Back to the roots: George Kelly in Hindsight

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My experience with Kelly’s theory

• How do young people screen occupational information?
• Personal construct theory is a systematic theoretical framework AND also very practical
George Kelly 1905 - 1967

- Ahead of his time: Predecessor of constructivism and cognitive behavioral theory
- *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (1955)
- An unpopular professor
- Re-discovery of Kelly
Basics of the theory

- Metaphor of Man-as-scientist (and Woman-as-scientist!)
- Constructive alternativism – we continuously construe our surrounding reality
- Anticipation – we are always trying to anticipate /foresee what will happen ≠ response
- If the construct, when tested, anticipates the right outcome the hypothesis holds and thus the personal theory or construct system about surrounding phenomena holds.
- Man/woman is always looking for personal theories that can better differentiate and anticipate events in the world.
Construing theories vs. constructs

http://www.ship.edu/~cgboereee/kelly.html
Fundamental postulate: Constructive alternativism

• According to this principle, reality does not reveal itself to us directly, but rather is subject to as many different constructions as we are able to invent.

• All of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement

  » Kelly, G. (1963, p.15)
A very formal theory:

• Fundamental postulate: A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events.

• 11 corollaries
11 Corollaries

1. Construction corollary
2. Dichotomy corollary
3. Range corollary
4. Modulation corollary
5. Organisation corollary
6. Fragmentation corollary
7. Experience corollary
8. Choice corollary
9. Individuality corollary
10. Commonality corollary
11. Sociality corollary
Personal construct

• The pattern of man’s construction are called constructs; and, since each person sets up his own network of pathways leading into the future, the concern of the psychologist is the study of personal constructs.
  » Kelly, 1955 (vol.2, p. 4)

• To understand someone else is to understand his personal construct system
  » Duck, 1983
What is a personal construct?

- A construct is defined not as an event, but how we construe the event. Thus a construct is the meaning we give to our surrounding reality.
- We create an image of reality and then we respond to this image.
- Personal constructs are then tested against reality.
Personal construct = Meaning

• To construe is to make sense of something
• A construct is not a concept
• A construct is always binary: pleasant - rude (insert as opposed to in place of the dash).
• A construct always represents a contrast, and you need to spell out the contrast before you can be sure of the meaning intended in the whole construct
• Words ≠ meaning
Vocational / career counseling based on Kelly

- Vocation is “one of the principal means by which one’s life role is given clarity and meaning” (Kelly, 1955, p. 751). I am .......... (occupation)

- Personal construct counselors make meaning of vocational behavior and comprehend careers by examining the personal constructs that agents use to channel their anticipations for and interpretations of the role that work plays in their lives (Savickas, 1997, p.152).
Repertory grid technique

- Kelly’s ingeneous method of exploring constructs and construct systems.
- Currently used by about 25 thousand researchers (Neimeyer, 1999).
- Use in career counselling: Choose three occupations that you have been thinking about as a future occupations. In what way are two of them alike and different from the third? (Exploration of vocational constructs).
References