Using a Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT) with people who stalk

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: Using a Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT) with people who stalk

ABSTRACT:

This manuscript aims to provide instructions on how to implement an adapted version of the standard Repertory Grid Technique (the VARGT). The purpose of which is to provide practitioners with a tool which enables active engagement by participants in research and clinical practice. This tool has been utilised effectively with people convicted of stalking offences.

Repertory grids, developed from Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (1955), had never been utilised with those who stalk, either clinically or in a research context. Visual and kinaesthetic adaptations were made to standard RGT procedures (see Grice, 2002; Tan and Hunter, 2002), for use in a mixed methods research study (see Wheatley, 2019, p. 77) due to expected challenges in engaging with this group. This manuscript presents theoretical underpinnings and step-by-step instructions for practical application.

The VARGT is easy to administer and produces rich data, in both qualitative and quantitative formats. This adapted approach encourages active participation and an interpreted therapeutic collaboration (see Wheatley, Winder, and Kuss, in press).

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS__(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This novel technique has engaged men convicted of stalking offences collaboratively in research activities and showed potential for its use as a clinical tool. This instructional technical paper allows the technique to be replicated.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This novel technique has engaged men convicted of stalking offences collaboratively in research activities and showed potential for its use as a clinical tool. This instructional technical paper allows the technique to be replicated.

Using a Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT)

with people who stalk

Abstract

Purpose

This manuscript aims to provide instructions on how to implement an adapted version of the standard Repertory Grid Technique (the VARGT). The purpose of which is to provide practitioners with a tool which enables active engagement by participants in research and clinical practice. This tool has been utilised effectively with people convicted of stalking offences.

Approach

Repertory grids, developed from Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (1955), had never been utilised with those who stalk, either clinically or in a research context. Visual and kinaesthetic adaptations were made to standard RGT procedures (see Grice, 2002; Tan and Hunter, 2002), for use in a mixed methods research study (see Wheatley, 2019, p. 77) due to expected challenges in engaging with this group. This manuscript presents theoretical underpinnings and step-by-step instructions for practical application.

Findings

The VARGT is easy to administer and produces rich data, in both qualitative and quantitative formats. This adapted approach encourages active participation and an interpreted therapeutic collaboration (see Wheatley, Winder, and Kuss, in press).

Originality/value

This novel technique has engaged men convicted of stalking offences collaboratively in research activities and showed potential for its use as a clinical tool. This instructional technical paper allows the technique to be replicated.

Key words   Repertory grids; Stalkers; Stalking; Stalking offenders; Adapted repertory grids

Article classification   Technical practice paper

Introduction

This manuscript provides a detailed description of the visual and kinaesthetic adaptations made to the standard Repertory Grid Technique (RGT: Winter, 2003). It outlines how to administer the Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT) referencing the originating mixed methods research study for greater context. It describes the VARGT procedures, incorporating transcript examples, and provides participant and practitioner-researcher observations to support a case for its utility as a meaningful research and clinical engagement tool. It establishes the novel use of the VARGT as a robust research tool and introduces its value as an engagement-enhancing technique. This manuscript constitutes a complete instructional and replicable guide to the administration of the VARGT, intending to allow further examination of its utility across client groups. This manuscript herein refers to practitioners for brevity, intended to incorporate both researchers and clinicians.

The RGT

The original technique generally consists of a practitioner-led interview, and unilateral paper-based exercise. The practitioner records the participant's rating of elements against contract poles by noting the assigned numbers onto a grid, or table, which usually identifies the elements across the top and constructs down the side. The elements, constructs and ratings are subsequently inputted into a computer software package for statistical analysis. The outcomes of this can be used to inform clinical case formulations and research studies. The traditional repertory grid technique therefore provides interpretative accessibility primarily to the experienced RGT practitioner. This limits participant engagement, empowerment and collaborative working. Notwithstanding, the use of the RGT as a clinical and research tool is well-established (i.e., Blagden, Winder, Gregson and Thorne, 2014; Faccio, Castiglioni and Bell, 2012; Leach, Freshwater, Aldridge and Sunderland, 2001; Mason, 2008; Turpin, Dallos, Owen and Thomas, 2009; Winter, 2003). Originally used in clinical practice (Winter, 1992), it can differ greatly from objective and projective forensic psychology assessments (Horley, 2008). This technique has been applied in research within forensic practice and has been coupled with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within social sciences research (e.g., Blagden *et al.*, 2014; Yorke and Dallos, 2015). It has also been utilised for measuring psychological change following treatment (e.g., Mason, 2008), and to provide rich offence-focussed case formulations for individuals with learning disability (see Kitson-Boyce, Blagden, Winder and Dillon, 2018; Mason, 2003).

