

## **The Hierarchy of Needs from the ‘Urge for Motherhood’ Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** *This article is a qualitative research that emerged from a more extensive study on pregnant women, and, at the same time, it is an analysis of the results of several studies that focus on a particular dimension of human needs, the need to give birth to a child. The involuntary lack of a child is a reality considered psychologically stressful for most couples. Some researchers have even claimed that the symptoms of this “stress” are similar to those associated with other severe medical conditions, such as cancer (Johansson et al., 2010).*

**Objectives:** *The purposes of this paper were to conduct analysis of human needs from the perspective of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the configuration of the pyramid including a particular need, specific to women: the need for motherhood, the need to give birth.*

**Methods:** *This was done through a qualitative research, based on semi-structured (qualitative) interviews conducted as part of a larger study, and by also looking into the results of various available research on the topic.*

**Results:** *We started the study from the classic Maslow’s hierarchy model and researched into the specific feminine need for giving birth. The desire to give birth is one of the fundamental needs of the human being. The article presents the physiological and social needs with their applications from the perspective of the need for motherhood.*

**Conclusions:** *The experience of motherhood completes human becoming. The unsatisfied psychosocial needs of women and even of their partners prevent human self-actualization.*

**Keywords:** *pyramid of needs, femininity, motherhood, suffering, self-actualization*

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Maslow's pyramid of needs (1943, 1954) is a motivational theory that presents the model of human needs, described as hierarchical levels in a pyramid (Figure 1). The needs of the lower layers of the pyramid must be satisfied before individuals can meet the needs of the upper levels. These needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization.

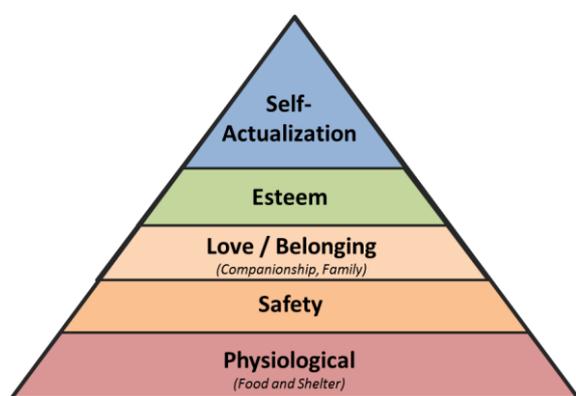


Figure 1. Maslow's pyramid of needs

Regarding the model presented by Maslow, Kenrick states that many scientists consider this pyramid as a strange visual artifact, without granting it much contemporary theoretical importance, but suggests that the model can take on new meaning when combined with subsequent theoretical developments (Kenrick et al., 2010). Kenrick suggests some revisions to Maslow's approach. He proposes to revise the classical model by placing basic human motives in three different levels of analysis: (a) final evolutionary function, (b) developmental sequencing, and (c) cognitive priority. He further considers the implications of this analysis on three significant levels. Functional analysis considerations suggest that, although self-actualization may be of considerable psychological importance, it is unlikely to be a functionally distinct human need. Consequently, he removed self-actualization from its privileged place in the above layer of the pyramid and suggested that it is largely included in the status (esteem) and reasons concerning mating, in the new framework. Considering the level of development of the analysis led him to rely on the biological framework of life history theory. Following this perspective, the top of the pyramid would include three types of reproductive objectives: couple formation, maintaining the couple relationship and upbringing the child. Also, the consideration of a close level of analysis, together with the theory of life history determined the researchers to

change the way the objectives are described in the pyramid: they were conceptualized as overlapping (Figure 2). This change explicitly reflects the assumption that the reasons for early development are unlikely to be completely replaced by further objectives, but instead continue to be important throughout life, depending on individual differences and future ecological indices.

