

Book Review

PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOTHERAPY

by Harry Procter and David Winter

Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 387.

Reviewed by
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Back in the Seventies, when the UK took over the main interest for the Theory of Personal Constructs from the US, the processes of human functioning were treated by the majority of practitioners as an affair going on “in the head”, as much as the entities describing human subjectivity which were also seen as integument commodities, residing in the particular psychological interior of every particular human individual.

Although the adjective “personal” is central to PCP, it is misleading to interpret it as a theory of the individual, where the emphasis primarily lies on the human organism as a unit. An individualistic approach is usually concerned with individuals populating the social environment or aggregating to build society. But there were some discordant voices warning that we may have too early pre-empted the meaning of “personal”.

Although Kelly emphasised the idiosyncratic side of human construing, he was aware of its social origin, defining the “person” as the intersect of many subjective dimensions, declaring that “a person, as construed by someone such as ourselves, is a unique combination of dichotomous categorical interpretations” (Kelly, 1955: p. 300). The person is thus constituted as a person in an interpersonal space of a unique

combination of dichotomous categorical interpretations.

With mind-independent reality, objective knowledge and absolute truth removed from the PCP menu, any comments on behaviour may not be regarded as a description of an inner essence, emanation from mental fabric, or a common material used for making the human psyche. This means that “human nature” is permanently construed and reconstrued by different people in different contexts and with different outcomes.

Claiming that the person is the intersect of many personal construct dimensions, Kelly made otherness a prerequisite of our existence. In order to be persons we have to be construed as persons by others; in order to construe us others have to be construed as persons – by others or by us. What we do and what we are is not our exclusive property, but resultant of our *relations with others*. Thus, *Personal and Relational Construct Psychology* may produce a better fit with the content of Kelly’s theory – as the authors convincingly show in the book under review.

From the very start – even in two so distinctly remote areas as in Chapter one which is a case presentation – to Chapter two – which summarises the philosophical background of PCP – it is difficult to escape the feeling that this book presents an easy read. Easy read it may be, but

being able to write such a demanding book and deliver it as an easy read is all-together another matter. It reveals many years of hard work, deep experience of the subject and competent devotion of the authors from the start to the end.

After a concise presentation of the main body of Personal construct theory, the authors move to the most challenging part of their work – reading PCT in a relational key. Knowingly introducing ‘primacy of intersubjectivity’, ‘dyadic interaction’, ‘dovetailing’ with the work of such as Bateson, Merleau-Ponty, Josiah Royce, Schutz, and Vygotsky, the authors turn our attention towards those who were painfully aware that persons were so socially deprived through the main stream of history of psychology, that they were presented as units even in asocial social psychology. Instead, relation with others was their main condition, the way of being and the way of becoming.

The book is replete with a lot of useful knowledge for a practitioner – reviewing both some of the more common and better known techniques from PCT, but also offering some techniques developed in their “relational” work, such as Systemic Bow-ties and a variety of grids without numbers (i.e. Perceiver Element Grid; Perceiver Event Grid; etc.). They have also provided very informative chapters about doing individual psychotherapy, working with families and couples, and group psychotherapy. Important issues of reflexivity, reflective practice and Supervision also had a dedicated chapter, as well as an added overview of evidence based practice.

From the day of its introduction as a science, psychology was standing on two legs, one of which – experimentally and mainstream was hypertrophied and ruling the game. The other – interpretative – after some time went into serious atrophy and neglect. Having read the book *Personal and Relational Construct Psychotherapy* I sincerely hope that it may represent the beginning of relationality which

may start the eagerly awaited recovery of the interpretative paradigm preferred by many.

REFERENCES

Kelly, G. (1955). *Psychology of Personal Constructs*. NewYork: Norton.

REFERENCE

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