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Abstract

Gilles Lipovetsky claims that the phrase "age of minimalism" is better suited to the postmodern society than "the society of generalised permissiveness". The postmodern society is a post-moralist one, at the twilight of duty. Transmodern ("hypermodern" in Lipovetsky's reading) ethics establishes moral norms based on liberal and pragmatic principles. The preferred focus is on the value of positivism, of cooperation as a source of efficiency, of personal enrichment – be it cultural, spiritual or moral – derived from the access to alterity. Tolerance as an ethical value is legitimised by a utilitarian humanism. The fundamental change proposed by Tel Franklin's appreciative therapy consists of shifting attention from illness as a state of disorder of the living system to that of implicit order, called "perfect health". We can view the counselling process as congruence between solving the problems of the human ego and facilitating the functionality of the social networks and systems the individuals is a part of. It is precisely at the level of the functionality of social systems that we can identify the reference space of the affirmative-appreciative counselling. The particularity of this approach is the replacement of the focus on problems with the focus on the individual's positive experience, on the strategies for "managing one's own existence" that the subject has successfully applied.

Keywords: Appreciative inquiry, appreciative counselling, appreciative therapy; counselling

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Foreword

The rise of environmental, feminist and ethnic movements have brought to the foreground the fundamental issues faced by man and society in the 20th century. Gilles Lipovetsky claims that the phrase "age of minimalism" is better suited to the postmodern society than "the society of generalised permissiveness". Lipovetsky (2005) believes that the postmodern society is a post-moralist one, at the twilight of duty. Transmodern ("hypermodern" in Lipovetsky's reading) ethics establishes moral norms based on liberal, pluralist and pragmatic principles. All forms of negation morals are abandoned: not only had that anchored in ontology – such as the paradigm of the God who picks favourites or of the jealous God –, even the contractualist perspectives, applied in the modern period, are no longer significant. The preferred focus is on the value of positivism, of cooperation as a source of efficiency, of personal enrichment – be it cultural, spiritual or moral – derived from the access to alterity. Tolerance as an ethical value is legitimised by a utilitarian humanism. The social contract is rather a need for togetherness going beyond spiritual space in the space of social cohabitation. Another value generating coherent systems in transmodern ethics is happiness. Crass hedonism and consumerism result in moral sterility an in ethics that defines itself as being beyond morals: neither moral, nor immoral, but instead amoral (Lipovetsky, 2005). We are dealing with a secularization of morals from the perspective of the ontological "emptying" of reality (Lipovetsky, 2005) and its transformation, in a constant identification of the meta-narratives established in interpretative conventions (Sandu, et al 2010). The lack of an anchor in ontology and the placement of absolute freedom and happiness at the top of the axiological priority list generate an ethics of admitted difference and, at the same time, of minimising ethical negation. We can put transmodernism in relation to the network society or to the hive society, as a continuation of postmodernism, presenting itself as a society of generalised spectacle, established on the basis of the theory of games and on the exacerbation of seduction strategies – more precisely on simulation and seduction strategies (Baudrillard 1996). The categorical imperative is displaced by that of unlimited action, however implying the existence of consequences; the latter are limited to the pragmatic. However, not doing evil within the limits where evil is punished does not mean doing good. Constructionist voluntarism anchors action in personal and social fulfilment as a formula for maintaining happiness.

Transmodern dimensions of ethics

Postmodern ethics finds its axiological anchor in happiness. However, happiness may be induced by drugs, alcohol, by consumerism in general, all these being justified by the goal of happiness – in fact of pleasure. The main failure in

the ethics of hedonistic happiness proposes a new ethical version that is an anchoring in the ego, in the shape of self-actualization. Transmodernism proposes a new ethical synthesis, the value being cooperation. Cooperation as an ethical value is subordinated to the central value, that of integrality (Bradu and Sandu, 2008). The integral recovery and development of the human potential is the mission of the new communication strategies, capable of generating appropriate discursive realities (Cojocaru, 2006). We witness a sectorialisation of ethics and its migration towards the deontological dimension. Deontology is often sub-ordinated to ethics precisely because society tends to corporatize and de-privatise private life. The holistic thinking tributary to the transmodern paradigm tends to include the previous paradigm as an extreme, particular model of the new, essentially broadened vision. The model of the transdisciplinary scientific analysis also appears as a paradigm of social practice as transculturalism. The deprivatisation of domestic life and the professionalization of parenting (Cojocaru D., 2008; 2009a; 2009b) are models of social practices from late postmodernism and transmodernism, aiming to impose an associative and institutionalised control on the individual seen as a component unit of a holarchical system. The traditional society is strongly associative; for example, the traditional church is a community of believers, individual identities being created through membership in a religious, family and ethnic community. The postmodern de-structuring of family and nations requires a trans-personal answer for the construction of identity, keeping social background as a control institution through the dynamics between the group the individual belongs to and a reference group. The new ideological currents in transmodernity propose another, non-organic type of solidarity, based on initiatic elitism, such as the corporate social solidarity.

