

Relationally reflexive questions help us to gain an understanding of what it is we are producing, instead of assuming that we already know. They also help us to notice the implications of our interventions and give us the opportunity to go beyond the therapeutic conversation into a new understanding. This, in turn, creates the potential for new possibilities that transcend the ordinary patterns of coordinated behaviors. It is what one could call “loose change,” in that reflexivity requires looseness, softness, and flexibility.

This type of inquiry enables the therapist to engage in a way of working that takes into account the ethics of the therapeutic process within moments when we explore the meanings being created and the impact these meanings have on the system as a whole.

In every moment of crisis there are both danger and opportunity—opportunity to be free of fear and open to the turning points in every conversation, letting in rays of light.

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TURNING POINTS IN THERAPY: DISCURSIVE ANALYSES AND THERAPIST COMMENTS

GENE HARVIE, M.S.W., L.C.S.W.
Private Practice (former Clinical Supervisor
with the Calgary Health Region)

TOM STRONG, PH.D.
University of Calgary

LANCE TAYLOR, M.SC.
Private Practice

NICK TODD, M.ED.

Calgary Health Region

FRANK YOUNG, PH.D.
Private Practice

We summarize and analyze some key developments from the “Turning points in counselling” conference in Cochrane, Alberta. At this conference, three prominent Alberta therapists interviewed the same “client” who presented with the same issue. After the conference, the therapists were asked to select “turning points” from their videotaped interviews. For the purpose of this article, “turning points” are defined as times in the session when, from the therapist’s perspective, the client provides discursive evidence of new understandings. Transcript passages were analyzed using Conversation Analysis and Comprehensive Process Analysis to relate researcher and therapist accounts of those “turning point” dialogues. We close by sharing benefits we feel can be derived from reflecting upon and analyzing interactions in therapy that therapists or clients consider helpful.

Based on events from the Cochrane, Alberta “Turning points in counselling conference” September 2005.

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Address correspondence to Gene Harvie, 34 Fox Chapel Place, The Woodlands, TX 77382; E-mail: geneharvie@sbcglobal.net.

... the field of psychotherapy research is a vital and evolving enterprise, which supplements the theory-based activities of the therapist and provides a foundation for practice. The forms that research has taken over the years have evolved in many of the same ways as psychotherapy itself—moving in the direction of precisely understanding the factors that lead to positive patient improvement.

Lambert, Bergin, and Garfield (2004, p. 3)

A unique opportunity presented itself when I (Gene) helped to organize a conference for mental health therapists in the Calgary Health Region. Big name conference presenters often talk *about* therapy or show videotaped passages of therapy but conference organizers were interested in featuring and discussing conversational turning points in therapy—live! The aim was to engage conference-goers in orienting to and discussing such turning points to enhance their own generative reflections when practicing after the conference. So, with the go-ahead of the conference organizing team I approached Frank, Lance, and Nick to show their distinctive interview styles in working with a “client” (a female actor) before conference attendees. As well, I invited discourse analysts, Tom Strong and Shari Couture, to highlight interview practices they saw as being related to turning points in each live interview. Conference attendees were then invited to share what they noticed in discussions with each therapist, the client, and the discourse analysts. In this article we share what transpired in passages of their interviews selected and commented on by Frank, Lance, and Nick. We bring together discursive analyses of these passages along with retrospective commentaries on each passage by the therapists involved. Our aim is to showcase these passages and comments to invite therapists to reflect on their “turning point” times in therapy, perhaps in some ways previously unconsidered.

INTRODUCTIONS

Therapy is where some things are talked into significance over others and this extends to turning points in conversations that clients find helpful. While we can't decide what is helpful *for* clients, we try to talk in ways we think clients will find helpful. But, notions of what needs to be talked about, or what is helpful, are often furnished by our theories and sense of good practice. In this respect, we each borrow from conversationally focused therapists (e.g., Steve de Shazer, Michael White, Milton Erickson) to join clients in constructing or deconstructing some understandings and actions over others. Thus, each turn at therapeutic conversation offers choices as to what might beneficially be said or responded to. Some passages of therapeutic dialogue are more helpful than others.

Each of the therapists at the conference had a distinctive interview style. Frank's dialogues draw from the clinical wisdom of Milton Erickson. Lance is a well known solution-focused therapist and trainer, and Nick draws from critical discourse

analysts to engage clients in resourceful, response-based discussions. Those attending the conference (some 80 or so regional therapists) practiced a wide-array of theoretical orientations but many used solution-focused, cognitive, or narrative ideas in their approaches to therapy. Tom, Shari, and I bring a perspective from discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992), ethnomethodology (Heritage, 1984) and conversation analysis (ten Have, 1999), seeing the talk of therapy as actions sustaining particular client (and therapist) understandings and action, or as actions that construct differences. “Kim” came from a local theatre troupe and was asked to play Frank's, Lance's, and Nick's client, as someone who has been in a relationship that concerned her. The client issue offered an opportunity to showcase how conversationally focused therapists address issues of gender and power in the “back and forth” of conversation to encourage change from the “inside-out.” This approach differs from therapists of theoretical persuasions that advocate for confronting such issues directly with the client.

