

# A look at allport psychology essay



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A theory of motivation must acknowledge the contemporaneity of motives. In other words, the importance of the present should be stressed: " Motives leading to activity, it may be argued, are always operative at the time the activity takes place." Allport added, " That which drives, drives now." (The Use of Personal 80) Allport was aware, however, that in complex adult motives the past is, to some degree, alive in the present. He considered it, however, the task of the psychologist to discover " how much of the past is fire and how much of it is ashes." (Allport, Pattern and Growth 219) To think that the motives of mankind are essentially unchanged from birth until death seemed to Allport inadequate at best. (Pattern and Growth 203) That which once motivated, does not necessarily motivate always. It is important to realize the past is only important if it exists as a present or current motivating force, or is " dynamically active in the present." (Allport, Pattern and Growth 220)

More precisely stated, it is the unfinished structure that has this dynamic power. A finished structure is static; but a growing structure, tending toward a given direction of closure, has the capacity to subsidiate the guide conduct in conformity with its movement. (Allport, Becoming 91)

### Pluralistic

Allport believed that a theory of motivation must have room for multiple motives. Motivation cannot be reduced to one general phase or drive.

Some motives are transient, some recurring; some are momentary, others persistent; some unconscious, others conscious; some opportunistic, others propiate; some tension-reducing, others tension-maintaining. Motives are so

diverse in type that we find it difficult to discover the common denominator. About all we can say is that a person's motives include all that he is trying (consciously or unconsciously, reflexly or deliberately) to do. (Pattern and Growth 221)

Simplification does not explain motivation. Neither does reducing " its strands to the simplified model of the machine, the animal, the child, or the pathological." (Pattern and Growth 222) A theory of motivation should allow that there may be some truth in each theory. (Pattern and Growth 221)

### Cognitive Process

A theory of motivation must acknowledge the importance of the cognitive processes - e. g. planning and intention. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 222) Allport's requirement of cognitive process gives emphasis to the individual's conscious plans and intentions. These conscious intentions represent, above all else, the individual's primary mode of addressing the future. (Becoming 89) Thus, cognitive process stresses the importance of the future in the motivating process of the personality.

Allport believed that all individuals possess the power of thought and it is this thought process which leads them to form decisions. Hence, an individual's intent should be central to understanding his personality.

Allport defined intention as " what an individual is trying to do," and he included several features of motivation derived from the concept of intention:

The cognitive and emotive processes in personality become fused into an integral urge.

The intention, like all motivation, exists in the present, but has strong future orientation. Use of the concept helps us to trace the course of motivation as lives are actually lived--into the future and not, as most theories do, backward into the past. It tells us what sort of future a person is trying to bring about and this is the most important question we can ask about any mortal.

The term has a flavour of " tension maintained" and thus reflects the true condition of all long range motives.

When we identify major intentions in a life we have a device for holding subsidiary trends in perspective. (Pattern and Growth 223).

Allport believed the present should be explained more in terms of the future, not the past. It is more important to identify what a person intends to do and how they are presently acting out this intention, than to look toward the past of an individual's childhood or development.

Unfortunately the concept of intention is not prominent in current psychology. The reason is that it connotes purpose, the efficacy of conscious planning, and a " pull" that man's image of the future exerts on his present conduct. . . . the more favoured " physicalistic" conception would say that he is pushed by his motives (not pulled by his intentions). Many psychologists would say that " drives" take entire care of what we here call intention. Yet drives as such are blind. They do not allow for organization and direction by

cognitive attitudes, by foresight, by cortical control. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 224)

### Concrete Uniqueness

Concrete uniqueness of motives is essential in the theory of motivation. Motives must be concrete and not abstract. Motives should be identified in concrete terms rather than abstract terms. Abstract terms classify motives in only general or common terms. Hence, there is a lack of clarity and exactness.

Allport gave the following example:

Concrete: Patricia loves to entertain guests in her home.

Abstract: The desire for competence is the root.

