

Maslow's Unacknowledged Contributions to Developmental Psychology

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Abstract

Few readily identify Maslow as a developmental psychologist. On the other hand, Maslow's call for holistic/systemic, phenomenological, and dynamic/relational developmental perspectives in psychology (all being alternatives to the limitations of the dominant natural science paradigm) anticipated what emerged both *as* and *in* the subdiscipline of developmental psychology. In this article, we propose that Maslow's dynamic systems approach to *healthy* human development served as a forerunner for classic and contemporary theory and research on parallel constructs in developmental psychology that provide empirical support for his ideas—particularly those affiliated with characteristics of psychological health (i.e., self-actualization) and the conditions that promote or inhibit it. We also explore Maslow's adaptation of Goldstein's concept of self-actualization, in which he simultaneously: (a) explicated a theory of *safety versus growth* that accounts for the two-steps-forward-one-step-back contiguous dynamic that realistically characterizes the ongoing processes of *being-in-becoming* and psychological integration in human development/maturity and (b) emphasized *being-in-the-world-with-others* with the intent of facilitating the development of an ideal society

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by promoting protective factors that illustrate Maslow's safety, belonging, and esteem needs. Finally, we dialogue with the extant literature to clarify common misgivings about Maslow's ideas.

Keywords

Maslow, self-actualization, developmental psychology, dynamic systems

Few readily identify Maslow as a developmental psychologist. Both he and the humanistic movement are almost always excluded from developmental textbooks (DeRobertis, 2008), and an EBSCO search in February 2017 yielded a dearth of relevant articles. In the rare instances in which Maslow is included, his ideas are typically misrepresented. On the other hand, as we have previously suggested (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017; DeRobertis, 2012), Maslow and other founding humanistic psychologists' calls for holistic/systemic, phenomenological, and dynamic/relational developmental perspectives in psychology (as alternatives to the dominant natural science paradigm) anticipated what emerged both *as* and *in* the subdiscipline of developmental psychology. Accordingly, herein, we propose that classic and contemporary theory and research in developmental psychology provide empirical support for Maslow's ideas, particularly those affiliated with characteristics of psychological health (i.e., self-actualization) and the factors that promote or inhibit it.

Maslow (1999) observed that "from a developmental point of view," self-actualizing individuals "are more fully evolved" insofar as they are "not fixated at immature or incomplete levels of growth" (p. 172). They strive toward "unity of personality" and "spontaneous expressiveness" as well as "seeing the truth rather than being blind," "being creative," and demonstrating "serenity, kindness, courage, honesty, love, unselfishness, and goodness" (Maslow, 1999, p. 171). Using *growth and health as his baseline*, Maslow helped usher in a *focus on normative and transformative developmental processes in psychology*. At the same time, he acknowledged the role of *regressive forces and the potential for stagnation, often as the outcome of inadequate environmental conditions*.

Maslow's Developmentally Oriented Adaptation of Goldstein's Self-Actualization

Maslow (1987) adapted the construct of *self-actualization* from Goldstein, an organismic-oriented neurologist-psychiatrist. According to Whitehead (2017),

Goldstein's construct was built on three axioms. First, self-actualization refers to a process of individuation (i.e., the ongoing emergence and regeneration of a self as an active, creative authority distinct from other biochemical systems) that, second, must be conceptualized holistically and not in isolation (i.e., it is only through the organism–environment relationship that the meaning behind behavior, pathology, personality, motivation, emotion, etc., can be understood). Third, Goldstein proposed that behavior is invariantly motivated in terms of self-actualization (i.e., is not synonymous with tension reduction or mere self-preservation or survival).

Whereas Goldstein (1934/1995, 1963) primarily focused on self-actualization vis-à-vis the resilient reorganization of a person's capacities in response to brain injury or psychopathology, Maslow further included overcoming obstacles (real and perceived) and living authentically despite one's personal, environmental, and historical shortcomings as functions of healthy development. Maslow (1999) explicated a theory of *safety versus growth* that accounts for the two-steps-forward-one-step-back contiguous dynamic that realistically characterizes the ongoing process of *being-in-becoming* and of graded experiential awareness and psychological integration in human maturity. Beginning in childhood and continuing throughout the lifespan, individuals negotiate a dialectic between homeostasis (i.e., defensively clinging to the familiar and predictable, irrespective of how stagnant, disappointing, or precarious the outcome) and morphogenic enactment “of all [their] capacities, toward confidence in the face of the external world at the same time that [they] can accept [their] deepest, real, unconscious Self” (Maslow, 1999, p. 55).

Maslow challenged the classical Freudian assumption of homeostasis *as an end state*. Instead, like Erikson (1959/1994), he argued that “healthy children *enjoy* growing and moving forward, gaining new skills, capacities and powers” that evolve into “authentic selfhood, [i.e., knowing] what one really wants and doesn't want, what one is fit for and what one is not fit for” (Maslow, 1999, pp. 30, 213). Taken together, Maslow's focus on the dialectical relationship between a process of continuous improvement and ongoing integration, organization, and self-consistency (see Frick, 1971) reflects Goldstein's aforementioned first axiom.

In addition, Maslow emphasized that self-actualization entails a sense of *being-in-the-world-with-others*, interindividuality, community feeling, and interest in making changes for an ideal society. These points are synonymous with Adler's (1931/1998) *social interest* and parallel Erikson's (1959/1994) emphasis on participating in (rather than struggling against) society as both conducive to and reflective of healthy social and emotional development. Maslow distinguished between *uniqueness* and *distinctiveness* in relation to

others (Koydemir, Şimşek, & Demir, 2014), drawing from and making best use of one's potentials to benefit the collective:

Authentic or healthy [individuals] may be defined *not . . . by [their] own intrapsychic and non-environmental laws*, not as *different* from the environment, independent of it or opposed to it, but rather in environment-centered terms. . . . Self-actualization . . . paradoxically makes *more* possible the transcendence of . . . self-consciousness and of selfishness. It makes it *easier* for [one] . . . to merge as a part in a larger whole. (Maslow, 1999, pp. 199, 231, italics added in first sentence)

This *relational* viewpoint is commensurate with Goldstein's second axiom.

With regard to Goldstein's third axiom, Maslow (1987) eschewed reductionistic explanations of behavior and emphasized that behavior is "overdetermined or multimotivated," reflecting combinations of needs in striving toward self-actualization. As an organizing principle, Maslow (1987, 1999) proposed a hierarchical structure from physiological to security to belonging to self-esteem. Each set of needs is gratified on a continuum from more externalized (lower, more basic needs) to more intrinsic (higher, more idiosyncratic needs). Furthermore, Maslow (1999) emphasized that one's essential "core" involves "potentialities, not final actualizations" that are "weak, subtle, and delicate, very easily drowned out by learning, by cultural expectations, by fear, by disapproval, etc." and can therefore become "forgotten, [i.e.,] neglected, unused, overlooked, unverballed, or suppressed" (pp. 212-213). To illustrate:

[Children] who [are] insecure, basically thwarted, or threatened in [their] needs for safety, love, belongingness, and self-esteem . . . will show more selfishness, hatred, aggression, and destructiveness. . . . This implies a reactive, instrumental, or defensive interpretation of hostility rather than an instinctive one. (Maslow, 1987, p. 86)

Maslow (1987) emphasized that fulfillment of the basic needs is *neither* a lockstep progression *nor* confined to specific ages/phases of life, but rather is a 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. In actual fact, most [individuals] are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time. A more realistic description of the hierarchy 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, italics added)

Thus, 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 lost.

Dynamic Systems Developmental Orientation

Perhaps one reason that Maslow is not typically included in developmental textbooks and research articles is that his quotidian vision of psychology as a human science was not fully congruent with either discontinuous stage models or the continuous, quantitatively driven perspectives that constituted the majority of the traditional developmental psychology literature during the second half of the 20th century. Meantime, *taken out of context*, his emphasis on self-actualization reeks of Western individualism and therefore generally has been dismissed (or, at best, overlooked) by most sociocultural theorists in the new millennium. On the other hand, during the past decade, *dynamic systems models*—the paradigm with which Maslow’s (1987) “holistic-dynamic” thinking aligned (p. 15)—have gained legitimacy in psychology (see Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; DeRobertis, 2011b; Gelo & Salvatore, 2016), and they were included as a theoretical category in Bergen’s (2008) textbook on human development.

Dynamic systems models incorporate concepts of complexity, plasticity, and recursive nested features (Bergen, 2008). Maslow (1971) emphasized that self-actualizing should be conceptualized iteratively (i.e., as a verb) and not as an achievement or trait (i.e., as a noun). Moreover, dynamic systems models are built on the assumptions that (a) complex, chaotic systems (e.g., human beings) have the ability to self-organize into purposeful behaviors and that (b) sensitive dependence on initial conditions—in which a small input in a system may yield disparate results—can explain developmental change (Bergen, 2008). Maslow (1987) accounted for the possibility of quantum leaps in development, in which significant changes at one need level can incite substantive changes at the subsequent levels.

Congruent with Maslow’s aforementioned *safety versus growth* principle (two-steps-forward-one-step-back), Skalski and Hardy (2013) noted that such quantum transformation is typically propagated by individuals’ understandings of themselves and the world becoming disintegrated by stress, relational difficulties, hopelessness, losing control/holding on, and psychological turmoil and then enhanced by the presence of a trusted other who provides *corrective experiences* (see Bland, 2014; Castonguay & Hill, 2012). To

illustrate, DeRobertis' (2016) study on children's education implied that quality teachers can serve not only as extensions of attachment relationships (when they already exist) but also as surrogates thereof (when they do not). In addition, whereas Graber, Turner, and Madill (2015) hypothesized that during adolescence family support would moderate the significance of friendships as a risk or protective mechanism, they discovered instead that, irrespective of family, having just one fulfilling friendship prevents relational, emotional, and behavior problems.

