A Brief Overview of Interpretation
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1. **The Cycle of Interpretation**: Includes 4 possible phases – confrontational observation, inferential clarification, interpretation, and construction.

   a. **Confrontational Observation** - is simply a calling of attention to an act or utterance
   i. **Example** "I've noticed that when I make a comment about what you have been telling me, we don't think or talk much about it together."

   ii. **Example** "Have you noticed how you always seem to hold your purse in your lap in front of you."
   a. **Follow-up Interpretation**: "You seem to feel safer behind your purse because you imagine that it would be painful to have both of you know how you feel and what you want."

   b. **Inferential Clarification** - combines a confrontation with an identification, by the analyst, of a possible unconscious process.
   i. **Example** "I've noticed that after I make a comment, you frequently stop speaking your thoughts and feelings and focus exclusively on the comment I've made. You may be doing this to avoid what you feel I seem to know something about you that catches you off guard."

   ii. **Example** "Your discomfort in talking with me just now about the sexual relationship with your wife suggests you may have ambivalent feelings about sex with your wife."

   iii. **Example** "I believe your tendency to label your thoughts as dumb or irrelevant is a way of hiding from yourself the meaning of a seemingly inadvertent thoughts."

   iv. **Example** "I notice you've been speaking about different ways that you've been hurt - the pain in your hand, your mistreatment by your wife and boss, and your inability to make friends at your new apartment - all ways in which you've been hurt. I have the sense that you're reaching out for me to fix the hurt. For instance, you seem to want me to advise you on whether you should seek treatment for the pain in your hand."

   c. **Interpretation** - the interpretation gives meaning to events, feelings, or experiences which previously had no meaning or for which the meaning was hidden. An interpretation essentially says, "This is how I understand what you've said to me." Traditionally, it involves making the link between an observable behavior, feeling, or thought; an unconscious wish/fear/intention/desire; and the defense against that wish/fear/intention/desire. Interpretation can also involve links made between patient-analyst, patient-current significant others (objects), patient-past significant others (objects). Said another way the interpretation explains why a conflict exists within the person. Within a Jungian framework the interpretation might also include explanations referring to the operation of complexes, archetypal influences, individuation patterns, etc.
   i. **Example** "Although you feel like a victim in such situations you might consider
how you contribute to these conflicts with your husband, and then choose to suffer silently through them in order to feel mistreated in a manner similar to the way your mother felt mistreated by your father." (i.e. past relationship - current relationship interpretive link)

iii. **Example**  "I've noticed that in our recent session you regularly arrive at the end of our time right in the middle of emotionally intense material. This is a way in which you arrange to feel hurt and cutoff." (i.e. an interpretation around sadomasochistic struggles)

d. **Construction** - is a pattern of interpretations, extending over time, and having to do with patient's primarily complexes, neurosis, psychosis, or character structure.

### Triangle of Conflict

![Triangle of Conflict Diagram]

### Triangle of Relationship

![Triangle of Relationship Diagram]

### Symbolic Triad

![Symbolic Triad Diagram]

#### Examples of Interpretations

1. **Transference**: “It seems you’re feeling angry with me today because you want me to side with you against your husband and it doesn’t feel like I’m doing that in the way you want.”
2. **Countertransference**: The analyst is feeling angry and says, “I wonder if there’s something you anticipate me feeling angry about today?” or “I wonder if there’s something about your own anger that feels difficult to discuss?” (The later would probably be an interpretation based on the idea of projective identification).

3. **Intrapsychic**: This type of interpretation might be either structural or process/conflict oriented. “It seems there’s a struggle within you between your desire for autonomy and your desire for security.” *(conflict interpretation)*. “It seems like you begin to shrink back when you encounter men in authority that remind you of your father.” *(a clarification around a father complex which could lead to a fuller interpretation)*.

4. **Interpersonal**: May be focused on current and/or past relationships. “I think you’re feeling angry with your wife because you feel controlled by her just as you felt controlled by your mother.”

5. **Resistance**: “Have you wondered today why you seem be avoiding talking about ______ ?” *(This would be an example of a observational confrontation)*

6. **Defense**: “There is something going on inside you where you seem to have an intellectual knowledge of this event but the emotional experience of it isn’t available to you right now.” *(This is an preliminary confrontation of a defense involving vertical splitting)*.

7. **Situational-Environmental**: “You seem quite angry about the outcome of the elections and also seem to have a sense of hopelessness. Perhaps that sense of hopelessness reminds you of those interactions with your father when it never felt like you could be heard by him.” *(interpretation which links a current event with a past relationship)*

8. **Archetypal**: “You seem to be in an in between place, between one way of being and another, somewhat like Christ must have felt when he was lying in the tomb between crucifixion and resurrection.”

**Recommended Reading**


**Additional Suggested Readings**


Levy, Steven T., *Principles of Interpretation*. Aronson: Northvale, NJ 1990 *(one of the best books available on doing effective interpretation)*

**Books with Extensive Verbatim Transcripts**


Merton Gill and Irwin Hoffman, "Analysis of Transference: Vol 2, Studies of Nine Audio-Recorded Psychoanalytic Sessions," International Universities Press, Madison, CT, 1982. (transcripts of both good and not so good sessions with commentary by Gill & Hoffinan)


Robert Langs and Harold Searles, "Intrapsychic and Interpersonal Dimensions of Treatment," Aronson, Northvale, NJ, 1980. (transcripts of Searles amazing capacity to enter into an interaction with a schizophrenic patient)


**Case Conceptualization**

