

Unconditional Positive Regard: Constituent Activities

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In this chapter I consider Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) first as it was described by Carl R. Rogers and then examine how some subsequent theorists and writers have studied and elaborated it. I then place my emphasis on activities especially pertinent to the momentary enactment of Unconditional Positive Regard, because as it is one of many possible modes of regarding, we need to know how to enter this particular mode. In the end, I hope to have helped answer questions a student therapist might have such as ‘What can I *do* to develop my capacity to have Unconditional Positive Regard for clients?’

THEORY OF CARL R. ROGERS

Unconditional Positive Regard is a central concept in the theories of Carl R. Rogers, both for psychotherapy and for interpersonal relations. A universal need for positive regard by others appears at about the same time a person begins to experience awareness of self (Rogers, 1959). In therapy, UPR is a quality of the therapist’s experience toward the client (p. 239). Rogers’ writing sheds light on various aspects of this construct:

Unconditional

One experiencing UPR holds ‘no *conditions* of acceptance . . . It is at the opposite pole from a selective evaluating attitude.’ (p. 225)

Positive

One offers ‘warm acceptance . . . a “prizing” of the person, as Dewey has used that term . . . It means a caring for the client . . .’ (p. 225).

Regard

One regards ‘each aspect of the client’s experience as being part of that client . . . It means a caring for the client, but not in a possessive way or in such a way as simply to satisfy the therapist’s own needs. It means caring for the client as a *separate* person, with permission to have his [or her] own feelings, his [or her] own experiences.’ (p. 225)

Rogers acknowledged an undesirable connotation of his term ‘unconditional positive regard’ (p. 225, footnote): it suggests an all-or-nothing condition. However, for the effective therapist, Rogers said it probably occurs sometimes (‘at many moments’) and not at other times, and to varying degrees.

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Theoretically, the importance of UPR lies in its power to build up or restore the recipient's unconditional positive self-regard. To understand this as Rogers did, I will review a few other related terms: conditions of worth, self-concept, organismic valuing, and incongruence.

Rogers postulated that the human infant equates organismic experiencing with reality. Experiences perceived as enhancing or maintaining the organism are valued positively, and those experiences perceived as negating maintenance or failing to enhance the organism are valued negatively.

As the person develops, the further differentiation natural to the actualizing tendency results in some parts of experiencing being symbolized in an awareness of being, an awareness of functioning (pp. 244–5). This partial awareness of experiencing gets elaborated into a concept of self.

When significant others communicate to a person that his/her positive regard depends on certain behaviors or certain experiences, the part of the person identified with the self-concept has incentives to include some behaviors and experiences and to resist, deny, or distort other behaviors and experiences. These incentives are powerful because of the 'pervasive and persistent' need for positive regard from significant others. Rogers says 'the expression of positive regard by a significant social other can become more compelling than the *organismic valuing process*, and the individual becomes more [oriented] to the *positive regard* of such others than toward experiences which are of positive value in *actualizing the organism*' (pp. 245–6).

Rogers describes the development of incongruence between self and experience as follows:

Experiences which run contrary to the *conditions of worth* are *perceived* selectively and distortedly as if in accord with the *condition of worth*, or are in part or whole *denied to awareness*... Thus from the time of the first selective *perception* in terms of *conditions of worth*, the states of *incongruence between self and experience*, of *psychological maladjustment* and of *vulnerability*, exist to some degree. (p. 247)

Moving toward less defensiveness and healthier adjustment requires a decrease in conditions of worth and an increase in unconditional self-regard, and the communicated UPR of a significant other is one way of achieving these things (p. 249). This is a very interactional notion of how things intrapsychic (incongruence, psychological maladjustment) can change. An environment of empathy and UPR, when perceived by the person, weakens existing conditions of worth, or dissolves them. Positive self-regard increases. Threat is reduced, and the process of defense is reversed, so that experiences customarily threatening can be accurately symbolized and integrated into the self-concept. (p. 249).

Thus, a central theoretical issue bearing on UPR is the self-concept and how that can feel threatened by experiences inconsistent with conditions of worth. There is a kind of resistance to or looking away from some parts of experience. Conditions of worth foster a basic me / not-me division in experiencing and reinforce a sense of self limited to parts acceptable to significant others. Rogers argued that this problem resolves when one experiences empathy and UPR so that the self-concept can be expanded or opened up to be more inclusive of all of

one's diverse experiences and qualities of experiencing.

An example from a therapy client of the effects of conditions of worth, and the struggle to undo their damage, may make these matters more tangible and clear (names and certain facts have been changed to protect the client's identity).

After more than two years of therapy in which he has made good progress, Mr. K. is now more aware of some of his tendencies, and he has changed many old patterns. He has described how he was treated by his older siblings (their father was absent): several of them would consistently get angry at and critical of him if he presented a situation involving what they construed as a mess, or if he required some special attention. He has often said tearfully 'the only safe thing for me to do was to keep quiet and not make any trouble.' He has made a great deal of progress toward being more assertive and self expressive and is building a sense that he has every right to have his needs attended to with respect and caring. But he is not yet in a position where he can always operate out of this new sense of more positive regard for himself.

