

***Are Critical Conversations enough?
Community-Based Interventions to
Improve the Lives of Women and
Girls: Problems and Possibilities***

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Imagine...

If you awoke one day to discover that gender equality had miraculously been achieved worldwide, how would you notice?

What would a vision of social justice for women around the world be, and how can we know if we are part of the problem or part of the solution, as community psychologists and in our personal lives?

It's girls in schools

It's labour too

It's being able to plan the kids

And owning all our land

Aspiring to be PM

And having roads and water

So that life in the future will be

Better for our daughters

Sustainable Development Goal 5

Achieve gender equality
and empower all women
and girls

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

Goal 5 targets

- End all forms of **discrimination** against all women and girls everywhere
- Eliminate all forms of **violence** against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including **trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation**
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as **child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation**
- **Recognize & value unpaid care and domestic work** through the provision of public services, infrastructure & social protection policies & the promotion of **shared responsibility** within the household & the family as nationally appropriate
- Ensure women's full and effective **participation** and equal opportunities for **leadership at all levels of decision making** in political, economic and public life

Goal 5 targets

- Ensure universal access to **sexual & reproductive health & reproductive rights** as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population & Development & the Beijing Platform for Action & the outcome documents of their review conferences
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to **economic resources**, as well as access to **ownership & control over land & other forms of property**, financial services, inheritance & natural resources, in accordance with national laws
- Enhance the use of **enabling technology**, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of **gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls** at all levels

Community-Based Interventions to Improve the Lives of Women & Girls: 3 Problems & 3++ Possibilities

- ▶ i. Poverty and Economic Participation of Women and Girls
- ▶ ii. *Civic Participation*
- ▶ iii. *Gender Inequity as a Health Issue*

i. Poverty & Economic Participation of Women and Girls

When one is poor she has no say in public, she feels inferior, she has no food, so there is famine in her house, no clothing and no progress in her family

(A woman from Uganda, World Bank Voices of the Poor, 2000, cited in Sloan, 2010, p.333)

The problem

- Economic participation and relative income are the most intractable of gender gap indicators
- No country has yet achieved equal pay for women.
- Caring for children is not counted in economic reckoning
- Lower economic participation rates for women with children
- Being a mother not supported by a (usually male) partner is strongly associated with poverty

The possibilities

- **ACTIVISM:** The Council of Single Mothers and their Children has been working for the rights of single mothers for more than 30 years
- *We DID Change the system, we DID change forever society's views of "unmarried mothers" and "illegitimate children" and we DID win almost equal rights to income support and we DID win almost equal rights for our children". (Jo Clancy, founding member, at the Council of Single Mothers and their Children's 40th Anniversary, 2012).*

The possibilities

- *It takes a village to raise a child*
- Playgroups are a universal platform for support for women with young (pre-school aged) children
- Playgroups are as engaging for Chin Burmese refugees from Myanmar as for lesbian parents in Inner City Melbourne.
- They are a platform for information, education and support
- And for long term friendships among parents and children.

ii. *Civic Participation*

I wanted to go out and change the world but I couldn't find a babysitter. (Anonymous, cited in Sweetman & Chopra, 2014, p.409).

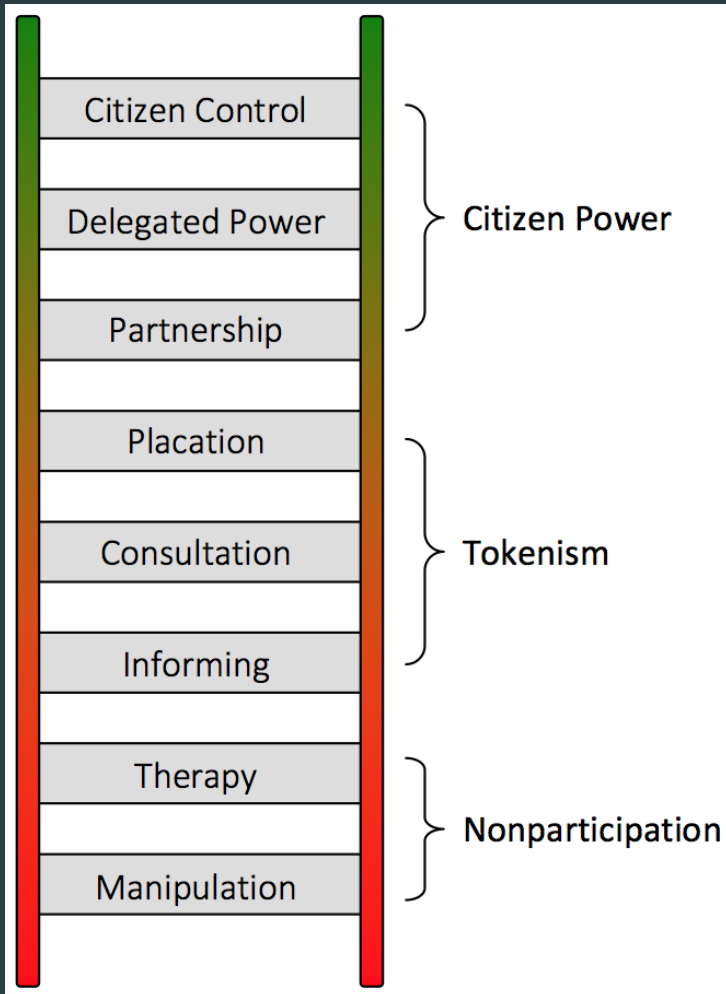
Whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

