Dialectics in DBT®: The Power of “And”
Dialectics in DBT®

• Dialectics
  – A system of argumentation (e.g., Hegelian dialectics)
  – A method of persuasion (e.g., Zeno of Elea, Plato’s *Dialogues*)
  – A political philosophy (e.g., Marx)
  – An entire semester-long graduate course for political science majors, philosophy majors, and the captain of the debate team!
Dialectics in DBT®

• Dialectics in DBT®
  – The synthesis of thesis and antithesis, which:

  • Acknowledges that change is the only constant in the universe as we know it, and is a process.

  • Acknowledges that all things are made of opposing forces.

  • Brings together the most valuable parts of two polarities to form a new meaning, understanding, or solution in a given situation.

Sources: Engels (1883); Linehan (1993); Dimeff & Koerner (2007)
Dialectics in DBT®

• Core dialectic: Acceptance and Change
  – Although acceptance does not guarantee change, acceptance is a pre-requisite to change.
  – DBT® therapists continually balance acceptance of where the patient is in the moment, while pushing them toward change, and vice versa...
    • When the patient demands change, the therapist also emphasizes acceptance.
  – Too much emphasis on change or on acceptance limits the patient’s progress.

Sources: Linehan (1993); Dimeff & Koerner (2007)
Dialectics in DBT®

We are always looking for the “middle path” - which is somewhere in between and rarely in the middle.
Dialectics:

Both ↔ And

Not “Either/Or”
The Dialectics of DBT®: Dialectical Synthesis

Either
Or
The Dialectics of DBT®: Dialectical Synthesis
The Dialectics of DBT®: Dialectical Synthesis

Either:
I want to die/
I don’t want to live.

Both

And

Or:
I want to live.
The Dialectics of DBT®: Dialectical Synthesis

Either:
I want to die / I don’t want to live.

Or:
I want to live, just not the way I’m currently living.

I want to live.
The Dialectics of DBT®: Dialectical Synthesis

Either:
- I want to die
- I don’t want to live

Or:
- I want to live, just not the way I’m currently living
- I want to live

Suicide
Build a life worth living
Keep living and suffering
Dialectical Examples

I am doing the best I can. AND I need to do better.

I hate him/her. AND I love him/her.

Others need to change for me to feel better. AND I need to change for me to feel better.

This pain is unbearable. AND I can tolerate this pain.
The Dialectics of DBT®: Patient Dialectics

Unrelenting Crises  |  Emotional Vulnerability  |  Active Passivity

Apparent Competence  |  Inhibited Grieving

Source: Linehan (1993)
Family Dialectical Dilemmas: Adolescent DBT® and Beyond

Normalizing pathological behaviors vs. Pathologizing normative behaviors

Forcing autonomy vs. Fostering dependence

Excessive Leniency vs. Authoritarian Control

Source: Rathus, Miller & Linehan (2006)
The Dialectics of DBT®: Therapist Dialectics

Unwavering Centeredness

Change Orientation

Benevolent Demanding

Nurturing

Compassionate Flexibility

Acceptance Orientation

Source: Linehan (1993)