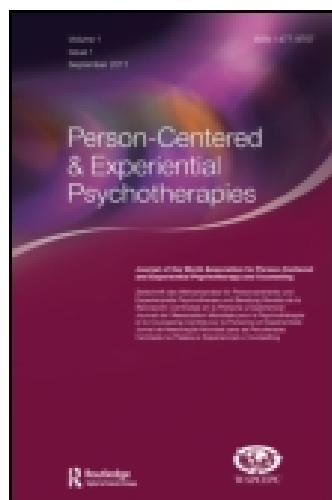


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Enquiring into human relationship in therapy and life systems, 1956-2010: Searching journey and new understanding

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Enquiring into human relationship in therapy and life systems, 1956–2010: Searching journey and new understanding

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This article surveys a half-century journey of unfolding inquiry, thought and writing by the author – up to his most current work. Concern with relationship processes and their correlates is a core theme. The journey began with research to test Rogers’ “conditions of therapy” theory; moved to new applications and development of the author’s Relationship Inventory; and on through several other regions of practice and inquiry. These latter include a focus on developmental small groups; contributions on family process and on empathy; community; and the plural self in relationship. New work is in progress that extends the author’s previous thought. This unfolds a relationship-centered vision of human life with development of a unified paradigm that is both system- and experience-sensitive.

Keywords: Relationship; system; self; context; experience; journey

Die menschliche Beziehung in Therapie und in Lebenssystemen erforschen, 1956–2010: Suche-Verläufe und neues Verstehen

Dieser Artikel gibt einen Überblick über ein halbes Jahrhundert des Forschens, Denkens und Schreibens des Autors – bis hin zu seinem jüngsten Werk. Die Beachtung von Beziehungsprozessen und ihre Korrelate sind ein Kernthema. Die Suche begann mit einer Forschung, die Rogers’ Theorie über “Therapiebedingungen” auf den Prüfstand stellte; sie ging weiter mit neuen Anwendungen und der Entwicklung des “Beziehungsinventars” (“Relationship Inventory”) des Autors; und sie führte durch verschiedene andere Gebiete von Praxis und Forschung. Letztere beinhalten einen Schwerpunkt zu Kleingruppenentwicklungen, Beiträge zu Familienprozessen und zur Empathie sowie zum Gemeinwesen und dem pluralen Selbst in der Beziehung. Der Autor entwickelt diese Überlegungen weiter. Eine beziehungsorientierte Vision menschlichen Lebens tritt dabei zutage, mit der Entwicklung eines vereinheitlichten Paradigmas, das sowohl system- als auch erfahrungs-sensitiv ist.

Investigando la Relación Humana en Terapia y los Sistemas de vida, 1956–2010: Viaje de búsqueda y una nueva comprensión

Este escrito investiga un viaje de medio siglo de indagación, pensamiento y escritura del autor, hasta su más reciente trabajo. La preocupación por los procesos de relación y sus correlatos es un tema central. El viaje comenzó con investigación para testear la teoría de las condiciones de la terapia de Rogers, siguió con las nuevas aplicaciones y desarrollos del “Inventario de la Relación”

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(Relationship Inventory) del autor, y siguió con varias otras áreas de la práctica e investigación. Estas últimas incluyen un foco en el desarrollo de pequeños grupos, contribuciones a los procesos de familia y la empatía; comunidad y la pluralidad del self en relación. Está llevando a cabo un trabajo nuevo que amplía el pensamiento anterior del autor. Esto se revela en una visión de la vida humana centrada en la relación, con el desarrollo de un paradigma unificado que es sensible tanto a la experiencia como al sistema.

