

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY IN THE TREATMENT OF ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION: A PERFECT FIT

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INTRODUCTION	THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF PROCRASTINATION	ACT PROCESSES RELEVANT TO PROCRASTINATION	ACT INTERVENTIONS	CONCLUSION
<p>What is procrastination?</p> <p>➤ Latin origin of <i>pro</i> means « forward, forth, or in favor of », and <i>crastinus</i> means « of tomorrow ». Academic procrastination is typically defined as an irrational tendency to delay in the beginning and/or completion of an academic task (Senécal et al., 2003).</p> <p>➤ It is a dispositional trait which has cognitive, behavioral, emotional (and motivational) components (Poppola, 2005).</p> <p>Prevalence and consequences</p> <p>➤ The act of postponing and putting off needlessly is a pervasive problem for a significant number of university students and male and female students are equally affected by this problem (McCown et al., 1989).</p> <p>➤ Prevalence estimates vary from 95% (Ellis & Knaus, 2002) to 10% (Hill et al., 1978). For 20% to 30%, procrastination is a serious problem adversely affecting academic achievement and quality of life (McCown, 1986; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984).</p> <p>➤ The typical outcome of procrastination is lower grades (Rothblum et al., 1986), course withdrawals (Welsley, 1994), stress (Blunt & Pynchyl, 2000), increased health risks (Baumeister, 1997) and interpersonal conflicts (Day et al., 2000).</p> <p>CBT interventions</p> <p>➤ There are several cognitive and behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions for procrastination (see Schouwenburg et al., 2004, for a review), but there is certainly a way to improve these treatments (Ferrari et al., 1995).</p> <p>➤ The existing CBT treatments are exclusively based on traditional CBT, and come mostly from Rational-emotive behavioral therapy (REBT; Ellis & Harper, 1997; Ellis & Knaus, 2002), a model that emphasizes the modification of thought content.</p> <p>➤ Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al., 1999; ACT) has been studied for various disorders (for ex., chronic pain, smoking cessation, psychosis, work stress, stigma, weight loss, depression, anxiety, epilepsy, etc.) and has shown promising results at the level of processes and outcomes (see Powers et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2010).</p> <p>➤ To our knowledge, there are no existing studies (or even articles) using an ACT intervention for procrastination. Because of the nature of this problem, ACT would apply particularly well to the understanding and treatment of procrastination.</p> <p>➤ This poster presents a possible theoretical rational and intervention for the treatment of academic procrastination among college and university students.</p>	<p>➤ There is no sharp distinction at the behavioral level between dilatory behavior and avoidance (Schouwenburg, 2004).</p> <p>➤ Procrastination can be defined as an interactive dysfunctional behavior avoidance process characterized by the desire to avoid an activity (...) (Ellis & Knaus, 2002).</p> <p>➤ Affective and cognitive variables like state and trait anxiety, social anxiety, guilt, shame, fear of failure, neurosis, learned helplessness and depression, are correlated with academic procrastination (see Ferrari, 2004, for a review).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators evaluate tasks as being unpleasant, boring or difficult (Milgram et al., 1993).</p> <p>➤ Irrational beliefs, especially believing oneself to be inadequate (perfectionist) and believing the world to be too difficult and demanding are present in procrastination (Ellis & Knaus, 2002).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators make excuses, often fraudulent ones (Ferrari et al., 1998), to minimize or altogether avoid consequences.</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators have difficulty focusing attention on study behavior and their concentration is often impaired. They are highly distractible. (Schouwenburg, 2004).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators have low self-efficacy and low self-esteem. They believe that any failure to perform to standard suggests inadequacy as a person (Steel, 2007). They regard themselves as less capable than other students (Milgram et al., 1995).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators may be characterized by a diffuse identify, a term used to describe individuals who are uncommitted to a personal involvement in the beliefs, aspirations, and values that one professes to hold (Berzonsky, 1989; Ferrari, 1996).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators are inclined to go for short-term reinforcement at the expense of their long-term goals (Schouwenburg, 1994).</p> <p>➤ Procrastinators have low impulse control, lack persistence and work discipline, lack self-control and may be unable to delay gratification. (Ferrari, 1993; McCown, Johnson, & Shure, 1993; Schouwenburg, 2004).