Mindfulness and acceptance-based behavioral therapy for generalized anxiety and comorbid disorders

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Therapists and clients
Review of research and model that informs case conceptualization

Acceptance-based behavioral therapy
  ➢ An overview of goals, methods and issues that commonly arise
    ▪ Cultivating acceptance and mindfulness
    ▪ Encouraging values-consistent living

Outline

cognitive BEHAVIORAL approaches (cBt)
  ➢ Conceptualize clinical problems as learned, habitual, serving a function
  ➢ Teach clients to understand difficulties and strategies for change
  ➢ Increase behavioral flexibility
  ➢ Increase awareness
  ➢ Use out-of-session practice
  ➢ Demonstrated efficacy with wide-range of disorders

Acceptance-Based Behavioral Therapies
  ➢ Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 1999)
  ➢ Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993)
  ➢ Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002)
  ➢ Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT; Jacobson & Christensen, 1996)
### Conceptual Model of GAD and Comorbid Disorders

| Problematic Relationship with Internal Experiences | Experiential Avoidance | Behavioral Avoidance/Constriction |

*Informed by a model of psychopathology described by Hayes et al., 1996*

### Problematic Relationships with Internal Experience

- Restricted awareness/ focus on threat
- Fusion/ entanglement with internal experiences
- Emotions viewed with fear and distress
- Reactivity, critical judgmental of internal experiences

*Lee et al., 2010; Mennin, 2005, Williams et al., 1997*
Experiential Avoidance

- Viewing internal experiences as threatening, dangerous motivates efforts to avoid\(^1\).
- Worry serves an experientially avoidant function
  - Cognitive avoidance of somatic arousal\(^2\)
  - Distraction from more emotional topics\(^3\)
- Consequences
  - Increases distress; contributes to problematic relationship with internal experiences
  - Motivates behavioral avoidance

1. Lee et al., 2010; Hayes et al., 1996; 2. Borkovec et al., 2004; 3. Borkovec & Roemer, 1995

Behavioral Avoidance/ Constriction

- Less likely to engage in valued behaviors\(^1\)
  - Behavior driven by avoidance rather than choice
  - Diminishes quality of life\(^1\)
- May appear to be active/busy
  - Worry, anxiety and avoidance efforts prevent true engagement

1. Michelson et al., 2010; Wilson & Murrell, 2004

Goals of an ABBT for GAD

- Cultivate an expanded awareness and a compassionate and decentered stance towards internal experiences
- Increase acceptance of/ willingness to have internal experiences
- Encourage mindful engagement in personally meaningful behaviors

1. Informed by ACT (Hayes et al., 1999), MBCT (Segal et al., 2002), and DBT (Linehan et al., 1993)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Individual psychotherapy for GAD principal dx (comorbidity, stable meds allowed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 16 sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- First four 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Last two are every other week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concepts of acceptance, mindfulness and values are interwoven into all sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Two phases of treatment</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Begin with a mindfulness exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Review outside of session work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Go over new concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Present using handouts and psychoeducation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- See how it fits with clients’ experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use metaphors and exercises to illustrate concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop new out of session work</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Client chooses mindfulness exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In and between session application of principles to life material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explore opportunities for valued action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use acceptance and mindfulness in response to urges to experientially avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Revisit concepts presented in earlier sessions as needed</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Open Trial (Roemer & Orsillo, 2007)

Waitlist RCT (Roemer, Orsillo & Salters-Pedneault, 2008)

Maintenance of Change
ABBT v AR RCT: GAD CSR
(Hayes-Skelton et al., in press)

Time:  [Math]t(116.14) = -7.92, p < .001, d = 1.47
Time X Tx: [Math]t(115.23) = 0.01, p = .99, d = 0.002

Quality of Life Inventory

Time:  [Math]t(120.24) = 4.07, p < .001, d = 0.74
Time X Tx: [Math]t(122.50) = 0.59, p = .55, d = 0.11

Clinical Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ABBT</th>
<th>AR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>73.3% (22/30)</td>
<td>72.7% (24/33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Month Follow-Up</td>
<td>80.0% (20/25)</td>
<td>75.0% (21/28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last value forward</td>
<td>76.7% (23/30)</td>
<td>66.7% (22/33)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Within normative range on 3 of 5 anxiety measures (Newman et al., 2011)
Other Findings/Ongoing Research

