

Abraham Maslow

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Abstract

Abraham Harold Maslow is a psychologist who worked on humanistic psychology. He created the hierarchy of needs in five layers namely physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, esteem needs and finally self-actualization. He also described Meta needs and Meta pathologies. Towards the end of his life he showed interest in transpersonal psychology, which he described as the fourth force.

Keywords: Abraham Maslow, need, self-actualization.

Introduction

Abraham Maslow (1908 - 1970) was born in Brooklyn, New York to Jewish parents who were immigrants from Russia. He first studied law at the City College of New York (CCNY).¹

Then he became interested in psychology and spent time working with Harry Harlow, famous for his experiments with baby rhesus monkeys and attachment behavior. He received his BA (1930), MA (1931) degrees and PhD (1934), in psychology, all from the University of Wisconsin.¹

A year later, he returned to New York and worked with E. L. Thorndike at Columbia, where he became interested in research on human sexuality. He began teaching full time at Brooklyn College. During this period, he came into contact with many intellectuals like Adler, Fromm, Horney, as well as several Gestalt and Freudian psychologists.¹

Maslow served as the chair of the psychology department at Brandeis from 1951 to 1969. There he met Kurt Goldstein, who had originated the idea of self-actualization in his famous book, *The Organism* (1934).¹

It was also here that he began his crusade for a humanistic psychology. He spend his final years in semi-retirement in California and died of a heart attack on June 8 1970.¹

Maslow's theory

Maslow noticed that some needs take precedence over others. For example, if one was hungry and thirsty, one tends to take care of the thirst first because thirst is a "stronger" need than hunger. Similarly thirst came after the need to breathe.¹

With this idea he created hierarchy of needs into five broader layers:

1. Physiological needs
2. Need for safety and security
3. Need for love and belonging
4. Need for esteem
5. Need to actualize the self

Physiological needs

These include the need for oxygen, water, protein, salt, sugar, calcium, and other minerals and vitamins; the need to be active, to rest, to sleep, to get rid of body wastes, to avoid pain, to have sex, to maintain body PH and temperature.¹ That babies eat the most foul tasting baby food, supports the above idea.

Need for safety and security

When physiological needs are taken care of, the second layer of needs come into play. Safe circumstances, stability and protection now take importance.¹

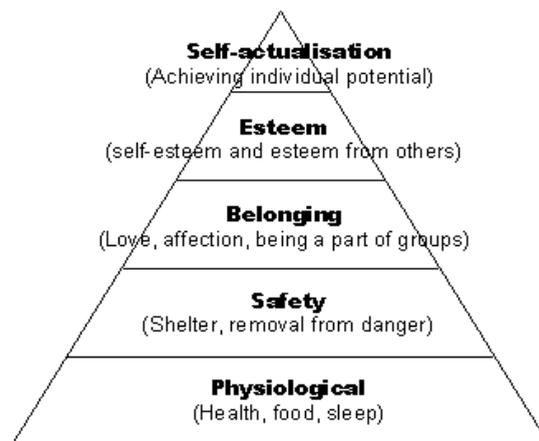


Fig. 1: Hierarchy of needs

For example, a need to have a home in a safe neighborhood, a job security etc.

Need for love and belonging

When the above two layers are taken care of, the third layer shows up- the need for friends, spouse, children (affectionate relationships).¹ For example the desire to marry, have a family, be a part of community. When these needs are not met, one becomes susceptible to loneliness.

Need for esteem: Maslow recognized two versions of esteem needs, a lower and a higher one.

| Esteem needs | |
|---|---|
| Lower | Higher |
| The need to respect others; The need for status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity, dominance | The need for self-respect, including feelings such as confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom |

Non fulfillment of these needs leads to low self-esteem and inferiority complex.

He called the preceding four layers as **D - needs** or the deficit needs. If one has a deficit – one feels the need. Maslow also talks about these levels in terms of **homeostasis**. Just as the body regulates the temperature, so also the needs are regulated. When it lacks something it develops a hunger for it; when it gets enough, the hunger stops.¹

Maslow saw all these as survival needs- essential for the maintenance of health- and were inbuilt genetically like the instincts, so called them **instinctoids** or instinct-like – needs.¹

One moves through these levels in stages, and under stressful conditions, regresses to a lower need level.¹ For example, when bomb blasts take place, safety becomes a priority.

During development, if needs are not met- for example, extreme insecurity or hunger as a child, the loss of a family member through death or divorce or significant neglect or abuse- one fixates on that set of needs for the rest of one's life. This formed the basis of Maslow's understanding of neurosis. For example, he, who in his childhood, has seen his parents getting separated, constantly fears that his spouse might desert him.

Need for self-actualization: Called variously as **self-actualization, growth motivation, B- needs** (being needs). These needs do not involve homeostasis. Once engaged, they continue to be felt and become stronger as we "feed" them.

They involve the continuous desire to fulfill our potentials to form a "complete" or the "fullest" person (all that one can be)–hence the term self-actualization.

To reach this stage, all the lower levels should be taken care of. Only a small percentage (2%) of people reach this stage. The rest are unable to, as their basic needs are not taken care of. Maslow found people like Albert Einstein, William James, Mother Theresa, to be **self actualizers**.¹

Meta needs and meta pathologies: Meta needs are the driving needs of the self-actualizers. Truth, goodness, beauty, unity, wholeness, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, completion, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, self-sufficiency to be happy.

When forced to live without these values, the self-actualizers develop depression, despair, disgust, alienation, and a degree of cynicism. These are called **Meta pathologies**.

Maslow hoped that his theory would create a periodic table of qualities, problems, pathologies and their solutions of human potential.¹

Eventually towards the end of his life, he inaugurated a fourth force in psychology, the **Transpersonal psychology**.

Criticism

1. Maslow believed self-actualization is rarely achieved by the young. In contrast, Rogers felt that babies were the best examples of human self-actualization.¹
2. Another criticism was, people whose lower needs are not taken care of, cannot be self-actualized. But, there are many artists, poets, philosophers, who were poor and depressed at some point in life. Similarly, not all people whose lower needs are met are self-actualized.¹
3. According to Gareth self-actualization should not only include people who are brilliant, but also those who were quite possibly damaged and unhappy human beings.¹

Achievements

1. Abraham Maslow founded the Journal of Humanistic Psychology, with Miles Vich as the editor in 1971. It continues to publish academic papers.²
2. Abraham Maslow attended the inaugural function of association for Humanistic Psychology in 1963. He was offered nomination for presidency, but he declined it arguing for the development of intellectual movement without leaders.²
3. He was named 'Humanist of the year' by American Humanist association in 1967.²

Publications

1. The farther reaches of human nature.³
2. Future Visions : The Unpublished papers of Abraham Maslow.³
3. The Maslow Business Reader.³
4. Maslow on management.³
5. Motivation and personality.³
6. The psychology of science: A Reconnaissance.³

7. Religions, Values and Peak – Experiences.³

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