(United Nations, 2013, p.5).

The problem

Participation has become a core value within community psychology, and involves people taking part in activities or decision-making processes that influence, change or make improvements at different levels (Churchman, Wiesenfeld & Sadan, 2016).

Participation can also be a tool for improving personal wellbeing, where individuals engage in processes that have potential for personal empowerment and where organisations can better reflect the aspirations and needs of people through their active involvement (Churchman et al., 2016).



Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation

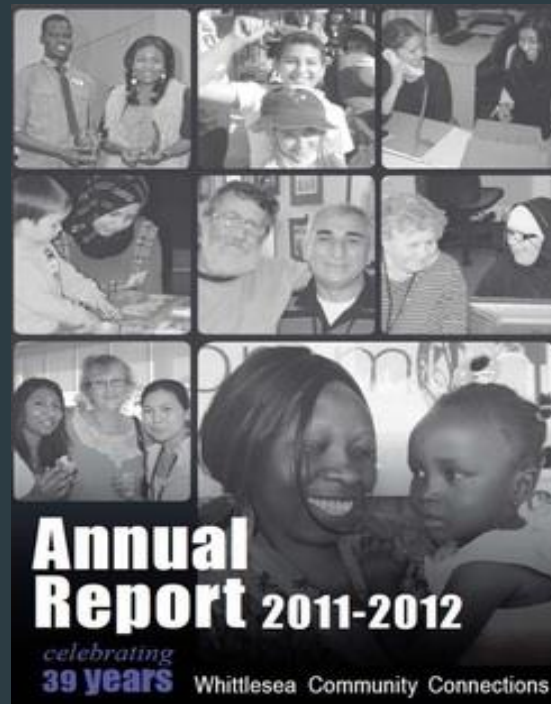
The problem

- Ensuring opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives is key to challenging inequalities and effecting social change (Angelique & Mulvey, 2012).
- But structural barriers continue to prevent women from fully participating in political processes and influencing power and resources.
- Different types of involvement reproduce traditional gender ideologies- divisions of volunteer labor reflect gender role differences within the home and workplace.
- Where women are successful in attaining leadership roles, they often face extensive public castigation and negative media scrutiny.

The possibilities

Facilitating women's community involvement: From the ground up.

From little things
big things grow...



The case of Community Health Cadres (CHCs) in the Indonesian Context

- ▶ Historically, CHCs were recruited by the government as non-paid fieldwork officers for national health programs
- ▶ Often depicted as a symbol of women's subordination or state control over women's political agency (Suryakusuma, 1996)
- ▶ CHCs as a transformative vehicle: challenges & possibilities
 - ▶ CHCs in 5 villages in Bantul District, Yogyakarta Province, Indonesia.
 - ▶ 'Hijacking' the agendas
 - ▶ Reproducing the subordination

We did all the work, but the village officers get the reward

“Cadres are the backbone of many community activities. Doing neighbourhood surveys, sharing information, and so on ... when the district government rewarded our work, the village officers would ask for a share. The village officers like the reward, but not the work”

(Asih, mid thirties, 9 years of volunteering)

iii. *Gender Inequity as a Health Issue*

It becomes not a nice thing (to walk in public with my child who has a disability) so you just think “stop staring at me, just go about your business” ... because whenever you go out it’s just really exhausting, a huge effort, and on my own especially. I couldn’t do it.

(A mother who has three children including two with disability, on barriers to her physical activity, in an unpublished needs analysis informing Mothers Living Well)

The problem

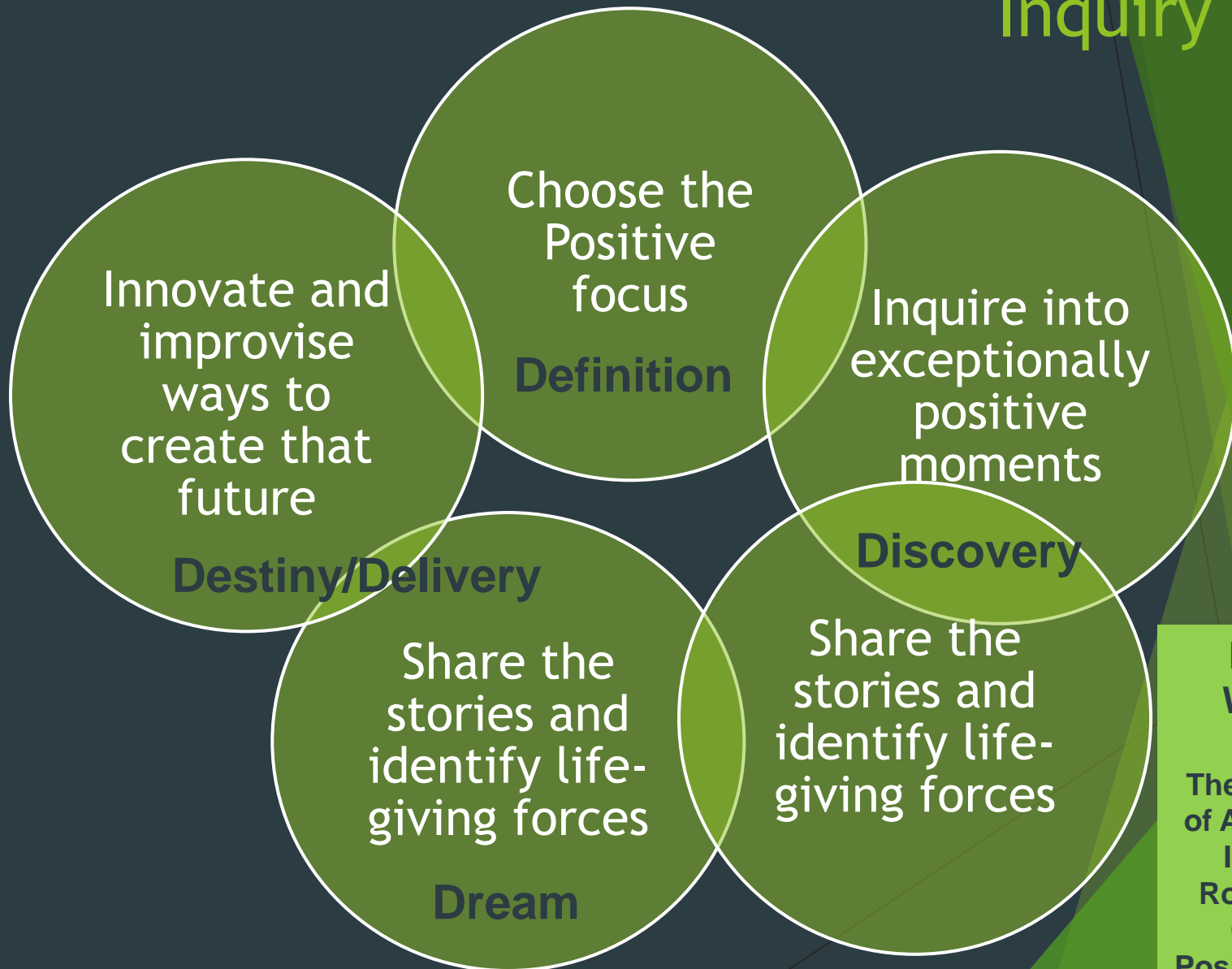
- Women aged 35 to 54 less likely to exercise, more likely (in Knox) to say children were a “barrier”
- Socio-Economic Status (SES) of a suburb independently impacts on residents’ health (King et al., 2006)
- Health Promotion Problematising of parents: e.g. “helicopter parents” as source of issues

The possibilities

Mothers Living Well aimed to address these issues of physical activity and social connectedness using a model that privileges:

- ▶ Women's visions (as mothers) for their communities as the basis for the change efforts (women as sources of solutions not problems)
- ▶ Process: Community Based Participatory research - We don't have the answers. The focus is on working with communities to find the answers.
- ▶ Partnership: Getting the right organisations and roles around the table, but when planning, connecting as people rather than "roles"

