11

Marching to a Different Drummer: George Kelly

George Kelly

- What psychological dimensions do you use to conceive of your world and its people: good–bad? ambiguous–clear? sane–insane? other?
- Can you apply the principles of science to the solution of your own problems?
- Can people be divided up into those whose thinking processes are complex and those whose thinking processes are simple?
- Can you imagine you are a child again, relating to your mother?
- Who is the happiest person in your life?

One of the issues running through most previous (and subsequent) chapters has been whether the "inside" or the "outside" of people is stressed by theorists. As you will see, the behaviorists generally look only outside. As you already know, the psychoanalysts are rather exclusively concerned with the inside. Other theorists, covered in later chapters, consider both perspectives. This chapter focuses on a theory of personality that emphasizes an internal aspect, cognition. It introduces an important figure in yet another break with Freud, a break as profound as the rift created by the humanists. George Kelly was in the vanguard of the "cognitive" revolution.

Kelly, the Person

George Kelly, born in a small Kansas town (1905), was the maverick son of a preacher. A rugged individualist, quite literally of pioneer stock, he was skeptical concerning psychological principles from day-one of his first psychology class. Sitting in the back row of the

introductory psychology classroom, Kelly tilted his chair against the wall and waited for something interesting (Kelly, 1969). After two to three weeks he only one had clear impression, his professor seemed nice. Then one day he was inspired to sit up and take notice. A capital "S" and a capital "R" were prominently displayed on the blackboard, connected by an arrow pointing from the former to the latter. Here, thought Kelly, is the meat of the matter. Unfortunately, further lectures only disappointed him. Many years later he wrote of the experience (1969, p. 47):

> Although I listened intently for several sessions, after that the most I could make of it was that the 'S' was what you had to have in order to account for the 'R' and the 'R' was put there so the 'S' would have something to account for. I never did find out what that arrow stood for—not to this day—and I have pretty well given up trying to figure it out

And he pretty well gave up on psychology for the time being, choosing instead to pursue a career in engineering. Three years later he was out of engineering and back in school, forced by the Great Depression to learn something more practical. Being interested in sociology and labor relations, he thought it high time to have a look at Freud. "I don't remember which one of Freud's books I was trying to read," wrote Kelly (1969, p. 47) "but I do remember the mounting feeling of incredulity that anyone could write such nonsense, much less publish it." Skepticism, ironically, may explain why he eventually became a psychologist. Kelly needed to practice his superb gift for healthy skepticism and psychology provided the perfect forum: it appears all psychological principles can be questioned.

Skepticism was sometimes accompanied by sarcasm. When prompted to consider Russian physiologist I. P. Pavlov's famous conditioning research (dogs salivating to a bell), he spoke with tongue not so deeply buried in cheek: "Salivation . . . takes place in a manner that suggests the anticipation of food, or perhaps hunger—I am not sure which. . . . Whatever it indicates, Pavlov seems to have demonstrated it and there is no reason we should not be grateful even though we are not quite sure what it was he demonstrated" (Kelly, 1980, p. 29). When inspired to cite examples of people who fail to benefit from experience, he recalled a naval officer with "a vast and versatile ignorance," and a school administrator who "had one year of experience—repeated thirteen times" (Kelly, 1963, p. 171). He even took a verbal swing at all of his colleagues. In observing that his fundamental assumptions apply to everyone, he wrote, "The same goes for psychologists, who are known to have human characteristics too" (p. 25).

Sometimes, however, he was more motivated to generate laughter than to engage in mild ridicule. In making the point that people orient to the future, not the past, he described a peculiar approach to driving: "A friend of mine, . . . driving her car, . . . customarily closes her eyes when she gets caught in a tight spot. This is an anticipatory act; she suspects something may happen that she would prefer not to see. So far, it hasn't happened, though it is hard to understand why" (Kelly, 1980, p. 26).

If sarcasm was a characteristic of Kelly, it certainly was overridden by a more central feature of his personality, warmth. He practiced therapy to help people and to learn

from them. In 30 years as a psychotherapist, he never collected a penny for his services. George Thompson, a former colleague, wrote (1968, pp. 22–23):

> At the 1963 Convention of the American Psychological Association, some 40 former students of George Kelly attended a dinner to pay tribute to their good teacher and warm friend. These professors, scientists, and therapists came from all parts of the United States. All of them knew that here was a man who had helped them find their ways to more productive lives. Many others who could not attend wrote letters of appreciation for his wise counsel and guidance.

Similarly, in the summer of 1965, Kelly's associates at Ohio State gathered to salute their colleague and friend who had just been granted an endowed chair at Brandeis University. Papers were read by three of Kelly's former doctoral students and by a visiting professor from England, who had spread Kelly's ideas through several of Britain's universities. At the end of these presentations, Kelly rose to invite the entire assembly to his house for dinner. Nearly 100 accepted the gracious offer. Thompson wrote of the occasion (1968, pp. 22–23):

> There was good food for all and a characteristic abundance of warm fellowship. The dinner [was] only a token to a man who had contributed so much, but [it] did reflect in modest measure the affectionate humanity of George Alexander Kelly—scholar, teacher, and warm friend.

Above all, Kelly was open-minded. Perhaps this aspect of his personality stemmed from his extreme versatility, which is clearly reflected in his own words (Kelly, 1969, p. 48):

> I had taught soap-box oratory in a labor college for labor organizers, government in an . . . institute for prospective citizens, public speaking for the American Bankers Association, and dramatics in a junior college . . . I had taken a Master's degree with a study of workers' use of leisure time, and an advanced professional degree in education at the University of Edinburgh, and . . . I had dabbled . . . in education, sociology, economics, labor relations, biometrics, speech pathology, and cultural anthropology, and had majored in psychology . . . for a grand total of nine months.

Kelly's training in psychology yielded a Ph.D. from Iowa State University in 1931. While his early career was spent at Fort Hays State College in Kansas, Ohio State University claimed him for more years than any other academic institution. His extraordinary versatility led Kelly to a dozen or so universities, each for an appreciable period of time, and around the globe for the purpose of applying his theory to the problems of the world. Little wonder that he embraced the assumption, adopted by many philosophers of science and dismissed out of hand by few, that in the realm of science there are no truths (Hempel and Oppenheim, 1960). In psychology, as in other sciences, there are theories that are supported by evidence to varying degrees, but no truth. For a personality theorist, this was an unusual assumption, but then Kelly was an unusual theorist.

Unfortunately, Kelly died in his early 60s (1967), having produced relatively few writings. Fortunately, he has had such a strong impact on his students that his writings, as

well as numerous speeches, lectures, and conversations, have been thoroughly mined. The psychological "gold" from several posthumous articles edited or written by his students contributed greatly to this chapter.

Kelly's View of the Person

As you recall, Freud thought of humans as helpless particles blown about by the hidden winds of hedonic impulse. Jung viewed humans from a broader perspective, but one might argue that he regarded them as captives of their ancestral past. Adler, Sullivan, Fromm, and Horney saw people as the products of their social environments. By contrast, Rogers and Maslow assumed that humans are capable of determining their own fates. True to character, Kelly did not even approximate the orientation of other theorists. Rather, he declared that people are governed by an internal process: the way they construe events in their worlds. While internal, this process results from consequences of an external factor, social relations (Kelly, 1955). Kelly also thought that people had free will, in that they could choose from many alternative ways to conceive of people that emerged from their relations with others. Further, Kelly's conception of time was different from that of theorists covered so far, except possibly Adler. While he did not neglect the distant past, the recent past, or the present, he declared humans to be basically future-oriented, determined largely by their predictions of future events (Kelly, 1980).

It is interesting to speculate about how Kelly came to adopt such an intellectual, pragmatic, and "hard-nosed" point of view. He was an engineer and a person made practical by the Great Depression. It was natural for him to orient to thinking rather than other psychological modes. As a victim of the Depression, little wonder that he looked more to the future than to the dismal present. As one who kept changing not only location, but also himself, he paid little attention to the past.