Derived from Personal Construct Theory (PCT; Kelly, 1955), the RGT provides an approach to research and practice that has a constructivist phenomenological outlook. That is, it disputes the concept of an objective reality in any one situation in respect of the human experience. Kelly's PCT proposes that it is the meaning we uniquely assign to events, not the event itself, which influences our responses, and this meaning (determining subjective reality) is largely predisposed by previous experiences (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1994). The constant processing of human experiences, structures, and re-structures, our personal theories. Kelly refers to *'man-the-scientist'* in this respect, given individuals build a template that underpins future meaning-making (1955: 4), manifesting on all levels (cognitive, emotional and behavioural). The template has the ability to mask, or highlight, aspects of our experiences of situations (Banister *et al.*, 1994), making us prone to believe that which supports our worldview. Our idiosyncratic experiential journeys and the repertoire of meanings we assign accumulate, reinforce and sometimes challenge our developing personal theories. The RGT has been a popular methodology, which enables practitioners to learn about others' subjective and contextual interpretations of life experiences at that given time point (Neimeyer, Bowman and Saferstein, 2005). It provides a vehicle for eliciting the templates which further interpretations of situations may be based upon (Tan and Hunter, 2002). This enables analysis of subjective meaning and idiosyncratic belief systems (Turpin *et al.*, 2009). The technique essentially builds and defines an accessible framework of how the participant views that contextual part of their experiential world on their terms, which rest on their personal repertoire (Jankowicz, 2004). Distinct from the traditional RGT, the VARGT includes the participant in gaining a contemporaneous understanding of their own repertory grid, which through visual display shows them the repertoire of values and expectations from which they interpret and predict their social world.

The RGT comprises an intricate sorting exercise (Neimeyer *et al.*, 2005), requiring skill and experience, however, once familiar the procedures are easy to adapt to ensure the user's objectives may be met more precisely (Easterby–Smith, 1980; Winter, 2003). There is no standard repertory grid method and the technique has been modified many times since its inception (Grice, 2002). Notwithstanding, it must maintain three key components, which are described later within this manuscript: the *elements*, the *constructs*, and a *linking mechanism* between the constructs to elements, such as rating (Easterby–Smith, 1980). Elements are people, activities or roles related to the topic of study (Tan and Hunter, 2002), whilst constructs are qualities that people attribute to those elements (Easterby-Smith, 1980). The linking mechanism commonly used is rating; that is, each element is numerically rated against construct pole continuums. For example, if 1 is *Smart* and 7 is *Foolish*, with the middle ground

depicting the spectrum between the two, the participant might rate *Mother* as a 2. This would suggest the participant views *Mother* as quite smart. Given the outcomes of the RGT are not obvious from the procedure, it is deemed less susceptible to socially desirable responding (Rowe, 1976), and thus useful for exploring aspects of behaviours which are inherently undesirable (Mason, 2008). Furthermore, it is purported to be able to minimise interviewer bias in the quest to understand another person's actions (see Hare, Durand, Hendy and Wittkowski, 2012). These aspects will naturally make the RGT appealing to practitioners.

The VARGT

An empirical understanding of the subjective realities of those who stalk has been lacking, hence the originating study was designed to explore the experiences of those convicted of stalking (see Wheatley, 2019, p. 77). It aimed to provide a novel understanding of the functions of their behaviours, often deemed incomprehensible to the objective viewer. The utility of the RGT fitted the researcher's constructive alternativism epistemological position and these research aims. However, practitioners have noted challenges in establishing therapeutic relationships with people who stalk (e.g., Rosenfeld, Fava and Galietta, 2009), with perceived barriers including their strong sense of entitlement to the victim (Mackenzie and James, 2011), interpersonal skills deficits, rigid thinking and a lack of insightfulness (MacKenzie, McEwan, Pathé, James, Ogloff, and Mullen, 2009). Attempting to mitigate these engagement concerns and to reduce the reliance on verbal articulation of stalking functions, adaptations were made to the standard RGT administration to develop a visually transparent, kinaesthetic and collaborative tool. The VARGT also intended to reduce cognitive loading and was utilised to minimise psychological challenge, often resulting from researcher-led questioning around sensitive topics.

The fundamental RGT procedures described by Tan and Hunter (2002), Grice (2002), and Jankowicz (2004) were adopted to provide the basis from which the VARGT was developed. The VARGT aimed to provide an accessible and contemporaneous output for both researcher and participants to review. The VARGT specifically intended to enable a collaborative exploration of participant experiences of their own stalking behaviours in context of their social world in a non-direct, non-judgemental and non-threatening manner. The use of the VARGT actualised these intended objectives, producing rich and valuable data for analysis (see Wheatley, 2019, p. 77), in addition to producing unexpected therapeutic impact experiences (see Wheatley, Winder, and Kuss, in press). Given the established use

of the RGT with a range of clinical and forensic populations, and the benefits seen from the originating study, it is posited that the VARGT would be applicable to most client groups. It is contended that the VARGT would be favourable where participants may present with engagement issues related to shame, lack of insight, or a need for autonomy. As a tool it can assist in enhancing participant collaboration, practitioner transparency, and support the overall professional relationship.

