Linking RFT to the Hexaflex:
How basic principles apply to clinical issues and ACT techniques

get through the
MAZE!

start

finish

see if you can find your way through this perplexing maze.

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Jean-Louis Monestès
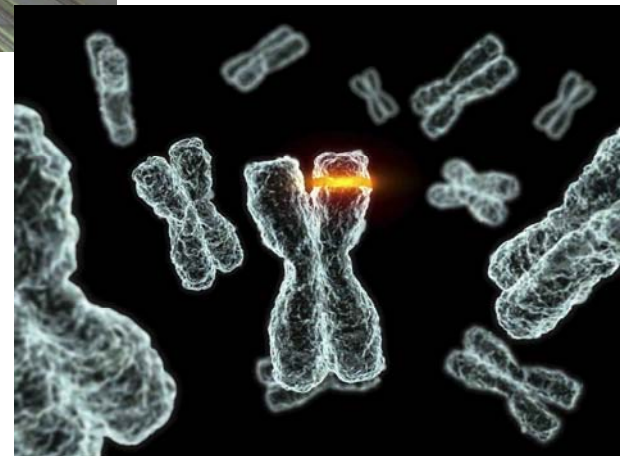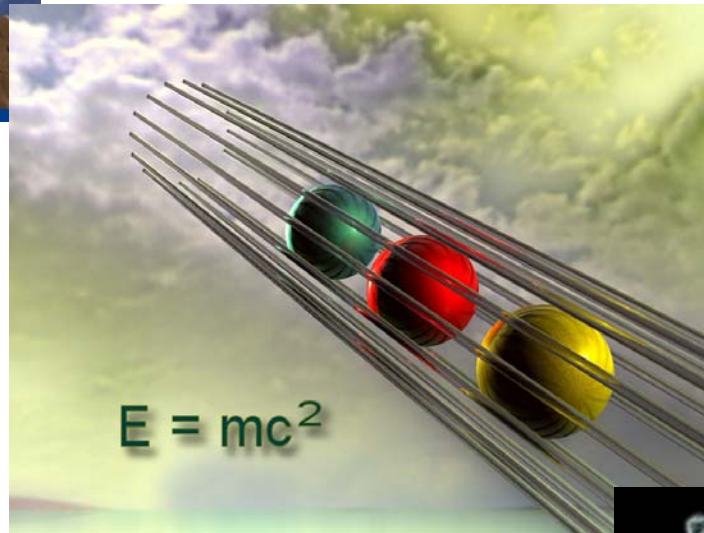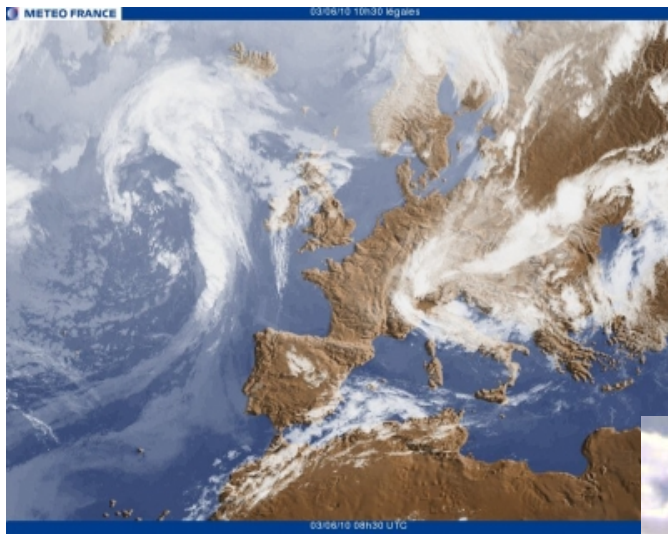
CNRS Fre 3291,
France

RELATIONAL
FRAME THEORY
A Post-Skinnerian Account
of Human Language
and Cognition

Edited by
Steven C. Hayes
Dermot Barnes-Holmes
and
Bryan Roche

SHOULD NOT

HAVE READ

THE RFT BOOK

REST IN PEACE

$E = mc^2$

Why is it important to know about RFT and theotical issues?

- knowing about RFT is the best way to be able to build your own exercises, metaphors, etc. and to adapt to each client

- choosing tools according to their function

- answering the ever lasting question

"Am I ACT consistent?"

- increasing flexibility in practice with various (and difficult) clients

A theoretical journey around the hexaflex

- transformation of functions and defusion
- transformation of functions and acceptance
- rule following and present moment
- rule following and the selves
- augmentals in values and commitment

The quick story of RFT
(and then you go to bed!)

- Once upon a time there was Skinner analysis of verbal behavior (50's)

- Then, Sidman worked on stimulus equivalence (70's)

- And also, Hayes studied the influence of rules on behaviors (80's)

- RFT extended the principle of stimulus equivalence to any dimension to make sens of the rule following effect.

