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# CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL ACTION

Ross Colquhoun and Brian Martin

**S**ocial movements are a regular feature of contemporary society. Some, such as the labour, environmental, feminist and antiracist movements, are well established, indeed institutionalised. Others, such as the peace and student movements, are more episodic. However, there are some other areas where there is a high level of social concern but no well recognised movement, such as privacy and noise. How can we better understand why there is a lot of social action on some issues and relatively little on others?

There has been a lot of research on social action and social movements, from various perspectives. The early studies of movements as symptoms of discontent have given way to more neutral or sympathetic treatments, for example in terms of resources that can be mobilised or political opportunities that exist.<sup>4</sup> Each of these perspectives has insights to offer. Here we examine a neglected feature of social action groups that can help to explain their presence, absence, persistence and dissipation: the creation and validation of meaning through interaction with like-minded people.

Most social movements start out as challenges to dominant ways of viewing the world. For most people, it is difficult to maintain perspectives

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that are at variance with everyone around them. A group of people with similar concerns provides a haven for nurturing a norm-challenging perspective.

Therefore, we expect to find that movements will thrive when there is a ready opportunity for groups of like-minded people to coalesce and to reinforce their perspectives. But when there are few opportunities for group formation around an issue, the development of a movement will be inhibited.

In the next section, we summarise ideas from personal construct psychology and what they suggest about the importance of groups in reinforcing ways of perceiving the world. Then we examine a number of arenas where social action seems warranted, contrasting those where social movements are well established and where they are absent. Opportunities for forming groups and thereby providing spaces for reinforcing constructs that challenge societal norms seem to be highly important for explaining why social action occurs much more in some areas than others.

### **Construct psychology**

There are various social and psychological theories which can be used to provide understanding group behaviour, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. In this paper we seek to gain insights from one particular theory: personal construct psychology.

George Kelly is the person credited with developing and elaborating personal construct psychology.<sup>2</sup> This is a theory of personality. Its basic premise is that each personality is unique because of the development of a range of personal constructs or meanings which comprise each person's reality based on their unique experience of the world. A "construct" can be thought of as a concept or idea that a person uses to make sense of the world. Kelly describes (1) a process by which an individual understands the world by use of a hierarchy of constructs formed by comparison of past events and which constitute the individual's unique reality, (2) a process of validation of these personal constructs and (3) a process of elaboration of constructs to account for new experience.

The process of validation is especially important. Kelly defines validation as "the compatibility (subjectively construed) between one's prediction and the outcome" observed.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he states that validation refers solely to the verification of a prediction, even if the prediction foreshadowed unpleasant consequences. In other words, it is not about the fulfilment of some need, but whether a person's predictions were construed as accurate or not. He proposes that in the face of invalidation people either experience emotional distress (anxiety, hostility, etc.) or else they alter their constructs to meet the perceived reality: "a person's construct system varies" as successive experiences are compared.<sup>4</sup>

Kelly's theory gives prominence to the prediction of events for validation to occur and the scientific analysis and measurement of constructs and personal meanings, thus posing the notion that a true meaning can be found.<sup>5</sup> Historically, personal construct psychology, in common with many other theories of personality, has focussed on individual behaviour, rather than group behaviour. In contrast, here we give more weight to affirmation by interaction with people. Interaction with other people seems to provide the most important source of comparison in the construction of subjective realities, and this process is mutual.

Most behaviour is not likely to bring about noticeable change in the world other than feedback from others, of which the most influential is feedback from those who are trusted. Following from this idea comes a third alternative for individuals to deal with invalidation: they can find people who share similar constructs. They can find validation from these people. Kelly, by not considering this response to invalidation of a person's constructs, neglects to fully explain the sociological dimension of shared constructs, particularly those representing group norms, including those not in accord with a rational view of a situation, but which continue to be adhered to by that group. Thus, validation of personal constructs or perceptions by the group and the social construction of those constructs describes the central motivating factor for individuals and explains the social dimension of group behaviour.

