

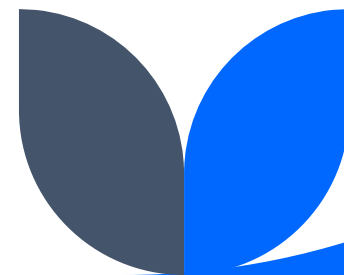
Web-based acceptance and commitment therapy for hoarding: Results and implications

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Disclosures

Utah State University provided funding for this study

We plan to make a public version of the piloted intervention available and the USU ACT Research Group will receive some income from this version



Background

- There are major unmet needs in hoarding treatment
- Few therapists are trained to treat hoarding, evidence-based therapy is time-intensive, and stigma may prevent help-seeking (Chasson et al., 2018)
- Web-based self-help has potential to address barriers of access, cost, and stigma

Current study

- We evaluated a self-help website for hoarding based on acceptance and commitment therapy
- ACT is an alternative treatment for hoarding that uses values, mindfulness, and acceptance to directly target problematic patterns of behavior that are linked to hoarding (e.g., experiential avoidance, low mindfulness, inattention, disconnection from values; Ong et al., 2018; Wheaton et al., 2011) and has shown initial efficacy in a multiple baseline trial (Ong et al., 2021)



Current study

- Core questions:
 - Does web-based ACT self-help for hoarding work?
 - Do people like it? Do they use it?
 - Does it work in the ways we would expect?
 - Increasing mindfulness
 - Decreasing stigma and psychological inflexibility



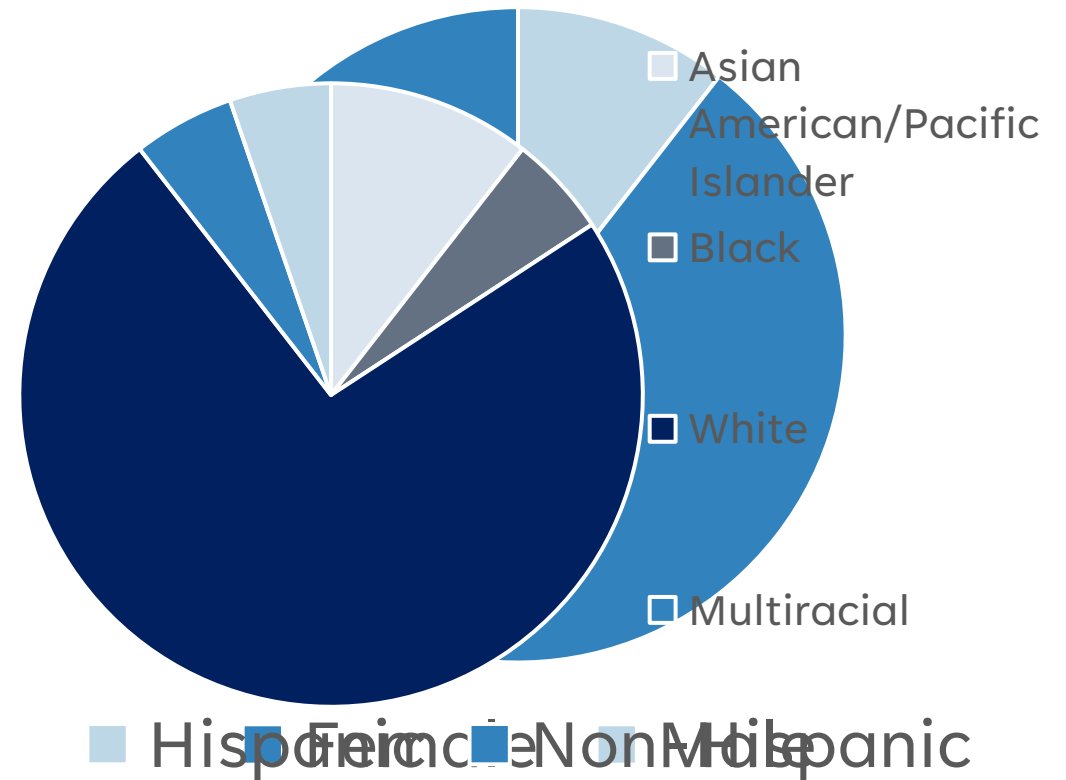
Methods

- Participants were randomly assigned to use ACT website with minimal supportive coaching, or be on a waitlist
- Website consisted of 16 interactive sessions; recommended schedule of 2 sessions/wk over 8 weeks
- Collected data on symptoms, functioning, and psychological processes at baseline, after treatment, and after a four-week follow-up

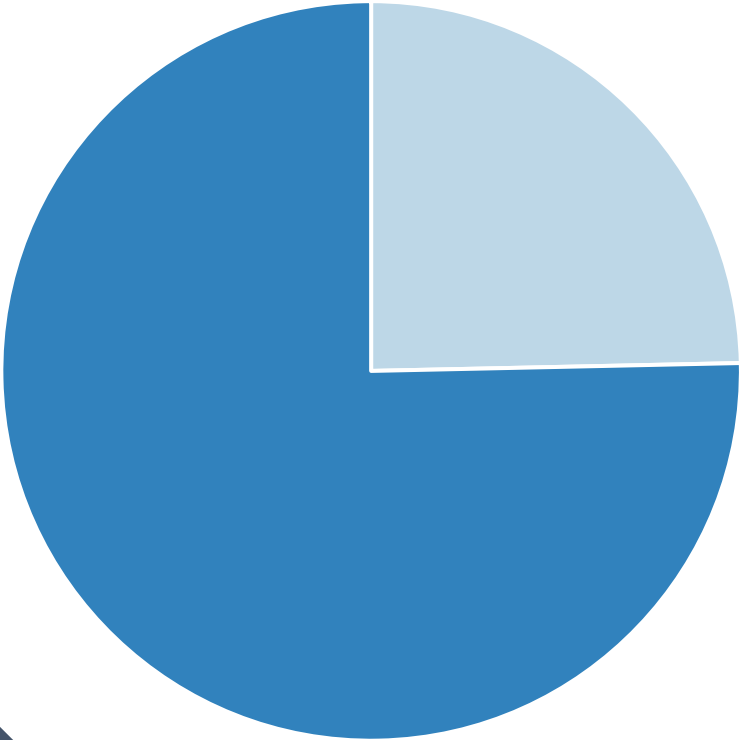
Participants

73 American adults meeting cutoff for clinically significant hoarding (Frost & Hristova, 2011)

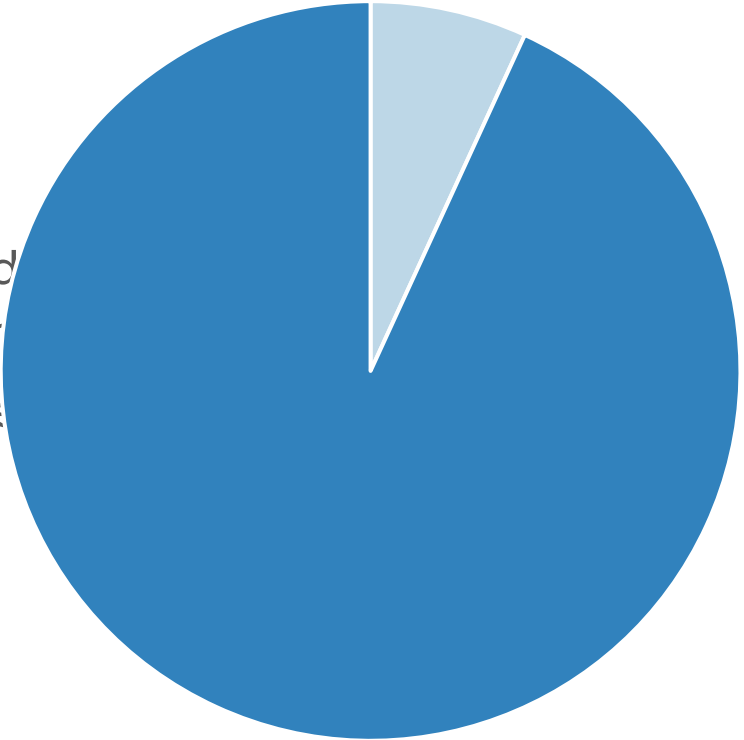
Average age: $M = 47.67$ years (SD = 14.34)



Participants



- Tried medication for hoarding
- Never tried



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Making Space | 4. Your Passengers

- Session 4
 - Intro
 - What Happens When We Try to Move Away
 - Driving with Passengers
 - Practice
 - Summary



The last two sessions have focused on learning to notice away moves and open up to difficult feelings instead. Pause to consider if there were any times when you opened up to your emotions this week, even for just a moment or two, and if so what it was like to open up rather than push away.

This session will focus on recognizing the difficult emotions that can show up when we're struggling with something in our lives, and **exploring how we can move forward even when emotions like shame and self-judgment are present**. We will cover:

- Why shame and self-judgment are normal
- How you can get unstuck by carrying these feelings with you
- Specific ways you can practice this skill



"We are like others not in our strengths, but precisely in our faults, our failings, our flaws."

- Ernest Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham



Making Space | 4. Your Passengers

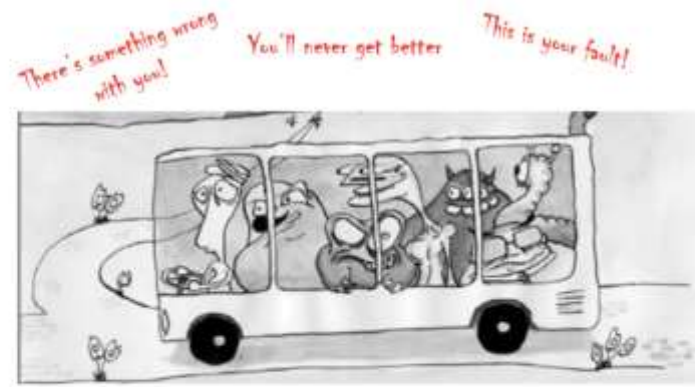
Passengers On The Bus

So if it doesn't work well to try and get away from shame and self-judgment, because they are so automatic, then we need to find a different way to respond to them. Instead of fighting them, we suggest learning to **carry them with you** instead.

Here's a metaphor to start looking at **how** to carry shame and self-judgment. Suppose you're **driving a bus loaded with passengers**. But the **passengers are your own harsh thoughts and feelings**.

As the driver you've chosen where you're going and the route you're going to take. But then the **passengers will start threatening, harassing, and heckling you** ("You're going the wrong way! You should have turned left back there! You're going to get us all lost!"). And some of these passengers are pretty intimidating and downright scary.

The threat that they have over you is that if you don't do as they say, they will come up to the front of the bus and get even more in your face.



Select each option to see how you might respond to these passengers:

Make a deal with them so they stay quiet

Throw them off the bus

Drive where you want, while being willing to have your passengers act up at times

To do this you have to stop the bus and go to the back to deal with them. But notice that you're no longer driving now. Instead you are caught up in dealing with the passengers. And they're very strong and they don't intend on leaving. Because there are more of them than you, no matter how hard you push and pull on them, you're not able to physically remove them.



Making Space | 4. Your Passengers

Noticing Buts

A good way to catch when you are caught up with your passengers, is to notice your "but's." These are all the **reasons you give for why you can't do things, because of how you are thinking or feeling.** You end up pitting what you want to do against difficult thoughts or feelings. In other words, you can't do what you need to because of your passengers.

Complete each of the "but" statements below by selecting an internal barrier that might stop you from doing it.

I want to let things go, but

I just can't

I want to get organized, but

I want to stop buying/getting so much, but

I want to make up with someone I argued with, but



- ✓ I just can't
- I'm too ashamed
- I can't change
- There's something wrong with me
- I'm not sure I can do it
- I don't know how to do it
- I think I'll fail
- I'm too overwhelmed
- I'm too angry
- I'm too depressed
- I'm too anxious
- I'm too resentful
- I'm too tired
- I don't think I have the time
- I'm too bored
- I'm too stressed
- I don't feel like doing it
- I'll do it later



Making Space | 4. Your Passengers

Getting Off Your Buts

What if you changed each of these "buts" to an "and"?

- I want to let things go, **and** *I just can't*
- I want to get organized, **and** *I'm not sure I can do it*
- I want to stop buying/getting so much, **and** *I think I'll fail*
- I want to make up with someone I argued with, **and** *I'm too tired*

In a way, isn't this more accurate? You want to do something *and* this means difficult passengers may come along for the ride.

Changing a "but" to an "and" can remind you that you can do these things even when uncomfortable thoughts and feelings come up.

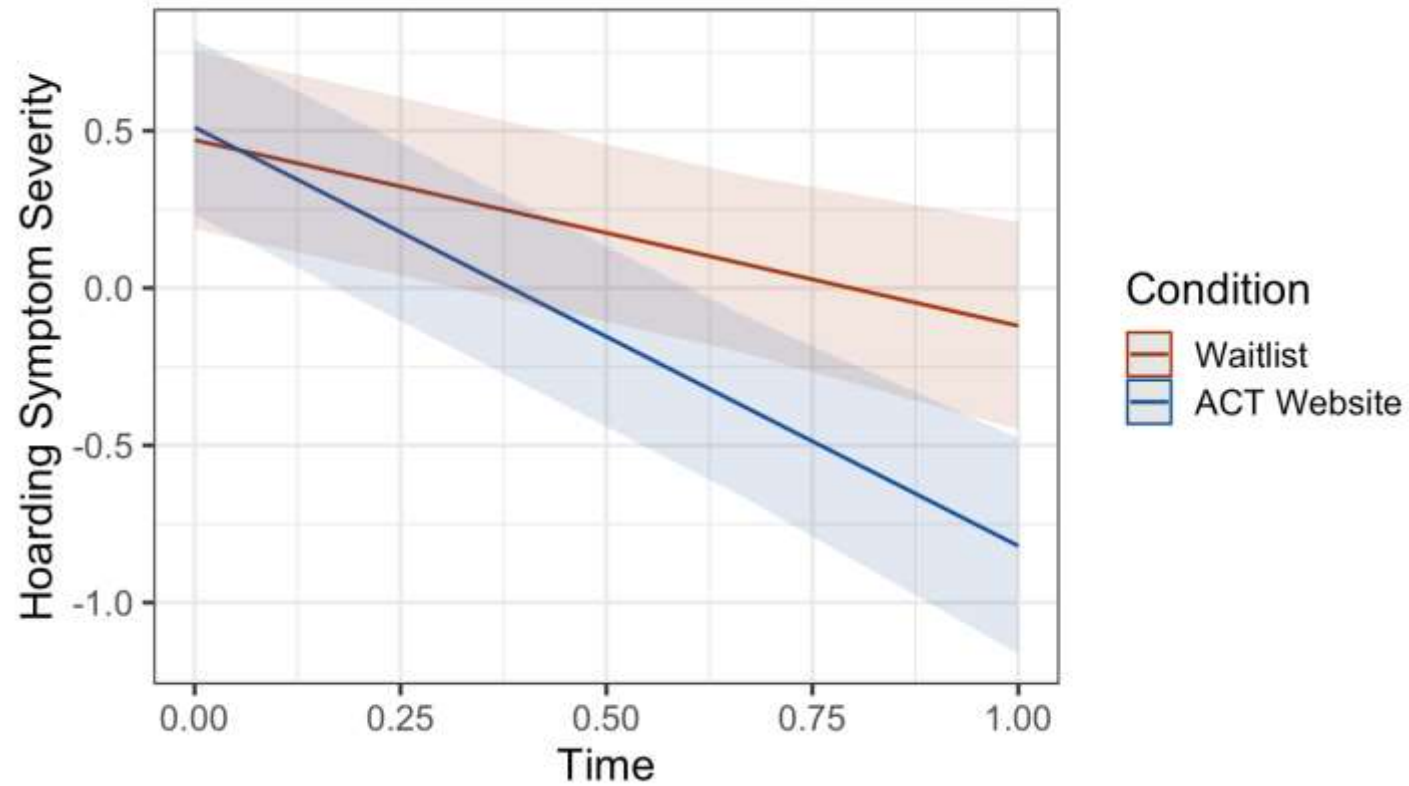
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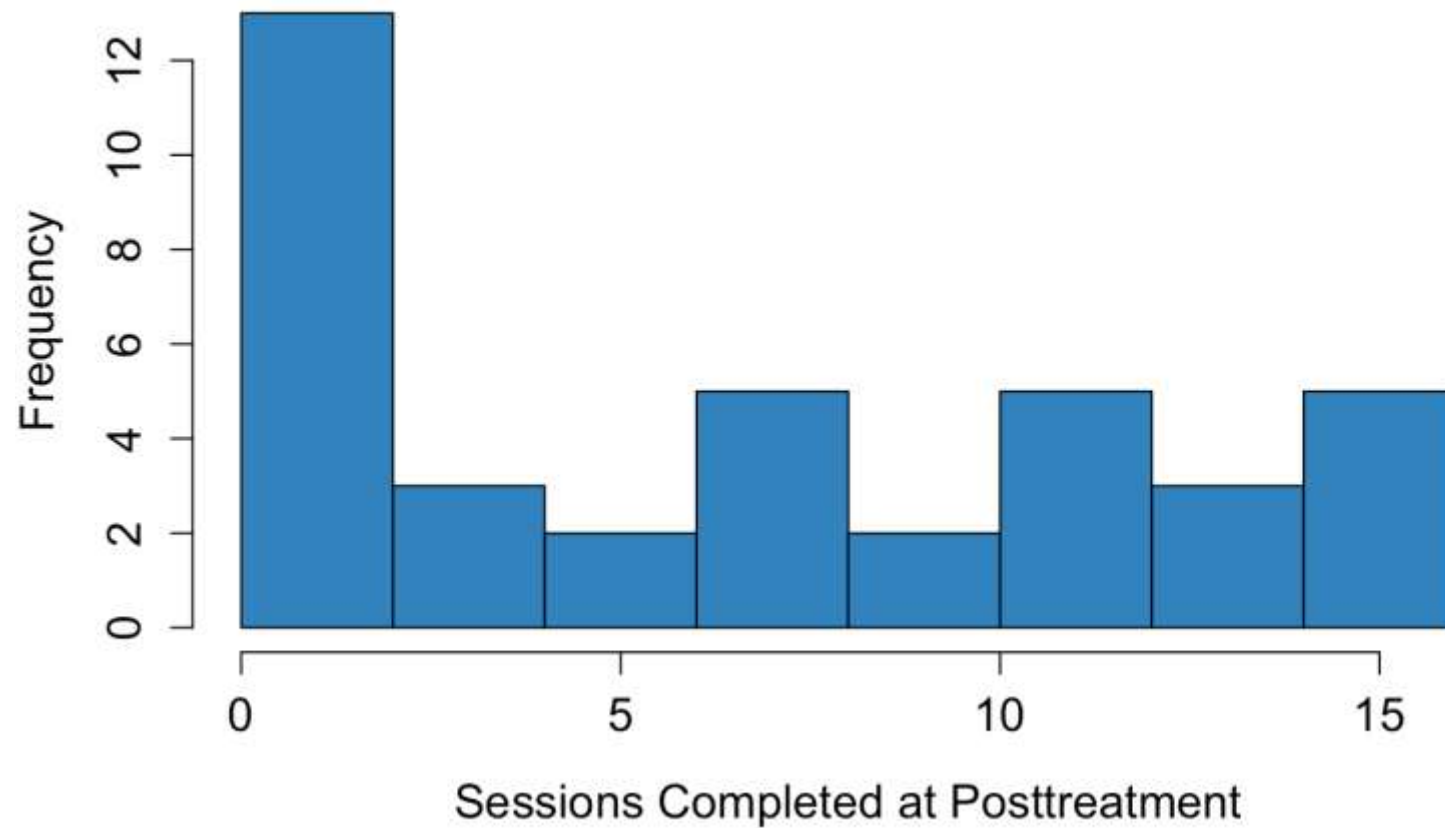
Results

Hoarding Symptoms by Condition



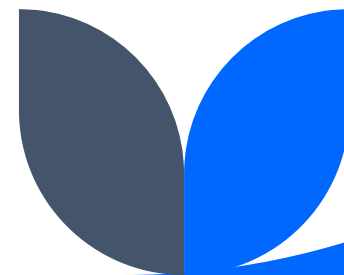
	Time β	Condition β	Time*Condition β	Baseline CGI-I β
Hoarding Symptoms	-0.59***	0.04	-0.74**	0.14
Difficulty Discarding	-0.46**	0.11	-0.74**	0.07
Excessive Acquisition	-0.51***	-0.05	-0.78***	0.16
Clutter	-0.53***	0.05	-0.45*	0.11
Functional Impairment	-0.28*	-0.05	-0.73***	0.05
Work/School Impairment	-0.15	-0.04	-0.57*	0.03
Social Impairment	-0.17	-0.02	-0.90***	0.13
Home/Family Impairment	-0.33*	0.07	-0.66**	0.08
Global Symptom Change	-0.17	0.44*	-1.42***	
Well-Being	0.45*	-0.17*	1.14***	-0.29***
Values Progress	0.09	-0.03	0.91***	-0.35***

Adherence



Processes of change

- In tests that looked at change over time – we did not find any evidence that changes in mindfulness, psychological inflexibility, or self-stigma caused later improvements in symptoms
- However, change in hoarding-related psychological inflexibility ($r = .73, p < .01$) and mindful awareness ($r = -.69, p < .01$) was correlated with change in hoarding symptoms over time



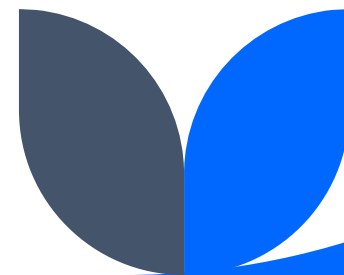
Discussion

- ACT self-help for hoarding:
 - Significantly improved hoarding symptoms, functioning, and quality of life relative to a waitlist control
 - Was satisfactory and user-friendly
- But:
 - It's hard to get people to stick with it
 - It's unclear whether it's working through the processes it should, or other, nonspecific factors



Clinical implications

- There are people with hoarding problems who are underserved by existing treatment, and interested in web-based self-help
- Web-based self-help can work for people with hoarding problems
 - It's hard to get people to stick with it; forms of support or accountability may be important



Clinical implications

- ACT shows initial promise as a treatment for hoarding
 - Further research is needed, but ACT may be appropriate as a second-line treatment or when there are other clinical reasons such as treating comorbid depression/anxiety/OCD
- Mindfulness, values clarification, emotional acceptance, and other processes included in ACT may be helpful in treating hoarding
 - More direct research is needed



References

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Thank you

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