Perhaps Kelly's most important departure from the precepts of traditional psychology was that he saw himself as no different from those he studied and attempted to help in therapy (Kelly, 1969; for more about the inconsistency between researchers' views of themselves and of the people they study, see Allen, 1973, and Allen & Smith, 1980). Most psychologists, he charged, viewed themselves as objective, rational scientists who ascertain the causes of people's actions and suggest corrections for maladaptive behavior. On the other hand, their clients in therapy and their research subjects are seen as incapable of objective observation, unable to sort out the causes of their behavior, and inept at developing a systematic program for positive behavioral change. By contrast, Kelly saw himself as a scientist in his roles as research psychologist, psychotherapist, and just plain person. Further, he viewed clients, research subjects, and people in general as scientists. Thus, he saw no difference between himself and others. To understand how all of us operate daily like scientists, consider Kelly's recollection of how he discovered "people as scientists" (Kelly, 1969, pp. 60–61):

> A typical afternoon might find me talking to a graduate student at one o'clock, doing all those familiar things that thesis directors have to do: encouraging the student to pinpoint the issues, to observe, to become intimate with the problem, to form hypotheses . . . to make

> some preliminary test runs, to relate his data to his predictions, to control his experiments so that he will know what led to what, to generalize cautiously, and to revise his thinking in the light of experience. At two o'clock I might have an appointment with a client. During this interview I would . . . be . . . helping the distressed person work out some solutions to his life's problems. So what would I do? Why, I would try to get him to pinpoint the issues, to observe, to become intimate with the problem, to form hypotheses, to make test runs, to relate outcomes to anticipations, to control his ventures so that he will know what led to what, to generalize cautiously, and to revise his dogma in the light of experience. At three o'clock I would see [the] student again. Likely as not he was either dragging his feet, hoping to design some world-shaking experiment before looking at his first subject to see firsthand what he was dealing with, or plunging into some massive ill-considered data-chasing expedition. So I would try to get him to . . . [do] . . . all the things that I had [tried to get him] to do at one o'clock. At four o'clock another client! Guess what! He would be dragging his feet, hoping to design a completely new personality before venturing his first change in behavior, or plunging into some ill-considered acting-out escapade, etc., etc.

Students doing research, their advisors, clients in psychotherapy, their psychotherapists, and "people on the street" behave like scientists daily. Sometimes they do well at it and sometimes badly, but they do it everyday (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992).

Basic Concepts: Kelly

Personality as a System of Constructs

Underlying all of Kelly's thinking are the cognitive structures known as **constructs,** ways of construing events or "seeing the world" so that the future is anticipated (Kelly, 1980). Thus, his theory was called "Personal Construct Theory" (PCT). The individual's **personality** consists of an organized system of constructs that may be ranked as to importance. "Construct" became the foundation on which Kelly built his most basic theoretical framework or *postulate,* a basic assumption that is the starting point for a theory. It is a broad statement that is just accepted; it cannot be directly tested. Kelly's **fundamental postulate** is the assumption that a person's psychological processes are routed through various channels, or pathways, by the ways in which she or he anticipates events (Kelly, 1963). In a sense, ways of "seeing the world" form the channels that are directed toward the future. The person is *pulled* along through life by predictions, as opposed to being *pushed* by unconscious impulses and drives or pricked into action by stimuli in the environment.

To set the stage for Kelly's other theoretical concepts, it is helpful to build on the notion of constructs by looking at how two individuals, Jim and Joan, go about an afternoon in their lives. As you read, pay special attention to the words in italics.

Jim's Problem. What's wrong now?" Joan inquired as she approached a figure who was slumped against the wall outside a classroom. Jim's reply was inaudible, partly because his hands covered his face and partly because he was too depressed to speak up. Undeterred by the lack of a response, Joan continued, "Let me guess . . . It's Professor Martinson again."

Jim's head sprang upright. Though his hair cascaded over his eyes, it failed to hide the fierce look distorting his face. "Damn it," he was nearly screaming. "I've tried everything. I give up."

Joan looked around self-consciously, hoping that, somehow, students passing them in the hall had not noticed the outburst. Then she eased down next to her friend and softly entreated, "Tell me about it."

"It's the same thing . . . same old thing," he muttered.

Joan leaned back against the wall and exclaimed with a sigh, "Ok then, tell me about your latest clash with Martinson."

"He hates me, I'm sure of it. The jerk said we could turn our papers in late, if we had a good excuse. Well, I had a good excuse . . . it was spring break . . . I was stuck in Florida . . . we were in somebody else's car. I mean, how could I get home?"

Joan's chin drew back and down. A familiar frown curled her lips. Martinson had looked much the same when Jim had first related the "stuck in Florida" story. It was that incredulous look.

Jim's Constructs. "See there, see there," rasped Jim. "You're no different. I thought I could expect some sympathy from you . . . you're supposed to be a *good friend,* someone with a little *intelligence.* Go away . . . just get lost."

Joan moved closer and slipped her arm around Jim's shoulders, but he elbowed her away. "Jim, you know you can *trust* me . . . I am your *good friend,* but gimme a break. I know you believe that your excuse is OK . . . let me just put it this way . . . try it on some other people; I'll bet you that you'll get the same reaction."

There was silence for a minute, then Joan continued. "Look, let me make a suggestion. Why don't you . . . "

"That's not all," Jim broke in. This time he was shouting. Joan was looking for a place to hide. "He laughed at me! . . . said he was just kidding about the excuse. 'I don't take excuses. The other students know that . . . it was just my way of making a joke' . . . Does he ever think I'm *stupid*! He probably thinks he couldn't *trust* me farther than he could throw me. And I thought *educated* people were my kind of people. Well, you live and learn."

Joan's Suggestions for Change. "That's what you said the last time you had it out with him." Joan could sense the taste of foot-in-the mouth the minute she uttered the words. Jim climbed to his feet. He'd had enough of her, but before he could get away, Joan grabbed his shirt sleeve and dragged him back down. "Look, I'm sorry," she pleaded, "but it's just that sometimes it seems like you don't learn anything from *experience.* I mean you just stick with an old idea, no matter what. Why is it so important that Martinson like you? I don't care whether he likes me or not."

After a time Jim settled down and he began to chatter amiably with his friend, which was usual for them. They talked about Jim's relationship with Martinson. "OK, you win," asserted Joan. "So you have some kind of fixation for Martinson—father figure is what my psych teacher would say—OK, I accept that. Now let me give you a suggestion . . . try this out. I mean you have had plenty of time to *evaluate* him. You think he's one of the '*good guys,*' right?" Jim shook his head in a vigorous "no" sign, but Joan ignored him. "What

you have to do is let him know you think he belongs in select company. I mean, as I see it, you expect him to think you're a '*good guy,*' but you won't put him in that same category. I know how you are. Surely you can understand that people like those who like them—it's sort of a law—but they can't read your mind. You have to communicate your feelings to people. If I know you, you've been very stiff and formal with Martinson. Am I right?"

Jim's head was hanging down, "Yeah," he mumbled, "you do know me."

"Actually, what it amounts to," Joan was talking rapidly now, "you think he's a '*good guy,*' you *admire* him and you want him to *admire* you. I know, because, if I like someone, I want that somebody to throw a little *admiration* my way."

"*Admire*?" Jim was puzzled. "*Trust* maybe, but *admire*? I don't resort to hero worship."

"Well you had better consider *admiration.* If you like someone, *admiration* is a way to communicate it without saying it . . . I mean, without using words . . . the sound of your voice will do."

"All right," said Jim, almost in a whisper, "I'll try it."

Joan's Constructs. Now Jim hopped up and offered Joan a hand. They left the building and strolled along leisurely toward their dorms. Silence prevailed for a while, then Jim casually remarked, "You know, sometimes I wonder who I am. Who am I anyway?" he was smiling as he posed the question.

"Good ole Jim, that's who you are," came the reply. "A little weird, but fun to be around."

He hugged her playfully. "OK, who are you, smarty?"

"Is that a serious question?"

"Yeah?" he queried. "Who are you?"

"Well, I don't stay up at night thinking about it, but I guess I'd answer in terms of who I'm *like* . . . you know, similar to."

"And who is that?" said Jim in a sober voice adopted to match her own suddenly serious tone.

"I guess I'm an *athlete* at heart," mused Joan, a member of the varsity track team. "Venus Williams, that's who I'm like . . . or uh . . . who I'd like to be."

"Tough break," kidded Jim. "You don't have her killer instinct."

Joan went along with the teasing and added, "Nor do I have the ability . . . but who knows, maybe I'll get better and maybe track will be as big as tennis some day."

