

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A MODE OF ACTION RESEARCH FOR COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Neil M. Boyd

Lycoming College

David S. Bright

Wright State University

In this article, the authors highlight the potential for rethinking approaches to community and social change interventions that draw on participatory action research at the organizational and community level. They distinguish problem-centric from opportunity-centric approaches to social change. Theory on social norms suggests that problem-centric approaches work with the momentum of norms without substantively changing them. By contrast, opportunity-centric approaches have the potential to reframe and dramatically shift organizational and community norms. Appreciative inquiry (AI), a growing practice in organization development, is presented as an example of opportunity-centric change that induces innovation and collaboration through participatory methods. It is distinct from other methods that focus on resolving problems in organizations. The authors illustrate how an AI Summit, a large-scale inquiry designed with four phases: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny, can assist in an opportunity-centric process. They conclude by describing how opportunity-centric methodologies like AI fit well with the tenets and concerns of community psychologists. © 2007 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Participatory action research (PAR) has long been an important area of interest in community psychology as a mechanism for intervening in and developing community social systems. The key concerns in such efforts are many: how to get buy-in from community members, how to involve multiple stakeholders, how to take into account potential consequences to a whole community system, how to develop a sense of empowerment among participants, etc. These concerns are studied and relevant, not

Correspondence to: Neil M. Boyd, Department of Business Administration, Lycoming College, 700 College Place, Williamsport, PA 17701. E-mail: Boyd@lycoming.edu

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DISCOVER SOMETHING GREAT

just to the arena of community psychology, but also in organizational management theory, particularly in the literature on organizational development and change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In this article, we will review emerging perspectives and practices in the area of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) with a focus on implications for the practice of PAR methodologies.

A recent movement in organizational studies, positive organizational scholarship complements the intent of positive psychology (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) to focus on understanding the characteristics, processes, and factors at play when organizations function at peak performance in both human and operational terms. In essence, these approaches to scholarship offer a unique lens for understanding the phenomena of human interaction and uncovering previously underemphasized factors and processes that are at play in human systems. These views suggest important avenues for understanding and addressing key issues for intervening to foster community development.

As an illustration, we introduce the practice of appreciative inquiry (AI), a change methodology that aims to create change through a focus on elevating strengths and extending communities (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). Many PAR methodologies tend to start with a focus on fixing community problems. In contrast, AI begins with the premise that communities are centers of relatedness, and that the extension of strengths within communities invokes a reserve of capacity to reshape the images of community such that previously viewed challenges can be confronted in radically different ways.

We begin by presenting the basic logic of positive organizational scholarship and the case for differences in the kinds of dynamics at play when people and communities are oriented toward solving problems versus when they are oriented toward discovering, elevating, and extending strengths (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). Then, we illustrate how many PAR methodologies have traditionally focused on problem solving and contrast this with the factors that are needed when striving to radically develop or transform communities. We illustrate how AI fosters the emergence of factors to achieve these aims. Finally, we conclude by demonstrating how AI is consistent with the concepts of ecological analysis, diversity, empowerment, and prevention, which are primary tenets and concerns of community psychologists.

DIFFERENCES IN DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

Positive organizational scholarship is the focus on understanding the processes, characteristics, and behaviors of exceptional or “positively deviant” communities/organizations (Cameron et al., 2003; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004, 2003). The catalyst for this emphasis is rooted in the same observation that has spawned positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), namely that we know more about defects in people and the social worlds they live in than we know about how people live with joy, hope, and happiness (Cameron et al., 2003). Although a review of this assertion is beyond the scope of this article, we except it as a premise and will explain its importance to the study of community development.

Various dimensions of the human condition can be described in three different states as illustrated in Figure 1 (Bright, Cooperrider, & Galloway, 2006; Cameron, 2003). Some scholars have described the human condition in terms of what is ordinary or deviant (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, 2004). As represented by the center point on the continuum in Figure 1, most people and communities gravitate to a rather

