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# The Head, Hands & Heart of Self-as-Context

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# Disclosures:

- Richard Bennett & Rikke Kjelgaard
  - We have not received and will not receive any commercial support related to this presentation or the work presented in this presentation.

# Overview

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- The self through the lens of RFT
- Key therapeutic targets
- Demonstration of techniques
- Questions and comments



Let's get present

# Defining the self

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- 'The self' lacks operational definition
- RFT offers a developmental account of the self via learning 'deictic' or 'perspective' relations
  - I v You
  - Here v There
  - Now v Then
- Over time, a consistent and distinct sense of 'I-ness' is developed in relation to other perspectives

McHugh L, Barnes-Holmes Y, Barnes-Holmes D (2004) Perspective-taking as relational responding: a developmental profile. *Psychol Rec*, 54:115-144.

Bennett R (2017) From esteem to acceptance: contemporary perspectives on the self. *Psych Sec Rev*, 59, 8-15.

# Defining the self

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- ‘I-here-now’ coherence is crucial as we mature, and...
- ...”Good development gets you into bad trouble” (Yvonne Barnes-Holmes)
- Development supports fusion
  - excessive co-ordination between ‘I-ness’ and content
  - tendency to co-ordinate judgements along a single dimension (e.g. I am bad if part of me is bad)
  - high regulation of behavioural functions as a consequence

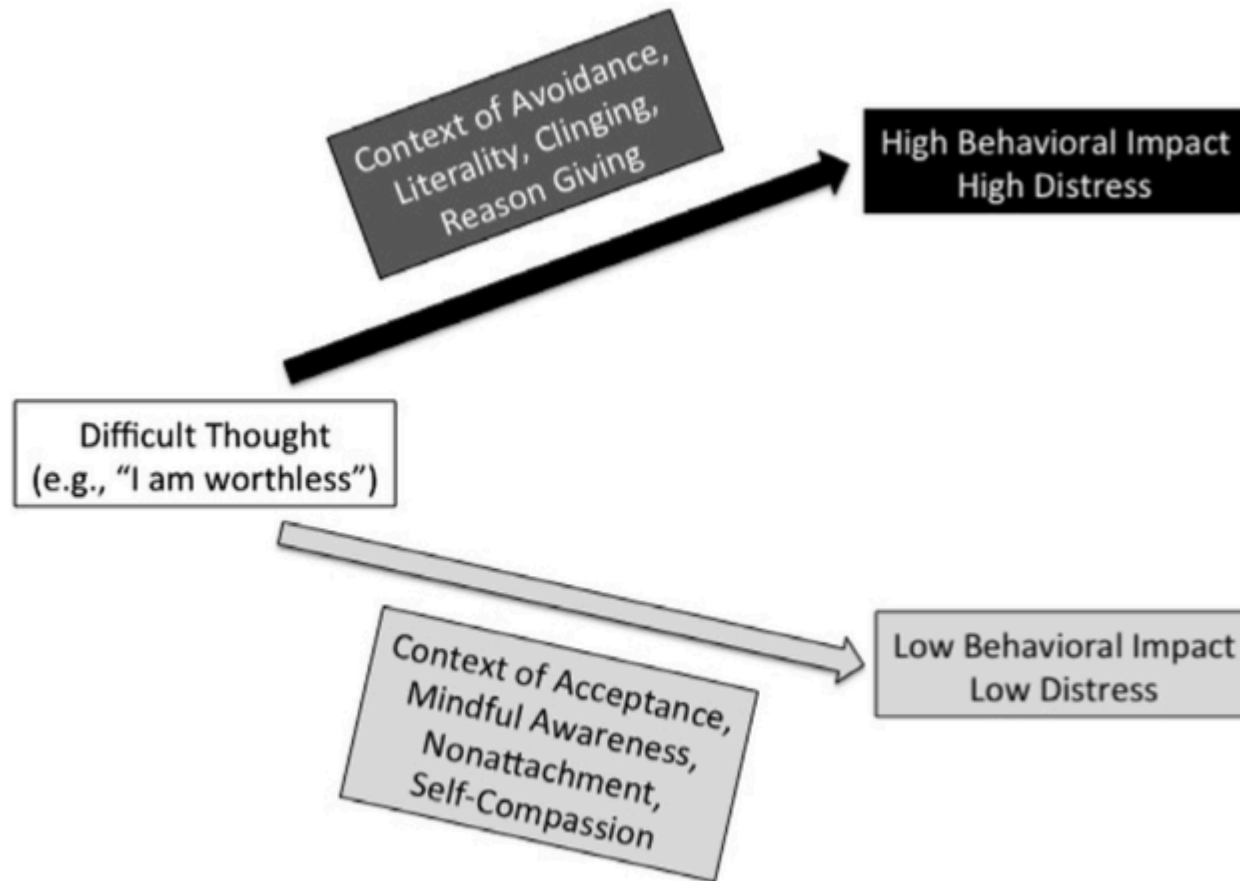
DeSoto, C.B (1961). The Predilection for Single Orderings. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62, 16-23

