



The use of metaphor in therapy  
Dr Jonathan Lloyd

## Introductions

Group Introductions – including hopes and fears for the day, why you are here & describe yourself as a therapist metaphorically

## Agenda

- 09:30 – 09:50 Introductions
- 09:50 – 10:00 Definitions
- 10:10 – 11:00 Models of Therapy and their use of metaphor (including negative aspects)– what the literature tells us.
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:15 – 12:00 Findings - a brief discussion including standing-in-for discussion.
- 12:00 – 12:30 Therapist Generated Metaphors including practice.
- 12:30 – 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 – 13:30 Client Generated Metaphors including exercise.
- 13:30 – 14:00 Clean language – DVD and demonstration
- 14:00 – 15:30 Co-constructed/moving metaphors/plus practice
- 15:30 – 16:00 Conclusion

## Some Definitions

**METAPHOR**

Overarching definition of metaphor: "as the phenomenon whereby we talk, and potentially think about something in terms of something else".

The term metaphor is derived from the Greek word *metapherein*, to transfer over. The etymological roots of the word are *meta* meaning beyond or over, plus *pherein* meaning to bring or bear.

In this context a metaphor is something that is brought or carried over or beyond.



**Similes** make use of the same cognitive mechanism as metaphors and have a rational or logical element to them. For example, 'she smiled *like a* Cheshire Cat'



Examples of a British culturally specific **metonym** includes 'the Crown' meaning the monarchy. An example of a metonym perhaps with a with a more universal application would be 'plastic' meaning credit cards. They stand-in-for.



Deep Metaphors are defined as:

"consistent, recurring images of a life story that give coherence to, and aid in, the interpretation of the events of that life....and are used by clients to both circumscribe and frame possible solutions to the problems in their lives" (Mallinson et al., 1996, p.2).

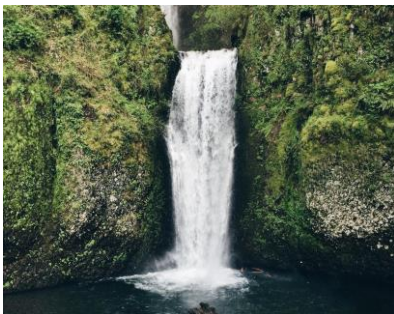
**Cryptophors**, are carriers of hidden meaning and are of particular relevance to counselling and psychotherapy (Cox & Theilgaard, 1987).



Introducing...



Sir Anthony Seldon



Why so useful?





Metaphors in Therapy



- All the Waterfall reasons, defence by-pass, can be developed/potential movement, often contain an element of hope.
- Pervasive, that’s how most people describe their life
- Used to describe models of therapy
- A method of bringing unconscious material to conscious awareness
- Can bridge cultures (but can also develop barriers)
- Improves empathy, rapport and mutuality
- Are imported/exported from/to therapy culture

The Metaphors of Therapy

- Inner-Child
- Journey, Boundaries etc..
- PAC
- Id
- Super Ego
- Waking the Tiger
- The Road less Travelled
- The Chimp Paradox
- The Broken Mirror

MODELS & METAPHOR



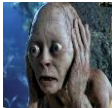
Person Centred

The absence of the promotion of the specific use of metaphors in the traditional person-centred literature is probably due to the authentic person to person “therapy as relationship encounter” (Rogers, 1962, p.185) stance which takes precedence over techniques and theory (Wyatt, 2001). It is about “a way of being” (Rogers, 1980, p.227).

CBT

Stott et al. (2010) explain the importance of metaphors in CT and CBT: "Cognitive Therapy has, as a central task, the aim of transforming meaning to further the client's goals and help journey towards a more helpful, realistic and adaptive view of the self and the world. Metaphor should therefore be a powerful companion" (p.14).

Issue led



## Psychodynamic



The use of metaphor in psychotherapy enhances the exchange between the unconscious and conscious realms (the entrance hall and the drawing room) as the metaphor can bypass the client's censoring defences. Metaphors allow the client: "safe access to hitherto buried (*and guarded*) experience" (Cox & Theilgaard, 1987, p.69).

Working with dreams can be a fundamental element of a Jungian Analyst's work with their client and can indicate unconscious wish fulfilment and latent transference issues (Sharpe, 1988). Sharpe (1988, p.7) suggests that dreams indicate the individual psychical product of the individual:

"The dream-life holds within itself not only the evidence of instinctual drives and mechanisms, by which those dreams are harnessed or neutralised, but also the actual experiences through which we have passed...dreams are like individual works of art."

Deep metaphorical visualisations that clients access during therapy, referred to in Rice (1974) as *evocative reflections*. I find that symbols, dreams, imagery, visualisation are all metaphoric messages from the unconscious that help us conceive the world in a meaningful and safe way, and connect our emotions with the visual.