RFT talks about language… with a new language

Derived relational responding

Relational cue

Mutual entailment
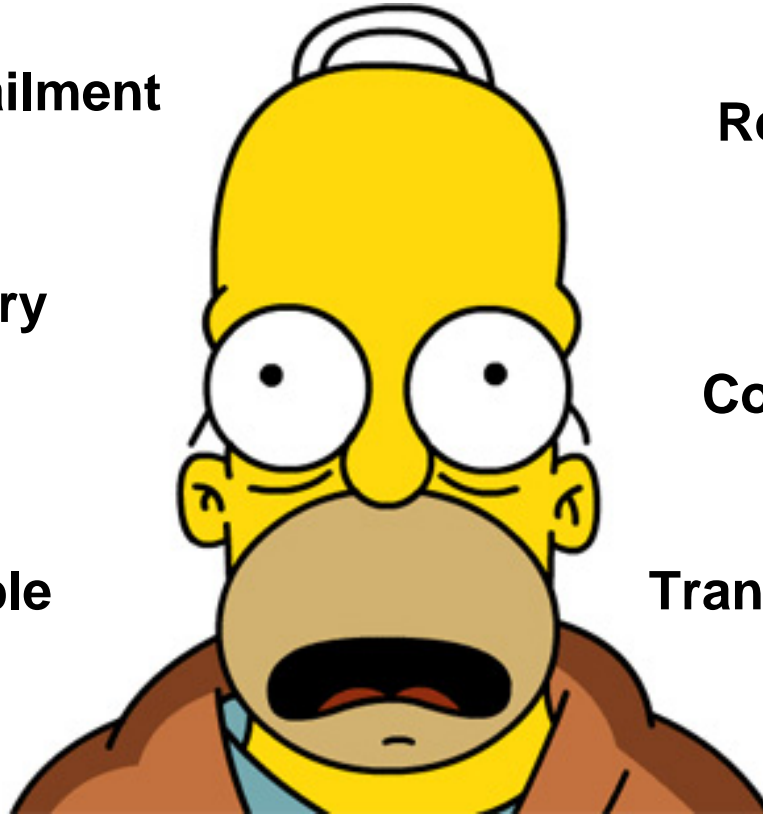
Combinatorial entailment

Relation of relations

Non abritrary
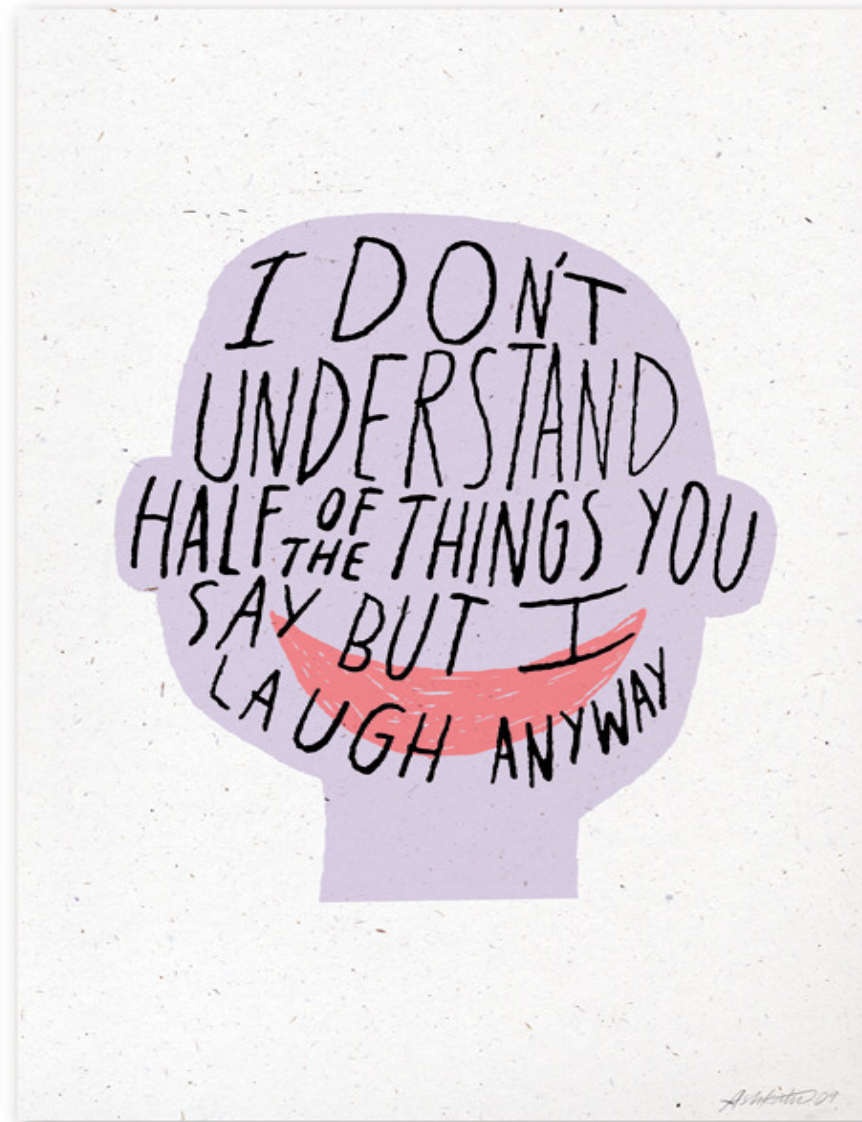
Contextual cue

Arbitrarily applicable

Transformation of function

An RFT definition of language

Arbitra[...]ponding

Relating [...]he intrinsic
[...]ts

In other words, language is being able to say:

« I saw a red duck shopping at the pool »
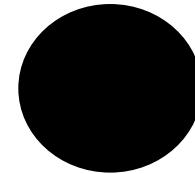
And still make sense of it (kind of…)

And even picture it!

But let's see that step by step…

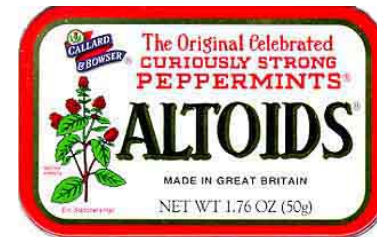# How do we learn Relational Responding?
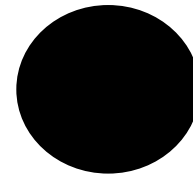
ZAWOK

Nothing

How do we learn Relational Responding?

