

BEING PSYCHOLOGY

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Being Psychology

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Humanistic Psychology; Transpersonal Psychology

1. Core Definition

Being Psychology (B-Psychology) is a foundational conceptual framework within the humanistic school of thought, primarily developed by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow. This perspective views human beings not as collections of defensive reactions or drives motivated solely by deficiency, but as inherently unique, incomparable, and potentially self-actualizing organisms. B-Psychology posits that the individual possesses an intrinsic, almost "sacred," worth and is ultimately an end in themselves, deserving of study based on their highest achievements and growth capacities.

The central aim of B-Psychology is to investigate and articulate the psychological dynamics associated with the highest level of human functioning--that of the self-actualizing person. Maslow argued that traditional psychology (which he termed Deficiency Psychology, or D-Psychology) had primarily focused on illness, failure, and the mechanisms required to alleviate pain or fill biological and emotional voids. By contrast, B-Psychology redirects focus toward positive human qualities, such as creativity, love, autonomy, and existential purpose, asserting that true psychological health is defined by the active pursuit of growth rather than merely the absence of pathology.

In this context, the human being is understood to be motivated not by basic survival needs once those are satisfied, but by "metaneeds" or B-Values (Being Values). These growth motivations include the pursuit of inherent values like Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Justice. When an individual operates within the B-realm, their behavior is guided by intrinsic satisfaction and the desire to realize their potential, distinguishing this state fundamentally from the need-reducing behaviors associated with deficiency motivation.

2. Etymology and Historical Development

The concepts underlying **Being Psychology** emerged during Maslow's later work in the 1950s and 1960s, a period marked by the formal establishment of humanistic psychology as the "Third Force" against the prevailing dominance of psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Maslow's initial framework, the Hierarchy of Needs, provided the necessary foundation by distinguishing between lower-level Deficiency Needs (D-needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem) and the ultimate Growth Need (self-actualization). However, Maslow recognized that self-actualization required a distinct theoretical framework because the psychology of a person seeking growth fundamentally differs from that of a person struggling for safety or love.

The formal term B-Psychology became necessary to emphasize the ontological shift required when

studying self-actualizers. Maslow realized that if he only studied people who were neurotic or stuck in lower-level need satisfaction, the resulting view of human nature would be fundamentally skewed and pessimistic. The development of B-Psychology was therefore a methodological imperative--a call to study the best examples of humanity to define the actual limits and potential of the species.

This intellectual development coincided with Maslow's detailed exploration of the B-Values and peak experiences. The analysis of these moments of profound fulfillment and transcendence provided empirical substance to the B-realm, suggesting that the drive toward wholeness and truth was an innate, if often suppressed, aspect of the human condition. B-Psychology, therefore, represents the culmination of Maslow's attempt to create a psychology dedicated to the realization of human potential and the highest forms of consciousness.

3. Key Concepts and Components

B-Psychology is built upon a system of concepts that describe the motivational structure and experience of individuals whose basic needs have been met, allowing them to engage in the process of self-actualization. These components describe a shift in perspective from external validation to internal, intrinsic fulfillment.

The B-Values (Being Values): These are the meta-goals that provide the content for the growth life. Maslow identified values such as Truth, Beauty, Wholeness, Aliveness, Uniqueness, Perfection, and Justice as fundamental, universal drivers of self-actualizing behavior. These values are not merely abstract ideals but are felt as intrinsic necessities; their pursuit is the essence of B-motivation.

Metamotivation: This is the motivational state unique to B-Psychology, defined by striving toward the B-Values rather than striving to reduce deficiencies. Metamotivation is non-homeostatic, meaning it does not seek to restore balance but rather encourages the individual to increase creative tension and challenge for the purpose of growth and expression.

Peak Experiences: These are intense, often spiritual or transcendent moments where the individual experiences a sense of profound unity, clarity, and meaning. Maslow considered peak experiences to be temporary, full realizations of the B-realm, providing powerful validation of the inherent structure and beauty of reality.

Cognition of Being (B-Cognition): This refers to a way of perceiving the world that is non-judgmental, holistic, and focused on the intrinsic nature of the observed object or person, without comparing or evaluating it based on utility or personal relevance. B-Cognition is associated with the clarity and insight achieved during peak experiences.

