

DJ Moran interview, Session 6 of The Behavioral Observations Podcast

Matt: [00:00:00] This is The Behavioral Observations Podcast with Matt Cicoria session number 6.

Matt: [00:00:13] Welcome to the behavioral observations podcast stimulating talk. For today's behavior analysts now here's your host Matt story.

Matt: [00:00:29] Hey everyone thanks for joining me for another session of the behavioral observations podcast. I can't believe we're at session six already. I'm looking forward to sharing a great conversation that I had with today's guest Dr. D.J. Moran. In this discussion I give him the impossible task of providing an overview of acceptance and commitment therapy in one podcast episode and he truly delivers. I'll talk a little bit more about that in a minute. If you're on the behavioral observations podcast mailing list you saw an informal poll that I sent out last week and that e-mail as subscribers to share their preferences on the topic for the next show and the responses unanimously chose to hear about one of my favorite topics and behavior analysis, and that is of course acceptance and commitment therapy, or ACT as it's called. And on a side note if you're not on the mailing list and wish to get an occasional e-mail from me head on over to behavioralobservations.com and click the big red button on the right sidebar. Getting back to the task at hand however D.J. Moran has been a student and practitioner of ACT for over 20 years. A clinical psychologist by training D.J. has played multiple roles over the years from supporting children and parents with autism to providing direct therapy in mental health settings. And more recently using the act model to help corporations improve their safety. Leadership initiatives. He's also a fellow podcasters to boot.

Matt: [00:01:54] He's also the host of a podcast about ACT-related topics called Functionally Speaking while D.J. is the author of many peer reviewed articles and chapters listeners the podcast will do well to check out his book Building Safety Commitment which provides one of the most accessible blueprints of the act model as seen.

Matt: [00:02:11] Even though the book was written for the behavioral safety community any behavior analyst can really read that book and apply it to the setting in which they practice. In other words these concepts are fairly universal.

Matt: [00:02:25] And I was making all sorts of connections to homes and schools and you know more traditional applied setting. So again if you get a chance to check out that book I think you will not be disappointed. It's called Building Safety commitment.

Matt: [00:02:43] Getting back to the show more generally in this park as D.J. tells us how we discovered ACT goes on to describe the core features and concepts of the model and discusses how Act can help support caregivers of individuals with autism spectrum disorders before getting into far to this episode I have to confess a couple of things.

Matt: [00:03:07] This was the first interview for the podcast I conducted and I was quite nervous before hitting the big red record button. I have to say and during our discussion I had a couple of random external things happen that kind of really challenged my attention if you will. I was already having some sound problems with my microphone so I was kind of fiddling with the settings during the conversation and then I think we got like a UPS delivery or something like that. And so during one section if you listen real closely you might even hear my dog barking at the front door as a package is being placed on my porch.

Matt: [00:03:45] And so I mentioned this not necessarily to manage your expectations but rather to point out the irony that you know for a topic that stresses being present and accepting and all those

things I was the furthest thing from that I had kind of a lot of private events going through my head now. It's funny now and again that's the primary reason I'm mentioning it but it was kind of nerve wracking at the time.

Matt: [00:04:14] Here's the good news though D.J. really delivered. He brought the goods on this episode and delivered a real you know kind of compelling. Like I said overview a primer on ACT concept so don't really worry about my shortcomings because d.j more than makes up for it. So you're in for a treat here.

Matt: [00:04:36] Before we get the D.J.'s interview I do want to let you know that this podcast is sponsored by bSci21.org. bSci21.org is an ABC news provider that talks about our practice using non-technical accessible language. And I think that the articles are really helpful to read because it is good dissemination practices because it really focuses on talking about behavior analysis concepts and clear everyday language. And when we're trying to explain to non-technical people or lay people what we do it's really helpful to have that second verbal repertoire. You know at the ready. So again it's bSci21.org. If you want to hear more about how bSci21.org was started and the underlying concepts behind it you can check out session number five of the parable observations podcast in that episode. I interviewed Dr. Todd Ward who is president of the side 21 media. So for more information about the articles and things like that again it's beside 21 dot org. So without any further ado please enjoy this really fun conversation that I had with D.J. Moran.

Matt: [00:05:52] Hey D.J. thanks for joining us today. How are you doing.

DJ: [00:05:55] Hey Matt I'm doing great thanks for having me on your show.

Matt: [00:05:58] The pleasure is mine and now you got a million things going on so I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to do this. You do it through thick. Well I've got a couple of different objectives here in our discussion. I want to obviously talk about the act model certainly and I know you've got so many years of being an act practitioner that you've got a wealth of knowledge to share with everyone. But before we do that I want to ask a couple of I kind of get to know your questions so we can kind of inform the listeners of the you know perspective that you've brought here today. So before we get going into the you know meat and potatoes of the act model one of the things I'd like to ask people is you know kind of what got you into behavior analysis or psychology and things like that. Can you take a minute and just kind of give us a little bit of background.

