SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS. WHAT'S WRONG WITH ABRAHAM MASLOW'S THEORY?

Abstract. Self-actualization is a key concept in psychology that describes the process of personal development and the achievement of one's full potential. This article examines the influence of sociocultural context on the process of self-actualization, particularly within the framework of Abraham Maslow's theory. It is revealed that Maslow's theory fails to adequately consider the sociocultural context, and a comprehensive understanding of the self-actualization process requires taking into account the multifaceted nature of the social environment in which an individual develops, as well as the individual's life experiences. Ten factors influencing individual self-actualization are identified: social environment, cultural values, socioeconomic status, religion, education and upbringing, social structures and institutions, cultural stereotypes, social mobility, ethnic identity and gender roles. It is found that these sociocultural factors are interconnected and their interaction greatly influences the process of self-actualization. Research on sociocultural factors is both scientifically and practically valuable as it enhances our understanding of the impact of the social environment on individuals and aids in developing strategies and programs aimed at supporting self-actualization. Understanding these factors can contribute to creating favorable conditions for personal growth, enhancing self-esteem and realizing human potential. This study complements Abraham Maslow's theory by exploring a broad range of factors that influence self-definition and personal development, as well as discussing the role of global, local and combined factors in self-actualization. It is concluded that self-actualization is a complex process that cannot be fully explained by a single theory or model. Further research can investigate the interrelationships between different sociocultural factors and their impact on self-actualization, which can help develop more adaptive and effective programs to support individuals in creating optimal conditions for their development and the achievement of their personal potential.
Keywords: society, culture, religion, self-development, political regime, identity, self-disclosure, quality of life

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САМОАКТУАЛІЗАЦІЯ І СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНІ ФАКТОРИ. ЩО НЕ ТАК ІЗ ТЕОРІЄЮ АБРАГАМА МАСЛОУ?

Анотація. Самоактуалізація – одне з ключових понять у психології, що описує процес розвитку та досягнення повного потенціалу людської особистості. У цій статті розглянуто питання впливу соціокультурних факторів на самоактуалізацію, зокрема у контексті теорії потреб Абрагама Маслоу. Визначено, що теорія Маслоу не враховує соціокультурний контекст належним чином, і для повного розуміння процесу самоактуалізації необхідно врахувати багатогранність соціального середовища, всередині якого розвивається індивід, а також життєвий досвід окремої людини. У цій статті визначено десять факторів, які впливають на самоактуалізацію індивіда: соціальне середовище; культурні цінності; соціально-економічний статус; релігія; освіта та виховання; соціальні структури та інститути; культурні стереотипи; соціальна мобільність; етнічна ідентичність; гендерні ролі. З'ясовано, що окремі соціокультурні фактори пов’язані між собою, і їх взаємодія має великий вплив на процес самоактуалізації. Дослідження соціокультурних факторів є науково і практично цінним, оскільки воно допомагає краще зрозуміти вплив екологічних факторів на розвиток індивіда, а також розвивати стратегії та програми, що спрямовані на підтримку самоактуалізації. Розуміння цих факторів може сприяти створенню найсприятливіших умов для розвитку особистості, підвищення самооцінки та здатності досягти максимального потенціалу. Це дослідження доповнює теорію потреб Абрагама Маслоу, розкриваючи широкий спектр факторів, які впливають на процес самовизначення та розвитку особистості, а також обговорює роль глобальних, локальних і комбінованих екологічних факторів під час самоактуалізації. Зроблено висновок про те, що самоактуалізація – це складний процес, який не можна повністю пояснити за допомогою однієї теорії чи моделі. Ця стаття може зацікавити соціологів, психологів, психотерапевтів і консультантів, а також тих, хто досліджує самоактуалізацію. Наукова новизна полягає у визначені низки соціокультурних факторів, що впливають на самоактуалізацію. Це допомагає уникнути спрощення, а також пояснює важливість зовнішніх факторів і умов для самоактуалізації.
**Introduction.** Self-actualization is the subject of scientific analysis in various domains, including psychology, sociology, education, philosophy, management, business and art studies [7; 11; 25]. Furthermore, there is currently no unified definition, as it depends on how each scholar interprets self-actualization. One of the most well-known theories is Abraham Maslow's theory, an American humanistic psychologist, who considers self-actualization as the highest level of personal development. The fundamental idea is that human needs are hierarchically organized. To progress and reach the pinnacle of self-actualization, person must satisfy lower-level needs such as physiological or safety needs first. Abraham Maslow's views on self-actualization have evolved over time. Initially, he aligned with the German neurologist Kurt Goldstein, who introduced the term «self-actualization» into scientific discourse and believed that every individual is programmed for development and the realization of their potential. However, Maslow later changed his perspective. The revised view posited that self-actualization is not a process but a specific set of characteristics by which a small number of self-actualized individuals can be identified [16]. While reviewing the literature, it was observed that Abraham Maslow's theory, particularly his ideas about self-actualization, were actively criticized by other scholars [4; 20]. This criticism arises primarily from the insufficient consideration of contextual aspects that influence individual paths of self-actualization.

**Objective.** In this article it was aim to identify and analyze the main sociocultural factors that influence self-actualization and discuss them within the context of the limitations of Abraham Maslow's theory.

**Main part.** Humanistic psychology and later existential psychotherapy, emerged as a response to the dominant behaviorism of the 20th century, which neglected the study of the individual's inner world, their motivations, values and needs, moreover included observations and rigid experiments. After World War II, there was a demand for new scientific approaches that focused on the individual with their unique nature, rather than on psychosocial traumas, large groups or cognitive distortions [12]. On one hand, this reflects the era and the tectonic shifts in European consciousness that occurred in the second half of the last century. On the other hand, it led to the risk that self-actualization would become part of only the humanistic paradigm, thus experiencing certain ideological distortions from the beginning. Therefore, it is unlikely to be appropriated by other scientific schools as an autonomous scientific category. It is important to note that neither psychoanalytic, cognitive or behavioral theories offer the same perspective on the individual as humanistic psychologists do, such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow or Rollo May.
The assertion that each representative of our biological species is a unique personality with their own potential for development and self-realization has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages lie in the fact that this idea is not inherently destructive. Unlike the philosophies of social Darwinism or Nietzscheanism, which were popular in the first half of the 20th century, it does not glorify will, struggle or effort. Moreover, humanistic psychologists offer hope to every individual by creating a safe and inclusive space where they can connect with their true self [6]. This idea could be extremely useful as it is primarily focused on support and acceptance. Humanistic psychologists believe in the individual and their potential, while environmental factors are predominantly seen either as a background in gestalt therapy or as obstacles [17].

The disadvantages partly stem from the advantages. The emphasis on the individual and highlighting their uniqueness leads to a lack of clear generalizations, which are essential to science. Humanistic psychologists, including Abraham Maslow, Rollo May and Carl Rogers, briefly consider ecological factors, mostly focusing on theoretical discussions and analyzing client stories [4; 22].

Sociocultural factors refer to the set of social and cultural conditions that influence the formation of individual and collective lives within a particular society. Based on theoretical research, there was identified the main sociocultural factors that impact personal self-actualization. The results are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social environment</td>
<td>The social environment refers to the interactions and relationships an individual has with others, including family, friends and community. It influences person's beliefs, behaviors and opportunities for self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural values</td>
<td>Cultural values are the shared beliefs, norms and ideals that define a particular culture or society. They shape individuals' perspectives, goals and aspirations, influencing their self-actualization process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status refers to an individual's financial position, including income, wealth and occupation. It can impact access to resources, opportunities and social support systems, which influence self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious influences</td>
<td>Religious influences encompass the beliefs, practices and values associated with a particular religion or spiritual tradition. They can shape an individual's worldview, moral framework and self-identity in the process of self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and upbringing</td>
<td>Education and upbringing encompass formal education, as well as the values, knowledge and skills acquired through family, socialization and cultural contexts. They play a significant role in shaping an individual's self-concept and opportunities for self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social structures and institutions refer to the organized systems and frameworks that shape society, such as government, laws and social hierarchies. They influence individuals' access to resources, opportunities and social mobility, impacting the possibilities of self-actualization.

Cultural stereotypes represent the generalizations, assumptions and judgments associated with specific cultures or social groups. They can impact individuals' self-perception, social interactions and opportunities for self-actualization.

The ability to change social position and status in society. It allows individuals to move up the social ladder, access higher socioeconomic status and pursue personal growth and fulfillment.

Ethnic identity relates to an individual's sense of belonging and identification with a particular ethnic or cultural group. It influences one's values, traditions and cultural heritage, shaping the process of self-actualization.

Gender roles encompass the societal expectations, norms and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity. They can shape individual's self-concept, give opportunities and constraints in self-actualization.

Next, it would be useful to discuss how factors such as the social environment, cultural values, socioeconomic status, religion, education and upbringing, social structures and institutions, cultural stereotypes, social mobility, ethnic identity and gender roles influence self-actualization.

The first factor is the social environment, which plays a crucial role in the process of self-actualization because people actively interact with others throughout their lives, receiving feedback from the external world. Particularly significant is the nature of relationships within the family, where a child can receive support and recognition or be devalued. This influences self-esteem, self-perception and personality formation. The influences of the social environment can be so strong that they determine how individuals see themselves and their potential. The family, as the primary social environment in which a person finds himself, has a significant impact on our self-actualization. If a child grows up in an environment where their values, needs and achievements are supported, where child receive love, recognition and a sense of security, it contributes to the formation of a positive self-image. The child feels important, worthy, believes in their abilities and feels confident about themselves and the world. In such an environment children have the opportunity to unleash their creative potential to the fullest. Conversely, if a child grows up in an environment where it's needs and achievements are ignored, where child constantly feel unwanted or inadequate, it can lead to low self-esteem and negatively impact self-actualization. Destructive relationships can harm personal development, suppress potential and lead to internal conflict [15]. In addition to the family other
social relationships such as friendship, romantic relationships and social connections also influence self-actualization. Interacting with people who share someone's values and have a positive impact on someone, providing support and stimulating growth, can enhance self-expression, assertiveness and goal achievement. Overall, the social environment has a significant impact on self-actualization, self-esteem, motivation and personality development. Positive, supportive and stimulating relationships with others promote self-actualization, while destructive relationships or lack of support can hinder development and the attainment of our full potential [9].

The second factor is cultural values. It encompasses established beliefs, ideals and priorities that are accepted and supported within a particular culture. They influence lifestyle, worldviews, moral norms, social relationships and much more. Cultural values are shaped through historical, social, religious and other influences, and are transmitted from generation to generation [5]. The American Dream is one of the most well-known examples of a cultural value that can significantly impact self-actualization. This concept emerged in the late 19th century and posited that every individual, regardless of their background, can achieve success, prosperity and personal happiness in America [14]. In the context of self-actualization, the American Dream supports the idea of personal development, creativity and achieving full potential. It asserts that effort, hard work and willpower can lead to social and economic success. Moreover, every individual has the opportunity to be «the captain of their own destiny» and influence their future. The American Dream idealizes entrepreneurship and success in society. It contributed to the development of concepts such as the «self-made man» and «rags-to-riches». This concept is part of American culture and, in one way or another, influences the self-actualization of Americans [23]. Through this example, it can be seen that cultural values indeed matter for self-actualization. In impoverished African countries, where economic hardships and social challenges prevail, values are mostly focused on survival rather than striving for the best possible outcomes [10]. African culture is characterized by communitarianism, which can easily devalue an individual and their uniqueness. Returning to the criticism of Abraham Maslow's theory, it can be recall Edwin Nevis's empirical researches evaluating the transferability of Maslow's Western theory to Asian societies. During the study, it was found that the first value for the Chinese in Maslow's hierarchy is belongingness, not physiological needs [21]. This may be a consequence of Mao Zedong's totalitarian rule and his Cultural Revolution, as well as the dominance of collectivism in Asian societies.

