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## COMPATIBILITY OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND ANXIETY<sup>1</sup>

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Dabrowski's (1972) theory of positive disintegration argues that anxiety appears to be the dynamic of self-actualization. A study to assess this hypothesis (Wilkins, Hjelle, & Thompson, 1977) reported that self-actualization was incompatible with chronic, debilitating or neurotic anxiety. The current study further examined the empirical and conceptual relation between anxiety and self-actualization. A measure of self-actualization (the POI) and two measures of anxiety were taken from Ss ( $N = 126$ ). Thirty-three items from the POI were found to be measures of anxiety and were scored negatively for self-actualization. Removal of anxiety items and rescoring of the POI yielded self-actualization measures that were related positively to anxiety test scores. The results indicate that the POI theoretically is biased against anxiety, the conclusion of Wilkins et al. is not necessary, and Dabrowski's theory remains viable.

Dabrowski's (1972) theory of personality development holds that anxiety is a necessary dynamic for a person's development and movement toward self-actualization. Two recent studies that investigated Dabrowski's premise that anxiety and self-actualization are compatible have reached divergent conclusions.

deGrace (1974) concluded that no significant difference occurred in anxiety levels between actualized and non-actualized Ss. He concluded that his evidence was "rather weak, it nevertheless points to the possible validity of those relatively new theories that stress the compatibility of anxiety and actualization, and anxiety as a source of actualization [p. 568]."

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Wilkins et al. (1977), however, raised concerns about deGrace's experimental and data-analytic procedures. The Wilkins et al. (1977) study attempted to clarify the theoretical relation between anxiety and self-actualization and "to present data on the relationship between anxiety and actualization that are consistent with theoretical viewpoints [p. 1002]."

Conclusions in the Wilkins et al. (1977) study were: (1) that a significant and negative correlation existed between all 12 subscales of a test purported to assess self-actualization (Personal Orientation Inventory) (Shostrom, 1974) and two measures of anxiety, i.e., the Taylor (1953) Manifest Anxiety Scale and IPAT, Krug, Scheier, & Cattell (1976) Anxiety Scale; (2) that a significant and negative correlation existed between two global POI (I plus Tc scales) measures and both measures of anxiety; and (3) that an identified high self-actualized group has lower mean anxiety scores than a low self-actualized group. Wilkins et al. (1977) conclude "while it is conceivable that certain forms of anxiety may foster the individual's progress toward higher levels of self-actualization, it is nonetheless evident that manifest anxiety . . . is incompatible with optimal mental health [p. 1004]."

If the foregoing results are confirmable, then it appears that self-actualization and anxiety are incompatible and Dabrowski's theory is no longer completely viable. However, a serious deficiency arises with the Wilkins study because the POI may not reflect adequately the concept of positive mental health contained in Dabrowski's theory. The POI's test construction and construct validity must be examined critically and empirically if it is to assess properly Dabrowski's theory. The POI's philosophical foundation was formulated from the ideas and writings of Perls, Maslow, May-Angel-Ellenberger, Fromm, Horney, Rodgers, Riesman, Watts, and Ellis (Shostrom, 1964). A self-actualized person has been described as "free of the inhibitions and emotional turmoil of those less self-actualized [Shostrom, 1964, p. 4]." The POI attempts to assess many of the concepts encompassed in Maslow's theory of self-actualization (Knapp, 1976). Maslow argued that growth has both anxieties and delights. "We grow forward when the delights of growth and anxieties of safety are greater than anxieties of growth and delights of safety [Maslow, 1968, p. 47]." Thus, high anxiety appears not to enhance but to hinder progression to a higher level of actualization.

In contrast, Dabrowski's (1972) theory of positive disintegration postulates that anxiety is the dynamism of disequilibrium. Although he began formulating the theory in the middle 1930s, it has only been since the middle 1960s that the theory has received much attention. Piechowski (1975) described the theory of positive disintegration as "different from other developmental theories in an important way: Besides general descriptive principles, it defines measurable developmental parameters, separate from the process of development [p. 241]." Piechowski further speculates that as the evolutionary theory "reoriented biologists from describing isolated phenomena as finished unchangeable forms to viewing them as a progression of evolving patterns, so a general theory of human development may reorient psychologists toward viewing human behavior as a progression of evolving behavioral patterns [p. 242]."

With regard to the central role of anxiety in development, Dabrowski (1972) wrote that "without nervousness and neuroses, there is no positive disintegration and without positive disintegration, there seems to be no positive development [p. 159]."

Both the theory of positive disintegration and self-actualization as measured by the POI utilize anxiety as one of several constructs to account for the variance of self-actualization attainment. However, the contribution and function of anxiety in each of these constructions is divergent. A perusal of the POI suggests that many questions may have anxiety-related components. Apparently, many keyed response items are not anxiety-related while many of the non-keyed responses are anxiety-related, which is consistent with Maslow's assumption that anxiety does not enhance self-actualization. Therefore, an individual who chose an anxiety-

related alternative would be penalized because of the test's theoretical leanings. Thus it appears that the POI is biased and, by its theoretical foundation, would correlate negatively with any anxiety test.

The present research examines the hypothesis that the construct validities of both the POI and theory of positive disintegration are not congruent nor compatible because each defines the contribution of anxiety differently, i.e., positively in Dabrowski's theory and negatively in the POI. Because the constructs relate anxiety and self-actualization as opposites, a negative correlation between the POI and tests of anxiety would result because the conclusions would have been established a priori. The results of Wilkins et al. follow from the design and assumptions of the measures, but fail as a test of the theoretical relationship in question.

The present study attempts to disentangle the anxiety construct from the POI and then assess the relation between manifest anxiety and positive mental health.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Ss were 126 undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology classes. Students received extra credit points towards their final grade if they completed all portions of the study. Complete data were obtained from 112 (69 males, 43 females). Only complete sets of data were utilized in subsequent analyses. Students were administered the POI, IPAT and TMAS sequentially in regularly scheduled class periods during the final two weeks of the 1979 Spring semester.

### *Instruments*

The POI was used to assess self-actualization by summing the test's I and Tc scales (Damm, 1969). The I (inner support) scale contains 127 items to evaluate the ability of an individual to act upon his or her motives and principles, and not external forces. The Tc (time competence) scale contains 23 items and assesses the ability to live primarily in the present and not in the past or future. Reliability and validity information from Knapp (1976) and a review of Bloxom (1972) indicates that the POI measures values and attitudes attributed to self-actualized individuals. Analysis of the POI's concept of self-actualization and Dabrowski's (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1972) characteristics of Level IV (Organized Multi-level Disintegration) indicated that both involve processes that best can be described as self-actualization (Dodez, 1980).

Both the TMAS (Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale) and the IPAT Anxiety Scale were used to assess anxiety. The TMAS is a 50-question, true-false assessment measure used to ascertain overt or manifest symptoms of anxiety and is used widely for research purposes (cf. Wilkins et al., 1977).

## RESULTS

Preliminary analyses attempted to replicate the results of the Wilkins et al. (1977) study. Mean differences and the pattern of correlations obtained here were congruent with Wilkins et al. (1977). This indicates similar populations, consistency of experimental procedures and reliability of results.

No significant sex differences were found on the POI ( $t = 1.68, p = .096$ ), TMAS ( $t = 1.41, p = .162$ ) nor IPAT ( $t = .78, p = .439$ ). Mixed-sex groups were used in subsequent statistical analyses. The anxiety measures, IPAT and TMAS, had a significant positive ( $r = .83, p < .001$ ) correlation. The POI correlated significantly and negatively with both the TMAS ( $r = -.44, p < .001$ ) and IPAT ( $r = -.35, p < .001$ ). These results are similar to those obtained by Wilkins et al., which reported correlations between the POI and both anxiety measures as identical and significant ( $r = -.41, p < .001$ ). Analyses of responses to each of the 150 POI items then were carried out.

