

Comparative Study of Morita Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

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Morita Therapy

- (1) Morita found *shinkeishitsu*, or neurotic character behind anxiety disorders.
- (2) Morita therapy is effective for anxiety disorders which are formed by the mechanism of “*toraware*,” based on *shinkeishitsu* character.

(3) The mechanism of “*toraware*” consists of ① psychic interaction and ② conflict between the ideal and real.

① **Psychic interaction** refers to the phenomenon in which attention to symptoms and emotions and sensations are fixated.

② **Conflict between the ideal and real** refers to the attitude to try to eliminate anxiety. It also indicates the distress concerning the gap between the “desired self” and the “real self.”

Morita's view of human being

He thought that anxiety and fear of death as well as desire for life are the two sides of the same coin.



Fear of death and desire for life are both recognized as “human facts.”

Treatment goal of Morita therapy is considered as “arugamama.”

- (1) It means to stop trying to eliminate anxiety and symptoms, and leave them as they are. By doing this, it aims to convert the attitude for anxiety.
- (2) It means to exert the desire for life behind anxiety in constructive behaviors.

The process of exerting desire for life

- (1) Increasing patient's constructive behaviors is attempted. As a result, psychic interaction for symptoms is to be overcome.
- (2) As patients expand their activities, they become concerned with the gap between "the way it should be" and the "the reality" in interpersonal relationship and daily life. This concern will be replaced by more flexible attitude for coping in accordance with the reality. This is regarded as the **cultivation of shinkeishitsu character.**

(3) Morita stated, “For those who have overcome their shinkeishitsu, we attempt to have them culture their minds for life. **Only when they gain a correct view of life, they are fully recovered and will never have a relapse.**”

The characteristics of the third wave of cognitive behavioral therapy

Contemporary Behavior Therapy is best understood as an applied progression conventional behavior therapy toward the incorporation of techniques and approaches that bear an unmistakable **Eastern** or **Oriental** signature (Francis, et al 1998; Barlow, 1998; Jacobson, 1998).

A definition of ACT

ACT is a psychological intervention based on the modern behavioral psychology including Relational Frame Theory (RFT), that applies **mindfulness and acceptance processes**, and **commitment and behavioral change processes**, to the creation of **psychological flexibility** (1999、 Hayes).

