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HEARING METAPHOR:  
A study of clients' use of language  
in a family therapy situation.

BY

Christopher Allen Whynot

B.A. (Hons.), Queen's University, 1979

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work  
In partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master of Social Work degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
1994

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## Abstract

Metaphor is defined as a central function of language by which different realms of experience are conjoined and which operates at the nexus of internal and social processes. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in an exploratory study of metaphor use by families in therapy. Significant differences were found in quantity of metaphor use along gender and generational axes. Content analysis also identified some suggestive differences with respect to issues of agency and imagery along lines of gender and parenting status. Categories nominated from the identified metaphors are also suggestive of the differential dilemmas faced by the clients. The study indicates that attending to clients' metaphors would be therapeutically useful and that further research in this area would be worthwhile.

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"...ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh."

- Aristotle

## Chapter 1

### Purpose and Rationale

Metaphor has been identified and studied in many ways by practitioners of many different disciplines. It has been variously defined as a literary trope, as a marker of repressed desires, as a form of euphemism, as the root of all language, as a fundamental process of thought.

The importance of metaphor in human psychology has been recognized at least since Aristotle wrote of the use of catharsis, and it has figured prominently in the psychoanalytic literature from the first writings of Freud. And, for the most part, these traditions of viewing metaphor as a method of energetic displacement - as a way of not saying or doing things - have prevailed.

The more recent convergence of ideas from other fields, such as linguistics, semiotics, sociology, anthropology, and the various forms of cultural analysis has led to the opening up of other ways of looking at how we function as individuals and as social beings. Of central importance to such approaches as structuralism, de-construction and constructivism, is the creative interaction between the individual and his/her history and culture, between the speaker and the language, between description and the world itself. Metaphor can be viewed as existing precisely in these interactive regions. It is a "carrying over" from one

realm to another. It works at the critical nexus of emotional, cognitive and socio-linguistic processes. Metaphor is essentially a bridging operation linking unconscious to conscious, concrete to abstract, sensed to symbolic, known to unknown, affect to insight, interior process to intersubjective connection.

Recent psychological theorists, notably Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, have looked to the acquisition of language as being central to the creation of a self - a self which can only exist within a social context. Higher mental functions appear first to the infant as social processes, which are progressively interiorized and privatized as language is acquired. Language is first spoken aloud, then becomes progressively more silent as it becomes increasingly intertwined with thought. Thought and language are not the same thing, but they are mutually regulating. As Vygotsky put it,

The structure of speech is not a simple mirror image of the structure of thought...Speech does not merely serve as an expression of developed thought. Thought is restructured as it is transformed in speech. It is not expressed but completed in the word. (Wilson & Weinstein, 1992, p.366)

The corollary is that a thought which is not put into words is not completed. This offers one explanation for the

development of the unconscious. Very early experiences are represented unconsciously because language cannot yet express the complexity of thought, in which is included inclination, need, interest, impulse, affect and emotion.

This is not only a developmental phenomenon, however. As we live our lives we are constantly bumping up against the limitations of our language to express the whole range of our experiences. Metaphor is a primary method by which the expressibility of language is expanded. It is language's way of transcending itself, of becoming able to express experience which as yet has no words. Indeed, linguists and philosophers of language such as Cassirer and Langer speak of metaphor as being the basis of all language, which is at root a process of analogy and symbolic transformation. It is through the metaphoric process that we develop new ideas. Something new is not only indescribable, it is largely incomprehensible. By comparing the unknown to the known, by mapping one domain on another, we increase our ability to comprehend and communicate about it (Langer, 1957).

Metaphor is an inherently social phenomenon. Meaning, Bruner asserts, is public and communal, not a private affair (Bruner, 1990). We are all participants in our culture and in our language. Indeed, the only way of learning language is to participate in it. Language acquires us as we acquire it, and we take our form according to the constraints and

possibilities afforded by our language and our culture. This makes possible shared understanding. Other minds are less opaque to us because of this common grounding in language.

Thus there is a bi-directional impetus to expression. We attempt to complete our thoughts in words in order to understand ourselves, and in order to be understood by others. If metaphor is the ever-shifting boundary between what can and cannot be expressed of our experience, it is also the leading edge of our search for a common currency with others. To be understood is to be upheld.

This is reminiscent of Jung's model of personality as a dialectic between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal realms. Jung spoke of personality as taking form in an interactive field. We are formed in part by our own specific histories and in part by more archaic, enduring aspects of being human. These enduring aspects, recognized as common patterns of response and symbolic representation, were considered to be the collective expressions of culture. This collective wisdom was identified by Jung as taking the form of archetypes. Archetypes were defined first as models for interaction in typical human relationships, and later as basic organizing forms for emotional expression (Young-Eisendrath, 1985).

This view of archetype is not dissimilar to Bowlby's notion of instinct as being a behavioural pattern which

emerges only in appropriate relational contexts. Both Jung and Bowlby emphasize the social nature of these responses - what is being regulated is relationship (Bowlby, 1969; Young-Eisendrath, 1985). What is not clear in either discussion is just where or how these archetypes or instincts are wired into us. Nor is it clear that these responses are, or should be, enduring and unchanging.

One possible place to locate some of these patterns and responses is in language, which is at once enduring and ever-changing. Metaphor, as the basis of all language and as the growing edge of personal and cultural expression can provide a fertile resource for understanding where we are individually and collectively.

The purpose of this study was to look at the metaphors people use in a therapeutic situation and to explore the degree of collectivity to be found therein. Because metaphors are so embedded in our language we tend not to hear them, or if we do hear them, not to hear them as metaphors. If we are to be effective as therapists, it is important that we be able to respond to, and to encourage, the creative constructions of our clients. Metaphor has been identified as a critical process in self-creation, self-discovery, self-expression and in the quintessentially human process of communication and questing for mutual understanding. If we have a better idea of what we are hearing, we will be better able to listen to it.

This exploratory study began with the most basic questions in this regard. What specific metaphors are people using in therapy? Are there commonalities which might allow for clustering? Do different groups of people, or people in different situations use characteristic metaphors?

It is hoped that the answers will prove useful to therapists by helping attune them to the ways clients articulate their understandings and their dilemmas. By looking in some detail at the specific metaphors people use in therapy, and at their commonalities and groupings, therapists will be alerted and sensitized to particular ways clients interpret and articulate their situations. In this way we may become better able to hear clients, especially those whose experience is different from our own.

More generally, metaphor would seem to be a promising entrée to the realms of internal and social process. This study gives some indication of just how much metaphor is actually used by clients, and how likely it is to be worthwhile pursuing as an interventive focus.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

To put the study of clients' use of metaphor in some perspective, it will be useful to begin by placing it in the context of some theoretical writings on the functions of language, meaning and change in the therapeutic situation.

Language has been central to the concept of therapy since Freud formulated his ideas concerning the "talking cure". For Freud, working within the ideology of scientific positivism, language was used as a way of revealing truths which had been repressed or suppressed through the client's history. There has been a shift in this way of thinking over the years. Fuelled by work in the areas of cybernetics (Bateson, 1972), biology (Maturana & Varela, 1992), psychology (Bruner, 1986; Wilson & Weinstein, 1992) and semiotics (Eco, 1984; Wilden, 1980), the emphasis in therapeutic thinking has moved to viewing language not as a revelatory, but as a generative process. According to this approach reality is a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Further, because social process among human beings is a linguistic process, the world is created for us through language.

This constructivist approach has several ramifications for thinking about the therapeutic process, particularly with respect to ideas of self, of meaning, of



intersubjectivity and dialogue, and of change. Carolyn Saari (1993) points out that if we accept the constructivist premise of a socially constructed reality, then the ideal of a self as unitary and unchanging is maladaptive. Because we live and function in multiple social contexts, and because these contexts are themselves in a constant process of change, a more useful ideal of self is one that allows for multiple ways of viewing or participating in the world. She is not talking here of the more primitive process of splitting the world into good/bad, but of the development of levels of complexity and the ability to handle ambiguity. For Saari, this is necessary to maintain a sense of coherence of self in a complex social environment, and is therefore a prime indicator of psychological health. She cites research by Mitchell which indicates that people come out of therapy experiencing themselves as multi-faceted and uneven and with a sense of a more complex life.

Metaphor, which is by nature imprecise and ambiguous in its connotations, could be seen as a way to foster the articulation of this complexity. It is not a chaotic inner life which is the problem, argues Saari, it is an non-articulated inner life. If one is undifferentiated linguistically, one's sense of self is truncated and less effective. The goal of therapy, then, is not so much to reduce the level of chaos, but to increase the level of articulation. Again, metaphor, as the means by which we

give words to the inexpressible, seems well placed to aid in this process.