A recent incident illustrates both his progress and the continuing struggle to escape the constraints of conditions of worth: at a holiday gathering at his sister's house, he went into the bathroom to find the toilet backed up and in danger of overflowing if it were to be flushed again. He anticipated people criticizing him and embarrassing him by saying "Oh, what did you do, Pete?" A year ago, he probably would have just kept quiet about it. This time he told his sister of the problem. As he was waiting for her to locate a plunger, he saw someone else go into the bathroom. He felt anxious and became unsure if it was his sister or someone else who went in there (he said to me that at some level he knew it wasn't her — it was a male friend of the family). In that moment, he couldn't be sure. (He believes this perceptual distortion happened so that he wouldn't have to draw attention to the situation and himself, risking mockery and embarrassment, but he was extremely frustrated about allowing himself to get confused like this.) Then his sister appeared, and he said 'Oh, someone went in there. I thought it might be you.' Before she finished saying 'tell him not to flush,' Pete was already yelling this to him.

This example shows how therapy enables living differently in a relevant life situation. It also shows the very real limits in the extension of these benefits. At this point in his therapy, when reflecting on a situation, Pete is readily aware of much complexity and nuance in his emotional reactions and implicit thinking. Many things he wouldn't have been able to admit to himself before, he easily acknowledges now. Nevertheless, in the situation with the significant others who were and still are sources of conditional regard, the same effects squelching certain aspects of his experiencing (in this case confusing his perception of what he saw) take hold and tend to dominate. He seems determined to eventually free himself of such squelching effects even in this powerful family social context. We should not minimize the importance of the change Pete has experienced already: within this most challenging situation with the purveyors of conditions of worth, self-assertive behavior is sprouting in spite of the likelihood of derision from significant others. This development is consistent with Rogers' theoretical claims that empathy and UPR in the therapy relationship bolster the client's capacity

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for unconditional positive self-regard.

FROM A RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTIC TO ACTIVITIES

More than 40 years ago, Barrett-Lennard (1959) became interested in researching the conditions Rogers had postulated to be necessary and sufficient for personality change (Rogers, 1957), among them UPR. He wanted to be able to assess the degree to which a therapy relationship provided these conditions, so that Rogers' theory could be put to empirical test. The instrument he developed, the Relationship Inventory (RI), now has a long history of psychometric development and use in a wide range of studies of psychotherapy. About the above clinical vignette, he might have asked, 'how can we measure the extent to which the therapy relationship includes UPR, and relate that to measures of the client's progress in therapy and improvement in living?'

Barrett-Lennard defined the conditions as features of a relationship, less enduring than personality traits, rather 'a sphere and axis of experienced response in a particular relationship, at the present juncture... but not with reference to the immediate moment or a very brief episode in that relationship' (Barrett-Lennard, 1986, p. 440). Thus he framed the relationship conditions as lasting over time, more than just a momentary occurrence, but also not so lasting that they were like therapist personality traits. As he construes them, they are not even a permanent feature of any given relationship. The items he uses to operationalize the concepts reflect this way of thinking. For example, 'She respects me as a person, and 'she cares for me' are items indicating Level of Regard.

Separating Conditionality from Level of Regard

Very early in the development of his instrument, Level of Regard and Conditionality were separated to differentiate and simplify the 'operationally awkward concept of unconditional positive regard' (Barrett-Lennard, 1986, p. 440). The Relationship Inventory is designed to scale quantitative degrees of these two components of UPR (as well as other relationship conditions).

The axis of 'Level of regard' is seen as ranging from certain negative affects to certain positive affects (not the full spectrum of affects on either the positive or negative extensions of the axis). He says

On the positive side it is concerned in various ways with warmth, liking/caring, and 'being drawn toward,' all in the context of responsive feelings for the other as another self like oneself. It does not encompass very close, passionate feeling (as of romantic love), or attitudes which do not imply interactive relationships . . . On the negative side, feelings of extreme aversion (except for contempt) or of anger to the point of rage, are not encompassed. No item points to feelings that allude to fear of the other (1986, pp. 440'-1).

The unconditionality component of UPR for Barrett-Lennard

. . . was interpreted literally . . . with the focus being on *conditional* variation of regard... more precisely, regard is conditional to the extent that it is contingent on, or triggered by particular behaviors, attitudes, or (perceived) qualities of

the regarded person... Regard (whether generally high or low in level) that is strongly unconditional is stable, in the sense that it is not experienced as varying with or otherwise dependently linked to particular attributes of the person being regarded. (p. 443)

Barrett-Lennard's measures have been influential on the course of exploration of Rogers' hypotheses. They made it possible to launch the empirical examination of Rogers' theoretical predictions.