The third factor is socioeconomic status, which pertains to a person's financial situation and social position in society. This factor is significant for self-actualization because economic resources and opportunities can influence a person's ability to grow, achieve their goals and satisfy their needs. Socioeconomic status can affect self-esteem, self-perception and overall life satisfaction. A high economic
status can provide access to quality education, healthcare, housing, nutrition and other resources. This creates favorable conditions for personal development and self- realization. Socioeconomic status influences the possibilities of career development, professional skills and achievements in the personal sphere. The presence of material resources correlates with important aspects such as social status and recognition. It gives individuals more opportunities to fulfill their social needs, which belong to higher levels in Abraham Maslow's theory. Financial independence also matters for self-actualization because it allows individuals to have more control over their lives and make independent decisions [28]. Furthermore, socioeconomic status can influence feelings of self-sufficiency and freedom, which are necessary for self-development.

The fourth factor is religion. Religious influence is also an important factor in self-actualization as it defines a system of beliefs, values and moral principles that can impact a person's life philosophy and personal development. Islam receives the most attention due to being a highly conservative religion. From religious perspectives, Abraham Maslow's theory is criticized. Researchers noting that spiritual needs may outweigh physiological or social needs [1;19]. A religious community, such as a mosque, can play a crucial role in the self-actualization of Muslims. Interacting with a religious community can provide support, inspiration and spiritual growth. Alternatively, it can also be a source of prohibitions and limitations that hinder personal development. In the Muslim world, it is challenging not to be a Muslim, which raises significant concerns about voluntariness and the right to choose. Significant differences are observed when it comes to Christianity, Protestantism or Buddhism. Although these religious traditions can also influence a person's self-actualization and serve as both a resource and an obstacle on the path of self-discovery, self-disclosure and self-realization [13].

The fifth factor is education and upbringing. These variables play a crucial role in self-actualization as they provide individuals with knowledge, skills and opportunities for personal development and reaching their potential. These two factors interact and influence each other. Education encompasses formal learning such as school curriculum, higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning. It equips individuals with knowledge, intellectual skills, broadens their worldview, enhances their understanding of themselves. Education provides opportunities for developing critical thinking, creativity, communication skills and other abilities that contribute to self-actualization. Upbringing influences self-actualization as it shapes the foundations of personality and determines how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world. Education and upbringing are interconnected since the educational process not only imparts knowledge but also contributes to the formation of values, beliefs and skills that are vital components of self-actualization [24].
The sixth factor is social structures and institutions. It is a global ecological factor that affects self-actualization. Political ideology defines the system of values, beliefs and political positions that are acceptable or unacceptable in a particular society. It can provide frameworks and guidelines for how individuals should live and interact with the world around them. Ideology can emphasize the importance of individual rights and freedoms or prioritize collective goals and obligations. The political regime can be democratic, authoritarian or totalitarian. The regime establishes the rules of the game, creates institutions and defines the boundaries of freedom and self-expression. It can also influence access to education, employment opportunities, economic resources and other factors that are important for self-actualization. State institutions can either encourage or limit personal development. Depending on the political conditions, people may have different incentives for self-improvement, participation in public life and so on. For example, in a democratic regime where rights and freedoms are guaranteed, there is greater potential for realizing potential, expressing personal views and participating in the political process. A totalitarian regime suppresses freedom of will, intrudes into people's private lives and may subjugate their self-actualization to the ideology of service [18]. This is a reason why the political regime significantly influences self-actualization by shaping the laws and rules within the society in which an individual life and develops.