KRUZZ

Nothing

ALTOIDS

Relational cues

- **ZAWOK** becomes a Relational Cue for establishing the relation « **is like** »

- **KRUZZ** becomes a relational cue for establishing the relation « **is different than** »

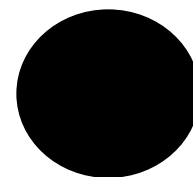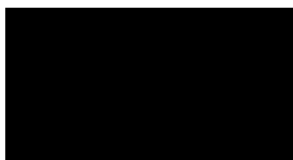# From non arbitrary to arbitrary relational responding

So far, we have learned to relate events according to their intrinsic formal properties.
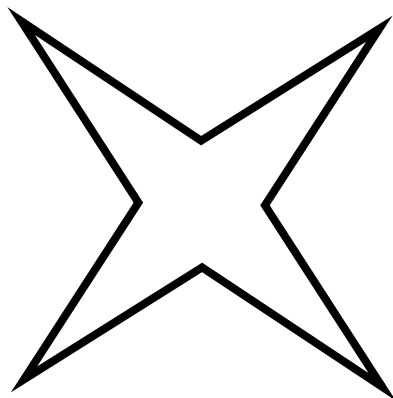
Here, the shape of the stimuli

= non arbitrary relational responding

From non arbitrary to arbitrary relational responding
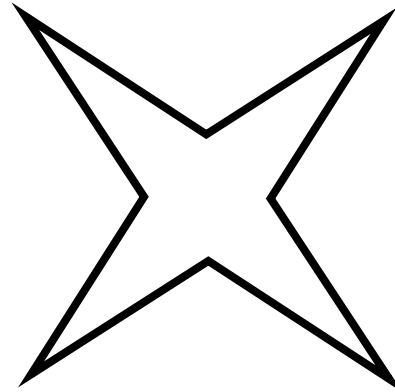
ZAWOK (is like)

Nothing

Now, I know that

is like

Responding IS NOT based on the intrinsic formal properties of the stimuli.

It depends on the context (the relational cue = is like)

In real life…

COLOR WHITE: Non Abritrary (independent from social context)

SYMBOL OF INNOCENCE: Arbitrarily applicable (determined by social context)

Relational cue

is like

is like

Language allows detaching from the concrete environment

Classic RFT example:

Relational cue: Bigger than

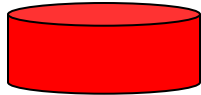Size: non arbitrary

Value: arbitrarily applicable
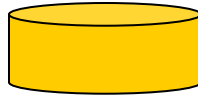
In our minds,
everything can become anything.

By relating stimuli along any dimension,
we can **transform the function** of any event.
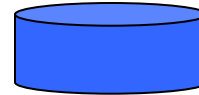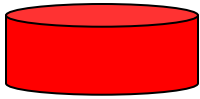
Language can lead to avoidance

- « *Try to push the yellow button* ».

You lost $10!!

- I learned the function of the yellow button through direct exposure to the consequences.
- I will now avoid pushing the yellow button
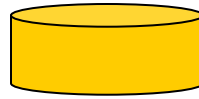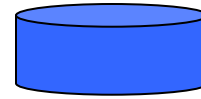
- « *If you push the red button, you will loose 10 $* ».

- I avoid pushing the red button.   **- 10 $**

- I learned the function of the red button through language, not by direct experience. I have never lost $10 by pushing it, I just know I shouldn't do it.

- And look… fortunately I don't!

So, language can lead to avoidance for good

Examples:

Driving slowly when it's raining,

Respecting work deadlines,

Not approaching snakes,...

No need to contact the direct negative consequences
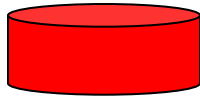
- 10 $ **- 10 $**   **?**
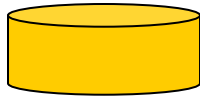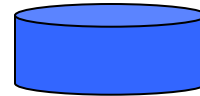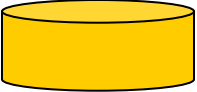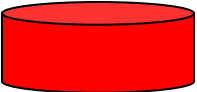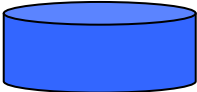
Nothing happens
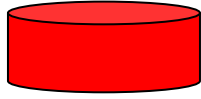
- *« If you push the blue button, you will loose 10 $ »*.
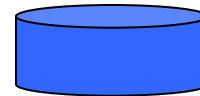
- I avoid pushing the blue button.

- I learned the function of the blue button by language, not by direct experience (i never lost $10 by pushing it, I just now I shouldn't do it).

- But look…

To summarize…

- I can learn to avoid something **<u>dangerous</u>** by contacting the consequences (non arbitrary)

- I can learn to avoid something **<u>dangerous</u>** by following a rule (language non arbitrarily applied)

- I can learn to avoid something **<u>not dangerous</u>** by following a rule (language arbitrarily applied)

Problem:
Transformation of function is not totally controlable

- When one event is transformed, the whole relational network can be transformed too.

