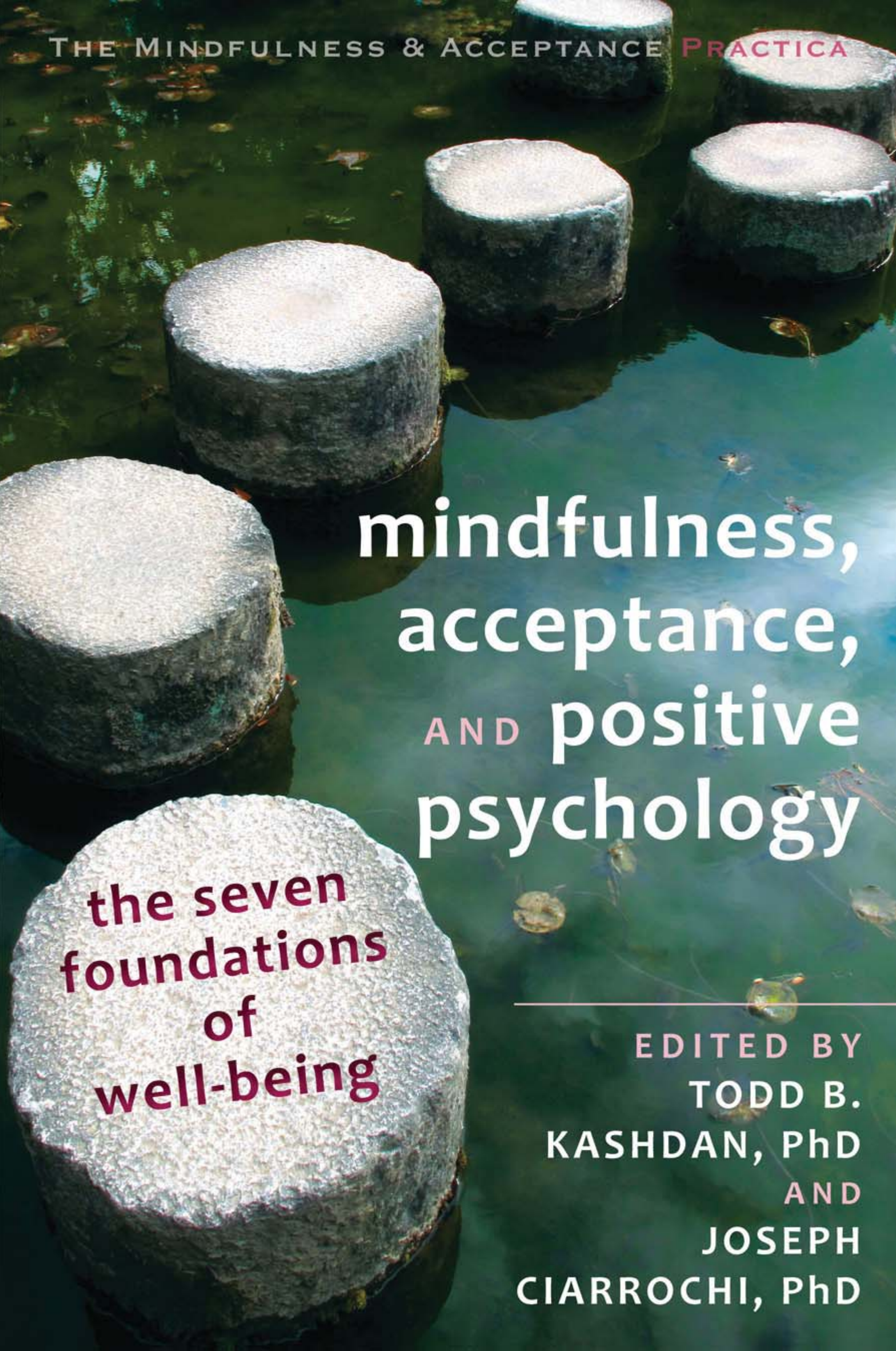

THE MINDFULNESS & ACCEPTANCE PRACTICA

mindfulness, acceptance, AND positive psychology

the seven foundations of well-being

EDITED BY
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CHAPTER 1

The Foundations of Flourishing

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Are humans innately good and compassionate (Rousseau, 1783/1979) or are they nasty and brutish (Hobbes, 1651/2009). This question has troubled philosophers for centuries, and when we look at the history of humankind, there is no simple answer. You can find great acts of love and kindness in our past, but also intense hatred and cruelty. We had the renaissance, but we also had the dark ages. We invented penicillin but we also invented nerve gas. We built churches, cathedrals, and hospitals, but we also built atom bombs and concentration camps. For every historical figure who has struggled for equality and compassion (Martin Luther King), we can find one who has fought equally hard for discrimination and cruelty (Adolf Hitler). Humans are capable of anything.

So the question should not be about the basic nature of humanity. Rather, the key question is, "Can we create a world where the best side of humanity finds expression?" Positive psychology and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) share a common answer: Yes.

