

Clinical RFT Video Annotation Notes

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The primary aim of the annotation notes is to provide a concise and informative explanation of the therapeutic techniques employed and their rationale. They are designed to underscore the brief notes that have been inserted directly into the videos. We believe that three key features of the video warrant on-going emphasis:

- a) in-session junctures, directions and techniques that illustrate the integration between RFT and therapeutic planning and delivery
- b) a focus on the deictic relations
- c) the relationship between topographical and functional analyses

Thanks

This video and these notes have only been made possible by the kind and courageous assistance of Dr Richard Bennett, the individual who was the 'subject of therapy' in the video. Richard is a highly experienced psychologist and ACT therapist. He is also a peer reviewed ACT trainer and proficient in RFT. However, the issues he disclosed were of a personal nature and there was no discussion of these or any other issues prior to shooting the video. Richard has provided his own insight into the therapeutic interactions in the latter section of these notes.

We are also indebted to the ACT Special Interest Group of the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy (BABCP) who funded the videos.

Video-specific Notes

1. Using Functional Analyses to Distinguish 'Front-Room' and 'Back-Room' Targets and Language

We have repeatedly found it beneficial to distinguish what we metaphorically refer to as 'front-room' and 'back-room' content and therapeutic targets. Front-room targets are emotional content which clients often disclose willingly, sometimes even avidly. However, even front-room content can take time and therapeutic effort to raise in-session. Although front-room content does cause distress, it may not exert much control over behaviour. In contrast, back-room targets are rarely provided openly by clients and are often not readily discriminated at the start of therapy. However, they exert considerable control over behaviour. We use functional analyses to decipher between these. In short, we typically use a focus on front room targets to enable identification of, and a focus on, back room targets. You will also see evidence of this in the other two videos.

In this particular video, there is a clear and rather rapid progression from front room targets (Richard's frustration at getting the children up for school in the morning) to the back room targets of shame and workability about how he is conducting the relationship with his children and the future consequences of this for all concerned. Put simply, Richard was convincing himself that he needed to engage in this behaviour in order to get the kids up for school, but the pain and worry of this behaviour damaging his relationship with them is actually controlling his behaviour. In coming to this conclusion, we considered that if the key issue for Richard was just about getting the kids up for school, he would not be so distressed about it because he always manages to get them up. Hence, the frustration of getting the kids up was front room content, while worries about the relationship were part of the back room content.

2. Using Strong Language and a Focus on Deictic Relations

The language of the therapist is very distinct in this video and in the other two. It is often direct and seemingly harsh, an effect which is heightened by a strong focus on the deictic relations (you and others, you and your own behaviour, now versus then). Furthermore, the deictic relations are strategically combined with other relations, such as distinction and hierarchy, to achieve precision over what the listener derives (e.g. “this is NOT YOU”). This type of strong language is employed here to ‘jolt’ Richard from operating largely from his own perspective on this issue toward the perspectives of others (i.e. the kids or his future self) and thus permit better discrimination of the impact of his behaviour. It is important to emphasise, however, that this strong impactful language is always counterbalanced by non-evaluative support. Examples of this type of language include: “aggressive/violent (behaviour)”; “hurt your child”; “out of control”; “lose your relationship with your children”; and “shame”. We often use the term ‘punch-pad’ to describe this therapeutic style to show how the therapist often starts unpacking an issue with a somewhat forceful ‘punch’ statement and then follows this by a ‘pad’ statement.

In conjunction with opening up the children’s perspectives, a focus on the temporal deictic relations (now vs. then) served to highlight the impact of Richard’s behaviour now on his relationship with the children later (e.g. how they will view him when they are older). Strong language was used to support this move. For example, the word “aggressive” highlighted that Richard’s behaviour, although not seemingly aggressive from his own perspective nor by intention, may readily appear aggressive from the perspective of his young children. This serves to enhance the aversive functions of his behaviour in terms of its future consequences.

