

# SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND COACTUALIZATION

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Self-actualization is a process of expressing one's deepest truth (J. Rowan & Glouberman, 2018) and of creating oneself and one's life (Montuori & Purser, 2015), rooted in one's basic tendency "to persist in attempting to develop and manifest their latent potentialities" (Greening, 1971, p. 6). This conceptualization is generally shared by founding humanistic psychologists who explored self-actualization (see Bühler & Allen, 1972; Bugental, 1965, 1967; DeCarvalho, 1991; Jourard & Landsman, 1980; Maslow, 1959; Moss, 1999; Moustakas, 1956; Rogers, 1959, 1961; Schneider et al., 2015; Severin, 1965; Tageson, 1982). This chapter specifically focuses on the work of Abraham Maslow, "the person most associated with" self-actualization, whose insights and research spurred interest in the construct (Welch et al., 1987, p. ix). Following an overview of his theorizing, the chapter surveys subsequent expansions of self-actualization via incorporation of existential, transpersonal, and constructivist–postmodern theorizing. Today, self-actualization has matured to explore cultural variations as well as *coactualization*, an emerging construct in which self-actualization is promoted and cultivated both by and in relationships. In addition, empirical research on and critiques of self-actualization and coactualization are reviewed, and their contemporary relevance is discussed. Throughout the

chapter, misinformation about self-actualization that commonly appears in textbooks and the professional literature is fact-checked.

As an area of inquiry during the mid-20th century, self-actualization offered an alternative to the limitations of and disparities between decontextualized experimentalism–behaviorism and psychoanalysis—the then-prevailing schools of thought in psychology in which founding humanistic psychologists, including Maslow, had been trained. At that time, consciousness had been marginalized, and the fuller range of human nature and its creative and spiritual accomplishments had been reduced to the study of conditioned responses in laboratory rats and of neurotic patients' unconscious drives or conflicts. Humanistic psychologists cautioned that these myopic images propagated by value-free science would seep into the greater culture and lower people's expectations of themselves and their potential—and therefore uphold a societal status quo characterized by mechanization, materialism, bureaucratization, authoritarianism, conformity, compartmentalization of experience, and disempowerment of individual authenticity in society (Arons, 1999, 2020; Grogan, 2013).

As the *third force* in U.S. psychology, humanistic psychologists like Maslow synthesized and incorporated the insights of the existing schools

Thanks to my graduate assistant, Shannon O'Loughlin, for helping with library research.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0000431-014>

APA Handbook of Humanistic and Existential Psychology: Vol. 1. History, Research, Philosophy, and Theory, L. Hoffman (Editor)  
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into a broader and deeper phenomenological orientation that emphasized the validity of human experience and meaning. Rather than focus merely on happiness, adjustment to a dysfunctional ecology, and/or freedom from psychopathology as his basis for psychological health (Maslow, 1951, 1987, 1999), Maslow focused on self-actualization as active engagement in and enjoyment of the process and intrinsic rewards of seeking knowledge and growth by transcending one's familiar circumstances and taking healthy risks to explore new possibilities in life (Pfaffenberger, 2007; Welch et al., 1987). Using growth and health as his baseline, Maslow approached self-actualization as a model of human maturity upon which psychology could build a more sustainable foundation. At the same time, as discussed in the next section, he acknowledged regressive forces and the potential for stagnation, often as the outcome of inadequate environmental conditions. Further, Maslow's (1971, 1987) dynamic systems theorizing provided a eudaimonic, chaironic, and holistic alternative to the hedonistic and reductionistic assumptions of the prevailing schools (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020).

## SELF-ACTUALIZATION

### Antecedents and Introduction of the Construct

Self-actualization was inspired by several theoretical–philosophical antecedents: Jung (individuation), James (psychology of the self), Aristotle (*entelechy*—self-contained purpose, *eudaimonia*—good life), Kant (interiority, self-auditing, spiritual striving), Rousseau (subjectivity), Hegel (intersubjectivity, mutuality), existentialism (authenticity, self-cultivation, self-overcoming), Taoism, Buddhism (*bodhisattva*), Hinduism, and Jewish wisdom (D'Sa, 2014; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; E. Hoffman, 2020; E. Hoffman & Compton, 2022). Additional forerunners included Horney (self-realization and tyranny of the should), Adler (social interest and teleological psyche), Gestalt psychologists (holism, systems theory), Fromm (having vs. being, productive character orientation, art of loving), Allport (appropriate striving,

teleological stance), Spinoza (becoming who one is intended to be), Straus (perception of choices and possibilities as an invitation to self-actualization), Benedict and Mead (social anthropology), Murphy (curiosity, social feeling, openness to experience), Murray (taxonomy of human needs, primacy of values), Buber (healing through meeting, I–Thou vs. I–it), and early creativity theorists like Bergson and Rank (Arons & Richards, 2015; Bland & DeRobertis, 2019, 2020; Compton, 2018; E. Hoffman, 1999; Moss, 1999). As a creative synthesizer, Maslow integrated insights from both across and outside psychology to forge a developmentally- and ecologically-situated conceptualization of psychological health.

As a construct, self-actualization was introduced by Goldstein (1934/1995), who challenged Freud's idea of homeostasis as the end state of organisms under normal conditions. Goldstein's conceptualization of self-actualization was built on three axioms (Whitehead, 2017). First, self-actualization is an individuation process (self as a unique biochemical system and an active, creative authority ever in a process of becoming). Second, paradoxically, this individuation process must also be conceptualized holistically (understood only through the synergistic, holonic organism–environment relationship). Third, behavior is invariantly motivated in terms of self-actualization (vs. merely tension reduction or survival).

### Maslow's Self-Actualization

A careful reading of Maslow's (1987, 1999) theorizing reveals the influence of Goldstein's three axioms (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020). Like Goldstein, Maslow believed that, throughout the lifespan, individuals negotiate a dialectic between homeostasis (defensively clinging to the familiar and predictable) and morphogenic enactment of their capacities and potentialities as human beings. Maslow (1999) explicated a theory of *safety versus growth* that accounts for the two-steps-forward-one-step-back contiguous dynamic that characterizes the ongoing process of being-in-becoming-in-relation despite the inherent struggle. In addition, Maslow extended Goldstein's (1963) conceptualization

of self-actualization (which had emphasized the reorganization of one's capacities in response to brain injury or psychopathology) by further emphasizing overcoming obstacles (real and perceived) and living resiliently, authentically, and creatively despite one's personal, environmental, and historical shortcomings. See Table 14.1 for

an outline of the interrelated qualities Maslow associated with self-actualization, which underscore paradoxes involving individuality–interdependence, acceptance–commitment, cognition–curiosity, creativity–wisdom, and process–presence.

