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Complimenting has been a criterion within Solution-Focused Brief Therapy history and tradition. From the early development of the approach in Milwaukee, compliments played a key role in pointing out client strengths/resources and heightening the end-of-session task. In this manuscript, complimenting is reviewed historically. Then the practice is critiqued using the notion of "not-knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; De Jong & Berg, 2012), followed by a commentary on possible cultural considerations that need to be considered by the SF practitioner. Finally, a review of traditional complimenting is offered along with additional types, with alternate applications and clinical examples that better fit with not-knowing and intercultural practices (Miller, 2014).

Several years ago, I presented a two-day workshop in a large European city. Simultaneous translation from English to the local language was made available to the participants. I met the professional translator (who was not a psychotherapist) at the beginning of the day but did not speak with her at length.

She sat in the back of the room quietly speaking into a microphone during the workshop and attendees heard her translation through headphones. Near the end of the first day's presentation, I said to the group, "I appreciate the translation services offered by the workshop organisers and want to thank Ms. X for her valuable contribution to today's presentation." We concluded the first day's time together, and after speaking with colleagues for a few minutes I went looking for the translator to thank her personally. The workshop organiser noticed my puzzlement when I could not locate her. "She left immediately after you concluded," he said, "and she said she might not return tomorrow for your second day." "Why not?", I asked. "Well ... You were too direct with your praise, and she felt embarrassed." I was mortified and felt ashamed. I pride myself in being culturally sensitive and yet I had committed a personal offense that created discomfort for another and quite possibly altered the experience for all of the attendees if she would not be available to translate the next day. The organiser contacted her that evening, passing on my apologies, and she agreed to translate the second day. At the end of the workshop, I said to the group, "It appears that you were focused on the content of the workshop whether you chose translation or listened without headphones. Although I may be wrong, it seems as though the support team has taken care to provide a professional experience for everyone, and I am grateful to all who contributed to our success today." I looked to the back of the room and noted the smile on the translator's face ... this time, my compliment was appropriate.

I learned a great deal about culture through this experience that has served me well as I have presented around the world. But I also came to the realisation that the Solution-Focused (SF) community has not systematically addressed complimenting and all its forms so practitioners and trainers can adapt this SF heritage to the sensitivities of culture and context.

The Not-Knowing stance

One means toward honouring others' experiences is adopting the position of "not-knowing" (Anderson, 2005; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; De Jong & Berg, 2012). The philosophical stance of "not-knowing" is simply "that the therapist's contributions, whether they are questions, opinions, speculations, or suggestions, are presented in a manner that conveys a tentative posture and portrays respect for and openness to the other ..." (Anderson, 1995, p. 36). Insoo Kim Berg and others adopted this posture within SFBT in the 1990s, appealing to SF professionals to practice less strategically and more collaboratively (Berg & De Jong, 1996). This approach involves being tenta-

tive and curious in one's contributions to the conversation whenever possible. A practice of "not-knowing" supports a constructionist approach that rejects the notion that professionals have special knowledge about clients and sustains therapeutic partnership.

However, adopting a philosophical posture of "not-knowing" and applying it in-session is often challenging. Extending the concept of not-knowing in SFBT, Chris Iveson called attention to compliments and other SF practices over a decade ago when he wrote:

> This most extreme version of the many ways Solution-Focused Brief therapists try not to know puts into question the necessity of both tasks and compliments. ... The fact that it is not a "problem-focused knowing" makes it no less "knowing." Compliments ... require a form of knowing that does not sit easily with the principle of "not knowing." They are, after all, the product of an assessment. We only have to give a bad compliment (e.g. one which celebrates a positive quality within our own culture which is regarded differently within the client's culture) to know how flimsy and provisional these assessments can be. (Iveson, 2005, p. 5)

Iveson's reflections pushed my own thinking. Are there alternative forms of complimenting that are less declarative? Have SF professionals been practicing forms of complimenting but not articulating differences regarding uncertainty and cultural sensitivity? And, how can those who choose to extend the legacy of complimenting, an integral part of SF practices, do so while holding closely to the not-knowing stance?

