

Gordon allport an
american
psychologist
psychology essay



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Psychology of the lack of interest and limited methods, in general, fails to disclose or study of the integrity and consistency of the characters that actually exist. The greatest drawback of a psychologist at the present time is his inability to prove the truth of what he knows.

Gordon Allport is an outstanding figure in the world of psychology, and now there is hardly a book on psychology of personality without a special chapter on his theory, or at least references to it. Having experienced the impact of different schools, Allport did not actually belong to any of them, and created his own. He believed that the comprehensive theory of personality can be created by combining the achievements of different scientific fields, and thus, of course, has earned numerous accusations of eclecticism. Today, such accusations can be viewed more as praise, for the future of scientific psychology more clearly seen in a balanced position rather than in an opposition of antagonists. In approving such a position Allport played a very important role, and now has a decent place of honor in the gallery of masters of psychology. His influence on the psychology of the world can not be overestimated.

Allport refers to a rare type of systematizers, he was perhaps the smartest person of those who engaged in the psychology of personality, a man with imagination, but the most striking feature of Allport was logical thinking. Allport introduced into the psychology a lot of new ideas, he smoothed out the extremes and overcome the contradictions of the science, that is why he can rightly be called one of the dialectically-minded psychologists. He was often called eclectic, and he

agreed with it, specifying that eclecticism in this sense was not a vice, but a very productive method of research. (Evans, 1971, p. 19)

Perhaps few people can be compared with him on the number of ideas that are included in textbooks on theories of personality, and in the main body of knowledge of personality psychology. Allport was behind the theory of traits, humanistic psychology, wrote the first textbook on the synthesis of personality psychology, has legalized the introduction to the academic science of qualitative methods, research problems such as personal maturity, vision, self-actualization, religiosity. He did not make discoveries or breakthroughs, has not created a school or any new paradigm, but in many respects he is credited with creating the psychology of personality as a particular subject area - it is no exaggeration to call him "the architect of personality psychology".

During his lifetime Allport managed to get all kinds of honors: he was elected as the president of the American Psychological Association (1939), president of Society of the Study of Social Problems, received the award for outstanding contribution to science (1964), etc. But in his autobiography he admitted that among the numerous scientific distinctions the most valuable to him was the prize given to him in 1963, a two-volume collection of works of 55 of his former graduate students with the inscription "from the students - with gratitude for the respect for their individuality."

The list of Allport's publications includes his reviews and prefaces to other people's books, as he was engaged in the educational activity: he enriched the American science with ideas of personology of W. Stern, Psychology of

the spirit of E. Spranger and Gestalt K. Koffka, W. Kohler and M.

Wertheimer. He was able to assess the significance for psychology of the ideas of existentialism, and supported the establishment of the Association of Humanistic Psychology.

Another distinctive feature of scientific style of Allport is “ to be always on the cutting edge of social issues of the time”, because he wanted to study what was more important for people. In many specific areas he has created articles and books: the Psychology of expressive movements, psychology radio, rumors psychology, psychology of war, the psychology of religion, and his 600-page work devoted to the nature of prejudice for almost 50 years remains the main source of the problem, and its relevance only increases.

Gordon Allport Biography

Gordon Willard Allport was born on November 11, 1897 in Montezuma, Indiana. He was the youngest of four sons of John and Nellie Allport. His father was a modest and not very successful doctor, his private clinic was situated within the walls of his own house. Allport’s mother was a schoolteacher, and, most importantly, a devout and pious woman, and she thought the children of reasonable, orderly and virtuous life skills. And the character of Gordon was formed largely under the influence of a strict, but humane maternal morality.

Gordon in 1915 went to Harvard, and from then began a half-century of his collaboration with Harvard University. At Harvard, the intellectual abilities of Gordon turned in full force and gained focus. In parallel with the psychology he dealt with social ethics – from an early age his interest was divided

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between psychology and the broader social context, and not by accident in the 30 years he created at Harvard the Department of Social Relations, an interdisciplinary by its very nature, with synthetic approaches of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

A distinctive feature of the scientific outlook of Allport was a pretty big influence on him of European psychology, especially of William Stern, Eduard Spranger, and Gestalt psychology (in many respects this was caused by staying of young scientist in Europe in the early 1920's). Influenced by these ideas, Allport, having been engaged in a 1920 in study of the issues of personality psychology, especially of personality traits and expressive movements, he quickly realized the need to consider the whole personality, rather than its parts.