For Maslow (1987, 1999), self-actualization entails choosing to become whom one “is fitted

TABLE 14.1

## Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualization Organized Dialectically

Individuality–interdependence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “A real self, a firm identity, autonomy, uniqueness; . . . democratic character structure; . . . ability to love” (Maslow, 1999, pp. 172–173)</li> <li>■ Both self-transcendence and transcendence of one's environment (see also Winston, 2016, 2018); living authentically despite one's personal, environmental, and historical shortcomings</li> <li>■ Concern for social justice and the welfare of others (based on Maslow's working-class upbringing as the eldest son of Russian Jewish immigrants, E. Hoffman, 1999), being-in-the-world-with-others, inter-individuality, social interest/community feeling, commitment to a cause outside oneself (see also Bland &amp; Swords, 2023; Compton, 2018; Pilisuk &amp; Joy, 2015)</li> <li>■ Interdependent worldview of the self (not merely as the individual person but instead as the interconnection of people and nature) and deep respect for nature and the natural (see also Pilisuk &amp; Joy, 2015)</li> <li>■ Enhanced humility and respect</li> <li>■ Paradoxically, development, values, and sense of morality/ethics become determined more from within (intrinsic) than from without (extrinsic) à la Kohlberg's postconventional morality and Gilligan's morality of nonviolence (see also Bland &amp; DeRobertis, 2020; Bühler &amp; Allen, 1972). Doing the right thing, even if it goes against the tide; rising above the “imperfections of [one's] culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it” (Maslow 1999, p. 201)</li> </ul>
Acceptance–commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Increased spontaneity, expressiveness, full functioning, aliveness” (Maslow, 1999, p. 172)</li> <li>■ Ability to face, endure, and grapple with the “real” problems of life—the existential problems to which there are no perfect solutions (tolerance of ambiguity)</li> <li>■ Healthy challenges regarded as opportunities for growth (vs. threats)</li> <li>■ Constructive adaptation to circumstances beyond one's control</li> <li>■ Abilities to withstand setbacks and to overcome obstacles (real and perceived) despite the inherent risks, to remain flexible, to learn spontaneously, to refrain from repeating mistakes, and to demonstrate acceptance of what they cannot control and commitment to what they can</li> </ul>
Cognition–curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Clearer, more efficient perception of reality; . . . increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self; . . . ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness” (Maslow, 1999, pp. 172–173)</li> <li>■ Enhanced cognition, perception of reality, aesthetic attunement</li> <li>■ Honest curiosity and motivation to know, explain, and understand in the interest of transformation (vs. categorical knowing to quell anxiety or fear)</li> <li>■ Ability to detect the spurious and the fake—both in people and in taste or judgment</li> </ul>
Creativity–wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Increased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person; . . . recovery of creativeness” (Maslow, 1999, pp. 172–173)</li> <li>■ Active negotiation of dialectics and appreciation of paradox               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Young–old</i> (sense of playfulness and spontaneity—vs. overly serious—and ability to integrate the creative imagination with practical wisdom; see also Arons &amp; Richards, 2015)</li> <li>■ <i>Self–other</i> (on one hand, more democratic, enhanced interpersonal relations, acceptance and forgiveness extended to a variety of relationships; on the other hand, increased autonomy, self-discipline, comfort in one's skin and being alone, desire for solitude)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Process–presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “More openness to experience” (Maslow, 1999, p. 172)</li> <li>■ Accepting the fuller range of human impulses (vs. rejecting them in the interest of reducing tension)</li> <li>■ Living fully in the present moment (vs. ruminating about the past or obsessing about the future)</li> <li>■ Appreciating the small things in life with a sense of freshness, awe, and wonder</li> <li>■ Enjoying life as a process (vs. outcome- or task-centered)</li> </ul>

Note. Data from Maslow (1971, 1987, 1999) and Maslow and Mittelmann (1951).

for” (1987, p. 22) in order to make a meaningful contribution to one’s community—versus uncritically playing a socially-conditioned or ideologically-defined role. As an alternative to the tabula rasa assumptions of the prevailing schools (Maslow, 1971), Maslow (1969) suggested that self-actualization is *instinctoid*—biologically based and a “fundamental human right” (p. 3). This nativist position was inspired in part by his experience of having two children whose individual temperaments were apparent during pregnancy, one being more active and the other more passive in the womb, well before any opportunity for behavioral conditioning or Freudian psychosexual development (Zweig & Bennis, 1968). Further, Maslow’s interest in self-actualization originated in the 1940s while he was preparing a textbook that would provide a 50-year follow-up to James’s (1890) *Principles of Psychology*. Important developments had been made in some domains, but Maslow was perplexed and concerned by the “huge big gaping hole” (Zweig & Bennis, 1968, 17:55) in areas such as consciousness, imagination, creativity, perceptions of reality, and necessary truths—for which he dropped the James textbook project to set about filling in with his theorizing and research (E. Hoffman, 1999).

### Within Maslow’s Holistic–Dynamic Hierarchical Theory of Needs

Maslow’s characteristics of self-actualization originated within an inventory of “Manifestations of Psychological Health (‘Normality’)” that led off his groundbreaking (E. Hoffman, 1996) abnormal psychology textbook (Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951, pp. 14–15) and that served as the basis for his needs hierarchy. Maslow (1971, 1987) proposed a hierarchical structure from physiological to safety to love and belonging to self-esteem needs (see Table 14.2), with fulfillment

of each set of needs proportional to the extent to which the previous one(s) have been consistently satisfied.<sup>1</sup> Each set of needs is gratified on a continuum from more externalized (lower, more basic needs) to more intrinsic (higher, more individualized needs). When the basic needs are more consistently satisfied, one becomes equipped to take an existential leap of faith toward self-actualization (J. Rowan, 1998, 2001)—that is, “more fully evolved because not fixated at immature or incomplete levels of growth” (Maslow, 1999, p. 172). Importantly, Maslow (1971, 1987, 1999) accentuated that self-actualization should not be conceptualized as an achievement or trait (as a noun), but iteratively (as a verb). It does not involve perfection or living without problems; rather, self-actualization entails ongoing striving for still greater improvement and self-reinforcing growth.

