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### **Citation:**

RIDLEY-DUFF, Rory and DUNCAN, Graham (2013). Critical appreciative processes as a methodology for studying the production of consciousness. In: Appreciative Inquiry: a method of working with disadvantaged people, St Mary's Community Centre, 17th March 2013. (Unpublished) [Conference or Workshop Item]

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# **Critical appreciative processes as a methodology for studying the production of consciousness**

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# **Critical appreciative processes as a methodology for studying the production of consciousness**

## **Abstract**

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed as an approach to organization development that involves groups of people in discovering the 'best of what is' to drive social change. Several researchers, however, found that an exclusive focus on 'positive stories' is not tenable in practice. This paper explores their advocacy of 'critical appreciative processes' by reporting findings from a Big Lottery Research Project on the lives of Pakistani women living in Sheffield (England). Our findings track transformative learning amongst six Pakistani research assistants who ran AI workshops, Open Space events and conducted 1-to-1 interviews with thirty-nine other Pakistani women. They collectively deconstructed and reconstructed the meaning of social practices within their community, triggering both personal and collective processes of change. The paper's value lies in the way Appreciative Inquiry, Critical Theory and Grounded Theory have been combined to theorise how *critical appreciative process* can advance study of the production of consciousness within a community.

**Key words:** Appreciative Inquiry, Critical Theory, Grounded Theory, Consciousness, Community Development

## ***Introduction***

This paper explores the research question ‘how can critical appreciative processes influence the production of consciousness?’ by examining findings from a Big Lottery Research project on identity development amongst Pakistani women in Sheffield (England). The motivation for this study lies in previous action research to create a social enterprise with Pakistani women (Duncan, 2009). In that study, ‘springboard stories’ developed by Denning (2001) during World Bank development work were deployed to inspire local women to engage in social entrepreneurship. While some women secured employment, no enterprise emerged from the project. Duncan reviewed the impact of the springboard stories and concluded that their ‘visionary’ narrative – despite being drawn from an Asian community setting - has no resonance with highly marginalised women.

This work increased understanding of the numerous cultural and linguistic barriers to participation that Pakistani women experience on arrival in the UK (compare Anand and Cochrane, 2005; Platt, 2007; Gater et al., 2010; Anandi and Platt, 2011). As a result, a new 3-year study “to give isolated women in the Pakistani community an opportunity to reconstruct their self-identity through conversations with other women in their community”<sup>1</sup> was designed to explore the social and cultural dynamics that influence the production of consciousness. The methodology blended:

- *Appreciative Inquiry*: to elicit stories of community life;
- *Grounded Theory*: to code, review and develop open, axial and selective coding that reflects the theoretical insights of research participants, and;
- *Critical Theory* to encourage an initial deconstruction, then reconstruction, of concepts that affect the ‘production of consciousness’ within a community.

This paper is divided into five sections. In the first, we provide an overview of the literature on Appreciative Inquiry and trace its heritage back to Kant’s and Hegel’s work on the production of consciousness. In the second, we link its philosophical assumptions to the field of transformative

learning, with a particular focus on the concept of ‘perspective transformation’. The third section sets out the research methodology and the methods used to collect and analyse narratives produced by researchers undertaking the study. The fourth section presents findings that influenced theory development, culminating in the authors' grounded theory of a critical appreciative process. The final section discusses the implication of the theory and its potential usefulness for research into community development.

### ***Appreciative Inquiry and Critical Theory***

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was established by Cooperrider and Sinastra (1987) as a learning cycle through which groups of people uncover narratives of success and build upon them. Their formulation involved envisioning, appreciating, dialoguing and innovating, and has been popularised through a number of practitioner models: the 4I model based on initiation, inquiry, imagination, and innovation, and; the 4D model based on discovery, dreaming, designing and destiny (see Watkins and Mohr, 2001; Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2008).

AI has roots in the profession of Organizational Development, but has recently been used in a variety of contexts ranging from local schools to community organisations and international development bodies (Grant and Humphries, 2006). AI is a form of Action Research with a social constructionist approach that emphasizes the connection between speech, thought and action (van der Haar and Hosking, 2004; Grant, 2007; Lewis et al., 2008). It seeks to discover the strengths and competences in a group of people, thus generating a positive and constructive discourse that drives further social change.

Grant and Humphries (2006), however, highlight the dearth of studies evaluating AI and its over-optimistic belief in human agency. They argue that AI is naïve about the influence of social systems and hegemonic power to influence consciousness (see Lukes, 2005 [1974]). As a consequence, they advocate the integration of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with Critical Theory (CT) to

develop ‘critical appreciative processes’. Drawing on ideas advanced by Wittgenstein, Lyotard, Derrida, Gergen, Foucault, Habermas, Alvesson and Skolberg, they trace its heritage back to developments at the Frankfurt School in the 1920s. This partial history can be usefully completed by tracing the origins of CT itself to earlier debates about the ‘production of consciousness’.

