



## Psychological Needs of the Female Main Character in *Water for Elephants* Movie using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the psychological journey of Marlena, the female protagonist in the movie *Water for Elephants*, focusing on her fulfillment of psychological needs. The aim of this descriptive qualitative research is to analyze Marlena's character development and the portrayal of her psychological needs within the narrative. The writer uses a contextual method in analyzing this movie. The writer analyzes the extrinsic aspects to show the fulfillment of Marlena's psychological needs through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The result of this study is Marlena's character in *Water for Elephants* demonstrates a gradual fulfillment of her psychological needs as depicted within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework, showcasing her development towards self-actualization amidst the challenges and dynamics of the circus environment. Through her experiences and interactions, Marlena embodies resilience and growth, illustrating the complexities of human motivation and fulfillment.

## INTRODUCTION

Humans are creatures who cannot be separated from various needs. As social creatures, humans need other people to meet the needs of themselves and their families. Human needs are not only clothes, food, and shelter. Humans also need love between each other which can only be obtained by interacting with other people. According to Young (2008), the importance of social interactions for humans is reflected in the fact that most psychiatric disorders involve some disruption of normal social functioning.

One of the film genres is fiction. In literature, fiction is a term that refers to fictional or imaginary stories. Fiction is defined as a type of narrative work whose discussion is not based on real stories or facts and does not actually happen (Nurgiyantoro, 2015). In literature, fiction plays an important role in offering readers an escape from reality, while in film, the genre allows audiences to engage in stunning and engrossing visual experiences. In this way, fiction not only entertains but also stimulates thought and imagination, providing a space for the exploration of themes that may not find expression in everyday life.

Literary works reflect various psychological symptoms of humans as individuals (Ratna, 2013). Human attitudes and behavior when facing problems in life are symptoms of the human psyche. A person's mental and emotional state is represented by human attitudes and behavior expressed through their words and actions. Unstable thoughts cause one's own emotions (Dilah & Zahro, 2021). Films, as literary works, discuss the difficulties humans face in an effort to meet basic needs and survive. It can be concluded that films have a correlation with the social conditions of society (Amiruddin, 2018). This is related to how the character's behavior in the film reflects the character's personality condition. In psychological studies, a person's desire to have a happier and more fulfilling life influences their behavior (Minderop, 2013).

Psychology comes from the words "psyche", which means "soul" and "logos", namely the science that investigates humans, especially aspects of their souls and behavior (Siswantoro, 2005). Psychology enters other fields as an auxiliary science, such as literature, social and culture. As a result, interdisciplinary sciences such as literary psychology emerged. Literary psychology is a field of science that investigates human thoughts and behavior (Ahmadi, 2015). This study relies more on the researcher's ability to interpret literary works related to the field of psychology.

Abraham Maslow put forward the theory of the hierarchy of needs, where there are five levels of needs that must be met by humans. The hierarchy of human needs that humans must fulfill is not only found in real life but also in the characters of literary works such as movies. A

movie is an image collected in a frame, with a projector lens that is projected and makes the screen make the image come alive (Arsyad, 2003). Most directors make movies based on reality, where the movie can represent ideas about all aspects of life that occur in human life. Therefore, a movie can be considered as a depiction of life as a story, where the characters in the movie also represent actual people in real life. As a result, the characters in the movie have their own needs that must be met.

Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist who is considered by many to be the father of humanistic psychology. Its fame can be seen from its influence on humanities sciences, such as geography and demography. His name became famous after formulating the hierarchy of needs theory, namely a psychological health concept based on fulfilling innate needs so that humans can self-actualize (Nova, 2005).

Maslow was born in Manhattan, New York, on April 1, 1908, he spent his childhood in Brooklyn. Maslow is a child oldest of seven children born to Samuel Maslow and Rose Schilosky Maslow. In his childhood, Maslow's life was full of strong feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and depression (Feist, 2010).

Abraham Maslow is a prominent figure in humanistic psychology, who had a major influence on this school of psychology. According to Syifa'a, Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs theory, which describes human behavior and all the potential that can be developed to the maximum point of development. This theory has a high level of practicality and is easy to understand, containing features from human experiences or behavior that have been experienced.

Maslow was a humanistic psychologist, who did not believe that humans were stimulated by mechanical forces, conscious instincts (psychoanalysis), or habits (behaviorism). Humanism has a focus on potential, and humans have personal limits and potential to achieve achievements at a certain level based on effort or ability. According to Zikrun, humanistic psychology was born from a reaction to dissatisfaction with the approaches of psychoanalysis

and behaviorism, which were seen as too negative and deterministic in viewing humans. The humanistic approach emerged as an attempt to focus on the positive aspects of humans.