## Negative Aspects

Potential pitfalls with using metaphors;

1. overvaluing
2. undervaluing
3. literalizing
4. an appealing metaphor may stand in the way of a less elegant more appropriate description
5. focusing on metaphors may take us away from deeper social meanings

### Negative Aspects

Potential pitfalls with using metaphors;

- 1. oversimplification can follow metaphors
- 2. the ‘poorly timed’ metaphor introduced by the therapist when the client is silent and ‘creatively reflective’ is regarded by some (C&T) as ill placed and contaminating
- 3. metaphors should have a therapeutic insightful element and not involve a “string of avoidance” .
- 4. a client may not wish to engage with metaphors, particularly if it has been introduced by the therapist, factors may include low self-esteem or a difficulty to visualise
- 5. metaphors can be used by clients as a way of avoiding conflict or as part of a power struggle with their counsellor

There may also be difficulties relating to certain mental health issues, for example, the following of client generated metaphors with those with Psychosis or Borderline Personality Disorders can make them become extremely anxious as they may experience metaphors as a form of direct revelation of a concrete, and often ruthless reality. I would add that a significant percentage of clients on the Autistic Spectrum can also struggle with the non-logical viewpoint that metaphors engage.

Milioni (2007) points to the danger of the therapist using the client’s metaphor as a ‘silencing device’. In such cases the client’s world-view is closed down in favour of the therapist’s interpretation.  
Cox & Theilgaard (1987, p.61) metaphorically describe this potentiality: “If the therapist is too predatory he may damage the humming bird with the lasso”.



### FINDINGS

A BRIEF DISCUSSION





I am like....

I am like the wind  
I am the train on the tracks  
that runs and runs and runs

I am from you  
me  
us  
them

I am like the glue that binds  
the magnet that repels  
the missing in the fog

I am like my child  
I can play  
I can smile  
I can cry  
I can find strength from here

I am like a bird  
I can fly  
I can drift  
as high as the cloud  
I can burrow deep into the cloud

I am always there  
ready  
on the shelf  
in the dream  
in this moment

I am like the creator  
I can change  
colour  
shape  
Your world and mine

I am like the gift  
the chameleon pathway to your mind

I am like the knot in your gut  
I rest in your heart  
I rest in your neck  
like the blade in your side  
I hold the dreams you cannot tell

I am like  
what you are like  
change me you  
our hills caves and dance floors

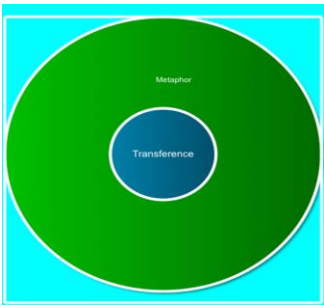
I am like the monster sleeping in the dark  
that can lead to doors  
doors hiding smiles behind

I am like the crack in the cut  
the safe dungeon  
the shiny hub  
the frozen rose

I am like the tissues in the box  
I am hope  
I am like.

STANDING IN FOR – THE METONYMS OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

The therapist is a metaphor for a lover, a care-giver, a teacher, a maiden, a shaman. You are a shape shifter, a chameleon, "whoever your client needs you to be. While still being yourself".



Standing-in-for – Discussion



ORIGINATION & DEVELOPMENT

- Therapist Generated
- Client Generated
- Co-Created

Therapist Generated Metaphors – see following slides


- 'Bank Metaphors' or 'off-the-shelf' metaphors include:-
- Castles
  - Trains
  - Wheels
  - Rivers
  - Trees (& Plants)
  - Desert Islands
  - Poems/Literature/Films/TV/Radio/Plays – cultural metaphors?
  - Shapes (Tomkins)

“Attend. Witness. Wait.  
Discern, formulate, potentiate, and reflect mutative  
metaphorical material.  
Attend. Witness Wait.” C&T.

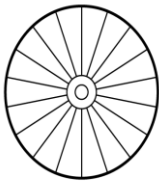
**The Black Parrot**  
By Dorothy Nimmo

*Kill the black parrot. Choke the sodding bird,  
it never said a kind thing or a true word,  
or if it did that wasn't what I heard.  
I only heard it squawking in my ear  
things no-one in their right mind wants to hear  
that made me cold with shame and white with fear.  
Behave yourself. Control yourself. You know  
you don't think that, you only think you do.  
You can't just please yourself, I told you so.  
You're being selfish. It's for your own good.  
You must. You must not. But you know you should.  
If you try harder, I am sure you could.  
I'm disappointed in you. Never say I didn't tell you.  
But you had your own way, you'd not be told. There'll be a price to pay.  
Where was it polly learned that canting word?  
It's time to wring its neck, the stupid bird.  
What made us think that was the voice of God?*

L. Nimmo (1993, 3-4)



Wheel of Relationship



Tree of well-being



Experiential

In small groups discuss any metaphors  
that you introduce to clients and the  
context in which you  
will introduce them – any ‘case-studies’?

