

# PROPRIATE STRIVING

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

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## PROPRIATE STRIVING

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Psychology, Personality Theory

### 1. Core Definition

Propriate Striving is the definitive motivational mechanism characterizing the mature and healthy personality within the framework of personality psychology established by **Gordon W. Allport**. It represents the final and most sophisticated stage in the development of the Proprium, Allport's term for the organizing core of the self. Unlike early, biologically driven, or reactive motivations, Propriate Striving is fundamentally future-oriented, intentional, and deeply committed to the attainment of long-range goals that imbue an individual's life with coherence and purpose.

This concept marks a critical theoretical divergence from reductionist psychological models. Allport argued that adult motivation cannot be solely explained by analyzing past experiences or unconscious conflicts; rather, the mature individual is driven by consciously held purposes that seek to increase tension and challenge, facilitating growth, rather than merely reducing physiological tension (as emphasized in drive theories). Propriate Striving, therefore, is the active, directed effort to fulfill one's unique potential, reflecting the personal, stable structure of the self.

The emergence of Propriate Striving is specifically situated during the developmental period of **adolescence**. This timing is significant because it corresponds precisely with the individual's intense search for identity and the initial foray into making substantial, long-term commitments. It signifies the point at which conscious intentions and detailed, future-based planning begin to operate as the primary directors of behavior and personality integration.

### 2. Historical Development and Context

Propriate Striving was formalized by Allport as part of his broader effort to establish a humanistic and dispositional theory of personality that championed the uniqueness and forward-looking nature of the individual. Allport initially presented these ideas in his seminal 1937 text, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, where he criticized the prevailing psychoanalytic and behaviorist views for neglecting the conscious, purposeful aspects of human existence. He emphasized that the psychological machinery of a healthy adult operates independently of its historical origins.

The concept is inextricably linked to Allport's principle of **Functional Autonomy**, which posits that adult motives become self-sustaining and functionally distinct from the earlier, infantile drives that may have initially spurred them. Propriate Striving embodies this autonomy; the mature person strives for goals (e.g., excellence in a profession, adherence to ethical standards) not because of early rewards or punishments, but because these pursuits have become fundamentally connected to the individual's integrated sense of self. The motivation is no longer external or reactive but

intrinsic and proactive.

By establishing Propriate Striving as the ultimate stage of proprietary development, Allport provided a framework for understanding psychological maturity. He argued that the striving function distinguishes the truly mature personality--one that possesses an extended sense of self, emotional security, realistic perception, insight and humor, and a unifying philosophy of life--from the immature personality still bound by rigid, reactive patterns.

### 3. The Eight Stages of Proprium Development

Allport envisioned the development of the Proprium--the core sense of self--as an orderly, yet flexible, sequence of eight overlapping stages, with Propriate Striving serving as the penultimate achievement. This sequence illustrates the gradual process by which an infant, lacking a stable sense of self, grows into a complex, integrated adult. This developmental pathway underscores the foundation necessary for mature striving to take hold:

**Bodily Self (Infancy):** Awareness of one's physical existence and boundaries.

**Self-Identity (Ages 1-2):** Recognition of continuity and consistency of self over time.

**Self-Esteem (Ages 2-3):** Development of pride through mastery and competence.

**Extension of Self (Ages 3-4):** Defining self through external possessions and significant others.

**Self-Image (Ages 4-6):** Conception of "good me" and "bad me"; formation of awareness of one's reputation and ideal goals.

**Rational Coping (Ages 6-12):** The use of logic and reason to solve problems and adjust to reality.

**Propriate Striving (Adolescence):** The development of long-range goals, intentions, and purpose, directing the personality toward the future.

**The Knower (Adulthood):** The culmination stage, where the self is fully aware of, and able to synthesize, all proprietary functions.

The transition into Propriate Striving during adolescence is marked by a sudden intensification of purpose. This is the period when the individual begins to synthesize the disparate elements of self developed in earlier stages--identity, image, and rational capacity--into a unified trajectory. The focus shifts dramatically from adapting to immediate circumstances to actively shaping one's future path.

### 4. Characteristics of Propriate Intentionality

The primary characteristic of Propriate Striving in adolescence is the establishment of conscious intentions. These intentions are the individual's declarations of what they plan to be or achieve, acting as powerful motivational forces that structure daily behavior. Prior to settling upon these stable, self-defining intentions, the adolescent stage is often characterized by a necessary period of **experimentation** and identity exploration.

This experimentation involves trying on various roles, testing different value systems, and exploring potential career paths without immediate, rigid commitment. Allport viewed this exploratory phase as healthy and essential, enabling the individual to find goals that truly resonate with their unique personality structure. It is only after this period of exploration that the adolescent makes the "long-range commitments" that define mature striving.

Furthermore, Propriate Striving is inherently linked to value maintenance. The goals pursued must be intrinsically valuable to the individual. These goals are not merely tasks to be completed, but existential commitments--the effort to realize one's self through dedicated work, relationships, or creative pursuits. This intentionality provides the overarching meaning that prevents an adult life from dissolving into disconnected, reactive episodes.

## 5. Significance for Psychological Maturity

Propriate Striving serves as the primary psychological mechanism differentiating a truly mature personality from one that is merely adjusted or reactive. A person engaged in healthy Propriate Striving possesses a unifying life purpose, allowing for the integration of diverse traits and behaviors under a singular banner of self-chosen destiny. This integration leads to predictability and stability in personality, as all actions are measured against the criteria of the long-term goals.

The impact of this striving extends beyond individual motivation; it defines emotional maturity. Mature strivings require the individual to tolerate frustration, delay gratification, and commit resources toward distant future rewards. In contrast, the absence or failure of Propriate Striving can result in shallow existence, characterized by a lack of deep commitments, reliance on external validation, and an inability to transcend biological drives or residual childhood conflicts.

By emphasizing striving, Allport shifted the focus of personality theory toward optimism and growth. The individual is viewed not as a victim of their history or environment, but as an agent capable of conscious planning and creative pursuit of ideals. This perspective has had profound implications for counseling and humanistic psychology, validating the search for meaning and purpose as a central psychological need.

## 6. Theoretical Limitations and Debates

Despite its enduring influence, the concept of Propriate Striving and the broader theory of the Proprium have faced significant scrutiny, particularly from researchers favoring quantitative and empirical methods. One major criticism revolves around the high degree of **idiographic focus**--the emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual's goals and personality structure. While philosophically appealing, this focus makes it difficult to operationalize and test Propriate Striving rigorously across large populations, limiting its predictive power in generalized psychological studies.

A second debate concerns the clarity and empirical verifiability of the developmental stages leading to striving. Critics suggest that the eight proprietary stages, while logically appealing, lack the clear empirical markers necessary to prove that they unfold precisely in the manner Allport described or that they are universal across cultures. Furthermore, the reliance on self-report and conscious introspection in studying mature striving may overlook powerful unconscious influences on goal selection, a factor Allport deliberately downplayed.

Lastly, some researchers argue that the concept of **Functional Autonomy**, which underpins striving, is too absolute. They propose that motives are rarely entirely detached from their biological or environmental origins, suggesting a more fluid and continuous interaction between primitive drives and sophisticated goals, rather than the sharp functional separation proposed by Allport.

### Further Reading

[Gordon Allport \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[The Proprium and Propriate Striving](#)

[Simply Psychology: Gordon Allport's Personality Theory](#)