Both perspectives focus on human strengths and aim to promote human flourishing. They often have overlapping technologies, particularly in the area of goal setting, psychological strengths, mindfulness, and the clarification of what matters most (values and meaning in life). They both seek to make positive change at multiple levels, from individuals to relationships to organizations and cultures. They both have experienced an explosion of research in the last 15 years. And they both appeal to a wide range of people, including those working in clinical, social, educational, and business disciplines.

Yet despite these similarities, ACT and positive psychology have hardly referenced each other. In this book, we propose that these two areas are related and unification will lead to faster, more profound and enduring improvements to the human condition. The chapters in this book will illustrate how this integration can take place, with a focus on concrete ways to empower and change what practitioners do.

What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a unique and creative approach to behavior change that alters the very ground rules of most Western psychotherapy. It is a mindfulness-based, values-oriented behavioral therapy that has many parallels to Buddhism, yet is not religious in any way. It is a modern scientific approach, a contextual behavioral therapy that is firmly based on the principles of applied behavioral analysis, and there are now over 60 randomized controlled trials to support its effectiveness.

ACT gets its name from one of its core messages: accept what is out of your personal control, and commit to action that improves and enriches your life. The aim of ACT is, quite simply, to maximize human potential for a rich, full, and meaningful life. ACT (which is pronounced as the word "act," not as the initials A.C.T.) does this by a) teaching you mindfulness skills to deal with your painful thoughts and feelings effectively—in such a way that they have much less impact and influence over you; and b) helping you to clarify your core values and use that knowledge to guide, inspire, and motivate committed action.

Mindfulness is a "hot topic" in Western psychology right now—increasingly recognized as a powerful intervention for everything from work stress to depression, to increasing emotional intelligence, to enhancing performance. Mindfulness basically means paying attention with openness, curiosity, and flexibility. In a state of mindfulness, difficult thoughts and feelings have much less impact and influence over behavior—so mindfulness is likely to be useful for everything from full-blown psychiatric illness to enhancing athletic or business performance.

ACT breaks mindfulness skills down into 3 categories:

1. defusion: distancing from, and letting go of, unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, and memories
2. acceptance: making room for painful feelings, urges, and sensations, and allowing them to come and go without a struggle
3. contact with the present moment: engaging fully with your here-and-now experience, with an attitude of openness and curiosity

In many models of coaching and therapy, mindfulness is taught primarily via meditation. However, in ACT, meditation is seen as only one way among hundreds of ways to learn these skills—and this is a good thing because most people are not willing to meditate! ACT gives you a vast range of tools to learn mindfulness skills—many of which require only a few minutes to master. In ACT, mindfulness serves two main purposes: to overcome psychological barriers that get in the way of acting on your core values and to help you engage fully in the experience when you are acting on your values.

Thus the outcome ACT aims for is mindful, values-guided action. In technical terms, this is known as "psychological flexibility," an ability that ACT sees as the very foundation of a rich, full, and meaningful life.

What Is Positive Psychology?

Instead of being viewed as a movement or a paradigm shift, positive psychology is best viewed as a mobilization of attention and financial resources to previously ignored topics (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). For decades, psychology has emphasized the reduction of distress and disorder. While this emphasis has led to efficacious treatments for a variety of psychological problems, the primary reasons for living have been ignored. Nobody lives to be merely free of distress and disorder, and the positive is not merely the absence of distress and disorder. There are other ingredients to a life well lived, and these ingredients have been the focus of positive psychology research and practice.

When first introduced to the world, Seligman and Csiksentmihalyi (2000) mapped out the terrain covered by positive psychology. The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the personal level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal competence, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, tolerance, and work ethic.

The working assumption of positive psychology is that the positive, healthy aspects of life are not simply the bipolar opposite of distress and disorder. This theme arises again in a special issue of the *Review of General Psychology* dedicated to positive psychology, where the editors claim that psychology has been effective at learning "how to bring people up from negative eight to zero, but not as good at understanding how people rise from zero to positive eight" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). That is, the primary aim is to address and cultivate positive experiences, strengths and virtues, and the requirements for positive relationships and institutions.

In this description, positive psychology seems to push too far to the other extreme, focusing only on the positive, with a caveat that of course, pain and suffering are important as well. It is only in the last few years that researchers have advocated for the need to move beyond the superficial connection between the "positive" and "negative" dimensions of the human psyche (Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011b). For instance, if you are attempting to teach children to be compassionate, you simply cannot ignore the negative, because it is built into the fiber of empathy, and perspective taking. Prominent positive psychologists often discourage a focus on weaknesses (because this is less efficient and profitable); (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) and reinforce the notion that when it comes to positive experiences, strengths, or virtues, “more is better” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This idea has recently been overturned as extremist because evidence continues to emerge that depending on the context, there are tipping points and boundary conditions for the effective use of strengths (e.g., Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011; Linley, 2008). Thus, the working assumptions of positive psychology continue to evolve, which we view as a sign of healthy progress.

In the current incarnation of positive psychology, the focus appears to be less on targets that are “positive” at the superficial, surface level and more on whatever elements lead to healthy living or well-being. In some cases, positive emotions and psychological strengths lead to suboptimal living, whereas emotions such as anxiety and guilt, and behaviors reflecting narcissism and quarrelsomeness, lead to the best possible outcomes. This more dynamic, nuanced approach to a well-lived life has much in common with the working assumptions of ACT.

