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Culture in Solution-Focused consultation: An intercultural approach*

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I develop an intercultural approach to Solution-Focused consultation in this paper. The approach represents an anthropological-sociological interpretation and is written by an interested outsider to the Solution-Focused world. The analysis stresses how multicultural concerns permeate Solution-Focused consultations as practitioners and clients draw from other cultures in which they participate. Practitioner-client interactions are treated as negotiations that turn on participants' intercultural competencies, that is, their ability to navigate between their own cultural orientations and those of others involved in consultations. An explanation of how my intercultural perspective extends cultural themes in the Solution-Focused literature is discussed and an illustration of its usefulness is presented by analyzing a case study. Finally, discuss future possibilities for further developing this perspective.

This paper focuses on the concept of culture as an aspect of Solution-Focused practitioner-client interactions by casting the interactions as intercultural negotiations. I use the term intercultural to call attention to the ways in which Solution-Focused practitioners and clients bring multiple cultural meanings to bear on the practical issues at stake in their interactions. The term negotiation directs attention to how Solution-Focused interactions involve dialogue, deliberation and even bargaining intended to foster new understandings of the situation at hand and working agreements on how to proceed in addressing the situation. Negotiations involve contributions from two or more par-

* Aspects of this paper were presented as a plenary address ("Continuity and Change: The Dance of an Attitude") at the annual meeting of the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Association, Santa Fe, NM, USA (November, 2014). I would also like to thank Sara Smock Jordan for commenting on an early draft of the paper.

ties who initially may have quite different interests. The themes developed here are intended to apply to a wide variety of settings (e.g., therapy, businesses, schools, medical agencies, etc.) in which Solution-Focused consultation is done.

This paper serves two purposes. The first involves identifying cultural issues that have been minimized in conversations among Solution-Focused thinkers and practitioners, and suggesting how these issues might be part of future conversations. The second purpose is to expand the horizons of such conversations to include perspectives developed outside of the Solution-Focused world. This purpose connects with my status as an interested outsider whose primary involvement with the Solution-Focused world is as a qualitative researcher. My involvement dates back to 1984 at the Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee.

While admittedly self-serving, I see the inclusion of interested outsiders' perspectives as vital to the development of Solution-Focused thought and practice. Outsiders' observations and interpretations challenge Solution-Focused practitioners to reflect on their work in new ways. Interested outsiders are particularly well positioned to act as intellectual brokers linking the Solution-Focused world with "intellectual currents in the contemporary world" (Miller 2014, p. 9). Relevant intellectual currents include both perspectives that clearly complement themes in mainstream Solution-Focused thought and those that challenge mainstream assumptions and claims about Solution-Focused interactions.

I draw from Geertz's (1973) approach to cultural anthropology and Fine's (1979) sociological analysis of small groups as idiocultures in describing Solution-Focused practitioner-client interactions as intercultural negotiations. Both approaches rest on the idea that human beings are symbol-making and symbol-using animals (Burke 1966). They also address Solution-Focused thinkers' and practitioners' concern for how meaning emerges within social interactions. Thus, they resonate with McKergow and Korman's (2009) interactional approach to Solution-Focused consultation, and Miller and McKergow's (2012) depiction of Solution-Focused interactions as complex systems within which unanticipated social realities sometimes emerge.

My approach to Solution-Focused consultations treats culture as a fundamental and ubiquitous aspect of Solution-Focused consultations. Thus, this paper might be seen as a response to complexity theorists' call for developing multiple descriptions of meaning making in complex social interactions (Cilliers, 1998; Miller & McKergow, 2012). Solution-Focused consultations are contexts for the social construction of multicultural meanings having implications for clients' future interpretations and actions. I develop the themes

discussed above throughout the rest of the paper. I begin with a brief review of the evolution of the concept of culture in the Solution-Focused world then develop my intercultural perspective on Solution-Focused consultation. Later, I analyse a case example to illustrate my intercultural approach and discuss some lines of future development of an intercultural approach to Solution-Focused consultation.