Figure 1.1: An ACT Model of Psychopathology

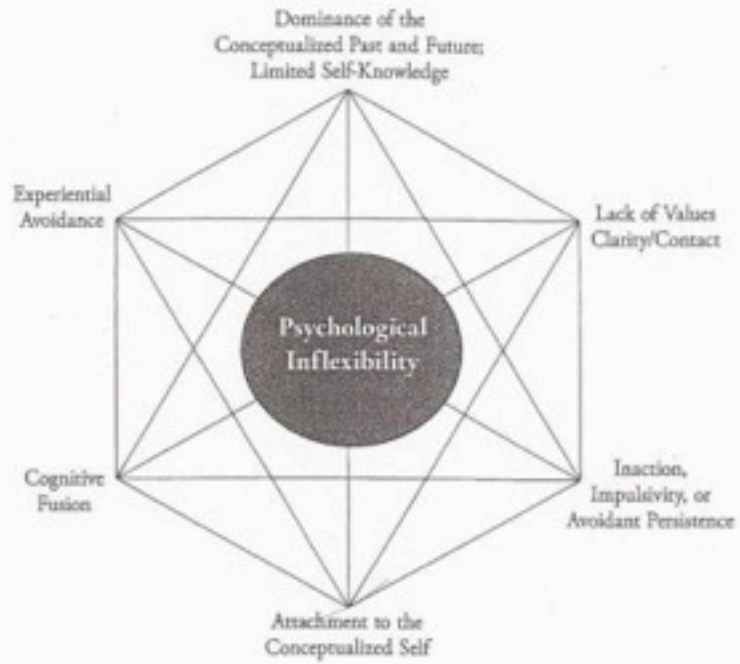
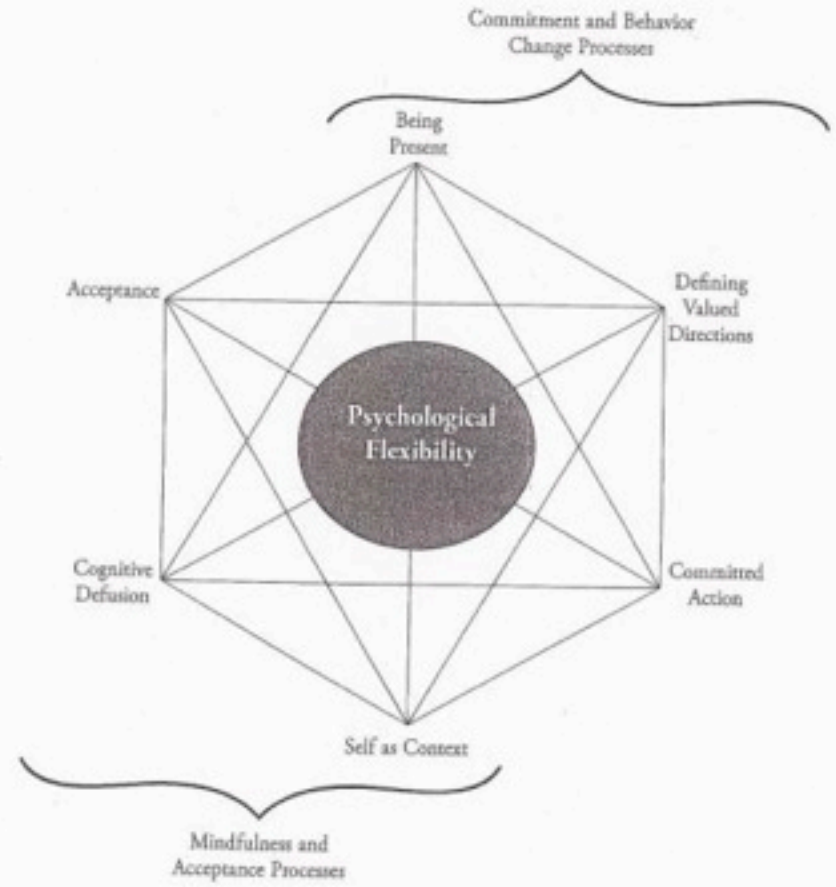


Figure 1.2: Six Core Therapeutic Processes of ACT



[1] Acceptance

Acceptance of private events is taught as an alternative to experiential avoidance.

It involves the active and aware embrace of private events that are occasioned by our history.

Acceptance in ACT is not an end in itself. Rather, acceptance is fostered as a method of increasing values-based action.

Obedience to nature

In short, the solution lies in assisting a client to discard artificial tactics and manipulations and to observe and obey nature(**Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 2, p. 329. “Morita therapy and the true nature of anxiety-based disorders” p.18).**

[2] Cognitive Defusion

Defusion is an invented word meaning to undo fusion, or [de-fusion], and refers to the process of creating nonliteral contexts in which language can be seen as an active, ongoing, relational process that is historical in nature and present in the current moment. **Creating this nonliteral context loosens the relationship to thought, creating greater flexibility.**

Psychic interaction

The concept of Morita therapy corresponding to cognitive fusion is the theory of “psychic interaction (Seishin-kogo-sayo)”. (**Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 2, p.290. “Morita therapy and the true nature of anxiety-based disorders” p.111).**

⌘ In order to break through this psychic interaction , exertion of desire for life is emphasized, and **cognitive defusion is not directly worked on.**

[3] Being Present

- ① Help clients to discover that life is happening right now, and to return to now from the conceptualized past or future.
- ② Help clients to make contact with the life that is happening now, whether it be filled with sorrow or happiness.
- ※ The technique for mindfulness is used to help a client **consciously** become being present moment.

To fully become the present

The phrase in Morita therapy which corresponds to this being present is “to fully become the present.” (**Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 5, p. 1 3 9**)

※ **Morita therapy emphasizes patients' experiences **in their daily life.****

[4]Self as Context

Key target is distinguishing conceptualized self from self as context.

✘ For this purpose, the client sometimes traces his memory of the past.

Conflict between the ideal and real

Conceptualized self in ACT corresponds to the ideal in Morita therapy. And self as context in ACT corresponds to real in Morita therapy. (Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 2, p.326; “Morita therapy and the true nature of anxiety-based disorders, p.3).