They reached the crossing that split the paths to their dorms and paused for a moment. "Big bash at the Gin Mill this Saturday, need a ride?"

"No thanks," responded Joan as she backed down the path to her dorm. "I'm going home . . . back to God's country . . . down on the farm . . . with the good *neighbors* and the wide open spaces . . . "

"And the horse manure," interjected Jim in a loud voice, as they were now many yards apart.

She lobbed a rock at him. "You can have your stinking old city, full of dopers and muggers. You love it . . . I'm going back where everything is small and people are concerned . . . "

Jim's and Joan's Personalities. It is instructive to analyze Jim's and Joan's conversation from Kelly's point of view. A look at Figure 11.1 will allow you to examine some concrete examples of constructs (Kelly disliked the concrete, but could not avoid it). The left part of the figure displays Jim's **construction system:** an organization of many constructs with the more important, and often more abstract, at the top and the less important constructs at the bottom. The constructs at the top are called **superordinate** while the ones at the bottom are called **subordinate.** Joan's system is on the right.

The Construction System is the Individual's Personality. Jim's most superordinate construct is represented by "trust–distrust," while Joan's most superordinate construct is "evaluative–descriptive." To evaluate is to pass judgment on, to describe is to label someone or something. A construct can be thought of as a special kind of concept (Kelly, 1963). Constructs have two opposite poles, like an automobile battery. The **emergent pole** is the primary and principle end, like *good* in good–bad and *intelligent* in intelligent–stupid (Kelly, 1955). The **implicit pole** is the contrasting end, like *uneducated* in educated–uneducated and *not admired* in admired–not admired. Normally, the emergent pole is formed first, but, as soon as it develops, the implicit pole usually comes into existence. Like Jung, Kelly believed people see the world in terms of opposites. These contrasts exist even if a person adopts a construct such as tolerant–intolerant and is unaware

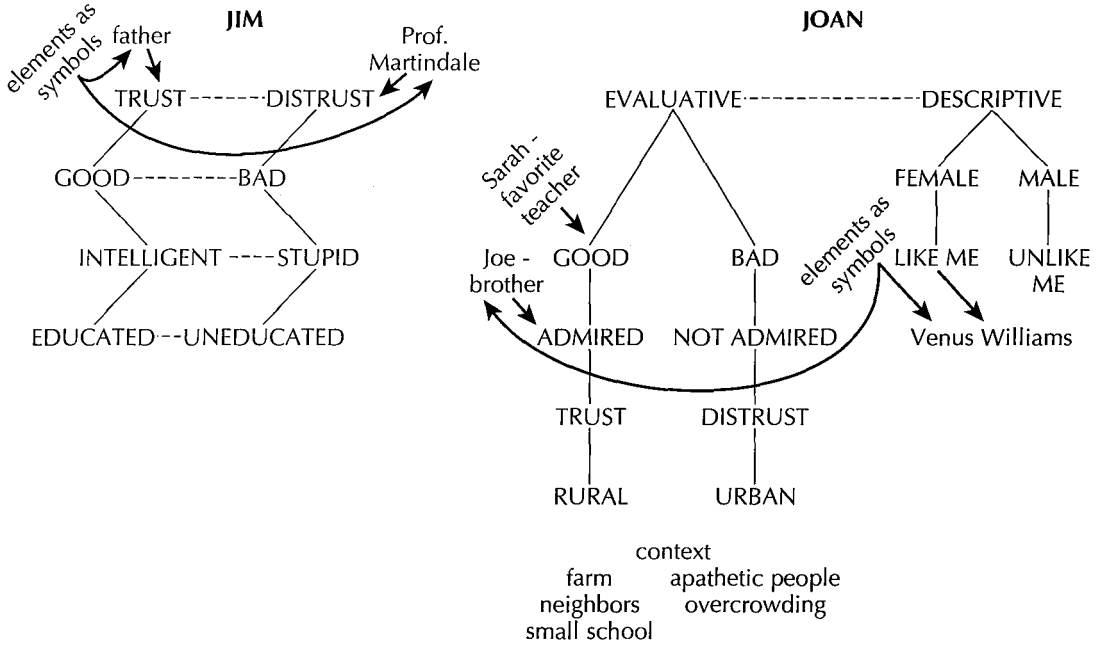


FIGURE 11.1 ***Joan's and Jim's Construction Systems***

of the implicit pole or it has not been expressed. Adopting *tolerant* usually brings *intolerant* with it.

Scrutinizing Jim's construction system reveals that he is highly dependent on the construct "trust–distrust," his most superordinate construct. Like other constructs, it has what Kelly called a **range of convenience,** the extent and breadth of the event-category to which a construct applies. For example, trust–distrust is applicable to events involving people, such as the episodes of Jim's conflict with Professor Martinson. Because it is reasonable to assume that Jim experiences many events involving many different people, trust–distrust may be said to have a wide range of convenience. Nevertheless, it has its limits. Trust–distrust is scarcely applicable to solving mathematical problems or to viewing architecture. A superordinate construct's range of convenience may be thought of as including its subordinate constructs. By contrast, a construct's **range of focus** refers to the events to which it is most readily applied. Trust–distrust is most applicable to relations with friends and family, rather than to relations with casual acquaintances.

Jim's construct, trust–distrust, also can be characterized as relatively **impermeable,** a reference to certain constructs that tend not to change in terms of range of convenience or place in the construction system. In fact, Joan noted that Jim's constructs are impermeable in general. Trust–distrust is also part of Joan's system, but it is much more subordinate. Thus, the construction systems of Jim and Joan display **commonality,** a reference to the sharing of constructs by two or more people whose experiences are similar. Jim and Joan are both students, thus, as you might expect, Figure 11.1 reveals that they do share constructs.

In contrast, **individuality** refers to differences among construction systems both in terms of the constructs comprising the system and in terms of how the constructs are organized. Such differences are due to differences in experiences. Joan is an athlete, Jim is not. Jim's problem, as Joan pointed out, is that he, unlike her, has failed to profit from **experience,** what one learns from the events of the past. Jim continues to try the same old strategies with Professor Martinson, and they are not getting him what he wants, mutual trust. Thus, Joan suggests a change in Jim's construction system. She thinks that Jim should embrace a new construct, "admire–not admire," and reorganize his construction system to be more like hers, with "trust–distrust" subordinated to "admire–not admire." Joan is trying to save Jim from **anxiety,** what a person experiences when his or her construction system does not apply to critical events, as Jim's fails to apply to events in his relationship with Professor Martinson. Joan should be cautious. In suggesting a new construct, she may subject her friend to **fear,** the experience one has when a new construct appears to be entering the system, and may become dominant. On the other hand, she need not worry too much about subjecting Jim to **threat,** the realization of the possibility that one's entire construction system will be overhauled. Joan is suggesting a new construct and some reorganization, not a major upheaval.

Joan as Scientific Psychotherapist. Joan the psychotherapist acts like a scientist in attempting to make a better scientist of Jim. She pleads with him to make his constructs more permeable. More importantly, she suggests a hypothesis for Jim to test. She feels that expressing admiration will allow Jim to obtain the mutual trust that he wants to exist in his relationship with Professor Martinson. To test the hypothesis, Jim is told to try ad-

miration out on Martinson. He then can observe to see how it works. If admiration has the intended effect, he should **replicate,** repeat a test in the hope the results will be the same as before. Replication provides the basis for anticipating future events. If one can repeat an observation of the successful application of a construct, one can be confident that the construct will apply again in the future, under similar circumstances. The greater the number of replications, the greater the confidence. In fact, replication is the best evidence science can provide.

If Jim carries out Joan's suggestions, he would confirm one of Kelly's most basic principles, **constructive alternativism,** the assumption that a person's present interpretations of her or his life situation are subject to revision and replacement (Kelly, 1963). It is assumed that a construction system cannot remain the same, but must change with changes in the person's life.

Relations among Constructs

Figure 11.1 reveals that Jim's and Joan's construction systems are organized differently. Jim's system is organized by **extension of the cleavage line,** a reference to the observation that the poles of Jim's subordinate constructs fall directly under the corresponding emergent and implicit poles of his superordinate constructs. Thus, "good" falls under "trust," "bad" under "distrust" (Kelly, 1963). However, Joan's system begins at the top by **abstracting across the cleavage line,** whole constructs fall under superordinate emergent and under superordinate implicit poles. In Joan's case, all of her constructs fall under her most superordinate construct, "evaluative–descriptive." The whole construct "good–bad" falls under the emergent pole, "evaluative," while the whole construct, "female–male" falls under the implicit pole, "descriptive." This feature of Joan's system makes it more complex and flexible than Jim's. She can approach her life situations from an evaluative stance (there are good people and bad people) or from a purely descriptive stance (there are North Americans and Africans).