The key question Kelly addresses is how we establish and then maintain a stable personality in the face of an infinite range of possible experiences. Kelly suggests we find stability by continually testing constructs against our

experience and then finding validation by judging how well they allow us to predict the future. Consequently each individual's construct system is limited to a greater or lesser extent. It seems to follow that to maintain some stability the person needs to manipulate their environment, or at least limit the likelihood of receiving invalidating feedback. This is most often achieved through social interaction. As people tend to interact in groups where they can rely on some consistent validation, there is a tendency toward stability within groups in terms of membership and the shared meanings of the group. Group instability results when constructs are no longer validated or when other constructs, which conflict with those of the members, are instead validated.

Kelly's theory is often declared to be a cognitive theory of personality with its emphasis on the ability of people to accurately predict events. While the basic process may be cognitive, the emotional force of validation is the most potent force for stability. When we receive validation for constructs, positive emotions result and hence the group has the potential to reinforce positive feelings if constructs are shared. This does not mean that all constructs are shared, but that the group tends to validate those constructs which the person has brought to the group. A person may have a set of constructs for which they do not seek validation in one group, but from another. A hierarchy of constructs not only exists within the person, but also in terms of which constructs are validated in which setting. The group validating the most important constructs tends to be the stronger source of positive feelings for the person and this is reflected in the stability, cohesion and longevity of the group. The strength of allegiance to the group depends on the essential nature of the constructs which are validated.

Individuals may share a range of constructs, even contradictory constructs, with different groups in different circumstances. Some constructs are widely shared and are of fundamental importance to a person's image of themselves. Kelly referred to these as 'core constructs.' Many of these are met within the social context in which people live and to the extent they accept the prevailing social norms. Feminist groups often share deeply personal meanings, which are at odds with accepted norms, even though other groups may validate other constructs which give meaning at another level. At other times only some constructs, particularly those which are held at cognitive level, are less fundamentally important to a person's concept of self and therefore require less validation or reinforcement apart

from those of the culture. These may be easily change or abandoned, particularly in the face of challenges to 'core constructs.'

The most important factor in the stability of the constructs that a group validates is the level of emotional response that is elicited by this process. For example, a woman who has been abused as a child may find enormous emotional support within a feminist group to the point of needing that validation to prevent personality disintegration. On the other hand, a person may join a peace group and be involved in events which require a low level of commitment and experience positive feelings. However, the threat of legal penalty or loss of job through such involvement may produce an over-riding sense of anxiety, meaning the validation by the peace group would be unable to produce the sort of loyalty that the woman may feel to the feminist group.

Before we consider in more detail the application of personal construct theory to the cohesion and stability and therefore the effectiveness of groups, it may be useful to look at other theories of personality and personal interaction. Despite differences in terminology and emphases we can discern similarities in theories which allow us to apply lessons to the role of social action groups and to develop practical strategies to improve the effectiveness of these groups.

### **Other theories of human behaviour**

It is useful to contrast personal construct theory with humanistic psychology, which emphasises the satisfaction of needs. Needs are manifest by a person's emotional response and the satisfaction of needs is signalled by emotional release. To adequately explain the psychology of social action groups we need to understand threats to the satisfaction of needs, how they are brought to bear and the accompanying stress that people experience.

Stress is seen by humanistic psychologists as physiological response to either trauma or unrelenting pressure and the denial of needs, and is associated with anger, frustration, anxiety, despair and depression. It is related to a sense of lack of control and lowered self-esteem. The needs which have been identified as being essential to a person's well being and which explain human behaviour include survival (including shelter and food),

physical safety, self-esteem, acceptance, aesthetic expression and self-actualisation,<sup>6</sup> response, security, recognition, stimulation, distributive justice, meaning, rationality and a sense of control of the physical and social environment.<sup>7</sup>

