

The Efficacy of ACT Skills Training for International Student Sojourners

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Overview

Importance of the study

Commonalities among intercultural competence models

What is the potential for RFT/ACT to enhance intercultural competence?

Methodology

Results

Implications for future research

Importance of the study

China accounts for 22.4 percent of international student enrolments in Australia - approximately 339, 763 (DEBP, 2014)

International students experience difficulties with adjustment, social isolation, English language skills, studies, unmet expectations, culture shock, seeking employment and psychological stress (Khawaja and Stallman, 2011)

Han, Han, Luo, Jacobs, and Jean-Baptiste (2013) - Chinese students at Yale University - 45% self-reported symptoms of depression and 27% self-reported anxiety symptoms.

International students use more dysfunctional coping styles, less social support and a report a disparity between former expectations and their current experiences (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008)



Chinese international students did not consider the university counselling service as something to help them with personal difficulties (Ang and Liamputtong, 2008)

Boey (1999) and Chang (2007) demonstrated Chinese students were resistant to seeking psychological assistance for mental health problems.

Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuchi, and Zane (1991) revealed Chinese students underutilise mental health services.

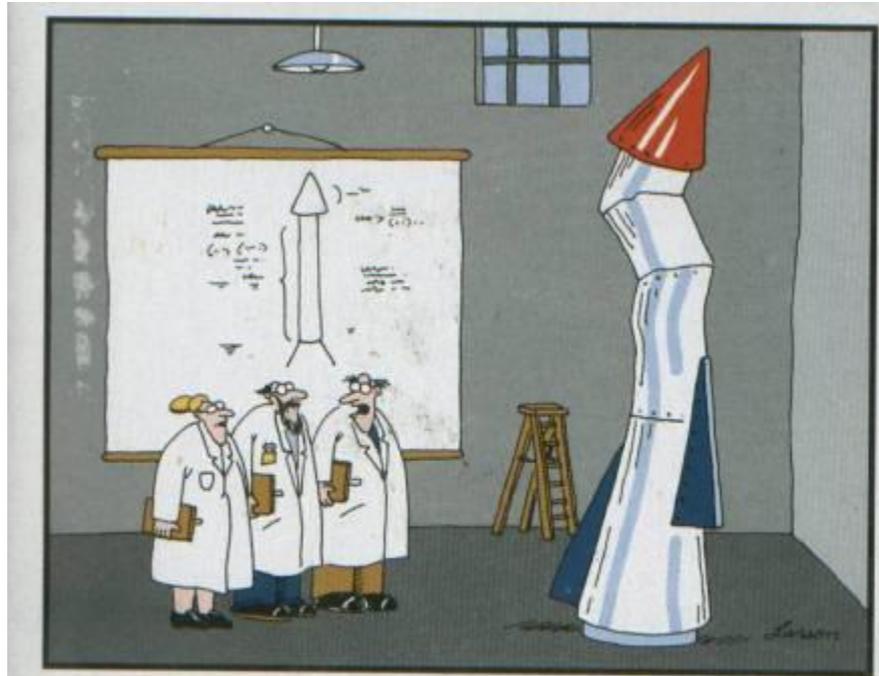
Numerous campus medical practitioners reported a tendency for Chinese students to present with physical complaints however requiring referral to psychological services (Aubrey, 2014).

Traditional somato-psychic approaches to treating mental illness, while traditional Buddhist and Taoist interventions for psychological distress are not so commonly applied (Chang & Kleinman, 2002).

Cook and Hayes (2010) Asian international students no more mindfully self-accepting than their Caucasian counterparts. Used significantly less acceptance-oriented coping and more control-oriented coping strategies than their Caucasian peers.

The top ten ICC frameworks (not in any particular order)

- The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) (Kelley & Meyers, 1993)
- The Cross-Cultural Sensitivity Scale (CCSS) (Pruegger & Rogers, 1993)
- **The Cultural Intelligence Model (CQ) (Ang et al., 2007)**
- The IBA and BASIC (Ruben & Kealey, 1979)
- **The Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) (Matsumoto, Hiramaya, & LeRoux, 2006)**
- Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) (Arasaratnam, 2009)
- The Intercultural Sensitivity Index (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992)
- The Intercultural Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (IDI) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003)
- The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) and
- **The Multicultural Personality Inventory (Van Der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).**



"It's time we face reality, my friends. ...
We're not exactly rocket scientists."

Commonalities among ICC Models

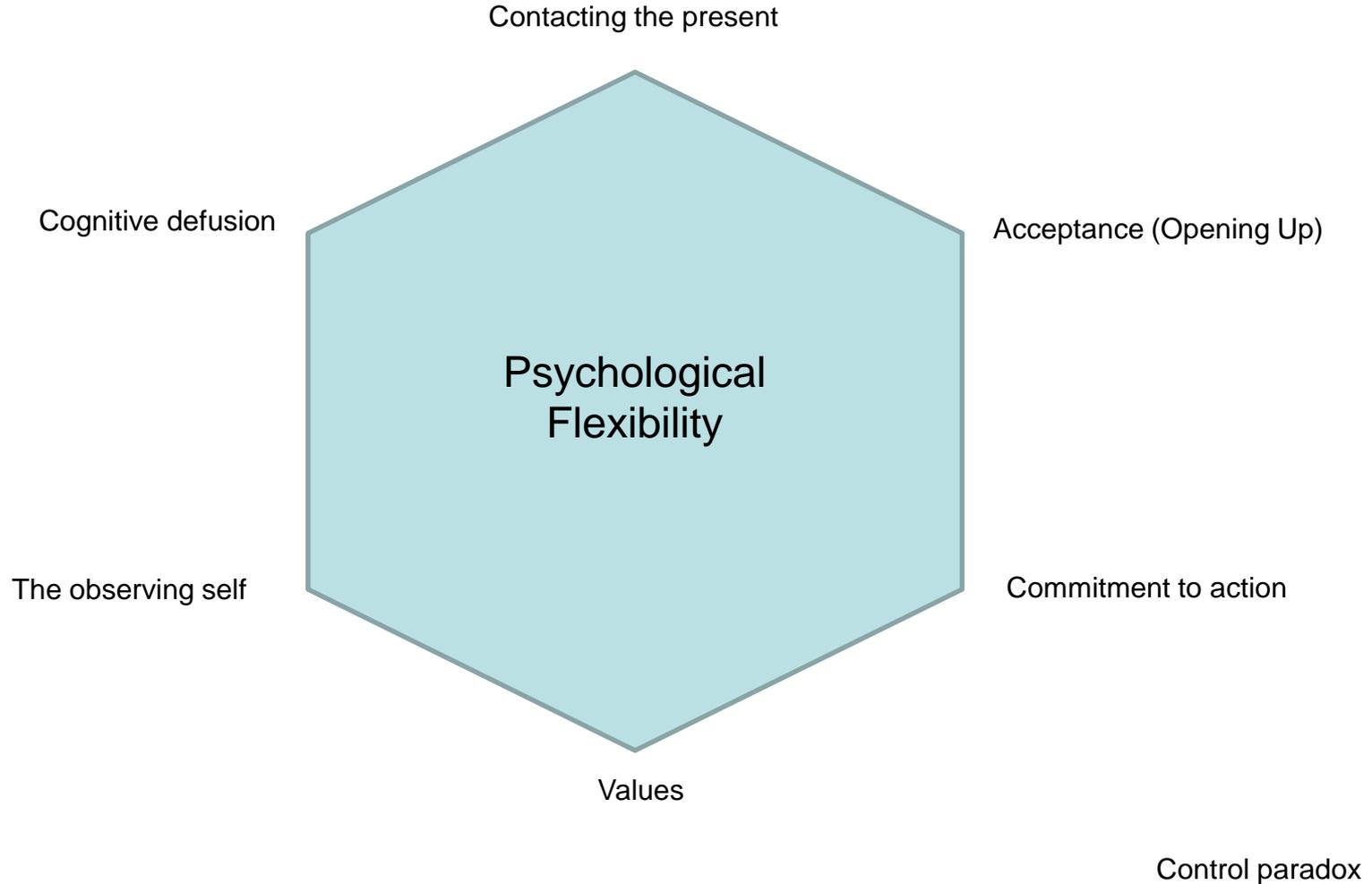
Domains identified by Matsumoto and Hwang (2013)	Common factors or subdivisions of ICC Models identified by Matsumoto and Hwang (2013)	Other commonalities identified in the literature
Domain 1: Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CQ's 'Motivation' • MPQ's 'Social Initiative and Open-mindedness' • ICAPS 'Openness' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Attitudes' in Deardorff's (2006) Intercultural Competence Framework (ICF) • 'Curiosity and Motivation' in Bennett, Landis Bennett's (2004) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and • 'Attitude' in Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model
Domain 2: Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CQ's 'Behaviour' • MPQ's 'Flexibility' • ICAPS' Flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Cognitive Flexibility' and 'Behavioural Skills' for Bennett et al.'s (2004) IDI • 'Internal Outcome' for Deardorff's (2006) ICF • 'Adaptability' in Byram's (1997) ICC
Domain 3: Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CQ's 'Metacognition' • MPQ's 'Cultural Empathy' • ICAPS' 'Critical Thinking' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Interaction Analysis' Bennett, et al.'s (2004) IDI • 'Empathy' Byram's (1997) ICC
Domain 4: Emotion Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ's 'Emotion' • ICAPS 'Emotion Regulation' 	

Why use ACT training/RFT principles to raise intercultural competence potential?

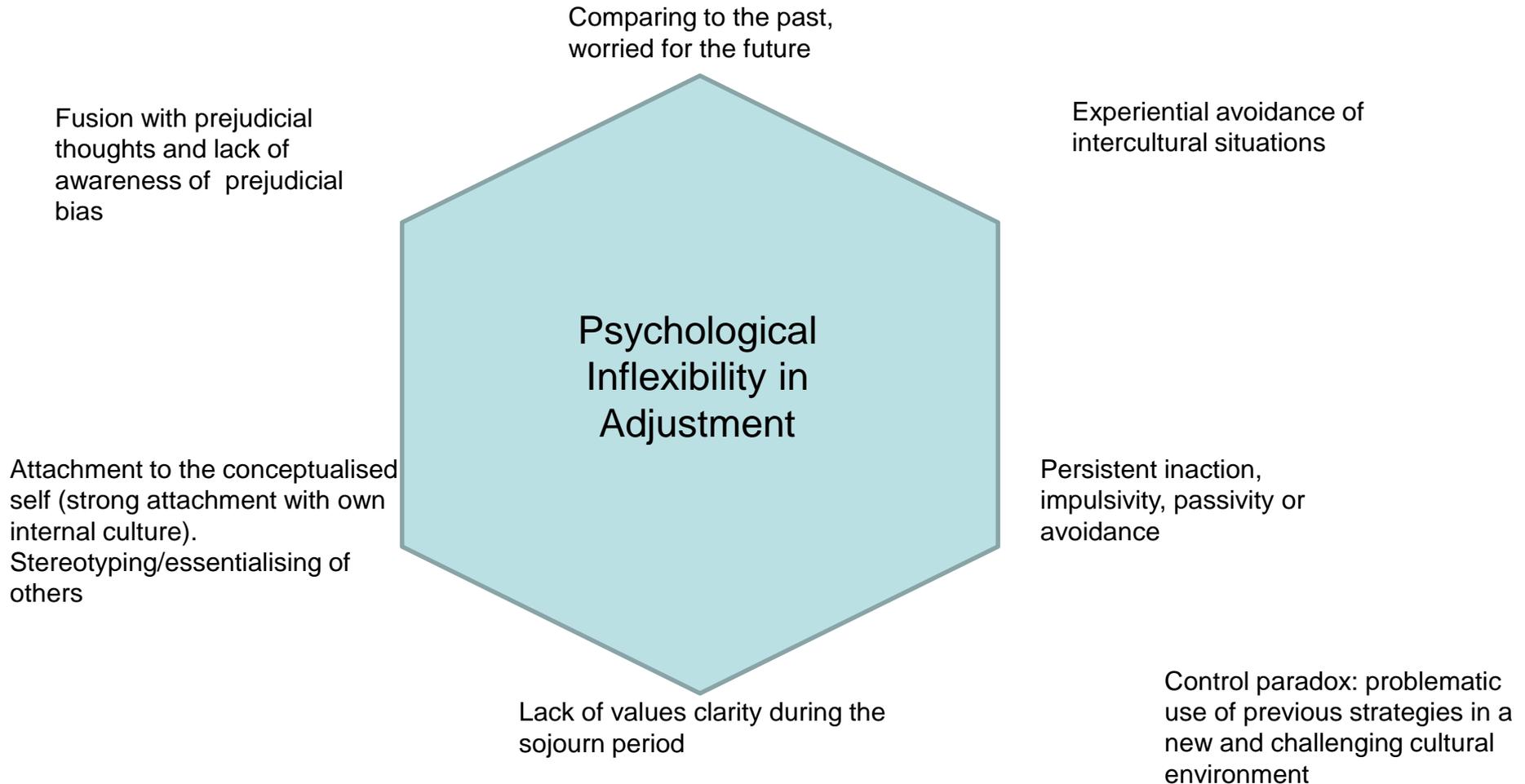
- As researchers continue to refine intercultural competency constructs into measurable scientific variables, opportunities exist for contextual behavioural science.
- ACT self-help book for Japanese international sojourners, showed improved general mental health at post intervention and follow up periods (Muto, et al., 2011).
- Lillis and Hayes (2007) showed ACT's effectiveness in increasing positive behavioural intentions, acceptance and cognitive defusion of prejudicial thoughts and developed a greater awareness of prejudicial bias.