Furthermore, dynamic systems models can be characterized as prototheoretical rather than fully developed, falsifiable theories and are supported by research methods that involve collecting minute process data (Bergen, 2008). Maslow's aforementioned initial study on the characteristics of self-actualizing people (included in Maslow, 1987) and his research on *peak experiences* (included in Maslow, 1999) employed iterative qualitative analyses (see Wertz et al., 2011). These involved him extracting themes from biographies and interviews with purposive samples to critically catalog and describe their common attributes which he then triangulated with extant theory and empirical research in conjunction with quantitative and qualitative studies he had conducted during his early career (see Hoffman, 1988; Maslow, 1973). Maslow's emphases on self-actualization and on values in psychology set the stage for psychologists acknowledging the realities of plasticity and of multidimensional, multidirectional developmental principles that value the whole person in context and that are now underscored in developmental textbooks (e.g., Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016; Music, 2017). It is crucial to note that Maslow's theories were built as an outcome of his *research* (not the other way around), that he was flexible, open to criticism, and constantly expanding and revising his ideas, and that he emphasized the need for them to be empirically tested and reworked as appropriate (see Frick, 1971; Maslow, 1971, 1999).

Finally, Maslow's nonexclusive vision also paved the way for developmental psychology's resolution of long-held (stereotypically Western) conceptual bifurcations (see Music, 2017). For example, with regard to nature versus nurture, Maslow (1987) remarked as follows:

How can it be said that a complex set of reactions is either all determined by heredity or not at all determined by heredity? There is no structure, however, simple . . . that has genetic components alone. At the other extreme it is also obvious that nothing is completely free of the influence of heredity, for humans are a biological species. (p. 48)

Maslow (1966, 1971, 1987, 1999) also emphasized moving beyond the antinomies of free will versus determinism, continuity versus change, universality

versus cultural specificity, and experimentalism versus experientialism in understanding human development.

Classic and Contemporary Empirical Support

Physiological

Maslow's working class upbringing as the eldest son of Russian Jewish immigrants influenced his lifelong focus on social justice (Hoffman, 1988). According to Anne Richards (personal communication, 2003), in his classes during the 1960s, Maslow advocated for the development of reduced-price meals in schools (now a given in most communities in the United States) as a means of minimizing obstacles to impoverished children's growth and empowerment. Maslow's suggestion brought awareness of how issues of social policy and both availability and quality of resources at Bronfenbrenner's (1994) exosystemic, macrosystemic, and chronosystemic levels influence individuals' development, whereas the principal focus of psychology at mid-20th century was almost exclusively at the individual and microsystemic levels.

Accordingly, since Maslow's day, developmental researchers have come to emphasize the connections between malnutrition and children's: (a) ability to sustain attention (which in turn affects cognitive development and academic performance); (b) levels of irritability and self-regulation (which affect social development); and (c) propensity to diagnosable mental health conditions as well as susceptibility to infectious disease, obesity, and eventual diabetes and heart issues (as summarized in Arnett, 2016; Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Congruent with the dynamic systems assumption that a small change can spawn sustentative outcomes, Broderick and Blewitt (2015) commented, "When we intervene to reduce one risk factor, such as malnutrition, we may actually [also] reduce the impact of other negative influences" (p. 56). In addition, Prince and Howard (2002) extended Maslow's thinking on the developmental implications of physiological needs to include access to adequate health care, insurance, and living environments safe from toxicity (e.g., exposure to lead). Furthermore, Desmond's (2016) ethnographic research addressed the systemic challenges in tenants', landlords', and social service agencies' abilities to uphold sustainable living environments and the developmental impacts for both children and adults.

Maslow (1987; Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951) also noted that healthy growth and development involves not only *gratification* of the basic needs but also the *ability to withstand reasonable deprivation*. "Increased frustration tolerance through early gratification" enables individuals to "withstand

food deprivation” because they “have been made secure and strong in the earliest years,” which reciprocates into them remaining secure and strong thereafter (Maslow, 1987, p. 27). As applied to the physiological needs, Erikson (1959/1994) suggested that a developmental task of infancy is to establish confidence in one’s caregivers to eventually attend to one’s needs even if caregivers are unable to drop what they are doing the moment one expresses a need. Accordingly, secure interactions between parent and child moderate the relationship between low socioeconomic status and developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Safety

Maslow (1987) defined the safety needs as “security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos [and] need for structure, order, law, and limits” (p. 18). In contrast with conventional wisdom in (particularly) American parenting practices that emphasize independence as quickly as possible, models such as attachment parenting (Miller & Commons, 2010) promote the value of strong bonding early in life, congruent with less ruggedly individualistic cultures around the globe (see Maté, 2011; Morelli & Rauthbaum, as cited in Arnett, 2016). Researchers have noted that such highly responsive caregiving practices: (a) mitigate potentially overwhelming negative emotional states (e.g., preventable fear, anger, distress) and therefore propagate appropriate emotional regulation; (b) reduce exposure to stressors that adversely affect brain development and self-regulation and that contribute to eventual mental health problems; (c) are associated with fewer expressions of distress; and (d) promote empathy, perspective-taking, social competence, cooperative behavior, and engagement in school life (see Broderick & Blewitt, 2015; Campa, 2013; Miller & Commons, 2010). In contrast, executive functioning becomes impaired “when young children are exposed to chronically stressful situations” insofar as:

the brain development of the lower portions of the brain, responsible for “fight or flight” reactions, are strengthened while the development in the cortex regions of the brain, which are responsible for functions such as abstract and rational thinking, are weakened. (Prince & Howard, 2002, pp. 29-30)

Thus, paradoxically, a strong sense of attachment early on facilitates appropriate levels of *differentiation of self* (Bowen, 1978; Firestone, Firestone, & Catlett, 2013) and *autonomy* (Erikson, 1959/1994)—all of which include mindful self-regulation and approaching unfamiliar situations with curiosity and interest rather than as threatening. Accordingly, they are

conducive to self-sufficiency (comfort in one's skin and with one's own beliefs, attitudes, and preferences) and assertiveness (vs. aggression, passivity, or passive-aggression).

