

Obituary

In Memoriam: Dr. Auke Tellegen (July 16, 1930 – March 11, 2024)

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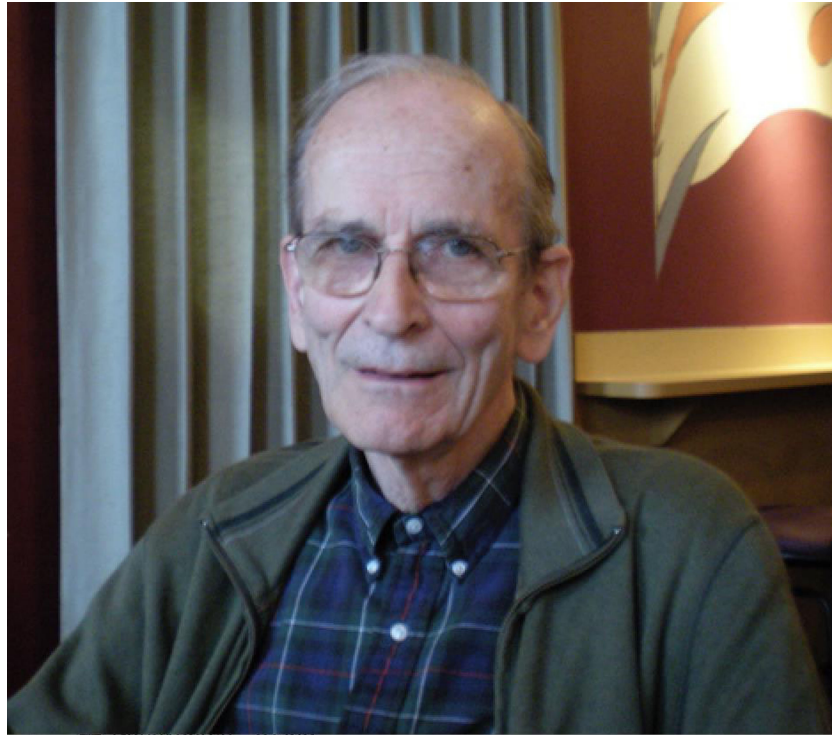


Figure 1. Professor Auke Tellegen at the University of Minnesota, October 2009, Photo Credit: Nancy L. Segal

Everyone who knew him has fond recollections and reflections of Professor Auke Tellegen, and I am no exception. I arrived at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, as a new postdoctoral fellow in late summer, 1982. I would be working alongside Dr. Thomas J. Bouchard, Jr., Director of the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart (MISTRA), and a core group of five or six colleagues who had been involved in the project since its inception in March 1979. One of the colleagues was Auke Tellegen, a tall, thin, mild-mannered, and brilliant personality psychologist and clinical investigator. Auke was famous for his development of the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, an 11-scale personality assessment survey) and his contributions to the development of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2). He has also authored some stunning twin research papers (several with David T. Lykken, also a core member of the

reared-apart research team) and was involved with other MISTRA-related publications. Before documenting Auke's twin studies, I will briefly review his early life.

Auke was born in the Dutch East Indies, in Yogyakarta, on July 16, 1930, to Veronica and Pieter Tellegen. Pieter was a deputy public prosecutor until 1936, at which time the family returned to the Netherlands where he was appointed mayor of Terneuzen. Following the Nazi occupation of their country, both parents did their part by hiding Jews in their home. When Pieter was sent to a camp with other civic leaders, Veronica visited him at great personal risk. Auke's great-uncle, Jan Tellegen, served as mayor of Amsterdam among his many civic positions. Jan's daughter, Marie Anne, was a Nazi resistance fighter and, like Pieter and Veronica, protected Jewish citizens during the Nazi occupation.

Auke was clearly part of a long line of highly accomplished family members. In 1949, he earned a Bachelor of Law degree from Vrije University in Amsterdam, followed by a Doctorandus of Psychology degree from the University of Amsterdam in 1957. (The Doctorandus of Psychology degree indicates completion of program requirements, except for a

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thesis. It is acknowledged as a degree for practitioners.) Auke went on to earn a PhD degree in clinical psychology from the University of Minnesota in 1962. He joined the Department of Psychology's faculty in 1963 and remained there until his retirement in 1999, becoming Professor Emeritus. He continued his involvement with the MISTRA and his work on the MMPI-2, contributing to the updating of this widely used form.