While some theorists maintain that these needs are universal, it is also clear that they vary between individuals and groups in response to cultural influences. Galtung felt that the denial of needs would lead to personal and/or social dysfunction. He described four categories of human needs: survival, well-being, identity and, most importantly in this context, freedom needs.<sup>8</sup> For people who engage in social action the denial of needs can occur two ways. Firstly, when people are subject to injustice or oppression certain needs are not being met, and seeking to have them met comes to dominate their behaviour. On the other hand, attempting to have those needs satisfied in the face of oppression may similarly create anxiety and stress because other needs are threatened, for example personal safety. Rogers' person-centred therapy emphasises the individual's ability to choose and capacity for growth. To facilitate growth and the innate capacity of people to find solutions, Rogers proposes that the aim of therapy is to create a therapeutic alliance based on mutual responsibility, unconditional positive regard, empathy, congruence and acceptance. This process of validation is the key to sustaining people who have found it difficult to come to terms with stress in their environment.<sup>9</sup>

From psychology, family systems theory has much to say about the influence of groups on individual behaviour. Here we attempt to integrate personal construct and family systems theories to explain the stability and cohesion of social institutions and cultural groupings. Family systems theory is very much concerned with the concept of homeostasis (stability seeking) and the difficulty of individuals changing without an associated change occurring within the system. It is also concerned with the construction of boundaries which either allow free flow into other social worlds or else constrain the members with the effect that they find validation almost solely within the family. Dysfunctional families tend toward stability with rigid boundaries and promote an environment in which abuse can flourish. Family system theory neglects to explain the mechanism for this situation, especially why individuals stay in a sick system.

Personal construct theory is very much concerned with issues of dependency (the need for validation) and poses the concept of the person needing to receive validation from the environment in order to predict their future in spite of being stuck in a dysfunctional system.<sup>10</sup> This process of testing the immediate environment, seeking validation while resisting invalidation, and using this information to know how to act in similar situations posits the notion of the individual resistant to change and yet able to actively process information from the environment to calculate an appropriate response to changing circumstances. By emphasising the validation process we attempt to extend the theories of personal constructivism to explain the importance of the group and the social context in the satisfaction of needs and to make predictions about the effective functioning of groups, whether they be families or formal organisations. This also helps to explain how socially constructed knowledge comes to be incorporated into the construct system of the individual.

For many years social psychologists have sought to explain the behaviour of individuals acting in groups. While much of the research has been conducted in the laboratory, ignoring the social context, the usefulness of these findings has been questioned because of a tendency toward mechanistic positivism. Even the new paradigm within social psychology, as described by Parker,<sup>11</sup> is seen as a paradoxical attempt to find explanations in structuralist accounts of social action that disavow human intention combined with individualistic "cognitive templates" that determine subjective responses. Nevertheless, researchers from social psychology have provided a number of descriptions of human behaviour as people interact in groups and of how behaviour changes with changes in attitude and the immediate environment. These descriptions are of people engaged in quasi-experimental conditions, either observational studies or where treatment conditions are controlled in the laboratory. They often employ statistical techniques to describe tendencies toward certain types of behaviour.

Social psychologists rarely seek to find explanations of behaviour in terms of the social construction of knowledge and culturally learned behaviour. We attempt to apply these theories of behaviour and attitude change to social change. An analysis of these descriptions is probably useful in providing a basis for the tactical planning of social change activism.

Studies have described a range of behaviours including: less inclination of individuals to act alone within the group; less inclination to trust their own judgement; decision-making in groups which tends toward more conservative or risky decisions than would be made by those individuals acting alone; greater compliance to majority will; less sense of personal responsibility for decisions made by the group; people in groups being less individually productive except when they are being evaluated; and the development of a group identity that tends to exclude and devalue members of "out-groups." Application of these lab-inspired concepts to actual social actions, whether or not they prove adequate explanations of human behaviour, can provide a starting point for the development of practical strategies. While there has been much discussion of social change there have been few attempts to turn this into meaningful strategies to not only bring about change, but to suggest ways of maintaining group integrity and effectiveness to resist disintegration, often in the face of oppression, and to achieve equitable social goals.