Elements are objects, beings, or events. The **context** of a construct is composed of all those elements to which the construct applies. The context of Joan's construct, "urban–rural," includes the elements farm, neighbors, apathetic people, and overcrowding. Whereas "range of convenience" and "focus of convenience" refer to rather gross and abstract event categories such as "relations with authority figures" and "leisure activities," context and elements refer to the actual, concrete people or objects that exist in a person's life.

A **symbol** is one of the elements to which a construct applies that illustrates the construct. Figure 11.1 indicates that, for Jim, "father" symbolizes the trust–distrust construct. For Joan, "Venus Williams" symbolizes the construct, like me–unlike me. Of course, the picture of Jim and Joan as indicated in their conversation and in Figure 11.1 is oversimplified. Kelly probably would argue that no one's personality could be neatly represented in a figure. For one thing, the figure would have to be as large as a house, and, for another, many constructs are too abstract to be represented as concretely as in Figure 11.1. Also, people normally do not blurt out their constructs as cooperatively as did Joan and Jim. As you will see, more sophisticated methods for getting at constructs are needed.

BOX 11.1 • *Similarities of Kelly's Ideas to Those of Other Theorists*

Kelly's theory in relation to other theories warrants special attention because it did not closely resemble any of them, but shares assumptions with some of them. While Kelly chastised the behaviorists for their alleged obsession with minutia, such as "Ss and Rs," he did share a broad assumption with B. F. Skinner, who advocated the arrangement of environments to maximize rewards. Analogously, Kelly held that constructs could be changed by human intervention.

Similar to Albert Bandura and other social learning theorists, Kelly was future oriented: ". . . everything [people do] follows lines laid down in [their] effort[s] to anticipate what will happen. . . . [People] never wait to see what will happen; [they] look to see what will happen. Even my motorist friend is looking for something, though she shuts her eyes to do it" (Kelly, 1980, pp. 26–27).

Kelly wrote, "The phenomenological psychologists, of whom I certainly am not one, usually take the view that it is only the experience of the passing instant that is . . . essential . . . " (Kelly, 1980, p. 22), but, he shared some assumptions with the humanists and phenomenologists (Benesch & Page, 1989). In fact, his position has been viewed as essentially phenomenological (Tyler, 1994). Like Rogers (and Jung), Kelly did not believe that one and only one set of procedures is effective in therapy: "Unlike most personality theories, the psychology of personal constructs does not limit itself to any pet psychotherapeutic technique" (Kelly, 1980, p. 35). Like Rogers (and Jung), Kelly also held that therapy is an *experience* in which both therapist and client participate and contribute as partners: "Psychotherapy [is] an experience. . . . Psychotherapy takes place when one person makes constructive use of another. . . . The professional skills of the therapist, as well as much of his repertory as an experienced human being, are brought into the transaction" (p. 21). Further, like Rogers, Kelly thought of therapy as an opportunity to become one's own self, relatively free of the constraints imposed by society and other people: "Psychotherap[y's goal], . . . is not to conform to oneself . . . or to society . . . [The] objective is for man continually to determine for himself what is worth the price he is going to end up paying . . . to keep moving toward what he is not . . . (Kelly, 1980, p. 20).

As with Skinner and Rogers, creativity was one of Kelly's concerns: "The creativity cycle we envision is one that employs both loosening and tightening in a coordinated fashion. The cycle starts with a loosened phase in which construction is vague, elastic, and wavering. Out of this fertile chaos shapes begin to emerge and one seeks patiently to give them definite form until they are tight enough to talk about and to test" (Kelly, 1980, p. 34).

Personality Development

How did Jim and Joan acquire their construction systems (develop their personalities)? Kelly's comments about the transition from childhood to adulthood supplemented his theory nicely.

Predictability

Because "anticipation of future events" is a cornerstone of Kelly's PCT, it is not surprising that "forecasting the future" has a prominent place in his discussion of construct development in children. **Predictability** refers to the ability to predict the future. A construct is as useful as the degree of predictability it provides (Hermans et al., 1992). Thus, parents, the major

components of every child's environment, are well advised to provide predictability. If they fail to do so, their child's need for anticipation of the future may be reflected in some rather extreme behavior (Kelly, 1955). For example, if "predictability" is a scarce commodity in certain children's lives, they may cling to instances of it, even if their resultant behavior has negative consequences. As an illustration, assume that a child, Johnny, has parents who treat him in a consistent manner only with regard to a few issues, all involving punishment. Johnny cleans his room; sometimes it is noticed, sometimes not. Johnny helps fold clothes and sometimes he is praised. However, Johnny has noticed that, should he stop up the bathroom sink while playing "laundry," the consequent overflow brings a highly reliable reaction from his parents. They apply the palm of a hand to his bottom. So, a naive behaviorist might assert that Johnny will avoid stopping up the sink. Not so, according to Kelly. Stopping up the sink is the best way to acquire the precious predictability that Johnny so badly needs.

Dalton and Dunnett (1992) considered Kelly's construct types that relate to predictability. **Tight constructs** yield unvarying predictability while **loose constructs** yield varying predictability (Kelly, 1955). Dunnett and Dalton indicate that tight construers are, "organized rigidly, full of regular habits, and fast held views of the world" (p. 56). In contrast, loose construers "seem to make different predictions at the drop of a hat. Other people find them difficult to predict . . . because their constructs do lead to varying predictions" (p. 56).

Dependency Constructs

Even given a reasonable amount of predictability in a child's social environment, early construction systems will still be characterized by impermeability of the few simple constructs that compose them. Children are small, weak, and vulnerable. They must depend on others for survival. Thus, the bulk of a child's early construction system is constituted by **dependency constructs,** special constructs that revolve around the child's survival needs. A "mother" construct would be an example. For a young child, the "mother" construct might have a context containing elements such as warmth, nourishment, and safety from frightening sounds. (Notice the similarity to Jung's mother archetype and mother complex and to Sullivan's conception of mother–child relations.)

At first the child might see the world in terms of "like mother–not like mother." The construct is very global and mother is seen in a very limited manner. The university classes she teaches and the Chamber of Commerce committees she chairs play no role in the child's conception of her. She is warmth, comfort, and food. However, with growth and development, the construct will become more permeable and she will be more than warmth and kindred elements. In time, the entire construct will likely disappear altogether and "mother" will become a symbol for some other construct or an element of several constructs. The general disposition to impermeability of constructs dissolves in the tide of ever increasing maturation.

Role Playing

The extent to which one can appreciate the construction system of another person is the extent to which one can adopt a role in a relationship with that other person (Kelly, 1963).

A **role** involves behaving in ways that meet the expectations of important other people in one's life.

In turn, such behavior provides the predictability that one requires. Thus, a six-year-old may assume that her role relative to her parents is that of the passive, compliant "seen but not heard" child. If she behaves in a passive, compliant, quiet manner, she predicts that she will be fed, cuddled, provided with toys, and so forth. At least during childhood, the hypothetical child's assumed role might work out fine, provided she correctly perceives that her predictions are confirmed.

However, assume that all does not go so well. Assume that her observations are faulty and she is seeing confirmation of her predictions that, in fact, does not exist. Eventually, she will have to stop deluding herself. Sooner or later she will have to face up to the fact that her parents do not really want a passive, compliant, quiet child. Perhaps in "reality" they expect her to play the role of the assertive, active, independent child. The outcome of such a revelation would be **guilt,** the result of the person's perception that he or she is being dislodged from some critical role, one that was thought to be very important in relating to important people. In more common terms, guilt in this case comes from not measuring up, not being one's parent's child, not fitting the mold that important others have sculpted for oneself.