Ss were divided into two groups on the basis of their choice of stem *a* or stem *b* for a POI item. *F*-tests were used to determine whether the resulting groups differed in mean anxiety level. Responses to 33 POI items were found to be ( $p < .05$ ) related significantly to both the TMAS and IPAT anxiety measures. Twenty-three additional items related to one of the anxiety measures, but not the other. There were 94 POI items for which the choice of response (stem *a* or stem *b*) could not be predicted on the basis of anxiety score. Therefore, over one-third of the POI questions (37.33%) were judged significantly anxiety-laden by either one or both of the anxiety tests. A listing of anxiety item numbers is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
POI ITEMS THAT APPEAR TO RELATE TO ANXIETY AS ASSESSED BY  
BOTH THE TMAS AND THE IPAT

Question	Anxiety stem	POI keyed stem	Subscale keying and membership											
			TC	SAV	EX	FR	S	SR	SA	NC	SY	A	C	
4	a	A				A								
26	a	B								B				
27	b	A		A			A							
29	a	B								B				
36	a	B		B	B						B	B		B
42	a	B								B				
48	a	B	B						B	B				
50	a	B								B			B	
55	a	B				B								B
58	a	B				B								
64	a	B			B									
68	b	A		A				A	A					
70	a	B								B			B	B
73	b	A											B	
82	a	B	B											
88	a	B												
94	a	B				B								
97	b	B												
98	a	B		B	B						B	B		
105	a	B	B											
107	a	B								B				B
118	b	A		A					A				A	
121	b	A		A					A					
125	a	B	B											
126	b	A									A			
131	a	A											A	
132	b	A							A					
135	a	A		A									A	
136	a	B	B											
137	b	A						A					A	
142	b	A	A											
147	b	A		A							A			
149	b	A			A				A					

These 33 questions, identified and scored as an ANX subscale, yield an anxiety score that also correlated significantly with the TMAS ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ) and IPAT ( $r = .73, p < .001$ ) and was related negatively to the original POI score. This indicates that these 33 questions are tapping anxiety constructs similar to those measured by the IPAT and TMAS.

These anxiety questions identified in Table 1 were analyzed further to determine whether the anxiety stem contributed positively or negatively to the final POI self-actualization score. The anxiety stem identified in 29 of the 33 anxiety questions (87.88%) disagreed with the POI keyed response, i.e., the stem identified as significantly more anxiety loaded was opposite of the POI keyed response. Thus, if a person chose an anxiety loaded stem, that individual's self-actualization score would be reduced.

The next procedure was to construct another scale from the existing POI that would eliminate the effects of anxiety. A Non-anxious POI (NAPOI) was made up from the remaining 94 POI questions. Deleted were the 33 questions comprising the ANX scale and the 23 questions identified as anxiety loaded by either the TMAS or IPAT. These latter 23 questions were not inserted back into the POI because their results were inconclusive and their effect upon scoring could not be properly controlled or evaluated. See Table 2 for a listing of item numbers for the NAPOI POI.

TABLE 2  
SYNOPSIS OF MODIFIED POI SUBSCALE QUESTIONS

Non-anxiety POI Questions (NAPOI)									
1	13	30	46	62	78	91	108	122	143
2	14	31	47	63	79	92	109	123	145
3	15	33	49	65	80	93	110	124	148
5	16	34	51	66	81	95	111	128	150
6	17	37	52	69	83	96	112	129	
8	19	38	53	71	85	99	113	130	
9	20	39	54	72	86	100	114	133	
10	22	41	57	74	87	102	115	138	
11	23	44	60	76	89	104	116	139	
12	24	45	61	77	90	106	119	141	

Scores from the 94 question NAPOI correlated significantly with the original 150 item POI scoring ( $r = .8229, p < .001$ ), which indicates that the part correlates with the whole and that both could be tapping similar self-actualization constructs. Further analyses indicated that the NAPOI did not correlate significantly with either the TMAS ( $r = -.0460, p < .315$ ), IPAT ( $r = .0527, p = .290$ ) or the 33 item ANX scale ( $r = .1486, p = .059$ ). However, the intact POI did have a significant negative relation with the same three anxiety measures. This means that when the anxiety questions were deleted, the self-actualization measure does not correlate with anxiety. Where the ANX items appeared in the various POI subscales (Silverstein & Fisher, 1972) the scoring again was biased against anxiety in all but three instances. The total ANX score had significant negative correlations with subscales FR, S, SR, SA, NC, SY, A, and C. The correlations between ANX and SAV and between ANX and EX were negative but nonsignificant. The raw Time Incompetance score and the Other raw score had significant ( $r = +.547$  and  $r = +.563$ ) positive correlations with anxiety.