Although our focus here is on the role of groups in the validation of constructs, it is worth mentioning that validation can and does occur in other ways, including through individual interactions and networks, reading (movement newsletters play a crucial role) and, in a few cases, independent thinking. However, the role of groups is an especially powerful method of validation. Depending on past experience and their ability to predict the likely response, individuals will tend to test new ideas within a trusted group to find validation. Either the group validates the new construct or, if not, the person is left to elaborate or change the construct, to seek to change the views of the group or to move to another group.

While it seems plausible that validation of constructs is an important function of social action groups, examining construct validation in practice is quite an ambitious project. Here we pursue a more modest aim: to use the personal construct model to help explain the presence and persistence of groups in several different arenas. We first look briefly at the second-wave feminist movement, where construct formation and validation initially played a crucial role. Then we look at whistleblowers, as a subset of worker activism, where construct validation is vital to personal survival but seldom leads to social action. Finally, we mention several areas where there are few support or action groups, though arguably they are needed.

Explaining the relative lack of action in these areas appears to require something in addition to construct theory.

### **Women's consciousness-raising groups**

Back in the 1950s in the western world, women had formal political equality but were systematically oppressed. They were not expected to join prestigious occupations such as law, medicine or science and certainly not to rise to the top. Many occupations were largely restricted to men, from politics to truck driving. Sexual harassment was rife. Most women were expected to become obedient wives and full-time mothers. Although there were some dissenting voices, it was the formation of groups that led to real change.

The oppression of women fundamentally affected individuals, resulting in some level of anxiety and distress and impinged upon 'core constructs' of self-worth. The story of feminism is in the sharing of these feelings and finding validation by comparison with the stories of others and in that finding the courage to actively seek change. The history of women seeking to bring about change was one of persecution and the labelling of these women as emotionally unstable and mentally ill. Individual women who sought help struck the same attitudes, compounding their existing feelings of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and high anxiety. In the face of values held to be intrinsic to women, any attempt to be heard required them to confront the prospect that what they were saying was *prima facie* lacking in reason, rationality and force.<sup>12</sup> Without the support of a group, the risk to individuals that they would suffer disintegration of personality was a testament to their courage.

The standard story is that in New Left groups in the 1960s, young female activists were outraged by the discrepancy between rhetoric about equality and liberation and the reality of women's subordination in the groups. They began to discuss their experiences, a process that laid the foundation for the organisations and initiatives of the feminist movement. It is widely acknowledged that women's consciousness-raising groups played a vital role in the early years of the movement. These groups provided havens for women to express their complaints, concerns and aspirations, away from the constant reinforcement of patriarchy in the rest of their lives.<sup>13</sup>

It is when a group's ideas are strongly at variance with those in the wider society that group validation of constructs is likely to be most important. The early interactions of women in the New Left and subsequently thousands of women's consciousness-raising groups provided validation of constructs that were not reinforced elsewhere.

However, not so many years later, ideas about women's abilities, power, entitlements and equality became standard fare in workplaces, politics and popular culture, though still heavily contested. As a result, opportunities for validating feminist constructs became far more widely accessible in everyday life. Hence there was less need for consciousness-raising groups to validate feminist constructs - and indeed such groups were never again so common as in the early years of the movement. On the other hand, feminist groups remain important foundations for feminist action, especially that grounded in radical feminist perspectives, since most public discourse reflects liberal feminist assumptions.

### Workers

In the industrial revolution, workers fresh from the countryside were thrown together in newly created factories, often in horrific conditions. Working together provided workers ample opportunities to interact and reinforce critical constructs, so it is not surprising that labour became the prototype for other social movements, including early radicalism in the face of ruthless attacks from employers, legitimisation of the movement through state recognition and regulation, and continuing struggles over directions, goals and the exercise of power.

