BEST PRACTICES FOR USING METAPHORS IN COUNSELING EFFECTIVELY

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

PARTICIPANTS WILL:

1. Identify metaphors, similes, and analogies and their use in communication

2. Explore how to use metaphors, similes, and analogies in counseling effectively

3. Describe specific metaphors, similes, and analogies to use in counseling sessions
WE’LL HAVE SOME TIME FOR QUESTIONS AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION.
Metaphors, similes, and analogies in communication and counseling

I’m walking on eggshells!

My life is going down hill very fast!
THE INITIAL CHALLENGE

TO DECIPHER

- REFLECT FEELING
- EMPATHIZE

**How are you feeling?**

"I AM UP AGAINST THE WALL"

I feel like I’m in a thick fog

My cup is empty!
FIGURES OF SPEECH

A creative way to understand the client’s world, feelings, situations, frame of reference, and experience.

Phenomenological Interpretation
COUNSELING IS “TALK THERAPY”

- People (our clients) use metaphors, similes, and analogies to:
  - Describe their situation
  - Conceptualize their life struggles
  - Express their emotions
  - Convey their perception of reality
  - Share their subjective perspectives
  - Try to make sense of their life

- “Metaphors help our minds find familiar patterns and build bridges between what is new and what is unknown by absorbing new ideas into already familiar concepts”
  
  (Killick, Curry, & Myles, 2016, p. 2).

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Metaphors        Similes

Analogy
Comparison of two things

Analogy
- Type of argument
- More complicated and lengthy
- Points out similarities between two things

Simile
- Uses words 'like' or 'as'
  Ex. He is as hungry as a horse.
- Comparison of two things
- Figure of speech
- Type of analogy

Metaphor
- Directly states the comparison
  Ex. Time is a thief.
- **ANALOGIES** = A is to B as C is to D
  - I’m as busy as a bee

- **METAPHORS** = A is B
  - My life is a roller-coaster

- **SIMILES** = A is like/as B
  - We fight like cats and dogs
  - They shall be as white as snow
Metaphors, Similes, and Analogies allow us into the client’s world.
AN EXAMPLE

• SPRING
  • Freshness, Hope, Anticipation

• SUMMER
  • Comfortable, Quiet, Enjoying life

• FALL
  • Uncertainty, Negligence, Fears

• WINTER
  • Discouraged, Separated, Dissatisfied
WHAT DO YOU HEAR FROM CLIENTS?

• I broke down
• I’m crushed
• I’m in the pit
• I’m trapped
• I’m hitting my head against a wall
• I’m running in circles
• My life is a roller-coaster
• My mother is like an octopus
• I’ve been crying like a baby lately
• I’m completely lost

What does the client mean?
Client-Generated
Metaphors, Similes, and Analogies

“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”

(Wagener, 2017, p. 153)

### Client-Generated Metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One’s image of self</td>
<td>I’m a teakettle about to explode!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s image of others</td>
<td>My husband’s a locomotive barging into the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between self and self</td>
<td>My life is a barren wasteland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s image of situations</td>
<td>I keep beating myself up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of self to another</td>
<td>Dealing with him, I’m trying to tame a wild lion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of self to a situation</td>
<td>I’m slowly sinking in quicksand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“provide a tool to further guide and support clients in the pursuit of their goals”

(Wagener, 2017, p. 153)
ACCEPTANCE COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)

- Passengers on the Bus

Cognitive Defusion
METAPHORS AND CBT

• ‘Black-and-white thinking’ and ‘mind-reading’

• Blinders and dark glasses
  • A metaphor to educate clients about depression

• Traffic lights
  • A metaphor for children

• The seeds of change
  • A metaphor to help clients contemplate the nature of change

Using metaphors, similes, and analogies in counseling effectively
Metaphors To Deal With Trauma

• Helps minimize anxiety-provoking feelings when clients are recounting the experience

• Helps clients reframe the traumatic experience by looking at it from a different angle

METAPHORS TO DEAL WITH TRAUMA

• Helps “[deactivate] the defenses without heightening the anxiety by allowing patients to defocus on the issue itself and focus in the metaphoric domain”

(Wirtztum, Van der Hart, & Friedman, 1988, p. 278)
EXAMPLE OF METAPHORS USED BY VETERANS TO DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH PTSD