Szelényi (2011) helpfully summarizes different lines of thinking in the works of Kant and Hegel. In Kant’s (2010, [1781]) *Critique of Pure Reason*, a distinction is made between *noumena* (things in themselves that exist separately from our capacity to perceive them) and *phenomena* (things that humans perceive with their senses and render into something intelligible through their capacity for reason). The key argument advanced by Kant, and one that links to all later developments in critical theory, is the assumption that human knowledge is based on the study of phenomena. Humans cannot access reality as it actually is, only how their capacity for reason (shaped by the way they experience phenomena) enables them to perceive, interact and shape their environment. All human knowledge, therefore, is socially constructed through the interactions of people with their environment and each other.

Following Kant, the German philosopher Hegel (1977, [1807]) responded by postulating a system of philosophy that could bridge the gap between noumena and phenomena through systematic development of a person’s spiritual consciousness. Hegel’s dialectical approach – of continually developing syntheses from postulated theses and anti-theses - was taken up (and then turned on its head) by Marx and Engels. Szelényi (2011) describes how the Young Hegelians (which included Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx) used Hegel’s system of dialectics to critique Hegel’s own philosophy, leading to intense debate about the relationship between people, their environment and the production of ideas.

For Hegel’s followers, the highest form of reality is the spirit. Spiritual consciousness is framed as a guide to action that helps people to realize their ideas. This philosophy of *idealism* fits

well with adherence to religious belief and the notion that an external supreme being conceives and creates the world. It also supports a line of argument that individuals can shape the world they inhabit in the image of their ideas. When working on his Paris Manuscripts in 1844, and discussing Frederick Engel's forthcoming text on the English working class (Engels, 2005, [1845]), Marx started to see the relationship the other way around (see Marx, 1959, [1844]). Drawing on Kant's arguments about the connection between noumena and phenomena, he argued that the conditions of a person's life (their noumenal experience) influence the development of concepts they use for reasoning. Consequently, the phenomenal world that they construct in their mind becomes the lens through which they interpret the noumenal world. In short, the material conditions of life (not an abstract spirit) shapes each person's capacity for reason and this shapes the phenomenological world they take to be real.

The root to increased self-consciousness, therefore, is not spirituality *per se*: it lies in the consciousness that develops when individuals engage with others to examine the concepts and community relationships that shape their capacity to reason. Dialogue with others offers an opportunity to reshape concepts, and to rethink the socio-economic institutions and practices that reproduce their existence. Indeed, it was a dialogic approach that Marx advocated as a way to counter the effects of:

“labor in which man alienates himself, [which] is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification...in that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another....it is the loss of his self.”

(Marx, 1959, p. 30)

It is worth stressing that the above statement can apply equally to women where their labour - domestic or paid - is also 'mortifying', 'self-sacrificing', directed by others for others, and results in a 'loss of self'. Szelényi (2011) argues that alienation is not – as Hegel proposed - a natural state from which we recover through the discovery of spiritual enlightenment, but a state into which

certain groups are propelled by social rules that inhibit their freedom to associate. The denial of this freedom prevents them from discussing and debating issues in a way that increases their consciousness and conceptual awareness.

Kincheloe and McClaren (1998) attempt to create a consensus between different strands of critical research by arguing that they are united through specific methodological commitments and shared philosophical assumptions:

“ [A critical researcher] attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable...”

Kincheloe and McClaren (1998), cited in Johnson and Clark (2006), p. 268

Critical Theory (CT) has been a strong influence on the development of transformative learning theory (Friere, 1968; Mezirow, 1978, 1981). In deprived communities, CT has been adopted to assist perspective transformations that lead to personal and community development. As Cranton and Taylor (2012) point out, transformative learning involves a change in the underlying assumptions that an individual or group hold about the world in which they live, leading to a questioning of the assumptions that guide their action, the roles they adopt, and the social practices they institutionalise.

Arendt (1958) and Habermas (1987) offer support for this argument through the development of ‘communicative action’ that prevents (or rebuffs) the colonisation of a person’s lifeworld. Just as



an imperial power controls subjects by invading and replacing their language and world view, so dominant discourses in a community can colonise the lifeworld of individual members, replacing concepts they have discovered with concepts favoured by another community of practice (Wenger, 2000). Arendt's perspective on debate in public spaces (see Kohn, 2004; Wilson, 2006) and subsequent advocacy of deliberative democracy (compare Habermas, 1962), is taken up by Grant and Humphries (2006) in their argument for critical appreciative processes. By encouraging deliberative democracy between two or more interlocutors who treat each other as equals, they are better able to critique existing discourses.

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 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. This line of thought is adopted by Taylor (2009) who argues for a holistic approach to critical reflection that goes beyond a personal exploration of rational and analytical discourses, and which puts more emphasis on affective and relational ways of knowing. For Taylor (2009, p. 11) transformative learning is “not so much analytical, point-counterpoint dialogue, but dialogue emphasizing relational and trustful communication, often at times ‘highly personal and self-disclosing’”. Moreover, he is clear that the dialogue which leads to critical reflection is not an abstract or solitary exercise as “without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the genuine discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection” (p.13).