ditioning & generalisation

al learning

Let's see how it works in lab…

Dymond et al. 2007, 2008; Roche et al., 2008; Dymond & Roche, 2009
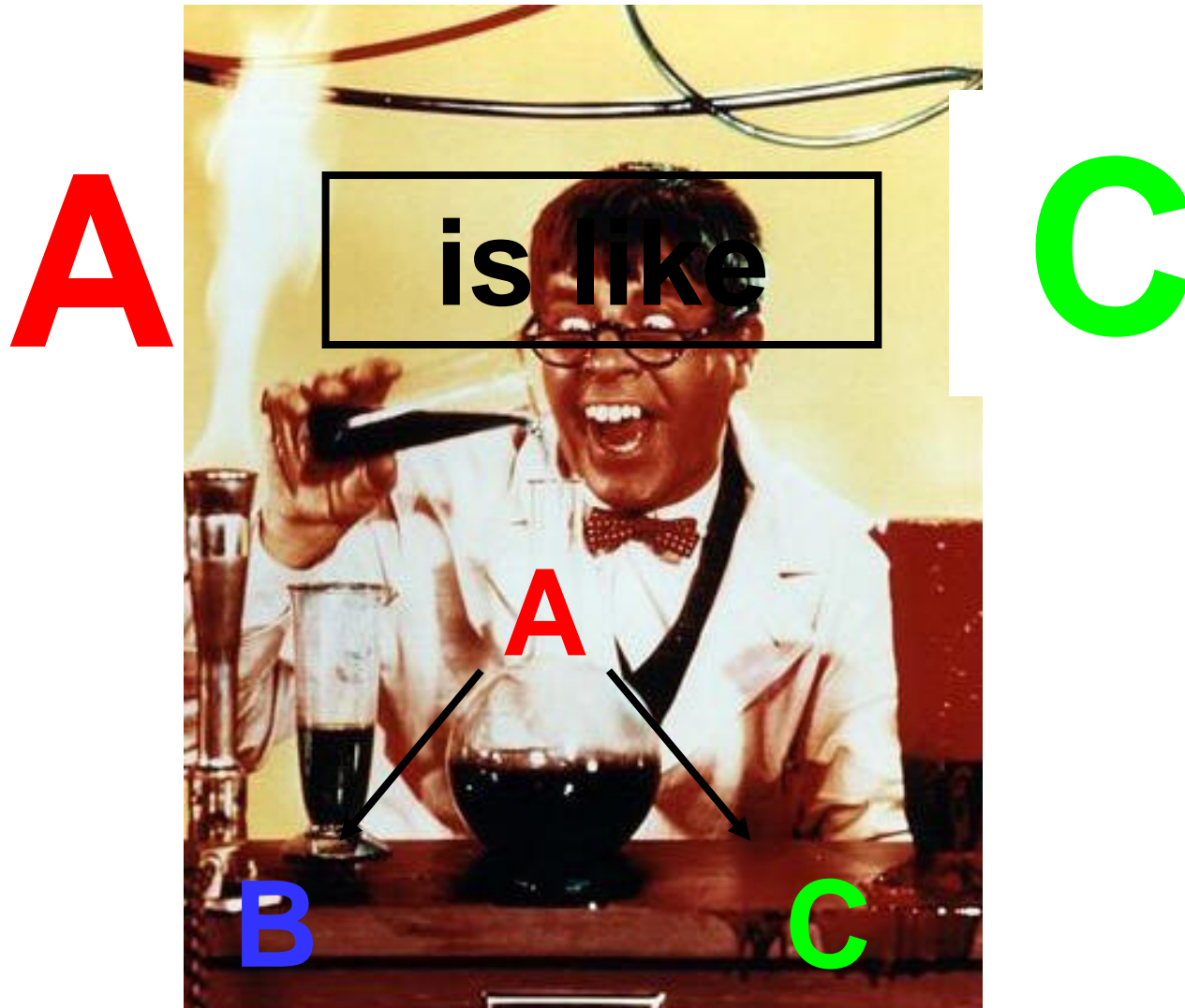
Derivation =
No additional learning needed

Dymond et al. 2007, 2008; Roche et al., 2008; Dymond & Roche, 2009
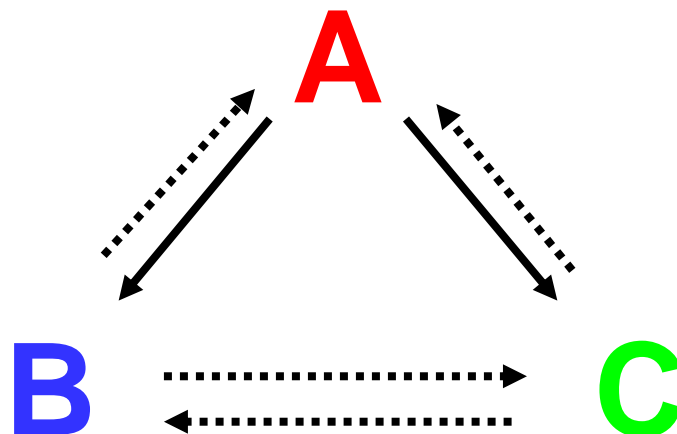
- **A** associated with anxiogenic picture
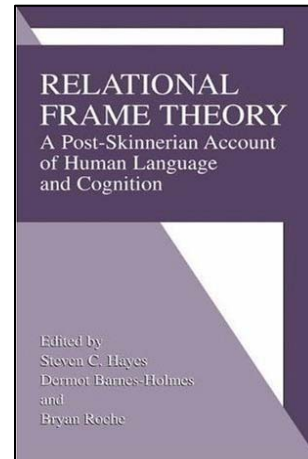
- Press space bar when see **A** to avoid

Dymond et al. 2007, 2008; Roche et al., 2008; Dymond & Roche, 2009
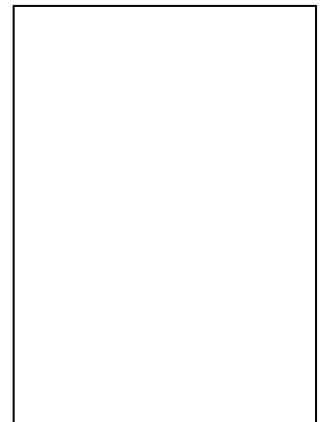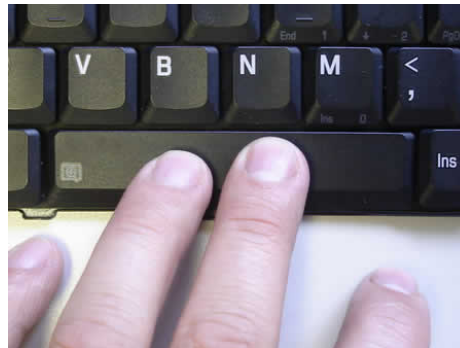
Test phase:

- Avoid when see **A**
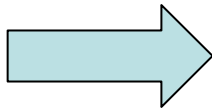
- Avoid when see **B** (DIRECT relational learning)
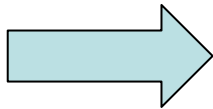
- Avoid when see **C** (DERIVED relational learning)

Dymond et al. 2007, 2008; Roche et al., 2008; Dymond & Roche, 2009

Derived Relational Learning leads to Experiential Avoidance

- Functions of stimuli are transformed independently from our will

- Thoughts evoke the same emotions as actual painful events in our life.

