Working with Client-Generated Metaphors in Art Therapy

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Abstract

This paper examines the power of intentionally attending to and working with client-generated metaphors in art therapy and explores interventions and techniques art therapists can use for this purpose. A case is made for the central role metaphor plays in human cognition, experience, and meaning-making and the powerful influence metaphor has on human reasoning, and behavior, both on an individual and collective level. Metaphor is discussed from a variety of frameworks, including: historical and cultural; conceptual metaphor theory (CMT); Individual Psychology; art therapy; the expressive therapies continuum (ETC); and Adlerian art therapy. Literature/research on the therapeutic benefits of metaphor is summarized and the unique benefits of working with client-generated metaphors—along with the therapist’s role in this process—are explored. Finally, sources for metaphor and types of interventions are reviewed. Examples of individual interventions and techniques are provided. Considerations for working with client-generated metaphors are examined along with areas for further discussion and study.
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Working with Client-Generated Metaphors in Art Therapy

Metaphor is central to human thought, experience, and meaning-making and has been important to human beings across time and cultures. The important role metaphor plays in human cognition has been increasingly recognized, researched, and documented over the last several decades. Despite the central role metaphor plays in the practice of art therapy, there appears to be a gap in the literature on the use of metaphors in art therapy. This paper is an attempt to partially address this gap. The paper begins by placing metaphor in a historical and cultural context, followed by a discussion on current theory and research regarding the centrality of metaphor to human cognition and ways in which metaphor powerfully influences our ways of looking at and experiencing the world. This is followed by a brief discussion on the use of metaphor within healing practices in general and counseling/therapy in particular, with a special focus on Individual Psychology. Following this is an in-depth look at metaphor within art therapy theory and practice, a discussion on the therapeutic benefits of metaphor, and a review of current clinical research on the topic. Client-generated metaphors are then specifically discussed, including advantages of and frameworks for working with client-generated metaphors. The final section looks at a variety of interventions and techniques art therapists can use when attending to and working with client-generated metaphors. The paper concludes with considerations for working with metaphor in art therapy and a discussion on areas for future discussion and exploration.

The Power of Metaphor

Although metaphor is sometimes narrowly viewed as a component of language—particularly figurative language—in actuality, metaphor encompasses something much broader and more fundamental to human thought and experience (Faranda, 2014; Killick, Curry, & Myles, 2016; Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Moon, 2007; Thomley, 2016; Wickman,
Daniels, White, & Fesmire, 1999). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) defined metaphor in its most basic sense as the process of “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” [emphasis original] (p. 5). Metaphors involve not only words, but also concepts, images, sensations, stories, movement, and more (Chesley, Gillett, & Wagner, 2008; Faranda, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mehl-Madrona, 2015; Moon, 2007; Thomley, 2016). The root of the word metaphor can be traced back to the Greek meta meaning above or beyond plus phorein meaning to carry or bear (Kopp, 1998; Moon, 2007). Moon (2007) pointed out that phorein comes from “the same root as amphora, an ancient Greek vessel for carrying and storing precious liquids” (p. 3) and argued that metaphors are like vessels that carry information hidden in symbolic form. Similarly, Mehl-Madrona (2015) noted that the luggage conveyer belts in the Athens Airport are called metaphorae. He argued that, like conveyer belts, metaphors allow us to more easily carry concepts from one place to another. According to Lawley and Thompkins (2013), “metaphor is a fundamental means of making sense of life” (p. 23).

**Historical and Cultural Influence**

Metaphor has been important to human beings throughout history and across cultures. Metaphors have been and continue to be vital to human communication and meaning-making in the form of language, stories, parables, proverbs, and myths extending back through history to the present (Kopp, 1995; Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau, Meier, & Keefer, 2010; Moon, 2007). Metaphors are also reflected within a culture’s language, art forms, rituals, religions, healing practices, and symbols (Faranda, 2014; Kirmayer, 2004; Kopp, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau et al., 2010; Mehl-Madrona, 2015; Moon, 2007; Pincus & Sheikh, 2010).

**Western Philosophical Thought**

For much of the history of modern Western philosophical thought, metaphor has been conceptualized primarily as a linguistic device, sometimes praised, sometimes denounced, and
sometimes dismissed (Angus & Rennie, 1988; Kozak, 1992; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau et al., 2010). There are, however, several notable exceptions. Nietzsche, a German philosopher, took a wider view of metaphor arguing that it is not possible to apprehend truth directly and that instead it must be understood indirectly through more concrete experiences (Landau et al., 2010, p. 1046). Vahinger, a German philosopher, stated (as cited in Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956):

> All cognition is the apperception of one thing through another. In understanding, we are always dealing with an analogy and we cannot imagine how otherwise existence can be understood. Anyone acquainted with the mechanism of thought knows that all conception and cognition are based upon analogical expressions. (p. 79)

Additionally, having noted that metaphors appear prominently within the languages, art forms, and rituals of disparate cultures, several 20th-century philosophers converged around the idea that metaphor is a central element of human cognition regularly used to understand and communicate more elusive or abstract concepts (Landau et al., 2010, p. 1046).

**Culture**

Metaphor and culture have a reciprocal relationship in which culture shapes metaphor and metaphor shapes culture (Finlay, 2015). According to Dwairy (1997):

> Cultural metaphors reflect the conscious and unconscious collective experience of people through their sociocultural history. They also contain their collective wisdom, ways of thinking, values, and world view. They are revealed in everyday language, symbols, proverbs, and myths. (p. 276)

> Culture molds the systems of conceptual metaphors adopted by a people and, in turn, metaphor become encoded within the culture and reflects underlying cultural models, knowledge, and beliefs (Ahammed, 2010; Kopp, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Segrave, 2000; Yu, 2003). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide an example using the underlying conceptual
metaphorical system TIME IS MONEY that is common to many Western cultures. This metaphorical system is reflected in linguistic phrases such as “That flat tire cost me an hour”, “You’re wasting my time”, and “How do you spend your time these days?” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 7–8). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), these are not just isolated phrases, but are reflective of an underlying cultural view of time that influences our worldview, norms, and behaviors.

Linguistic and anthropological analyses have indicated both similarities and differences in metaphor systems across cultures (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Landau et al., 2010; Thomley, 2016; Yu, 2003). Some metaphorical concepts appear to be common across many cultures. For example, Landeau et al. (2010) suggested that people across many different cultural and historical contexts refer to the experience of knowing or understanding in terms of vision, saying for example, “I had blinders on but now I see the big picture” (p. 19). Other metaphorical concepts are more culture-specific. For instance, Yu (2003) described how the Chinese understanding of courage is partially understood through two culturally-specific conceptual metaphors: (a) the gallbladder is a container of courage, and (b) courage is qi in the gallbladder. Yu (2003) identified the roots of these conceptual metaphors in traditional Chinese medicine and argued that a shared understanding of the connection between gallbladder and courage is reflected within Chinese language and plays an important role in Chinese culture. In some cases, there is an overarching metaphorical concept that is similar across many cultures, but the specific elements of the metaphor vary from culture to culture. For example, Thomley (2016) discussed how the metaphor of an angry person as a pressurized container is common across many cultures, however, the metaphor manifests in culturally-specific ways from culture to culture. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) discussed how metaphors that involve spatial orientations—up/down, in/out, central/peripheral—seem to be present across most cultures. For example, time is often
conceptualized and communicated using spatial metaphors in many cultures (Casasanto, 2014). However, which concepts are orientated in which direction and which orientations are foremost differ from culture to culture (Casasanto, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

**Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

For over thirty years, researchers in the field of cognitive science have been generating theories and evidence regarding a conceptual view of metaphor (Lakoff, 2014; Thomley, 2016; Törneke, 2017). In their landmark text *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) used linguistic evidence to highlight the pervasiveness of metaphor in our everyday thought processes and argued that metaphor plays a foundational role in human cognition and understanding (Faranda, 2014; Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Thomley, 2016; Wickman et al., 1999). Lakoff and Johnson’s ideas became the basis for what is now known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) which has since become widely influential within the field of cognitive linguistics and beyond (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Törneke, 2017). The assertion that humans think metaphorically is supported by significant linguistic and behavioral evidence (Casasanto, 2014; Lakoff, 2014; Landau et al., 2010; Törneke, 2017). Although providing an in-depth overview of CMT is beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary to briefly explain several key aspects of CMT because a conceptual view of metaphor will be utilized throughout this paper and a metaphorical thought structure has strong implications for the use of metaphor in art therapy.

**Source and Target**

According Lakoff and Johnson (1980), “Metaphors allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (p. 117). According to CMT, when we use metaphor, we take our knowledge of something known, concrete, or embodied—called a source concept—and map it onto something unknown, vague or abstract—called a target concept (Killick et al., 2016;
Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau et al., 2010; Thomley, 2016; Wickman et al., 1999). “We are taking something we know, often something we have felt in our bodies, and applying it to something distant, unfamiliar, or abstract” (Faranda, 2014, p. 67). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained that many concepts important to human beings such as time, emotions, or ideas, are either abstract or not clearly defined by our experience. Therefore, we get a grasp on them by applying our understanding of other concepts we understand in clearer terms such as spatial orientations, our body, or the physical environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, a couple that describes their relationship by saying “we’re just spinning our wheels” or “we’re not going anywhere” is using the common conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wickman et al., 1999). They are taking their knowledge and experience of journeys and stuck vehicles (source concept) and applying it to their relationship (target concept) to better understand and communicate their situation (Wickman et al., 1999).

**Conventional and Unconventional Metaphors**

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) made a distinction between what they called conventional and unconventional metaphors. Conventional metaphors are those that “structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture” and are “reflected in our everyday language” (Lakoff, 2014, p. 139). Because conventional metaphors are so deeply embedded in the way we think and speak, this type of metaphor often goes unnoticed despite its pervasive use (Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016). Conventional embedded metaphors like “I feel down”, “I’m stuck in this job”, “She’s way ahead of me in school” may not register as metaphors with either the speaker or the listener. Prior to CMT, conventional metaphors were believed to have become so common that they had lost their metaphorical function altogether. However, scholars of CMT challenged this view, asserting that conventional embedded metaphors strongly influence human thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Törneke, 2017).
Unconventional metaphors, on the other hand, stand out because of their novelty and are therefore more easily recognized as metaphors (Thomley, 2016). Unconventional or novel metaphors are able to draw attention to features of a target concept that are not normally highlighted (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016). They may extend, elaborate, and combine the boundaries of everyday metaphors in ways that are new, creative, or unexpected (Yu, 2013). For these reasons, novel metaphors play a crucial role in imagination and the creation of new meaning (Yu, 2013).

**Experiential and Embodied**

In CMT, metaphors are viewed as arising out of people’s interactions and experiences with their physical and social environments, both on a personal and cultural level (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Landau et al., 2010). They are also viewed as being grounded in the body, or *embodied* (Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016; Yu, 2013). According to Lakoff (2014), “embodiment is what makes concepts meaningful, linking what is going on in our brains to our understanding of the real world. Abstract concepts don’t just float in the air, they have to be given embodied meaning somehow” (p. 9). Many other authors have discussed the important relationship between metaphor and the body (Epp, 2016; Faranda, 2014; Finlay, 2015; Halprin, 2002; Kirmayer, 2004; Kozak, 1992; Mehl-Madrona, 2015; Thomley, 2016). In addition, Faranda (2014) pointed out that much recent scholarship on metaphor carries an implied emphasis on importance of the body.

**Highlighting and Hiding**

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested that “metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness” (p. 193). Metaphors only ever partially structure a concept because, if they were to totally structure a concept, they would actually *be* the
metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, metaphors always end up highlighting certain aspects of a concept and downplaying or hiding other aspects (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016). For instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified several different metaphor systems used to structure the concept of love, each one emphasizing and masking different aspects of the love experience. The conceptual metaphor LOVE IS MADNESS, for example—exemplified in expressions such as “I’m crazy about him”—emphasizes a lack of control and downplays choice and maintenance as a component of love (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016). On the other hand, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY—exemplified in phrases such as “this relationship isn’t going anywhere”—evokes other aspects of the love experience such as commitment, obstacles, and problem-solving (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By using a particular metaphor to better understand a target concept, we inevitably end up focusing on aspects of the target concept that are consistent with the metaphor while overlooking aspects that are inconsistent with the metaphor. Because different metaphors end up highlighting and hiding different aspects of our experience, the metaphors we use exert a powerful influence over how we see and understand the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thomley, 2016).