DJ: [00:06:58] I got into behavior analysis in a fairly crooked way. I went into Hofstra University's clinical and school psychology program back in 1991. It was a Ph.D. program and for the first year I was being taught all about cognitive behavioral therapy and especially rational emotive behavior therapy. Albert Ellis's material and I got interested in it. I wanted to be able to do something as a professional in order to help people. But at the end of the first year I took a class called learning with my friend now but my professor back then and supervisor Dr. Richard O'Brien and rich. Early early behavior Ousley he was in ABA where was we say these days ABH I write a check he's doing that right Mimi. Right exactly. He was. He's been going to ABA for years and he got me into behavior analysis because he was very critical of typical mainstream CBT I mean just the idea that you know we have to change our thoughts in order to change how we feel doesn't sit well with a lot of old school traditional behavior analysts. And I just liked his approach he was going after mainstream ideas so I jumped into becoming more of a behavior analyst and reading tons of Skinner and all the followers. Since then I mean I've I've become a little bit more aware thanks to what will probably talk a little bit more about his idea of relational frame theory that you can take a natural science approach to dealing with human behavior and still incorporate ideas about thinking and language into that behavior analytic approach.

DJ: [00:08:49] So when it all came together for me was when I learned more about acceptance commitment therapy functional contextualism relational frame theory. All of those complex ideas that are going to be able to help us predict and influence human behavior when I was learning that in graduate school I said this is the world for me I want to be a functional contextualism I want to be a behavior analyst and it all started back in the early 90s with my friend Richard O'Brien and also my supervisor Kurt Salzinger Kurt who became my dissertation supervisor in mid-nineties. I learned a ton from him. He was just a real hardcore dyed in the wool totally dedicated behavior analyst. And I wanted to have that kind of foundation if I was going to move forward with more complex behavior analytic professional opportunities. So folks aren't familiar with Kurt or Rich. Rich wrote probably the first organizational behavior management book The First behavior analysis for organizations book and Kurt Salzinger. He's written a ton on behavior analysis and he was the president of ABA just about three years ago. So that's my lineage.

Matt: [00:10:12] And so you have this background where you you know came into contact with some as she said hardcore behavior thinking folks and then took that into a Ph.D. CLINICAL program right. Right. And so what what helped you or what were the circumstances that allowed you to come to contact with the acceptance and commitment model and the practitioners of it.

DJ: [00:10:44] It is a really interesting out of nowhere coincidence we had Bob Kahlenberg who developed with his wife Mavis sai. He developed functional analytics psychotherapy or some people call it fap. He came to Hofstra and in the early 90s and he asked if we wanted to make a presentation at ABA with him I think it was 94 the ABA 94 in Atlanta went down there and we were just going to talk about Skinner's viewpoint on the development of self.

[00:11:19] What does self mean. It's always a 24 year old kid trying to figure out my gosh I have to give a presentation on the self from a radical behavioral point of view. Right. Exactly I got myself into a lot of trouble with that one. But at that conference in 1994 I was I was just at another talk and Robin Waltzer and Steve Hayes were both on the panel and what they were saying was just very interesting to me. I was going to do my dissertation on obsessive compulsive disorder and they were doing a case conceptualization of someone with OCD. And afterwards I got talking to Robin and we became fast friends and she invited me out to a workshop in 95 up at Lake Tahoe and just the community was so small that it was easy to fit into even if I was from far away you know like I felt like I was already belonging to something even though that something was kind of unique in the ABA world we had our special interest group. The clinical behavior analysis special interest group we had our meetings like it at 7:00 a.m. on the Monday of ABA. You know we were not front and center. There was no acceptance commitment therapy books out yet. You know so it was kind of like oh I was looked at as an unconventional idea but that people were really dedicated and they were interested in doing something complex and meaningful. So those those situations those experiences really shaped my career and my viewpoint on what we could do with this science called behavior analysis.

Matt: [00:12:56] Wow. Sounds like you kind of were in the right place at the right time.

DJ: [00:13:00] I just took my wagon and I hook my cart to the big wagon I mean Steve Hayes and Kelly Wilson Kirk Strohl's all they really took off I mean Steve Hayes was in time magazine like I don't know three five years ago I can't remember. At one point there was no big deal or what exceptions commitment therapy was there was probably 20 of us in the world that would say I'd do acceptance commitment therapy.

DJ: [00:13:22] Now there's thousands of people there is over seven thousand members of the Association for contextual behavioral sciences worldwide and that's essentially the act R.F.

DJ: [00:13:33] You know I went to a talk by Mark Dixon and he was talking about act and he said and I can't quote the actual numbers but he said the growth rate of CBS is out of control. Right.

