
Solution-Focused Practice and Song—An Overture: *The Best Part of Us*

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Abstract

In this article we introduce a new project, in which we are exploring the use of songs and music within solution-focused practice. We are considering ways in which songs can be drawn upon while practising the solution-focused approach, in teaching it, and in writing about it. Among our hopes and intentions is to bring together a collection of pieces of writing, each related to a particular song, which together will provide a comprehensive introduction to solution-focused practice. This article affords us the opportunity to try out a couple of such pieces, in this case to illuminate our discovery of solution-focused practice and our hopes for the project. In this way, the article is a part of the project as well as being an introduction to it. We also explain how we are situating our project in a wider context of embodied practice that has begun to influence our solution-focused thinking, and assert the importance of holistic and interactive approaches to songs in considering their uses for solution-focused practice. Finally, we share some examples of how songs can be used in practice with clients and in workshops and training courses. We also invite you, readers and listeners, to contribute directly by adding songs to our growing solution-focused playlist.

Keywords: songs, listeners, embodied, holistic, words and music, interactive, solution-focused, practising, teaching, writing

This article is intended to serve as an introduction to a project we have embarked upon together, to explore the use of songs and music within solution-focused practice. As music-related writing will be one aspect of this, we are also seeing this article as part of the project. This will influence the article's form as well as its content, which we will say a little more about below. The project's origins lie in an initiative taken by Jonas, when he started collecting "solution-focused songs" by putting out a call on the SOLUTIONS-L email list¹ (a listserv for people interested in organisational applications of the approach). A part of the ensuing project has been the subsequent compilation of an increasingly lengthy solution-focused playlist, which can be found on Jonas's Spotify account². If you think of this

playlist as an album, then this article might be thought of as its sleeve notes (or "liner notes," in American English).

Having come together through a joint love of music, we realised that we also shared a belief in music's applied potential. We believe that songs can be useful when practising solution-focused work with a client, when teaching the approach in workshops and training courses, and in writing about the approach. When we began to discuss our hopes and ideas for using music and song in our work, we realised, in a solution-focused fashion, that there have been times when this has already been happening. We will share examples of these times in this article. One of the aspects of the project we are most excited about is the potential of songs to convey the concepts and tools of solution-focused practice in fresh and unexpected ways. One mean of doing this is through pieces of writing connected to particular songs, which speak to various aspects of the approach. We intend to bring together a collection of songs and accompanying pieces that will

¹ The listserv of the Solution in Organizations Link-up, found at http://solworld.ning.com/notes/The_SOLUTIONS-L_email_listserv

² The Solution Focus playlist, direct link, <http://open.spotify.com/user/1118953357/playlist/5vRg60kwgdE7JfErxRnnL>

provide a comprehensive introduction to solution-focused practice. To this end, this article will be in part a test bed, as we will include pieces on a couple of songs, to illuminate elements of the approach and our relationship to it. Included in what we will be testing is how songs influence the form of a piece of writing, and the effect this has on the reader. We want to take advantage of the ways songs can be used metaphorically, and we would like to emulate their music and lyricality in how we write. A song's meaning is conveyed by how it sounds as well as by its words, and we hope to reflect this in the style of our writing. We invite you to adapt your style of reading accordingly.

The article is made up of a three sections, or *movements*, if we may use a musical metaphor. In the first movement we will situate the project in a wider context of embodied practice that has begun to influence our solution-focused thinking, and then underline the importance of taking holistic and interactive approaches to songs when considering their solution-focused use. The second movement consists of the two song-related pieces. The one by Jonas focuses on his solution-focused journey and his hopes for the project, while Guy looks at the moment of discovery of solution-focused practice. In the third movement we will share some examples of using songs in solution-focused work with clients, and in teaching the approach.

