

USING METAPHOR IN TRAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

NIKLAS TÖRNEKE

CARMEN LUCIANO

KELLY KOERNER



PART 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY



A RELATIONAL FRAME THEORY PERSPECTIVE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

- Due to the ability of symbolization (relational framing) we as humans have a very complex way of interacting with our own behavior.
- Two areas of special importance:
 - Self-awareness
 - Following instructions

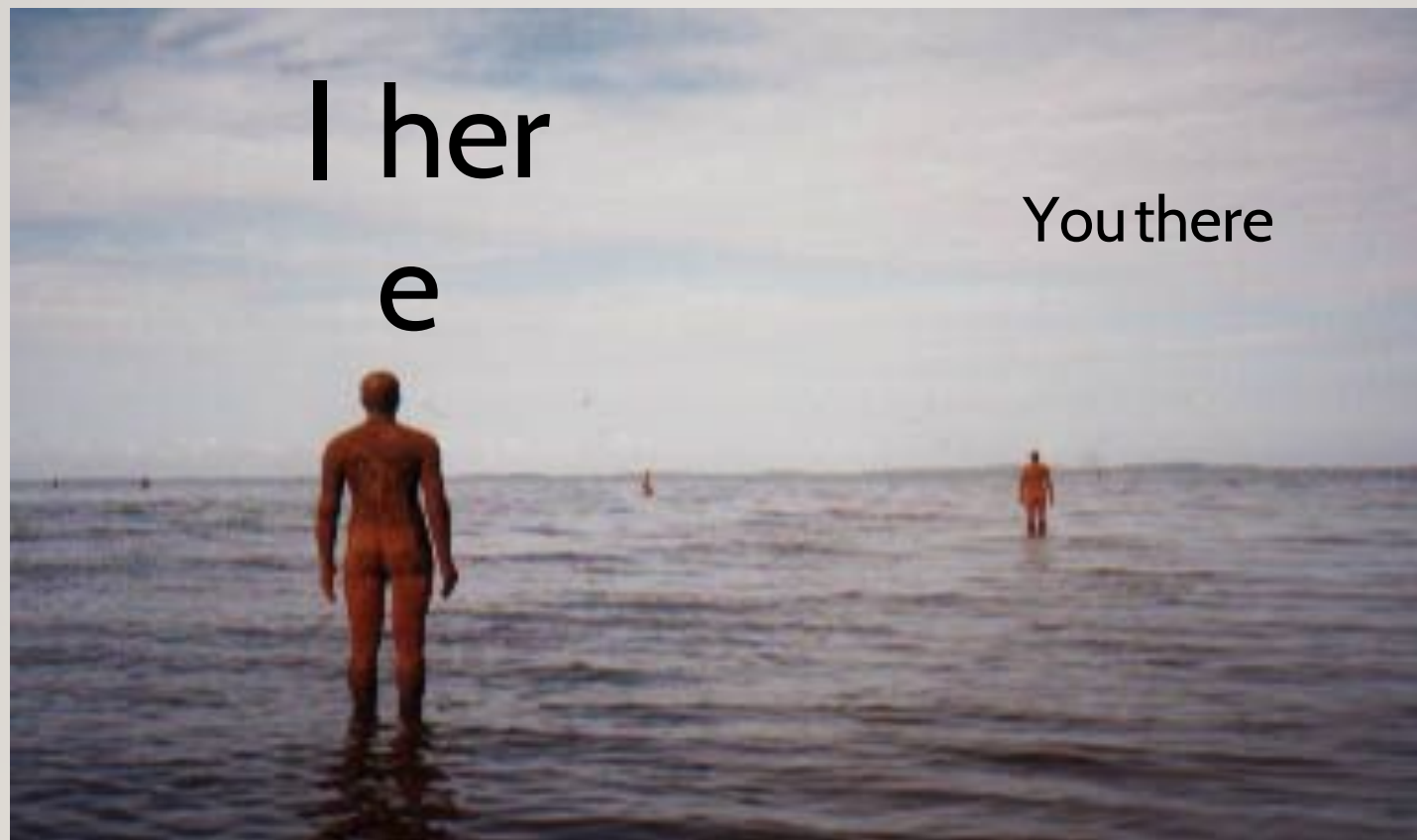
FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