Over two full days, conference attendees were oriented to the notion of “turning points” in therapy, first in an introductory talk by Tom and Shari, later in live interviews with “Kim” that were about 50 minutes in length, and in a general discussion about “turning points” at the end of the conference. After each interview, Tom and Shari provided some initial comments from their discursive perspective, and then drew attendees into lively discussions with the therapists, “Kim,” and themselves about perceived “turning points.” “Kim's” interviews with Frank, Lance, and Nick were each videotaped, and each therapist was asked to pick a passage from their videotape that they saw as a turning point. They were asked to comment on these passages and the passages were then analyzed using largely conversation analytic methods (Hutchby & Woofitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999) to identify conversational practices used and accomplishments occurring within the selected passages. We will now turn to the analyses and comments on these passages.

OUR METHOD

As practitioner-researchers, we are interested in what clients' and therapists' use of talk *does* in the therapy session. More specifically, we wanted to find out how turning points are accomplished in the talk of therapy. Although a client-actor afforded generous boundaries around confidentiality considerations, it created challenges for us in defining “turning points.” Being sensitive to issues concerning privileging therapist discourse over client discourse, we seriously deliberated over whether we should ask “Kim” to define what a turning point is and to determine which therapeutic events fit that description. However, we reasoned that we were on a different mission than studies investigating client reflection. Our purpose was to look closely at the conversational work of therapists who purposefully and constructively use their half of the therapeutic medium to foster collaborative and generative therapeutic dialogue. In effect, we wanted to create a situation where an observer could

“see what the therapist is seeing” by giving the observer a “passenger’s eye view.” As a result of our deliberating, “turning points” became defined as times in the session when, from the therapist’s perspective, the client provides discursive evidence of new understandings. In addition, these “turning points” would be seen as a recursive loop in their impact on the therapist’s use of language.

The method we chose is a synthesis of two qualitative analysis methods, Comprehensive Process Analysis and Conversation Analysis. Comprehensive Process Analysis (CPA) is a systematic discovery-oriented research procedure which has been used effectively to discover and analyze significant events in the counseling session (Elliott, 1989). Consistent with a focus on language, we modified the original CPA model to obtain a greater level of detail in the counselors’ use of language than previous studies investigating significant events. In this study, we used CPA to focus on three broad categories of investigation:

1. Microanalysis: What discursive aspects of the event were helpful in signaling that this event was a turning point in the session?
2. Context Analysis: What led up to the turning point occurring? What factors help to explain why these discursive events happened?
3. Process Analysis: What was the impact of the discursive event? What evidence suggests there was an impact?

While ideas from Comprehensive Process Analysis helped guide our investigation, we primarily used Conversation Analysis (CA) methods since they afford detailed analysis of talk in interaction. CA focuses on how an interaction is produced, seeing context not as “a bucket, but a performance: we *accomplish* who we are and what we are on an ongoing basis through interpretive practices” (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 104). The speaker’s utterances are therefore both “context-shaped” and “context-renewing” (Heritage, 1984, p. 242). By “discursive” we are referring to not only the language used in therapeutic dialogue, but how that language is used (e.g., with emphases, gestures, etc.).

The aim of CA, as described by its originator, Harvey Sacks (1984) is,

To see how finely the details of actual, naturally occurring conversation can be subjected to analysis that will yield the technology of conversation...the idea is to take singular sequences of conversation and tear them apart in such a way as to find rules, techniques, procedures, methods, maxims (a collection of terms that more or less relate to each other and that I use somewhat interchangeably) that can be used to generate the orderly features we find in the conversations we examine. The point is, then, to come back to the singular things we observe in a singular sequence, with some rules that handle those singular features, and also, necessarily, handle lots of other events. (p. 411)

The “technology of conversation” is revealed in how a CA researcher looks at how participants in interaction use talk to create meaning (ten Have, 1999). CA

Table 1. Transcription Notation

(.)	A pause which is noticeable but too short to measure.
(.5)	A pause timed in tenths of a second.
=	There is no discernible pause between the end of a speaker’s utterance and the start of the next utterance.
:	One or more colons indicate an extension of the preceding vowel sound.
<u>Under</u>	Underlining indicates words that were uttered with added emphasis.
CAPITAL	Words in capitals are uttered louder than the surrounding talk.
(.hhh)	Exhale of breath.
(hhh)	Inhale of breath.
()	Indicates a back channel comment or sound from previous speaker that does not interrupt the present turn.
[Overlap of talk.
(())	Double parentheses indicate clarification information, e.g., ((laughter)).
?	Indicates a rising inflection.
!	Indicates an animated tone.
.	Indicates a stopping fall in tone.
* *	Talk between * * is quieter than surrounding talk.
> <	Talk between > < is spoken more quickly than surrounding talk.