- So far no ICC models use cognitive defusion, acceptance, control paradox concepts to work with prejudicial bias.
- Relational Frame Theory (RFT) provides insights into how humans psychologically create links between stimuli. This process is known as relational framing or derived stimulus relations.
- Effective application of RFT concepts have worked for depression and anxiety amongst adult populations, cognitive and language development capability among children with autism spectrum disorder

The ACT Model



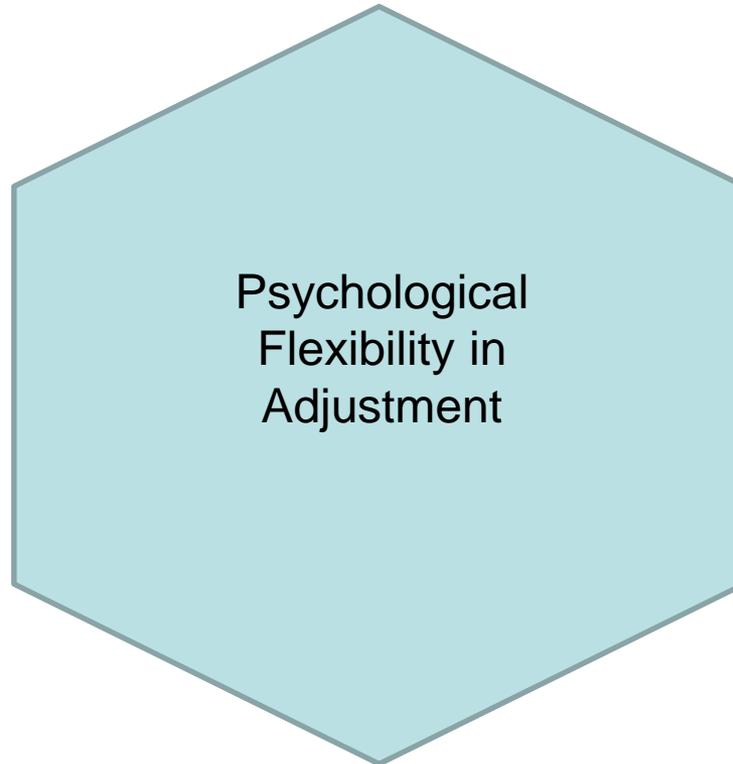
A Conceptualised ACT Model for Intercultural Adjustment



A Conceptualised ACT Model

Contact with the present

Cognitive Defusion from prejudicial thoughts and awareness of prejudicial bias



Opening up to uncomfortable feelings in intercultural situations. Acceptance of unwanted private experiences during the sojourn.

Self-as-context to resolve identity disturbances such as:

- identity gaps in the new culture
- stereotyping/essentialising

Commitment to action – goals are identified specific to the valued directions of the sojourn

Valued-directions:

- to enhance the sojourner's existential function in the new environment
- to motivate cultural learning

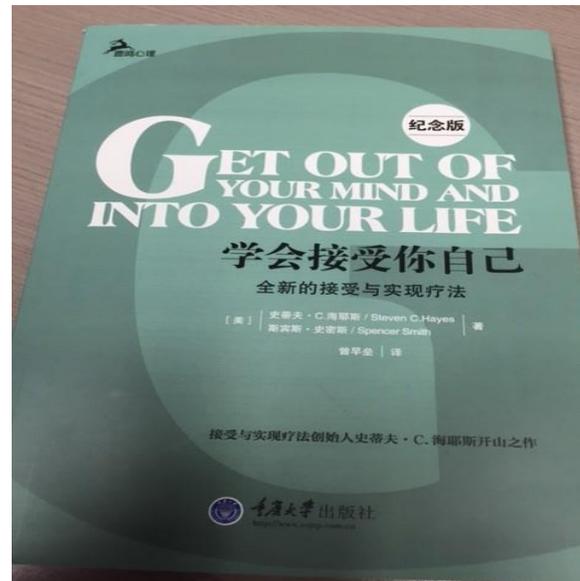
Control paradox: effective 'letting go' of previous strategies to accommodate new ways of living. Metaphors: Tug of war (drop the rope), The Chinese finger trap

Methodology

- 30 international students from mainland China 18-25 years
- English pathway students commencing university for the first time
- All participants relatively new to Australia (within 12 months)
- University Ethics Approval - recruitment flyers and emails
- Recruitment: ACT Group and a Waitlisted Control

ACT Group:

- provided with an ACT self help workbook in simplified Chinese
- invited participants to an ACT 'Skills Training' workshop
- sent fortnightly emails with ACT Mindfully resources (short animated videos, tip sheets)



The ACT Treatment Group participants were measured at pre-intervention (time period one) and at post intervention (time period two)

