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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Liam O'Flaherty's Short Story, "His First Flight"

Mahnour Khurshid*¹, Sana Khurshid²

Original Article

1. M. Phil Scholar of English Literature, Department of English Literature and Linguistics, University of Malakand. Email: mahnoor8261@gmail.com
2. Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Women Campus, University of Swat. Email: isanakhurshid8424@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the needs of a young seagull in the short story and to explore how the young seagull fulfills those needs, using Abraham Harold Maslow's Hierarchy theory. This study used a qualitative research method. The young seagull in the short story "His First Flight" takes his first flight represents his ascent through the hierarchical levels. The seagull was first relied on his parents for sustenance, but he eventually learned to obtain food on his own. He encounters challenges that are similar to the needs for safety that shows how his approach to risk management and security has developed. His associations with other birds illustrate his desire for affection and a sense of belonging, as well as the formation of ties. The seagull develops his flying ability, attracting praise and satisfying his desire for respect. The climax of the story arises when he takes a hazardous flight, a symbol of self-actualization and reaching one's full potential. The flight mirrors his way to self-realization by demonstrating not just physical achievement but also mental and emotional growth. The narrative's symbolic structure underlines the main character's progression from reliance to autonomy, as well as from uncertainty to self-assurance, which lines up with Maslow's hierarchy phases. "His First Flight" expertly conveys the core concepts of Maslow's theory on human desires and goals via challenges, connections, and successes, offering readers with a comprehensive exploration of self-actualization and satisfaction.

Introduction

Literature is a great source of psychological studies since it portrays human experiences, emotions, and actions. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy is a significant psychological notion that provides a framework for understanding human motivation and progress. The hierarchy contains several levels of needs that people strive to meet, providing a prism through which literary works can be evaluated to reveal deeper layers of meaning.

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist who was born in 1908, made major contributions to the psychological discipline or field. He is renowned for his humanistic psychology approach, which underscores the positive or good facets of human nature and personal progress.

Maslow's most significant book, "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943), presented the notion of a hierarchical system of needs. The basis of this hierarchy is made up of physiological requirements, which are then followed by safety, love/belonging, esteem, and lastly, self-actualization. Maslow's groundbreaking theory shifted the focus from behaviorism to understanding individuals' internal motivations and aspirations. His humanistic perspective highlighted the importance of self-discovery, personal fulfillment, and reaching one's full potential (Celestine, 2017).

Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to short stories enables readers and scholars to analyze characters' motivations, desires, and developmental journeys in a clear and concentrated manner. Short stories often provide glimpses of characters' lives, making it easier to pinpoint specific stages of Maslow's hierarchy within the narrative. Analyzing these stories through the lens of Maslow's theory helps uncover the psychological reasons behind character actions, choices, or transformative experiences. Additionally, short stories can serve as microcosms of broader human experiences, making the application of Maslow's theory particularly poignant. Readers can witness characters navigating through the hierarchy of needs, mirroring the complications of real-life psychological development.

O'Flaherty, an Irish author known for his evocative storytelling, often weaves narratives that illuminate the human condition. "*His First Flight*" unfolds as a poignant exploration of a young seagull's journey toward independence, mirroring the fundamental concepts found in Maslow's theory. O'Flaherty's storytelling skill is apparent in his ability to synthesize typical human experiences amid the setting of the natural environment, presenting readers with an in-depth perspective on life's complexity and the search of one's full potential.

O'Flaherty's works is infused with themes of autonomy, bravery, and self-realization, which go well with Maslow's theory. The researcher will examine the relationship between psychological theory and literary work in the narrative "His First Flight." By doing so, the perspective of a seagull taking off for the first time, O'Flaherty's effective storytelling, alongside Maslow's substantial understandings, offers a thorough investigation of the human psyche and its development.

Literature Review

Maslow's hierarchy theory has been applied to literature, garnered a lot of attention and praise, it has also sparked criticism or opinions. Intellectuals and literary critics have indulged in proficient arguments, presenting a variety of opinions on the validity and limitations of applying Maslow's hierarchy to the understanding of literary works. Some detractors hold that Maslow's psychology-based approach oversimplifies the complex nature of human behavior reflected in literature. Literature, as a form of literary expression, frequently contains diverse characters and narratives that transcend simple classification into hierarchical requirements. Analysts assert that reducing literary study to a rigorous framework may limit its range of possibilities, thereby neglecting the subtleties and complexities inherent in characters' motives and ambitions. Besides, others argue that Maslow's Hierarchy is not broadly applicable across cultures and historical settings. Literature is often seen as a mirror of human society, and critics claim that using a Western-centric psychological framework can overlook the subtleties of characters' requirements in works from other cultural or secular contexts. This raises concerns about the potential cultural bias in the literary application of Maslow's theory. The proponents of the method underline the significance of Maslow's Hierarchy in offering a systematic lens through which to investigate character development and motives. They contend that, despite its drawbacks, the framework provides useful insights into essential human experiences that are common throughout literary works. By connecting character trajectories with Maslow's phases, academics can draw parallels between the characters' psychological journeys and the wider human condition.