- The "three term contingency" (A-B-C) is forever changed for humans, due to relational framing.
- Antecedents and consequences can now acquire effects (function) on human behavior in a new way.
- Our ability to follow instructions (rules) is a result of this. Hearing words we can do new things to have consequences never yet experienced

SELF-AWARENESS

A combination of perspective-taking (deictic framing) and hierarchical framing

DEICTIC FRAMING



DEICTIC FRAMING



I here You there

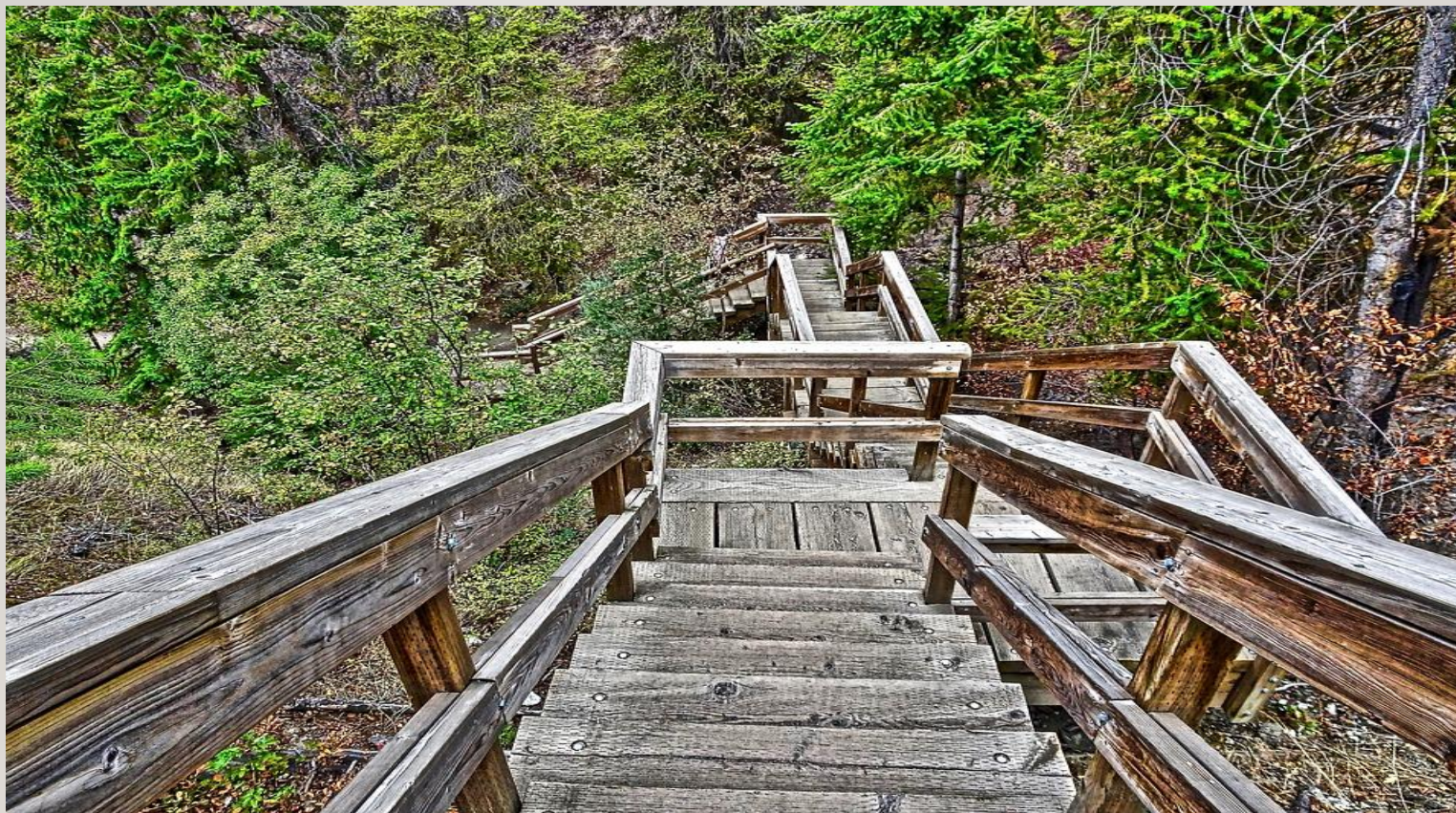


I here You there

DEICTIC FRAMING



DEICTIC FRAMING



DEICTIC AND HIERARCHICAL FRAMING OF YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR



DEICTIC AND HIERARCHICAL FRAMING OF YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR



SELF AWARENESS

- You need deictic framing (perspective-taking) and hierarchical framing of your own behavior.
- "This is an aspect of me and I am more than that aspect, as I am also the one noticing this"
- Now you can consciously interact with yourself
- Humans can now use private events for self-instruction
- The light and the dark side of the force

THE LIGHT SIDE OF THE FORCE

- We are able to sidestep immediate gratification
- We can go for "long term consequences"



THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE

- Our ability to follow self-instructions can lead to vicious circles
- Experiential avoidance



HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN USING "THE FORCE OF RELATIONAL FRAMING"

- You need to be able to interact with your own responding (thinking, feeling, remembering) in such a way that it helps you take action towards what is important to you. *This repertoire is what we mean by "psychological flexibility"*
- The risk: Given a certain situation (context) you will simply respond in coordination with the self-instruction that turns up spontaneously (explicit or implicit)
- To avoid that risk you need to train your ability to "frame your own responding in hierarchy with the deictic I" (defusion; self as context; unhook; decenter; establishing an observational distance) . This training is included in all normal language acquisition and as other training it is never perfect.

TRAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

- Train the client to discern the relationship between what she does in crucial situations and the problematic consequences she experiences (functional analysis, A – B – C analysis, chain analysis, creative hopelessness)
- Train the client to discern his own feelings, thoughts, memories and bodily sensations by establishing an observational distance to them as they emerge (frame your own responding hierarchically with the deictic I, defusion/self as context)
- Train the client to use this skill to clarify what is important in her life and to specify what would be concrete steps in that direction (augmenting, valuing)

“A person who has been made aware of himself by the questions he has been asked is in a better position to predict and control his own behavior”

Skinner 1974 in *About Behaviorism*, p.35.

REFERENCES

- **RFT for Clinical Practice: Three Core Strategies in Understanding and Treating Human Suffering.** Törneke, Luciano, Barnes-Holmes & Bond 2016. In Zettle, Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Biglan (ed.), *Wiley handbook of contextual behavioral science* s. 254–272
- Chapter 7 in **Metaphor in Practice. A Professional Guide to Using the Science of Language in Psychotherapy.** Törneke, 2017.

PART 2: METAPHOR



BASIC TERMINOLOGY OF METAPHOR



Targe
t

is



Sourc
e

BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF METAPHOR

- The metaphor's source corresponds to essential features of its target.
- The metaphor's source contains a property or function that is more salient there than it is in the metaphor's target.

WHY USE METAPHOR IN TRAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY?

- Easy to remember
- Functions as a flexible rule (instruction)
- Supports an observational distance of subtle behavior (self-instruction)
- You cannot avoid it.
- Metaphor is not "an advanced addition to literal language"
- Modern linguistics: Metaphor is at the very root of of language and cognition.
- ...as if language is a plant...

WE TALK AS IF...

