Validation: The Skill and the Art
by Al Turtle © Al Turtle 2005

The learning tool of Mirroring trains you in approximately 52 critical skills. These are all about getting heard, on the one hand; or making your partner feel heard, on the other. I think this is a vital set of human relationship skills: how to listen effectively, and how to speak effectively so that people can hear you. Most people raise their voices because they think people won't listen. Most people who talk fast, do so because the think people will not listen. I've learned that listening effectively, in a way that makes the other feel heard, will calm people and slow them down.

When we listen, do we understand? When we speak, do we get to feel understood? The skills of understanding, making a person feel understood, and speaking so that someone can understand you, come next. In this article I hope to be able to explain about this and start you on your way.

Expert in Validation

About 10 years ago, I began to realize how important it was to my partner that she feel understood – that she feel validated. I wasn't even sure what validating really was. While I had learned the term in Imago Relationship Therapy, it still seemed a hit and miss proposition. Sometimes, no matter what I did, my partner felt understood, and sometimes she felt mis-understood. What I was doing was not reliably successful.

I vowed to make myself into an Expert in Validation. As a kid, I had learned that "experts" were people who easily did what other people thought was difficult.

As a kid I played cello. I wasn't good, cuz I didn't practice enough. I would watch my teacher, a great cellist, and saw how easy it was for her. When I asked how to get good, how to make it simple the way she did it, she always said, "Practice, practice, practice what I show, what I teach you, Al, and it will become easy."

I got it that knowing what was right was the starting place, but practice was what made it easy.

I learned that there are several different skills: understanding and validation are different. I could understand my partner and she might still feel mis-understood. I sharpened my definitions, my ideas of the right way to do it, until I was comfortable with them. I defined "success". And then I began to practice.

That was years ago. Now it is easy, and I believe I am an Expert. And it was really worth the effort.

What are little Girls/Boys made of?

First let me share what I have learned about what it is we are going to understand in each other. What is a person, and what parts of them do they want us to understand? And what are the right ways to visualize this situation, so I can go practice.

This seems to have two parts. The first part involved who are we and how much do we know about ourselves. And the second part deals with how do we go about understanding feelings and thoughts, what are often called "our affective and our cognitive sides".

Let's go for part one.

Who do I think I am? Who do you think you are?

To share this I need to go back and tell you some of an early version of the Two Iceberg chart. Take a look at the figure below. I first organized my self into simple components. There was the part of me that I knew about and the part I didn't. I could tell you all about what I know about myself and I could refer to the parts of me I don't know about. This view of myself would change from time to time as I forgot things about myself and as I recalled things. But at an given minute, I viewed my "self" from the top, seeing the known and not seeing the unknown. The point I am trying to make is that if you ask me why I did something, all I can share is what I know about myself – the top part of the figure below.

We see ourselves from
this point of view.

We know this part.

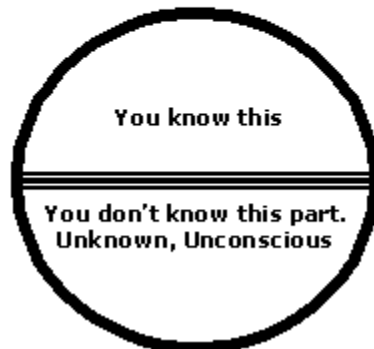We don't know this part.
Unknown, Unconscious

Now I expanded this to two people in order to include the relational point of view.   This seemed pretty obvious.

I see myself from this
point of view.
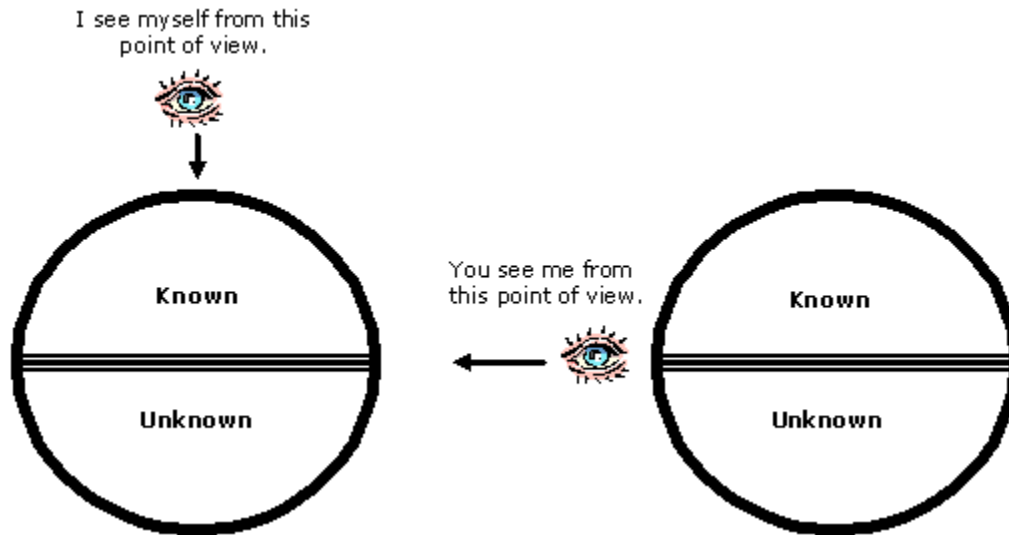
You see yourself from
this point of view.

I know this part.

I don't know this part.
Unknown, Unconscious

You know this

You don't know this part.
Unknown, Unconscious

What happened next was tricky to me. I don't see you from your point of view. You don't see me from my point of view. While I will describe myself using my perceptions and thoughts, your understanding of me may also include using your perceptions and thoughts.   So how is my view of you different from your view of you? Look at the next figure.

I see myself from this point of view.