- Common mechanisms of change
  - Mindfulness, decentering, experiential acceptance
- Applicability of treatment to ethnically and economically diverse clients
- Portability/Training
- Adaptations
- Basic research studies

Goals

Cultivate an expanded awareness and a compassionate and decentered stance towards internal experiences

Increase acceptance of/willingness to have internal experiences

Encourage mindful engagement in personally meaningful behaviors

Methods

- Therapeutic relationship
- Psychoeducation
- Mindfulness practice
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Therapeutic Relationship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Model the treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Be mindfully engaged in session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Demonstrate willingness to tolerate painful emotions and thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Validate and normalize client’s pain and struggle</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychoeducation</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenting Psychoeducational Material</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Handouts to reinforce learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Present general concept and then explore how it may fit with client’s experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Don’t attempt to persuade or debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Client encouraged to consider over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Recognize limits of psychoeducation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Experiential learning supports concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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9
Psychoeducation

- Function of fear
  - Valued living involves taking risks and facing challenges
- Function of worry
  - Ability to consider the future is adaptive, but unfortunately we cannot control it
  - Worry as avoidance
- Function of emotions
  - Provide information and prepare us

But, Sometimes Emotions Become Muddied....

(like when fear becomes clinical)

How Can We Tell When Emotions are Muddy?

- Stronger and/or last longer
- Diffuse – “upset” or “distressed”
- Confusing
- Feels really familiar, like part of personality rather than a reaction to situation
- Feel judgmental or critical about our reaction
- Feel caught up in or entangled in our emotional response
### How do Emotions become Muddy?

- Failures in self-care
- Emotions connected to future, imagined or past, remembered events
- Problematic relationship
  - Fusion/entangled
  - Critical/judgmental
  - Experiential avoidance
    - Limits and paradoxical effects

### How Do We Clarify Muddy Emotions?

**Mindfulness**

- Develop a spacious awareness of present moment
- Develop a curious, compassionate, observant stance
- Notice the transient nature of internal experiences
- Beginner’s mind

**Mindfulness Skills**

- Develop a spacious awareness of present moment
- Develop a curious, compassionate, observant stance
- Notice the transient nature of internal experiences
- Beginner’s mind
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mindfulness Methods</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Formal practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Informal practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In and out of session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neutral and emotionally charged situations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Monitoring**

- Break habitual avoidance habit
- Turning towards internal experiences
- Developing fuller awareness of responses/interconnections
  - Thoughts, emotions, behaviors, consequences
- Decentering or defusing
- Progressively more challenging
  - Target related to psychoeducation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>Bills</td>
<td>At desk at work</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>Conflict with boss</td>
<td>In bed</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Efforts to Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/8</td>
<td>Job interview</td>
<td>In bed</td>
<td>Tried to push out of my mind so I could fall asleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/9</td>
<td>Conflict with mother</td>
<td>At desk at work</td>
<td>I don't want to feel sad about this - she is wrong - I should be angry - need to be able to talk to her without crying!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>First Reactions (thoughts, feelings, sensations)</th>
<th>Second Reactions (efforts to control, critical responses, compassion)</th>
<th>Actions/Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/7</td>
<td>Meeting with boss, ask for a raise</td>
<td>Scared, dread, blockage, “She is mad; I don’t deserve a raise”</td>
<td>Too overwhelmed I can’t let her see how nervous I am, distort myself, so I don’t try</td>
<td>Tell her I need to go and attend to a client issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/9</td>
<td>Bed at night, replaying interaction with boss</td>
<td>Anger, sadness, “I am pathetic”</td>
<td>“I’m so hard on myself,” practice self-compassion</td>
<td>Write her an email asking for a meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concerns about Self-Monitoring

- Do I have to write things down in the situation?
  - Assumption that SM is something done for the therapist
- Do I have to mark down every time I am anxious?
- Won't paying attention make me more anxious?

Formal Mindfulness Practices

Exploring Mindfulness Practice

- What did you notice?
- Validate humanness of all experiences
- Listen for judgment – “good” or “bad” practice
- Connect observations to presenting problems and goals of treatment
Mindfulness Progression

- Awareness of body sensations
  - Awareness of Breath
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Beginner’s Mind
  - Raisin Exercise
  - Mindfulness of Sound

Progression (cont.)

- The challenge of thoughts and emotions
  - Labeling internal experiences
  - Mindfulness of Emotion
  - The Clouds Exercise
  - Leaves on a Stream
  - New language conventions

Progression (cont.)