The importance of articulation and dialogue in personal process and in the therapeutic process has a long history in the literature. Friedman (1985) provides a comprehensive history of the development of ideas surrounding the uses of dialogue and intersubjectivity in therapy. He takes as his starting point the ideas of Martin Buber on the importance and characteristics of I-Thou relationships. In this kind of relationship a "psycho-synthesis" occurs in which each partner is perceived as an existing whole and self-realization and growth become possible. According to Buber it is only in being perceived by another that a person becomes whole. "Mutual confirmation is essential to becoming a self" (Friedman, 1985, p. 4). This idea is echoed in Harry Stack Sullivan's concept of consensual validation, through which truth can be discovered only in interaction with others. Similarly Carl Rogers wrote of the importance of an active acceptance of the client in therapy. Therapy worked, according to Rogers, through the client's experiencing the self in a variety of ways in an emotionally meaningful relationship with an unconditionally accepting therapist. A more recent formulation of similar ideas can be found in the work of Kohut and the Self Psychologists, who put an emphasis on the roles of confirmation and mirroring in the development of the self and in the

effectiveness of therapy (Wolf, 1988). Central to these views is the idea that a person is a process and that change comes about through experience in a relationship.

This corresponds to Jung's insistence that psychotherapy is a dialectic between two persons. The therapist is not the agent of treatment, but a fellow participant in a process of individual development. Resolution and individuation take place not only within the client, but also between the client and the therapist. Jung refers to the "kinship libido" which he identifies as the drive for human connection (Huckins, 1992). "Relationship to the self," writes Jung, "is at once relationship to our fellow man." (Jung, 1946, p. 234)

These ideas are taken a step further by Anderson and Goolishian who argue that the importance of dialogue is not that it allows for revelation, but that it is only through dialogue that meaning and understanding are created at all (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Anderson, Goolishian & Winderman, 1986). They take as their starting point the idea that every human action takes place in language and that it is only through language that we bring forth an understanding of the world. Meaning exists only as it is created in communication with others. Without this dialogue, meaning ceases to be developed. Citing Bateson, Anderson and Goolishian posit that mind is not in our head, it is in our interactions. To be in language, then, is not

conceived of as simply a linguistic activity, but as a "process of social creation of intersubjective realities which we temporarily share with each other" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p.377).

The role of therapy is the creation and evolution of new meanings and understandings through dialogue. Because meaning is constantly being constructed, it is constantly open to change. No communicative account is complete, clear and univocal. In any communication there are unspoken meanings and possible new interpretations. Knowledge advances through the process of looking for the unsaid. Therapy is the process of expanding and saying the unsaid, which will lead to the development of new themes, new narratives and new understandings. This unsaid is not the same as the unconscious, it comes into being as a potential only through communicative action. The goal of therapy is to have a conversation which loosens and opens up, rather than closes down. It is a process through which fixed meanings and behaviours are broadened, shifted and changed.

The potential role of metaphor in the process of achieving intersubjective understanding in helping open up our conceptual framework is significant. It offers a way of making ourselves understood on a connotative level without having to know exactly what we want to say. It easily lends itself to a process of mutual exploration. And, because it is denotatively slippery, metaphor offers a way to expand on

fixed descriptions from within the descriptions themselves. The denotative fuzziness of metaphor can be frustrating if it is a clear and univocal answer or explanation which is sought. But if the therapeutic conversation is viewed not as a process of finding solutions, but as a process of dissolving problematic patterns, this denotative weakness becomes a strength.

Gergen and Gergen (1983) also talk of the self as existing only in communicative activity. They present the idea of the self-narrative as the way we give meaning and direction to our lives. These narratives are generated in the social sphere and can only be maintained by a constant process of negotiating with others concerning the meanings of events in relation to one another. According to this view, the self is not a state which is described, rather it unfolds in the telling. This narrative, then, is not something which we consult for information, it is constructed in relationship and is used to sustain, enhance, or impede various actions. It is always a social act and change comes about through altering the meanings of events. Therapy then is a process of renegotiation of meaning.

Still working within the constructivist approach, and also looking at the role of self-narrative, Palombo (1992) offers a more moderated vision of the concept of self. Personal narratives represent our current integration of our life experiences. They are a way of encoding the meanings

of what we have experienced which allows the retention of the affects as well as the percepts attached to events in our lives. Palombo sees this as happening not only on the social level of shared meanings, but also on the personal level. While acknowledging that the social context interpenetrates all our experience and that all our meanings are constructed within socially derived language, he indicates that the particular meanings for each of us are not identical. Rather we are born with certain endowments through which our experience is filtered, and which give rise to the level of personal meaning. This will have varying degrees of overlap with the level of social meanings. The activities which we refer to as mind, according to Palombo, are those associated with bringing order to our experiences through rendering them meaningful. Inconsistencies which exist between our personal meanings and our shared meanings can lead to a disrupted sense of cohesion. This failure of integration of the two meaning realms leads to gaps in meaning, which can be identified as pathology.

The role of therapy is to resolve disharmony between the realms and restore meaning to what was meaningless. This involves a reordering of the personal narrative structure through a reorganization of old meanings and the differentiation and construction of new meanings.

Karen Weingarten (1992) takes the idea of the therapeutic system as a linguistic system and approaches it from the point of view of intimacy. If therapy is conceived of as the art of contact and change through conversation, then the therapeutic relationship itself becomes vital. This is reminiscent of the interpersonal approaches cited above. Weingarten, though, speaks of establishing a feeling not of warmth and closeness, but rather of being understood. This follows the description of intimacy given by Wynne and Wynne (1986) as a recursive process which takes place in language. Self-disclosure does not itself generate intimacy. Nor is intimacy a quality of a relationship. It is, rather, a quality of an interaction. An intimate interaction occurs when people share or co-create meaning and are able to co-ordinate their communicative actions to reflect this. In terms of therapy this involves the therapist working to actively understand the client, or actively working with the client to create mutual understanding. Using and exploring the client's language is central to this approach. Hearing, entering into and expanding a client's metaphor is one way Weingarten identifies of doing this.

In turning to the literature specifically concerned with the therapeutic use of metaphor, we find that while there is a significant amount of writing on the subject, there is very little in the way of direct research.

Within the realm of psychoanalytic conceptualization, metaphor has generally been considered as a compromise formation similar to dreams or symptoms. Their identified function has been to provide a way for the client to express material from different structural or dynamic levels of the self (Rogers, 1968). Within this general approach, metaphors have been variously described as spontaneous expressions of forgotten experience (Sharpe, 1940), as catalysts for the release of unconscious material (Reider, 1972) and as regressive and defensive expressions of forbidden material (Ekstein, 1966).

The tendency in the psychoanalytic approach is to see working with metaphor as a first, preliminary approximation to the real therapeutic act of interpretation at the level of secondary process - that is, more literal statements about the client's history and experience (Evans, 1988). There is a consistent insistence on the distinction between primary process "fantasy", and secondary process "reality oriented" thinking. The emphasis is on accurate interpretation. Metaphor is seen as a form of diminished communication, as a faulty representation of more literal meaning - as a way of not really saying something. Support for the various psychoanalytic studies of metaphor tends to be limited to clinical examples and references to psychoanalytic principles. (Of course, these principles are



themselves highly metaphorical. Where is the "reality base" of the Oedipal complex?)

Ellen Siegelman, a psychoanalyst working more from a Jungian approach, has a more positive view of metaphor. She sees it as a way of fostering the transitional space between fantasy and reality, which she identifies as the source of creativity and change (Siegleman, 1990). She takes exception to the Freudians' tendency to read metaphors and other compromise formations as signs of the unconscious, which leads to a tendency to be schematic and reductionist. Citing Jung, she distinguishes between a sign, which is an equation agreed upon by convention, and which always means less than what is signified, and a symbol, which contains more than what is referred to, and more than what is known. Metaphors, as examples of symbols, open up meaning. They are unclear not because they are hiding something, but because of their complexity.

Metaphor partakes of both primary and secondary process and in doing so, creates a new synthesis - taking images, impulses and motives from the unconscious and applying conscious control to order and arrange them. Rather than seeing the lack of specificity as a problem, Siegelman sees this surplus of associations and feelings as a source of power. Metaphors arise from feeling and from the need to communicate something, to make others understand. They work to express psychological states that can only be

approximated in words. They are a way of making public ineffable feeling states. If the therapist is attuned to the client's metaphors it can lead to a sense of being comprehended, held and valued, which can be very effective therapeutically.

In much of the psychoanalytic literature, the sense is that metaphor is effective as a psychological catalyst because it allows the client some emotional distance from the material (Ekstein, 1966; Reider, 1972). This approach seems consonant with the more recent work presented by the narrative school of family therapy (White & Epston, 1989). White and Epston talk of externalizing a symptom in order to engage with it in some dramatic way. This approach can be viewed as a way of embodying the metaphor of conflict, thereby transforming an intra-personally felt conflict into an inter-personal one. This process of transformation from the subjective to the social realm by having personal confusions heard, validated and given shape - spoken "out loud" - seems to be a very powerful one. However, as with so much of the writing around ideas of metaphor, the evidence surrounding this work is anecdotal. It is difficult to attribute its effectiveness.

Some objective evidence concerning the use of metaphor in psychotherapy comes from a study conducted by Pollio, Barlow, Fine & Pollio (1977) in which a content analysis was conducted on transcripts of sessions from three diverse

approaches: rational-emotive, existential, and child analytic. They found "sustained bursts" of novel figurative language use by clients in all three sessions. A separate analysis of Gestalt and psychoanalytic sessions found a close linkage between high levels of figurative language use and periods of insight. This study supports the notion that metaphor is a form of self-insight. Metaphor in this view exists where inner and social speech are coterminous. The client is talking to his/herself and to the therapist at the same time (Wilson & Weinstein, 1992).

