ACTing in society

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Phineas Gage
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History of mental health treatment: Lobotomy in practice
Sigmund Freud

- Psychoanalysis
- Dream analysis
- Free association
- Suppressed feelings
- Stages of development
- Not scientific!
Pavlov’s dog – classical conditioning

1. Before Conditioning
   - Food (Unconditioned Stimulus)
   - Salivation (Unconditioned Response)

2. Before Conditioning
   - Bell (Neutral Stimulus)
   - No Salivation (No Conditioned Response)

3. During Conditioning
   - Bell + Food
   - Salivation (Unconditioned Response)

4. After Conditioning
   - Bell (Conditioned Stimulus)
   - Salivation (Conditioned Response)

Classical Conditioning
Skinner’s Operant conditioning

Reinforcement (positive and negative)

Rats like cocaine!!
Noam Chomsky – cognitive revolution

- Different to behaviorism – about mental constructs rather than behaviours!
Aaron T. Beck – cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

- Systematic desensitization
- Thought reconstruction
Introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
What do you mean ACTing?

- Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT)
- Emphasises:
  - Being present
  - Cognitive defusion
  - Acceptance
  - Values
  - Commitment
  - Self as context
We all get negative thoughts from time to time.
Ideally, we would like to turn off bad thoughts as easy as clicking a light switch.
We are taught through society to fix things which are broken or faulty
So, we instinctively try to fix or remove our faulty thoughts... perhaps by squashing or suppressing them like a bug!
Thought suppression does not work!

Evidence shows that suppressing thoughts can make them more frequent and intense in the long term.
ACT metaphors – about acceptance

• Quick sand – the more you struggle with your negative thoughts the more you sink
ACT metaphors – about acceptance

Tug of war – the more you struggle the more you tire
Accept the monster or unwanted guest – metaphor for accepting unwanted thoughts rather than struggling with them.
ACT metaphors – teaches us about core properties of ACT

- Chessboard metaphor
Chess metaphor – defusion

Your thoughts and feelings as chess pieces on a chessboard.

The white pieces as the thoughts and feelings you want (e.g., "confidence", "happiness", "self-esteem").

The black pieces as the thoughts and feelings you don't want (e.g., "anxiety", "fear", "self-doubt", "hopelessness").

The game of white vs. black (good thoughts vs. bad) represent our internal struggle – the internal war.

We should see ourselves as the chess board, not hooked into the activity on the board!
Cognitive defusion – leaves on the stream exercise

- Seeing thoughts as just thoughts
- Not to buy into them
- Hold thoughts lightly
- Exercise – leaves on a stream
- Where you place your thoughts on leaves and watch them quietly fall down a stream
Be present

- Be in the HERE and NOW and not the THERE and THEN
- Learning to live in the present moment is difficult, as our mind likes to wander into the future and past, worrying and judging things in our lives
- It is better to be present and mindful
- One exercise is to focus on your breathing to help you contact the present and learn to live in the present moment
As you travel through life you have passengers

• These passengers may represent your fears, insecurities etc. which hinder you from working towards a meaningful life...

• “you will fail”
• “you are worthy”
It is always best to accept these passengers and take them on the journey with you!

Which path do you choose, a life towards your values or the same old road?
Choice point – This is where ACT is useful. Values act as a life compass.

This is not easy and you will need practice!
Values vs. goals

- You can not tick off values as complete, but you can with goals
- Goals are anchored within your values

- Work
- Education
- Family
- Friends
- Health
- Intimacy
- Kindness
- Compassion

- Value – be healthy
- A goal of being healthy – go to the gym today
From an ACT perspective, ‘the self’ was initially conceptualised in terms of the three selves (self as content, self as process and self as context), all believed to be natural by-products of verbal behaviour.

- **Self as content**
- **Self as process**
- **Self as context (the transcendent self)**
Commitment to values

• Knowing your true values, you can begin to set realistic goals based on those values. For example, if you value doing well in school, a concrete goal would be to study for three hours each day. Goals come and go as circumstances change and evolve, whereas values are a constant driving and motivating force for behaviors.

• **Committed Action**
  • Harris (2009) explains that there are 4 steps to committed action:
    • (1) Choose a domain of your life that is a high priority for change.
    • (2) Choose what values you wish to pursue in this domain.
    • (3) Develop goals that are guided by those values.
    • (4) Take action mindfully.
Use SMART to set your goals within your values

- **SMART stands for** Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic/Relevant, and Time Bound.
- Comes out of the management literature
Often need to get out of your comfort zone to work towards your values.
Identifying values is important.

What do I want my life to stand for?
THANK YOU!