### Maslow’s Deficiency Versus Being

Despite Neher’s (1991) critique to the contrary, Maslow (1987) emphasized that basic need fulfillment involves not only satisfaction but also the ability to temporarily withstand a reasonable degree of deprivation based on a history of adequate gratification. In contrast, prolonged frustration of a particular need results in preoccupation with it, which inhibits further growth (for empirical support, see Winston, 2016; Winston et al., 2017). Maslow referred to the attitudes and actions associated with inadequate need fulfillment as *deficiency-cognition*, -motivation, and so forth. For example, deficiency-love can be characterized by people pleasing and/or possessiveness, and deficiency-esteem by the archetypal bureaucrat (J. Rowan, 2001). For most people, behavior, cognition, and experiencing reflects preoccupation with the basic needs (Maslow, 1987). Accordingly,

<sup>1</sup>Notably, Maslow (1987) emphasized that fulfillment of the basic needs is not a discontinuous, lockstep progression but, rather, an ongoing holistic process: “[The statement that] if one need is satisfied, then another emerges . . . might give the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100% before the next need emerges. . . . A more realistic description . . . would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy of prepotency. . . . The emergence [of a new need] is *not a sudden, saltatory phenomenon*, but rather a gradual emergence by slow degrees” (pp. 27–28, emphasis added). Thus, J. Rowan (1999) used the analogy of Russian nesting dolls to illustrate the idea that the lower needs are transcended but also included within the higher ones—that is, they are never renounced, just less pressing.

TABLE 14.2

## Characteristics of Fulfillment of Maslow's Basic Needs

Physiological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ability to accept bodily functions without preoccupation or shame or conflict, to work, to enjoy physical activities such as eating and sleeping, and to experience healthy sexual desire and gratification without fear or guilt</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Absence of excessive need to indulge in these activities</li> <li>■ "Security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos [and] need for structure, order, law, and limits" (Maslow, 1987, p. 18)</li> <li>■ Experiencing a reasonable sense of consistency and predictability; feeling safe in contact with others in occupational, social, and family settings; and being versatile, interested in a variety of activities, and able to concentrate</li> </ul>
Love/belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "Giving and receiving affection" without which one "will hunger for relations with people in general—for a place in the group or family—[because] the pangs of loneliness, ostracism, rejection, friendlessness, and rootlessness are preeminent" (Maslow, 1987, pp. 20–21)</li> <li>■ Abilities to form sustainable emotional ties; to empathize, enjoy oneself, and laugh with (vs. at) others; to express resentment without losing control (one can love others and concurrently be angry with them), as well as to having valid reasons for being unhappy (vs. harboring resentment); and to actively satisfy the ethical and moral expectations of one's culture or society (see also E. Hoffman, 2020)</li> </ul>
Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "Feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world" (Maslow, 1987, p. 21)</li> <li>■ Some originality, individuality, and independence from group opinions; real self versus idealized pseudo-self (Horney, Rogers, Winnicott, as cited in DeRobertis, 2008), differentiated self versus emotional cutoff (Bowen, as cited in Firestone et al., 2013)</li> <li>■ Having achievable, realistic, and compatible goals that involve some good to society as well as reasonable persistence of effort to achieve them</li> <li>■ No excessive need for reassurance and approval</li> <li>■ Desire for adequacy, mastery, competence, and achievement</li> <li>■ Sense of confidence in the face of the world (vs. sheer willpower and determination)</li> <li>■ Positive—versus negative—freedom (see also May, 1981)</li> <li>■ Desire for dignity, appreciation, and deserved respect from others—versus external fame, celebrity, and unwarranted adulation (see also Prinstein, 2017)</li> <li>■ Appreciation of cultural differences</li> <li>■ Realistic appraisal of one's strengths, limitations, motivations, desires, goals, ambitions, inhibitions, defenses, compensations, and so on</li> </ul>

Note. Data from Maslow (1987) and Maslow and Mittelmann (1951).

Maslow (1969, 1971, 1987) conceptualized psychopathology as behavior, cognition, and/or experiencing that is problematic, destructive, and/or ineffective, reflecting truncated development and communicating the need deficit to others. In contrast, Maslow used the term *being-*(as in being-values) to refer to attributes of healthy growth. Paradoxically, people are guided by more idiosyncratic and intrinsic aims while also becoming more self-transcendent at the higher end of the needs hierarchy, whereas at the lower end they are simultaneously both more externalized and ego-centered (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020; Winston et al., 2017).

### Self-Transcendence and Maslow's Theory Z

Maslow increasingly emphasized the role of self-transcendence in his later work. For example, in his *Theory Z* (see Maslow, 1971), he proposed degrees of self-actualization in terms of the capacity for *peak experience* (see Maslow, 1999). He differentiated nonpeakers (pragmatic self-actualization) from peakers (transcending self-actualization)—the latter tending to be more humble; more appreciative of the sacred, the ambiguous, and the awe-inspiring; and more concerned by humanity's failures to progress beyond self-centeredness and mundane concerns.

## ADVANCEMENTS AND EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES

Maslow died in 1970, having spent 30 years developing and articulating his holistic-dynamic theory of human needs, including self-actualization. His contributions to psychology filled a substantial theory and research gap that had been left for a half century since James's *Principles*. Self-actualization further evolved in the decades following Maslow's death. Since the 1960s, several advancements have been proposed—including reconfigurations of Maslow's needs hierarchy and contributions from existential, transpersonal, and constructivist–postmodern psychologies as well as models of self or self-actualization based on integrations of these psychologies. Recently, coactualization emerged as an extension of self-actualization in and to relationships.

### Reconfigurations of Maslow's Needs Hierarchy

First, Alderfer (1972) consolidated Maslow's needs into *existence*, the physiological plus the material aspects of safety needs; *relatedness*, the love–belonging and the interpersonal dimensions of safety and esteem; and *growth*, the self-confirmed aspects of esteem as well as self-actualization (see also Winston, 2016). Second, J. Rowan (1998) suggested adding competence needs between safety and love–belonging, as well as splitting Maslow's esteem needs into separate intra- and interpersonal dimensions. J. Rowan (1999) also proposed a bidirectional model of deficiency- versus abundance-motivation to expand upon as well as illustrate Maslow's contrasting deficiency–safety versus being–growth at each level of the needs hierarchy. For example, in the case of safety needs, short-term thinking in the interest of circumventing threats, stimulation, or change transforms into a focus on long-term prevention. Third, Kaufman (2020) and Yu (2022) proposed alternatives to the conventional pyramidal depiction of Maslow's hierarchy that better represent the dialectical,

dynamic systems, and self-transcendent aspects of his theorizing.