It is true that Patricia is in a sense manifesting "competence" in her entertaining. But there are surely a million kinds of competence in life which do not interest Patricia at all. Her motive is highly concrete. Entertaining, not abstract competence, is the bread of life to her, and any abstract scheme misses that point completely, and therefore sheds little or no light on her personality as it actually functions. It is a caricature of a person to view his interests merely as changes rung on a common pattern. (Pattern and Growth 226)

### Functional Autonomy

Allport developed the motivational theory of functional autonomy. Though he himself believed that the theory did not explain all human motivation yet he <https://assignbuster.com/a-look-at-allport-psychology-essay/>

felt that it was more effective than the other motivational theories. He felt it was an attempt to escape " the limitations of uniform, rigid, abstract, backward looking theories," and to recognize instead " the spontaneous, changing, forward-looking, concrete character that much adult motivation surely has." (Pattern and Growth 227)

Functional autonomy regards adult motives as varied, and as self-sustaining, contemporary systems, growing out of antecedent systems, but functionally, independent of them. Just as a child gradually outgrows dependence on his parents, becomes self -determining, and outlives his parents, so it is with many motives. The transition may be gradual but it is nonetheless drastic. As the individual (or the motive) matures, the bond with the past is broken. The tie is historical, not functional. (Pattern and Growth 227)

Motivation is always contemporary. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 227) Motive, in the normal, mature adult, is not functionally related to the past experiences in which the original motivation may have first appeared. The motive has become independent of the original circumstances. Therefore, the adult motive cannot be understood by exploring the childhood of the adult because the motive has changed. It may have originated in childhood, but time and maturity have developed it into an entirely different motivation. Allport explains:

An ex-sailor has a craving for the sea, a musician longs to return to his instrument after an enforced absence, a miser continues to build up his useless pile. Now the sailor may have first acquired his love for the sea as an incident in his struggle to earn a living. The sea was " secondary

reinforcement" for his hunger drive. But now the ex-sailor is perhaps a wealthy banker; the original motive is destroyed, and yet the hunger for the sea persists and even increases in intensity. The musician may first have been stung by a slur on his inferior performance into mastering his instrument; but now he is safely beyond these taunts, and finds that he loves his instrument more than anything else in the world. The miser perhaps learned his habit of thrift in dire necessity, but the miserliness persists and becomes stronger with the years even after the necessity has been relieved. (Pattern and Growth 227)

The activity of a particular individual, according to Allport, originated due to some earlier motive which now no longer exists. Yet that activity now serves itself. The adult motive now serves the self-image or self-ideal of the person. " Childhood is no longer in the saddle; maturity is." (Pattern and Growth 229) Allport feels that childhood causes behaviour need not be investigated at all because all adult motives are functionally autonomous. " A functionally autonomous motive is the personality ... [and we] need not, and cannot, look 'deeper.'" (Pattern and Growth 244)

However, functional autonomy is not always achieved. If in adulthood a person does not mature, motivation does not become functionally autonomous. Instead the motivation continues to be tied to the original activity found in childhood. This person Allport considered immature, and thus emotionally ill. (Schultz 208) For example, what if the young musician had not developed a love for the instrument, but continued to play out of anger and spite over those first hurtful words. His actions could not be

considered functionally autonomous; neither would he be considered a normally functioning, mature adult.

### Maturity

He also distinguished between maturity and adulthood, recognizing that maturity of personality does not have any necessary relation to chronological age. (Pattern and Growth 277) " Although the healthy adult personality is complicated by the presence of numerous dispositions, intentions, and instincts, it is organized around those matters that are most personal and important." (Ewen 266)

Allport believed that a normally functioning mature personality demonstrates the following:

The extension of the sense of self to persons and activities beyond the self. (Pattern and Growth 283) It is not enough for a person to simply be busy with the activities of life. Instead, mature individuals must involve a personal part of themselves (while still maintaining their individuality) in at least one of the spheres of human concern: economic, educational, recreational, political, domestic, and religious. (Pattern and Growth 284-5) Self is important, but the mature individual is able to decentre personal attention and extend that attention beyond the self.

