PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS
AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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An important issue in personality is the relationship between the life style of an individual, including his outlook, and his objective characteristics or characteristics of his situation. Certainly it would seem that the way an individual chooses to construe his environment and his place in it should be related to his own characteristics. Thus, a handsome person might be expected to have quite a different view of the world than one who is homely.

In his personality theory Kelly (2) made the "personal construct" the prime variable for the understanding of personality, but as the writer has pointed out before (4), the implications of personal constructs for behavior are only vaguely specified. Thus, if a given individual tends to construe people as "intelligent-unintelligent," we are likely to be uncertain why that particular characteristic is important to him and uncertain about the predictions which might be made to his own behavior, e.g., in intellectual tasks.

The purpose of this paper is to present some findings relating three types of personal constructs to seemingly congruent personal characteristics, in the hope of shedding some light on the "dynamics" of personal constructs.

Limitations on the study of personal constructs are that one cannot be certain that two individuals even when using the same verbal level are using the same construct. However, some evidence (3) suggests that constructs are at least minimally communicable by their labels and that one can assume some comparability in constructs of the same label. But it is not easy to find constructs common to a large proportion of a group, and for which other congruent information is available. In the group used here, student nurses, preliminary analyses suggested three "common" constructs, fortunately all very different from each other. These are (using the writer's summary labels): intelligent-unintelligent, anxious-nonanxious, and friendly-unfriendly.

METHOD

Two classes of student nurses provided all the data reported in this study. One class (Sample 1) had an enrollment of 60, with 57 students providing data, the other class (Sample 2), 75, with 67 providing data. They all were high school

graduates and in their first year of nurse's training. A few had had one year of college.

On a voluntary basis Ss were asked to participate in a data collecting effort on several occasions during the first year of study. For one reason or another not all Ss completed all the measures.

One of the measures was a Role Constructs Repertory Test (2). After the RCRT was completed the protocols from Sample 1 were examined by the writer to determine what, if any, common constructs might emerge. These were the three named above. Then Ss were categorized as using or not using the construct in question.

The construct *intelligent-unintelligent* was scored as being used if S used in her protocol such words as "intelligent," "smart," "gets good grades," "good student," or their semantic opposites.

The construct *anxious-nonanxious* was categorized as positive for such words as "anxious," "tense," "easily upset," "unstable," "emotionally unstable," etc. In some instances additional constructs were scored when both words together appeared to imply the dimension in question even though one was ambiguous, e.g., "moody-easy going," "emotional-relaxed."

The construct *friendly-unfriendly* was scored for all combinations of labels which suggested that people were being construed according to the quality of their interpersonal relationships, e.g., "friendly," "easy to get along with," "nice guy," "pleasant," "good personality," and "has many friends." It should be emphasized that it was the use of the entire construct which was scored.

Thus, approximately half the Ss employed one of the three constructs being studied, while the other half did not seem to use the construct for differentiating among people.

While many personal characteristics might have been chosen as relevant to the three constructs being studied, we decided on the following:

Use of the intelligence construct was related to the linguistic scores on the American Council of Education College Aptitude test, a requirement for admission to the nursing school.

As part of their research participation all Ss had taken the MMPI. The MMPI Pt scale was thus used as a measure of personal anxiety, which seemed to be justified by its relation to other anxiety measures (1). It was related to the use of the anxiety construct.

Finally, the Ss also participated in a sociometric nominating procedure of acquaintances to fit particular descriptions. Two of these, considered relevant here, were "most pleasant" and "least pleasant." Each girl was given a score consisting of the total number of nominations she received on each variable, and these scores were related to the employment of the "friendly" construct.

Because Kelly states that a personal construct represents a dichotomy within which movement may take place, it is not immediately evident just what relationship between the employment of a construct and a personal characteristic might be anticipated. In fact, it would be theoretically consistent if Ss using a particular construct differed in variance on another measure than the mean. On the dichotomy hypothesis, users of a construct might show a tendency toward extreme scores on the dimension in question.

