Metaphor in Professional Counseling

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Metaphors are linked to how individuals process information and emotions, and they are important to understand and utilize in counseling. A description of the structure of metaphors and metaphor theory is provided. The role of metaphors in emotional processing is explained, and the process of counseling is tied to the therapeutic usage of metaphors. Building from that information, approaches to using metaphors in counseling are described, and metaphors are divided into client-generated and counselor-generated categories, with corresponding information on how metaphors can be used in the counseling process. The counseling process is then separated into categories of exploration, insight and action, and descriptions of metaphor usage along with composite case examples are provided for each category to show how incorporating metaphors in clinical practice can be therapeutically beneficial in supporting positive client changes.

Keywords: **metaphor, exploration, insight, action, emotional processing**

Metaphorical language occurs commonly in communication, with a study by Steen, Dorst, Herrmann, Kaal, and Krennmayr (2010) finding that metaphoric language is used 18.6% of the time in academic writing, 11.8% in fiction and 7.7% in conversation. Examples of types of metaphoric language that may commonly appear in conversation are: *she rushed to his defense* (in the context of arguing on his behalf), *she broke down and cried* and *when I walked into the house, she attacked me for not calling to say I would be late* (in this case meaning that she was upset and spoke in a harsh manner). In these examples, the metaphors are *rushed to his defense*, *broke down*, and *attacked*. These words are not literal descriptions but instead use descriptions of physical processes to metaphorically describe emotional and verbal activities. These metaphors might appear in clients' normal speech and may be commonly overlooked as being metaphoric. The frequency of these metaphors in language provides opportunities for greater exploration and understanding of clients. Research findings also support metaphors occurring at a higher rate when describing emotions and discussing emotional experiences, making metaphors even more important for counselors to recognize and address (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Lubart & Getz, 1997; Samur, Lai, Hagoort, & Willems, 2015; Smollan, 2014).

Metaphors are not simply a linguistic or literary device; they play an important role in learning and cognitively organizing an understanding of the world (Aragno, 2009; Evans, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The importance of metaphors for learning and understanding is a prime reason for counselors to be conversant in metaphors and their uses in counseling. Counseling involves supporting clients in learning and understanding so they can make changes that enable them to reach their goals. Recognizing and working with client metaphors can be beneficial for professional counselors, as there is research supporting metaphor frequency and types varying in relation to emotional changes (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Tay, 2012; Wickman, Daniels, White, & Fesmire, 1999). Therefore, clients' metaphors can provide insight into their emotional states and how they are conceptualizing their situations. In addition, metaphors can be used in treatment interventions and for monitoring changes in client conceptualizations and emotions over the course of treatment (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Kopp & Eckstein, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sims, 2003; Tay, 2012). However, to effectively use metaphors in counseling practice, it is helpful to understand the basic

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terminology and structure of metaphors, as this allows the counselor to recognize metaphor types associated with increased emotional processing and the integration of new awareness (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Tay, 2012). Therefore, this manuscript begins with a brief description of metaphor structure and forms so that the later sections linking metaphors to emotional states and changes and providing approaches for working with metaphors in counseling are more understandable and useful.

Metaphor Structure

Metaphors are a symbolic approach for implying similarity between experiences, thoughts, emotions, actions or objects (Evans, 2010; Seitz, 1998). The structure of a metaphor can be broken down into two domains, the target domain and the source domain. The target domain refers to the concept the metaphor is being used to *explain*. The source domain is the concrete topic to which the target domain is being *linked*. By combining the two domains in a metaphoric expression, an understanding of the target domain's properties is established. The description of properties through the relationship between domains is referred to as *conceptual mapping* (Tay, 2012). For example, within the metaphor, *she is on fire*, *she* is the target domain and *fire* is the source domain. Through the linkage of these domains, the *she* referred to is understood to have qualities like that of a *fire*—in this case, an intense energy.