Stages of the Appreciative Inquiry

The origins of this technique may be identified in an approach called "appreciative inquiry", proposed by Cooperrider in the area of organizational development (Cooperider and Srivastva, 2005; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005; Bushe, 2010), later taken over by areas such as psychology (Thatchenkery, 2004; Sekerka and McCraty, 2004; Barrett and Cooperider, 2005), theology, social work (Cojocaru, 2005; 2010), political sciences (Schooley, 2008), education (Head and Young, 2004), adult training (Sandu, Cojocaru, Ponea, 2010), organisational development (Chapagain, Ojha, 2008), programme evaluation (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006; Cojocaru, 2009; 2010a), coaching (Bushe, 2005), planning (Fernando, 2010), analysis of minorities (Cojocaru, 2005; Sandu, 2010), supervision (Cojocaru, 2010b) etc.. The appreciative inquiry has a quadriphasic structure, caller "4-D cycle" in literature. The four stages of appreciative inquiry are the following:

- DISCOVERY: the stage of discovering positive "stories" and disseminating them in the organisation. The starting point of the inquiry is the selection of affirmative/positive topics; starting from the assumption that the organisation evolves in the studied direction, the choice of research topics is significant and strategic; the topics are formulated in affirmative terms and must be connected to the are in which the organisation wishes to evolve, hence in the areas where they can be amplified. This type of inquiry uses the appreciative interview, which is based on a set of interview guidelines containing questions centred on affirmative topics. This stage consists of interviewing everyone in the organisation. As a rule it is conducted in the shape of a mutual interview between organisation members, but it can also be run as a focus group (Cojocaru, 2008).

- DREAM: the stage where people describe their desires and dreams concerning work, their motivations, their work relationships and the organisation. This stage consists of a group meeting during which the data and the stories collected in the first stage are shared with the rest of the group. The results of the appreciative interviews in the previous stage are used in a new series of group or individual interviews in order to create an area of convergence or of communication transparency. The interview includes symbolic challenge elements, starting from valuable and successful experiences in the organisation, with an aspirational and transformational aim.

- DESIGN: this stage uses the data collected in the first two stages; once the system has a coherent image of what it wants to become, it needs a new social architecture. During this stage, the infrastructure and the management system required for supporting the system's vision are designed. The approach is to create actions, constructively and collaboratively, starting from identified opportunities and strengths.

- DESTINY: the implementation of plans for supporting, maintaining, adjusting, developing what has been designed (Bushe, 2010). This stage is also called "Delivery". This stage creates networks and structures that facilitate connections meant to develop the collaborative creative potential. The penalising attitude is replaced by a performative one.

The appreciative "destiny" therapy – a form of constructionist sociotherapy

If wellbeing is the individual's natural state, then success may be understood as an agreement between the mental programmes the individual uses in his life and his own wellbeing as the final destiny. In our vision, destiny is the perfectly ordered sequence of life experiences meant to bring the individual to a state in which his vital potential is used to the maximum. Success is therefore seen as an "appreciation", as a correct reification of the subject's positive potentials for

evolution, out of a multitude of options that exist simultaneously in the veiled continuum of consciousness, based on the identification and the affirmative-appreciative interpretation of past experiences. The use of the affirmative-appreciative "destiny" therapy involves a change in the subject's focus from the problem (illness, failure) to the fulfilment of one's own destiny and the achievement of wellbeing by focussing on one's own positive experiences and transferring their states onto the everyday experience as a permanent state of success.