Metapathology: This concept describes the psychological distress that results from the deprivation or frustration of B-Values (e.g., despair resulting from the absence of meaning or cynicism resulting from the loss of faith in truth or justice). Metapathology underscores the idea that B-Needs are as vital to psychological health as D-Needs are to physical survival.

4. Distinction from Deficiency Psychology (D-Psychology)

The theoretical power of **Being Psychology** is best understood through its contrast with Deficiency Psychology (D-Psychology). D-Psychology encompasses most traditional psychological models that focus on survival, homeostasis, and the mechanisms of coping with deficits. These models see behavior as primarily driven by the need to secure basic resources, achieve safety, or gain external approval.

The difference between the two frameworks is reflected in their respective motivational systems. D-motivation is tension-reducing and centered on objects or relationships external to the self (e.g., seeking food, seeking a partner to alleviate loneliness). Once the goal is achieved, the tension subsides, only to be replaced by the next deficiency. In contrast, B-motivation is tension-increasing and rooted in intrinsic desire and purpose. The B-motivated person seeks challenges that allow them to express their unique potential, and the successful attainment of a B-goal leads not to satiation, but to a renewed sense of purpose and capacity for further growth.

For Maslow, confusing these two realms leads to profound misunderstanding of human nature. For example, treating a self-actualizing individual's commitment to an ethical principle as merely a defensive reaction (a D-need) ignores the genuine, transcendent motivation (B-need) driving their behavior. B-Psychology thus provides the theoretical tools necessary to study the rich complexity of human endeavor beyond mere survival.

5. Significance and Impact

The significance of **Being Psychology** lies in its profound reorientation of psychological inquiry toward health, potential, and subjective experience. It served as a critical intellectual precursor to the modern positive psychology movement by providing a comprehensive, systematic framework for studying optimal human functioning rather than just dysfunction.

In clinical practice, B-Psychology revolutionized the understanding of therapeutic goals. It shifted the clinical objective from merely adjusting the patient to societal norms or neutralizing symptoms (D-Psychology objectives) to facilitating the discovery of the client's inherent growth directions. Therapies influenced by B-Psychology, such as Person-Centered Therapy, emphasize unconditional positive regard and empathy precisely because these conditions foster the environment necessary for the client's natural tendency toward self-actualization to emerge.

Beyond the clinical domain, B-Psychology heavily influenced organizational theory and education. Educational models emphasizing creativity, critical thinking, and the realization of individual talent--rather than just rote memorization or compliance--are rooted in B-Psychology's affirmation of the student's uniqueness and inherent drive toward knowledge. Similarly, in leadership, the principles of B-Psychology advocate for management styles that treat employees as complex, purpose-driven individuals rather than simple economic inputs, fostering environments conducive to internal motivation and commitment to organizational B-Values.

6. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its widespread influence, **Being Psychology** faces substantial theoretical and methodological scrutiny. One of the most persistent criticisms concerns its methodological foundation. Maslow's original research on self-actualizing individuals involved an idiosyncratic selection process, where subjects (historical figures or living acquaintances) were chosen based on Maslow's subjective criteria of psychological health. Critics argue that this non-empirical, definitional approach compromises scientific rigor and makes the findings difficult to replicate or generalize.

Furthermore, the concepts of B-Values and self-actualization are highly abstract, presenting challenges for objective measurement. The experiential nature of peak experiences and B-Cognition resists quantification, leading critics to label B-Psychology as overly philosophical or quasi-religious, lacking the empirical teeth necessary for a scientific discipline.

A significant debate also exists regarding the universality of the model. Critics suggest that B-Psychology, developed within a Western, individualistic framework, may not adequately account for cultural differences. The emphasis on individual self-actualization may minimize the importance of collective identity and communal B-Values prevalent in many non-Western societies. Additionally, the strict prerequisite that D-needs must be satisfied before B-needs emerge is often challenged by evidence from individuals in impoverished or oppressive circumstances who nevertheless exhibit profound B-motivation (e.g., pursuing justice or beauty despite lacking basic safety).

7. Further Reading

[Abraham Maslow \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Humanistic Psychology \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Overview of Humanistic Psychology \(Psychology Today\)](#)