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## Chapter 9

# Maslow: Holistic-Dynamic Theory

### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, students should be able to accomplish the following objectives:

1. List and explain Maslow's five assumptions regarding motivation.
2. List and explain the five needs in Maslow's hierarchy.
3. Distinguish between conative, aesthetic, cognitive, and neurotic needs.
4. Define instinctoid needs.
5. Describe Maslow's criteria for identifying self-actualizers.
6. List and describe the characteristics of self-actualizing people.
7. Discuss Maslow's philosophy of science.
8. Describe the Jonah complex.
9. Explain the implications of Maslow's theory for psychotherapy.
10. Summarize research on self-actualization.
11. Discuss Maslow's concept of humanity.

### Lecture Outline

#### I. Overview of Holistic-Dynamic Theory

The personality theory of Abraham Maslow has variously been called humanistic theory, transpersonal theory, the third force in psychology, the fourth force in personality, needs theory, and self-actualization theory. However, Maslow (1970) referred to it as a **holistic-dynamic theory** because it assumes that the whole person is constantly being motivated by one need or another and that people have the potential to grow toward psychological health, that is, *self-actualization*. The theories of Maslow, Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and others are sometimes thought of as the **third force** in psychology. Maslow believed that humans have a higher nature than either psychoanalysis or behaviorism would suggest; he spent the latter years of his life trying to discover the nature of psychologically healthy individuals.

#### II. Biography of Abraham H. Maslow

Abraham Harold (Abe) Maslow was born in Manhattan, New York, on April 1, 1908. Maslow was the oldest of seven children born to Samuel Maslow and Rose Schilosky Maslow. Maslow's childhood life was filled with intense feelings of shyness, inferiority, and depression. Being intellectually gifted, Abe found some solace during his years at Boys High

School in Brooklyn, where his grades were only slightly better than average. At the same time, he developed a close friendship with his cousin Will Maslow, an outgoing, socially active person.

After Maslow graduated from Boys High School, his cousin Will encouraged him to apply to Cornell University, but lacking self-confidence, Maslow selected the less prestigious City College of New York. One semester before his marriage, Maslow had enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, from which he received a BA degree in philosophy.

In 1934, Maslow received his doctorate, but he could not find an academic position, partly because of the Great Depression and partly because of an anti-Semitic prejudice still strong on many American campuses in those years. The following year he returned to New York to become E. L. Thorndike's research assistant at Teachers College, Columbia University. Living in New York during the 1930s and 1940s afforded Maslow an opportunity to come into contact with many of the European psychologists who had escaped Nazi rule.

One among Maslow's mentors was Ruth Benedict, an anthropologist at Columbia University. In 1938, Benedict encouraged Maslow to conduct anthropological studies among the Northern Blackfoot Indians of Alberta, Canada. His work among these Native Americans taught him that differences among cultures were superficial and that the Northern Blackfoot were first people and only second were they Blackfoot Indians. This insight helped Maslow in later years to see that his famous hierarchy of needs applied equally to everyone.

During the mid-1940s, Maslow's health began to deteriorate. In 1946, at age 38, he suffered a strange illness that left him weak, faint, and exhausted. In 1951, Maslow took a position as the chairman of the psychology department at the recently established Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Despite achieving fame during the 1960s, Maslow became increasingly disenchanted with his life at Brandeis. Some students rebelled against his teaching methods, demanding more experiential involvement and less of an intellectual and scientific approach.

In addition to work-related problems, Maslow suffered a severe but nonfatal heart attack in December 1967. Now in poor health and disappointed with the academic atmosphere at Brandeis, Maslow accepted an offer to join the Saga Administrative Corporation in Menlo Park, California. He had no particular job there and was free to think and write as he wished. He enjoyed that freedom, but on June 8, 1970, he suddenly collapsed and died of a massive heart attack. He was 62.

### **III. Maslow's View of Motivation**

Maslow's theory of personality rests on several basic assumptions regarding motivation. First, Maslow (1970) adopted a *holistic approach to motivation*: That is, the whole person, not any single part or function, is motivated. Second, *motivation is usually complex*, meaning that a person's behavior may spring from several separate motives. A third assumption is that

*people are continually motivated by one need or another. Another assumption is that all people everywhere are motivated by the same basic needs. A final assumption concerning motivation is that needs can be arranged on a hierarchy (Maslow, 1943, 1970).*

## **A. Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's **hierarchy of needs** concept assumes that lower level needs must be satisfied or at least relatively satisfied before higher level needs become motivators. The five needs composing this hierarchy are **conative needs**, meaning that they have a striving or motivational character. Maslow (1970) listed the following needs in order of their prepotency: physiological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization.

