

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

"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

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

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

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

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

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).

- **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.

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










