8.3: Abraham Maslow and Holistic-Dynamic Psychology

Maslow stands alongside Rogers as one of the founders of humanistic psychology. Although he began his career working with two of the most famous experimental psychologists in America, he was profoundly influenced by the events that led into World War II. He became devoted to studying the more virtuous aspects of personality, and he may be viewed as one of the founders of positive psychology. Well-known primarily for his work on self-actualization, Maslow also had a significant impact on the field of management. His fame in both psychology and business makes him a candidate for being, perhaps, the best-known psychologist of all time (Freud is certainly more famous, but remember that he was a psychiatrist). According to Maslow, his holistic-dynamic theory of personality was a blend of theories that had come before his:

This theory is, I think, in the functionalist tradition of James and Dewey, and is fused with the holism of Wertheimer, Goldstein, and Gestalt psychology, and with the dynamicism of Freud, Fromm, Horney, Reich, Jung, and Adler. This integration or synthesis may be called a holistic-dynamic theory. (pg. 35; Maslow, 1970)

Brief Biography of Abraham Maslow

Abraham H. Maslow was born on April 1, 1908 in Brooklyn, New York, the first of seven children. His father, Samuel, had left Kiev, Russia at just 14 years old. When Samuel Maslow arrived in America he had no money and did not speak English. Samuel Maslow spent a few years in Philadelphia, doing odd jobs and learning the language, before moving to New York City, where he married his first cousin Rose and began a cooperage business (a cooper builds and repairs barrels). Samuel and Rose Maslow did not have a happy marriage, and Abraham Maslow was particularly sensitive to this fact. Maslow resented his father’s frequent absences, and apparently hated his mother. His mother was a superstitious woman, who severely punished Maslow for even minor misbehavior by threatening him with God’s wrath. Maslow developed an intense distrust of religion, and was proud to consider himself an atheist (Gabor, 2000; Hoffman, 1988; Maddi & Costa, 1972).
Maslow’s childhood was no better outside the home. Anti-Semitism was rampant in New York. Many teachers were cruel, and he overheard them say nasty things about him. He had no friends, and there were anti-Semitic gangs that would find and beat up Jewish children. At one point he decided to join a Jewish gang for protection, but he didn’t have the “right” attitude:

I wanted to be a member of the gang, but I couldn’t: they rejected me because I couldn’t kill cats…We’d stake out a cat on a [clothesline] and stand back so many paces and throw rocks at it and kill it.

And the other thing was to throw rocks at the girls on the corner. Now I knew that the girls liked it, and yet I couldn’t throw rocks at girls and I couldn’t kill cats, so I was ruled out of the gang, and I could never be the gangster that I wanted to become. (pg. 4; Maslow, cited in Hoffman, 1988)

With six more children joining the family, one every couple of years, the family was constantly moving and, following the troubling death of one of his little sisters (Maslow blamed her illness, in part, on their mother’s neglect), Maslow became a very unhappy and shy child. He also thought he was terribly ugly, something his father said openly at a large family gathering! Perhaps worst of all, he felt profoundly strange and different than other children, largely because he was so intellectual. Maslow reconciled with his father later in life. During the depression, Samuel Maslow lost his business. By that time he had divorced Maslow’s mother, Rose, and he moved in with his son. The two became close, and after Samuel Maslow died, his son remembered him fondly. Maslow never forgave his mother, however. Some of the childhood stories he related were shockingly cruel. Once, he had searched through second-hand record shops for some special 78-RPM records. When he failed to put them away soon after returning home, his mother stomped them into pieces on the living room floor. Another time, Maslow brought home two abandoned kittens he had found. When his mother caught him feeding them a saucer of milk, she grabbed the kittens and smashed their heads against a wall until they were dead! Later in life, he refused to even attend her funeral.

What I had reacted to and totally hated and rejected was not only her physical appearance, but also her values and world view…I’ve always wondered where my utopianism, ethical stress, humanism, stress on kindness, love, friendship, and all the rest came from. I knew certainly of the direct consequences of having no mother-love. But the whole thrust of my life-philosophy and all my research and theorizing also has its roots in a hatred for and revulsion against everything she stood for. (pg. 9; Maslow cited in Hoffman, 1988)

Maslow spent much of his childhood reading, and despite the treatment he received from many of his prejudiced teachers, he loved to learn. After high school Maslow won a scholarship to Cornell University, but encountered pervasive anti-Semitism throughout his first year. So he transferred to City College, where he first studied the work of behavioral scientists like John B. Watson. He was impressed by Watson’s desire to use the newly created science of behaviorism to fight social problems, such as racial and ethnic discrimination. At the same time, however, Maslow had fallen in love with his first cousin Bertha Goodman, a relationship his parents strongly opposed. So Maslow left for the University of Wisconsin (Gabor, 2000; Hoffman, 1988; Maddi & Costa, 1972). Bertha Goodman followed, and they were soon married. Marriage boosted Maslow’s self-esteem, and provided him with a sense of purpose in life. He later said that “life didn’t really start for me until I got married and went to Wisconsin” (pg. 128; cited in Maddi & Costa, 1972).

In Wisconsin, Maslow studied the behavior of primates under the supervision of the renowned Harry Harlow (most famous for his studies on contact comfort). One day, while watching some monkeys seemingly enjoy munching on peanuts and other treats, Maslow recognized that appetite and hunger are two different things. Thus, motivation must be
comprised of separate elements as well. In another study, Maslow tried to address the different aspects of Freud and Adler’s psychodynamic perspectives by observing dominance behavior amongst the monkeys. His colleagues and professors, however, had little interest in the psychoanalytic science that they considered to be a European endeavor. Maslow completed his Ph.D. at Wisconsin in 1934, and then returned to New York. He earned a position at Columbia University with the renowned Edward Thorndike, and began studying the relative contributions of heredity and environment on social behavior, as part of a project to study factors involved in poverty, illiteracy, and crime. As a curious side note, Thorndike had also developed an IQ test; Maslow scored 195 on this test, one of the highest scores ever recorded. During this time at Columbia University, Maslow also began relationships with many of the psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists who had fled Nazi Germany. He was very impressed with Max Wertheimer, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology, and who helped to lay the foundation for positive psychology:

“Are there not tendencies in men and in children to be kind, to deal sincerely [and] justly with the other fellow? Are these nothing but internalized rules on the basis of compulsion and fear?” he asked rhetorically. (pg. 159; Wertheimer, cited in Gabor, 2000)

Maslow was one of the first students to study with Alfred Adler in America, being particularly impressed with Adler’s work helping academically-challenged children to succeed despite their low IQ scores. Maslow also studied with Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, and Ruth Benedict. Benedict was an anthropologist who encouraged Maslow to gain some field experience. She sponsored a grant application that Maslow received to study the Blackfoot Indians. During the summer of 1938, Maslow examined the dominance and emotional security of the Blackfoot Indians. He was impressed by their culture, and recognized what he believed was an innate need to experience a sense of purpose in life, a sense of meaning. A few years later, shortly after the beginning of World War II, Maslow had an epiphany regarding psychology’s failure to understand the true nature of people. He devoted the rest of his life to the study of a hopeful psychology (Gabor, 2000; Hoffman, 1988; Maddi & Costa, 1972).

Maslow taught for a few years at Brooklyn College, and also served as the plant manager for the Maslow Cooperage Corporation (from 1947-1949). In 1951 he was appointed Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at Brandeis University, where he conducted the research and wrote the books for which he is most famous. By the late 1960s, Maslow had become disillusioned with academic life. He had suffered a heart attack in 1966, and seemed somewhat disconnected from the very department he had helped to form. In 1969, however, he accepted a four year grant from the Laughlin Foundation, primarily to study the philosophy of democracy, economics, and ethics as influenced by humanistic psychology. He had been troubled by what he viewed as a loss of faith in American values, and he was greatly enjoying his time working in California. He also attended management seminars at the Saga Corporation, urging the participants to commit themselves to humanistic management. One day in June, 1970, he was jogging slowly when he suffered a massive heart attack. He was already dead by the time his wife rushed over to him (Gabor, 2000; Hoffman, 1988; Maddi & Costa, 1972). He was only 62 years old. Shortly after his death, the International Study Project of Menlo Park, CA published a memorial volume in tribute to Abraham Maslow (International Study Project, 1972).

Placing Maslow in Context: Beyond Humanistic Psychology

Whereas Carl Rogers is often thought of as the founder of humanistic psychology, in large part because of his emphasis on psychotherapy, it was Maslow who studied in great detail the most significant theoretical aspect of it: self-
actualization. In addition to studying self-actualization, he applied it both in psychology and beyond. His application of self-actualization to management continued the classic relationship between psychology and business (which began with John B. Watson and his application of psychological principles to advertising). Unfortunately, Maslow died just as he was beginning to study his proposed fourth force: transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology offered a connection between psychology and many of the Eastern philosophies associated with Yoga and Buddhism, and also provided a foundation for the study of positive psychology.

Maslow’s interest in business and management has quite possibly led to his being the most famous psychologist of all time, since he is well-known in both psychology and business. If he had continued being a vocal advocate for transpersonal psychology (if not for his untimely death at an early age), given today’s growing interest in Eastern philosophy and psychology and the establishment of positive psychology as a goal for the field of psychology by former APA President Martin Seligman, Maslow may well have become even more famous. It is interesting to note that someone so truly visionary seems to have become that way as a result of studying people whom he felt were themselves self-actualized. If positive psychology, the psychology of virtue and values, becomes the heir of Maslow’s goal, it should become a significant force in the field of psychology. That will be Maslow’s true legacy.

The Importance of Values in the Science of Psychology

A common criticism leveled against many personality theorists is that they have not confirmed their theories in a strict, scientific manner. When one goes so far as to consider values, which are typically associated with religious morality, there is even greater resistance on the part of those who would have psychology become “truly” scientific to consider such matters worthy of examination. However, Maslow felt that:

Both orthodox science and orthodox religion have been institutionalized and frozen into a mutually excluding dichotomy…One consequence is that they are both pathologized, split into sickness, ripped apart into a crippled half-science and a crippled half-religion…As a result…the student who becomes a scientist automatically gives up a great deal of life, especially its richest portions. (pg. 119; Maslow, 1966)

Consequently, Maslow urged that we need to be fully aware of our values at all times, and aware of how our values influence us in our study of psychology. Although people approach the world in common ways, they also pay selective attention to what is happening, and they reshuffle the events occurring around them according to their own interests, needs, desires, fears, etc. Consequently, Maslow believed that paying attention to human values, particularly to an individual’s values, actually helps the psychological scientist achieve the goal of clearly understanding human behavior (Maslow, 1970). In a similar vein, when Maslow co-authored an abnormal psychology text early in his career, he included a chapter on normal psychology. His description of the characteristics of a healthy, normal personality provides an interesting foreshadowing of his research on self-actualization (Maslow & Mittelmann, 1941).

Maslow felt so strongly about the loss of values in our society that he helped to organize a conference and then served as editor for a book entitled New Knowledge in Human Values (Maslow, 1959). In the preface, Maslow laments that “…the ultimate disease of our time is valuelessness…this state is more crucially dangerous than ever before in history…” (pg. vii; Maslow, 1959). Maslow does suggest, however, that something can be done about this loss of values, if only people will try. In the book, he brought together an interesting variety of individuals, including: Kurt Goldstein, a well-known neurophysiologist who studied the holistic function of healthy vs. brain-damaged patients and who coined
the term self-actualization; D. T. Suzuki, a renowned Zen Buddhist scholar; and Paul Tillich, a highly respected existential theologian (who had a direct and significant influence on the career of Rollo May). There are also chapters by Gordon Allport and Erich Fromm. In his own chapter, Maslow concludes:

If we wish to help humans to become more fully human, we must realize not only that they try to realize themselves but that they are also reluctant or afraid or unable to do so. Only by fully appreciating this dialectic between sickness and health can we help to tip the balance in favor of health. (pg. 135; Maslow, 1959)

**Discussion Question:** Maslow believed that values are very important, not only in the study of psychology, but in society as well. Do you agree? When politicians or religious leaders talk about values, do you think they represent meaningful, true values, or do they just support the values that are an advantage to their own goal or the goals of their political party or church?

