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Exploring Relationships between Needs and Solutions in Solution Focused Brief Therapy: A Recursive Frame Analysis

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Abstract

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Keywords

Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Recursive Frame Analysis, Needs, Milton Erickson, Marriage and Family Therapy

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Focus is a critical component in solution focused brief therapy (SFBT; de Shazer et al., 1986), yet little research has been conducted on how SFBT therapists utilize the clients' focus on their awareness of needs to relationally build solutions (Reiter & Chenail, 2016). To address this gap, we reviewed the notion of utilizing clients' focus in SFBT conceptually and presented the results of our discovery-oriented qualitative study of a classic training case conducted by one of SFBT's co-developers, Insoo Kim Berg (1994). We explored how Berg appeared to demonstrate relationally focused solution development. The findings suggest that Berg's therapeutic style and recursive nature facilitates the clients' awareness of needs in all stages, tapping into the clients' internal wisdom to enhance movement towards solutions. Keywords: Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Recursive Frame Analysis, Needs, Milton Erickson, Marriage and Family Therapy

Focusing on Clients' Needs in Solution Focused Brief Therapy

Solution focused brief therapy (SFBT) is a postmodern, systemic, marriage and family therapy approach which therapists use to respect and honor clients, to emphasize client resiliency, and to recognize clients have within them what they need to move forward towards future positive solutions (De Jong & Berg, 2002). To accomplish these goals, De Jong and Berg (2002) utilized the concept of needs, wants, and solutions to stimulate dialog creating new awareness and possibilities for clients. Throughout the SFBT stages (describing the problem, developing well-formed goals, exploring for exceptions, end-of-session feedback, and evaluating client progress), therapists build solutions with and within clients' frames of reference by helping clients to identify the perspectives they can use to create more satisfying lives. It appears in SFBT both a *need* and a *want* describe what clients are searching for in their solution to their problem(s). Problem descriptions and exploration of exceptions can lead to well-formed goals.

We explored how Berg (1994) utilized awareness of the clients' needs and solutions and the simultaneous relationship between them. We utilized recursive frame analysis (RFA), exploring the basics and interchange in circularity, to analyze Berg's (1994) two SFBT sessions with a couple therapy case. This is a commercially available training video in which Berg demonstrates SFBT in couple therapy utilizing actors as a couple with a variety of conflicts. We investigated how Berg's language attends to the clients' needs in SFBT, how it remains at the core of all stages, and how it is highly correlated in a complementary way in movement towards solutions. In this manner, we hold not only are the clients heard in their description of their problem(s), but their needs and solutions come forward simultaneously in a socially constructed way through Berg's facilitation. At times, therapists can easily focus exclusively on the aspect of isolated solutions and solution-building techniques in this approach, possibly forgetting to fully bring forth the client's needs in relationship to the solutions and vice versa.

Human needs are a vital aspect of survival and wellness of the body, mind, and spirit. The Oxford University Press (2017) definition of *need* is “[to] require (something) because it is [essential](#) or very important rather than just desirable.” A *want* can be defined as “[to] have a desire to possess or do (something); [wish](#) for,” and *solution* may be defined as, “A means of [solving](#) a problem or dealing with a difficult situation” (Oxford University Press, 2017). In examining the relationship between a need, a want, and a solution, we considered the possibility of reaching these means without knowledge of the needs; and that these three things could be one and the same (or at least related to each other).

The role of the therapist is to facilitate the process of self-awareness for client’s solutions (Lipchik, 2002). This requires a high level of attention by the therapist to clients’ perspectives, and this can be described as a delicate process. De Jong and Berg (2002) described the attentive state of the therapist using the Native American proverb: “Tell me, and I’ll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I will understand” (p. 52). Together, solution building begins through ongoing collaborative curiosity and awareness, with the therapist working in a complementary fashion (Bateson, 2000; Bateson & Donaldson, 1991) slightly behind the client (Bavelas et al., 2013). Curiosity is a big factor in SFBT and drives the therapist in their next best question and Berg (1994) was very curious as she asked her next best solution-focused questions in each stage. To do so therapists must work with the clients’ needs in curiosity to create change (Flemons, 2002). The therapist’s stance in curiosity allows for exploration of the clients’ needs and movement towards the clients’ wants towards solutions.

This curiosity moves SFBT therapists towards acknowledgement in understanding clients’ stated problems, validating what clients share, and bridging problem talk towards solutions. Simply, this is an attempt to listen, select, and build, utilizing clients’ words as a focus, and often noting ongoing patterns and themes (De Jong & Berg, 2002). The therapist may offer nudging, bridging, feedback, assignments, progress, amplification, and compliments in order to co-construct solutions with clients in relationship to the client’s focus. The process is geared towards the therapist asking solution-focused questions about a given situation, without an aim to label or focus on what is wrong (Franklin, Trepper, Gingerich, & McCollum, 2012). These questions address exceptions, strengths, relationship aspects, scaling questions, miracle questions, and solutions/goals that emphasize hope and vision towards solutions.

In addition, the SFBT process requires the use of the basic common factors in therapy, such as empathy, a collaborative therapist-client relationship, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness (De Jong & Berg, 2002). Franklin et al. (2012) described the significance of collaboration and co-construction as a natural feature in dialogue, which is also central in the therapeutic process. Qualitative common factors were described by Fosha (2004) such as the effects of the therapeutic relationship, the experience the client has in therapy affecting change, schemas related to patterns of interaction, validation, focus on future versus past, and support versus confrontation. Reiter (2010) stressed the common factors of hope and expectancy, which lead to goals and positive change.

