

# London gets in on the ACT

Miles Thompson

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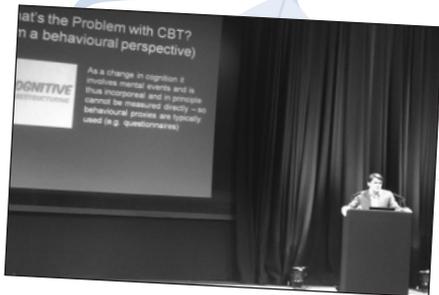
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# London gets in on the ACT



Last November, over 250 people from 15 countries gathered at the Mermaid Conference Centre in London for the first UK ACT Conference. The Conference was jointly organised by the BABCP Acceptance & Commitment Therapy Special Interest Group (ACT SIG) and the UK & Ireland Chapter of the Association for Contextual Behavioural Science (ACBS). ACT SIG Committee member Miles Thompson, who attended the Conference, reports



(Above, top to bottom) Dermot Barnes-Holmes giving his keynote, Frank Bond giving a pre conference workshop, Kelly Wilson giving his keynote

With around 1,000 members, ACT SIG is one of the largest Special Interest Groups within BABCP, while ACBS has nearly 7,000 members globally. ACBS is the worldwide organisation that seeks to advance Contextual Behavioural Science (CBS). Although it refers to ACT, CBS also implicates other endeavours such as Relational Frame Theory (RFT), which is a basic laboratory-based account of human language and cognition that has evolved alongside ACT.

## Programme

The event consisted of two days of pre-conference workshops and two days of the main conference programme with nearly 50 different sessions in total. Both parts showcased the breadth and depth of work that is taking place within the CBS community in the UK and beyond. A quick thematic analysis of the programme showed that broad areas covered included mental health, health psychology and insights from workplace and organisational settings. Parallel to this applied work was a large helping of basic psychological science in the form of RFT, which continued to show its potential to enrich all of the areas above.

## Mental health

One of the current strengths of the UK ACT community is the work being done with those suffering from psychosis. Conference organisers Eric Morris and Joe Oliver, along with Louise Johns, have recently published the book, *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy & Mindfulness for Psychosis*. Work taking place in this area was showcased throughout the conference with skills classes, symposia and panel discussions.

Other sessions applied ACT to diverse areas such as end of life issues and learning disabilities. One session also addressed working with mental health problems in developing countries around the world, highlighting the potential issues of applying ACT in these contexts. The conference also secured a keynote from Professor Kelly Wilson, author of what is popularly known as 'the '99 book'. Meanwhile his two day pre-conference workshop provided a deeply experiential introduction to ACT.

## Health

Another keynote, Professor Lance McCracken described the 'velvet revolution' that has taken place over the past two decades in the area of chronic pain and ACT. Professor McCracken, who holds the Chair in Behavioural Medicine at King's College London, noted how recent meta-analyses suggest that, while the methods of investigating psychological treatments for chronic pain have become increasingly sophisticated, the effectiveness of these treatments have stalled or even somewhat decreased. This has led to calls for fewer RCTs and more focus on which specific psychological components are effective and how.

At the same time ACT, with its focus on process and functionally derived treatment components, has been developing its evidence base such that the Society of Clinical Psychology within the American Psychological Association now says there is strong research support for its use with chronic pain. The conference also included a skills class that focused not just on talk based interventions

for chronic pain, but also on body movement interventions inspired by ACT. Open papers were also presented that described the recent £250k innovation grant that the Department of Health awarded to teach ACT-based techniques to Osteopaths. In other areas related to health psychology, the conference showcased work in areas such as insomnia and weight.

