

Where We Are At In The Connections Between RFT and ACT

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It Depends on What You Want and Expect

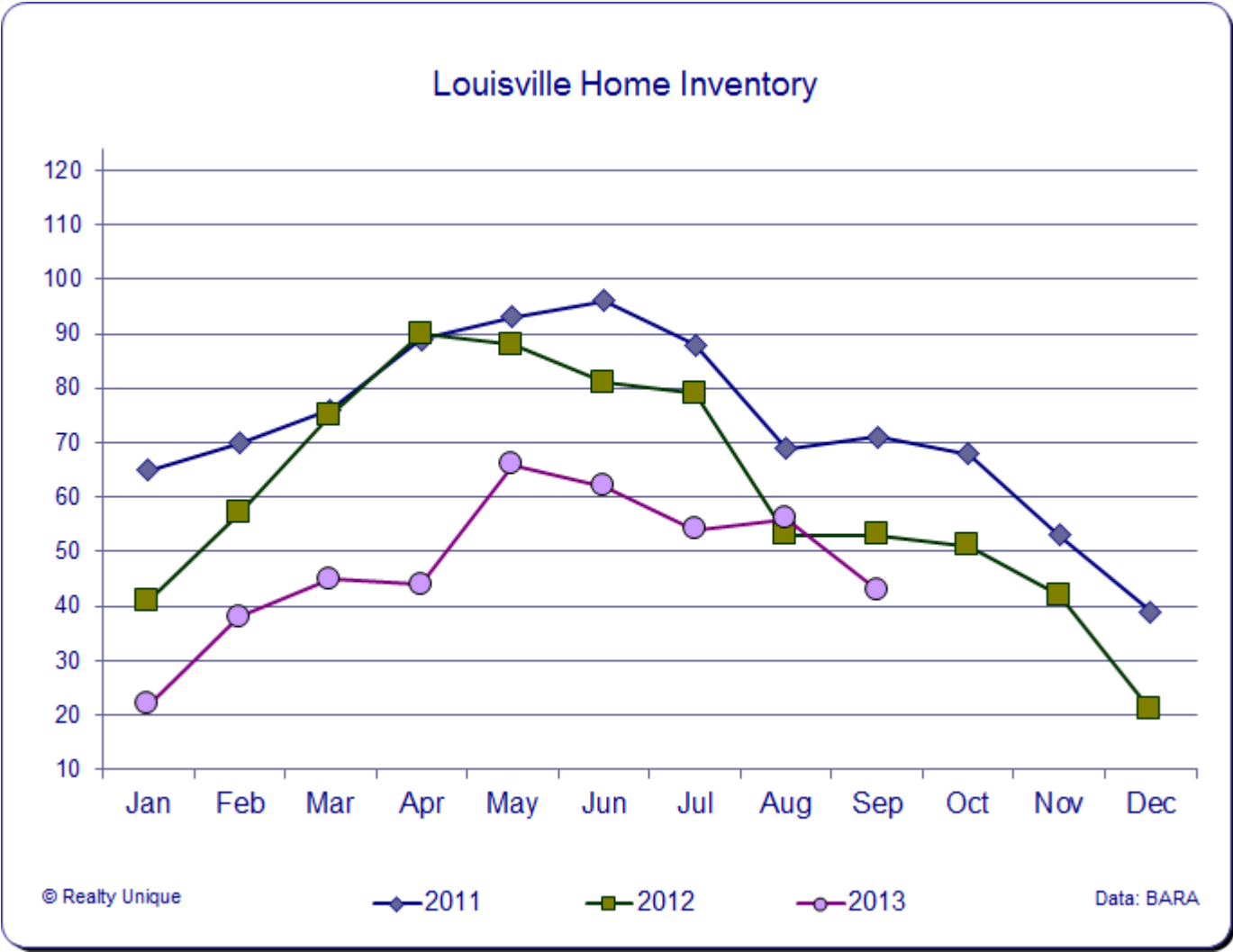
Apart from broad reflections of history (and even these are only interpretations), how you see the relationship between RFT and ACT is influenced by:

- what you want
- what you expect
- acceptable criteria by which these are measured

The Role of Scientific Ambition...