Known

Unknown

You see me from this point of view.

Known

Unknown

And now we jump to the relational challenge. How I see myself, and how I tell you about myself, will be different from what you see of me. And simultaneously the reverse true. How you see yourself, and what you tell me about yourself, will be different from what I see of you.

I see myself from this point of view.

What you hear will be different from what you see.

Known

Unknown

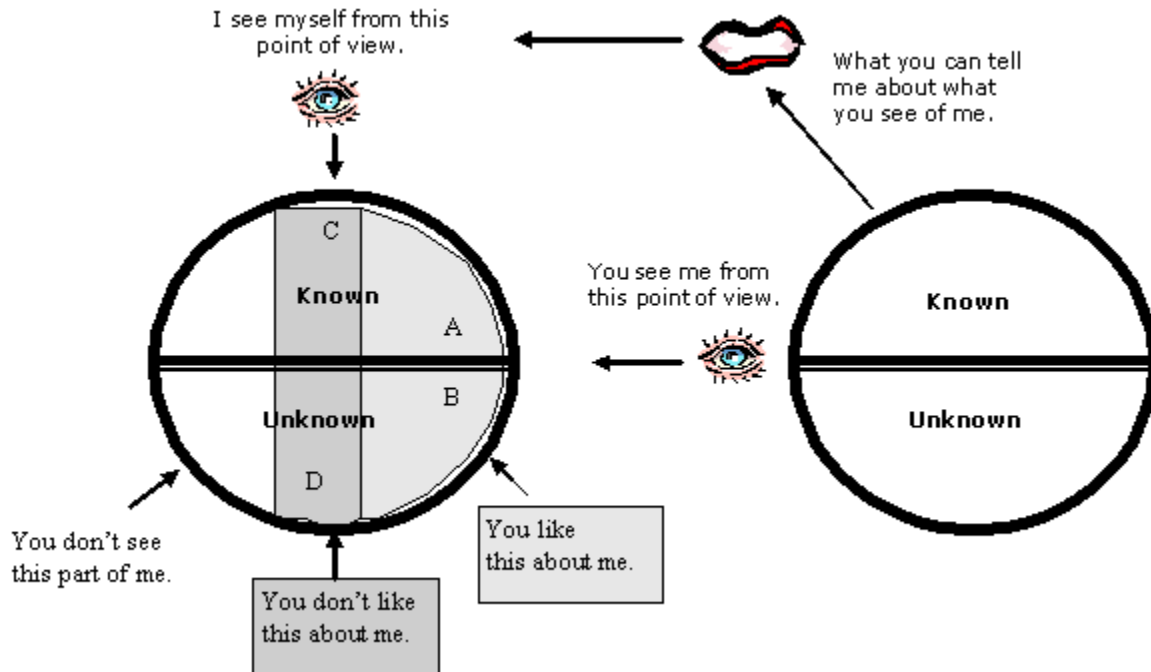You see me from this point of view.

Known

Unknown
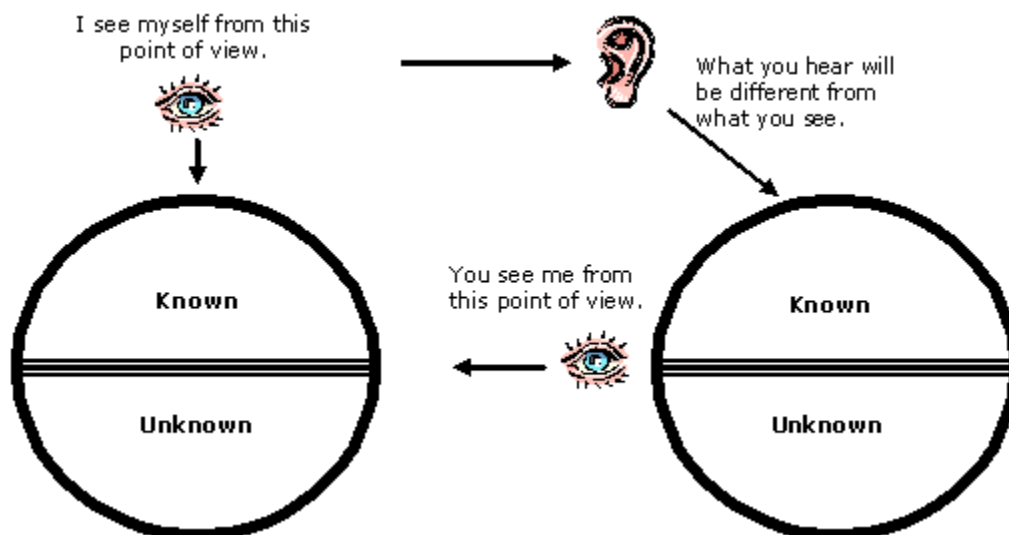
Two points of view exist and both are right. These can be shared or kept secret – yet they exist. Anyone who is challenged in dealing with differences, who is seeking the "right" or "truth" or "correct", may have trouble with this. This is part of why it is so important in communication to label your view as yours and my view as mine – to make coexistence of two correct points of vew easy to handle. This is part of why talking about "facts" (an un-labeled point of view) is so dangerous.

And I see things about you that you do not know about. You see things about me that I don't know about. I personally think this is a tremendous advantage – to have someone who can see things about me that I can't. But on the other side this could result in great conflict, if I didn't want to see parts of myself – that I felt ashamed of, for example.

While this at first seemed confusing to me, as I practiced using this concept, it came to be more and more simple and easy.

Let me add for you what I think is the one more really difficult challenge.   The most simple form of affect or feeling is the emotion of "like" and "don't like". We cannot stop this emotion. It happens in us. We can be aware of it or not. We can share it or keep it a secret. (For the moment ignore that this emotion is a continuum from intense dislike to intense like.)

