

# Abraham Maslow & Humanistic Approach

SIUE PSYC 340

# Abraham Maslow

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# Life of Maslow

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- Abraham Harold Maslow (1908–1970) was an American psychologist and founder of humanistic psychology.
- His approach focused on psychological health (rather than illness), growth (rather than stagnation), and virtues and potentials (rather than weaknesses and limitations).

# Life of Maslow

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- Born in New York in 1908 as the oldest of 7 children
- Felt isolated and unhappy throughout childhood
  - Father was aloof and periodically abandoned his family
  - Mother was unaffectionate and cruel
- Compensated for feelings of inferiority through reading and education

# Life of Maslow

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- Earned a PhD from the University of Wisconsin in 1931
  - Trained in experimental psychology
  - Became critical of psychoanalysis and behaviorism after the start of WWII and the birth of his first child, when he shifted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> force
- Completed a postdoctoral fellowship with E. L. Thorndike at Columbia University
  - Took several intelligence and scholastic aptitude tests, scoring an IQ of 195

# Life of Maslow

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- Met the wave of immigrant intellectuals fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 40s, which prompted his ideas concerning self-actualization
  - E.g., Karen Horney, Alfred Adler, Max Wertheimer, Ruth Benedict
- Applied humanistic psychology to the study of politics, economics, and ethics
- Died in 1970 of a massive heart attack

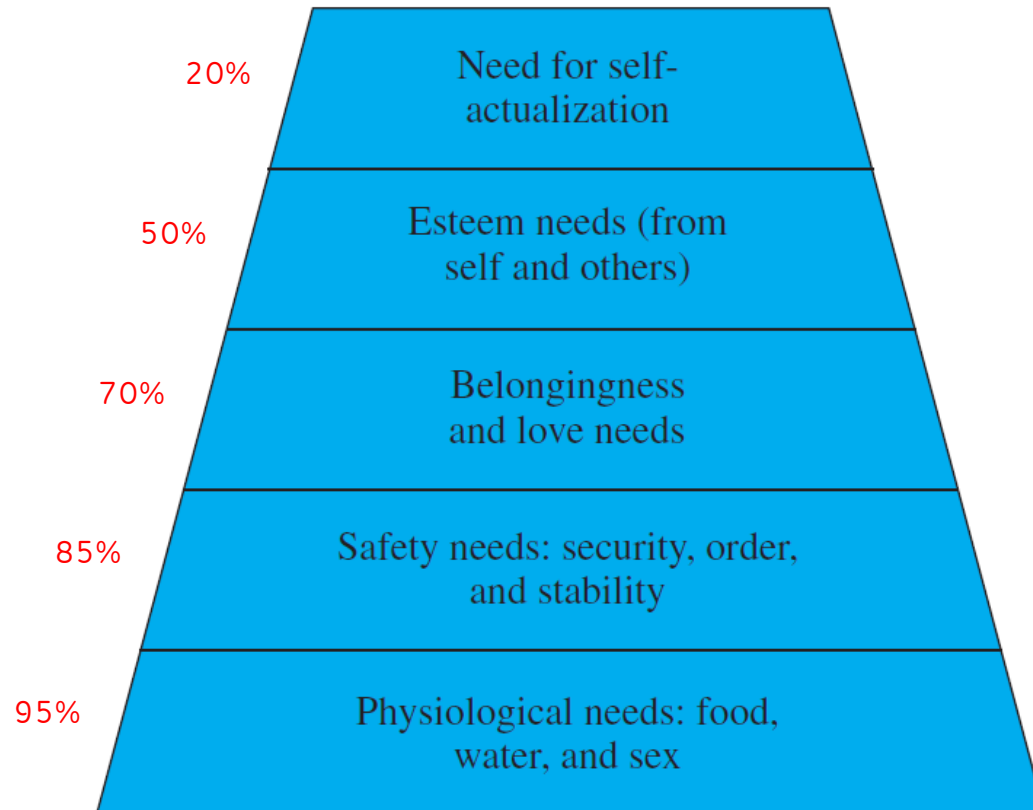
# Maslow's Needs-Hierarchy Theory

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- Said personality is determined by the interaction of heredity and environment
  - Proposed a hierarchy of 5 innate needs (nature) that activate and direct behavior
    - Lower needs – Physiological, safety
    - Higher needs – Belongingness, esteem, self-actualization
  - Satisfied by learned behaviors (nurture) and are subject to variation from one person to another
  - Enable us to grow, develop, and fulfill our potential

# Maslow's Needs-Hierarchy Theory

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- Needs are arranged from strongest at the bottom to weakest at the top.
- Lower needs must be at least partially satisfied before higher needs become influential.
- He proposed a declining percentage of satisfaction for each need.

# Maslow's Needs-Hierarchy Theory

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- As each need becomes more satisfied, the next level of unsatisfied needs begins to dominate conscious functioning.
  - At any one point in time, only one need will dominate personality.
- The degree of satisfaction impacts personality development and functioning.
  - High satisfaction has a positive impact.
  - Low satisfaction/failure to satisfy has a negative impact.

# Maslow's Needs-Hierarchy Theory

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- Characteristics of lower needs
  - Called **deficit or deficiency needs**
  - Greater in strength, potency, and priority
  - Failure to satisfy produces a crisis, a deficit or lack in the individual
- Characteristics of higher needs
  - Called **growth or being needs**
  - Appear in adolescence/adulthood
  - Satisfaction leads to improved health, happiness, contentment, fulfillment, and longevity

# Physiological Needs

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- Include basic survival needs
  - The need for food, water, air, sleep, and sex
- Rarely a concern for middle-class Americans
- Have a greater personal impact as motivating forces in cultures where basic survival remains an everyday concern



# Safety Needs

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- Includes the needs for stability, security, and freedom from fear
  - Infants react visibly and immediately to any threat to their safety.
  - Adults learn ways to inhibit their reactions to dangerous situations.
- Important drive for children and neurotic adults
  - Children desire a structure or routine for an orderly and predictable world.
  - Neurotic adults compulsively avoid new experiences.