*“A behavioural science
more adequate to the
challenge of the
human condition”*

To some extent, this raises the question of your level of scientific ambition, and the extent to which are you fundamentally aspiring toward the scientist-practitioner model in psychology



Scientific Ambition: A Grand Vision



**Well-defined, testable, coherent
units of analysis**

**Parsimonious
theorising**

In the hard sciences, *unified theory* is the standard aim, but in psychology, we shy away from this aspiration usually on the grounds that our subject matter is too broad and too complex

But what would a unified theory of psychology involve?

Establishing the Right Context



**Well-defined, testable, coherent
units of analysis**

**Parsimonious
theorising**

In Contextual Behavioural Science (CBS), we have inherited both well-defined units of analysis (units of behaviour) and parsimonious theorising, if we trace the history of behaviour analysis from Skinner's operant learning to Relational Frame Theory (RFT), which has added some of the necessary units of analysis to capture language and other aspects of complex cognition and emotion

So, where are we now on having a behavioural science adequate to meet the challenge of the human condition?

Science versus Practice



**Well-defined, testable, coherent
units of analysis**

**Parsimonious
theorising**

In order to answer this, we need to reflect carefully and often upon the concepts we use in both our science and our practice

If we look at RFT, we find clearly identified units of analysis (entailments, relations, relational networks and transformations of stimulus functions) and we find that the theory has continually restricted itself to these units

Science versus Practice



**Well-defined, testable, coherent
units of analysis**

**Parsimonious
theorising**

But if we look at our practice, it is hard to find any of these units of analysis

Instead we find, fusion, acceptance and values

None of which are units of behaviour, none of which have been abstracted from directly observed empirical study, none of which are in the work of Skinner or RFT, although admittedly they are organised within a model, known as ‘psychological flexibility’

Scientific Ambition: A Unified Theory



**Well-defined, testable, coherent
units of analysis**

**Parsimonious
theorising**

And so, this simple reflection upon the two key pillars of CBS quickly shows that we are not operating on the basis of a unified theory...

So, why is that? Let's explore the possibilities...

Giving Up on Scientific Ambition



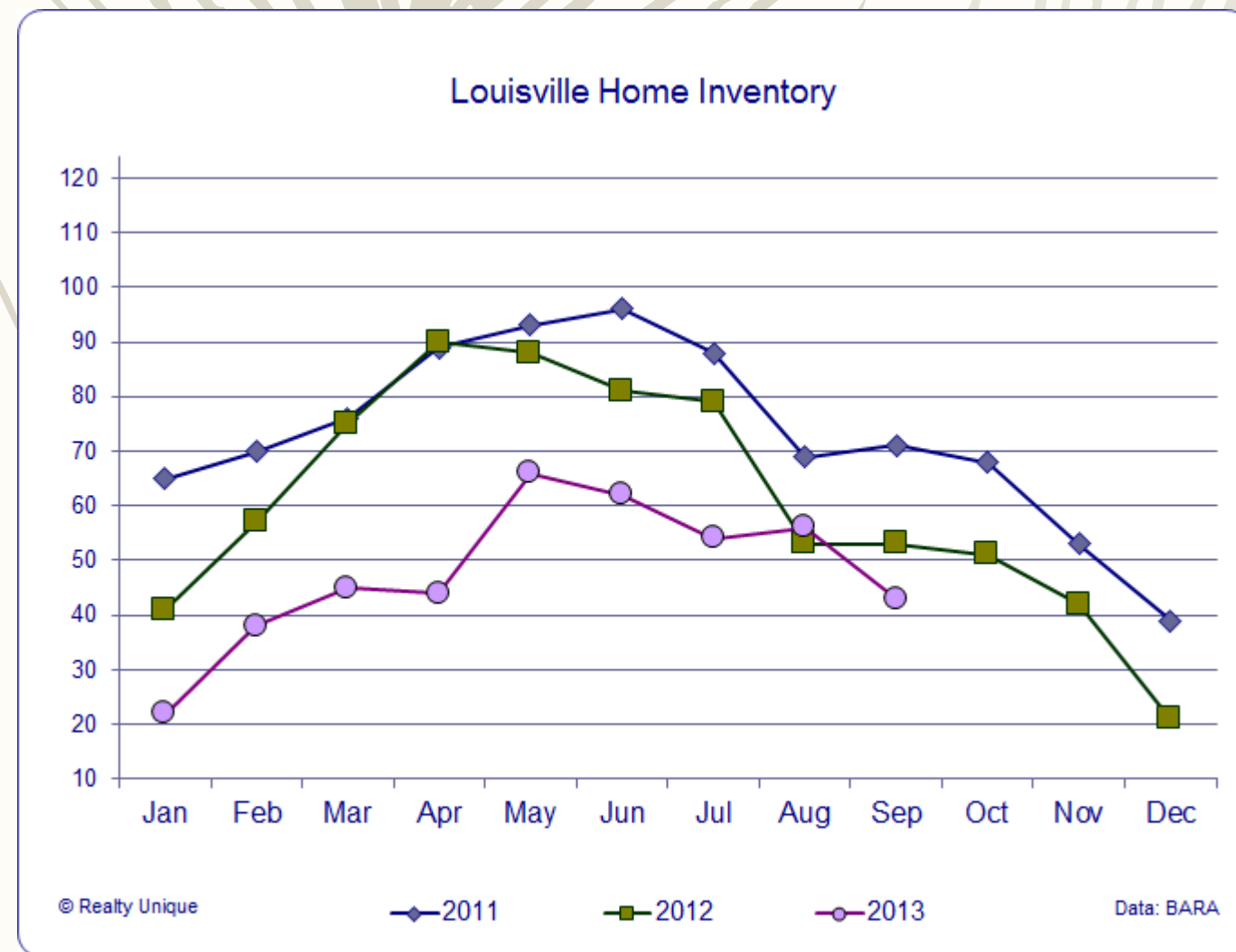
Perhaps deep down, you really believe that the psychological mountain is just too hard to climb (e.g. behaviour, the mind etc. are all just too complex)

So you have simply given up trying

And now, you regularly grab whatever looks like a decent description of the behaviour that you see and you stop searching to understand/explain it

. . . And so your efforts at changing behaviour will always involve some element of being in the dark

Never Letting Go of Scientific Ambition: Never Settling For Less



But, what instead, if you are not willing to let your scientific ambition go and so you push as hard as you can as often as you can towards unified theory

This would involve integrating, as much as the science provides for at the present time, the well-established units of analysis into your clinical undertakings

The Slippery Slope . . .



And whilst you recognise that at present, some gaps have to be filled because not all of the units of analysis have been identified (e.g. phenomena such as coherence)

Maybe you have been filling gaps instead of using your basic units and maybe what you have filled those gaps with becomes comfortable and you begin to believe that they are actually units of analysis (e.g. fusion) especially because you see clinical change

The Slippery Slope . . .



Vilardarga et al. (2009) defined functionality as “*based on sets of functional analyses based on behavioral principles based on behavioral observations*”

“*. . . none of these are technical terms; none . . . have the same degree of precision, scope, and depth of classical behavioral principles . . . nor of technical RFT concepts*”

The Slippery Slope . . .

Hayes et al. (2012), *“any disconnect between science and practice slows down practice and undermines the usefulness of science”* (p.13)

And yet, CBS marches on with endless additions to its practice with mindfulness, compassion, love

And all the while, moving further and further away from using its basic units of analysis or even looking for its basic units of analysis

And ultimately giving up, knowingly or unknowingly, on our scientific ambition, and possibly constraining *your* scientific ambition



The Methodological Slippery Slope . . .

And CBS has done this just as strongly in its scientific methodology, with an ever-growing use of analogue research, group designs and mediational analyses

Haven't we forgotten:

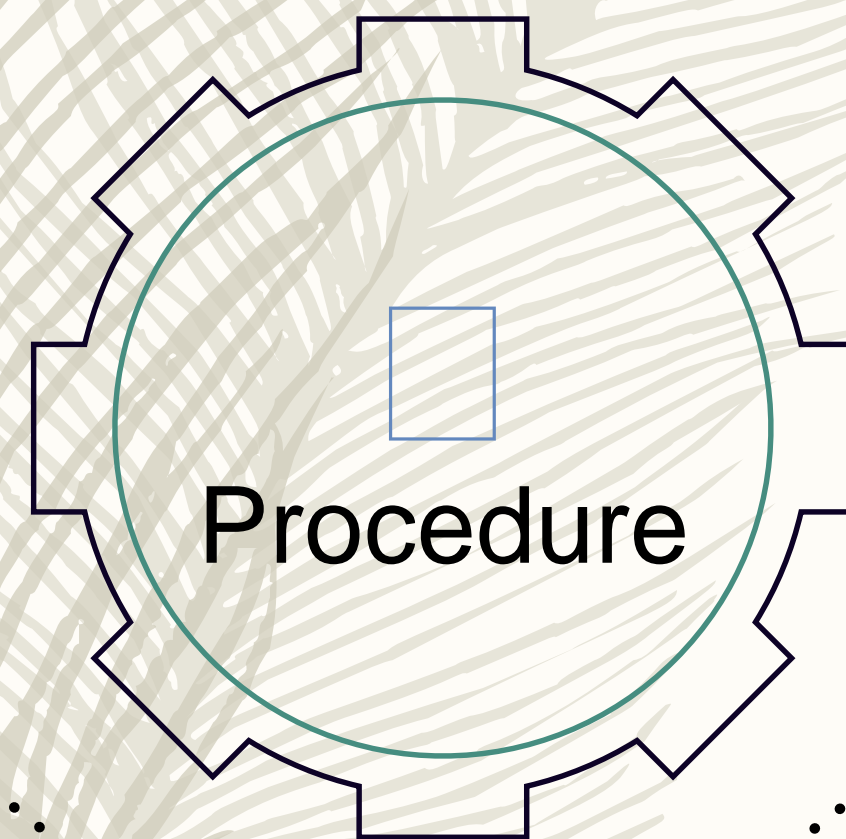
“while statistical mediation is necessary to support the operation of a mechanism of change, it does not provide sufficient evidence for such a relation. Indeed, just as correlation does not equal causation, mediation does not equal mechanism”

Chomsky (1979) . . . *“You can ... collect butterflies if you like, that's fine; but such work must not be confounded with [basic] research, which is concerned to discover explanatory principles of some depth and fails if it does not do so*

