

Traits and Personality

Chapter 10

Gordon Allport



- 1897-1967
- Grew up near Cleveland
- Spent much of his childhood alone
- College at Harvard
- A visit to Freud led him to find a new approach
 - Young boy with a phobia
 - "Is that young boy you?"
 - Excessive focus on unconscious forces, sexuality

The Nature of Personality

- Allport's definition of personality a lifetime work in progress
 - Over 50 revisions during his productive life
 - Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought
 - Personality is complex

The *Biological* Nature of Personality

- Personality is more than a metaphor in Allport's view
- Personality exists as a concrete, biological, structure—science is just not advanced enough to actually see it
 - Reductionistic approach
 - Forecasted emphasis on brain in psychology

Continuity vs. Discontinuity

- Allport distinguished between continuity and *discontinuity* theories
 - Continuity theories posited incremental (quantitative) change over time (e.g., Freud)
 - Accumulation of skills, habits, beliefs, or behaviors
 - Nothing really "new" happens → change is a function of the number of inputs
 - A closed system
 - Discontinuity theories propose genuine transformation (qualitative) over time (e.g., Allport)
 - Transition from low to high levels of organization
 - Over time, inputs are reshaped and reorganized into more meaningful forms

Traits

- Allport posited that traits were actual neurological structures within a person that influenced behavior
 - Vs. the idea of an "operational definition"
- Allport defined trait as a determining tendency or predisposition to respond to the world in certain ways
 - Traits are *consistent* and *enduring* characteristics
 - Allport distinguished between common traits and personal dispositions

Common Traits

- Hypothetical construct
- Allport spoke of common traits as a way to describe and compare individuals within a given culture
 - Universal human characteristics
 - Typically, people develop along similar modes or lines of adjustment (cultural constraints)
 - Assertiveness, openness
- Common traits allow one to classify individuals into a variety of categories within a society

Personal Dispositions

- General determining characteristic that is unique to an individual
- No two individuals are alike
 - Common traits help classify individuals into categories
 - Personal dispositions represent one's distinctiveness, uniqueness
- A cardinal disposition represents a characteristic that influences all overt behavior and actions
 - Rare
 - Mother Theresa

Personal Dispositions

- Central Dispositions represent highly characteristic tendencies of an individual
 - Think a letter of recommendation...
 - 5-10 for each individual
- Secondary Dispositions represent more specific tendencies that may be situational
 - Domineering and aggressive at home...
 - ...but submissive when getting a ticket
 - Secondary dispositions correspond to what cognitive psychologists refer to as schemas
 - Allport referred to this as the "doing" portion of personality

The Proprium

- The central experiences of self-awareness that people have as they grow and move forward
 - Avoided "ego" and "self," felt these terms described the unknown elements of personality
 - → the remainder, the junk
- Optimistic
 - "pro" signifies forward movement
- Divided into seven propiate functions that Allport posits develop over our lives
- For Allport, the proprium represents an evolving sense of self as *known* and *felt*

Propiate Functions

1. Bodily self refers to a sense of one's body and one's body limits
2. Self-identity refers to awareness of inner sameness and continuity—sense of "I"
3. Self-esteem refers to feelings of pride for our accomplishments—control
4. Self-extension refers to a sense of possession and the relationship of the self to other objects and other individuals—valuing others in terms of the self—"my mother" or "my doggy"
5. Self-image refers to comparing our actions to those of others

Propiate Functions

6. Self-as-rational copier refers to a sense of one's ability to use rationality and problem solving skills to confront obstacles
7. Propiate striving refers to the capacity to project into the future and to develop long-term goals with a plan to attain the goals
 - Emerge across the life-span in a generally predictable order
 - Build one on top of the next
 - Children lack a "real" personality, but have a personality potential in the future

Functional Autonomy

- Implies that adult motivation not necessarily tied to past
- Behaviors can become goals in and of themselves regardless of original intention
 - Example of Johnny the baseball player
 - There may be historical ties, but is not necessarily functionally related
- The behavior has a life of its own in the present moment

Types of Functional Autonomy

Two Kinds of Functional Autonomy

- Perseverative Functional Autonomy refers to behaviors that persist long after the original function is over and have no connection to proprium
 - Addictions, compulsions, ritualistic behaviors
 - Smoking as a teen to rebel against parents
- Propriate Functional Autonomy refers to acquired interests, values, attitudes that are directed from the proprium
 - Abilities → interests
 - Excludes processes such as drives, reflexes, physique, intellect, etc.