Attachment. *Secure attachment* (Ainsworth, as summarized and updated in Siegel, 2012; also see Music, 2017), marked by caregivers' sensitivity and responsiveness to infants' cues, is associated with curiosity and differentiation of self by early childhood (i.e., preschool and kindergarten age), with positive social interactions and stronger academic performance during school age, and with appropriate self-esteem and a strong sense of identity as adults (all prerequisites for, though not necessarily characteristics of, self-actualizing, Maslow, 1987). On the other hand, with respect to *insecure attachment*, Maslow observed that when safety needs are not met, behavior and motivation are disposed to stagnation or regression:

Since others are so important and vital for the helpless baby and child, fear of losing them (as providers of safety, food, love, respect, etc.) is a primal, terrifying danger. Therefore [children], faced with a difficult choice between [their] own delight experiences and the experience of approval from others, must generally choose approval from others, and then handle [their] delight by repression or letting it die, or not noticing it or controlling it by willpower. In general, along with this will develop a disapproval of the delight experience, or shame and embarrassment and secretiveness about it, with finally, the inability to even experience it. (Maslow, 1999, pp. 59-60)

This can lend itself to rigidity; to efforts to distract oneself from inner experience (Frankl, 1978; Harris, 2006); to engagement in addictive and/or compulsive behaviors as surrogates for meaningful interaction (Maté, 2010); and/or to involvement in (sometimes precarious) relationships (Campa, 2013) and/or institutional affiliations (May, 1967) that offer the illusion of security.

Parenting Styles. Maccoby and Martin (1983) noted that *authoritative* parenting (see Gordon, 1975; Shapiro & White, 2014)—characterized by a balance of emotional warmth and high expectations (demandingness); associated with *secure attachment* and, later, *identity achievement* (Erikson, 1959/1994; Marcia, 1966)—promotes the development of assertiveness, competence and self-confidence, social responsibility, healthy achievement orientation, adaptability, and so on (all qualities of Maslovian self-actualizing people). In contrast, children of *authoritarian* parents (high demandingness, low warmth; associated with *avoidant attachment* and, later, *identity foreclosure*) are prone to conformity, dependency, perfectionism, resentful anxiety, and susceptibility to bullying. Children of *permissive/indulgent* parents (high warmth, low

demandingness; associated with *ambivalent attachment* and, later, chronic *moratorium*) are at risk for becoming impulsive, egocentric, low in self-reliant decision making, underachieving, and easily frustrated by authority (being unaccustomed to structure). *Neglectful/uninvolved* parenting (low warmth and low demandingness; associated with *disorganized attachment* and, later, *identity diffusion*) is predictive of delinquency and children developing a symptomatic presentation consisting of both externalizing (impulsivity, aggression) and internalizing (moodiness, low self-esteem) qualities.

Maslow (1999) alluded to authoritative parenting by saying that children should “be directed . . . both toward cultivation of controls and cultivation of spontaneity and expression” (p. 219) and noted that “youngsters need a world that is just, fair, orderly, and predictable” and that “only strong parents can supply these important qualities” (Maslow, 1996, p. 46). Maslow also cautioned against both excessively authoritative and permissive parenting styles. With regard to the former, Maslow (1999) suggested as follows:

It is necessary in order for children to grow well that adults have enough trust in them and in the natural processes of growth, i.e., [to] not interfere too much, not *make* them grow, or force them into predetermined designs, but rather *let* them grow and *help* them grow in a Taoistic rather than an authoritarian way. (p. 219)

With regard to the dangers of permissive parenting:

Children, especially younger ones, essentially need, want, and desire external controls, decisiveness, discipline, and firmness . . . to avoid the anxiety of being on their own and of being expected to be adultlike because they actually mistrust their own immature powers. (Maslow, 1996, p. 45)

Maslow (1971) continued that this anxiety eventually manifests into the defense mechanism of *desacrilizing* (i.e., mistrusting the possibility of values and virtues associated with self-actualization) based on having felt “swindled or thwarted in their lives” and therefore coming to “despise their elders” (p. 48). Similarly, Horney (1945) proposed that to deal with this anxiety, based on their particular formative experiences, individual children develop means of coping via *moving toward* others (compliance), *against* them (aggression), or *away from* them (withdrawal).

Love and Belonging

Maslow (1987) conceptualized the love needs as “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” (pp. 20-21). He (Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951) continued that love needs include the abilities to form sustainable emotional ties; to empathize, enjoy oneself, and laugh with (vs. at) others; and to express resentment without losing control (i.e., one can love others and be angry with them at the same time), as well as having valid reasons for being unhappy (vs. harboring resentment). Concerning the placement of love and belonging at the same hierarchical level, he stated, “It is clear that, other things being equal, a person who is safe and belongs and is loved will be healthier . . . than one who is safe and belongs, but who is rejected and unloved” (Maslow, 1987, p. 38). For an example of the latter, consider gang or cult membership.