Many short stories and novels have been appraised in literature using Maslow's hierarchy. The detailed analysis of these works demonstrates that the characters in the stories have several degrees of needs that range from social and esteem requirements to self-actualization. As an instance in Weiner's novel *Little Earthquake*, the researcher analyzes how the protagonist reflects the Hierarchy of Needs (Soraya, 2018). Similarly, in Rachel Ward's novel *Numbers*, Rudyanto et al (2022) use Maslow's hierarchy to examine the characters' needs, which pertain to self-actualization, esteem, love/belonging, safety, and physiological requirements. In Bette Greene's novel *A Summer of My German Soldier*, the researcher applied Maslow's hierarchy to investigate the main character's psychological state and motivations (Hudadi, 2018). Plus, Maslow's theory is used to examine Richard Matheson's short story *Button Button* (2008). Anwar et al. (2018) assess Norma's motives and desires in their analysis of "Button, Button" using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. According to Maslow's theory, human needs may be classified in a hierarchy, ranging from fundamental physical requirements to higher-order desires such as self-actualization. Norma's behaviors might be seen as an attempt to meet her basic wants, which prioritize protection and security over love and esteem.

Yunadi et al. (2020) used the Hierarchy of Needs Theory to analyze Kathrine Rundell's *Rooftopper's* novel. This study focuses on the main character Sophie, whose needs are defined using the theory of motivation. Furthermore, it points into how she fulfills her needs. Bahuwa (2018) applied Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the novel *Great Gatsby*. This study aimed to analyze the needs of the main character in the novel. It was found that certain needs were fulfilled by the main character but two of them were not fulfilled. Gozali and Pendidikan (2020) conducted a study on the novel *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen by applying Maslow's Theory of Motivation to it. The study analyzed the needs of Elinor who is one of the characters of the novel. It was found that Elinor fulfilled four needs in a hierarchy which are physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs but during this whole process, she faced hardships and went through struggles. Ronnie and Hellystia (2020) investigated the needs of the main character in the novel *Flawed* by Cecelia Ahern based on the Theory of Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow. In J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," Maslow's framework has been applied to scrutinize the protagonist, Holden Caulfield's, psychological evolution as he grapples with identity, belonging, and purpose. Scholars find resonance between Holden's journey and Maslow's hierarchy, revealing layers of meaning beneath the surface of the narrative. Fiedhawatie (2013) carried out a study on a famous American movie by analyzing it through the framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The study is delimited to the main character of the movie.

These applications of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provide insights into the characters' motivations and behaviors in the stories, contributing to a deeper understanding of human development and evolution.

Many studies have been conducted on Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Different novels and movies are analyzed through the framework of the Hierarchy of needs. However, there are hardly any short stories that are analyzed through the aforementioned framework. Therefore, the researcher aims to extend this framework to short stories and analyze Liam O'Flaherty's one of the famous short story "*His First Flight*".

Significance of the Study

Short stories, by nature, encapsulate intense and focused explorations of characters' lives, often within a limited word count. Applying Maslow's Hierarchy to the stories presents a more comprehensive analysis of the characters' desires and motivations in a limited context. In comparison to longer works, where character development may take time, short stories require more immediate involvement with the characters' psychological settings. Utilizing Maslow's hierarchy, learners can analyze the various layers of characters' desires, fears, and self-discovery.

This method broadens literary studies through providing an orderly method to analyzing the multifaceted nature of character development in short tales. It provides an orderly process to exploring how characters undergo several phases of need, linking their psychological journeys to Maslow's hierarchy. Scholars can probe into the complexities of character development, bringing light on aspects that may otherwise be unnoticed in short stories. Furthermore, this technique enables comparative analysis of different short tales. Scholars might investigate how characters in various narratives express comparable or divergent desires, gaining insights on universal features of human psychology and cultural differences. It allows for cross-cultural analysis, which enriches our understanding of how other communities and circumstances impact characters' psychological journeys in short stories.

