Personal Construct Psychology

New Ideas

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Personal Construct Psychology
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Peter Caputi is a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Wollongong. He has published over 30 journal articles in the areas of Personal Construct Psychology, information systems and measurement issues in psychology, as well as co-authoring a textbook in research methods. He has reviewed for the International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology, now the Journal of Constructivist Psychology and Personal Construct Theory and Practice. He has also edited conference abstracts for the Australian Journal of Psychology.

Linda L. Viney is Professor in Clinical Psychology at the University of Wollongong. She was instrumental in introducing Personal Construct Psychology in Australia and published extensively in the area as well as generally in clinical, counselling and health psychology. She has been Consulting Editor and Editor of the Australian Psychologist, and official journal of the APS. Linda has also been Foundation Member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology, now the Journal of Constructivist Psychology (1988–), and Guest Editor of the issue based on the Fourth Australasian Conference on Personal Construct Psychology, which she co-ordinated, in Volume 3 (1990). Special Editor 1999, Community Mental Health Journal, for the American Association of Community Psychiatrists.

Heather Foster PhD, Dip Ed (Tech.), is a registered psychologist who has applied personal construct psychology in clinical, academic and research areas of psychology. Her research interest is in changes in mid-life, particularly menopause. She draws on a wide background in psychology and vocational education and training and worked for many years in the NSW vocational and education training system. Her work included counselling, teaching, curriculum, policy and management roles, and involved writing, editing and managing the production of educational publications.
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Preface

In 1955, George Kelly published his seminal work, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. This two-volume work was theoretically challenging and provocative! It provided a statement about how people make sense of their worlds, as well as an approach to clinical practice, based on an original theoretical framework. In presenting his theory, Kelly abandoned traditional concepts in the psychological literature, concepts such as motivation (Monte, 1987). Instead, Kelly proposed that individuals engaged in “scientific” activities similar to his own endeavours. Kelly saw people as “personal scientists” seeking to understand their lives by devising and testing hypotheses about their worlds and the people that share them (Monte, 1987).

The central concept in Kelly’s theory is *construction* or *construing*. People construe or make sense of their worlds, the events in them, and of themselves. This process of construing (and re-construing) results in a system of constructs that provides a unique framework for understanding and anticipating events in one’s world. The underlying philosophical assumption in personal construct theory is that “all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement” (Kelly, 1955, p. 15). This position is referred to as a philosophy of *constructive alternativism* (Winter, 1992, p. 4). This position posits that an individual is not “limited to” a particular interpretation of their world. People can re-interpret their worldview and make way for alternative, more meaningful interpretations of their universe (Winter, 1992). However, the philosophy of constructive alternativism is not a solipsistic position. Kelly does not deny the existence of an objective reality. Rather, he argues that we cannot experience the real world directly. We construe that world; we give meaning to it and anticipate future events (Winter, 1992, pp. 4–5).

People construe their worlds in various ways. People’s experiences of the world are diverse. Although having its origins in clinical psychology, Kelly intended his theory to have a wide range of applicability. The literature associated with Personal Construct Theory (PCT) demonstrates that Kelly’s ideas