Because the present analyses are opportunistic, it was thought important that they be cross-validated. Therefore, all analyses were performed initially on Sample 1 and then checked on Sample 2.

Because of irregular distributions on the different variables, all analyses are given in terms of χ^2.

RESULTS

The main results are reported in Table 1. For the intelligence construct there was no mean difference on either the ACE Linguistic or Quantitative score between Ss who used the construct and those who did not. However, when the Linguistic score distribution was divided into thirds, Ss of Sample 1 who used the intelligence construct were found less likely to have high L scores and somewhat

TABLE 1. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT OF CERTAIN
PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS AND CORRESPONDING PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Personal characteristic measuring instrument	Score	Personal construct			
		Sample 1 $(N=57)$[a]		Sample 2 $(N=67)$	
		non-use	use	non-use	use
		intelligent-unintelligent			
ACE aptitude test L score	70+	15	4	16	9
	60-69	6	11	8	14
	-59	12	9	10	10
	x^2	7.02; p<.05		3.57; p<.20	
		anxious-nonanxious			
MMPI Pt raw score	20+	2	13	2	12
	10-19	15	15	18	21
	-9	1	9	7	7
	x^2	8.66; p<.02		5.03; p<.10	
		friendly-unfriendly			
Nominating No. of nominations	10+	6	22	5	25
	-9	14	15	15	22
	x^2	4.52; p<.05		4.52; p<.05	

[a]For personal construct "anxious-nonanxious" $N = 55$ only.

more likely to have medium scores than were Ss who did not use the construct. The same findings were obtained in Sample 2 although at a lower level of confidence, an outcome to be expected since the findings for Sample 1 were somewhat adventitious. Similar results were obtained for the Quantitative scores; but even the .10 level of confidence was not reached for either sample. It appears then that

highly intelligent Ss are not especially likely to employ intelligence as a personal construct, while those at a middle level are more likely to do so. At the lowest level there is no differential tendency.

Regarding anxiety, Ss employing this construct were likely to obtain extreme rather than middle scores on the Pt scale. Unfortunately the results for Sample 2 confirm only that high anxious subjects will tend to employ the anxiety construct. What little bias there is at the low end of the scale tends to reverse the findings in Sample 1. Therefore, we must conclude tentatively only that personal anxiety disposes Ss toward employment of an anxiety construct.

As to "friendly," Ss employing this construct were more likely to receive a large number of nominations as "most pleasant," than Ss who do not. Findings from Sample 1 were fully substantiated by results from Sample 2. In neither sample was there any evidence that Ss employing the construct tended toward extreme scores. No significant differences were associated with the nominations for the description "least pleasant," although what slight differences did emerge in both samples were for a smaller number of "least pleasant" nominations of Ss who used the "friendly" construct. Hence, the results are weakly consistent with the tendency for such Ss to be regarded predominantly as pleasant by their peers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study investigated three constructs and found in each case significant relationships to congruent personal characteristics. But some confusion is introduced by the fact that the relationships were not entirely uniform. However, the constructs were picked in part because they are different in nature, and there is no necessity that the findings should be consistent from one to the next.

The intelligence construct involves a characteristic which is objectively determinable and uniformly valued. Persons near the middle of the range of intelligence may find it more important or meaningful to organize their impressions of others with respect to intelligence than persons at either end. Perhaps for the individual in the middle the construct is more salient and more often relevant to decisions he must make about others.

Anxiety is a more subjective and personally salient construct than intelligence. It is something directly experienced. Apparently the individual who experiences anxiety himself finds it more relevant

for categorizing others, perhaps because signs of anxiety in others become cues for personal anxiety.

Finally, regarding interpersonal pleasantness, the individual high in that trait appears to employ it in construing others. The hypothesis we hold here would be that individuals concerned about interpersonal relations and the impression they create are likely to be both pleasant themselves and inclined to view others in terms of their quality of interpersonal relations.

The findings indicate that personal constructs are relevant to the behavior of an individual, to the impression he makes on others, and to his own experiences. Personal characteristics and one's own life style should be congruent, and this investigation suggests that they are.

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