McHugh L, Stewart I (2012). *The Self and Perspective Taking: Contributions and Applications From Modern Behavioral Science*. Dublin: New Harbinger Publications



**CONCEPTUALISED SELF**





**Fig. 1.** A contextual model of different ways of relating to difficult thoughts.

Marshall et al (2015) Self-compassion protects against the negative effects of low self-esteem: A longitudinal study in a large adolescent sample. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*, 74, 116-121

# Hierarchical deictic relations



I-ness

Content



Content

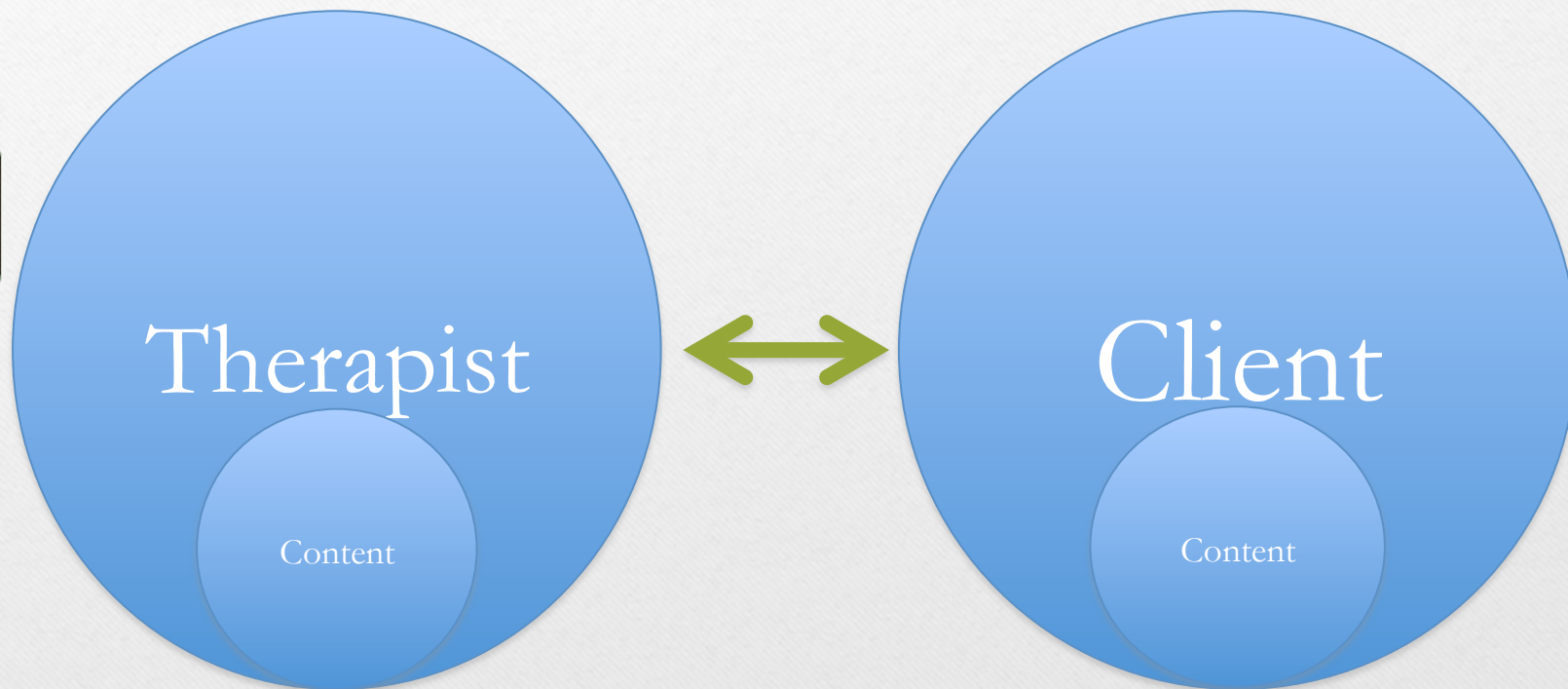
I-ness



Foody, M, Barnes-Holmes, Y & Barnes-Holmes, D. (2013). An Empirical Investigation of Hierarchical versus Distinction Relations in a Self-based ACT exercise. *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy*, 13, 3, 373-388

# A compassionate stance via RFT

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McHugh, L & Stewart, I. (2012) *The Self and Perspective Taking*. Oakland: New Harbinger

# A compassionate stance via RFT

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- Promote self-other co-ordination through perspective taking (“If I were you...”)
  - Validate the presence of the content
  - Validate the emotional impact of the content
  - Validate the behavioural control exerted by the content
- Source: Yvonne Barnes-Holmes (2015)

# Key therapeutic aims

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- Weakening fusion with self-criticism and self-conceptualisations
- Strengthening deictic framing repertoires involved in cultivating flexible perspective-taking
- Constructing and enacting a value of compassion through self-acceptance

Yadavaia et al (2014) Using ACT to increase self-compassion: a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 3, 248-257

# Specific therapeutic targets

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- I as various
  - Having a variety of experiences moment-to-moment
- I as perspective
  - Stability of I-HERE-NOW as the noticer/chooser