SF Approaches and complimenting

Early Development: de Shazer, Berg, and the Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC)

Early publications from Steve de Shazer reveal a strategic orientation to the use of compliments (de Shazer, 1980, 1982, 1988). Compliments "provide(d) an effective 'anaesthetic'" for the task assignment that followed (de Shazer, 1980, p. 471). In these early days of developing the Solution-Focused approach, compliments were often utilized as reframes, tools to elicit a family's cooperation as the therapist and team crafted an intervention. Clients were induced into more relaxed postures by compliments, which fit with de Shazer's background and use of Ericksonian hypnosis techniques (de Shazer, 1988).

In their classic paper outlining the Solution-Focused approach, de Shazer and his BFTC colleagues articulated the role of compliments in their early work:

> The purpose of the compliments is to support the orientation toward solution while continuing the development of what Erickson called a "yes set," ... the start of the therapeutic message is designed to let clients know that the therapist sees things their way and agrees with them. This, of course, allows the clients to agree easily with the therapist. Once this agreement is established, then the clients are in a proper frame of mind to accept clues about solutions, namely, something new and different. (De Shazer, Berg, Lipchik, Nunnally, Molnar, Gingerich & Weiner-Davis, 1986, pp. 216-217)

Compliments focused on "anything the client did that worked" (p. 218) to encourage replication of such changes.

Documents from the first years of SF practice at BFTC reveal more than the strategic uses and placement of compliments. In an unpublished training handout (BFTC, "Eyes," 1991), Berg, de Shazer, and their colleagues sketched out several types of compliments. *Direct* compliments are therapist statements about client self-reports or therapist reactions or conclusions. This type of compliment was to be used "sparingly" if conclusive but encouraged if reactive ("Wow! I like that!" would be an example of a reactive direct compliment.) *Indirect* compliments imply using the interrogative form. Several subtypes were listed and illustrated, making use of client language, relationships, and self-knowledge. Finally, *self*-compliments are client statements about themselves that are positive in nature. In this training document, the therapist is directed to notice (not elicit) self-compliments and trained to call attention to the clients' positive conclusions about themselves by reacting. An example: if the client says, "I decided to quit X because I finally wised up," then one should respond/react with "How about that!" The training goal was clear: "for clients to *notice* positive changes and not for them to accept compliments" (p. 2, emphasis in original).

This original set of distinct compliment types — direct, indirect, and self-compliments — was incorporated into Berg's writing and training throughout her career (Berg, 1994; De Jong & Berg, 2002, 2012). It is also clear that de Shazer distinguished types of compliments and used them clinically to the end of his career as well (de Shazer, Dolan, Korman, Trepper, McCollum & Berg, 2007). These compliment types, along with other possible categories, will be further defined and developed later in this paper.

Cultivating compliments in the SF Tradition

This tradition of complimenting-with-purpose continued into the 1990s with the development of compliment templates (Campbell, Elder, Gallagher, Simon & Taylor, 1999) and other specific complimenting strategies including summaries of successes, reminders of client goals, and calling attention to client strengths (De Jong & Berg, 2002, 2012). Campbell and her colleagues (1999) designed their template to generate cooperation but also to call attention to client competencies. Compliments had transitioned from a means to an end (cooperation with a task and acceptance of therapist/team conclusions) into a technique with multiple applications. Client responses to compliments informed the therapist regarding normalising, connection, affirmation, and validation, purposes not emphasised previously. What continued was the specific placement or normal timing of compliments. Much like de Shazer's original use, compliments were offered after a team consultation break and prior to the delivery of a message or task.

Complimenting evolved at the Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as well. When working with clients experiencing problem drinking, compliments differed with relationship type (Berg & Miller, 1992). Practitioners would vary compliments based on how the therapist defined the relationship with the client as visitor, complainant, or customer. Whether one compliments a client for taking positive steps, suffering, or working hard was based on the professional's assessment of the working relationship rather than client goals or developing a yes-set. Compliments were seen as intervention tools to enhance cooperation — again, a strategic means to a therapeutic end.

According to De Jong and Berg (2002, p. 35):

> When complimenting was first introduced at BFTC, compliments were mainly used at the end of the interview, to draw clients' attention to strengths and past successes that might be useful in achieving their goals. Little by little, practitioners turned to complimenting throughout sessions because the procedure seems to help clients grow more hopeful and confident. In-session complimenting also helps to uncover more information about client strengths and successes.

Although they caution practitioners regarding the use of different compliment types, De Jong and Berg continue to describe compliments as purposeful; that is, the practitioner should "remember that the first goal in giving compliments is for clients to notice their positive changes, strengths, and resources" (2002, p. 36). At this point in time, compliments were not yet

part of the conversational repertoire of the practitioner to build solutions; they were still tools to be used intentionally to further goals. Even if clients become more aware of strengths and resources, this awareness aligned with the professionals' view of what was useful or necessary to transition client relationships toward a customer-type and encourage client cooperation with the therapeutic process.

In a significant evolutionary shift, Berg and De Jong (1996, p. 390; c.f. 2005) articulated the value of "in-session compliments" in addition to end-of-session complimenting integral to task development and assignment. They also noted the necessity of maintaining a "not-knowing" position (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) while complimenting and encouraging clients. However, Iveson's (2005) point that direct compliments spring from a posture of knowing had not yet been addressed.

Compliments in current SF practices

In de Shazer's final book (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 4f), compliments are listed as a "main intervention" in and "essential" to the SF approach. In addition to their traditional importance in end-of-session messages, the authors note compliments are an effective way to validate client experiences. Compliments also call attention to client success while communicating, "I am listening."

De Jong and Berg (2014) place emphasis on complimenting for SF trainers, stressing curiosity and specificity along with utility. While important to note compliments the interviewer offered to the client, the trainer is directed to be specific whenever possible. Instead of, "You gave great compliments," the trainer is encouraged to point out the content of the interviewer's compliment and the observed client response (p. 6). Complimenting is an important SF skill to be developed through training exercises and role plays with a clear emphasis on locating experiences or resources to compliment as well as responsiveness to the observed effect of the compliments. Learners are instructed to incorporate complimenting into their normal course of practice as a part of "EARS" (elicit, amplify, reinforce/compliment, start again), a way to amplify client exceptions and strengths and encourage client engagement in the process (Turnell & Hopwood, 1994; De Jong & Berg, 2012). Faithful to its historical use, De Jong and Berg (2014) also emphasize the essential role compliments play in end-of-session feedback to clients.

Other prominent SF trainers, educators, and practitioners vary greatly in the use of compliments. The practice manual created by BRIEF (George, Iveson, Ratner & Shennan, 2009) does not mention complimenting at all. Progress is noted through questions (often involving scaling) of current positive

change and small signs of future progress, but the word "compliment" is not used in the document. Instead, these trainers take a different tack:

> ... Solution-Focused therapy aims to create a context within which the client gives self-affirmative feedback which in turn builds new possibilities for the client's future. Clients seem to be least likely to argue with or to minimise the constructive feedback which they give themselves and thus solution focus tends to work through a questioning process within which it is the client's answers which will make the difference. This is very different from a process of "pointing out positives" to clients and giving them praise! (George et al., 2009, p. 8)

In their 2012 book on SFBT, the BRIEF group stated that compliments "need to be honest and evidence-based" as well as "relevant to the client's purpose for being in therapy" and "given in a way that the client can accept and can agree with" (Ratner, George & Iveson, 2012, p. 43). They also believe end-of-session complimenting can bring a focus to the therapist's "attention *during* the session" (emphasis in original). However, compliments do not seem to be prominent in the clinical work and training at BRIEF.