Factor analytic studies of the Relationship Inventory seemed to confirm that there were indeed meaningfully distinct relationship conditions useful to characterize therapeutic relationships. Other studies showed these conditions to be generally positively associated with therapeutic outcome. Gurman, (1977) concluded

Barrett-Lennard's (1962) stress on the two distinct aspects of regard — the level of regard and the unconditionality of regard — appears to be justified in light of the nine studies reviewed... [and] it appears that the RI is tapping dimensions that are quite consistent with Barrett-Lennard's original work on the inventory (p. 513) . . . there exists substantial, if not overwhelming, evidence in support of the hypothesized relationship between patient-perceived therapeutic conditions and outcome in individual psychotherapy and counseling. (p. 523, italics in the original).

Distinguishing regard as activity from unconditionality and positivity

The Relationship Inventory makes no distinction between the *activity* which is the first meaning in the American Heritage Dictionary for 'regard' ('to look at attentively; observe closely') and the valence associated with the regard (Lewin, 1935). I want to distinguish the activity of regarding, the act of 'looking at attentively,' from its attributes: positive or negative, conditional or unconditional. Just as a skier has modes of skiing with different attributes (racing to maximize speed *vs.* cruising down the hill for sightseeing, *e.g.*), with their respective activity subsets (different positions over the skis, different types of turning), there are different modes of regarding. My goal is to further clarify the activity subset inherent to the mode of regarding which can be unconditional and positive.

Lietaer, who did some of the factor analytic work referred to above, later wrote a chapter on UPR (Lietaer, 1984). Some of his comments are suggestive of activities essential to this kind of regarding:

... congruence and acceptance are thought to be closely related to one another; they are parts of a more basic attitude of 'openness' (Truax and Carkhuff, [1967] p. 504): Openness toward myself (congruence) and openness toward the other (unconditional acceptance). The more I accept myself and am able to be present in a comfortable way with everything that bubbles up in me, without fear or defense, the more I can be receptive to everything that lives in my client. (p. 44)

Thus achieving openness to oneself and to the other is one activity we need to understand.

Lietaer also makes the distinction between client experience and client

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behavior, which is useful when congruence seems to conflict with UPR. He says unconditionality is to the client's *experience*, the acceptance and understanding of which is necessary to enable the client to 'explore the deeper needs underlying this experience.' Elaborating further, he says,

It remains important that [the client] can express and discuss everything that she experiences with respect to me, without my becoming reluctant or rejecting her as a person; but with regard to her behavior, I do confront her with my limits. '*Unconditionality*,' then, means that I keep on valuing the deeper core of the person, what she basically is and can become (p. 47).

Two more interrelated regarding activities are involved here: one is to manage my reactions which sometimes arise while interacting with a client (like the need to keep my limits, or the impulse to withdraw or strike back when hurt) so as to avoid rejecting or abandoning the client. The other is maintaining a broad sense of and respect and caring for the whole client as a person even when an aspect of the client's presentation is something I disagree with or which challenges me personally.

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This invites first a clarification of what it is in another person (or ourselves) which we can regard in an unconditionally positive way: what is meant by the 'deeper core' or 'deeper underlying needs' that could have a positive valence for the therapist even when conflicts or value differences may exist between client and therapist?

Wilkins (2000) reiterated that what we regard unconditionally must be very inclusive: we must accept *all* the parts of the client's feelings and experiencing, including *even the part(s) that may be uninterested in changing*. (p. 27)

Wilkins also cites Bozarth as one who considers UPR to be 'the curative factor of (person-centred) theory' (p. 29). Rogers' theory of pathology emphasizes UPR's capacity to restore the even more basic (but thwarted) actualizing tendency inherent in the client (Bozarth, 2001a).

Bozarth (2001b) says the healing that he has witnessed in people he has worked with came not from his *doing* anything in particular as therapist, nor from the clients looking deeply into their experiencing, but from the clients pursuing their own unique steps of growth, which varied greatly from client to client. He points to the trustworthiness of something originating in the client that moves them to constructive action. However, we must be cautious about assuming people will act constructively. This could be mistaken if a person were emotionally upset and acting out of only certain parts of experience without the benefit of reflection and therapeutic interaction. As Bozarth's examples illustrate, the trustworthy thing that moves the client to constructive action happens in the context of (or as the result of) a relationship providing UPR and empathy so that the client finds that particular urge to act that has enough subtlety and nuance to take into account the various parts and perspectives comprising the client's experiencing.

Interactive processes rather than thing-like objects

Part of the challenge in enacting UPR is to correct for our tendency to 'see' things as fixed entities. The idea of a 'self-concept' invites an image of a relatively consistent identity. UPR conceived as a relationship characteristic similarly emphasizes sameness over time. 'Incongruence' readily invokes a notion of established contents of experience which are perceived with distortion to maintain a fixed self-concept. In a human being, very little is actually so fixed and unchanging.