Songs and Embodied Practice

Solution-focused practice emerged from the wider world of talking therapies. Its main originator, Steve de Shazer, reminded us (quoting Sigmund Freud) that *Words Were Originally Magic* (de Shazer, 1994), and also drew upon the metaphor of "therapy as 'conversation'" (1994, p3-6, p 51-54). Words and language have always been at the heart of the solution-focused approach and, in particular, as confirmed by the detailed microanalysis of actual sessions (Korman, Bavelas & De Jong, 2013), the solution-focused practitioner pays very close attention to the words of the client. At the same time, recent developments in cognitive science are pointing to the important role the body plays in determining our understanding and actions (Clark, 1997; Damasio, 2000; Gibbs, 2006). Wilson and Foglia (2011) summarise these developments in their statement of the *Embodiment Thesis*, which holds that:

Many features of cognition are embodied in that they are deeply dependent upon characteristics of the physical body of an agent, such that the agent's beyond-the-brain body plays a significant causal role, or a physically constitutive role, in that agent's cognitive processing. (para. 28)

This thesis poses a challenge to talk-based therapies, depending as they do on an assumption that still influences parts of psychology, which sees the life of the mind as "largely separated from the body and the surrounding world" (Midlands Psychology Group, 2007, p. 424). Now,

we would argue that solution-focused practice, coming as it does from the brief therapy tradition (de Shazer & Berg, 1995) is one of the approaches that has responded to this challenge. This is because this kind of brief therapy, being built on the interactional view (Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977), aimed not to get inside individuals' heads, but into the spaces between people. However, it appears to us that solution-focused work still mainly involves sitting down and talking with people, asking them questions that encourage them to think and to put into words whatever is occurring, so to speak, "in their heads". Beyond facilitating the hearing of questions and the physical delivery of the answers, it does not seem that the body is doing much in such interchanges. We believe that the embodiment thesis encourages solution-focused practitioners to utilise the body more, and we have noted some recent developments, albeit small ones, that suggest that similar ideas are occurring to others. Marianne Bredow, an Austrian teacher of Biodanza, a practice that combines music, movement, and interaction, has made links between this and solution-focused therapy (reported in Shennan, 2012b), while Monica Ehresmann (2013) has explored possible connections between solution-focused and dance movement therapies. We came across more theoretical developments at a conference we attended at the University of Hertfordshire in England, which brought together solution-focused practitioners and philosophers studying embodied approaches to the mind (McKergow, 2013a). Given the theoretical nature of much of the proceedings, we viewed the question with which McKergow ended his presentation at the conference (2013b)—"how to bring together developments in philosophy of mind and psychology with practical implications"—as a crucial one. We believe that music can provide one means of re-coupling the mind with the body, a belief which is both based on our own bodily experiences of and responses to music, and supported by research in music cognition (Godøy & Leman, 2010).

A Holistic Approach - (1) Words and Music

When we started thinking about which songs can relate to, illustrate, or represent solution-focused practice and its features, we thought primarily of the words of the song, or, perhaps even more specifically, of the song's title. For example, on the face of it, *What Do You Want?* by the British teen idol, Adam Faith (Vandyke, 1959), would be a good choice to highlight the crucial question that the solution-focused practitioner needs to ask at the beginning of any piece of work. Yet the apparent simplicity of this question masks the confusion to which it can lead. Of the many ways the question can be interpreted, the solution-focused practitioner has a very particular intention in asking it. Behind Adam Faith's lovelorn protagonist's question was an agenda of his own: *Say what you want and I'll give it you darling. Wish you wanted my love baby* (Vandyke, 1959).

The solution-focused practitioner, on the other hand, has no agenda at all, other than to be of service to his or her client, and the question "What do you want?" has to be

completed and thus clarified by the addition of “from our work together?” It is the outcome of the work that is the subject of the inquiry.