Action Research Process: Appreciative Inquiry



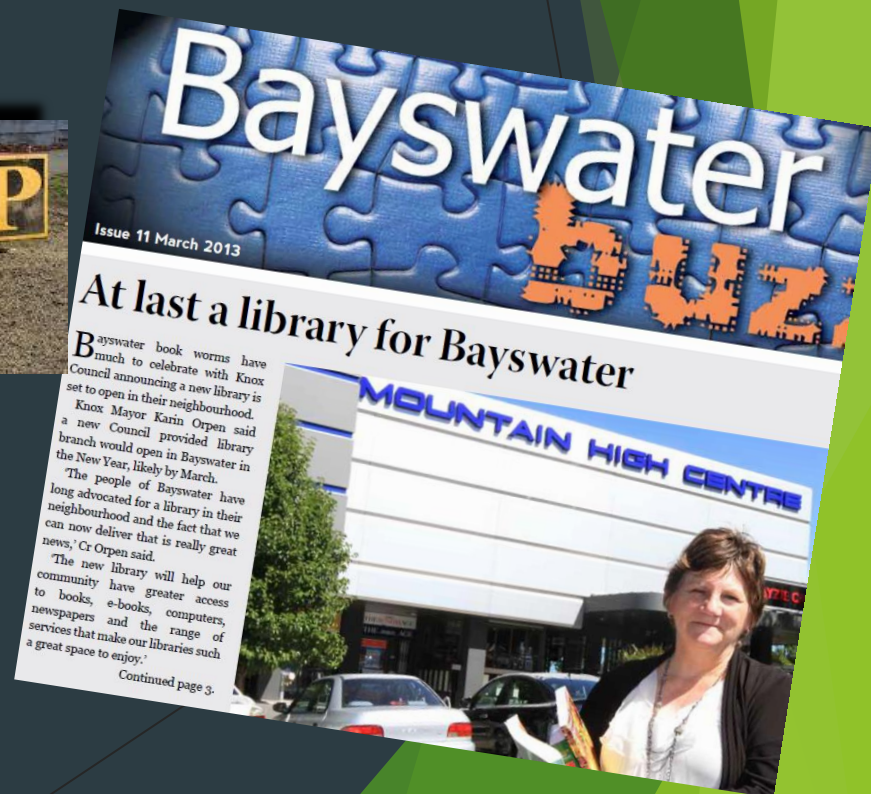
Mohr & Watkins (2002)
The Essentials of Appreciative Inquiry: A Roadmap for Creating Positive Futures

Impacts: Empowerment: increasing influence

75% of priority environmental improvements identified by the community completed or commenced by Dec 2012 (Klein 2013)



“This project really happened from community members (who) actually came to council at budget time & they presented to council & said we want changes in our community” (member, Bayswater West Community Hub Group)



Enabling women as mothers to improve their community's health

92% of mothers in Bayswater West strongly agreed they feel they belong in this community (compares 78%)

“We rely on one another, we support one another and most importantly the hub has grown to be a place where people feel they can be heard and they actually see their viewpoints represented in projects that take place”



Join festival team 2013

Bayswater Community Festival

Critical conversation: Reflections

- ▶ Breaking down gender stereotypes but action often based on women in roles as mothers, women, etc.
- ▶ Structural issues and intersectional issues e.g. discrimination against women with disability or from CALD communities: harder to address in a locally funded project

Opportunities & challenges for community psychologists

- Taking account of the gendered context of individual and community life - focus on possibilities and strengths of women and girls
- Navigating the tension between community-driven agenda with need to present in 'evidence-based' frameworks that convince governments of worth for funding
- Incorporating diverse voices and interests of women and girls into the research literature and the international policy arena

I'm a Feminist,

now what?



Opportunities & challenges for community psychologists

- Community psychologists are well placed to work with and value the ways women and girls currently experience and have agency in their lives, while at the same time imagining and working towards a feminist future.
- We challenge community psychologists not to shy away from issues for women and girls who have proved difficult to address via orthodox methods, and to work with everyone who is willing...

Roundtable questions - Vision into action

If patriarchy is the problem, are feminisms the solution?

How is gender inequity addressed as a core priority and commitment in our work?

How are we moving towards global social justice? (Sustainable Development Goals?)

Community-Based Interventions to Improve the Lives of Women & Girls: Problems & Possibilities

- ▶ Are you working in partnership with women in all their diversity to facilitate their involvement on their own terms? Are you including those who have the most stake in and are the most powerful voice for change?
- ▶ Do you imply that women are to blame for their problems; that is, does your work problematise the target group? Try placing yourself in the target group and consider how you would prefer to be described, in place of problem-based descriptions.
- ▶ How is the work you do contributing to developing and enhancing women- and child- friendly structures and opportunities?
- ▶ Does your work use inclusive methods such as participatory action research that make sense to the women and girls they are designed to benefit? How change is implemented is as important as the change itself.

Dr Una Gault was a fierce defender of the less fortunate. She could always be counted on keep us on track in our discussions and reminding us to use sound research to back up our arguments. You will be missed dear sister. Go in peace.