A Bridge between Two Islands

Both ACT and positive psychology have experienced an explosion of research in the last decade. For example, the term “positive psychology” appeared as a keyword in only seven scientific articles in 2000. This number has exploded to over 100 per year since 2008. ACT has experienced a similar expansion, with “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” appearing as a keyword less than 10 times a year before 2004, and then exploding to over 40 in 2009 and 2010 and then to 80 in 2011 (Scorpos search, April 5, 2011). Almost all of the over 58 randomized controlled trials in ACT have been published since 2008. Searching on the keywords “positive psychology” and “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” is likely to vastly underestimate the influence of these fields, as it ignores many relevant keywords, such as “mindfulness,” “acceptance,” “strengths,” and “upward spiral.” Still, the numbers clearly indicate that positive psychology and ACT are growing and thriving as research disciplines.

The time has thus come to unify these exciting fields. They have the same goal, to promote human flourishing, but because they have worked independently from each other, they have come up with largely non-overlapping insights and approaches. They have both made great strides, and yet, we can’t help but wonder what would happen if people from the two fields actually sat down and spoke to each other. Would this not accelerate progress? This book asks that question in every chapter, and in every case it returns a clear answer: Yes.

If we are going to sit down and talk, the first thing we need to do is develop a common language. Without that language, we will be confused with each other and grow frustrated. Indeed, this confusion is widespread in psychology. Every subdiscipline seems to create its own island of words and constructs. Positive psychology talks about the presence of a nearly universal list of 24 character strengths, ACT focuses on six core processes, personality researchers focus on the big five personality dimensions, and emotional intelligence researchers focus on the five (+-2) components. Each new researcher that comes upon the scene seems keen to create a new brand or at least a few new psychological terms that can be uniquely associated with him or her. Meanwhile, people on the front lines, such as therapists, coaches, and consultants, are drowning in a sea of jargon.

We propose there is a way to survive the flood and even navigate it effectively. Our solution is to identify a small set of basic factors (or foundations) from which we can build a wide range of larger psychological constructs, in much the same way that we can build complex physical compounds from simple primary elements (e.g., we can manufacture steel from iron and carbon). But how do we select these psychological foundations when there are so many options to choose from?

We decided to select a set of basic ingredients that can be arranged and rearranged into almost any strand of well-being. We selected our foundations on the basis of two key criteria: (1) they must be guided by the best available science, and (2) they must be of direct practical use for facilitating cognitive and behavioral change to improve well-being. Thus, we did not select brain regions or neuronal pathways as foundations, because although knowledge of these things is relevant to well-being, it does not provide a practitioner with direct ways of instigating positive behavioral change. Similarly, we did not select elements that are associated with well-being if the implications for intervention were unclear; a good example is the personality dimension of "extraversion."

At this point, let's note that although some positive psychology practitioners describe happiness as being synonymous with "well-being," the truth is that "happiness" is only a single strand of a multidimensional matrix (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). Beyond happiness, we can also consider meaning and purpose in life, love and connectedness, a sense of autonomy, a sense of competence, and optimal cognitive and physical functioning. This broadly defined view of well-being also includes anxiety and depression and other constructs that are frequently targeted by cognitive-behavioral interventions. Thus, our list of foundations had to be relevant to healthy functioning as well as to the amelioration of deficits or problems.

The foundations are presented in Table 1. They are assumed to mediate the relationship between specific interventions (e.g., mindfulness practice) and aspects of well-being (increased positive affect and meaning). Like psychological building blocks, one can rearrange any number of the seven foundations into increasingly complex dimensions. Similarly, one can deconstruct more complex dimensions into these seven foundations, and this can provide insight into the types of interventions that might be most useful separately or in unique combinations.

Table 1: The Seven Foundations of Well-Being

Foundations	**Examples**	**Example interventions**
1) Functional beliefs about the self, others, and the world	Do you believe you can overcome barriers and achieve goals (hope)? Do you view problems as a challenge or threat (problem-solving orientation)? Do you believe you have social worth (self-esteem)?	• Defusion: Undermining the power of unhelpful thoughts. (e.g., experiencing thoughts as passing events that don't have to dictate action) • Cognitive restructuring of beliefs

Foundations	**Examples**	**Example interventions**
2) Mindfulness and awareness	Are you aware of your emotions, actions, external stimuli, and mental processes? Can you label and clarify the exact mixture of emotions that you are feeling at a given point in time?	• Mindfulness practice directed at various domains • Improving emotion recognition and discrimination
3) Perspective taking	Can you take the perspective of others (empathy)? Can you take perspective on yourself (self-as-context)?	• Videotaped experiments to learn discrepancies between self-views, the views of others, and actual performance • Practice shifting perspectives and taking the view of an observer
4) Values	What do you care about (values, personal strivings)? Do other people's desires for you dominate your own (controlled versus autonomous motives)?	• Values clarification • Identifying personal strivings and motives behind them • Identifying implicit motives

