

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Motivation and Personality (Second edition, 1970)

By Abraham H. Maslow

Preface

Acknowledgments

1. A Psychological Approach to Science p. 1-10
2. Problem Centering vs. Means Centering in Science p. 11-18
3. Preface to Motivation Theory p. 19-33
4. A Theory of Human Motivation p. 35-58
5. The Role of Basic Need Gratification in Psychological Theory p. 59-75
6. The Instinctoid Nature of Basic Needs p. 77-95
7. Higher and Lower Needs p. 97-104
8. Psychopathogenesis and the Theory of Threat p. 105-115
9. Is Destructiveness Instinctoid? p. 117-129
10. The Expressive Component of Behavior p. 131-148
11. Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health p. 149-180
12. Love in Self-Actualizing People p. 181-202
13. Cognition of the Individual and of the Generic p. 203-228
14. Unmotivated and Purposeless Reactions p. 229-239
15. Psychotherapy, Health, and Motivation p. 241-264
16. Normality, Health, and Values p. 265-280

Appendix A: Problems Generated by a Positive Approach to Psychology p. 281-293

Appendix B: Holistic-Dynamics, Organismic Theory, Syndrome Dynamics p. 295-328

Bibliography p. 329-353

Index of Names p. 355-359

Index of Subjects p. 360-369



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Preface

1. Elements of a Psychological Approach to Science p. 1-12
2. Problem Centering vs. Means Centering in Science p. 13-21
3. Holistic-Dynamic Theory in the Study of Personality p. 22-62
4. Preface to Motivation Theory p. 63-79
5. A Theory of Human Motivation p. 80-106
6. The Role of Basic Need Gratification in Psychological Theory p. 107-122
7. The Instinctoid Nature of Basic Needs p. 123-145
8. Higher and Lower Needs p. 146-154
9. Psychopathogenesis and the Theory of Threat p. 155-167
10. Is Destructiveness Instinctoid? p. 168-178
11. The Expressive Component of Behavior p. 179-198
12. Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health p. 199-234
13. Love in Self-Actualizing People p. 235-260
14. Cognition of the Individual and of the Generic p. 261-290
15. Unmotivated and Purposeless Reactions p. 291-304
16. Psychotherapy, Health, and Motivation p. 305-334
17. Normality, Health, and Values p. 335-352
18. Toward a Positive Psychology p. 353-363

Appendix: Problems Generated by a Positive Approach to Psychology p. 364-378

Bibliography p. 379-394

Index of Names p. 395-399

Index of Subjects p. 400-411



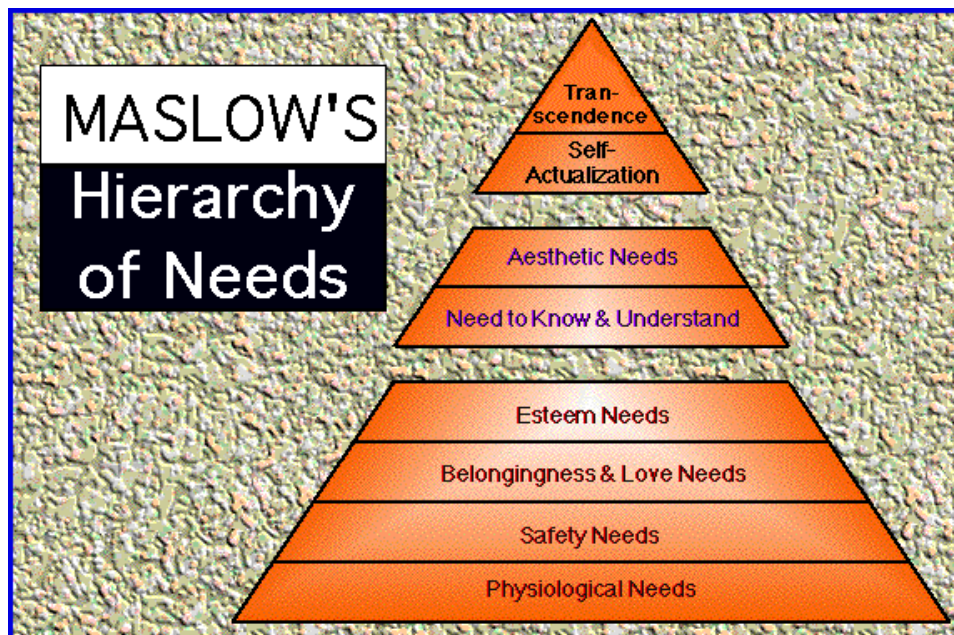
<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html>

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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[Abraham Maslow](#) (1954) attempted to synthesize a large body of research related to [human motivation](#). Prior to [Maslow](#), researchers generally focused separately on such factors as biology, achievement, or power to explain what energizes, directs, and sustains human behavior. Maslow posited a [hierarchy of human needs](#) based on two groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these needs has been satisfied, if at some future time a deficiency is detected, the individual will act to remove the deficiency. The first four levels are:

- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;
- 2) Safety/security: out of danger;
- 3) Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition.



According to Maslow, an individual is ready to act upon the growth needs if and only if the deficiency needs are met. Maslow's initial conceptualization included only one growth need--self-actualization. Self-actualized people are characterized by: 1) being problem-focused; 2) incorporating an ongoing freshness of appreciation of life; 3) a concern about personal growth; and 4) the ability to have peak experiences. Maslow later [differentiated the growth need of self-actualization](#), specifically naming two lower-level growth needs prior to general level of self-actualization (Maslow & Lowery, 1998) and one beyond that level (Maslow, 1971). They are:

- 5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore;
- 6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty;
- 7) [Self-actualization](#): to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential; and
- 8) [Self-transcendence](#): to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.