Look at the next figure. As you look at me, there will be parts of me that you like, parts of me that you don't like, and parts of me you don't observe.

I see myself from this point of view.

What you can tell me about what you see of me.

You see me from this point of view.

C
Known
A
B
Unknown
D

Known

Unknown

You don't see this part of me.

You don't like this about me.

You like this about me.

Now, things can get hot.

"A" represents parts of me that I can see and you can see and that you like. No problem there. Example: I think I have good legs and you like my legs.

"C" represents parts of me that I can see and you can see and that you don't like. Could be a little problem there. Example: I am forgetful, I know it, and my forgetting annoys you.

"B" represents parts of me that I don't know about, that you can see and that you like. This seems an awkward challenge. Example: I am confident. I am not aware of these behaviors. You really like what comes across as my self-assurance.

"D" represents parts of me, that I don't know about, and that you see and that you don't like. Here we have lots of potential trouble. E.g. I am cocky and dismissive. I am not aware this. You strongly dislike what comes across as my arrogance.

Risky Points of View – Models

So far I have shared how there are two points of view about each person. Not only are these points of view different, they often have lots of value judgements involved. In attempting to learn to Understand each other and Validate each other, I think this has to be dealt with directly. Here's a story.

When I was a little boy, I was raised by very polite people. I learned that polite people often smile poliltely when they are angry. I even learned to smile when angry, myself. For many years this was baffling to me. My parents would get tired of me, and then say, "He's tired and needs to go to bed." I learned, at the dining room table, that when dad would say, "The peas look good," that actually meant "pass the peas." The discrepancy between what was said, what was meant, and what was emotionally going on was enormous.

How does a kid understand a smiling person with rage in their eyes? Kids are all about survival. So, I figured it out. I would not listen to what my father said as much as I would pay attention to his actions, his looks, his breathing, his voice tone, etc. etc. I began to "understand him" by not listening to what he said. I built a model, in my mind, of him in my head over the years. It was my mental model, but it was of "him". I used my model of him to explain him to myself and others and to predict what he would do next. My model made me safer around him as it gave me predictive information. He became more reliable to me. And when he came near to me, I interpreted his actions through the lens of my model. I had learned to prefer my model of my father to the actual person.
Eventually I could carry on conversations with him, even when he wasn't around. I would say my sentence, and my model of him would pop up with "response." I
Now, I know this is all about projection and stuff like that, but it also was built in survival.
When I was 55 years old, I was driving home one day. I had had a debate with my wife and I argued it out with her all the way home, trying different starting sentences. Mind you, she was at home. I was talking to the steering

wheel. When I got home I saw her and offered her my "best starting line." Her response was completely different from what "she" had said in the car on the way home! I was stunned.

I learned that my model of Sandra lives in my steering wheel. Sandra lives at the house. And the two were not the same. I realized that I had preferred my model of Sandra to the real person. And I set about to remedy this situation.

In the office, I often 'test' a couple for this situation. In talking to one partner, I will ask them why their partner does something. "Do you know why she does that?" Most people, sitting less than a foot away, will prefer to answer from the internal model they have, then ask the person sitting next to them. And, if they say, "I don't know why they do that", I will ask them where the answer is. Very view pop up with the answer, "The answer is in them."

I think it critical to teach people the difference between their model of why their partner does things, and their partner's model of why they do things.

Yes, My Model of Myself – Codependency

I've learned that people usually build mental models of themselves. As a boy my model contained my answers for why I did what I did. I would figure myself out and add, bit by bit, to my model. I recall sitting, looking into the bright sky and looking at the small thingeys that moved across my vision – on the surface of my eyeball? I would gently poke the side of my eyeball to see these thingeys shift place. I would blink to see them all move up a little. I then decided that they were dust spots in the thin liquid on my eyeballs. If someone asked me what these dots were in their eyes, I would tell them what I had figured out about my eyes.

Over the years I repeated this process over and over, figuring things out about myself. Bit by bit I built a reliable mental model of me. It would change over time as I added to it. Now, I have come to realize that this was/is my model of my SELF. It is the vast collection of answers to the question, "Who am I?"

Over the years, as it became more complete (I doubt that it is ever complete) it became more reliable. I could use it to better predict what I would do next, or "understand" why I had done something. I began to feel safer with myself. The greatest impetus to building this comforting model of myself were the questions from others, "Who are you?" (Anyone remember the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland?) Or they would ask, "Why did you do that?" As a kid, I was taught I had to answer these questions. But what answer would I give? I discovered that I had two answers: a) my guess of what they wanted me to say, and b) my silent secret answer to myself.

I have two selves? Yep. My mental model of my father included what he wanted me to say about me. He would help me by telling me who he thought I was, "You're tired. You're lazy. You're sloppy." All these "You messages" helped me grasp who he thought I was and helped me figure out the answer he wanted when he asked me, "Why did you do that?" "Because I am lazy," says I. I call this model my Defined Self: the one people have told me I am, the one I have learned that I "should" be.

But remember, while people are telling me who I should be, I also have that other SELF – the one I have learned I "am."

What I've learned is that many people have not built a very strong, reliable model of who they are, and at the same time they have a strong idea of who other people think they are and should be. And they can get these confused, very easily.

I have a friend who told me that yesterday he had a nice day until he got home. Then he was bad. I asked him who it was that thought he was bad. He said it was his wife. It was her idea, not his. But he didn't have a strong model of himself and so, as he was describing his day, he switched from telling me of his Self ("I had a nice day") to telling me of his Defined Self ("I am bad" thinks my wife) without his own awareness.

I see this as one of the cues to what is often called Codependence. And I have come to see Validation as one of the repairing, curing, and preventative actions for the problems of Codependence. I see lack of Validation in childhood as one of the causes of Codependence. More on this later.