So we have to be careful in going by the title of a song when looking to connect it with solution-focused practice. Frank Thomas (2010) provided a wonderful list of solution-focused song titles, which makes for a useful starting point. However, investigation is required to ascertain if the song behind the title might speak in some way to a solution-focused practitioner or client. Picking one at random, *The Scale Song* (Yow, 1986) by Scratch Acid sounded promising, though upon investigation, it turned out to have no lyrics. In addition, it just did not sound solution-focused to us. If it brought any scale to mind it was the problem-focused one used in pain clinics to aid the professionals’ assessment of the pain sufferer. And this illustrates nicely what we came to realise: it is not only the lyrics of the song that are important, but the music as well. In fact, in all good songs they cannot be separated and the whole becomes far greater than the sum of the lyrical and musical parts. One does not simply complement the other, it needs it. Can you imagine *Penny Lane* in your ears and eyes without it being sung to that very melody (Lennon & McCartney, 1967)?

So the practical implications of this for our project are that, as well as still being inspired by the lyrics of many songs and seeing ways in which they can illuminate solution-focused practice, we have gone beyond them to consider connections triggered by the music too, and by the overall sound that the words and music make together. This “going beyond” will enable us to add to the often simple (though no less powerful for that) associations that words can offer, and to find the perhaps more elusive connections that music, through its evocativeness, can provide. As with songs, there are other ways to experience solution-focused practice too, than via the intellect.

Focusing on the music as well as the words of a song raises a couple of challenges for our project. First, it calls attention to the fact that the same song will say different things to different people. Though this will be the case with lyrics, especially those with the obliqueness of a certain kind of poetry, they will often convey a clear message compared to the more subjective effects of the music. Here, solution-focused connections will be more in the ear of the beholder. Many people will have a different reaction to *The Scale Song* by Scratch Acid, for example, than the one we had. The second challenge will be to the writing part of our project, in particular, as it can be notoriously difficult to convey in words on a page the qualities one perceives in music or the sorts of reactions one has to it. In this respect, we see this introductory article as being an invaluable opportunity to practise ways of doing this!

A Holistic Approach (2) - The Whole Thing

When I hear music, I just hear the whole thing
—Meg White, *Interview with Jim Jarmusch*

Seeing the value of a focus on the music as well as the lyrics of a song links to another idea that we want to pursue, which is the importance of seeing a song—and a piece of solution-focused work—as a whole. In the same way that much can be gained by considering the overall sound of a song, there is much that can be lost by not considering its entire length. Missing the first second or so of *A Hard Day’s Night* (Lennon & McCartney, 1964) would mean missing its famous opening chord, which not only set the bright, confident tone for the rest of the song, but, according to McDonald (2005), also opened “the group’s middle period of peak creativity” (p. 115). And the whole meaning of a song can depend on the denouement of its closing lines, such as when we hear that the narrator of Squeeze’s *Up the Junction* (Difford & Tilbrook, 1979) is finally ... *up the junction* (these very last words of the song being all the more memorable in that they are the only time we hear the song’s title sung, a quality shared by the Roxy Music song (Ferry, 1972) that ends *What’s her name, Virginia Plain*).

As it is with music and song, so it is with weighty matters of science and solution-focused therapy. A theoretical term is the name for an entity that is not directly observable, but that is posited as part of an empirical theory. For example, the term gene was introduced by Wilhelm Johannsen to describe the fundamental unit of heredity in the theories of Gregor Mendel, the founder of genetics. It was only possible to explain the meaning of the word “gene” by reference to the theory of which it was a part as, “We have to grasp the whole theory in order to grasp the meaning of any one of its theoretical terms” (Frankish, 2008, p166). We believe that the same type of thinking needs to be applied when deciding whether or not an activity is solution-focused. The solution-focused approach can only be understood holistically, and one can only judge whether someone is “doing” it by watching a whole session, or even a series of sessions. It is not just about using individual solution-focused techniques—the miracle question, scaling, coping questions, compliments, and so on—for all of these can be and are used by practitioners of other therapeutic models. There are some remarkable similarities with solution-focused practice, for example, in the description by a leading cognitive-behavioural therapist of how he approaches a first session: “How would you know if this was working?... What would other people notice?” (Meichenbaum, 2012, 0:32). But the solution-focused approach involves a whole process in which the practitioner maintains a solution-focused orientation throughout, set off by the client articulating what he or she wants from the work. And this orientation will typically exclude many other activities that a cognitive-behavioural therapist, for example, will engage in. We believe that McKergow and Korman came up with an important insight by characterising solution-focused brief therapy partly in terms of what solution-focused therapists “don’t normally do at all”

(McKergow & Korman, 2009, p37), and one of the implications of this view is that the whole has to be seen before a piece of work can be judged as solution-focused or otherwise.