Note. Adapted from Kogan and Gale (1997).

analyzes all of the features of talk including utterances, pauses, breaths, and sequences (see Table 1). Through a CA, it is hoped that “the seen but unnoticed practices” in counseling will be illuminated (e.g., Gale & Newfield, 1992; Kogan & Brown, 1998; Kogan & Gale, 1997).

THE RESULTS

Out of several “turning point” passages, each therapist chose the one believed to highlight the most positive change in their respective session. Each passage was analyzed using conversation analysis (e.g., ten Have, 1999) and was complemented by therapist comments relating to the passage. The “turning point” selections are presented in table form, followed by my (Gene) and the therapist’s observations of important dialogical contributions to the “turning point”. Our analyses begin with Lance’s (Table 1) passage.

LANCE’S TURNING POINT

- 1 **Lance:** So um (.8) you and John some how=I sort of have to ask you to speak a bit
- 2 for him because he’s not here so someone has to ((smiles)) [laughter] (.5) but how
- 3 did you and John two weeks ago manage to have (1.2) ah (.5) things work in such a

- 4 way that it was=it wasn't too big a fight? (.5) How did you two do that?
- 5 **Kim:** (.hhh) (2) I'm not sure (4) I guess I mean (1) (hhh) he kind of acts like he's
- 6 being put-upon sometimes but it didn't really escalate into a fight so it wasn't really a
- 7 big deal (.5) but he's like "Yeah sure fine" (lower tone of voice) kind of thing=
- 8 **Lance:** And ah two weeks ago um this time we're talking about (hhh) how did you
- 9 react (1) when he reacted as though he was being put upon
- 10 **Kim:** (.5) Um (5) I mean I kind of like you know I tried to explain like that I want to
- 11 go out with my friends I want to still I mean I try to explain to him [yeah] why I want
- 12 to still do this kind of stuff [right] umm (3) and then I just try to leave (inaudible)
- 13 (laughing) [uhuh]
- 14 **Lance:** A little explanation and then got out of there
- 15 **Kim:** >Yeah< yeah before I mean if I didn't want to=if I discuss it too much for it to
- 16 turn into a fight [that seems wise] you know [yeah] so=
- 17 **Lance:** Cause I guess you figured that out in the past too
- 18 **Kim:** >Yeah (nods) yeah exactly< sometimes it's just easier to say okay you know
- 19 this is why I'm doing it bye (motions hands outward)
- 20 **Lance:** And your ah your efforts to explain (.5) brief efforts let's remember that as
- 21 brief (yeah) "John this is why this is important to me" what were your hopes of the
- 22 good that that explanation would do?
- 23 **Kim:** Ah well I guess that would be that he would understand I mean he goes out
- 24 with his friends too [yeah] and I mean I should be able to go out with my friends too
- 25 (2) [okay] so
- 26 **Lance:** That was your (inaudible)=
- 27 **Kim:** Yeah

Conversation Analyst's Observations

Solution-focused therapists see talk with clients as a means to elicit accounts of client resourcefulness (de Shazer, 1994). First, I (Gene) observed Lance co-constructing (with the client, Kim) client agency through a specific conversational sequence involving four parts. Initially, Lance asks a question that builds on a prior identified exception ("have things work" lines 3 to 4). Second, in responding (lines 5 to 7), Kim initially attributes this success to the absentee party, to which a third part of the sequence (lines 8 to 9) sees Lance pose a question implicating Kim's resourceful actions in that situation. Fourth, Kim takes up Lance's invitation to discuss her implicated actions, and together they construct an account of Kim's agentive efforts in relation to this exception. Taken together, this sequence shows Lance asking about a potentially important exception in the client's problematic interactions with her boyfriend. When this initial question did not elicit an agentive account, a reformulated question focusing on Kim's helpful actions led to their discussing specific, purposeful actions. These were elaborated in response to follow-up comments from Lance (note line 17 "I guess you figured that out" and line 20 "your efforts to explain") and confirmed in Kim's line 27 "Yeah" response.

Also noteworthy is how both speakers can be seen as actively negotiating a common language for moving forward. This occurs in two ways above. First, Lance

used specific action-oriented language that Kim subsequently adopted. For instance, *doing* words such as "manage" (line 4), "do" (line 5), "react" (line 11), and "got out" (line 18) found in Lance's solution-focused questions became evident in Kim's responses which grew less tentative (e.g., from "trying" to "doing") as they talked. But, he also invites particular co-constructions of memory (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992) by offering a candidate account for Kim's actions ("little explanation, then out of there," line 18) to which she favorably responds on line 15. By line 21 Lance proposes a further agentive evaluation for Kim's action characterized "hopes for the good" as connoting a decision she made with respect to her "explanation"—an agentive purpose for her actions she then articulates. Lance's comments and questions, in other words, helped to open up new areas of inquiry and invite a particular kind of re-membering. Important to these analyses is how both demonstrably arrive at "common ground" (Clark, 1996) through talking their way to a shared vocabulary describing Kim's agency in this exception.