Maslow developed a theory that includes emotional, social, mental, and career aspects, which are the focus of the humanistic education model. The flow of humanistic psychology always encourages improving human self-quality through appreciation of the positive potential that exists in every human being. According to Rahmawati, Maslow also influenced the flow of humanistic psychology with the concept of a multilevel hierarchy of needs theory, which revealed that human behavior is determined more by tendencies. This theory has a high level of practicality so it is easy to understand, and reflects a humanistic orientation. Maslow's influence on humanistic psychology continues today, with this theory describing human reality and providing a positive and optimistic view of human potential and strengths.

Maslow made the decision to incorporate the field of humanistic knowledge into the fields of mental health and psychology. Maslow's theory includes internal and external aspects of humans. To gain a better understanding of the world they study, scientists must have a sense of security, self-confidence, and a sound mind. Scientists must remain open and find solutions to problems (Ahmadi, 2021). Any philosophy that talks about humanity must have universal humanism. There are benefits from Maslow's humanistic psychology regarding modern society which tends to see things from the extreme side.

Abraham H. Maslow is widely regarded as the founder and spiritual leader of the humanistic psychology movement. Maslow argued that a person's tendency to achieve goals that will make his life happier and more satisfying influences human behavior. His theory of multilevel needs consists of physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-actualization, and self-esteem (Minderop, 2016). Once one's lower-level needs are met, he or she seeks to meet higher-level demands until he or she reaches the ultimate goal, which is self-actualization or the fulfillment of one's potential. Maslow proposed the Hierarchy of Needs as a developmental psychology paradigm. According to this theory, humans progress through a

core set of hierarchical reasons in a certain order as a result of both physiological and psychological needs.

### ***Physiological Needs***

Physiological needs are the fundamental needs on which humans rely. It is the needs that generally arise from the bottom of the pyramid in the hierarchy of needs, also known as physiological drives. Physiological needs are the most essential of other needs in the pyramid since it includes breathing, drinking water, consuming food, having sex, sleeping, and others (Feist, 2010). Before moving on to the other needs, an individual must first satisfy these needs.

According to Maslow, hunger is the pre-protent of all needs; if all needs are unfulfilled and the body is then dominated by physiological needs, all other needs may simply cease to exist or be pushed to the back (Maslow, 1943). There are two differences between physiological needs and other needs. First, physiological needs are the only ones that can be completely or excessively satisfied. Second, physiological needs have the characteristic of recurrence in humans (Feist, 2010).

Maslow argued that humans always yearn for something throughout their lives. Fulfilling desires is the limit of human needs. Additional needs will arise after basic needs are met. Conversely, certain individuals may attempt to overcome or satisfy their hunger by doing other things, such as smoking or drinking water. Therefore, even though human needs are relative, their relationship still exists (Goble, 1971).

### ***Safety Needs***

When all physiological needs are met and no longer dominate thoughts and behaviors, a new desire for needs known as security needs emerges. Security, law, order, stability, personal mental and physical safety, and support are all safety needs. Safety needs are crucial because they enable an individual to feel safe, allowing them to advance to the next level of the hierarchy. In times of emergency, human behavior is dominated by their need for safety.

Maslow, on the other hand, believed that addressing people's safety needs may be seen in their choice of familiar surroundings, stable jobs, savings accounts, and insurance.

Safety needs may be separated into two categories according to whom the needs are used. The first is intended for children. Children would feel uncomfortable if they suffer from physical ailments or lose parental affection. Injustice, unfairness, and inconsistency in life will endanger children and make them feel uncomfortable and frightened. Meanwhile, for adults, health, a normal and stable condition of life especially in the workplace, and being affluent are believed to make them feel safe (Maslow, 1943).

### ***Love and Belonging Needs***

After an individual has met his or her physiological and safety needs, the need for love and belonging will appear. These needs include a hunger for an intimate relationship with others, a desire to be a part of a group, or a sense of belonging. At this stage, the individual will intensely feel the lack of friends, a mate, a wife, or children. This will push an individual to seek loving relationships with others in general, such as a place in his group or family, which then he will work hard to achieve this goal. According to Maslow, people attempt to overcome emotions of loneliness and alienation. Giving and receiving love, affection, and a sense of belonging are all part of it. Humans in general want to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a huge social group or a small social group.

In society, obstacles to the fulfillment of the need for belonging and affection are often found in cases that indicate failure to adapt and more severe pathology. Love and affection are seen as having many boundaries and prohibitions. Almost all psychopathologies emphasize that inhibition of the need for love is the main cause of the inability to adapt (Maslow, 1984).

### ***Esteem Needs***

A person will develop a desire to be valued if he or she already feels loved or owned. An individual has a desire for a stable appraisal of themselves in order to have self-respect or self-esteem and to have other esteem, humans need to stabilize their self-evaluation.

According to (Maslow, 1943), esteem needs are divided into two categories, which are self-esteem and reputation. The need for self-esteem drives an individual to seek success, strength, confidence, independence, and freedom. The desire for respect or repute from others includes a desire for acknowledgment, prestige, and appreciation by others of one's accomplishments, as well as a sense of importance. Satisfying the need for self-esteem leads to the feelings of self-confidence, value, strength, capability, and sufficiency in being important and beneficial in the world.