Research objectives

1. To investigate the needs of the young seagull in the short story.
2. To describe how the young seagull in the narrative fulfill its needs.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, with an emphasis on variable interpretation in accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. As defined by Creswell (2014), a qualitative study or research is a method for understanding and exploring the associated meaning of social or human problems, where emerging questions and procedures are involved, data are collected in a natural setting, and an inductive approach is used to analyze and interpret the meaning of the data. It is qualitative while it involves research questions to explore and describe the discourse paradigm rather than generalizations. In short, it utilized all the characteristics of qualitative research.

The qualitative technique adopted for this study is perfectly aligned with the research objectives and offering a detailed analysis of the psychological components buried in "His First Flight" and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. A qualitative technique is ideally suited for descending deeper into the depths of character motives, emotions, and diversifying narrative dynamics that are present in literary analysis. Qualitative approaches excel in conveying the complexity and context of human experiences. In the field of literary studies, this technique enables a thorough examination of the characters' psychological landscapes, affording insights into their emotions, ideas, and motives as they navigate Maslow's hierarchy.

Literary works often promote multiple interpretations. A qualitative method holds interpretive adaptability, enabling researchers to traverse the complexity of the short story and Maslow's hierarchy while being limited by impermeable set categorization. This adaptability is essential when dealing with the complexities of the characters' emotional and psychological states. Qualitative research is preferable for presenting broad insights into particular situations. The general context of "His First Flight" provides a thorough examination of the young seagull's experiences, presenting a nuanced understanding of how his needs evolve within the story.

Data Source

His First Flight is used as the primary means of data. The researcher attempted to study the data sources utilizing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory.

Data Collection

The researcher used the close reading approach to collect data. According to Brummett (2010), as referenced by Payumi and Hartati (2018), close reading is a method of probing deeply into the meaning of a work of literature through thorough and systematic reading.

Discussion and Analysis



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a psychological theory, asserts that multiple levels of human needs must be fulfilled in a particular order, with lower-level requirements following higher-level ones (Celestine, 2017). A young seagull takes off for the first time. Because the ultimate need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization, the voyage can be seen as a metaphor for his effort to achieve that end goal. Maslow's hierarchy of needs classifies essentials like food, drink, shelter, and safety as physiological needs. The young seagull's journey commences when his father fiercely pulls him from the nest, which marked the beginning of his ordeal for existence. When he begins to learn how to hunt and provide for himself, he meets his basic needs. He must quickly get food and shelter, which is the first rung of the hierarchy. These basic prerequisites for the protagonist's physical well-being serve as motivation for his conduct.

Seagull is delighted to have his safety needs addressed, and he begins to idealize his ability of flying around. Individual stability, privacy, and protection from hazard are all aspects of one's safety requirements or needs. The seagull gains confidence in its ability to fly, making it less vulnerable to predators and the environment. The present form reflects the character's growing sense of security and correlates to the second level in the hierarchy.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasizes an incentive for love, affection, and a sense of belonging at the third level, that is associated with social needs. As the seagull learns to overcome

the challenges of flight, encounters with other seagulls become more apparent. The seagull's interactions with his parents, other seagulls, and other bird species demonstrate his need for connections with others and a sense of belonging. His acquaintances with various birds educate him to a variety of views, skills, and existences that eventually help him assimilate into his community. He expresses his longing to fit in and connect with others by soliciting acceptance and admiration from the flock. Achievement, self-respect, and recognition are all necessary for self-esteem. The young seagull gains confidence and a sense of satisfaction as he continues to hone his flying abilities. His ability to fly successfully boosts his confidence and earns him the respect of the other seagulls. Through success, seagulls want to gain their respect and that of others.

Self-actualization, the top rung in Maslow's hierarchy, refers to reaching one's potential and pursuing personal progress and fulfillment. The seagull's adventure ends successfully when he learns perilous flying feats and achieves the pinnacle of his flying abilities. It represents the ultimate stage of self-actualization, in keeping with Maslow's theory that people are driven to realize their maximum potential once their lower-level needs have been satisfied. The narrative uses flight as a potent symbol. The seagull's psychological path of self-discovery and progress follows his physical adventure of learning to fly. Flight is a metaphor for overcoming barriers and restraints, which is in line with the notion of self-actualization. He overcomes his uncertainties and doubts, soars to new heights like the bird, and eventually finds self-fulfillment.

A persistent element in the narrative is fear, particularly when the seagull deals with the unknown difficulties of flying. It is crucial for his personal development that he be able to face his fears and open himself up to new experiences. The upper levels of the hierarchy, notably esteem and self-actualization, are in line with this progression. He feels more in control of his surroundings and himself with each fear he faces.