Une Etude de la Relation Humaine dans la Thérapie et dans les Systèmes de Vie, 1956–2010: Un voyage de recherche et une compréhension nouvelle

Au travers d'un voyage qui s'est déroulé sur un demi siècle et jusqu'à ce jour, l'auteur passe en revue son travail de recherche, de réflexion et d'écriture. Son intérêt pour les processus de la relation et ses corollaires est au cœur de son travail. Le voyage a commencé par un travail de recherche pour tester la théorie des "conditions de la thérapie" de Rogers. Ensuite, il est passé à des applications nouvelles et des développements du Relationship Inventory de l'auteur (un questionnaire à choix-multiple et à échelle multiple pour mesurer la présence des conditions), puis il a continué à travers plusieurs domaines de pratiques et de recherches. Ces autres domaines comprennent un centrage sur des petits groupes pour le développement des participants, des contributions par rapport au processus de la famille et par rapport à l'empathie, à la communauté et au self pluriel dans la relation. Un travail nouveau est en cours qui élargit la pensée antérieure de l'auteur. Celui-ci déroule une vision centrée sur la relation de la vie humaine et développe un paradigme unifié qui est sensible à la fois aux systèmes et à l'expérience.

Investigando as Relações Humanas em Psicoterapia e nos Sistemas Vivos, 1956–2010: Viagem de busca e nova compreensão

Este artigo percorre meio século de investigação permanente, pensamento e escritos do autor, até ao seu mais recente trabalho. O tema central é a preocupação com os processos relacionais e os seus correlatos. A viagem começou com investigação para testar as condições terapêuticas de Rogers, caminhou no sentido de novas aplicações e desenvolvimentos do Inventário Relacional do autor e para diversas outras áreas da prática e da investigação. Nestas inclui-se um ênfase em pequenos grupos de desenvolvimento, com contributos para: o processo familiar, empatia, comunidade e o *self* "plural" envolvidos nas relações. Encontram-se em curso novos trabalhos que expandem o pensamento anterior do autor. Tal desenvolve uma visão da vida humana centrada na relação, com o desenvolvimento de um paradigma unificado que é, ao mesmo tempo, sensível ao sistema e à experiência.

セラピー、そして生活全般における「関係性」:1956年から2010年の研究のまとめと展開

本稿では、半世紀にわたり筆者が考え論じてきた関係性の構築過程と相互作用に関する研究を概観し、今後の展開について論じた。関係性に関する研究は、ロジャースの論じた成功したセラピー等のセラピー状況の測定化を試みる調査にはじまり、多くの研究を重ねた上で、独自の理論を構築するに至った。本研究には、家族やコミュニティといった集団を対象とするもの、そして関係性により変化する自己の多様性に焦点をあてたものもある。また、筆者の初期段階の知見をさらに発展させた新しい研究が進行中であり、これらの研究の中から、人間の人生を関係性から捉える視点が生まれ、システムと個人の体験の両方を視野に入れた統合的なパラダイムが展開してきている。

Nearly all of the stepping stones in my career reflect a special interest in relationship, both within and beyond the therapist-to-client context. This paper includes a fly-over view of my journey, hovering over key features seen in their unfolding. My home is in Perth, Western Australia, but I also have studied, taught and practiced elsewhere, especially: Chicago, from 1954–1958; then at Auburn University; the University of New England, New South Wales; and Waterloo, Ontario. Perth has again been my base since mid-1983. Altogether, with visiting affiliations and other professional and cherished family experiences, it has been a far-flung and formative journey. The tracing given here leads on to a focus on my perspective now. What follows is, therefore, nearly all about my own work and ideas. Related elements in contributions by others can be found in issues of this journal (*Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*), in the handbook edited by Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid and Wyatt (2007), and further sources referenced therein.

Actually, the metaphor of “steps,” could be misleading, since my journey – and I dare say yours as reader – has not been a linear path on which each further step left all the others behind. Quite often I have come back to something that previously occupied me but which I now see in a new light. Wonderful lines by T. S. Eliot (e.g., in Gardner, 1972, p. 897) capture meaning close to my experience. Eliot wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started –
And to know the place for the first time.

The therapy relationship: breakthrough formulation and measurement

When I first read Carl Rogers' “necessary and sufficient conditions” paper in 1956, nearly a year before its publication (Rogers, 1957), I was just starting to look for a topic for my doctoral research at the University of Chicago. After reading the paper, I looked no more. I was extremely taken with Rogers' clear and inclusive hypotheses about how therapy worked in facilitating change – and I knew that my aim was to put this theory to the test. This meant, in the cause and effect methodologies of the time, that the “conditions” should be measured and tested as predictors of change. But how to go about doing this? There was a lot to think about and figure out. One of the first things was to sharpen the definitions of what we would be measuring as there were no instruments for the conditions. Many readers would know that I finally came up with a multiple-choice, multi-scale questionnaire called the Relationship Inventory (RI or BLRI) (see, e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 1962, 1986, 2003, pp. 93–113). (This instrument, in use now for half a century, remains available from me in its various current forms.)

The theory as I tested it (Barrett-Lennard, 1962) centered on the critical qualities of the therapist's response as perceived by the client. I reasoned that the client's perception, very carefully obtained in a nonthreatening context, would be the closest we could get to his or her unfiltered experience. This would have been triggered (though not wholly determined) by the way the therapist ‘actually’ responded. How effectively this fed into the client's experience would depend on the therapist's expressive communication or signals *and* the client's capacity to hear and believe these. Although the therapist's experience is two or three steps removed from the

client's perceptions, its crucial input to those perceptions made it relevant to tap through a parallel, therapist-completed, form of the Relationship Inventory.

My data from clients (especially) and therapists was analyzed in ways that included, but also went beyond, correlating relationship scores with outcome measures (Barrett-Lennard, 1962). A crucial additional feature was to compare the measured quality of the relationship in the work of two groups of therapists, a highly experienced group and a relatively inexperienced group in the same setting, each group of therapists having a matched sample of clients. Client-perceived relationship quality distinctly favored the experienced therapists, implying that they were seen as more empathic, congruent and unconditionally regardful. *And, their clients improved more.* This original study, supporting the importance of the relationship conditions as experienced, is carefully summarized in accessible later sources (especially, Barrett-Lennard, 1998, pp. 264–267).

Expanding the sphere of measurement and study

From the beginning, my notion was that the variables of empathic understanding, congruence, and level and unconditionality of regard would be important not only in therapy but in any interpersonal relationship. Thus, the BLRI *items* never included the words “client,” “therapist,” “therapy” or “helping.” Very soon, in fact, the instrument was simplified to use in the study of parent–child and teacher–student relationships, and then adapted to tap the responses of collectives, such as a family, group or close milieu (Wargo & Meek, 1970/71). Afterwards, I wondered, “How do people experience their whole environment of (differing) relationships?” A student assistant and I went on to identify three regions of relationship: (i) *family*, (ii) *friends and other close associations*, and (iii) *work and public life relations* and the RI was adapted to accommodate ratings of several relationships within each sphere. The current 40-item refinement of this form is called the “Interpersonal Life Space” RI (available from the author).

This multi-relation form (see Barrett-Lennard, 2005, pp. 106–107) also lends itself to comparing client perceptions of their life relationships with their therapy relationship. Given, for example, that empathic understanding is indeed crucial for therapy, one would expect (in cases where there is good evidence of positive outcome) that the level of empathy will be higher in the therapy relationship than in the client's other significant relationships. Logically, if this were not the case, those other relationships should be sufficient for the client's healing growth. A related result also would be predicted: Client experience of a level of empathy in therapy *above his or her own baseline in other (life) relationships* would be equally or more crucial for positive outcome than would the absolute or scored level of perceived therapist empathy. Clients in a relatively favorable world of relationships might require higher levels of empathy than those in impoverished relationships. I have not been in a position to test these related hypotheses but hope that someone else will do so.

A following step in my journey was to begin to think seriously about couple and other relationships, not just in the way each member is perceived as responding to the other but as whole dyadic (or larger) systems: systems naturally referred to as “we,” “us,” or “our relationship.” To tap into the experienced quality of this “We,” an RI item such as “S/he understands me” is replaced by “We understand one another.” With such minor adjustments, this “We” RI form asks respondents to

focus on the way they experience their twosome or family. I subsequently came to the idea that each of us in a relationship has what might be called an “I-consciousness” and a “We-consciousness” (how we are, or “us” in action together). In a well-functioning relationship I figured that there would be substantial overlap in the We-consciousness of the participants, reflected in *relatively* convergent responses and scores on the RI. Specifically, in couple therapy, it would be interesting to track the levels and potential *increase in agreement* in partner perceptions of their “We.” All of the mentioned ideas and developments of the RI helped to lay the ground for my present view that *relationships develop a life of their own*. But, before elaborating this view, there are parallel threads in my journey to mention.