Consequences of Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) asserted that everyone lives their lives on the basis of inferences they derive by way of metaphor. People use their understanding of a source concept to reason and draw inferences about a target concept (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Wickman et al., 1999) and because everyone reasons in terms of metaphor, the metaphors we use—both individually and collectively—greatly influence how we live our lives. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that many everyday activities such as arguing, problem solving, and budgeting time, are metaphorical in nature and that the metaphors used to characterize these activities frame our current reality. Furthermore, because metaphors are so deeply embedded in our
cultural and conceptual systems, we are often unaware how these metaphorical frameworks are influencing us (Killick et al., 2016). In this way, metaphors impact our perceptions and decisions in ways that are not always readily apparent (Killick et al., 2016). According to Lakoff (2014):

In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor. (p. 158)

The inferences and actions drawn from certain metaphors have wide ranging consequences. Segrave (2000) discussed the prominence of sports metaphors in U.S. American cultural discourse—particularly discourse related to warfare, politics, business, and sexual relations—and provided numerous examples of how such metaphors have influenced military and public policy decisions. Malm (2016) discussed the long history of military metaphors within biomedical discourse and argued, along with Halperin (2017), that the common use of military metaphors in the explanation, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer, influences the decisions a patient makes about their treatment as well as a doctor’s recommendations.

Thiboudeau and Boroditsky (2011, 2013, 2015) conducted several studies in which they found that metaphorically framing crime as either a beast or a virus influenced the types of policy decisions people were willing to support. When crime was framed as a beast, people were more likely to support enforcement-related policy decisions. Conversely, when crime was framed as a virus, people were more likely to support prevention- and reform-oriented solutions (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, 2013, 2015).

**Verbal and Nonverbal/Metaverbal Metaphors**

According to CMT, the locus of metaphor is not in language itself but in the process of conceptualizing one thing in terms of another (Kozak, 1992; Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson,
Metaphors manifest themselves not only in verbal but in nonverbal realms such as image, movement, play, and ritual (Chesley et al., 2008; Halprin, 2002; Moon, 2007). Proponents of CMT have long emphasized the need for an understanding of metaphor that goes beyond verbal language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). Additionally, there are many outside the field of cognitive linguistics who have also argued for the need to recognize nonverbal forms of metaphor. Many of these advocates, perhaps not surprisingly, come from the expressive arts therapies. Moon (2007, 2017) has described art therapy as a *metaverbal* therapy, a treatment modality that transcends words. He discussed four types of metaverbal metaphors he utilizes in the art therapy process: visual, aural, kinetic, and milieu metaphors (Moon, 2007). Graves-Alcorn and Kagin (2017) and Thomley (2016) discussed the metaphoric properties of art media. From the perspective of movement-based expressive arts therapy, Halprin (2002) explored the concept of movement as metaphor and Novy, Ward, Thomas, Bulmer, and Gauthier (2005) discussed the metaphoric use of movement and prop within a process for integrating drama therapy and narrative therapy. Chesley et al. (2008) and Kottman (2011) discussed the centrality of nonverbal metaphors within the play therapy context. What follows is a description of the prominent role that both verbal and nonverbal metaphor play in a wide variety of healing systems and practices.

**Metaphor and Healing Practices**

Metaphor has been an important component of healing systems and practices across time and cultures (Ahammed, 2010; Coulehan, 2003; Hinton & Kirmayer, 2017; Kirmayer, 2004, 2011; Mehl-Madrona, 2015). In fact, Kirmayer (2004) has argued that metaphor plays a central role in *all* systems of medicine. According to Kirmayer (2004):

The great diversity of systems of medicine is reflected in a comparable diversity of models and metaphors for healing…Healing involves a basic logic of transformation
from sickness to wellness that is enacted through culturally salient metaphorical actions.

(p. 34)

Ahammed (2010) observed that the use of metaphor “as a teaching tool and as an aide in the healing process extends back to thousands of years, as can be seen extensively in religious teachings such as those found in the Bible, Qur’an, Zen Koans, Dhammapada and so on” (p. 248). Metaphor plays an important role in the traditional healing practices of many cultures in the form of ritual, stories, imagery, and symbolic actions (Hinton & Kirmayer, 2017; Kirmayer, 2004; Mehl-Madrona, 1997, 2015). Although less recognized, metaphor also plays an important role in the Western biomedical model and practices (Coulehan, 2003). Hanne (2015) noted that metaphor figures prominently within discourse around health, illness, and medicine and pointed out that systems of medicine from different cultures are grounded in different sets of fundamental metaphors. For example, the Western biomedical model is organized around systems of metaphors such as the body as machine, the body as battle site, and the body as communication system. On the other hand, traditional Chinese medicine utilizes metaphors such as flow and blockage, balance and imbalance, and the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water (Hanne, 2015).

**Metaphor in Verbal Counseling and Psychotherapy**

The practice of psychotherapy was born out of the field of psychology. Psychology means the study of the soul, deriving from the Greek word psyche, meaning the soul, mind, and spirit. Thus, the therapeutic process can be viewed as going on an exploratory or metaphorical journey of the soul, mind, and spirit with another. The usefulness of metaphor in the therapy process has been widely discussed within verbal counseling and psychotherapy literature (Genuchi, Hopper, & Morrison, 2017; Killick et al., 2016; Törneke, 2017). This is true across a broad range of theoretical orientations including, but not limited to: Adlerian therapy (Kopp,

On the broadest level, metaphor is used within counseling and psychotherapy to frame or conceptualize specific theories or views of the therapy process itself. For example, Legowski and Brownlee (2001) noted that, within narrative therapy, the narrative itself is an implicit metaphor through which the therapist filters and conceptualizes the client’s experiences which and therefore “shapes the form of the therapy, determining the questions that can be asked as well as the ones that will not be asked” (p. 21). In fact, Kopp (1995) maintained that all psychotherapy theories are metathoric structures of reality.

Metaphors also emerge as part of the verbal communication that occurs within therapy (Finlay, 2015; Kopp, 1995; McGuinty et al., 2014). Clients regularly use metaphors as a primary medium for expressing emotionally charged content and subjective meaning (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Kopp, 1995). Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) asserted that, for clients who are grieving, “an accurate description of grief makes the loss adaptation process more manageable” (p. 107) and that, for many clients, “saying ‘I feel like I have been put through the ringer’ may be more descriptive than saying, ‘I feel overwhelmed and exhausted’” (p. 197). Therapists regularly use metaphors to communicate ideas, explain concepts, and reflect
understanding of the client’s experience (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Killick et al., 2016; Kottman, 2011).

Metaphor is also commonly used as a part of therapeutic interventions (Killick et al., 2016, p. 1). Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) conducted a content analysis of 100 articles published between 1989 and 2015 from professional journals that focused the use of metaphor as a counseling intervention. They found that fourteen theoretical orientations were represented in their findings with the highest percentage of articles discussing metaphor’s use within narrative therapy and marriage and family therapy (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016). Different theoretical approaches use different types of metaphoric interventions. For example, psychoanalytic and Jungian therapists focus on the interpretation of metaphors as a way to access the unconscious (Kopp, 1995; Kozak, 1992); Ericksonian therapists incorporate metaphoric stories (Combs & Freedman, 1990; Kozak, 1992); cognitive behavioral therapists regularly utilize metaphors as educational tools (Abbatiello, 2006); narrative therapists use metaphors in the externalizing process (Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; McGuinty et al., 2014); and Adlerian therapists use metaphors to help clients explore the roots of their beliefs, motivations and behavior.

**Individual Psychology**

Individual Psychology (also called Adlerian Psychology) is a system of psychology developed by Alfred Adler, an Austrian physician and psychotherapist, in the early part of the 20th century and further developed by scholars and practitioners since that time (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). The name Individual Psychology is somewhat misleading in English due to difficulties translating the original German *Individualpsychologie* (Griffith & Powers, 2007). While the English translation seems to suggest the psychological study of individuals in isolation from their social context, the original German tem connotes *indivisibility*, specifically the *indivisibility* (or wholeness and unity) of a person who is *indisvisibly* embedded within a social
and historical context (Griffith & Powers, 2007). In fact, the social embeddedness of the individual is an important component of Adlerian theory (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Griffith & Powers, 2007; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999; Oberst & Stewart, 2003).

Like all theories of psychology, many concepts within Adlerian Psychology are illustrated through use of metaphor. For example, the conceptualization of the individual as both picture and artist (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) is a metaphor. The concept of movement (Griffith & Powers, 2007), described more fully below, is also a metaphor. Mueller (2015) provided an in-depth discussion of metaphor in relation to Adlerian psychology and emphasized that metaphor is highly congruent with the Adlerian psychology’s phenomenological approach. Slavik (1999) argued that the concepts that make up Individual Psychology can be viewed as a network of logically-related metaphors, concepts the therapist treats as if they were true in order to facilitate the therapeutic process. Other authors have explored the relationship between metaphor and key Adlerian concepts such as lifestyle and private logic, our goal directed behavior, early recollections (ERs), and community feeling.

Life Style and Private Logic

In Adlerian psychology, life style (lebenstil) has a different meaning than what is typically meant by the word lifestyle in English (Griffith & Powers, 2007; Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Rather than referring to a particular way of life, the Adlerian concept of life style (sometimes called style of living) refers to a person’s style of dealing with life (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2005). The life style is a person’s characteristic pattern of perceiving, thinking, and acting as they move through the world attempting to find a sense of belonging or completion (Carlson et al., 2005; Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Mosak and Maniaci (1999) described life style as “the subjective unarticulated set of guidelines individuals develop and use to move them through life and toward their goals” (p. 47). These guidelines include both characteristic ways of
acting within social contexts as well as basic beliefs about self, others, and the world (Griffith & Powers, 2007). Life style “develops…through interactions children have with their significant others, peers, and social world; through their experience of culture and community; through their biological growth and dysfunction; and, perhaps most significantly, through their perceptions and choices” (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999, p. 47). Our life style develops in a social context as we try to figure out how to belong, fit in, and find our place (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Adler also emphasized the role that creativity and subjectivity play in the development of life style (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). One premise of Adlerian psychology is that the beliefs and convictions people develop about themselves, others, and the world, are based on their phenomenological (i.e. subjective) interpretation of their experiences. For example, two siblings growing up in the same family, can have different memories, views, or interpretations of the same family event. Subjective interpretations lead to private logic, or reasoning based on one’s subjective beliefs about oneself, others, and the world (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Sometimes, the beliefs or private logic a person has developed no longer fit new contexts or don’t feel congruent with who the person feels they are; this can contribute to a person becoming discouraged or unwell (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Adlerian psychotherapy serves as a space where people can gain insight into their beliefs, practice new patterns, and reorient themselves into a life that feels more congruent (Oberst & Stewart, 2003).

Kopp (1995) pointed out that although modern Adlerians often conceptualize life style using syllogistic cognition, life style is also present in metaphoric and imaginative cognition. As Dushman, and Sutherland (1997) pointed out, from a holistic perspective “all perception, cognition, memory, dreams, wishes, artwork, soul, attitude, emotions, and behavior…form the individual’s lifestyle pattern” (p. 462). Kopp (1989) proposed that “linguistically embedded metaphors are seen as symbolic/imaginal representations of the life-style and private logic
METAPHOR

(Dreikurs, 1973), which serve to unify beliefs, feelings, cognitions, and behaviors” (p. 57).

Further, if we accept conceptual metaphor theory’s premise that metaphor is foundational to the way humans conceptualize and experience the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), then it follows that metaphor would play an important role in the development and expression of life style.

**Movement**

*Movement* is a key concept in Adlerian psychotherapy that is closely tied to life style (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler conceptualized all human behavior as teleological, that is purposeful and goal directed (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). In Adlerian psychology, people are viewed as always striving toward subjective, often unconscious goals they believe will help them reach a sense/place of belonging or completion (Carlson et al., 2005; Oberst & Stewart, 2003). This goal directed behavior is often conceptualized in Individual Psychology using the metaphor of movement (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). The metaphorical nature of the concept is apparent in Carlson et al.’s (2005) observation that Adler saw movement as referring not only to people’s physical, but also psychological, movements. Movement is considered both an aspect of and expression of an individual’s life style (Griffith & Powers, 2007). Over time, “the pace, direction, and manner of psychological and bodily movements tend to form a personal pattern” (Carlson et al., 2005, p. 13). Kopp and Eckstein suggested that client-generated linguistic metaphors may give clues about the speaker’s metaphorical movement. For example, phrases such as “I’m hitting my head up against a wall,” ‘I keep running around in circles,’ ‘I keep shooting myself in the foot,’ and ‘I feel trapped in this relationship’” (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 167) are all metaphorical statements that may be indicative of a person’s movement.

**Early Recollections**

*Early recollections* (ERs) are stories of single, specific memories from childhood (Griffith & Powers, 2007; Mosak & Di Pietro, 2005). In Adlerian psychology, a client’s present
recall of an early memory is believed to be filtered through their subjective current lens (lifestyle) and, therefore, to some extent reflective of their current view of themselves, others, and the world (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2005). Memory is understood as dynamic and creative; therefore, which memories are salient for an individual as well as the form memories take is considered significant (Griffith & Powers, 2007; Mosak & Di Pietro, 2005). Early recollections (ER) are considered an important instrument within Adlerian psychotherapy and are used for a wide variety of purposes (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Mosak & Di Pietro, 2005).