Administering the VARGT

This section sets out the six steps for utilising the VARGT. These are: *Step 1. Preparing materials and interview space; Step 2. Introducing and choosing elements; Step 3. Eliciting constructs; Step 4. Rating the elements along the construct continuums; Step 5. Collaborative eyeball analysis;* and *Step 6. Applying statistical analyses.*

The total time taken to complete the VARGT within the originating study varied dependent on level of engagement but with the mean time of two hours. This included time for introductions, rapport building and an initial open question regarding their stalking conviction. This supports the suggestion by Easterby-Smith (1980) that if kept manageable with around ten elements and constructs each, the time taken to complete a grid would be two hours. This time did not include statistical analysis.

Step 1. Preparing materials and interview space

Materials include large visual grids as an overall template for the Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT). For example, two A1 sized grids that accommodate around five construct rows. Each separate row displays a rating continuum of 1-to-7 across the top. Figure 1 shows an example VARGT grid. Separate rating continuums for each construct row encourages the participant to rate the elements against each construct independently of previous ones and is less visually crowded. The grid layout ensures adequate space for element cards to be placed and for construct poles (i.e., *Smart - Foolish*) to be written either side of the continuum. Ten pre-prepared elements cards (i.e., *Victim*), which fit within the empty grid spaces, and can be coloured (for visual discrimination), are required. Marker pens are necessary for adding agreed constructs either side of the continuums, as are additional pens for adding in rated elements to the grids. An administration checklist is also useful, particularly when new to using this technique. Preparing the interview room is essential given the need to accommodate these materials, ensuring ergonomically appropriate seating and table space for writing onto the large grids. Ideally, a low stimulus, clean and relaxing room would be selected for

using the VARGT. It is important to ensure the participant understands the purpose of the VARGT, the topic of exploration and the need for the materials. Time for general rapport building is also recommended.

[Figure 1. Example VARGT grid]

Step 2. Introducing and choosing elements

To begin with, the practitioner spends time introducing the concept of elements. Elements are people, activities or roles related to the topic of study (Tan and Hunter, 2002). Then the participant is introduced to the elements by displaying the pre-prepared cards. Elements can be elicited from the participant, pertaining to the subject area, or supplied (Tan and Hunter, 2002). It is suggested that no fewer than six elements and no more than 12 are utilised to structure a repertory grid (Easterby-Smith, 1980). The choice of elements is crucial for appropriately contextualising the exercise in order to expose the related personal construct system of the participant. In the originating study the elements were supplied to reflect the focus of the study (supported by Easterby-Smith, 1980; Tan and Hunter, 2002). Table 1 identifies the specific elements chosen for the originating study contextual to its research objectives to explore participants' interpreted relational world and their stalking. It is advised to supply elements where comparison across homogenous sample responses is also intended (see Tan and Hunter, 2002).

[Table 1. Supplied elements for an example VARGT]

To ensure there is personal context the practitioner uses semi-structured interviewing to help personalize and define each element (Tan and Hunter, 2002), identifying specific people and key characteristics. For example, elicitation questions for more abstract elements, i.e. *Person I Like*, could include *"Think of someone you like… Who are they?", "Picture them... What are they like?"* If the participant finds an element difficult to define, it may be that they do not know them well enough to have made judgments and as such will find rating them against constructs difficult later too. The practitioner in this instance could elicit another element altogether (for example, if the participant doesn't know the *Offender Manager* very well as they are community-based professionals, but has had contact with the Offender Supervisor, an internally-based professional, then this could be a

7

comparable substitute). The practitioner could also elicit an entirely different element altogether as long as they fit with the subject matter.

Defining the elements may also include eliciting relevant contextual time points, for example in the originating study the *self-past* time point was whilst stalking. Selecting a contextual time point for other elements, for example *(alleged) victim,* was equally important where participants expressed the view that key characteristics for someone had changed over time. Discussions around finalising the time points can provoke interesting disclosures about perceived differences in characteristics such as, the *(alleged) victim* 'then' (time of offending) and 'now' (present day). Contemporaneous note taking of the element defining process as an aide memoire will assist the practitioner in re-focussing the participant regarding elements in subsequent rating activities, and also in adding contextual depth to the statistical analyses.

Step 3. Eliciting constructs

Constructs are qualities that people attribute to elements (i.e., identified people), and can be conceptualised as the values upon which the participants align and differentiate between people (Easterby-Smith, 1980). They tend to be bipolar and contrasting in nature (Tan and Hunter, 2002; Jankowicz, 2004), creating a continuum upon which individuals interpret others. The classical triadic method for construct elicitation was adopted in the originating study (also see Tan and Hunter, 2009). The VARGT therefore utilised pre-selected systematic triads of elements to ensure efficient coverage of all elements and to explore some specific relational aspects between elements of interest. For example, *Parent - Self-past - Stalker,* and, *Self-now - (Alleged) Victim - Person Don't Like.* Seven to ten triads is purported to be sufficient to elicit constructs and reach saturation (Reger, 1990).