Appreciative medicine. Redefining therapeutic relations

The use of appreciative interviews in non-conventional therapies has been perfected under the name of "appreciative medicine" by Tel Franklin, a medical doctor specialising in family practice. In his book *Expect a miracle,* Tel Franklin uses the appreciative dialogue (an application of the appreciative inquiry) in order to transform the relationship between the individual and his/her state of health and to direct change by using affirmative language. Franklin intended to modify the vision on the illness-diagnosis-treatment model, turning it into a positive and creative vision of optimal health (Franklin, 2003). The principles of appreciative medicine proposed by Franklin focus on the patient identifying his/her own wellbeing, his/her own state of perfect health, which would include self-satisfaction, as well as self-satisfaction in its spiritual aspects – spiritual realisation.

Both the therapist and the patient are involved in a process of mutual discovery of the state of perfect health through a synergy of body and mind, through understanding and appreciating what makes one unique, through waking up the mind in order that the individual becomes himself/herself (Franklin, 2003). Alternative medicine, as well as traditional, allopathic medicine, is both tributary to, and limited by a paradigm anchored in deficiency, that is in illness and suffering. A new paradigm should open in front of the therapist, a paradigm anchored in health as a positive and natural state of the living system, in our opinion much better adapted to the idea of holistic, transmodern medicine. The fundamental transformation proposed by Franklin's therapy consists of shifting attention from illness as a state of disorder of the living system to that of implicit order, called "perfect health". The appreciative therapeutic process is based on an approach deriving from the appreciative inquiry.

Affirmative-appreciative models of psychological and social counselling. The "Yes[3]!" method

One form of organising and carrying out the appreciative "destiny" therapy is the "Yes![3]" method, proposed by Rob and Kim Voyle (2008), as a synthesis consisting of the appreciative practices of positive psychology, of Ericksonian techniques, of the use of compassion as a transforming agent, and of contemplative

spirituality. The "Yes-to-the-third-power" programme entails: affirmative thinking – saying an unequivocal "Yes" and accompanying it in one's conscience before God with accepting one' neighbours and one's self. As a destiny therapy, the "Yes!³" method starts from the following assumptions:

– We were made by God for a purpose and we have been fully equipped with gifts and talents to fulfil that purpose;

– We most closely manifest our purpose when we are at our best, being and doing those things that flow from the core of our being and bring deep satisfaction;

– Life and the abundant life that Jesus' promised comes from what we deeply and profoundly say yes to, for it is in what we say **Yes!** to that we manifest our God given purpose (Voyle and Voyle, 2008).

Thus, the appreciative methodology is an amazing resource for building truly alternative therapeutic models (alternative in the sense of abandoning the deficiency-focussed model) that produce wellbeing by reconnecting the human being to its own destiny.

The principles of appreciative counselling

Irrespective of the approach chosen for counselling, the operational foundation of the traditional counselling process consists in a problem-solving process, a process of reducing deficiencies and eliminating dysfunctions. We can view this process as congruence between solving the problems of the human ego and facilitating the functionality of the social networks and systems the individuals is a part of. It is precisely at the level of the functionality of social systems that we can identify the reference space of the affirmative-appreciative counselling. The particularity of this approach is the replacement of the focus on problems with the focus on the individual's positive experience, on the strategies for "managing one's own existence" that the subject has successfully applied. Counselling is a process that targets change first and foremost, a change brought about mainly by the change in the language structuring action and intervention, both in individual interventions, as well as in group interventions. This process is transferred into the relationship between supervisor and the supervised (Cojocaru, 2010b). The process of change applies both to the person of the client, as well as to its social environment, with its complex networks that interact and influence each other (forming together the client system).

Stages of the appreciative counselling process

The following three stages of the counselling process may be distinguished:

1. Building a partnership relation between counsellor and client. From the point of view of the appreciative inquiry, this stage may be viewed as belonging

to the Define stage in a five-stage model in which this additional stage (Define) is added to the traditional 4-D cycle of the appreciative inquiry proposed by Cooperrider. The 5-D model separates an additional stage, "Define", from the Discovery stage precisely in order to establish the unconditionally positive framework of the relationship. The relationship between the counsellor and the client is a partnership in self-development/growth. The counselor and the client view one another as partners in a spiral of appreciative self-development.