#### Work

Work was one of the themes of the last year's BABCP Annual Conference. Mirroring this, the ACT Conference also illustrated how ACT is not just being applied in health and mental health settings, but also in more diverse areas such as in workplaces and for the leaders of organisations. Here ACT is being applied to help understand and increase both employee wellbeing and performance. In his pre-conference workshop and keynote presentation, Professor Frank Bond from Goldsmiths, University of London, spoke about how the clinical framework used to help formulate client problems from an ACT perspective could be adapted and applied to workplace and organisational settings. Professor Bond, who is also the current President of the ACBS UK & Ireland Chapter, informed the conference of a soon-to-be submitted meta-analysis about ACT in the workplace, illustrating just how far work in this area has progressed.

#### Relational Frame Theory

Colleagues in the CBS community have spent around two decades developing a basic account of human language and cognition known as RFT. It is hoped that the products of this work will be of benefit across psychology including to those who work day-to-day with clients. As a consequence, it is perhaps unsurprising that two of the pre-conference workshops sought to provide therapists and clinicians with a practical foundation in understanding RFT.

Throughout the conference, Professor Dermot Barnes-Holmes and his colleagues from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, informed attendees of recent insights from RFT. One research stream is in

the area of 'fast and slow cognition'. The distinction is made between responses that you give slowly and have time for deliberation (eg those you might give on a questionnaire), and those responses that are given quickly and automatically (eg when having to press a key on a keyboard under time pressure). Although this distinction has been made elsewhere in psychology, Professor Barnes-Holmes' work appears to be at the forefront of translating such basic effects into work that is meaningful to therapists in their day-to-day practice. Meanwhile his keynote highlighted how these and other developments could also be relevant to the psychology community at large. In this spirit, he drew attention to his current work with cognitive researchers in Europe and how this collaborative work provides some of the first direct empirical support for Paul Salkovskis' theoretical insights into OCD.

#### Fellow travellers

Despite a primary focus on research and practice related to ACT and RFT, the conference also included material from other therapeutic areas that share a contextual perspective. For example, sessions focused on mindfulness, compassion-based approaches and Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP) were also on the conference timetable. Even more broadly, some sessions illustrated the link that the wider CBS community is

forging with other levels of sciences, for example evolutionary science and epigenetics.

#### Conclusion

ACT has been a growing and developing movement within BABCP and the wider therapeutic community in the UK for a number of years. One of the most important achievements of this conference was simply to provide a focus and an outlet for the efforts and insights of the growing number of CBS practitioners and researchers in the UK and Europe. However the conference organisers should be congratulated for doing so much more than that. Building on this success, ACT SIG and the ACBS UK & Ireland Chapter are already in planning a similar event in late 2014, this time in Ireland.

To be amongst the first to know about this event, simply send a blank email with 'BABCP ACT Conference 2014' in the subject line to [act@eyas.co.uk](mailto:act@eyas.co.uk). The conference organisers will be in touch with more information later in the year.

*Dr Miles Thompson is a Clinical Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University*

#### BABCP ACT SIG presents

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Relational frame theory (RFT) offers the possibility of a theoretical functional basis for both cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and other types of clinical interventions involving verbal behaviour. The workshop will explore several areas that appear to be central to clinical understanding and intervention and which illustrate the utility of RFT in this regard. These areas are: functional verbal assessment; behavioural flexibility; constructing and using metaphor; changing perspectives; and assessing target relational networks. The workshop will be interactive in format and aims to provide attendees with opportunities for acquiring and practicing relevant therapeutic skills and formulating a scientific understanding of the basic verbal processes that underpin these skills and their impact on clients.

## Supercharging your CBT or ACT Practice with RFT

#### Presented by Yvonne Barnes-Holmes

Yvonne is an internationally respected trainer in both RFT and ACT, and has been a tenured lecturer at the department of Psychology at the National University of Ireland Maynooth since 2003. She is a prolific author and has supervised numerous doctorate students. Her research interests have focused on the early development of cognition and verbal language and how RFT can help clinicians to better understand client perspective and activate desired behaviour change. She continues to maintain a small case load of complex clients and supervision of ACT clinicians.

For more information email [workshops@babcp.com](mailto:workshops@babcp.com)



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