Self-Esteem: here's the heavy stuff.

I mentioned earlier that as you look at your partner you tend to like or dislike parts of them. But this is equally true of how you see yourself. We can look at the two models of ourselves (Self and Defined Self) and like or dislike parts of them. Liking your Self, I call Self-Esteem. Liking your Defined Self, I call Other Esteem. My definition of Self-Esteem is "I like myself even when they hate me." My definition of Other-Esteem is "I like myself if they like me."

For many years I was aware that I was "trying to do what is right." At one time I thought of putting that on my tombstone. "He tried to do it right." I would say that with a cry in my voice to get others to see I was trying, in the

face of their defining me as "lazy", "irresponsible" and "sloppy", "careless", and "selfish", etc. I found a solution to this problem when one day my boss spoke to me.

I came to my boss and said that I was sorry that I didn't feel much energy today and was probably not being very productive. I said this apologetically as I "knew" I was lazy. He looked startled. "Al. On one of your slow days you produce double what anyone else is doing. Take your time today. It's fine with me."   I was stunned. I had been judged by my parents and teachers as lazy all my life and here was a boss, a man paying my wages, who saw me as super-productive. How could this be!?

The answer was in the difference between my Self and my Defined-Self. I am a person who works very hard at what I want to work on. I love a thing done well. I am a person who frequently rebels at what seems like arbitrary orders. When I am resisting to do what other people want, they call me "lazy" and "irresponsible". When I am learning something, practicing in order to make perfect, trying to do better, struggling with my own impatience to be perfect immediately, they call me "sloppy" and "careless".   When I am thinking my own thoughts and not thinking about them, they call me "thoughtless" and "selfish," etc. Can you see the two selves weaving their way through those sentences.

As I began to separate my Self from my Defined-Self, I realized how I had been trying for much of my life to get others to like me. I was pained when they didn't. I had become a people-pleaser, constantly managing my Defined-Self. I wanted them to like me, so I would contort myself until they did, until they told me they liked me – the me they thought I was. I copied their values. I became like them. I avoided conflict. I lived in what I believed were their thoughts. But who was I? Here, by the way, is what I think is another cue to Codependence.

When I went to high school, I studied French. My French teacher came from France and had a wonderful accent. I learned to mimic his accent. I liked that. We had a German teacher and I found myself mimicking his accent. I knew a person at home from Portugal and I would mimic her accents. I loved British accents. One day as I was chatting with my friend, David, he said, "By the way, Al, which is your accent?" I didn't know. My inability to answer scared me.

One day my dad called me "Immature". The tone was one of a put down and I hurt. I thought he didn't like me. I want to school and asked my English teacher what the word "immature" meant.   He told me it was an "ethnocentric" term. I was stunned again. Now I had two terms I didn't understand. But I, "that lazy boy", perservered and looked up the terms in dictionaries and spoke more about it with my English teacher. I learned that the term "immature" involves a definition of behavior that is specific to a community. I asked how big a community could be. He told me the world was a community, a nation is a community, a town is a community, a family is a community.

I asked if, in the case of the meanings of words, could one person be a community. He said, "Absolutely. We all have different meanings for the words we use."   I studied dad. He used "immature" in an interesting fashion. "Mature" meant anything he did. "Immature" meant anything he didn't like. I learned to joke that "immature" meant anything I did. I decided then and there, that since he thought I was immature, then I thought dad was immature. Well, I was a teenager.

As I began to separate my Self from my Defined-Self (what they thought of me), I began to see I was a pretty damn good guy. I began to like myself. I began to build Self-esteem – a reliable sense of liking of me. Not only did I discover that I was "trying to do well" all the time, but I liked the values I had. The values I had, my values, were the best I could come up with.

**Summary: My selves and Your selves.**
I have not as yet put all this together in a single chart. But I find all these points necessary to being an Expert in Validation. Like my cello teacher, I had to practice keeping all these things in mind when I started talking about who you are and who I am.   The use of Mirroring helped. When I would talk, my partner would reflect back my statements about my Self and my statements about my Defined-Self. I would do the same for her. Practice helped us see the distinctions between the four-selves present more and more clearly and more and more reliably.

As I hope you will see, it was in learning to Validate that we both helped each other break the traps of Codependency, people-pleasing, and to build the beauty of a strong sense of Self. I believe true Self only emerges in relationship.

The Roles of Emotions, Feelings and Thinkings
I speak of this separately only because it proved to be such an area of confusion for me. I came out of childhood completely baffled by emotions. The rules from my parents were that "emotions get in the way." Eventually, as I was getting my Master Degree in college, I wrote my Thesis on emotions. (What you don't learn in childhood may become your greatest strength as an adult.)