Client Generated Metaphors





Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.233) note “In therapy, much of self-understanding involves consciously recognising previously unconscious metaphors and how we live by them”.

Further, as Ricoeur (1986) recognises, the metaphor needs to be isomorphic to the problem, the story and the situation of the client himself so that he can recognise himself in it and find out new ways to perceive his difficulties.



Samuel Beckett's 'Happy Days'



## Experiential – Mrs Potter



### "Mrs. Potter's Lullaby"

Well I woke up in mid afternoon cause that's when it all hurts the most  
I dream I never know anyone at the party and I'm always the host  
If dreams are like movies then memories are films about ghosts  
You can never escape, you can only move south down the coast  
Well I am an idiot walking a tightrope of fortune and fame  
I am an acrobat swinging trapezes through circles of flame  
If you've never stared off into the distance then your life is a shame  
And though I'll never forget your face sometimes I can't remember my name  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, don't cry  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, I know why  
But, hey, Mrs. Potter, won't you talk to me  
Well there's a piece of Maria in every song that I sing  
And the price of a memory is the memory of the sorrow it brings  
And there is always one last light to turn out and one last bell to ring  
And the last one out of the circus has to lock up everything  
Or the elephants will get out and forget to remember what you said  
Oh and the ghosts of the till-o-whirl will linger inside of your head  
Oh and the Ferris wheel junkies will spin there forever instead  
When I see you, a blanket of stars covers me in my bed  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, don't go, I said  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, I don't know, but  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, won't you talk to me  
Well all the blue light reflections that color my mind when I sleep

And the lovesick rejections that accompany the company I keep  
All the razor perceptions that cut just a little too deep  
Hey, I can bleed as well as anyone but I need someone to help me sleep  
So I throw my hand into the air and it swims in the beams  
It's just a brief interruption of the swirling dust sparkle jet stream  
Well I know I don't know you and you're probably not what you seem  
Aw, but I'd sure like to find out  
So why don't you climb down off that movie screen  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, don't turn  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, I burn for you  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, won't you talk to me  
When the last king of Hollywood shatters his glass on the floor  
And orders another  
Well, I wonder what he did that for  
That's when I know that I have to get out cause I have been there before  
So I gave up my seat at the bar and I head for the door. Yeah.  
We drove out to the desert just to lie down beneath this bowl of stars  
We stand up in the Palace, like it's the last of the great pioneer town bars  
Aw, we shout out these songs against the clang of electric guitars  
Well, you can see a million miles tonight  
But you can't get very far  
Aw, you can see a million miles tonight  
But you can't get very far  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, I won't touch and  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, it's not much but  
Hey, Mrs. Potter, won't you talk to me [3x]

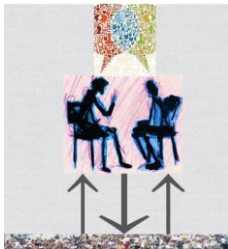
## Clean Language

David Grove DVD (10 mins) & Explanation

Example of working with Mrs Potter metaphors

Experiential of working with each other.

## Social & Cultural Aspects of Metaphors in Therapy – The Co- Created/Moving Metaphor



“The meaning of metaphor is revealed within a personal and cultural context, within a society of utterances”

(Hobson, 1985, p.60)

Cox & Theilgaard (1987, p.49): (Client) “because I don’t begin. You induce beginning in me”.

“It is the impact of the inner world of the patient on that of the therapist and vice versa which promotes movement”.

I would tentatively offer my view on this phenomenon that metaphors arise from the therapeutic relationship and for them to be therapeutically useful they need to be mutually understood and developed (they need to impact on each other’s ‘inner world’). Counselling and psychotherapy is about dialogue and conversation in a given context (Hobson, 1985). Even in person-centred circles it is now accepted that the therapist inevitably influences what is said, it is a co-constructive, contextualised process (Worsley, 2002).

“the reflection of being and object of reflection are defined through each other, they are co-constituted. We are actively involved in any experience and what we experience is co-constructed by us and by the object/person that we encounter – any experience of relationship says as much about me as it does the other, it is a co-constructed relationship.”

(Van Deurzen & Young, 2009, p.208).



## Time to practice .....

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Deep metaphors  
Co-constructed/Client  
Generated/Therapist Generated  
Mutual Development  
Moving  
State?

## References

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A full list of references is available along with a copy of the thesis by  
emailing me at [jonathan@calmminds.com](mailto:jonathan@calmminds.com)  
Or call 0161 439 7773

## Conclusion

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**Feedback**  
**Final Questions**  
**Future workshops**  
**Hopes & Fears**