

The Wholeness Principle and Stories of Diversity and Inclusion:

A Reflexive Approach

Ilene Wasserman

All eyes were glued on the stage. John, a self-avowed reformed neo-Nazi sat with the director and producer of the movie that told his story, ready and available for questions. The questions and comments came one by one. "How did you make the decision to leave the movement?" "How wonderful you are to risk your life to tell your story!" The conversation that followed the movie was both inspiring and riveting. There was time for one more question.

"My entire family was murdered in the holocaust by the Nazis. When you think back to when you were beating people up and murdering them in the street, can you tell me, where was your humanity?"

Pause "First, I want to say how sorry I am for your loss. I can't imagine the pain that you live with having lost your entire family. To answer your question, I don't know where my humanity was – if it was even there."

Introduction

For those who are committed to “live” the principles and philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry, this exchange might seem like a clear example of elevating the shadow in the turns of a conversation. The question posed in the second paragraph above, spoke directly to the horrifying acts that continue to be perpetuated on innocent people and contextualize those acts in a period of history when the genocide of groups of people were conducted in a methodological way. The tenor of the question departed from the preceding pattern of comments and questions, which amplified the heroic choice of the reformer. This encounter, one of two deeply textured narratives: those of a “transformed white supremacist” and a child of holocaust survivors whose life work is to share photographs of victims¹ with the world and to, in the process, help families build connections where bridges have been lost, shines a light on the value and importance of embracing the wholeness principle.

The Wholeness Principle and Storytelling

In any encounter, many social worlds are converging simultaneously. One way of viewing this is that in any encounter there is a meeting of stories that are lived, or the enactments, and the stories that are told, or the way enactments are narrated in order to make meaning in our lives. These social worlds, and the stories that constitute them may resonate with each other, or may create dissonance or tension. It can be very tempting to hold the story we are narrating for ourselves as the whole truth; all the more so when our colleagues, friends or work culture tell the same story. More often, however, the stuff that makes up our stories is much more complex. Because any story comes from a particular

¹ Photographs, which were collected from prisoners as they entered the concentration camp, were discovered by this woman during a tour of the camps over a decade ago.

viewpoint, which embodies particular beliefs, values and associations, "the whole story is never a singular story. It is often a synthesis, a compilation of multiple stories, shared and woven together by the many people involved" (Whitney; Trosten-Bloom, 2010)

Appreciative Inquiry is a methodology known to intentionally elevate stories that amplify strengths and possibilities (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). When this works, "instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream and design." Yet, in the process of elevating what are perceived to be strengths, what might be hindered in service of wholeness in relating and shared meaning making? In their article, Appreciative Inquiry as a Shadow Process, Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxey, (2010) invite a richer, more complex and holistic understanding of the practices of AI. Building on an earlier article (Fitzgerald and Oliver, 2006, 2011), this invitation creates an opening to explore "a new way of conceiving of AI through the generative and provocative metaphor of *AI as a shadow process in organizational life*, one that has the potential to resolve and even transcend the unintended consequences of the polarization and bifurcation of human experience and expression in our collective AI conversation" (p.220).

Boje (2010), in response to Fitzgerald et al (2010), proposes that the emphasis on the "positivity narrative" fails to take account of the ambiguous circumstances and diversity of voices in the workplace. AI represents a re-reading of the past, present and future with positive beginnings, middles, and ends, thereby "erasing the plots of the back shadows, disallowing side shadows that would offer alternative foreshadows" (p. 239). The shadow is, "that which is feared and suppressed, that which is considered inappropriate and shunned, that which is unbearable to hold consciously and denied" (p. 64). Fitzgerald et al, (2010) summarize suppressing, shunning, and denying as "censoring." The term "censored" refers to any conscious or unconscious regulation of cognition and/or emotion by self and/or others where their experience and/or expression that is judged to not fit with "accepted" cultural or group norms. (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

The tension of holding the appreciative perspective with issues of social justice has been particularly challenging. Part of this challenge may be understood by Boje's delineation of the front story, back story and side story. From Boje's perspective, AI censors anything other than a positive reframe of what has been and what is potentiated. In my experience with the discourse of diversity and my practice as an organizational development consultant helping organizations committed to leveraging workplace diversity, people who hold deeply embedded historical narratives of having been marginalized, not only need to tell their story, but need their stories to be heard and acknowledged as their truth as well. It is then, and only then, that people can move on, together to create a new vision of what they can potentially create together.