# Belongingness and Love Needs

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- Includes the need to give and receive love
- Expressed and satisfied through close relationships with others
  - E.g., family, friends, lovers, social groups, and forms of social media
- Failure to satisfy results in emotional maladjustment

# Esteem Needs

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- Includes the need for esteem and respect from:
  - Ourselves through feelings of self-worth
  - Others through status, social success, and recognition
- Satisfaction leads to confidence in our strength, worth, and adequacy, which helps us be more competent and productive in all aspects of our life
- Failure to satisfy leads to feelings of inferiority, helplessness, and discouragement

# Self Actualization Need

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- Involves the need to fully realize and fulfill our potentials, talents, and abilities
- Necessary conditions:
  - Freedom from societal or self-constraints and freedom from lower needs
  - Secure in self-image and relationships; able to love and be loved
  - Realistic knowledge of one's strengths/virtues and weaknesses/vices
- Failure to become self-actualized leads to restlessness and discontentment

# Study of Self-Actualizers

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- Proposed a distinct type of motivation for self-actualizers called **metamotivation (B-motivation or Being)**
  - Involves maximizing personal potential and developing from within
  - Goal is to enrich their lives by acting to increase tension to experience a variety of stimulating and challenging events
  - In a state of “being,” spontaneously, naturally, and joyfully expressing their full humanity

# Study of Self-Actualizers

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- Proposed a list of **metaneeds**, which are states of being (e.g., goodness, wholeness, uniqueness, and perfection) toward which self-actualizers evolve
- Suggested **metapathology** arises from the failure to satisfy metaneeds and prevents self-actualizers from expressing, using, and fulfilling their potential
- Believed that only 1% or less of the population were self-actualized and that they share certain characteristics

# Characteristics of Self-Actualizers

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- ✓ Efficient perceptions of reality
- ✓ Acceptance of self, others, and nature
- ✓ Spontaneity, simplicity, and naturalness
- ✓ Focus on problems outside self
- ✓ Sense of detachment and need for privacy
- ✓ Freshness of appreciation
- ✓ Peak experiences
- ✓ Social interest
- ✓ Deep interpersonal relationships
- ✓ Creativeness
- ✓ Resistance to social pressures

# Reasons for Failure to Self-Actualize

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- Self-actualization can be easily inhibited by:
  - Poor economic conditions
  - Inadequate education
  - Improper child-rearing practices (e.g., overprotection, excessive permission)
- **Jonah complex**, the fear that maximizing one's potential may lead to situation with which one cannot cope

# Maslow's Methods

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- Observed shared qualities in self-actualized individuals
  - E.g., Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, George Washington Carver, Harriet Tubman, and Eleanor Roosevelt
  - Techniques used to assess personalities:
    - Historical figures - Analyzed biographical material and written records
    - Living subjects - Interviews, free association, and projective tests
- Failed to meet the requirements of scientific research

# Assessment in Maslow's Theory

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- [Personal Orientation Inventory \(POI\)](#) – 150-item test developed by Everett Shostrom (1964) to measure self-actualization
- Short Index of Self-Actualization – 15-item test developed by Jones and Crandall (1986) to measure self-actualization behaviors
- Basic Need Satisfaction Inventory – Developed by Leidy (1994) to measure how well a person satisfies Maslow's needs

# Self-Determination Theory

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- Contemporary outgrowth of Maslow's self-actualization theory
  - Focuses on intrinsic motivation
  - Suggests we have an innate tendency to express our interests, to exercise and develop our capabilities and potentials, and to overcome challenges
  - Must satisfy three needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness
    - Studies suggest that satisfaction of these needs is positively associated with well-being, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

# Research on Maslow's Theory

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- Support for Maslow's theory:
  - Satisfaction of needs *negatively* related to neuroticism and depression
  - High self-actualization scores *positively* related to emotional health, creativity, well-being following therapy, academic achievement, autonomy, and racial tolerance
  - High self-esteem scores *positively* related to self-worth and self-confidence



# Research on Maslow's Ideas

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People high in *self-esteem*:

- Feel competent and productive
- Receive more job offers and cope better with job loss
- Are less likely to have anxiety or depression or to drop out of school
- Get along well with others
- Are emotionally healthy and creative
- Are likely to have strong ethnic identities
- Have a greater sense of self-worth and confidence
- May spend less time on Facebook and other social networking sites

People low in *self-esteem* tend to

- Become depressed
- Drop out of school and get criminal convictions
- Experience social problems and poor health
- Have a lower quality of life and psychological well-being
- Spend more time on social media

People high in *self-determination* tend to:

- Have satisfied the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness
- Be high in self-esteem and self-actualization
- Possess an innate tendency to overcome challenges and develop their capabilities

# Strengths and Criticisms of Maslow's Theory

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- Optimistic approach gained traction with experts and ordinary people
- Inspired streams of research in personality, social psychology, developmental psychology, and organizational behavior
- Influenced emergence of the positive psychology movement
- Explanation of methods and terms was inconsistent and vague
- Small sample size limits generalizability of principles
- Characteristics of actualizers lack specificity and are difficult to describe