Sociometric Status. Coie and Dodge (1988) and subsequent researchers explored the relationship between how children are perceived by their peers (i.e., liked vs. disliked) and their behavior. *Popular* children, most often rated as liked by their peers, tend to be cooperative, friendly, sociable, and interpersonally sensitive. *Rejected* children, typically boys, are most often rated as disliked and rarely as liked by peers. They fall into one of two groups: (a) *rejected-aggressive* children (most typical), who have reputations for bullying and disruptiveness and (b) *rejected-withdrawn* children (about 10% to 20% of cases), who are perceived by others as depressed. *Neglected* children, typically girls, are rated neither as liked nor disliked; however, their peers typically misremember them. *Average* children are not rated at either extreme (they are neither popular nor unpopular) but they are known for being socially skilled. Finally, *controversial* children are rated as liked by some and disliked by others; they have reputations as class clowns and as leaders with disregard for social rules.

Ollendick, Weist, Borden, and Greene (1992) noted that teachers tend to rate *rejected* children at highest risk of engaging in problematic behaviors during ninth grade based on their sociometric status at fourth grade, followed by, in order, *controversial*, *neglected*, and *popular* children—and *average* children at minimal risk. With regard to actual engagement in behaviors that led to suspension or legal issues, *rejected* children were highest. Perhaps more notably, 20% of *average* children dropped out, whereas none of the *neglected* children dropped out. Arguably, teachers’ reaching out to children who had been neglected by their peers may have contributed to a sense of belonging. In contrast, the average children, being overlooked by both teachers and peers, were less likely to “identify with the establishments of schools” and therefore drop out due to feeling “out of place” (Prince & Howard, 2002, p. 30). Furthermore, Prinstein (2017) differentiated between *popularity* and *likability*; Maslow would have regarded the former as *deficiency* (D-) love/

belonging, and the latter as indicative of appropriately fulfilled (*being*, B-) love/belonging.

Identity, Intimacy, and Generativity. Maslow's love and belonging needs also are implicated in Erikson's (1959/1994) developmental tasks of adolescence and adulthood. The mission of adolescence is to search for and settle on a sense of stability and continuity in individuals' personality amid confusion, change, and uncertainty. One dimension of identity development is clarification of their values and vocation—not only to earn money but also to strive for an honest sense of accomplishment within the lens of their culture. Like Maslow (1971, 1999), Erikson cautioned that American society's overemphasis on standardization and conformity places adolescents at risk of helplessness and foreclosure, while its oversaturation of choices begets stagnation and avoidance of responsibility. On the other hand, when the process goes well, adolescents arrive at a sense of belonging and of congruence between their actual self and the contributions they make to their society by employing their potentials and abilities. Also, they become more at ease in multiple roles across several life domains (e.g., work, family, community, etc.). Cordeiro, Paixão, Lens, Lacante, and Luyckx (2016) noted that Portuguese adolescents' perceived parental support (Maslow's love/belonging) is a protective factor in career decision making, while parental thwarting is a risk factor. Both are mediated by adolescents' subjective feelings of having their love/belonging needs met, which result in either confidence in proactive exploration and commitment making or in endless rumination over identity options.

As individuals enter adulthood, the development during childhood and adolescence of a strong sense of self is necessary to merge identities with another in a loving adult relationship without fear of losing their own identity, autonomy, and integrity. Erikson (1959/1994) noted that disconnection and repeated failed marriages arise out of failure to establish an intimate connection. On the other hand, when the process goes well, individuals are able to engage in authentic relationships (vs. overly formal or stereotyped ones and/or isolation). By middle adulthood, healthy development involves an increased shift in focus from self toward other and toward guiding the next generation as an expression of their belief in the species (not just their immediate social network). On the other hand, if Maslow's security and love/belonging needs have not been adequately satisfied, Erikson (1959/1994) noted that people fall into self-absorption and mechanical, unfulfilling routines.

Self-Esteem

"If . . . the person wins respect and admiration and because of this develops self-respect, then he or she is still more healthy, self-actualizing, or fully

human,” Maslow (1987) wrote; thus, “satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world” (pp. 38, 21). Maslow (1987; Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951) conceptualized self-esteem as a multifaceted construct that includes (a) some originality, individuality, and independence from group opinions—that is, *real self* instead of idealized pseudo-self (Horney, Rogers, Winnicott, as cited in DeRobertis, 2008), *differentiated self* instead of *emotional cutoff* (Bowen, 1978); (b) having achievable, realistic, and compatible goals which involve some good to society as well as reasonable persistence of effort to achieve them; (c) absence of excessive need for reassurance and approval; (d) desire for adequacy, mastery, competence, and achievement; (e) a sense of confidence in the face of the world—which, like Adler (1927/2010; see also DeRobertis, 2011a), Maslow (1987) distinguished from sheer willpower and determination; (f) positive (vs. negative) freedom; (g) desire for dignity, appreciation, and deserved respect from others—which Maslow distinguished from external fame, celebrity, and unwarranted adulation; (h) appreciation of cultural differences; and (i) realistic appraisal of personal strengths, limitations, motivations, desires, goals, ambitions, inhibitions, defenses, compensations, and so on.