Participants are visually presented with a triad (and later subsequent triads), using the pre-prepared cards, and asked which two are most alike, and different from the third. The unchosen card is moved out of view to allow focus. The practitioner then guides the participant through a 'laddering down' approach (Jankowicz, 2004) to ascertain the meaning of the constructs elicited from the triads, referred to as emergent poles. A number of personal constructs may emerge from the exploration of one triad using this approach. The practitioner might ask, *"What similar qualities do these two people have?"*, and further explore responses. For example, *"So they are both trustworthy. Why is trustworthiness important to you?"* Essentially, this process is to ascertain the nuances and

connotations of meaning for the individual rather than to assume a shared understanding of how one conceptualises trustworthiness.

The practitioner enables the participant to define terms, clarify concepts, explore value and meaning, and then attends to determining a contrasting construct, the implicit pole, to create a continuum. Equivalent attention is paid to this process as opposed to simply defining an opposite term. For example, the practitioner may ask, *"Someone being reliable is important to you. If someone isn't a reliable person based on your definition of this, what would they be like? What qualities would they have?"* Laddering processes enable participants to elaborate on the elicited constructs (Tan and Hunter, 2002), which is crucial to understanding constructs as the participant does (Jankowicz, 2004). Understanding construct hierarchies within an individual's personal construct system can also be achieved with employing laddering processes (Fransella, Bell and Banister, 2004). The quality of elicited constructs in terms of personal meaningfulness needs attention. Guidance provided by Easterby-Smith (1980) addresses concerns regarding the nature of constructs themselves, such as avoiding superficial descriptions like *'They're nice'.* Figure 2 provides examples of prompts and tips for construct elicitation using the triadic method.

[Figure 2. Eliciting constructs: Prompts and tips]

The emergent and implicit poles are reviewed with the participant to select the final elicited constructs with most significance for them, encouraging space for self-reflection. The selected constructs and implicit poles are written onto the grid (see Figure 1), with positively judged constructs entered on the same side. The benefits of such include being able to more clearly identify pattern biases in rating elements, providing more visually accessible patterns for subsequent eyeball analysis discussions, and in reducing cognitive load when the participant is making sense-checks by comparing element ratings whilst rating another.

Any supplied constructs are introduced following elicited ones to minimise bias in direction and themes in participant responses (Easterby-Smith, 1980; Tan and Hunter, 2002). They are then collaboratively explored as concepts to ensure shared understanding (construct equivalence). The originating study utilised three supplied construct continuums: *Feels Good About Themselves-Low Self-Worth; Connected To Others-Lonely; Realist-Fantasist*. Combining elicited and supplied ones

allows participant-led constructs to feature, whilst allowing the practitioner to introduce constructs from empirical findings pertaining to the phenomenon being examined (Mason, 2008). Supplying some carefully selected constructs for participant grids allows comparative statistical analyses to be undertaken across the sample (Easterby-Smith, 1980; Tan and Hunter, 2002). For example, low self-worth was supplied for participants in the originating study to review prevalence amongst those who stalk. In that study three were supplied, constituting a variant method supported by Tan and Hunter (2002). Those supplied were developed from reviewing literature, service user group consultation, and preliminary peer testing of discriminatory power amongst potential final supplied constructs. This process improves clarity of constructs as concepts and helps prevent their domination of participant grids. This can be subsequently tested by reviewing principal components analyses (see Easterby-Smith, 1980).

Step 4. Rating the elements along the construct continuums

Employing a rating scale to link constructs to elements is the most common method (Easterby-Smith, 1980; Tan and Hunter, 2002). Jankowicz (2004: 72) conceptualises the rating process as ascribing *'meaning attached to the elements by their positions on the various constructs in the grid'*. Ratings are assigned for each element along each construct continuum, one at a time by placing the element cards along the continuum (1 to 7), where the participant perceives them to best fit. Using a 7-point rating scale is preferable because it can elicit greater discrimination along the continuums amongst elements (Tan and Hunter, 2002). This range produces data that is more meaningful for statistical analysis (Grice, 2002). The numerical continuum written on the grids provides a visual scale to rate elements against in relation to the construct continuum under examination. Each element is placed along the continuum, some can be layered onto the same rating given the chosen method is to rate, as opposed to rank, the elements. The practitioner and participant then write onto the grid where elements had been placed in order to free the elements cards for reuse on the next construct continuum (see Figure 1). The practitioner can guide this by informing the participant; *"We are using the cards just to think about it and then we're going to commit it to paper by writing the elements on",* which can provoke participant-led reflections on their initial responses and later, more considered ratings.

The kinaesthetic process of placing all elements along a continuum and then writing them onto the grid as confirmation provokes spontaneous narratives as participants are inclined to explain their decision-making and judgments towards themselves and others. Where this does not naturally occur, prompt questions can be utilised to elicit the same, either at the placement or confirmation stage. For

example, "W*hat made you decide to place X there?"*, and *"Why did you place X there [pointing], and X there [pointing]?"* It is important to note repeat patterns in rating within the mid-ranges as this may be indicative of the participant not knowing the element well, or the construct concept. Such notations may assist in making sense of later analytical outputs. The rating process is repeated until all elements have been rated on each construct continuum.