Metaphors are further classified as having forms that are either simple or complex and either conventional or unconventional. Simple metaphors have one target and one source domain, and complex metaphors have one target with more than one source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conventional metaphors are those that are commonly used within a culture, and unconventional metaphors are those that are not commonly used (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphors and Emotional Change

The process of counseling requires a focus on the emotional experience of clients. Clients' emotions guide the counselor to what is most affecting and important to clients, so the counseling process often involves developing clients' recognition of emotional patterns and needs, as well as the generation of new emotional perspectives. Because emotions are at the heart of counseling, the specific connection between emotions and metaphors needs exploration. Research has shown that metaphor usage is connected to emotional change, and specifically, there is support for an increased occurrence of metaphors when talking about emotions, especially intense emotions (Crawford, 2009; Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described metaphor as an approach for conceptualizing the experience of emotion in a form that is relatable to other individuals. Metaphor is viewed as a way to cognitively organize the emotional experience (Crawford, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It is possible that intense emotions are an experience not directly relatable to other individuals without references, and this may explain research evidence supporting an increased use of metaphor when describing intense emotional experiences (Crawford, 2009; Smollan, 2014). In addition to the possible need for source domains as references to describe intense emotions, metaphors may be ideal for relating emotional experiences because of their ability to encapsulate specific and content-rich information in a concise and broadly understandable manner (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987).

The link between metaphor and emotion is supported by a number of studies showing that when comparing literal and metaphoric language with the same intended meaning and emotional valence, metaphoric language is related to greater activation of brain regions (particularly the left amygdala) associated with emotion (Bohrn, Altmann, & Jacobs, 2012; Citron & Goldberg, 2014; Citron, Güsten,

Michaelis, & Goldberg, 2016) along with higher participant ratings of the emotion contained in metaphor (Fetterman, Bair, Werth, Landkammer, & Robinson, 2016; Mohammad, Shutova, & Turney, 2016). Connecting these findings more directly with counseling practice, Fetterman et al. (2016) found that having participants write metaphorically about personal experiences significantly reduced negative affect in comparison to a control condition in which participants were writing literally about personal experiences. For those participants who wrote metaphorically, there was an increased preference for metaphor usage. These findings support the theory that metaphors are linked to emotional processing and provide more backing for counselors addressing and working with metaphors in counseling.

One additional study that provides a lens into metaphors in counseling practice was conducted by Gelo and Mergenthaler (2012). They performed single-subject research investigating whether the type of metaphor (unconventional or conventional) and frequency of metaphor use were related to client change in counseling. This research was based on previous studies suggesting that unconventional metaphors occur more frequently when clients are involved in emotional and cognitive change processes (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012). Gelo and Mergenthaler found that client metaphor usage was associated with periods of emotional and cognitive change, and the client used more unconventional metaphors when *reflecting* on emotional change, but not while *experiencing* emotional change. Though it is hard to generalize from a small study, this is an important observation that supports the conceptual idea that metaphors are used to organize emotional experiences and integrate the experiences with the cognitive domain (Crawford, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Taken in combination, studies examining the relationship between metaphor and emotion indicate that metaphors are linked to processing and communicating emotion, which makes metaphors important for counselors to understand, address and utilize. These studies also suggest that metaphors may have an important role for counselors who are supporting emotional change in clients. Therefore, these research findings inform recommendations for integrating metaphors into counseling.

Metaphor Sources and Approaches

Metaphors in counseling come from two sources, the client and the counselor. The source of the metaphor is important to consider when describing approaches to working with metaphors in clinical practice; thus, client-generated and counselor-generated metaphors will be discussed separately.

Client-Generated Metaphors

The nature of client-generated metaphors can allow for assessment of clients (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Stewart & Barnes-Holmes, 2001; Wickman et al., 1999). This assessment may only consist of recognizing how clients are conceptualizing experiences, but it also may involve working directly with metaphors to better understand relationships. Noticing the increased usage of complex and unconventional metaphors may be helpful for recognizing when clients may benefit from greater support and conceptual assistance to integrate new concepts or behaviors and explore emotions (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012).