Choices: The C-P-C Cycle

Whenever individuals face significant or dramatic change in their life situations, whether it is a short-term variation or a long-term upheaval, they must search their systems of constructs for dimensions that will best accommodate the change. They must make an **elaborative choice,** a selection of an "alternative, aligned to one . . . construct dimension, which appears to provide the greater opportunity for the further elaboration of [one's] . . . system" (Kelly, 1980, p. 32). "At a certain stage in one's development it may be more promising to choose to do something that will help . . . define [one's] position more clearly and thus consolidate . . . gains. . . . But at other times one will choose to extend his [or her] system so it will embrace more of the unknown and bring more of the future within [one's] grasp" (p. 32).

No matter which of the two directions we take in confronting life changes, the process is the same. We go through the C-P-C choice cycle. First we construe. "To do this we go through a **circumspection phase,** a period of 'trying on for size' the various constructs available in our personal repertory" (Kelly, 1980, p. 32; emphasis added). To illustrate the process, suppose a person receives a promotion on short notice. Now, for the first time, she is boss to several employees and must decide how to relate to them. If she does not have many relevant constructs, this phase will not take long and she may look like "a person of action." If circumstances are changing too rapidly for her to keep up, she may race through this phase of the cycle and appear to be impulsive. Of course, she may take her time. In any case, she next moves to the **preemption phase,** a period during which "one construct is allowed to preempt the situation and define the pair of alternatives between which the person must make his [or her] choice" (Kelly, 1980, p. 33). Henceforth, unless she backtracks, she will stick with the construct that has surfaced. Suppose that construct is "authoritarian–egalitarian." Finally, commitment occurs, the principle of elaborative

choice takes over, and she makes a **choice,** a decision between the alternatives provided by the construct that has preempted the situation. She chooses to be authoritarian in her relations with her new subordinates. Thus, she completes the C-P-C cycle: circumspection, preemption, and choice.

Evaluation

Contributions: Supporting Evidence and Practical Applications

Poles. A critical, testable aspect of Kelly's theory is the assumption that people cast their worlds in terms of opposites: each construct has two poles. If that supposition proved false, the structure might tumble. Predictions of the future would fail if a construct, for example, was represented by "all people are good," rather than "some people are good" and "some people are bad." In fact, if each construct had only one pole, there would be nothing to predict: all people would be treated in an equally positive (or negative manner). Life would be one certainty after another.

Accordingly, Kelly (1963) made special reference to some work by William H. Lyle, a former student. Lyle first selected numerous words that appeared to belong to four bipolar categories "cheerful–sad," "broad-minded–narrow-minded," "refined–vulgar," and "sincere–insincere" (eight class labels). A pilot sample of subjects then arranged the words into the eight different classes. This procedure provided a basis for accuracy scores in a main study in which subjects were given the same words and told to place them into the eight classes (plus a ninth, "don't know" class). They were given a point for a "correct response" each time they placed a word in the same class as did the pilot subjects. Thus, each main study subject had eight accuracy scores, one for each of the eight word classes. Then, a method to be considered later, factor analysis, was used on the accuracy scores to see what word classes clustered together and distinguished themselves from other clusters. Results revealed five collections of words or factors, one for "general intelligence" and four others exactly matching the four categories "cheerful–sad," "sincere–insincere," and so forth. Subjects tended to lump together "cheerful" with "sad" words and "sincere" with "insincere" words. If, for example, they made classification mistakes with "refined" words, they made mistakes with "vulgar" words as well. In short, they classed or organized the words into sets of opposites, just as Kelly believed constructs are organized.

Extension of Kelly's Theory. Benesch and Page (1989) investigated the circumstances under which individuals are able to appreciate the important constructs of other people. Subjects were recruited in triads, each consisting of three people who were close acquaintances. One triad member was designated the "target." The other two members, called "peers," reacted to the target in various ways that amounted to attempting to specify the target's constructs. Targets also indicated their own constructs. Results revealed good correspondence between targets' and peers' perceptions of targets' constructs. Peers tended to accurately perceive targets' constructs—they matched targets' self-perceived constructs—when those constructs reflected high meaningfulness and high stability (consistent use of

constructs). Commonality among the contents of these friends' construction systems may have helped them appreciate each other's critical constructs. Results extend Kelly's theory by indicating the conditions under which individuals are able to "read" others' constructs.

Kelly's PCT was originally used as a way to conceptualize personality and as a basis for helping people in therapy, but is now employed to account for specific circumstances faced by a restricted category of people, for example, elderly people who have lost a spouse. Viney, Benjamin, and Preston (1989) found that elderly people who had suffered the loss of a spouse displayed *guilt*: they felt dislodged from important roles. As an illustration, a woman whose husband had died felt dislodged from roles that involved core constructs, wife and homemaker. Viney and colleagues suggested that elderly people who have lost spouses lack the means of validating their core constructs and need help in locating new sources of validation.

Cognitive Complexity. One of Kelly's basic beliefs was that an effective construct system is well differentiated (Tyler, 1994). Probably inspired by this belief, former Kelly student James Bieri (1955) defined a new dimension, cognitive complexity–cognitive simplicity. A **cognitively complex** person has a construction system containing constructs that are clearly differentiated, that is, sharply distinguished one from the other. Complex people cast other people into many categories and thus see much variety in people. On the other hand, a **cognitively simple** person has a construction system for which distinctions among constructs are blurred—a poorly differentiated system. They cast other people into a few categories. Hypothetically, an extremely cognitively simple person would use mainly one construct such as good–bad, lumping half of humanity into the "good" class and the other into the "bad" class. Bieri showed that cognitively simple people have difficulty differentiating themselves from others (they tend to assume that others are like themselves). In contrast, complex people draw sharp distinctions between themselves and others.

Kelly (1955) believed that the more constructs one uses the better she or he will be at predicting future events, including the behavior of others. Bieri confirmed this assumption: complex subjects were better at predicting the behavior of others. If people use mainly one construct, say "good–bad," they are likely to put themselves in the "good" class. Given little information about other people—which was the case in Bieri's experiment—they predict that others are good, like themselves. Complex people use many constructs, some for application to themselves and some for application to the many other people in their lives. Table 11.1 summarizes the characteristics of cognitively complex and simple people.

TABLE 11.1 ***Comparison of Cognitively Complex and Simple People***

Cognitively Complex Person	*Cognitively Simple Person*
Maintains a clear distinction among constructs	Distinction among constructs blurred
Casts others into many categories	Casts others into few categories
Can easily see differences between self and others	Has difficulty in seeing differences between self and others
Skilled at predicting behaviors of others	Inept at predicting behaviors of others

In early studies, Signell (1966) reported that children tend to increase in cognitive complexity during the period 9 to 16 years of age, and Sechrest and Jackson (1961) found that social intelligence—an index of social effectiveness—was strongly related to cognitive complexity. In a more recent study Linville (1982) reported that: (1) students who were more simple in their representations of older males were extreme in their evaluation of older males; (2) individuals who were induced to adopt a simple orientation toward food used in a study of taste gave more extreme evaluations than did those induced to adopt a more complex orientation; (3) young males gave older males more extreme evaluations than they gave to members of their own age group; and (4) these young college students had more constructs available for use for describing their own age group than an older age group.

Complexity/simplicity sheds some light on nonverbal communication processes. Uhlemann, Lee, and Hasse (1989) developed a measure of subjects' sensitivity to nonverbal cues that were systematically displayed by a counselor performing on videotape. Subjects were categorized into four levels of cognitive complexity based on a test of complexity. They were also subjected to one of three levels of arousals: (1) low—they were alone while viewing the video; (2) moderate—others were present; and (3) high—the others present were supposedly "observers" who would evaluate the subjects. A complex person should be more able to decode nonverbal cues in ways that allow discrimination among them because of higher social intelligence and greater sensitivity to the behaviors of other people. Results showed the expected effects, but were qualified by level of arousal. When arousal was moderate or high, high-complex subjects were more discriminating of nonverbal behaviors than low-complex subjects.

Interest in the observation that people are more complex in their construal of the "in-group" (their own group) than they are of the "out-group" (another group) has been growing. Bernadette Park and her colleagues, Carey Ryan and Charles Judd (1992), reported that subjects produced more constructs in describing the in-group compared to the out-group. Subjects also saw more subgroups within the in-group compared to the out-group.

Tetlock and his colleagues are showing, contrary to original assumptions, that it is not necessarily "better" to be complex than simple. Examining historical records of pre-Civil War politicians, Tetlock, Armor, and Peterson (1994) found that a category of politicians who showed partial tolerance for slavery were more complex than either extreme slavery supporters or abolitionists. Given that slavery is morally indefensible, even partial support of it by complex people is contrary to arguments for their moral superiority.

