell their story. Most had experienced arranged marriages in which they had little choice about if, and who, they would marry. Some had moved to Sheffield to live with families who did not want them to be there. Women spoke of being completely isolated in households where no-one would speak to them, or where their family spoke English knowing that they could not understand. They gave accounts of disinterested or absent husbands, of in-laws who expected them to do all domestic work. They spoke of loneliness and boredom and a complete sense of dislocation from all that was familiar to them. These were stories that the researchers had never heard before, despite the fact that they too were embedded in the community. Their eyes were opened to hidden powerlessness of newly arrived migrant women whose stories were marginalised and discounted in the dominant discourse of the community. Everyone was shocked by the stories that emerged.

These stories forced us back to question our methodological assumptions. We realised that constructing a strengths-based discourse which was insufficiently cognisant of the way that power operated in the lives of the women was counter-productive. Indeed we realised that by privileging a positive and strength based narrative we may inadvertently be contributing to the power imbalance by imposing a definition of what is "positive" (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004) and preventing the women from understanding the way in which their lives were shaped by the discourses and power interests of others.

Therefore, whilst we continued with using the exercises to generate narratives, the research team allowed the narratives to develop more naturally. They still encouraged people to discover strength and competence, but these ideas were not privileged at the expense of the untold stories. While this shift in approach responded to the need to respect the integrity of the participants' experience, it led us to a nagging worry that we had abandoned our methodology at an early stage. But there seemed to be no choice: even if we had decided to abandon AI and adopt a purely critical approach we did not know how to. So we continued with the AI, but reduced our insistence on generating only positive stories.

The Emergence of Transforming Stories

Once the data collection phase was completed the open codes were worked into axial codes which became the basis of our theory generation. It was during this phrase of data analysis that the fog began to clear as we started to see patterns in the data that surprised us: clear evidence that participating in the AI sessions had had a transformational impact on the women

It was immediately apparent that Appreciative Inquiry was a successful technique in enabling a fairly reticent group of people to generate a rich, fine-grained and emotionally textured account of life for migrant women in the local Pakistani community. These accounts gave the research team new knowledge and understanding, demonstrating how community power defined the women's identity from a number of dimensions. The most defining event was marriage, after which the

women left their family and country and journeyed to England to live with a person and a family they barely knew. Yet this life-changing event was totally driven by the power of others. The following account was not untypical:

> "I live in a village in Pakistan. We didn't know this family at all. My cousin met them somewhere and they started to say that they are looking for a marriage proposal. My cousin told them about us and they came to visit. We 5 sisters did not know anything about this, we just made food for them and when they left they said to my parents that they would want to marry from here. I guess my parents knew why they had come. They came again the next day and formalised the marriage. Within 7 days all the marriage rituals had happened and I was married and taken to their house. My husband stayed for further 8 days then returned saying he had to get back to work."

This account illustrates how the whole process of arranged marriage creates and controls the identity of a woman, a process that continues as the women settle into their new families. They find that all the major decisions about their lives are made by their in-laws, and that they experience discrimination within the community. They are denied the freedoms that women born in the UK are able to enjoy. This subordinate identity becomes internalised, as the following spontaneous statement from a woman in our study articulates:

> "We women do not trust ourselves: we don't trust our own abilities. That's the reason we do not move forwards. If we are strong then it is our confidence that lets us down. We are all like dead people."

This is further highlighted in an extract from a researcher field note:

> "An informal discussion began about why Pakistani women are the least likely to learn English. Sania stated that 'there is nothing in our heads,' Shanaz added 'Pakistanis are always at the bottom'.

AI Setting a New Context

This level of story-telling and of disclosure between the women was a completely new experience for them. It was clear that Appreciative Inquiry set a unique emotional context that enabled the emergence of conversations that were utterly different from any that the women had in their everyday life. Through these conversations they started to generate new and fresh narratives: stories that had never been articulated, never spoken and therefore never subject to reflection or the possibility of learning from them.