Focus on intensive groups, family process and community: practice and theory

My interest in groups came to fruition at the University of New England (UNE) in Armidale, on the tablelands of New South Wales. Back from the US and restless with my remote location and undergraduate teaching, I looked for a way to spread my wings, and was able to initiate residential “workshops in therapeutic counseling” that were open to colleagues in mental-health-related disciplines. We promised “to ensure that the specific content of the workshop experience grows out of the thinking and concerns of the persons choosing to engage in it” and made provision for regular low-structure “intensive discussion meetings in small groups” (Barrett-Lennard, 1967, p. 4). This innovation began as far back as 1962/1963, when intensive groups of this kind had not so far been used in a professional development context (at least in Australia).

In addition to the jointly determined process, members of the groups provided session-by-session and follow-up data that allowed further study of process and outcome features (see Barrett-Lennard, 1998, pp. 294–298). It so happened that Carl Rogers became seriously interested in groups *at the same time*, conducting his first similar workshop in Wisconsin in June, 1963. (He sent me a mimeographed copy of his post-workshop reaction letters from members – which I marked “confidential” and still have on file.) He and I remained in touch about our new experiences, and he came to Australia early in 1965 mainly to lead the third workshop in our series. My later account of our shared interest and the full story of his visit appeared in the Memorial Issue of the *Person-Centered Review* (Barrett-Lennard, 1987). This series of workshops spawned numerous related events elsewhere and continued in the same setting after I was drawn back to North America and then settled in Canada.

For the first time, process- and theory-oriented *courses* in the small-group domain became an integral part of my teaching. I was stimulated to write a descriptive guideline paper on the experiential group process (Barrett-Lennard, 1973), and my research using the Australian workshop data progressed with grant assistance (Barrett-Lennard, 1974/1975; Barrett-Lennard, Kwasnik & Wilkinson, 1973/74). An avenue for me to develop and publish serious theoretical writing on groups also opened up (Barrett-Lennard, 1975). New work on empathic understanding, distinguishing a sequence of phases in the empathic process, occupied me as well (Barrett-Lennard, 1976, 1981, 1993). And, my interest in community surfaced in this eventful period, sparked by a period of leave in a physically lovely purpose-built city where most inhabitants came and went without really affiliating and evolving a community. The following year lent further impetus to this new interest through participation in a large group workshop centered on experiential learning in

community formation and personal empowerment – conducted by Rogers and colleagues in San Francisco.

I was able to gather some data from participants at the end of that large workshop (in 1975) with results that fed directly into later writing on community (Barrett-Lennard, 1994, 2005, pp. 83–102). A fascination with family process was another thread (later published in Barrett-Lennard, 1984, 2003, pp. 77–92, 2005, pp. 65–81), and experience in all of these areas stretched my consciousness. I have always needed to make conceptual sense of the phenomena that interest me. Working out ideas on paper (or computer) has been intrinsically satisfying to me; rewarding, in itself, to the point that I don't always follow up with publication before going on to the next thing. One of these “next things” was foreshadowed in my earlier poem “A person” (in Barrett-Lennard, 2003, p. 179). The first verse begins “One alone and many in one” and ends “each of us a singular multiplicity.”

This view of the multi-voiced plurality of self ties in with my thinking now about the pivotal role of relationship in self-development. Since life relationships for nearly anyone are of widely varied kind and quality, diverse patterns or modes of self-being can be expected. In different words, the adaptive self, evolving on into adulthood, would develop “differentiated repertoires of being” (Barrett-Lennard, 2009), which I called “contextual subelves” (Barrett-Lennard, 2000, 2005, pp. 13–14). I felt that it should be possible to empirically test this conception and devised a self-descriptive inventory to reveal the ways that respondents picture themselves in the context of varied key life relationships. Indeed, in exploratory work and a published study (Barrett-Lennard, 2008), respondents reported differing senses of themselves in different relationships: with a parent, partner, sibling, own child, work boss, members of a close group or team, or with someone they did not like or trust. The Contextual Selves Inventory, further revised, includes 24 self-descriptive items and provision to describe the self in up to 12 different relational contexts, and is freely available to other investigators. One of the potential applications is the study of subself *change* through therapy.