According to Mosak and Di Pietro (2005), early recollections speak the language of metaphor. They asserted that ERs are filled with symbols and metaphors and proposed that there is at least one metaphor present in every ER (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2005). Therefore, they argued that understanding metaphor is crucial to understanding ERs. According to Kopp (1995) and Kopp and Eckstein (2004), early recollections are metaphoric representations of an individual’s lifestyle and, therefore, can be used as metaphors in therapy. However, they cautioned that not all early recollections are metaphors and must meet certain criteria in order to be considered so. Like all metaphors, they argued, ERs must “carry meaning over from the domain of imagery (in this case, an early recollection) to something the imagery refers to” (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 166). For example, Kopp and Eckstein (2004) explained that an early recollection recalled at a moment when a client is experiencing a strong emotion regarding a problem may possibly be a metaphor for that problem. Mosak and Di Pietro (2005) suggested that ERs can be considered metaphors if they can be viewed in relation to a present problem, feeling, or symptom.

Community Feeling / Social Interest

An important element of Adlerian psychology and psychotherapy is the concept of gemeinschaftsgefühl, usually translated into English as either community feeling or social interest (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Griffith & Powers, 2007). In Adlerian psychology,
community feeling is considered a crucial element of mental and emotional health (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Community feeling includes a feeling of belonging, empathy for others, and a sense of responsibility for the way one’s actions affect the larger community and even humanity as a whole (Griffith & Powers, 2007; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). However, the concept of Gemeinschaftsgefühl encompasses not only a feeling, but also community-oriented attitude and behavior (Griffith & Powers, 2007). Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) famously explained the concept of community feeling using the metaphor: “to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another” (p. 135). Sicher (as cited in Griffith & Powers, 2007) introduced the spatial metaphor of horizontal versus vertical planes of movement to illustrate the difference between striving based community feeling/social interest (horizontal) versus striving in pursuit of personal prestige and status (vertical). Kopp (1989) has argued that working with client-generated metaphors in therapy is a way for therapists to express social interest/community feeling within the therapeutic relationship. He suggested that by attending to clients’ metaphors, therapists demonstrate empathic understanding and interest in a person’s imaginal/symbolic world (Kopp, 1989).

**Art Therapy**

Metaphor is central to art therapy. Riley (1997) asserted that “the use of metaphor is a basic tool in the practice of art therapy” (p. 283) while Moon (2007, 2017) observed that metaphor is essential to the art therapy discipline. In fact, Moon (2017) included metaphor in his list of twelve curative aspects of art therapy. Metaphor is utilized for a wide variety of purposes within the field including facilitating therapeutic interventions, engaging in communication, guiding the art process, exploring the art product, enhancing supervision, and conducting art-

**Art Therapists as Metaphoreticians**

Some authors have commented on the unique relationship art therapists have with metaphor. Moon (2007, 2017) maintained that art therapists are, by nature, *metaphoreticians*, a term he coined “to describe one who skillfully and spontaneously uses metaphors to uncover and convey truths” (Moon, 2007, p. 9). Gil (2014) noted that “art therapists consider metaphor work a natural part of their field of study” (p. 159). Thomely (2016) observed that art therapists, due to their unique training in both art and psychology, have a unique skill set that prepares them to notice and work with metaphors that arise in a therapeutic context.

**CMT and Art Therapy**

Thomley (2016) provided a valuable analysis of art therapy through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory and drew correlations between key concepts of CMT and art therapy. Thomely (2016) proposed that, from a CMT framework, art materials, processes, and products can all be seen as the concrete source domains through which clients are able to explore and gain new understandings of intangible or abstract domains such as emotions or relationships. Thomely further proposed that, through interaction with art materials, processes, and products, art therapists can assist clients in creating movement within metaphor systems that were once believed to be rigid. Based on her analysis, Thomley suggested that metaphor is fundamental to the practice of art therapy and that CMT may help explain some of the underlying processes that contribute to its therapeutic efficacy. Thomley (2016) concluded that “conceptual metaphor
theory has the potential to strengthen the foundations of art therapy, increase recognition of the value of the field, and encourage further collaboration with other disciplines” (p. 46).

**Metaphors and the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC)**

The *expressive therapies continuum* (ETC) is a conceptual model within art therapy that provides an approach to understanding interactions between artist and art media based on four levels of information processing and/or modes of expression: Kinesthetic/Sensory, Perceptual/Affective, Cognitive/Symbolic, and Creative (Hinz, 2009; Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978; Lusebrink, 2010). The ETC can be used to guide assessment, treatment planning, and therapeutic interventions within an art therapy context (Hinz, 2009; Lusebrink, 2010). Metaphor has primarily been discussed in relation to the Symbolic component of the ETC (Epp, 2016; Hinz, 2009; Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). Hinz (2009) described the Symbolic component as involving “intuitive and self-oriented concept formation, metaphoric representation, synthetical thought, and expression and resolution of symbol” (p. 145) [emphasis added]. At the same time, some authors have alluded to metaphor’s role within and across all ETC levels. Kagin and Lusebrink (1978), for example, proposed that art experiences at any level of the ETC can be experienced as analogies for situations outside the art therapy setting. Furthermore, Hinz (2009) noted that symbols are multidimensional and often contain embedded kinesthetic, sensory, and affective elements in addition to obvious the visual ones. According to Hinz (2009), a symbol’s multiple layers allow it to be understood across all ETC components in an integrative fashion. This bears a striking resemblance to Kirmayer’s (2004) suggestion that one reason metaphors are effective elements of many healing systems is that “metaphors transform our perceptions and
Adlerian Art Therapy

A major focus of Adlerian art therapy is for people to increase their sense of community feeling and belonging by making and sharing art in community with others (Dreikurs, 1986; Sutherland, 2016). Adlerian art therapy also provides people with the opportunity to gain insight into their life style pattern (i.e. beliefs, goals, and movement) through interactions with art materials, processes, and products in relationship with others (Sutherland, 2016). Sutherland (2016) stated that in Adlerian art therapy:

We watch for the themes that emerge, the themes that form a unified, holistic pattern for what Adler calls our lifestyle…The unity of the personality, a fundamental principle of Adlerian psychology, means that one’s art work, like all one’s actions, thoughts, and attitudes, fits with the individual’s holistic life pattern…Art creates a bridge between the physical and spiritual, between inner and outer world, between unconsciousness (that which we have yet to understand about ourselves) and consciousness. (pp. 17-18)

Adlerian art therapy provides clients with space, support, and processes through which they can explore and transform aspects of their life style pattern that are contributing to discouragement and keeping people from being well. In Adlerian art therapy, clients have the opportunity to explore new metaphors and practice new patterns of movement. The art-making process also provides clients with many opportunities to practice having “the courage to be imperfect” (Lazarsfeld as cited in Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 19) rather than becoming paralyzed or discouraged by unrealistic goals of perfection (Dreikurs, 1986; Griffith & Powers, 2007).

Metaphor plays an integral role in Adlerian art therapy in that metaphor is what allows clients to make connections between what is happening in the art therapy studio/process and their own
lives. Metaphors that arise within the art therapy process can be used to explore and work with life style patterns, strengthen community feeling, or take community-oriented action.

Sources of Metaphor in Art Therapy

Within art therapy literature, metaphor has been discussed in relation to various elements of art therapy practice: (a) art materials; (b) movement; (c) the art product or image; (d) verbal expression; and (e) the creative process. Although there is significant overlap between these elements and they are not always distinct and separate entities, they are discussed separately here in order to illustrate the multiple levels on which metaphors can arise within an art therapy context.

Art Materials/Media

A number of authors have commented on the metaphoric or symbolic potential of art materials. Graves-Alcorn and Kagin (2017) stated that “art materials can be experienced metaphorically” (p. 18) noting that the words a client uses to describe their experience with a material (i.e. smooth, sticky, rough, sharp, slippery) may be metaphorical for another aspect of their life. Lusebrink, Martinsone, and Dzilna-Silova (2013) suggested that the physical properties of an art material can act as a metaphor for needs such as autonomy, boundaries, control, or freedom. Hyland Moon (2010) noted that art materials are “potent carriers of symbolic meaning” (p. 56) due to the personal and cultural associations they evoke within the artist as well as due to the artist’s embodied encounter with a material’s physical or sensory characteristics. For example, Garlock (2016) discussed how textile and fiber arts may carry connections to culture, community, and ancestors. Thomley (2016) likened art materials to the concept of primary metaphors in CMT, the most basic and fundamental metaphors upon which all other metaphorical systems are built. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that different art media highlight different aspects of our experience and exclude others, just as metaphors do. Thomley
(2016) explained that although clients may have a wide range of associations with any given art material, the basic properties of that material will constrain metaphoric associations. In this way, “different qualities of materials have been noted to bring out different kinds of metaphors” (Thomley, 2016, p. 26). Thomley (2016) also observed that art therapists make use of conceptual metaphors in their understandings of art materials. For example, Thomley pointed out that aspects of Somer and Somer’s (2000) discussion of glass as an art material correspond to aspects of the conceptual metaphor system of the mind as a brittle object. She also noted that Chilton’s (2007) view that altered books can be used as a container for emotional material corresponds to Lakoff and Johnson’s (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) broad and prolific category of ontological metaphors, in which containment and shape is ascribed to concepts that in actuality have no physical form. Hyland Moon (2010) discussed possible metaphors that can arise when working with clay:

As a substance that transforms from wet and malleable, to brittle and fragile, to rock hard, clay offers a poignant metaphorical parallel to therapy. Both clay work and therapy involve a process of ‘going through the fire and coming out changed’ (Boyes, 2006, p. 44). (p. 17)

Other examples of art materials/media whose metaphoric or symbolic properties have been discussed in art therapy literature are: boxes; found objects; collage; paper; and many more (Hyland Moon, 2010; Thomley, 2016).

Movement

Moon (2007) used the term kinetic metaphor to describe metaphors that arise from a physical movement, gesture, or action. Moon observed that, in art therapy, metaphors can be found in the physical procedures involved in making. Action is a natural part of art-making
Metaphors are glimpsed in the ways pencils make marks, chalks are smoothed, and paints are smeared across surfaces, as well as in the way that hands push into and against clay. Metaphoric dances are glimpsed as people enter a room, move to a chair, interact with easels and potter’s wheels, tilt their heads, and avert their eyes. (p. 109)

Art therapists are trained to notice the clients’ interactions and behavior with the art materials which are sometimes viewed metaphorically as a way to understand the client (Hinz, 2009; Thomley, 2016). Additionally, the actions involved in art-making provide numerous opportunities for clients themselves to make metaphoric connections. For example, Hyland Moon (2010) described how the action of arranging and organizing materials in a collage can be experienced as symbolic for creating order out of fragments and chaos. Hyland Moon (2010) also noted that “clay forms can be worked, reworked, repaired, destroyed, and rebuilt” (p. 17) while Henley (2002) observed that the process of centering clay on a potter’s wheel has historically generated many spiritual and metaphysical metaphors.

The connection between gesture and conceptual metaphor has received considerable attention (Chui, 2011; Faranda, 2014; Geary, 2012; Gu, Mol, Hoetjes, & Swerts, 2017; Thomley, 2016) and some authors have discussed gesture as a type of movement-based metaphor (Faranda, 2014; Geary, 2012). The use of gesture and movement has been explicitly discussed within art therapy literature as (a) a way to facilitate the creative process, (b) an important component of art-making, and (c) a way of responding to client’s artwork (McNiff, 1992; Mitchell, 2016;

**Art Product or Image**

Riley (1999) stated “art therapy has always sought and utilized metaphorical communication inherent the art product” (p. 44). Early art therapy pioneer and theorist Margaret Naumberg’s art psychotherapy approach was strongly influenced by the psychodynamic approaches of her era and placed an emphasis on the meaning of symbolic content emerging from created images (Borowsky Junge, 2010; Hinz, 2009). “The most important aspect of art psychotherapy was viewed as mastering the meaning of symbolic content that arose from producing an image (Naumberg, 1966)” (Hinz, 2009, p. 24). Naumberg saw imagery within the art product as a form of communication (2010), and some authors have discussed this communication as being metaphorical in nature (Clark, 2016; Moon, 2007; Rehavia-Hanauer, 2003; Riley, 1999).