This is a very convoluted area. Mostly I think this is because people are trained to think about emotions and thoughts in ways that don't work, that don't lead to clarity. I abandoned using terms like "affective" and "cognitive" some years ago as they seemed just too misleading. Previously I had abandoned the use of the "mind" and "body". For me, these attempts at taxonomy, splitting things by labels in order to better grasp what is going on, just didn't help. The "mind" intimately responded to and influenced the "body" and it seems to me extremely difficult to draw the line between them. The concepts of I believe the same is even more so (confusing boundaries) with "affective" and "cognitive". I see it that emotions operate simultaneously with thoughts, interacting strongly, all the time. I can define them separately, but I think it is no use to try to peceive them separately. Yet many disagree with me, and that is fine. For a whole background on my grasp of this problem read my introductory article on Emotions.
The bottom line is that in trying to understand someone, I believe you must look at both their thinking and their feelings simultaneously. What are they thinking, what are they feeling and what is triggering what. The (to me) artificial distinction taught in Imago Relationship Therapy between Validation and Empathy in the dialogue process, I find un-useful. The use by relationship therapists of the semantics of "feeling" to label thoughts and ignore the active feelings, I find deplorable. (See my article on fixing this.)
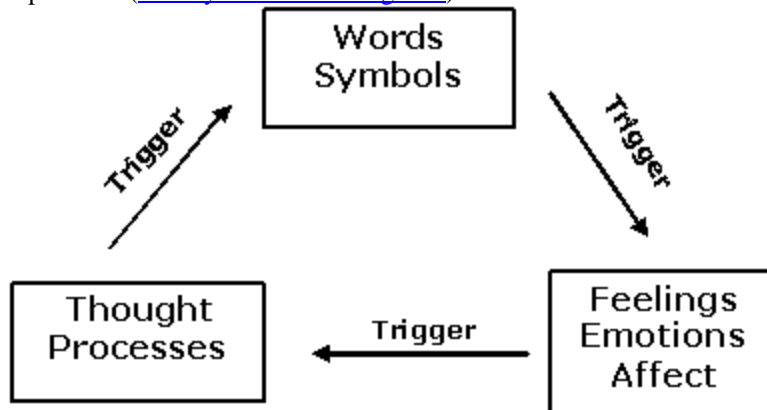
Making Sense
My next comments assume that you have read the article on PreValidation. I will recap a couple of the concepts from that paper and add them to what I have shared above.
All people are congruent with who they are. Their acts, words, deeds are a result of the components of who they are, whether they know about these components or not. I recall the lesson from my psychology teacher when we were studying rats. At one time she wrote a formula on the blackboard for why a rat turned left in a maze. The formula had many factors which all worked together in producing the behavior of the rat. What she wrote implied a large number of factors. I asked her how many factors were involved. She said, pulling this number out of her mental back pocket, "I imagine probably around 600." I then asked, "How many factors do you think are involved in a human when they turn left at an intersection?" Her response, "Probably more than 25,000." I assume this number came from the same back pocket.
There are many uses for the word "Sense", but after long consideration I decided to use the word for this idea of "congruence with self." To Make Sense is to be congruent with yourself, the known and the unknown parts. Thus

I put this sign up on the wall at work and at home, in order to practice this mental tool. When someone says they make sense, I think of sign. When someone says that they make no sense, I think of this sign and often practice saying, "Of course they make sense." When someone does something that baffles me, I think of this sign, and wonder what led them to do it – what their sense is. When someone tells me that I don't make sense, I respond, "Silly. Of course I make sense." When I am confused by my own behavior, I think of this sign and become curious about myself.

I've found it useful to grasp that because a person makes sense, does not mean I understand it, or even they understand it.   Nor does it mean I like it, I agree with it, encourage it or condone it. I don't even have to learn about their sense. Still they make it. Period.

Seeing a Person's Sense – Understanding
I believe any person's congruence, their sense, can be seen as a totality (the sign above). Or it can be appreciated as the sum of or the falling together of innumerable components including feelings and thoughts.   Remember my teacher's 25000 factors at to why a person turns left at an intersection.
Most of the time, when I hear some of the major factors (some seem more important, some less), I will have a body sensation of "ah, hah" or "Oh, I've got it!."   This seems a startle feeling and seems connected almost to the "sound of puzzle pieces falling into place."   This experience can take place as I am trying to understand someone else and it can take place as I am trying to understand myself. "Oh, I got why I/you do that.". This is my definition of Understanding: to grasp someone's sense, to see enough of the components of that person's sense to have the experience of "things falling in place."   I believe this experience has something to do with our need for the safety in reliability and we have just perceived something that seems reliable to us.

Validation and all Those Selves
I was taught by Imago Relationship Therapy to say, "You make sense…" I've heard therapists teach people to say, "You make sense because I would do that, too." This seem the flip side of the coin of saying "you don't make sense, because I disagree with you."   I cringe at using my sense to understand you.
I built a model of my dad, and my model of him made sense in my head. But if I told him this he would think I was immature, and not like me. Wow. So what to do?
So here we sit. You have a whole self (1) with which you are always congruent. You have a model of yourself (2). That model is not the whole of you, but is based on what you know of yourself. You have a model of what you think I want you to be, what you should be (3). It is based on your memories of experiences with me.   And I have a model of you (4) which is based on my memories of experience with you.   When we sit with each there is one 'reality' and three mental models of each of us present in the room. That's eight. Gad!
And this is only if we are calm. We can add another two models when we both get upset. When I am panicky, I imagine that you are my worst nightmare (5), the reincarnation of the worst traits of my childhood caretakers. And finally we can add another two models when we are both romantic. When I am in love, I imagine that you are (6) the incarnation of the best parts of my childhood caretakers plus a person skilled in the Biological Dream. When we come together there are potentially 12 "selves" in the room. Help, help, help.
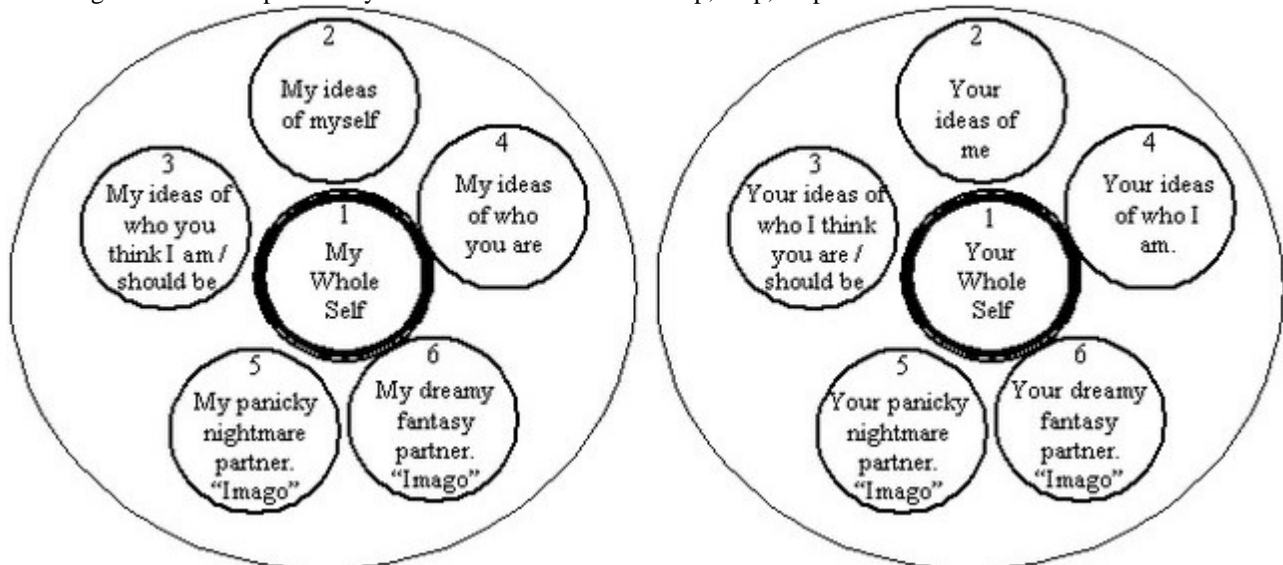

