

## ***Political Values Polarization and Unification: A Functional Contextual Viewpoint***

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The European Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2019  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Hampden-Turner (1981) in *Maps of the Mind* claimed that Martin Luther King considered segregation as "not merely dividing person from person but the splitting of value from value with personality" (p.204). Instead Hampden-Turner urged creative healing syntheses by bridging seemingly polar values (e.g., not "black versus white" but "black and white"). Functional contextualism in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) views behaviors and thoughts as "ongoing acts in context" (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001) in which the context establishes the nature and function of the acts. A relational frame is a context that functions to initiate and maintain a response in relation to an equivalence class (which is typically a verbal rule). In this paper we reformulate Hampden-Turner (1981) using functional contextualism and relational frames theory. A mind is not mere mentalism or brain structures, but instead is a network of functional contexts (behaviors, thoughts, environments). The "maps of the political mind" is thus construed as malleable events in context that are equivalence operations where transformations can produce new derived relations, thereby bridging and reducing polarization of political attitudes that occur in isolated social media communities and facilitating dialogue. ACT's application to collective functional units (groups, organizations) will be illustrated with an example for decreasing polarization and increasing adaptation and resilience. The steps comprise: (1) Identifying complementary positive values underlying the conflict through open dialog; (2) Using "both / and" rather than "either / or" (synergistic reasoning) to unify these value splits; (3) Elaborating this union of values by further dialog.

Keywords: Polarized Political values unification; functional contextualism; relational frames theory

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## Introduction

Hampden-Turner (1981) in *Maps of the Mind* claimed that Martin Luther King considered segregation as "not merely dividing person from person but the splitting of value from value with personality" (p. 204). Instead Hampden-Turner urged creative healing syntheses by bridging seemingly polar values (e.g., not "black versus white" but "black and white"). His "synergized conception of morality" claims that "dovetailed values lead to growth and development" (e.g., dissent and authority) "while split-off and repressed values lead to regression, violence, and mental breakdown" (e.g., dissent becomes subversion, authority becomes militarism or dictatorship) (Hampden-Turner, 1981, p. 155).

Functional contextualism in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) views behaviors and thoughts as "ongoing acts in context" (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001) in which the context establishes the nature and function of the acts. Hayes's (2004) Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an integrative post-Skinnerian approach based on relational frame theory (RFT) derived from functional contextualism. ACT challenges the importance of mental constructs such as self-control and instead promotes accepting the experience of events rather than avoiding them, defusing experience from thoughts, and facilitating commitment to valued actions. ACT processes increase psychological flexibility and commitment to valued actions by reducing experiential avoidance through acceptance, cognitive defusion, and mindfulness. A relational frame is a context that functions to initiate and maintain a response in relation to an equivalence class (which is typically a verbal rule). Example: A client may say "I can't do it" when asked to warm her hands to decrease migraine headaches, but through biofeedback as she relinquishes her control efforts she sees her hand temperature warming and says "I can do it" (Hawkins, 2016). RFT describes verbal rule governed behavior as arbitrary derived relational responses, i.e., equivalence classes that have three characteristics: mutual entailment, combinatorial entailment, and transformation of stimulus functions. Derived stimulus relations can be illustrated by a simple stimulus matching learning task, as shown in the next three figures which are adapted from Blackledge and Torneke (2010).