- <u>Example</u>: Avoiding words related with something we fear.

Afraid of words?!?... Try this:

Why are ACT therapists obsessed with MILK?

DEFUSION

To contact the non arbitrary characteristics of verbal stimuli (sounds)

➢A word and its meaning are two different things

➢We don't have to respond to words as if they were true.

Hayes *et al.*, 1999; Masuda *et al.*, 2004; Masuda *et al.*, 2009

Why do ACT therapists train to act independently from thoughts?

McMullen *et al.*, 2008

Derivation of functions and thought control…

We don't need no thought control !

- suppressing emotion and thoughts

- distracting from emotions and thoughts

➢ Both useless, both dangerous, because of derivation

Trying to suppress thoughts ? (Hooper et al., 2010)

BEAR = BOCEEM = GEDEER

Instruction: don't think of a BEAR !

1) **Each time « BEAR » on the screen, press to suppress**

2) **I learn that BEAR = BOCEEM (arbitrary relation of equivalence)**
➢ **Each time BOCEEM appears, I suppress it too !**

3) **I learn that BOCEEM = GEDEER (arbitrary relation of equivalence)**
➢ **Each time GEDEER appears, I suppress it too !**

Example in OCD

microorganisms

illness

hospital

water

Contamination - viruses

shower

doctors

bacterias

germs

soap
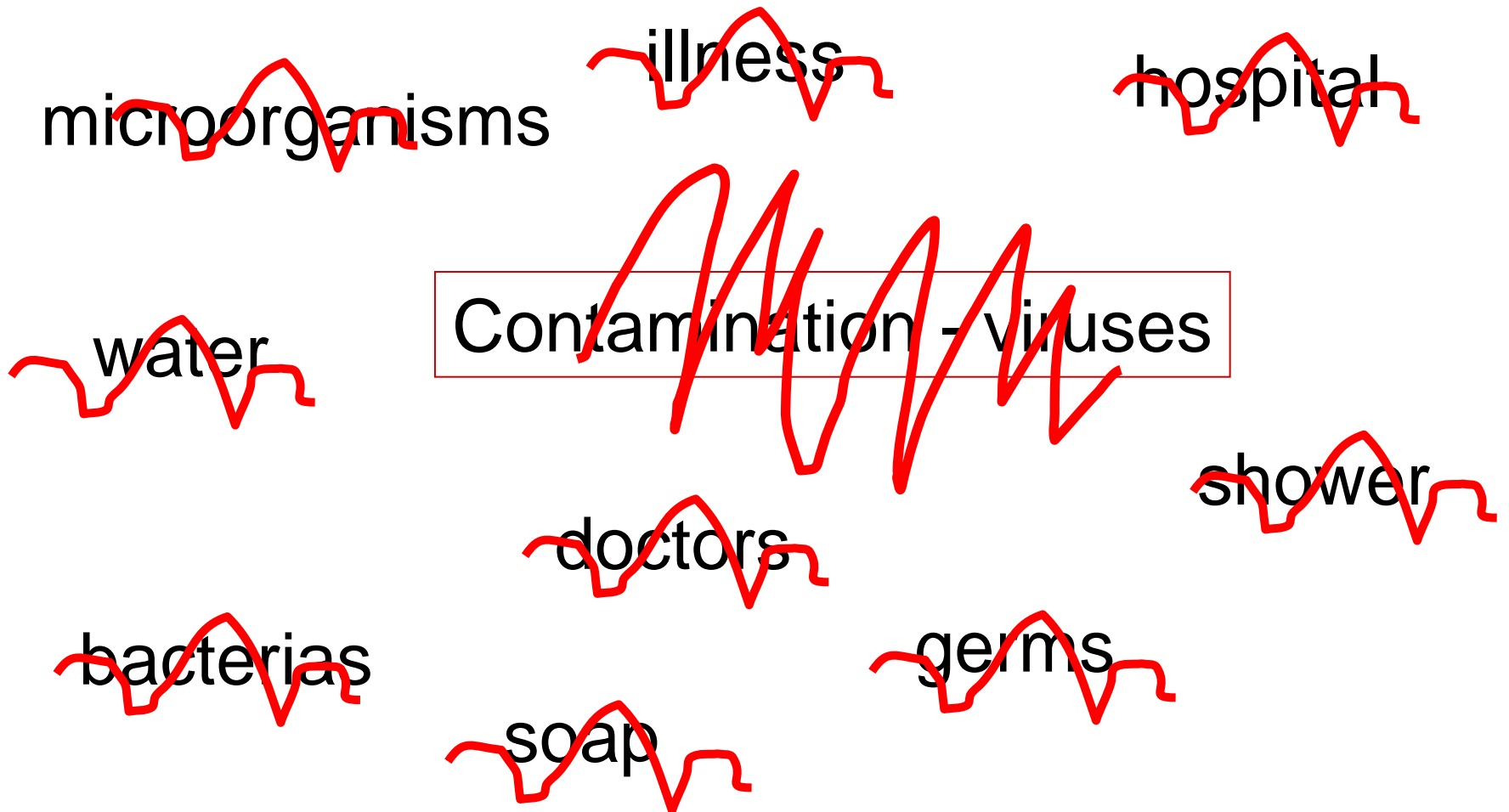
Because of equivalence, suppression of thoughts becomes an endless job!