Warm relations of self toward others. (Pattern and Growth 285) Allport believed this concept of warm relations went beyond intimacy to include compassion, and was valid in terms of individual and general relationships. Intimacy is reflected by an individual's capacity to develop deep and lasting



relationships, yet this intimacy must be balanced by compassion. Allport related compassion to a person's ability to respect and appreciate another person as an individual. In other words, the intimacy found in a relationship must never impede the freedom of another individual to find their own identity. (Pattern and Growth 285)

Emotional security (self - acceptance) (Pattern and Growth 287): Self - acceptance includes the ability to avoid overreaction to matters pertaining to temporary situations. Mature individuals may not be happy and positive at all times, but they have learned to accept their emotional state so it does not interfere with the well-being of others or themselves. They are able to express their convictions and feelings with consideration for the convictions and feelings of others, and they possess a sense of proportion and reality. (Pattern and Growth 288)

Realistic perceptions, skills, and assignments. (Pattern and Growth 288)

Maturity is not a reflection of a particular IQ score. Maturity, rather, is the ability to be realistic in the observations of life, to be able to solve objective problems, and to be able to be " problem-centred." This means that mature individuals will be in close touch with " the real world," they will see objects, people, and situations for what they are, and they will have important work to do. (Pattern and Growth 290)

Self-objectification: Insight and Humour. (Pattern and Growth 288) Allport believed that insight into one's self and a sense of humour work together to create self-objectification: the ability to look at oneself objectively. Mature individuals who have the most complete sense of proportion concerning their

own qualities and cherished values are able to perceive their incongruities and absurdities in certain settings. (Pattern and Growth 293)

A unifying philosophy of life. (Pattern and Growth 295) Allport believed maturity required a clear and comprehensive theory regarding life. This theory (or theories) can be considered practical, spiritual, or philosophical in nature. Despite the individual preference toward the nature of the actual philosophy, a philosophy of life which unifies and directs all aspects of a person's life should develop in the mature individual. (Schultz 208)

" Allport believed that an individual's philosophy is founded upon their values, or basic convictions that he holds about what is and is not of real importance in life." (Hjelle and Ziegler 202-206) A unifying philosophy gives meaning to one's life. It can be evaluated in term of value - orientation or value - direction. Allport developed an inventory containing 45 questions (The Study of Values), which he felt gave insight into the value-direction of an individual. He built on the theories of E. Spranger, a European psychologist, in regard to six value-directions found in the individual: theoretical, economic, aesthetic social, political and religious. Of the six values presented, Allport felt his inventory on values showed that only one or two values were dominant in any given individual's life, although all of the values were present to some degree. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 297)

The values are:

Theoretical - This value is concerned with the pursuit of truth, usually through the empirical, critical, and rational methods. (Pattern and Growth 297) For example, by becoming a scientist or a philosopher.

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Economic - This value is concerned with what is practical, useful, and relevant. The strength of this value might be manifested in some aspect of the business world. (Pattern and Growth 297)

Aesthetic - This value is concerned with beauty and artistic experiences. This value is not limited to artistic talent, but includes also the enjoyment or pursuit of the aesthetic. (Pattern and Growth 298)

Social - This value is concerned with human relations and the love of others, whether conjugal, filial, friendly, or philanthropic. (Pattern and Growth 298)

Political: This value is concerned with power and influence, but is not limited to the narrow world of politics. (Pattern and Growth 299) The pursuit of power and control can be found anywhere from general occupation goals to personal relationships.

Religious: This value is concerned with unity, harmony, and understanding of the world (or universe) as a whole. It strives to relate the individual life to the workings of the cosmos. (Pattern and Growth 299) It is the pursuit for a spiritual understanding as an end-in-itself.

The classification of values is partly nomothetic and partly idiographic. These six values contribute vitally to the integration of a mature personality.

Another major area that Allport considered important for the analysis of personality is behaviour. He believes that the physical body - that which is visible to the eye - reveals considerable amount of information about a person and hence, leads to a better understanding of his personality.

## Behaviour

Allport carried out extensive research in the area of behaviour. He identified two types of behaviour: expressive behaviour and coping behaviour.

