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Appreciative Inquiry for One: The Joy of Appreciative Living: Your 28-Day Plan to Greater Happiness in 3 Incredibly Easy Steps

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Abstract

Based upon the concepts and procedures of Appreciative Inquiry, Jacqueline Kelm offers Appreciative Living, a qualitative research informed therapeutic program for one. To this end Kelm presents a 28-day plan designed to help individuals achieve greater happiness via a three-step model. She also shares results from a study she conducted with participants who have tried her approach to further demonstrate the usefulness of applying Appreciative Inquiry means to therapeutic ends.

Keywords

Appreciative Living, Appreciative Inquiry, Therapeutic Qualitative Research

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**Appreciative Inquiry for One:
*The Joy of Appreciative Living: Your 28-Day Plan to Greater Happiness in 3
Incredibly Easy Steps***

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Based upon the concepts and procedures of Appreciative Inquiry, Jacqueline Kelm offers Appreciative Living, a qualitative research informed therapeutic program for one. To this end Kelm presents a 28-day plan designed to help individuals achieve greater happiness via a three-step model. She also shares results from a study she conducted with participants who have tried her approach to further demonstrate the usefulness of applying Appreciative Inquiry means to therapeutic ends. Key Words: Appreciative Living, Appreciative Inquiry, and Therapeutic Qualitative Research

The world's economy is a mess; countries are trying to solve their own monumental problems; unemployment is rising and people are losing their jobs left and right. It's exactly the right time to employ appreciative inquiry and positive thinking in our own lives. That's the premise of this book: By approaching our lives in a positive way and employing the principles of David Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry (AI), we can achieve personal change and possibly transformation leading to a more joy-filled life. This book is not a research text on AI; it is instead more of a self-help book, but it's directly connected to an established set of organizational principles. Jacqueline Kelm was a student of Cooperrider's at Case Western sometime in the 1990's while she was an MBA student. In her Introduction, Ms. Kelm discusses how she has used AI as a management consultant with a variety of departments and organizations and found that using the positive, strength-based approach was very successful in implementing change in organizations. She wondered if the same principles could be used to promote change in people's daily lives and eventually embarked upon the development of a research study that used AI principles applied to the individual.

Kelm is not the first qualitative researcher to notice that participants in research studies can find the process therapeutic (e.g., Colbourne & Sque, 2005; Gale, 1992; Murray, 2003; Ortiz, 2001; Shamai, 2003; St. George & Wulff, 2000; Stuhlmiller, 2001). Although many have observed these therapeutic outcomes as a fortunate side effect of participating in qualitative research studies, Kelm's approach is novel because she directly applies qualitative concepts and procedures from AI overtly to produce healing, restorative, and curative effects.

Ms. Kelm developed three brief exercises to conduct, based upon AI, with the goal of creating "meaningful, lasting joy" (p. xv). She solicited subjects (mostly through email) who had either purchased her previous book, *Appreciative Living*, or had attended a workshop on the topic. Hence, her subjects all indicated that they wished an increase in joy in their lives. They happened to be at least 30 years of age, primarily female, but otherwise diverse in geographic locations, partnership status, religious affiliation, and race and education level. Ms. Kelm used a quantitative questionnaire to determine beginning levels of individual happiness. Then, she asked participants to complete the exercises: two were done on a daily basis and one was done weekly.

At the end of the 28 days, the subjects repeated the questionnaire but also wrote written responses to questions about their individual experiences. Details regarding her choices of the questionnaire and the end response questions are provided in Appendix H (pp. 187-189). The results were quite significant: there was a significant increase in the amount of time participants felt “happy” and a reduction in “neutral” and “unhappy” times. Remarkably, in my opinion, the greatest difference was in the group of people who felt the least happy in the beginning. Among those who continued with the exercises beyond the 28 days, most continued to feel increased times of happiness.

At this point, we should pause to consider the nature of the exercises. They are simple, but profound. The first exercise asks a person to list three things for which he or she is grateful. (Each person picks his or her written method – computer, journal, notebook, etc.) Then one takes 30 seconds to really focus on the things listed and feel the appreciation. Each day, the participant should pick different things. Underlying thought: by thinking positively about the good things in life, the participant feels better about that which is already in one’s life. After doing the Appreciation List, one should reflect upon this question: “What one thing could I do today, no matter how small, that would increase my joy?” (p. 163). That’s the second exercise: to envision something that can be done that day to bring about greater joy for oneself. The third exercise, which is done on a weekly basis, takes these two questions and stretches them into the future. It sounds very much like the “miracle question” in Solution Focused Brief Therapy (see Thomas & Nelson, 2007). The person writes down what the ideal life would be like, providing details but keeping to a large focus (This shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes, as Ms. Kemp reminds us.). She remarks we should dream big about this happy, perfect life and feel the joy inside as we write.

The book is divided into three parts: “What You Need to Know,” “What You Need to Do,” and the “Appendices.” “What You Need to Know” guides the reader through the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and how to adjust to a personal level. Part two, “What You Need to Do,” explains the three exercises and provides alternatives to the original exercises plus support for staying on track through the 28-day program. Ms. Kemp also illustrates five stages of deliberate change as she uses examples from her own life. The third part of the book is the “Appendices.” Research-minded people may want to start with the Appendices because the underlying principles of AI, an exercise summary, the Appreciative Living Model developed by the author, and a suggested emotions questionnaire are given. Those who want to see her quantitative results from the original study will also locate those findings and charts in Appendix H.

The author uses short chapters and fairly simple language to reach a wide range of people. No prior knowledge of psychology or therapy is needed in order to process the information and go through the 28-day program. It was very thought-provoking and many readers will be reminded of other theories that speak to the power of the mind, meditative and reflective thinking, dreaming positively of those things that one desires for the future, and so on. If you just want to read through the book, it can be done in an afternoon. In addition, I can see that social workers, psychologists, or therapists who might be dealing with a joyless or negative client might find some exercise to use to “unstuck” a tough client.

I know that many of the hard-core researchers reading this are thinking that this book is popular psychology. Yet there are some ideas in here that are hard to resist. I read this book while I was beginning a new drug therapy for a chronic condition; the drug has quite a few side effects and I have gotten most of them, in varying degrees of severity. I try to keep a positive attitude and to keep doing those things that I enjoy. Reading *The Joy of Appreciative Living* was

a pleasant experience. I tried the exercises--okay, only once, I couldn't do 28 days straight!--and I did feel happier. No big changes, but just a higher chance that I would find something during the day that made me smile or grin or just feel better for a while. I view Ms. Kelm's slender volume as a serendipitous book that came along just as I needed an intellectual and emotional chuckle. And who can say that's not a good thing? We all need more joy and happiness in our lives. Maybe we just need something like "Appreciative Inquiry for One" to help us focus on what we already have as well as on what we'd like to have. That's a qualitative research side effect I think we can all appreciate!

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