• “PTSD in Control (Having Survived Trauma)”

• “Controlling PTSD (Surviving PTSD)”

• “Veteran in Control (Survivor’s Mission)”

EXAMPLE OF METAPHORS USED BY VETERANS TO DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH PTSD

• Describe the physiological effects of PTSD:
  • being easily “set off”, “suffocating”, being “on guard”, “hiding”, being in “combat mode”

• Describe the effects of PTSD on one’s disposition:
  • being a “Tazmanian Devil”, being overly “mission oriented”, being a “zombie”

• Overly identifying with the warrior:
  • relying on “Colonel” persona and being a “Spartan Warrior”

• Describe PTSD itself:
  • [PTSD] “tears away” and “breaks down”, PTSD as a “load”, PTSD as “baggage”, PTSD as a “battle”

A Marriage is like a lawn.

Yes!

But, what if the lawn is dead?
COUNTRY/CULTURE-BASED METAPHORS

What if the lawn is dead?
WORKING WITH A METAPHOR IN COUNSELING

• When clients kill the analogy/metaphor
  • Counselor can expand/explore
    • “what makes you think it’s dead?”

• Assessment
  • Let’s you know what the person feels, thinks about the situation
    • Client: “I’m stuck in the mud”
    • Counselor “what happened?” “How did you get stuck?”
    “How do you feel being stuck?”

• Counselor can provide hope
  • E.g., Landscaping companies revive dead lawns
EXPLORING A METAPHOR IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

• What is it like to be in the hole?
  • “dark” “lonely” “scary” “depressing” “helpless” [Assessment]

• How do you feel in the hole?
  • “Trapped” “stuck” “alone” “forgotten” [Assessment]

• What have you tried to do to get out of the hole?
  • “drinking” “getting into relationships” [self-medication]

• How did your attempts help you?
  • “they made me hurt even more” [not effective]

• What would your next option or attempt be?
  • “I am here . . .” [last resort]

Take a look at this source:
Potential Challenges in Using Metaphors in Multicultural Counseling

- Cultural Themes
- Cultural Differences
- Sometimes Language Differences
- Culture-specific Metaphors
- Acculturation
- Make Meaning

Potential Strategies When Using Metaphors in Multicultural Counseling

- Universal Themes
- Cultural Humility
- For Christians: Religious Metaphors
- Religious Coping
- Universal Metaphors
- Psychoeducation

COUNTRY/CULTURE-BASED METAPHORS
UNIVERSAL METAPHORS

Wounds and Scars

“ In many cases, a healed wound may leave a scar as a reminder that successful healing has taken place. Although the scar may be ugly, annoying, a topic of conversation or not as favorable as regular tissue, it is still an image of success signifying that a wound has healed.”

PETER D. LADD

A FEW CHRISTIAN METAPHORS, SIMILES, ANALOGIES POPULAR IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Broken Heart

The Lord is my Shepherd

The Writing is on the Wall

The blind leading the blind

Scapegoat
AN EXAMPLE FOR USING METAPHORS WITH RELIGIOUS/CHRISTIAN CLIENTS

“Counselees who have been abused as children may, for example, have erroneous perceptions of God (Gingrich, 2013). Counselors may find that God is viewed as unsafe, particularly if the counselee’s abuse was at the hands of his or her father. Therefore, introducing the metaphor of God as father can potentially tease out an underlying belief that no one is safe, particularly father figures. The counselee’s assumption may fit better with a metaphor of God as judge. Changing the metaphor to Jesus the Good Shepherd may help the counselee’s perception to shift to a more accurate, realistic one.”

(Sbanotto, Gingrich, Gingrich, 2016, p. 197)
USING METAPHORS TO HELP STRENGTHEN A RELIGIOUS/CHRISTIAN CLIENT SELF-IDENTITY

• I am a child of God – 1 John 3:1
• I am a new creation – 2 Cor. 5:17
• I am God’s masterpiece – Eph. 2:10
• I am more than a conqueror – Rom. 8:37
• Explore how client’s self-concept
• Help client replace negative self-concept with new identity

Moitinho & Moitinho, Best Practices for Using Metaphors in Multicultural Counseling Effectively, AACC World Conference 2019
Thank you

Q&A
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