An Interactive Approach

Another remark we wish to make in setting the scene for our project relates to the interactional view already mentioned, and the active role played by the listener. It is impossible to talk about meaning of songs without placing the listeners, and their socio-cultural contexts, directly in the frame. By reminding us that reading is part of the construction of the text, Gale Miller (2013) alerted us to the parallel case that listening partly constructs the song. A song cannot exist apart from the listener and the meaning he or she ascribes to it. However the meaning of a song is articulated, it is always a matter of construction, with the listener as an active, critical agent. Moreover, the listener is always engulfed in culture and actively engaging with the world. So, a song becomes something when it is related to by a listener, giving it meaning and placing it in some type of context, which at the same time is contributing to the meaning of the song. In this way, songs neither have intrinsic meaning, nor are their meanings solely subjective. As Bakhtin (1986) wrote,

The unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances.(...) These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (p. 89)

The words of others, like the content of songs and texts, are only half the story. The other half comes from the listener or the reader, just as, right now, it will be coming from you.

Let us now turn to the two pieces inspired by songs chosen by each of us, which illuminate our discovery of the solution-focused approach and our thoughts about this project. One of the inspirations for this aspect of the project was Nick Hornby and his collection of essays about songs that have been significant to him. In this he wrote,

I love the relationship that anyone has with music: because there's something in us that is beyond the reach of words, something that eludes and defies our best attempts to spit it out. *It's the best part of us*, probably, the richest and strangest part. (Hornby, 2003, p. 128, emphasis added)

Jonas's Choice:

(Keep Feeling) Fascination by The Human League

My discovery of the solution-focused approach is an ongoing personal journey that I am taking gradually. It

began more than 12 years ago with a trip to Karlstad and a meeting with Björn Johansson and Eva Persson. The fuel for the journey is supplied by the fascination that I keep feeling for the approach, hence my choice of this Human League song (Callis & Oakey, 1983). Occasionally, something happens to intensify this fascination. This is exemplified by the development of the Spotify solution-focused playlist, which started as a pastime and has grown into an adventure (at the time of writing this text it contained 274 songs). My idea was that popular songs could “breathe solution-focused practice” and be used to explain aspects of the approach, or to signify experiences related to solution-focused interactions. Some of the songs that have been suggested are loosely connected to the approach, some are more philosophical, and others more direct. I had not thought of the playlist as being more than playful, but as the emails died down, I found a fellow disc jockey in Guy, who saw the potential of exploring the connections between songs and using or teaching the solution-focused approach. Early on in our conversations, we considered what we might be looking for in this project and decided we would each pick a song to communicate at least some aspects of this to the other.

“*(Keep Feeling) Fascination*”, I explained to Guy, “says a lot about solution-focused practice for me, on a number of levels. It touches on a variety of themes too, which are difficult to separate. I want to separate out two, by expressing something specific about the project, and saying something about our task with each other. The song informs this project in that it reminds me of explorative and new ways of learning. Ultimately, I hope the project will extend my grasp of solution-focused practice by looking at it through a different perspective, through music and songs. I also hope that something interesting and useful will emerge from our interactions. As the song says, *Just looking for a new direction, in an old familiar way*. I hope to learn something new by being curious and fascinated by that which is solution-focused. I hope to connect with the *passion burning* behind it. *The forming of a new connection* says something about our emerging relationship. Our differing backgrounds can bring uniqueness to the interaction, which can lead us to novel ways of describing solution-focused practice: *The truth may need some re-arranging* and there are *stories to be told*. Doing it in this dialogical form also opens up new ways of seeing solution-focused practice and helps me to keep feeling fascinated. Maybe my skills—and yours too—will develop further and take on more distinctive forms. It could change the way I work in teaching and learning solution-focused practice.”