As the therapist works to create new realities (Franklin et al., 2012), the therapist may facilitate an increased awareness of internal wisdom, hope, expectancy, goals, and positive change that can lead the client towards systemic balance within their system. However, this is not an easy task because of the limitations of individual human consciousness. For any given problem, it is not possible to fully grasp the complexity of multiple systems involved in the situation at a conscious level (Atkinson & Heath, 1990). Keeney (as cited in Atkinson & Heath, 1990) suggested that individuals use their conscious knowledge of systems to develop strategies to facilitate balance and expand their perspectives “to a kind of systemic calibration that operates beyond the level of conscious awareness” (p. 3).

This awareness can facilitate the client in attention to their needs and solutions. De Shazer (1988) described an aspect of awareness in which the client builds their own solution based on their own resources and successes. He stressed that the therapist's behavior must demonstrate that the client has everything they need to solve the problem. This awareness surfaces at times with the therapist's facilitation of internal wisdom that may be stimulated from the unconscious, described by Milton Erickson as "your deeper, wiser self" (O'Hanlon & Martin, 1992, p. 109). Erickson often addressed the significance of tapping into the unconscious mind to bring forth an increased awareness of what the client may desire (de Shazer, 1988). Gilligan (2012) explained this awareness as individuals' connection to their creative wholeness and witnessing this from two worlds of the unconscious and conscious. Solution focused brief therapy appears to work towards a mutual understanding of the client's deeper needs and solutions, mutually exploring perceptions and meaning, while the relationship between needs and solutions surface.

The goal of this study was to explore Berg's (1994) SFBT therapeutic process in facilitating the clients' movement from problems to solutions. More importantly, it was an attempt to bring forward the significance of exploring the clients' internal wisdom, a vital aspect in exploration of needs in the SFBT approach. By focusing on the relationship between the client's needs and solutions, we attempted to address a gap in SFBT research that up to now has focused its attention on other aspects of the model. For example, researchers have concentrated on SFBT's brevity and techniques (e.g., McKeel, 2012; Reiter & Chenail, 2016), and relationships between commonly stated SFBT relational assumptions (e.g., client as expert, therapist not knowing and leading from behind, De Jong & Berg, 2002) and the steps of solution building (e.g., Bavelas et al., 2013).

The various relationships between needs and solutions have not been fully addressed in the literature, especially as it pertains to the possibility that solutions surface simultaneously as the needs are stated in the client's first description of their problems. Franklin et al. (2012) reviewed the latest SFBT process research, which addressed aspects of the stages that are commonly geared towards exceptions, strengths, and possibilities. However, little is said about the awareness and wisdom of needs and solutions occurring in all stages. Previous research has shown that connecting SFBT techniques with clients' frames is challenging for clinicians to master (Stith et al., 2012). We suggest that our exploration of the relationships between clients' needs and solution building not only addresses this research gap, but also helps SFBT therapists to be more effective in working with clients' in facilitating awareness of their needs and wants.

Method

In our study we utilized a classic training case by Berg (1994) involving two sessions of couple therapy to explore Berg's SFBT therapeutic intervention. We chose qualitative analysis due to its "...exploratory, naturalistic, subjective, inductive, ideographic, descriptive, and interpretive" qualities (Chenail, 2011, p. 1713). The use of a qualitative research design allow for investigation of language from a scientific standpoint, as well as addresses new aspects of research that may surface in the process (Chenail, 2011). We used the qualitative analysis method of recursive frame analysis (RFA; Keeney, Keeney, & Chenail, 2015) to assist us to map the structure of therapeutic conversations (Keeney, Keeney, & Chenail, 2012), and explore the metaphorical themes (Chenail, 2011). The idea in RFA is to look at what is significant in spoken words and pick and choose what comes alive in common ideas expressed. In RFA the researcher looks at communication and how language is used in context, noting patterns and themes, as well as difference that effects change. The steps involved in RFA include: choosing a topic of interest; justifying scholarly importance; specifics of who, what, when, where, why, and how; compose the research question; define goals; review the literature;

and develop the research design (Chenail, 2011). Keeney, Keeney, and Chenail (2012) described this process like a play, in which there are stages of acts with a common plot and theme. Perhaps a playful stance is helpful, allowing the researcher to be open to all that may surface and influence the conversation. This playfulness can be utilized in looking forward and backward in the conversation (Chenail, 1995). This is similar to an Ericksonian idea when following the client in the therapy process, facilitating the client in movement forward through collaborative exploration, utilizing the client's last response to build towards some aspect of positive change (O'Hanlon & Martin, 1992).

In the process of RFA, we explored the conversation in Berg's (1994) therapy sessions in detail by categorizing it in RFA's terms such as, museum, wings, galleries, and frames. The museum is the overall therapeutic process, wings are categories of galleries, galleries are the concept or themes being addressed, and frames are the context of the conversation involving patterns or meanings that surface. RFA was well suited for this study to help us move through the SFBT stages, evaluate the conversation, and examine the usage and sequence of words between Berg and the clients. This allowed us to be open to what surfaced in the process of careful analysis of the sessions, with attention to Berg's SFBT therapeutic process.

