

# Mastering the Metaphor

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**ACBS World Conference XI**

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# Goals of the Workshop

**Today we will:**

- **Review the science of metaphors**
- **Discuss how ACT utilizes metaphors in clinical practice**
- **Observe video and audio of ACT therapists using metaphors**
- **Examine guidelines for optimal use of metaphors in clinical practice**

# The Ubiquity of Metaphors

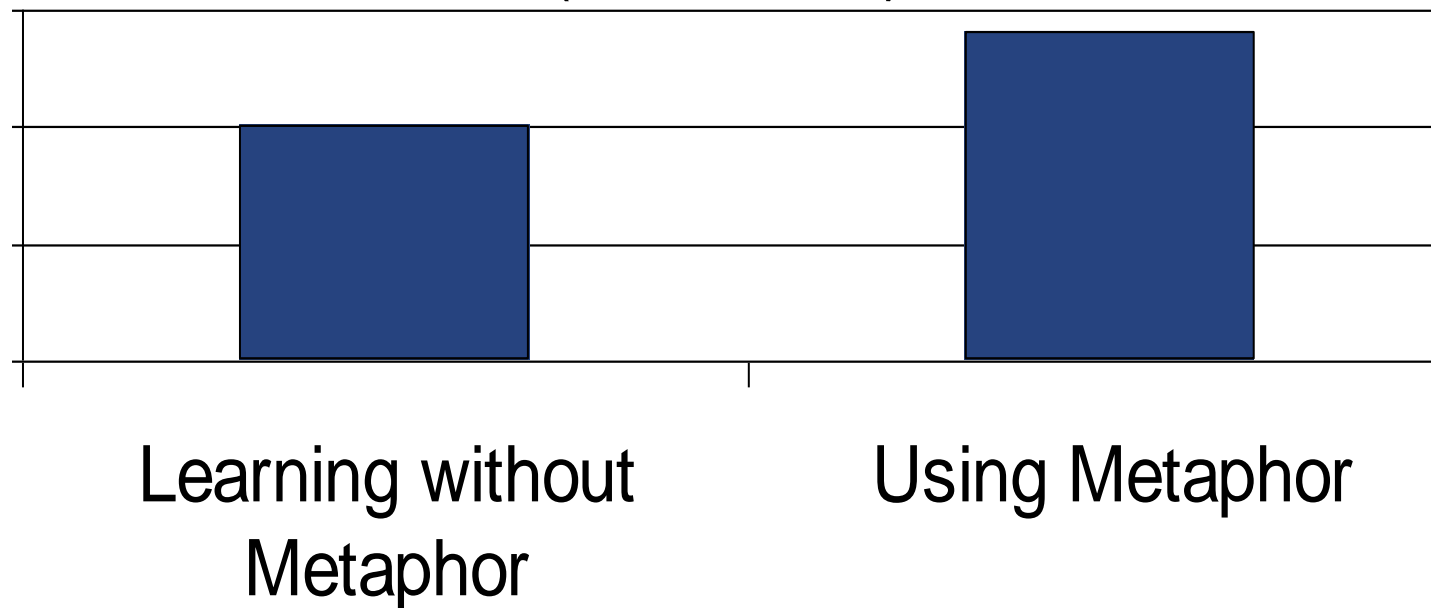
- We utter about one metaphor for every 10 to 25 words, or about six metaphors a minute (Geary, 2011).
- We use metaphors in life to communicate.