This is so complex! How can anyone handle this? Well…… and the *cello teacher said, "Practice, practice, practice what I show, what I teach you, Al, and it will become easy." I get that knowing what was right was the starting place, but practice was what made it easy.* I think the task is easier if you are shown it by other people. If your parents and teachers understood all this, and acted it out, I think it would have flowed smoothly into you as you

grew up. I think we were all designed for this. (For in depth learning and training about all these selves you might try Voice Dialogue.)
But that didn't happen for me. Doesn't seem to have happened for the people who come to my office. I had to learn it when I was older — like starting when I turned 50.

Validation: Who do you validate?
I've defined this as "bearing witness to your partner's sense." I've defined that it is successful when "they feel understood." (Article on PreValidation) And which model or self is it that you focus on? You validate your partner's **model of themselves.** They validate your model of yourself. Nothing more. At any give moment, they are operating, living, actualizing themselves with that in mind. If you bear witness to what they know and how they perceive themselves, they will feel understood. Anything else does not seem to work. (You can share later what you think, all you want – just not while you are validating them.)
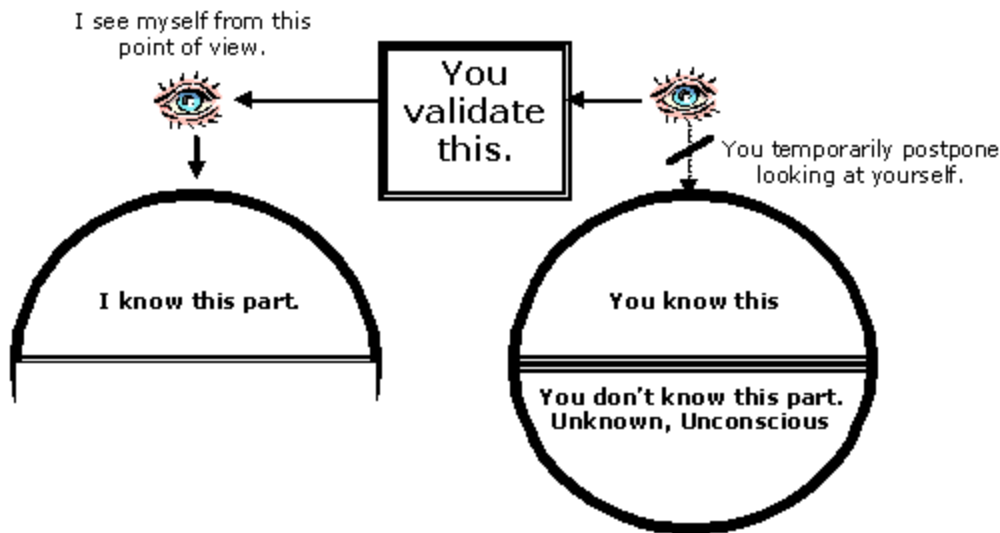
This means that you have to be able to put aside, while validating them, your knowledge of them or of anything else that is outside their awareness, that includes your model of them with your likes and dislikes. I have to do the same when validating you.
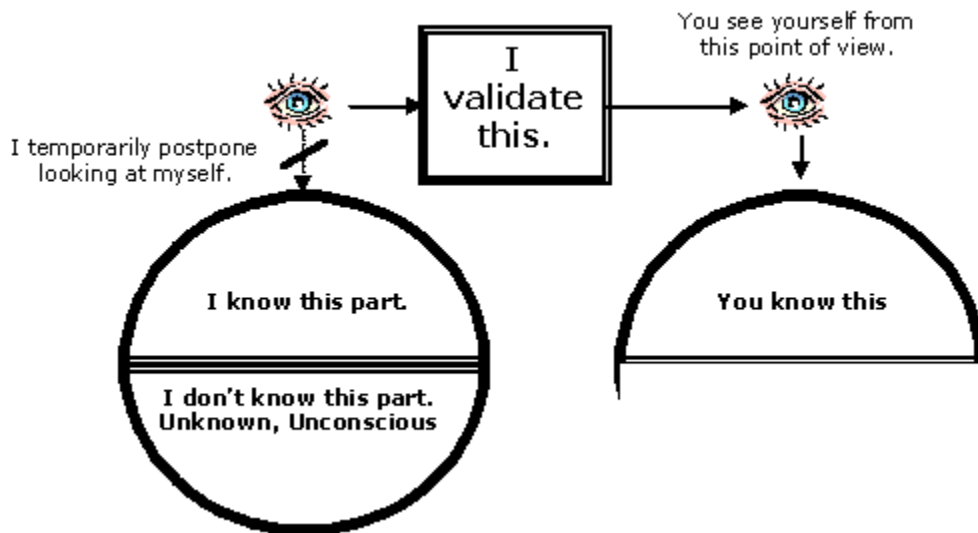
That's quite a skill. Here's a story.