### ***Self-Actualization Needs***

In Abraham Maslow's theory, the most important human need is the need to express oneself. The need for self-actualization is defined by Maslow as the individual's desire to become a person according to his desires and potential or the individual's desire to perfect himself through expressing all his potential (Koswara, 1991).

When the first four levels of need have been met, the final level of development, self-actualization, can be reached. (Maslow, 1943) defines self-actualization needs as a desire to become whatever one is capable of being. People who have reached this stage have become a complete human being. A self-actualized person is self-sufficient, they can maintain their sentiments of self-esteem even when they are despised, rejected, or disregarded by others. Self-actualization growth is the urge for personal growth and discovery that exists in the life of an individual. According to Maslow, a person is continually 'becoming' and never remains static in these words. Self-actualization occurs when a person discovers a meaningful purpose in life that is essential to them.

There are two papers that discuss the two different characters of *Water for Elephants*. First, *August's Abusive Act Reflected in Sara Gruen's Water for Elephants Novel (2006): A Psychoanalytic Criticism* written by Ryan Prihtani for his undergraduate degree in the English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. In this study, the writer focuses on August's deviant behavior, which stems from paranoid schizophrenia. Second, *Self-Actualization Need in Major Character of Water for Elephants Film* written by Syarif

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Hidayat. This study focuses on how Jacob tries to fulfill and satisfy his self-actualization needs seen from the Hierarchy of Human Needs Theory of Abraham H. Maslow.

The theme of animal rights in this novel has also been written in a paper by Evie Triana entitled *Animal Rights in Sara Gruen's Water for Elephants: An Ecocriticism Study*. Evie's work published in the *Allusion Journal* of Universitas Airlangga.

Bassmah Bassam Khaled AlTaher wrote *The Importance of a Dystopian Hero in Sara Gruen's Water for Elephants*. This study aims to prove the existence of the Dystopian world in Sara Gruen's novel *Water for Elephants* and how that world is formed in a miniature circus society. His paper published on *IJ-ELTS: International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*.

In the movie *Water for Elephants*, Marlena Rosenbluth, portrayed by Reese Witherspoon, is a complex and resilient character whose life unfolds amidst the challenging backdrop of a traveling circus during the Great Depression. As a skilled equestrian performer, Marlena exudes grace and expertise in her interactions with the circus animals, earning her a place in the spotlight. Beneath her outward confidence, Marlena grapples with the complexities of her relationships, particularly with August, the charismatic but volatile ringmaster. Her character is marked by a journey of self-discovery, as she seeks not only recognition for her talents but also strives to assert her identity and find love and fulfillment within the unconventional and often tumultuous world of the circus. Marlena's strength, vulnerability, and determination make her a compelling and multidimensional figure in this captivating tale.

One movie that depicts the struggle to fulfill the hierarchy of needs is the movie *Water for Elephants*. The character of Marlena in this movie can be analyzed in the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The hierarchy suggests that human needs are organized in a pyramid, with basic needs at the bottom and higher-level needs at the top. Abraham Maslow is a psychological figure who has had a lot of influence in the field of psychology. His famous motivation theory is the pyramid of needs (Irwanto & Gunawan, 2021). In the case of Marlena, her psychological needs can be understood through this framework. By applying



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the character of Marlena in *Water for Elephants* the readers can gain a deeper understanding of her motivations, desires, and emotional experiences throughout the movie.

The aim of this research is to analyze the character of Marlena Rosenbluth in *Water for Elephants* through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. By applying this psychological framework, the study seeks to explore Marlena's motivations, desires, and emotional experiences as she navigates the challenges of her relationships and strives for self-fulfillment within the circus. The research will examine how her psychological needs evolve throughout the movie, from basic survival needs to higher-level aspirations, shedding light on the complexities of her character and the driving forces behind her actions in the context of the Great Depression-era circus setting.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research methods are research methods based on philosophy, which are used to research scientific conditions (experiments) where the researcher is the instrument, data collection techniques, and qualitative analysis place more emphasis on meaning (Sugiyono, 2013). This study used a psychological approach to discuss the issue of the movie. Daiches stated that "Psychological comes into criticism in two ways, in the investigation of the act of creation and in the psychological study of particular authors to show the relation between the attitudes and states of mind and the special qualities of their work". The writer uses this approach to analyze this study because the theory of the hierarchy of needs is a kind of psychological issue. In this study, the writer tries to connect the personalities of the main character with the theory of the hierarchy of needs by Maslow.