After returning to Harvard, Allport at the age of 24 wrote his doctorate in psychology, but the key ideas of his work were presented to them a year earlier in the article " Personality traits: their classification and measurement", written jointly with his brother Floyd, and published in the " Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology". In the next two years Allport went to the internship in Europe – first in Germany, where he worked with M. Wertheimer, V. Kohler, W. Stern, C. Stumpf, and then for a short time in England, at Cambridge. Drawing on personal experience with work with masters of German psychology, he later at home has long been a leading expert in this area and the interpreter of their ideas.

In 1924 he returned to Harvard, where he began to read a completely new course of personality psychology. It is important to note that until then,

many psychologists considered problems in the theory of personality not as psychological. The final breakthrough in this area has occurred in 1937, after publication of the Allport's major monograph " Personality: a psychological study." In it the author (by the way, long before the groundbreaking theory of Maslow) was first to study a healthy personality and described its essential features.

Allport's collection of works " Personality in Psychology" presents a wide range of his interests: health issues, religion and superstition, social prejudices, as well as the main methodological problems of psychology. In his work, which was reflected in 12 books and more than two hundred articles, he tried to capture the complexity of human existence in the contemporary social context and resolutely refused to follow the fashionable tenets of his profession, demonstrating commitment to the imaginative and systematic eclecticism.

During his career, Allport was awarded with almost all the regalia of a psychologist: he was elected president of the American Psychological Association (1939), President of the psychological study of social problems, in 1963 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the American Psychological Foundation, in 1964, APA received an award for outstanding contribution in science.

Allport's approach to personality

Allport was the first in the world of psychology to build a holistic theoretical knowledge of the scientific psychology of personality. His book " Personality: a psychological interpretation", which was published in 1937, marked the

beginning of the academic personality psychology. Personality, by Allport, is a “ dynamic organization of psycho-physical systems of the individual, which defines a unique adaptation of the individual to his environment”. (Allport, 1937)

G. Allport theory of personality is a combination of humanistic and individual approaches to the study of human behavior. Humanistic approach lies in an attempt to identify all aspects of human beings, and individual approach is reflected in an effort of G. Allport to understand and predict the development of the real, specific person. One of the main postulates of the theory of G. Allport is that “ personality is open and self-developing”. People first and foremost are a social beings and therefore can not develop without contacts with other people and society. Here comes the Allport rejection of psychoanalysis on the antagonistic, hostile relations between the individual and society. In this case, G. Allport argued that the communication of personality and society is not striving for balance with the medium, but for networking and interaction. Thus, he strongly objected to the generally accepted postulate that development is an adaptation, an adaptation of man to the outside world, arguing that human nature just need to blow up the balance and reach more and more new peaks.

Explaining human behavior, G. Allport introduced the concept of traits. He defined the trait as “...the neuropsychological structure capable of converting a set of functionally equivalent stimuli, and to encourage and guide equivalent forms of adaptive and expressive behavior.” Simply it is propensity to behave in a similar manner in a wide range of situations. G.

Allport theory states that human behavior is relatively stable over time and <https://assignbuster.com/gordon-allport-an-american-psychologist-psychology-essay/>

in diverse situations. In the G. Allport system personality is characterized by “ traits”, or defining characteristics. He proposed eight basic criteria for determining personality traits:

- personality traits are real: they exist in humans, and are not theoretical abstractions;
- personality trait is a more generalized notion than a habit;
- personality traits is the driving, or at least, a defining element of behavior, it motivates the individual;
- the existence of personality traits can be established empirically;
- personality traits is only relatively independent, as people tend to react to events and phenomena according to a generalized manner;
- personality traits can not be associated with this individual moral or social assessment;
- the fact that actions and habits are inconsistent with the personality traits is not evidence of lack of that traits.

Allport’s Theory of Individual Trait and Common Trait

Each person is an idiom unto himself,

an apparent violation of the syntax of the species.