Trying to distract from thoughts ?
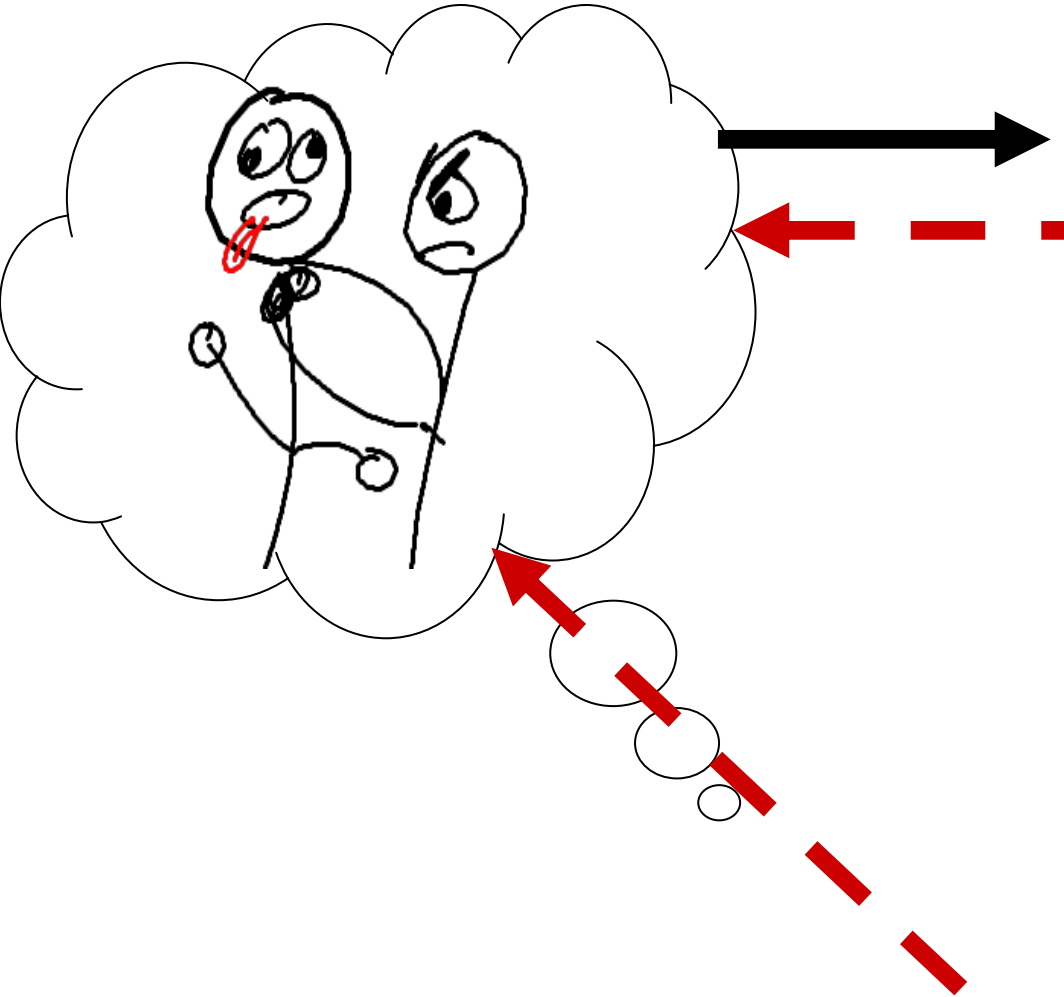
Beach, hotel, sand, …

Because of equivalence, suppression of thoughts becomes an endless job!

Because of derivation, distraction can create new relations and trigger painful emotions in any context!

No thought control: acceptance

- Not because painful psychological events are 'cool' , but because thought control is impossible, makes things worse (because entangled in language - derivation of function, arbitrary relations)

- Acceptance =

from : "*I'm about to have a panic attack, it's going to be awful*"

To: "*I know that when I enter the mall, thoughts arise that say 'I'm about to have a panic attack'. I enter the mall. Here come the thoughts. Welcome. The "machine" works as predicted*".

Why does Experiential Avoidance persist?

Language leads to and **maintains** Experiential Avoidance…

…through rule following.

Rule following leads to insensitivity:

- 2 types of rule:
  - Track: following the rule is reinforced by direct consequences in the environment.

    « Turn on the left and you will find the restaurant you are looking for »
  - Ply: following the rule is reinforced by rule giver for following the rule.
  - « Never contradict others and you will have many friends »
- Both help to learn faster but lead to insensitivity.

- Bigger risk for plies because independent from what happens in the environment.

Let's see how it works in lab…

1 point/r ss

Instructions to num of points

Modification o licated to the participants)
Difficult adapta equences

➤ Rule followir from the actual consequences

We learn faste nd rigid.

See Hayes (1989)

Imagine driving only according to what your GPS says…

If you are not in contact with your environment…

When the GPS makes a mistake…

You could go in a wrong direction without noticing it…

Some rules followed by our clients:

« I won't be able to work because I am too stress~~ed~~ out »

« I couldn't bear the fear of ~~...~~ audience »

« I ca~~...~~ ~~...~~ ~~...~~cause I could die of a

« ~~...~~nk in order not to be sad »