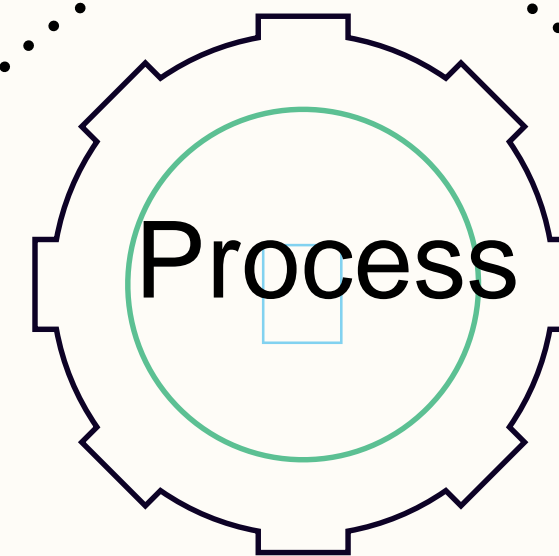


Fusion High

Defusion
Intervention

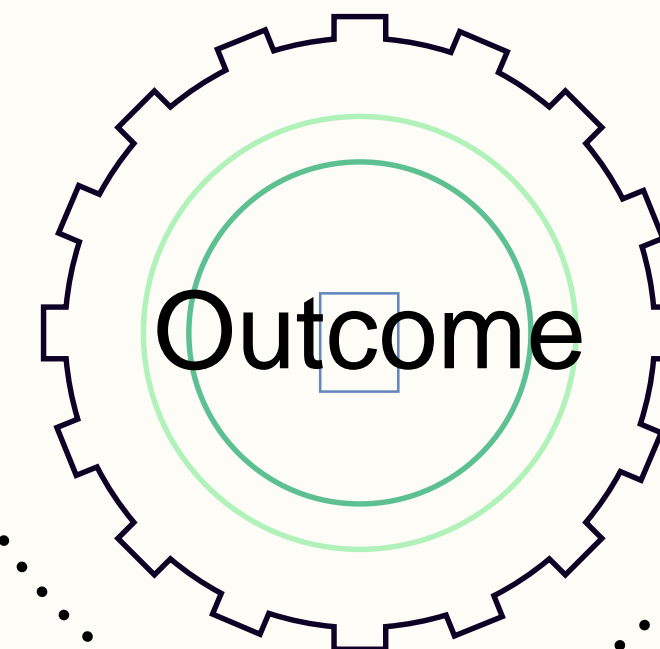


Process

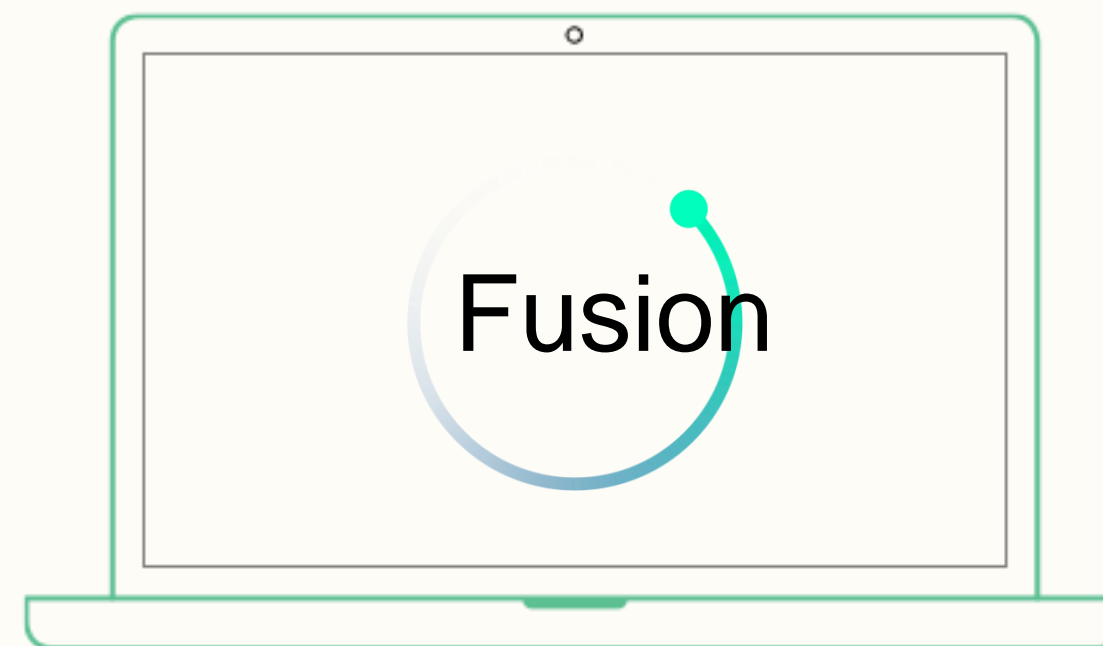


Fusion Low
Outcome

Outcome



Fusion



Translations . . .

An RFT interpretation is not an RFT explanation, nor an analysis of relational units



For example, Blackledge and Barnes-Holmes (2009) defined defusion as “*well established verbal stimulus transformations being disrupted via the displacement of contextual conditions that control relational responding in general*”

Although this description is topographically consistent with the language of RFT, it is neither based on, nor directs, functional analyses of relational responding

Bottom Up . . .

Progress is not driven from the bottom-up, but it is accomplished through it . . .

So, let's look at what we have so far . . .



Bottom Up . . .

Proof of principle on:

Entailments

Relational framing and the various patterns

Transformation of all types of functions through relations

Organisation of relational networks

Analogy and metaphor as relating relations

Perspective-taking as deictic relational responding



Bottom Up . . .

The acquisition of relational repertoires as central to the development of language and cognition

Deficits in relational acquisition highly influential in the failure to achieve language and cognition

Verbal functional analysis

Drill-down as a model of the therapeutic relationship

Relational coherence and why it is arbitrarily appetitive

Why level of derivation makes relational responding more resistant to change

Do the functions of fear co-ordinate more with approaching or avoiding (approaching)



Bottom Up . . .

How does trauma influence relating deictic-I to deictic-others and how might this influence therapeutic relationships

Defining flexibility as relational flexibility

Operationally defining how relational responding influences what has traditionally been called rule-governed behaviour

Why hierarchical relational responding with regard to deictic-I seems to capture resilience

MDML. . . .



Stand Up for What you Believe In . . .

Sometimes things are confusing, abstract and burdensome

Sometimes, we want to simplify life and reduce our cognitive loads

But do you really want to give up on the belief that one day we may be able to understand and change (prediction and influence) the complexities of human behaviour?

Will you keep ignoring the progress we have already made, by potentially reaching for the nearest technical-sounding glue?

Or can you find just a little more inside yourself to keep pushing and never settle for less when it comes to your scientific ambitions – the choice is yours...