In a study with a similar theme, Tetlock, Peterson, and Berry (1993) looked at the personality profiles of business-administration master's degree candidates. Their results draw a complicated picture that does not readily fit the "complex is better" original portrait. Complex candidates' self-reports reflected high openness and creativity, but they were low on the valued trait "conscientious" and also low on the sometimes valued trait "social compliance." They were high on initiative and self-objectivity, but were also high on narcissism, antagonism, and power motivation. These results show that cognitive complexity is, well, complex.

Gruenfeld and Preston (2000) found support for two hypotheses in the research literature: (1) majority members of a group, because they control outcomes, are open-minded about alternatives, especially if they face a vocal minority; (2) cognitive complexity is

BOX 11.2 • *An Interview with a Cognitively Simple and a Cognitively Complex Person*

An interviewer (iv) asks a cognitively simple (cg) and a cognitively complex person (cc), "What do you think about the people you work with?"

cg: "Oh, they all are pretty much the same."

cc: "They are quite varied; I like that."

iv: "Do you mean that they are different from you?"

cg: "Actually no, they seem pretty much like me."

cc: "Yeah, each is different from me."

iv: "So could you describe them for me?"

cg: " I guess so. They seem fairly nice."

cc: "You mean each one? That would take a while."

iv: "Just pick one to describe."

cg: "Sally is nice. So are Sue and Joe."

cc: "Well, unlike me, Joe talks a lot. He's the most friendly."

iv: "So in what other ways can you describe them?"

cg: "Hmmmm, that's hard. Let's see . . . they seem pretty considerate."

cc: "Some are thoughtful, some inconsiderate, some trustworthy, some not. . . . I could go on."

iv: "So, 'thoughtful' is different from 'considerate'?"

cg: "I'm not sure."

cc: "Definitely."

iv: "Can you describe them in other ways?"

cg: "Ah, . . . I don't think so. I've pretty much covered it."

cc: "Yeah, but do you have several hours?"

iv: "What do you think your coworkers are like when they are at home?"

cg: "Well I don't know . . . I guess they'd be about the same at home as at work."

cc: "Pardon me, but that is a dumb question. They could be anything at home."

iv: "Would you be surprised to learn that one of them writes computer games and another is an award-winning gardener?"

cg: "Wow, that is surprising. I don't do things like that. I can't believe they do those things."

cc: "No surprise to me. Like I said, they could be doing anything at home."

especially strongly manifested in defense of the status quo, because change threatens to reduce complexity in complex people. They found that U.S. Supreme Court Justices showed greater complexity in defense of legal precedents (status quo) than when they overturned precedents by their opinions. However, this effect was strongest for authors of majority rather than minority opinions.

The REP Test. Among Kelly's most enduring contributions is the **Role Construct Repertory (REP) Test,** an assessment device designed to reveal an individual's construct system (personality). It also has been a helpful tool for use during therapy. As you will see, it is being even more broadly applied at present and promises to be applicable to an expanding variety of problems in the future.

The Rep Test and PCT in Business and Industry. In the place of Kelly's traditional titles, self, mother, father, etc., applied researchers have inserted a variety of labels that are relevant to various situations in business and industry (Jankowicz, 1987). For example, through the use of products' names in place of the usual role titles, researchers discovered the constructs applied by home testers to cosmetics and perfumes. They could then use the dimensions represented by the constructs, for example, poignant–bland, to rate the products. This method allowed the researchers to get at the heart of consumers' conception of the products, an achievement that might have eluded them had they tried to use dimensions *they* thought were relevant. In an analogous fashion, researchers discovered the beliefs, values, and items of knowledge used by senior managers so that this information could be used by new managerial employees to smooth the way into their novel positions of authority.

Jankowicz, who works in the banking industry, has concentrated on identifying the "constructs the effective loan agent used and to examine whether they are different in kind and extent from the constructs used by less effective loan agents, effectiveness being defined objectively in terms of the relative size of loan defaults" (p. 485). Researchers have also used the REP technique to reveal the constructs used by quality-control inspectors to separate defective from acceptable products. Dalton and Dunnett (1992) outlined other business/industry REP applications.

The REP grid, as contemporary researchers and clinicians often call it (see Figure 11.2), has often been used with people displaying a variety of psychological problems. Examples include response to psychotherapy by people who suffer from nervous tics (O'Connor, Gareau, & Bowers, 1993); differentiation between successful and unsuccessful psychotherapy clients (Catina & Tschuschke, 1993); assessment of "quality of life" among medication-therapy, anxiety disordered patients (Thunedborg, Allerup, Bech, & Joyce, 1993); detecting increases in construed similarity of self and others following psychotherapy (Winter, 1992); and identification of the disordered thinking that is characteristic of schizophrenia (Pierce, Sewell, & Cromwell, 1992). Other REP grid uses include measurement of construct change as a result of a teacher education workshop (Fischl & Hoz, 1993); indexing educational psychologists' competencies (McClatchey, 1994); and assessment of cognitive and social representations of body parts and by-products among potential organ donors (Oliviero, 1993).

Fixed-Role Therapy. Though Kelly was not tied to a particular kind of therapy, he did develop a unique therapeutic method. In **fixed-role therapy** a client plays the role of an imaginary character who possesses certain constructs that are in contrast to his or her actual constructs (Kelly, 1955). The therapist uses the client's actual constructs as a basis for creating the construct(s) of the imaginary character. The process goes something like this: (1) the client describes himself in terms of central and troublesome constructs; (2) the therapist, in the simplest case, writes a fixed role for the imaginary character, requiring the client to assume a construct that demands very different behavior than is usual for him (his verbally aggressive tendencies to cut in when others are talking and to talk over them are replaced with an orientation to "biting the tongue" and "letting others speak their piece"); (3) the client tries the role, then he and the therapist discuss reactions of others to the new character; and (4) the client does not necessarily adopt the new role, but gains some insight into what it is like to be on the other side of the role he normally plays.

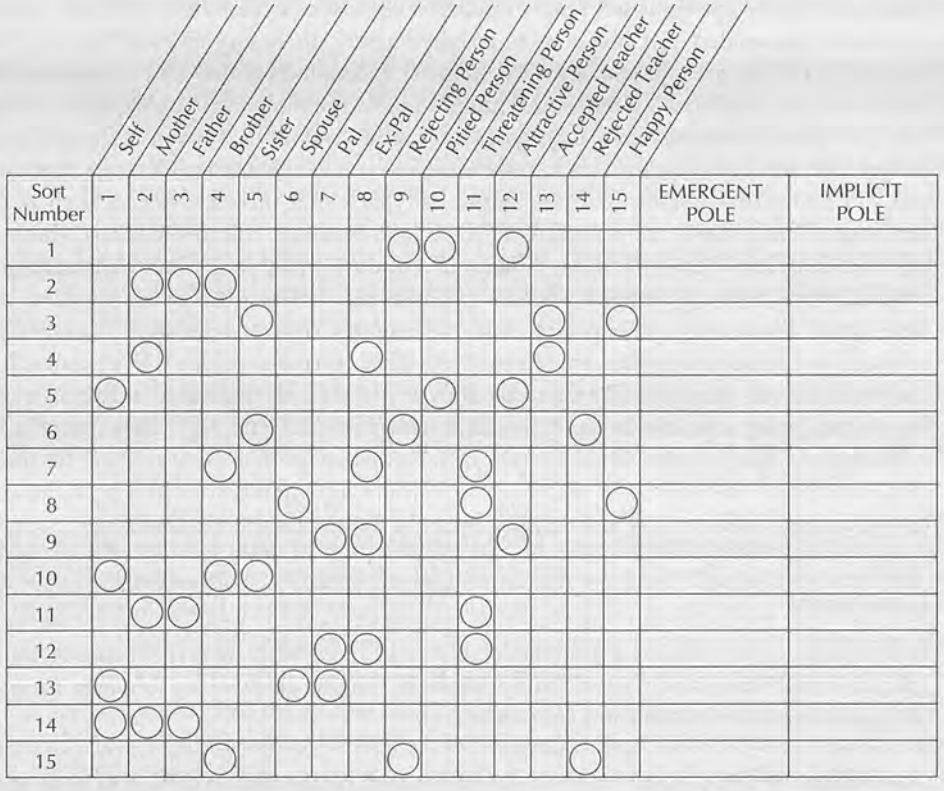
BOX 11.3 • *Your Own Construction System*

List A contains 15 role definitions. Read each carefully. In each blank, write the first name of the person who best fits that role in your life. It is essential to use the role definitions as given in List A. If you cannot remember the name of the person, put down a word or brief phrase that will bring the person to mind. Do not repeat any names; if some person has already been listed, simply make a second choice. Thus, next to the word *Self* write your own name. Then next to the word *Mother* put your mother's name (or the person who has played the part of a mother in your life), and so on, until all 15 roles have been designated with a specific individual.