5) Experiential acceptance	In order to live according to what you care about, are you willing to have private experiences such as distress and self-doubt (courage)?	• Creative hopelessness (connecting with unworkability of control) • Willingness practice (practice acting in valued way and opening up to feelings)
6) Behavioral control	Are you able to control what you say and do in a way that promotes your goals and values (self-regulation, willpower)? Do you persist (grit) and rebound from failure (resilience)? Are you able to modify feelings in an adaptive way?	• Linking behaviors to values • Goal setting, anticipating and planning for barriers, anticipating benefits from achieving goals • Music, biofeedback, distraction, and other strategies that change emotions and help regulate behavior
7) Cognitive skill	How well do you solve problems and reason (IQ)? How well do you shift attention and inhibit irrelevant stimuli (flexible mindset)?	• Improving intellectual functioning • Attentional training (e.g., practice controlling or altering attention)

Functional Beliefs

Functional beliefs are central to various forms of cognitive-behavioral therapy (Barlow, 2002; Beck, 1983; Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008). For example, Beck's therapy focuses on core and intermediate beliefs (Beck, 1995), Young's therapy focuses on schema (Young, 1990), and Wells's therapy focuses on meta-beliefs about emotions and worry (Wells, 1997). ACT does not focus on specific beliefs but rather encourages the practitioner to a) identify when beliefs are dominating over other sources of information (other thoughts, the environment) and when beliefs are "unworkable" (i.e., acting on the belief does *not* work to make life rich, full, and meaningful)(Ciarrochi & Robb, 2005). ACT undermines the power of beliefs through the use of defusion (changing the context so that a person can experience their belief as nothing more or less than a passing thought, which they do not have to act on). Positive psychology seeks not so much to undermine unhelpful beliefs but rather to promote positive, functional beliefs such as hope, self-esteem, and a positive problem-solving orientation (Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011a). However, plenty of models within positive psychology do advocate the active challenging and disputation of dysfunctional beliefs. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss beliefs related to love and self-compassion, and chapters 7, 8, and 10 discuss the issue of how beliefs are best modified.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness, broadly defined, means conscious awareness with an open, receptive attitude, of what is happening in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Williams, 2008). Conscious awareness involves intentionally regulating attention toward what is happening here and now. We can describe a person as "gently observing" what is happening, as opposed to "judging" it. An "open, receptive attitude" reflects the quality of one's attention, characterized by curiosity, and a turning toward one's experience rather than away from it. For example, even when our thoughts and feelings are painful or difficult, in a state of mindfulness we are receptive to and curious about these psychological events instead of trying to avoid or get rid of them (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). In and of itself, awareness of one's environment can be directionless. The quality of curiosity focuses one's attention and motivates a person to explore his or her environment with an appreciation of novelty, challenge, and uncertainty (Silvia & Kashdan, 2009). It is hardly surprising, then, that people who are predisposed to present-moment awareness, or trained to be mindful, show greater openness to experiences that challenge their personal beliefs (Niemiec et al., 2010)

Many practitioners of positive psychology construe mindfulness as a platform that facilitates other healthy skills, making them more likely to be used in a given situation for greater benefit. For instance, mindfulness skills can make it easier to repair negative moods, enhance positive moods, or increase the amount of positive appraisals about the self, world, and future.

In ACT, mindfulness is also used to facilitate other skills for healthy living and to increase the efficacy of those skills. However, in ACT, mindfulness would not be used to try to directly alter one's mood. Rather, mindfulness would be used to facilitate action in line with core values, enhance performance, increase engagement in the task at hand, and appreciate this moment of life, whether it be a moment of joy or of pain. (The reasons that ACT avoids targeting positive mood directly will be made clear in the experiential acceptance discussion below.) Chapter 2 covers this area in detail.

Perspective Taking

Many domains of psychology study perspective taking, and it goes by such labels as "psychological mindedness," "reflective functioning," "empathy," and "theory of mind" (Eisenberg, 2003; Eisenberg, Murphy, & Shepard, 1997). In positive psychology, researchers and practitioners have given minimal attention to perspective taking; they have generally classed it under character strengths as a merger of "personal intelligence" and "perspective" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). ACT-related interventions and research focus heavily on perspective taking and empathy (Ciarrochi, Hayes, & Bailey, 2012; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999), and in particular on the development of an observer perspective, technically referred to as "self-as-context." This is a perspective from which all experience can be noticed and you are aware of your own flow of experiences but without any investment in or attachment to them. Chapters 5 and 8 cover this area in detail, and chapter 9 offers an approach to manipulate the perspective of both individuals and groups.

Values

We can define values in many ways, but generally we can think of them as verbal descriptions of what people are personally invested in, regard highly, and seek to uphold and defend. Recognizing and endorsing these cherished ideals is quite different from behaving in ways that are congruent with them (e.g., see section on behavioral control). Many researchers view values as central to a person's sense of self; they operate as standards that guide thought and action (Feather, 2002; Hitlin, 2003; Kristiansen & Zanna, 1994; Rohan, 2000; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Positive psychologists discuss values in the form of personal strivings, goal setting, or personal philosophies for what is most important in life (Emmons, 1996; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). The distance between valued preferences and actual behavior can be vast, which can be a pivotal point of intervention.