Just as reading is interactive (Miller, 2013), so is listening to music and songs. Once I brought a solution-focused dimension to my listening, my relationship with the solution-focused playlist became an exercise in looking at familiar stuff—both the songs and the basic tenets of solution-focused practice—through new eyes. By interacting with the songs, we can pick out aspects that become somehow relevant to the approach. This tracing of new connections has deepened my understanding of the approach and made it more embodied. This Human League song, for instance, reminds me to keep feeling fascinated, even if the

facts start to appear mundane and ordinary. It is the feeling of fascination that makes the principles of meeting people in their resources, and of staying focused on preferred directions and on the stories that accompany this shift in perspective, come truly alive.

Guy's Choice:

Speed of the Sound of Loneliness by Alabama 3

The song here provides a metaphor for my discovery and first impressions of the solution-focused approach. As a solution-focused practitioner, I know how hard it can be for my clients to find the words to describe themselves moving into the futures they desire. It can be just as difficult as a practitioner, to describe to others the moment when you discovered the solution-focused approach, or when you felt that you had “got it”. Maybe it was more of a gradual process than an “ah-ha” moment, but the same challenge is likely to apply. Yet it occurs to me that this would be useful, to be able to communicate to others what it feels like to discover and experience this approach for the first time.

I tried to convey a little of what this was like for me in a piece I wrote on solution-focused training (Shennan, 2012a). As a continuing learner and as a teacher, my approach to solution-focused training will always be influenced by the first course I attended in 1995 with Chris Iveson of BRIEF (a London-based centre for solution-focused practice). What was it about that experience? The immediacy, the unexpectedness, the exhilaration? I could keep reaching for the words, or I could fast forward 5 years, when I settled down in a local cinema to watch the film *Some Voices* (Cellan Jones, 2000). The screen went black and the audience became quiet; then, simultaneously, the titles began to appear and an electric noise leapt into the auditorium—a squelchy, funky beeping and squeaking. In a Southern drawl, a voice said, *Everybody gotta run sometime now* and a rumbling bass kicked in. A bluesy harmonica began to play over the top of this strange brew, and my attention had been well and truly grabbed. Then the real surprise hit me. The first verse began and I realised it was *Speed of the Sound of Loneliness*, a lovely John Prine song, which had been beautifully and plaintively covered by the folk and country singer, Nanci Griffith (Prine, 1986). I wanted to laugh out loud and applaud whoever had thought to make a version of that slow, sad song so crackling with energy! The unexpectedness was part of the song's immediate charm for me, and I was hooked on whoever had made this music and on the film. When the film finished, I waited impatiently for the credits to tell me who had performed the song. That was the start of my love affair with the Alabama 3, who I had never heard of until that moment. I could not wait to get to a record shop the next day to order all of their recordings (which included the theme song for *The Sopranos* [Black & Spragg, 1997]), just as I had not been able to wait 5 years earlier for the weekend after my first solution-focused training course to end so that I could get back to work and put it into practice.

Using Songs When Practising the Solution-Focused Approach

Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.
—Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*

Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer (1993) suggested that using scales (0-10 rather than the musical variety, although therein lies an idea) allows the therapist and client “to jointly construct a way of talking about things that are hard to describe” (p. 19). They gave an example of a young woman who had rated herself at 5 on the scale, and when asked what would be different when she was at a 6, she replied that she would “feel more sixish” (Berg & de Shazer, 1993, p.19). What numbers can do, songs can do even more powerfully. As noted in Guy's piece above, it is not unusual for clients to struggle in describing how they would imagine themselves in a desired tomorrow, however surely they know that something would be different. Jean³, who wanted to feel more in control of herself and her life, was a case in point:

Therapist (Th): What's the first thing you'd notice about yourself tomorrow, if you woke up to find you were feeling that control?