### Existential Psychology

Although Maslow (1999) accentuated the need for an existential basis for psychology, and addressed the psychology of evil as antithetical to self-actualization (1971, 1987), his theorizing principally focused on the constructive aspects of human nature and human potential. In contrast, existential psychologists including Bugental (1965), May (1967, 1981, 1983), Schneider (1990, 2008, 2015, 2019), and Yalom (1980) proposed more fundamental theoretical advancements that emphasized human limitations and the tragic aspects of human nature that had been inadequately accounted for in self-actualization. They proposed that human nature is both constructive and destructive and that the conscious, active process of grappling with and integrating these potentials within oneself results in creative expression and growth (McDonald & Wearing, 2013; Pfaffenberger, 2007). Further, DeCarvalho (2000) reconceptualized self-actualization less as an instinctoid unfolding of inner biological potentialities but, rather, as a product of personal reflection (self-awareness) and authenticity (existential intentionality). Importantly for today, it is predicated on what options (possibilities and limitations) for self-actualization are available in the culture (see also Tageson, 1982).

### Transpersonal Psychology

The transpersonal psychology movement (or *fourth force*, as Maslow termed it) emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the desecularization of everyday life and despiritualized religion in modern Western technological society (Arons, 2020; Moss, 1999). It widened the map of human potential beyond the ego structures ordinarily assumed to be the personality—of which self-actualization is only a step beyond (J. Rowan, 2001; Wilber, 2000)—to also include psycho-spiritual dimensions, emphasizing that transcending ordinary human suffering is

contingent on realizing the illusion of separate selfhood. Xu (2021) explored comparable principles of divine self-realization from a Daoistic perspective.

### **Constructivist–Postmodern Psychology**

Since the 1980s and 1990s, constructivist–postmodern psychologists have called for a more relativistic approach in the interest of decolonization and social justice in psychology (L. Hoffman et al., 2015, 2019). Their critiques are summarized later in the chapter. Accordingly, Ferrer (2002) proposed a revision of transpersonal theory from a participatory perspective of knowledge and reality. Also as discussed at greater length later, researchers have informed adaptations of self-actualization theory to better meet the lived experience of cultural contexts beyond that to which Maslow had responded.

### **Integrative Models**

Several models have been developed that integrate theorizing on self and self-actualization that reflect aspects of the humanistic, existential, transpersonal, and/or constructivist–postmodern stances (Arons, 2020; L. Hoffman et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2015; Schneider, 2015; van Deurzen et al., 2019; Winston, 2016). Although the meaning of self may vary across cultures (L. Hoffman et al., 2019), importantly, “the myth of self sustains many people, helping them survive what otherwise would be an unlivable life” (L. Hoffman et al., 2015, p. 125).

### **Coactualization**

In addition, during the 21st century, the construct of coactualization has been introduced (Motschnig-Pitrik & Barrett-Lennard, 2010), which extends self-actualization to growth processes that take place in the context of intimate relationships. Coactualization develops from the interdependent self-actualization processes of each partner in conjunction with the growth-promoting unfolding of the relationship—which result in mutual understanding, influence, benefit, and expectations that create the possibility for enhanced

self-discovery, self-efficacy, and perspective-taking (Roberts, 2017). Similar to self-actualization (Maslow, 1987), coactualization is a potential realized in some relationships and not in others, contingent upon the absence of deficiency-needs and competitive attitudes in the relationship and the presence of reciprocity, mutual influence, and a climate of trust (Motschnig-Pitrik & Barrett-Lennard, 2010; Roberts, 2017). It is conducive to both partners “[experiencing] themselves as being ‘better off’ and being better people as a result of the relationship” (Roberts, 2017, p. 31). In that sense, coactualization can be connected with existential ideas—that is, freedom and growth in one partner is integrated with and contingent on freedom and growth in the other partner (see de Beauvoir, 1948/1976). Coactualization can apply not only to couples but also to therapeutic relationships that promote creativity and authenticity (Murphy et al., 2012; Råban-Motounu, 2014), to learning communities (Motschnig-Pitrik, 2008), and to workplace teams (Bland & Swords, 2023; Motsching & Ryback, 2016).

## **RESEARCH**

Maslow (1943, 1971, 1987, 1996, 1999; Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951) expanded and revised his ideas over the course of his career. He offered testable hypotheses based on his theorizing (Maslow, 1971), and he (Frick, 1971; Maslow, 1971, 1999) frequently emphasized the need for his insights to be empirically tested and reworked as appropriate in order for the construct to be taken seriously in the field.

### **Formative Research**

Maslow’s observations about self-actualization and self-transcendence were the outcome of his empirical research—and not the other way around, as purported by his critics (Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020; Geller, 1984). Maslow’s initial study on self-actualization (included in Maslow, 1987) used iterative qualitative analyses (for reviews and analyses of his method, see Wertz, 2015; Wertz et al., 2011; Winston, 2018).

He extracted themes from biographies and interviews with a purposive sample of educators, poets, writers, artists, composers, human rights and social justice activists, civil engineers, inventors, psychologists, social workers, philosophers, physicians, scientists, naturalists, investigative journalists, and statespeople by critically cataloging and describing their common attributes. He then triangulated these characteristics with extant theory and empirical research on then-emerging areas of inquiry in conjunction with quantitative studies he had conducted during his early career (E. Hoffman, 1999; Maslow, 1973), which included investigations into dominance (self-esteem) as well as human sexuality that predated Kinsey's research by about a decade.

### Subsequent Empirical Research

Welch et al. (1987) prepared a comprehensive annotated bibliography of all available literature on self-actualization through the mid-1980s. More recently, Kaufman (2020) reviewed contemporary empirical literature from numerous subfields of psychology and related disciplines that lends further support to facets of self-actualization by proxy. Further, dimensions of self-actualization are identifiable in themes from contemporary theory and research findings on resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2018), wisdom (Aldwin et al., 2019), heroism (Bland, 2019), altruism (Valsala & Menon, 2023), creativity (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2015), postformal cognition, psychological flexibility, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, locus of control, and well-being (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020; Burwick & Knapp, 1991; Compton, 2018, 2024; Kaufman, 2023; Winston, 2016).