Lance's Observations

This is a point in the conversation where the client identified something she did that actually worked . . . (giving her reasons for going out briefly and then leaving fairly quickly). . . . we identified both her positive intentions and key behavioral details that she could remember and use again. I used two overlapping conversational techniques during this turning point . . . a "layering technique" in order to build my questions (in line 9 I used Kim's exact phrase "put-upon" . . . to build my subsequent question inquiring into her own effective responses). I also interjected "overlapping affirmations" such as "yeah," "right," and "uhhuh" while the client discussed these effective actions. These affirmations reinforce productive behaviors. With the phrase "That seems wise . . ." (line 20) I give Kim credit for a fait accompli, for the wisdom involved and for figuring this solution out by herself (Taylor, 2005).

FRANK'S TURNING POINT

- 1 **Frank:** So (1) how come he's not here? Is he out on the rigs this [week]
- 2 **Kim:** [Ahh] yeah (.8) he's (.5) yeah he's away he doesn't know I'm here
- 3 **Frank:** He doesn't know
- 4 **Kim:** Yeah
- 5 **Frank:** I see (.5) umm (.2) How would how would you're (.3) how would
- 6 things be different if he did know you were going to come to this
- 7 consultation today?
- 8 **Kim:** (hhh) Umm I don't I don't know actually I'm kind of scared to tell=I'm not
- 9 sure how he'd take it
- 10 **Frank:** Yeah
- 11 **Kim:** Cause I mean like he already (.2) he doesn't like outsiders (.1) like

12 participating in the marriage=like he doesn't even like it when I leave the kids with
 13 our neighbors=sometimes I leave the kids with the neighbor to babysit and um he
 14 doesn't like you know "strangers" looking after his kids ((speaking in lower tone
 15 voice imitating partner)) (hhh) (.8) so I just kind a didn't tell him
 16 **Frank:** hnm I see (.8) are there are there kind of other things that you kind of don't
 17 tell him? (tentative tone)
 18 **Kim:** Well (hhh) I mean not on a regular basis sometimes when I do ah if he's away
 19 on the rigs and I go out with my friends sometimes I just don't mention it (hhh) cause
 20 I don't want=I don't want the hassle=the fight (.5) so (.5)
 21 **Frank:** So if you're having too much fun while he's working too hard
 22 ((laughter)) it's too much of a contrast
 23 **Kim:** (laughter) maybe (laughter) I'm not sure (.5) (shakes head looks down)
 24 **Frank:** Ah hhh what does he look like?
 25 **Kim:** Ahh he's tall has dark hair he's big (.2) strong
 26 **Frank:** Yeah (.2) do you have a picture of him? (.5)
 27 **Kim:** No I don't actually (.8)
 28 **Frank:** Ahh okay ((nods))
 29 **Kim:** I've never been the type to carry pictures actually
 30 **Frank:** Really?
 31 **Kim:** no
 32 **Frank:** Do you have pictures of your kids?
 33 **Kim:** In my car yeah
 34 **Frank:** Okay so as long as somebody drives with you they can get the chance to see
 35 ((laughter))
 36 **Kim:** (Laughter)
 37 **Frank:** what your kids look like
 38 **Kim:** Laughs yeah I guess ((laughter))
 39 **Frank:** Well you know I I I carry ah picture of my wife and my kids [really?] in my
 40 wallet
 41 **Kim:** yeah?
 42 **Frank:** (.5) yeah
 43 **Kim:** Oh my parents were never like that (.8)
 44 **Frank:** well what would (1.5) I'm just sort of thinking what what would John (.5)
 45 think (.5) cause you were talking about jealousy and all
 46 that=supposing he knew that you in your wallet you carried a picture of (.3) of him
 47 and of your kids?=
 48 **Kim:** =huh=
 49 **Frank:** =You know and and so any time any time you're out and some guy was
 50 trying to hit you up you say "oh, that reminds me of John do you know about John
 51 [laughter] and" (motions to pull out picture) ((laughter))
 52 **Kim:** (laughter) (inaudible)
 53 **Frank:** Not to generalize this all the time but I mean ahh (1.2) no but "the way you
 54 said that reminds me of John have I told you about John?" ((speaking as client could
 55 speak in that situation)) and then you bring out this picture of John [huh] to show this
 56 guy who's trying to make a move on you in the bar (.5) and supposing John knew
 57 that you had this (.2) picture of him as part of your (.2) relationship armor against
 58 outside intrusion (1.0)