Matt: [00:13:51] How many people are adopting it and the people who are adopting act are coming from very different walks of life in the helping professions if you will you know a lot of people are just you know kind of classically trained if you will. MSW is licensed clinical mental health counselors et cetera and they're just looking for really functional stuff to do.

Matt: [00:14:13] Is that consistent with your experience.

DJ: [00:14:16] Absolutely. I recently was elected president of the ACBS. So I got to know a little bit more of the demographics and it was just so surprising that there are folks who were interested in functional conceptualism in act and their physical therapists dentists accountants and it's just like oh my gosh I mean my wife's a physical therapist I talk to her all the time about acceptance commitment therapy and she gets it and she you know has adopted an approach to her physical therapy but I didn't know I didn't know somebody else besides my wife who's being bombarded with my ideas all the time would be able to absorb it but there are physical therapists who'd come to our conferences and psychiatrists and social workers as you mentioned teachers educators people who are interested in social change really seeming to take take this functional can textualism idea which is just basically 21st century behavior analysis.

DJ: [00:15:12] In short I mean obviously it's a lot more in that it's a whole philosophy but it's 21st century behavior analysis is what I would say what functional conceptualism is if if any of listeners or consider yourself a behavior analyst and you want to read some cutting edge behavior analysis Google functional contextualism check out the works of Steve Hayes and Robin waltzer and the folks who are doing the work in relational frame theory like Dermont Barnes Holmes and Yvonne barn's Holmes and Louise McHugh. There's a lot of really great literature that's pushing the edges of what behavior analysis traditionally was. And now it is something grand something fantastic and I hope people get excited about that.

DJ: [00:16:00] There's more to do and behavior analysis than what was done in the 80s and the 90s and prior you know Skinner's ideas fantastic.

DJ: [00:16:08] And we took that baton and kept running.

Matt: [00:16:11] I say well that's that's that's really inspiring. One of the questions I had and you know can we maybe spend a minute and talk about maybe some what I'm going to actually throw this to since you know your job is to talk about Act.

Matt: [00:16:30] So one of the things I'm thinking of you me you mentioned that the term functional can textualism and you know sometimes in behavior analysis when people are learning in their intro a bit you know maybe a course you know you go over you know what is behaviorism what is behavior modification what is applied behavior analysis was wondering if it would be helpful to do some some of those definitions type things with you know I guess my question is what is functional. What is your definition of functional contextualism. And I suppose before you answer that question it might be a good time to kind of segue into kind of it or could that be used to segue into a you know kind of an overview of the Act process. Right.

Matt: [00:17:18] So I'll leave it up to you in terms of how to.

DJ: [00:17:20] Happily I'll have to go at it with the caveat that we're we're talking about a

philosophy of science and that you just can't learn a philosophy of science by listening to a podcast so that's what functional contextualism it's a philosophy of science that basically has a lot of the same assumptions from traditional behavior analysis we care about context we just don't look at behavior the funny thing is we call it behavior analysis and you don't even just analyze behavior. I mean the funny thing is we actually analyze context more than anything else if you're thinking like a behavior analyst some of the terms of you were just to do an intro verbal test. Bill Verplank old friend of mine did some publications with him he was the chair at Indiana University with J.R. Cantore and BF Skinner. Bill Verplank taught me a lot about intraverbals and how people understand things. How what knowledge is. If you were to ask behavior analyst to describe some of the intervals around what behavior analysis is he going to say stuff like reinforcement punishment schedules extinction. Guess what none of those things are behavior. Those are things that we focus on an awful lot. I mean if you pick up any learning text in the first few chapters you're going to hear about positive reinforcement negative reinforcement punishment etc. etc. none of those things are behaviors the things that influence behaviors. But we still call it behavior analysis. Actually we're analyzing context. But if you're having any doubts of what I just got done saying I'll also admit that that's even a little bit shortsighted.

[00:19:01] What we really do in behavior analysis is we look at Environment behavior relationships that's what functional contextualism is all about. How do we look at the context of what's going on around behavior the antecedents the consequences those are the context. And how does the behavior function in that context what is the behavior a function of what's going on given the antecedents given the history of certain consequences that makes the behavior function a certain way. It's not as esoteric as one might think at first glance when you hear I study functional contextualism you get a little scared off. That's why I'm just simply saying right now it's 21st century behavior analysis. It's bringing in the ideas of relational frame theory and complex human behavior analysis into a science a codified science that we can use for not only research but applications to reduce suffering and improve quality of living. And that right there is like almost the motto of acceptance commitment therapy reduce suffering and improve quality living what we're doing in acceptance and commitment therapy is we're taking empirically based principles and we're trying to build up a repertoire that we would call psychological flexibility helping people become more psychologically or behaviorally flexible. I'll come back come back to what that is but acceptance commitment therapy uses empirically supported principles to increase folks psychological flexibility. And it does it by using mindfulness concepts and behavior change strategies. And so that's act in a nutshell. OK.

