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Related but not replaceable: a response to Warner's reworking of person-centered personality  
theory

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Abstract

Whether conditions of worth theory can explain complex forms of human psychological distress, such as those emanating from early experiences of abuse, neglect and trauma, alongside experiences of physiological events later in life is open to debate. It has been suggested that Rogers's personality theory should be reconsidered and replaced with an actualization-centered formulation that places greater emphasis on the enhancement of self, process and agency through relationship, rather than on a theory of defense. This paper aims to examine these proposals and consider their relative contribution to developing the theory of personality. We suggest that the actualization-centered process theory aids Rogers's theory of personality but is *not* an adequate replacement. We also consider the issues associated with maintaining theoretical and practical symmetry, and the practice implications of replacing conditions of worth<sup>1</sup>.

Keywords: Rogers's personality theory, conditions of worth, processing

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## Introduction

In this paper we examine the theoretical concepts of processing (Warner, 2000) and conditions of worth (Rogers, 1959). Over the last fifteen years there has been a gradual yet hitherto unchallenged integration of the concept of processing styles (Warner, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2009) into person-centered theory (Sanders 2004; Mearns and Thorne 2007; Pearce & Sommerbeck 2014). This was based on the claim that the concept of processing styles provides an alternate and more complete personality theory to that of conditions of worth (Warner, 2009). We agree that if person-centered and experiential therapies are to continue to thrive then new developments in theory are to be welcomed. However, in order for new theoretical ideas to replace existing ones they need to meet certain requirements. For instance, new theoretical developments need to demonstrate that the existing theory does not provide a sufficient explanation for an observed phenomenon or the new theory is able to provide a more parsimonious account. The processing styles theory was based on the claim that conditions of worth theory was not sufficient to explain a number of observable phenomena; however, before the new theoretical development can be fully accepted this hypothesis on which it is based needs to be put to the test. Theories need to have internal consistency, be parsimonious, have coherency, and be broadly applicable. If the theory of conditions of worth is not sufficiently broadly applicable then the theory rightly needs to be expanded and refined in order to make it more broadly applicable and able to include observed phenomena that are relevant to the field.

The primary aim of this paper is to examine the validity and basis for the claim that conditions of worth theory is inadequate for explaining complex forms of human psychological distress. Firstly, to put this to the test we outline the basic theory underpinning

conditions of worth. We will argue there is insufficient evidence to warrant the claim that conditions of worth theory has insufficient explanatory power. Contrary to the claimed need to replace conditions of worth theory we will illustrate that conditions of worth are both inextricably linked to processing theory and are implicit in all aspects of personality formation from the Rogerian perspective. We shall propose that conditions of worth theory provides a useful explanation for the deep structures formed within personalities, that relate to the very cognitive-affective system used to process information, experience and memory. To do this we address three hypothetical scenarios originally proposed by Warner (2009) as beyond the explanatory reach of conditions of worth theory. Following this we consider the issue of maintaining symmetry between theory and practice, and the implications for person-centered practice of integrating processing styles, which can be perceived as inherently diagnostic, into a theory of conditions of worth, which is universal. To end we assert the claim that conditions of worth theory cannot be dismissed, replaced or watered down in our understanding of personality formation and change but that conditions of worth and processing theories can be considered complementary to one another. Further theoretical development work will be useful to assist our understanding in this area together with empirical investigations of the links between conditions of worth and processing capacities.