To work directly with metaphors in counseling, several approaches are helpful. Kopp and Craw (1998) and Sims (2003) offered similar models with steps to facilitate insight using client-generated metaphors. Both models begin by having the counselor ask the client to elaborate on the metaphor and then follow up by asking the client questions to provide more detail, including emotions connected to the metaphor. Following client elaboration, additional questions and reflections from the counselor support the generation of client insight. To reinforce insight and apply it to the

current situation, Kopp and Craw's model has the client imagine changes in the metaphor that support counseling goals, whereas Sims' model directs the client to connect the metaphor with past experiences and future goals. Both models describe the use of basic counseling skills to address client metaphors and are easily incorporated into counseling work. An important takeaway regarding client metaphors is that metaphors have significance for the client and are appropriate for exploration in counseling (Tay, 2012; Wickman et al., 1999).

Another approach for working with metaphors in counseling practice was described by Tay (2012), who identified two types of metaphor processing in counseling that can be selectively used based on the purpose of the metaphor exploration. The first type is *correspondence processing*. Correspondence processing requires exploring the entailments of metaphors. The term *entailments* refers to a layering and transfer of meaning in the relationship between the symbols in the metaphor. The entailments are the associations and properties of the domains in the metaphor that are not specifically used in the metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, *she is on fire* might be used to indicate that *she* is energetically accomplishing a lot, but could also have entailments of meaning related to *fire* being culturally associated with destruction and being difficult to control.

Correspondence processing describes the cognitive combining of properties between target and source domains as a conceptual mapping that equates the entailments of both domains to facilitate thinking about and using the metaphor in a variety of forms. An exploration of the entailments of those metaphors is often necessary for correspondence mapping and is accomplished by expanding upon the metaphor. To expand on the metaphor, additional descriptions of content related to the metaphor are generated. For example, if the metaphor, *love is a journey*, is used for correspondence processing, then the expansion might include asking the client for descriptions of journeys that may elicit information such as: *there are rough roads in the journey*, *there are fellow travelers* and *sometimes it is necessary to find shelter*. These descriptions could map back to love to indicate that, respectively, relationships can be emotionally difficult, two people come together when in love, and breaks from relationships are sometimes necessary.

The second type of cognitive processing is *class inclusion*. Class inclusion refers to a linking of the target and source domain through the core conceptual properties of the domains without expanding the metaphor to understand entailments (Tay, 2012). For instance, in the metaphor example used above, *love is a journey*, a class inclusion processing would involve asking the client what is important about a journey. Those responses might include *needing time to get to a destination* and *the acceptance of risk in moving toward the destination*, and then those responses would be applied to love. This would indicate that love requires an acceptance of risk and a willingness to put in the time in order to achieve love. In this process, the linking of each entailment of the source domain to the target domain is not necessary; instead, broader concepts that connect the domains are the focus.

Counseling use of these approaches is based on client and therapeutic needs. For complex concepts that need to be better understood, metaphors may be shaped in a manner consistent with correspondence and processed as such, whereas for communicating core messages and principles, class inclusion may be preferable (Tay, 2012). These two approaches are both important for metaphor-based interventions because they provide two directions for exploration—understanding core messages or increasing understandings of the relationships and context surrounding the concept being described in metaphor (Tay, 2012). Exploring client metaphors using counseling skills and guided by the conceptual frameworks described above can increase understanding and awareness in both clients and counselors.

Counselor-Generated Metaphors

Counselor-generated metaphors involve the use of metaphors to intentionally support the therapeutic process. The application of metaphors by counselors can occur through the reintroduction of metaphors first generated by clients but with changes to support therapeutic growth, or the sharing of new metaphors as a way to help clients recognize thoughts, feelings and behaviors, or understand and integrate new concepts and behaviors (Millikin & Johnson, 2000; Tay, 2012; Wickman et al., 1999). The metaphors may be short and involve a very clear target and source domain, or they can be as long and complex as stories. In addition, depending on a client's ability to understand and recognize metaphor and the purpose for which the metaphor is intended, the exploration of the metaphor may be brief or more involved (Millikin & Johnson, 2000; Tay, 2012; Wickman et al., 1999).