With regard to acceptance of one’s imperfections and defenses as well as one’s strengths, Neff (2011) proposed the construct of *self-compassion* as an alternative to both the hubristic and fleeting images of self-esteem propagated by American culture and psychology in the interest of self-enhancement—which Maslow would have classified as D-esteem. Rather, self-compassion emphasizes nonjudgmental, mindful self-awareness as a means of overcoming self-consciousness and improving self-efficacy and well-being. Maslow (1999) noted that “fear of knowledge of oneself is very often isomorphic with, and parallel with, fear of . . . any knowledge that could cause us to despise ourselves or to make us feel inferior, weak, worthless, evil, shameful” (p. 71). Cultivating self-compassion can result in lower self-condemnation and higher self-forgiveness (Cornish & Wade, 2015) as well as in decreased maladaptive dependency and increased sense of connectedness (Chui, Zilcha-Mano, Dinger, Barrett, & Barber, 2016).

Self-Actualization

When conditions are favorable and the intrinsic self is heeded, the possibility of self-actualizing comes into focus for the developing person. Maslow (1971) noted that “self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption” and therefore “being more easily [oneself]” and “expressing rather than coping,” that is, directing one’s energies toward the best uses of one’s potentials and abilities and

feeling discontent and restless when one is not doing what one was uniquely fitted for (pp. 44, 290). Maslow (1999) identified several interrelated qualities of self-actualizing people:

Clearer, more efficient perception of reality; more openness to experience; increased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person; increased spontaneity, expressiveness, full functioning, aliveness; a real self, firm identity, autonomy, uniqueness; increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self; recovery of creativeness; ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness; democratic character structure; ability to love, etc. (pp. 172-173; see also Maslow, 1987)

Maslow's description of self-actualizing people is consistent with R. Walsh's (2015) conceptualization of *wisdom*, which involves the following: (a) people's abilities to "more deeply and accurately . . . see into themselves, reality, and [their] existential challenges and limitations" and to embrace "ethicality and benevolence [as] appropriate ways to live"; (b) the motivation to benefit others; and (c) operating on the awareness that "the deeper the kind of benefits they can offer, . . . the more skillfully they may offer them" (p. 289).

Propriate Striving. As noted earlier, self-actualizing is an outcome of healthy personality development, which entails an *ongoing process* of striving for still greater improvement and growth as opposed to an end state, as synonymous with Allport's (1955) *propriate striving*. Self-actualizing people assume the courage and freedom to create/recreate aspects of their personality based on new life experiences and interactions with others—especially those that test their ordinary ways of thinking, being, and relating and which liberate and integrate their intellect, emotions, and body—rather than remain homeostatically fixated in their comfort zones. This paves the way for *self-transcendence* (Maslow, 1971). Likewise, McAdams (2015) proposed that personality development involves a tripartite emerging process of *social actor* (dispositional traits, temperament), *motivated agent* (personal goals, projects, plans, values), and *autobiographical author* (narrative identity).

Social Interest. Self-actualizing involves a greater sense of identification with humanity and therefore compassion and altruism, devoting one's "energies and thoughts to socially meaningful interests and problems" beyond one's own self-interest and/or need gratification (Maslow, 1999, p. 22). Because healthier people "need less to *receive* love [and] are more capable to *give* love, [they] are *more* loving people" (Maslow, 1999, p. 47). Therefore, they demonstrate increased comfort being alone and enhanced self-discipline versus gregariously exuberant disposition (Maslow, 1987). At the same time,

they are more democratic, interdependent, and problem focused; have better interpersonal relations; are more accepting and forgiving of others; and are able to extend these capacities to a variety of relationships (Maslow, 1999; Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951). Toumbourou (2016) outlined a framework for identifying and evaluating *beneficial action* (i.e., altruistic and prosocial behavior) based on developmental and contextual influences that resemble Maslow's needs theory.

Resilience. Maslow (1999) wrote, "Self-actualization does not mean a transcendence of all human problems. Conflict, anxiety, frustration, sadness, hurt, and guilt all can be found in healthy human beings"; on the other hand, "with increasing maturity," one's focus shifts "from neurotic pseudo-problems to the real, unavoidable existential problems" (p. 230). Maslow (Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951) emphasized the abilities to constructively adapt to circumstances beyond one's control, to sustainably and nondefensively remain collected in the face of crisis, and to withstand setbacks as opportunities for growth (instead of as threatening). "The child with a good basis of safety, love, and respect-need-gratification is able to profit from . . . frustrations and become stronger thereby" (Maslow, 1999, p. 220). Maslow (1996) also accentuated that tragedy is conducive to growth insofar as it "confronts [individuals] with the ultimate values, questions, and problems that [they] ordinarily forget about in everyday existence" (p. 56). Likewise, F. Walsh (2016) defined *resilience* as follows:

"Struggling well," experiencing both suffering and courage, effectively working through difficulties both internally and interpersonally, . . . [striving] to integrate the fullness of the experience of . . . life challenges into the fabric of [one's] individual and collective identity, influencing how we go on with our lives. (p. 5)

Aldwin (2007) cited cognitive skills (insight, creativity, humor, morality), temperament (independence and initiative), and social integration (all reminiscent of self-actualizing people) as factors that characterize resilient children irrespective of social class or ethnicity. Furthermore, Masten (2014) identified attributes and outcomes of a supportive, accepting, and enriching but also appropriately challenging family, school, and community environment (i.e., Maslow's safety, belonging, and esteem needs) as protective factors that promote resilience.