The most basic needs of any person are **physiological needs**, including food, water, oxygen, maintenance of body temperature, and so on. Physiological needs are the most prepotent of all. When people have partially satisfied their physiological needs, they become motivated by **safety needs**, including physical security, stability, dependency, protection, and freedom from threatening forces such as war, terrorism, illness, fear, anxiety, danger, chaos, and natural disasters.

Children, however, are more often motivated by safety needs because they live with such threats as darkness, animals, strangers, and punishments from parents. Also, some adults feel relatively unsafe because they retain irrational fears from childhood that cause them to act as if they were afraid of parental punishment. They spend far more energy than do healthy people trying to satisfy safety needs, and when they are not successful in their attempts, they suffer from what Maslow (1970) called **basic anxiety**.

After people partially satisfy their physiological and safety needs, they become motivated by **love and belongingness needs** such as the desire for friendship, the wish for a mate and children, and the need to belong to a family, a club, a neighborhood, or a nation. Love and belongingness also include some aspects of sex and human contact as well as the need to both give and receive love (Maslow, 1970). To the extent that people satisfy their love and belongingness needs, they are free to pursue **esteem needs**, which include self-respect, confidence, competence, and the knowledge that others hold them in high esteem.

**Self-actualization needs** include self-fulfillment, the realization of all one's potential, and a desire to become creative in the full sense of the word (Maslow, 1970). People who have reached the level of self-actualization become fully human, satisfying the needs that others merely glimpse or never view at all.

## **B. Aesthetic Needs**

Unlike conative needs, **aesthetic needs** are not universal, but at least some people in every culture seem to be motivated by the need for beauty and aesthetically pleasing experiences (Maslow, 1967). People prefer beauty to ugliness, and they may even become physically

and spiritually ill when forced to live in squalid, disorderly environments (Maslow, 1970).

### C. Cognitive Needs

Most people have a desire to know, to solve mysteries, to understand, and to be curious. Maslow (1970) called these desires **cognitive needs**. Maslow (1968b, 1970) believed that healthy people desire to know more, to theorize, to test hypotheses, to uncover mysteries, or to find out how something works just for the satisfaction of knowing. However, people who have not satisfied their cognitive needs, who have been consistently lied to, have had their curiosity stifled, or have been denied information, become pathological, a pathology that takes the form of skepticism, disillusionment, and cynicism.

### D. Neurotic Needs

The satisfaction of conative, aesthetic, and cognitive needs is basic to one's physical and psychological health, and their frustration leads to some level of illness. However, **neurotic needs** lead only to stagnation and pathology (Maslow, 1970). By definition, neurotic needs are nonproductive. They perpetuate an unhealthy style of life and have no value in the striving for self-actualization.

### E. General Discussion of Needs

Maslow (1970) estimated that the hypothetical average person has his or her needs satisfied to approximately these levels: physiological, 85%; safety, 70%; love and belongingness, 50%; esteem, 40%; self-actualization, 10%. The more a lower level need is satisfied, the greater the emergence of the next level need.

Even though needs are generally satisfied in the hierarchical order, occasionally they are reversed. Reversals, however, are usually more apparent than real, and some seemingly obvious deviations in the order of needs are not variations at all.

Maslow believed that even though all behaviors have a cause, some behaviors are not motivated. Much of what Maslow (1970) called "expressive behavior" is unmotivated.

Maslow (1970) distinguished between expressive behavior and coping behavior. *Expressive behavior* is often an end in itself and serves no other purpose than to be. Expressive behaviors also include one's gait, gestures, voice, and smile (even when alone). On the other hand, *coping behavior* is ordinarily conscious, effortful, learned, and determined by the external environment. It involves the individual's attempts to cope with the environment; to secure food and shelter; to make friends; and to receive acceptance, appreciation, and prestige from others.

Deprivation of physiological needs results in malnutrition, fatigue, loss of energy, obsession with sex, and so on. Deprivation of self-actualization needs also leads to

pathology, or more accurately, **metapathology**. Maslow (1967) defined metapathology as the absence of values, the lack of fulfillment, and the loss of meaning in life.

Maslow (1970) hypothesizes that some human needs are innately determined even though they can be modified by learning. He called these needs **instinctoid needs**.

Important similarities and differences exist between higher level needs (love, esteem, and self-actualization) and lower level needs (physiological and safety). Higher needs are similar to lower ones in that they are instinctoid. Differences between higher needs and lower ones are those of degree and not of kind. First, higher level needs are later on the phylogenetic or evolutionary scale. Second, higher level needs produce more happiness and more peak experiences, although satisfaction of lower level needs may produce a degree of pleasure.