Recently, non-analytical thinking has emphasized the uses of metaphor as a way of remembering (of the past and of clinical insights), as a way of gaining new knowledge, and as a motivating factor, specifically with respect to establishing relationship (Haskell, 1987; Ortony, 1979). Metaphor, from this point of view, is a creative process. New knowledge is created in the conjunction of affect and cognition. These constructive functions of metaphors are presented as useful catalysts for encouraging change (Akillas & Efran, 1989; Fox, 1989; Mays, 1990; Muran & DiGiuseppi, 1990; Witztum, Van Der Hart & Freidman, 1988). Again, except for anecdotal discussion, none of these papers supports its pronouncements with any evidence.

Martin, Cummings & Hallberg (1992) conducted a study which looked at the clinical impact of therapists' intentional use of metaphor with particular attention to its

effect on client recall. Clients consistently remembered the metaphors and also rated sessions which contained the use of metaphor as being more helpful than sessions in which metaphors were not recalled. These findings support the idea that metaphorical communication is very powerful with respect to crystallizing understandings which are not strictly cognitive. It also implies that experiential communication is more memorable and more useful than theoretical interpretation.

Another important finding of this study is that, while it focused on therapist supplied metaphors, the sessions most remembered and most highly valued were those in which the metaphors were collaboratively initiated or developed. This would seem to emphasize the importance of mutual and explicit understanding in successful therapy and more specifically points to the importance of metaphor in promoting this understanding. It was consistently the metaphor-based insights which were remembered, even though the metaphorical exchanges never amounted to more than 10% of the total therapy time.

More detailed analysis of these data revealed other, more specific effects of the use of metaphor. Two epistemic functions were identified as a) enhanced emotional awareness and understanding and b) conceptual 'bridging'. Two motivational functions were also identified: a) enhanced relationship with the therapist and b) goal clarification.

These relate directly to the proposed effectiveness of metaphor in both the intra- and inter-personal realms. Meaning grows out of relationship and a bridging of affect/cognition within and experience/understanding without.

Although the sample size in this study was small (3 therapists, 29 sessions) and was non-random with respect to educational level, the results were highly significant and point clearly to the power of metaphorical communication, and the need for more study.

In a qualitative study conducted at York University, Angus & Rennie (1988) looked at the effects of metaphor use in four client/therapist dyads. They found that there was a marked difference in the degree of shared understanding of meaning which could be related directly to the therapist's style and approach to working with metaphor.

Clients whose therapists worked collaboratively reported much higher degrees of satisfaction with the sessions. These therapists promoted mutual engagement in the process of apprehending, articulating and elaborating on inner associations to the metaphors. Further, there was a particularly positive impact when the therapists expressed curiosity in and worked to elaborate on the client's own metaphors. Positive aspects reported by the clients included: demonstration of the therapists' attentiveness, clear demonstration of the therapists' way of understanding

the metaphor, revelation of the extent to which understanding was shared, opening of new ways for the client to appreciate the metaphor. An associated finding was that clients in the collaborative dyads revealed much more of their private experiences in the sessions.

Although the study did not set out to discover this, it clearly reveals that sessions in which clients' metaphors become the focus of mutual exploration and association were much more powerful than those in which the therapist supplied the metaphors and/or the interpretations. The power of these sessions seems to reside in a combination of self-disclosure and shared understanding. This double movement appears to be a mutually reinforcing cycle.

Most of the theoretical discussions, and all the studies reviewed to date, work from the assumption that it is the therapist who should supply the metaphor. In this light it is particularly striking that in every one of the studies it is client generation and participation in metaphor which emerges as being most effective. This would seem to point to the need to look more specifically at client generated metaphors. Neither have any studies yet been done which look in any detail at the content of the metaphors generated by clients. If shared understanding is so evidently powerful in the context of a therapeutic dyad, it should be worthwhile to look beyond the dyad to the

possibility of establishing a more broadly shared understanding.

This study asked two main questions: 1) What metaphors do clients generate in therapy situations and how can these client-generated metaphors be categorized? 2) Given the categories of metaphor established by this study, how are these categories correlated according to identified demographic and clinical variables? Some content analysis was also performed on the collected metaphors.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

The research presented here was primarily exploratory in nature. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to identify client generated metaphors, to attempt to form meaningful groupings of these metaphors, and to test for possible correlations.

The sampling was focused, purposive, and non-random, with a view to achieving the maximum possible richness of relevant information (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Patton, 1990). Subjects were recruited from among the existing family therapy caseload at the Child and Family Unit, an outpatient clinic of the Department of Psychiatry at Kingston General Hospital. Therapists at the clinic approached all the families on their current caseload with a request to participate. The sample consists of those who agreed to participate. It was expected that the use of families would allow for a maximum variation of ages and developmental stages within the sample. It was postulated in this design that a subject's use of metaphor would not be directly linked to his/her cognitive level or conceptual fluency. The use of families was a way of testing this.

Family therapy at the clinic is performed primarily by the four Social Workers - two men and two women, two with MSWs and two without. The clinic also employs two



psychologists, a psychometrist, a psychiatrist and a physician as family therapists. The aim was to have each therapist participate in the study, thus allowing for maximum variation of therapist modalities, ages, orientations and genders.

Families currently in therapy were to be approached by their therapist with a request to allow a session to be video- or audio-taped. The therapist then conducted the session as he/she normally would, with no particular direction or tactics imposed by the study. It was anticipated that subjects would number 60 individuals.

The use of a single clinic, a relatively small number of therapists and a non-probability sampling put severe limits to the generalizability of this study. The intent, however, was not to identify or estimate causal relationships between the variables, but to get a first look at what is going on in this area, and to point the way for further study (Neuman, 1991).

The tapes were analyzed by the investigator, who identified client generated metaphors along with relevant variables from data taken from the client file. The identification of metaphors was guided by the definition by Mark Johnson (1987), according to which a metaphor is a mode of expression by which "we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind" (pp. xiv-xv). In this process the

associational structures attached to one term are applied to another. Attention was paid to the apparently conscious conflation of realms in a subject's speech. No attempt was made to distinguish between clichéd and fresh metaphors, as such a distinction would be impossible without knowing the client's intent.

The intention was to avoid looking at such metaphors as are embedded in the language at an unconscious level (eg. metaphors of directionality such as "up" is good, "down" is bad) as identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This is partly because the interest of this study was in the active creation of the clients, and partly to keep data collection at a more manageable level. The investigator was open to the possibility of noting visual as well as verbal expressions in the case of children, although the feasibility of this wasn't to become clear until analysis began.

Attendant variables included: gender, age, position in family, family life cycle situation, social class, gender of therapist, presenting problem, relationship to identified patient, length of time in therapy.

As the metaphors were being collected, the researcher performed a content analysis in an attempt to identify discrete categories. The approach was a variation on the grounded theory approach in which categories are generated and tested out as part of the data collection process

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Reliability in the identification of metaphors was tested by having tapes chosen at random viewed by two independent observers - M.S.W. therapists who had no other connection with the study.

Once the categories were identified by the researcher, they were tested by having four family therapists, two male and two female, who were not otherwise involved in the project, sort the unidentified metaphors into the categories. On the basis of these preliminary sorts and comments by the therapists, the categories were altered as seemed appropriate to improve their fit. Sorts of the metaphors into the final categories were then performed by 8 different therapists, 4 male and 4 female. Seven of these sorters were Social Workers, the eighth was a Psychologist. The results of these sorts were tabulated and compared to give some indication of the validity and reliability of the categories. The comments of the sorting therapists were also noted.

The degree of association between the metaphor categories and the identified demographic and clinical variables was to be tested using Chi Square. The expectation was that at least some of the variables would have predictive power, although this study was designed to focus on correlation only.

This study was approved by the Queen's University Health Science and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board, and the investigator was granted the necessary clinical status in the Department of Psychiatry. It was also passed by the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Discussion

#### Data Collection

A presentation of the study was made to the clinical staff of the Child and Family Unit in mid-September, 1993. In all, four social workers, two psychologists, two psychiatrists, and one physician agreed to participate in the study. Between them, 14 tapes were collected involving the participation of 42 clients over the following four months. With the exception of one tape from one of the psychiatrists, all the tapes were from the social workers. In spite of numerous contacts and arrangements to help with the logistics, no tapes were forthcoming from the other clinicians. This fact made it impossible to attempt the anticipated correlational tests with respect to clinician modality.

Neither was it possible to conduct meaningful correlations with regard to therapist gender. Only four of the tapes were collected by women, one by the psychiatrist and three by the social workers. Of these tapes, two contained no metaphors at all. The remaining two were both prepared by one social worker.