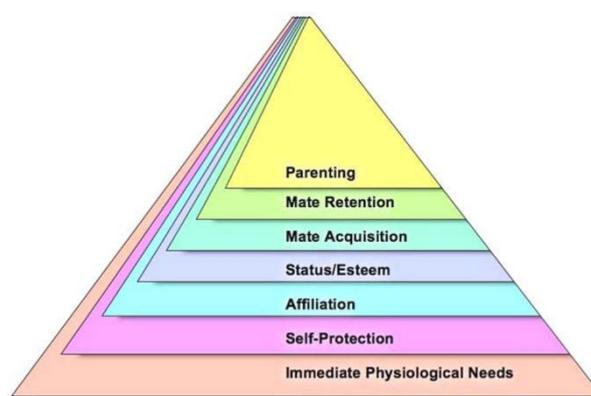


Figure 2. Revisions to Maslow's pyramid of needs (Kenrick et al., 2010)

In 2011, in the doctoral thesis "Psychological and social implications of high-risk and unwanted pregnancies" after studying 200 pregnant women with dysfunctional pregnancies (in the evolution of which at some point one or more pathogenic somatic changes, which are transient, repetitive, either resolvable, or which may lead to the termination of the pregnancy) (Rotaru, 2011), we analyzed the need to give birth, to mother children, from the perspective of the impossibility to satisfy such drive, which causes constraining, painful behaviors for the women experiencing it. It started from the classic model of Maslow's pyramid and the analysis emphasized on the feminine desire to give birth – one of the fundamental needs of every woman. That is why, starting from Maslow's conceptualization, we will present the physiological and social needs with their applications from the key of the need for motherhood. The object of this paper is to understand, according to specific needs, the behavior of women who become mothers after significant efforts or who even cannot satisfy such need. These are innate needs and differ from each other in their degree of intensity. In the case of the need to give birth, it starts from a primary drive (sexual need) reaching a social need, so it becomes a higher need for fulfillment, which is activated after the need to belong to the couple. This specific human need, which is

related to both biological and psychological factors, can be interpreted by references to several stages of the pyramid, from bottom to top. For this reason, we considered that in Maslow's model, in particular, as an attribution of femininity, there is a human aspiration, which directly links the basic needs with a higher need for self-actualization, bringing them together, integrating, and at the same time involving the others. In this particular case, even if the basic needs are met, as well as the other higher needs, should this need remain unfulfilled, this failure changes the degree of satisfaction of the other needs. This interference between these two needs at opposite poles generates a need inside the pyramid that causes changes in the mental and organic balance of women (Figure 3). All human actions aim to satisfy needs and requirements. Human beings are motivated by certain unmet needs. Maslow considered that the dissatisfaction of the needs located on the lower levels of the pyramid prevents the satisfaction of the superior needs. This leads us to consider that when the reproductive function is disrupted, blocked, both the needs in the lower and upper layers of the pyramid are unmet.



Figure 3. (Rotaru, 2011)

Reality shows that the lower and upper-level needs can be satisfied, but in the case of women who struggle to become mothers, when they activate the need to give birth, as a domino effect, all other needs satisfaction deteriorates. For some women, fulfilling their potential and reaching the highest level of "human being" means giving birth to children. In today's society this need is valued, it is mainstreamed so that some women may experience it as a failure if they cannot give birth to a child. We have established that the reproductive function provides a need that falls at the level of the last step of Maslow's pyramid and that

corresponds to the need for self-actualization. Some women view the satisfaction of their self-actualization through the birth of children, some live with the dissatisfaction of not having this achievement or with a state of fear regarding the inability to complete this need. The normal human condition includes experiencing ignorance and suffering. All things are animated by sacrifice and, of course, women must prove the ability of sacrifice. It is about realities at different levels, experiences that have made these realities possible.

Every woman who personally experiences the need to give birth to children acts in her own way in order to satisfy this need. All lived experiences change the mental structure of these women, creating feelings of anxiety, panic, dissatisfaction. Society, through restrictions in human life and conduct, has changed the inner being and its outer manifestations (Schnabl, 1993).

Individuals had to adopt new behaviors, to accept new types of interpersonal relations, imposed by the everchanging society. Modifications achieved by the repressive modelling of individuals brought a series of important changes in the plan of evolution, but they also generated protest reactions. One of the most important changes imposed on the individual was related to sexual behavior. The need for partnership developed with the evolution of society. The consequences of this development were expressed in the formation of the family, of the partnership relations of the psychosexual couple. The conscious personal self lies between two forces of the new forms of behavior, subjected to pressure to accept new types of interpersonal relationships, imposed by the ever-evolving society. The changes through the repressive model instill permanent pressure on the self, on the one hand, while it is assaulted by the drive of the unconscious, subjected to the principle of pleasure, and on the other hand it is controlled by the rationality of the superego, according to the principle of reality (Scher, 1984).