#### **IV. Self-Actualization**

Maslow's ideas on self-actualization began soon after he received his PhD, when he became puzzled about why two of his teachers in New York City—anthropologist Ruth Benedict and psychologist Max Wertheimer—were so different from average people. To Maslow, these two people represented the highest level of human development, and he called this level “self-actualization.”

##### **A. Maslow's Quest for the Self-Actualizing Person**

Maslow found a number of older people who seemed to have some of the characteristics for which he was searching, but when he interviewed these people to learn what made them special, he was almost always disappointed. Typically, he found them to be “well-adjusted . . . but they have no flame, spark, excitement, good dedication, feeling of responsibility” (Lowry, 1973, p. 87).

While learning about the lives of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, William James, Albert Schweitzer, Benedict de Spinoza, Jane Addams, and other great people, Maslow suddenly had an “Aha” experience. Rather than asking “What makes Max Wertheimer and Ruth Benedict self-actualizing?” he turned the question around and asked, “Why are we not all self-actualizing?” This new slant on the problem gradually changed Maslow's conception of humanity and expanded his list of self-actualizing people.

##### **B. Criteria for Self-Actualization**

The following are the four criteria that self-actualizing people possessed:

- First, *they were free from psychopathology*. They were neither neurotic nor psychotic nor did they have a tendency toward psychological disturbances.
- Second, *these self-actualizing people had progressed through the hierarchy of needs* and therefore lived above the subsistence level of existence and had no ever-present

threat to their safety.

- Maslow's third criterion for self-actualization was the *embracing of the B-values*. His self-actualizing people felt comfortable with and even demanded truth, beauty, justice, simplicity, humor, and each of the other B-values.
- The final criterion for reaching self-actualization was "full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc." (Maslow, 1970, p. 150). In other words, his self-actualizing individuals *fulfilled their needs to grow, to develop, and to increasingly become what they were capable of becoming*.

### C. Values of Self-Actualizers

Maslow (1971) held that self-actualizing people are motivated by the "eternal verities," what he called **B-values**. B-values are not needs in the same sense that food, shelter, or companionship are. Maslow termed B-values as "metaneeds" to indicate that they are the ultimate level of needs. He distinguished between ordinary need motivation and the motives of self-actualizing people, which he called **metamotivation**.

Maslow (1964, 1970) identified 14 B-values, but the exact number is not important because ultimately all become one, or at least all are highly correlated. The values of self-actualizing people include *truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness or the transcendence of dichotomies, aliveness or spontaneity, uniqueness, perfection, completion, justice and order, simplicity, richness or totality, effortlessness, playfulness or humor, and self-sufficiency or autonomy*.

### D. Characteristics of Self-Actualizing People

Maslow believed that all humans have the potential for self-actualization. To be self-actualizing, Maslow believed, people must be regularly satisfied in their other needs and must also embrace the B-values.

Self-actualizing people can more easily detect phoniness in others. They can discriminate between the genuine and the fake not only in people but also in literature, art, and music. Also, self-actualizing people are less afraid and more comfortable with the unknown. They not only have a greater tolerance of ambiguity, but they actively seek it and feel comfortable with problems and puzzles that have no definite right or wrong solution.

Self-actualizing people can accept themselves the way they are. They lack defensiveness, phoniness, and self-defeating guilt; have good hearty animal appetites for food, sleep, and sex; are not overly critical of their own shortcomings; are not burdened by undue anxiety or shame.

Self-actualizing people are spontaneous, simple, and natural. They are unconventional but not compulsively so; they are highly ethical but may appear unethical or nonconforming. They usually behave conventionally, either because the issue is not of great importance or

out of deference to others. A fourth characteristic of self-actualizing people is their interest in problems outside themselves. Non-self-actualizing people are self-centered and tend to see all the world's problems in relation to themselves, whereas self-actualizing people are task-oriented and concerned with problems outside themselves.

Self-actualizing people have a quality of detachment that allows them to be alone without being lonely. They feel relaxed and comfortable when they are either with people or alone. Because they have already satisfied their love and belongingness needs, they have no desperate need to be surrounded by other people. They can find enjoyment in solitude and privacy. Self-actualizing people are autonomous and depend on themselves for growth even though at some time in their past they had to have received love and security from others. No one is born autonomous, and therefore no one is completely independent of people. Autonomy can be achieved only through satisfactory relations with others.

Maslow (1970) wrote that "self-actualizing people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy" (p. 163). As Maslow's study of self-actualizers continued, he made the unexpected discovery that many of his people had had experiences that were mystical in nature and that somehow gave them a feeling of transcendence. Originally, he thought that these so-called **peak experiences** were far more common among self-actualizers than among non-self-actualizers.

