Section I

Exploring Personal Construct Theory

Chapter 1

Coming to Terms with Personal Construct Theory

Richard Butler

Background

After much soul-searching, and in his fiftieth year, George Kelly had the two volumes of his book *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* published in 1955 (later reprinted as 1991a and 1991b). As a stark contrast to both the psychodynamic and behavioural theories which predominated at the time, Kelly's writings presented personal construct theory (PCT) as a complete, innovative and elaborated abstraction of how people make sense of their world and themselves. Although offering a fresh and enlightening means of understanding human psychology, the challenge it invariably presented to the order of the day resulted in PCT being marginalised in both academic and clinical arenas. As Bannister (1977) suggests, the theory has been received rather than used.

PCT was written intentionally content-free, in 'abstract terms to avoid, as far as possible, the limitations of a particular time and culture' (Bannister & Fransella 1986; Fransella & Neimeyer 2005). However, by adopting unfamiliar terminology it seems, in hindsight, that Kelly further alienated his theory from mainstream psychology. Although his constructivist ideas remain profoundly influential and far-reaching in many threads of psychology, folk continue to find his ideas and notions somewhat troublesome to 'engage with' because of the phraseology he adopted. As a lead-in to this book, the fundamental threads of the theory (in reverse order: theory, construct and personal) are described, with particular emphasis on the building blocks of PCT.

Theory

1   *The philosophical foundation*

Fay Fransella (1995) explored a raft of potential influences on the way Kelly developed his theory of man. From his early leanings towards physics (thus the metaphor man-as-scientist) and mathematics (thus the grid as a technique for understanding) he sought actively to oppose the then dominant psychological approaches (behaviourism and psychodynamic). He felt such theories regarded the person respectively as either a passive recipient of the environment or a passive respondent to internal, unconscious forces. Both, argued Kelly, by denying the person's involvement in the directions that they move in, are fundamentally flawed. By considering the person as if they were a scientist, the theory, rather than being judgemental, invites an exploration of their predicament and difficulties. As Trevor Butt (2006) enlarges: 'no longer can we maintain the idea that a person is a simple victim of circumstances, struck down by neurosis. If they are the victim of anything, it is their theory.'

   Some writers (notably Bill Warren 2003; and Trevor Butt 2003; 2006) have teased out some of the specific philosophical influences on Kelly's writing. More generally Greg Neimeyer, Jocelyn Saferstein and Wade Arnold (2005) have clarified the epistemological (theory of knowledge) context for PCT, as outlined in Table 1.1. In contrast to both empiricism (with knowledge determined by verification) and rationalism (with knowledge acquired through reason), PCT is considered clearly within the constructivist tradition, where knowledge is understood to be constructed.

   From such an epistemological position, Kelly's fundamental philosophical stance of **constructive alternativism** is clearly apparent. Broadly this suggests:

- We contact 'reality' not directly, but through our interpretations and assumptions of reality.
- Meaning and knowledge are derived by means of the way a person perceives, or construes, events.
- All our present assumptions and perceptions are open to question and reconsideration.

2   *The psychological perspective*

In suggesting that people come to understand events by how they construe them, Kelly was proposing that, in essence, they are theory-makers. Indi-

Table 1.1 Personal construct theory in the context of epistemological strands

Origin (ancient Greeks)	*Democritus*	*Plato*	*Pyrrho*
Belief	Surest path to knowledge is through the **senses**	The essence of phenomena is accessible only through the **mind**	Knowledge is uncertain – hence the notion of **scepticism**
Contemporary expression	Empiricism (emphasises the role of experience)	Rationalism (based on justification)	Constructivism (knowledge is constructed)
Knowledge accessed	Through **experience** based on sight, sound, smell, touch, taste	Through the rational powers of the **mind** and the **use of reason**	Belief in something does not necessarily justify a knowledge of it
Modern theorists	Francis Bacon, John Locke	René Descartes	Immanuel Kant, George Kelly
Philosophy of science	**Logical positivism** espousal of **verificationism** and **falsification** (Karl Popper)	**Foundationalism** there are fundamental facts from which knowledge can be inferred	**Postmodernism** the meaning of all things is coloured by subjectivity
Psychological stance	**Realism** objects exist independent of our experience and understanding arises through experimentation and **verification**	**Realism** objects have essences (**essentialism**), which can be deduced through reasoning	**Constructive alternativism** our understanding of events is subject to a variety of alternative constructions
Process	**Perception** and validating beliefs through observation	**Logical conceptualisation** using rational and analytical skills; testing for logical consistency	**Metaphor** and symbolisation, testing validity in terms of the pragmatic ability to generalise to other realms of experience
Psychological practice	Behaviourism, cognitive behaviourism	Psychotherapy: rational emotive therapy	Constructivist: e.g. personal construct psychotherapy

viduals make sense by constructing theories of themselves, other people and the events before them. In a sense if PCT is a theory about the theories people have about themselves and the world they inhabit, then construct theory can be considered a meta-theory.