Self-of-the-Researchers

As first author and Principal Investigator, I addressed this study from the position of a researching therapist with training and experience in SFBT, as well as training in the Milton Erickson approach to hypnotherapy. I have used this approach in conjunction with other approaches and find it effective in the therapeutic process. I am an adjunct professor and practicum supervisor for master's level marriage and family therapy students. I find that the delicate process of moving from problems to solutions in the SFBT approach can be missed without proper education and practice. I practice as a psychotherapist and physical therapist facilitating therapy from a body and mind perspective.

As second author, I came to the project as a qualitative researcher and family therapist. I learned RFA from Bradford Keeney in 1988 (Keeney, Keeney, & Chenail, 2012, 2015) and have used the discursive analysis approach on a variety of clinical research projects including in-session process research (Rambo, Heath, & Chenail, 1993), couple and family assessment (Duffy & Chenail, 2004), and case conceptualization inquiries (Chenail, Somers, & Benjamin, 2009; Somers, Benjamin, & Chenail, 2010). Over the past few years, I have studied SFBT process with a special interest in focus (Reiter & Chenail, 2016).

As third author, I approach this study from the perspective of a full-time faculty member in family therapy. I supervise masters and doctoral students in clinical practice using various family therapy models including solution focused brief therapy. I am knowledgeable about both qualitative and quantitative research methods and have learned about RFA as a part of this project, as well as mentoring doctoral students' dissertation research.

Subject

The case study involved two SFBT sessions Insoo Kim Berg (1994) conducted with a couple recorded in *Irreconcilable Differences: A Solution-Focused Approach to Marital Therapy*, a commercially released training session available online from a secure library source. Even though this case was a reconstructed one, we decided to use the recording because Berg utilized the sessions to create a professional training tool and on two different occasions relied on the case to explain how to conduct SFBT with couples (Hoyt & Berg, 1998a, 1998b). Because we were interested in how SFBT therapists work from clients' needs to co-create solutions, we thought it would be best to use a case from one of the co-developers of the model,

Insoo Kim Berg. The couple, “Leslie” and “Bill,” were actors modeling difficulties with their long-term marriage in two sessions with Berg. Their reported difficulties ranged from sharing of parental duties, time spent with each other and the children, trust issues, assistance in the home responsibilities, aspects of money, occupational issues, communication issues, and loss of joy. The couple struggled with their personal relationship, their responsibilities in the home, and their care of their children; this was a challenge in balancing all with their full-time positions in their work. Their goal was to improve their relationship, and share the home and childcare responsibilities, all while maintaining successful employment.

Procedures

In our procedures, the first author of this paper completed the data analysis. As principal investigator, I watched and listened to these sessions, accrued a transcription from the same SFBT video, and reviewed accuracy of the transcription. I also numbered each speaker’s turn in the sessions so I could track segments’ placements when I extracted them into the RFA and subsequently used them in the final report. The numbered speaker turns also gave me the ability to direct readers’ attention to the specific portions of the examples to which my interpretations were directed giving readers a more informed position to base my judgments regarding the data.

I explored the conversations between Berg and her clients with attention to their awareness, simplicity in their talk, and Berg’s relational style of listening. I utilized RFA for analysis of the conversation between Berg and the clients and explored the recursive aspects of Berg and her clients in conversation. I noted in the transcripts what talk seemed to be connected to what SFBT stage (e.g., talk of what the clients wanted to achieve in therapy was noted as being in the Goal stage). I explored how Berg strategically moved from the three primary therapeutic SFBT stages: from problems, goals, and exceptions. I did not focus on the other two SFBT stages, scaling and feedback, because those stages are primarily meta to or about the contents of the other three therapeutic stages. I attended to Berg’s and the clients’ language in these stages as I focused on the SFBT therapeutic process. I read line-by-line and listened to the conversations utilizing RFA to put the primary SFBT stages into wings (i.e., the conversational topics they discussed such as problems, goals, and exceptions), the context of the conversations into frames, and the frames into galleries (i.e., conversational topics, such as communication).

In this process, I extensively analyzed and explored the conversational patterns and differences, as well as new qualities, within and across these SFBT stages. I observed the joining and weaving of words, exploring their context (in frames), and explored how Berg moved throughout the therapeutic conversation between the SFBT stages (the wings). I noted the words pertaining to themes (frames moving into galleries), coded them in terms of the qualities of the theme, categorized the coded qualities noting common qualitative features across the frames and galleries, until no new qualities emerged (Chenail, 1995). I then noted the qualities in each gallery (e.g., Bill not communicating as a frame within the communication gallery within the SFBT Problem stage). I summarized the data and noted the most common descriptive words throughout the stages (the wings) and wrote them on a large paper to get a full and comprehensive view. I noted these common features as the common thread that moved through the therapeutic conversation throughout the stages. Categorizing the conversation with RFA’s wings, galleries, and frames allowed me to examine Berg’s therapeutic language in which contexts of themes emerged; a process Cotton (2010) described as “a visual representation of talk” (p. 26). An example of the RFA process is described in Figure 1.

Problem Wing		Goal (Solution) Wing	
Frames- context of time and attention-----			
Galleries of communication and understanding-----			
“How he is spending his time and attention.”	“What’s he doing (with time and attention)? [Recursive frame]	“... (time and attention with) ladies he’s sees too much.” [Recursive Frame]	(What he should be doing with his time and attention) “some responsibilities” [Recursive Frame]

Figure 1. RFA Example

Credibility

Several techniques were used to assure credibility of the research findings. As first author and principal investigator, I reviewed the accuracy of the transcription from the SFBT video, carefully analyzed the transcription through RFA for the qualitative analysis (Chenail, 1995), and documented aspects related to needs and solutions on a paper with the second author. I also extracted ample excerpts from the transcripts to serve as evidence in support of the qualitative assertions I made regarding Berg and her clients’ discursive actions in the session. The second author met with me throughout the research project and served as a peer reviewer providing expert consultation on the research design and RFA (Chenail, 1995), analysis of the transcripts, and reviewing the results.