- I as container
  - I in a hierarchy with my experiences
- I as flexible
  - Able to respond flexibly to my experiences

# Tracking experience

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- I as various
  - Help clients track their experience moment to moment in the session
  - What do you notice now? And what about now? Is it the same as you felt before we started talking about this? How has it changed? How might you feel later?
  - Promote discrimination of different thoughts and emotions

# Perspective-taking

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- I as perspective
  - How might another person who cared about you describe you?
  - What would you on a good day say about this situation?
  - If future you could see offer some help, what would they say?
  - If you saw yourself as a child saying these things about yourself, how would you respond?



# Hierarchical framing

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- I as container
  - The sky and the weather (Unknown origin)
  - The chessboard metaphor (Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson)
  - The pizza metaphor (Jason Jones)
  - Rating a chair (Peter Trower)
  - The fruit bowl metaphor (Ruth and Richard Wessler)
  - “Big I, Little i” technique (Arnold Lazarus)

# Promote flexible responding

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- I as flexible
  - Observe the content of thoughts/emotions
  - Discriminate between self and content (using the self as the container for the content)
  - Present the opportunity to choose
    - E.g. to make repertoire- widening choices that are not about you being governed by your content

# Demonstration

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- Watch the demo, which incorporates:
  - I as various / perspective / container / flexible
- Notice and reflect upon:
  - The verbal content of the session
  - The relational process between therapist and client

**Thank you**

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