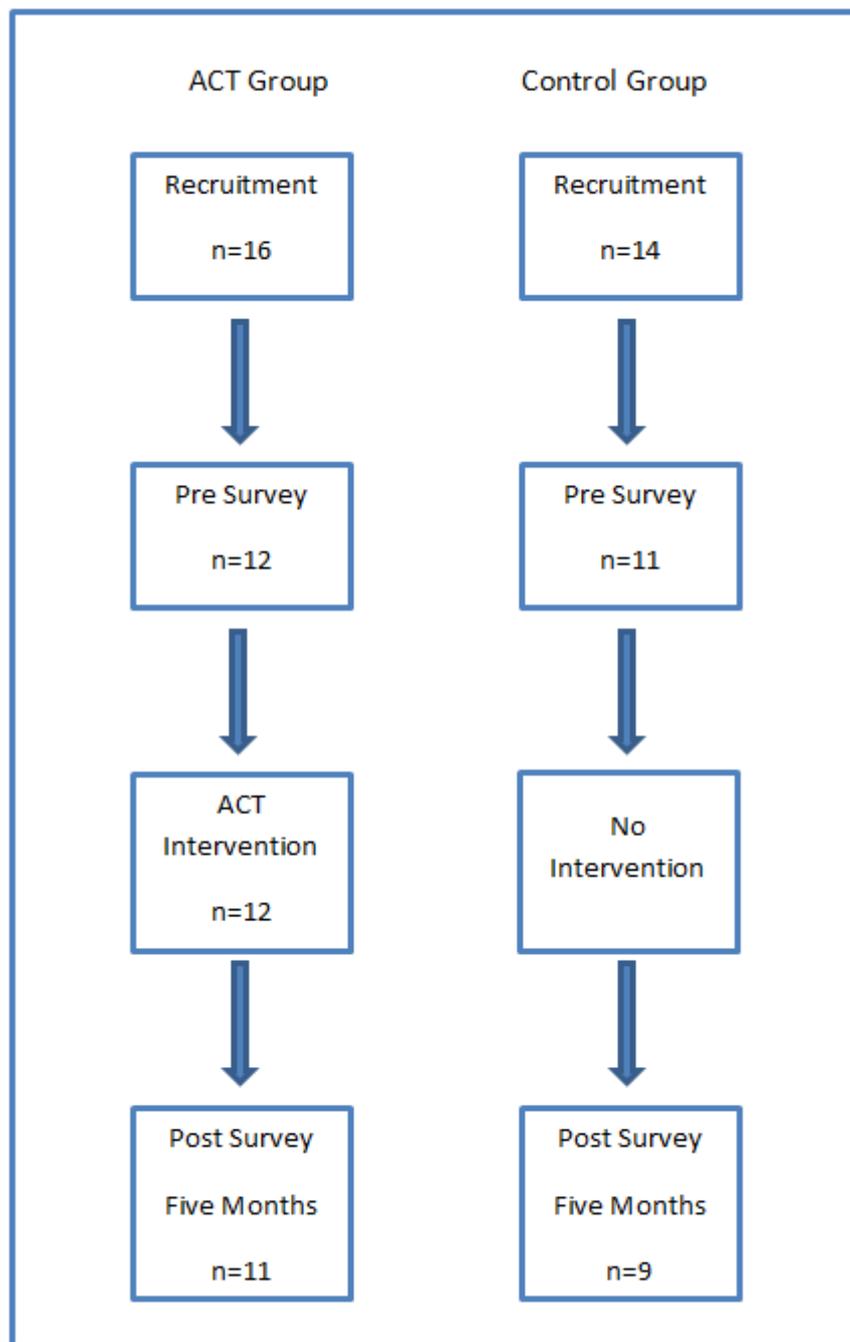
The control group was assessed at time period one and time period two to coincide with the ACT treatment group

Participants were assessed during a break period two weeks prior to the commencement of their degree (time period one) and during the break period at the end of the academic semester (time period two) – five months later.

The measures taken at both time points:

Positive acculturation, psychological morbidity, acceptance and action, and mindfulness and a prejudicial bias awareness, defusion and action questionnaire and a brief qualitative questionnaire





Results

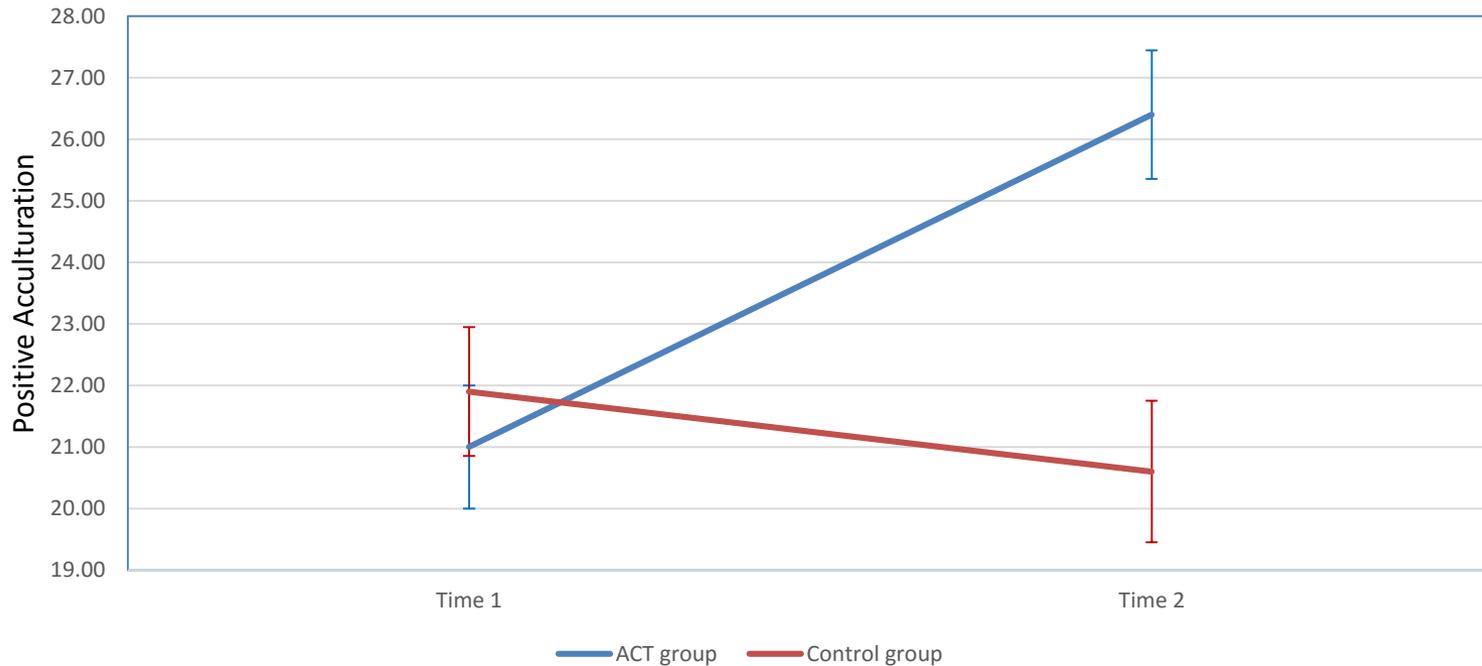


Figure 2. Significant interaction effects were found for positive acculturation in the ACT intervention group between the two time periods

