

Letting Go, Becoming Free: The Role of ACT in Promoting Nonattachment

Baljinder Sahdra, Sarah Marshall & Joseph Ciarrochi

b.sahdra@uws.edu.au; s.marshall@uws.edu.au;
j.ciarrochi@uws.edu.au



Workshop Overview

Part 1: Joseph Ciarrochi: ACT and Nonattachment

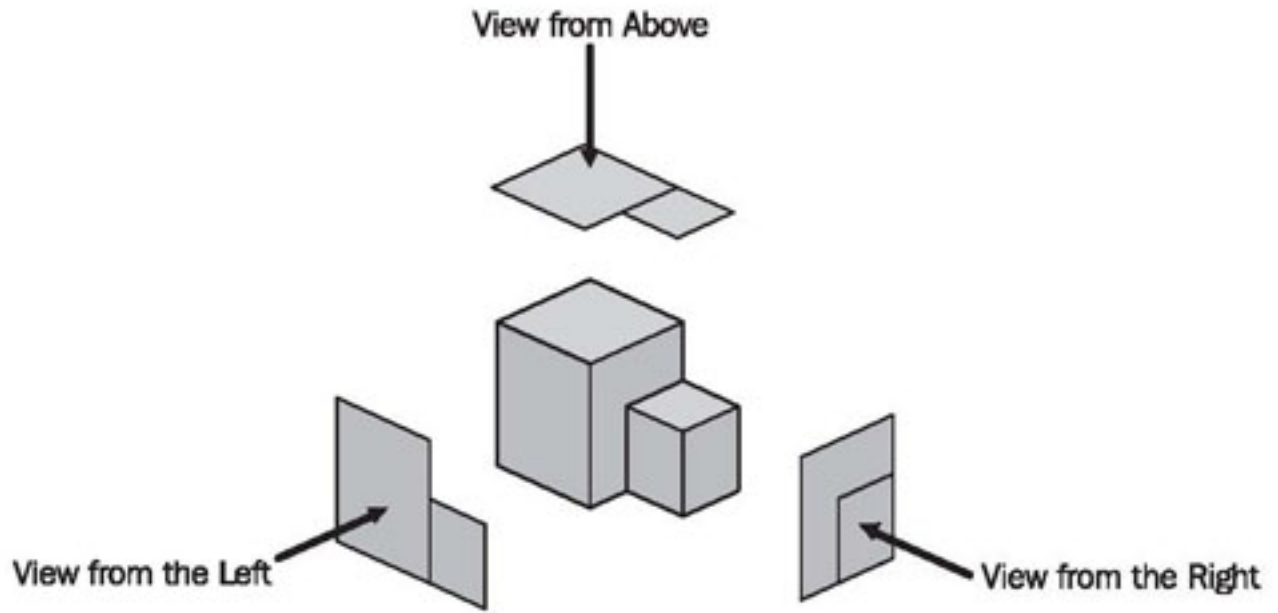


Part 2: Baljinder Sahdra: Nonattachment



Part 3: Sarah Marshall, Joseph Ciarrochi and Baljinder Sahdra:
Nonattachment Exercises

Part 1: ACT and Nonattachment



Mindfulness/ contact with the present moment

- “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997, p. 291)
- Letting go of clinging to worry or to positive emotional states

Acceptance

- Letting go of goals that can never be obtained (e.g., emotional control)

Defusion and self-as-context

- Attachment to positive self-models: The world holds much promise
- Attachment to negative self-models: “I know how to avoid the bad things in the world”
- Attachment to an unchanging self: “I am not changing, I am not ageing, I am not getting old.”
- Attachment to having a concrete self concept: “I know who I am”

Values and commitment

- Clinging to external things, and sacrificing values: “I must have the newest car, even if I have to work 70 hours to get it”
- Clinging to external outcomes: “I must have that person’s love/approval/respect”
- Clinging to outward success

Part 2: What is Nonattachment?