Between two contradicting forces, the personal and conscious ego is obliged to choose, select and maintain a state of balance amongst the instinctual unconscious and the moral superego. To maintain this balance, each individual imposes certain conditions. These conditions are based on certain restrictions. Renunciation is that mysterious Socratic daimonion. The giving up involves two types of prohibitions, one external, applied and imposed on man, and the second internal, self-imposed, voluntary, personal.

The desires of the self and the prohibitions that are imposed on it give rise to an inner conflict, which the self experiences as a deprivation of freedom. The self

will become frustrated because it can only satisfy its desires according to an imposed regime. He will rebel against, but the accepted bans will remain. This internal conflict between desires and prohibitions will give rise to anxiety. This anguish is a failed desire, a deep, inner wound of the personal self, which will produce an inner imbalance of being.

The rule imposes the norm, the psychological and social normal is acquired by the woman during childhood by referring to the model of her parents, to the model of the mother in particular. The rules order the time and give landmarks to the external space and open access to a certain pattern of being a mother. Respecting these transmitted patterns, the woman-child is inserted in the family in a secure way. The behavior becomes predictable and safe. Despite all the inconveniences of these rules, which limit the woman, the rules are appropriated because they are reassuring, and they give the feeling of comfort. Respecting the rules, even if it requires effort, even if it puts limits, even if it involves sacrifice, gives an illusory feeling of mental and social comfort. It is a cost, sometimes considerable, in relation to a well-defined purpose. Giving up, renouncing the self to satisfy a need, becomes necessary, but if too much, can subjugate women's entire mental life. They become persons who engage in coercive behavior, who obey rules unconditionally. Following the rules gives them entry into the "ranks of the world", into a safe, secure world.

The research carried out by me was of interest also in that I managed, in cases where individuals become exemplary due to resistance, to analyze from a psychological point of view the woman's relationship with herself. The description and analysis of the interiority experienced in these situations must be done as detailed as possible. The integrity of the body should be one of the cornerstones of the theory of motivation. The theory of human needs should also include the particular needs of human beings, i.e., to find specific needs. It would be necessary to clarify the needs in particular situations, which can cause changes in the balance of the human being. All capabilities are put at the service of meeting these needs. Although we are generally interested in the needs of the adult as a human being, we can address an understanding of the specific needs of women by observing their behaviors in case these needs are not met.

For women who make great efforts to give birth to a child, the coming of the babies changes the face of the world, it changes their entire universe. The central role of the child for women shapes their indisputable

normalcy. The death of loved ones, family members, divorce, abandonment, abuse can be extremely dangerous, but to some women the inability to give birth can be even more terrifying.

The research carried in the paper "Psychological and social implications of high-risk and unwanted pregnancies" (Rotaru, 2011) was also a qualitative one, based on semi-structured interviews conducted as part of a larger study.

From the observations made in the specified research, in which 200 pregnant women at risk of terminating pregnancy were investigated, we can generalize and state that there is a fundamental need, that of giving birth, which if unsatisfied can be dangerous for females, can be barely manageable, remaining unacceptable most of the time.

Research has shown that women who are confronted with the possibility to not have children, or those who have failed to reach pregnancy term, have a high, clinically significant, level of depression and anxiety, which was assessed with the Cattell Anxiety Scale and with Beck Depression Inventory. If the pregnancy cannot be brought to term, if the child is not born, the women stated that they cannot accept the inability to give birth. Regardless of demographic variables (age, gestational age of pregnancy, ethnicity, marital status, length of marriage, occupation), all pregnant women surveyed considered that life would not make sense without children, that they are willing to "endure anything", "make any sacrifice" to give birth to a child. For the group of pregnant women who have difficulties in the evolution of pregnancy, the average score on the depression questionnaire was 9.30 points, with a standard deviation of 3.390 and a standard average error of 0.240.