Gendlin's philosophical work (Gendlin, 2000) and its practical counterparts are enormously helpful for thinking about human processes that involve interaction and change. Theories are built on a foundation of basic (often unexamined) assumptions. One common assumption is that there is an empty three dimensional space that can be marked off in equal units of measurement within which reality exists. Similarly, for many theories, time with equal intervals is taken as a given fact. It is within this geometric space and time that events and phenomena are thought to take place and be observed. This starting point powerfully promotes our tendency to construe reality as composed of separate objects with parts that can be disassembled and reassembled and that work together mechanically. A disadvantage which comes with thinking this way is that it makes it more difficult to see and understand phenomena that aren't naturally so thing-like. Although we might very well be able to understand how to build bridges and computers with concepts like these, human feelings and interactions are not so amenable to understanding with concepts that suggest they are like atoms or bricks: fixed units that can be combined into larger units to make other things, or broken down into component parts. Part of the difficulty in identifying the object of UPR is that such philosophical assumptions get us looking for a relatively static, thing-like object. But if we really look clearly at the client, what we see is not thing-like.

Gendlin starts instead with living interaction processes as the basic given (linear time and geometric space are derived later in his theory as special case by-products of living interactions, so he does not lose the advantages of those ideas). From this different starting point he develops ideas early in his theory that are much more naturally suited to the life processes we as therapists and students of human behavior would like to understand. I cannot give a serious treatment of his theory in the context of this paper, but the interested reader will find it beneficial to read *The Process Model* (Gendlin, 2000) carefully.

A few key ideas may help the reader gain appreciation of Gendlin's way of thinking and help us answer the question at hand. An important feature of many life processes is that they are cyclical. An example is eating, which includes locating food, preparing it, chewing, digesting, absorbing water and nutrients, and eliminating wastes. This sequence repeats again and again. Such cycles are called 'functional cycles.' The elements of the cycle working together serve an essential function in maintaining the living process.

Each step in such a cycle implies the next step, and all the others, in an intricate order that cannot be rearranged arbitrarily if the function of the cycle is to be served. The status of the body at a given step in the sequence is such that

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immediate felt sensory experience implies the next step in the sequence. In the functional cycle of breathing, for example, lungs after inhaling produce a very specific set of sensations which imply exhalation.

When an aspect of environment needed to further a functional cycle is missing, the process is 'stopped' in that regard. The body carries such a stoppage with it in how the remaining (not stopped) processes go on differently because of the stopped one. A starving person walks in and looks at the environment differently than a satiated one. In this way the body itself 'knows' what is needed: what isn't right and what would resolve the dilemma is implied in the sensations of the tissues of all the ongoing interrelated processes, by how they are changed by the stoppage. This 'implying' of the body is a central concept in Gendlin's model.

Bodily implying is very intricately determined by many interwoven processes and only certain things will allow the stopped process to proceed properly. And yet what will allow the process to proceed is open-ended in many ways, so that numerous variations in the environment could carry the stopped process forward. When it happens, any one of these variations is a special occurrence which changes the bodily implying in just the way it needs to be changed for the functional cycle to be served. Other occurrences, although they may affect the body, fail to enable the process to properly proceed, and the implying remains active in the body. When the special events occur which change the process as it implied itself changed, the process is said to be 'carried forward.' Note that this carrying forward of a process that was stopped requires no mental reflection or cognition.

The bodily felt sense

Much later in Gendlin's development of terms, when he has built up to the level of the conscious human being, the person who attends (with unconditional positive self-regard) to the bodily implying of a stopped process is said to be focusing on his or her 'bodily felt sense.' It is the bodily felt sense which can be trusted to move the client to do things that are in the direction of healthy, satisfying further living. Thus, bodily felt sense is Gendlin's carefully fashioned term closely related to, but more specific than the actualizing tendency with its long history in client-centered thought. You might notice immediately that even the basic words suggest a subtle difference: the actualizing tendency connotes a general thrust of the organism toward furthering its ends and capacities. The bodily felt sense refers to the body's remarkable capacity, on a given occasion, under specific circumstances, to register as one holistic sense all relevant considerations and influences from the personal past and the external circumstances which comprise the meaning of the situation.

For the purpose of this article on UPR, I offer the bodily felt sense as something to which we can hold an attitude of unconditional positive regard. The bodily felt sense is implicitly complex, not always present to the client's awareness, and may take some time working in special circumstances (UPR and empathy) to form. It hearkens to other places and people and times in its associated emotions and thoughts. It tends to keep changing.

When a bodily felt sense forms, it is a trustworthy source of constructive action from within the client. Prior to the formation of a bodily felt sense, the person may be under the influence of some parts of experiencing and lack the balanced perspective that takes all relevant considerations into account. Action in that condition is not so trustworthy. A bodily felt sense is not something simply physical inside the person: it is not less than the person, but is rather the person's fullest sensitivity to everything that matters about the situation to the person, with the person in a centered relationship to this complexity.

