Gordon Allport and the Legend of "Rinehart"

David G. Winter
University of Michigan

ABSTRACT Gordon Allport's prize-winning junior-year essay on the Harvard "Rinehart" legend contains several features that are different from all other versions of the legend, most notably in the motives attributed to Rinehart and the responses of the students to him. These changes, it is argued, reflect the influence of Allport's own personality and values, as manifested in his adult life and academic career.

In October 1917, Harvard junior Gordon Allport entered a contest sponsored by the YMCA magazine *North American Student* for the best account of a "most highly treasured" college tradition. His essay, "Harvard's Best Tradition," won the first prize of $20 and was published in the December issue (Allport, 1917; the article is preserved in Allport's personal scrapbook in the Harvard University Archives). It was a retelling of Harvard's "Rinehart" legend. In Allport's version, Rinehart is a lonely Harvard student whose name is never called out by classmates passing by his dormitory. Out of desperation, one day he stood in front of the dormitory and called out his own name. His classmates noticed and, out of sympathy and pity, made a special effort to fraternize with him. (A complete copy of Allport's article is reproduced in the appendix.)

While the Rinehart legend was well-known at Harvard in 1917, Allport's version was quite different from any other known variant. Not

I am grateful to Abigail Stewart and Alan Elms for discussion of the ideas and interpretations of this article, and to Casey Smith for searching the Richard Dorson papers at the Lilly Library of Indiana University. Naturally, the responsibility for what I have written remains my own. Address correspondence to David G. Winter, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1109.

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only did Allport embellish the story with additional details; he also completely transformed its point. This article suggests that from a close examination of these differences, we can infer some of Allport's personality dynamics that were reflected in his later life and academic career.

Freud (1900/1953, pp. 261–266; 1908/1959; 1928/1961) suggested that inferences about people's personality could be drawn from examination of their literary interests and productions, and especially from any mistakes and alterations they made in repeating a story. Rank (1924/1975, 1925) expanded this analysis in his discussion of how, over time, original myths and legends are altered and elaborated by later authors who introduce changes and variations on the basis of their own personalities. Murray and his associates (1938) used these principles to develop a variety of projective personality tests such as the Thematic Apperception Test and, perhaps even more relevant to the present case, "The Minister's Black Veil" (Murray, 1938, pp. 548–550).[1]

The Rinehart Legend

Who was Rinehart?[2]

John Bryce Gordon Rinehart (1875–1952) was a member of the Harvard Class of 1900, having graduated from Waynesburg College in Pennsylvania 2 years earlier. He was intelligent (going on to graduate with honors) and affable, with many friends. He took most of his courses in history, government, and economics and on the side tutored other students in these subjects. He lived on the fifth floor (no elevator) of Harvard's Grays Hall. His friends and tutees, in order to save themselves an unnecessary climb up four flights of stairs, were in the habit of first calling out his name in order to see whether he was in.

On June 11, 1900, Rinehart was out of town, but left his windows open because of the heat. Some friends came by and called his name. Thinking he was in but hadn't answered because he was studying, they called again and again. (One person who claimed to have known Rine-

1. Participants are given the outline of a story by Hawthorne—a minister who one Sunday appears in the pulpit with his face covered by a black veil—and then asked to develop it in any way they like.

2. This account is based on Feeney (1950), supplemented by clippings in the Rinehart file of the Harvard University Archives (file HUG 300 [Rinehart, J. B. G. '00]).

hart well between 1908 and 1923 described him as a "grind" who "often studied late at night.")[3] Suddenly, in imitation, students in other dormitories took up the cry, "Oh Rinehart!" The following night this same call was repeated across the campus. A tradition had been born. Within a week, Harvard students attending the Boston Pops interrupted the concert with the cry.[4] Within a few years, the echoing cry of "Oh Rinehart!" had become a regular feature of warm summer evenings in Cambridge, especially before final exams. By the 1930s, the cry of "Rinehart!" often signaled the beginning of a college riot. The custom seems to have died out after World War II and especially after the campus turmoil of the 1960s. (An informal poll of recent Harvard graduates by the present author turned up no one who had heard of either the cry or the legend.)