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**The Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow’s is undoubtedly best known for his **hierarchy of needs.** Developed within the context of a theory of human motivation, Maslow believed that human behavior is driven and guided by a set of **basic needs**: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and the **need for self-actualization.** It is generally accepted that individuals must move through the hierarchy in order, satisfying the needs at each level before one can move on to a higher level. The reason for this is that lower needs tend to occupy the mind if they remain unsatisfied. How easy is it to work or study when you are really hungry or thirsty? But Maslow did not consider the hierarchy to be rigid. For example, he encountered some people for whom self-esteem was more important than love, individuals suffering from antisocial personality disorder seem to have a permanent loss of the need for love, or if a need has been satisfied for a long time it may become less important. As lower needs are becoming satisfied, though not yet fully satisfied, higher needs may begin to present themselves. And of course there are sometimes multiple determinants of behavior, making the relationship between a given behavior and a basic need difficult to identify (Maslow, 1943/1973; Maslow, 1970).

The physiological needs are based, in part, on the concept of **homeostasis,** the natural tendency of the body to maintain critical biological levels of essential elements or conditions, such as water, salt, energy, and body temperature. Sexual activity, though not essential for the individual, is biologically necessary for the human species to survive. Maslow described the physiological needs as the most **prepotent.** In other words, if a person is lacking everything in life, having failed to satisfy physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem needs, their consciousness will most like be consumed with their desire for food and water. As the lowest and most clearly biological of the needs, these are also the most animal-like of our behavior. In Western culture, however, it is rare to find someone who is actually starving. So when we talk about being hungry, we are really talking about an appetite, rather than real hunger (Maslow, 1943/1973; Maslow, 1970). Many Americans are fascinated by stories such as those of the ill-fated Donner party, trapped in the Sierra Nevada mountains during the winter of 1846-1847, and the Uruguayan soccer team whose plane crashed in the Andes mountains in 1972. In each case, either some or all of the survivors were forced to cannibalize those who had died. As shocking as such stories are, they demonstrate just how powerful our physiological needs can be.

The safety needs can easily be seen in young children. They are easily startled or frightened by loud noises, flashing...
lights, and rough handling. They can become quite upset when other family members are fighting, since it disrupts the feeling of safety usually associated with the home. According to Maslow, many adult neurotics are like children who do not feel safe. From another perspective, that of Erik Erikson, children and adults raised in such an environment do not trust the environment to provide for their needs. Although it can be argued that few people in America seriously suffer from a lack of satisfying physiological needs, there are many people who live unsafe lives. For example, inner city crime, abusive spouses and parents, incurable diseases like HIV/AIDS, all present life threatening dangers to many people on a daily basis.

One place where we expect our children to be safe is in school. However, as we saw in the last chapter (in the section on the martial arts), 160,000 children each day are too frightened to attend school (Nathan, 2005). Juvonen et al. (2006) looked at the effects of ethnic diversity on children’s perception of safety in urban middle schools (Grade 6). They surveyed approximately 2,000 students in 99 classrooms in the greater Los Angeles area. The ethnicity of the students in this study was 46 percent Latino (primarily of Mexican origin), 29 percent African American, 9 percent Asian (primarily East Asian), 9 percent Caucasian, and 7 percent multiracial. When a given classroom, or a given school, is more ethnically diverse, both African American and Latino students felt safer, were harassed less by peers, felt less lonely, and they had higher levels of self-worth (even when the authors controlled for differences in academic engagement). Thus, it appears that ethnic diversity in schools leads toward satisfaction of the need for safety, at least in one important area of a child’s life. Unfortunately, most minority students continue to be educated in schools that are largely ethnically segregated (Juvonen, et al., 2006).

Throughout the evolution of the human species we found safety primarily within our family, tribal group, or our community. It was within those groups that we shared the hunting and gathering that provided food. Once the physiological and safety needs have been fairly well satisfied, according to Maslow, “the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife, or children” (Maslow, 1970). Although there is little scientific confirmation of the belongingness and love needs, many therapists attribute much of human suffering to society’s thwarting of the need for love and affection. Most notable among personality theorists who addressed this issue was Wilhelm Reich. An important aspect of love and affection is sex. Although sex is often considered a physiological need, given its role in procreation, sex is what Maslow referred to as a multidetermined behavior. In other words, it serves both a physiological role (procreation) and a belongingness/love role (the tenderness and/or passion of the physical side of love). Maslow was also careful to point out that love needs involve both giving and receiving love in order for them to be fully satisfied (Maslow, 1943/1973; Maslow, 1970).

Maslow believed that all people desire a stable and firmly based high evaluation of themselves and others (at least the others who comprise their close relationships). This need for self-esteem, or self-respect, involves two components. First is the desire to feel competent, strong, and successful (similar to Bandura’s self-efficacy). Second is the need for prestige or status, which can range from simple recognition to fame and glory. Maslow credited Adler for addressing this human need, but felt that Freud had neglected it. Maslow also believed that the need for self-esteem was becoming a central issue in therapy for many psychotherapists. However, as we saw in Chapter 12, Albert Ellis considers self-esteem to be a sickness. Ellis’ concern is that self-esteem, including efforts to boost self-esteem in therapy, requires that people rate themselves, something that Ellis felt will eventually lead to a negative evaluation (no one is perfect!). Maslow did acknowledge that the healthiest self-esteem is based on well-earned and deserved respect from others, rather than fleeting fame or celebrity status (Maslow, 1943/1973; Maslow, 1970).