Wexler (1974) demonstrated that self-actualization involves a style of processing emotional information in which new experience is created via increased differentiation and integration of meaning—a finding that furthered self-actualization theorizing and has been taken up more recently in existential–humanistic self-development theory (DeRobertis, 2008; DeRobertis & Bland, 2020). Otherwise, most recent research

on self-actualization and its facets has not expanded the construct beyond what Maslow originally proposed (Compton, 2024), with one notable exception. Maslow's initial conceptualization needs to be expanded to better recognize the influence of social, cultural, and historical factors beyond mid-20th century U.S. culture. In particular, the role of systemic factors (racism, sexism, genderism, classism, and other forms of xenophobia and oppression—as well as poverty and intergenerational transmission of trauma) in impeding self-actualization also needs to be investigated (Compton, 2018).

As outlined in Table 14.3, researchers have noted correlations between self-actualization and parallel psychological constructs. Consistent with Maslow's theorizing, those that positively correlate with self-actualization suggest human flourishing as an artifact of normative development, whereas some of those that negatively correlate involve pathology reflecting deficiency-needs. Although a portion of these studies involved convenience sampling (usually undergraduate students, see Compton, 2018), importantly, they also included adults as well as purposive samples of gifted children and adolescents. Further, in addition to U.S. and Western European (mainly UK) participants, several of the studies discussed in this chapter surveyed people in China, India, Iran, Israel, the Netherlands, Russia, Slovakia, and Turkey.

### Self-Actualization and Development

As discussed in Bland and DeRobertis (2020), self-actualization is predicated on the idea that a secure attachment relationship (Otway & Carnelley, 2013), authoritative parenting (Bulut, 2018; Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Flett et al., 1991; Poorsheikhali & Alavi, 2015), and other attributes of a supportive, accepting, and enriching but also appropriately challenging family, school, and community environment (Masten, 2014) are requisite for the likelihood of creative self-expansion and resilience associated with self-actualization to occur. Further, researchers have found that self-actualization strengthens

TABLE 14.3

### Psychological Constructs Empirically Found to Positively and Negatively Correlate with Self-Actualization

Positively correlates	Negatively correlates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The combination of altruism or social interest and internal locus of control (Baumgartner, 1993; Hjelle, 1991; Sharma &amp; Rosha, 1992)</li> <li>■ Expressiveness, self-disclosure, understanding in interpersonal communication (Macklin &amp; Rossiter, 1976)</li> <li>■ Archetypal androgyny (Ivtzan &amp; Conneely, 2009)</li> <li>■ Hopefulness (Sumerlin, 1997), optimism (Richard &amp; Jex, 1991)</li> <li>■ Mindfulness (Beitel et al., 2014), present-centeredness (Burwick &amp; Knapp, 1991; Grudistova et al., 2019), emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 2001)</li> <li>■ Autonomy (Grossack et al., 1966), assertiveness (Burwick &amp; Knapp, 1991), informational identity style (self-exploration or -reflection, proactive or problem-focused coping, empathy, cognitive complexity, Beaumont, 2009)</li> <li>■ Work motivation and engagement (Kaufman, 2023)</li> <li>■ Psychological mindedness (Beitel et al., 2015)</li> <li>■ Perceived social support (Ford &amp; Procidano, 1990) and resilience in the face of adversity (Stutler, 2011)</li> <li>■ Preference for contact with nature (Young &amp; Crandall, 1984)</li> <li>■ Understanding the value of new knowledge and experience (Grudistova et al., 2019)</li> <li>■ Well-being—self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, and purpose (Compton, 2024; Kaufman, 2023)</li> <li>■ Creative disposition (Grudistova et al., 2019)—openness, self-acceptance, and life enrichment (Manheim, 1998) and sense of humor (Kaufman, 2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Proneness to boredom (McLeod &amp; Vodanovich, 1991), death anxiety (Lester &amp; Colvin, 1977), and socially-prescribed perfectionism (Flett et al., 1991)</li> <li>■ Negative view of human nature or potential (Grudistova et al., 2019)</li> <li>■ Trait anxiety (Richard &amp; Jex, 1991), depression (Berndt et al., 1982; Ford &amp; Procidano, 1990), neuroticism–dysfunction (Dahl et al., 1983), abasement, tension, excitability, and aloofness–coldness (Grossack et al., 1966), and need for psychiatric hospitalization (Fox et al., 1968)</li> <li>■ Religiosity and engagement in religious activity with little experience of spirituality (observed in both British and Indian samples—Ivtzan, Chan, et al., 2013; Jyothsna &amp; Ashok, 2015)</li> <li>■ Lower degrees of self-actualization in felons, for whom “individuation, spontaneity, self-expression, and creativity [may be perceived] as being more socially prohibitive and unacceptable” (Fisher &amp; Silverstein, 1969, p. 69)—reflecting Maslow’s (1971) <i>desacrilizing</i> (mistrust of and disregard for self-actualization values based on deficiency-needs)</li> </ul>

throughout the lifespan, suggesting a continuous process of growth and integration.<sup>2</sup>

#### Self-Actualization, Intelligence, and Emotional Maturity

Maslow (1987) suggested that cognitive abilities may be beneficial for one’s ability to meet basic needs, but he did not regard them as facets of self-actualization (Compton, 2018). Empirically, relative to high emotional intelligence, strong

intellect does not guarantee self-actualization (Bar-On, 2001). Further, self-actualization positively correlates with Dabrowki’s emotional maturity (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). Conversely, in a study of self-actualization in agency-supported caregivers, Rhoades and McFarland (2000) noted a tendency toward other-directedness but limited self-awareness and inner-directedness that precluded authenticity and social interest. This lends support to the difference between

<sup>2</sup>Self-actualization has been found to be stronger for eighth graders than for younger students (Karnes & McGinnis, 1995), for people in their mid-30s than for younger participants—especially in the domains of present-centeredness and inner orientation (Ivtzan, Gardner, et al., 2013), and for older versus younger adults (Reiss & Haverkamp, 2005). On the other hand, Bland and DeRobertis (2020) cautioned against reformulating Maslow’s needs hierarchy and dynamic systems theorizing as a discontinuous stage model with clearly defined categorical phases. Doing so misses Maslow’s (1987) observations that all needs are present and recurrent throughout the lifespan (see also Winston, 2016). Indeed, facets of self-actualization have been noted in adolescent girls (Pufal-Struzik, 1995; Stutler, 2011) and in college students (W. Davidson et al., 2007) that correspond with developmental flourishing for those periods of the lifespan. Likewise, researchers have found that transpersonal interests can emerge unexpectedly at any developmental stage and that personal maturity and transpersonal experiences have a bidirectional relationship (Pfaffenberger, 2007).

self-actualization and *Type C personality* (see Maté, 2022) or Horney's (1945) *movement toward others*, both of which are characteristic of Maslow's deficiency-love/belonging and -esteem.