- ... argument is war (“Your position is totally indefensible”; “His argument was easy to shoot down”; “She kept attacking my views”)
- ... life is a game (“The odds are against me”; “If I play my cards right...”; “She drew the short straw”)
- ... ideas are objects (“Bring that to our next meeting”; “Will you please drop that?”)
- ... ideas are food (“I find that hard to swallow”; “It was something to get my teeth into”)
- ... anger is pressure in a container (“He was bursting with anger”; “I exploded with anger”; “She could not contain her rage”)
- ... theories are buildings (“It was a theory built on sand”; “That’s where your theory falls to the ground”; “That’s the basis of the entire theory”)
- ... influence is a physical force (“I couldn’t resist the pressure”; “That really made an impact on me”)



EXCERCISE

Three together: one tells about something, one asks questions and one counts metaphors



THE TOWN OF ADDISON

- Lera Boroditsky
- Crime is like a *beast*, versus crime is like a *virus*
- Solutions of law enforcement (police force, penalties), versus investigating the underlying cause of the problem (economy, education)
- Thibodeau, P. H. & Boroditsky, L. (2013). Natural language metaphors covertly influence reasoning. PLoS ONE 8(1): e52961. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.005296

EXCERCISE

Tear a sheet of paper into ten pieces...

METAPHOR IN PSYCHOTHERAPY



IN WHAT DIFFERENT WAYS CAN THE THERAPIST FOCUS ON METAPHOR?

- Introduce metaphors
- Catch metaphors used by the client
- Co-create and develop metaphors together with the client
- Always: Focus the three principles for training psychological flexibility!

EXAMPLES

- Introducing a classical ACT metaphor
- Catching a metaphor used by the client
- Co-creating a metaphor

TRAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

- Help the client discern the relationship between what she does in crucial situations and the problematic consequences she experiences (functional analysis, A – B – C analysis, creative hopelessness)
- Help the client discern his own feelings, thoughts, memories and bodily sensations by establishing an observational distance to them as they emerge (frame your own responding hierarchically with the deictic I, defusion/self as context)
- Help the client use this skill to clarify what is important in her life and to specify what would be concrete steps in that direction (augmenting, valuing)

BODILY METAPHORS/EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

Establish an experience in the here and now, which has optimal functions as a metaphoric source targetting relevant behavior of the client.

EXCERCISE

Two together: When I am at my best in my working situation I am like...



EXERCISE, CONTINUED...

- In what type of situation is it easier for you to be like xxx..? An example?
- In what situation is it difficult for you to be like xxx...? An example?
- Deepen the dialogue about either if these situations. What does that situation feel like?
- What stops you from being more like xxx in those, more difficult situations?
- What can you do to act more like xxx in those situations?

SOME HELP IN THE DIALOGUE

- **To elicit metaphor:** What kind of sadness, joy, anger etc., is that sadness, joy, anger, etc.?
- **To explore or to develop metaphors:** What kind of X is X? Is there something more with X?
- **For functional analysis:** What comes before X? And then...?
- **To establish an observational distance:** Ask concrete questions about the source of the metaphor. What does it look like? Form? Color? Movement?
- **Direction:** What do you need to go in that direction/to be like that? What can you do that will move you in that direction/to be faithful to what you want, to be the one you want to be?
- **General principle:** After developing the source of the metaphor, remember to also talk about it's target!

REFERENCES

- **Metaphor in Practice: A Professional's Guide to Using the Science of Language in Psychotherapy.** Törneke, 2017.
- **RFT for Clinical Use: The Example of Metaphor.** Foody, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, Törneke, Luciano, Stewart & McEnteggart 2014. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 3, 305–313.
- **RFT for Clinical Practice: Three Core Strategies in Understanding and Treating Human Suffering.** Törneke, Luciano, Barnes-Holmes & Bond 2016. In Zettle, Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Biglan (ed.), *Wiley handbook of contextual behavioral science* p. 254–272
- **The Role of Common Physical Properties and Augmental Functions in Metaphor Effect.** Sierra, Ruiz, Flórez,, Riaño-Hernández & Luciano 2016. *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy*, 16, 265–279.
- **Learning RFT. An introduction to relational frame theory and its clinical implications.** Törneke, 2010