When all of these lower needs (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem) have been largely satisfied,
we may still feel restless and discontented unless we are doing what is right for ourselves. “What a man can be, he must be” (pg. 46; Maslow, 1970). Thus, the need for self-actualization, which Maslow described as the highest of the basic needs, can also be referred to as a **Being-need**, as opposed to the lower **deficiency-needs** (Maslow, 1968). We will examine self-actualization in more detail in the following section.

**Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\)**

*Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is based on a theory of motivation.*

*Individuals must essentially satisfy the lower deficiency needs before they become focused on satisfying the higher Being needs. Beyond even the Being needs there is something more, a state of transcendence that ties all people and the whole of creation together.*

Although Maslow recognized that humans no longer have instincts in the technical sense, we nonetheless share basic drives with other animals. We get hungry, even though how and what we eat is determined culturally. We need to be safe, like any other animal, but again we seek and maintain our safety in different ways (such as having a police force to provide safety for us). Given our fundamental similarity to other animals, therefore, Maslow referred to the basic needs as **instinctoid**. The lower the need the more animal-like it is, the higher the need, the more human it is, and self-actualization was, in Maslow’s opinion, uniquely human (Maslow, 1970).

In addition to the basic needs, Maslow referred to **cognitive needs** and **aesthetic needs**. Little is known about cognitive needs, since they are seldom an important focus in clinic settings. However, he felt there were ample grounds for proposing that there are positive impulses to know, to satisfy curiosity, to understand, and to explain. The eight-fold path described by the Buddha, some 2,600 years ago, begins with right knowledge. The importance of mental stimulation for some people is described quite vividly by Maslow:

I have seen a few cases in which it seemed clear to me that the pathology (boredom, loss of zest in life, self-dislike, general depression of the bodily functions, steady deterioration of the intellectual life, of tastes, etc.) were produced in intelligent people leading stupid lives in stupid jobs. I have at least one case in which the appropriate cognitive therapy (resuming part-time studies, getting a position that was more intellectually demanding, insight) removed the symptoms.

I have seen many women, intelligent, prosperous, and unoccupied, slowly develop these same symptoms of intellectual inanition. Those who followed my recommendation to immerse themselves in something worthy of them showed improvement or cure often enough to impress me with the reality of the cognitive needs. (pg. 49; Maslow, 1970)

There are also classic studies on the importance of environmental enrichment on the structural development of the brain itself (Diamond et al., 1975; Globus, et al., 1973; Greenough & Volkmar, 1973; Rosenzweig, 1984; Spinelli & Jensen, 1979; Spinelli, Jensen, & DiPrisco, 1980). Even less is known about the aesthetic needs, but Maslow was convinced that some people need to experience, indeed they crave, beauty in their world. Ancient cave drawings have been found that seem to serve no other purpose than being art. The cognitive and aesthetic needs may very well have been
fundamental to our evolution as modern humans.

**Self-Actualization**

Maslow began his studies on self-actualization in order to satisfy his own curiosity about people who seemed to be fulfilling their unique potential as individuals. He did not intend to undertake a formal research project, but he was so impressed by his results that he felt compelled to report his findings. Amongst people he knew personally and public and historical figures, he looked for individuals who appeared to have made full use of their talents, capacities, and potentialities. In other words, “people who have developed or are developing to the full stature of which they are capable” (Maslow, 1970). His list of those who clearly seemed self-actualized included Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jane Addams, William James, Albert Schweitzer, Aldous Huxley, and Baruch Spinoza. His list of individuals who were most-likely self-actualized included Goethe (possibly the great-grandfather of Carl Jung), George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Harriet Tubman (born into slavery, she became a conductor on the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War), and George Washington Carver (born into slavery at the end of the Civil War, he became an agricultural chemist and prolific inventor). In addition to the positive attributes listed above, Maslow also considered it very important that there be no evidence of psychopathology in those he chose to study. After comparing the seemingly self-actualized individuals to people who did not seem to have fulfilled their lives, Maslow identified fourteen characteristics of self-actualizing people (Maslow, 1950/1973, 1970), as follows:

**More Efficient Perception of Reality and More Comfortable Relations with It:** Self-actualizing people have an ability to recognize fakers, those who present a false persona. More than that, however, Maslow believed they could recognize hidden or confused realities in all aspects of life: science, politics, values and ethics, etc. They are not afraid of the unknown or people who are different, they find such differences to be a pleasant challenge. Although a high IQ may be associated with this characteristic, it is not uncommon to find those who are seemingly intelligent yet unable to be creative in their efforts to discover new phenomena. Thus, the perception of reality is not simply the same as being smart.

**Acceptance (Self, Others, Nature):** Similar to the approach Albert Ellis took with REBT (and his hypothesized dangers inherent in self-esteem), Maslow believed that self-actualizing people accept themselves as they are, including their faults and the differences between their personal reality and their ideal image of themselves. This is not to say that they are without guilt. They are concerned about personal faults that can be improved, any remaining habits or psychological issues that are unhealthy (e.g., prejudice, jealousy, etc.), and the shortcomings of their community and/or culture.

**Spontaneity:** The lives of self-actualizing people are marked by simplicity and a natural ease as they pursue their goals. Their outward behavior is relatively spontaneous, and their inner life (thoughts, drives, etc.) is particularly so. In spite of this spontaneity, they are not always unconventional, because they can easily accept the constraints of society and find their own way to fit in without being untrue to their own sense of self.

**Problem-Centering:** Self-actualizing individuals are highly problem-centered, not ego-centered. The problems they focus on are typically not their own, however. They focus on problems outside themselves, on important causes they would describe as necessary. Solving such problems is taken as their duty or responsibility, rather than as something they want to do for themselves.

**The Quality of Detachment; the Need for Privacy:** Whereas social withdrawal is often seen as psychologically...
unhealthy, self-actualizing people enjoy their privacy. They can remain calm as they separate themselves from problematic situations, remaining above the fray. In accordance with this healthy form of detachment, they are active, responsible, self-disciplined individuals in charge of their own lives. Maslow believed that they have more free will than the average person.