List A: Definition of Roles for the Demonstration

1. *Self:* Yourself _____.
2. *Mother:* Your mother or the person who has played the part of a mother in your life. _____.
3. *Father:* Your father or the person who has played the part of a father in your life. _____.
4. *Brother:* Your brother who is nearest your own age, or, if you do not have a brother, a boy near your own age who has been most like a brother to you. _____.
5. *Sister:* Your sister who is nearest your own age, or, if you do not have a sister, a girl near your own age who has been most like a sister to you. _____.
6. *Spouse:* Your wife (or husband), or, if you are not married, your closest present girl (boy) friend. _____.
7. *Pal:* Your closest present friend of the same sex as yourself._____.
8. *Ex-Pal:* A person of the same sex as yourself whom you once thought was a close friend of yours but in whom you were badly disappointed later. _____.
9. *Rejecting Person:* A person with whom you have been associated, who, for some unexplained reason, appears to dislike you. _____.
10. *Pitied Person:* A person whom you would most like to help or for whom you feel most sorry. _____.
11. *Threatening Person:* The person who threatens you the most or the person who makes you feel the most uncomfortable. _____.
12. *Attractive Person:* A person who you have recently met who you would like to know better. _____.
13. *Accepted Teacher:* The teacher who influenced you most. _____.
14. *Rejected Teacher:* The teacher whose point of view you have found most objectionable. _____.
15. *Happy Person:* The happiest person who you know personally. _____.

Now look at the first row of the matrix in Figure 11.2 (on p. 269). Note that there are circles in the squares under Columns 9, 10, and 12. These circles designate the three people whom you are to consider in sort number 1. (Rejecting Person, Pitied Person, and Attractive Person). Think about these three people. In particular, how are *two of them alike* in some way that *differentiates them from the third person*? When you have decided the most important way that two of them are alike, but different from the third person, put an X in the two circles that correspond to the two persons who are alike. Do not write anything in the third circle; leave it blank. Next, write a word or short phrase in the column marked "Emergent Pole" that tells how the two people are alike. Then, in the column marked "Implicit Pole," write a word or short phrase that explains the way the third person is different from the other two. Finally, consider the remaining 12 persons and think about which of these, in addition to the ones you have already marked with an X, also have the characteristics you have designated under "Emergent Pole." Place an X in the square corresponding to the name of each of the other persons who has this characteristic. When you have finished this procedure for the first row, go to the second row (sort



Sort Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	EMERGENT POLE	IMPLICIT POLE
1									○	○		○					
2		○	○	○													
3					○								○		○		
4		○						○					○				
5	○									○		○					
6					○				○					○			
7				○				○			○						
8						○					○				○		
9							○	○				○					
10	○			○	○												
11		○	○								○						
12							○	○			○						
13	○					○	○										
14	○	○	○														
15				○					○					○			

FIGURE 11.2 ***Your Construction System***

number 2). The process should be repeated until the procedure has been carried out for each of the rows. In summary, the steps to be followed for each row (sort) are:

1. Consider the three people who are designated by circles under their names. Decide how two of them are *alike* in some important way, and *different* from the third.
2. Put an X in the circles corresponding to the two people who are *alike*; leave the remaining circle blank.
3. In the "Emergent Pole" column, write a brief description of the way the two people are *alike.*
4. In the "Implicit Pole" column, write a brief description of the way the third person is *different* from the two who are alike.
5. In the same row, consider the remaining 12 persons, and place Xs in the squares corresponding to all those (if any) who can also be characterized by the description in the "Emergent Pole" column.
6. Repeat steps 1 through 5 for each row of the matrix. Now sit back and look at what you have done: you have written out your construction system.

PCT and Diversity. Kelly's PCT does not directly deal with diversity. Nor have Kelly's students or followers pursued diversity issues. Nevertheless, because of PCT's one-person-at-a-time, open-ended, flexible, and content-free nature, including its REP Test and fixed role therapy, it has great potential for use in many and varied cultures and subcultures. Because it is a way of viewing the world, rather than an internal entity with specific content like "extrovert" (content: out-going, talkative, social), a construct is not restricted to any culture. People partaking of any culture can state their constructs. Contrast this open-ended, content-free essence with the nature of typical trait theories. A trait such as "assertiveness" may have no meaning in some non-Western cultures because there are minimal individual differences on it (in some cultures, most people are nonassertive; in other cultures, most are highly assertive). Likewise the REP test can be easily recast to fit any culture. For example, role-persons who have mostly Western relevance (attractive person) can be replaced by culturally relevant role-persons (pious person). In a similar fashion, the fixed-role therapy method can be adapted to different cultures. A fixed role written for the imaginary character could be peculiar to any culture. The only requirement is that a construct is assigned that demands very different behavior than what is usual for the assignee. Applications of PCT to many cultures would highlight both differences and similarities among cultures. It could, thereby, increase intercultural understanding.

Limitations

Kelly's basic assumptions are vulnerable. Also, like most other theorists, some of Kelly's ideas have not been strongly verified by research. Finally, despite its usefulness for many purposes, the REP test has some limitations.

The Notion of Opposites. Kelly's theory is based on the notion of opposites as manifested in constructs. The most obvious attack on this central idea is that some candidates for "construct" do not involve opposites. Either the opposite is missing altogether, or it is not a true opposite. For some candidates the only specifiable opposite to the emergent pole is the negation of that pole. For example, "admire–not admire" was purposely used in the Jim and Joan illustration. "Admire–not admire" would certainly qualify as a construct (so would just about any set of two words that are apparent opposites). However, the implicit pole is the negation of the emergent pole; it is not something, but the absence of something. One can admire a person, but not to admire a person is rather ambiguous. It implies no definite relationship or action. Similarly, scrutiny of a list of words that were all generated during the process of self-description (disclosure of constructs) reveals a large number of emergent poles the opposites of which are negations (Allen and Potkay, 1983a). For example, "awful" and "bizarre" seem to have no opposites except "not awful" and "not bizarre."

While, in some cases, implicit poles are merely negations of emergent poles, in others, they may be absent entirely. Kelly himself acknowledged that his clients sometimes cannot articulate an implicit pole for a construct. He assumed that, in such cases, clients possessed a **submerged pole,** one that has either never been put into word form, perhaps because the construct is new, or is being suppressed (a client insists "all people are good"

in order to escape the perception that people are bad and out to get him; Kelly, 1963). Maybe some people do submerge implicit poles, or it may be that they did not express an implicit pole because none exists for them.

But what about Lyle's research support of Kelly's notion of opposites? Examination of the word list mentioned previously reveals that all of the eight labels for the eight classes of words used in Lyle's study have extreme favorability values. For each of the four sets of words, one member of the pair refers to a characteristic that is highly valued and desired by people in our society, while the other word refers to a highly undesirable characteristic (see Table 11.2). Also, all eight emergent poles have rather obvious opposites that are not just negations. One might wonder, do the emergent poles of real people's constructs all have such clear opposites? Do the constructs of real people have poles that are so extremely different in favorability? It seems intuitively obvious that some real people would have some constructs with no opposites to emergent poles and constructs with poles that are not extremely different in favorability. Thus, Lyle's study should be replicated with a more representative sample of potential constructs.

The Idiographic Approach and the Vagueness of Some Concepts. One reason for some problems with Kelly's PCT is that each person's construct system is different from that of each other person. Researchers must resolve the paradox inherent in studying single individuals in order to make *generalizations* about construct systems that are *different* for different people. Also, like those of several other theorists, some of Kelly's concepts are too vague to verify empirically. Among these are some of Kelly's attempts to include emotionality in his theorizing: (1) threat that the system of constructs may be overhauled; (2) anxiety that the system does not apply to critical events; and (3) fear that new constructs may be dominating. Aside from these being strange definitions for words commonly used by other theorists, an attempt to verify them has failed. Beck (1988) investigated these concepts and found little support for hypotheses based on them. In fact, in some instances results were opposite of predictions.