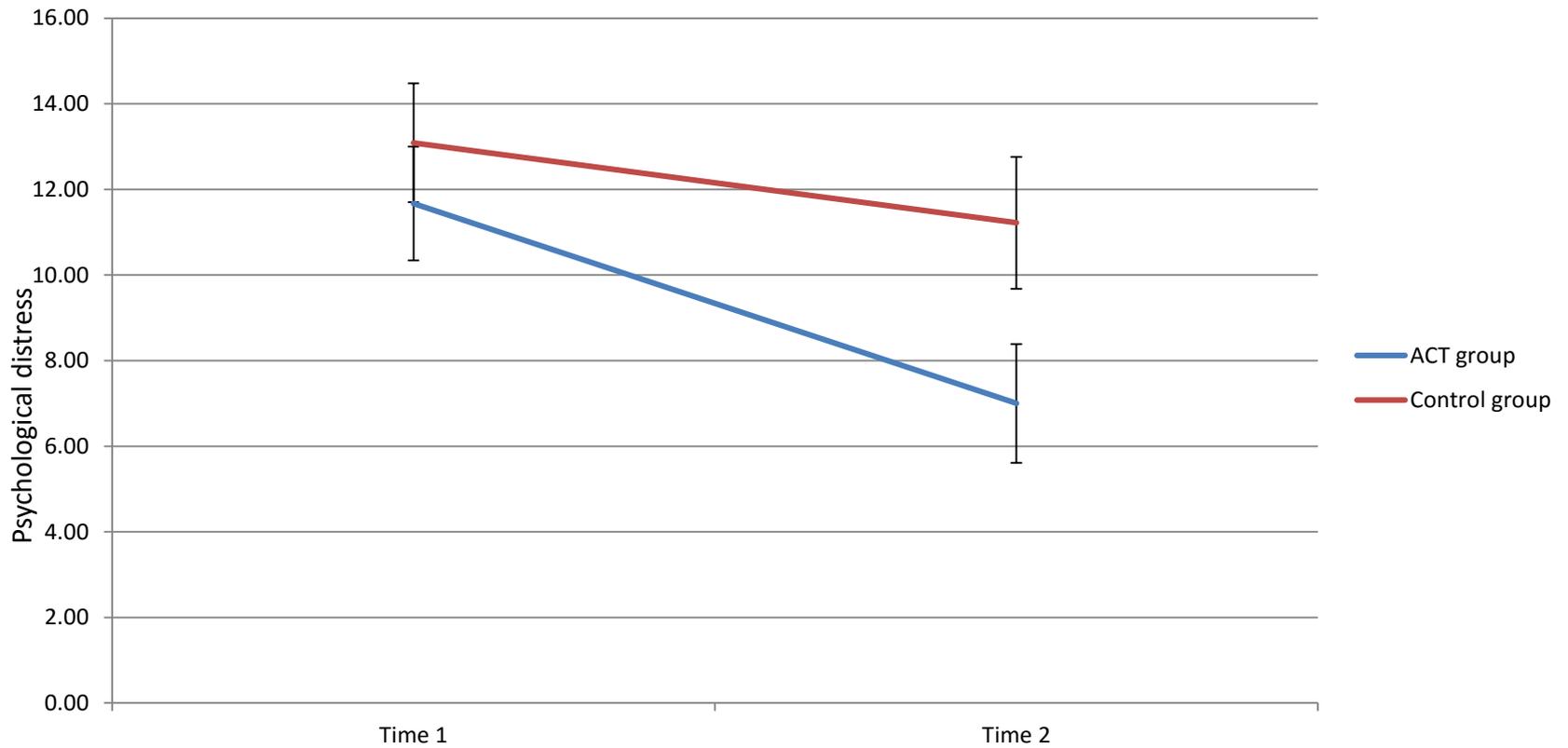


Figure 3. Psychological distress over the two time periods

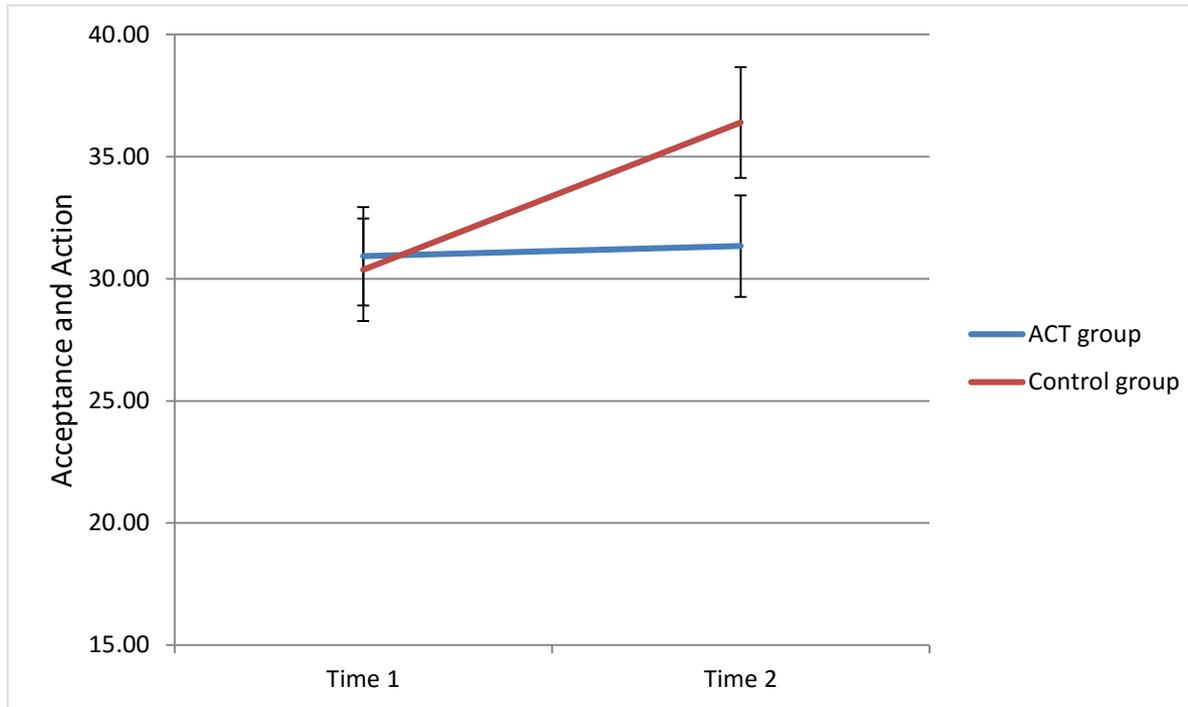


Figure 4. Acceptance and action interaction over time periods