There was at least equal contact with the women involved in collecting the tapes, so it is difficult to explain the discrepancy in numbers. At least part of it may

be due to a perceived technological barrier in setting up the camera. Allied with this is the fact that the men have bigger offices, which are more amenable to the use of the machinery. The women social workers were also involved in their own study at the time, although the tapes collected were to be used for both studies, so this should have tended to increase, rather than decrease their numbers.

Of the other ten tapes, four were prepared by one man, five by another, and one was a co-therapy situation with mixed gender therapists. The make-up the of the family groups was as follows:

single mother with kids:	8
single father with kids:	1
two parents with kids:	4
two parents, kids absent:	1

#### Metaphor Identification

The tapes were viewed by the investigator, who identified metaphors following the criteria outlined in the Methodology. In keeping with my focus on metaphor as a critical boundary of intra- and inter- personal understanding, I paid particular attention to those metaphors in which people were describing themselves or their relationships. As the population being studied was a voluntary clinical population, this attention was congruent

with the focus of the clients themselves. A total of 78 metaphors were initially selected from the total sample of 42 clients.

To establish the degree of reliability, two therapists not otherwise involved in the study were given two randomly selected tapes and asked to identify the metaphors according to the above criteria. The two therapists selected with a total reliability of .73 across the two tapes. Although each selected a different number from each tape, the total number of metaphors across the tapes was the same for each rater. The percentage reliability between the raters and the investigator's selections, however, was much lower, yielding a rate of .47 across the two tapes.

In contemplating this result, I decided that I had been somewhat forgiving in my application of selection criteria, especially in the earlier tapes. Applying the criteria more firmly resulted in a second selection with a reduced total of 63 metaphors. The disqualified metaphors were primarily those whose references were less concrete and were more likely part of the vernacular than novel uses. There were also a number which did not refer to personal state or relationships.

When this second selection was put to the same reliability tests, the resulting rate was .73 between the investigator and combined raters scores. The reliability between the two raters was again .73. And again, while each

rater chose a different number of metaphors from each tape, the total selected by each across the tapes was the same. I selected more metaphors from both tapes than either rater. This can be partly explained by the fact that the sound quality on the tapes was quite poor and the raters were less likely to pursue the project with the same patience as the investigator. Also, I was more invested in, and had more practice overall in the identification of metaphors.

The 63 metaphors were selected from the tapes in the array shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Array of selected metaphors by family members on each tape.

Tape	Father	Mother	Sons		Daughters		Total
1		9	0	0			9
2		4			2	0	6
3		1	1				2
4		3	0	0			3
5	1	7	0		2		10
6	0	0			0		0
7	3		0				3
8		7	0		0		7
9	2	5	0	0			7
10		1	0				1
11		0	0				0
12	5	7					12
13	1	2	0	0	0		3
14	0	0	0		0		0



There was a wide range of numbers of metaphors per tape, ranging from 0 to 12. As can be seen from Table 2, the mean is 4.5 with large standard deviation of 3.99. The metaphors themselves are listed in Appendix 1.

Table 2

Data for independent t-tests on number of metaphors used by gender/generation groupings.

	Fathers	Mothers	Sons	Daughters	Tapes
$\Sigma X$	12	46	1	4	63
N	7	13	14	8	14
$\bar{X}$	1.71	3.54	0.07	0.50	4.5
s	1.80	3.18	0.27	0.93	3.99
$s^2$	3.24	10.10	0.07	0.86	15.96

### Correlations of Metaphor Use

Independent t-tests on the data were performed to establish whether there were significant differences in who articulated the metaphors along gender or generational lines. The data for these tests is outlined in Table 2 and the test results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent t tests on numbers of metaphors used by different gender and generational groupings.

	Mothers	Fathers	Daughters
Fathers	t = 1.39 df, 18 Marginally significant (p = 0.20)		
Daughters	t = 2.62* df, 19 significant (p = 0.02)	t = 1.67 df, 13 Marginally significant (p = 0.20)	
Sons	t = 4.08*** df, 25 significant (p = .001)	t = 3.42** df, 19 significant (p = 0.01)	t = 1.63 df, 20 Marginally significant (p = 0.20)

Note. All degrees of significance are for two-tailed tests.

As can be seen from Table 3, differences in quantity of metaphor use within generations but between genders were marginally significant to the .20 level. The relatively small numbers in some of the categories, however, must throw some question onto the reliability of these results. For example, one man alone was responsible for 5 of the 12 metaphors attributed to the Fathers category. A larger sample would be needed to be able to adequately determine intra-generational gender differences in metaphor use.

The specific inter-generational differences were highly significant in most comparisons, with the exception of Fathers X Daughters. The Mothers X Sons comparison yielded a particularly significant difference. A clear ordering of metaphor use emerges:

Mothers > Fathers > Daughters > Sons

Further tests were performed to directly compare the combined numbers within generations and within genders. These tests are tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4

Independent t-tests cross-generation and cross-gender.

	Parents	Children	Female	Male
$\Sigma X$	58	5	50	13
N	20	22	21	21
$\bar{X}$	2.90	0.23	2.38	0.62
s	2.86	0.61	2.94	1.28
$s^2$	8.20	0.37	8.65	1.65
	t = 4.27 df, 40 p = 0.001**		t = 2.51 df, 40 p = 0.02*	

Note. Significance calculated for two-tailed tests.

### Children and Metaphor Use

As can be seen from the calculations in Table 4, females were significantly more likely than males to use metaphors. Even more dramatic, however, is the difference between the metaphor use by adults and by children - to a significance level of .001. There are a number of ways of trying to understand this. It is clear from the numbers that the children in this study were not speaking metaphorically.

In fact, the children were hardly speaking at all. Given that the modality in the sessions taped was ostensibly family therapy, the investigator was impressed by how little the therapists engaged the children. Almost all the talking was directed at the parents and the children were spoken about more than spoken with - this in spite of the fact that the identified patient in all cases was a child, and most often was a son - the group with the lowest average use of metaphor.

One premise of this study was that metaphor is a process of thinking used by everyone who exists in language, and should therefore be as much used by children as by adults. The data do not support this. It is possible, however, that this has as much to do with the dynamics and atmosphere present in the sessions taped than with the children's facility with language and thought. The conceptual level at which the sessions were pitched, the

attitude of objectification of children by adults - with the child being singled out and asked to perform rather than engaged on his/her own level of interest - and the general lack of attention and time given to the children by the therapists might all conspire to keep the kids quiet. It would at least keep them from conversing in their own language. Even when the therapists did engage the children, it was a quick hit, a question or a seeking of corroboration of what an adult had said. If the child was not immediately responsive, the therapist would turn back very quickly to the other adults in the room.

To the extent that the children in the tapes did participate in metaphor creation, they tended to do so in ways quite different from the adults. The researcher noticed a number of times when children seemed to be enacting metaphors without actually naming them. One boy, for instance, growled at his mother when she mentioned the possibility of moving across the country; a young girl offered her mother some plasticine when the mother was talking about feeling isolated and unable to cope. These children are acting directly but they are also acting out metaphors. Some supportive intervention by the therapists might have coaxed out the important connections.

That children use metaphor in particular ways is supported by the research of Santostefano (1988) and Gardner and Winner (1982). These studies have found a

developmentally linked progression in metaphor formulation. Metaphorical thinking becomes apparent in children as soon as their communicative behaviour becomes comprehensible to adult researchers. With the advent of language, metaphorical expression blossoms as the child experiments with sense-making. At this early stage the connections are almost all based on physical resemblance or similarity in action. There is little or no ability to make conceptual or psychological links, although there often is an affective link. Thus, for example, a young boy in the study hugged his mother and then remarked that she had "Jello in there", referring to her breasts. We can hear this and make connections at a number of levels, for example in terms of nourishment and nurturance. The child, however, is more likely to address the link at the level of texture.

It is not until the pre-adolescent years that the fully layered use of verbal metaphor becomes common. In some studies it has been found that the use of metaphors falls off dramatically when children are in the primary school years (Gardner & Winner, 1982). This is linked with the time of rule-learning and more literal mindedness. Children at this stage are more likely to use conventional metaphors - learning the connotative language of the culture - and can become troubled by novel figurative language.

An example of this was found in the study during a session in which an 8-year-old boy got very upset in talking about a commercial he had seen for Ritz Crackers. The catch line in the commercial was "Get close to somebody. Slip a Ritz between you". The boy protested that this made no sense at all and was clearly bothered by the concept. It seemed to me while watching the tape that the affective link had something to do with the recent death of the boy's father and the different kinds of distance and closeness he felt towards his father and his mother. These were issues he would not talk about directly. Attention to the metaphorical puzzle might have been a way into the therapeutic realm.

Santostefano describes a developmentally ordered progression of metaphor use in children from an acting mode (ducking for cover from a wooden block which has become a bomb), through an imaging mode (imagining the wooden block blowing up) to a verbalizing mode ("It's a bomb"). These correspond to an on-going progression from more concrete processes to more abstract ones - a progression which he traces within each mode as well as between them. Earlier modes are not replaced by later ones, but remain potentially active, so that the language mode is nested within the fantasy mode which is nested within the action mode. It is this nesting which provides the affective and conceptual power of metaphor.

