

A Spectrum of Selves reinforced in
multilevel coherence:

A Contextual Behavioural response to
the demands of Psychedelic-assisted
therapy

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Why use Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)?

- RFT lab research focused a great deal on varied self-perspectives
- It includes a Functional Analysis of behaviour, enabling an understanding of 1) why problematic behaviours repeat, and 2) the factors that reinforce new behaviours for lasting integration of therapeutic experiences
- It's an integrative humanistic approach that can interconnect multiple approaches into a theoretically consistent, behavioural science-informed psychotherapy **"Trans-orientational"**
- Person-centred methods can be integrated with active-directive
- Behavioural Science is just as relevant to cognitive as it is to somatic approaches
- Its established core processes naturally align with psychedelic phenomenology
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- See: Luoma JB, Sabucedo P, Eriksson J, Gates N, Pilecki BC. Toward a contextual psychedelic-assisted therapy: perspectives from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and contextual behavioral science. J Context Behav Sci. (2019)

Somatic work in Psychedelic therapy

Accessing the implicit, automatic or subconscious aspects of self

- › Much of our inner experiencing is non-cognitive, non reflective.
- › Feeling in the body/accessing a 'felt-sense' as a route beyond cognition (Gendlin, 1996; Danforth, 2009)
- › Psychedelic Somatic Interactional Psychotherapy (PSIP) advocates for both directive and non-directive modalities during the medication phase, and that the skill is knowing which is appropriate when (Razvi & Elfrink, 2020)
- › Cognitive and somatic integrated: labelling can be used as a shortcut to reactivate that specific inner experience (Damasio, 2001, p.105; Gendlin, 1996)

› A black hole is visible only by the way things move around it



› Behaviour also points to the unseen/non-cognitive

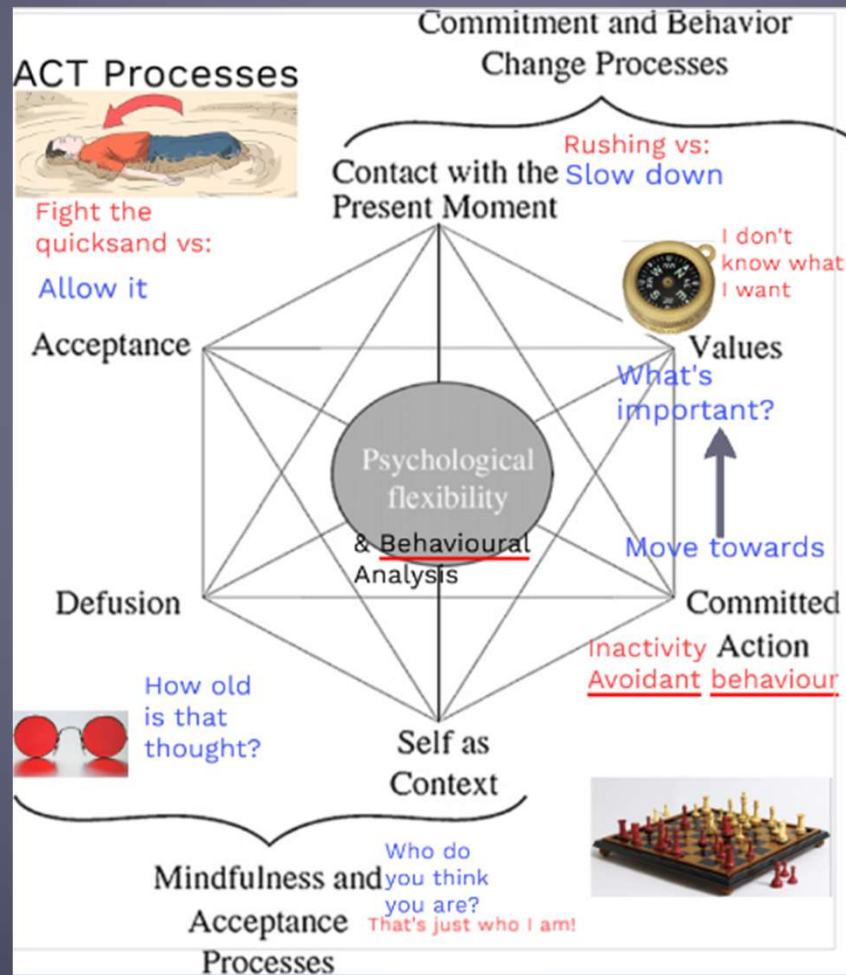
How to we harness the power of psychedelics for systemic change?