Key insights into why interactions within trusting relationships trigger changes in the production of consciousness can be found in the works of Scheff (1990) and Goss (2005). Scheff (1990) outlined a 'deference-emotion system' through which individuals monitor the deference extended to them during social interactions. Low levels of deference, or loss of deference, triggers negative

(self-) evaluations resulting in feelings of shame. Goss (2005) argued that the 'deference-emotion system' modulates human interaction so social entrepreneurial action to change patterns of deference will enhance individuals' power to discharge their feelings. It follows logically that action to 'appreciate' the stories of individuals to whom deference is normally denied by members of a community will influence their feelings, produce more experiences of pleasure and pride, and influence their consciousness.

With this in mind, the research team developed a methodology based on critical appreciative processes that build on Arendt's (1958, p. 126) concept of "telling of a story" and "the weaving of a web of narratives" with the result that a person can find out "who one is". These proceed from the assumption that a group of people asked to construct narratives about their lives have to engage with the production of their consciousness. By recognising and valuing their stories, their consciousness can be expected to change through conscious changes in the 'deference-emotion system' of the community. Furthermore, by making visible "that potential which springs up between people when they act in concert...where words are not used to veil intentions but...to establish relations and create new realities" (Arendt, 1958, p. 20), the production of consciousness extends beyond single individuals to groups of people. In the next section, therefore, we turn our attention to the way AI workshops were designed to elicit a 'web of narratives' and stimulate 'communicative action' that sheds light on the production of consciousness amongst Pakistani women in Sheffield.

## ***Research Context and Methodology***

For the last 10 years St Mary's Church has been working with Pakistani women, providing education in English language, vocational qualifications and opportunities for employment (Duncan, 2009). Much of this work is done by a team of bi-lingual female community workers of Pakistani origin who engage families resistant and suspicious of adult learning. As cultural diversity has increased, and more women from other cultures have joined St Mary's classes, it has become clearer that there

are cultural factors that influence the capacity to learn. Pakistani women seemed to languish for years in English classes without making progress, while women from other minority communities thrive. There is little existing research on factors inhibiting learning amongst Pakistani women so St Mary's Church formed a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University to research the social and domestic relationships that influence community-based learning.

AI was chosen because it fitted with the desire to generate conversations about life in the Pakistani community as a way of understanding how consciousness is produced and reproduced. Six research assistants of Pakistani origin were recruited. They underwent 4 days of intensive training on research philosophy, qualitative research methods and Appreciative Inquiry so they could make field notes during workshops, record one-to-one interviews, and run Open Space events in Urdu. In turn, they recruited 4 groups of women over an eighteen month period through personal and community networks. In all, thirty-nine participants completed a 6 week cycle of AI workshops<sup>2</sup>. The participants were women who had lived in Sheffield between 6 months and twenty three years. All spoke no (or rudimentary) English: none were employed; all lived in low income households; there was a mix of married and divorced women.

A Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was adopted to develop concepts from research findings. We have chosen to follow the approach described by Strauss and Corbin with three phases of coding and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Locke, 2001). **Open coding** takes place throughout a project and, in this case, was undertaken by the principal investigator (St Mary's Church), co-investigator (Sheffield Hallam) and a full-time research assistant (St Mary's Church). Open codes are emergent concepts that, initially, are not placed into any hierarchical relationships. As the study progresses, 'category saturation' occurs: open codes are grouped and consolidated into **axial codes** that capture the researchers' interpretation of the dimensions of each concept, and the inter-relationships between them (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Suddaby, 2006). In this case, we identified axial coding to represent factors that contribute to a critical appreciative process.

Unlike research approaches that start with a comprehensive review of academic studies to develop a testable theory, Grounded Theory “requires that a detailed literature review comes after the data has been collected when tentative theories or concepts have started to form” (Goulding, 2001:23). It encourages concept development based on data categories derived from empirical data, delaying significant engagement with academic literature until the process of coding has advanced to the axial coding stage (Locke, 2001; Walker and Myrick, 2006).

In grounded theory, conceptual development drives the literature review process. In this case, the research team were drawn more and more to the history and theory of ‘transformative learning’ in community settings (Cranton and Taylor, 2012). By tracing its origins, a core concept (the production of consciousness) became established as the **selective code** for presentation of a grounded theory.

Grounded Theory’s accommodation phase was handled in several ways. Learning sets conducted in English tested concepts within the research team (Revans, 1998); three conference presentations and one practitioner conference tested concepts with academic and professional audiences; Open Space events conducted in Urdu / Punjabi tested concepts with research participants and their families (Owen, 2008). Furthermore, the third cycle of AI invited women from earlier cycles to undertake a further round of activities to deepen knowledge of community relationships. All of these accommodation processes enabled the research team to clarify conceptual categories.

In the next section, we present findings from field notes, three rounds of interviews conducted by the co-investigator with the research team, learning sets and Open Space events. These are organised into themes that emerged from the phase of axial coding. For reasons of space, we have restricted the presentation of findings to three key themes: 1) generating *narratives*; 2) developing *insights*, and 3) discovering *power*.

## ***Generating Narratives***

The ‘discovery’ phase of AI depends on the generation of narratives (Watkins and Mohr, 2001).

Kitzinger (1994) draws attention to the importance of participant interactions in focus groups, and the value to researchers of changed behaviours and patterns of disclosure in 1-to-1 interviews and group work. Table 1 summarises findings on the research interventions that elicited narratives from participants. During coding, there was an immediate sense of the importance of religious and cultural traditions, as well as the economic and family relationships that affect new migrants.

Participants’ childhood and adolescence was framed by their upbringing in Pakistan, particularly the complexities of preparing for marriage within the community. Following marriage, the cultural traditions of the joint family system - living in extended families, deferring to the rules of parents and grand-parents - produce patterns of authority that are passed down from parents to sons and daughters-in-law (Aamir, 2004). The social rules of each household are framed by long-standing ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 2000) embedded in Pakistani society.

***Table 1 – Interventions to Generate Narratives***

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>AI cycle</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Family Tree	1	Participants were asked to draw, write or use magazines to describe family context.
Timeline	1	Participants were asked to tell the story of their upbringing and move to England in small groups. After giving their story, other group participants were allowed to ask three clarifying questions each. The research assistants participated in this activity.
The Four Circles of Life <sup>3</sup>	2 +	The Family Tree and Timeline were amalgamated into a single activity called 'The Four Circles of Life' (Marriage, Journey to England, Arrival in England, Life Now).
Arshi’s Story	All	Participants were presented with a story about Arshi who arrives in England, becomes stuck at home, and wants to learn English. Participants were asked to give advice to Arshi.
Three Wishes	2 +	Participants were asked to describe three wishes for the future.
1 – 1 Interviews	All	In the middle of each cycle, participants had 1-to-1 interviews that started by exploring an activity, then asked for a description of a time when they increased their confidence in speaking English. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.
Social Network Mapping	3	Participants were asked 10 questions to elicit stories about levels of trust within their families and communities, identifying the relationships they most trusted for support and help.

The narratives that emerged triggered strong emotions. The following extract describes the impact of the 'Timeline' activity in AI cycle 1:

A: Then another woman came... (Pause). She had tears in her eyes after me. She burst into tears when she said her mother left her. She was raised by her father. The questions for her were more comforting... (Pause) supportive of her. I think this triggered the other people off. It triggered a spiral downwards.

R: They all started sharing?

A: The negatives, the tragedies. I had to allow it.

Research Assistant Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

Discomfort with the positive focus of 'pure' AI methodology came to a head during a review of stories emerging from the first AI cycle (compare Grant and Humphries, 2006). It was clear that many were suffering distress. 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 feeling 'like dead people', isolated within 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 were lonely, bored and dislocated from all that was familiar to them. These accounts accord with Marx's (1959, p. 30) comments. The women became alienated from their own labour through a loss of control over it, were expected to sacrifice their own needs to those of their in-laws with the result that they ended up feeling 'dead'.

This was the first time that these women had been able to tell their story. Furthermore, they were stories that the research assistants had never heard before, even though they were embedded in the same community. Their eyes were opened to the hidden powerlessness of newly arrived migrant women whose stories were marginalised and discounted in the dominant discourse of the community. The entire research team, as well as the participants, were shocked.

These new narratives had a palpable effect on the research assistants. They learnt to suspend judgment until they had details of a person's relationships within the community:

“That stuff kept coming back to me. I kept thinking ‘don’t assume, you haven’t spoken to these people yet’. It’s so easy to assume... (Pause) without the facts, without the figures or whatever... (Pause) not until you’ve had a conversation... (Pause) until you have the positives and negatives of the whole thing about an individual. You can’t just assume... (Pause). It opened my eyes. I didn’t realise... (Pause). I don’t know how to put this into words... (Pause). To look at someone and think this is all going on behind the scenes... (Pause) you would never think.”

Research Assistant Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010

In the midst of these ‘tragedies’, however, depicting family relations led to moments of humour:

“Either it was a dreamland, or what people themselves thought they were. I found it fascinating. Their mother- and father-in-laws were all grumpy old men and women, while their girls, daughters and sons were all fashionable. One girl... (Pause) [she] cut from the magazine a pair of trousers advertising at £9.99 – from Matalan [showing] a whole man. She stuck it there with the label. She turned around and said ‘my husband’s for sale’”

Research Assistant, AI Cycle 1, personal notes.

The researchers deployed Arshi’s Story to generate positive narratives about change. It was particularly potent as it gave the women a chance to project the changes they wanted to see in community life and express their hopes. As one research assistant later commented:

- N: None of them said that Arshi could be in the wrong. They all relate to Arshi... (Pause). They all see themselves as Arshi. For people like [D] whose children are older, of marriage age, her views were different... (Pause) not totally, but more like the view I expected. She thought you have to go to the mother-in-law. I liked that session: very enjoyable, very fun.
- R: Sounds like you learnt a lot.

N: Yes, I learnt how family situations can change your views on other people's situations. What I learnt from the group was how these individuals think, and what their aspirations are, what they want.

Research Assistant Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

As Kitzinger (1994) identifies, group work generates dynamics that benefit researchers because the 'ideological work' of participants is made public. Conflict between participants, examinations of the challenges participants put to each other, and conversations that lead to a change of mind - these all clarify the connection between context, narrative generation and the framing of experience. Indeed, van der Haar and Hoskins (2004) draw attention to the character of AI fieldwork:

"Differences and conflicts between different voices should not be avoided but constructively dealt with. When viewed from our relational constructionist stance this does not mean that the process should result in a consensus of all voices. Consensus is not necessary for joint action and is undesirable if it means neglecting differences and excluding voices."

van der Haar and Hoskins (2004, p. 1028)

Mezirow (2009) argues that transformative learning starts when differences and conflicts produce a 'disorienting dilemma' that triggers strong emotions. In this case, the narratives confronted the research assistants as ethical dilemmas. In the next section, we look more deeply at these impacts, and the insights developed from discussing them.

## ***Developing Insights***

The research aim to "give women in the Pakistani community an opportunity to reconstruct their self-identity through conversations with other women in their community" proved as true for the research assistants as the participants. The narratives elicited provide evidence that an accumulation of 'surprises' generated insights and triggered learning. In the extract below, researcher [A] starts to consider the mismatch between public rhetoric and their own discoveries:

R: So the interviewing provided surprises for all of you?



A: Yeah. It did. [It] really, really did. It is learning that things don't really change, that people say things have moved on... (Pause) - the government says this - but they don't. I'm not saying that nothing changes, but things are difficult to budge. It takes generations, maybe, not a decade.

Research Assistant Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

On discovering that little had changed since their own arrival in the UK, the research assistants used learning sets to explore the ethical and emotional challenges in their research:

We are saying to them... (Pause) and telling them [that their stories] will be used without names. We are not telling them we'll help them through their process. But as people, it does tear us apart when we hear it one-to-one. We then have to deal with it... (Pause) what we are hearing individually. Taking it back out there... (Pause) we can't do that - we are bound by confidentiality. My concern is that I wonder if they really understand the consent form really means we can use it without names, [that] we can use that information. A lot of the experience has come out [...] it felt so good for them to air things out, just to talk about it.

Research Assistant, Learning Set, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010.

Over time, researcher [K] came to see the position of women new to the community as similar to slavery.

K: I realised these are not the people I see [in the shop]. They have so many problems... (Pause) more than me. When they came, they were treated as slaves. Their husbands were seeing somebody else. The way their in-laws... (Pause). The girls were not allowed to speak to anybody, not allowed to have friends, were not allowed to go out. It is not something major, just lots of little things.

Research Assistant Interview, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

The generation of these insights moved the AI process into the 'dreaming' phase. To maintain their own commitment to confidentiality, but also to 'help [participants] through the process', the research assistants discussed making a leaflet available with details of GP counselling services. Arshi's Story (see Table 1) also acted as an effective method for stimulating the 'dreaming' phase of

AI as it encouraged the application of insights to change women's lives in the community. In the interview extracts below, changes in the research assistants' assumptions starts to emerge. In the first interview extract, researcher [S] begins to question the racial and gender stereotyping that exists within their own community:

S: To think that when I go home each day... (Pause). I see women like this all the time, but then we stereotype and say 'they come from Pakistan, so they are like that'... (Pause). But, they are struggling with a life they didn't want.

Research Assistant Interview, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

In the second interview extract, three months later, researcher [N] describes a change in her assumptions about the formation of identity:

N: Cycle 3 was more about getting to know them as individuals, and getting to know... (Pause) - I think it was getting to know how their identity has been formed by other people.

R: Ah... (Pause), that's quite a step.

N: That's what we've learnt... (Pause), because we've talked about how identity is... (Pause), how it can be formed by the people that are surrounding you... (Pause). These women have come into a place where they are children in a sense. What we are thinking is formed by what is being talked about at home. The [AI] interviews will explore what social networks do, what importance they hold for that person.

[...]

R: Okay. You said something very interesting there... (Pause) - how identity is formed through relationships with other people. Is that, for you, a new view?

N: It is new in terms of coming to this job and learning from the two cycles, and listening to their stories... (Pause), the people... (Pause) - 80% is probably wholly from the environment they live in.

R: Is that something you've come to think, or something you thought [before]?

N: I've come to think it... (Pause), I never thought about it before.

Research Assistant Interview, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2011

This level of learning equips the research assistants with a new understanding of power. In the next section, we draw out how narratives (and particularly the ability to interpret and generate them) are sources of power.