### The Core Verbal Process

#### Training Relational Frames



Figure 1: Training Relational Frames

## The Core Verbal Process

Some Derived Relations

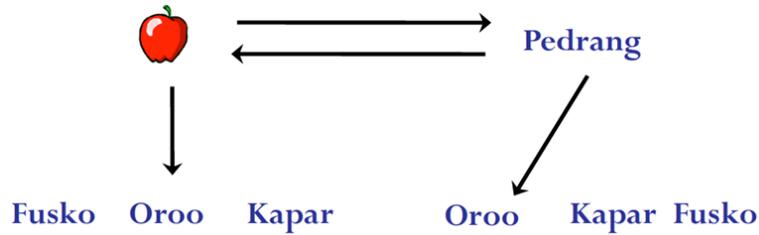


Figure 2: Some Derived Relations

## Defining Properties of Relational Frames

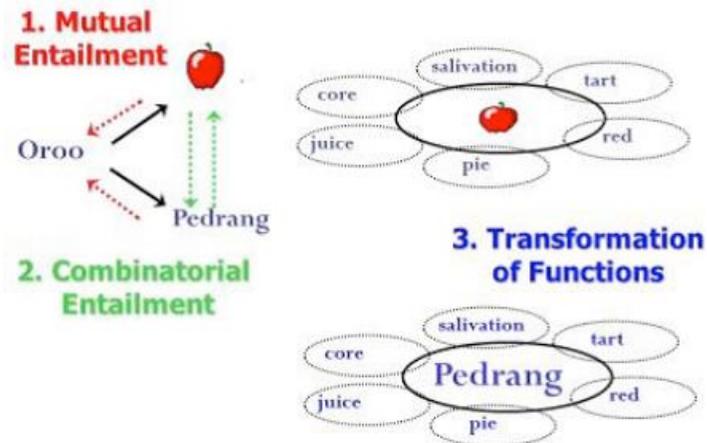


Figure 3: Three Aspects of Equivalence Classes

In Figure 1 a picture of an apple is shown on a computer screen and below it are three comparison stimuli (nonsense words or abstract images). In the initial training task the participant is given feedback for correctly choosing "Ooro" until this conditional discrimination is learned. Then in a second training task the participant learns to associate "Ooro" with another nonsense word "Pedrang." When these two tasks are presented repeatedly the participant thus masters these two conditional discriminations. Moreover, as shown in Figure 2, the participant now also associates "Pedrang" with the picture of the apple, despite never having received training feedback for this discrimination, i.e., this is a derived relation. Figure 3 shows the defining properties of relational frames: (1) mutual entailment (in red); (2) combinatorial entailment (in green); and (3) transformation of functions (in blue, showing that "Pedrang" has now acquired the functional attributes of the apple. This third property of relational frames will be very important in our reformulation of Hampden-Turner's (1981) synergized conception of morality to apply to polarized political values using ACT and RFT.

In this paper we reformulate Hampden-Turner (1981) using functional contextualism and relational frames theory. A mind is not mere mentalism or brain structures, but instead is a network of functional contexts (behaviors, thoughts, environments). The "maps of the

political mind" is thus construed as malleable events in context that are equivalence operations where transformations can produce new derived relations, thereby bridging and reducing polarization of political attitudes that occur in isolated social media communities and facilitating dialogue.

ACT / RFT has been applied to modifying human behavior in collective functional units (groups, organizations) (e.g., Torneke, 2010: Direct behavioral change by consequences, including modeling, vs. change in verbal antecedent rules). Dixon et al. (2003, 2006, 2007, 2009; McKeel & Dixon, 2014) have demonstrated establishing different relational frames of moral values and then modifying these derived relational responses to diminish moral polarities.

A fictional example applying Lakoff's (2016) "Moral Politics" cognitive linguistic model (i.e., "Strict father" - conservative morals; "Nurturant parent" - liberal morals) to the "Sound of Music" characters of Captain von Trapp and Maria Rainer, respectively, may illustrate how polarized political values may be altered by ACT / RFT. The following figure shows the differing relational frames of the Captain and Maria. Through the developing relationship there is a transformation of stimulus functions as can be seen by the songs they sing.

