

The science of selfhood



Ian A. M. Nicholson wrote the book *Inventing Personality* to cover and illustrate the work of Gordon Allport and the intensive research he pursued to learn more about personality or otherwise coined “ Science of Selfhood”. Gordon Allport was known by others as the “ Patron Saint” of personality. It was said he did more than others to make personality psychology a well - known and established practice. Allport was a well-educated man, earning many scholarships to universities such as Harvard, Sheldon, and Cambridge. Upon graduating, he served on the committee that founded its Sociology Department. Looking into Allport’s research, it is obvious but also impressive that he used his multiple backgrounds in educational departments and his own experiences to earn the title “ Father of Personality Psychology in America”. The majority of people in the circles of Psychology believed Allport to be second best to Sigmund Freud.

George Allport was best known for his own brand of personality psychology known as “ The Trait Theory”. The Trait Theory was a belief that personalities depended on individual differences and situation variables, meaning different situations and differences in humans’ shape who they become or their personality. He elaborated on this by developing his theory further and describing which traits were what. Cardinal Traits were what made up an individual’s entire personality and were not considered to be common. Central traits were also personality traits that focused on things such as sincerity, selfless-ness, and even the ability to make friends easily. Finally were secondary traits. Secondary traits only show themselves under duress or during key times of circumstances. Most find that secondary traits must be gently brought forward with certain techniques. An example of a

secondary trait would be becoming impatient with a slow server or cashier. While traits are broken down into three categories Allport had originally skimmed a dictionary and from it he had picked nearly 4, 000 traits that he felt accurately described the human personality. Allport believed that personality was a fluid thing that continuously evolved and changed over time.

But 4, 000 traits simply were not enough. Allport had deduced that even though personality could be boiled down into three categories of traits and in those categories thousands of traits would fall into place. Because he so fervently believed in this theory he threw aside the Psychoanalytical approach commonly used in behavioral studies and adopted his own, called the Value of Scales. The Value of Scales is a belief in which the personality of a person is founded upon their values or things that hold real importance in their life or no importance at all. In the Values Scale, only six major values are outlined which are; Theoretical, Social, Aesthetic, Political, Economic, and Religious. The values scale were used in all areas, including with Psychotherapists and social scientists. The Value of Scales had its popularity in the early 70's where it was used for a wide range of applications. Which included marriage counseling, and even educational advisement.

There was still even more research to be done into the mysterious depths that was personality. From Allports VOS and Trait Theory was born OCEAN (The five main dimensions of personality). OCEAN consisted of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Openness to Experience is usually reserved for people of high intellect. People who fall under the category OtE (Openness to Experience)

are more likely to enjoy art, new scientific journals, and being able to talk about things at length. I feel a strong connection to this category as I also enjoy cognitive skills and consider myself intellectually inclined.

Conscientious people were people who reflected more on their actions and the affects they could have in the future. People who are conscientious tend to be less impulsive and therefore refrain from making poor decisions or spending copious amounts of money on trivial things. Main traits that fall under the category conscientious are dependable and well organized.

Finding yourself on the lower end of the scale when it comes to being conscientious could leave you being considered as messy, unreliable, and derelict of your obligations or duties. Extraversion (taken from the word extravert) meant that those who aligned with this the title are social butterflies. Extraverts on this list tended to be more expressive with their emotions and more comfortable with settings that include large crowds of people. The opposite of extrovert would of course be introvert, meaning that those who ranked low on the scale would of course be silent and less likely to interact during social gatherings.

Agreeableness is the ability to form close friendships and get along well with others. Agreeableness and Extraversion were found to be strong in each other. Those who are found agreeable are more likely to be easily trusted. They stray from negative emotions and prefer to not dwell on them. The opposite of Agreeableness is Neuroticism (the last of the five dimensions of personality), people who are neurotic are pessimists and are inclined to be worriers and suffer from mental illness's such as anxiety and depression.

High scores of Neuroticisms indicates high stress levels and sometimes mental instability.

Allports version varied so immensely from Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism in the respect that Psychoanalysis tended to dig deep and had a greater chance of being incorrect and Behaviorism seemed to only scratch the surface. Personality psychology and The Value of Scales still have their usefulness today in the sense that much can be learned about one's self and others by simply reading the descriptions of the traits and dimensions and applying them to your life experiences. Using the dated system originally created by Gordon Allport and his cohorts Vernon and Lindsey, I was not surprised I scored highly in Theoretical (with an 11) which indicated that like a scientist I valued truth. My highest score which was most surprising to me would be Economic (with a 14) which indicated that I enjoyed business and was very orientated in that area.

In conclusion, even though this more sophisticated and relevant test of personality is used now (OCEAN), and has been repeatedly tested and administered in clinical and non-clinical settings. This refined version would not have been possible without the ground work and innovative thought process of Gordon Allport and his fellow scientists and students Vernon and Lindsey. Allport was not satiated with what had been brought to the table regarding personality and because of this he pursued and thirsted after the knowledge that is still used today.