## ***Discovering Power***

The research assistants, through their dialogue, developed a better understanding of the way power operates in society and their community. They generated narratives about Pakistani women being ‘oppressed’, and started researching and articulating the nature of oppression. They co-constructed new meanings from the women’s disclosures and generated new narratives by asking participants to specify ‘three wishes’ for the future (see Table 1).

Taylor’s (2009) work suggests that personal identity develops through a series of transformations over a lifetime. In the previous section, researcher [N] articulated a changed perspective on the formation of identity. But can we assert that other research assistants also changed their consciousness as a result of the research? Can we say that they also went through a perspective transformation? In the following interview extract, researcher [A] describes the change in her attitude to women in her community:

A: [AI] definitely does change people’s thinking. I think it is effective... (Pause). I strongly value what AI has done to the women, and also to me as well. It has allowed me to change my understanding of my own community. I assumed a lot of things. My assumptions were challenged... (Pause), challenging in a positive way. It was more... (Pause). There are these others... (Pause) - not that you are absolutely wrong. - (Pause) I’ve learnt to respect these women a lot more than I did because I don’t take it for granted they’ve got it all there at home on a plate doing nothing. I say to myself, “come on, you know better now”. You have this argument, this talk, to yourself.

Research Assistant Interview, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

In a separate interview extract, principal investigator [G] confirms how this change of attitude in [A] has contributed to changing practice at St Mary's Church:

G: "It is participative [and] that affects both parties... (Pause). I've noticed a change in the way that we operate here. I think we've become less prescriptive... (Pause). [A] in particular is less paternalistic in the way we approach what we are doing [...] and there is a genuine real buy into that."

Principal Investigator Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011.

Does a changed perspective result in a new power to act? Mezirow (2009) argues that transformative learning involves emancipatory action, through the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are integrated into new roles that change the direction of a person's life. In the next interview extract, research assistant [SH] describes how participating in AI workshops has made her more proactive at work:

SH: My work[place] has seen a difference in me. It is helping me at work...(Pause). I go back with a different stride. I've suggested we could do an AI at work for customer care...(Pause) bringing staff morale up. I've been talking about what it was, and what I've been doing so far...(Pause), and the training at the university.

Research Assistant Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010

Some of the most persuasive findings come from three Open Space events towards the end of Cycle 4. Early in the study, the research assistants thought that cultural constraints would make it impossible to involve both Pakistani men and women in Open Space events. However, in late 2011, they commissioned a man to interview new male Pakistani migrants, and subsequently invited them to their Open Space events. Researcher [Z] describes the experience:

Z: In the first Open Space, there was a dedicated table for men only. In the second one, when the Open Space started... (Pause), they were rotated around.

R: Did they act of their own accord?

- Z: No... (Pause) I would ask them their feedback - their own perspective was not coming out. One man who was older... (Pause) he talked a bit, but the other guys were quiet...
- R: We can't say the men really interacted with the women.
- Z: But the women did participate in the presence of men. When there were questions about Arshi's father-in-law, it was still answered by the women. The men stayed quiet [...] the women were talking very negatively about their husband's attitude [...] they were critical about husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law attitudes [...] - there was a very thorough discussion in the Open Space... (Pause) it may lead [the men] to reflect.

Research Assistant Interview (Male), 9<sup>th</sup> March 2012

The above extract shows not only that the research assistants started to include men from their community in the research, but also that women who had participated in AI workshops felt sufficiently powerful to debate the role of men and women in front of men new to the community.