(Non)attachment

- Attachment: Unhealthy fixations
 - Rejecting or suppressing or grasping emotions/ thoughts/ sensory objects
 - Compulsively expressing them
 - Controlling or managing them
 - Transcending or “going beyond” them
- Nonattachment: Release from fixations
 - No need to reject, grasp, compulsively express, manipulate or transcend them
 - View them as transient, complex, dependently arising events interrelated to multiple factors within and without
 - Letting them come, letting them go

Forms of Attachment:

Rejecting or Suppressing Experiences

- Replacing difficult experiences with their opposites
 - E.g., dealing with anger by trying to be sweet
 - E.g., dealing with grief by trying to be funny
- Inducing numb states in which nothing need be felt
 - E.g., seeking “forgetfulness” of one’s problems by taking drugs or alcohol
 - E.g., seeking trans-like states in prayer or meditation

Forms of Attachment:

Compulsively Expressing Emotions

- Acting on beliefs/emotions/ideas mindlessly
 - E.g., seeking release of anger by lashing out
 - E.g., seeking gratification through unregulated sexual passion
 - E.g., seeking relief from sadness by demanding others' attention or acknowledgment of one's misery
 - E.g., seeking comfort by mindlessly overeating

Forms of Attachment:

Controlling or Managing Emotions

- Manipulating difficult experiences
 - E.g., submitting oneself to some glorified or idealized other or a higher power
 - E.g., anxiously clinging to close others
 - E.g., seeking protection from fear or anxiety by avoiding difficult interpersonal situations
 - E.g., seeking distraction in TV or other sources of entertainment or books or gossip
 - E.g., filling inner sense of emptiness by eating compulsively
 - E.g., avoiding loneliness through superficial social interactions

Forms of Attachment:

Transcendence or “Going Beyond”

- Preferring “egolessness” or transcendence by
 - E.g., devaluing the self (“my thoughts are bad,” “I have such a big ego!”)
 - E.g., giving up sexuality
 - E.g., pushing aside or disavowing aggression
 - E.g., abandoning critical thinking
 - E.g., blindly submitting to authority
 - E.g., seeking “bliss” or trans-like states through drugs or meditation

How to Practice Nonattachment?

- In daily life: Any activity that facilitates ‘letting go’ of fixations is a practice of nonattachment
 - Letting go of your own desires for the benefit of your child
 - Letting go of your need to be loved by the ex-girlfriend who rejected you or your need to be admired by your boss who criticized you
 - Letting go of your obsession about the delicious passionate love or chocolate cake
 - Letting go of grief of death of a loved one
 - Letting go of the sting of blame
 - Letting go of the rush of an award/recognition
 - Letting go of the desire to be always “right”
 - Letting go of the need to win an argument

How to Practice Nonattachment?

- In Formal Meditation: Hold your breath for this one! We will try this in Part 3!
- Nonattachment can be cultivated if certain conditions are met....

Conditions for Nonattachment

- Not compulsively indulging in pleasant or unpleasant experiences – tolerance
- Not remaining estranged from or avoiding or denying emotions – acceptance
- Knowing one's patterns of thinking (e.g., in meditation) and behavior (e.g., in daily life) – familiarity
- Recognizing the various misconceptions that surround our experiences (forms of attachments) – awareness
- Seeing that the emotions/thoughts that we worry about or crave, and take to be so real and solid do not exist in that way – insight

Why care about nonattachment?

- Attachments lead to experiencing life with a sense of deep, recurring, seemingly intractable dissatisfaction with life (“dukha”)
- Nonattachment leads to experiencing life with a sense of internal freedom, ease, balance, wellbeing, and sustainable happiness (“sukha”)
- We all want to be genuinely happy.

Preliminary Research on Nonattachment

- The Nonattachment Scale seems to be a valid and reliable measure (Sahdra et al., 2010)
- Nonattachment is NOT avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, dissociation, depersonalization, impersonal motivation, amnesia, difficulty in identifying or describing feelings, or absorption
- It is meaningfully related to theoretically relevant constructs: mindfulness, acceptance, non-reactivity, self-compassion, non-contingent happiness, psychological and eudemonic wellbeing, empathy and generosity

Metaphors of Nonattachment

- Releasing the clenched fist of the mind
- Opening the hand of thought
- Kissing the joy goodbye as it flies
- Hugging angst when it knocks on the door
- Give up enlightenment as soon as you get it
- Killing the Buddha when you finally meet him

Part 3: Exercises

The “I must have” Exercise Led by Sarah Marshall

- Take 5 quiet minutes. Write down at least 10 things that you are attached to and 10 things that you really feel that you must not have

i.e. “I must have” (emotional clinging/hanging onto)

- The approval of others
- My health
- My youth
- My possessions or objects such as phone, laptop, house etc.
- The love of my partner
- My work

“I really don’t want.....” (the things you feel that you must or can’t have)

- To lose my health
- To grow old/age
- My loved ones to die
- To die
- To lose my job

The good ol' “mindfulness” with a twist:

Brief Nonattachment Meditation

Led by Baljinder Sahdra

The “I am” Exercise
Led by Joseph Ciarrochi