Based on this formulation, Santostefano describes working progressively with children's metaphors in a way which incorporates all levels. By this process the verbally constructed metaphors achieved at the end will have roots within the fantasy realm and the action realm. Pathology comes, he says, from a metaphor having become fixed somewhere along the line. It takes working directly with the stuck metaphor in the same mode in which it is formulated for the child to be able to move on. Thus, although over time the children will become more likely to use verbal metaphors than to enact them, simply talking about a problem will not itself reach what needs to be reached (Santostefano, 1988).

It is clear that the methodology of this study, which is focused on verbally articulated metaphor, is inappropriate to establish metaphor use by children younger than pre-adolescence. Indeed, of the five metaphors identified from the children, four are from adolescents. The other is a pale expression of the Ritz Cracker turmoil cited above, "When I imagine my dad, I get further away from my mom". A broader definition of metaphor which includes metaphors of action and fantasy would be required to fully include children.



### Metaphor Use and Length of Time in Therapy

Because of the very low participation rate of the children in the study, only the parents were considered in looking at the other attendant variables. The study sample turned out to be a remarkably homogenous one. All the parents were between 35 and 45 years of age, and of the 20 adults 18 had education to the high school level. The presenting problems were all child focused and, as I discovered, only vaguely described in the files. The most significant distinguishing variable in terms of family life cycle situation seemed to be whether the household was headed by one or two parents. Co-parenting households provided 10 of the adults who uttered 30 metaphors ( $\bar{X} = 3$ ;  $s^2 = 7.55$ ). Single parent households provided 8 adults who uttered 26 metaphors ( $\bar{X} = 3.5$ ;  $s^2 = 9.71$ ). An independent t-test on this data provided a t score of 0.36 (df, 16) which indicates no significant difference between the means.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to establish any correlation between the number of metaphors uttered and number of sessions in therapy for each adult. The data for this test is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Data for Pearson product-moment correlation between Number of Sessions and Number of Metaphors

Subject	Number of Sessions (X)	Number of Metaphors (Y)	(X)(Y)
1	30	9	270
2	10	4	40
3	3	1	3
4	3	3	9
5	5	1	5
6	5	7	35
7	7	0	0
8	7	0	0
9	4	3	12
10	3	7	21
11	5	5	25
12	5	2	10
13	9	1	9
14	20	0	0
15	4	5	20
16	4	7	28
17	2	2	4
18	2	1	2
19	1	0	0
20	1	0	0
	$\Sigma X = 130$ $\Sigma X^2 = 1764$ $(\Sigma X)^2 = 16900$	$\Sigma Y = 58$ $\Sigma Y^2 = 324$ $(\Sigma Y)^2 = 3364$	$\Sigma XY = 493$ $(\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y) = 7540$

The test resulted in  $r = 0.23$  (df, 18) which shows no significant correlation between the number of sessions a client had attended and number of metaphors spoken. It can be seen from the above table that if one parent didn't speak metaphorically, neither did the other. Family culture would seem to have an important role to play in style of speech. This gives some experimental support to what seems to be

only common sense. Another possible interpretation of this phenomenon comes from a quick anecdotal survey of the therapists regarding how much movement there was in the families at the time of taping. Their responses indicated a possible correlation between number of metaphors uttered and therapeutic progress. This would be worth further study. It would also be interesting to pursue a longitudinal study following clients through the process of their therapy to track the use of metaphor over time.

#### Metaphor Content

An examination of the content of the metaphors along the significant axes of gender and parenting status yielded some interesting distinctions. The metaphors collected from the men in the study were characterized by a central concern with the concept of agency. More than an expectation that they themselves were active or effective in the world, their expressions spoke to a generalized comprehension of the world as being defined in terms of agency. Either they order or try to control things ("That feeling isn't justified", "You have to have some kind of regimental order", "I should have caught that before it got out of my mouth", "We keep things inside...."), or it is clear that others are doing so ("She treats me like a kid", "The kid runs the show"). A personal, existential crisis is described in terms of a failure or misapplication of agency

"I'm desperate for love, but I live my whole life in my head", and dreams of escape from a current life situation are articulated in terms of giving up agency, "I wish the wind would come and take me away beyond the stars".

Women's metaphors seem much less concerned with agency per se and more involved with defining their position in a given situation. This is not a matter of expressed passivity or reactivity but rather of responding in a world which is not motivationally defined. Where men use the transitive, women prefer the intransitive or copula: "It's like I have two kids", "I feel I'm the size of a cockroach", "I feel diminished", "There has to be a balance...", "I get pulled both ways", "I don't want to be the ogre", "Every direction I turn, they're all flailing with their hands out to me". When agency does make an appearance in the women's metaphors, it is only in an attenuated way, "It's like putting the brakes on a locomotive that's been running for centuries", "I'm begging people to be thoughtful of me", "It's like being in the middle of a hurricane. If you stay in that one spot you're safe. But you can't always run as fast as a hurricane moves". The agency here is either secondary - trying to get someone else to do something - or seemingly insufficient to the task. This kind of mood extends even to descriptions of relationship. A woman in an unhappy marriage expresses it not as "I don't love him any

more", but as "The affection between us has been dead for years". It sounds almost non-participatory.

Even when the images expressed are very similar there is a significant difference to the subtext. One man explained that he was "pushed to the limit", while a woman talked of her kids "pushing me to the very edge". One possible interpretation of this difference is that the woman expresses herself in terms of an edge which exists independently of herself. It is there waiting for her to be pushed over it. The man speaks of a limit, which doesn't exist except as defined by himself. They are both being pushed, but there is an expressed difference in terms of the determination of how far they can cede.

None of the metaphors uttered by the men referred directly to a feeling state. On the few occasions when the men did speak of feelings in the sessions, it was done directly, "I hate my life", "I'm desperate for love". Their metaphors describe situations which, while they may be evocative of feeling, were presented very much as matters of fact. Men's metaphors were much less likely to be used as such and were more embedded in descriptions which were not particularly imagistic or ambiguous. "That feeling isn't justified", "I'm not a good yardstick", "She goes ballistic". Indeed, many of the sorters had difficulty identifying some of the men's statements as metaphorical at all.

The women were much more likely to use metaphors openly, often using formulations such as "I feel like....", or "It's as though...." to announce that it was a metaphor. They were also much more likely to use metaphor to describe a feeling state or a relationship. Women spoke more often of "what things are like". Men spoke more of "the way things are".

In terms of parenting status, the most suggestive distinction was in the language used by co-parenting women and single parenting women. The women in a co-parenting situation were much more likely to use more graphic and violent imagery in their descriptions: "Getting your head bitten off", "He jumps on you", "He has an angry seed in him that wants to burst", "I feel squashed", "It's like someone is punching me in the face". The images in these metaphors are quite specific and the action is clearly attributed to someone else.

The single mothers expressed themselves in terms of being cheated, punished, or lost: "I got ripped off, royally", "It's never going to be my turn", "I'm doing time", "They shut me out", "I've gone the wrong way". Here the attributions are generalized and vague. While marriage leads to descriptions of danger, single motherhood echoes with a general sense of unfairness. These tendencies clearly correspond to the realities of women's lives in our culture.

Looking at the collected metaphors altogether, it is striking how many can be seen to articulate or evoke some form of dilemma. Metaphor has been presented in this study as a way of conjoining conceptual and affective realms to open up new possibilities for articulation and understanding. But this conjunction could also be felt as being pulled in two directions at once. Many of the metaphors collected can be interpreted to imply such a dilemma of perception or desire; how I am seen/how I am, where I want to be/where I am, how things seem/how they ought to be.

What initially sound like complaints, then, can be heard as yearnings, as the marks of a decisional, as well as a descriptive, crystallization, as a conjunctive expression of a perceived disjunction: "I don't want to be the ogre", "She treats me like a kid", "I'd rather let go than do this pulling routine". This effect might account for the level of poignance reported by the therapist sorters in the study. Listening for these expressions could have significant therapeutic value in terms of identifying and exploring the client's presently felt binds or cusps.

### Categories

The process of sorting the metaphors into categories proved to be problematic. The researcher established preliminary categories by seeking thematic or imagistic

links between the metaphors. Metaphors were subject to a series of sorts based on whether they were like or unlike a chosen exemplar. In this way 12 categories were identified. These were tested by having the metaphors sorted into the categories by four other therapists. The results were tabulated and discussions with the therapists followed. Through the course of these tests some of the categories were dropped, some split, and some new ones were nominated. The result was a final set of 15 categories which were tested by 8 other therapists.

It became clear through the process of category nomination that the categories would only be relatively discrete. The only way to achieve discrete categories would be to sort strictly on the basis of imagistic content. This, however, would result in many more categories, most of which would contain one example. The richness of the categories, and their poignance, came from connections in theme, mood and impression. This necessarily involved a degree of interpretation, which introduced a level of ambiguity to the categories and their membership. Of course, ambiguity and multiple associational possibility is the very ground of metaphor. It would be surprising if the categories were anything but fluid.

The categories and the number of metaphors sorted into them according to various reliabilities are shown in Table 6. The reliabilities of .50 and over have been given



ordinal ratings from 1 - 5. These have been totalled for each category. Complete listings of the categories and the metaphors sorted into each are presented in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Table 6

Reliability of sorts into categories with ordinal ratings.

