

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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Maslow's theory of personality [8, 9] is based on: 1) a theory of human motivation, characterized by a hierarchy of needs; 2) a description of a particular type of maximally healthy personality, called "self-actualizing", which is supposed to emerge when all these needs are satisfied.

### Theory of motivation

According to Maslow human behavior is motivated by a set of basic needs. Which needs are most active in driving behavior depends on two principles: (1) a need which is satisfied is no longer active: the higher the satisfaction, the less the activity (the exception to this rule is the need for self-actualization, see further); (2) needs can be ordered in a hierarchy, such that from all the non-satisfied needs, the one which is lowest in the hierarchy will be the most active. A lower need is more "urgent" in the sense that it must be satisfied before a higher need can take over control.

The lowest level of needs may be called physiological needs. These are needs of the body as a physiological system which tries to maintain homeostasis. They consist of the need to breath air, hunger, thirst, avoidance of extreme heat and cold, etc. These needs are such that if they are not satisfied the organism dies. If the threat of dying because of perturbation of the physiological equilibrium has vanished, the organism can direct its attention to more indirect threats, such as the danger of being caught by a predator, and try to avoid them. This corresponds to the second need level: the need for safety. Once safety and physiological needs are met, higher, more typically "human" needs come to the foreground, in the first place the need for love and belonging. This is the basic social or affiliation motive, which drives people to seek contact with others and to build satisfying relations with them. Satisfaction of belongingness needs triggers the emergence of the esteem need. In this stage of need gratification, persons also want to be esteemed, by the people they are in contact with, as well as by themselves: they want to know that they are capable of achievement and success.

When all these needs are satisfied, we are left with the last one, the highest need, the need for self-actualization. This need is fundamentally different from the previous ones, in the sense that all the previous ones can be conceived as drives towards the reduction of a deficiency. Such a deficiency means that there is a **discrepancy** between the actual state of the individual, and some fixed optimal or equilibrium state, characterized by adequate values of the basic variables, as well physiological variables such as temperature, level of sugar in the blood, etc., as psychological ones such as feeling of safety, of belongingness, of esteem. The control which deficiency needs exert

over the individual's behavior is implemented as a negative feedback loop, which diminishes deviations from the goal state.

Self-actualization, on the other hand, may be called a growth need, in the sense that deviations from the previously reached equilibrium state are not reduced, but enhanced, made to grow, in a deviation-amplifying positive feedback loop. The deviations to be amplified are changes which can be interpreted as improvements in some way of the overall personality, as development of remaining potentialities. If you eat food, your desire for it becomes less and less, in accordance with principle (1). However, if you develop your capacities, you want to develop them more and more.

### **Definition of self-actualization**

Self-actualization is reached when all needs are fulfilled, in particular the highest need. Because of the positive feedback, self-actualization is not a fixed state, but a process of development which does not end. The word derives from the idea that each individual has a lot of hidden potentialities: talents or **competences** he or she could develop, but which have as yet not come to the surface. Self-actualization signifies that these potentialities of the self are made actual, are actualized in a continuing process of unfolding.

According to Maslow, self-actualization corresponds to ultimate psychological health. Health is more than the absence of disease. On the psychological level, diseases correspond to neuroses due to the frustration of one of the basic needs. For example, a person whose safety need has not been adequately fulfilled may develop paranoiac tendencies, and believe that everybody and everything is threatening him.

An interesting case is the situation where all the lower level needs have been satisfied, but the highest need, self-actualization, has not. In that case you have a person who apparently has everything to be happy: a comfortable and safe environment, a loving family, friendship and respect from peers, a sense of personal achievement... Yet the individual will not be really happy, because he has no longer a goal to live for, he has achieved everything he wanted. This will result in feelings of boredom and meaninglessness, which might even lead to suicide, unless the person becomes aware that there is more to life than reducing deficiencies, that is to say unless he becomes aware of his need for self-actualization. Though one may continue to live in a more or less stable manner, trying to satisfy the deficiency needs without developing acute problems or neuroses, he will not be really healthy unless he succeeds in satisfying his self-actualization need, thus liberating his most profound capacities.

