**personal construct theory**

Kelly’s **personal construct theory** departs from cognitive social learning in that he proposes it is not simply enough to know what a person is likely to do in a given situation, even when your predictions are correct. More importantly, we need to know what a person might have done (Kelly, 1966). Thus, unlike the cognitive social learning theorists who consider cognitive processes as an aspect of the environmental circumstances associated with behavior, Kelly focused on the cognitive constructs first and foremost.

Kelly presented his personal construct theory in a two volume set, which was published in 1955 (Kelly, 1955a,b). In the mid-1960s Kelly was preparing a new book that was to include talks and papers he had presented around the world, many of which were never published. Unfortunately, he did not survive to complete this task, but the project was later completed by Brendan Maher (Maher, 1969), thus furthering the information available on this unique theory.

**Brief Biography of George Kelly**

Not much is known about George Kelly as a person, particularly regarding his childhood. Later in life he instructed his wife to destroy all of his personal correspondence. Thus, it has been somewhat difficult to piece together a picture of how this fascinating individual became the man he was. He was born in 1905 on a farm near Perth, Kansas. His father had been educated for the Presbyterian ministry, but after getting married his parents moved to the farm in Kansas, where they had their only child. The Kelly family moved around from farm to farm, including a failed farm in Colorado on some of the last free land given to settlers in the West. Kelly’s education was erratic, and he learned what he could when the family would occasionally spend a few weeks in town. He attended four different high schools, and apparently never established any long-term relationships. He was, however, favorably influenced by the exciting stories told by his maternal grandfather, who had been the captain of a sailing ship in the North Atlantic (Fransella, 1995).

Despite his erratic education, Kelly attended college at Friends University and then Park College, where he received a Bachelor’s degree in physics and mathematics. Despite studying math and science, the collegiate debates he experienced had sparked a keen interest in social problems. So, he entered the University of Kansas to earn a Master’s degree in educational sociology, and in 1927 he completed his thesis on the distribution of leisure time activities of workers in Kansas City. He then moved to Minneapolis and supported himself by teaching one night a week in each of three different night schools. He began studying sociology and biometrics at the University of Minnesota, but when the university found out that he couldn’t pay his tuition he was told to leave. He was then hired to teach psychology and speech at Sheldon Junior College in Iowa, where he spent a year and a half. He then returned to the University of Minnesota for a semester of studying sociology, but then went back to Wichita, Kansas and worked as an aeronautical engineer for a few months. He then received an exchange scholar fellowship to study at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in education in 1930, having written his thesis on predicting teaching success. He then returned to the United States, attended the State University of Iowa, and in 1931 he received a Ph.D. in psychology, with a focus on reading and speech disabilities. Two days later he married Gladys Thompson (Fransella, 1995; Maher, 1969).

As uncharacteristic as it may seem, Kelly finally settled down. He spent the next ten years teaching at Fort Hays Kansas State College. His research and writings during this time focused on the practical aspects of providing clinical psychological services for schools. Much like Alfred Adler had in Austria, he developed traveling clinics to provide training around the state of Kansas, and his model had a dramatic influence on the future of rural school psychology. With the advent of World War II, however, Kelly entered the Navy as an aviation psychologist. At first he helped to train local civilian pilots, but then he transferred to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery of the Navy in Washington to help select naval air cadets. After the war he spent a year at the University of Maryland, but in 1946 he was appointed Professor and director of Clinical Psychology at Ohio State University, where he spent the next 20 years (Fransella, 1995; Maher, 1969).

During his first few years at Ohio State he focused on making their clinical psychology training program into one of the best in the country. One of his colleagues in the department was Julian Rotter, also known for his role in shaping the training programs used in psychology today, and one of their students was Walter Mischel (who admired both Rotter and Kelly). Kelly then turned his attention to the theory that made him famous, the two volume work entitled *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (Kelly, 1955a,b). Kelly’s theory gained immediate recognition as both unique and significant, and he was invited to teach and lecture around the United States and in Europe, the Soviet Union, South America, Asia, and the Caribbean. He was elected president of both the Clinical Division and the Consulting Division of the American Psychological Association, and he served as president of the American Board of Examiners in Professional Psychology. In 1965, Kelly left Ohio State for Brandeis University, where he was appointed to the Riklis Chair of Behavioral Science. He began working on a collection of his papers and lectures from the past decade, but he died unexpectedly in March, 1966. As mentioned above, that collection of works was completed by the man who succeeded Kelly as Riklis Professor of Behavioral Science, and was published under the title*Clinical Psychology and Personality: The Selected Papers of George Kelly*(Maher, 1969).

**Placing Kelly in Context: A Cognitive Theory of Personality**

Simply put, Kelly’s personal construct theory represents the culmination of the shift from animalistic behaviorism to humanistic cognition. In American psychology, behaviorism was a powerful force, and began with the very traditional approach of theorists such as John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner. Alongside the experimental behaviorists were the learning theorists, such as Clark Hull. As Dollard and Miller tried to find some common ground between psychodynamic theory and traditional learning approaches, they were inevitably led to consider the role of social factors in human learning. Bandura, Rotter, and Mischel built on the legacy of Dollard and Miller, but added to it the active role of cognition in the human species. Finally, Kelly moved to a purely cognitive description of how individuals become who they are.

However, we must address an important caveat. Just as Skinner’s radical behaviorism was an extreme position of ignoring cognitive processes, perhaps Kelly’s position is equally extreme for attributing significant cognitive processing to all aspects of personality and personality development. Although the man-the-scientist concept may hold a certain curious appeal for some, who doesn’t sometimes knowingly try acting in different ways to see what effect it has on others? Likewise, who isn’t attracted to a theory that says we desire the ability to both predict and control the events in our lives? However, as Kelly the therapist was keenly aware, many people cannot predict or control the events surrounding them. Is this always the result of failed construct systems, or is it possible that sometimes we just aren’t thinking? Regardless of the answer, Kelly is the recognized leader of a significant development in the field of personality, a development that contributed to the highly regarded cognitive therapies of Ellis and Beck.

It is also interesting to note that the basis for his theory of constructive alternativism questions the reality of the self in a manner similar to Eastern/Buddhist concepts of consciousness and self. Carl Jung was dramatically influenced by the ancient Vedic traditions of India, and Carl Rogers, the founder of humanistic psychology, was influenced by the spiritual traditions of China. And now we have Kelly, whose theory represents the culmination of behavioral-cognitive theories, sharing a fundamental similarity with Buddhist psychology. Clearly, throughout the history of personality theory, there have been important theorists who looked beyond the constraints of their own training and their own culture.

**Constructive Alternativism**

Kelly begins by questioning the role that psychologists have assigned to themselves. Psychologists consider themselves to be scientists, engaged in the systematic study of human behavior and thought. Kelly questions why we, as psychologists, don’t extend the same perspective to all people. According to Kelly, doesn’t every person seek to predict and control the course of events in their lives? Doesn’t every person have their own theories about situations in life, don’t they test their own hypotheses, and weigh the experimental evidence gained through experience?

…it is as though the psychologist were saying to himself, “I, being a *psychologist*, and therefore a *scientist*, am performing this experiment in order to improve the prediction and control of certain human phenomena; but my subject, being merely a human organism, is obviously propelled by inexorable drives welling up within him, or else he is in gluttonous pursuit of sustenance and shelter.” (pg. 5; Kelly, 1955a)

Since Kelly proposes that each individual is theorizing about and testing their own life circumstances, he suggests the term **man-the-scientist** for understanding how all people (including, of course, women) approach the world around them.

In trying to understand the world around us, using arguments that sound either existential or like Eastern philosophy, Kelly questions the existence of the universe. Of course it exists, he says, but so do the thoughts of each individual, and the correspondence between what people think exists and what does, in fact, exist is constantly changing. Thus, Kelly suggests that it is better to say that the world around us is *existing*, rather than to say it exists. Likewise, life can only be understood in the context of time, if it is to make sense. However, life is not simply the changes that occur over time. Rather, it is a relationship between living things and their environment. Kelly emphasizes the creative capacity of living things to represent their environment, as opposed to simply reacting to it. These representations are known as **constructs**, patterns that we create in our mind and attempt to fit over the realities of the world. Since our constructs don’t always fit with reality, we are constantly modifying them, as well as trying to increase our repertoire of constructs. Over time, we test our constructs for the ability to predict what will happen in our lives. With sufficient time and experience, and if we are willing to learn from our mistakes, we can evaluate all of our interpretations of the world in which we live (Kelly, 1955a).

Kelly believes that all of our present interpretations of the environment are open to revision or replacement; there are always alternative constructs that may help us deal with new or difficult situations. It is this philosophical position that Kelly refers to as **constructive alternativism.** It is important to keep in mind, of course, that not just any alternative will work in a given situation. Therefore, each potential alternative construct must be evaluated in terms of its specific predictive efficiency, as well as in terms of overall predictive efficiency of the system it would become part of, if that alternative construct were adopted (Kelly, 1955a).

discussion question 19.2.119.2.1

According to Kelly, it is more important to know what a person might have done, and he believed that people act as scientists, testing their constructs in order to become better at predicting and controlling their lives. Can you think of situations in which someone did what you expected, but you really wanted to know what they had thought about doing as alternatives?

**Basic Theory of Personal Constructs**

Personal construct theory begins with a **fundamental postulate**, which is then elaborated with eleven corollaries. The fundamental postulate states that “*a person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events*” (Kelly, 1955a). The carefully chosen words in this postulate define the nature of personal construct theory. The words *person*and *he*emphasize the individuality of this theory, the unique nature of each person’s constructs. Each person is then recognized as a process. The mind does not stop and start, simply reacting to stimuli, but rather it is constantly in motion, constantly experimenting with constructs. These processes operate through a network of pathways, or *channels*, according to the devices, or *ways*, a person constructs in order to achieve their goals. Since these processes, ways, and channels have not been identified as specific physiological mechanisms or anatomical structures, Kelly emphasizes that this is a *psychological*theory. So when we discuss this mechanism we are not necessarily addressing neuroscience on one hand or sociology on the other hand, we are working within the constraints of the field of psychology. We then have *anticipation*, the “push and pull of the psychology of personal constructs” (Kelly, 1955a). Being man-the-scientist, each of us seeks to predict the future and choose our actions accordingly. Finally, we have real-life *events*. Kelly was always very practical about both his personality theory and his approach to psychotherapy. Thus, the psychology of personal constructs is not an ethereal theory. Psychological processes, according to Kelly, are tied down to reality, and anticipation is carried forward in order to better represent future reality. Having established the fundamental postulate, Kelly then described eleven corollaries, or propositions, which both follow from the postulate and amplify his system by elaborating on the fundamental idea (Kelly, 1955a).

**Construction Corollary:** *A person anticipates events by construing their replications.*Construing refers to placing an interpretation upon an event. Since a new event will not occur exactly as a past event, our anticipation involves interpreting what the new event will be like. Kelly uses the example of a day. Today is not the same as yesterday, tomorrow will not be the same as today, but each day follows something of a similar pattern. Thus, our anticipation of tomorrow involves constructs based on both the similarities and differences between days we have experienced in the past. It is important to note that this process is not the same as cognition, it is not simply thinking about tomorrow. Much of this process is preverbal, or unconscious, and in that sense occurs automatically.

**Individuality Corollary:***Persons differ from each other in their construction of events.*No matter how closely associated two people are, they cannot play exactly the same role in any situation. Therefore, they will interpret events differently. Although Kelly acknowledges that people often share similar experiences, particularly as they attend to the experiences of others in the same or similar situations, this corollary emphasizes the unique, subjective nature of interpreting and anticipating events.

**Organization Corollary:** *Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs.* When faced with conflict, there may be solutions that contradict one another. Thus, the constructs we develop may contradict each other. Kelly suggested that we develop our constructs in a systematic and organized way, with some constructs being ranked more highly than others. For example, some constructs may be good vs. bad, or stupid vs. intelligent. A stupid construct might work in a given solution, but an intelligent one would probably be preferred. For instance, suppose you have an electric garage door opener, and the power is out. You could put your car in the garage by driving through the garage door. However, it might be preferable to get out of the car, go into the garage through the house or side door, and then disconnect the garage door from the opener and open it by hand.

**Dichotomy Corollary:***A person’s construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.* Every construct has both positive and negative aspects. In the example used above, both ways of putting your car in the garage have advantages and disadvantage. Driving through the garage door is quick and easy in the short term, but results in needing a new garage door. Getting out of the car and using another entrance takes more time and effort, and may be unpleasant in a bad storm, but it protects your property (and saves time and money in the long run). The essential nature of contrast was eloquently described some 2,600 years ago by Lao Tsu:

Under Heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.

All can know good as good only because there is evil.

Therefore having and not having arise together.

Difficult and easy complement each other.

Long and short contrast each other;

High and low rest upon each other;

Voice and sound harmonize each other;

Front and back follow one another.

Lao Tsu, c600 B.C.

(pg. 4; Lao Tsu, c600 B.C./1989)

**Choice Corollary:***A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system.* Simply put, since each situation requires us to choose between the options we construct, Kelly believed we choose the alternative that serves us best (at least within our system of constructs, which may be different than the reality of the best choice). But what about situations in which the best choice is not so obvious? Kelly believed that the choice corollary allowed for shades of gray when a decision is not clearly a choice between black and white alternatives. He did not view this as a contradiction, but rather, he proposed that the choice becomes one between options that are more gray or less gray. Thus, we can maintain the dichotomy of the choice while still also allowing the choice itself.

**Range Corollary:** *A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only.* Every personal construct has a range or focus, and few, if any, are relevant to all events. As Kelly points out, the construct tall vs. short may apply well to descriptions of people, trees, and buildings. But what would we mean by tall weather, or short light? Clearly, the construct tall vs. short is limited to certain types of discrete, physical objects.

**Experience Corollary:** *A person’s construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events.* As we apply constructs in our efforts to predict what happens in our lives, we sometimes experience unexpected outcomes. As a result, we reconstruct our constructs, and learn from our experiences. In other words, man-the-scientist is by definition a work in process, and that process is ongoing.

**Modulation Corollary:** *The variation in a person’s construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie.*This corollary addresses the ease with which the experience corollary can occur. Although all individuals modify the constructs that guide their anticipation of events, some constructs are modified more easily, and some people are more open to changing their perspectives (and, hence, reconstructing their constructs). This is one area where Kelly re-emphasizes the difference between psychological processes and the process of science. Scientists seek hypotheses, theories, and laws that are not likely to change. Indeed, there is a continuum from hypothesis to law based on how likely it is that a scientific observation is true. People, however, are constantly testing and retesting their constructs, and reconstructing them as necessary and appropriate. Therefore, people may act like scientists, but their psychological processes serve to facilitate the individual’s life, not the lives of others (as scientific theories and laws are meant to apply to the whole universe).

**Fragmentation Corollary:***A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other.* This corollary extends from the previous one, but with a twist. As an individual encounters unexpected events, they modify their constructs to the extent that they are able. Thus, their behavior may change slowly, or more quickly, depending on the nature of the constructs that guide their openness to change. The twist comes into play when individuals are either resisting change, or in the process of change, and it involves the dichotomy corollary. If an individual is failing to predict and control events in their life, they may choose an incompatible construct, essentially reversing the course of their behavior. One of the advantages of Kelly’s personal construct theory is that these dramatic changes in behavior can now be seen as reasonable progressions in one’s ongoing desire for predictability and control.

**Commonality Corollary:** *To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person.*This corollary is important for interpersonal relations. Even though two people cannot experience the same event in exactly the same way, their ability to share their experiences is facilitated by the similarity of their experiences. This raises important implications for therapists working with clients of different cultures, since they might not share similar constructs based on certain events. It also raises an important distinction between cognitive and behavioral approaches to understanding personality. In behavioral perspectives, simple stimulus-response relationships are the same for everyone who experiences them. However, in the cognitive perspective, each person necessarily experiences any event in a unique way.

**Sociality Corollary:***To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person.* Humans are social creatures. Our ability to predict and control our lives is largely based on our ability to predict and either control or work with other people. Thus, it is important for individuals to construe to thoughts and behaviors of others, and in so doing we can each play a role in the lives of others. Kelly suggests that this provides a natural connection between personal construct theory and social psychology, as well as a connection between personal construct theory and cross-cultural psychology.

**Dimensions of Transition**

Since life is an ongoing process, there are regular transitions in one’s personal constructs. According to the organizational and modulation corollaries, individuals have certain preferences amongst their constructs and differences in their ability to reconstruct them. Problems in life arise when individuals find it difficult to transition from an ineffective construct, one that does not allow for predicting or controlling events, to an effective construct. According to Kelly (1955a), the major problems are seen as the psychological phenomena of **threat, fear, guilt,**and **anxiety.** Kelly defines these terms as follows:

*Threat is the awareness of imminent comprehensive change in one’s core structures.*

*Fear is like threat, except that, in this case, it is a new incidental construct, rather than a comprehensive construct, that seems about to take over.*

*Perception of one’s apparent dislodgment from his core role structure constitutes the experience of guilt.*

*Anxiety is the recognition that the events with which one is confronted lie outside the range of convenience of one’s construct system.*

In each case, the psychological phenomenon is based on either the failure of one’s constructs to provide courses of action or a direct challenge to the system of constructs available to the individual. Given that the individual’s personal construct systems define the larger construct of self, these psychological phenomena represent a challenge to the very self experiencing them. In defense of the individual, aggressiveness is seen as*the active elaboration of one’s perceptual field*. In other words, aggressive individuals try to control events in ways that force decisions favorable to the individual. Similarly, hostility is viewed as*the continued effort to extort validational evidence in favor of a type of social prediction which has already proved itself a failure*. In this case, the individual tries to find confirmation of success following failed constructs, and this can only be done at the expense of others (Kelly, 1955a).

As people live their everyday lives, there are two typical cycles of transition, the **C-P-C Cycle** and the **Creativity Cycle**. The C-P-C Cycle involves circumspection, preemption, and control. Being circumspect refers to being wary, not taking risks. Thus, as we construe events we try to be precise in the development of our constructs. We then preempt these constructs for membership in an exclusive realm, one that best fits the event we are trying to predict and control. Finally, the first two steps have control as their natural consequence. Still, the individual must make the choice of that course of action, so Kelly suggests that the final C could just as well stand for choice as it does for control. In contrast, the Creativity Cycle begins with loose constructions, and then leads to tightened and validated constructions. What makes the Creativity Cycle meaningful is the individual’s ability to quickly experiment with various constructs and then seize upon the most promising, which is then tightened up and tested. Since much of this process is preverbal, the thought processes of creative individuals may not be apparent to others. According to Kelly, although individuals who begin with tight constructions might be productive, they cannot be creative. Creativity requires beginning with loose constructions (Kelly, 1955a). The value of creativity is not simply to be found as a distinction between the types of cycles experienced by individuals in their daily lives. Creativity is an important component of well-being, and a common topic in books on positive psychology and human strengths and virtues (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Cloninger, 2004; Compton, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2005). Indeed, Carl Rogers identified creativity as a significant aspect of the personality of a fully functioning person (Rogers, 1961).

discussion question 19.2.219.2.2

Many psychologists, including Kelly and Carl Rogers, consider creativity to be an essential aspect of healthy psychological development. Have you ever entered into an unfamiliar situation and tried to be creative in how you handled it? Was it difficult to set aside preconceived notions about how to act, or do you find it easy to try different things in new situations?

**The Role of the Psychotherapist**

Kelly was first and foremost a clinical psychologist, and his writings are full of practical examples related to clinical work. Theories are of little value unless they are rooted in the values of the psychologists using them. Kelly considered this to be particularly true of clinical psychologists, since they are routinely dealing with clients (Kelly, 1955b). Kelly believed that the role of the psychotherapist involves not only the training and perspectives of the therapist, but also a need to understand the client, and essential ethical considerations:

The role of the psychotherapist involves keen alertness to what the client expects from psychotherapy and the initial acceptance of a wide variety of client misperceptions of what psychotherapy is…it involves certain ethical obligations that transcend mere legal status. (pg. 618; Kelly, 1955b)

In his typically practical style, Kelly provides lengthy lists of what psychotherapy means to the client, the client’s conceptualization of the therapist, the clinician’s conceptualization of their role, and basic approaches to revising the client’s constructs. At the beginning of therapy, it is unlikely that the client has a good concept of what therapy is and what it can accomplish. Nonetheless, the client has some construction of what will take place in therapy. The complaint presented by the client says something about what he or she thinks therapy can accomplish, and some see therapy as an end in itself. However, the reality is that therapy is a means to an end, and that end should be generating movement forward on the part of the client. In contrast, some clients are so ready for change that the therapist must be cautious in interpreting the client’s state of mind (Kelly, 1955b). Just as the client makes predictions about therapy, they will also have an initial conceptualization of the therapist. They may construe the therapist as a parent, an absolver of guilt, a companion, or even a threat. Hopefully, according to Kelly, the client may construe the therapist as a representative of reality. In this case, the client may feel free to experiment with his or her constructs without fear of failure. Most importantly, how the client construes the therapist will have a dramatic effect on their relationship:

From the client’s conceptualization of psychotherapy comes the role he expects to play and the role he expects the therapist to play…He may be bitterly disappointed in the therapist’s enactment of the expected role. He may stretch his perceptions of the therapist in order to construe him in the manner he expected to construe him rather than in the manner the therapist seeks to be construed….The client may then feel lost and insecure in the psychotherapeutic relationship. (pg. 575; Kelly, 1955b)

As the client is engaging in these processes, the clinician is also conceptualizing their own role. Overall, the goal of any therapist should be to assist in the continuous reconstruction of the client’s construct system, and the changes that take place in therapy should set the stage for continued reconstruction after therapy has been discontinued. Initially, the therapist may rely on a variety of techniques to accomplish superficial reconstructions. The therapist needs to be patient, and initially must accept the client’s construct systems as they are. The latter point is quite similar to the empathy described by Carl Rogers in humanistic, client-centered therapy, and Kelly does indeed use the word “empathize” in his own writings. As therapy progresses, the therapist needs to help the client select new conceptual elements, accelerate the tempo of the client’s experience, and design and implement experiments. Finally, the therapist serves to validate the client’s experiments as they attempt to reconstruct their construct systems (Kelly, 1955b).

**Psychological Assessment within Personal Construct Theory**

Kelly believed that therapy was a joint effort between the therapist and the client, and since the goal was the ongoing reconstruction of the client’s psychological systems (even after therapy), the client ultimately needs to become his own therapist. Therefore, the **psychotherapeutic interview**(Note: by “interview,” Kelly means what we would commonly call a therapy session) becomes an essential part of therapy. Throughout the process of the interview, the therapist makes decisions regarding the course of the interchange between the therapist and the client. Overall, the decisions made by the therapist are tailored to the specific client, but still the therapist must remain in control of the interview. This requires that the therapist plan for the interview. Those plans include how often to interview the client, how long the interviews should last, the tempo of the interview, and when to terminate the interview. Since the client continues to live their life outside of the interview room, the therapist must also consider whether special circumstances will require special interview plans (Kelly, 1955b, 1958). One of the most practical aspects of the interview is that the client can simply provide information needed by the therapist, to a point:

…there is a useful adage for clinical psychologists to follow on occasion: if you do not know what is wrong with a person, ask him; he may tell you. (pp. 322; Kelly, 1955a)

The **Role Construct Repertory Test** (Rep Test) was developed by Kelly in order to understand how a client’s personal constructs influence their personal-social behavior. The client begins with a **Role Title List**, on which they list the names of important people in their lives (see Table 10-1). The names are then grouped three at a time, and the client is asked to describe in what *important way*two of the three individuals are alike but different than the third person. A more organized form of the Rep Test, particularly useful for research purposes, involves creating the **Repertory Grid**. Once again the client is asked to identify significant people in their life. The grid provides three-person pairings that address various relational factors (family, intimate friends, conflicted relationships, authority figures, and values), and as before the client provides a construct that associates two of the people yet distinguishes them from the third. The common factor is listed as the **emergent pole,** the distinguishing factor is listed as the **implicit pole**. The Rep Test does not result in specific outcomes, so its interpretation is also subject to different methods. If the Rep Test is interpreted formally, it will provide results on the number and range of constructs present within the client’s construct systems. In the hands of an experienced and skilled examiner, information can be gleaned on the equivalence of constructs, thus providing deeper detail on the effective range of the client’s construct system. As more information is obtained from the Rep Test, the better able the therapist will be to guide the therapeutic process (Kelly, 1955a).

**Fixed-role therapy**is a technique derived from personal construct theory. First, the client prepares a **self-characterization sketch**, a technique in which the client is asked to write a character sketch about themselves as if they were the principal character in a play, but written as if by a friend who knows the client well. Using information from the self-characterization sketch, as well as from interviews and perhaps the Rep Test, the therapist then writes a **fixed-role sketch**. The client is asked to act out the fixed-role sketch over a period of weeks. Initially, Kelly and his colleagues emphasized minor changes in the client’s construct systems. However, they later found that it is often easier for a client to play out roles that are the opposite of their usual constructs, rather than making only minor changes in their behavior. Over time, it is expected that the client will learn that the new construct systems are more predictive than their old construct systems, and the fixed-role therapy will establish an ongoing process of reconstruction within the client (Kelly, 1955a).

| Table 19.2.119.2.1: **The Role Title List Used for the Personal Construct Repertory Test** |
| --- |
| 1. A teacher you liked. (Or the teacher of a subject you liked.)
2. A teach you disliked. (Or the teacher of a subject you disliked.)
3. Your wife or present girl friend.3a. (for women) Your husband or present boy friend.
4. An employer, supervisor, or officer under whom you worked or served and whom you found hard to get along with. (Or someone under whom you worked in a situation you did not like.)
5. An employer, supervisor, or officer under whom you worked or served and whom you liked. (Or someone under whom you worked in a situation you liked.)
6. Your mother. (Or the person who has played the part of a mother in your life.)
7. Your father. (Or the person who has played the part of a father in your life.)
8. Your brother nearest your age. (Or the person who has been most like a brother.)
9. Your sister nearest your age. (Or the person who has been most like a sister.)
10. A person with whom you have worked who was easy to get along with.
11. A person with whom you have worked who was hard to understand.
12. A neighbor with whom you get along well.
13. A neighbor whom you find hard to understand.
14. A boy you got along well with when you were in high school. (Or when you were 16.)
15. A girl you got along well with when you were in high school. (Or when you were 16.)
16. A boy you did not like when you were in high school. (Or when you were 16.)
17. A girl you did not like when you were in high school. (Or when you were 16.)
18. A person of your own sex whom you would enjoy having as a companion on a trip.
19. A person of your own sex whom you would dislike having as a companion on a trip.
20. A person with whom you have been closely associated recently who appears to dislike you.
21. The person whom you would most like to be of help to. (Or whom you feel most sorry for.)
22. The most intelligent person whom you know personally.
23. The most successful person whom you know personally.
24. The most interesting person whom you know personally.
 |

discussion question 19.2.319.2.3

Kelly’s fixed-role therapy requires the client to write a script for how they want to live their life. He found that sometimes it was easier for his clients to act out the opposite of their typical behavior. Would you find it easier to make minor changes in your behavior, or easier to make dramatic changes?