Step 5. Collaborative eyeball analysis

The VARGT produces a rich and meaningful completed grid, facilitated by the practitioner but built and owned by the participant, and on display for both to review. The grid is the product of participant disclosures, choices, and interpretations, and thus is unique, and exposing. Figure 3 provides an example of a completed VARGT grid, and Figure 4 shows a standard populated RGT grid for contrast; included with the permission of Dr Nicholas Blagden [Blagden, 2011]).

[Figure 3. Example of VARGT completed for eyeball analysis]

[Figure 4. Example standard populated RGT grid]

The VARGT enables the participant to conduct their own eyeball analysis because of the visual presentation of the completed grid, formatting of such, and participant-bespoke content. The completed grid is the reference point upon which to use gentle probing to prompt reflective discussions on the elicited constructs, the element placements (ratings), and any patterns of element placements, visual clusters, comparisons or distinctions. With positive values generally formatted on the left and more negative contrasting constructs on the right, recognising visual patterns is easier. The VARGT encourages collaborative eyeball analysis and further interpretation of meaning.

The practitioner and participant should give ample time and attention to this step. This is because the unique completed grid exposes the fundamental template of one's construing; it represents the distinctions made between significant people on the topic and have been likened to schemas (Leach *et al.*, 2001). Essentially, the elements provide context to the topic of focus, whilst the elicitation of constructs provides insight into how the participant construes their interpersonal world, and the rating process tells of how the participant is thinking in terms of linking topic and elements by

constructs/ values (see Jankowicz, 2004). This step provides a crucial opportunity for both practitioner and participant to reflect upon the process and any new learning.

Step 6. Applying statistical analyses

The extensive amount of data produced from the RGT can be analysed in a number of ways dependent on the research or clinical focus (Grice, 2002; Fransella *et al.*, 2004). Transferring the information from the VARGT grid into an Idiogrid format is straightforward, simply requiring the user to input the element ratings directly onto the standard electronic grid within Idiogrid software (Grice, 2002) for statistical analysis. The VARGT creates the same data output as any RGT, although creates additional qualitative data (see Wheatley, 2019, p. 77). To complement any qualitative analyses from VARGT, Idiogrid can be utilised to run quantitative analyses. It is the most up to date statistical analysis software package for repertory grids.

A number of analysis functions can be performed (Grice, 2002). Univariate statistics offer information about factors such as averages and extremity of responses, which can indicate the meaningfulness a participant gave to the construct (i.e., if responding in the mid ranges it may denote little thought), and any rigidity of thought (i.e., by responding only at the extremes). Bivariate statistics show the fundamental relationships between pairs of elements or constructs. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) shows statistically and pictorially how the participant views their self-concepts in relation to the other elements along the construct dimensions. Self-Identity Plots (SIPs) visually represent how an individual's self-concepts are being understood in relation to relevant others on the topic. To further inspect the principal components of a sample, Slater Analyses can also be performed, constituting hierarchical cluster analysis, yielding both group, as well as individual-level, analyses.

Participant experiences of the VARGT

In the originating study, the VARGT prompted participant reflections regarding the method as well as insight-provoking experiences. One participant commented, '*Having it on the floor for movement, the kinaesthetic element to it and the physicality of putting things down, believe me it's a lot more engaging and interesting… You're more likely to get people working with you, collaborating with you'.* Participants were struck by the unavoidable observation that they had placed their *self-past* with *stalker* along most, if not all, construct continuums (see Figure 3). Despite initially denying they had

stalked someone, they began to draw similarities in the behaviours and psychological vulnerabilities, creating goals for change, which may have direct link to their criminogenic needs. The completed grids were also telling of participants' views towards their *self-now* and the values they aspired to in their future as opposed to materialistic measures. The self-reflections were numerous, bespoke to the individual and motivating. One participant found the VARGT to have validated his self-change efforts since his offending, contextual to his placements of *self-past*, *-now*, and *–future*. He commented, '*I wanted to see the actual change for myself and I really couldn't see it in words alone but by doing this chart my days, my eyes are so open that I can already see. I've got a long path in front of me and my future, it's like a yellow brick road. But it isn't yellow it's gold that's the difference and all I've got to say to you now is thank you cos at the end of the day you have literally have just gone bump with my eyes and made them open up'.*

Researcher and practitioner implications

Repertory grids are purported to be difficult to fake (Easterby-Smith, 1980), and the VARGT is easy to use, engaging, collaborative, kinaesthetic and exposing. The emerging self-insights can be more easily owned given the elicitation process, and the eyeball analysis is a reflective and often cathartic process. The use of the VARGT within the originating study demonstrates its ability to engage people particularly around sensitive topics. Ordinarily individuals in this situation might find it difficult to engage due to active defence mechanisms related to shame, or because they had not yet experienced a safe space in which to process and express their own interpreted experiences and reflections since conviction. These observations create numerous opportunities for researchers and practitioners alike. For example, to implement the VARGT as a tool to improve engagement to glean richer data in research, and to develop therapeutic alliance, encouraging guided discovery within therapeutic contacts. The generalisability of this method beyond this client group is deemed credible given the topic and elements are bespoke to the person, and the varied client groups with which general RGT has been previously utilised.