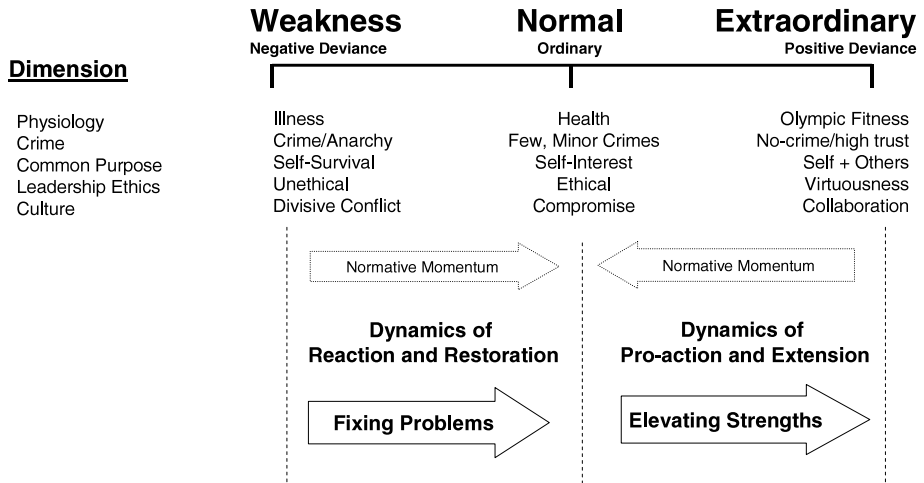


Figure 1. Different states of strength and the dynamics of movement between them. From “Appreciative Inquiry in the Office of Research and Development: Improving the Collaborative Capacity of Organization,” by D. S. Bright, D. L. Cooperrider, and W. B. Galloway (2006). *Public Performance and Management Review*, 29, 285–306. Copyright 2006 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc. Adapted with permission of the author.

normal or ordinary condition as a sustainable way of balancing multiple tensions or demands. Deviance from this ordinary condition can be couched in both positive (desirable) and negative (undesirable) terms. At the individual level, for example, in terms of human health, the left end of the continuum is a condition of illness, where a person is unable to function in a sustainable way and at worst, veers toward demise, clearly a condition of negative deviance. The center of the continuum is a condition of sustainable health, where a person may have a basic level of nutrition, exercise, and a generally maintainable lifestyle. This center is an ordinary state, the most common state across the general population. The right end of the continuum is also a condition of deviance, what we might describe in terms of Olympic fitness. At an extreme, this condition is also difficult, though not impossible for the individual to sustain: It is a level of readiness and health that requires an enormous and consistent effort.

We suggest that the same logic can be applied to the development and state of communities and organizations. The left end of the continuum represents a condition of negative deviance, where a community may be misaligned, unhealthy, or perhaps embroiled in deep, divisive conflict. Any community in this condition may have significant problems, such as high crime, blatantly corrupt or unethical politicians, unsafe public transportation, etc. However, most communities exist in a fairly ordinary condition. They have a basic level of security, people at least tolerate one another, structures are in place to prevent people from harming the community, and a basic level of participation ensures at least some connection between people and government. Yet other communities, perhaps for rare periods, build exceptional thriving communities. People interact regularly and frequently with their neighbors and are highly engaged in community governance. They work together to build extraordinary resources that are attractive to outsiders. A community in this state is almost a form of utopia.

Research on the norming influence in organizations suggests a normative force toward the center: there seems to be a natural momentum in communities toward the “ordinary” (Bright, 2005). This research would predict that when individuals within a

community deviate in either direction from the norm, there will be resistance from the community that serves to bring the individual back into conformity (Quinn, 1996). In the negatively deviant direction, individual members are sanctioned, punished, or cast out through the application of community laws and ordinances. Yet resistance may also occur in the positively deviant direction, individuals may also be harassed, resisted, and in some cases cast out. Efforts to create racially integrated communities, for example, something seen as desirable by many forward-thinking leaders, often met with strong resistance during the 1970s.

One way to view the task of community development efforts is that it aims to “reset” or adjust the fundamental assumptions about the taken-for-granted norms that exist within a community system, to adjust them “upward” in the direction of positive deviance.

The observation that this normative momentum is at play in all social systems has substantive implications for how we think about developing communities and community organizations. Movement from a position of negative deviance to the ordinary is about healing, reparation, and restoration: fixing problems. This concern generally works *with* the momentum of movement in a community toward the ordinary center (Bright, 2005; Bright et al., 2006).

By contrast, movement from a position of the ordinary to extraordinary is about extending and elevating strengths (Bright et al., 2006; Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003), it is about appreciating and capitalizing on what is good, already works, and is beautiful within a community system (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). It is also movement that works against the inherent momentum of movement toward the ordinary center (Bright et al., 2006). Interestingly, most people find it inspiring to think about building and strengthening communities, to increase the capacity of communities to work for the common good. Yet the evidence is overwhelming that the majority of change efforts fail (Kotter, 1995), and the result is an increase in the cynicism, despondency, and complacency that exists regarding change (i.e., “It can never happen around here.”). These are outcomes that are inherent aspects of the normative tendency toward the ordinary center.

PROBLEM-CENTRIC COMMUNITY/ ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGIES

The discussion thus far has several implications for practices of community development. To illustrate, we suggest a conceptual distinction between problem-centric and opportunity-centric methodologies, as illustrated in Table 1.

The typical PAR process for creating change is rooted in the practices of Lewin who was ideologically credited with bringing psychological inquiry to bear on social problems that require solutions in action (Selener, 1997). The original conception of action research (Lewin, 1951) was a three-stage process for planned organization change. In simple terms, the three stages consisted of unfreezing (reducing those forces maintaining resistance to change), moving (intervening with a change effort), and refreezing (stabilizing the change into a new state of equilibrium).

Over time, Lewin’s original change model was modified into what is commonly termed *traditional action research*, which tends to be associated with the following basic steps illustrated in the middle column of Table 1 (adapted from Cummings and Worley, 2005; see also, French & Bell, 1994; Schein, 1988):

Table 1. Differences Between Problem-Centric and Opportunity-Centric Change Methodologies

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Problem-centric methods (e.g., traditional ODC)</i>	<i>Opportunity-centric methods (e.g., appreciative inquiry)</i>
Basic process	<p>Problem identification and consultation Data gathering and preliminary diagnosis Feedback to a key client or group Joint diagnosis of the problem Joint action planning Action Data gathering after action</p>	<p>Affirmative topic choice—What ideas and questions will give life to this community/organizational system? Discover—What are the images and activities at play when this community/organization is functioning at its best? Dream—What might be possible with respect to our topic if we were to imagine a future, ideal community/organization? Design—What are the most compelling actionable ideas and how might we put them into use? Destiny—What will we actually do to bring about the change we envision? How will we track and encourage our progress?</p>
Underlying metaphor	Community is a problem to be solved—the community is sick and needs healing.	The community/organization is a living miracle, a center of human relatedness filled with potential for extraordinary possibilities.
Role of facilitator	Community members need a physician (the consultant/facilitator) to find relief.	Community/organization members are capable of envisioning and creating change for themselves.
Role of stakeholders	Only those who are necessary should be involved.	Involvement from the whole system of community/organization members
Role of leaders	Often top-down, dictated change—plans and initiatives need to be “sold” to general community members	Bottom-up involvement—all community/organization members are assumed to be equal participants, great ideas may emerge from any member—every relevant perspective should be represented in the inquiry, preferably in a simultaneous space
Dominant motivation for change	Fear of failure or imminent crisis	Inspiration from emergent ideas about what community/organization members authentically dream of accomplishing
Possibility for change	Generally limited to established, ordinary community norms	Established, ordinary community/organization norms are transcended and redefined—the possibility for the exceptional becomes a norm and asserts momentum.
Appropriate application	Where clearly discernible negative deviance is apparent, and there is no interest in shifting commonly held norms	Where there is a desire to understand strengths, develop resilience, or redefine the community/organization. It is also appropriate to utilize these methods to build a reserve of strength before tackling “problems” in the traditional sense; these methods establish an interpersonal atmosphere of psychological safety and trust, where problems can be addressed in ways that build, rather than diminish, community/organization strength.

Note. ODC = Organizational development and change.

- **Problem identification:** This stage usually begins when a key executive in the organization or someone with power and influence senses that the organization or system has one or more problems that might be solved with the help of a professional facilitator or an organizational development and change (ODC) practitioner.
- **Consultation with a behavioral science expert:** During the initial contact, the ODC practitioner and the client carefully assess each other. During this sharing stage, the client and consultant seek to establish an open and collaborative atmosphere.
- **Data gathering and preliminary diagnosis:** This step involves gathering appropriate information and analyzing it to determine the underlying causes of organizational problems. Typically, interviews, process observation, questionnaires, and organizational performance data are collected.
- **Feedback to a key client or group:** The feedback step, in which organizational members are given information by the ODC practitioner, helps them determine the strengths and weaknesses of the organization or department under study.
- **Joint diagnosis of the problem:** At this point, members discuss the feedback and explore with the ODC practitioner whether they want to work on identified problems. A close relationship exists during data gathering, feedback, and diagnosis because the consultant summarizes the basic data from the client members and presents the data to them for validation and further diagnosis.
- **Joint action planning:** Next, the ODC practitioner and client members jointly agree on further actions to be taken. This is the moving process that Lewin described.
- **Action:** This stage involves the actual change effort. It may include installing new methods and procedures, reorganizing structures and work designs, and reinforcing new behaviors.
- **Data gathering after action:** Because action research is a cyclical process, data must also be gathered after the action has been taken to measure and determine the effects of the action and to feed the results back to the organization. This, in turn, may lead to rediagnosis and new action.

One can see in these steps a clear bias toward a priority on identifying and resolving problems. Note, for instance, the two uses of the terms, *diagnosis* and *problem identification*, as technical steps they already presume that there is something wrong within the system. The underlying metaphor of these activities is that a community is sick or in a state of detriment, requiring a need for healing and restoration to be made whole. The consultant facilitator often takes this role, and from the organizational perspective is seen as a physician who can heal the organization's ills. These underlying assumptions—that “something is wrong around here”—tend to make community members wary of the consultant, especially if they have been burned by past development activities. As a result, data collection can generate skepticism, and feedback to community members may be met with concern, fear, or high anxiety among participants. Motivation through fear is not very sustainable.