The data is divided into two categories, primary and secondary. The primary data is the *Water for Elephant* movie. The secondary data comes from previous theses, books, journals, articles, and essays. The data collection method used in this research is library research. A library research method involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or

expert opinion on the research query, as well as learning and comprehending data that has close ties to the problems from books, theories, notes, and documents (George, 2008). The writer uses contextual methods to analyze the extrinsic aspects of the movie. The contextual method is a method of analyzing the text of a movie by understanding the characteristics of visual communication. The extrinsic aspect is the psychological aspect. The writer uses the theory of hierarchy of needs as an approach to analyze the extrinsic aspect.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

In this paper, the writer explore the psychological needs of the main female character in the movie *Water for Elephants* using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework. The film presents a narrative rich in emotional complexity and the life experiences of its main character, making it an intriguing study to examine how her psychological needs are fulfilled throughout the story. By referring to concepts within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the writer will analyze how the main character experiences and pursues needs such as physical, safety, social relationships, esteem, and self-actualization within the narrative context presented in the film. Through this approach, it aims to deepen the understanding of psychological complexity of Marlena.

### ***Findings***

#### ***Marlena's Physiological Needs***

Marlena's physiological needs, such as food, water, and shelter, are essential for her survival. These needs are depicted in the movie as she navigates life in the circus, ensuring her basic requirements are met.

#### ***Basic Needs of Shelter***

Marlena's physiological needs, encompassing basic requirements for shelter, food, water, and sleep, are intricately woven into the fabric of her character and the challenging circus life. Firstly, the traveling circus serves as Marlena's primary shelter, offering a sense of

community, identity, and purpose. However, the unconventional living conditions within the circus community may impact her physiological well-being, as the transient nature of the shelter could pose challenges to her overall stability.

**Picture 1**

*Marlena and her luxury room on the train*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 52.15, 2011

In a luxurious and elegant train carriage, Marlena, as the wife of a circus owner, finds a stable and comfortable residence amidst the circus' nomadic lifestyle. Interiors filled with high-quality furniture and elegant decor create a warm and welcoming home atmosphere. Despite living on the road as part of a circus, exclusive personal services such as nannies, private chefs and other staff ensure that all his daily needs are well met. With modern facilities and beautiful views passing by outside the carriage window, Marlena can enjoy the luxury and comfort that surrounds her life, indicating that her basic needs for housing have been well met amidst the continuous mobility of the circus.

*Basic Needs of Food and Water*

Marlena's basic needs for food and water are met within the context of the circus, but the availability and quality of these resources may be subject to the unpredictable nature of circus life. The movie explores how the Great Depression and financial struggles within the circus

community might influence the adequacy of Marlana's nutrition and hydration. These challenges underscore the precarious balance between meeting basic physiological needs and the harsh realities of survival in a nomadic and economically unstable environment.

**Picture 2**

*Marlena has breakfast with the circus performer*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.21.35, 2011

In this scene, Marlana is shown having a meal with other circus performers, including Jacob, the protagonist. They are gathered in a communal dining area, likely a makeshift mess hall or tent, where they are served food and beverages. Marlana is seen eating and conversing with her fellow performers, indicating that she is fulfilling her basic need for nourishment and sustenance.

This scene not only showcases Marlana's access to food and water within the circus community but also provides insight into the social dynamics and camaraderie among the performers. It highlights the importance of communal meals as a way for the circus members to come together, bond, and support each other amidst the challenges of their nomadic lifestyle.

### *Basic Needs of Sleep*

Marlena's basic need for sleep is likely affected by the demanding and irregular schedule of circus performances. The physical and mental toll of training animals, rehearsing acts, and navigating the challenges of circus life impact her ability to achieve adequate and quality sleep. The movie depicts moments of exhaustion and fatigue, shedding light on the physiological toll that the circus lifestyle takes on Marlena's overall well-being.

#### **Picture 3**

*Marlena prepares to sleep behind the curtains*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 54.07, 2011

In this scene, Marlena is shown retiring to her living quarters, likely a small trailer or tent provided for the circus performers. The camera captures her entering the space, and preparing for bed. While the movie may not explicitly focus on Marlena's sleep habits, this scene provides a glimpse into her routine and the importance of finding moments of respite amidst the chaotic and physically demanding environment of the circus. It serves as a subtle reminder of the universal need for rest and rejuvenation, even within the confines of the circus world.

### ***Marlena's Safety Needs***

Safety and security are another set of needs that are important for Marlena. This includes physical safety as well as emotional security. The character's experiences in the movie reflect her efforts to fulfill these needs, especially in the context of her relationship with August.

#### *Being Protected by Others*

Marlena's safety needs are intricately woven into the challenges and dynamics of the circus environment. As a performer, Marlena relies on the protection of others, particularly the circus owner August, to navigate the inherent risks associated with her role. The dangerous stunts and interactions with wild animals underscore the importance of a secure and protected environment. However, the fragility of this safety is evident as the storyline unfolds, revealing moments of vulnerability and the potential for harm within the seemingly protective confines of the circus.

August: Do you want to leave me?

Marlena: No. But I'm your wife. I'm not one of your things.

August: Prove it.