### Conditions of Worth

All major approaches to psychotherapy are based on a theory of personality. The practice of person-centered therapy is based on the theory of personality proposed by Rogers (1951; 1959). Conditions of worth form a crucial part within the theory of personality. The term *conditions of worth* was initially presented and described as the *introjected value* (Rogers 1951) and was later developed by Standal (1954). As a result the term the introjected value was subsequently renamed within the theory as condition of worth and since then has been the main terminology for understanding those aspects of the personality that shape our

sense of our own worth. Rogers deemed *conditions of worth* to be a more exact term for the observed phenomena that people seemed to take on the values of others and behave in a way *as if* the introjected value was their own (Rogers, 1959). Conditions of worth are formed when a person receives conditional positive regard from a significant social other that communicates to them that parts of their experience are more or less worthy of positive regard than others. A condition of worth is formed when the person assimilates this external valuing of their experience into the self-concept. The person gradually moves towards holding the same introjected conditional attitude toward themselves; losing and gaining self-regard, avoiding and seeking certain experiences, based on external valuations rather than based on whether the experience enhances or fails to enhance their organism (Rogers, 1959). This developmental process represents an ‘important specific instance of inaccurate symbolization’ (Rogers 1959, p. 210) as the person may value experience as if in relation to their actualization tendency, and perceive it as organismically satisfying, when actually the valuing is based externally, and does not relate to the maintenance or enhancement of the organism. In this way a condition of worth ‘disturbs the valuing process’ and prevents the person from functioning as freely and effectively as might be possible (Rogers, 1959, p. 210). In this statement Rogers draws on both the term conditions of worth and the term ‘valuing process’ and thereby the concepts of conditions of worth and processing, of which the valuing process plays a significant part, are linked together.

Thus, we can say that conditions of worth cause an incongruence between self and direct experience; experience which runs contrary to a person’s conditions of worth will be denied or distorted to allow for the maintenance of a consistent concept of self that is worthy of positive regard. The more ‘numerous and extensive’ the conditions of worth in a person, ‘the greater the proportion of experience which is potentially threatening’, and ‘the greater the degree of vulnerability and psychological maladjustment’ a person will experience

(Rogers, 1959, p. 231). As such, Rogers's theory states that the undoing and dissolving of conditions of worth is both 'the path toward psychological maturity' and 'the path of therapy' (Rogers, 1959, p. 226). This path is followed when the person perceives the unconditional positive regard of the therapist, which causes the existing conditions of worth to be weakened and dissolved (Rogers, 1959). Through this process the person experiences an increasing level of unconditional positive self-regard and moves towards greater psychological maturity.

Warner's critique of Rogers's theory of personality and conditions of worth

Warner (2009) writes that Rogers's most theoretically powerful and revolutionary ideas were in the active and positive ways processing, self and agency operate within human actualization. Warner considers the human capacity and wish to process experience, hold it within a sense of self, and act in personally congruent ways as deeply embedded within the organism, and within client-centered therapy, and as such expects it to have a central position in Rogers's personality theory (Warner, 2009). However, Warner also proposes Rogers's personality theory diminishes the power of process and agency, giving them secondary placing. The self has a stronger role, yet the breadth of its independent impact on human actualization is obscured. This, Warner suggests, happens as a result of Rogers's defense model being too rigid to explain fluid concepts that ultimately renders processing, self and agency as only quasi automatic in the absence of defenses. Warner hypothesizes that in creating a personality theory, Rogers was heavily influenced by both the push to present new theory in logical positivistic if then terms, and his own exposure to psychodynamic personality theories when training (Warner 2009). As a result, Warner claims Rogers was trying to fit his revolutionary ideas of actualization into more static and less process oriented theoretical ideas of the time (Warner 2009), and was effectively guilty of putting 'new wine into old wine bottles' (Warner, 2009, p. 117). This position echoes Gendlin's earlier critique

of Rogers's personality theory (Hart & Tomlinson, 1970). However, whilst such style of presentation might have influenced Rogers's writing this critique does not explain why Rogers never updated the theory of personality beyond 1959. One assumes he was content that even in later years the theory continued to provide a satisfactory account for human psychological distress and functioning.

