

George Kelly (1905-1967)

Chung & Hyland (2012) *History and Philosophy of Psychology*. **p. 233-241.**

George Kelly (1905-1967)

psy201 p233-241 of ebook

- Trained as a psychologist
- Developed a clinical-psychology service for the state school system and students at his University
- Developed his theory of personal constructs and applied it to these clients

Kelly's view of science

- There isn't an objective reality
- We *construct* reality. Reality is subjective
 - NB Hanson 1958
- Scientists construct a scientific reality by forming hypotheses.
 - Hypotheses have a focus
- Ordinary people are no different from scientists -
 - they too form a reality by forming hypotheses
- Scientists and ordinary people are trying to predict and anticipate events

Kelly's view of humans

- Not driven by drives
- Simply trying to understand the world in which they live
- Naïve scientists
 - predict and control phenomena - phenomena are subjective
 - The difference between scientists and non-scientists is imaginary

Kelly's theory of personality

- Key concept is the *personal construct*
- a way of construing or interpreting the world
- people have different ways of construing or interpreting the world - they have different constructs

What is a personal construct?

- A personal construct is a dichotomy which is used to make sense of the world: example
- Take three objects
 - e.g., a whale, a rat, and a trout
- In what way are two similar and one different?
- Similarity pole and contrast pole
 - Note a construct is not a dimensions - complexity is built up by constructs of quantity or degree

More about constructs

- A construct is like a theory
 - like a theory, a construct has a focus. It always applies to a particular type of context.
- Core constructs versus peripheral constructs
 - consistently used versus sometimes used
- Tight constructs versus loose constructs
 - always lead to the same conclusion versus lead you to expect one thing on one occasion and something else on another
- Constructs not always verbal

Kelly's theory of personality

- An individual's personality is his construct system.
- People have different constructs - they construe the world in different ways.
- Finding out about someone's constructs tell us what that person is like and how they will respond to different situations

The Repertory Grid Test - Rep test - part 1

- A way of finding out about a person's constructs
- Start with a role title list
 - remember that a construct always has a focus
- E.g., write down a list of 6 people you know
 - this exercise will help you find out about the constructs you use when interpreting other people.
I.e., the focus is construct about people

Rep test (part 2)

- Write down six people you know
 - e.g., Bob, Mary, Peter, Sue, Alison, Roger
- Take the first three and ask yourself, in what way are two similar and one different?
 - E.g., Bob and Mary have a sense of humour, Peter hasn't
- Write down the similarity pole (the way two are similar) and the contrast pole (the way the third person is different)
 - Has a sense of humour vs No sense of humour

Rep test (part 3)

- You now have your first construct (has sense of humour vs has no sense of humour)
- Now take another three people from you list
 - e.g., Peter, Sue and Alison
- Ask yourself again, in what way are two similar and one different
 - Peter and Sue are old, Alison is young
- You now have your second construct - keep doing this till you stop producing new constructs

Interpretation of Rep test

- Examiner considers constructs
- Often constructs which use different words have similar meanings
 - e.g., bright versus thick, education versus uneducated
- Examiner considers the total number and nature of the constructs
 - considers how tight or loose they are

Interpreting the Rep test

- What is the characteristics of the person who has these constructs?
 - Easy going - hypercritical
 - Feels inferior - feels confident
 - Socially skilled - unpleasant
 - Tense - easy to be with
 - Maladjusted - easy going
 - Understanding - hypercritical

Interpretation of Rep test

- Limited number of constructs so limited versatility in dealing with people
 - although different constructs are used they all concern ways in which people relate to the client
- Concerned about social confidence
 - Clearly there is an issue of perceived criticism, and being criticised by others is an important part of this client's construct system
- therapist will either be interpreted as critical or friendly/easy going

Complexity of construct system

- How many different constructs does the client have?
- Anxiety
 - recognition that the events one is confronted with lie outside the range of convenience of one's construct system
- Threat
 - awareness of imminent comprehensive change in construct.

How people use constructs in everyday life

- Circumspection-preemption- control cycle
- Circumspection
 - What constructs can I use in relation to the present situation?
- Preemption
 - Choose the construct or constructions to be used
- Control
 - Act on the conclusions drawn from the application of the preempted constructs

Pathology

- Everyone has their own constructs
- Pathology is disordered functioning in relation to the application of the construct system to events
- To treat pathology, it is necessary to change the construct system

Therapy - changing constructs

- Conditions needed for therapeutic change of constructs to take place
 - Atmosphere of experimentation
 - constructs can be tried out within a context of experimentation
 - not ‘playing for keeps’
 - Provision of new elements
 - Therapist provides new constructs in a protected environment
 - awareness that therapist will be construed in a particular way
 - Availability of validating data
 - Provide evidence that new constructs work

Fixed role therapy

- Client presented with a new personality sketch and asked to act it out
- Opportunity to construe the world differently and so behave differently in a protected environment
- Then given the opportunity to ‘become’ the person being acted
 - Client may resist - therapist suggests that it is temporary attempt to act like another person and see how it works.

Evaluation of Kelly

- Rep test used in lots of contexts, e.g., In architecture



Evaluation of G. Kelly

- Consistent theory of people as rational scientists
- A cognitive theory -an alternative to theories suggesting that people are motivated by desires
- Are people always that rational?
- Is the lack of motivation important?
- Precursor to cognitive psychology – the idea that people are rational information processing machines