### Cultural Variations of Self-Actualization

Despite some clear parallels with Maslow's observations about self-actualization in international samples (Trinh & Khanh, 2019; Winston et al., 2017), there also are subtle but important differences. For example, in Latinx culture, collective family identity occupies a central role in self-actualization facilitation (Ortiz, 2020). Self-actualization also has a unique emancipatory flavoring for the lived experience and behavior of those who have dedicated their lives to advancing the Black community (Jones, 2020), as well as for women in the United States (more extraverted, Dahl et al., 1983) and in India—"tough-minded, self-reliant, . . . capable of overcoming any shortcomings" (Barnes & Srinivas, 1993, p. 21).

### Maslow's Needs Hierarchy

Researchers have affirmed the arrangement of needs in Maslow's hierarchy (Graham & Balloun, 1973; Mathes & Edwards, 1978; Taormina & Gao, 2013), as well as its cross-cultural validity (Tay & Diener, 2011; Winston et al., 2017), not only at the individual level but also collectively through the needs of entire nations (Hagerty, 1999). Also, consistent with Henry's (2024) and Robbins's (2024) calls for greater emphasis on the horizontal aspects of self-actualization to offset Maslow's (1971) overemphasis on its hierarchical ones, self-actualization has been demonstrated in homeless individuals, attributable to efficacy in survival (Sumerlin & Bundrick, 2000), and in work environments is not confined to the upper echelon (Dorer & Mahoney, 2006). Further, Bland and Swords (2023) reviewed Maslow's theorizing on ecological conditions that synergistically promote self-actualization and provided empirical support for his (Maslow, 1943, 1971) observations

regarding the democratic (vs. authoritarian) character structure and Theory Z and, pertinent for today, the appeal of toxic leaders being reflective of deficiency-needs.

### Research on Coactualization

Coactualization entails neurobiological processes involving positive feedback loops and reciprocal influence (Lux, 2013) that can stimulate mirror neurons (Motschnig-Pitrik & Barrett-Lennard, 2010) and heart rate synchrony (Conroy et al., 2023). It is conducive to not only improved individual and relational well-being but also more autonomous, internalized motivation within relationships (Patrick, 2014). Further, coactualization processes appear to have been implicated in couples with greater congruence in Chapman's five love languages, which can contribute to greater relational satisfaction (Bland & McQueen, 2018). Moreover, Perez Figueroa (2021) explored coactualization processes in transforming relationships following a breach of trust.

### CRITIQUE AND LIMITATIONS

The research just summarized counters the argument often found in psychology textbooks that self-actualization and humanistic psychology in general are unscientific (Henry, 2017). It also demonstrates that research on self-actualization remains strong today, defying conventional wisdom about the status of humanistic psychology being, at best, a historical relic (DeRobertis, 2013; DeRobertis & Bland, 2021). On the other hand, despite self-actualization's contributions to psychology as a nonreductive, nonmechanistic, growth- and health-centered model of the process of human maturity, the construct has not gone unchallenged.

First, Maslow's tenets have been criticized as being one-sidedly positive and naïvely optimistic, as well as an invitation for a free-for-all (Daniels, 1988; B. Smith, 1973).<sup>3</sup> In response, to prevent

<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, these critiques come despite Maslow's assertion that he would "absolutely deny that [he] was optimistic" (Zweig & Bennis, 1968, 17:48), his addressing the psychology of evil as antithetical to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1971, 1987), and his insistence upon self-discipline and hard work in self-actualization (Maslow, 1971, 1987).

confusion, Waterman (2022) recently proposed the construct of *maldaimonia* to “differentiate ethical from unethical conduct when striving for personally-expressive well-being” (p. 14).

Second, Weiss (1991) decried the “serious logical and methodological errors” in efforts to validate self-actualization measurement (p. 265). For example, the lack of a standard operational definition of self-actualization despite the construct’s strong face validity (Yang, 2003) can result in varying scores on different self-actualization instruments (D. Rowan et al., 1995). For that reason, as an alternative to continuing quantitative investigations of self-actualization treated as a global construct, it may be more productive to use statistical methods to study facets or dimensions of self-actualization (e.g., see Kaufman, 2020). From there, qualitative methods—which Maslow advocated for the development of (A. Giorgi, personal communication, May 2016) because they provide the ideographic approach needed for meaningful self-actualization research—can be used to explore its process dimensions. Indeed, as qualitative research has gained greater legitimacy in psychology, it has increasingly been used in recent years to explore self-actualization.

Third, Yang (2003) summarized critiques of conceptual imprecision in self-actualization. For example, its individualistic, innate–hereditary, and universal nature has been observed as one-sidedly naturalistic, without ample consideration of socialization and cultural factors. This nativist position likely stemmed from Maslow having “overstated his case in attempt to make his theory distinctive compared with” the prevailing schools

of psychology in the mid-20th century (Neher, 1991, p. 92). But since the later decades of the 20th century, the cross-cultural validity of self-actualization theorizing has been called into question (Hocoy, 2020; Vallejos & Johnson, 2020; Vaughn, 2020). For example, the accuracy of Maslow’s needs hierarchy—in which self-actualization and self-transcendence are situated—has been questioned from the perspectives of Chinese, for whom belongingness needs may be the foundation, followed by physiological, safety, and self-actualization with no esteem needs involving moral development and achievement (Yang, 2003)<sup>4</sup> and Blackfoot Native Americans, for whom Maslow’s hierarchy is “upside down” (Broomé, 2017, p. 399). Even coactualization, which underscores the value of interdependence of relational contact for self-actualization, “though valuable, [remains] predicated on the premise of individualism as the desired outcome” (L. Hoffman et al., 2019, p. 291).<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, Maslow’s theorizing on self-actualization has been criticized for being predicated on two irreconcilable views of the self—one democratic, another elitist (Aron, 1977). “The underlying assumption is that if we all become better individuals through self-actualization, constructive changes in the structure of society will necessarily follow” (Prilleltensky, 1992, p. 320). However, for many people, self-actualization is seen as an impossibility; it is too irrelevant or out of reach (Daniels, 1988). Although Maslow (E. Hoffman, 1999; A. Richards, personal communication, 2003) made calls for steps toward social justice, historically, follow-up by humanistic psychologists

<sup>4</sup>Importantly, Maslow (1987) specified that the esteem needs pertain to “people in [U.S.] society” (p. 21).