✘ While past is addressed in ACT, Morita therapy emphasizes experiences in the here-and-now.

[5]Defining Valued Directions

Values clarification asks us to step back from everyday problems of life and take a look at what gives our lives meaning , to look for the larger possibilities that dignify our struggles and can guide constructive action.

“Ultimately, we must know what
we ourselves are seeking.”

(Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 5, p.519).

[6] Committed Action

Finally, ACT encourages the development of larger and larger patterns of effective action linked to chosen values.

In one sense, ACT is an exposure-based method. But there are differences. **First**, exposure would never be presented to an ACT client as a method of reducing arousal. **Second**, exposure is values linked. **The exposure in ACT has a values-based purpose.**

Patient's view of life

A 27-year-old patient who had suffered from taijin-kyofu and writer's cramp and had not been fully cured in inpatient treatment decided to go back to his hometown, quitting the company he had worked for. To this patient, Morita said, "Future plans must always come from ambition. You can be cured someday if you quit working, but you will never be cured by seeking easy situation."

This is the most essential point. Here is the turning point of whether **the patient's mind becomes extrovert towards his purpose in life**, or introvert concerned only with his own body and mind, being preoccupied with his moods. **With this mental attitude based on the above view of life**, the patient turned a new leaf and suddenly became able to write only within three days after the discharge. (Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 3, p. 149).

Morita would encourage the patient to become extrovert and move towards his purpose of life. This does not only mean to take actions to achieve the purpose but includes **the cultivation of shinkeishitsu character and the correction of attitude towards life.**

The treatment goal of ACT —psychological flexibility—

Psychological flexibility is the ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, to change or persist in behavior in order to serve valued ends.

The process from (1) to (4) are mostly aimed at **undermining language** in areas of living in which language is relatively ineffective. The clarification of values and the process of commitment are **learned and reinforced**.

The treatment goal of Morita therapy

—Mushoju-shin—

- Mushoju-shin describes a state in which attention is not fixed on a particular point and the entire mind is alert and functioning; attention extends in all directions. (**Morita Shoma Zensyu Vol. 2, p.344; “Morita therapy and the true nature of anxiety-based disorders,” p.30**).
- →In Morita therapy, it is aimed at reaching **the state of “pure mind”**.

ACT	Morita therapy
acceptance	obedience to nature
cognitive fusion	psychic interaction
conceptualized self, self as context	conflict between the ideal and real
being present moment	to fully become the present
defining valued directions	patient's view of life
committed action	become extrovert to move towards goal
psychological flexibility	Mushoju-shin

The characteristics of ACT

- (1) While the contents of cognition are controlled in traditional CBT, the contents of cognition are accepted in ACT.
- (2) While the exposure focusing on symptoms was used in traditional CBT, ACT adopts values-based exposure, which is a part of the effort to increase the behaviors based on values in life. In this aspect, the exposure in ACT is more motivating for clients.
 - **Cognition acceptance model** and **the increase of values-based behaviors** beyond alleviation of symptoms in ACT are the common aspects it shares with Morita therapy.

Some doubts about ACT

- (1) As an approach to change the context of cognition, various techniques are used in the process of defusion. I wonder if the change of cognition is sustainable.
- (2) Whether the increase in values-based behaviors results in psychological flexibility in a true sense.

Merits in Morita therapy(1)

(1) In Morita therapy, the modification of cognition and behavior is not divided. And it has the view of life which regards anxiety and fear of death and desire for life are two sides of the same coin. **It aims at changing cognition and behavior by exerting desire for life.** First, a client is encouraged to exert his desire for life in order to break through the conflict between the ideal and real. Physical activity is emphasized, and as a result, the client's distance from his cognition changes.

Merits in Morita therapy(2)

(2) What is emphasized in ACT is limited to the learning to increase the repertoire of behavior. On the other hand, Morita therapy includes two stages of exerting desire for life. In **the first stage**, the scope of constructive behavior is expanded, which alone is not sufficient as treatment. **The second stage** is the process of cultivating shinkeishitsu character. And **finally**, there is the process of correcting the client's view of life.



Morita therapy goes beyond the improvement of cognition and behavior as in ACT to the level of **cultivating shinkeishitsu character and correcting the view of life**. In other words, it addresses the issues of how patients live their life, which can be regarded as its unique feature.