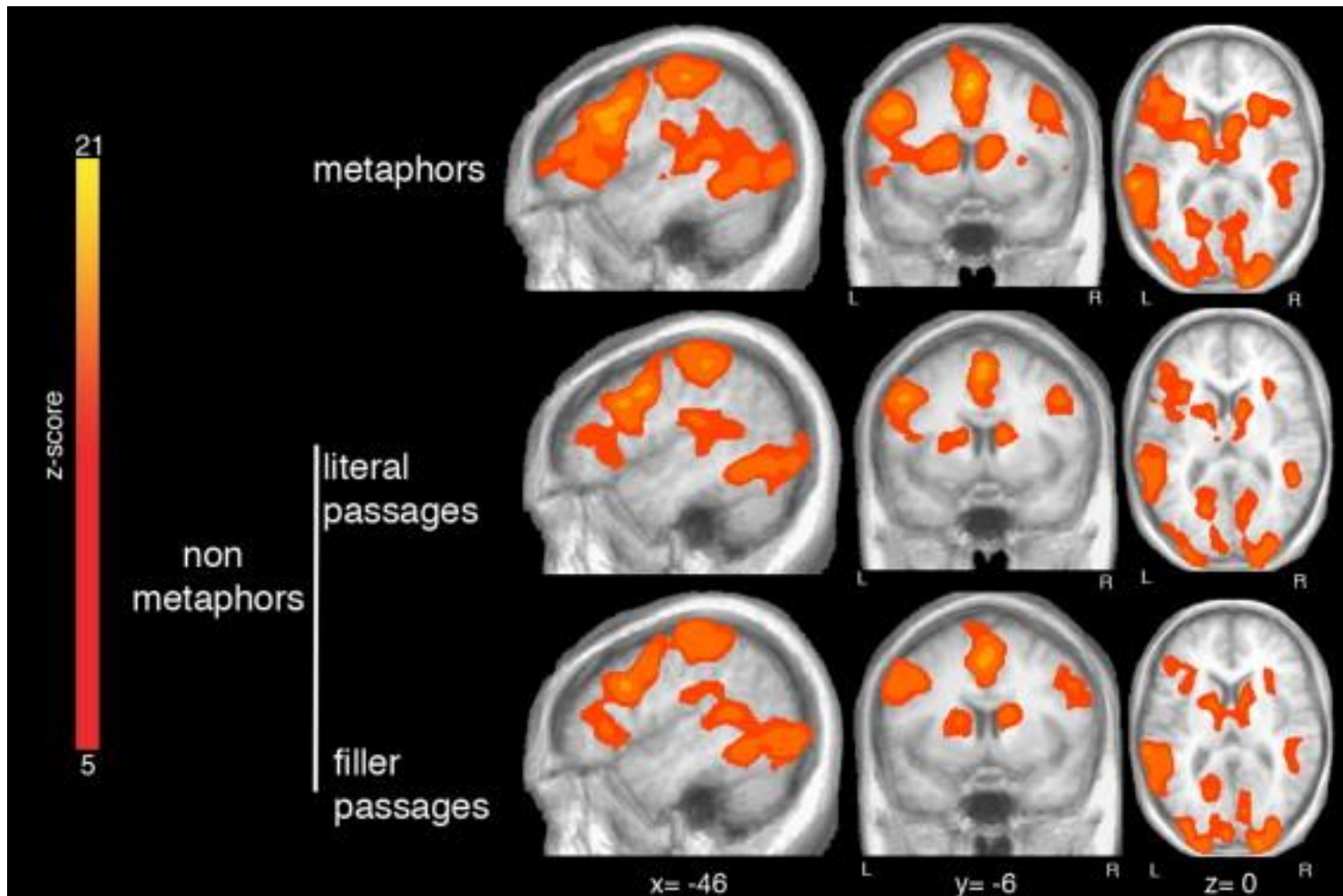
**Metaphor: Picture is worth a thousand words (embedded in computer metaphor)**

# Benefits of Metaphors

Metaphors In Learning can Increase  
Retention by 40%  
(Earl, 1995)



# This is your brain on metaphor



# **“Neural confusion” (Sapolsky, 2010)**

**Here we watched the first 4 minutes of the following video:**

**“Robert Sapolsky How Metaphors Work in Psychology and in the Brain.”**

**[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmyYj0fIV\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmyYj0fIV_k)**

# Metaphors in Clinical Practice

- **Thematic stories with an intention of exploring alternative choices.**
- **We use metaphors in clinical settings to communicate possibility and choice.**

**Metaphor:**

**Keep your eye on the prize.**



# Metaphors in Clinical Practice

- Precedes third wave contextual therapies
- Compatible with insight-oriented and dynamic theories (e.g., Milton Erickson)
- Beneficial for reaching clients through an open and curious stance

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**Metaphor: Zoom lens  
to wide angle lens**



# Chinese Finger Cuff Metaphor

Here we watched the following video:

**Chinese Finger Trap Self-Help: Know acceptance of powerlessness**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSnw-PHLUxY>

# What did you notice?

**1. Evokes a range of verbal and sensory associations (feeling stuck)**

**2. Opens up opportunity to examine perspectives (how do I live my life?)**

**3. Provides alternative possibilities of action (do I want to do something different?)**



**Metaphor:  
The lightbulb  
went on**

# Metaphor – a transfer of symbol

## Topic

- Issue of exploration

## Vehicle

- Network of knowledge that already exists

## Shared Ground

- Questions for consideration

**Arbitrary Crel for Co-ordination**

Rumination  
Somatic tension

Thrashing  
Frustration

**Struggling with Life is Like Struggling with Chinese Finger Cuffs**

**Struggle with Life**

**Struggle with toy**

**CAUSAL  
RELATION**

**EQUIVALENT & CAUSAL**

**CAUSAL  
RELATION**

**Stuck/Paralysis**

**Can't get out of it**

Can't breathe  
More tension

Fight harder  
Can't breathe

Metaphor

Topic

Vehicle

Struggling with Life is Like Struggling with Chinese Finger Cuffs

Struggle with Life

Struggle with toy

CAUSAL  
RELATION

EQUIVALENT & CAUSAL

CAUSAL  
RELATION

Stuck/Paralysis

Can't get out of it

Shared Ground = This is up to the client

# Chinese Hand Cuff Metaphor

**“The Chinese Hand Cuff is a great illustration of life.”**

## Topic

- How do you live your life?