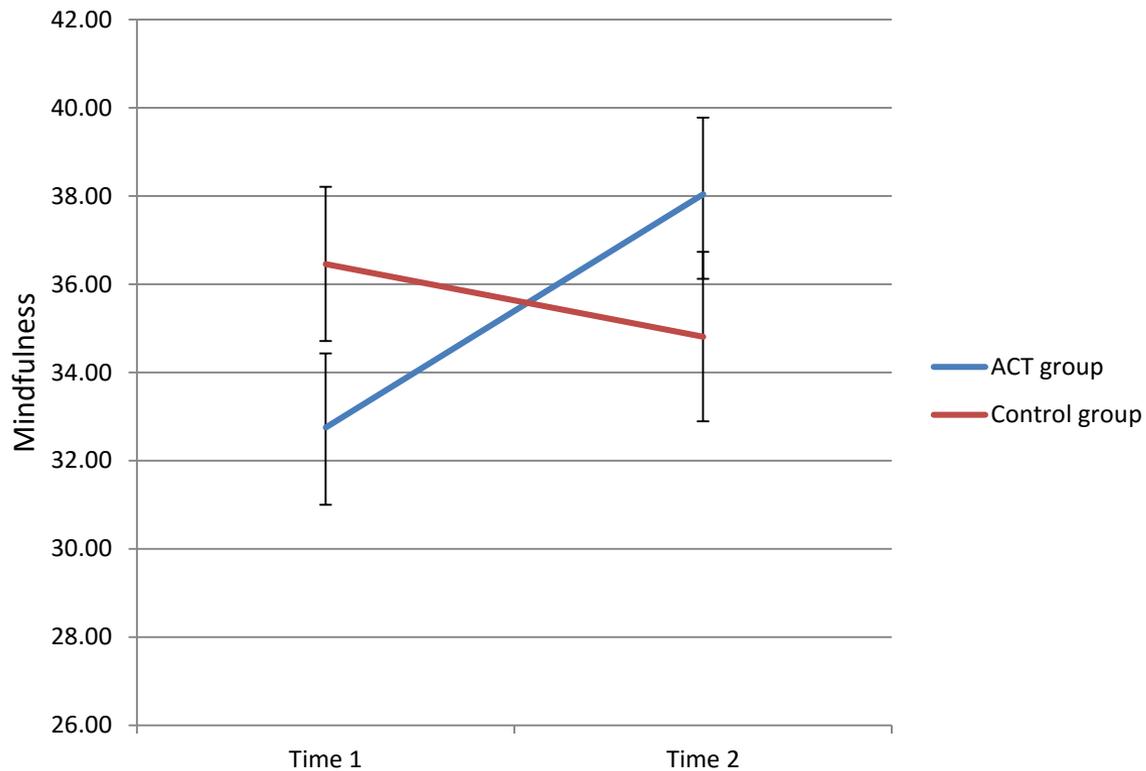


Figure 5. Significant interaction effects were found for mindfulness in the ACT intervention group between the two time periods.