Results

Within each stage (wing) it became apparent that the clients’ needs, as well as the clients’ solutions, surfaced simultaneously. Throughout the stages (wings) of problems, goals, and exceptions, ongoing themes (galleries) were noted. Berg (1994) and the clients’ language was observed, and the description of needs was noted and coded, categorized (the frames), and put into three primary themes (galleries): communication, understanding, and togetherness. Berg (1994) utilized language to facilitate the clients in their articulation of needs through the clients’ expanded attention within and with the interrelationships between the clients and Berg. Awareness of the clients’ needs appeared to surface with a pattern of interweaving that informed the clients in their awareness of solutions. A recursive relationship was noted between the needs and the solutions throughout the sessions moving forward and back between the stages (the wings) of problems, goals, and exceptions. Figure 2 represents Berg’s therapeutic process. The museum contained needs; and within each SFBT wing of problems, goals, and exceptions were galleries holding common needs in themes of communication, understanding, and togetherness. These needs became apparent in each stage and were stated in the context of the clients’ talk (frames), indicating “problem talk” and “solution talk” occurring across all stages in a recursive manner back and forth between SFBT stages.

In the following SFBT stages (wings) we present excerpts that demonstrate the context of Berg and the clients’ talk (frames). The context in these frames in time move into themes (galleries), and as the sessions progress move into solutions as Berg recursively moves back and forth between the stages (wings).

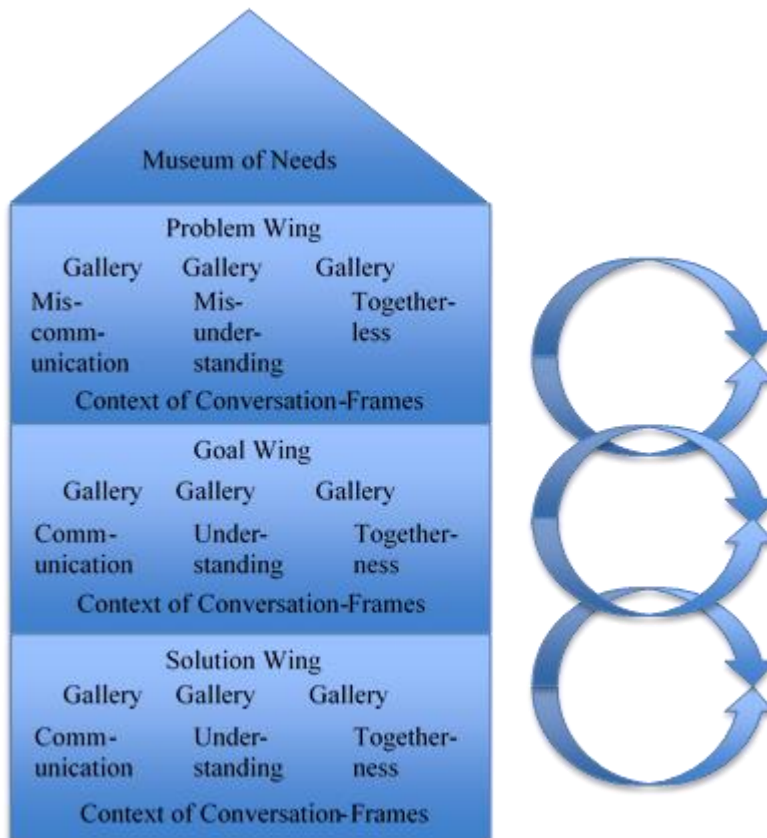


Figure 2. Museum of Needs

Stage 1: Problems

The goal of the problem stage (wing) in SFBT is for the therapist to inquire about how the problem is a problem for the clients, how it affects them, and then to explore aspects of the meaning of the problem (De Jong & Berg, 2002). In this session, Berg seemed to work towards accomplishing this goal and used language by taking a position of not knowing to facilitate the clients in their awareness towards their needs. Below, Berg's question "At what he's doing?" appeared to facilitate Leslie's response of needing more time and attention (frames – context of needing "time and attention" moving towards themes in galleries) by Bill:

Berg (030): I—in—at—ah—at what he's doing?

Leslie (031): Well, you probably should ask some of the ladies that he sees so much.

Leslie (046): [S]o that I have the primary responsibility for our children. My question and my concern is and that's one reason that I wanted to come here so that maybe, through talking, he could come to understand that he has some responsibilities too (frames – context of "talking and understanding" about "what he's (Bill) doing" moving towards themes in galleries).

From (046) to (054) Berg continued with answers such as, "right" and "okay" as Leslie and Bill made statements in reference to "the ladies." Berg then attempted to get closer to Leslie's needs by redirecting Leslie with the following question:

Berg (055): Just to hang on a minute. Hang on a minute. Let me come back to that. I'm gonna come back to that. Uhm, what about you? Ah, Leslie, what, ah, kind of work do you do?

This facilitated Leslie to share her work and household responsibilities, which in turn led to Berg's statement below, bringing attention to Leslie's lack of time and need for help (frames-context of "attention, lack of time, and need for help" leading towards themes in galleries).

Berg (067): You're busy. Yeah.