One specific type of introduced metaphor is the *disquisition*, a narrative form of metaphor (Millikin & Johnson, 2000). Disquisitions are stories that involve similar interactions and concerns as those of clients because they are developed or adopted specifically for the therapeutic needs of the client. These stories take many forms, including fictional stories of other clients in counseling and fairy tale-type stories, though the stories need to closely relate to the client's issue. The purpose of these stories is to normalize the client's experience, increase insight, deepen emotions and facilitate new perspectives (Millikin & Johnson, 2000). This is a very deliberate therapeutic usage of metaphor that generally requires a reservoir of stories to draw from for particular situations or the very adaptive and creative generation of appropriate stories.

Another approach is to use client-generated metaphors as a starting place for generating therapeutic, counselor-adapted metaphors. The appeal to this approach is the direct connection of client conceptualizations, represented within their metaphors, to new concepts through metaphoric imagery. With the introduction of this type of metaphor, it is often necessary to help clients reformulate relationships from the original metaphor to the new metaphor. This reformulation may be used in support of change that has occurred or as a tool to help clients generate new concepts and behaviors (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Tay, 2012; Wickman et al., 1999). As with disquisitions, this is also a very deliberate use of metaphor for specific therapeutic effect.

Metaphors and Contraindications

Before transitioning from approaches to using metaphors in counseling to the application of those approaches, it is important to briefly discuss whether metaphor-based approaches should be avoided with some types of clients or situations. A review of research produces no clear contraindications for using metaphors in client interventions, even with those experiencing psychotic disorders. In fact, a recent systematic review by Mould, Oades, and Crowe (2010) of 28 studies of clients with psychotic disorders found support for metaphors as a useful intervention with psychotic clients and describes metaphors as a tool for reorganizing clients' cognitive understanding in a way that is grounded in reality. In addition, though metaphors seem to present a challenge for some individuals with learning disabilities and autism, interventions to help them understand metaphors have been successfully introduced into counseling (Mashal & Kasirer, 2011). It would be advisable to use caution when introducing metaphors in counseling and to tailor metaphor work to clients' cognitive abilities and ability to evaluate reality, but with that said, there is no clear evidentiary reason precluding metaphor interventions across mental health diagnoses and therapies. In fact, metaphors are considered a ubiquitous and foundational aspect of cognitive and emotional processing and communication (Blasko, 1999; Evans, 2010; Steen et al., 2010; Tay, 2012).

Therapeutic Metaphors

To create a clearer sense of the use of metaphor in counseling, the three-part model of counseling described by Hill (2009) will be used. The model describes counseling as involving the self-explanatory stages of *exploration*, *insight* and *action*, with the recognition that these stages are not linear, the stages may overlap and not all stages will be incorporated in all counseling approaches. In the following sections corresponding to the three stages, there are descriptions of metaphor usage appropriate to the purpose of those stages.

Exploration

In counseling, the development of a therapeutic alliance is paramount (Baldwin, Wampold, & Imel, 2007; Del Re, Flückiger, Horvath, Symonds, & Wampold, 2012; Flückiger, Del Re, Wampold, Symonds, & Horvath, 2012). The generation of an effective therapeutic alliance is achieved by communicating to clients that they are safe, heard and understood and by establishing a shared purpose for counseling (Flückiger et al., 2012). One approach is through empathic reflection. With research and theoretical support for metaphors being used to communicate emotions (Crawford, 2009), the reflection and exploration of metaphors and emotions connected to metaphors is appropriate (Tay, 2012; Witztum, van der Hart, & Friedman, 1988). Understanding the client-generated metaphors in this step also may become useful later in the therapeutic process, as the metaphors can then be transformed and reintroduced to support positive changes.