Further, in critiquing Rogers's theory of defense, Warner argues that placing conditions of worth as the only cause of psychological maladjustment limits the theory's capacity to explain experiences of complex psychological distress. For example, Warner distinguishes early experiences of abuse and neglect, as well as biological factors that amount to complex distress as some of those that cannot be explained adequately by conditions of worth. Any attempt to do so broadens Rogers's theory to the point of being 'virtually meaningless' (Warner, 2009, p. 116) and leaves person-centered practitioners seeking to explain their practice with complex human situations to be seen as both narrow and naive (Warner, 2009, p. 117).

#### Warner's processing theory

In creating an alternative to Rogers's theory, Warner has proposed a theory of difficult processing styles (Warner, 2005, 2006, 2008). According to Warner (2008) processing is what happens when 'an individual stays with an experience which is troublesome or not yet clear' (Warner, 2008, p. 5). The theory suggests that in processing an individual pauses and attends to the situation, stays with the experience that emerges, holding it in attention without judgment, sensing new, spontaneous emotional and physical feeling responses, along with any triggered images and memories. In staying present alongside this

processing of experience, the individual forms a new awareness of what is happening and why. The next step is for the individual to be able to hold in awareness their experience, whilst being able to accept that another person will have a different experience to their own, allowing for both realities to exist (Warner, 2008). Warner sees processing as an explanation for how humans make sense of experience, conceptualizing it as a core human capacity grounded in the biological structure of the organism. Processing capacities are developed in optimal early childhood relationships and later in adult relationships of a similar quality (Warner, 2008). As a natural human capacity, processing is aided by accepting empathic connection, which Warner sees as ‘the environments evolutionary adaptedness’ (Warner, 2008, p. 119). Processing is developmentally impeded by trauma, neglect and biological differences, which Warner distinguishes from conditions of worth as only one of the number of ways processing capacities can be limited in early childhood (Warner, 2009). Using processing theory instead of conditions of worth, Warner offers different processing styles, such as fragile, dissociative and psychotic process, as explanation of distress caused by early trauma, neglect and biological factors, as it represents both human’s innate capacity to process and the ways in which this processing can be impeded and limited (Warner, 2009).

Warner’s overriding argument is that Rogers’s model of defense and presentation of conditions of worth as the only form of maladjustment is unnecessarily limiting within the theory (Warner, 2009). In its place, Warner calls for an actualization-centered theory, which has no need of a conceptualization of defense, elevating human’s innate capacity to process experience to its center, working in tandem with self and agency as a complex developmental phenomena, and relegating conditions of worth to only one of a number of possible explanations for why processing experience may become difficult (Warner, 2009).

A response to Warner’s processing theory



To replace the theory of personality and conditions of worth such a theoretical alternative would need to be more parsimonious, show how the original theory is incorrect, or as in the case of personality theory, is unable to be broadly applied to various forms of distress that is experienced within the person. That is, the existing theory is shown to no longer hold sufficient explanatory power for the observed phenomena for which it intended to account. In an attempt to highlight the limits of Rogers's personality theory Warner provides three case scenarios that question the validity of the conditions of worth theory whilst also claiming that processing theory can provide a better account. In the sections below we challenge the claim that conditions of worth have insufficient explanatory power in relation to these three case scenarios and examine the extent that conditions of worth, alongside processing, can explain the various types of distress that Warner suggests are beyond Rogers's original theory. We address each of the three scenarios framed within conditions of worth theory and other ideas related to Rogers's and Standal's personality theory that can account for the phenomena described in Warner's three case scenarios.. In addition, we emphasize how Rogers's original framework provides a clear symmetry between theory and practice, and that to replace this with a processing style theory would have significant implications for person-centered therapists. These implications are centrally concerning the impact of replacing conditions of worth theory, which is universal, with processing styles, which we argue is inherently diagnostic and therefore carries a requirement to tailor the therapeutic style to the processing style and not for the individual client.

However, we do not disregard Warner's processing style theory and in conclusion, we propose that the processing theory offered by Warner, is central to *supporting* the theory of conditions of worth and can be seen as *complimentary* and *strengthening* rather than contradicting or replacing the original theory.

