

Global Connections Session 2: mindfulness & anxiety

- ‘Research has shown that anxiety and moodiness are key factors impacting missionaries’ job performance.’ Mark A. Strand et al, “ Mental Health of Cross-Cultural Health care Missionaries,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 43, no. 4 (2015), 283.
- ‘In this study of career healthcare missionaries, 47.9% of female missionaries and 42.1 % of male missionaries reported experiencing anxiety...’ (Strand, 283).

Emotional regulation

- Emotional regulation is a key indicator for mental wellbeing
- Anxiety and worry show that work can be done on a person's emotional regulation
- E.g. experiential avoidance of emotions can be a way of regulating emotions
- See Britta K. Holzel et al, "Neural mechanisms of symptom improvements in generalized anxiety disorder following mindfulness training," *NeuroImage: Clinical* 2 (2013), 448,

Another definition of anxiety

- ‘Anxiety is the cognitive state related to the inability to control emotional responses to perceived threats.’ Fadel Zeidan et al, “Neural Correlates of mindfulness meditation-related anxiety relief,” *SCAN* 9 (2014), 751.

A CBT conceptualization of GAD

- ‘Worry and the perceived uncontrollability of worry are considered to be essential features of GAD.’
- Andrew Wilkinson, Kevin Meares and Mark Freeston, *CBT for Worry and Generalized Anxiety Disorder* (LA: Sage, 2011), 3.

What is worry?

- ‘The chain of thoughts is a succession of fearful scenarios, building upon each other, and chaining into new and increasingly catastrophic directions, each trying to foresee and trouble-shoot multiple catastrophes and disasters.’
- Wilkinson, Meares, and Freeston, 6.
- This leads to anxiety

What they worry about

- ‘People with GAD tend to worry about health, finances, relationships, family, work, school.’
- Key psychological processes
- Intolerance of uncertainty.
- Positive beliefs about worry
- Negative problem orientation
- Cognitive avoidance
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 6.
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 13.
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Why Worry?

- ‘Uncertainty is an unavoidable and inevitable part of life.’
- ‘But for people with GAD, uncertainty in any form is intolerable.’
- They try to reduce uncertainty through worry
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 14.
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Negative problem orientation and cognitive avoidance

- Real event worry and hypothetical event worry
- E.g. my neighbours are noisy ---I'll never be able to sell the house, I'll be stuck here forever
- 'problems are perceived as threatening and unfair; or the client doubts their ability to solve problems and is pessimistic about the outcome of problem solving.'
- Also are cognitively avoidant of 'anxiety-provoking thoughts and feelings.'
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 19.
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Nature of worry

- ‘people tend to worry in words...’
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 19.
- Strategies:
- Suppressing worrisome thoughts
- Substituting neutral and positive thoughts for worry
- Using distraction as a way to interrupt worrying
- Avoiding situations that can lead to worrisome thinking
- Wilkinson, Mears, and Freeston, 20.
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Anxiety & Mindfulness

- The first layer might be Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
- There is a lot of research as to its efficacy, more needs to be done
- ‘MBSR is not a medical or psychiatric treatment, nor is it intended to be. It is a psychoeducational approach that teaches participants to practice mindfulness meditation in the context of mind-body medicine for the purposes of stress reduction and improved health.’
- Brantley, 135.

A mindfulness & acceptance based approach

- ‘GAD is a chronic anxiety disorder centrally defined by pervasive, excessive worry that is difficult to control...’
- Lizabeth Roemer, Kristalyn Salters-Pednault and Susan M. Orsillo, “Incorporating Mindfulness-and Acceptance-Based Strategies in the Treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder,” in *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician’s Guide to Evidence Base and Applications*, ed. Ruth Baer (Academic Press, 2006), 53.

Theoretical & conceptual rationale

- The function of worry
- ‘Thus, continually thinking about potential catastrophes in the future seems to serve the function of avoiding more intense distress (possibly about the present).’
- ‘If experiential avoidance is a central problem in GAD, then experiential acceptance, which mindfulness practice promotes, may be the solution.’
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 53.
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 53.

Worry: avoids and reacts to emotions

- Individuals with GAD have narrowed attention that is focused on the detection of potential upcoming threats. They thus are less in contact with experiences as they unfold in the present moment.
- Narrowed awareness and focus on the future...focused on anxiety and distress

Why might mindfulness help?

- ‘Mindfulness practice may be beneficial for these individuals because it promotes an expanded awareness of both internal and external cues in the present moment, allowing for more clarity and flexible adaptation...’
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 54.

The model is presented to the client

- ‘A central component of treatment involves teaching clients how to practice the accepting, non-judgemental stance of mindfulness in a range of settings.’
- ‘Formal practices include breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, sensory exercises (e.g. mindfulness of sounds), imagery exercises...emotion-focused exercises.’
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 57.
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 57.

Working in line with values

- ‘From this perspective, values imply a way of being in the present moment and a direction or process that unfolds over time that is distinct from goals or future-oriented, static outcomes. For instance, being emotionally intimate is viewed as a value, while finding a committed partner is classified as a goal.’
- Roemer, Salters-Pedneault and Orsillo, 58.
- A value is only a value if you put it into practice

What are values

- ‘Values imply a way of being in the present moment and a direction or a process that unfolds over time that is distinct from goals or future-oriented, static outcomes.’
- Lisabeth Roemer et al., ‘Incorporating Mindfulness- and Acceptance-Based Strategies in the Treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder,’ in *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches*, ed. Ruth Baer (Academic Press, 2006), 58.

Often stress and worry stop us living out our values

- ‘For instance, being emotionally intimate is viewed as a value, while finding a committed partner is classified as a goal.’ Roemer, 58.
- ‘Often clients discover that their worry is distracting them from fully participating in valued activities (such as a mother who is distracted while interacting with her child)..’ Roemer, 58-59.

Remembering to put our values into action is a Christian principle

- Stepping out of cognitive fusion
- Another way of talking about this is the term from ACT ‘fusion,’ fusion occurs when ‘one or more clusters collapse on Self. With fusion the person becomes the feeling. At this point the anxious individual becomes the anxiety and Self is temporarily held captive.’
- Scott H. Symington & Melissa F. Symington, “A Christian model of mindfulness: using mindfulness principles to support psychological well-being, value-based behaviour, and the Christian spiritual journey.” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, 1, (2012), 74.

Living out values: Christian resonance

- Do any scriptures, ideas come to mind, about living out our values?
- Mark 8:33

What is acceptance

- ‘So we’ve seen how trying to control our thoughts, feelings and emotions is not a reliable, nor helpful, strategy for reducing stress, worry etc. The alternative to these unhelpful control attempts is *acceptance.*’ *a therapist*
- Paul E. Flaxman and Frank W. Bond, “ Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in the Workplace,” in *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches* ed. Ruth A. Baer (Academic Press, 2006), 387.

Acceptance?

- People often have concerns about acceptance, ‘we usually respond to these concerns by reiterating the distinction between the world inside the skin and the “real world” outside the skin.’
- ‘We explain that when we use the term *acceptance*, we are referring to the acceptance of internal events – thoughts, feelings and sensations...’ Flaxman, 387.

Getting in touch with bigger self

- ‘One of the core aims of ACT is therefore to help clients establish a sense of self that is distinct from their difficult psychological content.’
Flaxman, 390.
- Any Christian resonances?
- Ephesians 4:22-24
- ‘The goal is to encourage a person to make experiential contact with themselves as the “conscious vessel” that contains, but is not threatened by difficult internal events.’ Flaxman, 390.

Metaphors, riddles and stories

- One thing ACT does is use a lot of metaphors, stories, and riddles.
- Keep calm or I'll shoot you, and I've wired you up to a polygraph
- Clean my house or I'll shoot you
- The outside world is much easier to control than the inside world
- *We can use Jesus' parables much more creatively in therapy e.g. Matthew 7:24-7*