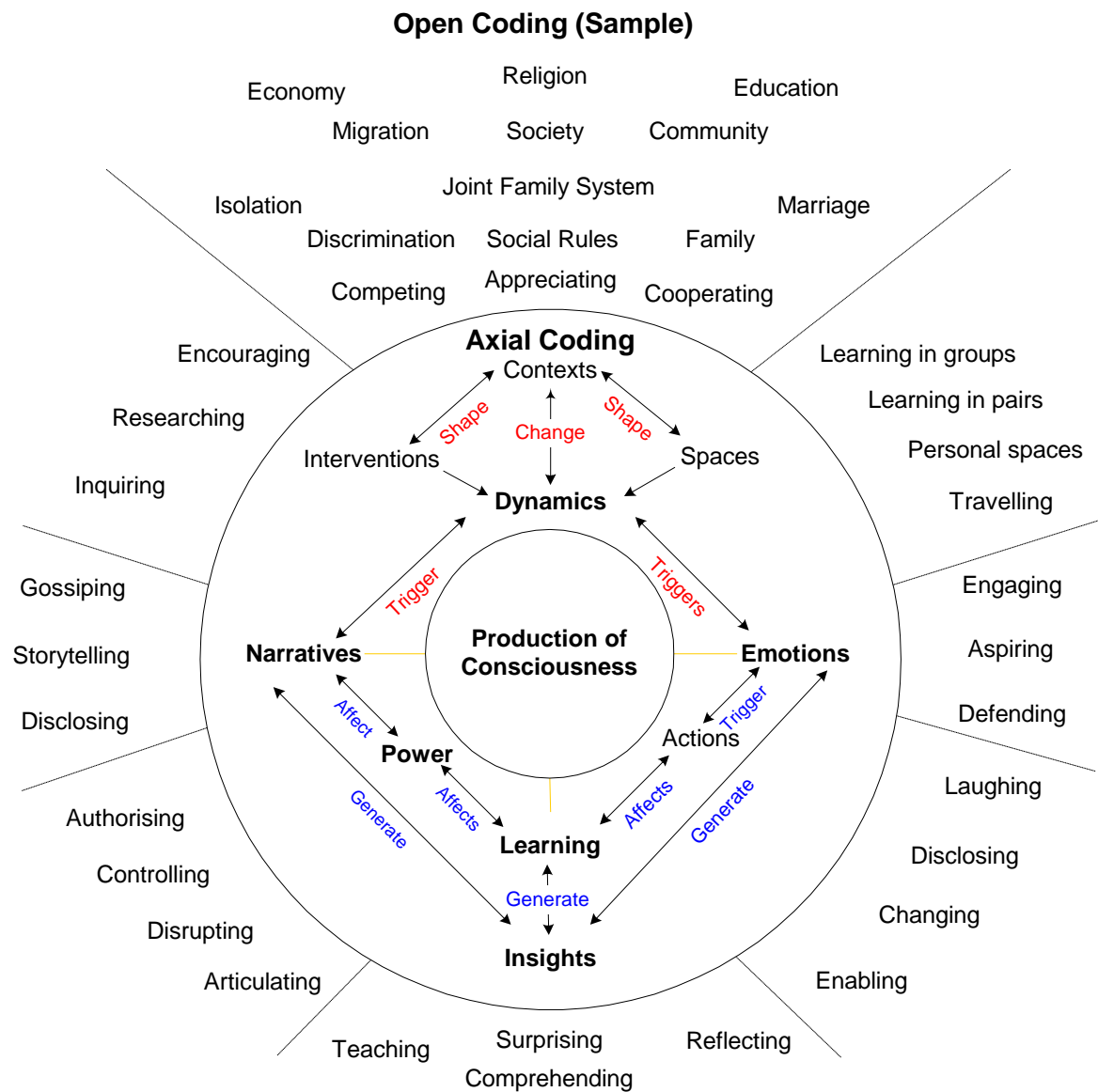
Having reviewed evidence of the way narratives were generated, insights were developed, and power was discovered, we (as authors) can outline the narrative that binds together all the axial coding. This articulates the theoretical assumptions of our grounded theory, and contextualises the role of AI within a critical appreciative process:

- Appreciative Inquiry workshops (AI) act as *interventions* into the *contexts* and *spaces* of community life, and change their social *dynamics*;
- As *dynamics* change, new *narratives* emerge about 'who one is' that trigger *emotions* and stimulate *actions*;
- Contemplating and taking *actions* (i.e. *learning* from *narratives* and applying *insights* to decision-making) increases a person's *power*;
- Using *power* and participating in *action* produces a new *consciousness*.

The authors' narrative, and the new consciousness that we developed through our own actions during the research, is represented visually in Figure 1. This shows how open codes were

grouped together as axial codes, and how axial coding identifies elements of the critical appreciative process that shaped the production of consciousness in this case.

**Figure 1 - A Grounded Theory of Critical Appreciative Processes**



In the next section, we examine the implications of our theoretical perspective on the production of consciousness. We then conclude by commenting on its relevance to *critical appreciative processes* as a methodology for studying human relationships.

## ***Implications for Research Practice***

AI workshops and techniques revive Arendt's (1958) argument regarding the use of *public spaces* for citizens to engage each other in debate. As Wilson (2006, p. 1) summarizes, when "citizens are willing to engage in the risk and unpredictability of mutual self-disclosure...they benefit from the self-discovery that comes through interaction with previously unknown others, and solidify the bonds between citizens that produce and sustain a space". Our research supports Koln's (2004, p. 8) claim that mutual interaction in public spaces "offsets the mutual fear and suspicion fostered by segregation".

However, we argue that it does more than this. Building on Goss (2005), we are that citizens engaged in disclosure and discovery, not only solidify bonds and reduce fear, they change the conditions under which their consciousness develops by changing the 'deference-emotional system' of their community (Sheff, 1990). Changing patterns of deference affects the way they think about themselves as well as the way they think about their community.

Habermas (1962) expressed concern about the degradation of public spaces brought about by the development of mass media. The creation of spaces for mutual interaction, rather than passive consumerism, is part of his argument for the advancement of deliberative democracy. Critical appreciative processes can be a means to this end, because they focus participants' attention on the 'stories behind the stories', and on the discovery of 'who one is' (Arendt, 1958).

The decision of researchers to participate in AI workshop activities, share their stories, and allow participants to question them (Table 1) contributed to the creation of public spaces in which 'ideal speech acts' became more possible (Habermas, 1987). Importantly, the use of group activities and one-to-one interviews aided this by providing multiple spaces for emotive disclosures. Once participants discovered their power to disclose, their subsequent participation dramatically increased (Duncan and Ridley-Duff, 2012).