The issues dealt with most standardly by trade unions are wages and conditions. These are two areas where workers have common interests and where validation of constructs different from management is straightforward. However, once unions are formed, they lay the basis for other sorts of actions that not so immediately connected to the workplace experience. For example, unions have taken stands on issues of free speech, peace and military repression, not to mention the rights of workers in other industries and countries. Consider, for example, 'green bans' - trade union bans on work that would be environmentally damaging - that were pioneered in Sydney in the early 1970s. The key initiative came

from leadership of the New South Wales branch of the Builders Labourers Federation, among whom a commitment to direct action, grassroots participation and social concern enabled a new form of social action.<sup>14</sup> Once the idea of green bans was nurtured in this union, the example set by green bans was taken up by many trade unions elsewhere: the idea of green bans obtained wider validation, permitting its uptake by unions without the special conditions in Sydney around 1970.

Whistleblowing is a form of action in the workplace for which validation of constructs is very difficult. The prototypical whistleblower is a worker who speaks out about a problem such as corruption or hazards to the public, making a report to superiors and, if this doesn't bring about change, to officials inside or outside the organisation. Most whistleblowers act individually, without support from a peer group. For their trouble, they commonly suffer reprisals such as ostracism, harassment, threats, demotion, punitive transfer, referral to psychiatrists, dismissal and blacklisting.<sup>15</sup> The blame is placed entirely on the whistleblower. They are told, for example, that their job performance is inadequate or that they are the cause of conflicts at work. The attacks on them are justified by these alleged deficiencies.

Many who speak out about problems at work did not set out to be whistleblowers. Rather, they observed a problem that needs attention and reported it, fully expecting that superiors would act to investigate and fix the problem. They are devastated when, instead, they are attacked for trying to do the right thing. The withdrawal of peer support is particularly damaging. The typical whistleblower receives little validation and may end up believing that their own behaviour is the problem.

Severe persecution and invalidation can be construed as an attack on the 'core constructs' or beliefs of the whistleblower. Disintegration of the self, an unravelling of personality, can cause deep emotional distress and the possibility of mental disturbance is real. The whistleblower becomes very vulnerable to doubts being raised about their sanity and as the assault on their 'core constructs' becomes more intense there is a risk to their ability to remain rational and coherent.<sup>16</sup> Authorities know this and can play on this susceptibility. The validation of their constructs within a group is not only important in achieving change, but also in preserving their sanity.

It is tremendously empowering for these workers when they are brought into contact with a perspective that explains what happened to them in terms of a dynamic of whistleblowing and reprisals. This can occur by reading an article or talking to a sympathetic friend or relative, but is most dramatic in whistleblower groups in which members can describe their experiences to others who have been through it themselves. New members often find it is the first time that anyone has “really understood” what they have gone through. A whistleblower support group thus provides validation of empowering constructs in a way that is virtually impossible in the workplace.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1990s, the most well-established whistleblower support groups, organised and composed primarily of whistleblowers, were in Australia and Britain, namely the groups Whistleblowers Australia and Freedom to Care.<sup>18</sup> The experiences in these groups show both the potential and challenge in moving from individual whistleblower support to collective action. Whistleblowers come from every occupation, including police, teachers, government bureaucrats, private sector employees, scientists and clergy. They are divided by occupation, organisation, political perspective and a host of other factors. What most of them have in common is being the victim of reprisals and finding that formal avenues for appeal are usually unhelpful.

While the role of whistleblower groups in validating constructs - such as that speaking out is a responsible action and that attacks are unjustified reprisals - is tremendously valuable, it also has limitations. If a whistleblower's case has been resolved or at least pursued as far as possible, then it is often time to “move on.” Possible post-whistleblower roles include providing support for other whistleblowers (as some veteran group members do), joining an action group relevant to organisational reform, or taking up a new job or occupation. Staying in the whistleblower group can hold a person back from moving beyond the whistleblower experience, by repeatedly emphasising the pain of coming under attack, being disbelieved and unsupported, and being resentful of those who are perceived as being responsible.

