

**Response to Commentaries on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for "Taro,"  
a Japanese Client with Chronic Depression: A Replicated Treatment-Evaluation**

**Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is "Haruki Murakami"**

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**ABSTRACT**

In response to Kanazawa's (2015) commentary on my case study of Taro (Muto & Mitamura, 2015), I reflect on the issue of the degree of "Japaneseness" in my approach to the case study. I pursue this by anchoring the perspective of my work in the perspective of the well-known Japanese novelist, Haruki Murakami. I also respond to a point made by Hayes (2015) in his commentary on my case study.

*Key words:* Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Japanese client; "Japaneseness"; writings of Haruki Murakami

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Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is "Haruki Murakami." I mean this statement metaphorically, of course, referring to the similarities in substance and style between ACT (and my own writing about ACT), on the one hand, and the writing of the well-known Japanese author, Haruki Murakami, on the other. And I have been using this metaphor for the past 10 years. Evidence of this is the fact that I opened the first four chapters of my original work on ACT in Japanese, *The Context of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (2006), with rather long quotes from different works by Murakami.

Why then Haruki Murakami? First of note is that Murakami's work is associated with Western-inspired, but globally-oriented postmodern literature as a kind of rebellion against traditional Japanese writing and culture generally (Poole, 2014), that is against "Japaneseness" As a reflection of Murakami's broad general appeal beyond Japanese culture is the fact that his works are now published in 50 languages (Curtis Brown, 2014). Here are some quotes from interviews with Murakami (2012) that address his perspective:

Stylistically speaking, my writing certainly does not follow Japanese literary style. My writing does not involve parts that are emotionally connected or intertwined with the Japanese language in the way that can be seen in the works of writers such as Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima, for example. In some ways, I aim at neutrality. Nonetheless, I am interested in that certain residue or remnant of "Japaneseness" that one cannot quite avoid leaving intact. I don't stick to it like glue or anything; it's just something I can't fully escape, no matter how much I consciously attempt to separate from it. (p. 144)

My work is in many respects totally different from that of Mishima or Kawabata. My writing style in particular is different, but that's not all. Their prose emphasizes formal, stylized beauty: it's ambiguous, highbrow, emotional, and decorative. What I am seeking is a natural, simple writing style; writing that is supple yet unadorned. That is what separates me from many traditional Japanese writers. What they call the "responsibility toward tradition"—whatever that means—I don't believe in it. (p. 157)

The family has had a strong and continual presence in traditional Japanese literature. Perhaps what I do is in part my response to that tradition. I wanted to portray the protagonist of my novel as an independent, immaculately individualistic human being. To some extent it has to do with the fact that he's an urbanite: he's someone who has chosen freedom and loneliness over intimate, personal bonds (p. 157).

Four elements are at the core of the writing style of Japanese highbrow literature (as opposed to mass culture) used to describe the human being in Japan: closely knit interpersonal relationships, the variety of private, undisclosed emotions that occur within individuals, the family system, and the dynamics of the "village society." In other words, those Japanese people who are oriented toward highbrow literature feel a kind of contentment arising from the "suitability" when reading descriptions containing these four elements. Contrarily, when an aspect of these four elements is missing, they feel the work "cannot describe human beings well." Interestingly, what Kanazawa (2015), one of the Japanese commentators on our case study of Taro (Muto & Mitamura, 2015), pointed out as lacking in the case study seems, in my opinion, to indeed perfectly match the above four elements.

Yes, I purposefully "did not select" for these four elements, just as Haruki Murakami did not. However, it is not that I did not pay attention to these four points. What appears to be an insufficient description is simply due to a matter of priority based on my past experience with academic journals that have rather severe word count limits. Actually, I have very recently written an empirical case study article including these four points, which ended up 2.5 times more voluminous than more conventional academic papers. As a result, I needed to forego submitting it to the main peer-reviewed academic journals. (The paper will appear in *Doshisha Clinical Psychology: Therapy and Research*, which is an annual bulletin of the Clinical Psychology Center where I serve as a therapist concurrently with my academic position.)

On the other hand, what Murakami termed "the Japaneseness that Japanese people are unaware of" can be seen in Muto & Mitamura (2015). This point is made in Hayes' (2015) commentary on our case study of Taro. Hayes writes:

Notice also that at several points the therapist introduced entirely new exercises and metaphors, always explaining them in common sense ways that fit with the clients' experience: "Even along familiar streets there are all sorts of fascinating things and occurrences to be discovered amidst all that we frequently overlook. When you find something like this that catches your attention, take a photograph and send it to me. I'm looking forward to seeing the interesting things you discover" (p. 131).

These details should not be waived away as unimportant. Evidence-based treatment has a

bad name in its impact on clinical creativity and freedom when it is taken to mean the rigid following of manuals and protocols. That, however, is not the only model of evidence-based treatment. An alternative model is the use of principles that have been shown to apply to the clinical goal at hand. This was always the vision of behavior analysis, but clinical behavior analysis stumbled on the topic of human language and cognition. ACT has overcome this barrier to a degree, and there are many points in the case study where evidence of technological flexibility co-exists with evidence of theoretical coherence .

Hayes' "e-mail photo exercise" was a surprise to me. He may only have wanted to point to the improvisational and creative nature of this exercise. As this exercise emerged spontaneously, I did not feel the need to make the point of mentioning its origin. Perhaps one may recognize implicit Japaneseness in this regard. This provides us clues for reconsidering mindfulness in Japan.

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