Whitfield (2021)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Six core process summary

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Centrality of self-perspective taking

- › The one process that “rules them all.” Hayes et al., (2020)

Table 1. Example of content moving therapeutically through the three selves of ACT,

The three selves in CBS	Neurobiological equivalent	Example of corresponding cognition
Self-as-content/story	Damasio's Autobiographical memory-based self (see Araujo, Kaplan & Damasio, 2013)	I just know I'm broken and therefore I can't love
Self-as process	<u>Damasio's Core</u> consciousness self, (Damasio 1999)	In this moment, I am aware of feeling broken, and am having thoughts about my capacity to love
Self-as perspective (a.k.a. Self-as context)	Less clear yet we can consider in the E-Network in Legrand & Ruby, (2009)	I see that this "I'm broken" self doesn't help me to love the way I want to and I know I can act independently of it. <u>My self</u> that is observing is independent from and contains the self that feels broken

Hayes, S. C., Law, S., Malady, M., Zhu, Z., & Bai, X. (2019). The centrality of sense of self in psychological flexibility processes: what the neurobiological and psychological correlates of psychedelics suggest. *J Context Behav Sci*, 15, 30-38.

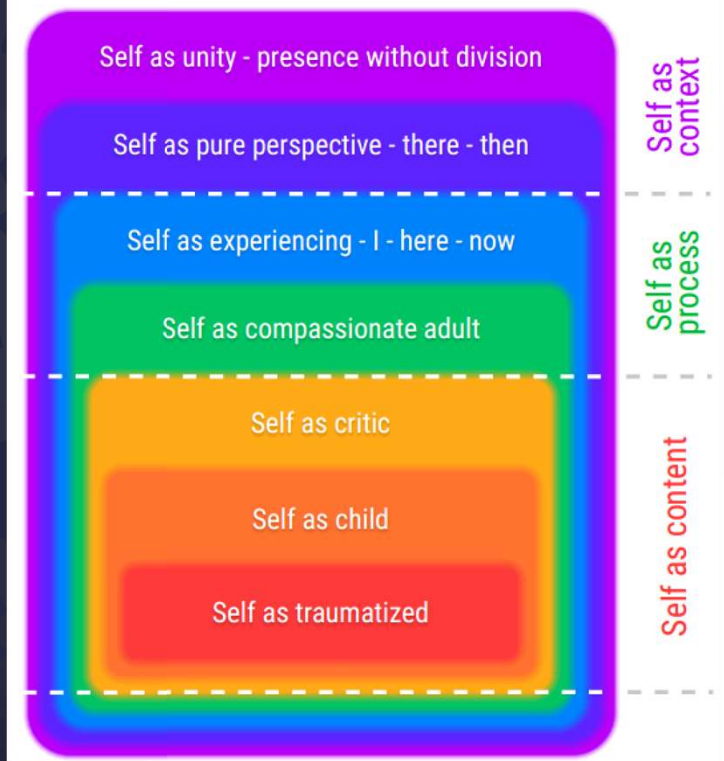
Psychedelic Phenomenology and the Self

Mystical Experience beyond the Self	Mystical Experience Questionnaire (Barrett et al., 2015).
'Ego-dissolution' – a dissolving self	"I experienced a disintegration of my "self" or ego" (Nour et al., 2016)
Othered selves: Meeting entities which can be considered hallucinations or actual 'sentient' beings	Strassman, 2008; Timmerman et al., 2018; Gallimore & Luke, 2015
Confusion around a multiplicity of 'selves'	"...the distress that comes from the loss of a habituated identity" Katzman (2018)
Inflated 'ego' and the narcissistic self	"I felt more important or special than others" (Nour et al., 2016, p.8).
Increases in the personality trait of openness	(Erritzoe et al., (2019) Wagner et al., (2017).
Experiences of changing sense of identity	"Lasting Changes to Sense of Identity" (Belser et al., 2017)
Unresolved Trauma informs self-story	"I experienced a resolution of a personal conflict/trauma" Emotional Breakthrough Inventory - Roseman et al., 2019

Whitfield, H. J. (2021). A Spectrum of Selves reinforced in multilevel coherence: A Contextual Behavioural response to the challenges of psychedelic-assisted therapy development. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 2025.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) adapted to psychedelics, trauma-focused and integrated with parts work/IFS