In exploring client-generated metaphors, the counselor will want to be aware of the type of metaphor being used and how it relates to what the client is working to address. Particular attention should be paid to the complex and unconventional metaphors of clients, as those metaphors may be indicative of areas that are challenging, confusing or emotionally difficult for the client. If the counselor recognizes that the client may be seeking to better understand a concept for which the client provided a metaphor, the correspondence mapping approach to exploring the metaphor may be particularly useful. For clients who seem to be using metaphor to describe beliefs or rules, class inclusion may be the more appropriate approach (Tay, 2012).

The choice between class inclusion and correspondence mapping will be influenced by the content of the metaphor and client willingness to engage in the exploration. If the client is willing and able to explore the metaphor and it seems therapeutically appropriate to expand understanding related to the target domain, then the correspondence approach can facilitate that exploration. For example, if a client says about her partner, *he is a turtle hiding in his shell*, responses based on a correspondence approach could be *what makes a turtle go into its shell* and *what makes up your partner's shell*? Depending on the response to the questions, it may be possible to make more connections between the metaphor and specific aspects of the client's situation. One way to strengthen the use of this approach in counseling is to reflect back client-generated elaborations in a form that links elements of the metaphor with clients' emotions and concerns (Greenberg, 2010; Johnson, 2004; Kopp & Craw, 1998; Sims, 2003; Tay, 2012). The correspondence approach can be very helpful as a way to explore important aspects of the client's situation and challenges.

In a class inclusion approach, the process might look a little different. Rather than discussing specific elements of the imagery, the theme or message of the metaphor is the focus. Taking the same metaphor of the turtle, the message that she cannot reach her partner and believes he is avoiding her becomes the focus. Responses to this message might be: *you feel you can't reach him*; *how do you feel when you can't reach him*; and *what would it look like if he didn't hide in his shell*? This is an approach addressed to the primary message of the metaphor, but it moves away from the metaphor itself to

access other metaphors and understandings related to the message. The class inclusion approach allows for an exploration of core messages, emotional reactions and beliefs.

Insight

The insight stage of counseling involves expanding a client's awareness to recognize patterns, effects of thoughts, emotions, behaviors and possibilities. Unconventional metaphors, complex metaphors or metaphor clusters may occur more frequently during the insight stage as the client develops new awareness (Crawford, 2009; Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It also is important to note that during the experiencing of emotion, it is likely that there will be less metaphor usage than when clients are working to explain and integrate emotions (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012). The client-generated metaphors, particularly the unconventional and complex metaphors, in addition to indicating expanding perspectives, can be a tool for furthering clients' insights and integrating those insights in a way consistent with their counseling goals.

Working with metaphors in this stage expands on the metaphor work in the exploration stage by focusing on metaphors in relation to goals and patterns related to clients' situations (Tay, 2012). Reflections and questions are often helpful to use in response to clients' complex and unconventional metaphors, as reflections and questions may encourage the continued development of new awareness and incorporation of new awareness into different aspects of clients' lives (Hill, 2004; Kopp & Craw, 1998; Tay, 2012). In addition, clients can be encouraged to develop new insights by having the counselor ask the client to change the metaphor to how he or she would like it to appear and then exploring the new metaphor through class inclusion, correspondence mapping or both (Hill, 2004; Kopp & Craw, 1998). The changed metaphor can be used to deepen feelings, clarify goals and recognize patterns (Tay, 2012). To illustrate this process, a composite dialogue from a case example is provided.

> Client (Cl): *I'm caught in a whirlwind that's spinning my head in a circle.*
> Counselor (Co): *Say more about being caught in a whirlwind that's spinning your head in a circle.*
> Cl: *I just do not know what to do, the relationship still is not changing.*
> Co: *So you're afraid that the whirlwind will carry you away?*
> Cl: *Not exactly, more that I'll just stay right where I am.*
> Co: *The whirlwind blocks everyone else from getting to you.*
> Cl: *Yes, I'm all alone in it.*
> Co: *Could you describe how this metaphor might change if you didn't feel alone?*
> Cl: *Well, I guess I would be holding my partner's hand in the eye of the whirlwind where we are safe and together.*
> Co: *How does that feel?*
> Cl: *It feels really good.*
> Co: *You really want that connection, but right now you feel scared, alone and trapped in the cycle.*