The strong language and deictic focus are counterbalanced by introducing Richard’s inability thus far to exercise choice over his behaviour in that context. This focus considerably softens the use of “aggressive” by emphasising that any harm is not intentional. A focus on lack of choice also permits exploration of the emotions that accompany this. Indeed, focusing on choice almost instantly shifts Richard’s position, from his own perspective, from being an aggressor to being a type of victim (of his own emotions and behaviour). Focusing on choice offers Richard freedom from his current behaviour, without evaluation.

Key Moments in the Video

1. **"It's not really you"**. The first key RFT piece comes in this deictic negation question “It’s not really you?”, in response to which Richard derives a temporal deictic-I relation (“It’s not how I was before I had kids”). This starts to allow him to discriminate his current actions from a more distant perspective (then).
2. **Workability**. Questions about the workability of Richard’s behaviour come forcefully with the simple question “Does all this help?” This is a conventional ACT piece, but workability is contextualised more broadly here. Instead of simply distinguishing if this behaviour is workable or not, the focus is on *relative* workability by explicitly and repeatedly juxtaposing getting the kids out of bed with the fullness of his relationship with them. This was based on doing a functional analysis of what was causing Richard’s distress and there was little evidence that this distress was caused by the event of getting the children out of bed (front room content), indeed he had greater (90%) distress after he had dropped them to school. The therapist, therefore, concluded that the distress was more broadly associated with the impact of these events on his relationship with the children (back room content). We have found that this ‘relative workability’ piece is often more effective simply because all of the behaviour we engage in must, by definition, be at least in part ‘workable’. Relative workability then paves the way for a discussion about the consequences and costs of this behaviour in a non-evaluative manner, using temporal deictics. Toward this aim, this piece explicitly used a distinction relation between “angry dad” behaviour and the goals of a loving father. Critically, relative workability also allows for further functional

analyses of what psychological events actually control the behaviour, which is not viewed in isolation or as an event in and of itself.

- 3. The children's perspective.** This was another critical deictic focus that was integrated with workability. As noted above, there was a strong move to open up Richard's perspective to accommodate his children's perspectives, which in conjunction with temporal deictic relations, highlighted the potential present and future consequences of his actions, and the overall potential negative impact upon his relationship. This led to the critical question of 'will you get the children out of bed at all costs?'

Video Timing Breakdown

Time	Dialogue	Video Insert	Explanation
0.47 1.10 1.17 1.27	R1: "I love them very much." R2: "They just aren't playing ball." R3: "I feel a real welling up of anger." R3: "I'm end up being not the kind of father I would want to be."	Notice possible deictic incompatibility (0.45) Client confirms deictic issue is relationship with children (1.23)	R derives a distinction relation between "being" and "wanting to be" regarding fatherhood. This relation causes distress and suggests a deictic struggle about 'which of these two am I: being or wanting to be?' R is very frank already and indicates that the problem is broader and more about his fatherhood, as a key part of who he is (deictic-I). This confirms the deictic incompatibility seen in his conflicting statements. The issue is fatherhood, as part of who he is.
1.50 1.57 1.58 2.10 2.12	Y1: "It's not really you. . . you know that's not you." R1: "It's a part of me..." Y2: "It must be because you see it." R2: "It's not how I would see myself." R3: "It's not how I was before I had children."	Deictic distinction relation offered (1.48)	The deictic distinction relation (your behavior now is not you) and then agreement on hierarchical relation facilitate better discrimination of behaviour in a more defused way. This shows that R responds well to the deictic distinction-hierarchical relations.