Matt: [00:20:55] I have you know as we were talking prior to me hitting the record button you know I paraphrase what I'm saying. I haven't studied the act in too much detail but I know enough of the term to be dangerous. That's right. Right. And so I sometimes have described is that you know the kind of combination interaction between behaviorism and mindfulness. So I wasn't too far off base.

DJ: [00:21:27] No but I mean when we're talking about it succinctly then yes behavior analysis and mindfulness training are concepts put together is hinting towards what acceptance of commitment therapies all about. Of course there's more to it but we're talking specifically on a podcast of course.

[00:21:43] Yeah. Yeah.

[00:21:45] So.

Matt: [00:21:47] What. Then again I'm asking the impossible here. As you know as you just referenced we're on a podcast here not in the graduate level seminar but. Keep it keeping in mind the the everyday behavior analyst practitioner who perhaps doesn't have an exposure to acceptance and commitment therapy you know what are the kind of nuts and bolts of it. You know I know

there are you know several processes involved and whatnot. Is it worthwhile going over those. Sure. OK.

DJ: [00:22:25] Sure. I have no problem with that. I think it's a good idea.

DJ: [00:22:31] There's a there's a a model an acceptance of commitment therapy. They call it the hexagon model because it is focusing on helping people become more flexible. Sometimes people called the Hexa flex model silly tongue in cheek kind of thing but there are six points six I would say. Skills that we teach people. And now that I'm mostly doing safety work an executive coaching I'm using the hexagon model as a set of skills rather than something that's curative or reducing people's you know behavioral diagnoses or anything on those I'm just these six concepts that help people build up a more psychologically flexible repertoire. Now before I say with those six principles are I had to explain what psychological flexibility is. I'm just going to say it in brief.

DJ: [00:23:30] Psychological flexibility gets measured on a test that we would call the cue the action and acceptance questionnaire. It's in its second edition so it's the AA Q2.

DJ: [00:23:40] And you can find copies of it online for free just. Just google it. The higher your scores are in psychological flexibility the more psychologically flexible you are the lower your scores are likely to be in measures of psychopathology like depression and anxiety and the higher your scores are likely to be according to the research in quality of life inventories. Now you have to do the research on your own to really delve deep into the details. But the more psychologically flexible you are the less likely you are to be diagnosable with some kind of suffering and the higher likelihood you have for having higher scores on the quality of life inventories that are out there.

[00:24:24] Act is designed to have six skills and they all interact. They all facilitate each other and they help people become more psychologically flexible. If behavior analysts don't like the term psychologically flexible I throw it right out and I just say flexible or behaviorally flexible either way there are six principles and I'll name them then I'll go into them. All right. Just in brief ones are just no surprise here.

DJ: [00:24:53] One is called acceptance and acceptance commitment therapy. So people have to learn about acceptance something else that we call diffusion another thing that we call values and then there's committed to action.

DJ: [00:25:10] And then there's contacting the present moment and the other one is what we call self as context. But some people prefer to call it perspective taking the SO will go through each one of those six the first one acceptance. When I'm talking to people about acceptance I have to make sure that they understand because they understand act definition of that the term acceptance has lots of different connotations it's not just like giving up or throwing your hands in there.

[00:25:45] Right.

DJ: [00:25:46] Exactly. Very good. What we're saying for acceptance is actively contacting your psychological experiences directly without defending against them while going out and behaving effectively. What we're saying here is if you want to behave effectively at something something so important to you you value it going to one of those other six principles if you value doing some kind of committed action. Again another one of those principles if you value doing some kind of committed action sometimes you just might not feel like doing it or you're negative so to speak.

DJ: [00:26:27] Emotions might arise you might be embarrassed you might be nervous to do something you might be too angry to do something you might be too sad to do something and then

you say to yourself again in shorthand I'm willing to have this feeling right now while doing what I personally care about. A pretty typical example is if you're going to give a public presentation you've got your heart palpitations you've got your you know nervousness you've got your sweats you've got the sweat dripping down the back of your legs and you just say if I don't give this presentation if I don't have to get up on stage and talking that microphone I don't have to feel this bad subversive event that I'm having this emotion is yucky.

DJ: [00:27:14] As long as I don't do it I don't have to feel this way. And so sometimes people don't do the thing that they care about. But when someone says this is meaningful I really want to talk about my research.

DJ: [00:27:25] I really want to talk to the local parenting group about autism treatments and even though I'm really nervous and I've got all these sweats and I'm stammering right now I'm going to accept that psychological experience fully without defending against it and go up there and do my presentation. That is somewhat culturally deviant people usually when they're having a private event especially if it's in reverse of a proud event they're feeling too sad mad nervous. They sometimes say no then that's a signal for me not to do this thing. If you really care about it then of course you're going to have some emotions tied into it. And if you really care about it and you're emotional about it except those emotions and go behave effectively anyway that is culturally deviant. That is a new idea. That brand new idea I mean people have been talking about this you know Christians have been talking about Buddhists have been talking about it for for centuries but we don't usually incorporate that into a lot of mental health treatments we're usually trying to get rid of the emotion then go do something important. What we're learning in the 21st century is maybe trying to get rid of your private events actually that actually is the problem.

Matt: [00:28:44] Yeah. So if I can put this in kind of layman's terms just to make sure I'm I'm with you here. So it's basically kind of recognizing your kind of private events yet persevering with what you what you have to do for you in order to obtain perhaps a larger reinforcer down the road if you will. We can maybe push today go.

DJ: [00:29:09] You know that's perfectly fine in the way you just said you know a larger reinforcer down the road. In general we could say what you're talking about are our values. You can do things and that's another one of the six what we like to have our clients do is clarify what are the big re-inforces in your life. Not not the next MNM not the next dollar the next opportunity to do something of meaning worth of value. Like what's vital in your life what's purposeful You only get one life on this planet. What are you going to do with it you get to make choices for the most part. I mean I want to get too wrapped up into the Beyond Freedom and Dignity kind of determinism debate. But people do make choices. Choice is very simple when you have two or more behaviors at your disposal. You engage in one of them you've made a choice. When people make their choices they make in their choices on.

DJ: [00:30:08] Because if they're just making that choice on the next short term reinforcer it's not really a meaningful life when people just say I'm just going to do the easy thing I'm going to get the next easy way out of this or you know some kind of I'm going to remove a little bit of pain or I'm going to get a tiny little bit of gain that that's a that's a life of stubbornness.

DJ: [00:30:31] You're not going anywhere. It's when you say I really care about the ultimate reinforcers the big things where I'm going to delay some gratification and work at the things that are more important to me that's living a life of meaning. And so what we do with our clients is to bring it back home.

DJ: [00:30:49] We want to ask them what do you want your life to really be about. And what kind

of committed action steps measurable behaviors can you engage in to move in that value direction. And that's the third of the things we've been talking about. There's six. The third one for us mentioning right now is committed action what kinds of measurable things can you do. And can we in therapy or in coaching set up schedules of reinforcement can we set up some kind of situation that reinforces people's skills based behaviors.

Matt: [00:31:25] You can just jump in here for a second it seems and just you know going out that what you're saying here it seems that a committed action and the values piece are things that would probably resonate very closely with someone who is a traditionally trained BCVA I would imagine.

[00:31:42] Right. I agree so anyway I'm sorry I stopped you unfortunately.

DJ: [00:31:53] That's fine. But committed action really is hard core behavior analysis. You know I mean I say this when I'm talking about it in longer workshops and lectures It's like the committed action piece that one sixth of the hexagon model committed action piece. The really is behavioral therapy. I mean everything you know about behavior therapy you fit into acceptance commitment therapy right there at the committed action piece asking people to engage in certain behaviors exposures just to make desensitisation flooding star charts behavioral contracts pinpointing or defining operationally what behaviors you would like to see and at what rate duration intensity perseverance latency. Once you start measuring behavior and operationally defining it when you do that in the act model it's it's at that wing that committed action. So I think the average behavior analyst really would resonate with that one sixth area. What I like to do is once people say yeah wow acceptance commitment therapy really does have a lot. A lot of behavior therapy applied behavior analysis.

DJ: [00:33:10] And I said yup and there's five other skills that you can bring into it. Imagine setting someone up on some kind of behavioral contract and also giving them the skills of acceptance also giving them the opportunity to clarify what's important and meaningful to them in their values.

DJ: [00:33:32] So the cool thing is excitement commem therapy is applied behavior analysis. It is behavior therapy with those added extra five skills acceptance diffusion values clarification contacting the present moment and perspective taking k so we did leave a couple out.

Matt: [00:33:51] Yeah. I'm furiously writing notes here. Good stuff good. Appreciate it.

DJ: [00:33:58] And if you have any questions just let me know and just want to make sure I mentioned the other tools contacting the present moment is essentially mindfulness and sometimes folks in the 21st century if they aren't studying mindfulness and never have sometimes they kind of keep it at arm's length. It sounds like it might be too religious or spiritual. I'm not teaching Buddhism when I teach people about mindfulness in my work. I want to keep it just secular I want I want it to be something embraceable by anyone. I'm not telling my clients that they have to get a Ying/Yang tattoo and start wearing yoga pants. That's that's not part of the therapy or the consultation. It's just can you spend a couple of minutes a day focusing on the skill of being right here right now. You see your mind or your private verbal repertoire private verbal events they're constantly happening we're so good at using language we become so fluent at it it's hard not to think. I mean it's such a useful skill that we're constantly thinking but sometimes when you're right in this moment right here right now sometimes you can be thinking about there and then and you're not paying attention right here and right now.

DJ: [00:35:28] And why is that bad. Because the only time you can ever engage in any behavior is now you can't you can't behave tomorrow you can't behave yesterday you can behave in five minutes or five minutes ago you can only behave right now. Put your mind to your private verbal

events.

DJ: [00:35:47] Sometimes they're about yesterday sometimes they're about tomorrow and when you're not thinking about what you're doing when you're when you're private verbal events or on something else other than what you're doing you might miss important cues for action. You might miss important antecedents and maybe even potential consequences because you are so caught up in language. What we want to teach people in accents commitment therapy is can you hold it lightly. Can you just notice that you're having thoughts but try to bring yourself back to this moment as often as you can because now is the only time you can behave.

Matt: [00:36:25] Cool I think I recall some examples of that with the year with eating candy and things like that. And your and your book a building safety commitment. Gotcha. Yeah those are pretty pretty cool examples. That contact in the present moment. Can you talk about diffusion for us from there. I think we got to add a little bit but can you talk more about that for a sec.

DJ: [00:36:54] Yep they all six of these concepts they really do interact with each other and they're facilitative. So when I was trying my contact and present moment I was already talking a little bit about diffusion. You see the idea here is that you have to know what fusion is before I can talk about the fusion fusion essentially means that again speaking just simply it's that your thoughts of your private verbal events or language has a significant impact on how you're feeling and what you're doing. Diffusion is being able to just take a look at the fact that you're thinking or that you're experiencing language. It's hard to do this just on a podcast but you know what I what I like to do is talk about a lemon imagine having a lemon right in front of you. Imagine that lemon is really super ripe it's almost overripe and you can smell it even though it's just about a foot and a half away from you. Now you take a sharp knife that you have around you and you cut this lemon in half and as soon as you start cutting into it it sprays out some citric acid and wafts through the air and you can smell this sour fruit and keeps slicing it all the way down and it's a big puddle of lemon juice on your cutting board there.

[00:38:11] And you can see how how ripe and sour this fruit is and you pick up half of that lemon is dripping having a lemon juices dripping down between your fingers and down your arm and you put that lemon up against your lips and you squeeze that lemon and drink down that sour lemon juice and then do it again. So this way you can really taste how sour that fresh fruit is. And now lick the Rhine with your whole tongue now I don't know if this is true but almost anybody who is listening to that as long as you speak English as a first language you're probably salivating even just a little bit even just a little bit. And when I do these kinds of exercises with folks most people say yeah Wow's salivating an awful lot.

Matt: [00:38:55] You probably see a lot of funny looks on people's faces in the crowd when they're in this exercise.

DJ: [00:38:59] They'll see a lot of puckering Yes they wince they pucker their lips. They kind of squint their eyes like oh stop talking about this. And this this unbelievable thing is usually when we talk about it in your podcast listeners can check in with themselves right now. Are there any lemons in the room you're sitting in right. I mean this is right in the zone here. And I've talked about this particular exercise dozens if not hundreds of times and I still salivate. And the thing is that's that's getting close to what we mean by fusion or transformation of stimulus functions. We were just talking and there was no citric acid being dropped on the receptor sites on your.

DJ: [00:39:43] In order to elicit the salivary response. It just didn't happen. But you salivated anyway that that's the power of words. Words do have power but it doesn't always have to be that way. Check this out. What if I were just to do this and if you know you're listening to this see if you

could just really put yourself into this perspective. All right.

[illegible]

DJ: [00:40:16] Stop it there if you were to say it along with me.

DJ: [00:40:21] The weird thing is you'd probably get cottonmouth some time in the middle of me doing that. You probably weren't thinking about Lemmons. You didn't see a yellow fruit. You probably stopped your salivary response. Again like I was saying ironically if you were saying it along with me and you say it like a whole minute your mouth dries out. That's weird because when you talk about it in one context your mouth starts to water. You talk about it by saying it over and over and over and over and over again and it loses its meaning it doesn't have an impact on you anymore. Wait three minutes ago we're talking about lemons and you are salivating you know is now a lemon in the room. I put it in a different context and just repeated over and over and we've got this kind of conditioned habituation happening. You're just noticing that it's just a sound. And guess what it is all words are just sounds you don't have to be influenced by them you don't have to I mean you know this isn't really a podcast exercise but I'm raising my right hand it's way up in the air in my office right here and I can say to myself I can't raise my right hand no matter what I do I can't raise my right hand and there it is my hands way up in the air if you're listening to this right now.

DJ: [00:41:35] Wiggle your toes unless you are driving drive safely and you know wiggle your toes right now and just repeat yourself no matter what I do I can't wiggle my toes and notice that behavior and language don't have to be the same thing. It doesn't have to influence you. That's diffusion. I see. And that's what we want to teach some of our leaders or people maybe who are trying do they come to see me as a psychologist because they're trying to lose weight just because you're having the thought wow I could really go for a Coca-Cola and I'm going to cook a whole entire tombstone pizza. Notice that you had those verbal events happening between your ears and behind your eyes and go back to your values and say I really care about my health. I really care about my children's health. I really want to be around a lot longer. So I'm going to go to the committed action steps of eating healthy.

Matt: [00:42:25] I see where it would. Given that overeating example and then where would self context play formulation of that example.

DJ: [00:42:38] What I like to describe when I when I talk about self is context I like folks to understand that it's just this sense of self that people have. And it's it is a consistent point of view that that core you that I would say if I didn't have to use jargon is that that core you that I am period experience it's it's it's hard to just plain old talk about you almost have to experience it yourself but it's being able to notice that you have lots of labels and descriptors of yourself like I am six foot three I am a psychologist.

DJ: [00:43:15] I am a father I am a New York Giants fan. I could go on and give you 100 descriptors But there's one true thing about all the ways I describe myself.

DJ: [00:43:25] I am that I'm a core that that I'm alive that I have this experience from which this perspective from which I look at everything in my life whether I'm a psychologist or I'm six foot three or I'm a New York Giants fan that's content that's the content of my life. There's a core of me there's a there's a variable with a sense of self from which I experience those things. That's the self is context or your perspective taking and perspective on your life. This helps people clinically if

they're going to believe things about themselves like I am a loser I am fat and I'm never going to lose it. When you have that kind of perspective that content perspective sometimes because language is powerful remember the lemon example because language is powerful and you're describing yourself a certain way. Sometimes it influences your behavior. But what if you can come to terms with the self is context just you are you just are. Anything that comes after I am blank and you fill it in. That's content and that can influence people's behavior. What we're trying to get them to do is just experience what it's like to say I am and put a period there you just are you're you're the context of all your experiences all your emotions sensations thoughts verbal descriptions urges flashbacks memories you have them you are not those things you just have them you're the context for your emotions and feelings and sensations and urges and thoughts kind of like a vessel you go you know can you have can you have it and realize it's not you.

DJ: [00:45:18] Can you have a bad feeling and realize it's not you can you have a you know word description. I'm no good and realize it's not you.

Matt: [00:45:26] You're just having it. Mm hmm.

DJ: [00:45:29] So we try to pull all those things together all six of them acceptance diffusion values committed action contacting the present moment and having better perspective taking put them all together and it leads to greater psychological flexibility.

Matt: [00:45:42] Really we hope and I say that's what well-taught I think you covered the six concepts pretty pretty pretty much more quickly than I think we both imagined.

DJ: [00:45:54] Well hopefully hopefully it was understandable though.

DJ: [00:45:57] I think it's yeah I think I think it is. And I don't want to hold it too much longer but would it be possible to spend a few minutes and I know you've done some speaking on how this model is related to behaving else practice with parents etc..

Matt: [00:46:19] Do you have a couple of minutes to talk about that.

DJ: [00:46:23] Sure. Happily Yeah.

Matt: [00:46:26] So if you can tell us you know what would be I think in one of our conversations you're talking about using the act model to motivate parents and staff members to you know follow through it with complex treatment plans and things like that. So can you. Can you describe that in a little bit more detail.

DJ: [00:46:47] Yeah I'll be happy to. The book chapter that I co-wrote with J.T. Blackledge and Thane Dykstra came out in 2009 in a book called teaching children with autism in the general education classroom. That's the name of the book and well we wrote a chapter called acceptance and commitment therapy approach to supporting parents of children diagnosed with autism. When I was going through graduate school I keep this as distinctly as I can and rich O'Brien and Kurt Solomon were influencing me to become well-read in behavior analysis. I also wanted to become well-practiced in behavior analysis so I actually joined up with the Rutgers University Lovaas replication program and was doing a lot of early traditional treatment of autism using behavior analysis. But there was a part of me that said this isn't the only thing that I went into analysis for and I was looking at the parents and I could see the parents were upset. I could see that there was a lot of stress. I can see that there's a lot of marital distress and it was also noticing that some parents were handling it better than others and the ones who weren't handling it very well didn't do a great job with the behavior analysis work that we were doing together were we doing 40 hours of work.

And the more distressed parents weren't doing it and I said I wonder if this stuff that I'm reading about acceptance commitment therapy could help the parents accept the stress of having a child diagnosed with autism and commit to following through on their 40 hour behavior analysis program with their child.