Figure \(\PageIndex{2}\)

Self-actualized individuals need their privacy. This may help them put life in perspective and prepare for each day.

**Autonomy, Independence of Culture and Environment:** As an extension of the preceding characteristics, self-actualizing individuals are growth-motivated as opposed to being deficiency-motivated. They do not need the presence, companionship, or approval of others. Indeed, they may be hampered by others. The love, honor, esteem, etc., that can be bestowed by others has become less important to someone who is self-actualizing than self-development and inner growth.

**Continued Freshness of Appreciation:** Self-actualizing people are able to appreciate the wonders, as well as the common aspects, of life again and again. Such feelings may not occur all the time, but they can occur in the most unexpected ways and at unexpected times. Maslow offered a surprising evaluation of the importance of this characteristic of self-actualization:

I have also become convinced that getting used to our blessings is one of the most important nonevil generators of human evil, tragedy, and suffering. What we take for granted we undervalue, and we are therefore too apt to sell a valuable birthright for a mess of pottage, leaving behind regret, remorse, and a lowering of self-esteem. Wives, husbands, children, friends are unfortunately more apt to be loved and appreciated after they have died than while they are still available. Something similar is true for physical health, for political freedoms, for economic well-being; we learn their true value after we have lost them. (pp. 163-164; Maslow, 1970)

**The “Mystic Experience” or “Oceanic Feeling;” Peak Experiences:** The difference between a mystic experience (also known as an oceanic feeling) and a peak experience is a matter of definition. Mystic experiences are viewed as gifts from God, something reserved for special or deserving (i.e., faithful) servants. Maslow, however, believed that this was a natural occurrence that could happen for anyone, and to some extent probably did. He assigned the psychological term of peak experiences. Such experiences tend to be sudden feelings of limitless horizons opening up to one’s vision, simultaneous feelings of great power and great vulnerability, feelings of ecstasy, wonder and awe, a loss of the sense of time and place, and the feeling that something extraordinary and transformative has happened. Self-actualizers who do not typically experience these peaks, the so-called “non-peakers,” are more likely to become direct agents of social change, the reformers, politicians, crusaders, and so on. The more transcendent “peakers,” in contrast, become the poets, musicians, philosophers, and theologians.

Maslow devoted a great deal of attention to peak experiences, including their relationship to religion. At the core of religion, according to Maslow, is the private illumination or revelation of spiritual leaders. Such experiences seem to be very similar to peak experiences, and Maslow suggests that throughout history these peak experiences may have been
mistaken for revelations from God. In his own studies, Maslow found that people who were spiritual, but not religious (i.e., not hindered by the doctrine of a specific faith or church), actually had more peak experiences than other people. Part of the explanation for this, according to Maslow, is that such people need to be more serious about their ethics, values, and philosophy of life, since their guidance and motivation must come from within. Individuals who seek such an appreciation of life may help themselves to experience an extended form of peak experience that Maslow called the plateau experience. Plateau experiences always have both noetic and cognitive elements, whereas peak experiences can be entirely emotional (Maslow, 1964). Put another way, plateau experiences involve serene and contemplative Being-cognition, as opposed to the more climactic peak experiences (Maslow, 1971).

**Gemeinschaftsgefühl**: A word invented by Alfred Adler, gemeinschaftsgefühl refers to the profound feelings of identification, sympathy, and affection for other people that are common in self-actualization individuals. Although self-actualizers may often feel apart from others, like a stranger in a strange land, becoming upset by the shortcomings of the average person, they nonetheless feel a sense of kinship with others. These feelings lead to a sincere desire to help the human race.

**Interpersonal Relations**: Maslow believed that self-actualizers have deeper and more profound personal relationships than other people. They tend to be kind to everyone, and are especially fond of children. Maslow described this characteristic as “compassion for all mankind,” a perspective that would fit well with Buddhist and Christian philosophies.

**The Democratic Character Structure**: Self-actualizing people are typically friendly with anyone, regardless of class, race, political beliefs, or education. They can learn from anyone who has something to teach them. They respect all people, simply because they are people. They are not, however, undiscriminating:

The careful distinction must be made between this democratic feeling and a lack of discrimination in taste, of an undiscriminating equalizing of any one human being with any other. These individuals, themselves elite, select for their friends elite, but this is an elite of character, capacity, and talent, rather than of birth, race, blood, name, family, age, youth, fame, or power. (pg. 168; Maslow, 1970)

**Discrimination Between Means and Ends, Between Good and Evil**: Self-actualizers know the difference between right and wrong. They are ethical, have high moral standards, and they do good things while avoiding doing bad things. They do not experience the average person’s confusion or inconsistency in making ethical choices. They tend to focus on ends, rather than means, although they sometimes become absorbed in the means themselves, viewing the process itself as a series of ends.

**Philosophical, Unhostile Sense of Humor**: The sense of humor shared by self-actualizers is not typical. They do not laugh at hostile, superior, or rebellious humor. They do not tell jokes that make fun of other people. Instead, they poke fun at people in general for being foolish, or trying to claim a place in the universe that is beyond us. Such humor often takes the form of poking fun at oneself, but not in a clown-like way. Although such humor can be found in nearly every aspect of life, to non-self-actualizing people the self-actualizers seem to be somewhat sober and serious.

**Creativeness**: According to Maslow, self-actualizing people are universally creative. This is not the creativity associated with genius, such as that of Mozart or Thomas Edison, but rather the fresh and naive creativity of an unspoiled child. Maslow believed that this creativity was a natural potential given to all humans at their birth, but that the constraints on behavior inherent in most cultures lead to its suppression.
As desirable as self-actualization may seem, self-actualizing individuals still face problems in their lives. According to Maslow, they are typically not well adjusted. This is because they resist being enculturated. They do not stand out in grossly abnormal ways, but there is a certain inner detachment from the culture in which they live. They are not viewed as rebels in the adolescent sense, though they may be rebels while growing up, but rather they work steadily toward social change and/or the accomplishment of their goals. As a result of their immersion in some personal goal, they may lose interest in or patience with common people and common social practices. Thus, they may seem detached, insulting, absent-minded, or humorless. They can seem boring, stubborn, or irritating, particularly because they are often superficially vain and proud only of their own accomplishments and their own family, friends, and work. According to Maslow, outbursts of temper are not rare. Maslow argued that there are, in fact, people who become saints, movers and shakers, creators, and sages. However, these same people can be irritating, selfish, angry, or depressed. No one is perfect, not even those who are self-actualizing (Maslow, 1950/1973, 1970).