Expressive behaviour is so spontaneous that it shows one's true personality. It has no specific goal or purpose, and is usually unconsciously displayed.

Coping behaviour, on the other hand, is consciously planned and formally carried out toward a specific purpose (directing a change in one's environment). He believed all behaviour was both expressive and coping in nature, although one is usually more influential than the other:

Every act that we perform copes with our environment. Even rest and sleep and play are no exceptions. There is a task in hand (the what of behaviour). We must repair a lock, seek relaxation, summon a doctor, answer a question, or blink a speck of dust from our eyes. To cope with the task we employ our reflexes and habits or call upon our skills, our judgment and knowledge. But into this stream of activity there enter deeper trends in our nature. There are styles of repairing locks, calling a doctor, relaxing, answering a question, or blinking the eye. Every action betrays both a coping and an expressive aspect. (Pattern and Growth 426)

Allport summarized the difference between coping and expressive behaviour:

Coping is purposive and specifically motivated; expressive behaviour is not.

Coping is determined by the needs of the moment and by the situation; expressive movement reflects deeper personal structure.

Coping is formally elicited; expressive behaviour spontaneously " emitted."

Coping can be more readily controlled (inhibited, modified, conventionalized); expressive behaviour is harder to alter and often uncontrollable. (Changing our style of handwriting, e. g., can be kept up for only a short time)

Coping usually aims to change the environment; expressive behaviour aims at nothing, though it may incidentally have effects (as when our manner of answering questions in an interview creates a good impression and lands us the job).

Typically coping is conscious, even though it may employ automatic skills; expressive behaviour generally lies below the threshold of our awareness. (Pattern and Growth 463)

Allport explains, " What an individual is voluntarily doing or saying constitutes the adaptive aspect of his behaviour; how he is doing or saying it, the expressive aspect." (The Use of Personal 111) Coping behaviour can act as a restrainer, sometimes even a destroyer, of the basic rhythms of individual expression. In order to perceive the individuality of expressive behaviour, the focus of behaviour must move beyond the specific intent of an act, beyond the conscious control, and beyond the conventions and skills employed in coping. (Pattern and Growth 465) Allport observes that as people become adults their expressive behaviour becomes more controlled. Consequently this leads to a physically limited expressive behaviour.

He gives the example of a child who is irritable. This child expresses the irritability in almost all aspects of behaviour: crying, whining, fighting, etc. An adult on the other hand might express the same irritability only through restless fingers or shifting eyes. (Pattern and Growth 469) Allport felt this was an example of a broader phenomenon: various features of expression are of unequal significance in different people.

Some faces are open books; some are " poker faces." For some people gestures are merely conventional; for others, highly individual. Sometimes the style of clothing or the handwriting seems " just like" the person; in other cases, entirely non expressive. One person reveals himself primarily in his speech; another, in his posture and gait; a third, in his style of clothing or ornamentation. As a promising hypothesis we suggest that every person has one or two leading expressive features which reveal his true nature. If this is so, it is somewhat futile to study all people by the same cues, e. g. voice, eyes, or handwriting. The cue that is revealing for one person is not necessarily revealing for another. (Pattern and Growth 469)

Allport also gives the example of public speaking. The speaker communicates with the audience on two levels. The first level is the formal level which includes the content of the speech. This speech is planned and thus constitutes coping behaviour. The second level includes the informal unplanned body movements, gestures, facial expressions, postures, voice modulations etc. These exhibit the expressive behaviour. The speaker might be nervous and this might reflect in his voice or he might stammer. This spontaneous behaviour brings out the true elements of the speaker's personality.

According to Allport, there are various determinants of expressive behaviour, emotions and mood being two of them. But he believes that these two factors can only determine the intensity of expression whereas the pattern of expression remains the same.

