

# Gordon allport draft

Psychology



Gordon Allport (1897 — 1967) was the first psychologist to give thought to the uniqueness of the human personality. He developed his 'trait' theory as a means to describe an image of personality rather than to try and understand its development. Allport was seen as a humanist due to his radical views of individuality, which conflicted with the beliefs of the more conservative behaviorists' and psychoanalysts of the time. He originally studied philosophy at Harvard University and later returned to study Psychology; it is this early interest in philosophy that may have led him to such open-minded theories later in life. Allport was the first to offer a class in the field of personality psychology, which he undertook at Harvard University and he published many books on his theories. Allport may not be as heavily referenced as other psychologists in his field, but he was the first to approach the theory of individual traits and he inspired many psychologists who adopted and developed his theory. Allport emphasized heavily on 'the individual' throughout his work. He viewed the behaviorist approach to psychology as inadequate without the study of the individual involved. He also rejected the psychoanalytic approach as relying too much on the effects of the past without taking into account current situations and stimuli. Allport understood the individual to be one who had certain attitudes or prejudices about situations and people, based on both their inner character and their previous experiences. (New World Encyclopedia: internet) (how do I reference internet?) Allport based his trait theory on this approach to individuality. He defined a trait as " a generalized and focalized neuropsychic system [peculiar to the individual], with the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide consistent [equivalent] forms of adaptive and expressive behavior. " (in Barkuus: 4) By this he did <https://assignbuster.com/gordon-allport-draft/>

not mean that a trait is genetic, although he did consider some hereditary, but that the trait will still be there if nobody is around to see it. Allport also concluded that traits guide a person's behavior, thus making the behavior consistent. Allport described three governing bodies of traits. He believed that every person has a number of traits that are prominent within their personality. These were called Central traits. He noted that occasionally one of these Central traits becomes a more dominant force and is more commonly pronounced than others. This trait would then be considered a Cardinal trait. Allport also notes the presence of Secondary traits. These are characteristics seen only on occasion, but must be included to provide the full image of personality. (should I reference this? Its what I have written but I read the information from a few different sources) Allport views all traits as individual to the person. For example aggressiveness: one person may be violently aggressive while another may be passive aggressive. Each trait has a different style and range for each person. (Barkuus: 5) Allport also differentiates between common and individual traits. Common traits are universal traits that are shared among individuals within a culture, while individual traits are unique to the individual. Individual traits are not common, Allport uses the example of paranoia: only few individuals possess this trait but in the few that do, the trait may be ' the very core of their personality' (in Barkhuus: 5) Allport Allport believes that traits can be found and measured by both experimentation and observation. He derived a list of almost 18, 000 words from the dictionary to describe these traits. Allport continued to develop and refine his theory throughout his career. In his later publications it is evident that he has come to a far more refined theory. Allport has always defended his initial thesis that by the use of traits “ we

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can succeed in knowing [personality]... at least in part ... beyond the level of unaided common sense" (in Barkhuus: 16) When put in context of the era in which Allport first publicized his theory it appears to be quite valid. No other publications had been made towards the understanding of human personality, and while we may see the trait theory as mere common sense, they did not. Allport's trait theory did not have a substantial influence on later trait theorists but it did provide the inspiration and foundations of the trait concept. No other person had contrived a list of descriptive traits, people would have described each other with common verbs. One of the most interesting studies that Allport had conducted was publicized in his book " letters to jenny" (1966) Allport's research was non-experimental. He conducted many case studies, surveys and observations but did not conduct any scientific experiments.