ACT makes use of positive psychology literature but speaks of values in a specific way, as qualities of purposive action that can never be obtained as an object, but can be instantiated from moment to moment (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011). Thus, ACT sees values as desired global qualities of ongoing action (or, in layman's terms, "your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being"). This definition is consistent with ACT's focus on behavior.

There is also a substantial literature on meaning and purpose in life that seems closely linked to values. Some researchers have defined purpose as a "central, self-organizing life aim" (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, 2009). Others have fleshed out this definition by unifying principles from positive psychology and ACT (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

Purpose is central. Purpose is a predominant theme of a person's identity. If we envision a person positioning descriptors of his or her personality on a dartboard, purpose would be near the innermost circle.

Purpose is self-organizing. It provides a framework for systematic behavior patterns in everyday life. Self-organization should be evident in the goals people create, the effort devoted to these goals, and decision making when confronted with competing options of how to allocate finite resources such as time and energy. A purpose motivates a person to dedicate resources in particular directions and toward particular goals and not others. That is, terminal goals and projects are an outgrowth of a purpose.

Purpose cannot be achieved. It is a life aim, one that is regularly being directed to new targets. A purpose provides a foundation that allows a person to be more resilient to obstacles, stress, and strain. Persistence is easier with a life aim that resonates across time and context. It is easier to confront long-lasting, difficult challenges with the knowledge that there is a larger mission in the background. Moving in the direction of a life aim can facilitate other elements of well-being such as life satisfaction, serenity, and mindfulness (Wilson & Murrell, 2004; Wong & Fry, 1998). Chapters 6 and 11 provide a detailed discussion of these issues.

Experiential Acceptance

Experiential acceptance means embracing "private experiences" (e.g., thoughts, emotions, memories—experiences an individual has that no outside observer can directly see) and allowing these experiences to be present without trying to avoid or get rid of them. Willingness, a close ally of acceptance, involves allowing difficult private experiences to be present, in the service of a valued action (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008). Experiential avoidance—the ongoing attempt to avoid or get rid of unwanted private experiences—transforms the perfectly normal experience of pain to one of suffering and ineffective action (Ciarrochi, Kashdan, Leeson, Heaven, & Jordan, 2011; Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006). There are two major reasons for this. First, attempts to control or suppress feelings often result in an increase in those feelings, as when attempting to not feel anxious makes you more anxious. Second, emotions and values are often two sides of the same coin, and therefore to avoid one means to avoid the other. You cannot have loving relationships without risking vulnerability and all the painful thoughts and feelings that inevitably go with it. Positive psychology addresses the experiential avoidance component under the umbrella of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) or effective emotion regulation (John & Gross, 2004).

ACT places a major emphasis on experiential acceptance but does not see it as a form of emotion regulation. Indeed, ACT seeks to minimize any attempt to directly modify private experience for fear that such attempts may reinforce experiential avoidance (Ciarrochi & Robb, 2005). Thus, ACT practitioners rarely seek to directly increase the frequency or intensity of pleasant thoughts or feelings. Rather, the ACT practitioner focuses on helping people to *be* with *all* their thoughts and feelings—both the pleasant and the painful—while *doing* what is important (i.e., acting on values). Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 10 deal with the issues of avoidance and acceptance.

Behavioral Control

Behavioral control refers to one's ability to regulate behavior in a way that is consistent with one's values. Positive psychology might label this component "perseverance," "self-regulation," or "willpower." Research in this area often focuses on identifying factors that promote goal success, such as mental contrasting (considering benefits and barriers related to goals) (Oettingen, Mayer, Sevincer, et al., 2009), implementation intentions (establishing if-then plans to deal with barriers to goals) (Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998), and self-concordance of goals (the goals match your inner-most needs) (Koestner, Lekes, Powers, & Chicoine, 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

When effort is devoted to valued aims, ACT refers to this as "commitment." Generally, there is a tight link between values, purpose, and commitment, and these dimensions are not always easy to disentangle. Despite the difficulty level, we think it is pragmatic to separate values from commitment to highlight the difference between knowing what you want (values, purpose) and acting on what you want (behavioral control). Chapters 6, 10, and 11 tackle the issues of values, purpose, and commitment.

Cognitive Skill

Cognitive skill refers to components of intellectual functioning such as reasoning, problem solving, and attentional control. Both positive psychology and ACT are somewhat neutral with regard to this factor, except that they both agree it is good to have. Research increasingly suggests that cognitive skill is more modifiable than originally thought (Cassidy, Roche, & Hayes, 2011; Jaeggi, Buschkuehl, Jonides, & Perrig, 2008). This dimension is essential to any complete definition of well-being and indeed directly links to the other foundations. For example, values clarification has been shown to increase cognitive performance among stigmatized groups (Cohen, Gracia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). A certain level of cognitive skill is needed to be able to take perspective (McHugh et al., 2004). Finally, basic cognitive training in inhibition of responses increases behavioral control (Houben & Jansen, 2011). Chapter 12 covers this skill in great detail.