Auke married Lysbeth Marijke van der Veen in 1953. The couple had two children, Peter Auke and Gwendolyn Antoinette.

Auke's work on twin studies changed the way many psychologists think about reared-apart twin samples, and factors affecting personality, happiness, and mate selection. There is a paper, albeit unpublished, that few people know about, but should. Lykken et al. (1981) showed that reared-apart twins offer significantly greater statistical power than reared-together twins. This is important, because reared-apart twin pairs are relatively rare, such that uninformed critics often dismiss the findings, due to small sample sizes. Furthermore, some reviewers suggest that authors simply gather additional cases prior to manuscript submission, but that is not an easy task. Dissemination of this paper would help admit meaningful findings into the relevant literature.

Auke's seminal personality article (Tellegen et al., 1988) — the first to use a four-part twin design (i.e., monozygotic [MZ] and dizygotic [DZ] twin pairs, both reared-apart and reared together) was ground-breaking and controversial; see Segal (2012). Analyses yielded an estimated 50% heritability for personality, consistent with previous reports. Most importantly, the data revealed that MZ twins showed the same level of personality similarity regardless of rearing status. This indicated that shared environments are not responsible for the personality resemblance of biological relatives living together; rather, the genes shared by family members underlie their resemblance. The study was misconstrued by some researchers who believed it implied that parenting was unimportant. Of course, that conclusion was neither stated, nor implied in the article — instead, parenting is of paramount importance, but functions differently from people's conception of what parenting can accomplish. The message one can take away from this article is that parents have the responsibility of staying attuned to their children's interests and talents and nurturing them to the best of their ability. This same message rings true today. Auke's paper had been cited on 2484 occasions at the time of this writing.

Lykken and Tellegen's (1993) paper on mate selection was extraordinary because it challenged the idea that MZ twins choose spouses with similar characteristics. This was a curious finding because most prior twin studies found that MZ twin similarity exceeded DZ twin similarity across most measured traits (e.g., see Loehlin & Nichols, 1976; Plomin et al., 1980). Based on results from a series of twin studies, Lykken and Tellegen (1993) concluded that mate selection reflects romantic infatuation that operates in random fashion, not unlike the imprinting process that occurs among precocial birds.

Lykken and Tellegen (1996) co-authored a paper on happiness, cited on 2949 occasions at the time of this writing. The wellbeing scale of Tellegen's MPQ had been completed on two occasions by both MZ and DZ twins who were reared apart or reared together. Analyses of these data led them to conclude that the heritability of the stable happiness component was 80%, and that the heritability of the momentary happiness component was 50%. It also appeared that the happiness of one twin could better predict the cotwin's current or later happiness better than that cotwin's educational achievement, status or income.

Auke rarely attended conferences, so I was very gratified when he accepted my invitation to be part of a panel dedicated to issues concerning the twin survivors of the Holocaust. It happened that in June 1985, news of Dr. Josef Mengele's 1979 death by drowning in southern Brazil was revealed. (Dr. Josef Mengele was the 'Angel of Death' who performed brutal medical experiments on twins at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, in Poland; see Segal, 2023). One of the surviving twins convened an Inquest, held in Terre Haute, Indiana, on November 14, 1985, at which forensic specialists, government officials, twins, and others reviewed evidence to decide whether Mengele had truly died and was no longer in hiding — or whether his death was possibly a hoax. While researching Tellegen's early life events for this tribute, I understood why he never hesitated when I asked him to participate in this panel — recall that Auke's parents and other relatives were instrumental in saving Jewish citizens from deportation during the Nazi regime.

I was privileged to know Auke. After relocating to CSU Fullerton in 1991, I visited the Twin Cities campus a number of times, making it a point to drop by his office. I saw him in October 2009 while researching material for my book, *Born Together – Reared Apart: The Landmark Minnesota Twin Study* (Segal, 2012) — the photograph of Auke accompanying this tribute was taken at that time; see Figure 1. I saw him several times after that.

I last heard from Auke on October 2, 2023. He wanted to tell me he had just regained email access and hoped my September lecture to the psychology department had gone well. 'At age 93 I am doing tolerably well,' he added. Auke will be missed at so many levels — his professional contributions to personality psychology, his seminal papers on twin studies, and his warm, engaging manner that kept colleagues and students close over the years will be treasured always.

A memorial ceremony will be held at the University of Minnesota campus, May 5, 2024.

Sources

Note: All twin-related publications by Auke Tellegen appear in the appended list.

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