

## Kelly – Theory of Personal Constructs

- a phenomenological theory

...in our assumptive structure we do not specify...that a person seeks "pleasure," that he has special "needs," that there are "rewards," or even that there are "satisfactions."...To our way of thinking, there is a continuing movement toward the anticipation of events, rather than a series of barter for temporal satisfactions, and this movement is the essence of human life itself (Kelly, 1955, p. 68).

### Central Concepts

1. People need to predict accurately how others will behave and how life will proceed.
2. Predictions are continuously being made and revised.
3. Concepts such as anxiety, guilt and defense have to be understood as prediction failures, i.e., inadequate *constructs* or lack of constructs

### Structure of Personality

Fundamental postulate: *A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events.*

i.e., what a person does depends on what she expects will be the outcome of what she does

Personal construct – how people *construe*, or perceive/understand/interpret the events of their worlds.

"A *construct* is a way in which some things are construed as being alike and yet different from others."

- *constructive alternativism*: all life events are open to multiple interpretations

- *dichotomous (bipolar)*: good – bad, strong – weak, safe-dangerous

- *emergent pole* – the applied pole  
e.g., flying is safe

- *implicit pole* – the pole that isn't applied  
e.g., dangerous

safety is only an issue if flying could also be dangerous

- evolve over time from recurring experiences

- *range of convenience*: the set of events to which a construct applies

- *permeability*: the degree to which a construct can take on new objects and events

- constructs are *experiential*: the labels used may not express what it is

- *cognitive, emotional and motivational*

- *personal construct system*: the hierarchical organization of one's constructs

- *extension*: using a construct in a new situation  
e.g., heli-skiing is safe

- *anxiety*: experienced when constructs are inadequate

- *threat*: experienced when a comprehensive change in constructs is required

- *fixed role therapy*: aids clients to construe themselves differently

- achieved by changing behavior according to an agreed upon script