**Discussion Question:** Consider Maslow’s characteristics of self-actualizing people. Which of those characteristics do you think are part of your personality? Are there any characteristics that you think may be particularly difficult for you to achieve?

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### Obstacles to Self-Actualization

In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Maslow, 1971), which was completed by Maslow’s wife and one of his colleagues shortly after Maslow’s death, Maslow described self-actualization as something that one does not obtain or fulfill at a specific point in time. Rather, it is an ongoing process of self-actualizing, characterized for some by brief periods of self-actualization (the peak experiences, for example). Maslow also described two major obstacles to achieving self-actualization: desacralizing and the *Jonah complex*. The Jonah complex, a name suggested by Maslow’s friend Professor Frank Manuel, refers to being afraid of one’s own greatness, or evading one’s destiny or calling in life. Maslow specifically described this as a non-Freudian defense mechanism in which a person is as afraid of the best aspects of their psyche as they are afraid of the worst aspects of their psyche (i.e., the socially unacceptable id impulses). He described the process of this fear as a recognition, despite how much we enjoy the godlike possibilities revealed by our finest accomplishments, of the weakness, awe, and fear we experience when we achieve those accomplishments. According to Maslow, "great emotions after all can in fact overwhelm us" (Maslow, 1971). Nonetheless, he encouraged people to strive for greatness, within a reasonable sense of their own limitations.

A very important defense mechanism, which affects young people in particular, is what Maslow called desacralizing. The source of this problem is usually found within the family:

These youngsters mistrust the possibility of values and virtues. They feel themselves swindled or thwarted in their lives. Most of them have, in fact, dopey parents whom they don’t respect very much, parents who are quite confused themselves about values and who, frequently, are simply terrified of their children and never punish them or stop them from doing things that are wrong. So you have a situation where the youngsters simply despise their elders - often for good and sufficient reason. (pg. 49; Maslow, 1971)

As a result, children grow up without respect for their elders, or for anything their elders consider important. The values of the culture itself can be called into question. While such a situation may sometimes be important for changing social conventions that unfairly discriminate against some people, can we really afford to live in a society in which *nothing* is...
sacred? Indeed, can such a society or culture continue to exist? Thus, Maslow emphasized a need for resacralizing. Maslow noted that he had to make up the words desacralizing and resacralizing “because the English language is rotten for good people. It has no decent vocabulary for the virtues” (Maslow, 1971). Resacralizing means being willing to see the sacred, the eternal, the symbolic. As an example, Maslow suggested considering a medical student dissecting a human brain. Would such a student see the brain simply as a biological organ, or would they be awed by it, also seeing the brain as a sacred object, including even its poetic aspects? This concept is particularly important for counselors working with the aged, people approaching the end of their lives, and may be critical for helping them move toward self-actualization. According to Maslow, when someone asks a counselor for help with the self-actualizing process, the counselor had better have an answer for them, “or we’re not doing what it is our job to do” (Maslow, 1971).

Discussion Question: Maslow believed that desacralizing was particularly challenging for young people. Do you think our society has lost its way, have we lost sight of meaningful values? Is nothing sacred anymore? Is there anything that you do in your life to recognize something as sacred in a way that has real meaning for your community?

Maslow had something else interesting to say about self-actualization in The Farther Reaches of Human Nature: "What does self-actualization mean in moment-to-moment terms? What does it mean on Tuesday at four o'clock?" (pg. 41). Consequently, he offered a preliminary suggestion for an operational definition of the process by which self-actualization occurs. In other words, what are the behaviors exhibited by people on the path toward fulfilling or achieving the fourteen characteristics of self-actualized people described above? Sadly, this could only remain a preliminary description, i.e., they are "ideas that are in midstream rather than ready for formulation into a final version," because this book was published after Maslow's death (having been put together before his sudden and unexpected heart attack).

What does one do when he self-actualizes? Does he grit his teeth and squeeze? What does self-actualization mean in terms of actual behavior, actual procedure? I shall describe eight ways in which one self-actualizes. (pg. 45; Maslow, 1971)

- They experience full, vivid, and selfless concentration and total absorption.
- Within the ongoing process of self-actualization, they make growth choices (rather than fear choices; progressive choices rather than regressive choices).
- They are aware that there is a self to be actualized.
- When in doubt, they choose to be honest rather than dishonest.
- They trust their own judgment even if it means being different or unpopular (being courageous is another version of this behavior).
- They put in the effort necessary to improve themselves, working regularly toward self-development no matter how arduous or demanding.
- They embrace the occurrence of peak experiences, doing what they can to facilitate and enjoy more of them (as opposed to denying these experiences as many people do).
- They identify and set aside their ego defenses (they have "the courage to give them up"). Although this requires that they face up to painful experiences, it is more beneficial than the consequences of defenses such as repression.