A Spectrum of Selves for Psychedelic-assisted Therapy



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Types of self: the 3 selves expanded to a 7 point scale (plotted against the other 5 core processes)		Cognitive Defusion - Cognitive Fusion	Values - Unclear values	Present moment - Automatic	Open acceptance - Closed/control	Committed Action - Avoidant action	Psychedelic-therapy relevance
SELF AS CONTEXT	as Unity	Awareness unfiltered by language.	All is love	All 'is' – and beyond past and future	Surrender to all that is	Allowing transformation, through death and rebirth	Mystical Experiences and (sometimes preceded by Pivotal Mental Experience (PiMS))
	as Pure Perspective	Language is thin and generally less interesting	Feeling what is important moment to moment	Seeing the world from beyond the habituated perspectives	Listening to all emotions as messengers	I always have the option to choose my response	New perspectives, Less identified with language. Nearing ego-dissolution. Entities (Othered selves)
SELF AS PROCESS	as Experiencing container	My thoughts are just thoughts /don't define me	I can choose independently of my old patterns	I see through my ways of not being present	I'm allowing myself to feel these challenging emotions	Choosing to grow through discomfort	Increased capacity for felt-sense (Somatic work)
	as Compassionate adult	I notice that's a harsh thought	I value kindness	I'm aware of what I'm doing	What does this feeling really feel like	I'm taking steps in self-care	
SELF AS CONTENT	as Inner critic	I am pathetic	I must/mustn't do X to be OK.	Rigid rule following to improve sense of self	Don't get upset again	Staying busy will make me feel less	Parts work for past selves
	as fearful child	Another must save me	Neediness	Automatic reactions to feeling insecure	I'm at war with these feelings	Demanding or inactively hoping to be saved	
	as Traumatized	There is something wrong with me.	I only care about making it stop	Dissociation/can't be aware of it	Frozen, Can't bear to feel	Inactivity, Giving up.	More accessible Traumatic memory, (also addressing psychological crisis PiMS experiences)

A chain of contexts for systemic change



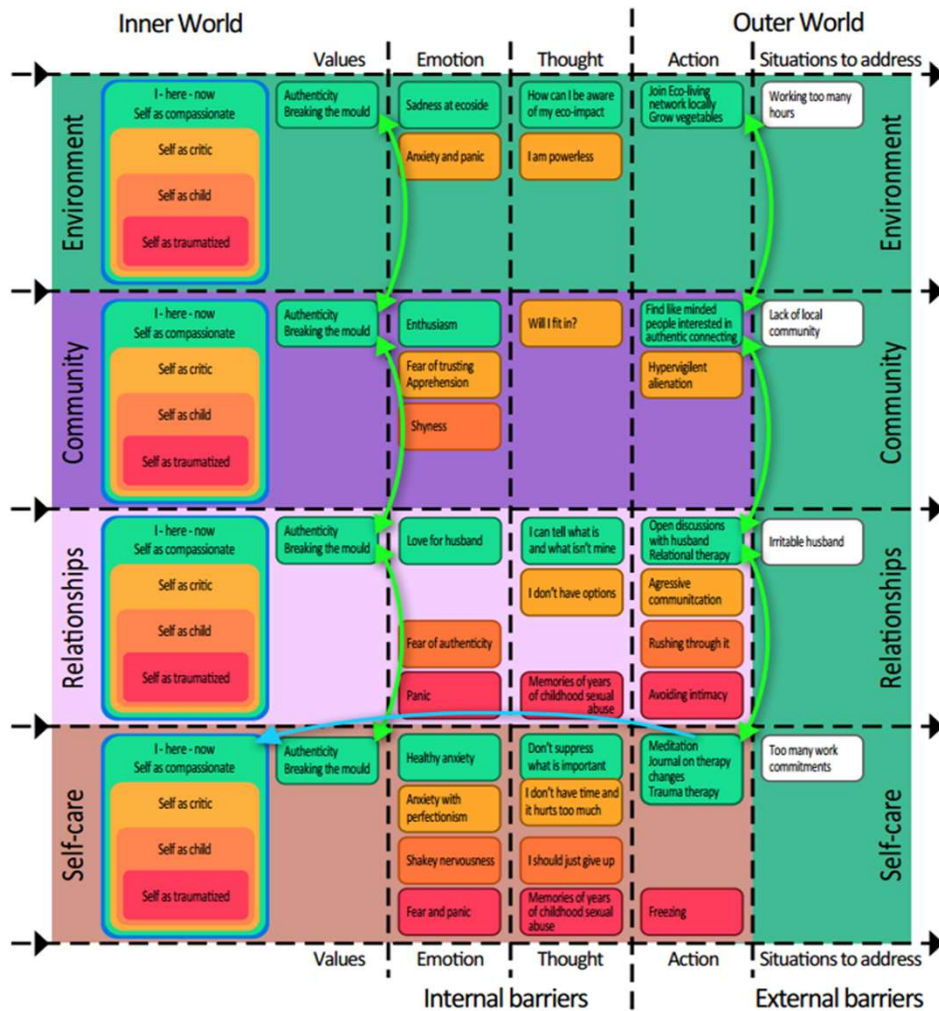
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- Mapping new self-perspectives to systemic behaviour change

- Coherence as a powerful reinforcer of behaviour

Case example of multi-level values and action

39 year old professional female with complex trauma
DASS-21 score of 66



Parts work also applicable to benevolent or malevolent entities

Compassion for Inner critic or inner child (Internal Family Systems)