From culture to intercultural competence

Culture's status among the inventors of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy at BFTC in the mid-1980s varied by context and time. Visitors were frequently told that culture was not a concern of Solution-Focused Brief Therapists. The early leaders explained that their approach emerged from working with a multi-cultural client population. They had developed techniques that were effective in addressing diverse problems reported by clients who varied by race and ethnicity, income, regional background, age, and gender. The therapists' emphasis on minimalism was also relevant. Why complicate the approach by attending to unnecessary issues? But I also observed how these therapists sometimes took account of cultural issues in doing therapy. For example, they replaced the miracle question in sessions with members of the Jehovah's Witnesses (who do not believe in miracles) with questions about being in God's grace, as well as modifying the scaling question to move from negative 10 to 0 to better fit with the cultural orientations of clients in some countries.

A major shift involved Berg and Jaya's (1993) article on working with Asian-American families. They made a case for including cultural concerns in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy while also cautioning readers to not over-generalize about Asian-Americans or emphasize culture over cooperating with one's clients. More recently, we have seen a number of publications discussing how Solution-Focused Brief Therapists might take into account the client's culture. They include Lee's (2003) incorporation of Solution-Focused ideas and practices into cross-cultural clinical social work and Lee and Mjelede-Mossey's (2004) approach to cultural dissonance among East Asian immigrants to the United States. Geisler's (2010) experiences in doing Solution-Focused work in Mexico and Hsu and Wang's (2011) discussion of filial piety as a concern in therapy sessions with Taiwanese/Chinese clients are also significant contributions to the literature. A recent addition is Moir-Bussy's (2014) report on fitting Solution-Focused Brief Therapy with the cultural concerns of Chinese and Australian clients.

Lee (1996) advanced a different line of development by showing how

social constructivism is related to cultural diversity. Also, Kim's (2014a) edited volume on multiculturalism and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is noteworthy for applying the concept of cultural competency to a number of different groups including clients with disabilities, LGBTQ, economically poor, spiritual and religious clients. Cultural competence involves both learning the values, practices, and beliefs of members of other cultures and using that knowledge to reflect upon one's own cultural orientations (Lee & Zaharlick 2013).

Finally, Solution-Focused practitioners and others have applied the idea of culture to team building and leadership in organizations (Aoki, 2009; Godat, 2013; Gray, 2011; Yoshida, 2011). Others have used Solution-Focused techniques in medical, prison, and school cultures (Ferraz & Wellman, 2009; Greenberg et al., 2001; Lindforss & Magnusson, 1997; Metcalf, 2008). These studies expand Solution-Focused Brief Therapists' primary focus on the cultures of racial, ethnic, and national groups to include workplaces, occupations and institutions as cultures.

This brief review of the literature points to the increasing interest of some members of the Solution-Focused world and interested outsiders in the concept of culture. Yet, as Kim (2014b) notes, much of the literature in this field expresses uncertainty about the extent to which Solution-Focused practitioners should be culturally oriented. He explains that many Solution-Focused practitioners worry that training focused on cultural issues will

reinforce assumptions around stereotyping and the fallacy of knowing everything about a particular race, culture, or minority group. Because of these concerns, Solution-Focused clinicians advocate for more of a *not knowing* approach, which is central to Solution-Focused Brief Therapy ... (p. 10; italics in original)

I see such concerns as warranted but only up to a point. Another concern involves the temptation to define culture in overly abstract ways, thereby divorcing it from the lived realities of people's lives. Also problematic is the frequent tendency to define others' values and practices as cultural expressions while neglecting one's own. Despite these realistic worries, Jahoda (2012, p. 300) makes an important point in stating that "the concept of "culture" is probably indispensable" to life in multicultural societies. This is the lesson that I draw from the cultural literature that has emerged in the Solution-Focused world over the last twenty years. The studies point to multicultural contexts of Solution-Focused consultation; thus, making a case for incorporating a greater cultural consciousness into the Solution-Focused world.