Physiological Needs

The initial stage of Maslow's Hierarchy focuses on basic physiological needs like food, shelter, sleep, oxygen, and thirst, these are the lowest layer of the hierarchy of needs (The Psychology Notes, 2020). In *His First Flight*, the young seagull's journey begins with the essential need for food and safety, as it can be seen in the story that his immediate concern is his hunger.

He felt the heat because he had not eaten since the previous nightfall. Then he had found a dried piece of mackerel's tail at the far end of his ledge. Now there was not a single scrap of food left. He had searched every inch, rooting among the rough, dirt-caked straw nest where he and his brothers and sister had been hatched. He even gnawed at the dried pieces of eggshell (Flaherty, 1928).

The seagull's search for food represents his struggle to fulfill his basic psychological needs. His survival becomes intricately linked with meeting these fundamental necessities.

Safety Needs

After the fulfillment of physiological needs, the next is to address safety needs, which include not only physical safety but also security, protection, and stability. It is crucial for an individual to feel secure and protected in their immediate surroundings, as well as in the presence of others, within an environment that is free of any potential harm.

The great expanse of the sea stretched down beneath, and it was such a long way down -- miles down. He felt certain that his wings would never support him, so he bent his head and ran away back to the little hole under the ledge where he slept at night. (Flaherty, 1928)

As the seagull learns to navigate the skies and face potential dangers, his quest for safety is evident. The hazards posed by predators and environmental challenges mirror the safety needs in Maslow's framework. The seagull's encounters with predatory birds and his adaptation to the dangers of flight illustrate the evolution of his approach to risk management and his pursuit of security.

The next moment he felt his wings spread outwards. The wind rushed against his breast feathers, then under his stomach and against his wings. He could feel the tips of his wings cutting through the air. He was not falling headlong now. He was soaring gradually downwards and outwards. He was no longer afraid. He just felt a bit dizzy. Then he flapped his wings once and he soared upwards. (Flaherty, 1928)

Social Needs (Love/Belonging)

After fulfillment of the two stages, love and belonging needs.

The young seagull was left alone on the ledge as his parents and siblings had flown away the day before. *"The day before, all day long, he had watched his parents flying about with his brothers and sister, perfecting them in the art of flight, teaching them how to skim the waves and how to dive for fish"*(Flaherty, 1928). This shows his need for love and belonging as he was feeling lonely and longing to be with his parents. The young seagull takes his first flight which allows him to rejoin his family and fulfill his need for emotional connection.

Esteem Needs

One of the levels of hierarchy is the need for esteem. It is the fourth level which occurs when the previous three needs are fulfilled. (Mustafa, 2022). The seagull's improvement in flying abilities attracts admiration from others, fulfilling his esteem needs. Through his first flight, he earns praise and recognition from his family which boosts his self-esteem.

He soared higher. He raised his breast and banked against the wind. Ga, ga, ga. Ga, ga, ga. Gawl-ool-ah. His mother swooped past him, her wings making a loud noise. He answered her with another scream then his father flew over him screaming. Then he saw his two brothers and sister flying around him, soaring and diving. (Flaherty, 1928)

The moments where the seagull gains confidence and earns the respect of his peers through successful flight represent the esteem-building phase in Maslow's Hierarchy.

Self-Actualization

The need for self-actualization is the most important need in the hierarchy. Maslow stated that these needs will generally be met after the needs for love and respect have been met. (Mustafa, 2022). *Then he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly, and commenced himself to dive and soar, shrieking shrilly* (Flaherty, 1928). The climax of the narrative, where the seagull makes a daring flight, symbolizes self-actualization. This goes beyond physical accomplishment, encapsulating mental and emotional growth. Mastering dangerous aerial stunts and reaching the pinnacle of his flying expertise, the seagull achieves self-realization, aligning with Maslow's concept of individuals realizing their maximum potential.

Conclusion

The study examines Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Flaherty's story *His First Flight*, unraveling the psychological voyage of the young seagull. The results show a strong connection between the phases of Maslow's hierarchy and specific events in the storyline. Maslow's hierarchy is mirrored in the young seagull's evolution from basic physiological needs to the pinnacle of self-actualization. In addition to summarizing the essential ideas of Maslow's theory, the story teaches important lessons about human development, the value of community, and the necessity of overcoming setbacks on the road to self-actualization. Contributing to the field of literary studies, the study illuminates how Maslow's Hierarchy offers a structured lens for analyzing characters' psychological landscapes in concise narratives. The symbiosis between the short story and psychological theory enhances both fields, providing readers and scholars with a deeper grasp of the connections between literature and human psychology.

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