Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid: The Self-Actualization Theory

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ABRAHAM MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS PYRAMID

Self-Actualization: Inner Talent, Fulfillment, Creativity

Self-Esteem: Achievement, Mastery, Recognition, Respect

Belonging/Love: Friends, Family, Spouse, Lover

Safety: Security, Stability, Freedom from fear

Physiological: Food, Water, Shelter, Warmth
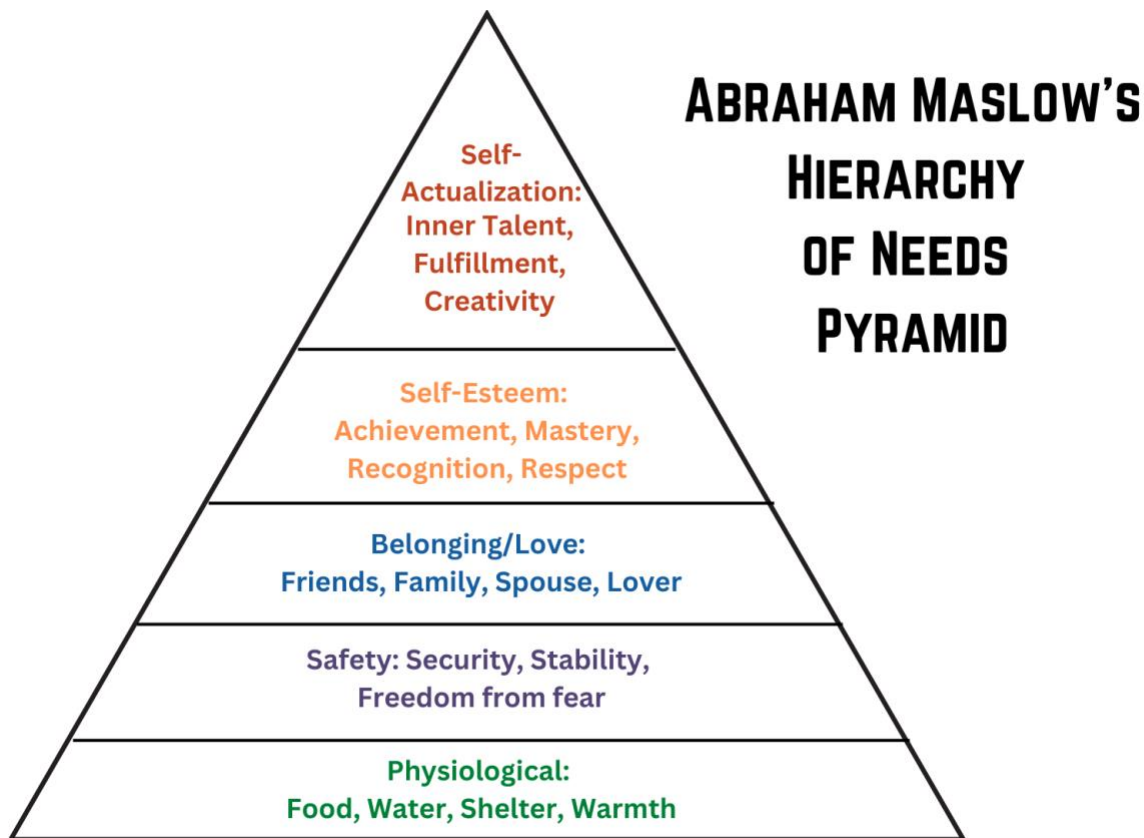
Self-actualization is a process through which, an individual is on a quest to learn, grow, and be creative, using their abilities to form an integrated personality, a whole "self." It can also be viewed as a process and realization that the self and the environment are two pieces of a greater whole: the holistic self (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Kurt Goldstein coined the term "self-actualization" in the early part of the 20th century. However, the term was not familiar to mainstream society until Abraham Maslow used it in his "Hierarchy of Needs" pyramid in 1943. Goldstein and Maslow observed that individuals undergo a fundamental quest to discover who they are and must be by searching for self- knowledge, and they must trust that they can become

the best they can be by reaching self-actualization (Ivtzan et al., 2013). Maslow also believed every human intuitively knows how to become mentally healthy and happy.

Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid

Abraham Maslow introduced the Hierarchy of Needs pyramid in his 1943 paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation," published in the *Psychological Review* journal. It took root in mainstream society in 1954 (Winston, 2016). There are five levels of needs on the pyramid: (1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. Physiological needs refer to necessary things for surviving, such as breathable air, food, shelter, and water. Meeting their safety needs make individuals feel safe, such as knowing that their water is clean, having adequate shelter, and living in a secure environment. Belonging needs are met through feeling liked, loved, and accepted by others. When an individual feels self-confident and respected by others, it meets the person's need for esteem. Finally, individuals' self-actualization needs are met when they engage in self-development and use their abilities to become their best selves.