Berg focused on Leslie's needs of needing more time and help by her husband (frames- "more time") instead of focusing on "the ladies." Berg facilitated attention to Leslie's notion of a lack of time, and then moved into Leslie's need for Bill to be home more to assist Leslie with the household activities (frames- context of "lack of time, be home, assist" moving towards themes in galleries), aspects of "togetherness" and "understanding" (galleries- where themes become apparent).

The session moved forward towards other needs that surfaced in the session (frames). In the following excerpt Berg's statement (107) facilitated Bill's needs and solutions of "understanding" (108) and "communication" (112) (galleries):

Berg (107): So, it sounds like you both are feeling very frustrated about what's going or what's not going on between the two of you?

Bill (108): Well, you know. I mean, she has zero understanding (frame- context of "zero understanding" moving into a gallery of "understanding") about what's going on and makes...

Berg (109): Right.

Bill (110): ...it very difficult.

Leslie (111): See, that's part of the problem.

Bill (112): We used to communicate (frame- moving into the gallery of "communication").

The clients' personal perceptions and awareness seemed to come forward in their talk as the clients and Berg interacted, exploring the meaning of the problem while solutions simultaneously surfaced ("problem talk" and "solution talk") (e.g., Bill saying he and Leslie used to communicate; an aspect of a problem frame moving into a solution in the gallery of "communication").

Stage 2: Goals

In the goal stage (wing) the SFBT therapist asks the clients to explore what would be different if the problem were resolved (De Jong & Berg, 2002). Through Berg's questions, she facilitated the clients' expressions of their needs in relationship to their goals. In the following excerpt, Berg's questions helped Leslie express relationships between her need and solution for understanding and communication (galleries) in (138):

Berg (134): What do you suppose...

Berg (135): ...needs to happen, as a result of you being here today? So that you can say—sort of—ah— looking back at this time. Oh, let's say three months from now? Six months from now?

Berg (137): What used to happen.

Leslie (138): Could come up with some kind of understanding of what his responsibilities and that in these sessions, sessions, he could really hear what I am saying because at home...(frames- context of “understanding” and “really hear”)

Leslie (140): ...he really doesn't listen, and therefore, he could change his behavior so that we could be as we were earlier in the marriage.

Below, even Berg's words of, “yeah” and “right,” can be seen as facilitating Leslie and Bill to say more of their needs. Berg then followed up with, “What?” (146), which led to the full expression of needs and solutions surfaced by Bill, primarily being “communication” (gallery) (147):

Berg (141): Yeah.

Leslie(142): You know, listening to one another and communicating...

Berg(143): Right.

Leslie (144): ...but he seems to have strayed from that.

Bill (145): That's what we, that's what we need.

Berg (146): What?

Bill (147): Communication (gallery- theme of “communication” surfaces).

In the following excerpt, Berg used the word “need” to assist the clients in clarity of their needs and solutions (324). With continued exploratory questions by Berg, Leslie stated an aspect of her needs, as well as solutions (“problem talk” and “solution talk”) (331):

Berg (324): I need to know from both of you, what needs to happen so that I am helpful to both of you. So, let me come back to this, what would he be doing different, let's say three months from now, six months down the road?

Leslie (325): He also has to build a relationship at home. We have little ones (frame- context of “relationship” moves into the gallery of “understanding,” “communication,” and “togetherness”).

Berg (328): So what would he be doing...

Leslie (329): He'll...

Berg (330): ...to build a relationship at home (frame- context of “relationship”)?

Leslie (331) ...he, he would be communicating (frame- contexts of “relationship” and “communicating” moves into the gallery of “communication”) more with me.

Berg then asked a miracle question (424), a common SFBT question used to elicit goals or exceptions, to assist the clients in more clarity of their needs, moving towards aspects of their solutions (425, 429).

Berg (424): All right? It will be nice but this miracle happens to happen in the middle of the night when both of you are sleeping. Like tonight, for example when you go to bed, tonight when you go home and go to bed, tonight this happens. So you don't know that this has happened. So, when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be the first small clue to you? Wow! Something must have happened during the night. The problem is gone. How will you discover this?

Bill (425): I'll smile first thing in the morning... (frame- context of “smile”)

Leslie (426): Aha.

Bill (427): ...instead of avoidance.

Berg (428): You'll smile at Leslie?

Leslie (429): He would put his arm around me (frame- context of “put arm around me”).

As the flow of talk appeared to shift to a more solution-focused emphasis, the clients’ talk about their needs, wants, and solutions did not seem to disappear from the conversation, but rather remained in relationship to the emerging goals. Leslie’s needs and wants from Bill and Bill’s needs and wants from Leslie become the essence of their goals as the solutions simultaneously surfaced (“problem talk” and “solution talk”).

Stage 3: Exceptions

In the exception stage (wing) the therapist explores times where there are exceptions to the problem, areas of difference, and successes and strengths (De Jong & Berg, 2002). In this stage the clients’ needs again surfaced. Berg asked a future question (175) leading towards what Leslie wants and needs and what the solution would look like (“problem talk” and “solution talk”) (178):

Berg (175): What will he be doing that he is not doing right now? That will let you know he’s being more responsible?

Leslie (176): He will take responsibility more of our children. He will take more responsibility for his own son, whom I love very much too (frame- context of “take responsibility”).

Berg (177): Okay.

Leslie (178): He will take responsibility to include me and have respect for me. Include me in his activities and have respect for me (frame- contexts of “responsibilities,” “include me,” and “respect for me” move into the gallery of “togetherness”). It hurts me.

Berg then moved back to the stage of goals (recursively between stages) facilitating the clients in continued awareness of their needs (597), which moved towards specific solutions (598, 600):

Leslie (594): It, it would help if you would call. If you would let me know about what time are you gonna come home (frame- context of “call” moves into gallery of “communication”).

Berg (597): Ah. That’s what you really want, isn’t it?

Bill (598): Okay, I’ll call.

Berg (599): You want to be part of Bill’s life.

Bill (600): I’ll call.

As the session progresses Berg utilized the word “needs” (642) once again in facilitating specifics from the clients in their needs and solutions (643, 645, 647):

Berg (642): Okay. Now, let me come back to you, Leslie. What can, what can, what do you need so that you feel that Bill, Bill understands how hard you were working to make this marriage work? Just make this family go. What, what do you need from Bill?

Leslie (643): I need some support from Bill (frame- context of “support” moves into galleries of “understanding,” “togetherness,” and “communication”). I mean, I—I—I work—I work more than 8 hours—ah—a day...

Berg (644): Right.

Leslie (645): ...also and then I come home.

Berg (646): Of course.

Leslie (647): ...I—I mentioned that I needed him to take more responsibility with child care arrangements, everything, (frame- context of “responsibility” moves into galleries of “understanding,” “togetherness,” and “communication”)

Berg (648): Right.

A scaling question is used by Berg (769) which appears to heighten the clients’ awareness of goals and the relationship between needs and wants becomes clearer (770):

Berg (769): What would it take, do you think, with these chances from your point of view, Leslie? What would it, what would it take for you to go from five to six, so you can say, it’s just a little bit better? It’s not perfect yet. It’s not that all the way up to 10 but it’s just a little bit better. What has to happen between the two of you so that you can say that to yourself?

Leslie (770): Well, he could—he could call like he said he would and...(frame-context of “call” moves into gallery of “communication”)

Berg then brought forth another exception question (870), assisting with concrete goals through understanding the clients’ needs (871, 873):

Berg (870): Suppose she believes, so she believes you that you are working and not with other women. How would that be helpful for you?

Bill (871): It would put my mind at ease (frame- context of “mind at ease” moves into gallery of “communication” and “understanding”).

Berg (872): Uh-huh.

Bill (873): It would make it easier for me to take care of what I need to take care of and—and...

Berg follows with a question to Bill to facilitate Bill in coming closer to his needs:

Berg (886): What? What can she do to make it easier for that to happen?

Bill (888): Just, just be understanding (frame- context “understanding” moves into gallery of “understanding”), you know. Just, just don’t.

Again, Berg facilitates attention to Bill’s needs (those addressed in the galleries), rather than getting side-tracked by Leslie’s notion of “other woman.”

In the following excerpt, Berg then follows through with an attempt to focus on both Leslie’s and Bill’s needs from their earlier statements:

Berg (938): And, ah, that certainly would help. So, what I would like to suggest to you, between the two, between now and the next time we get together, is for each of you to keep track of what the other person is doing for you to keep track what Bill does and for you to keep track of what Leslie does to make things a little bit better (frame- context of “keep track” moves into galleries of “communication,” “understanding,” and “togetherness” in solution talk).

Berg summarizes aspects from earlier in the session, facilitating an increased attention to needs, thereby leading the clients’ focus on potential solutions.

Berg (1934); You want to take care of things on your own. You want to be responsible. You want to make her life easier. So it's easier for you to just take care of Louise, take care of other things and not worry her and not burden her (frame- context of "take care" and "not burden" moves towards galleries of "communication," "understanding," and "togetherness").

Berg recursively moved between the stages and as the sessions progressed forward, the common theme (galleries) of in their needs became more present-communication, understanding, and togetherness. In the following excerpt, as Berg asked about difference (556), Bill addressed the need for communication, as well as the solution (561):

Berg (556): But supposed you two. How would Leslie be different with you? What would she do differently?

Bill (557): Well, I suppose, you know, I mean, she'd be warm with me.

Berg (558): She'd be, she'd be warmer with you (frame- context of "warmer with you" moves into galleries of "communication" and "togetherness")?

Bill (559): We'd get along better.

Berg (560): Okay.

Bill (561): You know. We would communicate better with our problem (gallery of communication).

Below, Berg expanded on aspects shared by the clients and tapped into Bill's strengths, leading to his needs and solutions for understanding:

Berg (1021): You did. Yeah. That must to take incredibly a coordination to pull it off. I mean that's not easy to do that with four kids—I mean—four people scheduled.

Bill (1039): Uhm, you know—the—the—the thing is—is that I'm hoping that we can continue to understand that you know that I can't, you know, do this as much (frame- context of "can't...do this as much" moves to gallery of "understanding").

In the following exchange, Berg facilitated Leslie in a deeper awareness of her needs and solutions for time together:

Berg (785): Uh-huh. Now, what would that mean? What does that mean? How would that help? He's hugging you and calling you and, I don't understand that. How would that be helpful for you?

Leslie (794): We could have—ah—you know— a late dinner together, you know but...(frame- context of "late dinner together" moves into galleries of "togetherness," "understanding," and "communication")

Berg (799): Uh-huh—uh-huh. So some more personal private time together?

Leslie (800): Right.

Throughout the sessions Berg's recursive style allowed for a playfulness to move forward and back between the three stages, and in each stage Leslie and Bill addressed communication, understanding, and togetherness as their needs, as well as the solutions.

