
MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF BASIC NEEDS

Abraham Harold Maslow's theory of human motivation postulates that all human beings, regardless of culture, have basic needs that can be arranged on a hierarchy according to prepotency or pressing drive for gratification. His earlier writings presented five basic sets of needs (or need groups), and he later added two additional need groups. From the lowest level of needs (the most prepotent needs) to the highest level, these include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, and need for self-actualization (see Figure 1). Maslow classified the four lowest need groups on his hierarchy as *deficiency needs* (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem) and the three highest need groups as *growth needs* (cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization). Table 1 presents a summary of the hierarchy of needs by name and description of need group, ordinal level on the hierarchy, and category (deficiency needs vs. growth needs).

Deficiency Needs

The most prepotent need group, physiological needs, relates to the body's need for food (hunger), water (thirst), air (oxygen), sleep (rest), and optimal temperature (comfort) in order to survive and maintain a state of physiological homeostasis or equilibrium. Safety needs, the second most prepotent need group, include needs for security; protection; stability; and freedom from harm, fear, or constant anxiety. Belongingness and love needs, the next level, are described as the need to belong to and feel loved by significant others and one's affiliated groups, such as family, neighbors, friends, fellow job employees, social club or fraternity members, gang members, or, in general, one's own primary group. The esteem needs, the next hierarchical

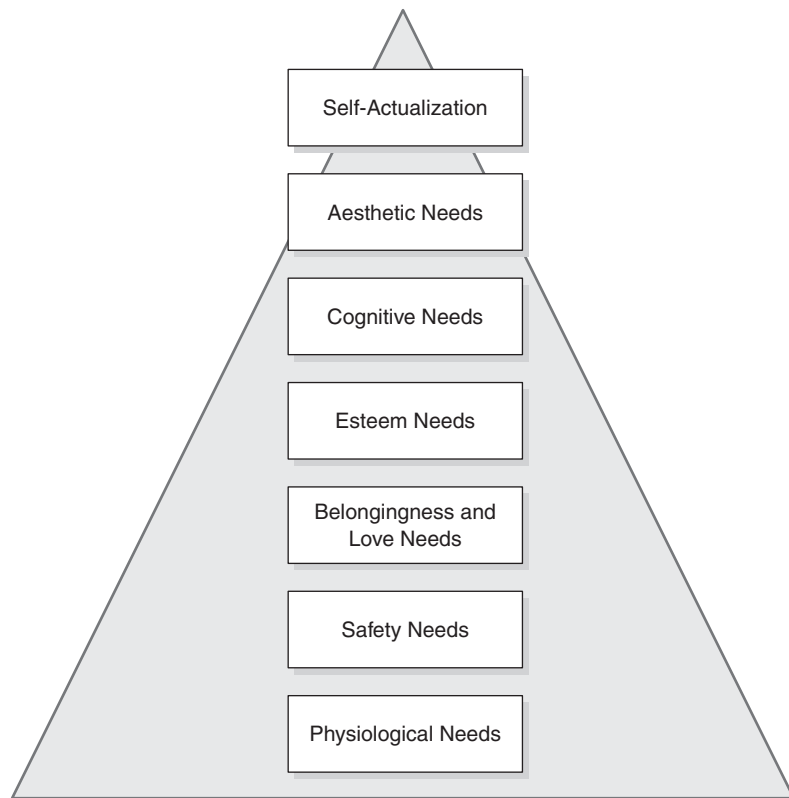


Figure 1 Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs

level, have to do with self-esteem and deserved esteem from others, that is, based on one's accomplishments, status, or appearance. Moreover, the esteem needs encompass the need for approval, self-respect, and respect from others.

Growth Needs

Cognitive needs, the first growth need group on Maslow's hierarchy, are described as needs to know, understand, and explore one's environment and world. Aesthetic needs, the second growth need group on the hierarchy, are defined as needs to appreciate, seek, and strive for beauty, symmetry, and order in the world and in one's environment. The highest Maslowian need is self-actualization, which is the need to develop one's common potential and unique talent at the highest possible level of growth and achievement. It is a personal need for growth and fulfillment toward becoming all that one can become—toward becoming a healthy person.

The Nature and Dynamics of Maslow's Basic Needs

Maslow theorized that needs explain much (but not all) of human motivation and striving, and that the gratification of basic needs leads to a holistically healthy or self-actualizing personality, whereas a lack of gratification of the basic needs results in psychopathology or sickness. Maslow used the term *sick* to include biological, psychological, and spiritual illness, or holistic illness vis-à-vis holistic health.