It is imperative to practice using the VARGT and consider exploratory questions that will help with the laddering process to individualise the construct continuums. When constructs are to be supplied, for example to be able to compare against numerous participant grids, they need to be based on current observational or theoretical understanding. They should be exposed to external auditing processes, following defensible selection based on relevant literature reviewing, practitioner feedback, and peer

review. Supplied constructs risk the production of an idiosyncratic grid and can skew the clustering of principal components, so need mindful selection.

Pre-prepared laminated grids will allow materials to be reused, and the invention of an electronic version available on a portable handheld tablet would further improve data collection and management. The utility of an electronic application to undertake the VARGT with the right programming could enable the entered data to be converted directly into a format for Idiogrid inputting and analysis following a collaborative eyeball analysis. Key statistical interpretations could then also be collaboratively discussed, building on the therapeutic alliance between researcher-participant or clinician-client. Whilst this would improve ease of portability and data management, it may lose its kinaesthetic value (i.e., of card placement), but may be more in tune with the current IT generation and be better suited to those with mobility issues. Any electronic based application therefore would need to be developed in consultation with users and piloted with participants.

Limitations of the VARGT

Whilst the VARGT functioned well when utilised within the originating study, it may reveal weaknesses inviting improvements and further modification when replicated. Statistical analyses were not shared with participants, which could encourage iterative reflections and the VARGT was not re-administered in order to measure longer-term impact and any changes. The VARGT would not be suitable for use with participants having eyesight impediments. It may also require adaptations to be used with participants with low cognitive functioning given the use of the RGT generally rather than the visual element (see Kitson-Boyce *et al.,* 2018). The required space and furniture required to replicate the VARGT is essential and any improvisations need to consider an individual's mobility and physical health.

Conclusions

This manuscript has presented technical instructions and theoretical considerations for designing, devising, and implementing a Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT). The VARGT has been shown to maximise participant engagement in the research process, and shows potential for therapeutic contexts. Limitations as well as practical application potential of the VARGT are presented

to encourage mindful replication. The VARGT has varying potential for clinician and researcher applications and provides a unique collaborative engagement tool (see Wheatley *et al.*, in press).

Implications for practice

- Provision of replicable technical instructions with theoretical underpinning for future application within research and clinical contexts.

- The ability to replicate the VARGT for use in research or clinical contexts to maximise engagement.

- Provision of a visually transparent and kinaesthetically engaging research or clinical tool.

- Provision of a replicable engagement tool which offers potential in developing therapeutic alliance and collaboration in developing case formulation type, accessible information pertaining to a person's construct system and meaning –making.

- Ability to engage people around sensitive topics and with those deemed hard to reach in research and clinical contexts.

References

Banister, P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Taylor, M., and Tindall, C. (1994), "Qualitative methods in psychology", *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide*, pp. 1-16.

Blagden, N., Winder, B., Gregson, M., and Thorne, K. (2014), "Making sense of denial in sexual offenders: A qualitative phenomenological and repertory grid analysis", *Journal of interpersonal violence*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 1698-1731.

Easterby-Smith, M. (1980), "The design, analysis and interpretation of repertory grids", *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies,* Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 3-24.

Faccio, E., Castiglioni, M., and Bell, R. C. (2012), "Extracting information from repertory grid data: New perspectives on clinical and assessment practice", *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology,* Vol. 19, No. 3.

Fransella, F., Bell, R., and Bannister, D. (2004), *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique. Second Edition,* John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, UK.

Grice, J. W. (2002), "Idiogrid: Software for the management and analysis of repertory grids", *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers,* Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 338-341.

Hare, D. J., Durand, M., Hendy, S., and Wittkowski, A. (2012), "Thinking about challenging behavior: A repertory grid study of inpatient staff beliefs", *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities,* Vol. 50, No. 6, pp. 468-478.

Horley, J. (2008), *Sexual offenders: Personal construct theory and deviant sexual behaviour*. London, England: Routledge.

Jankowicz, D. (2004), *The Easy Guide to Repertory Grids,* John Wiley and Sons Ltd, UK.

Kelly, G. A. (1955), *The psychology of personal constructs,* Norton, New York, NY.

Kitson-Boyce, R., Blagden, N., Winder, B., and Dillon, G. (2018), "'This time it's different' preparing for release through CoSA (The prison model): A Phenomenological and repertory grid analysis", *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of research and treatment.*

Leach, C., Freshwater, K., Aldridge, J., and Sunderland, J. (2001), "Analysis of repertory grids in clinical practice", *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 40, pp. 225-248.

MacKenzie, R. D., and James, D. V. (2011), *"Management and treatment of stalkers: Problems, options, and solutions", Behavioral sciences & the law,* Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 220-239.

MacKenzie, R. D., McEwan, T. E., Pathé, M. T., James, D. V., Ogloff, J. R. P., and Mullen, P. E. (2009), *Stalking Risk Profile. Guidelines for the Assessment and Management of Stalkers,* Stalkinc. Pty Ltd and Monash University, Australia.