The formation of a felt sense is coincident with the person developing a certain attitude toward his or her experiencing in all its facets. We can say the formation of a felt sense involves the person having a certain relationship to the manifold of emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, etc. involved at that moment. Now we proceed to clarify the kind of relationship to self-experience which helps form and carry forward a bodily felt sense.

RELATING TO EXPERIENCING IN UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

How does one open to one's experiencing and then manage what one finds in the openness?

The empirical results already cited support the utility of construing relationship conditions as Barrett-Lennard did: as phenomena of intermediate duration, neither momentary events nor personality traits of the therapist. Thus we can think of level of positive regard as a variable useful for scaling relationships for their differing amounts of this quality. Therapists and types of therapy can also be compared with each other on such a variable.

But this is not the level we need for thinking about how to improve the level of UPR in a given relationship, nor to think about how to improve a given therapist's capacity to have UPR for clients. All relationships, whether high or low on their typical levels of positive regard, would have some moments in which they are not at their respective maxima. As noted earlier, Rogers recognized variability in unconditional positive regard as part of how things are for effective therapists, and that the idea that an effective therapist never wavers from full positive regard was misleading. What can help us think about how one makes the momentary move into the mode of unconditional positive regard?

Momentary enactments of unconditional positive regard

To answer this question, we need to focus our attention on momentary events rather than the typical or average levels which the RI is designed to assess.

The question is obviously pertinent to novice therapists who would like to become more skilful. But even for seasoned therapists it is relevant, as one may on some occasions find what a client is saying more difficult to accept than usual. It may be that the relationships with more unconditionality of positive regard at the level assessed by the Relationship Inventory are in fact those in which the participant(s) are especially adept at this movement, able to recover quickly from the loss of positive regard, or to quickly arrive at positive regard from neutrality

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or from having one's attention elsewhere. Without ways to turn on or recover positive regard when it is absent or lost, one would have no way to improve one's average level of positive regard in a relationship. Momentary movements from lower to higher levels of positive regard are also necessary for transitions from the activities of other modes of regard (giving instructions, e.g.) into the mode which can be unconditionally positive.

When the movement from less to more positive regard occurs, it is something that happens in interaction with a specific person presenting specific life experiences, thoughts and feelings on a specific occasion. Thus, following Gendlin's way of thinking, positive regarding and its communication are therapist activities responsive to the client's bodily felt sense which have special power to carry forward stopped process aspects.¹

Many writers cited above have suggested that the therapist's capacity for unconditional self-regard is a factor limiting the therapist's capacity to provide UPR for clients. And a goal of providing a client with UPR is to build the client's capacity for unconditional self-regard. So let's start by asking how, for oneself, one moves into the mode of unconditional positive regard. In the study of Focusing (Gendlin, 1969, 1981, 1996), much has been written related to this question. Focusing is Gendlin's practical method for carrying forward one's bodily felt sense. The ways one acts toward and reacts to one's experiencing are essential to how one does this.

Focusing attitudes and activities

In his early writing about focusing, Gendlin (1978) described several common tendencies to relate to experiencing which seem to be less than optimal for carrying it forward. Some of these are 'belittling the problem,' 'analyzing,' "facing down" the feeling,' 'lecturing yourself,' and 'drowning in the feeling.' These activities were described to clarify what *not* to do. The focusing instructions offered alternatives: one was to quietly wait and sense what came in experiencing. Another thing that was emphasized was that when a feeling begins to come 'DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back, say "Yes, that's there. I can feel that, there."' (1978, p. 48). If the feeling when focused on begins to change, one is instructed to follow the feeling and pay attention to it. Much emphasis is placed on going gently and easily with oneself, and on patiently seeking fresh, new words and pictures for what one is experiencing, rather than accepting familiar or commonplace explanations and interpretations that may come to mind very quickly. A key emphasis is placed on finding words or pictures expressive of experiencing which 'make some fresh difference' and on letting 'words and pictures change until they feel just right in capturing your feeling.' (p. 49).

In discussing how the therapist can work with her own experiencing of a therapy interaction to keep it genuine and fresh, Gendlin described a move from minor incongruence to congruence:

1. Iberg (2001) has been developing post-session instruments to measure the relationship to experiencing which occurred during a single therapy session. These measures, especially the 'opening' and the 'focusing attitude' sub scales, are more appropriate than the RI for assessing momentary enactments of unconditional positive self-regard by the client.

one is usually turned away from such feelings [of being confused and pained, thrown off stride, put in a spot without a good way out,] and in the habit of ignoring them. I have gradually learned to turn toward any such sense of embarrassment, stuckness, puzzledness or insincerity which I may feel. By 'turn toward it,' I mean that I don't let it simply be the way I feel, but I make it into something I am looking at, from which I can get information about this moment (Gendlin, 1968, p. 223).