The most prepotent needs of the person occupy a conscious effort and striving for gratification or satisfaction, whereas the less prepotent needs are unconscious, minimized, denied, or suppressed. Therefore, when one need group is satisfied, the next prepotent need group emerges to dominate the drive or conscious motivational efforts of the person. Moreover, the gratification of the four deficiency needs (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem) are necessary before the human organism can sufficiently focus on self-actualization and other growth needs as a means toward a healthy or superior personality. Gratification of a need does not

imply total gratification or 100% satisfaction, but it suggests the sufficient gratification of one need group before the person focuses on the next need level.

Maslow believed that the basic needs are "instinctoid," that human beings have a natural, innate tendency toward gratifying basic human needs, growing, and expressing goodness versus evil. Just as positive societal conditions can facilitate need gratification, negative societal conditions and circumstances can thwart the healthy gratification of needs and create a repressive, fearful, and self-diminishing tendency for some human beings. In addition, very few human beings become self-actualizers, and this level is most likely to occur for adults and older persons and least likely or unlikely to occur among children.

Metaneeds

Maslow states that metaneeds are synonymous with metavalues or B-values (being values). The B-values behave like needs; therefore, Maslow also referred to

Table 1 Basic Needs by Category, Level, and Description

<i>Category of Needs</i>	<i>Basic Needs (Lowest to Highest)</i>	<i>Description of Need Group</i>
Growth Needs (Being Needs or B-Needs)	Self-Actualization	Need for growth to develop one's common and unique potential or talent; to find one's mission, purpose, or vocation in life; need for fulfillment
	Aesthetic Needs	Need for beauty, order, and symmetry
	Cognitive Needs	Need to know, understand, and explore one's world
Deficiency Needs (D-Needs)	Esteem Needs	Need to gain respect and recognition from others; need for self-esteem and prestige for one's accomplishments and appearance; need to feel a sense of adequacy and self-enhancement
	Belongingness and Love Needs	Need for acceptance and approval of others; need to belong to a group and acquire warmth from another or others; need to love and be loved
	Safety Needs	Need for a sense of security and freedom from threat or danger; need for protection from harm (both physical and emotional), need for adequate shelter for protection against the atmospheric elements
	Need for Physiological Maintenance	Physiological needs for survival and bodily maintenance (e.g., food, water, air, sleep, and optimal environmental temperature)

Note: Maslow referred to the basic needs or need groups as *sets of needs*, suggesting that a need group often contained subneeds or multiple needs.

them as metaneeds. Metaneeds or B-values are prevalent among self-actualizing people and those who choose a path of growth. They include the need or value for

- *truth* (honesty, reality, purity, completeness);
- *goodness* (rightness, justice, benevolence);
- *beauty* (form, perfection, uniqueness, honesty);
- *wholeness* (unity, integration, oneness);
- *dichotomy-transcendence* (acceptance, resolution, transcendence of opposites);
- *aliveness* (spontaneity, full-functioning, opposite of deadness);
- *uniqueness* (individuality, noncomparability, novelty);
- *perfection* (nothing lacking, everything in the right place, completeness);
- *necessity* (inevitability, it must be that way, it is good that it is that way);
- *completion* (finality, closure, fulfillment of destiny);
- *justice* (fairness, oughtness, nonpartiality);
- *simplicity* (honesty, unmistakability, nothing extra or superfluous);
- *richness* (totality, nothing missing or hidden);

- *effortlessness* (lack of strain, grace, perfect and beautiful functioning);
- *playfulness* (fun, joy, humor); and
- *self-sufficiency* (autonomy, independence, self-determination).

Implicit in the metaneeds or B-values, as well as the basic human needs, is Maslow's presupposition that the core of human nature is good rather than evil and growth-oriented rather than deficiency-oriented. Moreover, a lack of ability to fulfill metaneeds can result in *metapathologies* or minor psychological disorders.

Society, Culture, and the Dynamics of Basic Needs

During early publications of Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs, there was subsequent criticism regarding the rigidity of the fixed hierarchical levels and the theoretical prerequisite to fulfill needs in a fixed order, that is, one need group after another. Many of the questions were based on the fact that although the

basic needs were seemingly for all human beings, people differed in how they fulfilled such needs due to individual differences and cultural differences or cultural worldview. Therefore, in his later writings, Maslow revised the theory of basic needs and acknowledged the need for cross-cultural research in his theory of motivation. He addressed instances in which some persons, because of individual differences, may not follow the theoretical order of gratification of the basic needs; for example, such persons may give preferential attention to a higher need before attention to or sufficient gratification of the preceding, lower need on the hierarchy. For example, self-actualizers may almost totally ignore lower needs in order to practice and achieve perfection in performance or to create a scientific discovery or new product. As an example, famous musical composer George F. Handel refused food from his servants and had little to no human contact while locking himself in his room to write *The Messiah* (a massive 252-page book of music) in only 24 days. Along the same line of deferring lower needs, Maslow explains that some persons ignore love for the fulfillment of the higher need of esteem; therefore, greater potency emerges for esteem before adequate attention is given to the gratification of the lower need for love and belongingness.