By the same token, whistleblower groups are not likely to become action groups. Too many members are struggling to overcome their personal

traumas and pursuing their own struggles with bureaucracies for energies to be directed outwards at a common target. In this case, the main function of the group is mutual support rather than action, though some members may undertake action.

To generalise the lesson from whistleblower organisations, we can say that groups, by validating ways of perceiving the world that challenge life outside the group, both enable members to resist dominant realities but risk holding them in a limited mode of resistance.

### **When groups are absent**

The idea that social movement groups help to validate ways of perceiving the world that challenge conventional views seems reasonable enough when applied to the feminist movement, the labour movement and other new and established movements. But what about areas where there is no movement and hardly any groups?

Consider, for example, television. From the point of view of social activists, or even just concerned citizens, there are many negative aspects of television. Viewers are recipients of images created by others. While viewers can interpret images in various ways, they seldom play any role in creating the images. In that sense, viewers are passive. Television is not an interactive medium: the screen does not respond to anything the viewer says or does. This can be seen as training for a similar passivity to current affairs, namely viewing them, perhaps discussing them, but not engaging with them as a participant.

There are many other disadvantages of television from an activist viewpoint. The medium is undemocratic, in that a few people control messages that go out to many. Television images are chosen and constructed by producers, editors, journalists and advertisers, but the artificiality of the result is seldom appreciated by viewers. (An inkling of this artificiality is gained when participating in a public protest and then watching what is shown on the screen about it.) Television news emphasises personalities, violence, conflict and images and neglects quiet personal contemplation, environmental values and collective processes of nonviolent social change. Watching television is physically undemanding, contributing to a reduction

in fitness. It also takes up an enormous amount of time, thereby reducing opportunities for participating in groups.

We do not intend to present a full critique of television here.<sup>19</sup> Also, television serves some valuable purposes for activists. Rather, our aim is to point out that there has long been ample evidence of the damaging sides of television, enough to justify formation of social action groups against television as a pervasive form of consumption.

However, the reality is that there is no organised movement against television. The most concerted action has been over the content of television, such as violence or advertising, but this falls far short of being a general critique. There have been a few groups, such as the Society for the Eradication of Television, but these have involved small numbers. By and large, it can be said that opposition to television has largely been carried out by individuals. There have not been groups to provide validation of television-challenging constructs, nor even groups for those cutting down on viewing, such as Television Watchers Anonymous.

Why not? There are various explanations. One is that television infiltrated everyday life before its disadvantages became obvious. Another is that television viewing seems to be an individual choice, so that collective opposition does not seem as obvious as it does in the case of the systemic problems of patriarchy, exploitation of workers or destruction of the environment. Yet another explanation is that producers of television, catering for a wide variety of tastes in order to gain audiences, have defused fundamental dissent. The explanation is of secondary interest here. Our main point is that in the absence of television protest groups, there is no opportunity for regularly validating television-challenging perspectives.

Not everyone will agree that an anti-television movement is warranted. But there are other examples. There is widespread public concern about surveillance and attacks on privacy, but there is little privacy activism at a grassroots level.<sup>20</sup> Many activists are seriously hampered by defamation suits and other legal actions,<sup>21</sup> but there is no coordinated movement to challenge defamation laws.

Another example is the car. A social movement against the car could

easily be justified on the basis of the number of people killed and injured on the roads, by the massive resource and environmental cost of road transport, or by the social inequality associated with the car.<sup>22</sup> Compared to other environmental and health issues that have stimulated enormous levels of activism, resistance to the car has been relatively low. A couple of the areas of challenge show the importance of groups. One area is antifreeway protests, often relying on local community solidarity as the foundation for organising. Another is cycling protests, relying on the experience of cycling in groups as a unifying factor. In both cases, it is plausible that validation of constructs through collective endeavour is important.

## Conclusion

Personal construct theory helps to explain the importance of groups in social activism. Whether they are feminist consciousness-raising groups, affinity groups for nonviolent action, trade unions, groups of whistleblowers or cavalcades of cyclists, groups provide a place where ways of understanding the world can be created and validated. This is relevant in all walks of life, from boardrooms to school yards, but is especially important when groups aim to challenge dominant ways of thinking and acting.