Mason, J. (2003), "The use of a repertory grid as an aid to assessment and formulation in a sex offender with a learning disability", *The British Journal of Forensic Practice,* Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 13-20.

Mason, J. (2008), "Measuring psychological change in offenders with intellectual disabilities and alcohol misuse using repertory grids: Two case examples", *The British Journal of Forensic Practice*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 37-44.

Neimeyer, G. J., Bowman, J. Z., and Saferstein, J. (2005), "The effects of elicitation techniques on repertory grid outcomes: Difference, opposite, and contrast methods", *Journal of Constructivist Psychology,* Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 237-252.

Reger, R. K. (1990), "Managerial thought structures and competitive positioning", in Huff, A. S. (Ed.), *Mapping Strategic Thought*, Wiley, Chichester, pp. 71-88.

Rosenfeld, B., Fava, J., and Galietta, M. (2009), "Working with the stalking offender. Considerations for risk assessment and intervention", in Werth, Jr., J.L., Welfel, E.R., and Benjamin, G. A. H. (Eds.), *The duty to protect: Ethical, legal, and professional considerations for mental health professionals,* American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, US, pp. 95-109.

Rowe, D. (1976), "Grid technique in the conversation between patient and therapist", in Slater, P. (Ed.), *The Measurement of Intrapersonal Space by Grid Technique, Vol. 1: Explorations of intrapersonal space*. John Wiley and Sons: London.

Tan, F. B., and Hunter, M. G. (2002), "The repertory grid technique: A method for the study of cognition in information systems", *MIS Quarterly,* Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 39-57.

Turpin, M., Dallos, R., Owen, R., and Thomas, M. (2009), "The meaning and impact of head and neck cancer: An interpretative phenomenological and repertory grid analysis", *Journal of Constructivist Psychology,* Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 24-54.

Wheatley, R. (2019), *What drives men who commit stalking offences and how practitioners can best respond to their needs* [Doctoral dissertation, Nottingham Trent University]. http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/37679/

Wheatley, R., Winder, B., and Kuss, D. (in press), "*Researcher-practitioner reflections: the therapeutic utility of the Visually Adapted Repertory Grid Technique (VARGT) with stalkers". Journal of Forensic Practice.*

Winter, D. A. (1992), *Personal construct psychology in clinical practice: Theory, research and applications,* Routledge, London.

Winter, D. A. (2003), "Repertory Grid Technique as a Psychotherapy Research Measure", *Psychotherapy Research*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 25-42.

Yorke, L., and Dallos, R. (2015), "An interpretative phenomenological analysis and repertory grid exploration of anger in young offenders", *Journal of Constructivist Psychology,* Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 126-138.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Good self-worth	*Person I don't like*	*Self-future Person I like*	*Offender Manager*	*Ex-intimate*	*Self-now Parent/ carer*	*Alleged victim*	*Self-past Stalker*	**Low self-worth**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Connected to others	Alleged victim	Person I like / Ex-intimat	Self-future	Self-now	Offender Manager / Person I don't like	Self-past	Parent/ carer / Stalker	**Lonely; Isolated**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Realist								**Fantasist**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Trusting								**Guarded**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Faith in self								**Self-doubting**

Figure 1. Example VARGT grid

	Supplied elements	Rationale
1)	*Self-Past*	*Capture essence of who they were when offending*
2)	*Self-Now*	*Capture essence of who they feel they are now*
3)	*Self-Future (Ideal Self)*	*Capture essence of how they would like to be*
4)	*Person I Don't Like*	*Capture constructs/values they dislike in others*
5)	*Person I Like*	*Capture constructs/values they like in others*
6)	*Parent/Caregiver*	*Capture attachment-related constructs/values*
7)	*Stalker*	*Capture current views on the stereotypical stalker*
8)	*(Alleged) Victim*	*Capture constructs/values, positive or negative*
9)	*Ex-Partner (not victim)* **or** *Close Friend*	*Capture constructs/values related to experiences of closeness and connection*
10)	*Offender Manager or Supervisor*	*Capture constructs/values related to authority/ risk management / professional relationships*

Table 1. Supplied elements for an example VARGT

- Possible questions to initially elicit constructs (emergent poles) from the two elements chosen from a triad could be *"How are they similar?" "What makes them alike?" "Who would you prefer to be and why?"*

- It can be helpful to use third person terminology, e.g., *"how are those two people alike"*, pointing to *self-past* and *'stalker'*, to reduce potential for defensive responding.

- Possible questions to ascertain the personal value assigned to the constructs (which can often be hierarchical) are *"What does that mean to you?" "Why is that important?" "What advantages are there to being like that?"*

- Possible questions to clarify constructs – *"What is naïve?" "How would you define it?" "Define the kind of person who is naïve… What might that say about them, or make you think about them?"* The purpose here is to understand how the participant is conceptualising and construing in order to reduce practitioner connotations biasing data.