Category	Reliability/Ordinal rating					Ord. total
	1.0/5	.88/4	.75/3	.62/2	.50/1	
Inside,Outside	1	2		1		15
Small/Insignif	2	1			1	15
Balance	1	1				9
In the middle			3			9
Battle/Contest	2				1	11
Attacked			4		1	13
Rejected			1	2	2	9
Acted on					2	2
Judged		2			1	9
Judging			1		1	4
In prison	1	1			1	10
Despair	2	2	2		1	25
Measuring			1	1	1	6
Stuck/Impasse		1				4
Unfairness	1		1	1		10
TOTAL	10	10	13	5	11	
PERCENTAGE	5.8%	15.8%	20.6%	7.9%	17.5%	

In addition to the metaphors accounted for in Table 6, there were 14 (22.1%) which didn't sort into any category with a reliability of at least .50. In all, 49 (77.7%) of the metaphors sorted into a category with .50 or above reliability, and 38 (60.3%) sorted with a reliability of .62 or higher.

Working from the ordinal totals, the categories can be ordered in terms of reliability:

Despair (25); Inside,Outside (15); Small,Insignificant (15); Attacked (13); Battle,Contest (11); Unfairness (10); In prison,Punished (10); Balance (9); Caught in the middle (9); Judged (9); Rejected (9); Measuring (6); Stuck,Impasse (4); Judging (4); Acted on (1).

Any decisions about the validity of the categories would be arbitrary, but it seems clear that the final four are questionable, especially if the .50 level sorts are disregarded.

The numbers are too small to allow for the performance of Chi square. However, Table 7 gives some indication of the breakdown of categories by gender and parenting status.

Table 7

Category sorts by Gender and Parenting Status

CATEGORY	GENDER		Suggestive?	PARENTING STATUS			Suggestive?
	M.	F.		Co	S.	K.	
Inside, outside	2	2		3	1		
Small/Insig.		4	?	4			?
Balance		2	?	1	1		
In the middle		3	?	2	1		
Battle/Contest	.5	2		.5	2		
Attacked	1	4		4		1	?
Rejected		5	?	1	2	2	?
Acted on	.5	1		.5	1		
Judged		3	?	2	1		
Judging	1	1			2		?
In prison		3	?		3		?
Despair	2	5		4	3		
Measuring	2	1	?	3			?
Stuck, impasse		1		1			
Unfairness		3	?		2	1	?

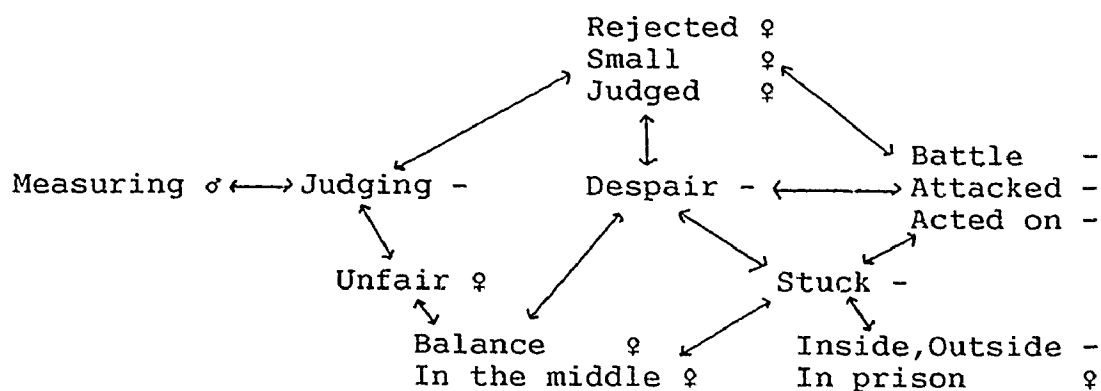
Note. Co. = Coparenting; S. = Single parent; K = Kid

The .5 values are due to one card being sorted equally into two categories.

As can be seen from Table 7, some of the categories are somewhat suggestive of gender and parenting status differences. "Despair" was the most reliably sorted

category, and it is also one which seems shared between men and women, married and single. Similarly, the category about generalized boundaries, "Inside,Outside" was common. Overall, the women's metaphors were sorted into categories related to some sense of relational imbalance. The men's were sorted somewhat preferentially into categories of measuring and judgement. Children seemed to sort onto the receiving end of some sort of relational insult.

In looking at the minority sorts for each metaphor, some clearly identifiable clusters emerged. These clusters of categories maintained the suggestive differentials between genders. For example, "Battle", "Attacked", and "Acted on" were consistent minority sorts for each other. None of these categories showed any suggestive correlation. "Rejected" and "Physically small" were interrelated and are both suggestively related to women. The same is true of "Balance", and "In the middle". The preferentially male category, "Measuring" was associated with no other category. The array of categories as clustered according to their minority sorts are represented below. The lines joining various clusters represent some overlap in the sorts or in the sorters' comments.



### Sorter Interpretations

There were some interesting differences as well in how the sorters interpreted the metaphors. Although the sorters were instructed to sort as much as possible based on what was on the card, it was clear that much of the sorting was being based on some degree of interpretation. In follow-up discussions with the sorters, these interpretations were identified as coming partly from some basic attitudinal stance, based for example on gender.

As an example, the metaphor "I feel squashed" was sorted by the men according to its descriptive content. "Squashed" from this point of view is a state of being and the metaphor was sorted into the "Physically small/Insignificant" category. For the women, however, "squashed" was a relational word, it was something someone had done to you. They sorted this card into the "Rejected" pile or the "Attacked" pile. "The kid runs the show" was sorted by the women into "Acted on" and by the men into

"Battle/Contest". It seems the men felt themselves to be in direct competition with the kid where the women put themselves more into a responsive, outside position. Women sorted "She talks as though we are beneath her" into the category of being "Judged". The men, however, sorted this card into "Rejected". The difference seems to lie in the question of how much guilt was taken on in the context of a relational snub.

It was clear through the process that the sorts were being performed on the basis of an emotional response to the metaphors. The extent to which this happened became clear only after discussion. A woman realized during discussion that she had not sorted the metaphor "The kids are pushing me to the very edge" into the category of "Acted on" because she didn't want to think about kids that way, even though it seemed to fit in terms of content. In another case one of the men acknowledged sorting "She doesn't look out for me at all" into the category "Unfair" because of associations in his own life. He 'knew' it fit better into "Rejected/Not considered" but his immediate emotional response took precedence.

There are many examples of this kind of interpretive sort happening. This speaks to the power of metaphor to generate a feeling response which can by-pass or override our cognitive filters. It also points out the importance of not assuming we know what a metaphor means without exploring

it with the client. This is consistent with a constructivist approach whereby meaning is created only in interaction. We cannot assume or impose an interpretation on our client's expressions or behaviours. It may be tempting to assume we know what a metaphor means, especially since that appeal is implicit in its articulation, "You know what I mean?" Neither the therapist nor the client can "know what it means" without mutual exploration.

It became clear through the sorting process that the categories were not clear and distinct, but functioned more like nodal points along a number of continua. The differences between the categories were differences of degree rather than kind. Metaphors would constellate around these nodal points at various distances, and the categories themselves could be seen to cluster together in various formations. These clusters were themselves fluid, with many cross-currents running between them. One arrangement is presented above, organized on the basis of majority and minority sorts. Some of the sorters would arrange the categories in different ways when they were setting up to sort, depending on which associational links were being pursued.

For example, one sorter organized the categories into the following constellations based on ideas of 1. Balance of forces 2. Feeling small 3. Being attacked.

Inside/Outside	Physically small
Balance	Rejected
Caught in the middle	Despair/Emptiness
Stuck/At an impasse	Unfairness
Measuring/Ordering	Acted on/Controlled
	Judging/Judged
	In prison/Punished
	Attacked/Casualty
	Battle/Contest

While there are clear continuities within each constellation, there are also clear linkages between them, as I have represented here by placing Measuring/Ordering and Acted on/controlled between constellations. Other cross-linkages are also possible. Stuck/At an impasse can be placed on a continuum with Despair; Caught in the middle with Unfairness; Rejected with Attacked.

Another sorter tried to distinguish categories according to the concepts of agency; control and lack of control. Here, too, issues of interpretation became paramount. For example in the metaphor "Its like trying to put the brakes on a locomotive that's been running for centuries", some sorters responded to the sense of being acted on by the locomotive, while others saw the attempt to put the brakes on as a sign of agency.

In reflecting back on the earlier discussion of metaphor as indicator of dilemma, it is interesting to note that all the nominated categories are evocative of some kind of oscillation between states. The differences between them



have to do with how that polar tension is identified or defined.