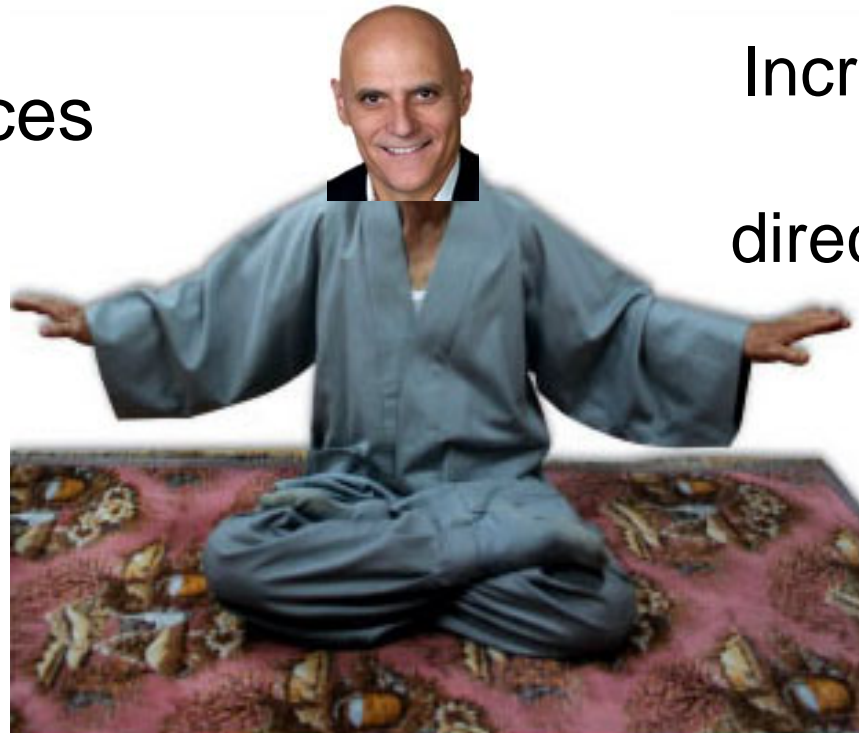« I can't be happy if I can't stop thinking about my trauma »

Language = insensitivity + loss of flexibility

Why do ACT therapists meditate?

Decreasing the influence of ineffective rules by:

Contacting
direct consequences
of behaviors

Increasing control
from
direct environment

An RFT definition of mindfulness?

<u>Two key aspe</u> ... P ... ment & No judgement

Responding to ... ently from their verbal rel ... present moment + defusion)

• Ex. Could yo ...
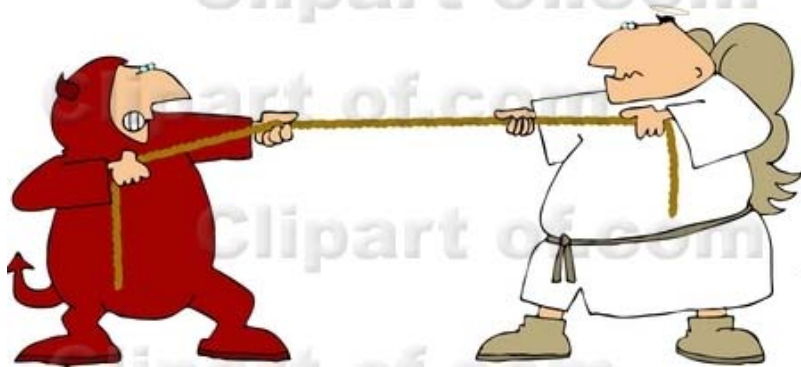
Why do ACT therapists use experiential exercises?

- Decreasing the influence of ineffective rules.

- The client observes the non arbitrary relations included in their situation.

An experiential use of language: the metaphors

Relation of equivalence between the metaphor

and

Experiential Avoidance

WARNING:
Geeky slide coming
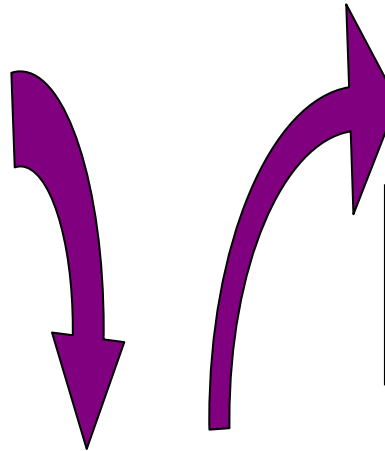
New rules describing more efficiently the environment

- Following these new rules is reinforced by the effective apparition of consequences in the environment ("tracking").
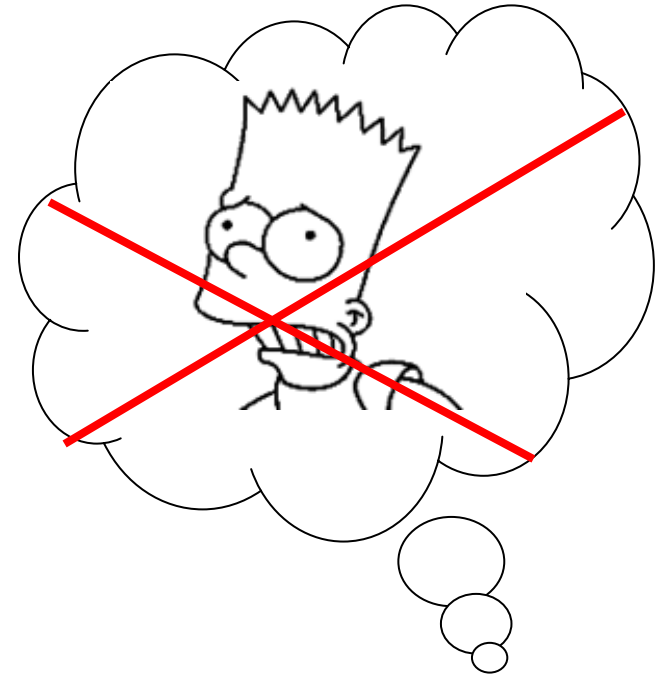
Example:
"If I try to avoid my fear, I will be even more afraid"
"If I accept my fear, I will save energy for action"

Rule following and selves

We use rules also to define ourselves

- Special instances of statements

I'm a
psychologist
(description)