Marlena: Look at me! Nothing is going on. Nothing. Do you hear me? I'll never leave you. (She knelt down to him)

August: Of course, an innocent woman wouldn't have to get on her knees. But you can't help it, can you? Just a force of habit for a woman like you. (August Slaps Marlena)

(Marlena groans)

(August and Jacob grunting) (Water for Elephants (2011): 01.33.30-01.34.30)

The scene above is about an emotional confrontation between the characters August, Marlena, and Jacob. August, who is the ringmaster and Marlena's husband, accuses Marlena of having an affair with Jacob, a new employee at the circus. Marlena vehemently denies the accusations, affirming her love for August and trying to convince him that there is nothing going on between her and Jacob. However, August refuses to believe it and blames Marlena

by revealing her sexist attitudes, stating that as a woman, Marlena should not have to prove her loyalty in such a way. August then hits Marlena as a form of humiliation and violence, showing his control and dominance over Marlena. Jacob, who was a witness to the altercation, also got involved in a physical fight with August in reaction to Marlena's rough treatment. This scene depicts complex interpersonal, power, and gender conflicts in the relationships between the three characters.

The incident where Rosie kills August in this movie is the culmination of the conflict that has been mounting throughout the story between kindness and cruelty, fear and courage, and oppression and justice. Rosie's actions are not only a natural response to threats against Marlena but also a symbol of rebellion against the oppression she has experienced. August's death at the hands of Rosie represents liberation from tyranny and the courage to stand up against injustice, while also ending the circus' long-standing cycle of violence and oppression. This incident creates an important turning point in the movie's narrative, showing that even the most unlikely creatures can deliver justice in the bleakest of situations.

**Picture 4**

*Rosie slapped August with her trunk*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.48.57, 2011

August, a circus ringmaster who is rude and often cruel to his wife and circus employees, gets a tragic ending when he treats Marlena with violence in front of Rosie, a circus elephant who

has previously felt kindness from Marlena and Jacob. When August begins to violently attack Marlena, Rosie reacts in an extraordinary way. Under pressure and anger, Rosie, who had previously been bullied and abused by August, breaks free from her bonds and attacks August viciously. August, in the position of stabbing Marlena, was slapped by Rosie's strong trunk and died.

### *Being Supported by Others*

Marlena's need for support is both physical and emotional, extending beyond the arena performances. The camaraderie among circus members offers a semblance of a supportive community, but it is also a complex web of relationships. The dynamics with August, both as a husband and a figure of authority, create a unique blend of support and control. Marlena's interactions with other performers and her bond with Jacob, the protagonist, further showcase her pursuit of meaningful connections that go beyond the surface, emphasizing the importance of emotional support in meeting her psychological needs.

### **Picture 5**

*Marlena and Jacob treat Rosie's wounds*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.01.16, 2011

In the scene where Marlena and Jacob care for Rosie after being tortured by August, it is seen that Marlena's safety needs are fulfilled, supported by Jacob. Even though Marlena is



August's wife, who often acts violently and rudely, Jacob, a circus employee who has feelings of love for Marlena, shows strong concern and support for Marlena and the circus animals, including Rosie. When Rosie suffers injuries from August's rough treatment, Marlena and Jacob work together to care for Rosie.

In this moment, Jacob shows that he cares and supports Marlena in a challenging situation. While he may not have had the formal relationship with Marlena that August had, Jacob provided invaluable support to Marlena and assisted in caring for Rosie after the violence. Jacob's actions in this scene show that he is there to support Marlena and her safety and well-being, even amidst the unsafe and dangerous environment created by August. Thus, this scene reflects that Marlena's safety needs are supported by Jacob through his participation in caring for Rosie, indicating a strong relationship between the two.

There is another scene where Jacob supports Marlena. Jacob shoot a sick horse dead, it is seen that Marlena's safety needs are met, supported by Jacob. Silverstar, the horse, was experiencing unbearable suffering due to severe pain, and Marlena felt responsible to end the animal's suffering. Jacob, who has feelings of love and empathy for Marlena and the circus animals, supports and helps Marlena in making this difficult decision.

**Picture 6**

*Jacob shoots Silverstar*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 36.58, 2011

In this moment, Jacob shows that he is on Marlena's side, supporting and helping in a situation that requires an important decision. Jacob's presence gave Marlena strength and moral support, as well as physical assistance in carrying out these actions. Although Marlena may find it difficult to make such difficult decisions alone, Jacob's presence provides reassurance that she is not alone in facing these challenges. Jacob's actions in helping Marlena shoot the sick horse to death show that he is there to support and protect Marlena, as well as ensure that her safety and welfare needs are met. Thus, this scene reflects that Marlena's safety needs are supported by Jacob, showing the close relationship between the two and the existence of strong support in difficult situations.

#### *Personal Mental Stability*

In the scene where Rosie goes on a rampage at the show, almost causing Marlena harm, Marlena's mental stability is clearly disturbed by the incident. As Rosie's main trainer, Marlena is responsible for the elephant's safety and welfare, as well as the smooth running of the circus performances. When Rosie goes on a rampage in the middle of the show, Marlena must confront a threatening and potentially dangerous situation, which significantly affects her mental stability. In the midst of chaos and panic, Marlena may feel tremendous pressure from having to maintain control over a situation that is increasingly deteriorating. Fear of possible danger to herself, the circus crew, as well as the audience, may have caused intense stress and anxiety for Marlena. Apart from that, a sense of responsibility and worry about Rosie's safety can also disrupt her mental stability.