This definition of self-actualization derives from Maslow's motivation theory. However, Maslow has also undertaken an empirical observation of existing healthy personalities, more or less independently of the theory. Though he has tried to explain his empirical results by means of the theory, the observations are more detailed than what the theory can predict, and as we will see further they sometimes

even seem to contradict the theory. Though he uses the same word, "self-actualizing", to label the personality type coming out of his observations, and the one coming out of his theory, it is not obvious that it describes the same phenomenon. Therefore it is important to study his observations in detail, and to try to correlate them with theoretical explanations.

### **Empirical validation**

The problem with Maslow's observations is that they are difficult to reproduce (though there does exist a validated test for measuring the degree of self-actualization a person has reached [13]). Maslow is rather vague about how he selected his subjects, and he acknowledges that his work could not conform to the conventional criteria of psychological experimentation because of the complexity of the problem. Yet I would agree with his defense that it is preferable to carry out methodologically primitive research about fundamental problems, such as the conditions of human well-being, rather than restrict oneself to technically sophisticated observations about minor issues.

The hierarchical emergence of needs seems easier to test in an objective way, and some empirical research has effectively been done, mostly in the area of management and work satisfaction, but the results are mixed at best, sometimes seeming to support the theory, sometimes contradicting it [14, 15]. In particular the specific order in which needs (e.g. love and esteem) emerge, seems to be ambiguous.

Mook [11] illustrates another problem by means of two case studies, one about an African tribe which has lived in conditions of misery and insecurity for generations, and one about the behavior of people in Nazi death camps. In the first case, Maslow's theory seems to be confirmed: the frustration of the safety and sometimes even the physiological needs seems to have erased any behavior aimed at the satisfaction of the higher needs: there is no sign of love, of affiliation, of esteem or achievement among the people of the tribe. In the second case, however, in spite of the continuous threat to safety and to life, people still retain some form of dignity and **altruism**.

This last example points to where the basic problem lies: though it seems **intuitively** evident that somebody who has been fighting for survival during his whole life will have difficulty to develop a higher sense of love, understanding and creativity, need gratification alone does not seem sufficient to explain in which circumstances self-actualization will or will not emerge. Other factors must be involved. The main difference between the African tribesmen and the Jews in the concentration camps seems to be that the first ones never experienced need gratification in their life, while the second ones probably have led a relatively satisfying life before their persecution by the Nazis. So one important factor seems to be the period during which basic needs were or were not satisfied. Maslow partly acknowledges this when he remarks that self-actualizers can endure need frustration much better than other people, because they have already received so much gratification in the past.

Maslow wanted to understand what motivates people. He believed that people possess a set of motivation systems unrelated to rewards or unconscious desires.

Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled a person seeks to fulfill the next one, and so on.

The earliest and most widespread version of Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs includes five motivational needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. This five stage model can be divided into basic (or deficiency) needs (e.g. physiological, safety, love, and esteem) and growth needs (self-actualization).

The deficiency, or basic needs are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the need to fulfill such needs will become stronger the longer the duration they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food the more hungry they will become.

One must satisfy lower level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization.

Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower level needs. Life experiences including divorce and loss of job may cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy.

Maslow noted only one in a hundred people become fully self-actualized because our society rewards motivation primarily based on esteem, love and other social needs.

### **The five needs**

- Physiological needs are to do with the maintenance of the human body. If we are unwell, then little else matters until we recover.
- Safety needs are about putting a roof over our heads and keeping us from harm. If we are rich, strong and powerful, or have good friends, we can make ourselves safe.
- Belonging needs introduce our tribal nature. If we are helpful and kind to others they will want us as friends.
- Esteem needs are for a higher position within a group. If people respect us, we have greater power.
- Self-actualization needs are to 'become what we are capable of becoming', which would our greatest achievement.

Write a brief comparison/contrast of these two explanations of Maslow's hierarchy.