Other determinants which affect behaviour to some degree are:

Cultural tradition

Regional convention

Passing emotional moods

Conditions of strain and fatigue

Age

Sex

Native muscular structure and bodily build

Conditions of health and disease

Accidental deformations of the body

Special training (e. g. Dramatics, military drill)

Conditions of physical environment (e. g. The ground and climatic factors in walking)

Any region of the body which can move is--either in rest or in that movement--expressive; consequently, any region of the body can be

analyzed for its expressive nature, whether separately or in combination.

(Pattern and Growth 479) Allport considered it impossible to discuss them all or to try to discuss ne completely. However, he discussed a few examples in order to demonstrate the significance of this research.

### The Face

Allport considered the face to be the most expressive region of the body due to the fact that it is mostly unclothed and the most visible part of the body.

(Pattern and Growth 479) The face contains several features which are very expressive themselves; the eyes, facial muscles, the mouth, eyebrows and the forehead. According to Allport, most research has been done on not what a facial expression reveals but on what the observer interprets it to reveal.

(Pattern and Growth 480)

### Voice and Speech

While most of the research has been done on speech, it has been found that an untrained voice is comparatively a more expressive instrument. The following tendencies have been revealed though through research: untrained voices are more often correctly matched in terms of actual personality and true expression than trained voices; age can usually be distinguished within a ten year accuracy; other physical features (height, complexion, appearance) cannot be distinguished with any accuracy; deeper traits (such as dominance, extra-version, etc.) can be judged with a fair success; complete sketches of personality can be matched with an even higher degree of success. This means voice-as-a-pat tern is highly congruent with personality-as-a-whole. (Pattern and Growth 483)

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## Posture, Gesture and Gait

Posture, gesture, and gait are affected by the influence of coping motivations, expressive motivations, cultural conventions, and personality. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 485) Allport quotes an anthropological investigation's finding that the human body is capable of assuming about one thousand different steady postures; that is, static positions that can be maintained comfortably for a period of time. (Pattern and Growth 486) Posture during sleep is also highly consistent in regards to a personal characteristic. Allport recognized gestures as highly individualized and revealing; however, he felt little research existed that was not artificial in nature. (Pattern and Growth 486) In regards to gait, Allport quotes a study which suggests a person's gait can be measured by regularity, speed, pressure, length of stride, elasticity, definiteness of direction, variability and rhythm.

Coping behaviour is taken as the foreground and expressive behaviour as the background in personality analysis. Allport felt that it was easier to document the research on coping behaviour in scientific terms but expressive behaviour was more important in terms of personality analysis. Therefore, Allport said that more research should be done on expressive behaviour because of its potential insight into the human personality. (Pattern and Growth 494)

## Personality Analysis

Allport is credited with writing more about the specific methods appropriate to personality assessment than almost any other theorist. (Schultz 209) As is <https://assignbuster.com/a-look-at-allport-psychology-essay/>

typical of the work of Allport, he recognized that there was no one best method of personality assessment due to the complexities of the human personality. Allport believed that knowledge of others is available only in fragments, so at best people only catch "glimpses" of each other. (Pattern and Growth 407)

No person can understand any other person completely, for it is impossible for one human being to share directly the motives, thoughts, and feelings of another. This unbridgeable chasm between mind and mind has led philosophers to ponder the egocentric predicament of the human race, and poets to lament the ultimate solitude of each soul. It is, they assure us, only through circuitous routes and through the study of "shadows" that we are able to achieve our imperfect glimpses of one another. Since psychology can do nothing to change this "metaphysical solitude," it must recognize at the outset that the problem of understanding people is always a problem of partial understanding. We may understand one another relatively well but never completely. (Allport, Personality 499)

Allport believed that the perception of someone's personality is a subjective analysis based on an objective reality. This subjectivity can lead to errors in analysing a personality. Three of the main errors which Allport discussed are discussed below as they are relatively more important.