My sense is that the BRIEF group has made a shift from compliments-as-tool to a curiosity-guided approach that includes conversation surrounding instances (times when they experience moments of their preferred future) and exceptions (times when the presenting complaint is absent or different). The BRIEF group asks the questions, "How did you do it?" (influence progress) and, "What have you learned about yourself?" (pondering progress) (George et al., 2009, p. 24), which invite reflections and may result in what Berg (1994) would call self-compliments. And since the BRIEF group has shifted away from formal end-of-session tasks (Ratner, George & Iveson, 2012), compliments as reinforcers of the team messages are largely absent, a significant change from mainstream SF practices since the 1980s.

Others have also de-emphasised complimenting, usually as a result of adopting a more conversational or social constructionist approach to SF practice. McKergow and Korman (2009, p. 40) describe their shift this way:

> Readers may be wondering about the position of compliments — offering views of the client's strengths, qualities, and so on — in SFBT practice. It is quite true that we as Solution-Focused practitioners offer such compliments, so that strengths may enter the conversation. In our view, these strengths are used conversationally, to give an alternative view of the client and their situation, rather than as fixed elements which must somehow be worked on, worked around, or taken

into account.

McKergow (2014, p. 36) refers to the SF shift as a move from tools to "conversation expanders" resulting in "narrative emergence" rather than internal or structural shifts (c.f. Miller, 2013).

A rift in complimenting may be occurring. While some value its continuation, others are shifting from techniques to conversation as the primary means toward agreed-upon ends. One thing is certain: there is no unanimity on the use or value of complimenting within SFBT.

Current state of complimenting in SFBT

Complimenting is still required by significant professional organisations and many reviewers if research is to be considered Solution-Focused. In one of the most thorough reviews of SF research prior to the current century, Gingerich and Eisengart (2000) named complimenting as one of the core components of the SF approach. Complimenting is listed by the Research Committee of the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Association (SFBTA) (Trepper, McCollum, De Jong, Korman, Gingerich & Franklin, 2009, p. 5) as an "essential part of SFBT." Bliss and Bray (2005, p. 66) say complimenting has historically been one of the SF therapist's "key tasks" and call attention to its prominence in the European Brief Therapy Association's (EBTA) requirements for evaluating whether or not clinical work is Solution-Focused. And keeping with Gingerich's standards from his 2000 article, Gingerich and Peterson's (2013) review of controlled outcome studies utilising SF approaches cited compliments as one of the key techniques in their operational definition of SFBT.

Finally, leading SF authors, trainers, and educators continue to promote and apply compliments in their work. Dolan notes she and other SF trainers have altered their forms of complimenting but imply the practice continues (Chang, Combs, Dolan, Freedman, Mitchell & Trepper, 2013). Well-known and respected SF trainers like Coulter (Coulter & Nelson, 2014), Crow (2014), De Jong (De Jong & Berg, 2014), Dolan (2015), Durrant (Huber & Durrant, 2014), Furman (2015), Nelson (Coulter & Nelson, 2014), Pichot (Pichot & Bushek, 2014), and Simon (2015) continue to utilise complimenting as part of their practices and training. In addition, SF authors and trainers promote the value of complimenting across such diverse contexts as mental health nursing (Ferraz & Wellman, 2008), supervision (Berg, 2003; Lane & Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2013, 2012), child welfare (De Jong, Jiordano, Cowan & Kelly, 2006), career counselling (Burwell & Chen, 2006), coaching (Grant, 2013; Roeden, Maaskant & Curfs, 2014), play therapy with children (Nims, 2007; Taylor,

Clement & Ledet, 2013), and bullying (Young & Holdorf, 2003).

My conclusion is this: complimenting remains prominent in SF training, research, and practice, but it is not universal.

