

## George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory



### Personal History

- born and raised in Kansas
- thought Freud was a kook
- only studied psychology for 9 months
- worked in academics, public schools, and clinical settings
- remained in the Midwest (mainly Kansas) to practice
- “man-the-scientist” was his motto
- his theories gained popularity after his death

### General Theory Overview

- emphasis on individual thoughts
- idiographic focus
- returns focus to the individual rather than the society
- “jackass theory”
- very similar to many humanistic theories (although he doesn't focus on motivation)
- focus on integrating cognition with other factors

## Kelly's Theory

- individual differences caused by differences in cognition
- behaviors and emotions are the result of cognition
- healthy social relationships are the result of understanding another person's cognitions
- personality changes throughout life as people adjust their personal constructs

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## "Man the scientist"

- scientists use theories to predict behavior  
people make up their own theories to figure out the world
  - | these theories called personal constructs
- scientists test their theories and change them if they don't work
- people can also change their personal constructs if they are not useful
  - | this notion is constructive alternativism
  - | there is no real "truth"
  - | people have freedom to revise their views

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## Structure of Personality

- variations in personality are due to variations in constructs
- the construction of constructs:
  - | must have 3 elements - 2 which are similar and 1 which is different
  - | similar elements make up the similarity pole
  - | other element makes up the contrast pole

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## Types of Constructs

- verbal versus preverbal
  - | conscious and unconscious constructs
- core versus peripheral
  - | determines the degree of importance and ease of adjusting
- must also examine the degree of cognitive complexity

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## Fundamental Postulate

- “a person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events”
  - | our thoughts actively influence our behaviors and emotions
  - | due to past experience, we prepare for life through anticipation
  - | we learn by examining when our anticipations come true and when they do not
  - | based on this learning, we modify our personal constructs

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## Fundamental Postulate Problems

- self-fulfilling prophecy
  - | seek things that agree with our personal constructs
- cognitive cycles
  - | we find things to confirm our beliefs, so our beliefs get stronger, so we are able to find more things that validate our beliefs
- validation and invalidation of personal constructs is not precise
- people don’t always change their personal constructs in response to invalidation

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## Making Sense of Emotions

- Anxiety: from not being able to predict future events. Perceived inadequate construct system.
- Threat: awareness of imminent comprehensive change to one's core structures.
- Fear: potential change is to "peripheral" construct (not core).

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- Guilt: when social actions are inconsistent with core constructs.
- Hostility: continued effort to extort validation evidence for a social construct when it has already proved itself a failure.

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## Therapy

- in order to promote change, one must understand the client's faulty constructs
- goal is to help the client improve their construct system
- change in construct system cause anxiety, fear, and threat
- often relies on REP testing
- types of therapy:
  - | fixed-role therapy
    - | client role-plays new constructs
  - | personal stories
    - | narratives help to explain the client's constructs

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