

WJEC Psychology A-level

The Positive Approach

Notes



A01 Introduction and Assumptions:

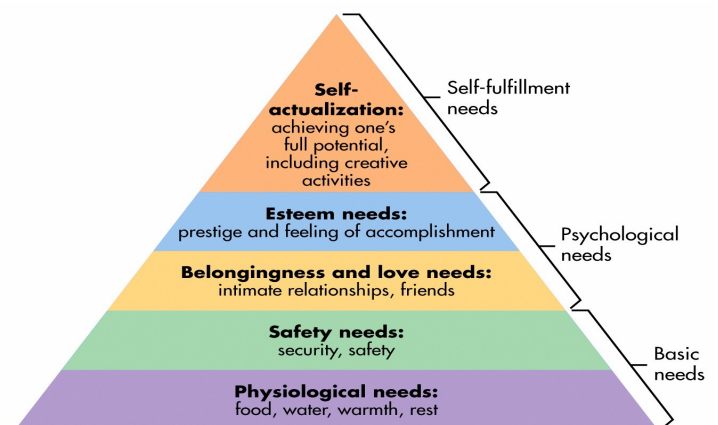
- Assumes that we all have free will and are ‘mistresses’ and ‘masters’ of our own development, so we can ignore the influence of internal and external factors on our behaviour.
- Sees self-actualisation, as achieved by being the top level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as a crucial part of being human.
- Due to having free will, we also have to ability to progress through this hierarchy of needs and better ourselves.

Incongruence and Self-Actualisation:

- The ‘self’ is a term to describe all the ideas and values we have about ourselves, including perceptions of our abilities.
- The ‘ideal self’ describes our perception of the best version of ourselves.
- When there is too large a gap between the self and the ideal self, we experience incongruence. The consequent negative feelings of low self-worth and low self-esteem prevent us from progressing through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and so we cannot achieve self-actualisation.
- When there is little or no gap between the self and the ideal self, then we have achieved congruence, allowing us to progress up the hierarchy, with the aim of achieving self-actualisation.
- Self-actualisation refers to the innate desire we all have to become the best version of ourselves, through personal and psychological growth i.e. “achieving one’s full potential” (as shown on the right).

Rogierian Therapy, Conditions of Worth and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs:

- Rogierian therapy aims to reduce the gap between the self and the ideal self, thus increasing increasing the likelihood of achieving congruence and subsequently, self-actualisation.
- According to Rogers and Maslow, conditions such as low self-esteem and low self-worth originate in childhood, where adults restrict the love they show towards their children, by imposing conditions of worth e.g. “I will be proud of you only if you achieve top grades at school”. This represents a lack of unconditional positive regard.
- Rogierian therapy views a good therapist as being open, genuine, empathic and most importantly, providing the unconditional positive regard which the patient most likely lacked during childhood.
- **N.B. This has a specific link with mindfulness, as well as allowing individuals to reevaluate the quality of their life! A particularly useful link about the effectiveness of mindfulness, and the research to support this, can be found here: <https://bemindful.co.uk/evidence-research/>**
- These therapies view patients as ‘experts’ of their conditions, and so they are encouraged to arrive at their own solutions to these problems, with the help of a therapist.



A02 Potential Application Questions:

1. The impact of humanism on counselling psychology.
2. Comparisons with other, reductionist approaches.
3. Explanation of mental disorders using the Maslow's idea of a hierarchy of needs, conditions of worth, a lack of unconditional positive regard in childhood and subsequent incongruence.

A03 Evaluation:

+ **Practical Application to Therapy** = Rogers' client-centred therapy has had a major impact on counselling psychology, and how such therapies are used both in the USA and the UK. This therapy is particularly beneficial due to acknowledging that individuals do have free will and do have the ability to improve themselves, through focussing on developing solutions to the patient's current problems. This is in stark contrast with Freud's psychotherapies, which tend to dwell upon childhood experiences and so may be frustrating for the patient who has identified the cause of their problems. Nonetheless, Roger's client-centred approach is not suitable for treating serious mental disorders, such as schizophrenia or depression.

+ **Holistic Approach** = The humanistic approach is unique in that it adopts holism, therefore focussing on the individual's subjective experiences as a whole, as a method of investigating behaviour. This is in contrast with the cognitive approach (which sees the brain's functions as analogous to a computer), the biological approach (which sees humans purely as biological organisms which are made up of physiological processes) and behaviourism (where all behaviour is seen as the product of past reinforcement contingencies). Therefore, humanism is a refreshing alternative, compared to other reductionist explanations of behaviour.

— **Untestable and subjective concepts** = As with Freud's psychodynamic approach, humanism suffers from a lack of empirical evidence and no possibility of systematically observing and measuring the processes which it describes. Self-actualisation cannot be objectively measured, due to individual differences and a lack of a universal measuring scale. Similarly, congruence may also be up to personal judgement, especially as opinions of whether one has is their 'ideal self' will differ. This does little to improve the scientific credibility of both humanism and Psychology.

— **A culture-bound explanation of behaviour** = Maslow's ideas of self-actualisation, the need to improve oneself, and congruence can be mostly viewed as attitudes typical of Western, individualist cultures where the needs of the individual are greater than the needs of the group. Therefore, due to this cultural bias, humanism may be more readily accepted by Western cultures who will identify more with these values, as opposed to Eastern collectivist cultures, where such a desire for personal growth may be seen as selfish considering that the needs of the group are greater than that of the individual.

Part 2: An Introduction to Classical Research

- Myers and Diener (1995) - Who is happy?
- These researchers studied the idea of subjective well-being, which is made up of both positive and negative components/affects. They concluded that ¹"happiness and life satisfaction are similarly available to the young and the old, women and men, blacks and

¹ Myers, D.G. and Diener, E (1995), Who is happy? *Psychological Science* 6(1), pp.10-17



whites, the rich and the working class. Better clues to well-being come from knowing about a person's traits, close relationships, work experiences, culture, and religiosity".

— **Subjective well-being was mainly measured through self-report measures.** This mainly suffers from the problem of social desirability bias (demand characteristics), where individuals are more likely to paint a better picture of themselves (or at least convince themselves to do so!) due to life satisfaction often being viewed as a desirable characteristic by society. Therefore, this suggests that the basic findings produced by the study may be unreliable due to the lack of objectivity.

- + **The conclusions drawn from this study have particularly important real-life applications.** For example, the idea that research support has been given to the idea that money cannot buy happiness may cause some people to reconsider their career paths or life choices, and therefore increase their own happiness through improved self-satisfaction. The idea that the majority of people, regardless of race, sex or income, have the opportunity to reach the same level of happiness is encouraging and positive, rather than simply pointing out all of the negative aspects of an individual's life.
- + **The research conducted by Myers and Diener was specific about the traits which characterise happy or sad people,** in the traditional sense. For example, the authors cite high self-esteem, an awareness of personal control and optimism are such traits which are characteristic of happy people. This is useful in the sense that individuals can reevaluate themselves on the basis of this research and so have some kind of direction for improvement if they wish to improve their happiness in life.
- + **The flow model also gives a visual representation of the dimensions** on which life happiness and satisfaction can be measured upon i.e. anxiety, flow, apathy and boredom. This adds to the practical benefits discussed above, in terms of directing people in specific ways to improve their lives.