These themes run through each of the three primary stages, having a relational quality between problems, exceptions, and solutions. The themes (frames) remain the same in all stages (galleries) but framed slightly differently depending on the gallery. The therapist moves

from gallery to gallery through each stage as the focus of the themes and frames slightly shift, depending on the stage and gallery that Berg and her clients are in. This is a recursive process as Berg moved between stages. Regardless of the stage, the needs and solutions stay as the focus of all stages.

Discussion

These findings contribute to the SFBT literature by highlighting the therapist's role in the SFBT process. Franklin et al. (2012) reviewed the latest process research in SFBT and addressed exploring exceptions, strengths, and possibilities in the primary stages of problems, goals, and solutions. In this study, exceptions, strengths, and possibilities were also found to be significant—but in addition—the client's needs were closely addressed and utilized in each of primary stages. Awareness of needs in all stages provides the therapist and client attention and focus on needs. The importance of focusing on the client's needs is missing from the current SFBT literature; yet this attention on needs is a focus, as needs and solutions occur simultaneously through all SFBT stages. The therapist can utilize the client's needs as a resource, as they tap into the client's internal wisdom, and the awareness of solutions can more easily surface in all stages. Although this study reviewed only two sessions from Berg (1994), it can contribute to future literature and possible teaching of the SFBT process. By focusing on the client's needs throughout a therapeutic session, the context of the therapist and client's talk can more easily move into themes, allowing "problem talk" and "solution talk" to simultaneously surface recursively between all stages (wings). This enhances the process of going from problems to solutions.

Berg's style of SFBT (1994) was effective in facilitating the awareness of the clients' needs and solutions simultaneously. This study suggests that awareness of the clients' needs facilitates solution generating. This awareness of needs and solutions simultaneously can be seen as both the therapist and clients' focus regardless of the SFBT stage. This is a creative way of inquiring about the clients' needs and solutions without directly asking. The interweaving of the questions and steps in this approach can be seen to allow for needs to organically surface. In SFBT, the therapist assists clients in becoming aware to their own resources, values clients' resilience, and facilitates clients' awareness of their internal wisdom. With the facilitation of Berg (1994), the clients began to use language to state their needs and their solutions. This was done with rhythm and repetition of words, which is also described by Gilligan (2012) when working with trance. Gilligan (2012) described awareness of the unconscious system as an attempt to pay attention to needs. Berg brings her attention to the clients' needs by attending to the clients' intention, not their story, and can be considered a delicate process.

The ongoing theme of the clients' needs and solutions in this case was to have better communication, understanding, and more time together. Meaning surfaced through these words and needs and solutions came forward in a socially constructed manner between Berg and the clients. In time, the words utilized by the clients were brought forward into awareness for both the therapist and the clients, slowly bringing forth commonality in the clients' words. We noted the awareness that came forward for both Berg and the clients, the simplicity of their talk, and the significance of Berg's relational listening style. This required intentional listening to words and context, and at the same time the therapist's intentional attention to the SFBT stages.

Using RFA (Chenail, 2011) allowed us to investigate the language in the therapy sessions from a rigorous standpoint and was helpful to explore needs and the connection to solutions in Berg's (1994) SFBT process. In RFA terms, perhaps SFBT therapists attempt to unframe needs from a problem frame, as common themes move from problem themes to

solution frames; miscommunication becomes communication, misunderstanding becomes understanding, and together less becomes togetherness (see Figure 3). The therapeutic process can be seen as a session in a museum of needs; housing the wings of the SFBT stages, containing the galleries of themes, and frames holding the context of the talk. With this recursive interchange, unframing the needs from problems to solutions moves more easily. Therefore, awareness of needs from the initial session forward, initiates a smoother transition in movement towards solutions. This unframing practice was a surprise to us and does not appear to be a SFBT speech phenomenon discussed as a way to manage the listening, selecting, and building solution-building process. Rather, the practice appears to be a way SFBT therapists can work with client's needs albeit in a solution-focused manner (e.g., miscommunicating to communicating; both a need and a solution).

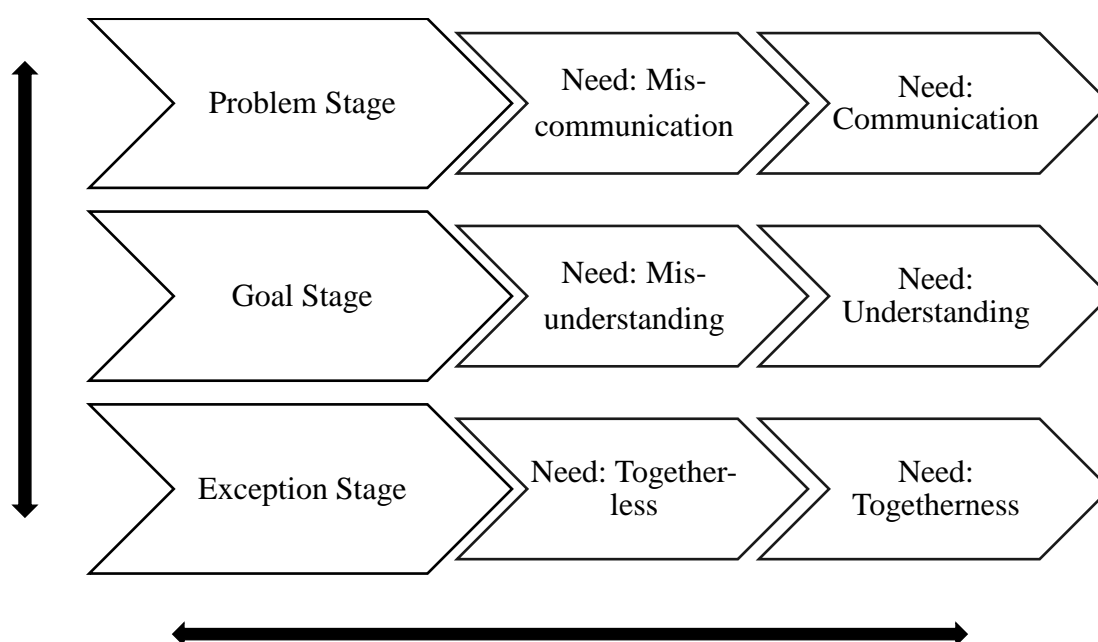


Figure 3. Unframe the frame

The findings indicated that the method of how the therapist asked the questions was significant and complimentary to the clients' response, and therefore the clients became more aware and focused of their needs and solutions. This style brought forth a change in the clients' position by facilitating aspects of difference. "What is transmitted around the circuit is transforms of differences. And...a difference which makes a difference is an idea or unit of information" (Bateson, 2000, pp. 317-318). This difference provides information that leads towards change. Bateson's (1972) shared that when individuals change aspects of their viewpoint, movement can occur towards doing something different (as cited in Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 2011). One may consider this change in the client's position as allowing for a more significant and on-going change, as needs and solutions simultaneously surface. Proust (1996) believed that wisdom was within, and clients must work towards discovering it (as cited in Lerner, 2004). This wisdom is utilized in movement forward towards their goals as it comes into their awareness of needs. Rosenberg (2005) based his Non-Violent Communication work on needs, again bringing attention to individual's internal needs in times of miscommunication and conflict. In SFBT, the needs and solutions come from the client, from their internal wisdom that in turn lead them forward towards solutions. Additionally, SFBT requires acceptance and joining. Erickson accepted the client's reality and connected with different levels within the

client (Erickson & Rossi, 1980). The SFBT therapist works very closely in the same manner. Deeper aspects of Ericksonian influence on SFBT can be explored further in future research.

Future Research

Although our results emanate from the study of one exemplary case study, we suggest these findings warrant exploration of more SFBT cases to further examine the benefits of the relationship between clients' needs and SFBT solution building, as well as a recursive therapeutic style. If these studies build more support for these relational findings, the next stage of research could be into the efficacy of relationally-enhanced SFBT with couples and families (Kim, 2008).

Clinical Implications

The implications of this research and exploration of Berg's (1994) SFBT approach can assist therapists to better understand this therapy process, specifically in noting the importance of the therapist's attentive state to the client's needs and their attempted solutions. Many see the solution focused approach as simply finding solutions, but an exploration of the client's internal wisdom is vital in bringing forth the client's needs, leading to solutions which address these needs. This is an important concept for this approach to be successful, together with pragmatics that support hope and respect. A focus on the client's needs facilitates a more fluent, efficient, and effective therapy; and facilitates awareness of solutions even in the initial session. Berg's maneuverability allowed her to stay close to the clients' needs and respect the clients' needs and wants throughout the sessions.

The qualitative research approach of utilizing RFA as a means to explore common themes within the frames was not only useful in this study but may be beneficial in assisting new therapists in their awareness of themes and patterns that often surface in the therapy session. This is especially significant in a systemic and relational outlook, which is common in the marriage and family therapy systems approach (Clarke, 2014). We think focusing on the client's needs and wants should be a major element in the training of SFBT therapists. Previous research (e.g., Stith et al., 2012) has shown students have difficulty framing SFBT practices such as the miracle question. By helping students to listen for client's needs and to select these expressed wants to frame SFBT techniques, such as a miracle question, would help SFBT therapists build solutions in relationship to the client's focus.

Limitations

This research study involved reviewing a single reconstructed case, in two sessions, of Insoo Kim Berg's (1994) SFBT. Berg and her clients are no longer available to do member checking, and therefore Berg and the clients' intent could not be checked. We did endeavor to use a case Berg herself has used numerous times to explain how she worked as an SFBT therapist (Hoyt & Berg, 1998a, 1998b) so we hold the case is an authentic example of her work. Recursive frame analysis, although a reliable qualitative research tool, still relies on the researcher's view of what they are researching. The analysis was primarily through the principal investigator's lens, who consulted with the second author throughout the research process. I used ample excerpts to serve as evidence of these findings and ultimately turn to the readers to assess the quality of these findings.

Conclusion

The SFBT process is described in stages, but the additional attention to needs can facilitate specifics necessary in selecting, which enhances movement forward towards bridging and building solutions. This selecting involves a delicate process of facilitating awareness of the client's needs, keeping their needs in the forefront throughout the process. Developing therapists may not innately bring attention to the client's needs, with focus on specifics of the stages. Clients often have acute awareness of their problems, but acuity to needs is often diminished. Without the client's realization of their needs, movement towards solutions can be difficult. This allows the collaborative process of unframing needs from a problem frame towards solution frames starting from the initial session. This is an attempt to bring forward the importance of exploring the client's internal wisdom or "deeper, wiser self" as Erickson called it (O'Hanlon & Martin, 1992), and is a vital aspect in exploration of needs in the SFBT approach. Additional attention to the client's needs allows for a smoother collaborative progression towards concrete, more crystalized solutions.

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