<sup>5</sup>Maslow (1999, pp. 199, 231) emphasized that self-actualization occurs in cultural context, and that its focus on individuality should not be confused for individualism: “Beware of stressing only the pleasures of . . . actualization of the individual self. Not enough attention has been given to being in a [loving] community with which one can identify (Maslow, 1965, p. 24). Further, researchers have shown that, “even in a collectivistic culture,” self-actualization is “associated with the same values of autonomy of thought and action, universalism, stimulation, democratic character structure, and a lack of preoccupation with others’ approval that Maslow [described],” as well as “concern and tolerance toward all people (as well as nature) rather than towards one’s own social group [alone]” (Winston et al., 2017, p. 307). Moreover, recent calls for *collective actualization* as a goal—that “the self cannot be advanced unless the entire community is advanced” (Diaz-Laplante, 2007, p. 64)—still echo Maslow’s (1971, 1999) evocation of the Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal. Rather, the stereotype of self-actualization as self-absorbed naval-gazing seems less reflective of problematic theorizing as it is of “a shift . . . from self-actualization to *actualization of the self*” (Bazzano, 2017, p. 305, emphasis in original) as humanistic psychology became conflated with the human potentials movement (L. Davidson, 1994) during the latter part of the 20th century at the expense of its greater intellectual tradition (B. Smith, 1973; Taylor, 1999). Concerningly, that metamorphosis has contributed to public perception of self-actualization as status seeking (Krems et al., 2017) more reminiscent of Maslow’s deficiency-esteem, which fuels predatory capitalism (Kennedy, 2020) and thus contributes to the maintenance of the social status quo also decried by critics of self-actualization.

has been limited (L. Hoffman et al., 2015; Jackson, 2020). Thus, with self-actualization's focus on microlevel transformation without amalgamating person-centered with systems-oriented paradigms, it inadequately translates into social and political action—and, accordingly, the status quo it aims to overcome is inadvertently upheld (Prilleltensky, 1992; see also Hocoy, 2020; Lethbridge, 1986; Rountree, 2011; Shaw & Colimore, 1988; R. Smith & Feigenbaum, 2013). Alternatively, self-actualization can be integrated with an intersectional lens to critically consider overlapping axes of identity as situated in multiple systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Jackson, 2020). That said, despite Maslow (1943) having stated that his encounter with the Blackfoot tribe early in his career “influenced” his perspective (p. 401) at that point in his development, it is worth noting that, in recent years, members of the Blackfoot community have lamented Maslow's participation in academic cultural appropriation by incorporating aspects of their worldview into his theorizing without giving due credit (Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020).

Fifth are sampling issues, which Maslow (1996) himself acknowledged. B. Smith (1973) decried Maslow's exclusion of “people with gross pathology—the Dostoyevskys and Van Goghs” from his self-actualization sample (p. 24). Also, Maslow's (1971) stance on sexual diversity has come under fire (Bland, 2024; Boot-Haury, 2024). Moreover, in recent years, despite his selection of “people who were consistently admired in his own American society and also by many societies around the world” (Compton, 2018, p. 13)—including several women, people of color, and international figures whom Maslow identified as contenders for self-actualization who had been recommended by colleagues—Hanson (2019) denounced Maslow's “obvious lack of cultural and historical diversity” (p. 213). As an alternative to Maslow's hierarchical positioning, a greater focus on the potential for self-actualization for all people is recommended (Henry, 2024) and, as noted, has been demonstrated empirically (Dorer & Mahoney, 2006; Sumerlin & Bundrick, 2000; see also Amada & Shane, 2022). By accounting

for the contextual significance of each person's life-world experience and within the sociocultural context of their perceptual habits, Maslow's focus on superior functioning gives way to a sense of being “called in [one's] own particular way, within [one's] dignified irreplaceability, to answer to their own existence and to the claims of love that draw them forward through life's ongoing struggles” (Robbins, 2024, pp. 140–141).

### A Note About the Critiques

Like all theories, self-actualization has its limitations. Some critiques, however, have more merit than others. Alas, over the decades, the more complex, nuanced, and paradoxical aspects of self-actualization have become increasingly diluted, distorted, or lost (Arons, 2020). Typically, this is the outcome of overreliance on Maslow's early writings on self-actualization without adequate consideration of his later theorizing on the social interactionist aspects of self-actualization and self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006)—as well as on secondary sources and uncritical repetition of evaluations of self-actualization that are based on insufficient reading and/or misinterpretation of original writings on the subject (Bland & DeRobertis, 2019, 2020; Brennan & Piechowski, 1991; Daniels, 1988; DeRobertis & Bland, 2021; Winston, 2018; Xu, 2021).

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Self-actualization is an ongoing process of self-creation that entails negotiating dialectics or paradoxes involving individuality–interdependence, acceptance–commitment, cognition–curiosity, creativity–wisdom, and process–presence. During the mid-20th century, self-actualization appeared as an area of inquiry by humanistic psychologists such as Maslow, who synthesized intellectual and experiential traditions both across and outside psychology to formulate a eudaimonic, chaironic, and holistic alternative to the hedonistic and reductionistic assumptions of conventional psychology. Maslow incorporated and expanded on Goldstein's rollout of self-actualization (which was a counterview to Freud's homeostatic assumptions)

in part having found himself underwhelmed by the then-abysmal follow-up to numerous domains of psychological investigation identified by James. Maslow situated self-actualization within his holistic–dynamic hierarchy of needs and correspondent values (deficiency–safety vs. being–growth). He also identified two sub-forms of self-actualization (one more pragmatic, the other more self-transcendent). During the last 6 decades, several advancements of self-actualization emerged via existential, transpersonal, and constructivist–postmodern psychologies. Recently, coactualization has been proposed as an extension of self-actualization in and to relationships.

As an antidote to misinformation about self-actualization being unscientific, this chapter has surveyed both classic and contemporary empirical literature on self-actualization, which includes Maslow’s research and dozens of studies that have appeared in both the mainstream and humanistic psychology literatures worldwide. Emerging areas of self-actualization research in recent years have included cultural variations and developmental dimensions of self-actualization, along with how self-actualization is promoted via favorable relational or ecological conditions including transformative leadership. In addition, research on coactualization has quickly grown into a robust empirical base to support and inform the construct. Despite self-actualization’s contributions to psychology as a nonreductive, nonmechanistic, growth- and health-centered model of the process of human maturity, the construct has not gone unchallenged, critiques having been leveled on philosophical, methodological, and cultural grounds. Like all theories, self-actualization has its limitations. Some critiques have more merit than others, however, and some erroneous arguments have been fact-checked in this chapter. Such clarification is important in the current academic climate, in which fewer psychologists are trained in original writings on self-actualization and humanistic psychology but, rather, from the beginning, are indoctrinated into a vision of psychology based on scientism (Bland, 2023).