## Vehicle

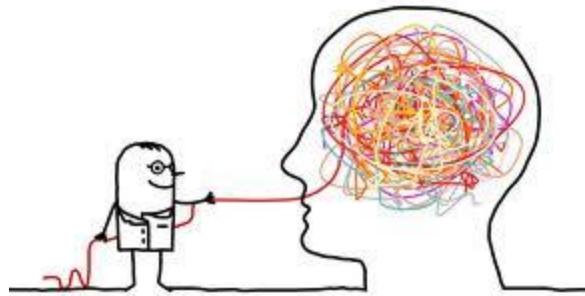
- Mechanics of the Chinese Finger cuff toy

## Shared Ground

- Do I surrender/accept or do I fight?
- Do I want to consider an alternative behavior?

# ACT Metaphors

**Allow for psychological flexibility to be actually happening in the room at that moment for both parties**



**Metaphor: Psychological Flexibility**

# Russ Harris “Hands as Thoughts”

Here we watched the following video:

‘Zara speaks with Dr Russ Harris on the  
"HandsAsThoughts" metaphor’

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M77UEpfRhXs>



# Hands as Thoughts Metaphor

**“If my hands were like my thoughts....”**

## Topic

- What is my relationship with my thoughts?

## Vehicle

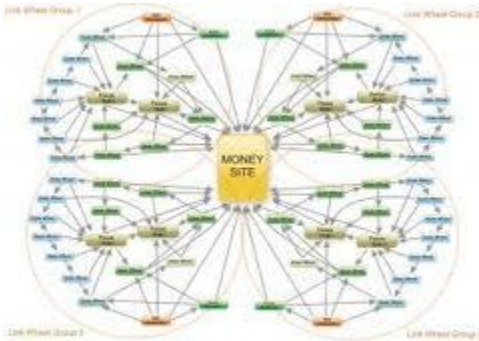
- How your hands work (e.g., proximity to face)

## Shared Ground

- Do I get lost in my thoughts?
- Do I miss out on life as a result?
- Would it be helpful to consider alternative behavior?

# Function of Metaphors

**“Metaphoric language transfers functions from one experiential field to another” (Torneke, 2010).**



**you link a network of connections with another network.....”**

# Function of Metaphors

**Which swiftly opens up new possibilities both internal ('thinking in a different way') and external ('acting differently than usual')”(Torneke, 2010).**



# Rule governed behaviors

**Opposable thumbs and linguistic rules -- our bragging rights.**

**We can identify three functional patterns (Törneke, Luciano, & Valdivia Salas, 2008).**

- 1. Pliance**
- 2. Tracking**
- 3. Augmenting**

# ACT Language

**Pliance (“plys”) – compliance with verbal rules that are socially supported.**

**Plys are typically our first introduction to rules.**

## Examples:

- **Eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables to stay healthy**
- **Wear a coat – it is cold outside**
- **Avoid places that make you feel anxious**
- **Fight or suppress thoughts about suicide**

# Rules are part of Life

**Pls can be prevalent because they do not require direct experience.**



**Metaphor: The Brain is taking a short cut**

**Challenge here is that without direct experience, the rules run the risk of becoming rigid and inflexible.**

# Pliance is pervasive

1. We often don't get feedback from the environment (especially if we control or limit our environment)



**Metaphor: Lotto: you can't win if you don't play**

# Brains are stubborn

**2. Even when we get feedback, we have a hard time making room for it (aka memory monitoring).**

- **Confirmation bias**
- **Over-magnification**
- **Assimilation versus accommodation**



**Metaphor: Changing her mind is as unlikely as a dog singing opera**



# What are your plys about doing therapy?

Do you have to:

- “fix” the problem?
- reduce pain and suffering?
- always have the answers?
- show vulnerability?
- model contact w/present moment?

## What do you notice when you track the clinical experience?

# DJ Moran “Jumping off the Paper”

Here we listed to 4 minutes of ACT in Context Podcast #9 starting at 1 hour into podcast.