We have aimed to give an overview of the relevance of personal construct theory to social action groups. The following points are preliminary insights.

- It is worthwhile for groups to pay attention to the construction of meaning and the validation of personal and group meanings and to provide regular opportunities for this to occur.
- In the development of a social movement, safe opportunities to share ideas in groups are especially important. Later, as the ideas become more widely accepted, the role of groups in consciousness raising is less vital, though still important.
- By providing a safe haven for expressing nonstandard ways of viewing the world, groups of people with common experiences and perceptions can provide an essential psychological support function that cannot readily be replicated by therapists, human services or other formal agencies or processes.
- Some groups, such as whistleblower support groups, empower



members by providing a way of understanding experiences but at the same time may limit some members' personal growth by reinforcing ways of thinking most relevant to new members.

Little or no organised social action occurs in a number of areas where, arguably, it is needed. Without groups, there is less opportunity to build challenging perspectives. One possible way to overcome this problem is for existing groups to branch out into new areas, such as when environmental groups tackle genetic engineering.

By being aware of the importance of constructs and their validation, social action groups may be able to become more effective in attracting and holding members and in making effective interventions. In the absence of trusted validation and in the face of threats to the 'core constructs' of individuals, there is the possibility of mental disturbance and personality disintegration. The isolated individual is in danger of being rendered dysfunctional, branded as irrational and labelled insane or a criminal when they challenge the norms of a society, even in the face of obvious injustice and oppression. Early feminists, labour activists and whistleblowers are familiar with this process. Despite the overwhelming evidence supporting their causes, people who speak out against the influence of television and the impact of the car on our environment may find themselves similarly isolated and their sanity questioned. The role of the group in protecting individuals and in bringing about change is fundamental. The more we can understand the essential role of groups in validating the constructs of the people who comprise these groups the more effective they will be to bring about social change.

Often the fundamental importance of the group is underestimated. When most people adhere to social norms, their senses of self - their 'core constructs' - are not threatened but reinforced by the prevailing values of the society at large. It is only when we consider the plight of individuals who find their constructs are violated or find themselves victims of persecution that the importance of the group to human functioning is realised. We are after all social beings and without validation we cease to function effectively, not only to create change, but to preserve our personal integrity. The pressure on people to conform is very strong. It is a rare individual who risks their safety to oppose injustice and oppression. The most sensible way to do this is with the support of a group.

## Footnotes

1. C. A. Rootes, "Theory of social movements: theory for social movements?" *Philosophy and Social Action*, Vol. 16, No. 4, October-December 1990, pp. 5-17.
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9. Carl R. Rogers, *Client-centered therapy: its current practice, implications, and theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).
10. While the person-centred therapy developed by Carl Rogers rests very much on a concept of validation (what he called unconditional positive regard) and respect for the person's unique concept of self and truth, the concept is quite different for Kelly as validation was solely concerned with the accuracy of predictions.
11. Parker, *op. cit.*
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18. Whistleblowers Australia, [http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/contacts/au\\_wba/](http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/dissent/contacts/au_wba/); Freedom to Care, <http://www.freedomtocare.org/>.
19. Two classic treatments are Jerry Mander, *Four arguments for the elimination of television* (New York: William Morrow, 1978); Marie Winn, *The plug-in drug* (New York: Viking, 1977).
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21. Fiona J. L. Donson, *Legal intimidation: a SLAPP in the face of democracy* (London: Free Association Books, 2000); George W. Pring and Penelope Canan, *SLAPPs: getting sued for speaking out* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). Pring and Canan have played a key role in supporting resistance to legal attacks on activists, but this has not led to a movement of any significance.
22. Some early works include Alisdair Aird, *The automotive nightmare* (London: Arrow, 1974); Terrence Bendixson, *Instead of cars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1974); James J. Flink, *The car culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).