## CONCLUSION: CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Maslow’s dynamic systems theorizing and research on self-actualization and self-transcendence have influenced the motivational, developmental, clinical–counseling, cultural, educational, industrial–organizational, and personality subfields of psychology, and they helped spur the introduction of creativity, spirituality, peace psychology, sustainability, and well-being as formal areas of inquiry (Arons, 1999, 2020; Arons & Richards, 2015; Bland & DeRobertis, 2019, 2020; Bland & Swords, 2023; Compton, 2024; E. Hoffman, 1990, 2020; Moss, 1999; J. Rowan, 2001; Schneider et al., 2015; Tageson, 1982). Facets of self-actualization are observable in the seven-factor model of personality and the contemporary constructs of *hardiness* and *honesty–humility* (see also Bland & DeRobertis, 2019), in self-determination theory and terror management theory (Compton, 2024; DeRobertis & Bland, 2018), and in positive psychology (Compton, 2024; DeRobertis & Bland, 2021; Kaufman, 2020). Beyond psychology, self-actualization has made a mark in the fields of health care, management, and theology—and “in many subtle ways, [it has] affected our entire culture (E. Hoffman, 1990, p. 2; see also E. Hoffman, 2020; Schneider et al., 2015).

Far from a historical relic (DeRobertis & Bland, 2021), self-actualization is implicated in several contemporary matters. For just a few examples, these include incorporating spiritual identity or spiritual integration (Gold, 2013) and psychedelic experience (Amada & Shane, 2022) in psychotherapy; differentiating between psychologically healthy and unhealthy social movements (Bland & Swords, 2023; Laas, 2006); exploring heroism as a contemporary expression of “ethical self-actualization in its highest form” via personal meaning making and the social good (Franco et al., 2018, p. 382; see also Bland, 2019); cocreating narratives involving needs beyond survival-via-work in a technologized zeitgeist (Hai-Jew, 2020); engaging in psychologically androgynous fathering during an era characterized by the slow demise of

the good provider role (Abell & Schwartz, 1999) and in synergistic mentoring that guides mentees toward identifying their calling (E. Hoffman & Compton, 2022); encouraging self-actualization dispositions and attitudes in the development of the helper-as-person (Bland, 2018); promoting well-being and flourishing in holistic education (Kazanjian, 2022); encouraging meaningful and interactive leisure pursuits (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991); working with children with multiple disabilities (Croft et al., 2009); enhancing self-actualization in the elderly (Gholamnejad et al., 2019); minimizing obstacles to impoverished children's growth and empowerment (Prince & Howard, 2002); empowering women (Samantaray et al., 2002) and Black Americans (Johnson, 2017); and understanding pathology as adaptive adjustment to impossible situations (Grogan, 2013; Jackson, 2020). In addition, the fulfillment of psychological needs throughout Maslow's hierarchy including self-actualization (as described in Tables 14.1 and 14.2) are implicated in Stanley's (2016) embodied relational approach to healing trauma.

On the other hand, self-actualization is not without challenges today. First, empirical research by Howell et al. (2020) revealed abysmal engagement with natural, artistic, and moral forms of beauty in contemporary U.S. culture—reflecting individual and social pathologies (materialism, hopelessness, alienation from nature) comparable to Maslow's (1971) desacralization (mistrust of and disregard for self-actualization values based on deficiency-needs), which impede capacities for self-actualization and self-transcendence. Second, in a society in which healthy challenges have become diminished by automation (Carr, 2014; see also Bland, 2024)—which risks propagating a lack of personal significance (Schneider, 2019) and supplanting creativity with curation (Questlove, 2018)—and by overprotectiveness that begets hypervulnerability (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018; Weidman, 2022), it is not surprising that “the importance of self-development for its own sake” is undervalued today (J. Rowan & Glouberman, 2018, p. 31).

Third, on its own, without adequate reading of original writings, self-actualization can be

a misunderstood construct. For example, as discussed, Maslow's focus on individuality-in-relation for the benefit of one's community often is confused with a focus on individualism. Further, legitimate calls have been made for better understanding of cultural–ecological factors beyond those during Maslow's time that play into self-actualization, along with better recognition of its horizontal (vs. hierarchical) aspects. Given the parallels between characteristics of self-actualization and those involved in emerging constructs such as *everyday creativity* (Richards, 2018) and *personal heroism* (Bland, 2019), it seems conceivable that, in time, self-actualization could eventually become supplanted with a more easily and universally understood term while upholding both the breadth and depth of its fundamental principles.

Regardless of the nomenclature, keeping in mind that self-actualization theory originated in part from concern that conventional psychology's myopic images of humanity could thwart human potential, in today's climate of scientific monoculture in psychology in conjunction with culture wars worldwide, the interrelated principles behind self-actualization are perhaps more relevant than ever. They offer an alternative to the current fast-paced, distracted, survival-focused, experientially-avoidant, interpersonally isolated, rating- and metric-centered, systems-blind, toxically-masculine, inequitized, traumatized, polarized, technocratic, posttruth, postpandemic zeitgeist. self-actualization principles also can “lend wisdom to the project of transhumanism” in an individualistic, capitalistic, materialistic society (Grant, 2023, p. 48)—especially with artificial intelligence experts having voiced the same cautionary statement as Maslow (1971) regarding the risks posed by technology being placed in the wrong hands (Bland, 2024). With that in mind, second-wave positive psychology—which emphasizes confronting and transforming suffering and the dark side of human existence via responsible action and appreciating well-being as an artifact of meaning making and self-transcendence as an alternative to a prescriptive happiness agenda (DeRobertis & Bland, 2021;

Wong & Roy, 2018; see also Chapter 26, this volume)—is emerging in a manner reminiscent of self-actualization's theoretical deepening via the incorporation of self-transcendence and existentialism about a half century ago.

Finally, the focus of self-actualization on cultivating the courage to live an I–Thou way of being in an I–it world, on negotiating dialectics and paradoxes, and on unfolding awareness of interdependent self-in-relation and social processes that promote versus inhibit that sensitivity are crucial as humanity collectively faces numerous global-scale existential threats like pandemics, climate change, war, and a rise in authoritarianism (Bland, 2024; Bland & Swords, 2023; O'Hara, 2015; Zakaria, 2020). In that sense, self-actualization satisfies MacAskill's (2022) call for *longtermism*, “the idea that positively influencing the long-term future is a key moral priority of our time” (p. 4).

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