In this example, a complex and unconventional metaphor, composed of two combined metaphors, that the client spontaneously introduced into the session became a tool to deepen and expand awareness concerning the challenges experienced in her current relationship. In the first part of the metaphor, the target domain is the client's current situation and the source domain is a whirlwind. In the second part of the metaphor, the target domain is the client's head and the source domain is spinning in a circle. In the example, the client was first asked questions following a class inclusion approach, which allowed for the identification of the important concepts with which the client is struggling—namely, feeling stuck in her current situation and alone in her relationship. Then, by asking the client to change the metaphor based on changing the feelings she identified as particularly concerning, a clearer awareness of her goal to be connected and feel safe with her partner was

identified. The utility of this approach is made clear in this example, and it is also important to emphasize that this approach, by changing the context of clients' descriptions from their everyday life to the imagined, may enable clients to provide descriptions that are outside what they currently view as possible. In the above example, it may have been difficult, given the client's current frustrations and challenges, to clearly describe what she wanted in her relationship, but in relation to the metaphor of the whirlwind, she could directly and simply state a transformation in the metaphor that spoke to her goal. The insight from this metaphor exploration provides a focus for future therapeutic counseling work.

Another way of promoting client insight is through counselor-generated metaphors. Disquisitions, as described above, are a narrative form of metaphor introduced by the counselor. The use of disquisitions may be particularly appropriate when there are fewer metaphors being used, perhaps indicating either active emotional experiencing or a lack of cognitive and emotional change, because the disquisitions can both highlight the need for change and direct the form it takes (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Millikin & Johnson, 2000). The way these metaphors are processed with clients depends on therapeutic needs. A composite case example of a class inclusion approach to a disquisition about relationship interactions in couples counseling follows. (It is important to note that in this example, male and female genders were assigned to match with the genders of the couple, but these genders can be changed to fit the situation.)

> Co: *This reminds me of a story. There once was a lonely skunk. He lived all alone in the forest and desperately wanted a friend. One day he came upon a solitary porcupine. The porcupine also was lonely and looking for a friend. The skunk started walking up to the porcupine softly grunting his hello. The porcupine backed away in terror, showing her teeth. The skunk thought this was a friendly greeting, so he kept approaching. The porcupine was backed against a rock and kept showing her teeth in warning. The skunk came close and just out of reach sat down, prepared to make a new friend. As soon as he sat, the porcupine shoved her way past, fleeing into the forest and leaving quills stuck in the skunk, who out of instinct sprayed the porcupine. The skunk was left lonely, confused and in pain, and the porcupine was terrified and alone, with her eyes burning in pain. Now why do you think I told this story?*
> Client 1 (Cl1): *Because we don't communicate well.*
> Client 2 (Cl2): *And because we hurt each other when we try to connect.*
> Co: *Yes, but that's not what either of you want. In fact, I suspect that just like in the story, you both want a close friend and partner.*
> Cl1 and Cl2: *Yes.*
> Co: *So, it sounds like the real problem for you two isn't that you both want something different. It's that, like the skunk and porcupine, the interaction between you and your interpretation of that interaction keeps you both from getting what you want—a loving, connected partner.*

The disquisition provides a powerful image that represents the interaction cycle of the couple. The message of the story is discussed, and through this discussion there is recognition and awareness of a problem in the relationship that has similarities with the story. However, to bring out the specifics of the relationship interaction cycle, it is necessary to go into more detail. To do that, the metaphor can be left at this point to focus on the specifics of how each partner contributes to the interaction cycle in the relationship, but another option is to take a correspondence approach and tie specific behaviors to specific parts of the story. There are several positive benefits of the correspondence approach. First, there is already agreement that the story is related to what is happening in their relation-ship, so it provides an agreed-upon story with which details can be linked. It also gives a strong image that can be used throughout counseling to reinforce awareness and contrast change. Finally, it can create a feeling of more safety because details of interactions that are uncomfortable to acknowledge can first be discussed based on the imagery (Romig & Gruenke, 1991). The correspondence approach can facilitate going into more

detail and emotion more quickly with resistant clients than would otherwise be possible, and through that more detailed exploration it can then be used to generate shared insight into patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviors that are problematic for the couple.