Maslow's basic position is that as one becomes more [self-actualized and self-transcendent](#), one becomes more wise (develops wisdom) and automatically knows what to do in a wide variety of situations. [Daniels](#) (2001) suggests that Maslow's ultimate conclusion that the highest levels of self-actualization are transcendent in their nature may be one of his most important contributions to the study of human behavior and motivation.

Norwood (1999) proposes that Maslow's hierarchy can be used to describe the kinds of information that individual's seek at different levels. For example, individuals at the lowest level seek **coping information** in order to meet their basic needs. Information that is not directly connected to helping a person meet his or her needs in a very short time span is simply left unattended. Individuals at the safety level need **helping information**. They seek to be assisted in seeing how they can be safe and secure. **Enlightening information** is sought by individuals seeking to meet their belongingness needs. Quite often this can be found in books or other materials on relationship development. **Empowering information** is sought by people at the esteem level. They are looking for information on how their ego can be developed. Finally, people in the growth levels of cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization seek **edifying information**. While Norwood does not specifically address the level of transcendence, I believe it safe to say that individuals at this stage would seek information on how to connect to something beyond themselves or to how others could be edified.

Maslow published his first conceptualization of his theory over 50 years ago (Maslow, 1943) and it has since become one of the most popular and often cited theories of human motivation. An interesting phenomenon related to Maslow's work is that in spite of a lack of evidence to support his hierarchy, it enjoys wide acceptance (Wahba & Bridgwell, 1976; Soper, Milford & Rosenthal, 1995).

The few major studies that have been completed on the hierarchy seem to support the proposals of [William James](#) (1892/1962) and Mathes (1981) that there are three levels of human needs. James hypothesized the levels of material (physiological, safety), social (belongingness, esteem), and [spiritual](#). Mathes proposed the three levels were physiological, belongingness, and self-actualization; he considered security and self-esteem as unwarranted. Alderfer (1972) developed a comparable hierarchy with his ERG (existence, relatedness, and growth) theory. His approach modified Maslow's theory based on the work of [Gordon Allport](#) (1960, 1961) who incorporated concepts from [systems theory](#) into his work on [personality](#).

Alderfer's Hierarchy of Motivational Needs

Level of Need	Definition	Properties
Growth	Impel a person to make creative or productive effects on himself and his environment	Satisfied through using capabilities in engaging problems; creates a greater sense of wholeness and fullness as a human being
Relatedness	Involve relationships with significant others	Satisfied by mutually sharing thoughts and feelings; acceptance, confirmation, understanding, and influence are elements
Existence	Includes all of the various forms of material and psychological desires	When divided among people one person's gain is another's loss if resources are limited

Maslow recognized that not all personalities followed his proposed hierarchy. While a variety of personality dimensions might be considered as related to motivational needs, one of the most often cited is that of [introversion and extroversion](#). Reorganizing Maslow's hierarchy based on the work of Alderfer and considering the introversion/extraversion dimension of personality results in three levels, each with an introverted and extroverted component. This organization suggests there may be two aspects of each level that differentiate how people relate to each set of needs. Different personalities might relate more to one dimension than the other. For example, an introvert at the level of Other/Relatedness might be more concerned with his or her own perceptions of being included in a group, whereas an extrovert at that same level would pay more attention to how others value that membership.

A Reorganization of Maslow's and Alderfer's Hierarchies

Level	Introversion	Extroversion
Growth	Self-Actualization (development of competencies [knowledge, attitudes, and skills] and character)	Transcendence (assisting in the development of others' competencies and character; relationships to the unknown, unknowable)
Other (Relatedness)	Personal identification with group, significant others (Belongingness)	Value of person by group (Esteem)
Self (Existence)	Physiological, biological (including basic emotional needs)	Connectedness, security

At this point there is little agreement about the identification of [basic human needs](#) and how they are ordered. For example, Ryan & Deci (2000) also suggest three needs, although they are not necessarily arranged hierarchically: the need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. Thompson, Grace and Cohen (2001) state the most important needs for children are connection, recognition, and power. Nohria, Lawrence, and Wilson (2001) provide evidence from a sociobiology theory of motivation that humans have four basic needs: (1) acquire objects and experiences; (2) bond with others in long-term relationships of mutual care and commitment; (3) learn and make sense of the world and of ourselves; and (4) to defend ourselves, our loved ones, beliefs and resources from harm. The Institute for Management Excellence (2001) suggests there are nine basic human needs: (1) security, (2) adventure, (3) freedom, (4) exchange, (5) power, (6) expansion, (7) acceptance, (8) community, and (9) expression.

Notice that bonding and relatedness are a component of every theory. However, there do not seem to be any others that are mentioned by all theorists. Franken (2001) suggests this lack of accord may be a result of different philosophies of researchers rather than differences among human beings. In addition, he reviews research that shows a person's [explanatory or attributional style](#) will modify the list of basic needs. Therefore, it seems appropriate to ask people what they want and how their needs could be met rather than relying on an unsupported theory. For example, Waitley (1996) advises having a person imagine what life would be like if time and money were not an object in a person's life. That is, what would the person do this week, this month, next month, if he or she had all the money and time needed to engage in the activities and were secure that both would be available again next year. With some follow-up questions to identify what is keeping the

person from happening now, this open-ended approach is likely to identify the most important needs of the individual.

There is much work still to be done in this area before we can rely on a theory to be more informative than simply collecting and analyzing data. However, this body of research can be very important to parents, educators, administrators and others concerned with developing and using human potential. It provides an outline of some important issues that must be addressed if human beings are to achieve the levels of character and competencies necessary to be successful in the information age.

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