The key question, of course, involves how to incorporate greater cultural

consciousness into Solution-Focused thought and practice. Treating Solution-Focused practitioner-client interactions as intercultural negotiations is one starting point in answering this question. The critical skills in Solution-Focused negotiations consist of practitioners' and clients' intercultural competencies. These competencies include practitioners' and clients' abilities to express their practical concerns and cultural orientations to each other, as well as to assist other parties in expressing their own concerns and orientations. A basic step in expanding intercultural awareness in the Solution-Focused world involves developing an intercultural perspective on Solution-Focused consultations. We turn to this issue next.

An intercultural perspective

My approach to culture and Solution-Focused consultation begins with Geertz's (1973, p. 5) definition of culture as "webs of significance" or meanings that people spin and in which they are suspended. Geertz's depiction of culture as a web points to how multiple meanings are linked to one another within particular cultures. Put differently, culture consists of symbolic clusters (Burke 1973). "Each element in the cluster serves as a background for the other elements, thus imbuing them with values that might not otherwise be associated with them" (Miller, 2014, p. 13). This is one reason why groups that appear to share some of the same values may define themselves as significantly different from — even opposed to — each other.

Spinning of webs of significance is a process of social construction. Meanings emerge as people interact and interpret aspects of their own and others' life experiences. Both activities are sources of change and continuity. This is the importance of Geertz's (1973) depiction of culture as suspending people. Meanings hold people in place for a time but they are not necessarily trapped in that place for all time. To the extent that socially constructed meanings hold people in place, cultural meanings serve as orienting frameworks through which they engage the worlds around them. The meanings guide perception by casting some concerns as more relevant than others and some responses to situations as more appropriate.

Geertz's (1973) approach does not limit the concept of culture to a few group categories or identities. All groups are candidates for cultural analysis as long as analysts can demonstrate that group members orient to shared meanings. Thus, we may speak of Solution-Focused culture. Further, Geertz's approach challenges cultural analyses that treat members of cultural groups as orienting to stable and enduring meanings. The challenge calls attention to the variety of cultural contexts (webs of meaning) in which people suspend

themselves as they go about their everyday lives. Consider a day in your life. It might include participation in family, profession, popular culture, public service, politics and religion. Each of these contexts involves spinning webs of meaning that are somewhat distinct. Indeed, an important part of managing life involves successfully moving from one cultural context to another.

While one can argue that such cultural identities as race, gender, sexual orientation and nationality cut across diverse contexts more than others, this is not to say that the identities have same meaning in all contexts. This is an important reason why cultural analysts need to attend to the social practices associated with particular social settings and to the negotiations through which cultural realities are socially constructed. Consider, for example, Jackson's (2001) ethnography of racial and class identities among residents of Harlem in which he states

many African Americans have decidedly performative notions of social identity. Class position is glimpsed through interpretations of everyday behaviors. Racial identity is predicated on perceptions of particular social actions and is shored up with recourse to specific kinds of activities. Racial "location" is not contingent solely on one-drop rules or degrees of skin pigmentation. Socially meaningful identifications are partially derived from observable behaviors, practices, and social performances. (p. 4)

Jackson's statement underscores the multidimensionality of seemingly stable cultural identities. His study is a useful point of departure in seeing how life in contemporary societies involves continuing intercultural encounters and negotiations. Sustaining racial, gender, sexual and other cultural identities involves ongoing adaptations to the webs of meaning associated with the diverse social groups and settings in which people participate.

Fine's (1979) analysis of small groups as idiocultures augments Jackson's (2001) insights by showing how small group members draw from multiple cultures in constructing distinctive webs of meaning that address their shared social circumstances. Fine uses his studies of little league baseball teams to show how members of each team used selected aspects of baseball culture, adult social worlds and their shared experiences as children to invent their own cultural practices, values and perspectives. Team members demonstrated their intercultural competence in negotiating which general cultural themes to take from the larger society, how to reorganize them into their own webs of meaning, and in applying the themes in diverse situations.