- It may be pertinent to employ third person language in cases where the participant discloses sensitive and negatively laden self-assertions. For example, *"What did arrogant look like in relation to self-past?"* This may help to elicit personal and sensitive constructs in a less psychologically threatening way.

- Easterby-Smith (1980) advises *'why'* questions produce greater generality, whereas *'what'* and *'how'* questions produce more specific constructs during this stage of elicitation.

- Possible questions to define implicit poles are *"What is the opposite of naïve for you?" "If someone is not naïve then what are they?" "What does that look like?"* Make sure to use the participants' implicit pole construct rather than a superficial, opposite word to the emergent pole.

- Recording the process of elicitation will enable later observational analysis i.e., chosen constructs from specific element triads, and the qualitative processes of defining constructs and assigning importance.

Figure 2. Eliciting constructs: Prompts and tips

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Good self-worth	*Person I don't like*	*Self-future Person I like*	*Offender Manager*	*Ex-intimate*	*Self-now Parent/ carer*	*Alleged victim*	*Self-past Stalker*	**Low self-worth**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Connected to others	*Self-future Person I like*	*Parent/ carer Offender Manager*	*Self-now Alleged victim*	*Person I don't like*	*Ex-intimate*		*Self-past Stalker*	**Lonely; Isolated**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Realist	*Parent/ carer*	*Self-future Person I like*	*Self-now Offender Manager Alleged victim*		*Ex-intimate*	*Person I don't like*	*Self-past Stalker*	**Fantasist**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Trusting	*Parent/ carer*	*Self-future Person I like*	*Ex-intimate Alleged victim*	*Self-now Offender Manager*	*Person I don't like*		*Self-past Stalker*	**Guarded**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Faith in self	*Self-future Person I like Offender Manager*	*Parent/ carer Person I don't like*	*Alleged victim*	*Self-now*	*Ex-intimate*		*Self-past Stalker*	**Self-doubting**

Figure 3. Example of VARGT completed for eyeball analysis

Stef Grid (page 1)

	Me Now	Police Officer	Spouse	Me as I'd like to be	Alledged Victim	Prionser admitting offence	Me before arrest	Person you don't like	Prisoner maintaining innocence	Person you like	Sexual Offender	
Optimist	7	7	3	3	7	6	2	6	6	4	7	Pessimist (looks for hidden meanings)
Happy Person	5	6	4	2	6	3	2	6	5	3	7	Burdened Person
Outgoing person	6	5	4	2	6	3	2	6	3	3	7	Can't let people near
Positive outlook on life	6	4	4	2	6	4	2	6	3	3	5	Negative outlook on life
Happy Life	5	5	4	2	7	4	3	6	4	3	6	Unhappy life
Manipulative	3	1	5	4	7	4	3	2	4	4	1	Naive
Honest and Truthful	4	7	4	2	7	4	3	6	4	3	7	Liar (Dishonest person)
Paranoid of people motives	2	4	4	4	2	5	4	3	3	5	6	Able to trust people
Friendly and approachable	6	7	2	4	6	3	3	7	5	3	6	Hostile
Stand up for what you believe in	1	5	2	1	2	5	1	7	2	2	5	Get walked over

Notes:
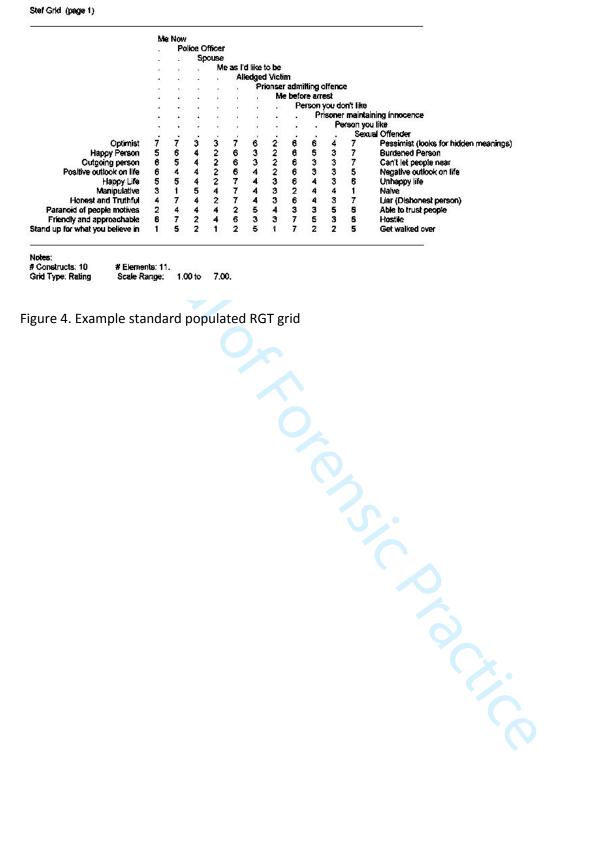# Constructs: 10   # Elements: 11.
Grid Type: Rating   Scale Range: 1.00 to   7.00.

Figure 4. Example standard populated RGT grid