Sutherland (2016) suggested that drawings are visual metaphors. From the perspective conceptual metaphor theory, Thomley (2016) agreed observing that “any image could be an instance of metaphor, in that it is being used to understand a concept that is not literally present” (p. 35). Schroeder (2015) provided numerous examples from art-based genograms in which clients represented their family members, family atmosphere, or other aspects of their family using metaphorical images. Garlock (2016) noted that “many cultures have mastered various weaving, sewing, and fiber techniques that incorporate meaningful symbols that tell about the maker and/or wearer and their origins” (p. 59). Other authors have discussed metaphors in relation to the formal elements of an image such as color, line character, shape, or texture.
Several authors have discussed metaphor’s usefulness in approaching and exploring the art product (Hyland Moon, 2002; McNiff, 1998; Moon, 2007). Hyland Moon (2002) encouraged art therapists to make use of clients’ metaphors as much as possible when guiding clients in exploration of their artwork. McNiff (1998) discussed the benefits of finding metaphor connections, patterns, and themes within the art product. According to McNiff (1998):

In creative arts therapy we…encourage the poetic process of making metaphor connections between the physical features of artworks and personal experiences. When we make analogies between artistic expressions and our lives, the images help us see patterns and themes. (p. 102)

**Verbal Expression**

Although Moon (2007, 2017) has emphasized the metaverbal nature of art therapy, he has also acknowledged that most art therapists incorporate verbal communication into the art therapy process. In her discussion on the use of verbal language in art therapy, Hyland Moon (2002) recommended that art therapists cultivate and use poetic and metaphorical language that is responsive to clients’ verbal and visual metaphors. Hyland Moon provided some tentative guidelines for how to do this including presenting directives in metaphoric terms, making use of clients’ metaphors as much as possible, and noticing metaphorical themes in clients’ stories. In addition to verbal dialogue between the client and therapist, verbal metaphors may be found in art therapy in the form of poetry, stories, dialoguing with an image, and role play (Allen, 1995;
The Creative Process

Some authors have discussed ways in which the creative process may act as a metaphor for the therapy process or for life itself. Malchiodi and Cattaneo (1988) explored the parallels between the creative process and the therapeutic process noting “the stages of the creative process and the therapeutic process are similar and interface with each other. As art therapists we have the capability to consciously use this interface for fostering self-awareness and psychological health in our clients” (p. 53). Mitchell (2016) described how viewing the therapeutic process as a creative process can be beneficial for art therapy practitioners by providing insight into the important role mistakes, collaboration, anxiety, and doubt play in the therapy process. Moon (2017) noted that the creative process can be a metaphor for life and can hold important lessons for artists. In one example, Moon described how the patience needed to prepare a canvas becomes a metaphor for the nature of the therapeutic journey and for life itself (Moon, 2017). McNiff (1998) discussed common challenges encountered both in the creative process and in life (e.g. feeling blocked, a desire to control outcome, procrastination, and perfectionism) and provided insight on ways to approach these struggles in both arenas.

Therapeutic Value of Metaphors

The therapeutic value of metaphor within the therapy context is well-documented. One benefit many scholars have noted is that, due to their indirect nature, metaphoric communication may be experienced as less threatening to clients and therefore less likely to raise a client’s defenses (Ahammed, 2010; Kopp, 1989; Moon, 2007). Moon (2007) along with Even and Armstrong (2011) attributed this in part to the safe distance that metaphors create for the client.
between themselves and what is being communicated. From an art therapy perspective, Moon (2007) explained:

> An artwork is an externalized object once removed from the artist who created it; this distance, if maintained by the therapist’s response to it, establishes an element of safety for the client. Consider the difference between asking a client to ‘explain why you are defensive’ and asking the same client to ‘draw walls’. (p.11)

Other authors have proposed that metaphors promote creative and flexible thinking (Ahammed, 2010; Angus & Rennie, 1989; Dwairy, 1997; Kopp, 1995) that allows for new ways of looking at a situation as well as new possibilities (Ahammed, 2010; Kopp, 1995; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; Moon, 2007; Mueller, 2015). Hinz (2009) suggested that symbolic thought has the potential to expand knowledge of the self beyond what is currently known or available to an individual. Sutherland (2016) similarly proposed that metaphor bridges the gap between what we know about ourselves and what we don’t, as well as between our intellect and our intuition.

Many authors have touted metaphor-work as an important source of insight and meaning-making for clients (Ahammed, 2010; Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Kopp, 1995; Kozak, 1992; Moon, 2007; Wickman et al., 1999). Faranda (2014) suggested that humans are, at heart, playful beings and that image, illusion, and metaphor are central to human vitality and wellbeing.

Metaphor also plays a role in learning, perhaps due to metaphor’s ability to bridge what is familiar and what is unknown (Killick et al., 2016; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; Mueller, 2015). According to Jaynes (as cited in Kozak, 1992), “understanding a thing is to arrive at a metaphor for that thing by substituting something more familiar to us. And the feeling of familiarity is the feeling of understanding (1976, p. 52)” (p. 148). Killick et al. (2016) noted that metaphors can often be more effective than abstract explanations when explaining or grasping a new or complex concept. This idea is supported by the research findings of Liao and Masters (2001) and Poolton,
Masters, and Maxwell (2007) which demonstrated that learners who are taught through analogy/metaphor—although acquiring less explicit knowledge—performed better when placed under stress than individuals who received explicit instruction.

Some authors have pointed out that because there are many layers of meaning to metaphors, they are understood on multiple levels and can therefore affect clients on multiple levels (Ahammed, 2010; Kirmayer, 2004; Mays, 1990; Moon, 2007). Kirmayer (2004) stated “importantly, these multiple levels of interpretation go on in parallel and may reinforce each other, giving experience profound depth and resonance, or contradict each other creating complex experiences of irony, ambivalence and ambiguity” (p. 38). The multiple meanings within a metaphor may provide another benefit: Ahammed (2010), Comb and Freedman (1990), Mehl-Madrona (1997) and Moon (2007) each asserted that part of what makes metaphoric stories effective is that the listener can interpret and apply the content to their life in their own way. This is a clear example of enlisting client creativity, strengths, resources, and agency, all client factors that Bohart and Tallman (2010) argued are essential to change in therapy.

Metaphors can also facilitate rapport, attunement, and joining between client and therapist (Ahammed, 2010; Kopp, 1999; Lindsay, Thomas, & Douglas, 2010; Moon, 2007; Wickman et al., 1999). Lindsay et al. (2010) contended that metaphors are maps of a client’s thinking which can be explored by client and therapist via the therapeutic alliance. Wickman et al. (1999) noted that speaking a client’s language has long been recognized as a way to join with clients and, therefore, tuning into and using the client’s metaphoric language can enhance the client’s experience of being heard. As previously mentioned, Kopp (1989) suggested that working with client-generated metaphors shows social interest/community feeling by expressing empathy and “understanding of a person as expressed in his/her imaginal/symbolic thought and
speech” (p. 59). Moon (2007) noted that making and sharing visual metaphors through the process of art therapy encourages rapport between art therapist and client.

The use of culturally-relevant metaphoric interventions has been discussed as a way to foster culturally responsive counseling practices (Ahammed, 2010; Bernal, Bonilla, & Bellido, 1995; Dwairy, 2009; Zuñiga, 1992) as well as way to incorporate resources and symbols from a client’s cultural and spiritual life into the counseling process (Ahammed, 2010; Allen, 2005; Dwairy, 2009). This fits with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) assertion that “the conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature” (p. 41). Dwairy (1997, 2009) argued that clients from non-Western cultures are less likely to describe their distress in psychological terms (i.e. emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological) and may be more apt to describe their complaints in physical terms and using metaphoric language. Dwairy (1997) advocated that it is more efficient and culturally respectful for the therapist to match a client’s metaphorical or physical language and develop interventions or techniques that fit this language rather than asking or expecting clients to translate their description into the therapists’ language or worldview.

Some authors (Epp, 2016; Faranda, 2014; Finlay, 2015) have suggested that the embodied and experiential nature of metaphors contribute to their therapeutic potential. There is a growing recognition within the mental health fields of the importance of integrating the body into mental health treatment. Van der Kolk (2015) has been a major proponent for the use of modalities that engage the body in the treatment of trauma. There is also significant evidence supporting the efficacy of mind-body approaches in the treatment of many physical and mental ailments (Burnett-Zeigler, Schuette, Victorson, & Wisner, 2016). Moon (2007) stated:

The painful events that lead one to seek art therapy are visual, auditory, olfactory, and sensual. It would be a fallacy to imagine that such painful experiences could be worked
through, resolved, or healed through talking alone. The success of therapeutic endeavors often hinges upon their capacity to involve the senses. (p. 70)

Metaphor may also provide an important avenue for understanding, communicating, and working with emotion (Törneke, 2017). There is substantial literature supporting the idea that conceptual metaphors are an important way that humans understand and communicate emotion (Killick et al., 2016; Kozak, 1992; Thomley, 2016; Törneke, 2017). In addition, Kopp (1995) suggested that, within everyday speech, metaphor is often used to convey emotionally charged content.

Finally, from the perspective of conceptual metaphor, if a client’s reality is conceptualized metaphorically, then metaphoric interventions should be particularly potent because shifts within the client’s metaphorical realm could have a profound impact on their understanding or experience of a situation (Faranda, 2014; Kopp, 1995, 1999; Lakoff, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; McG uinty et al., 2014).

Clinical Research on Metaphor

Törneke (2017) summarized a number of conclusions drawn from clinical research on metaphor use as it relates to positive outcomes in verbal psychotherapy. Some of these conclusions include: (a) successful therapy is often marked by an overarching metaphorical theme that is developed over the course of therapy, recurring through individual metaphors connected to the larger theme (Angus, 1996; McMullen, 1989); (b) cooperative use of metaphor and co-created metaphors developed and used by both client and therapist correlates with positive therapy outcomes; (Angus, 1996; Angus & Rennie, 1988, 1989); (c) client-generated metaphors often contain themes central to the client’s concerns or problem; (Angus & Korman, 2002; Levitt, Korman, & Angus, 2000; McMullen, 2008); (d) whether a metaphor is conventional or unconventional appears to make little difference as both can be effective in
facilitating understanding and change; (Angus, 1996; McMullen, 1989); (e) intentional use of metaphor by the therapist increases the likelihood the client will recall what the therapist said (Martin, Cummings, & Hallberg, 1992); (f) the sheer number of metaphors used by client or therapist does not in and of itself predict therapeutic efficacy; (Angus, 1996; Angus & Korman, 2002; McMullen, 2008). These conclusions establish a basis for working with clients’ metaphors, particularly when these interventions are cooperative, intentional, and build on a central metaphorical theme over time. Törneke (2017) argued that more research still needs to be done on metaphoric interventions as they relate to positive outcomes in therapy. He pointed out that the majority of research to date has been conducted with relatively small sample sizes and most has been limited to researchers using a psychodynamic or emotional processing therapeutic orientation (Törneke, 2017). Another limitation, from the perspective of art therapy, is that these studies have focused solely on the use of linguistic or verbal metaphors.

Despite clinical research and the assertion by many art therapists as to the importance of metaphor within the field, the extent or depth to which metaphor is explicitly discussed within art therapy literature varies greatly. There are few art therapists who have explicitly written about metaphor as central to their approach. Moon (2007) has provided the most in-depth description of an art therapy framework in which metaphor takes center stage and forms the basis of clinical decision-making, communication, and interventions. In his book *The Role of Metaphor in Art Therapy: Theory, Method, and Experience*, the foremost text on the use of metaphor in the field, Moon (2007) described his an “an approach to art therapy focused on the central role of clients’ metaphoric creations and art therapists’ metaphoric responses” (p. 3). Gil (2014) outlined a framework for the creative use of metaphor in working with children experiencing attachment
problems within art or play therapy. Thomley (2016) provided an in-depth discussion on applications of conceptual metaphor theory and research to art therapy theory and practice.

Outside these sources, discussions on the role metaphor plays in art therapy has not been quite as in-depth. Although Henley (2000), Hyland Moon (2002), Riley (1999) explicitly discussed the importance and use of metaphor in art therapy, their discussions were much less robust. Other art therapists (e.g. Allen, 1995, 2005; Hanes, 1995, 2008, 2017; Potash, Ho, Chan, Wang, & Cheng, 2014; Schroder, 2015) have discussed metaphor only implicitly or mentioned it as a passing reference. Many texts on art therapy history and theory—such as Borowsky Junge’s (2010) The Modern History of Art Therapy in the United States and Rubin’s (2016) Approaches to Art Therapy: Theory and Technique—contain only limited or passing references to metaphor.

**Client-generated Metaphors**

Much of the literature on the use of metaphoric interventions in counseling and psychotherapy has distinguished between two main sources of metaphors: the client and the therapist (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Killick et al., 2016; Kopp, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2010). From here forward, metaphors that originate with the therapist will be referred to as *therapist-generated metaphors* and metaphors that originate with the client will be referred to as *client-generated metaphors*. Also discussed within the literature, albeit to a lesser extent, are family-, group-, and community-generated metaphors, such as those that appear within the context of family therapy (Chesley et al., 2008; Sobol & Howie, 2016), group therapy (Moon, 2007; Sutherland, 2016), or community-created art and rituals (Greaney, 2002; Krouse, 1994; Warner, 2001).

Some authors have pointed out that, within the therapy context, metaphors are often collaborative or co-created by both client and therapist. In fact, due to the collaborative nature of therapy, even when working with client-generated metaphors, therapists often play a role in
highlighting and/or elaborating these metaphors. Additionally, Legowski and Brownlee (2001) observed that some approaches may be therapist directed but may encourage client-generated metaphors.

Historically, the use of metaphor within clinical practice has largely been dominated by therapist-generated metaphoric interventions and “very few approaches allow the client generated metaphor to be the central theme of therapy without prescriptive and interpretative intervention from the therapist” (Legowski & Brownlee, 2001, p. 19). Although therapist-generated metaphors can be both valuable and effective within the therapy process (Moon, 2007; Törneke, 2017), the focus of interventions discussed in this paper will primarily involve client-generated metaphors, and to some extent, client-therapist collaborative metaphors.