- Compassion
  - The Guest House
  - Wild Geese
  - Inviting a difficulty in
- Developing a sense of the transience of experience
  - Observer exercise
  - Mountain meditation
Informal Mindfulness Practice

- Daily activities/ routines
  - Washing dishes, folding laundry, brushing teeth
- More challenging situations
  - Interactions with boss, conflict with partner, parenting situations

Struggles with Self-Compassion

- Emotional responses are unacceptable
- Misunderstanding self-compassion
  - = heaping false praise on oneself
  - = ignoring or denying our mistakes
  - = selfish
- Fear of self-compassion
  - It will turn me into a lazy softie
- I don’t deserve it

Goals

- Cultivate an expanded awareness and a compassionate and decentered stance towards internal experiences
- Increase acceptance of willingness to have internal experiences
- Encourage mindful engagement in personally meaningful behaviors
Values articulation and action

- Psychoeducation
- Emotional processing/writing exercises
- Self-monitoring
- Engagement in action

Psychoeducation

- Goals can be helpful
  - But, contain assumption that where you are now is not enough
- Values differ from goals
  - Process not endpoint
  - Present moment versus future focus
- Willingness is an alternative to avoidance that promotes engagement in valued living
  - Swamp metaphor

Values Writing Assignment I

- How is your anxiety interfering with...
  - Relationships (partner, family, friends)
  - Work, education, training, household management
  - Self-nourishment and community activities
- Writing Assignments
  - 20 minutes on 4 different days
  - Explore deepest thoughts and emotions about topics
  - Don’t worry about grammar
### Values Writing Assignment II

- **Relationships**
  - How open or private would you like to be? How would you like to communicate with others?

- **Work/Education**
  - What kind of work do you want to be engaged in? What sort of work habits are important to you? What challenges do you want to take on?

- **Self-nurturance/Community Involvement**
  - How would you like to spend your free time? What do you want to do for fun? To better take care of yourself or others?

### Values Assignment III

- **Name one or two values in each domain**
  - **Relationships**
  - **Work/Education**
  - **Self-nurturance and community involvement**

- **Identify obstacles that prevent you from living consistently with values**

### Value: To Connect with Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Taken (T) or Missed (M)</th>
<th>Mindfulness (0-100)</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/4</td>
<td>Co-worker invited me to lunch</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>I was afraid I wouldn't be interesting and fun enough. Going to lunch would make me feel too anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Talked to my partner about how I was feeling</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Making a Commitment to a Values-Consistent Life

- Identifying values consistent actions to be taken
- Use mindfulness/acceptance/defusion to address obstacles
- Bring mindfulness to valued living

Values Writing Assignment IV

- What is the importance of the values you have chosen? What do they mean to you?
- What are the biggest obstacles that stand between you and the changes you want to make?
- What positive and negative reactions come up when you think about making a commitment to change?

Common Stuck Points with Values

- I have no control over valued domains
  - Wanting other people to act differently
  - Situations/circumstances beyond my control
- Separating my values from the values of those around me
- Indecision/fear of articulating a value
- Balancing values across domains
Bringing It All Together

Termination and Relapse Prevention

Review Elements of Treatment

- Overview of model and strategies
- Identify particularly useful strategies
- Establish ways of reminding self of concepts and strategies
  - Use of binder and handouts
  - Suggestions for maintaining mindfulness practice
- Setbacks and struggles are expected
## Mindfulness Suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breath</td>
<td>Basic portable practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing Space</td>
<td>Helpful when racing from one activity to another or to check in and get centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness of Emotions</td>
<td>When experience muddy, or intense reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts on Clouds, Leaves or Movie Screen</td>
<td>When entangled, fused or tied in unjudgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness of Sounds/ Eating Mindfully</td>
<td>When you are bringing expectations to a situation; not necessarily watching as it unfolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guest House/ Inviting a Difficulty In</td>
<td>When you are struggling with willingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mountain Meditation</td>
<td>When you need help connecting to inner strength and stability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Signs to Revisit Mindfulness and Valued Action

- Feeling increasingly anxious/stressed/frazzled
- Feeling checked out or disconnected
- Having muddied reactions more frequently
- Feeling constrained in life – like you don’t have freedom or flexibility
- More frequently passing up valued activities
- Repeatedly thinking things will get better after this one hurdle is passed

[www.mindfulwaythroughanxietybook.com](http://www.mindfulwaythroughanxietybook.com)