59 **Kim:** hmm
 60 **Frank:** how do you think he'd feel? (1.5)
 61 **Kim:** I don't know (2) hmm (2) it might make him feel more secure (1.5)
 62 **Frank:** (nods) Well I'm pretty sure that if I was trying to make a move on you and
 63 you start to talk about your kids your boyfriend and he's a big hulky [laughing] guy
 64 holy smoke (.2) think I would really really back peddle put on the brakes [laughing]
 65 and do something you know [laughing]
 66 **Kim:** (laughing) yeah (.5)
 67 **Frank:** you know
 68 **Kim:** I mean I don't invite it in the first place you know like I'm not (1.5) I don't
 69 care about guys hitting on me or what not it's just that (laughing) [well] he always
 70 assumes that (2)
 71 **Frank:** But you know he loves you he's attracted to you John is and and you know
 72 you're an attractive woman so I would guess his automatic assumption is that you're
 73 going to get some guys hitting on you even if you don't cue them up by eye contact
 74 or anything like that=
 75 **Kim:** hmm=
 76 **Frank:** It's just because you're an attractive woman and they're gonna see what they
 77 can do
 78 **Kim:** hmm
 79 **Frank:** So it's not like you invite it=
 80 **Kim:** I never thought of it that way actually (2)
 81 **Frank:** But imagine how he would feel if you had that as part of your armor to
 82 defend the marriage [hmm hmm] against [that might help] external threat
 83 **Kim:** That might help (3)
 84 **Frank:** Well, it's just an idea
 85 **Kim:** hmm hmm

Conversation Analyst's Observations

Frank's turning point shows three major conversational themes. The first, in lines 1 through 23, is a sequence of turns focusing on assessing the couple dynamics between Kim and her boyfriend. In line 1, Frank asks a systemic question about why Kim's boyfriend is not present in the session with her. In line 2, Kim observably pauses before taking up this question. Not feeling dialogically complete with her answer, Frank follows up with a "question of difference" in lines 5 through 7 which Kim takes up, sharing a great deal of detail about the dynamics of her relationship in lines 11 through 15. Also noteworthy, in lines 16 and 17, Frank asks a confrontational question but with a tentative tone. Kim takes up this question without contest, suggesting no disruption in rapport given how the question was put to Kim. Taken together, this subsection demonstrates a successful assessment sequence, despite discussion of topics that could have been considered confrontational.

The second theme, in lines 24 to 67, is an interesting dialogic exchange regarding pictures. In lines 26 and 32 Frank inquires as to whether Kim carries a picture of her boyfriend and children. In lines 39 and 40 Frank makes a normative dis-

inction (Tomm, 1987) through sharing his own personal practices. This could also be seen as implied suggestion. Kim's overlapping utterance "really" (line 39) seems to indicate that this is a new idea to her. In line 57 Frank packages this practice as "relationship armor" and Kim tentatively takes up the suggestion, offering that it might make her boyfriend more "secure" (line 61).

The third theme, lines 68 to 85, features a breach in conversational flow as Kim contests the implications of Frank's suggested intervention. It appears that Kim perceives Frank's intervention as "authoritarian discourse" (Gonçalves & Guilfoyle, 2006), evidenced by her resistance to the implication that she invites male attention (lines 68 to 70). For Schegloff (1992), this is a "problematic misunderstanding" in need of "repair" (p. 1301). Through lines 71 to 79 Frank attempts to repair this conversational damage and preserve the merit of his suggested intervention. He responds by "normalizing" (Berg & Reuss, 1998) both the "hitting on" behavior of men as well as Kim's boyfriend's jealous response to this behavior, thereby rendering such behavior outside of Kim's sphere of influence. Throughout, Frank assures Kim that he does not think she is doing anything to "invite it." In line 80 Kim's words "I never thought of it that way actually" suggests that Frank is successful in his attempt to shift the intervention from "monologic" or authoritarian, to "dialogic" or shared. The idea seems more "intrinsicly persuasive" (Gonçalves & Guilfoyle, 2006) as Kim says in Line 83 "that might help" to Frank's suggested action.

Frank's Observations

When I watch and listen to a client, I carefully scan and track nonverbal and paralinguistic cues for anxiety and threat. In this interview, although Kim seemed somewhat constrained by her partner's jealousy and bids for control, she was far from helpless and actually displayed considerable resourcefulness in dealing with the situation and managing it. Sensing no real danger to the client, I did not feel the need to protect her from "John." The main object of a solution-oriented consultation is to break through her paradigm of helplessness, replacing it with her own empowerment and authorship to manage herself, and thus indirectly recalibrate the whole relationship.

I begin . . . asking Kim about her partner and . . . find . . . this is one of several activities that she . . . "just kinda doesn't tell him," because he would get upset and angry if he knew. I am now further aware of the reciprocity of Kim's role in fuelling relationship distrust . . .

I do a surprising thing at line 26 by asking, "Do you have a picture of him?" She is startled . . . I introduce the "internalized other" in asking "How do you think your boyfriend would feel if he knew that you carried pictures of the family as metaphorical armor against would-be intruders?" . . . I then do a mini role-play . . . where she might be approached by a man and how she could use pictures as a way of discouraging his further advances. Kim deflects this . . . she does not do

anything to encourage men to approach her. I bypass this deflection by emphasizing that because Kim is attractive, and her partner knows this, she will attract men anyway, so she might as well have a strategy to deter them and thus reassure him of her loyalty. She looks reflective and says "I never thought of it that way" (line 80). She is thus seeing her change in behavior as a possible solution to the pervasive depth of her partner's distrust and insecurity, a way whereby she will not be as oppressed by his need to control her. This solution illustrates the use of systemic recursions in solutions that likely could work to break deadlock in a couple.

I focused on this turning point because it was the first to noticeably shift Kim out of helplessness in a victim role. She began to be curious about her potential efficacy in moving her stuck situation into a zone of making a difference in her life, her emotions, and even shifting the center of the relationship. Throughout this passage I was "kinda" mirroring Kim's verbal language forms, and using analogical marking with eye gaze and eyebrow lifts to emphasize messages intended to be encoded in their discourse. The use of humor and body lean also helped to punctuate the process of pacing and leading out of old paradigms into potential solution patterns. At several points Kim's giggle indicated her shift out of a helpless role to have a meta-position perspective on her situation. (For more information on Frank's approach, see his website at <http://members.shaw.ca/frankdyoung/index.htm>.)

NICK'S TURNING POINT

- 1 **Nick:** Okay=so an=anything you can do to increase your sense of freedom (hhh) (1)
- 2 you've (.5) kind of (.5) hung on to that and even maybe not being married gives you
- 3 a few more options than if you were=
- 4 **Kim:** Yeah that's true (1) [hmm] I mean there's got to be more I can do=I just=I
- 5 don't know what to do=
- 6 **Nick:** Hmm okay (3) So you've wanted (.5) something better for yourself early on
- 7 (hhh) (.5) and you've been able to build that for yourself
- 8 **Kim:** A little bit yeah (1)
- 9 **Nick:** But not enough there's there's
- 10 **Kim:** Not enough I guess it's it's (1) ah I'm scared and my life is is (.5) is starting to
- 11 look like my (.5) my parents' life and (2) you know my
- 12 daughter she looks so much like me (hhh) (1) it's it's it scares me cause it reminds
- 13 me of what it was like when I was little (6)
- 14 **Nick:** Okay (nods) so you want things to be better yet for her [yeah]
- 15 yeah=how do you think it's going for her
- 16 **Kim:** (hhh) Well I mean she's pretty little she's only she's only 18 months umm (3)
- 17 but um (1) it's going okay [good] (2) I think (hhh) (2) um (2)
- 18 **Nick:** Like how would it be better than when you were 18 months as
- 19 much as you would know about that
- 20 **Kim:** (hhh) Well there's not as much yelling in the house (.5) or breaking of dishes
- 21 (1) um so there's that much I mean it's a little calmer atmosphere I mean I've

22 given as much love as I can and support and um (4) just (.5) ah (1) I don't know=I
 23 mean I guess we would have more money and we could afford a house and we can
 24 afford better things for them more cloths stuff like that (2)>that I wish< we had (2)
 25 **Nick:** So and your daughter's name?
 26 **Kim:** Lucy
 27 **Nick:** Lucy [yeah] (hhh) so Lucy would probably experience things as quieter and
 28 calmer and more loving=
 29 **Kim:** Yeah (1) yeah (2)
 30 **Nick:** Did you say you're you're father was prepared to go as far as smashing
 31 dishes?
 32 **Kim:** Yeah (nods) (3) yeah none of our dishes matched because he liked smashing
 33 dishes (2) so
 34 **Nick:** What else would he=how violent was he?
 35 **Kim:** Umm (1) mostly yelling mostly just tirades like just he was like a little
 36 whirlwind storm (hhh) um (2) I (.5) think (.5) he might have slapped my mom a
 37 couple of times (1) but it was stuff I heard from my bedroom (hhh) so I'm not
 38 positive (1) but um (2) that usually like I remember once or twice hearing something
 39 that sounds like a slap or maybe like a body thunk and then it was an end but that
 40 would be it (.5) so I think he knew he'd crossed the line (1) but um (1) no it was
 41 mostly just kind of a sound (inaudible) but that was that was enough
 42 **Nick:** So he would keep that kind of thing out of public view?=
 43 **Kim:** >Yeah well< (1) MOSTLY but I mean he I mean he just has a bad temper
 44 like (hhh) (.5) um (.5) I guess of course when he when he drinks so I mean that he
 45 was usually at home was the worst but I mean (hhh) his bad temper was for things
 46 like um we went to Heritage Park it was a park day (hhh) and he parked in the in a
 47 handicap spot so we got a ticket and he just flipped out I mean he's yelling in the
 48 parking lot so I mean yeah there was people around it was really embarrassing (hhh)
 49 but um (.5) most of it I guess was at home (2)
 50 **Nick:** So (2) but you heard some things which suggests he was prepared to cross the
 51 line and be physically abusive?
 52 **Kim:** =a few a few times (1) yeah I can remember only a couple of times (.5) but
 53 yeah (.5)
 54 **Nick:** Did you do you think that she (2) ah experienced the r (2) the right amount of
 55 fear of your father or do you think she was too afraid of him?
 56 **Kim:** (3) Um maybe she wasn't afraid of him enough I mean (hhh) I guess I mean
 57 she put up with it all (1.5) so she didn't think it was dangerous enough to to leave
 58 him (1) or maybe she felt she couldn't I'm not sure
 59 **Nick:** (2) Okay so you you've been thinking if she's that afraid she would leave=
 60 **Kim:** Yeah so she must have been I mean (3) there was no fearing for her life or
 61 none like that so that I know of huh=
 62 **Nick:** Okay (1) so for you that was a trap then um (3) you you just wanted to (.5)
 63 change if you could
 64 **Kim:** Yeah I didn't want it to be as bad for me or bad for (.5) my kids as a I mean it
 65 wasn't bad for me I mean it's not like it's horrible it wasn't all horrible (5) but um I
 66 don't want my kids to go have the same (3) life as I guess growing up that I did (2)
 67 it should be better but I don't know (hhh) I should be able to learn from that crap
 68 and and give my kids something better (hhh)=