**Advantages of Working with Client-generated Metaphors**

One advantage of working with client-generated metaphors is that they provide the therapist and client with a window into the client’s subjective reality. In other words, they “come straight from the horse’s mouth” (Kopp, 1995, p. xvi). If, as proposed by CMT, a client’s metaphoric language and imagery embodies the client’s metaphoric structure of reality (Kopp, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), then the metaphors used by clients provide a glimpse into clients’ views of themselves, others, and the world (Kopp, 1995; Kopp & Eckstein, 2004).

Killick et al. commented that, for metaphors to be effective, they need to fit well with the client. They pointed out that a metaphor which may be meaningful or inspirational for the therapist may fall flat for the client. Metaphors that fit the client’s worldview are more meaningful to the client, are easier for the client to remember and typically link to deeper emotions (Killick et al., 2016). Therefore, Killick et al. (2016) suggested that it may be
especially therapeutic to work with a client’s metaphor when aiming to inspire or facilitate change. (Killick et al., 2016).

Working with client-generated metaphors is consistent with theoretical orientations that place importance on the client’s perspective, experience, and worldview. Mueller (2015) argued that working with client-generated metaphors is highly congruent with an Adlerian phenomenological emphasis on the client’s subjective understanding of the world. Postmodern approaches such as narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy emphasize allowing “the client to speak to their own experience and define the meaning of their experience within the context of their own life and culture” (Legowski & Brownlee, 2001, p. 27). Postmodern approaches also are concerned with power dynamics within the therapeutic relationship and “have been to carefully scrutinize and eschew dominance by the therapist, including how metaphors are generated and incorporated within therapy” (Legowski & Brownlee, 2001, p. 20). Therefore, the fact that client-generated metaphors privilege the experience and worldview of the client over that of the therapist, makes working with client-generated metaphors especially compatible with these approaches.

Some authors have hypothesized that working with client-generated metaphors may be helpful when working across culture (Kopp, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2010). As previously discussed, metaphors are shaped by culture and are embedded in implicit cultural models (Ahammed, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Because metaphors often convey concepts that are implicit within a culture, working within client-generated metaphors may assist in privileging the worldview of the client and overcoming possible cultural barriers (Kopp, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2010). However, Genuchi et al. (2017) stressed that therapists should exercise caution when differences in culture, language, or experience exist between therapist and client because the therapist may not be aware how a particular metaphor is embedded in a client’s culture which
can lead to misunderstandings or therapeutic ruptures. Additionally, differences in cultural values can lead to different understandings of the same metaphor (Littlemore, 2003) or influence a client’s receptivity to specific metaphors (Genuchi et al., 2017).

**Collaboration**

Even when metaphors are primarily client-generated, due to the collaborative nature of therapy, therapists inevitably play a collaborative role in the process of metaphor creation or exploration. Possible roles that therapists may play in the process include: (a) creating conditions that facilitate metaphoric expression by clients; (b) noticing and highlighting metaphors used by clients; (c) guiding clients in expanding or elaborating metaphor; (d) exploring the metaphor more fully with clients; or (e) assisting clients in transforming the metaphor (Angus & Rennie, 1989; Epp, 2016; Faranda, 2014; Finlay, 2015; Gil, 2014; Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Hinz, 2009; Kopp, 1995; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; Moon, 2007; Novy et al., 2005; Thomley, 2016; Wickman et al., 1999). Each of these will be explored in more depth within the intervention section of this paper.

Some authors (Grove & Panzer, 1989; Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; McGuinty et al., 2014; Sims, 2003) strongly advocate that therapists should avoid adding to the content of clients’ metaphors. Other authors have held the position that therapists can or should take a more active role regarding the content of client-generated metaphors. Chesley et al. (2008), for example, contended that while therapists should encourage the development of the child’s own metaphors in art therapy, they must avoid becoming complacent and failing to provide structure and direction as needed. And Goldberg
and Stephenson (2016) asserted that counselors must be open to adding to metaphors provided by the client or helping the client generate new metaphors.

Regardless of the level or type of involvement, Angus and Rennie (1988, 1989) pointed to the damage that can be done when therapists engage in a non-collaborative style of communication and make assumptions regarding the meaning of a particular metaphor for a client. In their qualitative study involving four client and therapist dyads, they found that “misunderstandings…typically occurred in those metaphor sequences in which either one or both participants had incorrectly assumed that they were drawing upon a shared context of meaning” (Angus & Rennie, 1989, p. 378). They observed that whether or not a shared meaning around a metaphor developed “seemed to depend on whether or not a discovery-oriented, collaborative style of elaboration had been established in the relationship” (Angus & Rennie, 1988, p. 554).

**Frameworks for Working with Client-generated Metaphors**

**Expressive Arts Therapies**

Literature from the fields of expressive arts therapies and verbal psychotherapy includes a diverse array of frameworks and methods for working with client-generated metaphors. As previously mentioned, within the field of art therapy, Moon (2007) has provided the most in-depth description of a framework for working with metaphor. Although Moon did not focus exclusively on client-generated metaphors, they do play a central role in his approach and he provided numerous examples of ways to respond and work with client-generated metaphors. Gil’s (2014) approach focuses specifically on client’s metaphors and she discussed various ways for “inviting and responding to clinical material highlighted in metaphorical language or images” (p. 159). Kottman (2011) described a framework for working with clients’ metaphors in play
therapy while Halprin’s (2002) and Novy et al.’s (2005) approaches focus on working with clients’ metaphors within a dance and movement therapy context.

**Verbal Psychotherapy**

Within the field of verbal psychotherapy, there are numerous authors who have described detailed frameworks for working with client-generated metaphors. Kopp’s *Metaphor Therapy* is a method for exploring and transforming client-generated metaphors which draws heavily from Adlerian therapy, but which Kopp argued can be incorporated into any theoretical approach (Kopp, 1989, 1995, 1998, 1999; Kopp & Eckstein, 2004). Grove and Panzer (1989) developed a model for resolving traumatic memories based on the activation of client-generated metaphors through the therapist’s use of what he called *Clean Language*. Lawley and Thompkins (2013) described a five-stage process called *Symbolic Modeling* which draws heavily on Grove and Panzer’s Clean Language approach. Legowski and Brownlee (2001) discussed the important role client-generated metaphors can play in narrative therapy, particularly within the process of externalization. McGuinty et al. (2014) developed a short-term, narrative-based therapy called Externalizing Metaphors Therapy that includes the purposeful manipulation of client-generated metaphors. Sims (2003) outlined a six-stage model for attending to client-generated metaphors. Törneke (2017) discussed a framework for working with metaphor grounded in relational frame theory and dedicated an entire chapter to the subject of working with metaphors spontaneously used by the client. Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) described a reality-therapy approach to grief counseling in which attending to and staying with the client’s metaphor plays a prominent role as the principal intervention.

**Differences Between Frameworks**

Frameworks for working with client-generated metaphors vary in terms of structure, ranging from step-by-step stages or protocols to an emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation.
Goldberg and Stephenson (2016), Kopp (1995), Lawley and Tompkins (2013), McGuinty et al. (2014), and Sims (2003) all outlined specific steps or stages therapists can use to guide clients through the process of exploring and transforming their metaphors. Many of these authors have emphasized that the steps they provide are not meant to be used rigidly, but rather as a heuristic tool that, once mastered, can be adapted in a nonlinear fashion to fit the unique needs of individual clients or sessions (Kopp, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2010). Moon (2007), on the other hand, opted not to provide specific steps and instead discussed overarching principles and suggestions for working with metaphor in art therapy, illustrating his examples and techniques through the use of storytelling. According to Moon (2007), “the problems and difficulties people bring to us are too complicated and varied for a cookbook approach, so I avoid giving recipes. Rather, I hope this text serves as a starting point…” (pp. 131-132). Moon (2007) argued that experienced art therapists don’t rely on stock interventions and that the flow of an actual art therapy session is very individualized to the needs of each client, resembling an improvisational art form. His approach to working with metaphor is one grounded in improvisation and spontaneity. At the same time, Moon (2007) has acknowledged the important role that theory, structure, and technique play for the art therapist. He noted that skilled improvisation is built upon a base of disciplined preparation that includes training, technique, and experience which all take years to develop. Moon (2007) concluded that it is ideal to strike a lively balance between technique and spontaneity.

Authors have differed in their views regarding which metaphors to highlight within a therapy session. Adams (1997) asserted that, because clients utilize many metaphors over the course of a session or the course of therapy, therapists must consider which metaphors are beneficial to focus on. Törneke (2017) agreed, arguing that all metaphorical speech is not of equal therapeutic value and that therapists should direct attention toward metaphors that
“concern something of clinical/functional relevance to the client’s problem” (p. 134). It is notable, however, that what is considered an area of clinical relevance differs depending on one’s theoretical perspective (Corey, 2013). Other authors have taken a less directive stance in deciding which metaphors to highlight. Lawley and Thompkins (2013), for example, considered any metaphor used by the client a potential opening into the client’s symbolic world. They argued that therapists initially “may not appreciate the significance of a client’s symbols or the correspondence to their ‘real life’—and sometimes, to begin with, neither do [clients]” (Lawley & Tompkins, 2013, p. 80).

The frameworks mentioned above also differ in terms of how much focus is placed on verbal and/or nonverbal metaphors. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of frameworks originating within verbal psychotherapy focus almost exclusively on client’s verbal metaphors. Some, however, have acknowledged the value of noticing or exploring metaphors through art or other forms of creative expression (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001) while others have discussed the importance metaphors embedded in nonverbal communication such as gesture (Lawley & Tompkins, 2013). Most of frameworks rooted in the expressive arts therapies emphasize clients’ nonverbal metaphors while also incorporating and working with their verbal metaphors. Both nonverbal and verbal techniques for working with client-generated metaphors will be included in the intervention section of this paper.

**Interventions and Techniques**

There are many metaphor-based interventions and techniques described in both expressive arts therapies and verbal psychotherapy literature that art therapists can use when attending to and working with clients’ metaphors. Despite the diversity of frameworks for working with client-generated metaphors discussed in the previous section, there are types of interventions common across many of the approaches (Lindsay et al., 2010). Although not
necessarily mentioned or discussed in every framework and sometimes called by different names (or not given a name), the following types of interventions are common within literature on working with client-generated metaphors: (a) encouraging or evoking, (b) noticing, (c) staying with the metaphor, (d) exploring, (e) transforming, and (f) stepping outside the metaphor. It is important to note that these categories are not actually distinct entities and in practice there is much overlap.

**Encouraging or Evoking**

Due to the ubiquity of metaphors in human thought, speech, and action, clients naturally use metaphors of their own accord within the art therapy process. Finlay (2015) has noted that metaphors emerge organically, spontaneously, and intuitively within the psychotherapy space and Moon (2007) proposed that “metaphors in art therapy are formed when the artist, media, procedures, and external environment intersect” (p. 70). Thomley (2016) proposed that by “providing clients with materials and a space in which to explore their creativity, art therapists are providing what is, in essence, an experimental laboratory where concrete bases of metaphors can be discovered to aid in the understanding of abstract, intangible concepts” (p. 28). At the same time, some authors have discussed specific strategies or techniques which may encourage or support clients’ natural metaphoric expression or more directly elicit or evoke overt metaphors from clients if a therapeutic metaphor is not forthcoming.

**Creation of images.** As mentioned previously, any image could be considered a metaphor if it is being used to understand another concept not actually present (Thomley, 2016). Therefore, allowing a client to create images can elicit visual metaphors. Using a nondirective approach, an art therapist might allow the client to create whatever image arises during the art-making process (Malchiodi, 2006). Alternately, the therapist may choose to provide the client with an art invitation or art directive (Malchiodi, 2006; Mitchell, 2016). An example of an art
directive that Moon (2007) suggested as being constructive during the early stages of art therapy is asking the client to metaphorically represent their hoped-for results in therapy by completing a task such as: (a) create an image representing where they are, where they have been, and where they want to be; (b) paint an image which on one side represents how they feel and on the other side how they wish they could feel; (c) draw a hallway with three doors that represent their past, present, and future, and asking them what is behind each door (Moon, 2007).

**Metaphoric language in art directives.** Hyland Moon (2002) discussed the benefits of using metaphoric and poetic language when presenting art directives to clients as a way to encourage imaginative, poetic, and metaphoric encounters with art-making. For example, Hyland Moon suggested that rather than simply asking a client to draw a picture of a problem, an art therapist might ask the client to imagine they are walking through a dense and thorny wood where they encounter an obstacle, then asking them how they get past it. Art therapy literature abounds with examples of this type of metaphoric directive. For example, Hanes (1995, 2008, 2017) has discussed the benefits of having clients create road drawings, noting that clients easily make metaphoric connections between the road they are drawing and their own life journey or circumstances. Other common themes for metaphoric directives mentioned in art therapy literature are: bridges and paths (Darewych & Bowers, 2017); natural forces or weather (Graves, Jones, & Kaplan, 2013; Moon, 2007); doors (Moon, 2007); landscapes (Cameron & Kipnis, 2016; Liebmann, 1986; Schroder, 2015); trees (Brooke, 2004; Darewych & Bowers, 2017) and many others. Such metaphoric directives could be seen as examples of co-created metaphors in the sense that the therapist is providing a larger overarching metaphor as a framework which stimulates the client to create sub-metaphors within that larger metaphorical framework.

