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Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization. Needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up. Needs Hierarchy: The original hierarchy includes physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Later expansions add cognitive, aesthetic, and transcendence needs. Not Strictly Linear: While Maslow initially proposed that lower needs must be relatively satisfied before higher ones, modern research suggests people often pursue multiple needs simultaneously. Cultural Variations: Different societies may prioritize needs differently. Individualistic vs. collectivist cultures, for example, can shape which needs take precedence. Practical Applications: In fields like education, healthcare, and workplace management, Maslow's framework helps identify barriers to motivation and guides strategies to fulfill various needs. Criticisms: Maslow's biographical approach, cultural biases, and the debate over rigid vs. flexible ordering highlight the importance of viewing his theory as a starting point rather than an absolute rule. What is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? According to Maslow, human needs were arranged in a hierarchy, with physiological (survival) needs at the bottom, and the more creative and intellectually oriented 'self-actualization' needs at the top. Maslow argued that survival needs must be satisfied before the individual can satisfy the higher needs. The higher up the hierarchy, the more difficult it is to satisfy the needs associated with that stage. The interpersonal and environmental barriers that inevitably frustrate us, higher needs are more difficult to satisfy than physiological and safety needs, as they are lower survival-related needs. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled, the next level up is what motivates us, and so on. The human body cannot function optimally if physiological needs are not satisfied. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met. Once an individual's physiological needs are satisfied, the need for security and safety becomes salient. Safety needs can be fulfilled by the family and society (e.g., police, schools, business, and medical care). For example, emotional security, financial security (e.g., employment, social welfare), law and order, freedom from fear, social stability, property, health, and well-being (e.g., safety against accidents and injury). After physiological and safety needs have been fulfilled, the third level of human needs is social and involves feelings of belongingness. Examples of belongingness needs include friendship, intimacy, respect, acceptance, receiving and giving affection, and love. This need is especially strong in childhood and can override the need for safety, as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents. Maslow classified esteem needs into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige). Esteem is the typical human desire to be accepted and valued by others. People often engage in a profession or hobby to gain recognition, which gives them a sense of contribution or value. Low self-esteem or an inferiority complex may result from imbalances during this level in the hierarchy. Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity. This level of need refers to what a person's full potential is and the realization of that potential. Maslow (1943, 1987, p. 64) describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, and "to become everything one is capable of becoming". Individuals may perceive or focus on this need very specifically. For example, one individual may have a strong desire to become an ideal parent. In another, the desire may be expressed artistically, for others, it may be expressed in paintings, pictures, or inventions. Although Maslow did not believe that many of us could achieve true self-actualization, he did believe that all of us experience transitory moments (known as "peak experiences") of self-actualization. Such moments, associated with personally significant events such as childbirth, sporting achievement and examination success), are difficult to achieve and maintain consistently. Maslow posited that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy: "It is quite true that man lives by bread alone – when there is no bread. But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? At once other (and "higher") needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still "higher") needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency" (Maslow, 1943, p. 375). Key Point: Keep in mind that Maslow's hierarchy of needs doesn't follow a strict linear progression. Individuals can feel various needs at the same time or shift between levels.Maslow continued to refine his theory based on the concept of a hierarchy of needs over several decades (Maslow, 1943, 1962, 1987).Regarding the structure of his hierarchy, Maslow (1987) proposed that the order in the hierarchy "is not nearly as rigid" (p. 68) as he may have implied in his earlier description.Maslow noted that the order of needs might be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences. For example, he notes that for some individuals, the need for self-esteem is more important than the need for love. For others, the need for creative fulfillment may supersede even the most basic needs.Maslow (1987) also pointed out that most behavior is multi-motivated and noted that "any behavior tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them." (p. 71). Maslow (1954) proposed that human beings possess two sets of needs. This five-stage model can be divided into deficiency needs and growth needs. The first four levels are often referred to as deficiency needs (D-needs), and the top level (known as growth or being needs (B-needs)). Deficiency needs concern basic survival and include physiological needs (such as the need for food, sex, and sleep) and safety needs (such as the need for security and freedom of self-changer). Behaviors associated with these needs are seen as 'deficiency' motivated, as they are a means to an end. Deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and arise to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the motivation to fulfill such needs will become stronger the longer they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food, the more hungry they will become. Maslow (1943) initially stated that individuals must satisfy lower-level deficit needs before progressing to meet higher-level growth needs. However, he later clarified that satisfaction of a need is not an "all-or-none" phenomenon, admitting that his earlier statements may have given "the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges" (1987, p. 69). When a deficit need has been "more or less" satisfied, it will go away, and our activities become habitually directed toward meeting the next set of needs we have yet to satisfy. These then become our salient needs. However, growth needs continue to be felt and may even become stronger once engaged. Growth needs Growth needs are more psychological and are associated with realizing an individual's full potential and needing to 'self-actualize'. These needs are achieved more through intellectual and creative behaviors. Growth needs do not stem from a lack of something but rather from a desire to grow as a person. Once these growth needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level, called self-actualization. Growth needs are achieved more through intellectual and creative behaviors. Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by a failure to meet lower-level needs. Life experiences, including divorce and the loss of a job, may cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy. Therefore, not everyone will move through the hierarchy in a uni-directional manner but may move back and forth between the different types of needs. It is important to note that Maslow's (1943, 1954) five-stage model has been expanded to include cognitive and peak experiences (Maslow, 1970a) and later transcendence (Maslow, 1970b). Changes to the original five-stage model are highlighted and include a revised eight-stage model developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Biological/physiological needs – air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sleep, etc. Safety needs – protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear. Love and belongingness needs – friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work). Esteem needs – which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the need to be accepted and valued by others (e.g., status, prestige). Cognitive needs – knowledge and understanding, curiosity, exploration, need for meaning and predictability. Cognitive needs drive our pursuit of knowledge and understanding. For instance, a student's desire to understand complex mathematical theories, a traveler's curiosity about diverse cultures, or an individual's quest for life's deeper meanings all exemplify these needs. Meeting these needs facilitates personal growth, comprehension, and a deeper understanding of life and its complexities. Aesthetic needs – appreciation and search for beauty, balance, form, etc. Fulfilling these needs leads to a deeper sense of satisfaction and harmony in life, as individuals seek environments and experiences that are pleasing and resonant with their sense of beauty. This involves the appreciation and pursuit of art, music, nature, and other forms of aesthetic expression. Fulfilling these needs isn't just about physical beauty but also the emotional and psychological satisfaction derived from experiencing order and elegance. Self-actualization needs – realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth, and peak experiences. "Transcendence needs" – A person is motivated by values that transcend beyond the personal self. Beyond self-actualization, they represent the human desire to connect with a higher reality, purpose, or the universe. This level emphasizes altruism, spiritual connection, and helping others achieve their potential. Individuals seek experiences that move beyond personal concerns, aiming to achieve a deep sense of unity, understanding, and belonging within the vast expanse of existence. Examples of transcendence needs include mystical experiences and certain experiences with nature, aesthetic experiences, sexual experiences, service to others, the pursuit of science, religious faith, etc.). Self-Actualization Needs Instead of focusing on psychopathology and what goes wrong with people, Maslow (1943) formulated a more positive account of human behavior which focused on what goes right. He was interested in human potential, and how we fulfill that potential. Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954) stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth. Self-actualized people are those who are fulfilled and doing all they are capable of. The growth of self-actualization (Maslow, 1962) refers to the need for personal growth and discovery that is present throughout a person's life. For Maslow, a person is always "becoming" and never remains static in these terms. In self-actualization, a person comes to find a meaning in life that is important to them. As each individual is unique, the motivation for self-actualization leads people in different directions (Kenrick et al., 2010). For some people, self-actualization can be achieved through creating works of art or literature; for others, through sports, in the classroom, or within a corporate setting. Maslow (1962) believed self-actualization could be measured through the concept of peak experiences. This occurs when a person experiences the world totally for what it is, and there are feelings of euphoria, joy, and wonder. It is important to note that self-actualization is a continual process of becoming rather than a perfect state one reaches of a "happy ever after" (Hoffman, 1988). Maslow offers the following description of self-actualization: "It refers to the person's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. The specific form that these needs will take will of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed artistically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventing." (Maslow, 1943, p. 382-383). Characteristics of Self-Actualized People Although we are all, theoretically, capable of self-actualization, most of us will not do so, or only to a limited degree. Maslow (1970) estimated that only two percent of people would reach the state of self-actualization. He was especially interested in the characteristics of people whom he considered to have achieved their potential as individuals. By studying 18 people, he considered to be self-actualized (including Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein), Maslow (1970) identified 15 characteristics of a self-actualized person. They perceive reality efficiently and can tolerate uncertainty; Accept themselves and others for what they are; Spontaneous in thought and action; Problem-centered (not self-centered); Unusual sense of humor; Able to look at life objectively; Highly creative; Resistant to enculturation, but not purposely unconventional; Concerned for the welfare of humanity; Capable of deep appreciation of basic life-experience; Establish deep satisfying interpersonal relationships with a few people; Peak experiences; Need for privacy; Democratic attitudes; Strong moral/ethical standards. Experiencing life like a child, with full absorption and concentration; Trying new things instead of sticking to safe paths; Listening to your own feelings in evaluating experiences instead of the voice of tradition, authority or the majority; Avoiding pretense ("game playing") and being honest; Being prepared to be unpopular if your views do not coincide with those of the majority; Taking responsibility and working hard; Trying to identify your defenses and having the courage to give them up. The characteristics of self-actualizers and the behaviors leading to self-actualization are shown in the list above. Although people achieve self-actualization in their own unique way, they tend to share certain characteristics. However, self-actualization is a matter of degree. 