DJ: [00:48:36] And all I have was anecdotal evidence if you will just anecdotal stories that it seem like parents who were willing to learn mindfulness willing to clarify their values were more in tune with what they had to do in order to be a good parent to this child with autism. And JT Blackledge did his dissertation on helping our parents of children with autism. I can't remember the results I'm not good at citing chapter and verse but I think you had very positive results. We want to help our parents who have children diagnosed with autism with the act model.

Matt: [00:49:14] OK so I could see you know clarifying the values in a committed action piece certainly would perhaps attenuate some of the avoidance as a reinforcer if you will you know in other words if they are about to engage in a teaching routine that you know sometimes is successful sometimes it isn't.

Matt: [00:49:39] You know escaping that would be very reinforcing. Right. And so recognizing that they're having the experience I guess of not wanting to do it and you know persevering despite that you know and identifying you know the longer term reinforce or as their values must tell you on the right track here.

DJ: [00:50:03] I was just going to say you're hitting the nail right on the head that right. You're speaking about in the way that it seems that you understand where we're going with this.

Matt: [00:50:11] Yes I have some friends who are delay discounting researchers and so they would love the values and pieces well.

DJ: [00:50:19] So I don't know.

DJ: [00:50:21] I don't know a ton about it but I keep thinking that you know when and when I do see the posters at a local state conference about delay discounting a wow you know I mean we really mean delayed discounting work to make sure it's linked up with what's going on with the relational frame theory and what we know about behavior analysis of language because you know I imagine that something becomes worth less or more depending upon the language you use to describe it. And I think we can mess with or alter people's interaction with their own language. So that would have an influence on the delayed discounting measures would be interesting to see somebody start to investigate that.

Matt: [00:51:04] Yeah pretty cool. Well and this has been a really enlightening and thought provoking kind of overview of that and again I appreciate your time and hold it to much longer.

Matt: [00:51:17] So DJ is there anything else we missed or do.

DJ: [00:51:22] I mean I think we've covered quite a big ground here and I think if anybody was really interested in learning more about acceptance commitment therapy or relational frame theory you would want to check out contextualscience.org. Just like all one word contextual science org or the organization is let's call these associations for contextual behavioral sciences. And when you go to that particular Web site consider becoming a member of the CBS and the neat thing is you know you get access to just dozens if not hundreds of PowerPoint podcasts questionnaires and PDF us to almost all the articles about acceptance commitment therapy and relational frame theory there's over 100 randomized controlled trials showing acceptance commitment therapy to be a worthy approach

and having access to being able to read those PDF. I think it would be great for any any person interested in clinical behavior analysis or complex behavior analysis so that the neat thing is that we're a values based organization so it's values based.

DJ: [00:52:37] Do you know I mean a and ABAI they tell you how much you should pay in order to become a member at ACBS we say what do you think it's worth.

DJ: [00:52:48] We hope people actually do values based dues and we go wow you know I get a lot I get a lot out of this organization so I'm willing to pay for it. But it's values based news to check out the check out the you Arel just check out that Web site and I'm sure you'll find something there that will immediately catch your fancy. So check out a CBS.

Matt: [00:53:07] I'll echo echo the sentiments because I have joined and that values base dues is definitely something I've never seen before. And it's definitely different but I'd be interested to see the data on what you know the variation but you know how much of you will pay that's a price for a different day. Right. So any who has been. Like I said a really thought provoking delightful conversation so D.J. Moran I want to thank you again for your time.

DJ: [00:53:46] Matt I'm happy to be here. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you. And if you ever have any other questions feel free to contact me.

Matt: [00:53:53] All right thanks so much. Take care.

Matt: [00:53:55] Now everybody I'm back and boy what a great job D.J. did in describing act in such a succinct way you know summarizing research and practice that's been going on for a couple of decades into about I don't know 45 minutes of conversation or so. So much to cover. I don't even know where to begin. What I want to do is definitely take D.J. up on his offer to come back on the podcast. I would love to hear more about how he views his act for the fostering of behavioral safety and leadership and things like that. Finally I want to echo deejays recommendation too for those who are interested in learning more about act to check out contextual signs dot org that is the flagship Web site for the Association for textual behavioral sciences. Again contextuallscience.org; consider joining that gives you access to a treasure trove of information. I know from personal experience having read up to my membership a couple of times I've found that invaluable. So anyhow that's all I have today. If you enjoyed the episode and have a couple of minutes just head on over to iTunes and give a rating and review it really helps us kind of stand out from all the other podcasts that are out there. And I think that's pretty much it. And I will.

Matt: [00:55:23] See you guys later. Thanks for listening.

[00:55:27] Thank you for listening to the behavioral observations podcast with mass to Korea. You can find Max notes on this episode at w w w dot behavioral observations dot com. We also invite you to stay connected with us on Facebook at Facebook dot com forward slash behavioral observations and on Twitter behavior podcast.