Postconventional Morality. In self-actualizing people, locus of control shifts from *externalized* to *intrinsic*, and both motivation and ethics follow suit. They are

“not only or merely [their institutional and/or national affiliation] but also members at large of the human species” and “[looking] within for the guiding values and rules to live by” (Maslow, 1999, p. 201). Being strongly focused on problems outside themselves, their focus broadens to include matters reflecting a desire for truth, justice, beauty, and so on. In addition, being comfortable in their skin, they are inclined to do what is right versus what is easy even if it goes against the tide (i.e., *resistance to enculturation* and *transcendence of one’s environment*). Using Kohlberg’s (1984) model of moral development, *postconventional morality* is characterized first by right action based on compromise and reciprocity. The letter of the law is considered insufficient to uphold a society; rather, rules are broken and/or revised when one is faced with situations in which the rules interfere with human rights or needs. Second, right/wrong is based on universal ethical principles of fairness and equality, and individuals turn to their inner conscience with respect for diversity, dignity, and human welfare and for balancing individual and social concerns. Similarly, Gilligan (1982) proposed a parallel concept, a *morality of nonviolence* (i.e., preventing harm to self and others), as the *telos* of her feminist moral development model.

Postformal Cognition and Psychological Flexibility. Maslow (1999) emphasized that cognition associated with self-actualizing people is marked by “[sharpened] awareness of the limitations of purely abstract thinking, of verbal thinking, and of analytic thinking” and by “dichotomies [becoming] resolved, opposites . . . seen to be unities, and the whole dichotomous way of thinking . . . recognized to be immature” (pp. 227-228). Post-Piagetian psychologists (e.g., Basseches, Kitchener, Labouvie-Vief, Perry, Sinnot, etc., as cited in Arnett, 2016; Broderick & Blewitt, 2015) emphasized that, when conditions are favorable, the *formal operational* thought of adolescence gives way to more flexible, complex, and integrated *postformal cognition* characterized by *pragmatism* (adapting idealistic, logical thinking to the practical constraints of real-life situations), *dialectical thought* (awareness that problems often have no clear solution), and *reflective judgment, relativism, and postskeptical rationalism*. Decisions are based on situational circumstances, and emotion is integrated with logic to form context-dependent principles. Accordingly, the legitimacy of competing points of view and of *psychological flexibility* (Wilson, Bordieri, & Whiteman, 2012) is recognized and favored over making arguments for the justification of only one true/accurate perspective at the exclusion of others (Schneider, 2013). Maslow (1966) discussed how these principles could be applied to develop a more humanistic approach to science.

Emotional Intelligence. Maslow (1999) observed that “the ability to be aggressive and angry is found in all self-actualizing people, who are able to let it

flow forth freely when the external situation ‘calls for’ it” (p. 216). They are accepting of the full range of human impulses without rejecting them in the interest of reducing tension. Like postformal cognition, Goleman’s (1995; see also Dalai Lama, 2012) *emotional intelligence* theory emphasizes moving away from Western dualistic assumptions about emotions as inherently positive (approach, pleasant) or negative (withdrawal, unpleasant) and instead recognizing that each emotion has both beneficial (constructive) and afflictive (destructive) elements. For example, fear can signal legitimate threats and promote survival, and righteous anger is necessary and appropriate for confronting injustice. The ability to accept emotions as they are rather than deny, repress, or project them also promotes empathy and compassion (toward both self and others), consistent with Maslow’s simultaneous focus on appropriate striving and social interest.

Creativity. Maslow (1999) recognized creativity as the dialectic integration of primary (childlike, Dionysian) and secondary (rational, Apollonian) processes, a conceptualization that was elaborated by Arieti (1976) and explored in a qualitative inquiry by Bland (2003). Specifically, Maslow focused on the nonduality between young and old (i.e., a sense of playfulness and the ability to integrate imagination with practical wisdom). In addition, he emphasized that creativity (a) is not limited to production of products (i.e., art, music, literature, scientific work) but also includes the propiarte process of individuals’ growth and development and (b) serves to benefit society by providing alternatives to the limitations of convention. Sternberg (2016) proposed a triangular theory of creativity that involves *defying the crowd* (i.e., the beliefs, values, and practices of one’s field despite the short-term interpersonal risks), *defying oneself* (self-challenging and self-transcending by moving beyond one’s own earlier values, practices, and beliefs), and *defying the zeitgeist* (i.e., the unconsciously accepted presuppositions and paradigms in a field). In addition, consistent with Maslow’s suggestions for social conditions that are conducive to self-actualization (i.e., a consistent and nurturing environment that enables one to express oneself rather than cope and conform), Ren, Li, and Zhang (2017) noted that while Chinese adolescents’ creativity is enhanced by *behavioral* control from their parents, it is stifled by parents’ *psychological* control over them.

