AN ANALYSIS OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS IN THE MAIN CHARACTER GARY JOHNSON IN *HIT MAN* (2023) MOVIE BY RICHARD LINKLATER'S

Mohammad Jefri[1], Elfiondri[2]

[1]Student of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bung Hatta University

Email: jeff.mhd01@gmail.com

[2]Lecturer of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bung Hatta University

Email: elfiondri@bunghatta.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the main character's needs in the movie Hit Man directed by Richard Linklater using Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The study focuses on the main character's needs and the characteristics of self-actualization. The research is based on the interdisciplinary relationship between literature, film, and psychology, particularly humanistic psychology, which emphasizes personal growth and self-actualization. Using the psychology of literature as its framework, this descriptive qualitative study analyzes dialogues, scenes, and character actions from the film. The findings show that Gary Johnson fulfills all levels of Maslow's hierarchy physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs allowing him to achieve self-actualization. He also demonstrates several characteristics of self-actualizing individuals, including more efficient perception of reality, acceptance of self, others, and nature, spontaneity and naturalness, creativeness, and resistance to enculturation. Overall, the study shows that Gary Johnson's development reflects the process of human growth in which fulfilling hierarchical needs leads to self-actualization.

Keywords: *Hierarchy of Needs, Self-Actualization, Creativeness*

INTRODUCTION

The psychology of literature is an interdisciplinary approach that examines literary works through psychological theories in order to understand characters' motivations, conflicts, and personal development. One of the most relevant theories for analyzing human motivation is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which proposes that human needs develop progressively from physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, to the highest level, self-actualization. The film Hit Man (2023) presents a compelling psychological journey through its main character, Gary Johnson. Gary is portrayed as a psychology and philosophy lecturer who lives a stable yet emotionally unfulfilled life. His life changes when he works undercover with the police, pretending to be a hit man named "Ron." Through this dual identity, Gary experiences significant personal transformation. This study aims to answer two research questions: (1). How does the main character fulfill his needs based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory in the film? and (2). How are the characteristics of self-actualization reflected in the main character?

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. The primary data source is the film Hit Man (2023). The data consist of dialogues, monologues, scenes, and character actions that reflect the fulfillment of needs according to Maslow's theory. Data collection was conducted through intensive observation and documentation of relevant scenes. The data were then classified into five levels of Maslow's hierarchy: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. The analysis was carried out by interpreting each scene using Maslow's theoretical

framework and identifying characteristics of self-actualized individuals as proposed by Maslow.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
HIERARCHY OF NEEDS OF GARY
1. Physiological Needs
The findings show that Gary Johnson fulfills his physiological needs from the beginning of the film. He has a proper house, food, water, and a structured daily routine. Scenes depicting him eating at home and living independently demonstrate that his basic biological needs are satisfied. According to Maslow, these needs must be fulfilled before an individual can pursue higher-level needs.

2. Safety Needs
Gary also fulfills his safety needs. He is portrayed as an adult living in a stable society with no signs of social crisis or psychological instability. His primary occupation as a lecturer at the University of New Orleans provides job stability and economic security. Although his secondary role as an undercover operative appears risky, he operates under police supervision and institutional protection. Moreover, as a psychology professor, Gary has the analytical ability to read human behavior and anticipate danger. Therefore, his sense of security and stability remains intact throughout the film.

3. Love and belonging needs
Although Gary has fulfilled his physiological and safety needs, he initially feels emotionally empty because he lives alone and lacks close relationships. His love and belonging needs begin to be satisfied when he meets Madison, and their relationship develops into a genuine emotional bond after he reveals his true identity. In addition, he gains a sense of belonging through his roles as a lecturer and a member of the police team. By the end of Hit Man, Gary builds a family with Madison, showing that his love and belonging needs are fully fulfilled.