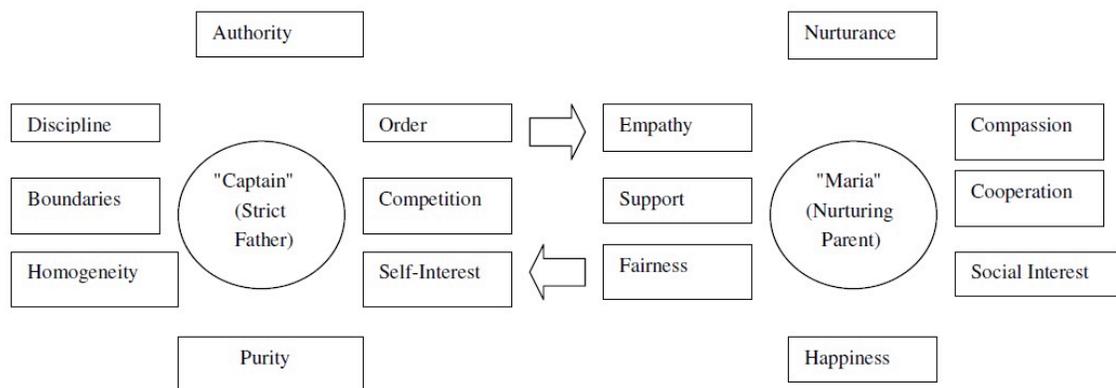


Figure 4. The relational frames of the Captain and Maria

Thus, the Captain as a grieving widower with no song in his life becomes metaphorically the edelweiss flower, while Maria is changed metaphorically from a "will of the wisp problem" to a "mountain to be climbed" (as sung by the Mother Abbess). Finally, the song "Loving You" describes the transformation from a "wicked childhood" to "something good" for both characters. Lakoff's (2016) cognitive linguistic theory assumes implicit metaphorical mental structures rather than explicit derived relational responses in RFT. Lakoff's cognitive model reifies the otherwise useful metaphors ("strict father", "nurturant parent", "nation as family"). Although describing "framing" and "reframing" (e.g., Lakoff, 2016, pp. 419-420) he does not show how this process can be utilized to change metaphors and values (as does Relational Frame Theory). Lakoff merely calls for developing a "metalanguage" (p. 385) without specifying how to use it for bridging polarities in political opinions. Lakoff's (2016) distinction of "strict father" and "nurturant parent" worldviews to characterize conservative versus liberal morals is

suggested in the "Sound of Music" example. Following Hayes et al. (2001) the new metaphors might be "Captain Von Trapp is a flower (edelweiss)," and "Maria is a mountain," showing how derived relational responses in relational deictic frames for the self may be transformed. From "loving you" (HERE, NOW) Captain and Maria affirm "something good" in their "wicked youth or childhood" (THERE, THEN)<sup>1</sup>.

Interpreting Hampden-Turner's (1981) "Maps of the Mind" within the functional contextual framework of ACT / RFT we may derive the following guidelines for unifying polarized values:

- Premise: Applies only to mild or moderate conflict situations (not to absence of conflict or to extreme lethal threat)
- Identify complimentary values underlying the conflict through open dialog (assuming "good faith")
- Use "both/and" rather than "either/or" (synergistic reasoning) to unify value splits
- Elaborate this union of values by further dialog

These guidelines need to be tested by further empirical research studies. Researchers (e.g., Dixon et al. 2003, 2006, 2007, 2009; Manbeck et al., 2018; McKeel & Dixon, 2014; Mizaël et al., 2016) have conducted experiments demonstrating how stimulus functions can be transformed for prejudicial political beliefs. Social media definitely contribute to the elaboration of relational frames (e.g., Happer & Philo, 2013). Westen's (2007) book emphasized the salience of emotional appeals over rational issue-oriented ads for influencing political opinions. Haidt (2012) refers to the build-up of moral capital, which may be related to the differential value "tastes" of liberals, libertarians, and conservatives. Haidt's pluralistic value framework emphasizes "groupishness" or "hives" as a vehicle for accumulating both moral capital and social capital (the latter discussed by Putnam, 2007, 2015). We might consider different "hives" as different verbal communities (pluralistic) with different learning histories and different derived relational responses (rule governed behaviors). Haidt contends that maintaining "hives" would promote building and bridging social capital (and prevent "turtle-ing"). Social identification theory has advantages (in-group favoritism) and disadvantages (out-group prejudice). Making friends with persons with different political beliefs (different relational frames) will reduce polarization and increase moderation<sup>2</sup> through transfer of stimulus functions. Leaders who model or encourage dialogue across political divides (e.g., Argon, 2011; Bohm, 1996) would likewise modify relational frames to reduce polarization and prejudice.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we integrate Hampden-Turner's (1981) *Maps of the Mind* synergistic conception of morality into "maps of the political mind" as reformulated via functional contextualism. We use a fictional example from the "Sound of Music" to illustrate how ACT / RFT may be used to transform stimulus functions to unify polarized political / moral values. Although the example we presented is interpersonal ("Captain and Maria"), we believe that this ACT / RFT model can be applied at a macro level to the current political climate, as the "strict parent" / "nurturant parent" metaphors underlie the conservative / liberal polarity. In that sense we believe that this model has the potential to

bridge current political divides and to facilitate dialogue toward more moderate viewpoints.

#### End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hawkins & Meier (2015) in their System Contextual Integrative Model of personality describe how individual differences in temperament and personality may be contextualized within different social ecological contexts. Relational frame theory may be useful to describe the elaboration of the relational frames corresponding to these person-environment contexts.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.newfair.org> for an example of fostering a moderate perspective on political values and goals.

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