Our interwoven journeys and consciousness: another understanding

Related to the verse I began with, my long interest in relationship keeps coming into focus in new ways. A marked shift crystallized as I was ending my book *Carl Rogers' Helping System* (1998). Until about that time, client/person-centered ideas and work had focused very much on the individual person's inner life and functioning, and on experience in interpersonal, face-to-face relationships (especially in therapy, process groups and community workshop settings). Close relationships were seen as both the main cause of psychological difficulty *and* potentially the main avenue of salvation from it. The change for me was a vivid awareness that, although this *personal* focus remains of great importance in our movement and its contribution, it centers on a process that is nested within a field of interacting and highly influential wider relational systems. I benefited vastly from Rogers' depth of thinking and attunement in first-hand relationships, and his support for my own and each person's search. My thought now about the self, the nature and domain of human relationships and the working of systems is both founded on his pioneering thought and has evolved beyond it.

Central to the experience of each of us is our own resident consciousness. I say “resident,” rather than individual, because it is so intricately and closely

interconnected with the consciousness of other people: both close personal others and the surrounding fields of thought, attitude and outlook. In a word, each of us lives in and through a world of relationships and connection. We are separable, one from another, but never separate or literally autonomous – even when at our active best.

I have proposed six levels of relationship and potential helping engagement (Barrett-Lenard, 1998, pp. 369–371, 2002): (1) Individual psychotherapy is particularly concerned with the level of relations within the self; (2) Couple, family and group therapies include a focus on self-other personal relationships; (3) In a team or work group context the consultant-helper's role is potentially that of process facilitator in *group* relations; (4) Relations in and between communities is a further distinctive region of enabling practice; (5) The diverse cultures and personal, role-related and intergroup relationships in large organizations form another context for sophisticated and enabling practice; (6) Finally, relations between big national, ethnic or religious systems clearly can have huge impact on quality of life of their members and may precipitate great human suffering. Although remedial intervention is difficult and complex in this context, there is the challenging possibility that a few of us, from the person-centered movement, might learn to assist in unique ways on this level.

The intense interest I feel in the basic nature, scope and working of relationship in human life extends also to relations with other species and the natural world, and I would love to contribute further to a depth of understanding in this whole domain. As a follow-on to this and other mentioned interests, I am now working to articulate a broader vision than formerly presented. Humans are a body–mind whole, and the enormous complexity of our physical beings – for instance, 100 billion brain neurons with their astronomical range of interconnections (Kolb & Whishaw, 2005; Rains, 2002) – underlies the complexity of the emergent human self and consciousness, and also the variety of our relationships. Humans are much too complex to be always on the same track in their inner working and relations. The intricate two-way influence I see between self and relationship, coupled with natural variation in relationships, contributes to a multi-configured self. More broadly, how are we to understand causality or influence in such complex systems? And, what are the implications for a new way of thinking about human dysfunction in place of the prevailing focus on individual “psychopathology.” These are a sample of the issues exercising me in new writing.

I referred above to “our relationships,” but who is the “our” if not itself largely a product of relationship? Do you and I possess our relationships or do they, in equal measure, possess us? Or, is it not a matter of possession, but (as I think of it) the yin and yang of two kinds of system – self and emergent relationship – each feeding into the other in complex interplay? Any significant relationship to me is an emergent phenomenon and expression of life distinct from what one can say about individuals or subsystems within that relationship.