Jean (J): *I don't know. Just feel . . . I'm not sure . . .*

Th: What do you think? You're becoming aware you're waking up, to a new day, and also that something's different, you have this sense of being in control, of yourself and your life - how would you know? How would you become aware of that?

J: *I'd just feel it. I'd feel better.*

Th: What's the first thing you'd do, if you felt better, in control?

J: *Turn on my iPod, probably.*

Th: What would you listen to? Anything in particular?

J: *I'm not sure.*

Th: Would there be something on your iPod that suited your feeling of being in control, this better feeling?

J: *Um . . . yes, probably. Hang on. Yes, probably . . . something by Adele.*

Th: Which song in particular?

J: *Turning Tables.*

Th: What is it about that song that would fit with you being in control?

J: *The bit where she sings 'It's time to say goodbye to turning tables.' That's how I feel. And 'Next time I'll be braver'...*

When songs and music are invited into the conversation about preferred futures in this way, they can add to the concreteness of the description and the experiential nature of the process for the client. The specificity afforded by an actual song or artist is useful, as it was for Jean, who was able to go on to describe how she would have increased courage in her life. At other times, a realistic description

³ Client details have been anonymised

simply involves listening to a music station on the radio and being happy with whatever is played.

Another example that included a song used to represent a desired future comes from the UK-based family therapist, Paul Hackett. Paul had been asked to undertake an assessment with John, a teenage boy who had tried to take his own life, leading to him spending time in hospital. In the first session, John was largely uncommunicative, only warming to questions that touched on what he enjoyed, which was mainly listening to music. He agreed that for the second session he would bring in two pieces of music, one representing how he felt at his lowest point and the other where he would be happy enough with his life so that active thoughts of suicide were no longer present. He brought with him *No Life Singed Her* by Pavement (Malkmus, 1992) to mark the lowest point and *Tony's Theme* by the Pixies (Francis, 1988) to represent where he wanted to be. Paul and John's father, who was also attending the sessions, listened to them with him. The songs were included later in a safety plan, so that if John's father heard the Pavement song being played, he would call Paul, as that would be a sign he was feeling at his lowest. The Pixies song was used as a way for John to describe a future in which he was happy enough with his life. In terms of the safety plan, when his father heard this song, he would contact Paul so that they could discuss the progress John had made towards his desired future state.

Using Songs When Teaching the Solution-Focused Approach

Another context in which we have already been using songs is when teaching solution-focused practice. Using music during training courses to accelerate learning (Dryden & Vos, 2001) has become increasingly popular since Gardner (1983) included musical intelligence in his theory of multiple intelligences. Brewer (1995) set out three areas of teaching where integrating music could be effective: in learning information, in creating a positive atmosphere, and in facilitating personal expression. We have found that playing music at the beginning and end of courses and workshops can set a welcoming tone and establish a sense of community among the group. This communal sense can be enhanced by encouraging simple and non-threatening participation, in songs chosen to underline particular messages, thereby creating multi-purpose activities. In one international workshop, my colleague Rob Black and I (Guy) used Michael Franti's song, *Taxi Radio* (Franti, 2003), which was inspired by the idea that the words "taxi" and "radio" are used all over the world, to support our notion of solution-focused practice as a common language. The chorus is rather simple (repeating *Oh, oh, oh, taxi radio*), so we were able to have one half of the room joining in on "taxi" and the other on "radio"!

Another workshop had a musical theme running all the way through, as Rob and I drew on the connections we saw between solution-focused brief therapy and punk rock. These included the shared features of energy, brevity,

minimalism, and simplicity. A striking aspect of how the approach was taught by BRIEF (then known as the "Brief Therapy Practice") in the 1990s was that it was summarised as consisting of only two activities: finding out where the client wants to go, and finding out what the client is already doing to get there (George, Iveson & Ratner, 1995). This was a manifestation of Ockham's razor, a minimalist doctrine attributed to the medieval philosopher, William of Ockham, and referred to by de Shazer (1985) as "what can be done with fewer means is done in vain with many" (p. 58). This raises the question of what is so good about minimalism and simplicity. Their virtues can be taken for granted, but they are not self-evident; they need to be argued for or somehow demonstrated. Here is an example of how the analogies and metaphors provided by music can be enlightening. Woody Guthrie, the American folk singer, once said, "Anyone who uses more than two chords is just showing off", though Lou Reed went further: "One chord is fine, two chords are pushing it." Furthermore, "Three chords and you're into jazz!"