Complimenting: Cultural considerations

Discussions about the role of culture in SF approaches have continued for decades, including the necessity for sensitivity when complimenting across cultures (Berg & Jaya, 1993; Berg, Sperry & Carlson, 1999; Chang & Ng, 2000; Corcoran, 2000; Hsu & Wang, 2011; Kim, 2014; Kuehl, 1995; Miller, Kim, Simon & Lee, 2014; Song, 1999; Thomas, 2007; Thomas, Sunderaraj Samuel & Chang, 1995; Yeung, 1999). In the early years of SF practice, Berg and Miller (1992) wrote this about culture in the context of problem drinking:

> We discovered through our cross-cultural and international presentations that all cultures use compliments as a means to cementing social relationships at all levels. However, the cultural norm dictates the manner in which compliments are presented. For example, a commonly accepted form of insuring a positive relationship in North America highlights personal achievements and individual traits ... In other cultures, the compliment may be directed at what a person does on behalf of the family, the group, the clan, or the employer ...While North Americans value an open, clear, and direct manner of complimenting one another, other cultures are much more subtle about giving compliments...Such unique cultural and ethnic differences need to be taken into consideration when a therapist selects what to highlight and compliment the client on. (p. 102)

While some have downplayed culture as a significant variable in the effectiveness of SF approaches, Holyoake and Golding (2013) clearly connect multiculturalism and the non-expert stance in the approach. Similar to Miller (2014), Holyoake and Golding start with a conversation metaphor, moving away from structural and intrapersonal assumptions about interaction toward understandings centred on language and discourse. From there, the authors critique "hidden discourses" that "sneakily undermine both the nonexpert and multicultural message" (2013, p. 77). These hidden discourses may include practitioner assumptions that are applied universally, such as an emphasis on personal reports over cultural narratives or ahistoricising individuals by neglecting social relationships and emphasising personal agency. Miller (2014) wrote an eloquent article on culture and SF practices. He concludes, "I cannot imagine a form of Solution-Focused practice that is culture-free ... it

is hard to argue that we live in a world of multiple realities without including the concept of culture" (p. 38). Social constructionist assumptions endemic within SF approaches, such as the construction of meaning in conversation and the importance of considering multiple social realities, require a developed sensitivity to people's contexts within the therapy room and the world they inhabit when they leave our SF conversations.

Although discussions regarding culture and SF approaches have been ongoing, three fairly recent publications (Iveson, 2005; Hsu & Kuo, 2013; Kim, 2014) precipitated my interest in the challenges of complimenting in culturally sensitive ways. As discussed earlier, Iveson (2005) created an enigma for me by overlaying the "knowing" of complimenting with a not-knowing assumption. Kim (2014) juxtaposed the not-knowing stance with the necessity to educate counsellors on multicultural issues. He proposed continuing the SF notion of not-knowing augmented by a research-informed multicultural approach that enhances the clinical relationship by acknowledging barriers and resources unique to clients with diverse backgrounds. And Hsu and Kuo (2013) noted the necessity for cultural sensitivity when conducting Solution-Focused supervision in Taiwan. They found that supervisees in their culture often had difficulty listening to "direct verbal praises" ... "because of the supreme (Chinese/Taiwanese) emphasis and value placed on humility and modesty" (p. 202). They adjusted their complimenting style and technology, asking the supervisee to sit outside the circle of her peers and eavesdrop on their conversation of appreciation for her and the clinical work they had just observed. This indirect complimenting format was highly effective and culturally sensitive, enhancing the supervision by adjusting to cultural values.

In summary, I cite the work of De Jong and Berg (2002) as they discuss the junction of SFBT and culture, stating that

> ... efforts to foster diversity-competent practice in the field mainly presume the problem-solving paradigm ... . We regard cultural diversity as one aspect of the enormous differences among people and as further confirmation of the need to take a posture of not knowing when interviewing clients. (p. 257)

Spaces for complimenting in SF practice

Compliments are and will probably continue to be part and parcel of SFBT. Although their early use in SFBT was limited to strategic reinforcement of tasks, they have evolved while maintaining their relevance in practice and research. At the same time, the posture of not-knowing has gained promi-

nence within SF practice, influencing the intentions and forms of complimenting. In addition, sensitivity to culture has gained attention as SFBT continues to spread around the world.

In an attempt to extend the SF approach, I propose changes in complimenting that fit with current research expectations, respecting the stature of complimenting within our common SF history and hopefully expanding applications in culturally sensitive ways. These questions guide my ideas for creating spaces for complimenting: How do those who value the practice of complimenting utilise it while remaining loyal to the concept of not-knowing? and, How do we allow culture to inform our work, especially regarding complimenting?