**Externalizing images.** Legowski and Brownlee (2001) suggested that asking clients to create an image of their problem is an effective way of helping clients create a client-generated
metaphor to facilitate the externalization process in narrative therapy. *Externalizing the problem* is a key process within narrative therapy in which a person objectifies or personifies a problem that they experience as oppressive, allowing them to regard the problem as separate from themselves (Legowski & Brownlee, 2001; Casasanto, 2014; Lakoff, 2014; Landau et al., 2010; Törneke, 2017, 2001). McGuinty et al. (2014) argued that the use of metaphor is the most effective way to facilitate the process of externalizing a problem and several authors (Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; McGuinty et al., 2014; Riley, 1997) have proposed that the creation of an image can facilitate the externalization process.

**Art media.** Hinz (2009) has argued that a diverse range of art media can stimulate symbolic expression in different ways. Hinz (2009) suggested that art materials and processes which produce ambiguous forms, such as watercolors or scribble drawings, promote symbolic thought by encouraging clients to imbue abstract or vague forms with personal and symbolic meaning (Hinz, 2009). Alternately, low-structured art tasks that entail few instructions, such as nontopical collage, promote symbol formation by forcing clients to rely on an intuitive, internal sense to organize the art media or task (Hinz, 2009). Such intuitive concept formation, argued Hinz (2009), promotes symbolic expression. Other types of media suggested by Hinz (2009) to promote symbol expression and resolution are resistive media, quantity-determined media, and boundary-determined media. Thomley (2016) pointed out that, in addition to materials’ physical properties, art materials always contain personal and cultural metaphorical associations for clients and that these metaphorical systems are evoked through the use of these materials in the art therapy process.

**Stories and poetry.** Mehl-Madrona (1997, 2015) has written extensively about the power of story and narrative within healing practices as well as the connection between story and metaphor. He advised that one way to elicit a story from a client that contains a metaphor is to
refrain from asking “Why?” and instead say “Tell me a story of when this came to be true for you,” or “Tell me a story of how you came to understand this,” (Mehl-Madrona, 2015, p. 120).

Hyland Moon (2002) noted that poems and stories are a powerful way to present a theme metaphorically within an art therapy setting. Fairytales, folktales, and myths have been discussed within art therapy literature as a powerful way for clients to explore their own lives in a symbolic, meaningful, and non-threatening way (Hinz, 2009; Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2003). Garlock (2016) pointed to the diversity of cultures in which women have created story cloths, narrative textiles, or memory cloths in response to historical and community trauma and discussed potential applications to art therapy contexts, particularly in group and community settings.

**Verbal prompts or questions.** Novy et al. (2005) proposed that within the context of verbal dialogue, the question “Can you show me?” provides clients with an invitation to create a visual representation of whatever they are talking about using movement or image. This question, according to Novy, can help clients extend their stories beyond words and make space for visual and movement-based metaphors within verbal dialogue. Lawley and Thompkins (2013) suggested that when clients use language that includes an abstract concept, emotion, or sensory description, the question “And that’s [client language] like what?” (p. 69) can be used to prompt clients to translate the concept to symbolic form. According to Lawley and Thompkins (2013), “the prime function of the ‘Like what?’ question is to enable the inexpressible, abstract or voluminous to be expressed as a tangible, vivid and compact metaphor” (p. 69).

**Early recollection metaphors.** As previously mentioned, Kopp and Eckstein (2004) proposed that early recollections (ERs) can effectively be utilized as metaphors. They described a process through which counselors can guide clients in eliciting an early memory metaphor in situations when a client is experiencing strong emotions in regard to a problem. The process
includes asking the client to: (a) recall a recent time they felt similarly; (b) form an image of that
situation in their mind focusing on the part that stands out as if it were a snapshot; (c) feel the
feelings they felt in that situation within their body now; (d) share the first childhood memory
that comes to their mind at that moment. According to Kopp and Eckstein (2004), the first early
recollection that comes to the client, is likely to be a metaphor for their subjective experience of
the problem. Kopp and Eckstein (2004) go on to explain steps for guiding clients in exploring
and transforming early memory metaphors. Other authors have discussed the use of expressive
arts modalities such as Adlerian sandtray therapy, drawing, puppetry, and storytelling as a way to
elicit early recollections within children using symbol and metaphor (Bainum, Schneider, &
Stone, 2006; Even & Armstrong, 2011).

**Noticing**

Several authors (Combs & Freedman, 1990; Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013; Lindsay et al., 2010; Sims, 2003) have identified *noticing* clients’ use of metaphor as the first
step to working with client-generated metaphors. Despite the ubiquitous use of metaphor by
clients within the therapy setting, clients’ metaphors often go unnoticed by clinicians and clients
alike (Wickman et al., 1999). Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) stated that metaphors are “so
common that therapists often miss them and do not take advantage of the therapeutic
opportunities that they pose” (p. 107). Kopp (1995) suggested that therapists may be more
accustomed to focusing on what a verbal metaphor is communicating rather than noticing and
attending to the metaphor itself.

Noticing and recognizing clients’ use of metaphor is both a prerequisite to other
metaphor-based interventions (Gil, 2014; Kopp, 1999; Sims, 2003) as well as a way for
therapists to become “more attuned to the language and conceptual understandings of their
clients” (Wickman et al., 1999). It takes considerable practice to become attuned to the metaphor
systems of a person or culture (Thomley, 2016). Kopp (1995) suggested that therapists can improve their ability to spot client-generated metaphors with the therapy session by intentionally paying attention to verbal metaphoric expressions used by themselves and others throughout their day-to-day life. Chesley (2008) and Moon (2007) also emphasized the importance of noticing and recognizing client’s nonverbal/metaverbal metaphors due to the historical focus that has often been placed on verbal metaphors.

Conventional metaphors may be particularly hard to notice because they are so embedded that they are often not even perceived as metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Törneke, 2017). Regardless, it can powerful to notice and highlight conventional metaphors used by the client unintentionally, a process Törneke (2017) called awakening sleeping metaphors. Törneke argued that once a sleeping metaphor is awakened, it can have a powerful effect on thought and behavior. Törneke (2017) provided an example from his own life in which, after commenting to his therapist that a new work situation was not exactly paradise, she responded by saying “You’re interested in that, in paradise?” (p. 30). Törneke (2017) commented that the way in which she woke his unintentional, conventionalized metaphor paved the way for what he found to be a helpful conversation.

**Staying with the Metaphor**

Staying with the metaphor has been discussed both as an intervention in and of itself (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016), as well as an element common to many of the interventions and techniques for working with client-generated metaphors (Gil, 2014; Kopp, 1995; Pincus & Sheikh, 2010). When staying with the metaphor, therapists and clients “explore the symbolic world of the metaphor and use the language of the metaphor intentionally for extended portions
of the therapy sessions or even during the course of multiple sessions” (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016, p. 105).

Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) noted that counselors too often rush to paraphrase or interpret a client’s metaphors in order to propel therapy sessions forward. However, Goldberg and Stephenson, along with other authors (Gil, 2014; Kopp, 1995; Kottman, 2011; Kronengold, 2014), have discussed the power of staying with the client’s metaphor rather than jumping too quickly to making connections between the metaphor and real life. Kopp (1995) proposed that the insight clients gain from staying with the metaphor can be greater than if the metaphor was talked about and analyzed. Kronengold (2014) discussed the benefits of staying with the metaphor within play therapy, noting that staying with the metaphor:

- Allows the richness and fullness of metaphor to take hold, uninterrupted by a therapist’s need to make the metaphor linear. Linearity is comforting for adults and can make a therapist feel that he or she is being ‘therapeutic,’ but such linearity may not honor how a child comes to understand or manage his or her world. (p. 243)

Gil (2014) encouraged therapists to focus on problems, worries, and concepts as they are presented in the metaphor and not what they interpret or surmise the metaphor could mean. Gil (2014) provided the example of a child describing a vulnerable deer in play therapy and argued that “it is less useful to wonder about who might be feeling vulnerable or afraid, and more useful to understand the deer’s experience or vulnerability or safety (or whatever) as it is created by the child” (p. 168). Kottman (2011) described ways that therapists can use clients’ metaphors as a vehicle for implementing basic or complex counseling skills such as tracking, reflection of
feeling, cognitive reframing, or an invitation to problem-solve. She provided examples of how numerous skills such as these can be accomplished all while staying within the metaphor.

Some authors have suggested that expressive therapies, including art therapy, may especially facilitate the process of staying with the metaphor. Goldberg and Stephenson (2016) noted that art therapy may be a modality particularly suited to encouraging a client stay with the metaphor because art therapy provides a means through which the client can explore their metaphor artistically. They provided an example of a client who used the metaphor of a patchwork quilt within a therapy session and observed that, in art therapy, the client could design and make an actual quilt. Gil (2014) pointed out that art therapists are taught to stay with metaphors created by clients rather than jumping quickly to interpretations of how the metaphor might connect to the client’s life. Drewes (2014) stated that “working with expressive arts allows for communication to stay within a metaphor while the child or teen explores intimate and often painful material nonverbally. The creation can contain what has been experienced without causing the young client to feel exposed” (p. 199).

Exploring

Staying with the metaphor is an important component of interventions that involve exploring the metaphor. This type of intervention is called by a variety of names within the literature including: expanding, elaborating, developing, or amplifying the metaphor. In this type of intervention, therapists guide the client in the process of highlighting and further developing the metaphor in any number of directions including the context, story, or sensory details connected with the metaphor. This often done while staying within the metaphor, using the imagery and language of the metaphor to inform dialogue, directives, or responses. Törneke (2017) explained this process from a CMT perspective as one of developing the network the metaphor constitutes for the client, either in terms of the metaphor’s source or target. This type
of intervention can serve a variety of purposes including: (a) allowing a vague metaphor to
become more specific and tangible (Gil, 2014; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013); (b) creating a
common metaphorical language the client and therapist can then use throughout the therapy
process (Angus & Rennie, 1989; Törneke, 2017); (c) facilitating self-reflection and exploration
(Gil, 2014); (d) tapping into the power of play and imaginal thinking (Faranda, 2014; Mueller,
2015); and (e) laying the groundwork for metaphor evolution or transformation (Kopp, 1995;
Moon, 2007).

Several authors have emphasized the importance of allowing time and space for
exploration and development of the metaphor rather than prematurely jumping to moving,
manipulating, or transforming. Gil (2014) urged therapists to spend time amplifying and
attending to the metaphor as it is presented by the client. According to Gil (2014):

As therapists, we may feel tempted to solve problems that appear in metaphors, to
provide a reassuring ending, or to bring in a resource prematurely. Amplifying metaphors
does not mean moving or manipulating them in any way. It means accepting what has
come forward and simply attending to what is present, not necessarily to what it means
narrowly or to what it could become. (p. 168)

Riley (1999) also discussed the importance of deferring the process of making sense of metaphor
during art therapy. She emphasized taking time to explore the imagery itself and, in doing do,
broadening the range of associations through which meaning will surface.

Almost all of the frameworks for working with client-generated metaphors include this
type of intervention. Therefore, there are many different techniques described within the
literature that art therapists can draw upon in assisting clients to explore, develop, expand, elaborate, or amplify a metaphor.

**Image creation.** In Kopp’s (1995) Metaphor Therapy, once the therapist observes the client’s use of a verbal metaphor, the therapist then asks, “When you say [the metaphor], what image/picture comes into mind?” (Kopp, 1995, p. 6). Although Kopp’s method involves asking the client to create a mental image of the metaphor, within an art therapy context this could be modified to involve the creation of a physical image using art materials. Thomley (2016) similarly suggested that art therapists could take note when clients use language that reflects conceptual metaphor systems “and consider highlighting this for the client and offering it as inspiration for art-making” (p. 40).

**Verbal questions.** Many approaches for working with client-generated metaphor—especially those from verbal psychotherapy approaches—use verbal questions to facilitate the exploration of client-generated metaphors (Grove & Panzer, 1989; Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013; Törneke, 2017). Such questions usually stay within the metaphor and are designed to prompt the client to elaborate or explore a metaphor in any number of directions such as: (a) sensory elements, (b) setting, (c) point in time, (d) action/interaction, (d) attributes of form, and (e) perceptual space (Grove & Panzer, 1989; Kopp, 1995, 1999; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013). Some frameworks—most notably Clean Language (Grove & Panzer, 1989; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013) and Kopp’s (1995) Metaphor Therapy—include examples of specific questions therapists can use to facilitate the process of metaphor exploration. These authors have emphasized facilitating an exploration process that limits a therapist’s influence over the content of metaphors (Grove & Panzer, 1989; Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013; Pincus & Sheikh, 2010). Törneke (2017) observed that therapists can prompt the client to explore either the metaphor’s target or source. For example, Törneke (2017) noted that if a client says “It’s like I’m
an ant” (p. 132), the therapist can either (a) prompt the client to develop the metaphor’s source by asking what kind of ant they are; or (b) prompt the client to develop the metaphor’s target by asking what it’s like to be an ant. Gil (2014) suggested that it may be helpful for therapists to identify points of entry as a starting point for working with clients’ metaphors. Points of entry “are areas of a story, sandtray, artwork, or the like with one or more identifiable objects that can serve as ways of entering the metaphor” (Gil, 2014, p. 168). The therapist is then able to develop questions, comments, or observations that bring the client’s attention to that specific aspect of the metaphor (Gil, 2014).