3:00	Y1: "Imagine it did work ... is it worth it to you in terms of your relationship with the kids?"		A focus on discriminating workability and its potential benefits/costs as part of the broader focus on the relationship.
3.33 4.01	Y1: "It becomes a part of the dad the kids know... dad has an angry side... the kids ... would say 'I wish dad could get us up a different way'." R: "Even if ...it was the best strategy in the world, I still probably wouldn't want to use it."	Deictic reversal shifts to children's perspective (3.32)	Y is asking R to take the children's perspective on his behaviour toward them. This has an immediate impact. R responds well to the deictic reversal and did not interpret it as evaluative. His response indicates that the focus has now shifted entirely to the relationship with the children and R starts to discriminate the cost of his behaviour from the children's perspective.
4.45	R: "I could just shout into a void and just accept some of that." <i>(paraphrase)</i>		R's stated co-ordination relation with other parents transforms normality and acceptability functions.
5.21 6.18	Y1: "slightly aggressive ... out of control ... you could hurt them ... lose". Y2: "Your relationship with them [vs.] being 10 minutes late for school everyday."	"Harsh" language highlights cost of behaviour to relationship (5.10) Temporal deictic focuses on future to highlight costs of current behaviour on relationship with children (5.49)	Y1 pulls back strongly toward cost of behaviour for relationship, using a strong distinction relation between what may be accepted BUT is ultimately damaging to the relationship. Once again, manipulating the temporal deictic relations helps to discriminate in the present potential costs to the relationship in the future. The probing language seems harsh, but the combination of the

			<p>distinction and deictic relations highlights that R will also lose.</p> <p>Y2: This comparison relation highlights the greater importance of the relationship over success in getting the kids up in the morning.</p>
6.29	<p>Y: "You don't want to be out of control of your life around your children." R: "What does that model to them?"</p>	<p>Deictic reversal highlights impact of problem behaviour (6.42)</p>	<p>This shift to the children's perspective established earlier is well reflected in R's concerns about whether his behaviour would be later modelled by the children.</p>
6.48	<p>Y2: "You don't want them ... hurting your grandchildren."</p>		<p>This segment shows the benefits that resulted from the deictic shift to the children's view of their father's behaviour.</p> <p>This is flexible temporal perspective-taking through which R can derive that one day his children will be parents and he would not wish to see them behave this way toward their own children.</p>
6.58	<p>Y1: "You are doing what other parents do." (<i>paraphrase</i>)</p>	<p>Co-ordination relation with "other parents" increases safety for opposition relation with "healthy" (6.58)</p>	<p>Y1: Co-ordination with other parents facilitates defusion and reduces possible evaluation in context of "harsh" language.</p>
7.06	<p>Y2: "AND ... that's not healthy"</p>		<p>Y2: Co-ordination with comment above, but opposition to health.</p>
7:55	<p>Y1: "I [<i>you</i>] have capacity to hurt my [<i>your</i>] children and I [<i>you</i>] can't stop that sometimes."</p>	<p>Juxtaposing impact of behaviour with inability to control behaviour (8.07)</p>	<p>Y1, 2 & 3: Highlighting R as victim/unable to choose. Style is focused and safe.</p>
8.24	<p>Y2: "Rob you and them of the relationship."</p>		
8.40	<p>Y3: "How painful is contacting that bad dad piece?"</p>		
		<p>"Harsh" language validates language</p>	

8.59	R: ““Harsh” ... I’ve already been there.”	client has used on himself (8.54)	R (“I’ve been there) as victim in opposition relation with bad behaviour. R is validated, acknowledged and empathised with.
9:25 9.49	Y1: “The hurt inside this piece comes from what it says about you as a dad and your relationship with your children.” Y2: “What type of dad am I?”	Co-ordination relation between hurt and relationship with children (9.27)	Co-ordination relation between hurt and relationship (distinct from anger about morning routine). Strong emphasis on deictic relation.
11.03 11.13 11.18	Y1: “You’re a warm, loving, intimate dad.” Y2: “... those small pieces where you are not yourself.” Y3: “I [<i>you</i>] am [<i>are</i>] not being who I [<i>you</i>] want to be in here as a person.”	Deictic distinction relation: “This is not you” (10.58)	Y2: Deictic distinction relation highlights that behaviour is incompatible with who he is. Y3: Deictic reversal where Y speaks as R highlights shared perspective of his pain and lack of choice.
12.13 12.40 12.59	Y1: “You will be the last person he comes to.” Y2: “You may have lost him.” R: “Short-term gain but ... in the long-term . . there are potentially lots of losers.”	Combination of deictic reversal and temporal shift to highlight urgency (12.15)	Temporal piece refers to future when son is older, but also to past in that damage may already be done. Strong language and deictic reversal (son’s perspective) highlight urgency in need to act now. This shows that R responds well to temporal relations (recall that he initiated this previously).

