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Abstract

Metaphor use stands as a striking example of the creative drive of humans, with its ability to render understandable that which is highly convoluted, making it a natural partner and tool of the behavioral sciences. Touching briefly on the nature and efficiency of metaphor, I explore that tenacious and fertile connection vis a vis historic and current conceptualizations and contexts, and preparation for the counseling relationship.

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Introduction

As anyone knows who has attempted to master a foreign language, one must travel metaphorically to another land. Sentence structure may be alien; the language itself may sound on the one hand disjointed, or in contrast, a stream of contiguous, meaningless utterances; familiar idioms likely no longer work; and a sense of welcome may be evasive at best. It can take considerable time, effort, and frustration before becoming acclimated enough to be able at last to navigate with confidence and success.

The above scenario, while certainly not new in concept or content, depends on metaphor to convey essence and evocation. Indeed it would be practically impossible to impart more concisely both the meaning and sense of being linguistically lost *without* the help of metaphor and its ability to capture and express both literal and figurative truth. However, neither metaphor‟s value nor presence is limited to such everyday terms and discourse, but infuses virtually every aspect of thought and communication, including academic conceptualization and its surrounding discourse. Specifically, since the inception of the social and behavioral sciences, metaphor, unrivaled in expressive capacity, has served as integral but silent partner in the development of various models and concepts, mediating between abstraction and accessibility, density and directness, complexity and comprehension. The following is intended as a brief exploration of this quiet but crucial partnership and the key role the use of metaphor may have within the counseling environment.

To start, the formal study of metaphor is extensive, a considerable linguistic field unto itself, and well outside the scope or purpose of this discourse. Nonetheless, before entering said exploration, the concept of metaphor is worth discussing in broad terms from a couple of vantage points: what metaphor is fundamentally, and why it is so powerful.

Addressing the first issue, Fraser (1979) denotes metaphor as "an instance of the non-literal use of language in which the intended propositional content must be determined by the construction of an analogy" (1979, p. 176). More simply put, [T]he essence of metaphor is the use of one thing to represent another" (Barker, 1996, p. 11). For example, in hearing someone

described as a *raging bull*, the listener does not think that said person is actually bovine, but that his behavior is angry and threatening. So common is this type of imagery that we scarcely give it any thought. Human endeavor is steeped in metaphor to such an extent that it can be argued that we live by metaphors even, and cannot get through a day, or perhaps even a conversation, without constructing or using them (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Hayakawa (as cited in Embler, 1966) asserts that "in everyday speech, in social thought…the meaning is, more often than not, in the metaphor" (p. ix). He continues: "Metaphors are the principles of organization by means of which we sort our perceptions, make evaluations, and guide our purposes" (p. ix), and that metaphors "are the very stuff with which human beings make sense of their lives (p. i). "It is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh" (Aristotle, ca 330 BCE/1924). So fundamental are metaphors that "[T]he metaphors--spare like poetry-- embrace and express a large arc of human experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 198). Thus it is no surprise that metaphor, stemming from Greek and meaning "carrying from one place to another" (Cuddon, 1977, p. 383), is a long-established literary device as well, given its capacity to "open windows of unexpected insight into areas dense, distant, or ineffable" (Horton, 2002, p. 280).

How then does metaphor work?

One salient characteristic about metaphor construction is that it increases in times of high feelings (Siegelman, 1990) or when there are decisions to be made that may be difficult (Leary, 1990).

Metaphor flows from affect because it usually represents the need to articulate a pressing inner experience of oneself and of oneself"s internalized objects. It typically arises when feelings are high and when ordinary words do not seem strong enough or precise enough to convey the experience (Siegelman, 1990, p. 16).

What makes this yet more intriguing is that in so constructing metaphors, we engage both hemispheres of the brain (Cox and Theilgaard, 1987). This has the effect of metaphor"s serving as an internal, structural bridge between something understandable and something not so, in some cases between the linguistic and the non-linguistic (Horton and Andonian, 2005), even as we ourselves are trying to form a conceptual bridge between what is difficult to understand and what we can grasp. Significantly, it means that we almost literally bring more brain power to a problem or expression thereof through metaphor use, calling to mind the efficacy that Ortega appositely noted in the introductory quotation.