The core Rinehart legend

Within a few years of the events of June 1900, a legend developed around the "Rinehart!" cry. A 1950 survey of 74 Harvard alumni asking how the cry started (Feeney, 1950) showed that 72% of graduates from the classes of 1900 through 1909 gave some version of the true story stated above. Among graduates of the classes of 1910 and later, however, only 5% knew the truth and fully 76% replied with something along the lines of the following, which we shall call the "core legend" (Feeney, 1950, quoting a member of the Harvard Class of 1916):

> An undergraduate of the Nineties or earlier, who roomed in the Yard and had few friends, used occasionally to stand below the windows of his empty room and call his own name, Rinehart, in hopes of adducing the attractive odor of popularity and friendship. He was probably caught at it, and the cry was taken up derisively from other windows. (p. 661)

3. Letter from Henry P. Fry to David M. Little, January 26, 1953, in the Rinehart file of the Harvard University Archives.

4. This information comes from a newspaper clipping in the Rinehart file. Although the clipping does not indicate the name of the newspaper or the date, internal evidence suggests that it was from the *Boston [?] Sunday Journal* of June 24, 1900, less than 2 weeks after the original incident. In the article, Rinehart is described as a "shark [better than ordinary] in government" and "one of the best-natured fellows in the Harvard dormitories."

Why and how the true story was so quickly transformed into the legend is an interesting question for folklore scholars,[5] but for present purposes the survey data clearly suggest that by the time Allport entered college in 1915, the Rinehart story in the above form had already become a preeminent Harvard legend.

Other versions show minor variations of detail. For example, a 1936 newspaper story told of a "lonely youth a long distance from home [who] had conceived the idea of calling his own name up to a vacant room so that the other students would think he was not without friends" ("Rinehart again at Harvard," 1936). The folklorist Hankey (1944) described two variants. She dates the first as 1919–1920, just about the time Allport graduated from Harvard:

> The son of a famous person named Reinhardt [sic] went to Harvard and wanted to be very popular. So *to foster this idea among his classmates* he would go outside of his dormitory and yell his own name as if somebody were calling him. He was discovered and then everybody began yelling it. (p. 33, emphasis added)

In a later 1932 version Rinehart was initially unpopular, but otherwise the core legend was unchanged:

> . . . His unpopularity made him very unhappy, so *to impress people* he would quietly sneak down from his room at night and standing below his window would call. . . . (p. 33, emphasis added)

The folklorist Dorson, himself a Harvard student in the 1930s, described the legend of a "lonesome . . . poor Rinehart" who, "lacking friends, would go beneath his window and call out his own name, to make the neighbors think him popular" (1949, p. 675; 1977, p. 259). At the time of Rinehart's death in 1952, the *Harvard Crimson* ran a story reiterating the core legend (Amphitheatrof, 1952):

> Rinehart was the true incarnation of pathos. He had no friends. Rinehart suffered, quite reasonably, from his unpopularity, so, to bolster his social-status, he called up to his room, "Rinehart, oh Rinehart," then ran back up, flung open the window, and answered himself with a cheery "Yes?"

5. In a recollection apparently tinged with the legend, a later-life friend of Rinehart claimed that after the June 11, 1900, episode, "soon he was the best known man and one of the most popular in Harvard" (letter from Henry P. Fry to David M. Little, Rinehart file).

Although these versions vary in minor details, every one clearly involves the theme of *deliberately simulated popularity*, sometimes successful and sometimes not.

Elaborations of the legend

Over the years, several incidents attributing almost magical efficacy to the "Rinehart!" cry accumulated around the core legend. Morrison (1936), for example, repeated the following story:

> A Harvard graduate, pestered by touts in the courtyard of Shepheard's Hotel, Cairo, called "Oh, Rhinehart!" [sic] and was presently answered in the same kind from four or five windows, whose occupants then helped him to disperse the beggars. (p. 300 n.1)

Kahn (1969) added the story of "a Harvard man in Africa who was about to be kidnapped by some Arabs, screamed 'Rinehart!' and was rescued because there happened to be another Harvard man nearby in the French Foreign Legion" (1969, p. 126).

The "Rinehart!" cry also penetrated American popular culture. John Barrymore mentioned it in the 1939 movie, *The Great Man Votes*, and the song "Harvard Blues," written by Harvard graduate George Frazer and recorded by Count Basie, includes the line, "Rinehart, Rinehart, I am a most indifferent guy . . ." (Feeney, 1950, p. 660; see also McCord, 1985, p. 52; "Spring Is Coming," 1942, p. 11; Wagner, 1950, p. 128).

Allport's Unique Version of the Legend

In many respects, Allport's version of the Rinehart legend is consistent with most others. He especially emphasized the hero's loneliness and lack of social skills, but these are at least implied in other versions. He added traits of "ambition and aspiration," which are not mentioned in other versions. He described Rinehart as a "freshman," as do some other versions, but also added the adjective "awkward" and gave Rinehart a specific age (17). To my knowledge, these two details are not present in any other version.

However, two major features of Allport's version distinguish it from all others, including versions dating from 1919 and recollections of alumni from 1910 onward. These two features completely alter the character of the story. First, why did Rinehart call out his name? Allport

altered the core legend motive of *calculated self-presentation* (e.g., "in hopes of adducing the attractive odor of popularity and friendship") to motives of *self-expression* or even *fantasy-fulfillment* ("just to see how it would sound").

Second, what was the response of the other students? According to the core legend, it was either *derision* or *admiration and attraction*, depending on whether they realized that it was Rinehart himself who called out his own name. Allport's version, in contrast, is a story of *pity* and *altruism*: The "sympathies of the crowd were easily aroused," which led them to altruistic help by "call[ing] to him to come and join in all excursions."

These two features are unique to Allport's version.[6] Taken together, they completely change the point of the legend: Instead of a clever student who transforms (or fails to transform) an unpromising social life into power and prestige through the calculated use of illusion, we have a lonely student who is "started on the path to strong self-development by a cheery call and a few words of encouragement and good fellowship." Allport's explicit message at the end emphasizes this change of focus: "May such customs as this increase."

Rinehart and Allport

Why did Allport change the Rinehart legend? Practical considerations should not be discounted: In a YMCA writing contest, a story of redemption-through-altruism would surely fare much better than a cynical tale of calculation and derision, especially during a time of idealism and patriotic fervor (barely 6 months after U.S. entry into World War I). On the other hand, Allport's changes suggest the influence of personal factors as well. Some changes make clear his own identification with the hero of his legend. For example, like "his" Rinehart, Allport was a 17-year-old freshman "full of ambition and aspiration." As Allport later described his own freshman year:

6. A search of the papers of folklorist Richard Dorson (himself a Harvard graduate of the class of 1937, also with Harvard M.A. and Ph.D. degrees) at Indiana University, as well as the holdings of the library and archives of Harvard University, revealed no version of the Rinehart legend containing either of Allport's changes. Moreover, the source of one of Hankey's (1944) "Rinehart" versions was given as the ethnologist-botanist Sherburne F. Cook. Since Cook's version closely followed the core legend, and since he was a college classmate of Allport's (class of 1919, also with later Harvard M.A. and Ph.D. degrees), we may conclude that Allport's version was not some special variant known only to his college contemporaries at Harvard.

> Did ever a Midwestern lad receive a greater impact from "going East to college"? I doubt it. Almost overnight my world was remade. . . . First and most important was the pervading sense of high standards. Harvard simply assumed, or so it seemed to me, that excellence should prevail. At the first hour examinations I received an array of D's and C's. Profoundly shattered, I stiffened my efforts and ended the year with A's. (1968, p. 380)

At least twice Allport described himself as having "a youth of great inferiority feeling," specifically toward his older brother Floyd (1968, pp. 382, 390). Like his own Rinehart, perhaps, he knew "what it is to be the object of scorn" (see Elms, 1993, pp. 49–50). Thus the Rinehart legend, already firmly established at Harvard by his freshman year, would have been an appealing story of "superiority" established through intelligence and effort.

On the other hand, Allport had a strongly developed social conscience and ethic of service. Throughout college, he conducted a boys' club in a low-income district of Boston. In addition, he held several volunteer and paid positions with social welfare organizations. He was executive secretary of a group that helped foreign students adjust to college. These activities reflected his "search for personal identity" (Allport, 1968):

> All this social service was deeply satisfying, partly because it gave me a feeling of competence (to offset a generalized inferiority feeling) and partly because I found I liked to help people with their problems. (p. 382)

With its focus changed from the calculating Rinehart to the helping students, Allport's version of the legend can be interpreted as expressing a corresponding change of identification for Allport. Rinehart's loneliness is resolved not by cynical calculation and manipulation but rather by altruistic sympathy and assistance, thereby preserving Allport's values while still dealing with the problem of loneliness and inferiority. At the same time, the changed focus also facilitated Allport's personal sense of *mastery*, through identification with the altruistic students rather than the lonely Rinehart.