Implications of recognizing that life pivots on relationship

It follows from seeing the central role of relationship that we need to change our usual ways of thinking about suffering, disorder and healing. I believe we should always view persons and groups in context, and apply a developed sensitivity to the working and difficulties or dysfunction of relationship in the lives of our clients, and

also to the way larger systems are contributing to this and being reinforced in turn. From this viewpoint, even if a person seemed to be stuck in acute inner conflict we would *not* be drawn at once to assume and look for a personality disorder. We would make no assumption that their difficulties, however acute, were endogenous or somehow integral to their makeup. Depression, anxiety and other mental-emotional suffering, though painfully felt by individuals, would strike us not as inherent disorders, but as symptoms having their source in qualities and meanings of interchange and relation with others – present- and past-meanings so deeply reverberating that everything is seen through a glass darkly. These presumptions inexorably follow from a view that relationship is a central expression of human existence and that we never really act or react alone; that our life worlds are interwoven outwardly and in our consciousness. This perspective extends to the larger system contexts of relationship I will now turn to.

Almost all of us live a big part of our lives engaged in, or with, organizations – organizations we work in, ones we buy from, ones that provide services we need, religious organizations, and professional, government, recreational and other associations to which we belong. Diverse interacting and overlapping systems of these kinds are everywhere in our culture. They include the international professional association, WAPCEPC, in whose biennial conference I first presented this work. Organizations are major life settings whose working can variously channel and/or oppress their members or, in other cases, release creative and expressive energies and contribute positively to their wellbeing. I see the quality of relationships that form within organizations – personal, role-related and between groups – as a major force toward health or ill-health in our contemporary cultures. Workplace systems and other organizations draw from and contribute to the ethos of their larger society. They are, in effect, among the primary custodians of human relational life with vital bearing on the humanity of our world.

Some organizations (universities for instance), in my observation, become significant communities to many of their members and in this way play a very important part in their sense of inclusion and belonging. A core feature of the many forms of community is that of affiliated belonging on the part of members. What contributes to this sense and how does it develop? My view, in a word, is that it comes from common association: that it pivots on the experience of connection and that relationship is in fact the *sine qua non* of community. This implies, in turn, that individuals and groups in a community not only feel knowingly received by others, but also that they implicitly feel a shared responsibility within and for their communal whole. They take for granted a certain personal agency and mostly accept the agency of others. They feel attached to similar things about their community and (in many cases) its environment. Their sense of an enveloping community presence extends beyond the people they personally know or have direct contact with.

Almost all that I've said about relationship in its various contexts could be systematically studied, and a good bit of it already is. My own research on helping and life relationships has been mentioned (including Barrett-Lennard, 2003, Chap. 8) and there is much other work that has centered on the "common factors" (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999) of relationship and alliance in therapy and other helping contexts. Colleagues within the broad person-centered movement could uniquely add to the study of community process, for example, with a *focus on discerning the connective tissue and quality of relationships*. Research on *organizational processes*

has included a great many studies of leadership, job satisfaction, morale, attitude development, and the like. New work could focus on *quality* of communication and relationship, between groups as well as individuals, within these systems. Member visions of what the organization is and could be, in respect to its philosophy, ethos and contribution to the wider culture, would be another socially relevant focus.

The human relations working of any very large entity, such as a nation or transnational system, might seem impossibly complex to decipher. However, unless we can achieve some understanding of the multi-level processes within a particular system, it would seem impossible to adequately comprehend relations between that system and another macro-system. Any national government (with its many appendages and expressions) is influenced by the nature and diversity of relations among the groups within its broad jurisdiction. How then could we gain an understanding of the many attitudinal and relational currents feeding into its interaction with an opposing nation state? We *might* start from what we know about human motivation, or from observation of small relational systems in tension or conflict where one can see what is happening. Or, we might concentrate on seeking to assess attitudes within each population toward the other system and its people. We might place our confidence in a particular conflict-resolution strategy and formula. However, the chances are that, in practice, none of these or related approaches will work well alone because they oversimplify the diverse multi-level interacting relational structures and dynamics within each system.

To work out a more adequate plan is a huge and urgent challenge. Here are a few suggestive ideas about an approach: First is the notion of building a model, one that takes account of many features of the particular players, including their histories and meaning systems, and the ways that various levels of association and responsibility are structured in their large systems. The ways people tend to communicate in face-to-face relations would be *one* building block. However, the interactive working of larger groups, communities, and organizations, including the major systems of government, commerce, and human services all would be included in the model. Interactions of a mutually reinforcing or weakening nature among these systems could be of particular relevance. Development of the model would draw from a variety of sources, including the (often undocumented) experience of people who particularly work to enhance communication and relationships in communities, government agencies, and other complex systems.