4. Esteem Needs
After fulfilling love and belonging needs, Gary moves to the level of esteem needs. He achieves external recognition when his colleagues praise his performance as "Ron." This recognition strengthens his sense of competence and value.

He also develops internal self-esteem, demonstrated by increased self-confidence, courage in making decisions, and recognition of his own abilities. Through his role as Ron, Gary realizes his hidden potential and no longer perceives himself as a passive and rigid individual.

5. Self-Actualization
Ultimately, Gary reaches the level of self-actualization. His self-actualization is reflected in his personal transformation into a braver and more direct person. He is no longer passive or overly cautious, but becomes confident in expressing his thoughts and making decisions. He also succeeds in integrating the identities of "Gary" and "Ron" into a unified and authentic self.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION REFLECTED IN GARY
1. More Efficient Perception of Reality
In this study, Gary is portrayed as someone who can perceive reality objectively and rationally. As a psychology lecturer, he understands human behavior and motivation. This ability helps him accurately assess dangerous situations during undercover operations. He does not act impulsively but carefully analyzes each circumstance. His realistic perception allows him to distinguish between illusion and fact, especially in managing his dual identity as Gary and Ron.

2. Acceptance of Self and Others
Based on the findings in this research, Gary gradually accepts both aspects of his identity: the quiet, intellectual Gary and the confident, assertive Ron. Instead of rejecting one side, he integrates them into a unified self. He also accepts Madison as she is, including her past and complicated situation. This acceptance reflects emotional maturity and psychological balance, which are important indicators of self-actualization.

3. Spontaneity, Simplicity, and Naturalness
At the beginning of the film, Gary's life is structured and somewhat rigid. However, after experiencing personal growth, he becomes more spontaneous and natural in expressing his feelings. He no longer hides behind routine or fear. His behavior becomes more genuine, especially in his relationship with Madison. This shift shows that he is no longer constrained by excessive self-control but acts according to his true self.

4. Creativeness
Creativeness is strongly reflected in Gary's ability to create and perform multiple undercover personas. He designs different characters with distinct personalities, speech patterns, and appearances depending on the client he meets. This creativity is not merely performance but demonstrates psychological flexibility and originality in problem-solving. As explained in the analysis chapter, this ability

represents one of Maslow's characteristics of self-actualized individuals.

5. Resistance to Enculturation

In this study, resistance to enculturation is seen when Gary does not blindly follow institutional rules or social expectations. He makes decisions based on his own moral judgment, particularly in protecting Madison and choosing his personal happiness. Rather than being controlled by external systems, he becomes more autonomous and internally directed. This independence indicates that he has moved beyond merely fulfilling social roles and has begun living according to his own values.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Gary Johnson's journey in Hit Man reflects the gradual fulfillment of human needs as described in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, beginning with the satisfaction of physiological and safety needs, followed by an initial deficiency in love and belonging needs that is later fulfilled through emotional relationships, the achievement of esteem needs through recognition and growing self-confidence, and ultimately the attainment of self-actualization. Furthermore, Hit Man (2023) portrays Gary as demonstrating several characteristics of a self-actualized people, including a more efficient perception of reality; acceptance of self, others, and nature; spontaneity, simplicity, and naturalness; creativeness; and resistance to enculturation. This study contributes to interdisciplinary research in literature, psychology, and film studies by demonstrating how humanistic psychological theory can be applied to character analysis in contemporary cinema. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze the film using other psychological approaches, such as identity theory, existential psychology, or psychoanalysis, in order to gain broader perspectives.

REFERENCES

[1] Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2013). *Film art: An introduction* (10th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

[2] Feist, J., Feist, G. J., & Roberts, T.-A. (2018). *Theories of personality* (9th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

[3] Holland, N. (1990). *The dynamics of literary response*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[4] Linklater, R. (Director). (2023). *Hit Man*. United States: 20th Century Studios.

[5] Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.

[6] Ryckman, R. M. (2013). *Theories of personality* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

[7] Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.