Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Authored by

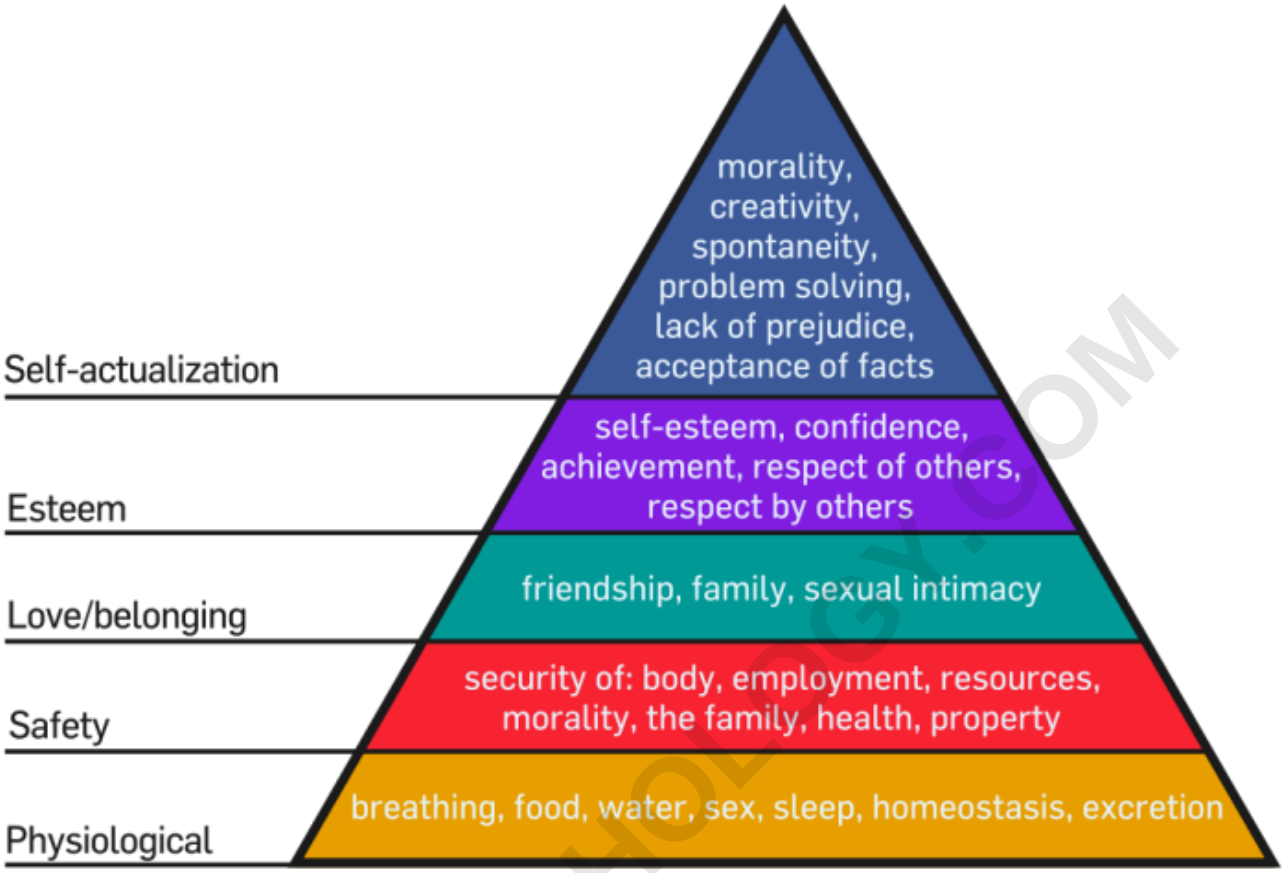
mohammad looti

June 4, 2026

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2026). *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=38454

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM



ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM

An interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, represented as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology, proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper A Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow subsequently extended the idea to include his observations of humans' innate curiosity. His theories parallel many other theories of human developmental psychology, all of which focus on describing the stages of growth in humans.

Maslow studied what he called exemplary people such as Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, writing that "the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy." Maslow studied the healthiest 1% of the college student population. Maslow's theory was fully expressed in his 1954 book Motivation and Personality.

Hierarchy

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, with the largest and most fundamental levels of needs at the bottom, and the need for self-actualization at the top.

The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called "deficiency needs" or "d-needs": esteem , friendship and love, security, and physical needs. With the exception of the most fundamental (physiological) needs, if these "deficiency needs" are not met, the body gives no physical indication but the individual feels anxious and tense. Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary or higher level needs. Maslow also coined the term Metamotivation to describe the motivation of people who go beyond the scope of the basic needs and strive for constant betterment. Metamotivated people are driven by B-needs (Being Needs), instead of deficiency needs (D-Needs).

Physiological needs

For the most part, physiological needs are obvious -- they are the literal requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met, the human body simply cannot continue to function.

Air, water, and food are metabolic requirements for survival in all animals, including humans. Clothing and shelter provide necessary protection from the elements. The intensity of the human sexual instinct is shaped more by sexual competition than maintaining a birth rate adequate to survival of the species.

Safety needs

With their physical needs relatively satisfied, the individual's safety needs take precedence and dominate behavior. In the absence of physical safety -- due to terrorist attack, war, natural disaster, or, in cases of family violence, childhood abuse, etc -- people (re-)experience post-traumatic stress disorder and trans-generational trauma transfer. In the absence of economic safety -- due to economic crisis and lack of work opportunities - these safety needs manifest themselves in such things as a preference for job security, grievance procedures for protecting the individual from unilateral authority, savings accounts, insurance policies, reasonable disability accommodations, and the like.