Linking the Seven Foundations to Strengths

Character strengths, often viewed as a centerpiece of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011) can be understood as a mixture of the foundations in Table 1. Strengths often have an element of valuing (e.g., "love of learning," "capacity for love," "fairness," "honesty," "humility," "spirituality," and "gratitude.") *Capacity for love* probably involves not only valuing loving relationships but also the ability to take perspective and believe you are worthy of love. *Leadership* involves valuing influence and probably requires all seven elements above (e.g., cognitive capacity, experiential acceptance of uncontrollable events, perspective taking). *Self-control* is one of those extremely broad strengths that involves elements of cognitive skill (inhibition), as well as experiential acceptance (e.g., not acting impulsively to get rid of urges), behavioral control, and functional beliefs (belief that you can achieve goals). S*elf-compassion* can be seen as a combination of experiential acceptance (recognize that you will beat yourself up sometimes), mindfulness (be aware of this self-criticism), perspective taking (recognizing the similarity of your own suffering to that of others), and values (put self-kindness into play in your life).

Other areas of study in positive psychology can also be understood in terms of the seven foundations. *Spirituality* is a particularly potent yet understudied strength (Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Leeson, 2010; Heaven &

Ciarrochi, 2007). Spirituality generally includes values (connect with god or the universe), beliefs that could be functional or dysfunctional ("God gives me strength" versus "God is trying to punish me for being so shameful"), the observer perspective (a sense of a constant, unchanging self), and frequently, mindfulness (engaging in and appreciating the present moment and all it holds). *Moral emotions* such as shame can be seen, in some contexts, as involving dysfunctional beliefs about the self (I am completely worthless), as well as unhelpful attempts to escape the self (low experiential acceptance). Rather than bombard you with more examples, we invite you to take a few minutes before reading on to think about some other popular psychological constructs and see to what extent you can "deconstruct" them in terms of our seven foundations.

The Importance of Intervention Purpose

To truly integrate positive psychology and ACT, we must first look a little deeper at their purpose and philosophical assumptions. We shall see that as long as positive psychology and ACT adopt similar philosophical assumptions, they can work well together.

At this point, a warning to the reader: we have named the seven foundations as if they are real entities, like animals walking about in the world. However, in reality we view these foundations through a pragmatic philosophy. The foundations help us to organize a rather bewildering array of constructs. We make no assumption that they are real entities lying in the brain waiting to be discovered by some neurosurgeon.

Our pragmatic view stands in contrast to more mechanistic views. As a contrast to our approach, consider the following recent declaration by Seligman (2011):

> Well-being is a construct, and happiness is a thing.
> A "real thing" is a directly measurable entity…. [T]he elements of well-being are themselves different kinds of things. (p. 24)

By describing well-being in this way, Seligman implicitly takes a philosophical stance called elemental realism (formerly known as "mechanism") (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011).

Elemental realism gets its name because it assumes that one can know the true nature of reality and objectively discover the elements of which it is composed. The elemental realist views the universe as a machine consisting of parts that interact. The goal of analysis is to model the universe accurately.

The key question for the elemental realist is, "What elements and forces make the model work?" Success is defined by how well a model is able to make predictions and establish meaningful, reliable causal patterns. Most forms of cognitive psychology are good examples of elemental realism, as are the information processing models found in positive psychology. There is of course, absolutely nothing wrong, outdated, or inferior with this philosophical stance. Acknowledging one's philosophical worldview simply means owning up to the improvable assumptions upon which one's work rests. Thus one philosophical worldview can never refute another.

The worldview adopted by ACT and some positive psychologists is functional contextualism (a form of pragmatism). Functional contextualism assumes we can never know the true nature of reality or the elements that comprise it; all we can do is observe how an aspect of the universe functions in a given context (and part of that context will always be the human mind itself). Functional contextualism focuses on something called the "act-in-context." "Context" means whatever comes before the act that influences it (antecedents) and whatever follows the act that reduces or increases the chance of its recurring (consequences). The "act" is whatever happens in between the antecedents and the consequences.

The key question in functional contextualism is, "How can we manipulate the antecedents and consequences to best achieve our goals?" The functional contextualist *will* divide an event into "elements" (e.g., antecedents and consequences) but does so purely for pragmatic purposes (i.e., Does the division help us achieve our goals?). The functional contextualist would make no assumption that this "division" uncovers or reveals something of the "true nature" of reality; it is nothing more or less than a useful strategy for achieving a specific goal.

The goal of functional analysis is to find ways to predict and influence behavior. Prediction in itself is not enough. Typical research in this tradition focuses on manipulating antecedents and consequences and observing how behavior changes as a result. A particular activity is "successful" if it helps to achieve stated goals. Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) are two examples of models based on functional contextualism.

Scientists and practitioners in positive psychology can take either an elemental realism viewpoint or a functional contextualist viewpoint, whereas ACT folks take only a functional contextualist viewpoint. Thus, for collaboration to occur, positive psychologists need to put on their functional contextualist hat. They can always remove it later and take up the perfectly valid elemental realist perspective.