These reactions are exacerbated if the joint action planning focuses on a seemingly small circle of people who are “in the know” and are hierarchically selected (Powley, Fry, Barrett, & Bright, 2004). Inner circle participants may make decisions

about the diagnosis and the need for change that they then have to advocate and defend to the excluded members. One of the most common methods among inner-circle participants is to advocate an imminent crisis (Kotter, 1995, 1999), that if not addressed could ultimately destroy the organization. The results of these activities predictably increase the level of fear, anxiety, and potential resistance to significant change. In other words, the tendency of organization members to continue with ordinary activities will intensify—the normative force toward the center away from deviance can become palpable. Ironically, the fear of failure or imminent crisis motivates people to become more self-centric, more concerned with survival (Fredrickson, 2003), and they are likely to work for the common good only so long as they can see a clearly discernible link to their own self-interests (Bright, 2005). All of these reactions suggest that any change within an organization will be limited to existing norms. To the extent that successful transformation in norms does occur, it usually entails significant angst and conflict. Community and organizational development from this perspective is not a pleasant experience for participants.

OPPORTUNITY-CENTRIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGIES

Appreciative inquiry represents an alternative PAR process with emerging, new methodologies that allow for an extension and elevation of community strengths, where the images of normative existence within that community are shifted toward the exceptional or extraordinary (Cooperrider, 1990; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative inquiry is an opportunity centric methodology that focuses first on shifting the fundamental conceptions about community norms toward a consideration of the extraordinary. The groundwork for this shift rests in several starting assumptions about human systems. Consider the following:

- All organizations or communities are centers of human relatedness that can serve to magnify the best possibilities of the human condition. This magnification occurs to the extent that communities appreciate the developmental potential of their members and community characteristics or resources.
- Communities are an embodied miracle of life, filled with capacity, energy, and potential. People live in communities or organizations precisely because of the basic need for human association that provides a sense of aliveness and energy.
- For the practitioner, every inquiry is an intervention, which means that the images embedded within the very questions we ask have enormous potential for unlocking, possible, actionable answers.
- The whole system should be involved because a global change in a community is most likely if all members shift nearly simultaneously. (Imagine, for example, what would happen if the U.S. government were to attempt to change the direction of traffic from the right side to the left side of the road. This would absolutely require that nearly everyone in the system change the norm instantaneously—it could not work piecemeal.)
- The possibility of deep community change is most probable when community members feel a strong sense of trust, psychological safety, and commitment to the process. In an environment where people feel safely connected and inspired

when interacting with one another, they are more likely to feel inspired, think creatively, and try on new ideas. Social change can be easier to implement, and potentially more sustainable.

This process of initiating the momentum for change is different from problem-centric approaches in several ways. First, authentic inquiry, not diagnosis, is the primary mechanism for initiating the possibility of change (Adams, Schiller, & Cooperrider, 2004). A focus on inquiry suggests that an answer is not predefined, meaning that there is room to collaboratively discover common answers.

Inquiry also tends to create “an appreciating effect” on relationships (Bright et al., 2006; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). It tends to level the hierarchical boundaries that often separate people (Powley et al., 2004). For instance, when the executive director of a nonprofit organization takes the time to listen to an employee, the employee now becomes a teacher: an individual with unique expertise, perspective, and importance. In the best cases, a relationship may develop that shifts the assumptions that each holds of the other. The term *appreciation* means two things: (a) to increase the value in something of worth, and (b) to understand and perceive, epistemologically, what exists in one’s environment, to feel grateful for what “is” in one’s experience (Bright et al., 2006; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Authentic inquiry creates appreciation in both senses: inquiry serves (a) to strengthen the relational ties between people, while (b) expanding the strengths and opportunities that people see in their communities (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004).

The importance of inquiry’s effect makes it essential to exercise care in the selection of a topic for the intervention (Goldberg, 1998). Again, the key is to identify possibilities for shifting normative expectations. In the practice of AI, this is done by focusing on positive possibilities rather than on simply defined problems (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom, & Kaplin, 2002). Indeed, problems are redefined as opportunities and the images that define problems as problems in the first place are explored. For instance, consider the lack of parental involvement in an urban school setting. The intervener can easily define this as a problem. But hidden in this easily defined “problem” is an image of a strong positive—high parental involvement. What does that look like? Who is involved? When are moments when parents have already been engaged in extraordinary ways? This not-so-subtle shift in emphasis for inquiry still addresses the same issues, but does so in a way that allows for a consideration of the norms that support authentic high engagement. The opportunity-centric approach focuses on examining in great detail the successful examples of desired images within communities. In the process, the norms that define problems are often fundamentally transformed. These claims have been examined as related to strategic planning (Powley et al., 2004), leadership (Cummings & Anton, 1990; Frost & Egri, 1990), psychophysiology (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004), team development (Bushe, 2000; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995) interorganizational alliance building (Miller, Fitzgerald, Preston, & Murrell, 2002) and community development (Hammond & Royal, 2001; Pratt, 2002) among others.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN OPPORTUNITY-CENTRIC CHANGE METHOD

Appreciative inquiry as an opportunity-centric change methodology has progressively gained stature as a viable and effective organization development strategy. During the