Two subgroups of Ss were selected on the basis of their original POI scores: A high-scoring group (HS) that consisted of the top 15% of the distribution ( $N =$

18, POI >107) and a low-scoring group (LS) that consisted of the bottom 15% of the distribution ( $N = 17$ , POI <84).

Correlations were computed between the anxiety measures and the self-actualization measures within each subgroup. These results are summarized in Table 3. In both groups the two anxiety measures were correlated. The original POI score did not correlate with anxiety. In the LS group the NAPOI scores also did not correlate with the anxiety measures. However, in the HS group the NAPOI scores had significantly positive correlations with the anxiety measures.

TABLE 3  
CORRELATION BETWEEN ANXIETY AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION  
MEASURES FOR HIGH AND LOW SCORING POI GROUPS

Variables	HS group ( $N = 18$ )		
	IPAT	NAPOI	POI
TMAS	.6582*	.6098*	.3348
IPAT		.6262*	.0891
NAPOI			.6530*

  

Variables	LS group ( $N = 17$ )		
	IPAT	NAPOI	POI
TMAS	.8333*	.1279	-.3778
IPAT		.1399	-.0887
NAPOI			.5570*

\* $p = .005$ .

## DISCUSSION

The difficulty with the Wilkins et al. (1977) study is that the theoretical aspects of the POI were not appropriately assessed and integrated with Dabrowski's theory. The POI's theoretical constructs and test construction were found to be biased against anxiety. The POI was not only biased against anxiety, but anxiety was penalized in the final POI scoring. The failure of the newly constructed Non-anxious POI to correlate significantly with the IPAT and TMAS/demonstrates that significant negative correlations found in the Wilkins study were artifacts of the biased POI scoring.

Anxiety was involved in 56 of the POI test questions, a heavy emphasis upon anxiety in self-actualization determination. Thus, anxiety appears to permeate the POI. It is difficult to assess what influence the deleted anxiety questions had upon the assessment of self-actualization because other self-actualization constructs may have been contained in the questions. However, the NAPOI did correlate significantly with the intact POI to indicate that the global concept of self-actualization probably remained viable. We concluded that the NAPOI can be used appropriately as an anxiety free test instrument for this college population. When scores are obtained from this anxiety-reduced form, anxiety did *not* inhibit self-actualization, as previously concluded in the Wilkins et al. (1977) study.

Further analyses indicated that for HS individuals, as defined by the original POI, the anxiety measures were related positively to the NAPOI. This means that if HS individuals were to be assessed with the modified NAPOI, their self-actualization scores would correlate positively with anxiety. This provides a basis not only for the compatibility but positive relationship of self-actualization and anxiety as suggested by Dabrowski (1972).

In comparing the HS and LS groups, it appears that anxiety becomes more prominent and significant as self-actualization increases, i.e., significant NAPOI correlations with anxiety measures at high but not low self-actualization levels.

This study supports the notion that anxiety is a function or dynamic of self-actualization and not vice-versa. It is hypothesized that self-actualization precipitates facilitating anxiety. However, if anxiety occurs out of the context of the proper level of self-actualization (as yet undefined), then debilitating anxiety may occur.

Anxiety (overexcitability) as described by Dabrowski is a complex concept. This study measured only what Dabrowski calls psychomotor indices. Other forms of overexcitability (sensual, affective, imaginal, intellectual) could not be assessed properly and were not identified. Failure of the two anxiety measures to differentiate significantly POI stems on 23 questions may have been the result of overt and covert indices being mixed or, perhaps, to other forms of overexcitability as suggested by Dabrowski. Further research that employs conceptually valid measures of Dabrowski's theory is needed. Until such research is carried out, Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration remains viable.

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