Emotions: Emotions play an important role in perception. Emotional bias affects both the message being sent and the way the message is perceived. Even if one strives for an objective perspective, personal feelings turn the objective perspective into a subjective perspective. A person in love is often

a poor judge of a lover's personality. (Pattern and Growth 498) Research shows, for example, that when in a threatening or humiliating situation, other people are rated as far "less attractive" than in situations which flatters the individual's self-esteem. (Pattern and Growth 498)

Openness: Some people are open about themselves and reveal their natures to others whereas some people like to keep their lives or certain personal matters a secret. Therefore, people vary widely in the amount of information they are willing to disclose, and in whom they are willing to confide. (Pattern and Growth 499) This willingness to disclose oneself is an essential factor in accurate perceptions, yet it does not necessarily imply a conscious disclosure. Some people, in their spontaneous daily activities, allow their natures to be revealed, while other people analyze closely their actions in order not to reveal their motives. (Pattern and Growth 500)

First Impressions: There is a famous saying that the first impression is the often the last impression. An immediate judgment made upon meeting an individual for the first time often undergoes a change as contact with that person increases. Because Allport believed knowledge of others comes indirectly and in fragments, he was highly sceptical of the judgement which tries to instantly organize a complex pattern of interrelated cues. (Pattern and Growth 501) Yet, first impressions are often long standing, and despite their inaccurate nature, are very difficult to change.

Allport listed eleven different techniques for assessing the human personality:

constitutional and physiological diagnosis

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socio-cultural setting, membership, role

self -appraisal

conduct sampling

ratings

test and scales

projective techniques

depth analysis

expressive behaviour

synoptic procedures

personal documents and case studies (Pattern and Growth 396)

All of these techniques use the basic scientific (and common sense) method of observation followed by an interpretation of the significance of what has been observed. (Allport, Pattern and Growth 396) Allport acknowledged that the list of assessment techniques did not include literary or philosophical contributions to assessment, although he did recognize the contribution of literature and philosophy. (Pattern and Growth 396)

1. Constitutional and Physiological Diagnosis: How the biological aspects of the human body correlate to the personality are important. (Pattern and Growth 398)

2. Socio-cultural setting, Membership, Status and Role: Sociocultural studies analyze the framework within which the personality develops: social conventions, customs, codes, religious and occupational groups, etc. Through these studies a certain amount of "probable knowledge" can be ascertained in regards to trait and behaviour.

It has been argued that such knowledge of membership is the best predictor of a person's future conduct. To know that he or she is an Arab, an army engineer, a Salvation Army lassie, an actor, or even a mother, is to know a good deal about the probable present and future course of the life in question. (Pattern and Growth 400)

3. Self-appraisal: Self - appraisal includes all methods that invite individuals to report explicitly and deliberately concerning selected aspects of their own personality. (Pattern and Growth 410) The individual's response, whether correct or incorrect gives an insight into his personality.

4. Conduct Sampling: Conduct sampling is the systematic observation of behaviour in an everyday situation. Time sampling or time budgeting spot checks behaviour at chosen intervals either through observation, (time-sampling) or a written record which is later analyzed (time-budgeting). (Pattern and Growth 414-415)

5. Ratings: This formal technique estimates the strength of one or more qualities in a personality based on direct acquaintance with the personality and compared with other people with respect to a particular trait. (Pattern and Growth 418)

6. Expressive Behaviour and other Assessment Techniques: Expressive behaviour has been discussed above along with coping behaviour. The other types of assessing techniques discussed by Allport are based on scientific and analytical aids. They are tests and scales, depth analysis, and synoptic procedures.

7. Personal Documents and Case Studies: Allport had a strong interest in personal documents and conducted an extensive research in this area.

No understanding of general laws is possible without some degree of acquaintance with particulars. If we may assume that the concrete and the general are of equal importance in the production of psychological understanding, it follows that case materials (including personal documents) should claim half of the psychologist's time and attention. (The Use of Personal 151)

Allport also saw the importance of personal documents in interdisciplinary terms: He realized they were of interest not only to the psychologist but to the historian, biographer, and novelist. (Pattern and Growth 401) He defined a personal document as " any freely written or spoken record that intentionally or unintentionally yields information regarding the structure, dynamics, and functioning of the author's mental life." (The Use of Personal xii) These include both first person and third person documents: autobiographies, whether comprehensive or topical; diaries, whether intimate or daily log-inventories; letters; open-ended questionnaires (but