Fine (1979) identifies several concerns that guide group members' negotiations about the incorporation of particular values and practices into their

idiocultures. Three are particularly relevant to Solution-Focused consultation: the incorporated values and practices must be known to group members, consistent with the group's social interests and appropriate to the social relations of the group. Fine's baseball teams differed in their knowledge about baseball traditions, their primary interests and preferred teammate relationships. For example, all of the teams did not emphasize winning over other social values, nor did they emphasize the same criteria in assigning members to differing statuses within their groups.

Fine's (1979) analysis has direct relevance for understanding how cultural realities are constructed in Solution-Focused consultations. Participants in consultations form small groups focused on a limited range of issues. Similar to little league baseball teams, Solution-Focused practitioners and clients negotiate about what aspects of more encompassing cultures are relevant to their interactions, and how the selected cultural elements should be fitted together to form webs of meaning that are consistent with their emerging relationships. Idiocultural participants need not be experts on others' cultures but they do need to know enough to successfully negotiate with each other. This brings us back to Jackson's (2001) stress on paying close attention to what others say through their words and unspoken actions.

In treating culture as webs of meaning and Solution-Focused consultations as emergent idiocultures, Solution-Focused practitioners might better see how their orientations to interacting with clients are grounded in Solution-Focused culture. Practitioners selectively borrow from Solution-Focused culture in asking particular questions, responding to clients' answers in particular ways and formulating parting messages. Solution-focused practitioners and clients construct shared idiocultures by negotiating if and how practitioners' actions fit with cultural themes introduced by clients. This is how Solution-Focused practitioners and clients spin and suspend themselves in webs of meaning that express aspects of multiple cultures. I illustrate how idiocultures are negotiated in the next section. It summarizes a case example offered by Blakeslee and Smock Jordan (2014) involving a white therapist and two Native American clients. I summarize the case example to save space and focus on the give-and-take of the negotiation.

Case example¹

Blakeslee and Smock Jordan (2014) begin by noting some core values of Native American culture and contrasting them with dominant — white — cul-

1. The case example discussed here is from Blakeslee and Smock Jordan (2014) and is used with the authors' permission.

ture in the United States. The values are a holistic orientation to spirituality that includes: treating nature as sacred; stress on community relations as a source of well-being; personal identity as inseparable from family and tribal identities; time as coordinated by natural events; and communication practices that include avoiding eye contact and extended pauses between sentences. Blakeslee and Smock Jordan also discuss substance abuse, partner/family violence, poverty and unemployment, and depression and suicide as major clinical issues in Native American communities. They next offer some suggestions on how Solution-Focused Brief Therapists might adjust their therapy practices to respect Native American culture, such as replacing the word doing with being (e.g. “so, if you weren’t fighting as much, how would you be instead?” p. 116), modifying the miracle question to ask about having a vision and being directive in giving the parting message.

The session involves a married couple (Mika, who is employed, and Matt, who is unemployed) with a 15 year old son (Tokada, who is not present in the session). The therapist begins by asking about what needs to happen “during our meeting today so that being here was helpful” (p. 113). Mika explains that she has been sent by her boss and is concerned about losing her job. The therapist notes, “So just being here is helpful” and “Keeping your job is important” (p. 113). Matt nods and Mika says “Yes.” The therapist then asks about Mika’s job. Mika replies that she gets little time off, must take sick days to attend tribal events, and concludes: “I wish we had never left” (p. 113). Mika next turns to her concerns about Tokada who she says is “losing his heritage” because the school is “trying to make him think like white people,” adding “no offense” (p. 113). The therapist replies that she/he takes no offense and asks Mika to say more about her son. Mika states that he prefers to be called Tate which “is really a slap in our face because his name has special significance in our tribe” (p. 113).

Next, the therapist asks about how the couple is coping. Mika explains that she and Matt have been fighting and that it is interfering with her job. The therapist replies that it must be hard talking to a white therapist. Mika agrees. The therapist asks, “How might I be helpful given that I am not American Indian?” (p. 114). Mika states that it would help if the therapist gave a positive report to her boss, one that states that Mika is a good worker and not crazy. Mika explains that less fighting would also help because she wouldn’t be arriving late to work, would be sleeping more and spending more time with Tokada. Mika responds to the therapist’s “what else” question by adding family members would spend time talking about tribal traditions if there was less fighting, and that “This would make us feel more at home” (p 114).