What is it about music based on this type of simplicity that appeals? Here's one idea: A singer-songwriter such as Woody Guthrie wants to communicate directly with his listeners, to be heard as clearly as possible and so be understood by as many people as possible. He is writing and singing for the masses, who are often the subject of his songs and whom he addresses, as for example in *This Land is Your Land* (Guthrie, 1945). By keeping the music simple, he does not distract the listener from the words; by keeping the words simple, he does not detract from the transmission of their meaning. A second and connected idea: Songs such as Guthrie's are written with participation in mind; folk songs are songs that folk can sing along with. Singing is a pleasurable activity, yet it is possible to feel excluded from it; for example, a song by its complexity might make its singing seem the preserve of the talented or the trained. Simplicity on the other hand can be an aid to participation and hence to the enjoyment of a collective endeavour, as well as to the deeper understanding that active rather than passive involvement can engender. Thirdly, making music simple is likely to enable more people to make music of their own, as well as to be consumers of the music of others. This is what happened, with a necessary bang, with the advent of punk rock in the mid-1970s. Something had gone awry in pop and rock music in the post-*Sgt. Pepper* era. Progressive rock bands like Yes and Deep Purple contained virtuoso musicians playing interminable guitar or drum solos, and their fans could only admire them from afar, never dreaming that they could emulate their heroes. Then, along came punk rock with its *One Chord Wonders* (Smith, 1977) and blew all this away with its do-it-yourself philosophy. This encouraged the belief that anyone could join in, anyone could form a band. You did not have to be a technical wizard to play. And popular music became brighter and accessible once more.

We all know from experience that talking with others can be helpful. In fact, it is probably an essential aspect of human life and survival. Psychotherapy was in its early days called the "talking cure," which points us to what, in

effect, it is: the professionalisation of an ordinary and universal human activity. A problem with any professionalising process is that it leads to the accumulation of a body of knowledge that becomes increasingly esoteric, and to the mystification of an activity that was previously accessible to many (Illich, 1977). This can discourage the development of skills by many workers who might think, “I could never do that”. We believe that one of the great strengths of solution-focused practice has been its usability across all helping contexts, with support workers, classroom assistants, and children acting as peer supporters as likely to use it as psychotherapists. As we said at the end of the workshop: Solution-focused practitioners, the punk rockers of the therapy world!

An Exercise

In the spirit of a participatory workshop, we would like to move towards the end of this piece by suggesting an activity for you to do, so you can experience for yourself one of the many possibilities songs offer to solution-focused practice. It will involve wrapping both main solution-focused areas of interest—the desired future and progress towards it—around a piece of music. Bring to mind something you would like to achieve this year. Then, select a song that will somehow represent what achieving this would be like. Play the song, and while you are listening to it, brainstorm lists of what you are already achieving in this respect, and of the resources and skills you have that give you confidence that you can achieve it.

Coda

As a last note in our musical piece, we are still looking to add to the songs on the solution-focused playlist. In particular, as Jonas said in an email to the SOLUTIONS-L list, “I am still looking for songs on the theme ‘What else?’ and I would love them to be in a major key! Tone is everything.” So, that is the end of our overture, and we will be turning our attention next to the first act. We have done our best to convey a flavour of what we are talking about, planning, and doing already. However, we are concerned that we may not have been able to do our project justice in writing. So perhaps this will be a good time to remember something Hans Christian Andersen, that great teller of fairy tales, once said, and go and play one of your favourite songs, for *Where words fail, music speaks!*

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