

ACT AND CBT: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Sue Watson

*Research Department of Clinical, Educational
and Health Psychology*

University College London



STYLE DIFFERENCES IN CBT AND ACT



CBT

ACT

analytic (reasoning)	un-analysed experiencing
highly verbal	less verbal
focus on 'what it means'	mindful
comparison and evaluation	defused, less evaluative

ACT AND CBT I:

- ACT uses very little cognitive challenging and restructuring. Therapeutic goal is *not* the reduction of depression or anxiety, but the *activation of value-congruent, observable behaviour*.
- CBT generally seeks to *increase effective reasoning* and reduce psychological distress

ACT AND CBT II:

- similar, in that they both view unhelpful thoughts as an important focus of therapy
- different, in that in CBT the focus is on *content*, (relational intervention) whilst in ACT, the focus is on *function*

ACT AND CBT III:

RELATIONAL INTERVENTIONS (CBT)

- common in CBT but not ACT. They focus on content with the aim of altering the *form, frequency, or situational specificity* of a thought

FUNCTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

- altering the *power* of thoughts to impact on behaviour, e.g. using defusion to undermine the potency of destructive language

A FOCUS ON THE **CONTENT** OF THINKING (CBT Model)

"I was depressed all day yesterday because I was thinking about how my sister doesn't really love me".

- * What is the evidence that this thought is accurate?
- * What would it mean if it were true?
- * Can you think of another way to interpret what your sister said?
- * Why must everyone love you?

A FOCUS ON THE FUNCTION OF THINKING

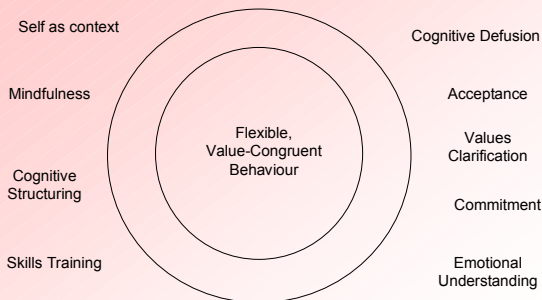
“I was depressed all day yesterday because I was thinking about how my sister really doesn’t love me.”

- * When did you start thinking that?
- * What were the consequences of thinking that?
- * What were you doing while you were thinking that?
- * Does thinking that support your values and goals?

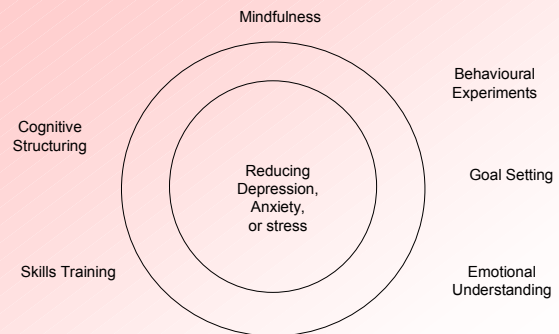
COGNITIVE CHALLENGING: A MIXED MESSAGE?

- may actually increase the importance of unwanted thoughts
- may lead to thought suppression and rebound
- may allow further thoughts to become related to the unwanted thought - so that even more of the neutral environment is interpreted accordingly
- implies causal relationship between thoughts and behaviour
- it reinforces the ‘context of literality’, so we may take our thoughts *even more* seriously

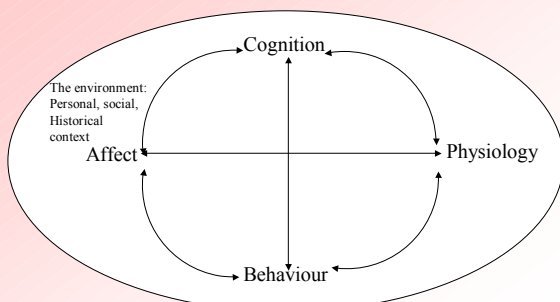
THE FLEXIBILITY MODEL



THE DISTRESS-REDUCTION MODEL



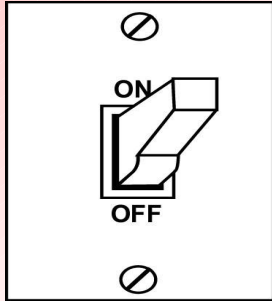
HOT CROSS BUN (Padesky & Mooney, 1990)



THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOURS DON'T HAVE TO GO TOGETHER AUTOMATICALLY



THE STRUGGLE SWITCH



GETTING OUTSIDE THE 'CLOUD' OF LANGUAGE AND EVALUATIONS



HISTORICAL TEST OF SCHEMA

Belief: I am defective

Evidence supporting the belief But Evidence against the belief

0-5 years

Mum told me I was a bad girl for letting my baby brother burn himself.

It was inappropriate for mum to expect me to keep myself and the baby safe while she was drunk.

My aunt shouted at my mum and told me it wasn't my fault because I was only a baby myself.

5-8 years

I couldn't read very well. Other children teased me because my clothes were all creased.

No one helped me with reading at home. Mum never ironed. My clothes like other children's mums did.

The classroom assistant gave me extra reading lessons so I caught up. At least mine and my brother's clothes were clean because I washed them myself.

THE CHESS METAPHOR IN ACT: DISTINGUISHING THE SELF FROM EXPERIENTIAL PHENOMENA

**SELF AS CONTEXT
V. CONTENT:**



❖ Who are you in this chess game?

ACT: learning how *not* to win the war, but instead to abandon the battle



thank you - and may your thoughts be like these leaves floating gently downstream