Recognizing societal variations across cultures and countries, Maslow discussed preconditions of society that could either facilitate or limit an individual's ability to satisfy the basic needs. Some of the preconditions that can facilitate need gratification include (a) freedom of speech, (b) freedom of choice, and (c) freedom from injustice. As can be expected, need gratification and self-actualizing possibility are limited in countries or cultures that oppress or violate the human rights of various groups or individuals. Throughout the world and across historical eras, there have been particular groups and individuals whose need satisfaction and growth toward self-actualization have been blocked or stifled due to injustice, oppression, and exclusion from opportunity and resources.

Raised and educated in U.S. culture, Maslow was a product of Western psychological training; therefore, his theory represents an emphasis on individual needs and motivation (a focus of Western cultures) versus group needs or group-related motivation (e.g., a value of Eastern or Asian cultures). Although Maslow's basic needs seem to be universal to all human beings, the question is whether there are differences in the hierarchical order of need emergence,

manner and level of gratification, and the importance of values attached to particular needs as related to the person's cultural worldview and context.

Self-Actualization

Maslow acknowledged and credited Kurt Goldstein for coining the term *self-actualization*; nonetheless, it was Maslow who popularized and gave broader meaning to the concept. He viewed self-actualization as a growth need and a process toward becoming a psychologically healthy personality or superior human being in terms of organismic functioning at the highest level of personal fulfillment, human functioning, and enhancement of the self. In other words, Maslow believed that an artist must paint, a gifted musician must create and play music, and a poet must write; in other words, what a person is gifted to do, that person must do in order to be happy, fulfilled, and actualized.

Although Maslow viewed self-actualizing people as being creative in thought and productivity, he eventually concluded that highly creative persons and self-actualizing or healthy persons were not necessarily the same; rather, some persons who performed at a high level of creativity were not necessarily mentally healthy or healthy personalities, whereas others were mentally healthy or self-actualizing people. Nevertheless, the gratification of higher human needs or growth needs was theorized by Maslow as the natural passage to a healthy personality or to positive mental health, and failure to gratify basic needs in a sufficient manner could result in pathology or mental illness.

Characteristics of the Self-Actualizing Person

Self-actualization is an ongoing process and not an end within itself. Although no one is expected to achieve the perfect state of self-actualization or gratify this need 100%, there are a few human beings who rise to the hierarchical need level of self-actualizers or self-actualizing people, that is, by developing their potential at a high level and exhibiting most of the self-actualizing characteristics that Maslow identified. These characteristics of self-actualizing people are based on Maslow's study of historical figures and personal acquaintances. A summary of the 15 characteristics of self-actualization follows:

1. *Superior Perception of Reality.* Perceives and judges situations and people efficiently and accurately; sees the world as real and from a logical perspective; is unthreatened by difference or by the unknown.
2. *Acceptance of Self, Others, and Nature.* Accepts oneself without unrealistic shame, guilt, complaint, or anger; accepts others and people as they really are; accepts self as a healthy individual (e.g., accepts one's sexuality and shortcomings).
3. *Spontaneity.* Is spontaneous and unconventional in behavior as influenced by inner thoughts and personal ethics.
4. *Problem Centeredness.* Focuses on problems outside of oneself instead of oneself as a problem; is occupied with purpose, mission, and a problem to be resolved.
5. *Detachment.* Can be solitary and, at times, prefers solitude and privacy more than the average person; is not dependent on others but rather depends on self; is not exceptionally disturbed by misfortune or setbacks.
6. *Consistent Appreciation.* Can appreciate the same experiences and encounters with equal or greater enjoyment and intensity.
7. *Mystic Experiences/Oceanic Feeling.* Is capable of reaching frequent peak experiences or ecstatic, spiritual experiences of unlimited heights—peak experiences that are characterized by a feeling of transforming strength and a precious sense of well being and purpose in life.
8. *Identification With Mankind.* Identifies with humankind and tends to feel deep compassion for the suffering of human beings; is interested in improving the human condition.
9. *Interpersonal Relations.* Shares few close or intimate relationships; however, handles many superficial relationships effectively.
10. *Democratic Character.* Establishes a natural relatedness to various ethnic, cultural, religious, and educational groups; is tolerant of group and individual differences; and is open to learning from anyone, but is selective in choosing relationships with others.
11. *Discrimination Between Means and Ends.* Focuses on ends to the subordination of means, especially ethical ends as well as ends or goals related to personal growth and mission.
12. *Independence of Environment.* Is less dependent on other people or culture, or extrinsic satisfaction and more dependent on continued growth and development of inner potential.
13. *Philosophical Sense of Humor.* Possesses a philosophical and spontaneous sense of humor that is not degrading of or hostile to others; does not laugh at the miseries or weaknesses of others.
14. *Creativeness.* Is creative, original, and divergent in thoughts and actions.
15. *Resistance to Cultural Conformity.* Resists blind conformity to culture, especially conformity that interferes with inner ethical principles or personal growth and fulfillment.