Being and Transcendence

Maslow had great hope and optimism for the human race. Although self-actualization might seem to be the pinnacle of
personal human achievement, he viewed Humanistic Psychology, or Third Force Psychology, as just another step in our progression:

I should say also that I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still “higher” Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like…These new developments may very well offer a tangible, usable, effective satisfaction of the “frustrated idealism” of many quietly desperate people, especially young people. These psychologies give promise of developing into the life-philosophy, the religion-surrogate, the value-system, the life-program that these people have been missing. Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, we get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic. We need something “bigger than we are” to be awed by and to commit ourselves to in a new, naturalistic, empirical, non-churchly sense, perhaps as Thoreau and Whitman, William James and John Dewey did. (pp. iii-iv; Maslow, 1968)

Although Maslow wrote about this need for a Fourth Force Psychology in 1968, it was not until the year 1998 that APA President Martin Seligman issued his call for the pursuit of positive psychology as an active force in the field of psychology. Maslow believed that all self-actualizing people were involved in some calling or vocation, a cause outside of themselves, something that fate has called them to and that they love doing. In so doing, they devote themselves to the search for Being-values (or B-values; Maslow, 1964, 1967/2008, 1968). The desire to attain self-actualization results in the B-values acting like needs. Since they are higher than the basic needs, Maslow called them metaneeds. When individuals are unable to attain these goals, the result can be metapathology, a sickness of the soul. Whereas counselors may be able to help the average person with their average problems, metapathologies may require the help of a metacounselor, a counselor trained in philosophical and spiritual matters that go far beyond the more instinctoid training of the traditional psychoanalyst (Maslow, 1967/2008). The B-values identified by Maslow (1964) are an interesting blend of the characteristics of self-actualizing individuals and the human needs described by Henry Murray: truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, self-sufficiency.

Transcendence is typically associated with people who are religious, spiritual, or artistic, but Maslow said that he found transcendent individuals amongst creative people in a wide variety of vocations (including business, managers, educators, and politicians), though there are not many of them in any field. Transcendence, according to Maslow, is the very highest and most holistic level of human consciousness, which involves relating to oneself, to all others, to all species, to nature, and to the cosmos as an end rather than as a means (Maslow, 1971). It is essential that individuals not be reduced to the role they play in relation to others, transcendence can only be found within oneself (Maslow, 1964, 1968). Maslow’s idea is certainly not new. Ancient teachings in Yoga tell us that there is a single universal spirit that connects us all, and Buddhists describe this connection as interbeing. The Abrahamic religions teach us that the entire universe was created by, and therefore is connected through, one god. It was Maslow’s hope that a transcendent Fourth Force in psychology would help all people to become self-actualizing. In Buddhist terms, Maslow was advocating the intentional creation of psychological Bodhisattvas. Perhaps this is what Maslow meant by the term metacounselor.

connections Across Cultures:

Is Nothing Sacred?
Maslow described some lofty ambitions for humanity in *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968) and *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971), as well as some challenges we face along the way. Transcendence, according to Maslow, is a loss of our sense of Self, as we begin to feel an intimate connection with the world around us and all other people. But transcendence is exceedingly difficult when we are hindered by the defense mechanism of desacralization. What exactly does the word “sacred” mean? It is not easily found in psychological works. William James often wrote about spiritual matters, but not about what is or is not sacred. Sigmund Freud mentioned sacred prohibitions in his final book, *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939/1967), but he felt that anything sacred was simply a cultural adaptation of all children’s fear of challenging their father’s will (and God was created as a symbol of the mythological father). A dictionary definition of sacred says that it is “connected with God (or the gods) or dedicated to a religious purpose and so deserving veneration.” However, there is another definition that does not require a religious context: “regarded with great respect and reverence by a particular religion, group, or individual” (The Oxford American College Dictionary, 2002). Maslow described desacralization as a rejection of the values and virtues of one’s parents. As a result, people grow up without the ability to see anything as sacred, eternal, or symbolic. In other words, they grow up without meaning in their lives.

The process of resacralization, which Maslow considered an essential task of therapists working with clients who seek help in this critical area of their life, requires that we have some concept of what is sacred. So, what is sacred? Many answers can be found, but there does seem to be at least one common thread.

Christians have long believed that forgiveness lies at the heart of faith. Psychologists have recently found that forgiveness may also lie at the heart of emotional and physical well-being.

*David Myers & Malcolm Jeeves (2003)*

…Compassion is the wish that others be free of suffering. It is by means of compassion that we aspire to attain enlightenment. It is compassion that inspires us to engage in the virtuous practices that lead to Buddhahood. We must therefore devote ourselves to developing compassion.

*The Dalai Lama (2001)*

I have been engaged in peace work for more than thirty years: combating poverty, ignorance, and disease; going to sea to help rescue boat people; evacuating the wounded from combat zones; resettling refugees; helping hungry children and orphans; opposing wars; producing and disseminating peace literature; training peace and social workers; and rebuilding villages destroyed by bombs. It is because of the practice of meditation - stopping, calming, and looking deeply - that I have been able to nourish and protect the sources of my spiritual energy and continue this work.
Thich Nhat Hanh (1995)

…Our progress is the penetrating of the present moment, living life with our feet on the ground, living in compassionate, active relationship with others, and yet living in the awareness that life has been penetrated by the eternal moment of God and unfolds in the power of that moment.

Fr. Laurence Freeman (1986)

Keep your hands busy with your duties in this world, and your heart busy with God.

Sheikh Muzaffer (cited in Essential Sufism by Fadiman & Frager, 1997)

Forgiveness is a letting go of past suffering and betrayal, a release of the burden of pain and hate that we carry.

Forgiveness honors the heart’s greatest dignity. Whenever we are lost, it brings us back to the ground of love.

Jack Kornfield (2002)

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself…”

Jesus Christ (The Holy Bible, 1962)

In examining self-actualizing people directly, I find that in all cases, at least in our culture, they are dedicated people, devoted to some task “outside themselves,” some vocation, or duty, or beloved job. Generally the devotion and dedication is so marked that one can fairly use the old words vocation, calling, or mission to describe their passionate, selfless, and profound feeling for their “work.”

The spiritual life is then part of the human essence. It is a defining-characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not full human nature. It is part of the Real Self, of one’s identity, of one’s inner core, of one’s specieshood, of full humanness.

Abraham Maslow (1971)

Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, as well as members of other religions and humanists, all have some variation of what has been called The Golden Rule: treating others as you would like to be treated. If that is sacred, then even amongst atheists, young people can evaluate the values and virtues of their parents, community, and culture, and then decide whether those values are right or wrong, whether they want to perpetuate an aspect of that society based on their own thoughts and feelings about how
they, themselves, may be treated someday by others. This resacralization need not be religious or spiritual, but it commonly is, and some psychologists are comfortable embracing spirituality as such.