### *Hypothetical scenario 1*

Warner states that

*'A client has dissociative experiences as a result of having been raped as a young child. This situation is more difficult to conceptualize using the theory. Are we to consider "rape" as a "condition of worth"? Clearly it is an action that shows little valuing of the person. But this physical violation seems to be quite different from a parental value which brings withdrawal of "positive regard" when a child fails to live up to that value' (2009, p. 117).*

In this first hypothetical scenario, Warner begins the critique of conditions of worth asking 'are we to view rape as a condition of worth?' The simple answer is 'no' we are not to consider rape as a condition of worth; rape is a terrible and traumatic *event* experienced by the victim and so in terms of the development of conditions of worth should be treated in the same way as other traumatic event experiences; *events* themselves are not to be considered as conditions of worth. In this scenario the main issue is how such an event impacts functioning of the person. Warner's claim is that such an event leads to a specific form of processing style. But can the existing personality theory, including conditions of worth, account for the dissociative experiences that might follow experiences of trauma such as a rape? If existing personality theory provides a sufficient explanation then there is no basis to the claim that conditions of worth theory is inadequate in this instance.

For the purpose of the argument let us say that in the case scenario at the time of the rape the client is in the common state of being to some degree psychologically maladjusted. That is, they have to some extent already developed conditions of worth. Therefore, experiences that are inconsistent with the self-concept are denied and distorted by these conditions of worth. Whatever the unique meaning of these conditions of worth and the significant social-cultural relations they are related to, their very existence means experience

can be *difficult to process* and symbolization is to some extent being affected due to the effect of conditions of worth on the perception of reality. It is highly likely that the child's organismic response to a rape would be experienced as extreme threat, to either or both the self-concept or physical integrity of the organism. If existing defenses fail to maintain a sense of consistency between organismic experience and the self-concept inclusive of their conditions of worth, then the child's experience of vulnerability, violation, and threat are accurately symbolized in awareness. In the case of a rape, this might lead to a strong chance of a breakdown and disorganization in the self-structure. As a consequence of the breakdown and disorganization a process of reorganization ensues. The experience of rape has to be somehow integrated into the self-concept. As this process occurs some of this experience is accurately symbolized and some aspects might continue to be denied and distorted as the self-concept reforms a consistency. As the experience comes to be fully integrated there is no longer a need for denial and distortion. In the intermitting period some aspects of the experience of rape continue to present a threat and therefore the person experiences dissociative states to deny to awareness painful or traumatic memories. This is a coping strategy and creative adjustment to the trauma. Joseph (2004) and more recently Joseph, Murphy and Regal (2012) have provided a theoretical account for this process consistent with the person-centered personality theory.

The more conditions of worth that exist, the greater the person's conditional self-regard (Standal 1954) will be and the greater the level of vulnerability within the person's self-structure can be assumed. Consequently, if the defense system works to protect the self-structure and a total breakdown is avoided, it will remain difficult for the traumatic experience of rape to be fully processed. A feature of conditions of worth is they prevent accurate symbolization. As a result of rape the level of psychological tension will remain or even increase. As a client attempts to process their experience of a trauma such as rape their

conditions of worth are a critical part of the affective-cognitive processing system (Joseph, Murphy & Regal, 2012). Dissociative processing is part of, not an alternative to, attempts to assimilate or accommodate traumatic experience. For healthy functioning to exist following a traumatic event, the event itself needs to be *processed* and conditions of worth, as they are related to the processing systems of perception and defense, inevitably shape the processing of such an experience.

Rape is an event and not a condition of worth but how an experience of rape is processed is inextricably linked to the conditions of worth that exist within the maladjusted self-structure of the person. As such, one person may experience a rape but have fewer conditions of worth affecting how they process their experiential responses, then the next person, whose existing conditions of worth, contribute more heavily to what makes the experience difficult to process. This explains why not every victim of rape will have the same experience in response to the event. The effectiveness of this theory in relation to trauma is reflected in recent research that highlights the link between levels of unconditional positive self-regard (UPSR) and post traumatic growth (PTG) (Flanagan et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2015) with higher levels of UPSR having a significant positive correlation with PTG.

