Mastering the Metaphor

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The Ubiquity of the Metaphor

- We utter about one metaphor for every 10 to 25 words, or about six metaphors a minute (Geary, 2011).
- Metaphors are represented in this presentation in both written and visual form.

Metaphor: Picture is worth a 1000 words (embedded in computer metaphor)
1. Learn where metaphors fit into the infrastructure of the ACT model
2. Understand the basic science of metaphors
3. Know and apply the guidelines for using metaphors in therapy
4. Watch therapists use metaphors in the therapeutic context
5. Practice using some ACT metaphors in the therapeutic context
Prerequisites for this workshop

Mechanistic versus Contextual

Metaphor: Bank of a stream—Where does the bank end and the water begin?
Prerequisites for this workshop

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

Metaphor: Google maps v floorplan – do you want to drive there or live there?
Prerequisites for this workshop

Suffering is related to language

Metaphor: Your words slice through me like knives
Prerequisites for this workshop

RFT is the science behind ACT

Metaphor: Driving a car without knowing the mechanics of it
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

Metaphor: Go the extra mile
Clinical Question:

What are your plys about doing ACT in the therapy room??
Who has the time?!

Plys are more 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 (remember, it is a verbal rule)

Metaphor: Lotto: you can’t win if you don’t play

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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
RFT Tracking

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.
Learning by thinking versus learning by living

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

Metaphor: Follow your heart
Ways ACT promotes tracking

**Therapeutic Paradox**
- Challenges paradox between language and life
- If you are not willing to have it, you will

**Experiential Exercises**
- Allows experience to be observed and studied
- Milk, milk; Jump off cliff; Chocolate Cake

**Metaphors**
- Open for interpretation and rapid learning
- Quicksand, Passengers on the bus
Metaphors provide for the opportunity to develop the capacity for tracking, that is, adjusting behavior in accordance with natural consequences.
Do any of these resonate with you?

- A good meal is like a sunset
- Work like a dog, burn the candle at both ends
- If someone hurts you, turn the other cheek
- Shower people with love and compassion
- Fighting anxiety is like struggling in quicksand
- Trying to get rid of depression is like trying to dig your way out of a hole
What did you notice?

- Metaphors evoke a rich range of verbal and sensory associations
- Alters the interpretation that people apply to their life experiences
- Expands the repertoire immediately

Metaphor: The lightbulb went on
“Metaphoric language transfers functions from one experiential field to another” (Torneke, 2010).

“...you link a network of connections with another network..... Which swiftly opens up new possibilities both internal ('thinking in a different way') and external ('acting differently than usual')” (Torneke, 2010).
How do metaphors work?

- Don’t have to adjust information on a deep schematic level, just apply new framework to the problem
- Build on something that is already in place
- Avoid common challenge of convincing through language
- Work around the fusion that accompanies language

Audio: Changing Radio Stations
The brain treats literal and metaphor as the same; this “neural confusion” gives symbols enormous power (Sapolsky, 2010).

A study on learning reported that the use of metaphors and other strategies can “increase retention by as much as 40%” (Earl, 1995).

Metaphor: I could eat a horse
Definition of Metaphors

Metaphor = a transfer of symbol

Cats are dictators. What is your inference?

Cat = topic
Dictator = vehicle
Transferable = Shared ground

Metaphor: Leaves on a stream
Metaphor is widely applied to other linguistic classifications (e.g., similies, puns) as well as to analogies, allegories, idioms, anecdotes and any figurative stories that have multiple interpretative meanings.

Who cares? Be willing to be lost!

Metaphor: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.
Clinical Definition

- Thematic stories suggesting solutions to a client’s problem
- Optimal in situations where description is unavailable or overwhelming.
- The goal is behavioral change.

Metaphor: Keep your eye on the prize.
History of metaphor in treatment

- Compatible with insight-oriented and dynamic theories (projective technique)
- Assumed to enhance therapeutic insight by expanding clients’ awareness of situation and of alternative life choices

Metaphor: Zoom lens to wide angle lens
Language and metaphor

Ubertragung – German term applied to mean the transference phenomenon in which therapist becomes a substitute from the client’s past, can literally be translated to mean “metaphor”
Metaphors allow the listener to generate his or her own conclusions about the story presented.

The client can extract his or her own meaning from the metaphor.

Insight precedes behavioral change, even in the absence of verbal comprehension.
ACT Metaphors

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

Metaphor: Psychological Flexibility
Model 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
1. The metaphor needs to match as closely as possible with the situation faced by the client.

Metaphor: Quicksand
Guidelines for choosing metaphors

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

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

Metaphor: Tug of War
4. Metaphors need to be memorable, so they can be portable and reusable. Plan on referencing them over time.

Metaphor: Passengers on the Bus

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Guidelines for choosing metaphors

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

“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