Action

The *action* stage is focused on behavioral change and is often based on what has been learned in the *exploration* and *insight* stages. It is likely that client-generated metaphors at this stage may become more simple and conventional, though their metaphors also are likely to be changed from those at the beginning of counseling. Metaphors are likely to become less common and take simpler forms at this stage, which may be an indication that the client is incorporating a new awareness of his or her situation (Crawford, 2009; Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012). At this point in the counseling process, metaphors may be useful for clarifying behavioral changes to be implemented and considerations for their implementation. As an aside, it is important to pay attention to the types of client metaphors at this point, and if the counselor observes unconventional metaphors and complex metaphors, it may be appropriate to work on exploration and insight rather than action. This is because unconventional and complex metaphors are more likely to occur when the client is struggling through emotional and cognitive change (Crawford, 2009; Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which would indicate that the client may not have developed the perspective necessary to implement changes.

In generating action plans, a helpful approach is to use metaphors to provide a different perspective related directly to the client's experience. If a client has been using a metaphor related to an issue that is the focus of behavioral planning, then asking the client what change they would make to the metaphor and then linking that change back to the client's life can generate new ideas. The following is a composite case example of that approach.

> Co: *You are saying that your goal is to not fight with your mother anymore. As we focus on how that might happen, I am reminded of the metaphor you gave earlier about the conflict with your mother. You said that your mother is smothering you. That she holds you so close that you can't breathe. Did I say that right?*
> Cl: *That's what it feels like.*
> Co: *Well I am wondering what would you change in that metaphor?*
> Cl: *I would have my mother not hold me so tight that I can't breathe.*
> Co: *So having a little more room to breathe would really change things.* (Client nods)
> Co: *I also notice that you are not saying that you want your mother far away from you or to ignore you; you just want her to give you a little more space.*
> Cl: *Yes.*
> Co: *So, what you are looking for is a way to not feel controlled by her and still feel connected to her.* (Client nods)
> Co: *How might you do that?*
> Cl: *Well I guess I could move out of the basement of her house.*

In the example above, it would have been possible to generate an action plan without using a metaphor, but it can be observed that the metaphor added a strong connection to the emotional experience of the client and helped to open the client to identifying a change that made sense based on his goal. The ability to generate a greater connection with clients through the use of clients' metaphors can empower clients to make changes directly connected to what is most affecting them. There also are times when clients have difficulty making changes because of fear, and in those situations, providing a path to identifying potential changes indirectly through metaphor can be very beneficial and can allow ideas to be discussed in a manner that may provoke less fear in the client.

Conclusion

Metaphors often seem simple, but they have a deeper conceptual role, and through observing metaphor usage in clients, actively exploring metaphors with clients and generating metaphors to address therapeutic goals for clients, metaphors can become a valuable tool in counseling. The above descriptions and examples provide some practical ways that understanding and using metaphors can positively impact counseling work. Client-generated metaphors provide a lens into the internal world of clients that combines their emotional reactions and experiences in an understandable manner and creates a bridge so clients' internal worlds can be shared with the counselor. Counselor-generated metaphors provide a tool to further guide and support clients in the pursuit of their goals. Through both client-generated and counselor-generated metaphors, the inner experience of clients can be more directly accessed and positive change can be facilitated. Therefore, the recognition and incorporation of metaphors can be an incredibly valuable tool for counselors. It is hoped that the information provided in this manuscript will serve as a foundation for incorporating metaphor awareness and usage into counseling practice and will stimulate counselors to seek out additional training and information and develop research on the application and effectiveness of using metaphors in counseling.

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