Metaphorical language offers the benefit of engaging the left and right side of the brain simultaneously, combining the linear and the figurative, the descriptive and the participative, the concrete and the abstract (Kegan, 1994, p. 260). In this way, metaphors serve to heighten cognitive functioning, which has obvious advantages when we are problem solving. Thus, when it comes to practical activity, metaphors can be signally effective (Leary, 1990).

Such boosted mental activity is necessary for forming and conveying ideas in a multitude of realms and situations. Here again the advantage of metaphor construction is evident, since "[C]ertain concepts are structured almost entirely metaphorically" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 85). This is certainly true in the social and behavioral sciences, where in attempting to create explanations for life events and contingencies that are highly complex and convoluted, we rely on available assistance such as metaphor to formulate, convey, understand, make sense of, and learn from them, even as we are well admonished to be aware of the danger in becoming trapped by a metaphoric conceptualization (Cox and Theilgaard, 1987). We mustn"t mistake the map for the territory.

All the same, the behavioral sciences abound in metaphor use, and have

from the beginning, whether describing concepts or models of development, working with families within a theoretical perspective, or counseling individuals in therapeutic situations. Psychology and developmental studies in particular depend heavily on metaphor to delineate ideas that are quite intricate.

Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientation, objects, etc.). This need leads to metaphorical definition of our conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 115).

Metaphor in Counseling Theory

The popularizer of the so-called talking cure, Freud (1960) was a prodigious producer of metaphor, with uses too numerous to cite, other than minimally. For instance, within just three pages he asserted that "the ego is the actual seat of anxiety" (p. 47), is "servant of three masters" (p. 46), and is a constitutional monarch. His and others" subsequent use of stages to describe developmental change is widespread; Erikson (1963), Jung (1933), and Piaget (1952) all spoke of stages as they developed and honed their particular approaches to developmental issues.

There are many other examples of the use of metaphors to describe concepts or models (*model* itself being metaphoric) and the processes of development. Some but not all are noted briefly below, broken into rough and perhaps arbitrary categories, and certainly neither in any hierarchical order nor claiming comprehensiveness, as there are doubtless others, with yet more to be conceived. In any case, these that follow evoke physicality, non-physical events or conditions, changes of many kinds, directional progress, and storytelling.

Among those that rely on physical structure for comprehension of mental representations are spirals (Kegan, 1982, 1994), pyramid (Maslow, 1968), scaffolding for learning (Vygotsky, 1934/1996), and plateaus (Kegan, 1982). Vygotsky"s work lends itself very well to such physicality. Both his concept of scaffolding in particular and his Zone of Proximal Development make sense presented this way, as does Maslow"s pyramid and Kegan"s spirals and plateaus, all of them bringing to mind things that are familiar, tangible.

Transitioning from the physical to the non-physical, we find tasks (Havighurst, 1952), crisis (Erikson, 1963), systems (Hockey and James, 1993; (Tennant and Pogson, 1995), and cognitive operations (Basseches, 1984; Piaget, 1952). Each of these imply a sense of order or threat thereto, the expectation being that the individual will face or accomplish something as part of her/his own development, or will develop within a prescribed organizational arrangement. Although non-physical, they are nonetheless recognizable as events that we all experience at some point or represent our attempts to understand them in the context of the surround in which these events take place.

Long a staple of explaining natural change, whether recurring or one of a kind, are such metaphors as cycles (Erikson, 1997), seasons (Levinson, 1978, 1996), transformation (Jung, 1933), and metamorphosis (Stein, 1998). We are familiar with the changing of the seasons, cyclical themselves, and sometimes extraordinary alterations of form that animals and insects go through, such as frogs and caterpillars respectively. We can sense some commonality if we ourselves have experienced surprising developments within our own lives or witnessed them, and it is natural to assert that others likewise have or will.