Self-actualizing people possess *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, Adler's term for social interest, community feeling, or a sense of oneness with all humanity. Maslow found that his self-actualizers had a kind of caring attitude toward other people. Related to *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is a special quality of interpersonal relations that involves deep and profound feelings for individuals. Self-actualizers have a nurturant feeling toward people in general, but their close friendships are limited to only a few.

Maslow found that all his self-actualizers possessed democratic values. They could be friendly and considerate with other people regardless of class, color, age, or gender, and in fact, they seemed to be quite unaware of superficial differences among people. Self-actualizing people have a clear sense of right and wrong conducts and have little conflict about basic values. They set their sights on ends rather than means and have an unusual ability to distinguish between the two. Another distinguishing characteristic of self-actualizing people is their philosophical, nonhostile sense of humor. Most of what passes for humor or comedy is basically hostile, sexual, or scatological.

All self-actualizing people studied by Maslow were creative in some sense of the word. In fact, Maslow suggested that creativity and self-actualization may be one and the same. A final characteristic identified by Maslow was resistance to enculturation. Self-actualizing people have a sense of detachment from their surroundings and are able to transcend a particular culture. They are neither antisocial nor consciously nonconforming.

## E. Love, Sex, and Self-Actualization

Before people can become self-actualizing, they must satisfy their love and belongingness needs. It follows then that self-actualizing people are capable of both giving and receiving love and are no longer motivated by the kind of deficiency love (**D-love**) common to other people. Self-actualizing people are capable of **B-love**, that is, love for the essence or “Being” of the other. B-love is mutually felt and shared and not motivated by a deficiency or incompleteness within the lover.

## V. Maslow’s Psychology and Philosophy of Science

Maslow’s philosophy of science and his research methods are integral to an understanding of how he arrived at his concept of self-actualization. Maslow (1966) believed that value-free science does not lead to the proper study of human personality. Maslow argued for a different philosophy of science, a humanistic, holistic approach that is not value free and that has scientists who *care* about the people and topics they investigate.

When Maslow attended medical school, he was shocked by the impersonal attitude of surgeons who nonchalantly tossed recently removed body parts onto a table. His observation of such a cold and calloused procedure led Maslow to originate the concept of **desacralization**: that is, the type of science that lacks emotion, joy, wonder, awe, and rapture (Hoffman, 1988). Maslow believed that orthodox science has no ritual or ceremony, and he called for scientists to put values, creativity, emotion, and ritual back into their work. Scientists must be willing to **resacralize** science or to instill it with human values, emotion, and ritual.

Maslow (1966) argued for a **Taoistic attitude** for psychology, one that would be noninterfering, passive, and receptive. This new psychology would abolish prediction and control as the major goals of science and replace them with sheer fascination and the desire to release people from controls so that they can grow and become less predictable.

## VI. Measuring Self-Actualization

Shostrom (1974) developed the **Personal Orientation Inventory** (POI) in an attempt to measure the values and behaviors of self-actualizing people, such as time competence (how present-oriented is a person) and support (how self- versus other-oriented is a person). In the 1980s, Jones and Crandall (1986) developed the second measure of self-actualization, which borrowed 15 items from the POI. This inventory was dubbed the **Short Index of Self-Actualization** (SISA) and was easier to administer than the POI. In the 1990s, two additional measures of self-actualization were published: the **Brief Index of Self-Actualization** (BISA; Sumerlin & Bundrick, 1996, 1998) and the **Measure of Actualization Potential** (MAP; LeFrancios et al., 1997). Recently, one new measure has been published, namely, the **Characteristics of Self-Actualization Scale** (CSAS; Kaufman, 2018). A primary goal Kaufman had in making the newest self-actualization measure was to test and validate which



of the 17 qualities of self-actualizing people that Maslow (1950) put forth hold up to empirical scrutiny.

## **VII. The Jonah Complex**

Growth toward normal, healthy personality can be blocked at each of the steps in the hierarchy of needs. If people cannot provide for food and shelter, they remain at the level of physiological and safety needs. Others remain blocked at the level of love and belongingness needs, striving to give and receive love and to develop feelings of belongingness. Still others satisfy their love needs and gain self-esteem but do not advance to the level of self-actualization because they fail to embrace the B-values (Maslow, 1970).

One obstacle that often blocks people's growth toward self-actualization is the **Jonah complex** or the fear of being one's best (Maslow, 1979). The Jonah complex is characterized by attempts to run away from one's destiny just as the biblical Jonah tried to escape from his fate.