Warner suggests that rather than personality theory, processing styles offers a better explanation of complex distress; with ‘dissociative process’ named as a processing style which might explain the dissociative experience of the client in this hypothetical scenario. Warner states that ‘dissociative process’ usually results from physical and sexual trauma in young children, and describes how, in the face of overwhelming trauma, client’s may dissociate to avoid experiences that are too intense to process (Warner, 2008). We agree with this last statement but such dissociative process is part of the systems of denial and distortion that operate to maintain the conditions of worth that have evolved within the self-structure. Although offered as an alternative to conditions of worth theory, we see this explanation as

intrinsic to the process of denial and distortion (Rogers, 1959). Joseph (2004) provides the best account of how the person-centered theory can explain the process features of post-traumatic stress disorder and post-traumatic growth (Joseph 2003, 2004, 2005) wherein processing is integral and not separate to the theory of conditions of worth.

### *Hypothetical scenario 2*

*'A baby is left for long periods of time in an orphanage with little attention or care. Similarly, is abandonment or lack of care the same as a "condition of worth"?' (Warner, 2009, p. 117).*

This second hypothetical scenario poses the question is abandonment and lack of care a condition of worth? Again the simple answer is no, abandonment and lack of care are not conditions of worth they are behaviors accounted for by acts of omission by a significant social other. However, this is not the same as saying that abandonment and lack of care have nothing to do with conditions of worth. Referring to the need for positive regard Rogers (1959, p. 223) said:

- a) Satisfaction of this need is necessarily based upon inferences regarding the experiential field of another
- b) It is associated with a very wide range of the individual's experiences
- c) It is reciprocal
- d) It is potent, in that the *positive regard of any social other* is communicated to the total regard complex which the individual associates with that social other. (italics added)

Rogers (1959, p. 224) went on to explain the development of self-regard '[A]s the individual comes to experience the positive regard satisfaction or frustration with any particular self-experience...[positive self-regard satisfactions] come to be experienced independently of positive regard transactions with a social other'. Now a need for self-regard

has been learned and because of the capacity to experience this independent of social interaction the individual becomes their own significant social other.

Rogers (1959) statement above establishes the need for positive regard as a learned need but one that is closely associated with the basic elements of care. Similarly, Standal (1954) suggested that satisfaction or frustration of the need for positive regard is closely linked to the satisfactions of primary needs such as food, water, shelter. In light of the close link between satisfactions of the need for positive regard and primary needs required for basic care and survival, it is easy to see how the experience of a lack of care and neglect can lead to the acquisition of a condition of worth or will be communicated to the entire regard complex associated with a significant social other. In Warner's hypothetical scenario, she makes it clear the baby receives 'little attention or care' - yet what 'little' attention and care is provided will also be associated with either the ongoing satisfaction or frustration of the need for positive regard from the caregivers. As the infant grows and develops, the need for positive regard will undoubtedly be satisfied inconsistently, in response to its environment. Consequently, abandonment and lack of care are not conditions of worth per se, but they are an important feature of the environment in which positive regard need satisfactions are either satisfied or frustrated by a caregiver. As primary need satisfactions or frustrations are examples of 'lack of care' and 'neglect' it is apparent how these actions are closely linked to conditional positive regard and the development of conditions of worth.

Conditions of worth will develop for the child that matches the inconsistency and conditionality of the positive regard of care givers. For example, the child experiences and comes to expect the unpredictability in provision of care, a condition of worth might be 'Sometimes I am held when I do not demand or expect anything from anyone but sometimes I get punished' or 'If I need love or affection I will get punished, I am bad'. The introjected values create conditions of worth that become part of a self-structure.