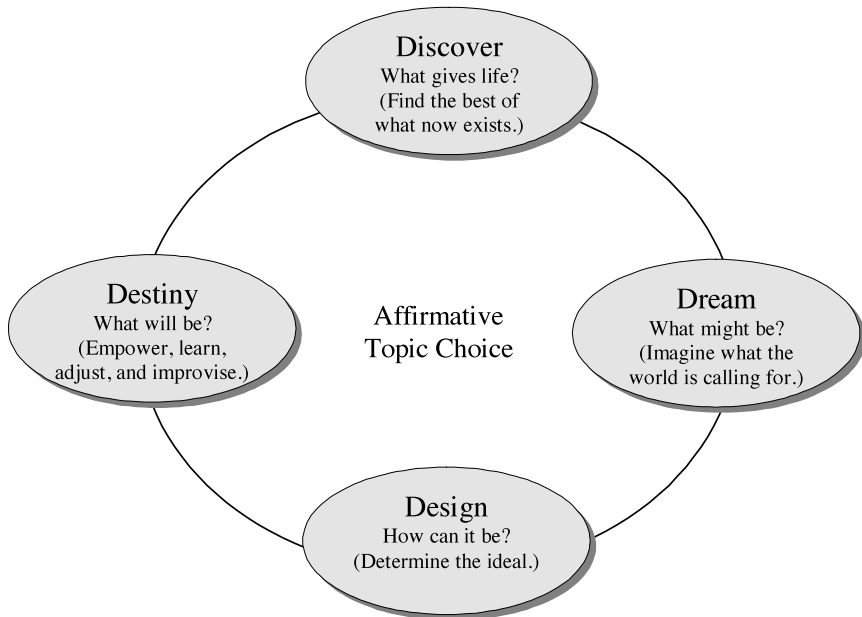


Figure 2. The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry. From “Appreciative Inquiry in the Office of Research and Development: Improving the Collaborative Capacity of Organization,” by D. S. Bright, D. L. Cooperrider, and W. B. Galloway (2006). *Public Performance and Management Review*, 29, 285–306. Copyright 2006 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc. Reprinted with permission of the author.

past decade or so, AI scholars and practitioners have honed a method that creates an atmosphere for opportunity-centered change into a practitioner model known as the 4-D cycle: Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny (see Figure 2; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Ludema et al., 2003; Whitney et al., 2002). To highlight how AI works, and, in turn, demonstrate the capacity of opportunity-centric methods for enacting organizational and social change, we present a brief case analysis of an AI-based intervention.

The organization used the AI Summit, a large-scale gathering of stakeholders, to transform the way they function (Ludema et al., 2003). The event was organized in four phases as illustrated in Figure 2: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny.

Case Background

One of the authors was involved in an intraorganizational AI Summit with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that was established in 1995 to promote and fight for the rights of injured workers. For the purpose of anonymity, we will call the organization, *Helping Injured Workers* (HIW). The organization is situated in a northeastern state of the United States, and at the time of the AI Summit, the organization had over 2,000 members and was organized in 11 active regional statewide chapters. The organization also maintained a headquarters in a central location of the state that was operated by an executive director. Oversight of the executive director and the organization was maintained by a geographically dispersed group of board members.

The facilitator team entered into the organization per invitation from the executive director, and after a few preliminary meetings, a contract was established between the parties to create a steering committee that would manage the change process. The

AI approach was selected as the method to infuse change for two reasons: (a) The executive director wanted to try something new due to the fact that problem-based strategies of the past had not worked, and (b) the facilitator team wanted to test the efficacy of an opportunity-centered change method in the field. For the purpose of evaluating the efficacy of the AI approach to change, qualitative and quantitative outcome measures were collected at the individual, change process, organizational, and community level. Individual and AI process measures were collected via open-ended questionnaires at the end of each AI stage in which participants were asked to reflect on their individual experiences and their experiences of change method. Organizational and community measures were collected via interviews with steering committee members and survey feedback from organization members immediately following the AI Summit and at 6, 12, and 18 months post-Summit.

The Change Process Begins

A letter was sent to all members of the organization to create a steering committee for the change process.

Hello. I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in an organizational development process that is currently being considered by Helping Injured Workers (HIW). During the past month, I have had a couple of preliminary meetings with a consulting team to discuss how HIW can add to the great successes that we have already achieved. As such, I would like you to consider participating in a steering committee that will be formed including board members, state directors, chapter leadership, members at large, and consulting team members. As a final note, even if you are not able to participate in the steering committee work, you will likely have an opportunity at some time later to participate in the organizational development process. Take care and hope to hear from you soon.