Maslow also considered the four lower needs deficient (D-needs) or gratification needs, and the fifth higher needs (B-needs). Maslow proposed that lower needs motivate the emergence of higher needs and culminate in the need for self-actualization. The higher person is on the pyramid, the higher their motivation level (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016).

Maslow argued that human behaviors are driven by needs, also called goals. He believed that individuals would want to pursue higher goals as they fulfill their current goals. For example, as individuals meet a certain need at the lower levels of the pyramid, such as obtaining food and shelter, they develop higher needs, such as developing their self-esteem and reaching self-actualization (Ivtzan et al., 2013). There is flexibility on how much individuals need to fulfill the needs listed at the pyramid's bottom before pursuing and achieving self-actualization. For instance, some individuals might go hungry on certain days, pay little attention to their physiological needs, and still creatively use their strengths and talents to reach self-actualization.

Furthermore, the needs listed at the lower levels of the pyramid do not necessarily have to emerge in the given order presented by the pyramid for individuals to reach self-actualization. For example, individuals can fulfill their need for belonging before their physiological and safety needs. Also, depending on numerous personal and environmental variables, needs may recur over time. However, meeting the needs listed at the pyramid first can make it easier for individuals to reach self-actualization than not meeting those needs (Winston, 2016). For instance, individuals who have enough food to eat and feel safe in their environments can experience less worry and stress; therefore, they can give more time and attention to learning and developing the skills needed to reach self-actualization. However, it is common for self-actualized individuals to arise in the order specified by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

Reaching Self-Actualization

To fulfill their B-needs, self-actualized individuals are motivated to learn and mature. These individuals only satisfy their deficit needs enough to motivate them to fulfill higher needs, the B-needs. For example, when a lower need is satisfied to a certain extent, these individuals give their time and attention to higher needs. In other words, to a certain extent, fulfilling the deficit motivates individuals to develop the behaviors they need to fulfill the B-needs. Self-actualized individuals are less motivated by achieving fame, wealth, or influence. They are more motivated by intrinsic self-development, focusing more on growth-oriented than deficiency-focused needs (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Maslow stated that when individuals understand and realize that self-actualization is not about making the most money or achieving the highest status, opportunities for enjoyment and fulfillment can become more accessible (Winston, 2016).

Reaching self-actualization is based on the individual's process of and motivation to leverage their ability to reach their potential (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). It is also a natural, dynamic, lifelong growth process with total concentration and absorption, developing into a full, transparent, and selfless experience (Ivtzan et al., 2013). Self-actualization involves a strong sense of purpose and self-awareness. The process often requires individuals to abandon familiar comforts and explore new possibilities. It is also vital that individuals develop and continue to

have courage, commitment, creativity, and the ability to take risks (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). As individuals learn to develop and grow their strengths and talents to become their ideal selves, they are closer to self-actualization.

Self-actualization is not a permanent state. For individuals to maintain self-actualization, they must continue learning new knowledge and skills and be creative in using their abilities (Ivtzan et al., 2013). Furthermore, individuals travel between several levels up and down the hierarchy pyramid over their lifespan based on their life circumstances, individual choices, and mental health. For instance, individuals experiencing stress because of survivor needs such as food and shelter would give more of their focus to achieving those needs instead of the higher needs such as creativity and self-expression (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Once the individuals fulfill enough of the lower needs, they will give their attention back to the higher needs.

Outcomes

Individuals who reach self-actualization can experience intrinsic benefits. Self-actualized individuals can make decisions despite contrary opinions, peer expectations, and other conventional stressors (Compton, 2018). They trust themselves rather than rely on external factors when making decisions. These individuals are more accepting of their flaws and mindful of their weaknesses. They are independent, self-confident, and resourceful in using their abilities to achieve their goals and fulfill their purpose and mission in life. These individuals can self-assess things, situations, and people (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Self-actualized individuals tend to have deeper, healthier, and more meaningful interpersonal relationships than people who are not self-actualized. They express genuine empathy and respect for the autonomy and individuality of others.

Individuals who are working toward self-actualization can also bring benefits to society. These individuals tend to lead to a more compassionate, caring, problem-solving, and altruistic lifestyle. Maslow stated that individuals are born selfish, but as they move toward self-actualization, they gradually become selfless and compassionate to create a flourishing society (Compton, 2018). Even though fulfilling the bottom needs is more focused on self-interest, as

individuals move up the pyramid as they try to fulfill their higher needs, they tend to dedicate more time to causes outside of themselves and family. These choices can result in selfless behaviors. Therefore, individuals who follow a growth motivation path can shift their focus from self-interest to societal interest, resulting in increased personal satisfaction and communal peace (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016).

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