Monitor the effects of any new self stories (ego inflation)

Process known or emergent traumatic memories (Imaginal Exposure)

The three phases of psychedelic assisted therapy

- › Phase 1: Preparation – practice in leaning into pain, willingness, Shame work (self work that is challenging)
- › Phase 2: Psychedelic experience – active help with remaining open to the process may be necessary
- › Phase 3: Integrating the psychedelic experience. What was learnt? New perspectives attained? Memories to process? New actions to take?
- › This workshop focussed on the integration phase

“The Return” (to a psychedelic experience)

- › A repetitive recounting of the experience
 - Any peak experience can contain more than we have time to process at the time it happens
 - Repetition increased awareness like any mindfulness meditation can
 - 1. Imagine yourself at the start of the experience
 - 2. Recount it as though it is happening to you
 - Repeat 1,2,1,2,1,2

OR

- 1) Recall an important moment from your psychedelic (or peak) experience...
- 2) What is it like to [insert mentioned felt experience]. Repeat part 2 as long as it seems appropriate

Rounding off

What's it like to experience that perspective?

Any values you wish to note or prioritize as part of the new self perspective?

Any traumatic/challenging memories to address further still?

Self-perspective “toggling”



- › **Defusion and perspective taking in one exercise**
- › What do you tell yourself when you are struggling?
- › 1. Imagine [insert unhelpful fused thought of self as content-trauma/child/critic] e.g. ‘I’m a bad person’
- › 2. Imagine [insert self-compassionate version of same thought/topic] e.g. I’m as good as anyone else
- › 1,2,1,2,1,2 – as long as the person engages

How does [unhelpful thought] seem?

What’s it like to contain both those perspectives?

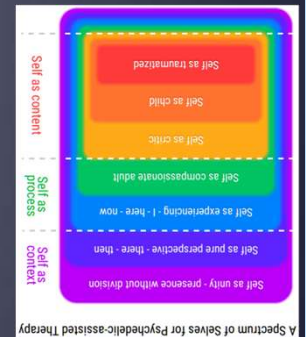


Befriending and broadening your Spectrum of Selves repertoires as a scale exercise

- › **Defusion meets multiple selves exercise**
- › Not just a thought but a whole identity!



- › 1) In my deepest fear I might tell myself...
- › 2) When I'm most needy and dependent I might tell myself...
- › 3) When I'm hard on myself I might tell myself...
- › 4) When I'm feeling compassionate I might tell myself...
- › 1,2,3,4,1,2,3,4, etc



Generating new behaviour aligned with a new self perspective

- › **To strengthen newly attained self perspectives**
- › Instruction given repetitively as meditative process – tell participant that it's an invitation to think of absolutely anything from the smallest to most grandiose ideas.
- › “**As your compassionate open self** [insert self description that resonates with new felt sense], **tell me something you could really do** [for self-care, your relationships, your community]”
- › Write down all answers in a shared spreadsheet
- › Afterwards ask which values these potential behaviours would honour? Can these values be honoured more?
- › Which of these behaviours would you like to action?
- › See tracking form at:
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1lxWJcSBGQf-4xOyCqLyPOWS-ciXZVqs7Bj-kJE02I5o/>

Integration Checklist (abridged)

1. What new behaviours since the psychedelic experience are spontaneously occurring?	8. What experiential practices/therapeutic exercises could continue interaction with new implicit felt-senses that emerged?
2. Brainstorm any new actions your new self-perspectives position you to take?	9. What practices can help nurture the new self-perspectives you have experienced and wish to develop?
3. What values do these new behaviours point to?	10. What behaviours on one domain-level might support behaviour change on another level?
4. Are you now more aware of values you wish to focus on or that have been neglected?	11. Have any areas in the chart been neglected? e.g. lack of community, relational values, selfcare practices (for retention)
5. Which of these four life domains do these values touch?	12. Aim to make any behaviour change self-reinforcing - generate contexts that reinforce
6. Are you more aware of behaviours that haven't served you? (de-selection) Which selves do these behaviours belong to?	13. Are there any difficult decisions worth considering that would change your daily environment to align it with the life you want?
7. Which selves might you compassionately attend to? (their thoughts and emotions?)	14. What would psychological/situational barriers make that decision difficult (bringing barriers into the work)...

Visual Summary: ACT as a chain of contexts through multiple therapy phases for systemic change, reinforced in a multilevel coherence



Long term follow up successful example

- › “Within my, my relationship with my husband, again, there's huge progress in our in our dynamic. Being able to voice my feeling and not ignore myself. Because I'm now back in my body. I've been able to express what I'm happy with and what I'm not happy with in particular. And I've been able to hold my ground. And that has led my husband to seeking his own support. So he started therapy, which has been invaluable for him, and actually for our relationship.”

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