'There are no perfect human beings' (Maslow, 1970a, p. 176). It is not necessary to display all 15 characteristics to become self-actualized, and not only self-actualized people will display them. Maslow did not equate self-actualization with perfection. Self-actualization merely involves achieving one's potential. Thus, someone can be silly, wasteful, vain and impolite, and still self-actualize. Less than two percent of the population achieve self-actualization. Applications: Examples: Workplace: Organizations and employers can use Maslow's theory to improve employee satisfaction and productivity. For example, they can provide a safe and secure work environment, offer competitive salaries and benefits, and create a supportive culture. Education: Schools can use Maslow's theory to understand student motivation and learning. For example, they can provide a safe and secure learning environment, offer challenging coursework, and create a supportive culture. Healthcare: Healthcare providers can use Maslow's theory to understand patient motivation and behavior. For example, they can provide a safe and secure healthcare environment, offer comprehensive healthcare services, and create a supportive culture. Management: Managers can use Maslow's theory to understand employee motivation and behavior. For example, they can provide a safe and secure work environment, offer competitive salaries and benefits, and create a supportive culture. Self-actualization is a process that can be achieved by anyone who is motivated to do so. It is a journey of self-discovery and growth that leads to a deeper understanding of oneself and the world. Maslow's theory of self-actualization is a powerful tool for understanding human motivation and behavior. It provides a framework for understanding the needs that drive us and the ways in which we can achieve fulfillment. By understanding our needs, we can better understand ourselves and the world around us. We can also use Maslow's theory to help others achieve fulfillment and happiness. We can provide them with the support and resources they need to meet their needs and reach their potential. We can help them to understand their own motivation and behavior and to make choices that are in line with their values and aspirations. We can help them to achieve a sense of purpose and meaning in life and to live a life of fulfillment and happiness. Maslow's theory of self-actualization is a powerful tool for understanding human motivation and behavior. It provides a framework for understanding the needs that drive us and the ways in which we can achieve fulfillment. By understanding our needs, we can better understand ourselves and the world around us. We can also use Maslow's theory to help others achieve fulfillment and happiness. We can provide them with the support and resources they need to meet their needs and reach their potential. We can help them to understand their own motivation and behavior and to make choices that are in line with their values and aspirations. 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Blackfoot nation, but neglected to acknowledge this. Maslow's studied the Northern Blackfoot tribe as an anthropologist. However, this foundational basis disappeared over time, causing him to misuse the concepts he was originally there to assess. Regardless of these criticisms, Maslow's hierarchy of needs represented 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. There has been relatively little research supporting Maslow's theory, yet the hierarchy of needs is well-known and popular both in and out of psychology. And in a study published in 2011, researchers from the University of Illinois set out to put this hierarchy to the test. What they discovered is that, while the fulfillment of the needs was strongly correlated with happiness, people from cultures all over the world reported that self-actualization and social needs were important even when many of the most basic needs were unfulfilled. Such results suggest that while these needs can be powerful motivators of human behavior, they do not necessarily take the hierarchical form that Maslow described. In 1970, Maslow built upon his original hierarchy to include three additional needs at the top of his pyramid, for a total of eight: Cognitive needs. This centers on knowledge. People generally want to learn and know things about their world and their places in it.Aesthetic needs. This addresses the appreciation of beauty and form. People might fulfill this need through enjoying or creating music, art, literature, and other creative expressions.Transcendence needs. Maslow believed that humans are driven to look beyond the physical self in search of meaning. Helping others, practicing spirituality, and connecting with nature are a few ways we might meet this need. Whether you accept Maslow's hierarchy of needs or not, his theory shines a light on the many needs we have as human beings. And even if we don't all place these needs in the same order, keeping them in mind when interacting with others can help make our interactions more caring and respectful. Frequently Asked Questions The basis of Maslow's theory is that we are motivated by our needs as human beings. Additionally, if some of our most important needs are unmet, we may be unable to progress and meet our other needs. This can help explain why we might feel "stuck" or unmotivated. It's possible that our most critical needs aren't being met, preventing us from being the best version of ourselves possible. Changing this requires looking at what we need, then finding a way to get it. Self-actualization is at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This need refers to the desire to reach our full potential. According to Maslow, this need can only be met once all of the other needs are satisfied. Thus, it comes after physiological needs, safety needs, the need for love and belonging, and esteem needs. Some criticize Maslow's hierarchy of needs on the basis that our needs don't always exist in a pyramid format, or that one need is more important than another. There's also a concern that his idea of self-actualization cannot be tested. Others suggest that Maslow's theory is weak because it was based on research that was misattributed or lost the original concept being studied. There are five levels in Maslow's pyramid. The bottom two levels are physiological needs and safety needs which, together, make up basic needs. Next are social and esteem needs—also referred to as psychological needs. Self-actualization needs are at the top level of Maslow's pyramid. Someone who is self-actualized is said to be at (or in the pursuit of) their full potential.