If we all agree to wear the functional contextualist hat, we can begin our conversation across islands. We might start with the question: "What is the purpose of our constructs?" The answer is: they help us to classify and guide interventions. They help us focus the intervention (e.g., on experiential acceptance) and adopt the most appropriate measures that capture how well an intervention works (e.g., Does experiential acceptance improve, and does it lead to greater well-being?). This answer begets another more general question. What is the purpose of our interventions? There are at least two possible answers to this question, and the answer we choose will determine the appearance and function of the intervention:

1. The purpose is to promote psychological states with a predominance of pleasant thoughts and feelings

2. The purpose is to aid in the promotion of psychological flexibility: the capacity to live mindfully and act effectively in line with one's core values (see Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010, for alternative definitions)

The first purpose directly emphasizes the importance of modifying the form and frequency of private experiences; the second purpose emphasizes changing the nature of one's relationship with private experiences—to one of mindfulness and acceptance—while directly modifying one's actions. ACT typically adopts the latter approach, whereas some positive psychologists typically adopt the former. However, these approaches do not have to be mutually incompatible; in many contexts, they can complement one another.

The way we conduct an intervention will vary enormously depending upon our purpose, intention, or ultimate goal. Consider mindfulness.

You could engage in a mindfulness practice to facilitate acceptance of painful emotions (ACT consistent), or you could engage in it with the purpose of inducing calm, relaxed, pleasant emotional states (Cormier & Cormier, 1998). If you have the former purpose in mind, then you might be anything but relaxed. You might be fully present to feelings of anxiety as you mindfully talk with a potential lover, or you might be fully aware and accepting of your racing heart and sweaty hands as you get up to give an important speech.

And obviously, the way you would frame the mindfulness intervention would also be quite different, depending on the purpose or end goal. If your focus is behavioral, you might frame a mindfulness practice in terms of anchoring in the present moment so that you can be less reactive to your feelings and engage fully in the task at hand, which is essential for peak performance. However, if your focus is on directly changing emotional states, you might describe the mindfulness exercise as an excellent way to relax and unwind after a difficult day. Furthermore, the specific purposes and end goals limit the applications of any given intervention. For example, if mindfulness is used primarily to facilitate acceptance of unpleasant feelings, then it can be used in any sort of fear-provoking situation, from public speaking to charging the enemy on a battlefield, whereas if mindfulness is used as a relaxation technique, then it can only be of use in situations where there is no genuine threat. (No relaxation technique known to humankind will reverse a fight-or-flight response in the face of a challenging stressful situation.)

We have discussed strategies that seek to change the valence of emotional state (e.g., from negative to positive). In addition to valence-change strategies, there are valence-neutral change strategies that are used by both ACT and positive psychology. For example, mindfulness might be used to increase a state of “equanimity” or “concentration.” These states are not inherently positive or negative, and both can be used to promote the same purpose, namely, flexible, value-consistent behavior.

Are Strengths Inherently Positive?

Applying the word “strength” to a psychological trait makes it seem inherently positive. Who, after all, would not want more strength, resilience, or optimism? However, within a functional contextualist viewpoint, nothing is inherently good or bad. Rather, we evaluate the benefits of a trait (or pattern of behaving) by answering two questions: 1) What value is the behavior serving? and 2) How is that behavior working in a particular social context? For example, forgiveness has been defined in part as the behavior of giving people a second chance (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). To assess whether this behavior is useful, we need to first ask: What is "giving a second chance" in the service of? Let's assume that this behavior is intended to increase intimacy in a close relationship. The second question then is, how is it working? In a supportive romantic relationship, forgiveness may work quite well. However, in an abusive relationship, giving the abuser a second, third, and fourth chance may work very poorly.

Indeed, recent research supports this view. McNulty and Fincham (2011) have shown that the "positive" processes of forgiveness, optimistic expectations, positive thoughts, and kindness can be related to higher **or** lower well-being, depending on context. Specifically, in a longitudinal study, these processes predicted better relationship well-being among spouses in healthy marriages but worse relationship well-being in more troubled relationships. In another study, Baker and McNulty (2011) showed that self-compassion may sometimes be helpful or harmful to relationships, at least among men. Men high in self-compassion have better relationships only if they are conscientious and willing to correct interpersonal mistakes and engage in constructive problem solving. In contrast, men high in self-compassion have worse relationships if they are not motivated to correct their mistakes (low conscientiousness).

There has been substantial debate about whether optimistic illusions are good or bad. Some argue that they are fundamental to mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988), whereas others suggest such illusions can be harmful to relationships (Norem, 2002), workplace effectiveness, academic performance, and physical health and longevity (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). This debate may be resolved by assuming that illusions are helpful in some contexts, but not in others, and proceeding to study illusions in context. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) recognize this issue when they talk about the importance of "appropriate negativity" and the possibility of having too high a ratio of positive to negative emotions.

The Big Questions

Our goal in this book is to build a more complete and integrative approach to improving the human condition. To facilitate integration, we posed a number of questions to our contributors. We describe them below, and we leave it to you to explore the book with curiosity and search for the answers.