Our Story – Our Praxis

The approach my colleagues and I take when working with organizations is informed by positive organizational scholarship and the methodologies of the appreciative approach. That said, we are also informed by decades of experience in

issues of diversity and inclusion at the workplace. In our experience with diversity and inclusion at the workplace, three conceptual frameworks frame our work. One is the work related to *intersectionality* (e.g., Jones & Wijeyesinghe 2011; McEwen 2003; Torres, Jones, & Renn 2009), an analytic lens that values the complexity of the integration of multiple identities such as gender, class, and sexual orientation, how they intersect and the ways the consequential influence on behavior and perceptions (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves 2007). *Intersectionality* argues for the integrated study and critical inquiry that addresses the various systems of inequality related to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and nationality (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 2007). This approach expands perspective of categorizing people from *either/or*, to a more integrated *both/and* approach. Various facets of identity become multiplicative or interactive rather than additive, painting a complex matrix of individual facets as a total identity (Jones & Wijeyesinghe 2011)

The second framework expands our notion of dominance and subordination by highlighting the distinctions among personal identity, positional identity and cultural identity.² In this framework, personal identity is contextualized along with positional identity or role, and social group or cultural identity. Once again, patterns of relating are created in the complex engagement of both dominant and subordinate personal and social narratives.

The third framework is the CMM model or the Coordinated Management of Meaning (Pearce, 2004). One aspect of this model that I reference here is the LUUUUTT model. The LUUUUTT model is a tool for exploring the systemic or holistic aspects of stories and storytelling. LUUUUTT is an acronym for stories (1) *L*ived, (2) *U*nknown, (3) *U*ntold, (4) *U*nheard, (5) *U*ntellable, (6) storied *T*old, and (7) story *T*elling (p. 212).

Boje suggests that AI's 5-D model (define, discover, dream, design, and destiny) needs at least 3 more D's: (1) *D*econstruction of narratives of dominance; (2) *D*ifferences in the play of embodied standpoints, and (3) *D*ialogical processes that bring people from the side shadows into meaningful conversation in crafting the more official narrative orders. At the risk of adding complexity to an already rich equation, I would suggest yet another D: engaging *D*issonance. We often use the opportunity to pose questions that invites an encounter with dissonance or a "disorienting dilemma" such that it disrupts one's taken-for-granted story and in so doing, offers both a challenge and a learning opportunity to further expand one's definition of their personal and collective identities (Wasserman, 2004, Wasserman & Gallegos, 2009). This is akin to Bushe's invitation to "pay attention to the habits of polarizing our thinking and speaking when trying to help a group of people raise their collective awareness" (p. 234) to explore processes that invite wholeness in ongoing discourses. The generative potential here is especially rich where relationships have deeply embedded historical narratives both experienced and inherited that are in conflict such as what we find in ethnic and cultural conflict.

² I want to acknowledge the work of Anne Litwin who initially introduced this framework in her work with Barry and Karen Oshry.

Summary

In each encounter of every day, we come together bringing the complexity of our social worlds informed by our narratives of the past and how we anticipate our futures. The complexity of these encounters is not always as clear as that of the opening story. My invitation is to greet each encounter with a sense of the humility of a limited view, poised with a curious presence, and the capacity to engage what is most unsettling, and engage in pursuit of wholeness. It is with such encounters that we then have the potential, as Boje suggests, “to create safe spaces for those in the side shadows and the main light, ... to be dialogical, to fully embody their respective standpoints and in that to achieve the co-generativity that AI explicitly desires (2010, p.240).