13:19	Y1: "Burrow into that piece of pain."	<p>Dynamic functional analysis suggests shame is target emotion (13.16)</p> <p>Client's reactions confirm the importance of shame (13.45)</p> <p>Therapist reinforces sharing in presence of shame (14.36)</p>	<p>Y1 & 2: Drilling down to understand the functions of the content that has been buried deepest and causes most pain leads Y to explore shame.</p> <p>R1: Timing link between shame reference and desire to leave suggests functional analysis is correct.</p> <p>R2: Co-ordination between shame piece and who he is (deictic-I). Y3: Reinforces target behaviour of sharing shame.</p>
13.35	Y2: "It's a shameful piece."		
13.45	R1: "Real sense of wanting to get out of here."		
14.20	R2: "It reveals something about me."		
14.36	Y3: "You revealed that here."		
15:19	Y: "From over here I can have a sense of what you have over there ... because you let me have it."	Deictic shift offers alternative perspective on shame (15.19)	Deictic shift re. shame shows an alternative perspective on shame when shared and establishes future reinforcing functions.
16.10	Y: "It isn't all of you. It's a piece of the way your life is at present but it is something to work toward shifting."	Hierarchical, deictic and temporal distinctions suggest potential for change (16.10)	Hierarchical deictic facilitates discrimination and willingness to have shame, combined with a temporal distinction between present and future that permits agency about changing behaviour.
17:13	Y: "If I was you and I'd had those experiences in the morning, I would also be ashamed."	Deictic co-ordination suggests further potential for change (17.13)	Deictic co-ordination between Y and R distinguishes person from shame.
19.08	Y: "... help you deal with wherever that shame piece comes	Later sessions can now explore how shame has come to control behaviour (19.02)	Sensitivity to shame is revealed by looking at history (future sessions) to explore

	from ... and where the desire to hide your shame comes into play.”		how shame came to control behaviour without client being aware of this control.
19.52 20.00	Y1: “If you let me, I would be willing to carry some of your shame over there - as least some of it, over here.” Y2: “This will allow you to be able to say to somebody ‘I have shame, shame is choking me’.”	Deictic coordination allows for discrimination of burden of shame from new perspective (19.47)	Y1 & 2: Deictic shifting is supportive, validating and empathic, but allows full depth and burden of shame to be recognised, and inside that recognition and support is full discrimination of shame and how it can be responded to in a workable way.
20.44 20.52	Y1: “You can only do that if you are safe and comfortable here with me.” Y2: “Sometimes you will be uncomfortable, and you will always be safe.”	Therapist highlights safety of the therapeutic relationship (20.44) Discrimination between discomfort and safety (20.52)	Y1: Safety piece inserted where shame is fully discriminated. Y2: Discomfort as distinct from safety reduces probability that discomfort is derived as unsafe and potentially aversive.
21.05 21.25	R: “As difficult as that might be, there’s a purpose or a reward.” Y: “Two people here sharing that one burden.”	Shame burden is co-ordinated and shared from new perspective (21.05)	R/Y: Now shame as a burden is co-ordinated between R and Y.
21.50	Y: “All that I would ask is that you be willing to do that again.”	Establishing context for later sessions based on new targets and perspectives (21.43)	Target for next therapeutic steps has been clearly identified through functional analyses.