Next, we have a miracle question. The therapist asks Mika and Matt to

imagine a shift where “an elder or an animal appeared in a vision and they let you know that the problems you have been talking about today are no longer a problem” (p. 114). Mika mentions four changes resulting from her vision: she and Matt would wake up in the same bed because they would not be fighting, Matt and Tokada would return to morning chanting, Tokada would join his parents for morning tea, and they would walk Tokada to school prior to Mika’s going to work. She characterizes this as the best possible situation “while living outside of our tribe” (p. 115).

This session illustrates how Solution-Focused consultants address clients’ concerns while keeping the sessions consistent with the principles of Solution-Focused consultation. We see this in the therapist’s use of the word being, supportive response to Mika’s worries about white culture, treatment of Matt’s silent nodding as an acceptable form of participation, and refocusing the miracle question around having a vision of an elder or animal. The session shows how Solution-Focused consultants’ responses to clients’ statements guide clients toward identifying resources for change. We now consider how the case example is an intercultural negotiation.

Intercultural interpretation

Looked at from an intercultural perspective, Mika and Matt’s interaction with their Solution-Focused Brief Therapist is a first step in building an idioculture that might be further developed in subsequent sessions. The therapist’s questions (which express Solution-Focused cultural concerns) form a context in which clients and therapist selectively draw from Native American and white cultures to construct a shared orientation to the issues at hand. The therapist’s questions establish the parameters within which Native American and white cultural values, practices and identities are incorporated into their emergent idioculture. It is significant that the therapist’s questions do not ask clients to blend or harmonize differences between the cultures. Indeed, the interaction turns on stated and unstated contrasts between them.

The example illustrates how Solution-Focused practitioners and clients build idiocultures by using known aspects of their own and others’ cultures to spin webs of meaning that are consistent with their interests and relationships. All of the parties in the interaction display intercultural competencies, but Mika’s actions are particularly instructive. Mika displays her understanding of white culture in expressing sensitivity to the therapist’s possible negative feelings about Mika’s disapproval of the white orientation taught in Tokada’s school, request for a report that fits with her boss’s concerns (i.e., that she is a good worker and not crazy) and desire to find the best possible

situation for living within white society. Mika also displays her understanding of how therapy relationships are organized in nontribal society. Perhaps most impressive is Mika's positioning of herself outside of both white and therapy cultures, while also participating in both. Her actions suggest, but do not guarantee, that the interaction adequately addresses her concerns and sense of appropriate client-therapist relations.

Looking at what is said in therapy is only one way of seeing intercultural competence in interaction. We should also consider what might have been talked about but was not. The therapist's choices are central here. Specifically, the therapist shows no interest in the clinical issues that Blakeslee and Smock Jordan (2014) describe as recurring problems in Native American communities. Nor does the therapist focus on issues that might otherwise be treated as basic to family members' cultural identities. For example, the therapist does not ask the clients to discuss the meanings associated with particular tribal practices (such as morning chanting and the special meaning of Tokada's name), what aspects of white culture they find particularly problematic, their regrets about leaving the tribe or what is different when they feel more at home while living in white society. It is telling that Mika does not return to these issues as the interaction proceeds.

Three unspoken aspects of the therapy session warrant special mention. They involve the therapist's treatment of time, Matt's unemployment and the circumstances of the family's departure from the reservation. Each of these issues might be seen as relevant to the family's current situation based on the therapist's knowledge of Native American culture. For example, might Mika's tardiness at work be related to the traditional Native American orientation to time? Could Matt's unemployment be caused by excessive drinking, depression or suicidal thoughts? One might also imagine a variety of reasons why the family moved away from the reservation, including the alienation of family members from other tribe members. Thus, we might ask if the clients' problems are related to feelings of social separation that undermine their sense of well-being and challenge the close connection between their personal and tribal identities. Who knows where the interaction might have gone had the therapist used her cultural knowledge to pursue these and other possibilities in the session.