Yet another metaphoric approach employs the imagery of direction and progress. There is hardly anyone who has not traveled somewhere or another, hence the metaphors of journey (Sternberg and Spear-Swerling, 1998), paths or pathways (Lachman and James, 1997), passages

(Sheehy, 1974/1976), personal navigation (Sternberg and Spear-Swerling, 1998), and life course (Hockey and James, 1993). No matter how clichéd it may seem to say that "life is a journey," some developmental approaches nonetheless find richness in the resonant commonality of this way of expressing and understanding life"s process and the episodes one may take part in along the way.

Finally, and most recently, the power of the age-old human practice of story-telling has proven applicable as a new way of exploring personal development, as witnessed by the concepts of narrative therapy (White and Epston, 1991), of being in voice (Gilligan, 1982), of chronicling of one"s life story (Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 1999), and of personal myth (McAdams, 1993). All of these reveal the potent and integral nature of who we are vis a vis what we say and how we say it, with the telling (or the non-telling, for whatever reason) of our history being perhaps as important as the history itself.

Moving now from the arena of individual counseling or conceptualization, we enter the relatively new realm of family therapy. Family has been variously characterized in terms of system (Hoffman, 1981), which opens up into a world of system controls, family boundaries and subsystems, and so forth (Rosenblatt, 1994); narrative (White & Epston, 1991), with its emphasis on language, story, and metaphor; a system of meaning-making (Maturana & Varela, 1987) based on constructivist epistemology; and anthology (Horton & Andonian, 2005), the idea that a family is an aggregation of individual or collective stories and voices; to cite a very few. Even the term *therapy* itself is metaphor for the process of investigating and working through the sometimes labyrinthine interconnections between people comprising what is paradoxically the most basic of human groups, the family. Perhaps the very newness of the field accounts for the comparatively smaller metaphoric representation, but the two disciplines (psychology and family therapy)

do co-mingle to a certain extent.

Consciously aware or not of the breadth and depth of metaphor"s hold, therapists and counselors nonetheless use all manner of metaphor in their work. Such concepts as mirroring, projecting, ventilating, acting out, attachment, boundaries, transparency, splitting, ego, id, superego, drives, modeling behavior, feedback, defenses, and more far too numerous to cite (Yalom, 1995), are all themselves integral metaphors of the profession" complex environs; for an experienced professional it may difficult to imagine everyday counseling, including its language, without their presence or contribution.

As one can see in this brief overview and recognizable examples, there would appear to be a Will to Metaphor (Horton, 2002), so suffused with metaphor are these disciplines and applications therein, from the broadly conceptual to the idiosyncratic realm of the individual attempting to convey or better understand her/his reality or concerns. Speaking to the latter, metaphor has value in identifying and individual"s life themes (Horton, 2002), conspicuous clues being the key, root, or deep metaphors that "will often be metaphors for the whole person" (Siegelman, 1990, p. 67). Such awareness can be a valuable tool for practitioners and counselor educators. In any case, metaphors, whether used or suggested by the therapist, or client generated, have great value, for "[W]ithout metaphor we neither begin to think about nor experience our mundane thoughts, our humdrum emotions" (Hockey and James, 1993, p. 39).

One key, however, in all of this, is that the metaphors be recognizable not just to oneself, but to others. On a therapeutic level this means that the counselor must be open to the metaphors of the client, rather than imposing her/his own, regardless of how reasonable or applicable they seem from the outside or how successful one has been in the past with a certain metaphoric construct. To do otherwise can lead to distance, misunderstanding, or even

cessation, which is hardly the goal of an therapeutic environment or outcome. However, especially for someone new to the profession, this may not be so apparent, requiring that specific attention be paid to metaphor as part of counselor education.

There can be a profound misfit as the client strives to accept a counselor"s view/metaphor of things, perhaps in an effort to please, or to avoid being *resistant*. It may be, for instance, that what first appears to be resistance is simply a reflection of a clash in metaphor. The question is: whose metaphor holds sway? If understanding is the goal, then finding the client"s reality dictates the answer. "We can learn a great deal by studying our most metaphor-using clients in their most metaphorical moments" (Carlsen, 1996, p.340). Individuals create highly idiosyncratic metaphors that serve to connect the person (and presumably the listener) to what is important, bringing their intelligence to an issue creatively. Within one"s own culture, assuming broad enough commonality to bridge individual experiences, this is more likely to occur.