References

- Boje D. M., Side Shadowing Appreciative Inquiry: One Storyteller’s Commentary
Journal of Management Inquiry 19(3) 238–241.
- Bush, G., (2010) Commentary on “Appreciative Inquiry as a Shadow Process”, *Journal of Management Inquiry* 19(3) 234–237
- Bushe, G. R. 2007, February. Appreciative Inquiry is Not About the Positive. Retrieved June 25, 2007 at http://www.gervasebushe.ca/AI_pos.pdf.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. 1987. Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. *Organizational Change and Development*, 1: 129-169.
- Dill, B. T., McLaughlin, A. & Nieves, A.D., 2007. “Future directions of feminist research: Intersectionality.” Pp. 629-637 in *Handbook of feminist research*, ed. Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ferdman, B. M. 1995. “Cultural identity and diversity in organizations: Bridging the gap between group differences and individual uniqueness.” Pp. 37-61 in *Diversity in organizations: New perspectives for a changing workplace*, ed. Martin M. Chemers, Stuart Oskamp, and Mark Costanzo. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fitzgerald, S. P., & Oliver, C. (2006). *Walking the dark side of positive organizational behavior: Appreciating the role of the shadow*. Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Southern Academy of Management, Clearwater, FL.
- Fitzgerald, S. P., Oliver, C., & Hoxsey, J. (2010). Appreciative Inquiry as a Shadow Process. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 19, 220-233.
- Gallegos, P. I., and Ferdman, B. M., 2007. “Identity orientations of Latinos in the United States: Implications for leaders and organizations.” *Business Journal of Hispanic Research*, 1: 27-41.

Hermans, H.J.M., (2001), *The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning Culture & Psychology* vol. 7: 243-281.

Holvino, E, 2010. "Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender, and Class in Organization Studies [Special Issue: Gender and Ethnicity]." *Gender, Work and Organization*, 17: 248-277.

Jones, S. R. and Wijeyesinghe, C. L., 2011. "The Promises and Challenges of Teaching from an Intersectional Perspective: Core Components and Applied Strategies." Pp. 11-20 in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning: An Integrative Analysis Approach to Diversity in the Classroom*, ed. M.L. Ouellett. Wilmington, DE: Wiley.

Kirk, G., & Okazawa-Rey, M., eds. 2007. *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

McEwen, M. K. 2003. "New perspectives on identity development." Pp. 203-233 in *Student services: A handbook for the profession*, ed. S. R. Komives and D. B. Woodard. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Oliver, C., Fitzgerald, S. P., & Hoxsey, J. C. (2011, June). Critical appreciation of Appreciative Inquiry: Reflexive choices for shadow dancing. *Review of Business Research*, 11(2), 45-59.

Pearce, W.B., (2004), *The coordinated management of meaning in W.B. Gudykunst (ed), Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage 35-54.

Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. R., 2009. "Identity Development Theories in Student Affairs: Origins, Current Status, and New Approaches." *Journal of College Student Development*, 50: 577-96.

Wasserman, I. (2004), *Discursive processes that foster dialogic moments; Transformation in the engagement of social identity differences in dialogue*. PhD Dissertation, Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA.

Wasserman, I. and Gallegos, P. V., 2009. "Engaging Diversity: Disorienting Dilemmas that Transform Relationships." Pp. in *Innovations in Transformative Learning: Space, Culture, and the Arts*, eds. Beth Fisher-Yoshida, Kathy Dee Geller, and Steven A. Schapiro. New York: Peter Lang.

Whitney, D., Trosten-Bloom, A. & Cooperrider, D., (2010) *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, BK Business.

Wijeyesinghe, C. L. 2001. "Racial Identity in Multiracial People: An Alternative Paradigm." Pp. 32-66 in *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology*, ed. Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W Jackson III. New York: NY University Press.