A couple I was working with were in business together. The husband had a habit of clumsily forgetting to call clients back. The wife was irritated by this trait, fearing they would loose money. On one particular day, the wife got a call from an important client who had work to give the husband. She took down the message and put the note on his desk. This was around 9AM.   Around 11AM the clients called again, got an answering machine and left an eager message. At 11:30 the husband got the message from both his desk and from the answering machine. He was trying to do better about calling people back, knowing that his past "sloppiness" irritated his wife. He called the clients, took their order, and started on their work.

That evening the wife got home first. She checked the answering machine and heard the eager 11AM message from the clients, which her husband had not erased. Thinking that he hadn't read her note, nor had he listened to the answering machine all day, and that he was loosing business, she built up a head of steam. "Darn that irresponsible wretch."

Around 7PM the husband arrived home having had a long day, but at least he was caught up on all messages. And there was his wife, steaming. "You didn't call those clients," she yelled. Clearly she had a large load of high emotions, anger, grief, fear all going at once. The man had learned a lot about validation.   What should he do?   If he interrupted her "send" of emotions to tell her that he had called the clients, she would feel invalidated.   If he listened and witnessed and validated her emotional steam, she might feel betrayed when later he told her that he had taken care of it. What should he do? What would you do?

He waited, and listened, and mirrored, and validated his wife. Her anger made lots of sense to her. Her anger no longer hurt him. Sure he felt misunderstood, but it wasn't his turn yet. She went on for some time. He saw, encouraged, and bore witness to her validity both in thinking and in her emotions. When she wound down, as people will when they are being listened to, he was careful to wait until she sensed she was through. Then he asked, carefully, was she ready to hear him. Yes, she was. Then he told her of dealing with the client's call before noon. I talked to them both that next week and both felt what he had done was pretty good. How often he had interrupted her or she had interrupted her when they had strong emotions before and how badly they felt. Emotions don't turn off like thoughts. They take time to cool. His taking a stand and validating her even when "she was wrong" seemed courageous and pretty skilled. From her point of view she was right, anyway. She was valid and he affirmed it.

The lesson is that you dig in onto how they see themselves and their world and then look for that "ah hah", those puzzle pieces of theirs falling together in their puzzle and your copy of it.   Then you affirm them, bear witness to their sense.

How to Validate: the Skills and the Arts

Most important step is to PreValidate.

You can always do this, even if your partner doesn't give you much information. PreValidation is both an attitude and action. The attitude is to recall that your partner makes sense before they open their mouth. They make sense to themselves, but where else is there to make sense.   I've learned to reject the phrase "you make sense to me" because it can so easily mislead me. I prefer the phrase "I see your sense."   And so, if you are PreValidating, your posture is one of curiousity about your partner's sense.

The action part of PreValidation are the many little acts and words that indicate your attitude of PreValidation. The most important acts, I think, and the facial expressions, the voice tones, the gestures that show your gentle and durable curiosity about their sense at whatever they say. "Yup." "Sure." "I get it." "Cool. Go on." "I see. Go on." "I get you. Go on." "Hey, its great to see what's going on for you." "Thanks for sharing."

There are lots of phrases that you can use. "Of course you did that. It made sense to you. And I am curious why." "Sure." "Heck, you make sense all the time just as I do. What is your sense in this case?"   "If I were in your shoes completely I would surely do the same thing. However, I'm not. What was going on for you."   "What lead you to do that?" "What was going on for you at the time that pointed toward doing that?" "What lead up to you doing that?" "I hear you don't know why you did that, but what are your guesses. I'm sure your action made sense."   Note that sometimes you have to PreValidate someone when they are Pre-Invalidating themselves. "I

know you think you don't make sense, but I don't doubt it for a moment." I think PreValidation statements are best when they sound pretty confident.

If you are with someone or in a group and PreValidate enough, it seems to me that people relax into a kind of openness of sharing.
Eventually in many cases all that is needed is PreValidation to make a person feel understood – validated.

When the pieces click into place is a good time to Validate.
When a person is telling you about themselves, you may get that sense of "oh, wow" as you hear the components of their sense falling together. This is a fine time to stop them and "Check it out." And don't be hesitant to use their words. "Oh. Let's see if I have you. You thought I had forgotten about you all day and were lonely. Did I get that?" If they say, "Yes", then you invite them to continue (Remember Mirroring.). You may be getting some of their points, but they may not be finished. Also I suggest you always end a validation statement with an invitation for correction and to continue– the Check and Pull step which is the same as in Mirroring .

Sometimes the pieces fall into place and your partner is going on. A validating pull works wonders. "I'm getting it." "I see that. Go on." "Oh. Wow." Remember, that little startle reaction that happens when you "get it" may be visible to them. Making it explicit never hurts.

When they stop talking, you have two options.
If you feel sure that you can see a large portion of their sense, then tell them so and using their words, bear witness to their sense. "Let's see if I have it. You did so and so, because you believe such and such, and saw this, and heard that. Am I getting you?"

