

Introductory Comments to the Serie on Relational Frame Theory

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The Special Serie of the *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy* is comprised of two editions dedicated specifically to Relational Frame Theory (RFT) that cover the key concepts, controversies, and applications associated with this approach. The first and present issue consists of articles covering a range of conceptual aspects of the theory and some new empirical evidence generated by it. The second issue, available in November of 2004, will be more concerned with research investigating applications of the account.

Why this Special Serie? Relational Frame Theory is a modern behavioral account of human language and cognition that emerged in early work by Steven C. Hayes in 1991, and was thereafter more formally articulated in 2001 by the same author, along with Dermot Barnes-Holmes, and Bryan Roche. In this latter edited book, the relational frame approach to language and cognition was presented in the context of research on phenomena such as stimulus equivalence, multiple stimulus relations, and rule-governance. The book set out the philosophical, conceptual, and experimental underpinnings of the theory, and for the first time offered interpretations of a range of issues that had long been beyond the remit of the behavioral tradition. Specifically, the chapters explicated the ways in which RFT has opened the door to behavioral and functional analyses of many critical features of human cognition, including analogy, metaphor, perspective-taking, and deductive reasoning.

These serie of *IJPPT* attempts to bring our knowledge and understanding of RFT even more up to date, with reviews of some of the most recent research generated by the theory. As is the case with all scientific endeavors, this new empirical evidence has given rise to new questions, and these in turn will likely stimulate further investigation and continue to clarify aspects of the theory. This is the natural sequence of scientific inquiry. In the current special issue, we have endeavored, as much as possible, to clearly present the RFT position on the chosen topics and to indicate how this approach appears to remain consistent with behavioral principles and procedures, as well as the generic scientific goals of prediction and influence.

The first edition of the Special Serie presents ten articles that show the new methodological in-roads generated by RFT to the study of human language and cognition from a behavioral perspective, as well as ways in which the theory has built bridges with other aspects of the field of psychology. Specifically, the first paper presents a number of new procedures for the analysis of derived stimulus relations that extend beyond the traditional matching-to-sample preparations. The second paper continues the issue of methodological advancement, and provides empirical evidence that illustrates how RFT has begun to build bridges with cognitive neuroscience and cognitive psychology using neurophysiological measures. In the third paper, the RFT interpretation of the development of analogical reasoning in terms of the relating of derived relations is presented. The fourth and fifth papers are concerned with rule-governance, and describe the RFT account of instructional control and “formative augmenting”, respectively. The sixth article focuses on yet another area in which RFT has built bridges with the cognitive tradition and presents a behavioral analysis of Theory of Mind in terms of relational perspective-taking. The bridge-building continues in the seventh paper with links between the RFT analysis of human language and evolutionary psychology. The focus of the three final papers is on how RFT has fostered a working relationship between basic and applied behavioral science. In the eighth paper, the authors examine how RFT facilitates a synthesis between basic and applied behavioral psychology. The two final papers are primarily applied in orientation and concentrate specifically on the RFT functional dimensional model of psychopathology, and its application to the treatment of human suffering in terms of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

The applications of RFT continue in the second edition of the Special Serie, which is almost entirely dedicated to the synthesis of basic and applied research, in both clinical and educational domains. The papers contained therein present new empirical evidence from a range of problem areas in which RFT appears to offer substantial benefits over traditional approaches. The clinically-relevant topics covered in this issue include, among others: posttraumatic stress, experiential avoidance, brain injury, strategies for coping with aversive stimuli, electroencephalography, and a conceptualization of the verbal processes in ACT strategies. The educationally-relevant issues covered in the second edition include parent-child interactions and establishing repertoires of relational responding in accordance with comparative and opposite frames in young children.

Our primary aim in the RFT Special Serie of *IJPPT* is to present at least some of the new research that is emerging in the science of human behavior and its applications to clinical practice and education. It is our hope that the articles stimulate debate and further investigation, irrespective of whether one agrees or disagrees with the theory itself, or aspects of it. Understanding the behavior of human language and cognition is a broad and complex task, and will require on-going, intense analysis, investigation, and debate. It is our belief that RFT has an important role to play in this regard and thus warrants considerable attention within the pages of this journal.

References

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