Dialogue With the Extant Literature

Maslow’s work has been met with ongoing criticism and confusion since he initially introduced his ideas at mid-20th century. His association with the worst of 1960s counterculture (about which he publicly expressed

frustration; see Maslow, 1964/1970; 1984; 1987) arguably contributed to his work being dismissed (or at best ignored) today by many conventional psychologists as a historical relic. In addition, since Maslow's death in 1970, the more complex and nuanced aspects of his thinking have become distorted or lost due to oversimplified and/or inaccurate portrayals of his work in secondary sources that resemble an academic game of "telephone" (Bland & DeRobertis, 2017).

Applied to this article, perhaps the most troubling misrepresentation of Maslow's work has been the attempt by developmentally oriented researchers to reformulate his dynamic systems approach as a discontinuous stage model with clearly defined categorical phases. For example, some have attempted to equate each level of his needs hierarchy with specific stages in extant models (e.g., Bauer, Schwab, & McAdams, 2011; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Harrigan & Commons, 2015), and others with factors on assessment measures (e.g., Reiss & Haverkamp, 2005). We find these efforts problematic, as they fail to uphold Maslow's emphasis on holistic conceptualization and his cautioning against misunderstanding fulfillment of the basic needs as a simplistic, lockstep progression ("not a sudden, saltatory phenomenon," Maslow, 1987, p. 27) but rather as a dynamic process in which fulfillment of the higher needs is proportional to fulfillment of the lower needs. Accordingly, we agree with Rowan's (1998) call to "[do] away with the triangle!" (p. 88). First, Maslow never actually represented his theory with a pyramid (Eaton, 2012)—at least in the way that it is commonly presented in textbooks (see Bland, 2013). More important, while such a visual image is convenient for instructional purposes, it implies that maturation has an end point, which belies Maslow's foci on propiarte striving and on self-transcendence (Rowan, 1998). As an alternative, we propose the aforementioned image of Russian nesting dolls, an expanding spiral or helix, or a lightning bolt, all of which better convey the two-steps-forward-one-step-back, contiguous dynamic of maturation as an ongoing process (see Kegan, 1982).

Another criticism leveled at Maslow (e.g., see Hanley & Abell, 2002) is his emphasis on hedonistic values and on culture-biased notions of self-esteem and self-actualization. However, numerous international studies have directly (e.g., Koydemir et al., 2014; Winston, Maher, & Easvaradoss, 2017) or indirectly (see citations throughout the previous section of this article) demonstrated the cross-cultural validity of Maslow's theorizing.

Furthermore, others have (a) made pleas for a more dynamic interactional self as an alternative to Maslow's proposition of an instinctoid self in his adaptation of Goldstein (Frick, 1982; Morley, 1995) and (b) accused Maslow of "[emphasizing] the importance of maintaining a unified, coherent self," whereas "the self-concept differentiates with maturity, [incorporating] both

the private and the more public sides of our nature, accommodating our ability to keep our own counsel and still be known to others by virtue of our interactions with them” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015, pp. 169-170). These critiques tend to focus on the individuating aspects of self-actualization (i.e., Goldstein’s first and third axioms) without adequately acknowledging Maslow’s emphasis on maturity within a social–environmental context (Goldstein’s second axiom), which has been more properly acknowledged by Sassoon (2015). Maslow (1987, 1999) accentuated that the difference between merely healthy individuals and self-actualizing ones who genuinely embody social interest is mediated in part by adequate cultural–societal conditions. Likewise, he insinuated that, *paradoxically, individuals are simultaneously both more externalized and ego-centered at the lower end of his needs hierarchy, whereas at the higher end they are guided by more idiosyncratic/intrinsic aims while also becoming more self-transcendent.*

Conclusion

In this article, we have employed Maslow’s needs hierarchy as a dynamic systems process framework for situating parallel developmental constructs that serve as empirical support for his ideas at multiple ages and in various contexts, and we have sought to clarify common misgivings about his ideas on psychological health (i.e., self-actualization) and the factors that promote or inhibit it. Our intent has been to legitimize Maslow’s unacknowledged contributions to developmental psychology in an effort to overcome the “recurrent Maslow bashing that one finds in the literature” (Winston et al., 2017, p. 309). We further reach the conclusion that Maslow ought to be counted as a forerunner of contemporary existential–humanistic developmental thought (see DeRobertis, 2008, 2012, 2015; DeRobertis & McIntyre, 2016).

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Eugene M. DeRobertis is a professor of psychology at Brookdale College and a Lecturer at Rutgers University–Newark in New Jersey. He holds a BA in philosophy from St. Peter's University and a PhD in psychology from Duquesne University. He is the author of *Humanizing Child Developmental Theory: A Holistic Approach* (2008), *The Whole Child: Selected Papers on Existential-Humanistic Child Psychology* (2012), *Existential-Phenomenological Psychology: A Brief Introduction* (2012), *Profiles of Personality: An Approach-Based Companion* (2013), and *The Phenomenology of Learning and Becoming: Enthusiasm, Creativity, and Self-Development* (2017).