If you don't feel sure that you can see their sense, then invite them to continue using a Deepening Pull in the direction that you feel uncertain about. Since they always make sense, you can pull in any area where the sense is unclear to you. Remember that they want to feel understood and will often be eager to fill in the areas where you feel mystified. "I know that makes sense to you, but could you share more about what you mean by that word?" "Could you share more about why that might bother you so much?" "Could you share more about how long that has bothered you?" "I'm trying to understand you, but I am missing what is your belief about that."

A Deepening Pull is an invitation to speak more fully and completely about something. Make sure to remember to invite a person to share their emotions/feelings as well as their thoughts. "Could you share more about how you felt when that happens?" "What were you feeling right before that happened?" "That sounds really important. Can you recall when you felt like that before?"

Deepening pulls can be misused easily in such a way that the listener starts to direct the sender. I use the image that a deepening pull is a drop of sand around which your partner can develop a crystal of thoughts. A misused deepening pull can come across as invalidating. Watch your partner and see if they are gratefully receiving your pull or are hesitating.

I suggest that you don't refer to yourself while you are validating them. It doesn't seem to work. Particularly avoid anything like "You do that because I do that …." kind of statement.

Building a Solid sense of Self: You are not Crazy
 I believe that all people need quite a bit of affirmation frequently during their lives. Particularly it seems they need a sort of "stamp of approval" when they are experiencing or doing something far from societies norms. This is not a stamp of agreement, but one of validity. I think people need to be affirmed that they are not "crazy." We often ask for this. "….. Do I make sense?" "Does what I say make sense to you?" "I'm not nuts thinking this, am I?"

I believe this need is there for all of us, but begins to grow strong in a child of 2–3 as they begin to run into the norms of society as expressed by their caretakers. Kids will do or say something, that makes sense for them, and will ask for that "stamp of approval." If what they receive is a message like, "no one in their right mind would do that" or "you're crazy kid" or "that's crazy thinking" or "you're wrong" then I think the need for validation grows bigger and bigger. For me it is a case of childhood innocence running into a "crazy" adult.

Thus many of us loose faith in our own "sanity" in early childhood, we become fairly compliant, and then in adulthood start on the process of repair. Validation is, I believe, the primary the tool for this repair. Frequently I have to invite and invite a person to open up to their own logic and emotions and sense that leads them to do what they do. This seems particularly true of codependent people. They often seem to either use other people's logic to explain themselves or they fall back on the famous "I don't know" escape. "I did that because I am irresponsible." "I did that because I am lazy." "Irresponsible" and "lazy" are the labels someone else put on them and now they are using those labels to explain themselves. I believe one needs to have a good ear for this silliness, and to invite them to share their "own" reasons, logic, and emotions.

The act of validation often seems to help people flourish.

Teaching Validation in the Office
My first step is to PreValidate clients all the time. I use this technique from the first time they enter my office. I also take every opportunity I can to seek their sharing their sense. E.g. as they are telling me about something they did, I might ask, "Oh, and why did you do that?" or "What leads you to do that?" And then I sound approving of anything they share.

In the second session I explicitly teach PreValidation and Validation ([see my article on teaching this](#)) so that a couple has the common language. I continue to validate and PreValidate at every chance I have.
I use three different teaching models that end up with validation.
1. "Share with your partner something about yourself that you think they don't understand." I think coach sharing (and mirroring) until the sender (and I) feels complete. I use a prompted validation technique. I turn to the listener (mirroring partner) and say, "Do you see why your partner does that?" If they say, "Yes," I prompt, "Ok, now you tell me why they did it." If they slip into using the wrong model (their model of their partner), I stop them and direct them to share "why your partner thinks they did it." This gets them onto the correct validation model. (See way up above in this article.) If they can bear witness to their partner's sense, I then turn to the original send and ask, "Did they get it? How does it feel to hear them say that?" Usually the validated partner says they feel really good. Then I turn to the validator and say, "Now all you have to do is make them feel that way 10 times a day forever. Practice makes easy."
2. The Odd Dialogue. I mentioned this in my article on teaching PreValidation. One partner starts by thinking of something, anything, that their partner did that seems odd. They then prompt, "When you did that it seemed odd to me or I didn't understand what was going on for you. Could you share with me what was going on so that I can understand you better?" I then use the prompted validation technique I mentioned above.
3. The Movies. I put one partner into mirroring and straight pulls, and I do the deepening pulls. Here they are.
    o "Share with your partner your favorite movie, a little about it, and what you like about it."
    o "Share with your partner your favorite character and why you like that person."
    o "Share with your partner your favorite scene in the movie."
    o "Share with your partner the frame of film, what was on camera at the point in that scene that touched you the most."
    o "Share with your partner what that moment, that frame, reminds you of from your early childhood."
    o I turn to the receiver. "Do you see why that spot in the film touches your partner so deeply? Tell me why." This becomes the Prompted Validation technique above.
    o

Super-Validation
On cool way to nurture a person's self-awareness and eventually their self esteem, I call super-validation. I use this as a deeply affirming action when one partner has really revealed their "sense" in one of the teaching models above. I start this off by writing a sentence stem on the board. Here it is.

"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes….."

Then I take turns with the listener (the mirroring partner) making defining statements about the sender's self. Each word in the sentence stem is important. Our statements can be accurate or inaccurate and each time the speaker gets

to tell us. "You're right." or "Nope." But every time the speaker gets to hear and agree with positive self-defining statements of self.

Example (the person's favorite movie was Whale Rider)
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes likes swimming."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes can get sunburned."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes doesn't like crowds."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes prefers picnics alone to city beaches."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes likes whales."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes feels lonely."
"I am getting it that you are the kind of person who sometimes wishes people would notice your strength."
Etc.

Summary
I think I have all my points in this paper. I am sure I will work on it some more, cleaning it up, and adding little bits and pieces. But I now have a tentative sense of completion.