Cornell (1996) suggested a term for one key part of what Gendlin described, which is 'disidentification.' She says of this move,

The essence of disidentification is to ...move from 'I am [this feeling]' to 'I have [this feeling].' In most cases, disidentification can be facilitated simply with empathic listening or reflection, in which the therapist adds phrases like 'a part of you' or 'a place in you' or 'something in you.' (p. 4).

Wiltschko (1995) has discussed the same idea in terms of the 'I' which is distinct from all contents of experiencing.

Cornell (1996) also articulates three other 'inner relationship' techniques: 'acknowledging' what's there, 'resonating,' and 'sensing from its point of view.' These three distil out essential features of what Gendlin described in detail in the movements intended to guide someone through a focusing process (Gendlin, 1981).

Acknowledging what is there involves just that: acknowledging without evaluating or selecting (note how this is a refrain of the quote from Rogers at the beginning of this paper for the 'unconditional' part of UPR). In addition to noticing each aspect of your experience Cornell adds emphasis on *making some gesture of acknowledgment*, like 'saying hello' or saying 'I know you are there' to each aspect of your feelings. Cornell has also discussed this in terms of 'Presence:'

Presence is what we call that state of non-judgmental awareness which can give company to any part of us... we reserve the word 'I' for Presence, as in 'I'm sensing something in me that wants to tell him to go to hell'...

Most of the time, all you need to move into Presence is to acknowledge both [or all] parts using Presence language : 'I'm sensing that something in me wants to tell him to go to hell, and another part of me that's not so sure about that.' 'I'm acknowledging the part of me that's wanting to go back to school and the part of me that feels like it's a big change.' 'I'm aware of the part of me that wants to find the right person and the part of me that feels like giving up.'

Presence needs to be maintained through the whole process; it's not just something you can attend to once and forget about. So if you find yourself judging or taking sides or trying to determine who is 'right,' you have lost Presence and you need to find it again (Cornell, 2000).

Resonating 'is checking whether a word, or other symbol, or a larger unit of meaning, fits how the felt sense feels... in order to do it, the Focuser must be in direct contact with the felt sense, with a neutral observer (i.e. non-victim) perspective' (Cornell, 1996, p. 4).

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Sensing from its point of view

... is a powerful and empowering move, when the client is able to shift from her point of view (which may be 'overwhelmed' or 'victim') to the felt sense's point of view. This brings in the possibility of empathy and compassion. The aspect of self which has the capacity for empathy and compassion is not a victim. (p. 5)

Collecting activities productive of unconditional positive regard

The foregoing includes a strong emphasis on the importance of moving from identified to disidentified. Cornell, a linguist, helps us see how language can be chosen carefully to elicit and support this move. She also sharpens activity-oriented terminology for acknowledging what's there, resonating, and sensing from its point of view. Another important point Cornell makes is that these things require ongoing maintenance during the time we wish to be unconditionally positive in our regard.

In another paper (Iberg, 1996), I abstracted six variables involved in the range of possible focusing experiences (Table 2, p. 28). These variables cover much of the same ground (and a bit more), and they suggest prompts for activities which may help at the times in which one finds it difficult to 'disidentify' from some aspects of experiencing, or when one has been unable to find action that is carrying forward.

1. *Seek enough safety to be able to feel things in your body:* The situation in which one does therapy must feel safe enough to allow the formation of a bodily sense of experiencing, which has a certain vulnerability to it. When a bodily felt sense forms, one leaves the everyday mental realm of the familiar, clearly known, and enters a more murky, unclear, unknown but pregnant-with-personal-meaning inner territory. What makes a situation safe enough includes your internal requirements from personal history, your preferences, the pressures you put on yourself, as well as the external environment, which may be too loud, judgmental, too bright, smelly, crowded, or in other ways unsatisfactory to you.

Activity prompt: You could check and see if things are arranged okay for you in the room. Do we need to make some adjustments to make you feel comfortable and safe?

Another prompt: You could notice if there is anything making you feel unsafe.

2. *Make complexity explicit:* One may need to further articulate the complexity, internal or external, in one's situation. Until all important intricacies of one's experiencing have been acknowledged, it may not be possible to disidentify. Unnoticed or ignored parts can keep us off balance until they get noticed.

Activity prompt: You might ask yourself if there is something more to this that is feeling left out or neglected.

3. *Seek congruence between words and experiencing:* Sometimes we have internalized rules for what it is okay to feel and think. We may not immediately notice the filtering effect of such rules on what we can readily acknowledge

in our feelings.

Activity prompt: Please check and see if there is any nervousness about what you might discover or reveal about yourself. We may also simply be sloppy at times about the accuracy of words for our feelings.

Activity prompt: You might take a moment to see if in any way you feel dissatisfied with what we've said so far.