The results obtained on the scales of depression and anxiety showed the existence of emotional changes of depressive or anxious type in pregnant women when they are confronted with disorders that could endanger the pregnancy. These results show the emotional disturbance of women who face the difficulties of a pregnancy. The fact that these situations can be so easily observed in women facing helplessness is proof that this need pushes women to all known sacrifices (e.g., in vitro fertilization is a way to meet the need to give birth). The tendency not to talk about what they live, the existence of blockages, lack of reaction, isolation, all are very dangerous, and can generate somatic or mental dysfunctions. The need to give birth is also a need for security, if accomplished, the woman no longer feels powerless or

incomplete. Just as no longer feeling hungry after eating, a woman after birth no longer feels alone, no longer feels on the verge of extinction. If we want to see these needs directly and clearly, we must focus on the particular aspects of the human being. The need to give birth is the basis of the universe and is also partly motivated by the search for security, the need for esteem and status, self-actualization. These needs, from base to top, are core needs of the woman. In “Motivation and Personality” (1954), Abraham Maslow states: “What a man can be, he must be”. Self-actualization, which is the highest level or stage in his model of human motivation.

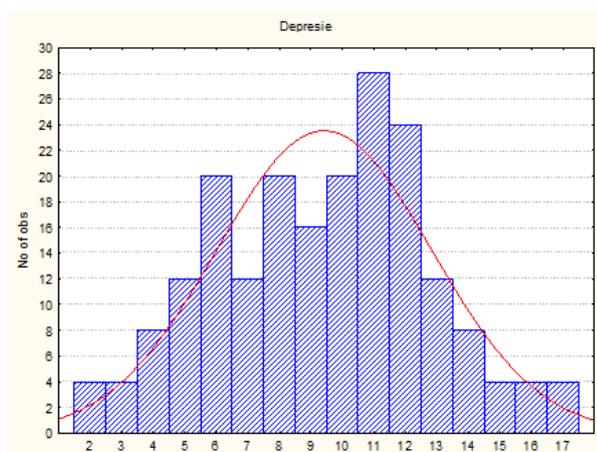


Figure 4. Distribution of scores in depression (Rotaru, 2011)

According to the hierarchy of needs presented above (Maslow, Kenrick), self-actualization leads us to the realization of true potential and to the attainment of the “ideal self”. Self-actualization needs are also called “being” needs that include personal and creative self-growth and are realized by fulfilling our full potential. To give birth to children is the highest fulfillment of the female human being. Self-actualization means giving birth to viable children. Self-actualization would not be achieved if this need is not met. Various studies, including the presented research, have highlighted the emotional changes occurring in women during pregnancy. The research revealed the emotional changes (anxiety, depression) generated by the symptoms that endanger the evolution of the pregnancy, which further endanger the existence of the child. The fact that the evolution of pregnancy is questioned by various obstacles, generates suffering in pregnant women. This suffering is related to the fear that they cannot have a child, that they are not capable, that they do not deserve to be loved, they do not deserve to be respected. There has been psychological distress in women with

dysfunctional pregnancies. Specialized studies have shown that motherhood and the mother-child relationship are complex processes which are not instinctively secured, neither by the mother, nor by the newborn (Lopes et al., 2018; Badinter, 1985). Motherhood is a unique development resulting from a complex symbolic transmission and a transgenerational order, in which motherhood begins to be sustained based on the logic of desire, given the symbolic game established in the history of family, society, in which ancestral customs are updated in the confrontation with current experiences.

Freud, in his study on femininity, emphasizes that the baby is part of a subjective place unique to his mother, determined by transgenerational factors and, within it, by his unique experience facing castration anxiety, when introduced into the logic of Oedipal triangulation and sexual difference. For Freud, motherhood has an important place in the elaborations of women who face such sufferings, configured as a possible feminine response when she understands the place of the child in the series of phallic substitutes. Thus, we understand that motherhood has an impact on the feminine psyche (Freud, 1994, 2000), an impact necessary for the evolution of women. From childhood, women (as well as men) face difficult puzzles about them (or their selves), about male and female sexuality, about motherhood, the body, babies and the world of relationships. Birth brings fulfillment to the woman in many ways. Through breastfeeding, embracing and contemplating the child, the mother, at the same time, receives and satisfies the most primitive of desires (Lacan, 1938).

