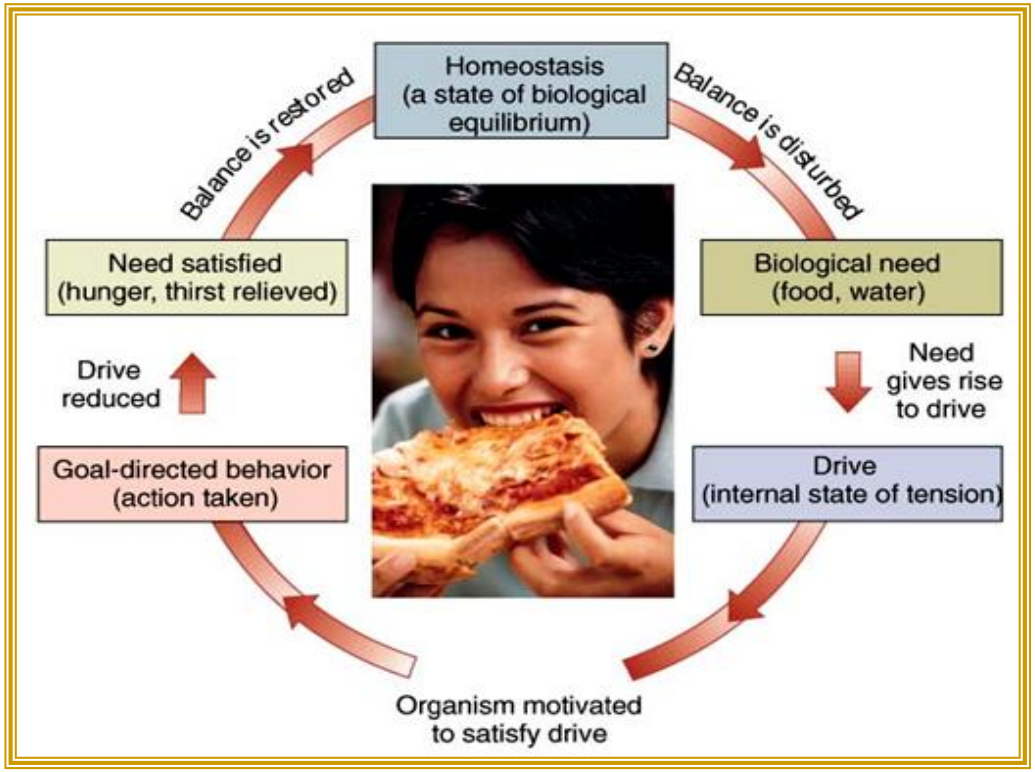
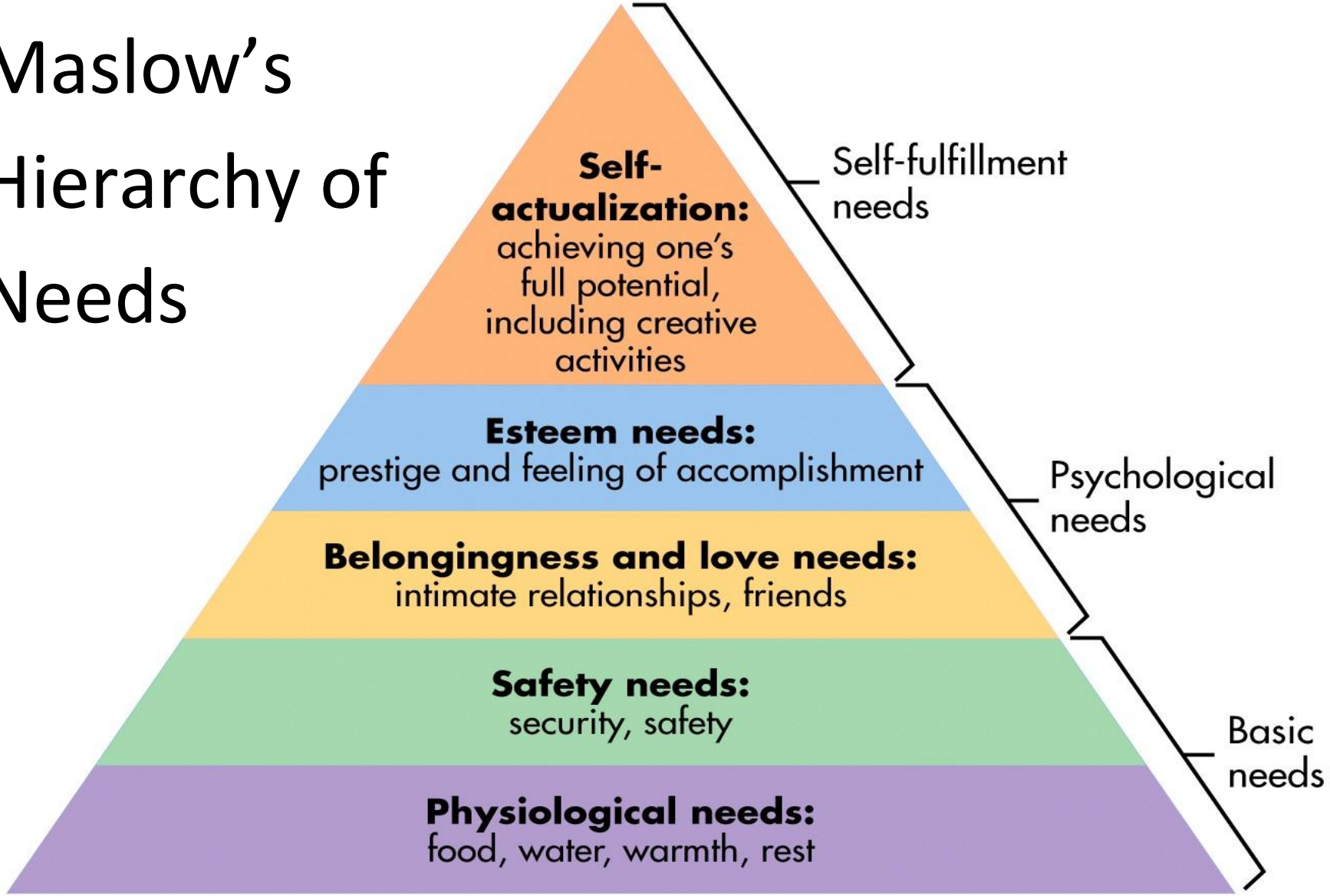
Drive-Reduction Theory



A popular theory of the 1940s and 1950s that attributed behavior to the desire to reduce tension produced by primary (biological) or secondary (acquired) drives.

Many psychologists believed that all motivation depended upon the pleasure experienced when basic needs are met. A person who is hungry, for instance, eats in order to reduce the tension that hunger produces. All human behavior could be attributed to the pleasure gained when these drive-induced tensions were reduced.

Drive reduction theory lost favor over the years because it failed to explain human actions that produced, rather than reduced, tension. Many people enjoy riding roller coasters or skydiving, for instance, despite the fact that such activity may cause fear and anxiety.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs