



Identifying and Defining Private Events for Clinical Intervention for Youth with ASD

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Private Events

- Behavior that occur within the organism's skin
 - Thoughts, feelings, urges
- Some are probably respondent
 - Urges
- Most are operant
 - Thoughts & Feelings




Radical Behaviorism and Private Events

- Behavior is a function of stimuli and other variables in the environment
- The environment consist of things outside of the organism's skin AS WELL AS things within the organism's skin
- Private events are unique in that no one else has access to them
 - Headache
- This limited access does not mean that private stimuli affect behavior any differently than public stimuli




Radical Behaviorism and Private Events

- Therefore, private behavior is different in location but not different in kind than public behavior (Skinner, 1953 and 1965)



Importance of the way thoughts, feelings, urges, and overt behavior relate

- Communication/ self-advocacy
 - "The lighting in here gives me a headache and that makes me think this class sucks. I want to leave the class."
 - Either leave or ask to turn down the lights.
 - "I can tell you I have a headache; I need to rest for a while and not do this work right now."
- Decision Making
 - Decide to go on specific outings because you know you like them and they make you happy versus declining or going on outings that in the past have made you angry



Importance of the way thoughts, feelings, urges, and overt behavior relate

- Boundary setting & abiding
 - Knowing when you are uncomfortable
 - Asking someone to stop saying or doing something
 - "I don't like when you praise me. It make me think I am dumb, and then I start to feel angry"

Private Events and People with and ASD



- Children with autism have difficulty understanding complex social emotions
 - Pride, embarrassment, guilt, loneliness (e.g., Kapps, Yirmiya, & Sigman, 1992; Kasari, Chamberlain, Paparella & Baumbinger, 1999; Kasari, Paparella & Baumbinger, 1999; Baumbinger & Kasari, 2000)
- Children with an ASD better at identifying social conditions associated with emotion (e.g., not having anyone to do things with) than co-occurring feelings or emotions (Baumbinger & Kasari, 2000)

Measurement and Shaping of Private Event in Persons with an ASD



- Goal = reliability with knowledgeable observer
- Teach relationships between public events and private events
 - Public events most often occasion (thoughts or feelings) or elicit (urges) private behavior
 - Teach person with an ASD to identify private behavior and relate that behavior (i.e., explain its emission) in relation to public events
 - Reward reliability

ASD Possible Intervention Targets: Tacting Body States



- Heart rate
 - Pounding faster, normal pace
- Changes in body temperature
 - Feeling warmer, feeling colder
- Changes in “stomach” feelings
 - Nausea, butterflies, emptiness
- Changes in oral & esophageal states
 - Lump in throat, dry mouth

Teaching Feelings



- Look for public correlates to private events & link these to context and history
- Tired
 - Yawning, slumping shoulders, reduced rate of movement
- Embarrassed
 - Blushing, turning away
- Nervous
 - Shaky voice, change in voice volume

Linking & Matching Private & Public Behavior



- link thoughts and feelings to what you say and do...
- Congruence – What you are thinking, feeling, and doing
 - Do they match? Laughing when hurt and thinking you want to hit the person next to you
 - Thinking you want to break the window, feeling sad, while smiling and talking about the weather

An Examples of the Importance of Matching what you say and your feelings



- At the top of the rock climbing wall and you say “Can someone please get me down from here?” In a tone that sounds sarcastic or joking (others laugh) – Others do not listen, your heart is pounding
 - Need to say, “I am really scared. I really want to get down.”

Some Final Thoughts...

- No evidence exists that people with ASD do not experience private events just as the rest of us do
- Their level of linguistic (verbal) development probably relates to their ability to learn feelings and thoughts
- We've gotten SO MUCH BETTER at teaching people with an ASD new language skills
- Expand ASD intervention to include effective instruction around private events