(Allport G. Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality, 1955, p. 19).

G. Allport pointed general and individual traits. The first include any characteristics peculiar to some number of people within a particular culture. Individual traits represent characteristics of the individual, which does not allow comparison with other people, that are those neuropsychiatric elements that direct, manage and motivate a certain type of behavior. This category of traits more fully reflects the personality structure of each individual.

Later G. Allport called individual personality traits as dispositions, and identified three types of them:

- Radical disposition. Almost all human actions can be explained by the influence of inborn traits.
- Central dispositions. They do not dominate, but are the foundation of human individuality.
- Secondary dispositions. These traits are less visible, less generalized, less stable and therefore less suitable for the characteristics of personality. For example, eating habits and clothing, etc.

G. Allport believed that personality is determined by the unity and integration of individual traits that give him originality.

The Proprium

In 1950 Allport, however, introduced a new concept to replace the traditional "I concept" - the notion of proprium. A Proprium by Allport is similar to what William James once explained as an area of "I". The main thing that has

developed Allport in connection with the concept of the proprium and proprium structures of personality is periodization of personal development, based on seven aspects of proprium.

G. Allport identified seven stages of development of proprium from childhood to adulthood:

- During the first three years child demonstrate three aspects: the sense of a body, a sense of continuous self-identity and self-esteem or pride.
- At the age of four to six years, there are two other aspects: self-identification and self-image.
- Between six and twelve years a child develops self-awareness, so that he can cope with problems on the basis of rational thought.

In adolescence, there are intentions, plans and long-term goals, they called their own aspirations.

So, in an adult individual we can see a person whose determinants of behavior is a system of organized and congruent traits, these traits resulted from many different motivations of a newborn. Normal individuals usually know what they are doing and why. This behavior is consistent with congruent pattern, and at the core of this pattern lie traits that G. Allport called proprium. Complete understanding of the adult is not possible without considering his goals and aspirations.

Motive and Functional Autonomy

According to Allport, the core of the personality are the motives of activity. In order to explain the nature of motivation, he introduced the concept of functional autonomy, which means that the motivation of the adult is not functionally connected with his childhood experiences. Motives of human activity do not depend on the initial circumstances of their occurrence. Thus, adults are responsible for their deeds and actions, and do not depend on the vicissitudes of childhood. Motives of adults can not, according to Allport, result from their children's intentions and perceptions, and these goals are determined by the current situation and current intentions. Thus, functional autonomy, in the view of Allport, are motives of adults which do not depend on their children's experiences.

Criticism of Allport

Despite his influence in psychology, theory of Allport has not received sufficient experimental confirmation. What is the empirical validity of the theoretical concept of personality in Allport? Analysis of relevant literature shows that the Allport's theory does not rise any study to confirm its validity. With his views and concepts agreed only few well-known authors in the field Personology (Maddi, 1972).

Allport's position, emphasizing the uniqueness of the human personality, as well as the importance of understanding personal goals and expectations, had a significant impact on the views of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and other members of humanistic psychology. Allport work on personality theory have played a significant role in the renewed interest of researchers in this subject. His idea <https://assignbuster.com/gordon-allport-an-american-psychologist-psychology-essay/>

of “ produce a very strong impression... and gives impetus to a number of new theoretical and applied research in contemporary personality psychology”. (Evans, 1971)

Conclusion

During the years of his long and highly productive career at Harvard University, Gordon Allport has done much to make research on the psychology of the individual of an academic importance. Before his book “ Personality: psychological interpretation”, the theory of personality problems in general was not considered as the subject of psychology. G. Allport was one of the few psychologists who made a bridge between academic psychology with its traditions on the one hand, and rapidly evolving field of clinical psychology and personality psychology on the other. This connection not only enriches sub-discipline discoveries, but also allows to set the intellectual continuity that is important for the future development of psychology. Finally, the novelty of the position of G. Allport lies in the fact that he focused on the future and present, and rarely on the past.

Gordon Allport was a unique, proactive, integrated, forward-looking person, who left great theoretical material on the psychology of individual, and influenced many scientists, their views and approaches, as well as all the science of psychology.