Hyland Moon (2002) cautioned art therapists about using questions to explore visual metaphors within clients’ artwork. She noted that although some questions may be useful or necessary, questions are generally not the best way to promote an imaginative exploration of artwork. According to Hyland Moon (2002), although questions may seem more expedient, clients may experience them as intrusive instead of inviting. Moon (2007) took a similar stance, encouraging comments and observations over questions. Moon (2017) especially cautioned against questions beginning with who, what, where, when, why, and how, which set a tone of inquisition not conducive to sharing. Gil (2014) noted that “careful and purposeful therapeutic language is the most challenging part of amplifying metaphors” (p. 168) advising therapists to avoid yes-no questions, why questions, or interpretive questions. Instead, Gil (2014) encouraged practitioners to express therapeutic curiosity, be patient and take time with identified points of entry, and switch to comments or observations if the client is not responsive to questions.

**Open-ended observations or comments.** Several art therapists have discussed the benefits of using open-ended comments or observations rather than questions as a way to invite clients to explore metaphors that surface in their artwork (Gil, 2014; Hyland Moon, 2002; Moon, 2007). For example, Moon (2007) noted that rather than questioning a client about a dark spot he
noticed in their tree drawing, he might wonder aloud about the tree’s story and how the dark spot was formed. Or in response to a client drawing of a stormy path, he might observe, “Wow…This looks like stormy place” (p. 48). Moon (2007) proposed that comments or observations create an opening for the client to respond without being intrusive or interrogative. He noted that comments and observations put less pressure on the client to respond; a client may choose to share more in response to a therapist’s observation or they may choose to stay silent (Moon, 2007). As an alternative to asking a question, Hyland Moon (2002) encouraged practitioners to make “poetic commentary that invites the client to participate with the artwork in deepening relationship or amplifying meaning” (p. 263). She suggested that by using phrases such as “I wonder” or by expressing curiosity about an aspect of the artwork, art therapists can indicate their interest to hear more. Hyland Moon noted that comments about the literal qualities of an image may invite elaboration by clients if offered, not as an analysis, but as statements expressing interest, curiosity, and wonder. Gil (2014) discussed the usefulness of making comments and observations when amplifying metaphors. She stated that, although questions are fine, if the therapist notes that the client is not responsive, it can be beneficial to offer a comment or observation instead as a way to take pressure off the client from responding verbally.

Giving voice. In several vignettes, Moon (2007) illustrated a process through which clients are prompted to give voice to metaphors within their artwork. In one example, Moon asked a client to imagine that the rain in her artwork was alive and asked the rain to tell about itself, prompting the client to respond from the perspective of the rain. Moon (2007) explained that, by doing this, he was “accentuating the focus on the metaphor of the rain in her image. By wanting to hear it talk rather than hear Emma explain what the rain means, we entered the story of the drawing itself” (p. 49). Moon (2007) also encouraged clients to personify parts of their artwork by speaking in the first person or through the use of dialogue or role play. Moon (2007)
emphasized that in order for the client to be receptive to such imaginative dialogue, the therapist and client must have already established a strong therapeutic relationship.

**Dialoguing.** A related technique is that of dialoguing with images, which has been discussed by art therapists such as Allen (1995, 2005), McNiff (1992), and Rappaport (2009). McNiff observed that when people begin dialoguing with images they have created using their imaginative minds, fresh and intriguing statements surface that surprise even them. According to Epp (2016), “the process of imaginal dialogue creates space for questioning, interaction, and intuitive listening, which is fostered through engagement with the metaphorical images” (p. 9). Allen (2005) considered dialoguing with images an invaluable part of witness writing. Witness writing is a component of Allen’s open studio process in which the artist first sits with an image and then begins free writing. Although the free writing process can include anything from descriptions and observations to intuitive responses, dialoguing with the image is considered an especially important part of this practice (Allen, 2005, p. 8). According to Allen (2005), witness writing naturally evokes metaphorical texts.

**Metaverbal responses.** A key aspect of Moon’s (2007, 2017) approach to working with metaphor is the use of metaverbal or art-based responses by the art therapist. Moon (2007) encouraged art therapists to respond to clients’ metaphors by engaging in a process of responsive art-making using of gestures, sounds, images, poetry, or other modes of creative expression. According to Moon (2017), “when one responds to a painting through another artistic modality, such as writing a poem, a transformative process of ever-intensifying expression is promoted, whereby the client/artist comes to know the meanings of artworks more deeply” (p. 41).

**Reintroducing the metaphor.** A related intervention is what Gil (2014) called reintroducing the metaphor, in which the therapist prompts the client to explore the metaphor further using another medium or in another way (Gil, 2014). For example, a therapist may have a
client take a metaphor they developed in the sand tray and explore it further through an art experiential (Gil, 2014). Gil identified reintroducing the metaphor as an effective technique for amplifying the metaphor. Legowski and Brownless (2001) also discussed the benefits of having clients explore metaphors across more than one medium of creative expression, noting that in some instances of metaphor exploration, “clients begin with art and then create a poem that accompanies the work of art, thus including multiple layers of meaning and allowing for a greater appreciation of the interconnectedness of the issues before the client” (p. 25). From an ETC framework, asking a client to re-explore a theme, image, or metaphor again using a different art medium can be an effective intervention as it may stimulate different modes of information processing (Hinz, 2009).

**Changing point of view.** An art therapy technique which could be used to explore the larger context in which a metaphor exists is that of changing point of view (Graves-Alcorn & Kagin, 2017; Hinz, 2009). Changing point of view is an art therapy intervention where the client is asked to re-create an image from another point of view or perspective. This might mean zooming in and making an extremely close-up view of a small part of the image, zooming out to create a bird’s eye view, or showing the image from another angle (Graves-Alcorn & Kagin, 2017; Hinz, 2009).

**Transforming**

Numerous authors have included transforming metaphors within their framework for working with client-generated metaphors. Kopp’s (1995, 1998, 1999) model especially places an emphasis on metaphor transformation. Kopp (1995) proposed that due to the primary role that metaphors play in human cognition, helping clients explore and transform their metaphoric imagery can activate therapeutic change in patterns of beliefs, feelings, and behavior associated with the metaphor. This is related to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) suggestion that “new
metaphors have the power to create a new reality…If a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to” (p. 145).

It is important to note that not all authors have considered the transformation of metaphors as a priority and have instead chosen to emphasize the witnessing or exploration of metaphors (Adams, 1997; Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Törneke, 2017). Other authors have discussed the evolution of metaphor as naturally resulting from the process of exploring, interacting with, and responding to the metaphor rather than as something that actively needs to be facilitated (Faranda, 2014; Lawley & Tompkins, 2013; Moon, 2007). For example, Moon (2007) suggested that the process of attending to client metaphors in art therapy and responding with our own metaphors, begets a process of image evolution which may result in a shift of client’s thoughts, feelings, behavior.

At the same time, there are authors who have specifically included steps or interventions within their framework designed to actively transform metaphors (Kopp, 1995; Kopp & Eckstein, 2004; Lindsay et al., 2010). For example, Kopp’s (1995) protocol for working with client-generated metaphors includes a step in which the client is invited to transform their metaphoric image. What follows is a discussion of interventions or techniques aimed at intentionally transforming client-generated metaphors.

**Transforming the image.** In Kopp’s process for working with client-generated metaphors, once a mental metaphoric image has been explored, the therapist invites the client to transform the image by asking: “If you could change the image in any way, how would you change it?” (Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 174). Although Kopp is referring to the imaginal transformation of mental imagery, art therapists have long discussed therapeutic benefits connected to physically transforming or altering an art image. Riley (1997) noted that the art
therapist can encourage “the client to experimentally change the product, which, in turn, metaphorically suggests new resolutions to old scripts” (p. 284). Potash et al. (2014) provided an art therapy case example in which supervisees were first asked to create symbols of work-related stress and then, after discussing the meaning of their symbols, were invited to transform the artwork in some way. The participants chose to alter their images in a variety of ways including “changing the colours, removing elements, or altering the perspective. All of these tactics were discussed as metaphors for work-related strategies” (Potash et al., 2014, p. 237). Hass-Cohen, Findlay, Carr and Vanderlan (2014) described a five-step art therapy protocol for working with trauma called Check, Change What Your Need to Change and/or Keep What You Want grounded in current neurobiological and trauma theory. Although the entire protocol will not be discussed here, it is notable for the purposes of this discussion the process includes asking the client to paint or draw what happened (or an aspect they feel comfortable representing) and, after saving a digital copy of the image, asking the client what one aspect of the drawing or painting they would change or keep. The art therapist then communicates to the client that they “‘may cut it out, keep or throw away the cutout, and/or paint over it using the background color’ of the paper. ‘Consider painting, drawing, or gluing on additional images…or glue the rescued parts on a fresh page and start afresh’” (p. 73).

Several scholars have discussed how a physical action performed with an image or art product can transform the client’s relationship to it. For example, Rankin and Toucher (2003) had clients formally return artwork related to their trauma narrative to a folder at the end of the session to “assist in containing the trauma story between sessions” (p. 142). A 2013 study by Briñol, Gascó, Petty, and Horcajo provided support for the powerful effect of performing physical actions on externalized objects. Over the course of several different experiments, researchers found that participants who wrote down their thoughts and then physically discarded...
the paper on which they were written were less influenced by these thoughts in terms of attitudes and intentions than participants who did not throw their thoughts away. Conversely, participants who wrote down their thoughts and then physically kept them safe by placing them in their pocket, wallet, or purse, were more influenced by their thoughts in terms of attitudes and intentions. The researchers also found that physically performing the action of disposal was more powerful than visualizing or imagining the performance of the action (Briñol et al., 2013).

Melmed-Marmor (2016) described an art therapy case vignette in which a client who was struggling with an eating disorder created an image of her body being weighed down by stones, impeding her ability to breath, move, and function. The client and therapist, upon further exploration, discovered that each stone symbolized for the client a situation that felt burdensome to the her. Additionally, they observed that not all the stones she carried belonged to her. The client then created a series of images on actual stones, each stone/image representing a burden she was carrying. The client divided the stones between those she was carrying for others and was ready to give up, and those she recognized as things for which she needed to take responsibility. The client created a container for her stones which she decorated with messages and images connected to growth and recovery. This container allowed the client “a space to hold the ‘weight’ when she did not want to bear it herself” (Melmed-Marmor, 2016, p. 175). According to Melmed-Marmor (2016), soon after completing this process, the client began to experience her body differently and subsequently recovered from her eating disorder.

**Ritual.** Moon (2007) described ritual as enacted metaphor. According to Moon (2007), rituals are “enactments of metaphors performed in a set, ordered, and ceremonial way” (p. 120). In their book Symbol, Story and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy, Combs and Freedman (1990) also connected metaphor with ritual and described ceremony/ritual as a set of actions with symbolic importance for the person or people performing them. Lakoff
and Johnson (1980) described ritual, metaphor, and culture as intimately intertwined and suggested that ritual helps preserve and propagate cultural metaphors and the values connected to them. They also asserted that ritual makes up an important part of the experiential foundation for our cultural metaphorical systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Ritual is an important element of many healing systems and practices (Coulehan, 2003; Hinton & Kirmayer, 2017; Kirmayer, 2004).

Moon (2007) suggested that “rituals as enactments of metaphoric themes are often helpful in therapy and beneficial in times of transition in clients’ lives” (p. 121). Combs and Freedman (1990) stated that ceremonies create “a context in which change can occur and metaphorically marks the change” (p. xvii). According to Seftel (2006), “rituals provide a focal point of awareness that we are moving through an obstacle, transitioning to a new sense of self, or letting go of something lost” (p. 142) and they “allow us to move from the personal to the transpersonal—to create connections with ourselves, each other, and our experience of the sacred” (p. 142). Smart (2007, See Appendix) provided several examples of purposes a therapeutic ritual might serve, including: (a) recognizing a transition or rite of passage; (b) symbolizing the process of letting go; (c) remembering or honoring what has been; and (d) symbolizing hope, healing or transformation. Other authors have agreed about the strong connection between metaphor and ritual (Hinton & Kirmayer, 2017; Kirmayer, 2004) as well as potential benefits of incorporating ritual within the therapy process (Rutenberg, 2008).