Relationships with the non-human world

We humans not only live in interwoven relationships with other humans. Many of us have animal friends or feel concern for other species. Some of us care greatly about the natural environment and especially the wonderful profusion of life forms that share this precious habitat with each other and us. We recognize that higher animals generally are profoundly aware in their own ways and very often can engage and relate with us. We are fellow creatures with a shared evolutionary history, a common distant ancestry and a great deal in common in our physical, sensory and even emotional beings. Willy-nilly, we are profoundly interconnected (see Abrams, 1996). Among the “simpler” species, plants of many kinds not only provide essential nutriment and a pleasing world, but also have a vital role in absorbing CO₂ and maintaining the oxygen balance necessary for our survival and that of nearly all of the animal life we know.

As is the case between humans, relationships with members of other species vary greatly in quality. In one form, the human responds with a high degree of empathy and genuine caring for the animal other. In another case, human and animal groups work together as a team and sometimes also as accomplices in capturing or killing other animals. In a contrasting type of relationship the animal partner is exploited and used as a commodity, not as another experiencing creature. *Relationship in its widest sense applies to the whole closely connected web of life.* As potentially the most farseeing species, it seems that we have a special responsibility for our collective relationship with other species and the world biospheric system, for gaining ever more understanding of its working (Capra, 1996) and (with this knowledge) for helping to maintain its integrity and balance in the interests of all of its varied inhabitants.

Conclusion: a transforming dialectic

I see an emerging shift away from overriding individualist or “island” images of our nature and toward an understanding in which life is seen to pivot on connectivity and relationship. A concern for subjective human experience can work in easy partnership with a systemic way of thinking (see also Kriz, 2008). Each person is an exquisitely complex being both in organic makeup and emergent consciousness. Persons engage with each other and in multi-person systems nested within larger systems (see also Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Couples and families, groups, organizations, and communities of people form living systems of association. Person-centered and related approaches to bringing about personal and social change are, at their best, therapies of relationship. Person-centered psycho-relational *therapy* is but one important level of potential healing change in a much larger spectrum, each level a sphere of relationship interfacing with other spheres in larger wholes. Intervening at one level is insufficient, *on its own*, to produce beneficial change on those other levels. This challenges us to inquire into, and more directly address, those levels. The more one views human association in its systemic complexity the less credible it is to imagine that a single “cause” has a constant effect, as though cause and effect were encapsulated away from any other influence. The question of how our relationships (on differing levels) are powered and influenced is, I believe, enormously important to hold in view and further understand. A simple message from my experience, to offer as I end this paper, is never to reach contented closure, because some sense of present limitation and not-yet-seen possibility is essential to moving forward. I believe this, but admit also that for me the direction is not so much calculated as guided by a hunger, a hunger to see further and maybe make a modest difference through this seeing.

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Commentaries

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In reading Goff Barrett-Lennard's paper, and having heard it also at the conference, I am again struck by the depth of his commitment to the person-centered and experiential approach (PCE) and by the wide range of his contribution to the approach over so many years. In this article, we see Goff as a historian of the PCE; as a researcher whose work on exploring the experience of the helping relationship continues to inspire researchers; as therapist; and as a theorist with a particular interest in the meaning of connection and relationship in the lives of individuals, groups, and communities. It shows something of the process of his thinking over the years, but clearly, whatever the focus of his work has been, the central theme has always been "relationship."

He has touched here on many important topics, and one that has particular importance for me is the simple but profound statement that "we need to change the way we think about suffering, disorder and healing." A great strength of the PCE is its focus on the therapeutic relationship and its constant exploration of new ways of understanding the crucial elements in therapy. But in its effort to avoid the dehumanizing of clients through traditional diagnostic paradigms, it has never quite managed to construct a coherent perspective on "disorder" or suffering, a perspective that is truly consistent with its radical philosophical basis.

We need to develop our conceptualization of "disorder": rather than a problem or difficulty located within the person, we need to explore how we can understand disturbance as both a symptom and a symbol of the person's effort to survive challenging (relational) circumstances. Disorder is an expression of experience – and an expression that demands to be understood and related to.

A corollary of this perspective is that we also need to develop a greater understanding and sensitivity to cultural context and the different construction of self, relationship and of the meaning of existence that are present in diverse cultures. I hope that the increasing communication and exchange of ideas between PCE practitioners and researchers in different parts of the world will give a new energy and impetus to such important areas of development of theory and practice.

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Years ago, I started writing about "co-experiencing" in a yet-to-be completed novel. However I did not pursue it far until I read Goff's work on emergent "we" experience, starting with one of his papers on empathy (Barrett-Lennard, 1993). His work, as well as the work of some others in which they took seriously the idea that human beings together can form higher units of relating, helped me to have confidence in "co-experiencing." This is the idea that the experience of two (or more)

people can literally interpenetrate such that each person's experiencing is "wider," richer, and different than it would be if they just had separate awareness. Examples include: (a) sitting together watching a sunset, (b) listening to music together, and, of course, (c) lovemaking. The point is that the whole of the experience is more than the sum of two independent experiences. This idea was subsequently reinforced by the work of some cognitive scientists who were developing related notions in the form of "socially shared cognition."

Following on this thought, Gayle Byock and myself (Bohart & Byock, 2005) did a research study where we examined transcripts of Carl Rogers. We discovered that the only way we could make full sense out of what was going on was to understand the therapist–client interaction in terms of two individuals co-thinking and co-experiencing in the form compatible with Goff's work. To quote us: "Focusing on the relationship, therapists and clients 'meet' on the common ground of talking about clients' feelings and perceptions. Similarly, therapist empathy responses 'join with' clients' thinking processes. It becomes accurate to say that therapists 'participate in' clients' thinking process, just as clients participate in therapists' thinking process" (ibid., p. 202).

Goff's thought was seminal in getting me to look at human experience in a new way. I believe that Goff is on the forefront of a revolution in how we see human experience. I am grateful for the insights I have gotten from him.

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When I think of empowerment, particularly personal power, I ask myself questions like, "Who am I?" "How can I be?" In answering those questions, I come to a conclusion similar to Goff's: I am my relationships. I aim to be open to others and myself, often learning who I am in a given situation through first receiving others. In similar ways, I am my relationship with myself, a relationship that I orient towards letting parts of myself interact where new meanings can unfold.

Goff's emphasis on the centrality of relationship fits my experience in another way. I have collected data for the last five years in which I ask my students to write down each day what they are grateful for and why. The most consistent theme across 300 students is that they are grateful for their relationships. Students are surprised, as their stated values are often more for independence than connection. Goff's work provides an elaboration on this theme. His six levels provide a model to see how people intersect across different levels.

Lately, I have found myself consistently attending to relationships at some of these more complicated levels – in and between communities, in and between organizations, and between national, ethnic and belief systems. While these comments may be uniquely influenced by my personal experience of serving as the

chair of the World Association of Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (WAPCEPC), I believe other member colleagues are also involved at some of these levels. With representatives from 35 countries at PCE 2010, many participants are connection points between cultures, languages, and collaborations for shared purposes. To engage with the WAPCEPC rather than only its member organizations or other PCE groups, persons often have a budding or explicit recognition of multiple levels in their relationships. A quick review of the seven goals in the statutes of this World Association shows that nearly all of them are aimed at fostering cooperative relationships at these systemic levels.

I am grateful not only for the many personal ways in which Goff's work touches me and so many others, but for his elaboration of and valuing of our connections to each other at all levels of interaction.

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Goff Barrett-Lennard's concept of recognizing and accepting our multi-selved nature is an interesting and valuable understanding.

Among the many important things he says, I see a new dimension on congruence. Each subself can within itself be a congruent mode of being. His work also, in a sense, enlarges this concept as a new democratic-systemic kind of congruence, where the internal different parts are all contributing to a higher order of harmony in the music of our individual but so different selves.

Goff's special focus illuminates a deeper link in the sphere of what he refers to as the yin and yang of individuality and relationship. It is not in our nature to be separate self-contained beings. To use Goff's words: "We never really act or react alone."