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Hierarchy of Needs

The Five Levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

By Kendra Cherry, About.com Guide

Psychologist Abraham Maslow[1] first introduced his concept of a hierarchy of needs in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" and his subsequent book *Motivation and Personality*. This hierarchy suggests that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to other, more advanced needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
J. Finkelstein

This hierarcy is most often displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of the pyramid are made up of the most basic needs, while the more complex needs are located at the top of the pyramid. Needs at the bottom of the pyramid are basic physical requirements including the need for food, water, sleep, and warmth. Once these lower-level needs have been met, people can move on to the next level of needs, which are for safety and security.

As people progress up the pyramid, needs become increasingly psychological and social. Soon, the need for love[2], friendship, and intimacy become important. Further up the pyramid, the need for personal esteem and feelings of accomplishment take priority. Like Carl Rogers[3], Maslow emphasized the importance of self-actualization, which is a process of growing and developing as a person in order to achieve individual potential.

Types of Needs

Maslow believed that these needs are similar to instincts and play a major role in motivating behavior. Physiological, security, social, and esteem needs are **deficiency needs** (also known as *D-needs*), meaning that these needs arise due to deprivation. Satisfying these lower-level needs is important in order to avoid unpleasant feelings or consequences.

Maslow termed the highest-level of the pyramid as **growth needs** (also known as *being needs* or *B-needs*). Growth needs do not stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person.

Five Levels of the Hierarchy of Needs

There are five different levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

1. **Physiological Needs**[4]
   These include the most basic needs that are vital to survival, such as the need for water, air, food, and sleep. Maslow believed that these needs are the most basic and instinctive needs in the hierarchy because all needs become secondary until these physiological needs are met.

2. **Security Needs**[5]
   These include needs for safety and security. Security needs are important for survival, but they are not as demanding as the physiological needs. Examples of security needs include a desire for steady employment, health insurance, safe neighborhoods, and shelter from the environment.

3. **Social Needs**[6]
   These include needs for belonging, love, and affection. Maslow considered these needs to be less basic than physiological and security needs. Relationships such as friendships, romantic attachments, and families help fulfill this need for companionship and acceptance, as does involvement in social, community, or religious groups.

4. **Esteem Needs**[7]
   After the first three needs have been satisfied, esteem needs becomes increasingly important. These include the need for things that reflect on self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment.

5. **Self-actualizing Needs**[8]
   This is the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Self-actualizing[9] people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinions of others, and interested fulfilling their potential.

Criticisms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

While some research showed some support for Maslow's theories, most research has not been able to substantiate the idea of a needs hierarchy. Wahba and Bridwell reported that there was little evidence for Maslow's ranking of these needs and even less evidence that these needs are in a hierarchical order.

Other criticisms of Maslow's theory note that his definition of self-actualization is difficult to test scientifically. His research on self-actualization was also based on a very limited sample of individuals, including people he knew as well as biographies of famous individuals that Maslow believed to be self-actualized, such as Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt. Regardless of these criticisms, Maslow's hierarchy of needs represents part of an important shift in psychology. Rather than focusing on abnormal behavior and development, Maslow's humanistic psychology was focused on the development of healthy individuals.

While there was relatively little research supporting the theory, hierarchy of needs is well-known and popular both in and out of psychology. In a study[10] published in 2011, researchers from the University of Illinois set out to put the hierarchy to the test. What they discovered is that while fulfillment of the

needs was strongly correlated with happiness, people from cultures all over the reported that self-actualization and social needs were important even when many of the most basic needs were unfulfilled.

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