*Sincerely,
Executive Director, HIW*

Notice that the AI approach was designed into the call for action by highlighting a focus on past successes to serve as a guide for change. In addition, notice that the letter represents an attempt to create inclusiveness for all members of the organization. These statements were intentionally created for the purpose of setting a positively oriented trajectory of thinking that would guide the OD process. Future communications contained similarly intentioned appreciative and inclusive statements. A few weeks later, a steering committee met at a neutral conference site for a half-day meeting. The steering committee was comprised of members from the entire organizational system, and members from the external environmental system. The committee included the executive director, AI team members, three board members, eight chapter members, and state and local union officials. The steering committee decided to design an AI Summit as a full-day session in which participants would work through the 4-D cycle. The event was designed to create an atmosphere in which many diverse interests would be considered, and that it would not require excessive time investment from the participants.

Discover. The underlying assumption of the Discover phase is that people enact intrinsically held assumptions and images into the reality of organizational life (Cooperrider, 1990). Created by the social constructions of language and stories, these assumptions and images generally lead to events and actions that reinforce the way members speak and think about the organization. Positive images refer to an ideal state about what should be in organization practice: how people should treat one another, what the organization should represent or strive for, etc. The primary goal is to create an awareness of images, stories, and capacities that are most likely to inspire future organizing.

A well-executed opening activity uses questions to generate an atmosphere of energy, focus, and anticipation for alternative possibilities and assumptions. The Discover phase initiates intentional conversations among organization or system members, often involving hundreds of participants. In the case of HIW, approximately 50 organization and community members representing the stakeholders to the issues of injured workers met for the full-day session. The day began with a warm-up period in which attendees introduced themselves and noted at least one positive thing that HIW had done for them or for injured workers. The warm-up served to orient the group to each other and was designed to identify and enhance the organization's "positive capacity" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 10).

Immediately following the warm-up, attendees were randomly assigned to breakout groups and they were charged with answering the following question: "What has HIW done in the past that made it successful?" The breakout session lasted approximately 45 minutes, and there was an appreciable amount of dialogue and energy surrounding the stories of past HIW successes. Examples of successes included: (a) HIW helped to modify the latest version of the state workers compensation act, (b) HIW helped injured workers get access to important workers compensation information, (c) HIW increased awareness of the plight of injured workers, and (d) HIW increased access to affordable and qualified attorney representation.

The HIW participants talked about hopes and dreams for the future, and they discovered common values that served to create an atmosphere of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), trust, and a sense of high quality connection (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Participants also reported that they noticed traits in others or in the community for the first time, as they became aware of previously unnoticed strengths (see Table 2 for additional individual and change process outcomes).

Dream.

The Dream phase alters the focus of inquiry from discovering existent strengths to a consideration of how these strengths can be leveraged (Bright et al., 2006). The key question is "What could be . . .?" in relation to the Summit topic. The dialogue in this phase is practical: It is based in the organization's history and it allows for an expansion of thinking about an organization's potential. The themes from the previous phase are used to design and expand aspirations for change, challenging the status quo and building synergy. Events generate an atmosphere of playfulness and creativity. Participants might work in groups to create artwork, poetry, or a skit to depict an ideal future, where the highest dreams, passions, and aspirations become clearly apparent. Participants might also summarize and prioritize key themes or ideas for action. The linking of past, present, and future ideas creates a sense of continuity and connection across time (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). In sum, the Dream phase draws

Table 2. A Sample of Individual, Change Process, Organization, and Community Outcomes

<i>Outcome</i>	
Individual	<p>"I'm feeling good about HIW." "I can see that lots of things are happening across the state." "My energy level is high today." "I learned how I can help make a difference with this organization." "I am excited to go back to my chapter and share with them what has happened here." "I have more faith in this organization than ever." "I think the sessions have shown me that people in this organization really care."</p>
Change process	<p>"This meeting has been the best thing that ever happened to HIW." "I especially like how we began the workshop with the good stuff about our work. I think it created a lot of energy for change." "The sessions showed us that we can take control of our organization, and get things done." "Being positive works! Two years ago, we held a conference for HIW, but most of the time was spent complaining about the politicians and laws. This time we could see that we are making a difference." "I would like to try this method with other organizations that I work with."</p>
Organization	<p>Central Office disbanded in 2004 and organization structure changed from hierarchical to a virtual-systems orientation. Board of Directors reconfigured to create majority control via the members. New Bylaws are created in 2005. Eleven chapters reorganized into five regional chapters in 2005. New Web-Portal Established in 2004. New Web-Portal connected the HIW chapters, and members, together. "The New Web-Portal has significantly increased information flows between leadership and rank-and-file members." "We communicate in real-time now." [2005] Average number of legislator contacts increased by 30% in 2005–2006. Average number of formal petitions to Legislators increased by 33% in 2005–2006. Average number of rallies and protests increased by 20.5% in 2005–2006. Membership increased by 18% in 2005–2006. Revenues increased by 28%.</p>
Community	<p>Number of community-based publications increased by 40%. Number of community-based advertisements increased by 50%. A State-Level Workers Compensation Advisory Council was established in 2005 for the purpose of accepting public commentary into new policy initiatives. A State Commission was established in 2006 for the purpose of initiating workers' compensation legislation reform. HIW supported bills introduced in the House or Senate has increased by 20% in 2005–2006. HIW supported bills that became law increased by 15% in 2005–2006.</p>

Note. HIW = Helping Injured Workers organization.

on the best of the past and present in a way that maximizes the capability for expansive thinking about the potential future.