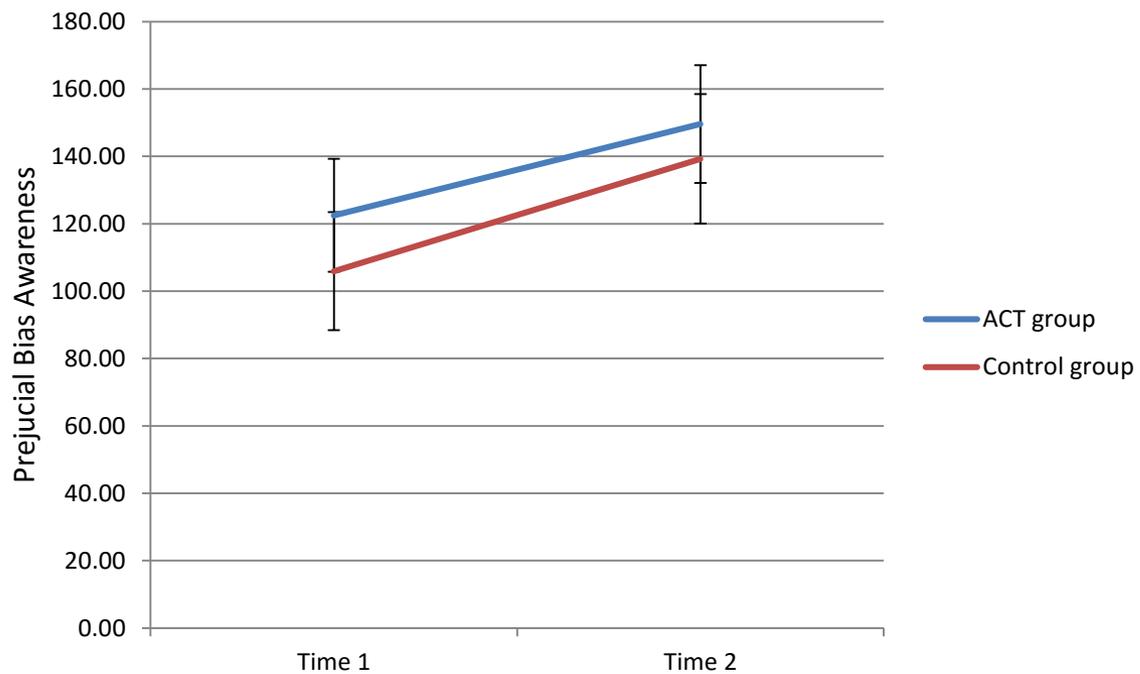


Figure 6. Prejudicial bias awareness over the two time periods

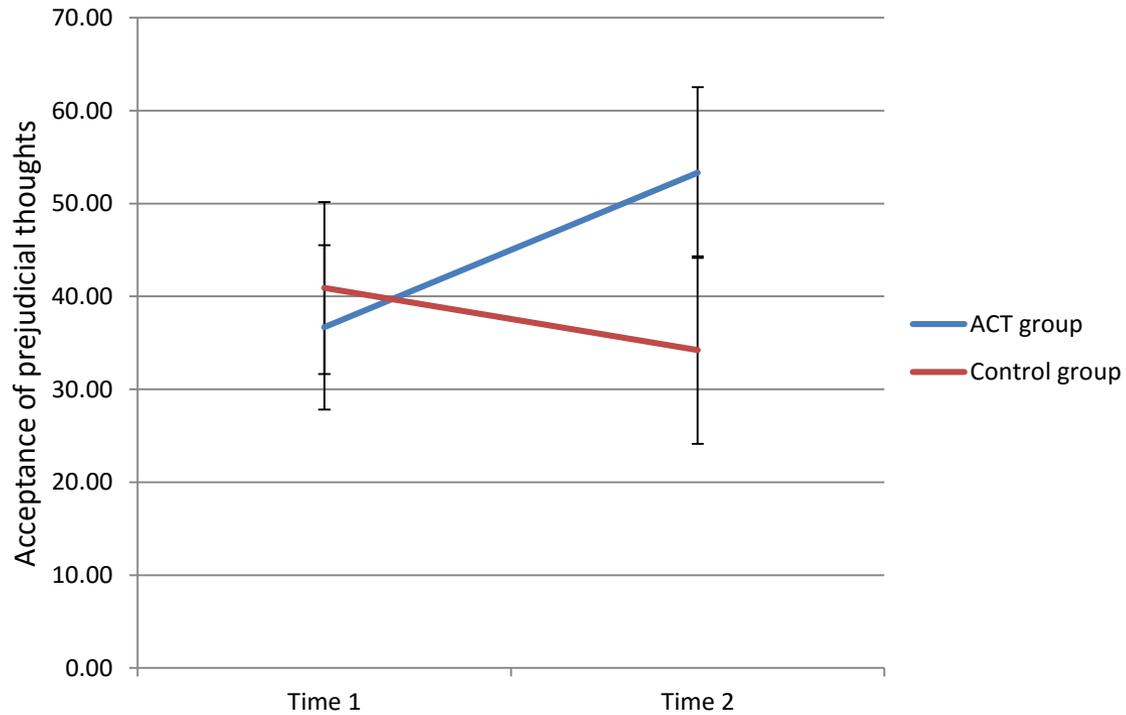


Figure 7. Acceptance of prejudicial thoughts over the two time periods

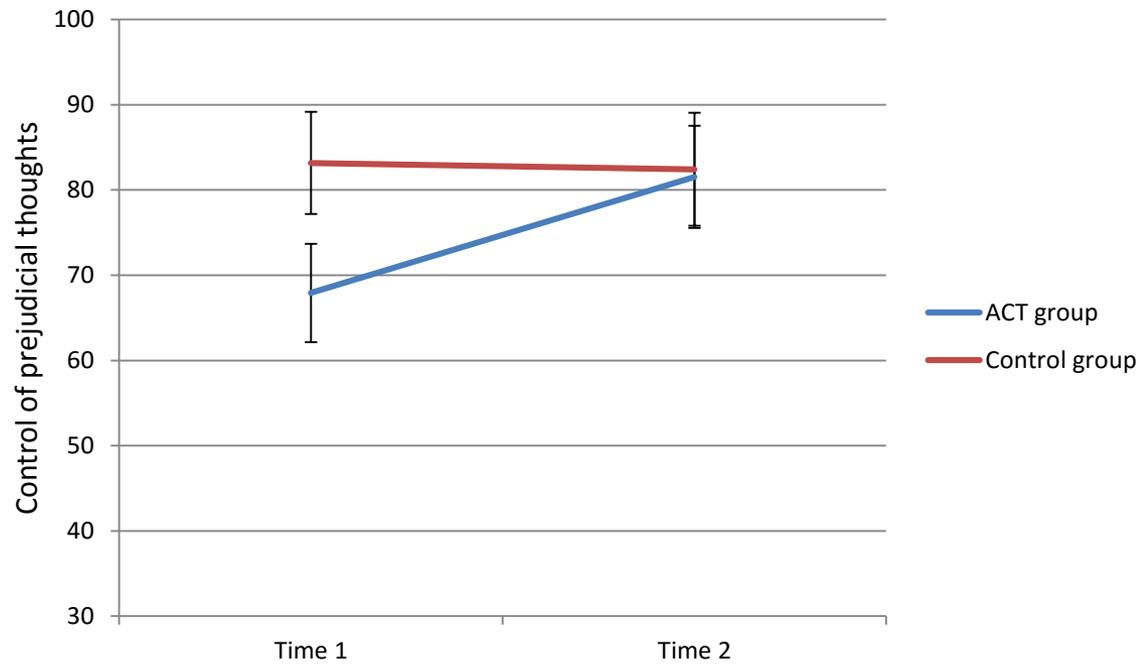


Figure 8. Control of prejudicial thoughts over the time periods

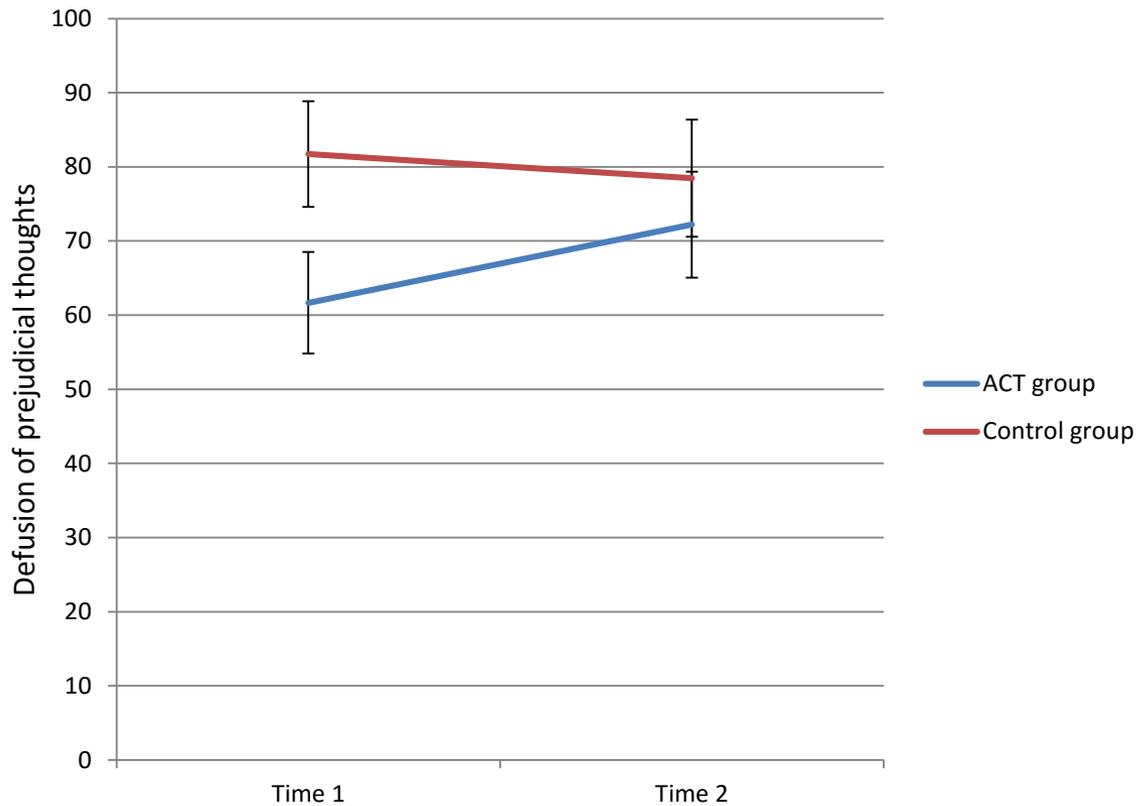


Figure 9. Cognitive defusion of prejudicial thoughts over the time periods

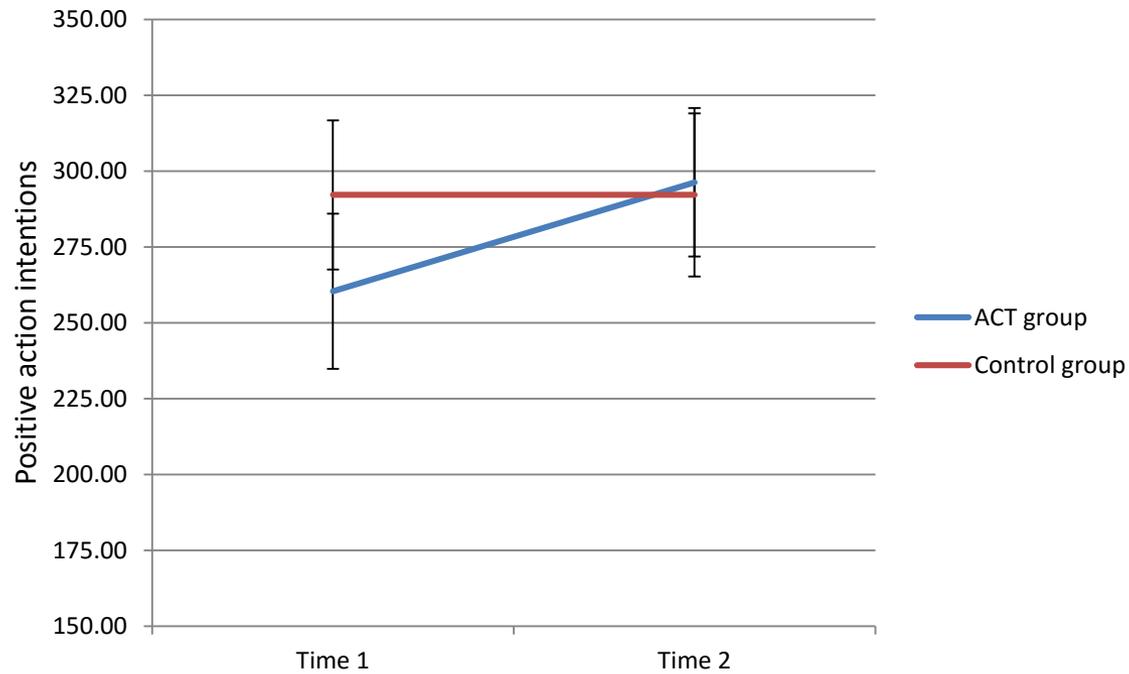


Figure 10. Positive action intentions over the time periods

Qualitative Feedback

- Themes of self-acceptance, mindfulness and valued directions were illustrated:
- “...accept myself”
- “...helped me find more ways to solve problems”
- “When I first arrived in this country I was confused about the circumstances here, after reading this book, I have learned how to deal with stress”
- “When I feel lonely and lost my aim, this method helps me to think positively”
- “Because it helps me to receive a true me”
- “It helps me to calm down and feel the environment around”
- “It provides me some useful ways to balance my life”

Five participants reported cognitive defusion skills were very useful and commented:

- “It was really useful for me to learn how to see my thoughts, emotions and don’t always get lost in it.”
- “I can use a different perspective to solve problems”
- “I should let it go and keep peaceful thoughts”
- “Help my inner peace”
- “Helps me deal with problems”

Acceptance skills were also ranked highest by four of the participants and some expressed the following:

- “The skill helps me to confront my negative emotions”
- “Help me to stop worry”

Other participants regarded the valued directions and mindfulness as very helpful to their life and study in Australia and were quoted:

- “Helps me aware of what am I doing and who I am”
- “Mastering this skill enable me to set my goal and go for it, when I realize my direction I can complete it with passion”

Implications for Future Research

- promise for the utility of brief ACT interventions for international students studying abroad.
- further research using RFT can potentially yield valuable interventions for this population
- RFT can potentially contribute to the growing body of knowledge in intercultural competence