The identification power that sustains the mother-child connection reveals the “eversion” suggested by Lacan, who puts together in a single scene the mother for her baby, the mother for herself and, at the same time, the baby for their mother, in themselves. This reversal feeds a nursing mother with the care she has received (and the suffering she has experienced) to be passed on in this new baby care, in this identification game. Currently, many specialists study the pregnancy and the mother-child relationship and bring important contributions to the knowledge of the elements involved in this field. Juliet Jerusalinsky (2009) emphasizes that the penis-phallus-child equation presented by Freud and the phallic pleasure, described above, do not exhaust the size of the mother-child bond and pleasure in motherhood. It suggests that pleasure in transitivity, that is, in this exchange of places and positions, through processes of identification, may be an alternative

pleasure to the expected phallic pleasure, which is a need required to be satisfied. Regina Orth Aragão (2007) emphasizes the work required of the mother's psyche during pregnancy, indicating an important psychological reshaping in the psychological universe of representations of the mother, to build a new representation in the relationship with the new child.

Bydlowski (1998) points out that the pregnancy and the psychic transparency that accompanies it revives, for many women, the memory of their origin and, thus, the primitive emotions, conflicts, knowledge and anxieties related to her first connections are reactivated.

We consider that, in the evolution and attainment of self-actualization, this period that puts the woman in contact with the unconscious contents, decreasing the censorship of the unconscious, participates in the knowledge so necessary for human progress.

The results of the research presented here reaffirm the feeling of complexity and psychological density in motherhood and in establishing the mother-child connection, a feeling that defines and propels the woman towards self-actualization. We know, since Freud, that the conditions for a woman to want to mother a baby are organized from the earliest days of her childhood, in the identification with her mother, by establishing loyalty to the mother, duty, and differentiation from of the latter, in its wider organization, marked by the feminine condition, the Oedipal development and the transgenerational features.

It is also known that these conditions are updated by current emotional, social and family experiences. So, this need is configured and strengthened as the little girl grows up, becoming instinctual and demanding her right to be satisfied. Women who have this need and fail to give birth to babies, fail to live life as a fulfillment, cannot resignify their lives, their bodies, their relationships and their emotions. The research highlights the anguish and suffering that were expressed when the pregnancy was in danger, when the possibility of being a mother was called into question. It makes us think that pregnant women are in a state of suffering when they go through silence, through major difficulties, because the subjective elaborations that determine the construction of their roles of mothers and the symbolic construction of babies in their subjective universes are very relevant.

The research reveals aspects that have shown the need, already known by many, to give birth

avoiding the chronicity and aggravation of suffering caused by the impossibility of forming the new feminine, maternal configuration. The experience of motherhood completes human becoming. Satisfying these needs is the expression of how to achieve personal abilities and talents. The need for power is also satisfied, along with the achievement of the need to give birth, to give life. The research of women who resorted to in vitro fertilization, comes in support of these ideas, because it revealed a complexity of the reasons for anxiety, and included concerns about the period of infertility and the number of treatment attempts (Crespo & Bestard, 2016). One of the main findings of the studies of women who used in vitro fertilization was that there are psychosocial needs expressed by families, especially women (op. cit., 2016) that are related to "giving birth", to mother children. As demonstrated by van Balen (2002), infertility has been strongly associated with psychological problems, leading to an increased biomedical emphasis on the psychological explanation of women experiencing infertility. This psychologization of infertility had consequences in women's psyche, causing them to perceive themselves as "guilty", to feel treated by others as "guilty", with negative effects on women's self-respect and self-esteem.

It is important to think about how the myths of motherhood produced by society create expectations that are unattainable for some women, and put the minds of healthy women in danger. They can be seen as "bad" or "abnormal" if their experiences do not meet the expectations and myths of society. Women can feel painful emotions, such as anger, guilt, helplessness, anxiety and loneliness (Beck, 2002), thus blocking self-actualization.

Physiological birth is an intense and transformative psychological experience that generates in psychism a particular construction and pushes women to meet this particular need. The psychological configurations identified as indicative of psychological suffering (helplessness, pain, anger, etc.) reinforce the idea of the existence of a need that is required to be satisfied, but which is unsatisfied and prevents the achievement of self-actualization. Based on this presented study and the existing ones, it is noted the importance of the need to give birth. We graphically illustrated the results taking into account the specific needs of women and the results of existing research for a pyramid of needs from the perspective of the need to give birth (the maternity pyramid).

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