Participant 1

"Yes, I have heard a lot of gossip, but you never know how truthful that is. In AI, we were actually honest about our situations and that created a bond that allowed us to speak of our issues without the fear of it going back into the community or back to your own household. At first I thought that I was all alone in my situation and was very scared to talk to anyone about it. But being in AI has helped me realise that "we are all in the same boat".

Participant 2

"I have realised that my story is not much different to the ladies attending AI. We are all in the same boat of dependency when we come here. I have never heard women speak like this before. The conversations we have in AI are more focused."

As the women shared in story telling a new self-understanding began to emerge and they began to recognise and to challenge the identities that had been given to them.

Participant interview

"For the first time I recognised my identity as Shanaz and I understood that I am a person in my own right. Before I was always "wife" or "mum" or "big sister". This was the first time that I was identified by my name."

The researchers also noted a change in the women's self-identities

Researcher: "I think Nasia said something about how the AI has not just had an effect on her learning, but also her personality. Let me see if I wrote that down…she said "It's made a difference on both my English and my personality. It's given me peace, and hope as well."

Interviewer: "Is she telling you what you want to hear?"

Researcher: "I think that is genuine…because a lot of people don't comment on their personality, but she did. I think that felt quite genuine."

As the women began to construct more resistant identities they also started to tentatively develop a critical view of power, and questioned whether their future had to be determined by others. The development of an identity that resists power resonates strongly with Arendt's contention that an understanding of "who one is" becomes tangible in Narrative Action, which creates a form of power. (Benhabib, 1996). This transformation is illustrated in the following three interview extracts:

Participant 1

"I feel that I have gained more confidence in myself. I feel ready to change my situation and am now a little more decisive in what I want from life."

Participant 2

"I now know that slowly I can achieve what I want. By seeing others, their responses to problems, their mannerisms, their problems, their way of finding solutions - all this has helped me look at my life and encouraged me to do something positive about my issues."

Participant 3

"I used to be very scared of everything and everybody before. But not anymore: I do not feel the same fear."

Story Telling as a Critical Act

Without exception, the women said that the most powerful aspect of the research was sharing and discussing their stories in an environment that felt safe and confidential. The atmosphere in the story telling sessions was emotionally charged and often accompanied by tears. As they realised that they were not alone, they started to examine, and in some cases to change, their perspective on fundamental issues such as identity and power. What does AI do that that might explain this change?

Van der Haar & Hosking (2004) observe that Appreciative Inquiry invites a "particular way of participating." We would suggest that the "particular" nature of AI is its subversive premise that

strength, competence and possibility reside in the most unlikely people, even those whose identity is impoverished by the power which operates at the "critical meso" level of the community.

From a Foucauldian perspective, AI is an act of transgression (Foucault, 1977, 1984): an act which crosses the limits set by power and which does things differently. Much of what we did through AI was to do things differently, to create a space, a context of trust and of equal relationships where stories could be told for the first time. The space created by the stories enabled the women to have subversive conversations and to be playful with the identity of those who are dominant (for example sticking a "for-sale" sign on the image of their husband and laughing about it). Such acts of transgression demonstrate that things can be done differently and contribute to the formation of a new "knowledge-power constellation".

The stories that emerged from our Appreciative Inquiry were not all "positive" but they resonated powerfully with the life experiences of the participants. They were all "possibility-full" (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004, p. 10) because they engaged with the things that really mattered to the participants – their sense of their own identity. Kinchloe (2008) draws on Gramsci (1988) to argue that an effective critical pedagogy must have such emotional content because emotional "knowing" subverts dominant ideological forces which emphasise the importance of keeping things objective and logical. From this perspective the Appreciative Inquiry conducted in this study contributed to the development of a "critical complex epistemology" (Kinchloe, 2008) and also responds to Grant and Humphries (2006) call for a wider definition of "appreciation" (p. 404).

The other transgressive act that AI enables is the development of subversive social relations. The women formed relationships with each other and with the research assistants which cut across perceived barriers of class or status. Through the sharing of untold stories power differentials were minimised as the following extract from a participant interview illustrates.