Kenneth Pargament and Annette Mahoney (2005) wrote a chapter entitled *Spirituality: Discovering and Conserving the Sacred*, which was included in the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Snyder & Lopez, 2005). First, they point out that religion is an undeniable fact in American society. Some 95 percent of Americans believe in God, and 86 percent believe that He can be reached through prayer and that He is important or very important to them. Spirituality, according to Pargament and Mahoney, is the process in which individuals seek both to discover and to conserve that which is sacred. It is interesting to note that Maslow and Rogers consider self-actualization and transcendence to be a process as well, not something that one can get and keep permanently. An important aspect of defining what is sacred is that it is imbued with divinity. God may be seen as manifest in marriage, work can be seen as a vocation to which the person is called, the environment can been seen as God’s creation. In each of these situations, and in others, what is viewed as sacred has been sanctified by those who consider it sacred. Unfortunately, this can have negative results as well, such as when the Heaven’s Gate cult followed their sanctified leader to their deaths. Thus, spirituality is not necessarily synonymous with a good and healthy lifestyle.

Still, there is research that has shown that couples who sanctify their marriage experience greater marital satisfaction, less marital conflict, and more effective marital problem-solving strategies. Likewise, mothers and fathers who sanctify the role of parenting report less aggression and more consistent discipline in raising their children. For college students, spiritual striving was more highly correlated with well-being than any other form of goal-setting (see Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). So there appear to be real psychological advantages to spiritual pursuits. This may be particularly true during challenging times in our lives:

…there are aspects of our lives that are beyond our control. Birth, developmental transitions, accidents, illnesses, and death are immutable elements of existence. Try as we might to affect these elements, a significant portion of our lives remains beyond our immediate control. In spirituality, however, we can find ways to understand and deal with our fundamental human insufficiency, the fact that there are limits to our control… (pg. 655; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005)

### Eupsychian Management and Theory Z

It is not merely a coincidence that Maslow is well-known in the field of business. He spent 3 years as the plant manager for the Maslow Cooperage Corporation, and later he spent a summer studying at an electronics firm in California (Non-Linear Systems, Inc.) at the invitation of the company’s president. He became very interested in industrial and managerial psychology, and the journal he kept in California was published as *Eupsychian Management* (Maslow, 1965). *Eupsychia* refers to real possibility and improvability, and a movement toward psychological health, as opposed...
to the vague fantasies of proposed Utopian societies. More precisely, though this is something of a fantasy itself, Maslow described Eupsychia as the culture that would arise if 1,000 self-actualizing people were allowed to live their own lives on a sheltered island somewhere. Maslow applied his psychological theories, including both the hierarchy of needs and self-actualization, to a management style that takes advantage of this knowledge to maximize the potential of the employees in a company (also see the collection of Maslow’s unpublished papers by Hoffman, 1996).

Maslow introduced a variety of terms related to his theories on management, one of the most interesting being **synergy**. Having borrowed the term from Ruth Benedict, synergy refers to a situation in which a person pursuing their own, selfish goals is automatically helping others, and a person unselfishly helping others is, at the same time, helping themselves. According to Maslow, when selfishness and unselfishness are mutually exclusive, it is a sign of mild psychopathology. Self-actualizing individuals are above the distinction between selfishness and unselfishness; they enjoy seeing others experience pleasure. Maslow offered the personal example of feeding strawberries to his little daughter. As the child smacked her lips and thoroughly loved the strawberries, an experience that thrilled Maslow, what was he actually giving up by letting her eat the strawberries instead of eating them himself? In his experience with the Blackfoot tribe, a member named Teddy was able to buy a car. He was the only one who had one, but tradition allowed anyone in the tribe to borrow it. Teddy used his car no more often than anyone else, but he had to pay the bills, including the gas bill. And yet, everyone in the tribe was so proud of him that he was greatly admired and they elected him chief. So, he benefited in other ways by following tradition and letting everyone use his car (Maslow, 1965). In the business field, when managers encourage cooperation and communication, everyone benefits from the healthy growth and continuous improvement of the company. And this leads us to **Theory Z** (which is Eupsychian management).

Douglas McGregor, a professor of industrial relations at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was greatly impressed with Maslow’s work, and McGregor had used *Motivation and Personality* as a textbook in his business classes. Based on Maslow’s theories, McGregor published a book in 1960 in which he outlined two managerial models, **Theory X** and **Theory Y** (Gabor, 2000; Hoffman, 1996). Maslow described the two theories as follows:

…To put it succinctly, **Theory Y** assumes that if you give people responsibilities and freedom, then they will like to work and will do a better job. **Theory Y** also assumes that workers basically like excellence, efficiency, perfection, and the like. **Theory X**, which still dominates most of the world’s workplace, has a contrasting view. It assumes that people are basically stupid, lazy, hurtful, and untrustworthy and, therefore, that you have got to check everything constantly because workers will steal you blind if you don’t. (pg. 187; Maslow, 1996a)

The Theory X/Theory Y strategy was intentionally put into practice at Non-Linear Systems, hence Maslow’s invitation to study there. Maslow concluded, however, that even Theory Y did not go far enough in maximizing people’s potential. People have metaneeds (the need for B-values), needs that go beyond simply offering higher salaries. When employees have their basic needs met, but recognize inefficiency and mismanagement in the company, they will still complain, but these higher level complaints can now be described as **metagrumbles** (as opposed to the lower level grumbles about lower level needs). Theory Z attempts to transcend Theory Y and actively facilitate the growth of a company’s employees toward self-actualization (Hoffman, 1996; Maslow, 1971; Maslow 1996b).

**Discussion Question:** How’s your job (or any job you have had)? Would you describe your supervisor or boss as someone who uses Eupsychian or Theory Z management? Does the workplace foster synergy amongst the employees? If not, can you imagine how the job would be different if they did?