#### **Picture 7**

*Marlena almost fell while riding a raging Rosie at a circus show*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.03.53, 2011

Rosie, who was continuously tormented by August throughout the circus performance, put up a fight. Marlena is still riding Rosie, who is running amok, which is endangering Marlena. This scene may also reveal Marlena's uncertainty in dealing with an unexpected emergency situation. However, as an experienced circus professional, Marlena must remain calm and take appropriate action in dealing with crisis situations like this. However, when Rosie throws a tantrum, Marlena may feel trapped in an uncontrollable situation, which can disrupt her mental stability and present major challenges to her overall well-being. Thus, this scene reflects the disturbance in Marlena's mental stability due to the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty she faces in the face of threatening events at the circus performance.

### ***Marlena's Love and Belongingness Needs***

Marlena's love and belongingness needs are explored through various relationships—be it with family, friends within the circus, or her romantic partner. Each connection contributes to her sense of belonging and fulfillment, portraying the complexity of human relationships within the backdrop of a unique and challenging setting.

#### *Love Needs from Family*

Marlena's love and belongingness needs are intricately woven into the fabric of her relationships with family, friends, and her romantic partner. Firstly, Marlena's connection with

her family is a significant aspect of her emotional well-being. The movie hints at her past and the possibility of strained family relationships, which may have influenced her longing for familial love and acceptance. The absence or complexity of these connections could contribute to her vulnerability and desire for a sense of belonging.

**Picture 8**

*Welcoming party called baptism in Benzini Brothers Circus*



Source: Water for Elephants 01.28.02, 2011

The event of Jacob's baptism shows the warmth of the Benzini circus family for Marlena through the support and unity shown by the members of the circus. All the circus members threw cakes and cream at Jacob, giving him affectionate hugs and kisses. Jacob's baptism becomes a symbol of his integration into the circus family. Marlena, as one of the important figures in the circus, provided support and warmth to Jacob during this process. She may have acted as a maternal or even sister figure to Jacob, showing concern for his existence and well-being in the harsh circus environment. In this moment of baptism, Marlena and the rest of the circus welcome Jacob warmly, showing that they consider him part of their family. Marlena, as an important figure in the circus, plays an important role in welcoming Jacob into the circus family, showing that this family is not only made up of blood ties, but also of emotional bonds and warm relationships between fellow circus members.

### *Love Needs from Friends*

Marlena's friendships within the circus community provide a surrogate family of sorts. The bond with fellow performers, workers, and the animals fosters a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose. These relationships contribute to her need for belongingness, creating a support system within the unconventional environment of the circus. The challenges and joys of circus life are shared experiences that deepen her connections with others, fulfilling a part of her emotional needs.

#### **Picture 9**

*The riots during Benzini Brothers Circus rebellion*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.47.12, 2011

The uprising of Benzini's circus members shows Marlena's solid friendship through the support and solidarity shown by her colleagues in facing difficulties together. As the situation in the circus became increasingly tense and unstable, especially due to August's harsh and cruel treatment of the circus animals and crew, the circus members began to feel dissatisfied and uncomfortable with the conditions.

It displays solidarity among the circus members, including Marlena, who feel that they must stand together against the injustice and oppression they experience. Despite the great risks involved in going against the ringmaster, the circus members remained united and collectively

took steps to voice their dissatisfaction. Marlana, as one of the main figures in the circus, may have had a big influence in forming unity and leading this rebellion movement.

In this moment, Marlana may have felt supported by her friends, because they together showed courage and bravery to fight injustice. The solidarity and friendship between the circus members shows that they are not only working as colleagues, but also as friends and family who support each other in facing challenges together. Thus, the uprising of Benzini's circus members in this movie shows Marlana's solid friendship through the support and solidarity shown by her professional colleagues in facing difficulties together.

#### *Love Needs from Partner*

Marlena and Jacob's love life is a journey full of obstacles and tension, but ultimately leads to a heart-warming happy ending. Initially, Marlana, the wife of ringmaster August, and Jacob, a medical student who joins the circus after losing his family, are attracted to each other. Their relationship grows in secret behind the circus curtain, amidst fear of August's wrath. Despite being involved in a dangerous and forbidden relationship, Marlana and Jacob's love continues to grow. They find happiness and support in each other amidst the stress and uncertainty of the harsh circus environment. However, tensions rise as their secret is about to be revealed and August becomes increasingly suspicious of their relationship. Fights between Jacob and August occur frequently, posing a threat to their safety and that of the rest of the circus.