Studies of Self-Actualizing People

Maslow studied a small sample of personal acquaintances and friends as well as historical figures. Among the historical figures whom he found to exhibit characteristics of self-actualizers were Ludwig von Beethoven, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Sigmund Freud, Mahatma Gandhi, William James, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Henry David Thoreau. Also, Frederick Harper studied three internationally known African American protest leaders and found Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X to exhibit personality traits that were consistent with the 15 characteristics of Maslow's self-actualizing person. This is not unexpected, because Maslow noted that self-actualizing people are likely to be the great reformers of society and the most effective fighters against injustice and inequality, as well as fighters for excellence, effectiveness, and competence.

Evaluative Comments of Maslow's Theory of Needs

Much of Maslow's writing is philosophical or theoretical; he conducted very little research on his need theory or theoretical concepts. Maslow was more of a philosopher of science and a theoretician. Nevertheless, his basic need theory is highly heuristic in terms of generating much scholarly interest and discussion in psychology as well as interest from the general public, primarily because it addresses humanistic concepts that are of great interest to people (e.g., needs in general, physiological survival, safety, love, esteem, and growth).

Regarding research or empirical measurement, Maslow's theory of human motivation influenced the

development of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), a psychometric instrument that was developed by Everett Shostrom to measure self-actualization and other dimensions of personal growth. The POI has been used in a number of studies related to self-actualization. Regarding the use of Maslow's needs theory in cross-cultural research, Michael Hagerty conducted a study on quality of life across time and countries. The study used Maslow's original five needs and data from each country that reflected level of need fulfillment for its citizenry.

It is difficult to assess Maslow's work because he died unexpectedly while in the process of redefining his theory of basic needs and his concept of self-actualization. Moreover, he often wrote on individual concepts in his papers, lectures, chapters, and articles and did not develop a conceptualized theory that clearly demonstrated the interrelationship of these concepts and assumptions as one theoretical framework. Another challenge in reading Maslow's writing is his tendency to use multiple or interchangeable terms to discuss an idea or phenomenon. For example, he used *metaneeds*, *metavalues*, and *B-values* with similar or identical meaning, and he used *satisfaction* and *gratification* (of needs) interchangeably. He also discussed *needs*, *desires*, and *impulses* in the same breath or seemingly with the same meaning. Nonetheless, Maslow's theory of basic needs has created much interest across academic disciplines, cultures, and countries.

About Maslow

Maslow was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 1, 1908, and died from a heart attack in Menlo Park, California, on June 8, 1970. For much of his professional career, he was a faculty member at Brooklyn College and Brandeis University. At Brandeis, he served as chairman of the Department of Psychology; moreover, he was president of the American Psychological Association from 1967 to 1968.

Maslow first published his theory of basic needs in 1943. Other discussions of Maslow's theory or hierarchy of basic needs can be found in his *Motivation and Personality* and his *Toward a Psychology of Being*. The year after Maslow's death, his widow, Bertha G. Maslow, in consultation with some of Maslow's colleagues, published a collection of his articles and papers in the book *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. This book also contains discussion on his hierarchy of basic needs; furthermore, it includes a comprehensive

bibliography of Maslow's publications and important unpublished papers.

As a psychologist, Maslow's most significant contributions were to the fields of humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology, wherein many authorities recognized him as a leading pioneer, if not a founder, of these movements or forces in psychology. In addition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has provided implications and applications for education, business management, and religion. It is a psychological theory with multidisciplinary implications and applications across contexts or settings.

Although Maslow is primarily known for his writings on basic needs and self-actualization, his books, articles, lectures, and papers encompass a number of concepts of humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Most of these concepts are related to his theory of basic needs and self-actualization in some way and include topics such as peak experiences, human aggression and destructiveness, human values, growth, transcendence, humanistic education, creativity, religion, and holistic health. Nevertheless, from the broader perspective, his work's theoretical focus is in the areas of human motivation and healthy personality, and his greatest contribution is probably to the development of positive psychology, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology, or what is generally referred to as the *third force* in psychology.

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See also Emotional Development; Maturation; Social Development

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