> "In AI, we were actually honest about our situations and that created a bond that allowed us to speak of our issues without the fear of it going back into the community or back to your own household ….. [it] helped me realise that 'we are all in the same boat'."

Youngman (1986) argues that hegemony arises from social relations and not just intellectual ideas. Therefore story telling which helps people to reconceptualise their social relations will enable people to develop a more critical view of their situation and therefore to resist the colonising influence of meso-level power. The importance of relationships is highlighted by Arendt's assertion that Narrative Action occurs through a "web of relationships" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 125). This view is reinforced by Taylor (2009) who recognises that critical reflection is not an abstract exercise but one which is grounded in relationships: "Without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the genuine discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection" (p.13).

Therefore we argue that Appreciative Inquiry can include a strong critical element if it is conducted in a context where the emotional and relational aspects of its practice promote authentic dialogue and reflection. It is this holistic approach, weaving together ideas, emotions and relationships, discovering and "appreciating" the hidden stories, allowing identities to emerge through acts of transgression, that can give AI its ability to generate a critical understanding and response to power relationships within the community:

Conclusions and Implications

We would suggest that many of the problems with Appreciative Inquiry result from a simplified methodology that has been written in a large number of handbooks and manuals (Bushe, 2012). In this paper we have attempted to counter this by strengthening its philosophical underpinnings and by releasing the practice of AI from a rigid adherence to the "positive", seeking instead to find the "possibility full" (van der Haar & Hosking 2004).

Our experience is that in a complex situation of human dynamics and community power AI makes an effective contribution to the development of critical thinking and action. Although the approach to AI described in this paper was not simplistic, it nevertheless offers an accessible and engaging method of bridging the gap between critical theory as advocated by scholars and the

difficulties of critical practice on the ground: the gap between "what we must do" and "how to do it" identified by Wiggins (2011), Bushe (2012) and Grant & Humphries (2006). We believe therefore that Appreciative Inquiry may have a widespread application to practitioners working in disadvantaged communities as it is effective in creating generative themes that disrupt self-limiting and "taken for granted" assumptions (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

Framing AI in the context of Arendt's work on Narrative Action focuses the practice on creating authentic connections between individuals, and then trusting the process of co-production and discovery to create power and identity: genuine co-production. In this way AI is released from slavish adherence to a simplistic methodology and responds to the need to develop Critical Appreciative Processes advanced by Grant and Humphries (2006).

The relevance of this study is not only to contribute to debates about critical pedagogy (for example Kincheloe, 2008), it also builds on Mezirow (for example 1978, 1981, 2009) and Taylor's (2009) work on Transformative Learning which enables people to change their "frame of reference". Along with journaling and coaching approaches, such as those adopted by Meyer (2009), Appreciative Inquiry that involves the 'appreciation' of emotional pain as the first step in learning has a key role to play in work with communities whose well-being has been compromised by deep-rooted marginalisation. This paper also therefore suggests links between Appreciative Inquiry and Transformative Learning and points to topics for further research.

Acknowledgements: This research has been funded by a Big Lottery Research Grant (No: C756A981). We would also like to thank the participants of the SCUTREA Conference 2012, The NCVO Research Conference 2012, and the International Social Innovation Conference 2012, for feedback on earlier drafts and papers related to this research project.

References

Anand, S. and Cochrane, R. (2005) "The Mental Health Status of South Asian Women in Britain: A Review of the UK Literature", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 17, 195-213.

Anandi, A. and Platt, L. (2011) *Ethnic Minority Women's Poverty and Economic Well-Being,* Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/research/ethnic-minority-women-poverty/, accessed 27th April 2012.

Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aziz, A., Shams, M. and Khan, K. (2011) "Participatory Action Research as the process for women's empowerment", *Action Research*, 9(3), 303-323

Benhabib, S. (1996) *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Bohman, J. (2012), "Critical Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/critical-theory/, accessed 27th April 2012.

