A Dialectical Model for Helping Clients Resolve a Fundamental Dilemma

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Overview

- Definition
- Origin of the model
- Case examples
- Therapy process
- Dialectical Diamond
Definition

- di·a·lec·tic noun \ˌdī-əˈlek-tik\

- *philosophy* : a method of examining and discussing opposing ideas in order to find the truth


- Hegel applied the term to the process of thought by which apparent contradictions (which he termed thesis and antithesis) are seen to be part of a higher truth (synthesis)

- [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dialectic](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/dialectic)
Why is a dialectical approach useful?

- In therapy a dialectical approach helps us look for what’s missing, think more flexibly and systemically
- Human beings are survival-driven & meaning making
- Our brains are designed to figure out how to survive and get what we need and yet remain connected to those who matter
- This ability is perhaps our greatest strength and our greatest weakness – it is designed to protect us but may ultimately keep us stuck
Origins of the model

- My own clinical practice
- Noticed people often have a fundamental dilemma
- They feel stuck, trapped, unfulfilled, unhappy, inauthentic
- This model evolved as a formulation to understand historical relational dynamics that are the root cause
- Relational, systemic yet quite simple
What is a fundamental dialectic?

Commonly: (Tom, 55 years)

Mother

Mo: “Go to university and become a professional [like me]”

Father

Fa: “You don’t need to go to university, be a businessman [like me]”
How does this play out?

Mother
Be a professional

Father
Be a businessman

Tom – ‘plays it safe’ - I’m a failure - depression

Negative compromise – swings between

Passive victim – trying to please both

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Active Creator
Positive synthesis
BOTH – AND

Tom - “Step out and create”

Professional

Business

“Play it safe”

Negative compromise

Passive victim

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Another variation of the dialectic

(Anna, 25 years)

Parents

Stable family of origin, secure, connected

‘Reactive Self’

“I need to create adversity in my life to grow”
Anna - 25 years

Parents

Stability

Good/Bad
Desire for a home, stability, roots, connection...
Hiding for cover, do what I think is safe

Reactive Self

Adversity

Good/Bad
Searching, travelling, new opportunities...
Running away, push people away

Anna - “alienate myself, inability to be authentic” - numb, shut down

Negative compromise – swings between settled and travelling

Passive victim – can’t be happy in either
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BOTH – AND

Anna - “Connection and Freedom”

Hiding for cover
Running away

“Alienated and inauthentic”

Negative compromise
Passive victim
Jasmine - 37 years
“to find a way of living that I can be at peace with”

Parents
Aspirational
“You can be an international star”

Grandparents
Pioneers
Loved the land and sea, lived a simple life

Jasmine - “On hold, missed the boat” - regret, fear, anxiety, depression

Negative compromise – on the road – travelling show

Passive victim – avoidant, puts up with ‘bad’ situations

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Jasmine – “Beauty, Magic & Peace”

My Starry Career

“On hold”

A Simple Life

“On hold”

Negative compromise

Passive victim
Cara - 38 years
child sexual abuse

Good Self

Being ‘in’ my body, exercising, eating healthy food, being kind and loving, open, social, engaged, motivated

Bad Self

Eating bad things in secret, binge drinking, procrastinating, watching TV, not sharing/open, feeling bad, hopeless, unmotivated, failing

Cara “judgmental of myself, in a battle” - disconnected, numb, empty, anx/dep

Negative compromise - swings between

Passive victim - always either good or bad

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Cara – “Zen Goddess”

“The Judge”
Negative compromise
Passive victim

Good

Bad

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Existential CBT: An epistemological model for contemporary CBT

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Existential CBT: Cara

Old way of being

The Judge

Create it
- ACT
- imagery

New way of being

Zen Goddess

Change it
- CBT
- CFT

Accept it
- ACT
- mindfulness

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Dialectical Diamond Model

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Active Creator
Positive Synthesis

Negative Compromise

Passive Victim

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Thank You