The unspoken aspects of the example point to the importance of interactional discipline by Solution-Focused consultants in choosing which topics to develop in interacting with clients. This issue harkens back to Berg and Jaya's (1993) caution about therapists using their cultural knowledge to over-generalize about clients' desires and needs. Interactional discipline involves sustaining a disciplined curiosity that focuses on the actual circum-

stances of clients' lives. This is not to say that there is only one correct way of doing Solution-Focused consultation with particular clients. Fine (1979) clearly shows that all idiocultures are — to varying degrees — unique social constructions. My point is only that the construction of Solution-Focused idiocultures should be informed by clients' expressed desires and needs. I explore other implications of an intercultural approach to Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in the next section.

Future considerations

I have described an intercultural approach to Solution-Focused consultation that turns on Geertz's (1973) definition of culture as webs of significance spun in social interaction and Fine's (1979) analysis of idiocultures. The approach extends McKergow and Korman's (2009) analysis of meanings as emerging in-between practitioners and clients. I have discussed how participants in Solution-Focused consultations rely upon aspects other cultures in interacting with one another. Thus, there is no clear or stable boundary separating practitioner-client interactions from the larger cultural environments in which they take place. My intercultural approach advances complexity theorists' interest in how transformations of meaning emerge in some social interactions (Miller & McKergow, 2012) by noting how Solution-Focused consultations are contexts for constructing idiocultures. In negotiating what aspects of other cultures should be included in consultations and linking them together in particular ways, Solution-Focused practitioners and clients create potential conditions for interactional transformation.

An intercultural approach also has practical implications for Solution-Focused practitioners seeking to increase their intercultural competence. In particular, Blakeslee and Smock Jordan's (2014) case example illustrates how an intercultural orientation can aid Solution-Focused consultants in adapting their questions and comments to take account of clients' cultural values and practices. They also show the usefulness of acknowledging cultural differences with clients and perhaps asking clients for guidance in conducting consultations in culturally preferred ways. It is important to note the several potential cultural topics that the therapist avoided asking about. Taken together, these practical implications of an intercultural orientation fit well with Panayotov's (2011, p. 8) simple therapy, particularly his practice of asking clients, "*What do you think is the most useful question I have to ask you now?*"

I see the intercultural approach described here as a first step in incorporating a greater cultural consciousness and competence within the Solu-

tion-Focused world. But I also recognize that I have not addressed some important issues related to the approach. These issues represent future considerations that Solution-Focused consultants and interested outsiders might address through future research, theory development and innovations in Solution-Focused practices. I discuss three future considerations here. The first focuses on how an intercultural perspective challenges aspects of the dominant discourse in the Solution-Focused world.

One challenge involves depictions of Solution-Focused practitioners as taking a not knowing stance, position or attitude in interacting with clients. Thus, not knowing is a choice. Viewed interculturally, one must ask, "How could practitioners ever know in advance what cultural themes clients will interject into particular consultations or how practitioners and clients will negotiate webs of meaning for addressing their shared concerns?" Not knowing is a circumstance of life that calls for recognition and acceptance, nothing more or less. On the other hand, disciplined curiosity is a skill that is, to varying degrees, evident in the intercultural negotiations of Solution-Focused consultations. As a skill, disciplined curiosity may be fostered through training, supervision, conversations and analyses of intercultural negotiations.

The individualistic assumptions that pervade Solution-Focused discourse are also significant. Clients are depicted as voicing unique individual desires in Solution-Focused consultations, and practitioners are cautioned to closely attend to their clients as individuals. This theme echoes a well-established and essentialist emphasis in Western cultures. Thus, it should not be surprising that individualistic claims are often made by clients in diverse Solution-Focused settings. Solution-Focused practitioners should take the claims seriously by treating them as client contributions to the building of idiosyncratic cultures, that is, as cultural claims. The uniqueness of practitioners and clients is negotiated and realized as they select and organize themes borrowed from the other cultures in which they participate. Thus, every consulting session is a context for socially constructing clients and practitioners as unique.