2. In-depth exploration of the client's success strategies. From a methodological point of view, this stage overlaps with the "in-depth problem exploration" stage of the problem-centred approach. In vocational counselling, for example, we shall talk about the evaluation of the pupil/student's skills, of his/her previous performance, about his/her short-term and long-term interests. In social work counselling, during this Discovery stage of appreciative counselling, the client explores together with the counsellor his/her own affirmative strategies, success strategies, resources for change etc.

3. Exploration of alternative solutions by the client in partnership with the counsellor. The alternative solutions of classic counselling are replaced in the appreciative counselling by the appreciative visioning process. This stage overlaps with the Dream stage of the appreciative inquiry.

4. The contract stage in problem-centred counselling may be placed in parallel with the Design stage of appreciative counselling. the Design stage may be defined as the identification of innovative ways for creating the future the client wants for himself/herself. This step is characterised by concreteness and achievability, since it aims to change the client system in congruence with the client's own projections of the future expressed in affirmative language.

5. The contract implementation stage of the problem-centred approach may be put to better use in terms of appreciative counselling as part of the Delivery (Destiny) stage of appreciative inquiry. This stage means the actual implementation of the self-realisation strategies identified in the visioning stage. Once the individual has identified and built a picture of the preferred future, the next step is to use language and communication (non-directive intentional interview) in order to act out and to work towards the concrete realisation of the projected future.

In terms of appreciative counselling, ample time is given to the stage of identifying the client's successes and of clarifying the situation of the client system. During this stage the purpose of the counselling process is to help the client built several scenarios rooted in the affirmative projections of the desired situations and not in the avoidance of possible risks. It is important for the counsellor to highlight situations in which the client has managed to face successfully challenges coming from the social environment, to identify, together with the client the latter's skills and competences that have allowed him/her to face

those challenges, as well as to identify means for creatively transferring those social skills to other potentially challenging situations ("problem situations" in the perspective of classic counselling).

Encouraging positive action

During the Design stage of appreciative counselling, the client must be assisted in developing and evaluating self-determining strategies in order to be able to create his/her own vision of the world (Sandu, 2002, 105-112). Once the appreciative vision established, it is necessary to decide on the main ways of reaching the identified goals. The individual does not react according to reality, but instead with his/her own image about reality. Our own personal "map" may differ sometimes fundamentally both from reality and from other individual's maps; the identification of the client's map is achieved through dialogue (appreciative interview). The appreciative interview must be accompanied by the technique of active listening. Active listening entails focussing the attention exclusively on the speaker, suspending one's own reference frameworks in order to understand those of the speaker and to assist him/her in the process of reassigning meaning to his/her own existence; active listening entails the suspension of critical judgement and a full deployment of empathy, manifested not through the classic model of "putting the counsellor in the client's shoes", but through the adoption of a language that is congruous with the client's.

Appreciative dimensions of (bio)ethics

Appreciative ethics has developed especially in organisational ethics and in business ethics, due to a shift of social solidarity towards social corporatist responsibility. The weight shift from deficiency to performance and from individual action to collaborative communication fit the general structures of transmodern ethics, network development and the obsession of unification, of de-individualisation. The creation of inter-individual relations by asking the subjects to present their dreams and hopes for the future, together with the positive experiences is ethical experiences on the positive. The transformation of social reality into a communicational one means in fact the very elimination of the concept of reality and its replacement with the supremacy of discourse reflecting the multitude of realities interpreted by the individual (Gergen, 2001). The quasi-ontological centrality of the discourse in the appreciative philosophy causes us to conclude that most of the constructionist currents we have discussed, and implicitly affirmative ethics are logo-centric. We might object and say that the obsession for the affirmative – like the general integrative obsession of transmodernism – is in fact just another discourse strategy, in other words a *flatus vocis*, meant to yield commercial results on the one hand and to satisfy the need for originality of some researchers. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) reply that in fact people and

organisations tend to evolve towards those areas towards which discourse aims primarily. In other words, the manipulation of discourse is tantamount to the transformation of realities. The identification of so-called undesirable behaviours that need to be modified during the process of change must take into account they adaptive situation that has generated those particular behaviours. The resulting intervention insists precisely on finding the need that generated behaviour, in order to replace it with a more beneficial, more constructive and more ecological one for that particular being. The appreciative practice replaces the process of making an inventory of all the problems faced by the subject of intervention with a redesign of the problem situation, turning it into a challenge that generates social feedback.

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