Shortcomings of the REP. One of the REP test's virtues is also a major limitation. It involves an idiographic approach, one person at a time. Each REP outcome is unique to the person who produced it. A given person's constructs, as revealed by her or his REP responses, may not be meaningfully compared with those of other persons, much less generalized to all other people. Such is the case even in industry and business applications.

TABLE 11.2 ***Lyle's Word Categories and Associated Favorability Values****

Cheerful	475	Sad	213
Broad-minded	425	Narrow-minded	142
Refined	342	Vulgar	77
Sincere	504	Insincere	107
Average (mean)	437		135

*From Allen and Potkay (1983a); 600 is maximum favorable.

The REP outcomes produced by successful loan officers or product quality-control inspectors cannot be readily generalized to other loan officers or inspectors, whether successful or not. Just as a radiologist's method for reading an X-ray is unique to her or him, one's REP outcome is specific to oneself. In fact, the REP reflects the highly idiographic PCT from which it is drawn. Thus, it is alien to the most popular orientation in the United States: nomothetic—identifying universal characteristics and broad principles that can be generalized across all humans. Parity in popularity with other major theories will have to await a change in the major U.S. orientation.

Conclusions

George Kelly is certainly one of psychology's most original thinkers. In fact, research support for his theory may not be optimally great, because it is so original researchers may not know how to approach it. Although some of his ideas resembled those of some other theorists, Kelly did not directly borrow from anybody. His theory is composed mainly of fresh, new ideas. Nothing resembling ids, archetypes, or needs exists in the theory. Little wonder that some U.S. psychologists have had trouble relating to PCT. In Britain it is a different story: His popularity is great.

Kelly is to be congratulated for emphasizing what others have ignored. He, more than any other psychologist, has made cognition the primary basis for the study of personality. Also, Kelly's "one subject or client at a time" approach is not lacking in merit just because it is not often embraced in the United States. My colleague, Charles Potkay, and I personally favor the idiographic approach (see Allen & Potkay, 1983a, Potkay & Allen, 1988). Humans are just too complicated and each is too unique to readily generalize from what one displays to most others (also see Allen, 1988a, 1988b). Finally, because Kelly has provided a cognitive basis for understanding personality at a time when the cognitive approach is burgeoning, many of his ideas are here to stay. Constructs, complexity–simplicity, the REP test and many other contributions will likely guarantee Kelly a place in the psychological literature well into the next century.

Summary Points

1. George Kelly was an individualistic person whose background ranged from engineering to labor relations. He made a point of rejecting "stimulus–response" and Freudian psychology. Yet, with all of his sarcasm and skepticism, he was a warm friend and mentor to colleagues and students. He believed that thought processes were the key to understanding people and that people, as well as therapists and researchers, act like scientists in their pursuits.

2. Constructs are ways of construing events. The fundamental postulate is that people's processes are routed by the ways they anticipate events. Jim's and Joan's conversation illustrates two different construction systems, each having superordinate and subordinate constructs that have emergent and implicit poles. A construct's range of convenience is the

extent of the event-category to which it applies and its range of focus is the events to which it most readily applies.

3. Some constructs are impermeable, while some are characterized by commonality and others by individuality traceable to differences in experience. Anxiety occurs when a construction system does not apply to critical events, fear when a new construct enters a system and may be dominant, and threat when a system appears to be facing overhaul.

4. Joan recommended that Jim adopt "admired–not admired," try it out, and then try it again (replicate). Joan was assuming constructive alternativism. Kelly shared some ideas with other theorists. He believed in people's ability to change what controls them (Skinner), was future-oriented (Bandura), and was in agreement with the humanists on some issues. He was not an advocate of a particular therapy (Rogers and Jung) and he was interested in creativity (Skinner and Rogers).

5. Jim's construction system was organized by extension of the cleavage line, poles of subordinate constructs fall under emergent and implicit poles of superordinate constructs. Joan's system reflected abstracting across the cleavage line, whole constructs fell under superordinate emergent and under superordinate implicit poles. A construct's context is all the elements, objects, or events to which it applies. A symbol is an element to which a construct applies that serves as its name.

6. Children will do whatever is required to achieve predictability. Tight and loose constructs vary on the predictability they yield. Dependency constructs tend to dominate early systems, but eventually they give way to more permeable constructs. Adopting a role involves behaving in ways that meet expectations of important other people. However, if we misread others' expectations, guilt results. The need for elaborative choice starts the C-P-C cycle: circumspection (trying on for size), preemption (a construct defines alternatives), and choice (decision between alternatives).

7. Lyle provided some evidence that words referring to constructs are organized into pairs of opposites. Friends are able to appreciate each others' critical constructs. PCT sheds light on the plight of elderly people who have lost a spouse. Only cognitively complex people have constructs that are clearly differentiated. Complexity increases with age and simple college males described older males in less complex terms and gave them more extreme evaluations. Complex subjects were more discriminating of nonverbal behavior when moderately or highly aroused.

8. People apply more constructs to the in-group and see more subgroups among in-group members. Being cognitively complex is not necessarily "good." U.S. Supreme Court Justices were more complex if their opinions defended the status quo, especially if they voted with the majority. In Kelly's increasingly popular REP test, individuals indicate the important people in their lives and, while considering them in threes, pick two who are alike in some way and different from the third.

9. The REP procedure is useful in business and industry, when role titles are replaced by product names. Its grid has many applications beyond assessment of people's psychological problems. In fixed-role therapy, a client adopts the role of an imaginary person

having a construct(s) that contrasts with the client's. Kelly's PCT is ripe for use in investigating similarities and differences among cultures because it is basically content free and involves methods that are easily adapted to any culture.

10. Limitations of PCT include that some constructs have no real opposites to their emergent poles, just the negation of that pole. Lyle's work in support of PCT suffers for nonrepresentativeness of the words he used. Some of Kelly's concepts have not been clearly verified by research, such as threat, anxiety, and fear. Finally, the REP test suffers from being too "idiographic," applicable to only the particular persons who complete it. Yet Kelly's novel ideas and idiographic approach are catching on, especially in Britain.

Running Comparison

Theorist	*Kelly in Comparison*
B. F. Skinner	Unlike Skinner, he was oriented to the future, but both believed that people could be changed by planned human interventions, and both were interested in creativity.
Rogers	Like Rogers, Kelly held that individuals have choices. They also agreed that therapists should not limit themselves to traditional methods. Both were concerned with creativity and both felt that clients were more like partners.
Maslow	"Becoming oneself" was a major goal in therapy for both, but Kelly was less concerned with the present moment.
Jung	The mother construct resembled Jung's mother archetype and mother complex. They both cast psychological reality in terms of opposites.
Sullivan	Kelly's view of mother–child relations was similar to Sullivan's.

Essay/Critical Thinking Questions

1. Think of a current personal problem of a psychological or interpersonal nature. How would you go about solving it scientifically?
2. Based on your completion of the REP test, draw your construction system (see Figure 11.1).
3. Indicate the constructs of a close friend or romantic partner and write a fixed-role script for him or her.
4. Imagine that you suffered "threat" as Kelly defines it. How would you cope with it?
5. Based on your answers to questions 2 and 3, how would you conceive of the commonality between your construction system and that of your best friend?
6. What dependency constructs characterized your childhood construction system?
7. Think of a change in your life situation or relationships. What form did Kelly's *guilt* take and what did you do about it?

8. Think of another past change in your life (high school to college changes in friendships?). Use the C-P-C cycle to indicate how you dealt with your new situation.
9. What evidence can you provide to support the argument that you are a complex individual?
10. How does the "they all look alike" phenomenon as it applies to perceptions of the out-group relate to cognitive complexity–simplicity?

E-mail Interaction

(Write the author at mfbpa@wiu.edu)
Forward one of the following or phrase your own.

1. Was Kelly really a maverick or was he more Horney's expansive type?
2. Are you a tight construer or a loose construer?
3. How would I benefit from taking the REP test?
4. Tell me what is good about being cognitively simple.
5. Do you really support studying one person at a time?