Bushe, G. (2007) "Appreciative Inquiry is not (just) about the positive", *OD Practitioner*, 39(4), 30-35.

Bushe, G. (2012) "Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry: History, Criticism and Potential" *AI Practitioner,* 14 (1), 8-21.

Bushe, G. and Kassim, A. (2005) "When is Appreciative Inquiry Transformational?: a meta case analysis" *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science,* 41, 161-181.

Burr, V. (2003), *Social Constructionism,* London: Routledge.

Cooperider D.L., Whitney, D. and Stavros, J.M. (2008) *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, 2nd Edition, Brunswick Crown Custom Publishing.

Cooperider, D. and Srivastva, S. (1987) "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life", *Research in Organizational Change and Development,* 1, 129-169.

d'Entreves, M. P. (2006) "Hannah Arendt", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/arendt/, access 27th April 2012.

Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and Education.* New York: Free Press

Ecclestone, K. (2004) "Therapeutic stories in adult education: the demoralization of critical pedagogy" *paper to SCUTREA Conference*, Sheffield, 6th-8th July.

Foucault, M. (1975) *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon, 1977.

Foucault, M. (1976) *The History of Sexuality (Vol 1): The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1977) 'A preface to transgression' in D.F. Bouchard (ed.). Language, Counter-Memory: Selected Essays and an Interview by Michael Foucault, Practice, New York: Cornell Paperbacks, pp. 29-50

Foucault, M. (1984) 'What is Enlightenment?' in P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon.

Freire, P. (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Republished by Continuum, 2000.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, New York: Adine.

Gramsci, A (1988) *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, D. Forgacs (ed) New York: Schocken Books.

Grant, S. (2007) "Learning through 'being' and 'doing'", *Action Research*, 5(3): 265-274.

Grant, S. and Humphries, M. (2006) "Critical Evaluation of Appreciative Inquiry: bridging an apparent paradox." *Action Research*, 4(4), 401-418.

Habermas, J. (1987) *Theory of Communicative Action*, Boston: Beacon, translated by T. McCarthy, cited by Bohman, J. and Rehg, W. (2011) "Jürgen Habermas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/habermas/, accessed 27th April 2012.

Kinchloe, J. (2008) *Knowledge and Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction* Springer Verlag.

Letiecq, B. and Schmalzbauer, L. (2012) "Community-based participatory research with Mexican migrants in a new rural destination: A good fit?", *Action Research*, 10, 244-259

Lewis, S., Passmore, J. and Cantore, S. (2008), *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management*, London: Kogan Page.

Meyer, S. (2009) *"Promoting personal empowerment with women in East Harlem through journaling and coaching*", in Mezirow, J. and Taylor, E. (eds) *Transformative Learning in Practice*, Jossey-Bass, Wiley.

Mezirow, J. (1978) 'Perspective Transformation', *Adult Learning*, 28, 100-110.

Mezirow, J. (1981) “A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education”, *Adult Education*, 32(1): 3-24.

Mezirow, J. (2009) “Transformative Learning Theory” in Mezirow, J. and Taylor, E. (eds) *Transformative Learning in Practice*, Jossey-Bass, Wiley.

Platt, L. (2007) *Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Policy Press.

Reason, P. (1999) “Integrating action and reflection through co-operative inquiry, *Management Learning*, 30(2), 207-226.

Taylor, E. (2009) “Fostering Transformative Learning” in Mezirow, J. and Taylor, E. (eds) *Transformative Learning in Practice*, Jossey-Bass, Wiley.

van der Haar, D. and Hosking, D. (2004) “Evaluating Appreciative Inquiry: A Relational Constructionist Perspective”, *Human Relations*, 57(8): 1017-1036.

van der Meulen, E. (2011) “Action research with sex workers: Dismantling barriers and building bridges”, *Action Research*, 9, 370-384.

Wiggins, N. (2011) “Critical pedagogy and popular education: towards a unity of theory and practice”, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 43(1), 34-49.

Youngman, F. (1986) *Adult education and socialist pedagogy*. London: Croom Helm.