

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY  
Overview of APMF Workshop Opening and Activity  
Cynthia Irmer, JD, PhD

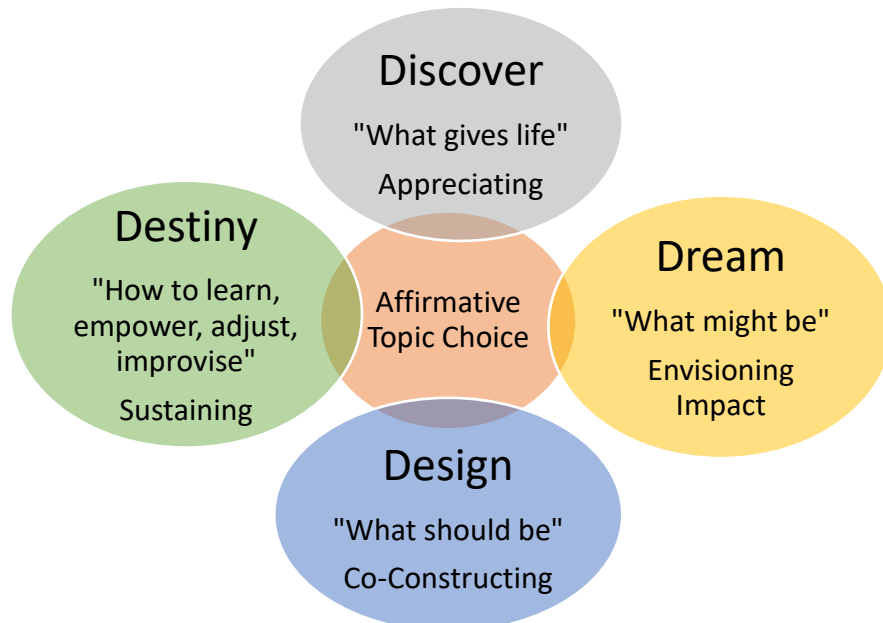
In his renowned book, *Violence explained*, John Burton demonstrates that violence in contemporary societies erupts because participants in violence believe no change in perceived oppressive social structures is possible. According to Burton, people “see no evidence that their plight is known to or being addressed by relevant authorities. Their anger is directed against society generally, and against their own peoples in the absence of any other outlet.” Transformation of personal perceptions and social narratives on violence is required to break this cycle. Through a method based on the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, it is possible to foster new levels of resilience in communities impacted by social violence.

Appreciate (verb): 1) To value or regard highly; place a high estimate on; 2) To be fully conscious of, be aware of, detect; 3) To raise in value; 4) To be grateful or thankful for

Appreciative Inquiry is a process that

- Focuses on what works in a system
- Describes where the stakeholders want to be, based on the “high” moments of where they have been
- Builds a set of statements that are grounded in real experience and history
- Is a living process
- Is a generative process

“Appreciative Inquiry is the **cooperative** search for **the best** in people, their organizations and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system “life” when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to [apprehend, anticipate] and heighten positive potential.” Cooperrider and Whitney (1999)



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Appreciative Inquiry Principles

- Constructionist
- Simultaneity
- Poetic
- Anticipatory
- Positive

Assumptions

- In every society, organization or group, there is something that works
- What we focus on becomes our reality
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities
- The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past
- If we carry parts of our past forward, it should be what is best about the past
- It is important to value difference
- The language we use creates our reality

Task 1

- Gather data by asking the pre-written question; each person should ask every one
- Quick ask, quick response, jot it down, jot them all down

Task 2

- Share ideas about what might exist
- Craft statements building on what exists now, stretching to what might exist

Statements for Task 2 are specific, concrete and tangible; they grow out of current conditions, they inspire; they are connected to the Peace Infrastructure.

Task 3

- Rate each statement
  - How much is already present in the system
  - How Important is it

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WORKSHOP AGENDA

14:00 Introduction to Workshop

14:05 Basic Human Needs (BHN) and the Cycle of Conflict/Violence

John Burton's theory of BHN and populations' resort to violence  
Trigger, Escalation, Violent Communities, Deadlock, De-escalation, Termination  
Limits of Problem Solving (PS) Approach; Benefits of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

14:20 Activity: Large Group Work, Ask Questions, Collect Answers

Each of four groups collects answers to a single question; each group must finish with an answer from everyone else in the room; there are four rounds of question/answer activities, each is 10 minutes long; during each round, half of each group stays in one spot, the other half travels around the room to get answers from others (both stationary and traveling can ask and answer questions); one person reads the group's question (below) and one person supplies a thoughtful 2-sentence answer. Person asking question records response. Ask and answer as many questions as possible in 10 minutes, return to group. Second round is the same as the first round with different people in each group remaining stationary.

Questions to be answered: Group a) why is it that suffering in communities other than one's own is so easily ignored; Group b) what happens when suffering spills across community boundaries; Group c) what would it be like if a majority of people believed that reducing suffering anywhere reduces it everywhere; Group d) what would it look like if cultures collaborated to reduce suffering across community borders?

14:40 Plenary Discussion: Set up Small Group Work

15:00 Small Group Work: Design Activities

Working on its own, each group compiles the information gathered during Phase I and sketches out five innovative yet realistic community-level activities that implement answers to its question (no donor resources available).

Each group devises one activity for each of the following: 1) improve community-level leadership for asking and answering group's question; 2) generate necessary community-level communications for engaging on group's question; 3) incentivize community embodiment of the answers to group's question; 4) establish community-level practices; and 5) recommend community-level decision-making approaches. With

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many participants, each group may form sub-groups to complete various portions of this phase.

15:10 Plenary Session

Each Group:

- Report out activities
- Debrief experience in activity and possible personal steps toward implementation of activities
- Generate a written statement of all the answers they received to their question and the activities they suggested
- One person in each group compiles comments and discussion during the plenary

During this discussion, participants comment on the developing social narrative

15:30 Final Comments and Wrap-up