

What did Abraham Maslow mean by self-actualization?

Maslow suggested the hierarchy of human needs arranged from lowest to highest: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs. He stated that humans cannot pursue the higher needs until the lower ones are met. According to Maslow, self-actualization is the highest of human needs that involves active use of all the personal qualities and abilities, the development and fulfilment of one's full potential. In other words, self-actualization is the ability to become the best version of oneself.

Maslow identified those people who satisfied the self-actualization need as psychologically healthy. They are less likely to suffer from neuroses and usually middle aged or older. Maslow believed that, because of the difficulty of fulfilling the 4 lower needs, not so many people are able to become self-actualized. According to Maslow only around 1% of the population of people are within the category. Maslow determined the list of tendencies that people who met self-actualization needs are likely to share, among those are objective perception of reality, full acceptance of their own nature, commitment to some kind of work, simplicity and naturalness of behavior, need for autonomy, privacy and independence, intense mystical or peak experiences (feelings of intense ecstasy, joy, and wonder), empathy for all humanity, resistance to conformity, democratic character structure, attitude of creativeness and a high degree of social interest. For Maslow, love in childhood and satisfaction of one's safety and physiological needs in the first two years of life are the prerequisites for one's future self-actualization.

According to Maslow self-actualizing people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, and interested in fulfilling their potential. They can appreciate good things in life again and again, they see beauty in various aspects of life. Self-actualization is different for each one of us and takes time. Plus, Maslow pointed out that we are all driven by different motivations. It's a life-long journey for us and the goal is to become the best versions of ourselves.