In the case of HIW, a storytelling method was used to explore the participants' dreams for the future of the organization. Facilitators invited participants to share personal stories of HIW successes and to recite the story like one would "at a campfire." As stories were shared, participants from each group wrote on poster paper

a summary of emergent themes from their stories. By analyzing these themes, each group decided on the key elements that defined major successes of HIW. These ideas were posted on the walls of the meeting hall, and a group moderator conducted content analysis, in real time, by organizing the themes of the conversation and creating a priority list of major positive successes. In addition, participants wrote brief descriptions of their successes and then posted these on the walls of the meeting room. With these writings as a collective resource, each group could see reminders of positive organizational elements as they proceeded into the design phase. It was interesting to observe that this method collectively reminded participants that HIW had created significant value to their lives and the lives of injured workers, and there was a clear sense that HIW was an important and needed organization.

Next, to refine dreams of the future, the facilitator asked the breakout groups to answer the following question: "If you could look into the future in the year 2010, what will be the successes that HIW has achieved?" Each member of a breakout team told their version of a futuristic story. Group members generated key themes from the contents of these future visions. A moderator helped to summarize these key ideas for the future across all of the groups. Examples dream statements included (a) the state workers compensation act is repealed, and a new "worker friendly" version is in place, (b) injured workers are empowered by HIW to get access to the information and resources they need, (c) we are connected in a virtual communication network, and (d) we have ample monetary resources to fund our mission. Note that these ideas are stated in present tense as a means to focus the mind on the possibility of an actualized reality.

Design. The Design phase initiates a shift from reflection to action. The major task is to identify concrete, actionable ideas that will move the organization closer to its newly envisioned potential. A key task is the formation of action groups, organized to focus on the implementation of prioritized ideas and to operationalize Summit outcomes. Team development activities aim to build strong, focused teams with a clear sense of purpose and identity. Groups generate a statement of aspirations and develop a plan to enact these aspirations. Because people are more likely to become actively engaged in a particular initiative when they are involved from inception to implementation (Burke, 2002), self-organization and self-governance is prominent. Participants are free to choose or propose any group based on common interests. In the ideal scenario, emergent leaders become actively engaged in planning change, fostering an atmosphere of commitment and purpose, a sense responsibility that encourages supportive behaviors, the enhancement of innovation and creativity, and the opportunity for skill-development in leadership (Harrison & Freeman, 2004).

In the current case, facilitators again organized breakout groups. Each group designed three specific ways that HIW could meet the major dreams of the groups. After each group designed action plans, a few members of the steering committee moderated a session in which representatives from each group shared their action plans. These plans were merged to create a single action plan. The focus of the single action plan called for a transformational organizational structure change that would reduce the number of regional sites, interconnect the regional sites into an integrated computer network, and eliminate the executive director position. Organizational governance controlled by a new board of directors was designed to consider a better cross-section of stakeholders. By modeling empowerment in the organizational structure and governance of HIW, the resultant organization design reflected empowerment of the injured worker. It was especially interesting that the AI Summit seemed to

facilitate a condition where members realized that they, collectively, were in control of the organization's destiny (see Table 2 for additional individual and change process outcomes).

Destiny. Initiated at the end of the Summit, the Destiny phase is a transition from planning to deployment as teams implement their plans to create change. End-of-Summit activities should prepare the action teams for post-Summit activity. For instance, each action team presents its plan to the rest of the Summit community. Each plan might include refined aspirations, goals, major milestones, and an assignment of team leadership. Organizing the management of the post-Summit environment might include discussions about how often to schedule team meetings, how final decisions will be made, or how to stay connected through virtual technologies. As in any change event, the key is to create a plan for perpetuating the momentum from the Summit as people return to their day-to-day responsibilities. Destiny's most obvious effects are found in the degree to which teams carry out their plans. As Summit participants continue work in their newly formed groups, they create small wins or incremental shifts in the patterns of organizing.

In the case of HIW, the final hour and a half of the AI Summit was spent in designing and assigning tasks for specific action plans to become a reality. Task assignments included (a) designing a team to review and recommend changes to the bylaws of the organization, (b) creating a team to design a new election process to the board of directors, (c) having a team design a Web site for the organization so that members could stay connected, (d) creating a team to design the exit strategy of the executive director, and (e) creating a team to consider regional mergers and restructuring of the number of regional sites. At 6, 12, and 18 months following the AI Summit, steering committee members monitored the change process via a number of feedback mechanisms. In particular, interviews were conducted with steering committee members and survey feedback data was collected from organization members. Respondents reported significant increases in the ability to conduct legislative lobbying efforts, better communication flows between the regional sites, easier access to information through the development of the Web portal, and an increased sense of organizational control by the members. In addition, organization members felt that their mission was being achieved with greater effectiveness, that fundraising amounts were increasing and that it was easier to fundraise by allowing grassroots members to have control of organizational fiduciary responsibilities, and that organization members felt a greater sense of community with each other (see Table 2 for additional organizational and community outcomes).