Warner uses the term ‘fragile process’ to label the impact of abandonment and lack of care. In Warner’s ideal developmental process, the child has their experience held in attention by another, so they are able to feel it as it is, regulate the intensity of the feelings, and then understand that other people with different experiences exist around them, without letting that realization diminish their own experience (Warner, 2009). Deprivation of this process in childhood would mean that later in life the person struggles to believe certain types of intense experience can exist (Warner, 2008).

Warner suggests that Rogers’s personality theory does not account for such difficult and fragile process. However, Rogers (1951) offered a similar account of the importance of the developmental period when carers/parents help the child make sense of experience (Rogers, 1951). For example, Rogers (1951) provides an account of a boy who wishes to hit his baby brother, and describes how the denial of such experience as a result of the condemnation from the parent can create conditions of worth, and the alternate ideal developmental outcome. He suggests the ideal would involve the parent offering acceptance and understanding of the experience, whilst also owning their own yet different response to his behavior. In doing this he suggests the boy will feel the desire to hit baby brother as allowed to exist, and is therefore regulated in its intensity, whilst becoming aware of another person’s experience existing independently of their own. The similarity of Rogers’s account and Warner’s, in emphasizing the significance of the carer/parent role in either helping or hindering the individuals’ processing of experience, further illustrates existing person-centered personality theory is possible to explain the impact of abandonment and lack of care (lack of care may also be experience vis a vis harsh parenting) and therefore we can reject the claim that the theory cannot account for this form of distress.

*Hypothetical scenario 3*

*'A person who has had a stroke has difficulty communicating in ways that can be easily understood. The stroke is a physiological event that presumably occurred independently from any withdrawal of "positive regard." Are we then to assume that client-centered therapy is likely to be of no use to the person, since his or her problems don't result from parental withdrawal of positive regard?'* (Warner, 2009, p. 117).

In this final hypothetical scenario, Warner suggests Rogers's personality theory does not apply to a person who experiences emotional distress as a result of a physiological event, rather than due to withdrawal of positive regard and therefore person-centered therapy would likely be not considered as helpful. However, we propose the psychological discomfort this person experiences can be understood through conditions of worth disrupting the processing of and giving meaning to the physiological changes they have undergone. This may, for instance, include conditions of worth around being self-sufficient or being reliant on others, alongside personality constructs regarding perceptions of vulnerability, death, and relational concepts concerning communication, and how this impacts on self in relationship. All these potential *hypothetical* conditions of worth could represent a difficulty and block the processing of the changes arising out of a physiological event like stroke, and in that regard Rogers's personality theory shows us how applicable person-centered therapy could be for this hypothetical client.

Warner on the other hand sees the kind of biological deterioration offered in this final hypothetical scenario as a circumstance where another kind of difficult process, 'psychotic process' can emerge (Warner, 2008, p.19). This processing style accounts for experiences which are not common or reality based, and include experiences of voices, hallucinations, delusions and thought disorder (Warner, 2008). Once again, rather than, as Warner claims, conceptualizing psychotic process as explaining 'complex distress' better than conditions of



worth, we see it only as a continuation of the explanation offered by Rogers (1959) when accounting for psychotic breaks experienced by some people. Rogers states when a person has a 'large or significant degree of incongruence between self and experience, and an experience demonstrating this incongruence occurs suddenly' (Rogers, 1959, p. 229) then the process of defense can fail. This process leads to a psychotic break, where previously denied feelings are 'regnant, followed by a period of disorganization and confusion, with denied feelings and defenses alternating in dominance' (Rogers, 1959, p. 229). Shlien describes this psychotic state as an 'impossible life to live' (Shlien, 2003, p. 33) as the conscience forbids the person to live all their experience (Shlien, 2003, p. 36), and eventually both the denying self and the 'self as knower' are completely lost from a sense of reality (Shlien, 2003, p. 37). Rogers and Shlien's accounts share the same sense of confusion and disorganization that characterizes Warner's account of psychotic process, once more illustrating that Warner is elaborating on rather than offering an alternative to Rogers's original theory. Psychosis is a form of symbolizing experience when the usual defense systems are unable to work to retain consistency in the self-structure and instead is characterized by a disorganization and confusion in the process of symbolization.