Several art therapists have described examples of incorporating ritual into the art therapy process, especially within contexts of grief and loss. Rutenberg (2008), an art therapist working in a palliative care unit, described how she incorporated a ritual involving hand casting into her work with dying patients and their family members. Junge (1985) explained how the collaborative creation of a book about a deceased family member served as a medium for family
ritual to aid in the grieving process. Seftel (2001, 2006) illustrated how art and creative ritual can be helpful to bereaved parents who have experienced pregnancy loss. Warner (2001) described how image and symbol can play a role in community rituals such as lantern-floating ceremonies designed to address social concerns and foster community.

**Transforming early memory metaphors.** Kopp’s protocol for working with early memory metaphors (described earlier) includes steps to help clients transform imagery associated with these metaphors (Kopp, 1995, 1998; Kopp & Eckstein, 2004). After eliciting and exploring imagery related to an early memory metaphor, Kopp (1995, 1998) described steps therapists can take to help the client transform the metaphoric image. This involves: (a) asking the client what they would change about the memory; (b) inviting the client to create in their mind a detailed, specific image of the changed memory; and (c) inquiring as to what is the most vivid instant or snapshot of the changed memory and the feeling connected with that snapshot. This is another example of an intervention which, although originally described with mental imagery in mind, could be adapted for use with tangible art images.

**Stepping Outside the Metaphor**

Some authors have argued that, although staying with the metaphor is an extremely important and unique element of working with client-generated metaphors, this doesn’t mean that the therapist and client should never step outside of a metaphor and overtly discuss parallels between the metaphor and the client’s life or a metaphor’s meaning. In fact, according to Kronengold (2014), exploring a metaphor’s meaning may be an important therapeutic intervention, enhancing a client’s capacity for reflection and allowing “the metaphor to take on a fuller shape” (p. 43). Hinz (2009) suggested that explicitly exploring the meaning of visual symbols with clients may aid in enhancing symbolic information processing. Kopp (1995) considered discussing parallels between the client’s verbal or early memory metaphor and their
current problem as a crucial part of the process which allowed the client to bridge back insights they gained through exploration and transformation of metaphors back to other areas of their life. Thomley (2016) noted that although art therapy “does provide a strong basis from which metaphorical connections can be made, it’s possible that clients will have trouble making these kinds of connections without encouragement to notice them” citing the results of a study by Gick and Holyoak (1980) in which students were more likely to make connections between a science problem and a helpful analogy with prompting to do so.

Kronengold (2014) and McNamee (2004) considered the question of whether to stay with a metaphor or step outside of it to be a matter of clinical judgement that depends on the needs of a particular client within that particular session. Other authors have considered it a matter of timing and have viewed the process of making connections between the metaphor and the client’s life as the last step in the process of working with client-generated metaphors, after the client has the chance to fully explore or transform the metaphor (Kopp, 1995; Lindsay et al., 2010).

At the same time, there exists a lack of consensus about whether an overt verbal discussion of the metaphor’s meaning or parallels is necessary (Lindsay et al., 2010). Kottman (2011) for example, advised therapists against breaking the metaphor within play therapy and considered such an action as disrespectful of the child’s wish to communicate metaphorically. Moon (2017) noted that it can be important to let a visual metaphor speak for itself or to respond through art-making and metaphor rather than verbal analysis.

When discussing a metaphor’s meaning, numerous art therapists have stressed the importance of honoring the many possible meanings a metaphor may contain rather than assuming a fixed or impoverished view. Moon (2007) has criticized the systematic labeling and reductive interpretation of metaphoric messages and instead has advocated “approach[ing]
clients’ artworks with a sense of awe and wonder, and try[ing] to establish a respectful conversation with them that honors many possible meanings” (p. 4). Allen (1995) viewed images as functioning within the realm of metaphor and cautioned against taking a literal view of an image’s symbolic meaning. She advised therapists not to mistake an image’s message as a literal report or to judge the image’s meaning as definitely this or that (Allen, 1995). Hinz (2009) stated “a therapist who is comfortable with complexity and ambiguity nurtures creative thought…art therapists must be able to resist easy answers, and the premature closure of simple solutions to complex issues” (p. 157). Some art therapists have also stressed the importance of allowing clients to be the authority on the meaning of their images and metaphors (Hinz, 2009; Moon, 2007; Riley, 1997). Moon (2007) has argued that allowing clients to engage with the metaphor and discover their own meanings allows them to “come up with understandings that are truer, deeper, and more personally significant than anything I could have said” (p. 5). At the same time, Finlay (2015) and Moon (2007) have pointed out that engaging with metaphors can also be a collaborative process and that it can be beneficial for the client and therapist to explore potential meanings together in a collaborative manner.

**Considerations**

Some scholars have made note of considerations and precautions regarding the use of metaphor informed interventions and techniques in therapy. First, certain approaches or interventions may be unsuccessful or contraindicated with certain clients. For example, some interventions require clients to think symbolically, abstractly, and use their imagination (Goldberg & Stephenson, 2016; Legowski & Brownlee, 2001). Hinz (2009) noted that individuals who struggle with abstract thinking may not fully benefit from interventions dependent on abstract or symbolic thought. Legowski and Brownlee (2001) pointed out that some clients may not want to participate in activities that require active use of imaginative and
creative thought and that it is important to be sensitive and responsive to this position. Kopp (1995) noted that some clients may become anxious when exploring and transforming metaphorical imagery and he stressed the importance of using sound clinical judgment when using such interventions. Some authors have warned that metaphorical communication can be misappropriated or misunderstood when the client’s perspective is not centered or the therapist makes assumptions about what the client means, especially when there is a language or cultural difference (Genuchi et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2010; Littlemore, 2003; Novy et al., 2005). It is important, therefore, that therapists check for shared understanding and not make assumptions (Genuchi et al., 2017; Novy et al., 2005).

Smart (2007; See Appendix) provided a number of considerations for therapists to take into account when using ritual and metaphor in a therapy or art therapy context. Smart advised therapists to consider the timing of the intervention, including whether a strong therapeutic relationship has been established, how the client feels about the process, and whether the client is ready for any symbolic steps contained in a ritual. It is also recommended that therapists consider whether any symbols or metaphors involved originated with the client or the therapist. Another consideration is the purpose of a ritual and whether it matches the client’s current needs. It is important to consider how to ensure both physical and emotional safety and containment for the client, including ensuring an opportunity for processing the experience and obtaining a sense of closure. Finally, therapists might consider how the client will be supported outside the session if strong memories or feelings surface during the process as well as how the therapist will receive
ongoing consultation and support regarding metaphoric and symbolic work with clients (Smart, 2007).

**Discussion and Areas for Further Exploration**

As previously mentioned, outside a few notable sources, there appears to be little in-depth literature discussing the use of metaphor in art therapy. This raises the question of how something so fundamental to art therapy practice has been left mostly unexplored within the field. One possibility is that perhaps metaphor is so basic to the practice of art therapy that it has been largely taken for granted. This could explain the many art therapy texts which mention metaphor only in passing. Perhaps, just as conventional metaphors are often difficult to spot within language due to how deeply embedded they are, the use of metaphor is so embedded and implicit in the practice of art therapy that it is easily overlooked or taken for granted. Another possibility is that metaphor is not considered new or innovative enough to merit scholarly attention. Hyland Moon (2010) observed that there exist many journal articles and book chapters dedicated to the topic of digital media in art therapy, while there is relatively little discussion in art therapy literature exploring paint as an art material. She speculated that one reason for this discrepancy could be that digital media are considered unconventional and innovative in the art therapy field while paint is a common medium of choice (Hyland Moon, 2010). Perhaps, like paint, metaphor is not considered unconventional or innovative enough to inspire much research and study. It is also possible that it is a question of terminology and that art therapy texts use other another word such as symbol/symbolism interchangeably with or instead of metaphor. It is important to consider how such differences in terminology may play a role in the aforementioned gap in the literature.

While there are many valuable directions that future study on the topic of metaphor and art therapy could take, there are four areas that are particularly salient. First, as previously
mentioned, many art therapists utilize both verbal and arts-based interventions in their work. Currently, many art therapy training programs prepare art therapists for dual professional statuses in the fields of art therapy and mental health counseling which often involves training students on both art-based and talk therapy approaches (Wadeson, 2004). Because metaphor exists in both verbal and nonverbal forms of expression and because metaphor plays an important role in both art therapy and talk therapy, it could be valuable to investigate whether the use of metaphor helps integrate verbal and arts-based approaches and techniques.

Another second line of inquiry could be for art therapists to study what underlying metaphors frame, shape, and influence the theories and philosophies that inform their work—both individually and as a field. If, as suggested by Legowski and Brownlee (2001) and Kopp (1995), metaphors structure the frame of reference by which therapists conceptualize and structure the therapy process, then these implicit metaphors impact many areas (e.g. theory, case conceptualization, treatment planning, interventions, techniques). This is especially important considering the culturally-embedded nature of metaphors. Becoming aware of one’s own worldview as a therapist is considered an important component of culturally responsive counseling practice, especially when working across culture (Sue & Sue, 2015). Furthermore, some art therapists have called for the field of art therapy as a whole to examine how its theories, practices, and research have been largely informed by dominant culture worldview (Hocoy, 2005; Talwar, 2010). In 2013, Awais and Yali reported that over 90% of members of the American Art Therapy Association identified as White and female while Talwar (2010) pointed out that “in the field of art therapy the dominant perspective on human relationships is largely derived from male, Eurocentric teaching, which has shaped in turn theories of human development derived from psychology and psychopathology” (p. 11). As art therapists continue the task of acknowledging and unpacking the assumptions that inform their work and making
space for other perspectives, it may be valuable to further examine the role that metaphor can play in this process.

Third, most psychotherapy and art therapy literature has focused almost exclusively on metaphors that originate within individual client-therapist dyads or, to a lesser extent, family or group therapy. Almost nonexistent within the literature is a discussion regarding community-generated metaphors and the role they can play in the healing process. Throughout much of human history and within many cultural healing systems, community plays an important role in healing. This is also congruent with the Individual Psychology’s emphasis on community feeling/social interest as an important indicator and component of mental and emotional health. A valuable line of inquiry could be to look more closely at community-generated metaphors, explore the unique possibilities they hold, and discuss what this could look like in relation to art therapy. Community-created art such as murals (Pontious, 2014), community rituals (Warner, 2001), and other places where such community-generated metaphors already play a prominent role may be good place to start.

A fourth, related line of inquiry could be to look at what role metaphor, particularly community-generated metaphor, can play in facilitating social change. Many traditional models of art therapy focus on individual transformation which may not adequately address difficulties stemming from oppressive systems or trauma on a societal or collective level (Gipson, 2015; Hocoy, 2005; Nolan, 2013). Some art therapists have developed art therapy frameworks that address the need for social change and social action on a collective level (Golub, 2005; Kaplan, 2007). Golub (2005) defined social action art therapy as “a participatory, collaborative process that emphasizes art-making as a vehicle by which communities name and understand their realities, identify their needs and strengths, and transform their lives in ways that contribute to individual and collective well-being and social justice” (p. 17). Considering that many authors
have emphasized the socially and culturally embedded nature of metaphor, as well as metaphor’s powerful influence on things like social discourse and public policy, it could be valuable to explore the intersection of metaphor, art, and social change.

It is important that art therapists approach these last two areas of inquiry with humility, acknowledging and deferring to work already being done in these areas by communities, arts activists, and community-based artists, among others.

Metaphor is fundamental to human understanding and central to the practice of art therapy. This paper discusses the benefits of intentionally noticing and attending to client-generated metaphors as they arise in art therapy along with a variety of approaches, interventions, and techniques for doing so. Outside a few notable texts, there appears to be a gap in the literature on the topic of metaphor in art therapy. This paper addresses this gap, discusses why it might exist, and how this knowledge can help guide metaphor informed art therapy interventions. Several areas which merit further attention and discussion were also presented, specifically, whether metaphor facilitates integration of verbal and arts-based approaches, implicit metaphors informing art therapy theory and approaches, possibilities associated with community-generated metaphors, and metaphor in relation to social change.
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Appendix

Considerations for the Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Metaphor

1. Timing  How does this work affect the overall pace of the client’s therapy process? Has a strong relationship been established between client and therapist? If a ritual is being considered, how ready is the client for the symbolic step contained in the ritual? How does the client feel about doing this process? If symbols or metaphors are involved, did they originate with the client or the therapist?

2. Purpose  What is the purpose of the ritual or experiential process? Does this purpose match the client’s current needs? Examples include:
   - mark a transition or rite of passage
   - symbolize a process of letting go
   - honor/remember what has been
   - symbolize hope, healing and/or transformation
   - metaphor or image related to a sense of mastery

3. Logistics  Where will this take place? Do I have the needed materials and a clear understanding of the process involved? What are the time constraints of this ritual? Do I plan to involve any other participants?

4. Safety  What will be done to assure both emotional and physical safety and containment? What will be the plan for processing an experience and assuring a sense of closure for the client?

5. Roles  What will be the role of the therapist in facilitating and processing the client’s experience? Will the therapist be an active participant? What will be the client’s role? If others are involved, what are their roles?

6. Support  Where/how will the therapist receive ongoing consultation and support for symbolic and metaphorically work with clients? How will the client be supported outside of session if the process brings up strong memories or feelings?

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