I'm selfish
(evaluation)

I can't stand anxiety
(evaluation)

I'm the father of
2 children
(description)

I'm uggly
(evaluation)

= conceptualized self

Rules = Risks of fusion with conceptualized self

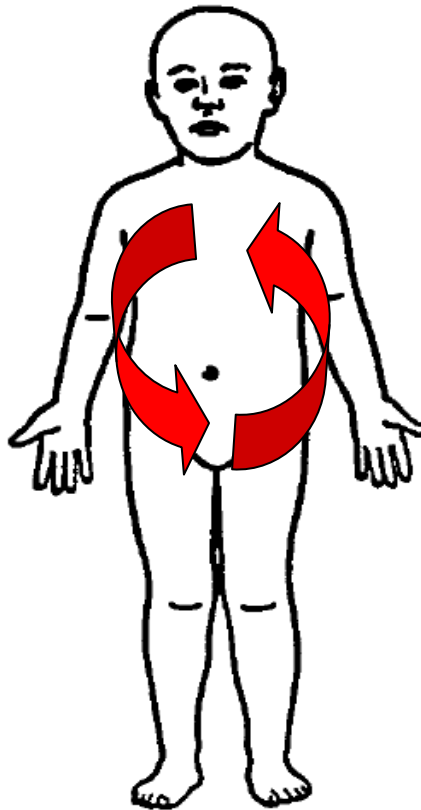- Same problem as for all rules: insentivity to contingencies – fusion with the definition of 'me'

- Risks when:

- This definition of 'me' doesn't match anymore what I observe (I'm a kind person but sometimes get mean)

- Someone attacks the conceptualisation of 'me', thinks or says unpleasant things about 'me' (someone saying I'm racist, selfish, …)

- These rules about myself become plys that drive my behaviors (I'm uggly means I can't have friends, hence I don't try to meet other people)

Relational frames builds self as context

- Special relational frames: « deictics »

  I → You   Here → There

  Now → Then

- Self as context is an *invariant* relation coming from the multiple exemplars of self-centered questions (where were you? What did you do? Are you hungry? etc.)

Invariability of Self as context decreases dominance of conceptualized self

- self is disctinct from the content of thoughts about me = disable problematic transformations of function about 'me'

- Self as context = defusion from conceptualized self = flexibility vis-à-vis definition of self

Deictics to help clients accessing the perspective of self as context

What did you think of it a month ago?; what will you think of it next year?

What would you think if you were him?

What would you feel if you were not working in this firm?

Functions of language in values and commitment

Values are augmentals

- Tracks
- Plys

Augmentals: change the capacity of events to function as reinforcers or punishers

(Zettle & Hayes, 1982)

I have to travel during 15 hours

"traveling is boring"

Valuing is augmenting

Spending 15 hours in planes
is boring and exhausting

If I frame it with going to
WoldCon to learn more
and improve in helping my
clients, it becomes
reinforcing to me

Valuing is augmenting

- Suppose you commit to run once a week. The pain in your muscles after your jogging will be a good sign (reinforcement): proof that you did something for your health.

Values are the bright side of language

✓ Bring verbally abstract consequences that are not present here and now

(eg: being the dad I want to be for my children, take care of my health, etc.)

✓ Counterbalance short term consequences (painful) with verbal long term consequences (reinforcing)

(I'm going to feel fear but I can handle it for being the parent I wish to be)

✓ Are everlasting sources of reinforcement

(because, in a way, they don't exist, hence, no shortage!)

And we're done…(phew!)

Need to sum up?

Clinical technique	Fundamental principles
Defusion	Derived relational responding transforms function of thoughts and leads to experiential avoidance.
Acceptance	Derived relational responding prevents thought and emotional control
Contact with Present moment	Insensitivity to contingencies due to language
Self as context	Verbal rules about 'me' (conceptualized self) - Plys - Deictics relational frames
Values/ commitment	Augmentals Short/long term reinforcement

Learned relation

« powerful tool »

Derived relation
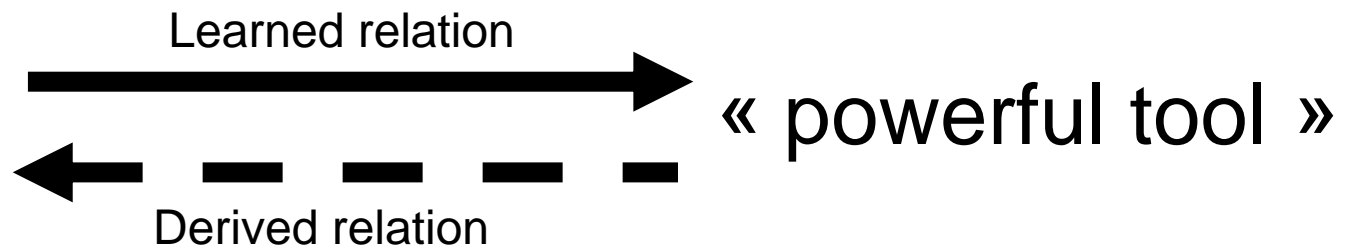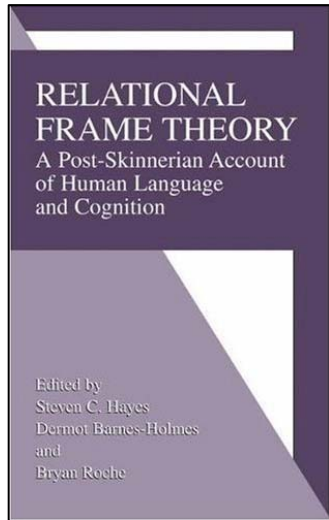
We hope that we changed the functions of RFT for you!

Linking RFT to the Hexaflex:

How basic principles
apply to clinical issues and
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Thank you for your attention

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