The seventh factor is cultural stereotypes, which describe widely accepted generalizations about typical characteristics, behavior and traits of a particular group of people. They are formed based on shared beliefs, passed down from generation to generation, and can have a significant influence on people's perceptions and behavior. Cultural stereotypes can include notions about the roles of women and men in society, behavior of certain ethnic or national groups, stereotypes about professions, age-related stereotypes and so forth [2]. Cultural stereotypes can impact self-actualization as they shape expectations regarding the role and behavior of individuals according to accepted cultural norms and values. This can affect career choices, personal goals, attitudes towards oneself and others. Negative cultural stereotypes can lead to discrimination, marginalization and limitations on personal development opportunities [8]. They can create barriers to achieving personal goals and self-realization, especially for those who do not conform to expectations or fit within established frameworks. Awareness of cultural stereotypes and critical perception of them can contribute to self-actualization by enabling individuals to distinguish between widely accepted notions and individual possibilities and needs.

The eighth factor is social mobility. It reflects an individual's ability to change their social status and position in society. It is determined by a person's capacity to climb the social ladder, attain higher status, gain more opportunities and resources and change their social environment [27]. Social mobility plays an important role in
self-actualization as it can stimulate individuals to seek new achievements, growth and development. When individuals have the opportunity to improve their economic status, education, professional skills or engage in social activities, they discover new horizons and possibilities for realizing their potential.

The ninth factor is **ethnic identity**, which also influences self-actualization to some extent as it reflects a sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group. This can include shared cultural, historical, linguistic aspects and other characteristics that are formed within the context of the group with which a person identifies [3]. Ethnic identity can influence self-actualization by providing individuals with a sense of belonging and understanding of their place in the world. On the other hand, ethnic identity can hinder self-actualization through stereotypes, discrimination, conflicts and tension between different ethnic groups, as well as lead to closed-mindedness and isolation from other people and cultures, for example, it can be seen in North Korea. This can limit opportunities for self-realization, impede personal development and restrict the free expression [26].

The tenth factor is **gender roles**. It determines how individuals perceive themselves and the possibilities and limitations they see for themselves during self-actualization [24]. It involves expectations regarding careers, family, participation in community life, politics or other important spheres. In some cultures, men may be assigned the role of providers who are expected to support the family with various resources. Conversely, the role of women may be reduced to domestic chores, child-rearing and supporting their husbands. This can create a false notion that a woman's success lies in creating a nuclear family and meeting the family's needs. Therefore, stereotypes and gender roles can limit self-actualization and perpetuate gender inequality.

In summary, the sociocultural factors, which were described in this article can be categorized as **local** (social environment, economic status, education and upbringing), **global** (cultural values, social institutions and structures), **combined** (ethnic identity, social mobility, gender roles).

**Conclusions.** In this article there was explored the importance of sociocultural factors in the process of self-actualization and discussed ten key factors that influence this process. It has been concluded that self-actualization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be understood without considering the context of sociocultural influences. Abraham Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs has made an important contribution to understanding self-actualization, but it does not account enough for the sociocultural context, which has a significant impact on the process of self-actualization. This article has shown that sociocultural factors such as social environment, cultural values, socioeconomic status, religion, education and upbringing, social structures and institutions, cultural stereotypes, social mobility,
ethnic identity and gender roles may be considered very important for self-actualization. Moreover, it has been revealed that some of these factors interact with each other and influence an individual's self-actualization. For example, socioeconomic status can influence education and upbringing, while ethnic identity can impact religion and culture. Understanding these sociocultural factors and their interactions is important for developing an integrated approach to self-actualization. By considering these factors, scientists can investigate the process of personal growth and the realization of full potential within the context of local, global and combined sociocultural factors, as well as evaluate their impact on self-actualization.

References:


Література:


