
Albert S. Thompson (1909–2004)

An important contributor to the dramatic rise of professional psychology in America, Albert Stoler Thompson worked for seven decades as a psychologist, professor, and consultant. Born on August 7, 1909, in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, Al lived a life distinguished by character, caring, and commitment. The son of a minister, Al showed an early interest in the concerns and welfare of other people.

After earning his bachelor's degree at Ursinus College in 1931, Al worked as a history teacher in a Philadelphia high school. His interest in students and how they learn led him to the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) for weekend and summer course work in vocational guidance with Arthur J. Jones, a pioneer in that field. At the time, several faculty members at Penn were leaders in applying psychological principles to problems of everyday life. Al had the opportunity to learn from such distinguished psychologists as Lightner Witmer, Robert Brotemarkle, Samuel Fernberger, E. B. Twitmeyer, and Morris Viteles. His first year as a doctoral student, Al was a graduate assistant for Witmer, who then retired. Al next became a protégé of Viteles, who founded Penn's Vocational Guidance Clinic, in part to enlarge the work of Witmer's Psychological Clinic. Al trained in the Vocational Guidance Clinic and later, during the war years, did research on pilot training. Seated behind student pilots, Al filmed their use of the airplane's control mechanisms under various conditions. Viteles, who by then was America's leading industrial psychologist, approved the study as Al's dissertation research. However, because the project was classified, the military did not permit Al's dissertation committee to examine him about this research. Instead, as Al enjoyed recounting, he endured an excruciating examination that covered everything he knew about psychology. He received his doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in 1943.

On the basis on Viteles's recommendation, Norman Munn recruited Al to Vanderbilt University in 1945 as an associate professor of psychology and director of the newly founded university counseling and placement service for students and returning veterans. In 1949, Al moved to Teachers College, Columbia University to replace the retiring Harry Dexter Kitson, another pioneer in the vocational guidance movement.

At Teachers College, Al served as major professor for 53 students, both in counseling and industrial/organizational psychology. His published research was in vocational guidance, occupational adjustment, and personnel psychology. Together with Donald E. Super, he formed the nucleus of a research team whose studies of career development led to the transformation of vocational guidance into career counseling. In addition to his teaching and research activities, Al held numerous positions during his years at Teachers College, including coordinator of the program in personnel psychology, department chair (1964–1970), and director of the Psychological Consultation Center (1974). Al retired from Teachers College in 1974 because at the time, professors had to retire at age 65. Nevertheless, he remained active at Teachers College for the next 14 years, serving as academic ombudsman for Teachers Col-

lege students and as coordinator of a project that evaluated all of the doctoral programs offered by Teachers College.

Al participated actively in the American Psychological Association (APA), holding fellow status in Divisions 13, 14, and 17. He was convention manager for the annual meeting of the APA in New York in 1954, chairperson of the Committee on Subdoctoral Education of the Education and Training Board (1954–1955), member of the Board of Professional Affairs (1958–1959), chairperson of the Committee on Legislation (1959 and 1962), member of the Committee on Secondary School Psychology (1958–1963), and chairperson of the Committee on Scientific and Professional Ethics and Conduct (1964–1965).

Division 17 was an important professional home for Al. He felt strongly that counseling psychologists should study the meaning of work and the nature of careers and apply this knowledge to help people develop satisfying work lives. Al served as president of Division 17 in 1963, presiding over the planning of the Greyston Conference at Teachers College in 1964. The meeting was a response to an earlier Education and Training Board report that called into question the viability of counseling psychology as an area of professional psychology. The conference helped to solidify an identity for counseling psychology and offered a set of recommendations that prompted further developments such as certification by the American Board of Examiners of Professional Psychologists and criteria for internship training. Al was also very active in the New York State Psychological Association, serving as its president in 1956. Working with other psychologists such as Arthur Combs, Rollo May, and Raymond Katzell, Al was instrumental in procuring the first certification law for psychologists in New York.

Al's family was an ever-present source of pride, satisfaction, and comfort. In 1935, he married Ruby Jackson and began their lifelong partnership. Together they had two children, Lois and Ellen. Leaving Teachers College in 1988, Al and Ruby moved into a retirement community near his childhood home. Ruby died in 2001. Al remained professionally active, reviewing books and manuscripts and attending meetings, where he often was a presenter. He welcomed inquiries from colleagues and students and always conveyed a genuine sense of warmth, interest, and acceptance. In the months before his death, Al was working closely with his Teachers College colleague Roger Myers and others to construct a Web site that will allow counselors free access to his innovative career development inventories. Al died peacefully on March 29, 2004. He will be remembered as a person with a kind and generous spirit, an enthusiasm for life, a love for family and friends, and an enduring interest in psychology.

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