</p> <p>➤ In procrastination, there are temporal gaps between intentions and their corresponding goal-directed behaviors (Schouwenburg, 2004).</p>	<p>➤ From an ACT perspective, psychopathology is caused and maintained by experiential avoidance (see Chawla et Ostafin, 2007, for a review).</p> <p>➤ Willingness/Acceptance strategies can be used to work through these difficult thoughts and feelings.</p> <p>➤ Defusion exercises can undermine unhelpful thinking and reason-giving. Examples of cognitions: « I'll do it tonight » « I'm very good at getting things done at the last minute » « I'm just too stressed to work » « I need to distract myself before I perform this task » « I'm too tired » « I'm not smart enough to do this task »</p> <p>➤ Mindfulness exercises can have a beneficial impact on attention, concentration and management of distracting cues to help get in contact with the present moment.</p> <p>➤ Self as context can be developed to increase awareness of thoughts and feelings, create a space to experience them and create distance from defining the self with verbal evaluations.</p> <p>➤ Clarifying values can help procrastinators adopt a long-term life direction, resolve value conflict and work as augmentals by increasing the subjective value of an activity.</p>	<p>➤ Creative hopelessness could be appropriate to get clients in contact with the inefficiency of avoidance and control: • Chinese Handcuffs Exercise • Tug-of-War with a Monster Metaphor • Man in the Hole Metaphor • « If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always got »</p> <p>• Joe the Bum • Two Scales Metaphor • Physicalizing Exercises • Exposure • Mindfulness Exercises</p> <p>• Thank Your Mind for That Thought • I Am Having the Thought that... • Self-Evaluation vs. Self-Description • Defusing Reason-Giving • « Get Off your Buts » • « Acting with a thought that says the opposite » • Re-vocalizing • «Milk, milk, milk...»</p> <p>• The raisin exercise • Mindfulness of the breath • Different mindfulness exercises (walking, yoga)</p> <p>• Chessboard metaphor • The Observer Self</p> <p>• Epitaph Exercise • 80 years old birthday (or graduation party): “What would you like people to remember about you?” • “Where do you see yourself in ten years?” • Valued Living Questionnaire (Wilson et al, 2008) • Bull's-Eye (Lundgred et al., 2008)</p> <p>• Passengers on the bus • “Carrying your procrastination” exercise • Plan goals and actions in relation to values • Anticipate psychological barriers</p>	<p>➤ ACT has certainly a great potential in the treatment of procrastination, notably because of the etiology of procrastination. Procrastination is a problem of « not doing », a breakdown in volitional action (Pichyl & Binder, 2004). It is almost by definition an avoidant behavior.</p> <p>➤ An ACT treatment for procrastination may serve several advantages.</p> <p>➤ First, it proposes innovative interventions in this domain such as acceptance of feelings (instead of controlling), defusion (instead of disputing the content of thoughts), clarifying values (instead of working solely with goals), and commitment to action.</p> <p>➤ Second, an ACT treatment would also address comorbidity which is common in procrastinators.</p> <p>➤ Third, most CBT treatments on procrastination are short-term (between 2 and 20 sessions) treatments and ACT has the particularity of being effective rapidly.</p> <p>➤ Fourth, treatments with this population have a high dropout rate, but these « attractive » interventions (for example, values) could prevent dropouts.</p> <p>➤ For the future, we must test the concept of experiential avoidance with the AAQ-II in relation to procrastination questionnaires such as the Procrastination Assessment Scale - Students (PASS, 44 items; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Eventually, it would be interesting to test other processes in the hexaflex (for example, defusion, values, etc.).</p> <p>➤ With few exceptions, systematic, quasi-experimental outcome research studies are still largely lacking (Ferrari et al., 1995) and it would be essential to test ACT in these settings.</p> <p>➤ This poster has some limits. It is exclusively theoretical and doesn't offer any data on the subject. Also, the proposed treatment doesn't include interventions like stimulus-control techniques and time management tools like other treatments (see Schouwenburg, 2004), but they wouldn't be incompatible. Nevertheless, it is a first attempt at applying ACT to the treatment of academic procrastination.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REFERENCES</p> <p>Most ACT metaphors and exercises come from:</p> <p>Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G., (1999). <i>Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change</i>. New York: Guilford.</p> <p>Please contact the main author for a specific reference at: frederickdionne.psy@gmail.com</p>