## **VIII. Psychotherapy**

To Maslow (1970), the aim of therapy would be for clients to embrace the Being-values, that is, to value truth, justice, goodness, simplicity, and so forth. To accomplish this aim, clients must be free from their dependency on others so that their natural impulse toward growth and self-actualization could become active. Most people who seek therapy have these two lower level needs relatively well satisfied but have some difficulty achieving love and belongingness needs. Therefore, psychotherapy is largely an interpersonal process.

## **IX. Related Research**

One of the most notable aspects of Maslow's theory of personality is the concept of a hierarchy of needs. Some needs such as physiological and safety needs are lower order needs, whereas needs such as esteem and self-actualization are higher order needs. Generally speaking, according to Maslow's theory the lower order needs must be met early in life, whereas the higher order needs such as self-actualization tend to be fulfilled later in life. Research suggests that the lower motives were stronger in younger people, whereas the higher motives were stronger in older people.

### **A. Empirical Testing and an Evolutionary Update to the Hierarchy of Needs**

Two key tenants of Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs are that needs of a lower level must be mostly met before the needs at the next level can be worked on and satisfied. One way to assess this is to see whether satisfaction of needs at one level has strong positive correlations with the satisfaction of needs at the next higher level. Additionally, this correlation should be stronger than the one between one level of two levels higher. Other attempts to measure the hierarchy of needs have produced less reliable and valid results. In

addition to testing the theory, some have argued for an update, specifically an evolutionary psychology update to the hierarchy.

## **B. Positive Psychology**

**Positive psychology** is a relatively new field of psychology that combines an emphasis on hope, optimism, and well-being with scientific research and assessment. One area of positive psychology where Maslow's ideas have been particularly influential is in the role of positive experiences in people's lives. Positive psychology focuses on how positive experiences affect one's personality and one's life. Moreover, an important quality of self-actualizing people is their capacity to have "peak experiences"—feeling unified with the universe and more humble and powerful at the same time.

In the last 10–15 years, research on the nature and experience of the positive emotion of awe has begun to garner serious scientific attention (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007). Awe is defined as experiencing the feelings of vastness and expansiveness while at the same time needing to alter or accommodate one's perceptions of the world (Keltner & Haidt, 2003).

Studies have shown that people who experienced awe expanded their sense of having time, increased their willingness to donate their time (but had no effect on their willingness to donate money) for prosocial causes. The experience of awe increases (at least temporarily) one's overall satisfaction with one's life.

## **X. Critique of Maslow**

Maslow's search for the self-actualizing person did not end with his empirical studies. In his later years, he would frequently speculate about self-actualization with little evidence to support his suppositions. Although this practice opens the door for criticizing Maslow, he was unconcerned about desacralized, or orthodox, science.

On its ability to *generate research*, one can rate Maslow's theory a little above average. Self-actualization remains a popular topic with researchers, and the tests of self-actualization have facilitated efforts to investigate this illusive concept. On the criterion of falsifiability, one must rate Maslow's theory low. Researchers remained handicapped in their ability to falsify or confirm Maslow's means of identifying self-actualizing people. Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework gives his theory excellent flexibility to *organize what is known about human behavior*. Maslow's theory is also quite consistent with common sense. On its ability to serve as *a guide to the practitioner*, Maslow's theory can be highly useful. On its ability to be *internally consistent* it can be rated high in this criterion. Finally, the theory is moderately parsimonious.

## **XI. Concept of Humanity**

Maslow believed that everyone can be self-actualizing; one's human nature carries with it a tremendous potential for being a Good Human Being. If people have not yet reached this high level of functioning, it is because they are in some manner crippled or pathological.

Maslow concluded that true human nature is seen only in self-actualized people and that "there seems no *intrinsic* reason why everyone should not be this way. Apparently, every baby has possibilities for self-actualization, but most get it knocked out of them" (Lowry, 1973, p. 91).

Maslow was generally *optimistic* and hopeful about humans, but he recognized that people are capable of great evil and destruction. Maslow believed that society, as well as individuals, can be improved, but growth for both is slow and painful. Nevertheless, these small forward steps seem to be part of humanity's evolutionary history. Truth, love, beauty, and the like are instinctoid and are just as basic to human nature as are hunger, sex, and aggression.

From both a historical and an individual point of view, humans are an evolutionary animal, in the process of becoming more and more fully human. On the dimension of *consciousness versus unconsciousness*, Maslow held that self-actualizing people are ordinarily more aware than others of what they are doing and why. As for *biological versus social influences*, Maslow would have insisted that this dichotomy is a false one. Individuals are shaped by both biology *and* society, and the two cannot be separated.