### On the Nature of Categories

The fuzziness of the categories is troublesome if what Johnson (1987) refers to as the classical Objectivist ideal of categories is applied. According to this view a category is defined by necessary and sufficient conditions which specify the properties shared by all and only members of that category. This ideal seems to apply in only very few cases. In reality, we categorize things based on imaginative structures of understanding, which are themselves based in perception, conception, culture, and context. The result is not a collection of discrete sets, but networks of clusters. Each category, according to this view, has a kind of radial structure, with more prototypical members closer to the central definition and others more peripheral, and perhaps participating in the outer reaches of several clusters. The image is not unlike the view of the atom presented by quantum physics, in which electrons do not inhabit discrete shells, but rather exist everywhere as clusters of probability.

Working from the same, non-objectivist stance, Lakoff (1987) talks about categorization as being more a matter of human experience and imagination than of clearly distinctive properties of the members. Categories may be founded, for

instance, on the basis of some sort of family resemblance, whereby the members may all be related to one another without all having any property in common that defines the category. Thus we can have a complex kind of chaining taking place, whereby a member is linked to other members which are themselves linked to others. A may relate to B which may relate to C, but C and A may have nothing obviously in common. One ramification of this phenomenon is that there may be members which are better examples of a category than others. This will certainly be the case when one member is used as a prototype to generate the categories. As this was the method used to generate the categories in the study it is not surprising that a radial clustering was the result. This structure was most clear in the categories which were nominated on the basis of more concrete images, such as "Physically small" and less clear in those based more on thematic links, and were therefore more open to interpretation. This view of categories also allows for a gradience of membership and a lack of clearly distinguishable boundaries between them. A may relate to B which may relate to C which may be related to B' which relates to A' of another category. Thus, the range of a category will depend on what other categories are available.

What determines category structure, according to Lakoff, is a matter of correlations, which grow out of our interactions with the world, including the social world -

how we perceive it, picture it, affect it and gain knowledge of it. How we categorize will depend on what seems relevant. A television set can be categorized as a piece of furniture, an electronic device, a tool of the capitalist élite, a baby-sitter, and so on.

This is not an argument for relativism so much as an argument for pragmatics. It is not that there is no hierarchical structure, but rather that the structure grows out of, and is contingent upon, our mutual understanding. This is a point taken up by Umberto Eco (1984) in his discussion of dictionary understanding and encyclopedia understanding. By dictionary, he means the closed, definitional, two-dimensional, hierarchical structuring of meaning which Johnson referred to above as Objectivist. Encyclopedia refers to the whole range of description and interpretation and flux which forms the whole ground of our understanding. This encyclopedia Eco describes as a net, in which all points can be connected with every other point.

Links are made not on the basis of inherent properties or imperatives, but on the basis of choice and intention. It is interpretation which creates structures in knowledge - which creates localized, contextually determined dictionaries.

Such a notion does not deny the existence of structured knowledge; it only suggests that such a knowledge cannot be recognized and organized as a global system; it provides only local and transitory systems of knowledge.

(Eco, 1984, p. 84)

These localized systems are very useful. In fact, they form the basis of all pragmatics. And they are precisely what we are dealing with in therapy. But they grow out of a background of encyclopedic knowledge which will be more or less common to all parties and different aspects of which can be brought into the local interaction. Metaphor is one way of making the connections, of crystallizing and localizing the sense of an experience.

The complex interplay between metaphors and categories was explored as long ago as 1655 in the work of Emanuele Tesauro (Eco, 1984). Reviewing the typologies of Aristotle, Tesauro came to the conclusion that there is no unified way of understanding any metaphor. By altering the categories by which we interpret any metaphor, something new is created. This he saw as an open-ended process.

This was certainly evident during the sorts in this study. The sorters very often commented on how many different ways there were of interpreting the cards. According to Tesauro, one could take any metaphor card and

look at it under the light of any of the categories nominated, and new propositions, arguments and insights would become visible.

It has too long been thought that in order to understand metaphors it is necessary to know the code; the truth is that the metaphor is the tool that permits us to understand the encyclopedia better. This is the type of knowledge that the metaphor stakes out for us.

(Eco, 1984, p. 129)

## Chapter 5

### Implications

It is clear from the results of this study that adult clients do speak metaphorically. Of the 20 adults in the sample, 15 provided metaphors during the single session in which they were taped. Children, on the other hand, do not speak metaphors. For them the metaphorical realm is one of enaction and imagination. To work effectively on the level of children's metaphorical constructions requires moving beyond simply talking at them. In the context of family therapy, this invites us to find ways of working effectively in this realm with children and adults together. For children, working with metaphor can be a way to help them articulate something which is sensed. For adults, it promises a way to loosen up conceptual bindings. Metaphor might offer a place where adults and children and therapists can learn to play together.

The low level of interaction with the children in the sessions taped has implications for the way family therapy is conceived and taught. A greater emphasis on inclusive interactive methods appropriate to different developmental stages might help bring the children into the therapy more effectively.

That working with metaphor has real potential in terms of linking the affective and cognitive realms was evidenced

by the reactions of the sorters, all of whom became interested and energized in their contact with the metaphors and by the process of puzzling out a sort. This is in contrast with the attention the therapists apparently paid to the metaphors uttered in their sessions. The identified metaphors were shown to the therapists following the data collection for the study. Only twice did one of them recognize metaphors which had been spoken in their sessions. As the therapists are all seasoned and skilful practitioners, this is indicative of the ability of metaphor to bypass our cognitive filters. Something makes them difficult to hear, yet they evoke a strong and highly empathic response when they are heard.

The numbers in this study were too small and the sample too homogenous to establish reliably valid categories or significant correlations. The results were quite suggestive, however, especially as regards gender and parenting status, and point to the value of further research. This could be pursued fruitfully both extensively and intensively. Looking at a much broader sample with higher numbers and in a variety of modalities could establish clearer distinctions in terms of how clients speak. As indicated in the discussion above regarding categories, this would never achieve the rigor of a taxonomy. It could, however, be helpful in giving therapists some idea of what we are hearing, and be

suggestive of new ways of listening. In the language of Umberto Eco, this would be a project of enlarging our knowledge of the encyclopedia.

It would be valuable, also, to work intensively and more pragmatically with specific clients to establish differences in metaphor use over time. A longitudinal study tracking client use of metaphor through a course of therapy might give some indication of linkages between use of metaphor and therapeutic progress. These linkages would be worth pursuing both on the level of content and form of use. An exploration of different ways of working with and in metaphor could also prove valuable. The findings of the content analysis in terms of the differing conceptions regarding agency and the identification of dilemmas point to possible directions. Paying close attention to the metaphors our clients use is one possible way of slowing down the cognitive pattern and gaining more direct access to the vital affective connection between process and content.

It is clear from this study that what an utterance means cannot be assumed. Some of the sorters commented that they would find it easier if they knew the context in which something was said. Maybe so. But my own feeling is that in terms of metaphor use the context is not always apparent, either to the therapist in the room or to the client. Indeed, the potential power of using metaphor therapeutically is that it is a way of opening up to



contexts which are not visible or even expressible in any other way.

If one conclusion can be made quite clearly from this study, it is that working with metaphor presents conundra on a number of levels. To work with metaphor is to give up absolutes. It is not to know, but to be open to revelation. It is to trust, yet not totally rely on, our interpretations. It is to be open to play, with all its attendant inconclusiveness and challenging of precepts. Perhaps it is fitting that an exploratory study should raise more questions than it answers. At the end as at the beginning, metaphor proves to be at once a source of clarity and enigma.

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## Appendix 1

The MetaphorsTape 1.

- Mother:
- I'd sooner let go than do this pulling routine
  - I feel like I'm doing time
  - I'm being punished
  - I got ripped off, royally
  - I'm a lost cause
  - Its never going to be my turn
  - Its like putting the brakes on a locomotive that's been running for centuries
  - I have a big black void in my life where interests should be
  - Every direction I turn, they're all flailing with their hands out to me

Tape 2.

- Mother:
- The attention I pay them balances out along the way
  - Who gets the last word, wins
  - We constantly have to battle for things
  - You want to shove your opinion down everybody's throat
- Daughter:
- I feel cheated
  - She doesn't look out for me at all

Tape 3.

- Mother:
- I don't want to be the ogre
- Son:
- When I imagine my dad, I get further away from my mom

Tape 4.

- Mother:
- I'm being judged by the way my children are being brought up
  - They gang up on me
  - They shut me out

Tape 5.

Mother: - I get pulled both ways  
- He tops the list  
- I'm caught in the middle  
- I feel this small (with fingers held together)  
- She talks as though we are beneath her  
- If you like getting your head bitten off  
- He jumps on you

Father: - I'm not a good yardstick

Daughter: - He yells at me like I'm a stranger  
- He's the first to bite my head off

Tape 6. - noneTape 7.

Father: - We keep things inside until they bubble out  
- That feeling is not justified  
- I was pushed to the limit

Tape 8.

Mother: - Its like being in the middle of a hurricane. If  
you stay in that one spot your safe. But you  
can't always runs as fast as a hurricane moves  
- It seems I've gone the wrong way  
- Its my kids I'm running from  
- I shut myself off  
- I just totally lose myself  
- I'm shoved onto the back burner  
- The kids are pushing me to the very edge

Tape 9.

