

A blue wireframe globe is centered in the background, composed of a network of interconnected nodes and lines, creating a mesh-like structure. The globe is set against a solid black background.

# Metaphor in PIT

PIT-UK

# What is metaphor?

Metaphor means “to carry across” and has the same linguistic roots as “transference”



It is not specific to PIT, but it has a central place here as it links with

*How we say things*  
(tentative, open-ended, staying with, focus on feelings, exploratory, based on cues)

*Why we say things* (to develop a common-feeling language, to enhance “symbolical transformation”)

*What we say* (living or moving language, to encourage the core self, to stay with the moment, and to develop a narrative within and across sessions)

Metaphor and  
living symbols  
See  
Psychodynamic  
Interpersonal  
Therapy 2017  
pp72-3

Metaphor in literature means the fusing of two images or ideas to bring new order and meaning

In a conversation it

- Brings vividness to an idea
- Expands shared understanding
- Deepens the level of emotional interchange

The emphasis is not on what a metaphor or symbol means but in promoting a “*symbolical attitude*”

Symbolical  
attitude  
See Forms  
of Feeling  
1985, p199

- Symbolical attitude:
  - “This means endowing words, gestures, experiences, and dreams with value; regarding them not only as communications of formulated messages but also as living symbols. They are intimations of, and a means of apprehending, what is as yet unknown”
    - In the examples (coiled spring, tighter and tighter & caught in a trap like an animal) the therapist picks up and extends the metaphor initially voiced by the client. There is a movement, a carrying forward.
    - In the first “on edge” is linked to an interpersonal dynamic, and the second elaborates and brings to the fore the feeling of being trapped

# How do we assess our use of metaphor? Rating 1

See PIT (Barkham et al. 2017)

p 164-5

In the rating manual part of the book:

- Metaphor (living symbols)
  - Did the therapist encourage and elaborate the client's use of metaphor?
  - "This item is designed to measure the extent to which the therapist deliberately aims to convey and promote a symbolical attitude. This means endowing words, gestures, dreams, etc with value- regarding them not only as communications of formulated messages but also as living symbols.

## Rating 2

The therapist rated highly on this item encourages the client to use metaphoric communication, and elaborates or builds upon metaphors introduced by the client, in order to make greater integration of the client's experience, and to heighten or intensify the client's experiencing and expression of feelings.

However, the rater should be alert to possible use of metaphor as an *adornment* rather than as direct and vivid communication. There should be some instances of this item in a session of PI therapy

## Rating 3

- In this example the therapist would score above 1 by use of figurative language, however, it is not based on the client's material in the session, and so the rating would not be above 2
  - C: There's so much to do at work that I often feel I cannot carry on
  - T: You sound to me like Samson or Charles Atlas bearing the world on your shoulders

## Rating 4

- The following examples would secure a moderate to high rating as the therapist promotes the client's use of metaphor, teasing out and elaborating the metaphoric content of which the client is scarcely aware
  - C: It seems such a heavy burden when I am the one who always has to take responsibility for things.
  - T: The weight of that burden feels really overwhelming...maybe to the point where you feel crushed by it
  - C: I find it very difficult to do my job. There is very little guidance laid down. I'm all at sea with the work, especially at this time of year
  - T: No guidance, all at sea. It feels like there's no-one to steer you, and you're at the mercy of the waves, buffeted around by the waves, by things you can't control
  - C: I don't really feel anything inside... Just empty
  - T: Empty... A void... That's a powerful image
  - C: I do feel a chasm I suppose, opening up between me and everything or everyone around me
  - T: A great vastness of the distance between you ...

# Problems with using metaphor

- The main difficulties can be understood in terms of “The Persecutory Therapist” (Meares & Hobson, 1977): Intrusion, derogation, invalidation of experience:
  - The therapist may push his or her own metaphors
  - May appear “all knowing”
  - May subtly choose metaphors that put the other down or demonstrate superiority
  - May fall on the wrong side of either cultural dominance or cultural appropriation

## Negotiation and shared meaning

- Example from Meares, 2000, “Intimacy and Alienation” *Olivia* case example
  - “T: Did you feel almost like a nothing?”
  - C: No, not a nothing. Just someone who didn’t count. You couldn’t give much weight to anything I said
  - T: You would almost be a ghost, wouldn’t you, hovering around without any substance to you
  - C: I guess that’s what it is. With people who know me I am worthless”

Bob Hobson  
interview with Mrs  
Jones See Meares  
2000 Intimacy and  
Alienation pp 126-  
7

Mrs Jones had been ill for 3 years – vertigo and panic attacks

Conversation dominated by bodily complaints

Bob focuses on “dizziness”

Association with fear of falling

Developing a *moving metaphor* by detailed elaboration – left sided nature of symptoms etc

Gradually she becomes free of the stimulus entrapment and increases vitality in the session

Transformation  
of language  
across sessions

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The “chronicle”

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Resonance and complexity

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Implicit metaphor

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Narrative

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Explicit metaphor