

1955

Year in Review



BREAKING NEWS

PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

This year, George Kelly developed and published his work on Personal Construct Theory in his book “The Psychology of Personal Constructs.” Kelly’s ideas are radically different from the current psychological focus upon more deterministic and reductionist assumptions. Kelly based Personal Construct Theory off of a philosophical assumption called “constructive alternativism”. Constructive alternativism posits that people construct their own worlds, and that reconstruction is possible in events that are open to alternative constructions. Much of the early content in the book circulates around a “fundamental postulate”. The fundamental postulate argues that people anticipate their worlds and function like scientists, meaning that they formulate hypotheses, test them, and revise them if they are invalidated. Kelly argues that the building blocks of the hypotheses we use in life are “personal constructs,” which are bipolar discriminations between elements of the world, like determining that your neighbour is either simply good or bad. Each construct represents a choice that an individual makes in terms of either pole. People make the choice that is most likely to lead to a better prediction of the world. The constructs are organized hierarchically in superordinate and subordinate categories. Superordinate constructs are more resistant to change and carry more implications than subordinate constructs. Kelly’s view of the person is holistic and does not distinguish between cognition, emotion, and motivation. Emotions, Kelly postulates, are actually an awareness of transitions in construing. For example, anxiety arises when an aspect of the world is beyond range of one’s constructs and is therefore unpredictable, like experiencing culture shock. People move toward better event prediction and away from unpredictability and invalidation of construing. Kelly further laid out a set of assessment techniques that aid psychologists to show sociality – the construing of another person’s construction processes – rather than less personal forms of assessment like questionnaires. Psychologists working under personal construct theory take a credulous approach, respecting the views of patients and taking them at face value. Kelly’s theory is the first psychological theory using a constructivist approach and provides great hope for the future of both personality and person-based psychology.



CONSTRUCT VALIDITY IN PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS



In July, Lee J. Cronbach and Paul E. Meehl published “Construct Validity in Psychological Tests” in the Psychological Bulletin. Between 1950 and 1954, the APA Committee on Psychological tests attempted to specify the qualities that should be investigated before a test is published. The Committee distinguished 4 types of validity, one of which was “construct validity”. Cronbach and Meehl attempted to explain and elaborate upon the idea of construct validity. Specifically, they aimed to indicate the types of evidence that can substantiate interpretations where conventional validation methods are inappropriate, and how that evidence should be interpreted. Conclusively, Cronbach and Meehl laid out 8 important points. Firstly, constructs exist not in isolation but in a network and can vary in clarity at different stages of research. Next, construct validation is only possible when there is a relationship between the construct and something observable, and the observable variables should be viewed as unconfirmed. Continuously, the network and reasoning behind using specific observables should be clear so that evidence can be properly interpreted. Furthermore, many kinds of evidence, including correlations, are relevant to construct validity, and the interpretation of high correlations or stability depends on the theory of the construct. Additionally, if a predicted relationship fails, the issue may lie in the interpretation of the network. Any alteration of the network to account for new observations needs to be validated once again, and caution should be used to ensure post-hoc explanations are not substituted for validation. Moreover, construct validity cannot be expressed as a single coefficient, but may be expressed through upper and lower bounds that measure the proportion of test variance attributable to the construct. Also, constructs may vary in simplicity due to their more descriptive or theoretical natures. Finally, the investigation of a test’s construct validity is similar to general scientific procedures when developing and confirming theories. Conclusively, Cronbach and Meehl advocated that psychologists make construct validity a familiar part of their methodological thinking. Cronbach and Meehl’s discoveries will undoubtedly have a large impact on how psychological research is conducted.

WARSAW TREATY ORGANIZATION



On May 14th, a political and military alliance was established between the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, including Albania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic. The Warsaw Pact was a response to the NATO alliance between America, Canada, and Western European countries that was established in 1949. The Warsaw Pact pledged that its members would defend one another under attack, use collective decision making, and employ non-interference in the internal affairs of its members.

MENTAL HYGIENE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Paul Lemkau published the 2nd edition of Mental Hygiene and Public Health, where he extended on his earlier edition. The 1st volume explained the concept of community-based mental hygiene and functioned to train mental health professionals. The 2nd volume extended this and offered a systematic approach to organizing mental health services in society. It was published in 12 languages and was influential worldwide.

APA LICENSURE

On September 2nd, the American Psychological Association’s Council of Representatives approved the first model legislation for state licensure of professional psychologists, which acts as a prototype for U.S. states considering using legislation to regulate psychology practice.

HAWTHORNE

The term “Hawthorne Effect” was suggested this year by Henry A. Landsberger. The Hawthorne effect refers to any short-term productivity increase that may occur as a result of being viewed or appreciated. The effect was based on the Hawthorne experiments of the 1920s and 1930s. The Hawthorne effect is influential in organizational research, and in research procedure.

GENEVA SUMMIT

In July, the Big Four, including U.S. President Eisenhower, Britain Prime Minister Eden, Soviet Union Premier Bulganin, and France Prime Minister Faure, met in Geneva to begin peace discussions to reduce international tensions. No agreements were reached, but the conference is a first step towards eased tension around the world.



EMMETT TILL’S MURDER



On August 24th, a Black 14-year-old boy named Emmett Till was visiting family in Money, Mississippi. Emmett and some other young boys went to a local store, Bryant’s Grocery and Meat Market, to buy candy. Reports on the events inside Bryant’s Grocery are conflicting, but most allege that Emmett teased White shop clerk, Carolyn Bryant, in some fashion. Emmett’s cousin claimed that Emmett did not make any inappropriate comments towards Bryant. There were no witnesses present in the shop. Roy Bryant, Carolyn’s husband, returned from a work trip a few days later and heard of Emmett’s alleged interaction with his wife. 4 days later, on August 28th, Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam went to Emmett’s great uncle Moses’ home and demanded to see Emmett. The men forced Emmett into their car and tied him up in the backseat. They then brutally beat Emmett, shot him, and threw him into the Tallahatchie River with a cotton-gin fan attached to his neck with barbed wire. Emmett’s body was discovered by fishermen 3 days later on August 31st. Emmett’s great-uncle Moses identified his body by an initial ring Emmett had been wearing. Emmett’s mother, Mamie Bradley, requested that Emmett’s body be sent back to Chicago, and decided to hold an open-casket funeral to expose the harm done to him. Photographs of Emmett’s body were published in media nation-wide. In September, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were indicted for murder. The trial lasted 5 days, and Moses Wright’s testimony marked the first time a Black man testified to the guilt of a White man in Mississippi. On September 23rd, an all-White, all-male jury deliberated only 67 minutes before acquitting Bryant and Milam. For many Black Americans, Emmett’s murder was further proof of White violence upon Black individuals in the South and inspired a fight against racial injustice.

ROSA PARKS & THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

Rosa Louis McCauley was born in Alabama, U.S.A., in 1913. When Rosa was 19, she married Raymond Parks, who is a barber and a member of the “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” (NAACP). In 1943, against her husband’s wishes, Rosa became chapter secretary at the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP. Rosa frequently attended meetings about Emmett Till’s murder and had recently learned of his murderers’ acquittals. On December 1st, 42-year-old Rosa Parks was commuting home on a Montgomery municipal bus. On Montgomery buses, the front seats are reserved for White citizens, and the back seats are reserved for Black citizens. Laws for the Montgomery buses are contradictory, where one law states that segregation must be enforced and another law states that no person, regardless of race, could be asked to give up a seat. On Rosa’s route home, a White man had no seat because the “White” seats were full. The bus driver told the riders in the first row of the back section to stand, to which three riders obeyed. Rosa, however, did not stand. Two police officers approached the bus, assessed the situation, and placed Rosa in custody. Rosa used her phone call to call her husband Raymond. Montgomery NAACP chapter president E.D. Nixon was present when Rosa was released on bail on the evening of December 1st. Nixon had hoped for years to find a “courageous Black person of unquestioned honesty and integrity” to become a plaintiff in a case that would test the validity of segregation laws. Nixon convinced Rosa that she should be that plaintiff. They also determined that Black citizens should boycott Montgomery buses on the day of Rosa’s trial. Rosa was found guilty of violating segregation laws and fined on December 5th. By that time, however, participation in the boycotts had surpassed initial expectations. Taking advantage of this, Nixon and other ministers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to manage the boycott. They have elected young reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the president of the MIA. At a recent meeting between White and Black committees, a Black spokesman requesting a “first come, first served” seating arrangement on the buses, bus driver courtesy toward Black patrons, and employment of Black bus drivers on predominantly Black routes. Bus officials refused to employ Black drivers, stated that the proposed seating arrangement is illegal, and asserted that there have been no recent reports of discourtesy by drivers. As of now, the boycott continues, and could be quite impactful as it paves the way for litigation that could contest the right of discrimination based on race on mass transportation.



POLIO VACCINE APPROVED



Following years of testing, Jonas Salk’s inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) was licensed on April 12th. This has been documented as the first successful polio vaccine! Salk argues for equitable access and believes that low or no-cost vaccination is essential to eliminating polio. An interviewer asked Salk who owned the patent for his vaccine, to which he responded, “The people, I would say. There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?”. This vaccine is quite promising for the future of healthcare.

MEPROBAMATE

Meprobamate, or Miltown as it is advertised, both launched and took the world by storm this year! Meprobamate is an anxiolytic drug that is tranquilizing, relaxing, and reduces mental symptoms. Meprobamate is the first drug to be widely advertised to the general public.