Mother: - Its like someone is punching me in the face  
- There has to be a balance where I can step out  
of the picture for a while  
- I feel dispensable  
- I'm begging people to be thoughtful of me  
- I feel judged by my sons' future wives

Father: - I should have caught that before it got out of  
my mouth  
- She goes ballistic



Tape 10.

Mother: - I don't want to be caught in the middle

Tape 11. - noneTape 12.

Mother: - I feel totally stopped in my tracks  
- Its like I have two children (instead of one child, one spouse)  
- We've been stewing and boiling inside all week  
- I feel squashed  
- The affection between us has been dead for years  
- I feel like I'm the size of a cockroach  
- I feel diminished

Father: - I'm desperate for love, but I live my whole life in my head  
- She treats me like a little kid  
- We get into the darkness  
- The kid runs the show  
- I wish the wind would come and take me away beyond the stars

Tape 13.

Mother: - He has an angry seed in him that wants to burst  
- I feel like part of life is gone

Father: - You have to have some regimental order

Tape 14. - none

**Appendix 2**The Categories

1. Inside, Outside
2. Physically small/Insignificant
3. Balance
4. Caught in the middle/Torn
5. Battle/Contest
6. Attacked/Casualty
7. Rejected/Not considered/Put one-down
8. Acted on/Controlled/At the mercy of forces
9. Judged
10. Judging
11. In prison, Punished
12. Despair/Emptiness/Loss/Lost
13. Measuring/Ordering
14. Stuck/At an impasse
15. Unfairness

### Appendix 3

#### The Sort (With Reliabilities Over 0.5)

##### 1. Inside, Outside:

- We keep things inside until they bubble out (1.0)
- He has an angry seed in him that wants to burst (.88)
- We've been stewing and boiling inside all week (.88)
- I should have caught that before it got out of my mouth (.62)

##### 2. Physically small, Insignificant:

- I feel I'm the size of a cockroach (1.0)
- I feel diminished (1.0)
- I feel this small (fingers together) (.88)
- I feel squashed (.50)

##### 3. Balance achieved or sought:

- There has to be a balance where I can step out of the picture for a while (1.0)
- The attention I pay them balances out along the way (.88)

##### 4. Caught in the middle/Torn:

- I get pulled both ways (.75)
- I'm caught in the middle (.75)
- I don't want to be caught in the middle (.75)

##### 5. Battle/Contest:

- Who gets the last word, wins (1.0)
- We constantly have to battle for things (1.0)
- The kid runs the show (.50)

## 6. Attacked/Casualty:

- He's the first to bite my head off (.75)
- He jumps on you (.75)
- If you like getting your head bitten off (.75)
- Its like someone is punching me in the face (.75)
- She goes ballistic (.50)

## 7. Rejected/Not considered by others:

- They shut me out (.75)
- I'm begging people to be thoughtful of me (.62)
- She doesn't look out for me at all (.62)
- He yells at me like I'm a stranger (.50)
- I'm shoved onto the back burner (.50)

## 8. Acted on/At the mercy of outside forces:

- It's like being in the middle of a hurricane.  
If you stay in that one spot, you're safe.  
But you can't always run as fast as a hurricane  
moves (.50)
- The kid runs the show (.50)

## 9. Judged:

- I feel judged by my sons' future wives (.88)
- I'm being judged by the way my children are  
being brought up (.88)
- She talks as though we are beneath her (.50)

## 10. Judging:

- It seems I've gone the wrong way (.75)
- That feeling is not justified (.50)

11. In prison/Punished:
- I feel like I'm doing time (1.0)
  - I'm being punished (.88)
  - I shut myself off (.50)
12. Despair/Emptiness/Loss/Lost:
- I feel like part of life is gone (1.0)
  - The affection between us has been dead for years (1.0)
  - We get into the darkness (.88)
  - I have a big black void where interests should be (.88)
  - I'm a lost cause (.75)
  - I just totally lose myself (.75)
  - I wish the wind would come and take me away beyond the stars (.50)
13. Measuring/Ordering:
- You have to have some regimental order (.75)
  - I'm not a good yardstick (.62)
  - He tops the list (.50)
14. Stuck/At an impasse:
- I feel totally stopped in my tracks (.88)
15. Unfairness:
- I feel cheated (1.0)
  - I got ripped off, royally (.75)
  - Its never going to be my turn (.50)

## Appendix 4

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

HEARING METAPHOR: A study of clients' use of language in a family therapy situation.

Your family is being asked to participate in a study which will look at how people use language in a therapy situation. This study is being conducted by Chris Whynot, a masters student in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. The primary purpose of the study is to learn more about the specific ways people express themselves in therapy. It is hoped that this will help therapists to hear and understand their clients' concerns more accurately.

Your participation in the study will involve allowing this session to be video or audio taped. Other than the presence of the recording equipment, there will be no alterations or intrusions into the session.

Everything in the session will remain confidential. The tape will be analyzed by Mr. Whynot with respect to language use. The only other person having access to the tape will be his thesis supervisor, Prof. Dennis Miehl, of the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. The tape will be kept in a secure place until such time as the sessions have been analyzed and coded. At this point, the tape will be erased.

The anonymously coded data will be sorted by a number of other therapists participating in the study. At no point will any identifying information be related to the content of the material.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. Any member of your family is free to withdraw consent at any time. Mr. Whynot is available to discuss the research and any concerns you may have about the project. He may be reached at 542-8133 in Kingston. If you wish to discuss the research with his advisor, Professor Dennis Miehl, can be reached by phone in Waterloo at (519) 884-1970, ext. 2666. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your own convenience and information.

\* \* \*

We have read and understand the above information and we give our consent to having this session taped.

Dated at Kingston, Ontario, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 1993.

Clients' signatures: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Therapist's signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 5

## KINGSTON GENERAL HOSPITAL

76 Stuart Street, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 2V7  
Telephone (613) 548-3232

1993 September 9

Mr. Christopher A. Whynot  
121 Cliff Crescent  
Kingston, Ontario  
K7M 1B1

Dear Mr. Whynot:

I am writing to inform you that your application for departmental assistant privileges to work in the Department of Psychiatry has been approved. As outlined in your application, Dr. A. Froese will act as your supervisor.

The appointment is effective immediately, and expires on June 30, 1994.

Please present this letter to the Security Officer, Connell O, any Tuesday or Thursday between 0900-1130 hours to obtain your security pass.

Sincerely,

David M. Robertson, MD, FRCPC  
Medical Director

DMR:l

cc Dr. E. Waring  
Dr. A. Clark  
Dr. A. Froese  
Patient Records

## Appendix 6


**QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES AND AFFILIATED  
TEACHING HOSPITALS RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW APPROVAL**

Queen's University, in accordance with the "Guidelines on Research Involving Human Subjects, 1987," prepared by the Medical Research Council, requires that research projects involving human subjects be reviewed annually to determine their acceptability on ethical grounds.

**A Research Ethics Board composed of:**

<b>Dr. A.F. Clark</b>	<b>Associate Dean, Medical Research Services Faculty of Medicine, Queen's University Director of Research, Kingston General Hospital (Chair)</b>
<b>Dr. J. Bickenbach</b>	<b>Professor, Department of Philosophy, Queen's University (Lawyer)</b>
<b>Mr. B. Breen</b>	<b>Community Member</b>
<b>Dr. L.E. Dagnone</b>	<b>Associate Professor, Division of Emergency Medicine, Department of Surgery, Queen's University</b>
<b>Professor S. Eastabrook</b>	<b>Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, Queen's University</b>
<b>Dr. E. Eisenhauer</b>	<b>Director, Investigational New Drug Program, National Cancer Institute of Canada Clinical Trials Group Professor, Department of Oncology, Queen's University</b>
<b>Dr. P. Iyer</b>	<b>Assistant Professor, Division of Geriatric Medicine, Department of Medicine, Queen's University and St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital</b>
<b>Sister J. Kalchbrenner</b>	<b>Bioethicist, Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph Clinical Ethicist, Hotel Dieu Hospital Assistant Professor, Dept. of Family Medicine, Queen's University</b>
<b>Dr. S. Lawson</b>	<b>Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Queen's University and Kingston Psychiatric Hospital</b>
<b>Dr. J. Low</b>	<b>Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Queen's University and Kingston General Hospital</b>
<b>Dr. W. Racz</b>	<b>Professor, Department of Pharmacology &amp; Toxicology, Queen's University</b>
<b>Professor S. Taylor</b>	<b>Bioethicist, Faculty of Medicine, Queen's University and Kingston General Hospital; Assistant Professor, Department of Family Medicine, Queen's University</b>

has examined the protocol and consent form for the project entitled "Hearing Metaphor (The Quest for Mutual Understanding in Psychotherapy): A Study of Clients' Use of Language in a Family Therapy Situation" as proposed by Chris Whynot of the School of Social Work at Wilfred Laurier University and considers it to be ethically acceptable. This approval is valid for one year. If there are any amendments or changes to the protocol affecting the patients in this study, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to notify the Research Ethics Board.

Albert Clark  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Aug 26/93  
Date

ORIGINAL TO INVESTIGATOR - COPY TO DEPARTMENT HEAD - COPY TO HOSPITAL(S) - FILE COPY