4. *Find the witnessing perspective:* This refers to the same idea as disidentification. The alternative to witnessing is being identified with some part of our experience.

Activity prompt: Please check and see if you are able to observe what you feel with non-evaluative interest. Notice and acknowledge any evaluative reactions you are having to the things you feel and have talked about.

5. *Let go of rigid control.* There is a natural tendency to cling to the things we are used to, especially ways of thinking and being that have served us well. But to open to experiencing we need to surrender a degree of control, so what is fresh and new can accurately emerge and not be fit only roughly into old symbols (Gendlin, 1981, 1996; Campbell and McMahan, 1985, especially the chapter 'Humor, Playfulness, and Surprise').

Activity prompt: You might check to see if there is anything in you that needs reassurance that we won't go too fast or be reckless.

6. *Transcend your personal stake in the issue.* The detachment from one's personal rewards and interests that Rogers spoke to (see 'Regard' on page 2) is a generous perspective. It lacks pride and possessiveness. It involves viewing a person as a complicated human being worthy of honor and respect. A certain humility about the extent of one's knowing fosters openness to experiencing. In contrast, self-assuredness and self-centeredness tend to be defensive and threatening to the other and to parts of ourselves. Opening to one's experiencing is facilitated when one's attachments and ego-interests become part of what one senses from the witnessing position, rather than those being the perspective with which one is identified.

Activity prompt: Notice if any part of you feels disdain or contempt for someone else in the situation you are working on.

Another prompt: Notice if any part of you feels oppressed by someone else.

Another prompt: Notice if you feel any need to protect your interests from attack.

Self as the beholder of bodily intelligence

One theme we see running through all the preceding is that we seek to foster an expansive, inclusive experience of self, open to experiencing without distortion. In focusing, we observe how becoming open to experiencing involves a qualitative change in the experience of the body: when one is able to have an attitude of presence toward a bodily felt sense, one's physical body seems to 'open up' almost like a delicate flower blossom. One's sensitivity increases so that one can feel and think about many interconnected emotions and meanings with ease and without

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bias for some feelings in favor of others. When this qualitative change occurs, the implying body reveals much wisdom to the person.

Part of what resolves with this qualitative shift is the *identification with any set self-concept*. By a disciplined practice of mindfully (Santorelli, 1999) examining experience from a disidentified distance, one learns over time that one is more than any symbolized part of awareness, and that one can rest in the witnessing process, rather than in the contents of experiences, patterns of behavior, or in familiar ways of understanding oneself (self-images, personae). The witnessing process can give a respectful, friendly hearing to *all* the various parts of one's experience, even when they conflict with each other. One can find security in this content-free form of continuity. The security grows as, over time, one accumulates experiences which demonstrate one's organismic wisdom at dealing with situations that are highly complex and difficult from the perspective of the 'me.'

What we can regard in an unconditionally positive way is the person situated in the witnessing position in relation to the whole complex interwoven set of processes his or her implying-body is. Out of this intrapersonal relationship (which almost always happens more easily in an empathic interpersonal situation), we repeatedly see healthy forward living emerge. This emergence of forward living is not mainly conceptual, nor does it require psychological sophistication in terms of introspective insight (although that often comes as a welcome bonus). When an interaction helps one find a step that carries forward, it is likely to be taken, conceptual insight or not.

CODA: 'ENJOYABLE BEAUTY' AS A MODEL FOR UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

I will close by likening UPR to the experience of enjoyable beauty. I do this in hopes of giving the reader an experiential referent with which to grasp and organize the preceding complexity. All of us have experienced enjoyable beauty.

Mortimer Adler (Adler, 1981) distinguishes 'enjoyable beauty' from 'admirable beauty,' the latter of which requires expertise to fully appreciate. In contrast, any person can experience enjoyable beauty. He wrote a separate chapter for each kind of beauty. I find what Adler has to say about enjoyable beauty remarkably relevant to UPR.

Adler starts with a definition articulated by Thomas Aquinas in the 1200s: 'The beautiful is that which pleases us upon being seen.' Adler further specifies several aspects of the meaning of this definition.

Beauty pleases us — in enjoyable beauty this refers to the obvious way, when our desires or appetites are met, we *feel satisfied*. It is a direct experience of satisfaction, not dependent on reasons or justifications. This pleasure can be quite strong or intense: we might say we are 'moved.' For example, when I saw the ice dance performance by Torval and Dean televised in the 1984 Olympics, I could detect no clumsy movements, and they seemed perfectly coordinated with each other and the music. When, again precisely in time with the music, on the last note they fell gracefully but forcefully to the ice to end their routine, I was moved to cry, stand and cheer, and applaud. My emotions and body were quite

literally and directly moved without requiring expertise on my part regarding the fine points of ice dancing.

Adler goes on to say the pleasure of experiencing enjoyable beauty involves simply *seeing* the object — the kind of pleasure which is non-possessive and non-controlling. This is in contrast to the pleasure involved in eating, drinking, buying something, or having health or wealth, which all please us when we *consume* them, *possess* them, or *control* them. Rather, the pleasure of enjoyable beauty is ‘disinterested’ in that we are content to contemplate or behold the object, rather than needing to possess or control it. For example, being pleased by the beauty of a picture in an art museum does not require the acquisition of the painting or any control over or alteration of it. This clearly echoes the comments of Rogers and many other writers about the attitude of a person experiencing UPR.

Adler notes that perceiving enjoyable beauty involves seeing in more than a visual way — we can easily grasp that it involves more than the visual sense. It involves beholding, or apprehending with the mind as well. As in the example of a near perfect execution of an athletic or musical performance, the visual sense is much involved, but we certainly use more of our capacities to perceive the beauty. It may involve timing and coordination of movement, the musicality of the object, and a sense of the whole of the performance as a gestalt. The mind brings together apprehension of a range of possibilities and input from various senses within the context of which we ‘see’ the current one.

Another example of non-visual apprehending is when we perceive that the course of action persons take requires the courage of their convictions: in spite of risking costly personal consequences, they decide to do what they consider to be morally right. What we apprehend is more than what we can see in their immediate behavior or statements. An inspiring source of examples of this kind of beautiful living is the film *Weapons of the Spirit* by Pierre Sauvage, which is about the residents of a small village in France who sheltered 5000 Jewish children during World War II with full knowledge of the fact that neighboring villages had been burned to the ground when suspected of doing similar things. The mind provides a context of relevant experiences within which the beauty of what we see comes into relief.

How the mind is involved — Adler insists that a further qualification deserves emphasis in this kind of ‘seeing,’ since we normally associate the mind with concepts and thinking. But the kind of mental apprehending involved in enjoyable beauty is *devoid of concepts* in the way they are usually used. Enjoyable beauty does *not* involve regarding the object as an example of a ‘kind’ or ‘type’ or member of a category. Rather, the object is regarded as a unique individual, for and in itself alone, appreciated in its rich, individual detail. The similarity to the openness that has been described as essential for UPR, requiring acceptance of all the parts of a person’s experiencing, is striking. Acceptance is, in large part, looking in an open, non-categorizing way.

I believe these features of the experience of enjoyable beauty apply nearly completely to the activity subset for the mode of unconditional positive regard. The one additional element that we had not already seen in the discussion of UPR is the idea that there is a personally moving kind of satisfaction in perceiving

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enjoyable beauty. From my personal experience in working as a therapist, and in personal relationships where I have been able to be present with UPR, I have often experienced being moved by a sense of the beauty before me. Santorelli has also noted this somewhat paradoxical fact: when we stay closely and non-judgmentally with someone exploring pain, we find beauty in the midst of the 'ruins' (Santorelli, 1999).

To witness someone carry feelings and actions forward on a matter about which the person has been troubled is, for me, a moving experience: one witnesses intricate complexity of motives, reasoning, and emotions which, when fully taken into account, make perfect sense of the person's reactions and dilemma. We see emerge in the midst of this complexity the person's genuine 'positive strivings' (Gendlin, 1968): perhaps an intense desire to be a good parent or partner or child, or a moral or ethical sense of the right thing to do. We might witness the person rise above a previously egocentric perspective on an interpersonal matter and become more empathic to the perspective of the other, as the result of more fully honoring the complex mesh of his or her own experiencing. To glimpse these things in another person is often for me, and I suspect for many, an experience of enjoyable beauty. This is a partial answer to a question often asked of therapists: 'how can you stand to listen to people's problems all day?'

Thus, here is my simpler answer to the question of how to *do* the activities of UPR: Seek the enjoyable beauty in the person you regard. To do this, 1) do not attempt to control or change the person; 2) use all your senses plus your conceptual grasp of the full range of possibilities to understand; 3) maintain a non-categorizing mentality, attending to the full rich detail rather than thinking of categories into which to fit things, and 4) allow yourself to be moved by what you hear.

Persons we regard for their beauty in this way are likely to welcome our help to find the witnessing position from which they can tap the wisdom in their complex bodily senses of situations. This promises to lead to their discovery of exactly what is needed to bring them into fuller and better living.

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Appreciation

I appreciate the Monday Vasavada group I attend in many ways, but in particular because when I was writing this paper I became identified with a notion that I was responsible for what to say about Unconditional Positive Regard. This got me stuck. The group helped me disidentify from this notion, and the writing then flowed better. Thanks to Fred Schenck, Sally Iberg, Jan Doleys, and Jerold Bozarth for their very helpful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript. I also feel grateful to Drs. Eugene Gendlin and Arwind Vasavada for their guidance, inspiration, and abundant supplies of Unconditional Positive Regard even though they also responded often and strongly in other modes.