When Is Experiential Control Most Likely to Work? When Will It Fail?

We know experiential avoidance is often a destructive coping strategy. Is there any danger that some positive psychology interventions might unintentionally promote unhelpful avoidance? What are contexts where emotional control might work to improve well-being (e.g., Is seeking pleasant emotional states the same as avoiding unpleasant ones)? When does it fail? Please note, by "emotional control," we mean control of internal states (thoughts, feelings, sensations, urges, images, memories), not control of the actions that occur simultaneously with these states. Humans can control their actions without having to control their internal states; we can feel furious, but act calmly; we can feel anxious, but act assertively.

When Is Cognitive Restructuring Most and Least Likely to Work?

ACT often seeks to minimize direct attempts at cognitive restructuring, in part because it might increase unhelpful language processes (e.g., reasoning about the future/worrying, believing that reasoning can solve everything, excessive dominance of symbols over experience). ACT emphasizes cognitive defusion, techniques that attempt to change one's relationship with thoughts, rather than trying to alter their form or frequency. For example, when we defuse from unhelpful thoughts, we are less likely to believe them or allow them to influence our action. With defusion as an alternative to restructuring, is there anything gained by cognitive restructuring? When is restructuring most likely to work? When is it least likely to work?

Are All Mindfulness Interventions Created Equally?

Does the purpose of the intervention and type of instruction matter? For example, does it make a difference if mindfulness is taught as a way to reduce stress or as a way to increase psychological flexibility?

Do We Need to Improve Self-Concepts?

ACT typically focuses on helping folks to let go of unhelpful self-concepts and spends less time seeking to directly improve self-concept. What are contexts where changing self-concept might be helpful? When might it be harmful? For example, it might be unhelpful to target hope or self-esteem without linking it to concrete behavior. If everybody is special no matter what they do, why do anything?

Values and Committed Action

Is happiness a value or a side effect of valued activity? Should we reinforce the valuing of pleasant emotions (e.g., creating contexts where pleasant emotions are more likely to occur)? Is directing people to pay attention to their pleasant feelings another way of directing them to what they value?

Can We Separate the Positive from the Negative?

To what extent is it possible to study the positive without the negative? Are these separations artificial? Oxygen and hydrogen form water, which has emergent qualities that cannot be inferred from hydrogen and oxygen. Can the same be said about positive and negative emotions? Is it sometimes unhelpful to talk about “positive” and “negative” emotions? Given that fear, sadness, and guilt are useful, life-enhancing emotions that play a major role in building a rich, meaningful life, is it fair to call them “negative”? Would we do better to talk about “pleasant” and “unpleasant” emotions rather than “positive” and “negative”?

Structuring the Book

The range of topics in this book will be as broad as the fields of ACT and positive psychology. To help the reader find order in this chaos, we wanted to list each of the seven foundations that are discussed in subsequent chapters. The check marks in the table below indicate the components given the greatest emphasis. This single visual provides insight into the variety of topics and angles explored by our distinguished authors.

	Chapter 2: Mindfulness Broadens Awareness and Builds Meaning at the Attention-Emotion Interface	Chapter 3: Love and the Human Condition	Chapter 4: Self-Compassion and ACT	Chapter 5: Perspective Taking	Chapter 6: Committed Action
Functional Beliefs	√		√	√	
Mindfulness and Awareness	√	√	√		
Perspective Taking			√	√	
Values		√			√
Experiential Acceptance	√	√	√		
Behavioral Control					√
Cognitive Skill				√	

Chapter 7: Positive Interventions	Chapter 8: On Making People More Positive and Rational	Chapter 9: Microculture as a Contextual Positive Psychology Intervention	Chapter 10: Accepting Guilt and Abandoning Shame	Chapter 11: Using the Science of Meaning to Invigorate Values-Congruent, Purpose-Driven Action	Chapter 12: Nurturing Genius
√	√		√	√	
√	√		√		
√	√	√	√		
√	√	√	√	√	
			√	√	
√		√	√	√	
		√			√

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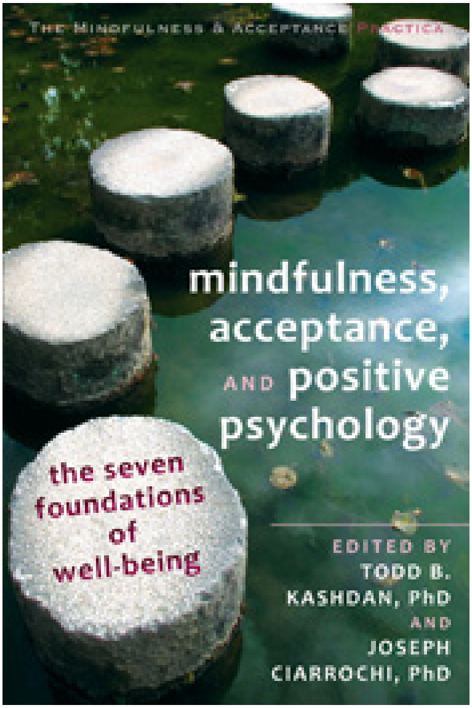
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