#### Symmetry between theory and practice

Symmetry between theory and practice is important. Warner states that, in the actualization oriented model, regardless of the different threats which may be encountered, 'if a therapist is able to offer genuine, empathic, prizing connection to the most difficult aspects of a client's experience, this is likely to alter the person's sense of self and open the person to natural tendencies to process' (Warner, 2009, p. 124). The strength of this assertion for guiding practice however can be seen as incoherent without a clear conceptualization of a defense model which illustrates the impact that relationship has on wellbeing and distress. The closest Warner comes to offering an explanation for the impact of the therapists'

attitudes is in their capacity to ‘restart the development of processing capacities’ (Warner, 2009, p. 120) through ‘mirroring the optimal developmental scenario between parent and infant’ (Warner, 2009, pp. 119-12). Warner also offers an explanation for how the therapist’s empathy and unconditional positive regard are capable of affecting the tendencies of process, self and agency both together and in isolation (Warner, 2009). Yet, without directly setting the empathic, unconditionally accepting attitudes of the therapist against the conditional attitudes of significant others, the impact of these therapist attitudes are somewhat vague and unexplained. One informs the other, giving it the potency to drive change.

In contrast to Warner, Rogers’s personality theory clearly links theory to practice in first hypothesizing that the person who receives only unconditional positive regard will have developed no conditions of worth (Rogers, 1959) and then explains that when a maladjusted person perceives unconditional positive regard, their conditions of worth are weakened or dissolved, and they are increasingly able to offer this attitude toward themselves. This direct, symmetrical relationship between conditions of worth and the impact of person-centered therapy has been emphasized by other person-centered theorists. In rooting psychological maladjustment in a lack of acceptance from a significant social other, the theory is given ‘economy’ and ‘symmetry’ by then marking the ‘acceptance’ of the therapist as the leading factor in psychological readjustment (Standal, 1954, p. V; Wilkins and Bozarth 2001). The person-centered therapist is effectively ‘renewing’ the acceptance the individual has been denied, placing the attitude at the center of the theory, and illustrating a definitive theoretical rationale for the process of psychotherapy (Standal, 1954, p. VI). Lietaer (1984) and Mearns (2004) also both infer this symmetry between conditions of worth and the unconditional positive regard of the counsellor, in describing the latter’s ‘counter conditioning effect’ on the client (Lietaer, 1984 in Mearns, 2004, p. 90). It is this effect which illustrates the ‘central therapeutic power’ of the counsellor’s accepting attitude (Mearns, 2004, p. 4). Yet Warner

places conditions of worth as only one of many factors that may make the emergence of processing more difficult (Warner, 2009, p. 124), yet still attributes the valuing attitude of the therapist as fundamental to the practice of the approach. Warner suggests the need for theory to be reworked to provide person-centered therapists with a more coherent and meaningful personality theory to explain their practice (Warner, 2009), and yet in this respect, the actualization oriented model is potentially diluting key parts of the person-centered theory for therapy.

### Implications for person-centered therapy

One of the major breakthroughs of person-centered therapy was the universal theory of psychological distress attributable to the incongruence between organismic and self-experiences. This removed the need for diagnosis to guide specific treatment behaviors. Whatever the client's problems, the therapist was always guided by respect for the client's self-directiveness. However, rejection of conditions of worth and a focus on discrete processing styles can significantly impact contemporary person-centered practice. For example, the grouping of experience into different processing styles, practitioners inherently take a more diagnostic view of distress. Processing theory itself states that those with fragile process will share features of borderline and other personality disorders (Warner, 2000) alongside suggesting those with dissociative process are often victims of childhood sexual abuse (Warner, 2008). Indeed, processing styles theory suggests specific types of interactions which are more therapeutically effective than others when working with different processing styles. For example, promoting more precise forms of empathic responses for clients with fragile process, suggesting they need more than an accepting presence (Warner, 2000). In doing this, the approach is taking a step closer to becoming a specificity- diagnosis-treatment model of psychotherapy, which serves to confuse and diminish the fundamental and radical

role *acceptance* plays in Rogers's work. In processing styles theory, there is also a general movement toward focusing on particularly 'process rich' elements to client's experience (Warner, 2009, p. 119). This is an area of process theory that has prompted concern and criticism, as Warner herself acknowledges, from client-centered theorists, including Barbara Brodley (1990) and Jerold Bozarth (1990), who believed unconditional positive regard means valuing all experience rather than prioritizing one over the other (Warner, 2009).

As we have explored, Rogers used the presence of conditions of worth to explain how a person develops conditional self-regard, disrupting organismic valuing processing capacity, making unconditional positive regard of the person-centered therapist fundamental in raising of client self-regard, and the capacity to process experience. As such, unconditional positive regard is understood to be both the 'curative factor' in person centred therapy, and the 'active facilitator of constructive personality change' (Wilkins & Bozarth 2001 p vii). We suggest that a focus on processing styles, without appropriate appreciation of the connection between processing and conditions of worth, risks diminishing the value and impact of the person-centered therapist's unconditional positive regard, instead placing heightened value on specific modes of empathic communication, and a directional focus on modifying different processing styles.

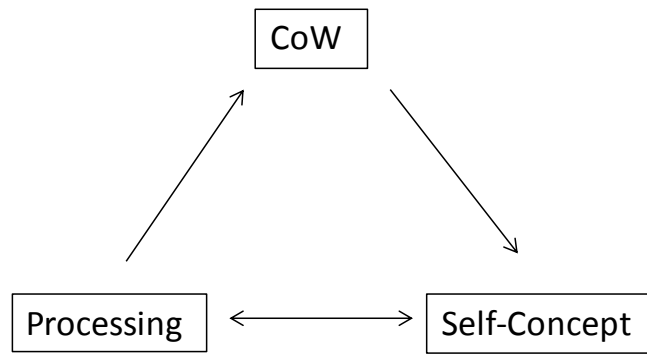
Conclusion                      We have shown how existing person-centered personality theory and conditions of worth can account for the different types of complex distress Warner proposes are beyond the theory. We have also argued that Rogers's original theory provides an important symmetry between theory and practice, and critically that a movement away from conditions of worth towards a selective focus on processing styles risks diminishing the value of unconditional positive regard in place of specific forms of empathy. However,

importantly, in making these arguments, instead of suggesting a separate or distinct way of conceptualizing psychological distress we have highlighted the important connection between conditions of worth and processing styles. Our intent is not to set one against the other when looking at personality theory and processing, but rather to emphasize our view that the two are inextricably linked. We believe processing and conditions of worth are interdependent rather than being mutually exclusive. Conditions of worth give us a theory that allows us to understand the ways we develop our individual style and capacity for processing experience. With regards to conditions of worth the fewer or more flexible they are the more effectively we can process experience; the greater the number and more rigid they are the greater the difficulty in processing our experience. In this sense, conditions of worth provide the *mediating function* between direct experience and the self-concept. They are part of the process of symbolization, perception and other social cognitive processes. This includes the processing styles of the neglected person, the sexually abused person and the person facing biological deterioration. They have responses to all these discomforts, but it is conditions of worth which will block the capacity to process responses to these events. Our challenge to the person-centered community is that Warner's processing styles theory tempts throwing the baby out with the bathwater, whereas we see processing styles as a useful addition to the theory we already have, with conditions of worth very much at its center (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

In response to an event or aspect of an individual's environment, there follows an organismic response, and the individual's natural capacity to process this experience

interacts with their conditions of worth and their need for positive self regard (self concept).





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