The Marxian heritage of active intervention through collective deliberation and joint action is present in Arendt's and Habermas's work. In transformative learning theory, this heritage appears in the pedagogy of Friere (1968) and critical theory of Mezirow (1978, 1981). In this study, we provide strong evidence that story-telling is a 'critical act' (e.g. 'The Four Circle of Life', 'Arshi's Story'). Participants can create the conditions in which hidden narratives of power can be safely shared with other members of the community.

In this study, we found it necessary to reframe the meaning of 'appreciation'. We found that disclosing private stories in a public space (including a 1 to 1 interview) releases a deep well of unarticulated thoughts and feelings. This supports the contention of Taylor (2009) that emotion and disclosure in transformative learning is a central – and highly valued - activity. Van der Haar and Hoskins (2004, p. 1019) also describe the discovery stage of AI as one in which "the central aim...is to find out and appreciate what gives life and energy to people, their work and their organisation".

We came to see 'appreciation' as respect for narratives that are meaningful to participants. The stories that emerged from our study were not all 'positive' in the popular sense, but they resonated powerfully with participants' life experiences. They were all "possibility-full" (van der Haar and Hosking, 2004, p. 1026) precisely because they engaged with participants' sense of identity. By framing 'appreciation' as respect for meaningful narratives, and by giving recognition and acceptance to the meanings that participants attach to their disclosures, 'appreciation' takes a critical turn by changing the patterns of deference within a group and changing the conditions in which the production of consciousness takes place (Goss, 2005).

A *critical* appreciative process, therefore, focuses initially on co-constructing a sense of 'who one is'. Had the researchers by-passed this phase, they would have missed the 'best of what is' for survival in an oppressive culture. They would not have understood the ways in which participants had navigated their way through loneliness, boredom and 'mortification' (Marx, 1959). This adds substance to the arguments made by Grant and Humphries (2006) and Bushe (2007) that



'appreciation' is about more than finding positive stories. It provides a basis for distinguishing Appreciative Inquiries that focus on organisation development from Critical Appreciative Processes that focus on human (relationship) development.

Lastly, the study adds weight to the arguments of Kitzinger (1994), that multiple *spaces* for dialogue - and paying close attention when participants move between spaces - generate a wider range of narratives. Multiple (small) public spaces were demonstrably more effective at generating narratives, insights and learning than a single public space. The combination of AI workshops in different physical locations, containing one-to-one interviews, group activities, and Open Space events deepened the level of discovery.

## **Conclusions**

In our conclusions, we return to the main question of the paper: “how can critical appreciative processes influence the production of consciousness?” Our answer is that critical appreciative processes generate ‘untold stories’ that act as ‘disorienting dilemmas’ within a research setting. Under guidance, ‘disorienting dilemmas’ stimulate critical reflection that enables participants to accumulate insights and plan new actions. In short, the ‘web of narratives’ that critical appreciative processes generate provides the source material from which to develop a consciousness about ‘who one is’, and – perhaps more importantly - ‘who one can be’.

Given the original motivation for this study - to understand why Pakistani women did not respond to springboard stories about social entrepreneurship in their community - we can now position critical appreciative processes as a foundational activity for bringing about social change. For women's entrepreneurial aspirations to be triggered, changes in patterns of deference towards their capacity for enterprise need to be embedded in the discourse of a community. As Goss argues, individualist explanations that emphasise innate traits have never been entirely convincing explanations for entrepreneurial behaviour. Instead, we can see it as the 'outcome of the dynamics

of social situations: specifically, the giving and withholding of deference' (Goss, 2005, p. 631) that generates the emotional conditions for sustainable social innovation. Critical appreciative processes change patterns of deference and, therefore, play a part in generating the consciousness needed for (social) entrepreneurship. This will be a fertile area for follow up studies.

Our research has advanced a grounded theory of the way critical appreciative processes influence the production of consciousness. To our surprise, the researchers we interviewed changed as much as the research participants. Concurrently, we – in our roles as principal and co-investigator – transformed our own understanding of the important link between freedom of association, public spaces and the production of consciousness. Grounded Theory's process of accommodation to test conceptual categories with different audiences satisfied us that theoretical generalisation is possible. However, future empirical research will still be necessary to establish whether the critical appreciative process described in this paper help other marginalised groups to develop the narratives, insights and power needed to participate more in the development of their community.

*Acknowledgement:* The authors wish to thank the Big Lottery for a 3-year research grant (Grant Number: C756A981) to conduct this study. They 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.

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## Notes.

- <sup>1</sup> Agreed in a Learning Set of all eight researchers (including six Pakistani women) on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> We discussed more conventional methods of publicising this work (e.g. leaflets, mailings, emails) but the consensus was that this would not reach the most marginalised people because of literacy barriers. Personal contacts through the church setting, schools and community organisations became the preferred method.
- <sup>3</sup> Subsequently reframed using new metaphors based on the 'river of life'.