Definition of Maturity

- Believed there was a Radical discontinuity between neurotic and healthy personality
 - Vs. tendency to view "normal" personality as an absence of neurotic tendencies
- Too much emphasis in psychology on what is neurotic
- Not enough focus on what is healthy

Characteristics of Maturity

1. Extension of the sense of self refers to one's interest in the welfare of others
2. Warm relating of self to others refers to one's ability to relate intimately to others
3. Emotional Security (Self-Acceptance) refers to accept one's self and one's emotional states without impulsive or dangerous responses
4. Realistic perception, skills, and assignments refers to one's ability to realistic handle the challenges of life
5. Self-Objectification (Insight & Humor) refers to self insight
6. Unifying philosophy of life refers to one's outwardly focused guiding principles for a healthy, happy life
 - Must of childhood → Ought of the adult

Assessment and Research

Nomothetic vs. Idiographic Distinction

- Nomothetic research refers to the study of large groups to determine the frequency with which certain events occur
 - Normalcy = high frequency
 - Infer common traits, universal principles
- Idiographic research centers on one individual at a time that attempts to document distinctiveness and uniqueness
 - Complex research, often used to answer specific questions about individuals

Henry Murray



- 1893-1988
- Born & raised in NYC
- Privileged family
- Medical school first, then psychology
- Meeting with Jung provided inspiration
 - Experienced the unconscious
- Had affair with Christiana Morgan who did not get appropriate credit for TAT

The Study of Personology

- Like Allport, Murray emphasized the complexity of personality
- Differed from Allport in saying that personality was not an entity or physical substance
- Personology defined as the study of "human lives and the factors that influence their course"
 - Normal people and natural settings
 - Study of individual human lives

The Study of Personology (cont.)

- Wanted to separate the total of a person into manageable units
- The basic unit, the proceeding refers to a short significant behavior pattern that has clear beginning and ending
 - Interactions of the person with other individuals or objects
 - Picking up a book, writing a letter, pacing back and forth
- Proceedings chained together into serials
 - A planned series of proceedings leading to a goal is a serial program

Human Needs

- Murray's most significant contribution to study of personality
- Needs are "forces within the brain that organize our perceptions, understanding, and behavior in such a way to change an unsatisfying situation or increase satisfaction"
 - Aroused by internal states (hunger) or external stimuli (food)

Human Needs and Press

- Derived and articulated 20 basic human needs
- Not all needs present in all people
- Needs are in varying strength and intensity
 - These fundamental needs are ordered into a hierarchy by Maslow
- Press refers to forces from objects or persons with the environment that help or hinder an individual in reaching goals

Alpha vs. Beta Press

- Alpha Press refers to actual properties or attributes of the environment
- Beta Press refers to the individual's perception of the environment
 - Beta presses are the real determinants of behavior

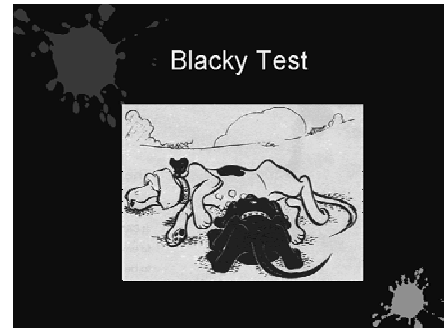
Murray's 20 Needs (p. 291)

Dominance	Sentience	Nurturance
Deference	Exhibition	Defendance
Autonomy	Play	Counteraction
Aggression	Affiliation	Harmavoidance
Abasement	Rejection	Order
Achievement	Succorance	Understand
Sex	Infavoidance	

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

- Murray's most enduring contribution
- Projective Test still used in clinical psychology assessment
- Patients respond to cards with ambiguous drawings by telling a story and describing the needs of the characters therein
- Patients "project" their own needs onto the card

TAT: An Example



TAT: An example (cont.)

1. What story does the picture tell?
2. What led up to the event in the picture?
3. How are things going to work out?
4. What are the people in the card thinking and feeling?

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

- Extensively used
- Limited empirical evidence
- Poor reliability when scored
- Used primarily for the narrative themes that patients describe