The second future consideration involves conducting studies of Solution-Focused culture. Bidwell's (1999) theological analysis of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is one starting point. Bidwell states that hope and possibility are the ultimate metaphors for Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, adding these values infuse therapists' techniques and ethical orientations. Another starting point is Ferraz and Wellman's (2009, p. 326) characterization of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy as "fostering a culture of engagement." These are only starting points, however. Future discussions need to move beyond such vague claims as Solution-Focused consultation is collaborative, respectful and optimistic.

There are many ways of addressing this issue but I think ethnographic studies of the Solution-Focused world are particularly promising. I say this because Solution-Focused culture consists of more than what happens within practitioner-client interactions. The Solution-Focused world consists of a wide diversity of settings, actors and activities. They include trainings, reading and writing texts, supervision, conference presentations, casual conversations about one's own and others' consultation practices and explaining Solution-Focused consultation to outsiders. A holistic ethnographic examination of the Solution-Focused world must look at how Solution-Focused assumptions, claims and practices are described, explained and justified in different social contexts. It should also look at disagreements among members of the Solution-Focused world; the criticisms they make of their own work and others' practices and the times when they treat practices that they usually criticize as appropriate for particular circumstances. The latter focus is significant because humanly constructed webs of meaning include both consistent and inconsistent themes as well as certainties and dilemmas.

The third issue directs attention to the relationship between clients' lives inside and outside of Solution-Focused consultations. How do clients interpret their brief involvement with Solution-Focused culture when they return to their families and communities? Quantitative studies concerned with clients' behavioural or attitudinal changes following Solution-Focused consultations are inadequate in addressing this issue. It calls for qualitative studies of the webs of significance and interactional contexts within which clients incorporate their Solution-Focused experiences within other idiocultures. We might treat this process as intercultural translation (Latour, 1983). Clients translate by selectively interpreting and applying aspects of Solution-Focused brief culture in their everyday lives. Studies of clients' uses of Solution-Focused culture in their everyday worlds promise to increase Solution-Focused consultants' ability (competence) to assist their clients' intercultural translation in non-consulting settings.

Conclusion

This paper develops an intercultural approach to Solution-Focused consulting. The consultations are negotiations within which practitioners and clients use their intercultural skills in developing somewhat unique webs of meaning that will potentially transform clients' orientations to their present and future lives. The negotiations are also contexts for constructing practical resources that clients might use in changing their lives. New meanings and resources emerge as practitioners borrow from and rearrange aspects of

multiple cultures to create idiocultures which might serve as standpoints for seeing new possibilities in clients' lives.

My intercultural approach is also a potential resource for therapists wishing to reflect on the values and practices that define Solution-Focused culture, and the diversity of forms it takes in different practitioner-client consultations. It may be useful in assisting Solution-Focused consultants to reflect upon their professional values, practices and identities, as well as asking themselves about other possible ways of being a Solution-Focused practitioner. Such reflections reposition clients and their cultural preferences as sources for practitioners' professional development. It is a way of extending Solution-Focused consultant's intercultural consciousness and competence by engaging the non-Solution-Focused world and learning from it.

While I have stressed the usefulness of developing intercultural consciousness in the Solution-Focused world, I would be remiss to leave the impression that that cultural analysis is always the most useful way of understanding Solution-Focused consultation. The concept of culture is only one of many concepts that people use to make sense of issues in life. For example, many so-called cultural issues might also be addressed using economic or biological perspectives; not to mention the many political and moral philosophies extant in contemporary societies. No doubt, there are times when other perspectives better address Solution-Focused clients' and practitioners' concerns. Still, I cannot imagine a form of Solution-Focused practice that is culture-free. My difficulty in imaging this possibility is related to the diversity of webs of meaning and idiocultures within which people participate in contemporary societies. It is hard to argue that we live in a world of multiple realities without including the concept of culture.

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