69 **Nick:** What have you learned from that? (2)
 70 **Kim:** Umm (2) well (hhh) I'll never never ever let any man hit me ever I mean if if
 71 John ever hit me that would be it I mean (hhh) I'd live on the street before I'd let
 72 him hit me that's so there's no way that's ever going to happen and (1) um (2) I
 73 mean I I (hhh) I won't let him (3) ah (1) I mean I do let him tell me what to do to a
 74 certain extent but (5) (shakes head slowly) [where's] but
 75 **Nick:** Where's your line on that (.5) what what's the extent=
 76 **Kim:** Well its (.hhh) >because I mean< like I do still (1) go out with my
 77 girlfriends >I mean< not as often (hhh) ah (.5) but (.5) I I still do (2) um (4)
 78 sometimes I just >you know< (hhh) do it take the guilt I guess (.5) but um but I just
 79 don't accept what he says to me like my mom did (3) she was always (3) she would
 80 always "yeah you're right yeah you're right yeah you're right" and I'm like no you're
 81 not right (1) I might not want to yell about it but (3) that's not okay (2.5)
 82 **Nick:** (nods) (hhh) So you've learned how to be kind of quietly insistent [yeah]
 83 when it's time to fight that violent [yeah] (nods) (6) okay (.5) so the the the trap
 84 you're living in is (1) (hhh) to to the extent you've been able to control things much
 85 more (hhh) ah to your specifications than the ones you grew up with [hmm hmm]
 86 that was kind of imposed on you [yeah] this one you negotiated where some of the
 87 boundaries are [right]

Conversation Analyst's Observations

Nick's turning point involves two themes. The first focuses on the difference between Kim's experience at home as a young child and the current experience of her own child. In lines 10 through 13, Kim verbalizes her fear that she is repeating unhealthy generational patterns. In lines 14 to 15, and 18 to 19, Nick introduces a "comparison question" inviting Kim to explore the experiential difference between her as an 18-month-old and her own child. Kim responds in lines 20 to 24 with a number of positive differences showing that she takes up this comparison. In acknowledging positive differences between these experiences, Kim's wishes drift toward more materialistic measures (e.g., more clothes, line 24) rather than emotional measures of well-being. This dialogue of difference indicates self-healing or reflexive (Tomm, 1987) discourse since it allowed Kim to let go of some anxiety about repeating unhealthy generational behavior through positive self-appraisal.

The second theme evolves from discussing Kim's father's violent behavior to Kim's constructing boundaries in her current relationship. Lines 30 to 52 explore the extent of Kim's father's violent behavior. In lines 53 to 54 Nick asks a "distinction-clarification question," used by family therapists when "causal attributions are not clear" (Tomm, 1987, p. 178), to determine why Kim's mother behaved as she did. Kim responds that her mother was not afraid of her father "enough," an evaluation which enables Kim to agentively position herself differently from her mother, with respect to relational violence.

Building on the above, in line 68, Nick "utilizes" (Erickson, 1955, 1965) Kim's passing phrase "I should be able to *learn* from that crap" and asks a poignant ques-

tion, "What *have* you *learned* from that?" by extending Kim's discourse. Kim answers by formulating boundaries on acceptable and unacceptable levels of violence. Nick helps her thicken and bolster these formulations through elicited answers to follow-up questions such as "Where's your line on that?" (line 74). In line 81, Nick packages Kim's successful relational posture with her partner as "quietly insistent" and in lines 82 to 86, reinforces how she has designed her marriage to her own "specifications" rather than those that generational habits dictated. Overall, this passage shows Nick packaging interventions using "recipient-design" (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), working *within* Kim's discourse and thereby facilitating her ability to take up the interventions.