Traditional SF complimenting practices re-visited

In this section, several forms of complimenting used in SFBT will be outlined as described in prominent publications. In addition, suggestions on the process of complimenting within each form will be offered that may allow the practice to better fit with the notion of "not-knowing". Although others have suggested templates (Campbell et al., 1999) in compliment formation, I find this too influential, potentially conflicting with the not-knowing construct. Moving away from such instrumentality and keeping with the conversation metaphor that is perhaps the greatest current influence on the SF approach, I suggest a transition from noun to verb, from compliment-as-tool toward complimenting-as-verb. Movement in this direction may also create space for greater cultural sensitivity, a notion that has been promoted for decades within SF approaches and discussed above.

Direct compliments: An early training document (BFTC, 1991, p. 1) describes a direct compliment as "a statement with a positive verb or positive attribute or positive *reaction* to a client statement" (emphasis in original) and recommends statements be used "sparingly" but positive reactions frequently. Examples of a positive reaction would be "Wow!" or "That's good!" Sensitive to the context, the BFTC trainers note that "both are better when they reflect what the client values." Berg and De Jong (2005) state that such direct practitioner statements may be useful in raising clients' awareness of change and resources.

A not-knowing stance: Honest positive reactions — not preformed, but spontaneous — certainly honour the "not-knowing" position. Anyone familiar with Insoo Kim Berg's "Wow!" response knows the genuineness such a reaction can convey. A suggestion: avoid declarative statements within this category to keep with not-knowing. Assertions such as "That's good!" are just

as certain as "You are a strong person," and both can lead to disagreement with the client's own perception or experience. In addition, declaratives like "You are so smart!" (common among those working with children) or "You are so creative!" may be intended as praise but can actually inhibit future effort (Dweck, 2007). Practitioners taking a "not-knowing" stance seek to be tentative (Thomas & Nelson, 2007), honouring clients' views and not imposing their own. For those who compliment clients using the time-honoured end-of-session format, endorsing client self-compliments may be useful. An example would be, "You said you are a 'strong person' when we discussed your journey with addiction ... I like that."

Self-compliments: BFTC (1991, p. 2) defined a self-compliment as "an 'I statement' made by clients saying they do what is good for them." The trainers direct practitioners to "react" to client reflections on progress to draw attention to the positive self-statement. Berg and De Jong (2005, p. 52) add questions that elicit descriptions of "successes and hidden abilities," such as, "How did you know...?" or, "Did it surprise you that you did it?"

A not-knowing stance: Clients may offer "I statements" regarding their intentions, abilities, or self-knowledge regarding successes; however, culture may influence one's perception of taking or sharing credit. The concept of personal autonomy is not universal, and pushing clients to take credit for change may be counterproductive. Presuppositional questions such as "How did you (singular) do that?" imply an agency the client may not own or accept. A suggestion: take less direct approaches when asking about clients' designations of positive change. Since many cultures are more collectivist and less individualistic, the practitioner might offer this line of inquiry:

Practitioner: Tell me about this success you've experienced this week. How much came about because of something you changed?

Client: Most of this happened because I just decided I'd had enough and had to move on.

P: What is there about you that contributed to this decision to "move on?"

C: I'm the kind of person who...well, when I put my mind to it and tell myself, "That's IT!". I make different decisions.

[Practitioner and Client discuss this.]

P: You said "most of this" was deciding you'd "had enough." Were there others who played a part in the success you've had this week?

C: Oh yes, for sure. I went to my minister, and she was very supportive. She

gave me some great advice.

P: What is it about you that allowed you to take this "great advice" and make it work for you?

C: I think it's because I know I need help sometimes and I'm not afraid to accept it. I don't know everything.

P: So you know yourself well enough to know when you "need help" and are "not afraid to accept it?"

C: *[nods]*

P: I wonder if that's common or unusual, knowing yourself that well? *[hedging — see below]*

C: I think I'm pretty unusual in that way.

Furman and Ahola (1992) called this approach sharing credit, noting the importance of acknowledging the role others often play in our change processes. While some psychotherapy approaches assume clients have ultimate control over the changes they make and should acknowledge such control, a "not-knowing" stance allows space for clients' personal understandings to take precedence. When asked of their actual experiences and knowledges, clients often share credit with a higher power (God) and those in close relationship as well as fate, chance, and spontaneity. Taking (full) credit for change should not be forced on clients; taking a not-knowing position allows clients to self-compliment when appropriate but does not impose assumptions of agency.

Indirect compliments: BFTC (1991, p. 1) defined an indirect compliment as "a statement that *implies* something positive" (emphasis in original). Several types were outlined. First, the practitioner is encouraged to "use the same words the client uses when the client describes desired outcomes." Next, relationship questions (De Jong & Berg, 2014) can be used to draw forth indirect compliments. An example might be, "What do you think your spouse noticed about you that led her to give you more time with your son on that last visit?" Finally, these trainers encourage "how" questions to imply positive change. "Instead of saying, 'That's good.' ask, 'How did you know that would help?'" (BFTC, 1991, p. 1). Berg and De Jong (2005) refined this complimenting category, limiting it to relationship questions that ask the client to take another's viewpoint and reflect on the situation, often resulting in a positive statement about the client.

A not-knowing stance: Because inquiry into how clients make sense of their successes is discussed in the extending curiosity category (see below), I would suggest relationship questions around positive exceptions and instances as a main avenue for indirect complimenting. As traditionally described, using the client's words is a good starting point for this complimenting response. An example: "You said earlier your adult daughter knows you well *[client nods]* and is a kind and honest person *[client nods]*. What would she say about this ability you have to 'bounce back' *[client's words]*?" Indirect complimenting allows clients to use familiar terms to additionally name their abilities, choices, or traits that contribute to success. And because the terms they use may be similar or different from others', follow-up can be fruitful: "So you think your daughter would say you are a 'tough cookie,' right? So do you think 'tough cookie' is related to this ability you have to 'bounce back'? [*client nods]* What other ways might your daughter view this positive change you've made?"

Additional complimenting practices in concert with not-knowing

Hedging: (Lakoff, 1973; Varttala, 2001). Hedging is a SF practice used and encouraged by Insoo Kim Berg (Berg, 2003; Berg & Reuss, 1998; Rudes, Shilts & Berg, 1997; Thomas, 2013). Berg (2003, p. 48f) illustrates the practice:

> Getting in the habit of using tentative language helps to facilitate collaboration and negotiation. So, what is tentative language? Phrases such as, "It seems like …", "Could it be …?", "It sounds like …", "Perhaps …", "I am not sure …", or "I wonder …", and many other questions that are put forth with a tentative tone of voice facilitates collaboration.

Hedging is a way to "assert uncertainly" (Legg & Stagaki, 2002, p. 389), keeping with postmodern assumptions that avoid truth statements and remaining indefinite when one speaks. When practitioners hedge they are imprecise, leaving space for (and even encouraging) differences when clients respond. Examples of hedging (*in italics*) that encourage self-compliments are:

> Practitioner: *Could it be that* you did some things this week that contributed to the positive changes?
>
> Client: Well, maybe … I did get a fresh start Tuesday because I went to bed earlier.
>
> P: *I think that probably* you had a role in this "big shift," as you call it.

C: You could be right, but I'm not sure what it is ...

P: *I'm not sure, either, but maybe* it's tied to your response to your boss on Wednesday...

C: Maybe ... I was more assertive when I told him I had to pick up my kids and couldn't stay late...

According to Rudes, Shilts, and Berg (1997), the practice of hedging relinquishes a "privileged position of knowledge" (p. 209) and recognises the multiplicity of understandings possible in a situation. A usual results of practitioner hedging are a more egalitarian relationship and conversational space for public "supposing." In addition, polite exchange can result when persons in positions of power make a practice of hedging in conversations (c.f., Varttala, 2001, who studied physician-patient conversations).