Dr. D.J. Moran

Ph.D., Board Certified,  
& loves Heavy Metal



# Alternative Behavior

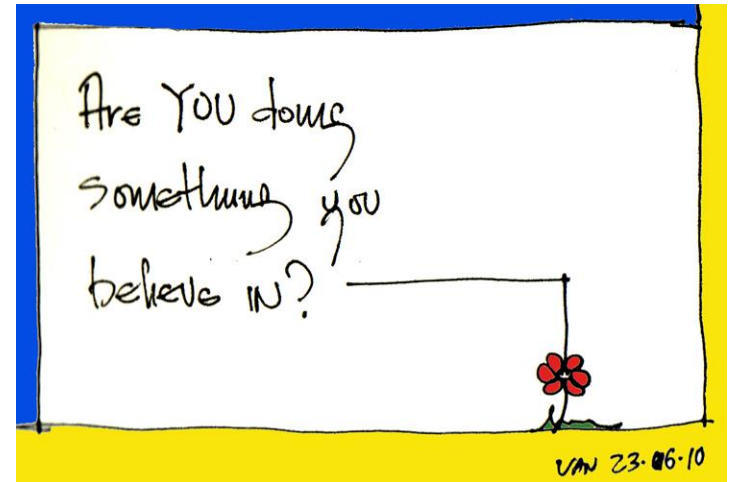
**Tracking (“tracks”) – behavior based on rules that are reinforced by natural consequences in the environment.**

**Examples:**

▶ See plys

**Tricky: Is putting the coat on ply or track?**

**Distinction is functional, not formal.**



# **ACT and Metaphors**

**“The use of metaphor increases the proportion of client behavior that is under the control of tracks. Thus, the functional value of behavior is directly targeted” (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).**

**AKA: Behavioral Change, psychological flexibility, workability**

# **ACT in Action Movie Metaphor**

**Here we watched a video of the Movie metaphor from the ACT in Action DVD series.**

# Therapeutic Stance

- Therapist models tracking in the room.
- Go with all interpretations, never fight, convince, or contest; instead-- dig deeper.
- Therapist needs to be willing to stay with function and process and resist urge to go in or after content.

**Metaphor: Two Mountains**



# Guidelines for choosing metaphors

1. The metaphor needs to match as closely as possible with the situation faced by the client.

Use the ACT protocols to find metaphors that match diagnostic groups.

**Metaphor: Quicksand**



# Guidelines for choosing metaphors

**2. The metaphor needs to be something the person truly understands.**



**Metaphor: Chessboard**



# ACT in Action Chessboard

**Here we watched a video of the chessboard metaphor from the ACT in Action DVD series.**

# Guidelines for choosing metaphors

**3. A metaphor aims to modify behavior; it needs to have the intention of providing alternative behaviors.**

**“Topic” = inflexible,  
rigid behaviors  
that interfere w/  
committed action**



**Metaphor: Tug of War**

# Guidelines for choosing metaphors

**4. Metaphors need to be memorable, so they can be portable and reusable. Plan on referencing them over time.**



**Metaphor: Passengers on the Bus**

# **ACT in Action – Bus Metaphor**

**Here we all participated in the  
Passengers on the Bus Metaphor.**

# Guidelines for Choosing Metaphors

- 5. Consider picking a few favorites and becoming very comfortable with them, rather than trying to master them all.**

# Nesh Nikolic “Fixing thoughts”

Here we watched the video

“Exploring the workability of thoughts - an ACT metaphor”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTN0vhZxwIM>

# **ACT principles explained via metaphors...**

# ACT Theoretical Perspective

**Functional Contextualism – given the context, what is the function?**



**Metaphor: Google maps v floorplan – do you want to drive there or live there?**



# **ACT Theoretical Perspective**

## **Mechanistic versus Contextual**



**Metaphor: Bank of a stream– Where does the bank end and the water begin?**

# The Science Behind ACT

Suffering is related to language



**Metaphor: Your words slice through me like knives**

# The Science behind ACT

## RFT is the science behind ACT



**Metaphor: Driving a car without knowing the mechanics of it**

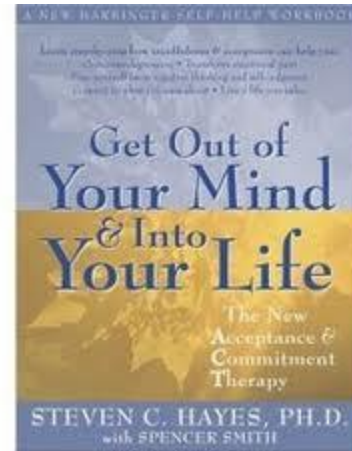
# In summary....

## **Metaphors:**

- ▶ **encourages clients to seek clues that apply to their current experience**
- ▶ **Extract potential new perspectives that lead them to see the consequences of their actions**
- ▶ **focus on the here and now**
- ▶ **Observe what is happening in the natural environment, rather than relying on thoughts about what is happening**

# Goals of ACT

**Learning by living versus learning by thinking**



**This allows for flexibility, contact with the present moment, and behavioral choice in the direction of values**



**Metaphor: Stop and smell the the roses.**

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