Nick's Observations

I chose this passage because it is one in which I seek details to confirm a reformulation I am working on, namely that the client may feel that she is "trapped" but she has also been active in customizing the trap to make it more livable. By contrasting how things were for her growing up versus now in her own family as an adult, I am hoping to build toward a larger reformulation which constructs the feeling of being trapped as a directional response to both her partner's controlling behavior and abuse she saw growing up as a child. This intervention is based on the assumption that people are not just affected by violence but respond to it and will always resist mistreatment in some way. Reconnecting people with their histories of such resistance can be an important source of therapeutic impetus (Coates, Todd, & Wade, 2003; Todd & Wade, 2004; Wade, 1997, 2000, 2007). I am hoping to propose, at least implicitly, that Kim continues to the present day to respond to what she saw as a child by attempting to build a better marriage and family life for herself than what she saw growing up. To make this construction more compelling, I attempt to map out all that Kim has been doing to ensure that her relationship is better than her parents' was. Against this background, it is possible to see the feeling of being trapped as an intelligible response that is itself a potential solution to her present problems in that it indicates her ongoing awareness that she has not yet achieved all that she would like to in terms of creating the right kind of relationship for herself and her children. Kim initially tempers my reformulation by remarking "there's got to be more I can do" (lines 4 to 5) and that the improvement is only "a little bit" (line 8). I respond by reflecting that the change is "not enough" (line 10). This allows the client to articulate a strong sense of directionality by articulating her preference that her life not turn out "like my parents' life" (line 11), and in particular that her daughter not have to experience the same level of disruption and violence that she did. I then ask two questions about how Kim thinks things are from her daughter's perspective (lines 14/15 and 18/19 respectively). This appears to allow the client to grant that the differences between how her life is going and how her parents' went are indeed probably significant, at least from the perspective of her daughter.

Turning Points

From lines 30 to 60, I intended to draw out details that I hoped might support a re-evaluation of Kim's mother's behavior by introducing the idea that Kim's mother did in fact oppose her father's abuse (contrary to Kim's presentation), though perhaps in different ways than Kim opposes her partner's controlling behavior. I hope to suggest that it may have been more dangerous for Kim's mother to resist openly because of the level of violence her father was prepared to use and because options for more overt resistance such as leaving may have been more restricted in her mother's generation. I invite Kim to consider this reformulation by asking if she thought her mother experienced about the right amount of fear of her father (lines 53 to 54). This question is meant to embed the presupposition (McGee, 1999) that her mother's experience of how afraid she should be of Kim's father would have been critical to her mother's decisions as to how to respond to him. My hope here is that in recognizing that her mother was an active agent in evaluating and judging how best to respond to her father's abuse, Kim could begin to reconsider the notion that her mother somehow didn't do enough to resist his abuse. This could hopefully subvert the stereotypical notion of the passive victim (Coates & Wade, 2004; Todd, 2002; Todd & Wade, 2004; Wade, 2000; Weaver, Todd, Ogden, & Craik, 2005) that Kim is applying to her mother and shift responsibility for the deficiencies Kim experienced in her family of origin onto her father's abusive behavior, where it belongs. This could hopefully begin to frame the idea that Kim's resistance is built on a foundation of her mother's resistance and will in turn provide a base for Kim's daughter to build a better life. Kim appears to consider this reformulation in lines 56 to 57 when she hesitantly introduces the idea that "maybe [my mother] felt she *couldn't*" leave her father. Looking back, this seems to be a potential "turning point missed" and I wish I had perhaps asked something at line 58 like, "What is it like for you to think that maybe your mother felt she *couldn't* leave your father? Why do you think she may have felt that way?"

In the final 30 lines of the passage, we return to what Kim has learned from her past and the idea that Kim has at least been able to make the trap she's living in "much more . . . to *your* specifications than the one you grew up with." My hope here is to propose that Kim's feeling of being trapped has been an important part of responding to mistreatment and an impetus to making positive changes, but also to honor her feeling that more needs to be done by labeling her present situation as still a trap, no matter how much improved. This seems to fit for Kim as she offers three utterances of assent ("hmm hmm . . . yeah . . . right") as I am concluding my statement.

CONCLUSION

The "Turning Points" conference presented its participants with a rare opportunity to see three well-known Calgary area therapists demonstrate their slightly different

versions of therapy with the same client and same presenting issue. Such a conference format was not entirely new (see Chasin, Grunebaum, & Herzig, 1990) but we feel revisiting the actual therapeutic dialogues from the conference, along with the discursive analyses presented, offers something new to readers. In this article, we set out to investigate what seasoned, linguistically focused therapists identify as useful "turning points" that can be demonstrated in the actual words of both client and therapist. Guided by the idea of therapy as conversation (Anderson, 1997) it makes sense to us to focus on the language uses of both clients and therapists as "sign posts" of progress in therapy. CA sees such use, and what develops from it, as relational "accomplishments" (ten Have, 1999). That is, the spoken words in the client/therapist dialogue may be seen as evidence of progress, or lack thereof. Although the use of a client-actor limits the application of results to real-world clinical practice, this type of study may have particular merit for student therapists who are learning their craft as well as experienced therapists who are in the process of refining their use of language in the therapeutic process. As well, the success of this experiment lends credence to future studies using similar discursive methodology with real clients to strengthen the application to real-world clinical practice.

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