Extending curiosity: SFBT continues to evolve toward a postmodern position in which meaning is created in conversation (Anderson, 2003). While past SF complimenting practices seemed designed to elicit or declare, the current directions in SF include and encourage co-construction of significance and understandings. Miller and de Shazer (2000, p. 8) promoted this when they wrote, "we also use our understandings of social context to *make sense of* what is going on around us, to react to these activities, and to anticipate what may happen in the future. As Wittgenstein ... states: 'only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning'" (emphasis added). In keeping with this shift away from "information-gathering towards co-created conversations" (McKergow, 2014, p. 36), the concept of extending curiosity is helpful (Thomas & Nelson, 2007). A stance of curiosity increases possibilities and builds on previous compliments. Past complimenting practices often asked clients, "How did you do that?" and called this self-complimenting; instead, "conversation expanders" (McKergow, 2014, p. 36) might be utilised whenever appropriate to encourage understandings of abilities, resources, and outcomes within the counselling context. Here are examples of extending curiosity while remaining tentative (including hedging):

How do you make sense of the changes you just described?

I wonder if there's something in your ability to "put your mind to it" we should explore ... what do you think?

Suppose you continued to go to bed earlier, like you did last Tuesday, and you were getting more done the next day, at least part of the time. What might that say about your ability to influence this thing you call "procras-

tination?"

I'm not sure, but ... could it be that you have applied this resource we've been discussing as "bouncing back" in other areas of your preferred future? (If the client agrees and gives details, follow with), What do you think this says about you, that you have used this wonderful resource in different ways?

Staying Tentative is Central

"... not-knowing is not just a stance/role we take/play, but is the only possible way to be in therapy." — Plamen Panayotov, August 18, 2015

The SF approach continues to evolve. It has been more than eight years since Insoo Kim Berg died and more than 10 since Steve de Shazer passed away. It is natural that the clinical and conceptual leadership void they left be filled by others, and directions others take are sometimes divergent. While I see significance in the conversation emphasis some have brought to solution building and its de-emphasis on techniques, most in the SF world continue to value particular tools as essential in their SF work. And as long as EBTA, SFBTA, and other international groups insist upon the presence of certain practices in their definitions of SF research, training, and practice, complimenting will be valued.

Although SFBT has a time-honoured tradition of pointing out client strengths and ascribing credit to clients for change, these practices are declarative, an uncomfortable fit with the now-prominent SF notion of "not-knowing". SF has a decided (and often uncritically accepted) bias toward individual human agency. A person's ability (and right) to choose is implicit to the point that practitioners do not examine their assumptions and expectations on this. In addition, past applications of SF practices such as compliments, tasks, and other techniques were often imposed by the therapist. As SFBT is moving from techniques to partnerships, one change that privileges client experiences is consistently adopting a not-knowing position.

The notion that personal meanings are constructed in SFBT is not new. Decades ago, Michael Durrant (personal communication, October 31, 1991) said, "People are engaged in a constant process of 'making sense' of themselves, their relationships, and what happens to them." The shift toward a "not-knowing" stance encourages SF practitioners to move away from declaration toward co-creation, eliciting client views more than dictating meaning and significance. No one person or organisation is in a position of directing or

policing the evolution of the SF approach. Chang and Nyland (2013) point out attempts to maintain purity of an approach "make(s) no sense" as "ignoring cultural and contextual influences on our approaches to therapy keeps them frozen in time" (p. 82).

In this paper, I have encouraged a confluence of complimenting and not-knowing in an attempt to honour the important role compliments have and continue to play in our practices while remaining true to a not-knowing stance. Since Iveson's (2005) article prodded me toward serious reconsideration of complimenting and not-knowing, it is fitting he and his colleagues have the closing words on the topic: "a compliment must have no strings attached; it should be unconditional and not be used to try to pressure the client" into a particular way of behaving or understanding (Ratner, et al., 2012, p. 43). This, I believe, is the future of complimenting within SF practices.

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