Safety and Security needs include:

Personal security
Financial security
Health and well-being
Safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM

Love and belonging

After physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third layer of human needs are social and involve feelings of belongingness. The need is especially strong in childhood and can over-ride the need for safety as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents which is sometimes called Stockholm syndrome. The absence of this aspect of Maslow's hierarchy - due to hospitalism, neglect, shunning, ostracism etc - can impact individual's ability to form and maintain emotionally significant relationships in general, such as:

Friendship
Intimacy
Family

Humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a large social group, such as clubs, office culture, religious groups, professional organizations, sports teams, gangs, or small social connections (family members, intimate partners, mentors, close colleagues, confidants). They need to love and be loved (sexually and non-sexually) by others. In the absence of these elements, many people become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, and clinical depression. This need for belonging can often overcome the physiological and security needs, depending on the strength of the peer pressure; an anorexic, for example, may ignore the need to eat and the security of health for a feeling of control and belonging.

Esteem

All humans have a need to be respected and to have self-esteem and self-respect. Esteem presents the normal human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People need to engage themselves to gain recognition and have an activity or activities that give the person a sense of contribution, to feel self-valued, be it in a profession or hobby. Imbalances at this level can result in low self-esteem or an inferiority complex. People with low self-esteem need respect from others. They may seek fame or glory, which again depends on others. Note, however, that many people with low self-esteem will not be able to improve their view of themselves simply by receiving fame, respect, and glory externally, but must first accept themselves internally. Psychological imbalances such as depression can also prevent one from obtaining self-esteem on both levels.

Most people have a need for a stable self-respect and self-esteem. Maslow noted two versions of esteem needs, a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, recognition, fame, prestige, and attention. The higher one is the need for self-respect, the need for strength, competence, mastery, self-confidence, independence and freedom. The latter one ranks higher because it rests more on inner competence won through experience. Deprivation of these needs can lead to an inferiority complex, weakness and helplessness.

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM

Maslow also states that even though these are examples of how the quest for knowledge is separate from basic needs he warns that these "two hierarchies are interrelated rather than sharply separated" (Maslow 97). This means that this level of need, as well as the next and highest level, are not strict, separate levels but closely related to others, and this is possibly the reason that these two levels of need are left out of most textbooks.

Self-actualization

What a man can be, he must be." This forms the basis of the perceived need for self-actualization. This level of need pertains to what a person's full potential is and realizing that potential. Maslow describes this desire as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. This is a broad definition of the need for self-actualization, but when applied to individuals the need is specific. For example one individual may have the strong desire to become an ideal parent, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in another it may be expressed in painting, pictures, or inventions. As mentioned before, in order to reach a clear understanding of this level of need one must first not only achieve the previous needs, physiological, safety, love, and esteem, but master these needs.

Criticisms

In their extensive review of research based on Maslow's theory, Wahba and Bridgewell found little evidence for the ranking of needs Maslow described, or even for the existence of a definite hierarchy at all. Chilean economist and philosopher Manfred Max-Neef has also argued fundamental human needs are non-hierarchical, and are ontologically universal and invariant in nature--part of the condition of being human; poverty, he argues, may result from any one of these needs being frustrated, denied or unfulfilled.

The order in which the hierarchy is arranged (with self-actualization as the highest order need) has been criticised as being ethnocentric by Geert Hofstede. Hofstede's criticism of Maslow's pyramid as ethnocentric may stem from the fact that Maslow's hierarchy of needs neglects to illustrate and expand upon the difference between the social and intellectual needs of those raised in individualistic societies and those raised in collectivist societies. Maslow created his hierarchy of needs from an individualistic perspective, being that he was from the United States, a highly individualistic nation. The needs and drives of those in individualistic societies tend to be more self centered than those in collectivist societies, focusing on improvement of the self, with self actualization being the apex of self improvement. Since the hierarchy was written from the perspective of an individualist, the order of needs in the hierarchy with self actualization at the top is not representative of the needs of those in collectivist cultures. In collectivist societies, the needs of acceptance and community will outweigh the needs for freedom and individuality.

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM

Maslow's hierarchy has also been criticized as being individualistic because of the position and value of sex on the pyramid. Maslow's pyramid puts sex on the bottom rung of physiological needs, along with breathing and food. It views sex from an individualistic and not collectivist perspective: i.e., as an individualistic physiological need that must be satisfied before one moves on to higher pursuits. This view of sex neglects the emotional, familial and evolutionary implications of sex within the community.

Business

Marketing

Courses in marketing teach Maslow's hierarchy as one of the first theories as a basis for understanding consumers' motives for action. Marketers have historically looked towards consumers' needs to define their actions in the market. If producers design products meeting consumer needs, consumers will more often choose those products over those of competitors. Whichever product better fills the void created by the need will be chosen more frequently, thus increasing sales. This makes the model relevant to transpersonal business studies.

International Business

Understanding the strengths and weakness of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is important in the field of international business. Evaluating the different needs, values, drives and priorities of people from different countries - individualistic or collectivist - is incredibly valuable in cross-cultural communications, and especially within the workplace. It also illustrates how differences in values can greatly affect work atmosphere and work ethic between cultures: " For example, societal cultures in many individualistic countries, such as the United States, may lead to an advantage in technological research and development. Many collectivistic societal cultures, such as that in Japan, may result in an advantage in workforce organization, quality control of products and service, and establishment of good relationships among contractees, suppliers and customers".

ARABPSYCHOLOGY.COM