

## **A BRIEF GLANCE BACKWARD**

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The journey to my dissertation began early when I realized that I could not understand why I was not like other guys. They were sexually attracted to women; I was not. To find out, I began to read Freud at age 18 at the suggestion of a dorm counselor in Clinical Psychology. Freud's distinction between manifest and latent content made perfect sense, and thus began my journey to understand the unconscious deeper significances and meanings of my young life. A quote for Jean Paul Sartre summarizes my search and my dissertation: "A single gesture implies a Weltanschauung."

Many people have asked me why I didn't publish my dissertation. The answer is simple; I didn't know how to publish a dissertation! I also didn't think the dissertation was important, because I believed I had only demonstrated the obvious, and it had taken six months of work to do that. What interested me most was my theoretical extension of Kelly's work. Kelly said this had pleased him more than my methodologies. After my extensive review of the psychological research literature in preparation for my Doctoral exams, Kelly asked what I now thought of the research literature. I said it was mostly depressing, generally not worth the paper it was printed on. It was primarily aimed at tenure and promotion. He smiled and said, "Good! You will probably be a good psychologist. Well, I guess someone has to do the research." Kelly was a theorist, not a researcher.

Kelly very much wanted me to accept a position at Harvard, but I knew I was not up to the pressure of such a place. I opted for what I thought would be less pressuring for publications and grant money.

He was definitely disappointed, but relented and wrote a fine letter of recommendation to the University of Colorado at Boulder. I had been

naïve in believing that professors were hired to pursue truth and was quickly informed that grant money was the winning ticket, followed by a large number of publications and citations.

Before I had entered graduate school, I planned on becoming a skilled psychotherapist for two reasons: First, I believed I could learn more of significance and depth about people in the intimate context of therapy. Second, I feel less lonely the more deeply I understand another. I had been friends with faculty in the English department and believed that great authors had understood people better than psychologists, primarily because authors see the world through the eyes (constructs) of their characters. Kelly often quoted his first law of learning, "If you don't understand what a person is doing, ask him! He just might tell you." Kelly listened deeply to people and from his remarkable empathy came Personal Construct Theory. He didn't do research. He was my mentor and role model, my good father.

Kelly also wanted to pack the universities with his students, so we were warned not to mention that we wanted to be therapists or we would be dropped from the program. I knew that I did not want to be an academic researcher, because I saw the publish-or-perish game as cynical and I believed I could learn more of value in the intimacy of therapy, but I reluctantly agreed to give it a try. Significantly, when my wife and I looked down on the beautiful campus at Boulder, Colorado on our first day there, a loud voice in my head astonished me and said, "I don't want this!" How prophetic. While on the faculty, I became friends with Prof. Peter Ossorio, founder of Descriptive Psychology, who was one of the most brilliant people I have ever had the privilege of knowing. Through him, I developed

a strong interest in philosophical psychology. His work is challenging and brilliant.

It was clear by this time that I was far more interested in ideas than data, not a good fit for academia. I transferred to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in the hope of even less publication pressure, but then I longed even more for the freedom and intimacy of therapy. Finally, petty academic politics and the homophobia of the all male faculty was sufficient for me to make a clean break. I set up a successful independent practice (and tripled my income) in the beautiful San Francisco Bay area. I have never regretted that decision. I was fortunate to have a vocation in which I was actively compassionately related to others. My clients were my very best teachers and I have deep gratitude for the privilege of knowing them in truth. Theirs were the beautiful songs of the human soul.

Surprisingly, I had no idea of the usefulness of my dissertation or what had happened in Construct Theory until Beverly Walker and Fay Fransella contacted me just several years ago. My work, I was told, had been cited in over 1,000 research studies and was known internationally! Astonishing! I had listed many implications for further research in my dissertation and I had also compiled a private list of 20 really interesting studies that I wanted to complete before others did.

Sadly, I no longer have that list and can't remember what was on it. That was 44 years ago.

One idea that I thought was most important, however, came from my careful observations about what intrinsic standards clients use to make decisions. That is, when laddering up their decision matrix, people eventually came to a standard that is an end in itself, not a means to an end. These standards are at the highest levels of significance. These are the constructs that modulate our construing and our very life. They are the Way of Life constructs that define us as persons. I have identified four such intrinsic standards: 1. Hedonic; pleasure vs. pain. 2. Prudential; regard for one's own self interest, pleasurable or not. 3. Ethical; non-harmfulness, right vs. wrong in moral conduct. 4. Aesthetics; the standards of fittingness and appropriateness, e.g. truth, beauty, and goodness.

What is of interest in deeply understanding people is what are the relative weights in context that an individual gives to these Way of Life standards? For example, is the person primarily, in a given context, a seeker of pleasurable feelings, an exploiter, a moralist, an artist, a truth seeker? Most people make decisions based on how it makes them feel – hedonism, and are, therefore, subject to the vagaries of emotional conditioning. The third and fourth intrinsic standards have primarily characterized my own life. It is my ardent hope that someone will investigate the richness of these vital Way of Life intrinsic standards. I regret that I did not – on those rare occasions in which I indulge in regrets!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Dennis Hinkle* received his PhD in 1965 from Ohio State University. He studied with George A. Kelly from 1960 to 1965, then followed him to Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, where he remained until Kelly's death in 1967. Dennis taught doctoral level psychology at several universities until 1975 when he established an independent practice in the San Francisco Bay area. Her was married for 20 years and fathered three sons. He is blissfully retired with his former graduate student and partner of 36 years. His male partner is also a clinical psychologist.

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