However, as we continue to receive and hopefully welcome those from *other* cultures into our own, it is as critical that we understand them as it is for them to understand us. For instance, in *The Tongue-tied American* (1980), Illinois Senator (then Congressman) Paul Simon cited many examples of international communication gone awry, where our American English imagery and metaphor simply did not translate. One brief vignette relates to an American businessman who attempted to market doormats in Japan, with no success at all, since the Japanese, accustomed to removing shoes when entering a home, take their shoes off, and thus have no need whatsoever for doormats as foot-wipers.

This example reinforces both the personally and culturally idiosyncratic nature of metaphor. To the Japanese, the metaphor of someone"s being *a doormat*, that is, trodden on, treated disdainfully and disrespectfully, does not apply, at least so

stated. What culturally analogous metaphor the Japanese use I do not know, but it stands to reason that unless it were to be a culturally universal metaphor, it could or would be lost on us or anyone outside that specific culture, just as our doormat metaphor would be lost on them. In a time noted for global awareness and interconnectedness and its implicit intercultural exchange, in treating an immigrant client, attending to metaphors can be critical.

However, we needn"t travel that far either linguistically or in miles to find that even within the English language, cultural differences may result in metaphorical chasms, England coming to mind readily. It has even been said that the English and Americans are separated by a common language. Sharing a common long-term history with the British and ostensibly speaking the same language is not enough to guarantee understanding. One example is the following. Most people in the United States are passingly familiar with the tale of Lady Godiva, who rode naked through town, assured that no one would look. One did, however: the famous Peeping Tom. His punishment for peeking was that he was *sent to Coventry*, where he was completely isolated and shunned. However, the metaphor, while well-known in England, is not at all stateside. There are many, many more examples illustrating easily that however common a metaphor may be in one culture or set of circumstances, it may be completely alien elsewhere, the same language base notwithstanding.

Where, then, does this leave us?

It is clear that humans everywhere have an uncanny knack and drive to use metaphor in all realms and will continue to do so. Even someone who adamantly argues against metaphor use must inevitably use metaphor in her/his selfsame argument, so interwoven is it into human endeavor, language, and thinking. It is also clear that metaphors

themselves are "not only innovative, imaginative forms of comparison and contrast, they are also conceptual windows into evolution and change" (Carlsen, 1996, p. 338). As such, they too must change as our thinking evolves, sensitive as they are to our meaning-making, creative problem-solving, growth, and personal experience. Witness the constellation of metaphors presented here, many of which have passed into disfavor or simply been supplanted by more urgent, current, and more powerfully resonant constructions, or may not translate across cultures.

It is further clear that there exists, alongside the manifest advantages of metaphor, some potential for miscommunication, especially as the world seemingly shrinks, wherein it is possible for someone who mere years ago would have been practically unreachable by most people, to now communicate instantaneously through electronic means, to travel to distant lands quite readily, and indeed to become our colleagues and students. Thus, we must not assume congruity, either culturally or linguistically.

This leads to a few questions.

Which metaphors do transfer culturally?

How sure can we be that our metaphors are understandable outside ourselves?

How certain can we be that we understand others' metaphors?

Is there a need, then, for the equivalent of an international clearing-house of metaphors?

Just how tolerant, embracing, or helpful can we be to those whose fundamental metaphoric constructions (and therefore life experiences and subsequent views) may be at great variance, considering our dominant Western perspective, and our dominant American one specifically?

And perhaps most importantly, how

beneficial can we be to others or the cause of finding grounds of connection implicit in an effective counseling relationship if we do not have a heightened awareness of fundamental cultural or *personal* conceptualizations that metaphors convey so felicitously?

In closing, there is an imperative, a power or magic, if you will, as Ortega notes, to metaphor, a sentiment echoed by Hayakawa, who asserts that "we do not use metaphors so much as our metaphors use us" (as cited in Embler, 1966, p. i). This paper has not attempted to furnish answers to the questions raised, so much as to alert or remind counseling educators regarding the pervasiveness and potency of metaphor, and to provide a background and framework from which to open a convivial colloquy around the fruitful creativity, certainty, and potential of metaphor, partner to the behavioral sciences, and one of humankind"s greatest gifts.

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