In summary, the four phases of a Summit provided an opportunity for people to participate in a series of guided conversations that explored a topic of organizational significance. The output was a collection of action steps, developed and carried out by democratically organized groups. Other less-visible benefits were an enhanced network of relationships, greater awareness about existing organizational strengths and resources, and the development of leadership potential among employees at all levels.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Appreciative inquiry, as an example of opportunity-centric participatory action research, connects with many of the foundational assumptions and philosophies of community psychology. In particular, appreciative inquiry respects ecological analysis, diversity,

empowerment, prevention, and sense of community. Moreover, appreciative inquiry is a strengths-based approach that is consistent with emergent findings in the positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship academic movements that are producing new discoveries and perspectives.

Appreciative inquiry is consistent with ecological analysis and the concept of person-environment fit. An ecological perspective recognizes the transactional nature between people and their environments, and that individuals function best when their environments are designed to align with their particular characteristics (Pargament, 1986; Seidman, 1990). Appreciative inquiry is premised on the assumption that generative dialogues will create a consultative environment that is pleasant and energizing for participants. In addition, the technique of asking participants to inquire about the ideal state of their organization or community system, and what gives life to it, allows them to use their imagination and creativity to self-design an environment of reflection.

In addition, an ecological perspective supports the notion that change interventions can be targeted at various subunit's of an ecological system (e.g., individual, group, organizational, interorganizational, societal, intersocietal), which, in turn, can alter the environment to create a greater fit between the person and environment. Using the summit methodology as an example, when a steering committee is created to guide the appreciative action research project, various stakeholders are intentionally included as representatives of organizations (or units of organizations), neighborhoods, regions, political landscapes, and various worldviews. Participants in the process reflect on the life-giving aspects of their particular environments, especially focusing on the larger societal environment that their individual circumstances impact. After reflecting on what is working in their individual and intertwined systems, the participants use their findings as grounding to design specific changes that directly alter the organization. Appreciative inquiry allows for multiple stakeholder involvement, and therefore reflects an appreciation and respect for diversity and tolerance of individual differences. Moreover, by its very nature, AI tends to create interventions that increase the power of diversity as an ongoing resource within organizations. By discovering commonalities with others, participants in an AI often claim that they are better able to respect their differences with others as a source of strength. Appreciative inquiry also nicely fits with a preventive focus in community psychology. Appreciative inquiry eschews a problem-focused reactionary methodology, and instead attempts to build upon current system strengths that lead the system to a greater potential. It seeks to prevent the system from incurring future problems by envisioning and implementing changes at the present time that would ward off or prevent future negative states from occurring to the organization or social system. In relation to the reflective process, AI helps prevent excessive negative thought patterns and energy that could thwart the group's ability to reach desired outcomes and social changes.

Appreciative inquiry also respects a philosophy of empowerment. It requires a participative environment for all stakeholders; therefore, it helps to empower those who do not typically have voice in organizations (Rappaport, 1987). In addition, groups, organizations, and community systems can attain various degrees of empowerment. When individuals and groups participate in deficit-focused interventions, they may unconsciously develop states of learned helplessness that reduce their ability to envision a greater future (Seligman, 1992). Appreciative inquiry may help to avoid negative psychological states that develop during change processes by preventing disempowering cognitions, and instead creating a sense of learned optimism for participants in the process (Seligman, 1991). In this way, an opportunity-focused process allows participants

to achieve greater levels of control than traditional participatory action research by avoiding the pitfalls of problem-focused methods.

Finally, AI is consistent with the competency-based or assets-based approach in community psychology and the recent theme of positive psychology. Psychology has historically focused on the frailties and weaknesses of the human condition; however, positive psychological approaches (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) have increasingly become accepted in the various domains of psychological practice and scholarship. We have known in community psychology what others are perhaps beginning to realize through the concept of positive psychology, that assets-based approaches are fundamental to the way we conceptualize the human condition. Appreciative inquiry as a mode for organizational and social change accepts this tenet, and therefore is consistent with our worldview of human nature.

In summary, the goal in this article is to highlight the importance of the need for rethinking the basic assumptions embedded in traditional PAR methodologies as a mode of action research for community psychologists. We believe that appreciative inquiry is an opportunity-centric method that can aid community psychologists who are interested in facilitating organizational and social change interventions. In addition, we believe that appreciative inquiry is consistent with many of the underlying assumptions of community psychology, and therefore is philosophically aligned with our traditions. Finally, we would like to highlight the continued importance of maintaining an organizational perspective (Boyd & Angelique, 2002) for ideas that can stimulate and aid us in our quest to design better social systems.

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