The climax of Marlana and Jacob's romantic journey occurs when Rosie, the beloved circus elephant, goes berserk and causes chaos at the show. In this moment of crisis, Marlana and Jacob fight together to control the situation and save those around them, showing the strength of their relationship. At the end of the movie, Marlana and Jacob are finally able to be together and achieve their happiness, even though they have to go through various obstacles and dangers.

#### **Picture 10**

*Marlena, Jacob, and their first child*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 01.53.15, 2011

After a rebellion breaks out in the Benzini brothers' circus, Jacob completes his final exams in veterinary medicine. Marlena and Jacob received a promising job offer from the biggest Ringling circus of that era where Marlena worked as a performer and Jacob as a veterinarian. In Ringling Marlena gave birth to her first child, Walter. Marlena and Jacob were then blessed with 3 children. A love story that has a happy ending as the audience expects.

### ***Marlena's Esteem Needs***

As an artist and performer, Marlena's need for esteem and recognition is significant. The movie portrays her pursuit of validation and respect within the circus community, reflecting this aspect of her psychological needs.

#### *Esteem from Others*

Marlena's esteem needs, rooted in the desire for recognition and esteem from others, are evident in her role as a star performer within the circus. Marlena's skills as an equestrian and her captivating performances make her a central attraction, garnering admiration and applause from the audience. This external validation contributes significantly to her sense of self-worth and esteem. The spotlight and recognition she receives not only fulfill her need for acknowledgment but also elevate her status within the circus community. Marlena's ability to captivate the audience symbolizes her quest for esteem and recognition, reinforcing the importance of external validation in meeting her psychological needs.



**Picture 11**

The rube gives applause to Marlana



Source: *Water for Elephants* 22.03, 2011

Here is a scene where Marlana dazzles the audience with her performance in the circus ring. As she flawlessly executes her acts and receives applause and admiration from the audience, Marlana's confidence and self-esteem are boosted. The validation and recognition she receives from the spectators fulfill her esteem needs from others, affirming her talents and abilities as a performer.

*Being Recognized by Others*

The dynamics of the circus community, coupled with August's controlling and possessive behavior, create a challenging environment for Marlana to balance her need for esteem with the constraints imposed on her personal and professional life. The movie explores the tension between external recognition and the cost of achieving it, shedding light on the intricate interplay between Marlana's esteem needs and the challenges she faces within the circus setting.

Jacob: Hey, Camel, who's the woman who works with the horses?

Camel: (shushes) That ain't no woman. That's the boss's wife, Marlana. She's a star attraction.

And she doesn't talk to nobody, and you don't talk to her. She'll just high-hat you anyway. (*Water for Elephants* (2011): 24.05-24.18)



This conversation illustrates how Marlena is recognized by other circus members, especially by Camel, who tells Jacob that Marlena is not an ordinary woman, but the wife of the circus boss, namely August. Camel explains that Marlena is one of the circus' main attractions, showing how important Marlena's role and reputation are in the circus environment. When Camel says that Marlena doesn't talk to anyone and that she can ignore others in an arrogant manner, it shows that Marlena is considered to have high status and authority in the circus. This accolade could be due to her skill and beauty, as well as her status as the wife of the ringmaster, August.

Marlena is known and respected by the other members of the circus. Her reputation as a graceful and honorable person shapes people's perceptions of her. This also highlights the importance of hierarchy and social dynamics within the circus, where Marlena occupies a high position and is respected by her co-workers.

### ***Marlena's Self-Actualization Needs***

Self-actualization, which involves realizing one's full potential and pursuing personal growth, is a key aspect of Marlena's psychological needs. The character's journey in the movie can be analyzed in terms of her quest for self-fulfillment and authenticity.

#### ***Showing Capability***

Marlena's journey towards self-actualization is intricately linked to her desire to showcase her capabilities and to attain self-acceptance within the confines of the circus. As a skilled equestrian performer, Marlena strives to demonstrate her expertise in front of the audience, showcasing her ability to command and connect with the circus animals. This pursuit of excellence becomes a crucial aspect of her self-actualization, as she seeks recognition and validation for her unique talents. The applause and admiration from the audience contribute to Marlena's sense of accomplishment and self-worth, fulfilling her need to show her capabilities to both herself and others.

**Picture 12**

*Marlena and her horses show*



Source: *Water for Elephants* 22.08, 2011

Marlena became the main star in the Benzini Brothers Circus show. This was due to a combination of extraordinary horsemanship, personal grace, and her position as the ringmaster's wife. His ability to excel in performances earned him recognition and appreciation among circus members and audiences alike, making him one of the circus' most sought-after attractions.

*Accepting Oneself*

Marlena faces challenges and societal expectations within the circus, particularly in her tumultuous relationship with August. The process of self-acceptance becomes a central theme as she grapples with her own vulnerabilities and fears. Marlena's journey involves confronting societal norms and finding the strength to embrace her true self, both as a performer and as an individual. Through her experiences, the movie portrays Marlena's evolution towards self-actualization as she navigates the complexities of the circus world, striving to embrace her capabilities while accepting and asserting her own identity.