Sean Brophy, Fay Fransella & Nick Reed (2005) set out the characteristics of a theory. If people are in the business of constructing theories, then the characteristics held to be true of a theory might also be held to be true of the person. Thus the person in PCT might be held able to:
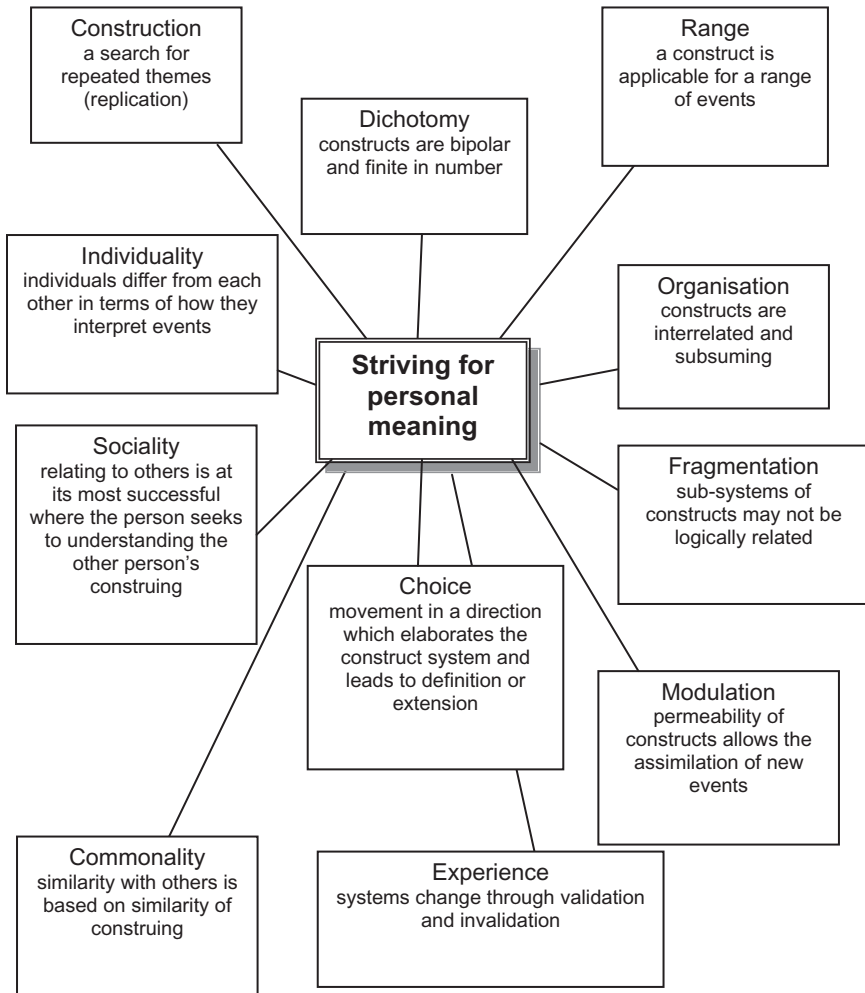
- bind events together so they mean more than any single event by itself;
- formalise a set of ideas into a system;
- use the framework to anticipate outcomes;
- address issues that were not thought about at the time the theory was constructed;
- test their assumptions and deductions;
- inform action;
- rely on their theory when in doubt;
- flourish, so long as the theory proves fertile and useful.

Kelly unreservedly presented his theory in terms of a psychological structure, which consists of a fundamental postulate and 11 corollaries (see Figure 1.1). The **fundamental postulate** suggests that *a person's processes are psychologically channelled by the ways in which they anticipate events*. This core element of the theory attempts to explain a person's psychology not so much in terms of past history – as if through a rear-view mirror (Shotter 2007) – but in terms of anticipatory choices. The fundamental postulate implies that:

- we reach out to the future;
- we discriminate (**construe**) the events before us;
- such construing enables us to **anticipate** future events;
- consequently, we are able to **predict** what may happen;
- and we strive to **make sense** of the world and our self.

Construct

The following section owes much to Don Bannister and Fay Fransella (1986), who sought succinctly to define the formal aspects of the theory, and to the work of David Winter (1992; 2003), who elaborated many

Construction
a search for
repeated themes
(replication)

Range
a construct is
applicable for a range
of events

Dichotomy
constructs are bipolar
and finite in number

Individuality
individuals differ from each
other in terms of how they
interpret events

Organisation
constructs are
interrelated and
subsuming

**Striving for
personal
meaning**

Sociality
relating to others is at
its most successful
where the person seeks
to understanding the
other person's
construing

Fragmentation
sub-systems of
constructs may not be
logically related

Choice
movement in a direction
which elaborates the
construct system and
leads to definition or
extension

Modulation
permeability of
constructs allows the
assimilation of new
events

Commonality
similarity with others is
based on similarity of
construing

Experience
systems change through validation
and invalidation

Adapted from Butler & Green (2007) with permission.

Figure 1.1 A diagrammatic summary of Kelly's corollaries

of the clinical issues within the framework of the theory. Further elaboration of many terms within the rubric of the theory can be found in the alphabetical index of the internet encyclopaedia of personal construct psychology, edited by Jörn Scheer and Beverly Walker (www.pcp-net.org/encyclopaedia).

1   *The properties of constructs*

Kelly (1955/1991a; 1991b) wished to distinguish between a construct and a concept. The latter he saw as existing independently of any particular person's psychological processes. A construct, he proposed, may be viewed as:

- An **abstraction** arising from an awareness of a similarity and a contrast between **events** (**elements** or objects), summarised in the **construction corollary**, which suggests *a person anticipates events by construing their replications*.
- **Devised by the protagonist** with no existence independent of the person whose thinking it characterises. Hence the distinction between a construct and a concept, the latter often being treated as existing independently of any one person's psychological processes.
- **Bipolar**. The relationship between the two poles of a construct is considered to be one of **contrast** (defined in terms of the **dichotomy corollary**: *a person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs*). Thus 'lazy' may be contrasted to 'hard-working'. It is through such discriminations that Kelly suggested a person derives meaning.
- Having an **emergent pole**, which is the pole that arises when an individual elicits a construct. Thus if asked to characterise themselves in three ways, a person's self-descriptions of 'loud', 'unconventional' and 'creative' can be seen as emergent ends of three constructs.
- Necessarily having a **contrast** or **implicit pole**, which describes the contrast end of a construct. Thus 'boring' might be differentiated from 'unconventional'.
- A portable **axis of reference**. Constructs are discriminations imposed on events and as such are successively 'picked up and laid down over many, many different events in order to bring them into focus and clothe them with personal meaning' (Kelly 1958/1969). Thus Huddersfield, a geographical element, may be construed as either 'north' or 'south', depending on whether we are respectively in Bristol or Inverness.
- Possibly having **verbal markers**, though constructs are foremost the discriminations we make, not the labels we attach to them. Kelly referred to 'unlabelled' constructs as **preverbal**, possibly emerging before a child has command of speech, and which continue to be employed even though the individual has no consistent word symbol. Viv Burr (2006) has wonderfully elaborated how our artistic 'style', gait, handwriting, gestures, posture, dance, and so forth express our identity without recourse to symbols or language.

- Arising out of an individual's personal experience and therefore regarded as fundamentally their own. Kelly's **individuality corollary**, which states that *persons differ from each other in their constructions of events*, stresses the uniqueness of each person's construing, even where they may attach similar verbal labels to their discriminations. Two employees may both construe their boss as 'generous', yet their contrasts 'tight-fisted' and 'selfish' suggest that each construes (understands) him in different ways.
- Phenomenologically valid, in that even where a person takes another person's verbal markers as a basis for a construct (such as with a **supplied** construct), they will invest it with their own personal meanings.
- A means of simultaneously promoting an **understanding** of events (by bringing them within our grasp through one set of terms) whilst also **restricting** other meanings by blinding us to other aspects of the same configuration of events. Thus if we determinedly construe a pile of bricks as building material, we limit the possibility of construing them in artistic terms.

2   Construct elicitation

- Traditionally, the Kellyan form of construct elicitation is by **triadic elicitation**. Here a person is asked to consider how two elements are alike (which gives an emergent pole) and therefore dissimilar to a third element (the contrast pole). Thus a brother and a friend might be construed as 'fun to be with' in contrast to a colleague, who might be construed as 'boring'.
- Other forms of construct elicitation have subsequently been advanced – either the similarity of two elements (e.g. two beers may both have a 'nutty' flavour) or the difference between two elements (e.g. free-flowing footballers vs. a set of cloggers). Further, the emergent end of constructs may be elicited through only one element (e.g. by asking a person to describe their self)
- A **self-characterisation** directly invites a person to spell out what is important to them by writing a sketch of themselves in the third person, as if they are an observer of themselves. Their writings are awash with constructs (emergent poles at least) in relation to how they imagine others view themselves (Denicolo 2005).
- **Laddering** (devised by Dennis Hinkle 1965) seeks to unearth superordinate constructs by asking a person why ('how come?') a preferred pole

of a construct is important to them. Thus the importance of being 'honest' might be the need to 'avoid criticism' (a more superordinate construct).

- **Pyramiding** is a contrast to laddering for it seeks to understand more subordinate constructs by asking a person to characterise, describe or detail what constitutes a preferred end of a construct. Pyramiding tends to reveal more behavioural constructs. Thus what characterises 'honesty' might be owning up to the mistakes we make (a more subordinate construct).

3   *Constructs in relation to events (elements)*

- A construct has a **range of convenience** which encompasses events for which it is applicable. An element such as a guitar which fails to be interpreted within the bounds of a construct (e.g. enthusiastic–apathetic) is said to lie outside the range of convenience. The **range corollary** states that *a construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only.*
- **Anxiety** results from awareness that events with which one is confronted lie mostly outside the range of one's construct system. You are in effect faced with (or anticipate) a situation that feels mostly unconstruable. 'Mostly' is the key word here, for as Bannister (1977) illustrates, someone who is anxious about an examination or test may readily construe much about the anticipated event but remain 'at sea' with respects to notions of 'what will I (or others) think if I fail this exam?'
- A construct has a **focus of convenience** which covers events for which it is particularly apposite or usefully predictable. Thus, for example, the construct 'out of tune–in tune' is of particular relevance in terms of a guitar.
- **Slot rattling** describes the (usually rapid) movement of an element (self, other person or event) from one end of a construct pole to its contrast. The resulting change is regarded as fairly unstable.
- When elements are freely allotted to a construct it is described as being **permeable**. This is refined in the **modulation corollary**, which states that *the variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience lie.* A construct is described as impermeable if it rejects elements on the basis of their novelty.
- The pole of a construct which is less well elaborated or available for application to events is called the **submerged pole**.

- Where a pole of a construct is relatively inaccessible and thus rarely tested (submerged), a person may sense being trapped, an experience familiar to those who suffer with problems such as **agoraphobia**.
- A construct which pre-empts its elements for membership in its own realm exclusively is known as a **pre-emptive construct**. It makes sense of an element in one, and only one, way. Such 'nothing but …' construing restricts elaborative potential. Diagnostic construing which labels people, say, as suffering from 'schizophrenia' may lead to perceptions of them as only schizophrenic.
- A **constellatory construct** fixes the other realm membership of its elements. As a type of stereotypical or prejudicial approach it leads to absolute linkages. For example, a person (element) construed as 'artistic' might also be construed as 'self-obsessed', 'precious' and 'work-shy'.
- A **propositional construct** carries no implications regarding other realm membership of their elements. A person construed as 'artistic' may be construed in many other ways – 'friendly', 'intense', 'tongue in cheek'.
- The **repertory grid** technique (grid) is an idiographic means of understanding a person's psychological space in terms of the patterns between constructs and elements. The relationship tends to be expressed mathematically through principal components or cluster analysis. (For more information see Fransella, Bell & Bannister 2004.)

4   Particular types of construct

- Kelly considered **dependency** in terms of the resources people rely on for support and validation. He contrasted undispersed dependency (reliance on a few people for most needs) with dispersed dependency (a more differentiated support network).
- A **dependency grid** contains elements only and involves asking to whom, out of a list of people, a person would turn for help in various difficult situations.
- The notion of **self** is constructed, and like other construing is regarded as a means by which a person makes sense of themselves. Don Bannister (1983) suggests that the self-picture and the world picture are painted on the same canvas and with the same pigments.
- Folk may appear contradictory to others yet an understanding of that person's construing may reveal different (even contrasting) construct sub-systems. Being a father and being the captain of a rugby team may consist of quite different sets of constructs. Miller Mair (1977) suggests that we may understand a person in terms of their **community of selves**.

- The **Self Image Profile** (Butler 2001; Butler & Gasson 2004) is an idiographic means of displaying and measuring both self-image and self-esteem by employing commonly elicited self-description constructs.

5   Constructs in relation to other constructs

- Constructs relate to one another both 'horizontally' and hierarchically.
- In terms of horizontal relationships, constructs can be viewed as alike where they encompass similar elements and lead to similar anticipations. In grid work such constructs are highly **interrelated** (correlated) and cluster together.
- The **implications grid** (or Impgrid), devised by Dennis Hinkle (1965), contains no elements and explores construct relationships in terms of how each implies the other.
- Where constructs are closely correlated, the person might be understood as having a **tight construct system.** Tight construing leads to unvarying prediction and is particularly vulnerable to invalidation.
- **Obsessionality** may be perceived as the behavioural expression of excessive tightening.
- **Loose construing**, in contrast, leads to varying predictions. The relationship between two constructs might be said to be loose where mathematically there is a low correlation.
- Where constructs loosen to the point where predictions are vague, inconsistent and highly vulnerable to invalidation, schizophrenic **thought disorder** may result (Bannister 1962).
- Kelly describes the **creativity cycle** whereby a person shows inventiveness and resourcefulness by moving between construing in a loose fashion and then tightening to a point where predictions can be tested.
- **Fixed-role therapy** is one of Kelly's original therapeutic techniques where a person is invited for a limited period to act an alternative role (set of constructs) based on an agreed sketch. This is a protected form of experimentation.
- The alternative sketch role is based on constructs that lie at an **orthogonal angle** to the person's usual form of construing. Thus 'good listener' might provide the basis of a sketch where a person's predominant construing orbits around 'shy vs. confident'.
- Constructs are also organised **hierarchically** with constructs pertaining to physical characteristics, role and behaviour at the base, psychological

constructs in the middle and core, fundamental constructs at the apex. This is outlined as the **organisation corollary**, which states that *each person characteristically evolves, for their convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs*. By referring to evolution, Kelly was emphasising the developmental nature of construct systems whereby the 'hierarchy' is elaborated with experience.

- A **superordinate construct** is relatively higher in the hierarchy, lying in a 'dominant' relationship vis-à-vis constructs. It is generally elucidated by laddering.
- The **resistance to change grid**, devised by Dennis Hinkle (1965) and free of elements, explores the hierarchical arrangement of constructs in terms of which constructs a person would resist changing.
- A **core construct** lies at the top of the hierarchy, relates to a person's identity, is fundamental to the way they seek to impose meaning on events and governs what Kelly called their 'maintenance processes'. A desire for approval, avoidance of criticism, search for achievement, wish for independence and need for nonconformity are typical examples of core constructs (Butler 2006).
- The **core role structure** is the core group of constructs by which we understand ourselves.
- **Guilt** arises from an awareness that we are acting in a way that we might not have expected. You have misread yourself – in Kellyan language, an awareness of dislodgement of the self from one's core role structure. Guilt, like all emotions, is conceptualised in PCT terms as value-free. Thus guilt might arise where a laid-back, rebellious student hands in a piece of work on time much as a conscientious scholar does who misses the deadline.
- **Threat** arises when our fundamental (core) constructs are anticipated to be endangered or are indeed invalidated, leading to a feeling that our 'known' world appears on the brink of becoming chaotic. Kelly defined it as an awareness of an imminent comprehensive change in core structures. Although we are often aware of an 'alternative self' to our current sense of self (core role structure) we may resist taking on even what might be viewed as a preferred self because of the threat of the unknown. Thus stutterers may resist fluency (Fransella 1972); impulsive children avoid being clever (Hartley 1986); and those with anorexia may resist normal weight (Button 1993) because the implications threaten the 'known self'.
- Sometimes people may experience conflict and dilemmas, particularly when constructs are at odds with one another over a particular

event. Kelly explained such eventualities in the **fragmentation corollary**, which states that *a person may successively employ a variety of construction systems which are inferentially incompatible with each other*.

- A **subordinate construct** lies in a subsidiary relationship with another construct at a relatively lower point in the person's construct system hierarchy. It is generally discovered through pyramiding. At the most subordinate lie constructs relating to physical and behavioural discriminations.
- **Performance profiling** (Butler 1996; 1999) is an idiographic display of a person's view of their current behaviour, functioning or ability on constructs considered important in characterising a desired performance.

6   *Constructs in operation*

- Constructs often operate at a **low level of awareness**. Individuals do not appeal to their construct system in order to act (thus much construing is undertaken outside of consciousness), but they nevertheless **are** their construct system. Reflection is a means whereby constructs may be brought into awareness.
- Folk **test** out their constructs (and revise them where necessary), as if they function like scientists – hence the metaphor **man-as-scientist**.
- **Behaviour** is thus seen as the person's means of asking a question. Just as all questions are anticipatory, so too is behaviour (Kelly 1970).
- Kelly later termed this process the **experience cycle**, which in optimal functioning involves anticipation, investment, encounter with the event, assessment of anticipation and revision of construing if necessary.
- Kelly considered the process of decision-making in terms of the **C-P-C cycle**, which involves, in succession, circumspection, pre-emption and control (the last of these stages Kelly later changed to 'choice'), which forms the direction of their movement.
- **Ruminative** behaviour may be understood as the result of prolonged dwelling on the circumspection phase of the cycle.
- **Impulsiveness** is the characteristic foreshortening of the C-P-C cycle.
- People, according to Kelly's **choice corollary**, elect *that alternative in a dichotomised construct through which they anticipate the greatest possibility for the elaboration of their system*. Essentially, they move in directions that to them make most sense. Thus actions are always understandable from the protagonist's perspective, no matter how bizarre, idiosyncratic or inconsistent it may seem to onlookers.

- Some people develop well-elaborated views of themselves in terms of a problem, e.g. stuttering (Fransella 1970) or nocturnal enuresis (Butler 1994) in which the problem becomes a 'way of life', and the contrasts (e.g. fluency, being dry at night, respectively) are poorly elaborated.
- Where the anticipated choice turns out as expected, the construct is described as strengthened or **validated**.
- Elaboration can take the form of **extension**, which is reaching out to increase the range of the construct system by exploring areas that are only partially understood, or **definition**, which is confirmation of experiences which are already well construed.
- However, where events unfold in a way the person had not expected, then the construct is described as being weakened or **invalidated**.
- Kelly described the process of validation and invalidation in the **experience corollary**, which states that *a person's construction system varies as they successively construe the replication of events.*
- **Hostility** describes the way a person determinedly seeks to extort validational evidence to support a prediction (construction) which has already been recognised as a failure. Sometimes we cannot readily abandon a belief (Bannister 1977). A manager, sensing he has 'lost the troops', may resort to bullying in order to maintain his authority.
- Though not built on notions of psychopathology, Kelly sought to apply his theory in the clinical context and considered a **disorder** to be any personal construction which is used repeatedly in spite of consistent invalidation. Beverly Walker and David Winter (2005) have challenged the use of such a pejorative term, suggesting there are times when construing may fail to achieve its purpose (leading to psychological distress), but it can be regarded as the person's best attempt to make sense of their world and themselves.
- Don Bannister (1963) suggested that repeated or **serial invalidation** may lead to schizophrenic thought disorder.
- Kelly described the process whereby a person broadens their 'perceptual field' in order to reorganise it on a more comprehensive level (though not necessarily reconstruing the elements) as **dilation**.
- **Aggression** is considered to be the active elaboration of one's perceptual field.
- A person may broaden their perceptual field (dilate) to a point where exploration 'outruns' their organisation, possibly resulting in **manic** or **paranoid** behaviour.
- In contrast, when a person narrows their perceptual field in order to minimise apparent incompatibilities, Kelly employed the term **constriction**.
- Constriction is regarded as central to **depression.**

7   *Constructs in relation to other's construing*

- Where two people construe an event in a similar way, they can be considered similar to one another. Thus similarity is based on the construing of the protagonist (not on an outsider's view of the two people). Kelly described this in the **commonality corollary**, which states that *to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, their processes are psychologically similar to those of another person.*
- People tend to make sense of others by employing their own construct system. Thus I might construe you as 'erudite' and 'resilient' having read through the chapter to this point. However, such construing is my construing, an observer's perspective, and divorced from the protagonist's (your) perspective. Construing others in our terms minimises the depth of a relationship with them.
- Kelly suggested we can only, as it were, truly understand another person when we seek to understand that person's construing. He called this the **sociality corollary**, which states that *to the extent that one person construes the construction process of another they may play a role in a social process involving the other person.*
- In working with others, Kelly suggested we adopt a **credulous approach**. By attempting metaphorically to 'stand in the other's shoes' and see the world through their eyes, the other person's behaviour and stance possess an 'intrinsic truth'.
- In order to fully understand another we have to **subsume** the construing system of the other – that is, trying to put our own construing on hold and 'step into' the construing world of the other.
- In clinical practice a desired aim is to subsume the client's construing in terms of Kelly's **professional constructs** – primarily understanding the structure of their construing in terms of tight vs. loose, constricted vs. dilated, and so forth, before focusing on content.
- Such a principle is crucial in psychotherapeutic work. Larry Leitner and colleagues (2005) have fully elaborated the sociality corollary and recoined the term a **role** relationship to distinguish it from other forms of role.
- Where folk have difficulty construing other people's construction processes, their world is bereft of psychological understanding. In childhood it has been argued that those struggling with **autism** and **Asperger's syndrome** have profound difficulty is construing the construction process of the other.

8 Constructs in transition

- Revision of the construct system may leave previously construed elements omitted from the person's way of making sense. Such elements are described as **suspended**.
- A **peripheral construct** is one that can be altered without serious modification of the core structure.
- **Emotion**, in the Kellyan sense, is understood as arising when constructs are in transition. They are value-free. Kelly defined six emotions, which have subsequently been further elaborated and extended by Mildred McCoy (1977) and Butler & Green (2007).
- **Resistance** is understood in the context of therapy where a person, behaving perfectly reasonably from their own perspective, makes a determined stance to avoid invalidation.

Personal

The final facet of the theory's triad – Personal – is an invitation to take the person (rather than unconscious drives, faulty thinking or behavioural reactions) seriously. Kelly offered a few handy reminders as to how we might do this:

- Acknowledge that each of us lives in what is ultimately a unique world where situations/events are perceived and understood through the 'goggles' of our personal construct system. This is formally stated in the **individuality corollary** as *persons differ from each other in their constructions of events*. What gives a person their stamp of individuality is the particular constructs they employ as a framework to make sense of their world and themselves.
- Consider the person as the **unit of enquiry**. This contrasts markedly with traditional, 'numbskull' psychology where deconstructed and dissociated fragments of the person, such as learning, memory, perception, motivation, cognition and the like, are esteemed as the focus of interest.
- Recognise that we differ from each other in how we perceive and interpret events, what we consider important and what we consider are the implications.
- Accept that however perplexing a person's actions may appear to be, the protagonist is, in line with the **scientist metaphor**, striving to make sense of their world and their self.

Central to pretty much all of Kelly's thinking is the notion of **reflexivity**. He was convinced that observers of the human condition (psychologists, researchers, counsellors, therapists, and the like) should be understood in the same way that their 'subjects' or 'patients' are. Both are testing out their respective construct systems. Kelly mused that if a theory-maker cannot apply that theory to their own functioning, then it is a useless theory. Thus the 'black box' notion was seriously flawed because it couldn't account for the 'thinking' that went into conceptualising the black box.

Kelly argued that PCT provides a way to understand the theorising of the theorist in addition to the theories people have about themselves, their world and others. 'People' here includes the football supporter trying to understand why his team lost, the child grappling with why she is excluded from a social network she wishes to be part of, a mechanic working on the possibilities as to why a car shudders to a halt, a student pondering her imminent and long-term future, and Kelly himself grappling with a theory as to why folk do the things they do.

Hence the focus of this book.

References

Bannister, D. (1962). The nature and measurement of schizophrenic thought disorder. *Journal of Mental Science*, **108**, 825–842

Bannister, D. (1963). The genesis of schizophrenic thought disorder: a serial invalidation hypothesis. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **109**, 680–686

Bannister, D. (1977). The logic of passion. In D. Bannister (ed.) *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London: Academic Press

Bannister, D. (1983). Self in personal construct theory. In J. R. Adams-Webber & J. C. Mancuso (eds.) *Applications of Personal Construct Theory*. Toronto: Academic Press

Bannister, D. & Fransella, F. (1986). *Inquiring Man*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge

Brophy, S., Fransella, F. & Reed, N. (2005). The power of a good theory. In F. Fransella (ed.) *The Essential Practitioner's Handbook of Personal Construct Theory*. Chichester: Wiley

Burr, V. (2006). The art of writing: embodiment and pre-verbal construing. In P. Caputi, H. Foster & L. L. Viney (eds.) *Personal Construct Psychology: New Ideas*. Chichester: Wiley

Butler, R. J. (1994). *Nocturnal Enuresis: the Child's Experience*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann

Butler, R. J. (1996). *Sports Psychology in Action*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann

Butler, R. J. (1999). *Performance Profiling*. Leeds: The National Coaching Foundation Press

Butler, R. (2001). *The Self Image Profiles for Children & Adolescents*. London: The Psychological Corporation

Butler, R. J. (2006). Investigating the content of core constructs. *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*, **3**, 27–34

Butler, R. J. & Gasson, S. L. (2004). *The Self Image Profile for Adults*. London: Harcourt Assessment

Butler, R. J. & Green, D. (2007). *The Child Within: Taking the Young Person's Perspective by Applying Personal Construct Theory*. Chichester: Wiley

Butt, T. (2003). The phenomenological context of personal construct psychology. In F. Fransella (ed.) *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester: Wiley

Butt, T. (2006). Personal construct therapy and its history in pragmatism. In P. Caputi, H. Foster & L. L. Viney (eds.) *Personal Construct Psychology: New Ideas*. Chichester: Wiley

Button, E. J. (1993). *Eating Disorders: Personal Construct Therapy and Change*. Chichester: Wiley

Denicolo, P. (2005). A range of elicitation methods to suit client and purpose. In F. Fransella (ed.) *The Essential Practitioner's Handbook of Personal Construct Theory*. Chichester: Wiley

Fransella, F. (1970). Stuttering not a symptom but a way of life. *British Journal of Communication Disorders*, **5**, 22

Fransella, F. (1972). *Personal Change and Reconstruction: Research on a Treatment of Stuttering*. London: Academic Press

Fransella, F. (1995). *George Kelly*. London: Sage

Fransella, F., Bell, R. & Bannister, D. (2004). *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* 2nd edition. Chichester: Wiley

Fransella, F. & Neimeyer, R. A. (2005). George Alexander Kelly: the man and his theory. In F. Fransella (ed.) *The Essential Practitioner's Handbook of Personal Construct Theory*. Chichester: Wiley

Hartley, R. (1986). 'Imagine you're clever'. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, **27**, 383–398

Hinkle, D. (1965). The change of personal constructs from the viewpoint of a theory of construct implications. Unpublished PhD thesis, Ohio State University

Kelly, G. A. (1955) *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Volumes **1** and 2. New York: Norton (reprinted London: Routledge, 1991)

Kelly, G. A. (1958/1969). Man's construction of his alternatives. In B. Maher (ed.) *Clinical Psychology and Personality: The Selected Papers of George Kelly*. New York: John Wiley & Sons

Kelly, G. A. (1970). Behaviour is an experiment. In D. Bannister (ed.) *Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London: Academic Press

Kelly, G. A. (1991a). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Volume **1**. *A Theory of Personality*. London: Routledge

Kelly, G. A. (1991b). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Volume **2**. *Clinical Diagnosis and Psychotherapy*. London: Routledge

Leitner, L. M., Faidley, A. J., Dominici, D., Humphreys, C., Loeffler, V., Schlutsmeyer, M. & Thomas, J. (2005). Encountering an other: experiential personal construct psychotherapy. In D. A. Winter & L. L. Viney (eds.) *Personal Construct Psychotherapy: Advances in Theory, Practice and Research*. London: Whurr

McCoy, M. M. (1977). A reconstruction of emotion. In D. Bannister (ed.) *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London: Academic Press

Mair, J. M. M. (1977). The community of self. In D. Bannister (ed.) *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London: Academic Press

Neimeyer, G. J., Saferstein, J. & Arnold, W. (2005). Personal construct psychotherapy: epistemology and practice. In D. A. Winter & L. L. Viney (eds.) *Personal Construct Psychotherapy: Advances in Theory, Practice and Research*. London: Whurr

Shotter, J. (2007). Re-visiting George Kelly: Social constructionism, social ecology, and social justice – all unfinished projects. *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*, **4**, 68–82

Walker, B. M. & Winter, D. (2005) Psychological disorder and reconstruction. In D. A. Winter & L. L. Viney (eds.) *Personal Construct Psychotherapy: Advances in Theory, Practice and Research*. London: Whurr

Warren, B. (2003). Pragmatism and religion: Dewey's twin influences? In F. Fransella (ed.) *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester: Wiley

Winter, D. A. (1992). *Personal Construct Psychology in Clinical Practice: Theory, Research and Application*. London: Routledge

Winter, D. (2003). Psychological disorder as imbalance. In F. Fransella (ed.) *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester: Wiley