In its final form, then, Allport's version of the Rinehart legend can be seen as congruent both with his youthful needs (succorance and mastery) and also with his youthful ideals (altruistic service). Finally, the original theme of the Rinehart legend—social impact achieved by a cynical egoist through deception—has become transmuted to a theme of

social impact exercised by high-minded and mature helpers, for a good cause. Rinehart's desires for power, prominence, and status have been transformed, by Allport, into the other students' desire for responsible influence and leadership.

Allport's reworking of the Rinehart legend is consistent with his own later behavior. Gordon Allport helped people—particular people and people in general—who were in need (Elms, 1993, p. 53). After World War I, for example, he taught at Robert College (supported by the YMCA) in Istanbul, "an early version of a Peace Corpsman" (Pettigrew, 1969). Despite his differences with Henry Murray, he was a strong advocate during Murray's difficult tenure case at Harvard, even threatening to resign if Murray was denied tenure (Triplet, 1983). And for 11 years, he was a patient and helpful confidante for "Jenny," the exceptionally difficult but exceptionally needy mother of his college roommate (Allport, 1965; see also Winter, 1993). When the tide of academic refugees from Hitler's Germany swelled in the years before World War II, Allport labored to make contacts and find them jobs (Allport, 1968, p. 396). He directed a philanthropic trust. Throughout his career, he was remembered by his younger colleagues for his encouragement and good fellowship. As colleagues put it in an obituary: "He was kindliness personified" and "one of the best listeners in the world." "How many people *always* write back and comment when one sends them an offprint or a manuscript?" (Smith, Vernon, & Tajfel, 1968, pp. 103–104).

Creative Writing and the Interpretation of Personality

Thus many features of Allport's unique version of the Rinehart story—"Harvard's best tradition"—both reflected and anticipated his own life story. If the problems of Allport's "Rinehart" were in many respects the problems of the young Gordon Allport, so also the changed focus and identification with the helping students prefigures Allport's adult style and values. More generally, such connections illustrate the usefulness of carefully studying people's literary or creative products—especially any unique changes or nonstandard features—to illuminate aspects of their personalities. In demonstrating the interpretive usefulness of personal documents, these connections between personal documents and lives reflect still another of Gordon Allport's professional values (see Allport, 1942).

Appendix

Gordon Allport's Version of the Rinehart Legend (from Allport, 1917)

Many years ago, in one of the venerable ivy-covered dormitories in the college yard, there lived a very lonely freshman. This freshman, like most of his kind, was full of ambition and aspiration, and had come to college to win himself a creditable place in the fraternity of Harvard men. He craved popularity, but had little talent in the art of becoming a social leader. He couldn't play football; couldn't dance; was neither good nor bad in his studies; had no pronounced vices or signal virtues which might appeal to one crowd or another. He was indeed a typical awkward youth of seventeen.

Many an afternoon he sat by the window listening to his classmates call their favorites to come and join a happy crowd bound for a Saturday hike to Fresh Pond or for a theater party in town. Eagerly he waited, hoping that some one would call: "Rinehart, O, Rinehart, do you want to go?" He often rehearsed his response to this coveted invitation, visualizing carefully his *entree* into the society of his classmates. But the call never came.

One day, out of sheer desperation and loneliness, he went down in front of the dormitory and, just to see how it would sound, called his own name vigorously, "Rinehart, O, Rinehart, come on down!" How glorious it sounded! If only. . . .

The rest of the story is not hard to imagine. One of the boy's observant classmates—there were a few such—witnessed this scene, and associating with it the remembrance of certain timid advances and wistful looks, divined the secret.

The sympathies of the crowd were easily aroused by the story, and special effort was made to fraternize with the lonely boy. Ever after it was the custom upon passing his window to call to him to come and join in all excursions.

Rinehart has long since left Cambridge; is dead, perhaps, by this time. His class has passed into history. But among those who are familiar with the story, the custom still prevails of calling out when passing the old hall on the way to festivities: "O, Rinehart, come on along."

Harvard's little tradition can serve as a parable to those who are willing to take it to heart, for has not every university its Rineharts? Many times a lonely student—freshman or otherwise—may be brought out of

himself and started on the path to strong self-development by a cheery call and a few words of encouragement and good fellowship. May such customs as this increase.

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