Jacob: Just come with me.

Marlena: What?

Jacob: You think there's nothing out there for you, but there is. You just can't see it.

Marlena: Jacob, you don't understand. I can't. He'll find me.

Jacob: Marlena, there's a better kind of life that's meant for you. Whether that life is with me or not, or whether you love me or not, it doesn't matter. But it's got to be now. (*Water for Elephants* (2011): 01.36.06-01.36.30)

In the conversation between Jacob and Marlena, Jacob offers Marlena a chance to leave her unhappy life and bond with August. She shows Marlena that there is a chance to find happiness and a better life out there, even though Marlena may feel trapped and unsure of the possibilities. Jacob describes that Marlena may feel shackled by insecurity or fear of August, which may be preventing her from seeing opportunities beyond the situation she is currently experiencing. He emphasizes that there is unrevealed potential for Marlena in the outside world, where she can achieve a better and more fulfilling life.

The connection of this conversation to Marlena's self-acceptance is that Jacob is trying to help Marlena accept herself by giving her hope for a brighter future. Through Jacob's words and actions, Marlena may begin to realize that she deserves happiness and safety and that she does not have to be trapped in circumstances that make her unhappy. Jacob shows Marlena that she deserves a better life and that she can choose to leave unhealthy and unhappy circumstances behind. She fights for Marlena's self-acceptance by offering her freedom and a chance to start over, showing that Marlena can have control over her own life and choose to live the life she wants. Thus, this conversation reflects Marlena's process of self-acceptance and the courage to pursue her own happiness.

### ***Discussion***

In the movie *Water for Elephants*, the female main character, Marlena, is able to fulfill all her needs according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. She starts the journey with her physiological needs, such as the need for food, water, and safe shelter, which are met through her role as a circus performer that gives her access to these basic resources. Marlena then fulfills her security needs by relying on her status as August's wife, although their relationship is fraught with tension and violence. However, at the needs stage of love and belonging,

Marlena begins to experience deep inner conflict. Although she was trapped in a violent marriage, Marlena found true love and emotional support from Jacob, who gave her the strength to fight the pressure she was under.

Marlena managed to fulfill her need for self-esteem, especially through the recognition she received as a successful circus star and as an independent figure when she finally decided to leave August. At the top of the hierarchy, Marlena achieved self-actualization when she chose to live according to her own choice, free from August control. Marlena's choice to live an authentic and independent life, although fraught with risk, shows that she has achieved true self-fulfillment.

This research shows that Marlena successfully went through all stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, culminating in the need for self-actualization. These findings can be integrated with a previous study by Syarif Hidayat who also used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory to analyze Jacob's character. In the study, Hidayat found that Jacob managed to achieve self-actualization through his struggle to meet his basic needs first. Similarly, Marlena shows the same pattern in her quest for happiness and self-fulfillment. The main difference between Marlena and Jacob was the context in which they sought self-fulfillment. Marlena had to face more personal and emotional challenges in her relationship with August, which affected the way she achieved self-actualization.

The contribution of this study is that it enriches the understanding of how female characters in films can achieve their psychological fulfillment despite being in stressful situations. It also broadens the perspective on the application of Maslow's theory not only to male characters like Jacob but also to female characters like Marlena, who through her struggles, manages to achieve self-fulfillment in different contexts. The implications of these findings confirm the importance of considering gender factors and interpersonal relations in the analysis of characters' psychological needs in works of literature.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of Marlena's psychological needs in *Water for Elephants* through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs reveals a nuanced journey of fulfillment and self-actualization. Throughout the movie, Marlena undergoes a series of challenges and experiences that profoundly impact her psychological well-being. From her initial struggles to meet basic physiological and safety needs within the confines of a circus environment to her pursuit of love, belongingness, and esteem, Marlena demonstrates resilience and determination in navigating the complexities of human desires and aspirations.

As the narrative unfolds, Marlena's character evolves, reflecting a gradual progression towards higher levels of psychological fulfillment. She finds solace and companionship in her relationship with Jacob, transcending the isolation and uncertainty of her previous circumstances. Moreover, Marlena's role as a performer and beloved figure within the circus community reinforces her sense of identity and esteem, fulfilling her need for recognition and belongingness.

Marlena's journey culminates in a state of self-actualization, where she embraces her true passions and desires without compromising her values or integrity. Her ability to overcome adversity, forge meaningful connections, and pursue her dreams exemplifies the inherent resilience of the human spirit. Through Marlena's story, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between individual aspirations and the broader context of social and environmental influences.

Marlena's fulfillment of her psychological needs underscores the timeless relevance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in understanding human behavior and motivation. As she navigates the complexities of her journey, Marlena exemplifies the universal quest for meaning, fulfillment, and self-discovery—a journey that resonates with audiences and transcends the confines of the cinematic narrative. Through her triumphs and tribulations, Marlena reminds us of the transformative power of resilience, love, and the pursuit of authenticity in shaping human lives and fulfilling their deepest psychological needs.

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