

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HARLEY QUINN'S PERSONALITY IN "BIRDS OF PREY" MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the psychological analysis of Harley Quinn as the main character in "Birds of Prey" movie. Theory of Human Motivation proposed by Maslow (1970) was used to analyze Harley's personality through the fulfillment of five-level needs that can show her personality; namely physiology, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs. "Birds of Prey" movie with the scope of limitation of Harley's speeches, actions, and dialogues are chosen as the source of data. The data were collected qualitatively and analyzed applying the theory of Human Motivation. The findings were presented descriptively with descriptions in sentences and paragraphs. As the result, Harley shows herself as a kind, dramatic, vicious, realistic, optimistic, trustworthy, and independent woman. The way how Harley fulfilled all needs and the motivation behind each of them are the overviews of her personality. A desire of looking for emancipation causes Harley to fulfill the five needs that indirectly show her personality.

Keywords: psychology, Harley Quinn, personality, human motivation theory

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini membahas tentang analisis psikologis Harley Quinn sebagai pemeran utama dalam film "Birds of Prey". Teori Human Motivation yang dikemukakan oleh Maslow (1970) digunakan untuk menganalisis kepribadian Harley melalui pemenuhan lima tingkat kebutuhan yang dapat menunjukkan kepribadiannya; yaitu kebutuhan fisiologi, keamanan, cinta dan kepemilikan, harga diri, dan aktualisasi diri. Film "Birds of Prey" dengan cakupan batasan cara bicara, aksi, dan dialog Harley dipilih sebagai sumber data. Data dikumpulkan secara kualitatif dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori Human Motivation. Hasil penelitian disajikan secara deskriptif dengan uraian dalam kalimat dan paragraf. Sebagai hasilnya, Harley menunjukkan dirinya sebagai wanita yang baik hati, dramatis, kejam, realistis, optimis, dapat dipercaya, dan mandiri. Cara Harley memenuhi semua kebutuhan dan motivasi di baliknya adalah gambaran umum tentang kepribadiannya. Keinginan mencari emansipasi menyebabkan Harley memenuhi lima kebutuhan yang secara tidak langsung menunjukkan kepribadiannya.

Kata kunci: psikologi, Harley Quinn, kepribadian, teori human motivation

I. INTRODUCTION:

Literature is a medium of human expression which brings a new world of human expression and communication with their feelings and internal emotions. Literature is a reflection of human life in

society through a language in written or spoken literary works. Wellek and Warren (1948) stated that some literary critics see literature as a product of human creativity in the form of written or oral work. Through the intrinsic element of literature, the authors convey their expressions such as

thought, feeling, emotion, and enthusiasm, which all are related to the scope of psychology.

Literature and psychology are different disciplines in their scopes of discussions. According to Atkinson (1996), psychology refers to the scientific study of the mind or the science that investigates or studies human behavior. However, they cannot be separated from each other because literature is a medium of expressing human expressions, especially the author's psychology. It can be depicted in the characters, which are the representation of the author's concern and interest. Characters are an important element that depicts humans' psychological expression through their appearances, speeches, actions, and dialogues in which they also meet their conflicts within themselves or with other characters. Analyzing the psychological expressions of the characters is an interesting study to describe the psychological condition and personality of the characters. It can bring the viewers or readers into the psychological dimension of human reality from the characters' point of view and help them to understand the story deeply.

Many psychological theories and approaches can be applied to analyze the psychological dimensions of characters, and one of them is the theory of Human Motivation proposed by Maslow (1970). This theory discusses the motivation of people in fulfilling their hierarchical needs which can reveal their personality. As the representation of human beings, characters need to satisfy the five needs to survive and control their lives as in Maslow's theory. The needs are physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs which are structured as five hierarchical levels within a pyramid-shaped that is well-known as the Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow (1970: 37) also states that "a person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more

strongly than anything else". Therefore, physiological needs at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid are the fundamental needs to be satisfied first than others.

According to Maslow (1970, 37 – 46), the first and basic need is physiological needs which include the needs of food, water, air, sleep, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex. The second need is safety needs which includes the need for security, stability, protection, freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos; the need for structure, order, law, and limits, and so on. The third need is love and belongingness needs which are not all about a partner like a marital relationship, but it is also about being part of the family, group, mate, friends, etc. The fourth need is esteem needs which divides into two; self-esteem (i.e. the desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, mastery and competence, confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom) and esteem from other people (i.e. the desire for reputation or prestige, status, fame and glory, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation). The last and the higher need is self-actualization needs in which people in this need wants to demonstrate their potential, strengths, expertise, skills, and knowledge to get a better result from the previous one, to have the ability in controlling their destiny and feel a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

In this study, the motivation of the main character fulfilling the hierarchical needs that could reveal the main character's personality in a movie entitled "Birds of Prey" was analyzed deeply. Harley Quinn as the main character shows her personality through the fulfillment of her five levels of needs. The movie is released in 2020, written by Christina Hodson, directed by Cathy Yan, and Harley Quinn is the main character played by Margot Robbie. Harley Quinn has a unique character on the psychological side in which her psychological condition turned 180 degrees from a kind-hearted psychiatrist to a cruel

and unforgiving female clown after she fell in love with Joker. The way how she fulfilled all needs and the motivation behind each of them shows her personality.

This study is inspired by previous studies, including studies by Fauziah (2008), Nasution (2017), Selvi (2017), Bilalia (2018), and Retnaningsih (2019). They brought similar topics and discussions about the psychological analysis of

II. RESEARCH METHOD:

The qualitative method was used to analyze Harley Quinn's personality through the application of Maslow's theory of Human Motivation (1970). Harley as the main character in "Birds of Prey" depicts a unique character that shows her personality through the fulfillment of the five needs. The desire and struggle of Harley to live independently and getting her emancipation as a woman are the main concern of the movie.

In order to present the analysis, the data samples were collected by documentation method and note-taking technique. The scope of data is Harley Quinn's appearances, speeches, acts, and dialogues. Watching the movie repeatedly, taking notes, and classifying the data samples based on the five needs were the steps of collecting data. The data collections were then taken to be analyzed.

The data collections were analyzed by descriptive qualitatively. There are the steps of analyzing data: 1) Classifying the data collections that show the main character's motivation in fulfilling her hierarchical needs by using Maslow's theory of Human Motivation (1970), 2) Explaining the main character's motivation in fulfilling her hierarchical needs to reveal her personality, and 3) Drawing conclusion based on the analysis.

The analysis is presented in the informal method in the forms of words and sentences. Moreover, it was best to

characters. However, the application of theory and approach in this study is different from the previous studies in which they used various theories and approaches to analyze the data. The result of this study expects to give insight to the reader or viewer about the psychological analysis of the main character's personality through the fulfillment of hierarchical needs.

compose the result of the analysis descriptively in the form of multiple paragraphs that have been interpreted before. The result of the analysis was in the form of data that shows Harley's personality viewed from the fulfillment of her hierarchical needs along with the explanation of the data based on the theory of Human Motivation (1970).

III. DISCUSSION

This part presents the psychological analysis of Harley Quinn's personality as the main character in "Birds of Prey" movie. Maslow's theory of Human Motivation (1970) was used to examine the data, followed by the interpretation about the fulfillment of hierarchical needs, which exposes Harley's personality. The fulfillment of five hierarchical needs; physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs are more elaborated in the following.

3. 1. Physiological Needs

Physiological needs are the fundamental needs that should be fulfilled first before moving on to other needs. These needs consist of human body needs, such as food, water, air, sleep, shelter, clothing, warmth, and sex (Maslow, 1970: 36). The following scene explains the fulfillment of Harley Quinn's physiological needs as the main character, which reveals her personality.

[Data 1] Scene: Harley buy an egg sandwich for the breakfast

After hangover at the club and blowing the toxic industrial processing plant, Harley is hungry and she decides to buy an egg sandwich as breakfast at Sal's food stall (00:12:40 – 00:14:02)

[Prolog]

*"The fact that he wants me dead hasn't yet hit my radar. See, I was halfway across town, hungover, and **thinking about breakfast. Egg, bacon, American cheese. Soft, toasted buttered roll. Just a dash of hot sauce.**"*

Harley : Not too much, Sal. I wanna taste the cheese.

[Prolog]

"What a way to start my new life. With the perfect egg sandwich."

Harley : Mmm! You're a lifesaver, Sal.
And I'm good for the 75 cents, okay? I promise. That's all the money I got in the world and it's so worth it.

[Prolog]

"I don't know if it's the stray Armenian arm hair, or the fact that his cheese slices are always six months out of date, but no one makes an egg sandwich like Sal."

Harley : I mean it, Sal. No one.

From the movie scene above, Harley has fulfilled her physiological needs through the purchase of food for breakfast. In the data, Harley buys an egg sandwich from Sal, an Armenian who sells food like sandwiches, tacos, and burritos at his food stall. As in the explanation of Maslow (1970: 37) that "For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food, and he wants only food", Harley obviously shows that she is hungry after being hangover and blowing up the toxic industrial processing plant last night, thus she is thinking and perceiving about food. Moreover, her expression in the

scene portrays the emotion of being hungry in a theatrical manner by that showed in the sentences **"I don't know if it's the stray Armenian arm hair, or the fact that his cheese slices are always six months out of date, but no one makes an egg sandwich like Sal"** and **"Egg, bacon, American cheese. Soft, toasted buttered roll. Just a dash of hot sauce"** with dramatized intonation.

Although Harley is known as the Clown Princess of Crime, she pays for the egg sandwich that she bought from Sal. She neither stole nor ran away after getting her breakfast, even though she pays 75 cents less, she still pays for the sandwich that she buys from someone who has always been kind to her and she says that Sal is her lifesaver. She says that Sal is the best egg sandwich seller in the town because the sandwich is so worth it for her. Therefore, it can be said that Harley is a **kind person** for someone who also kind to her and she also is a **dramatic person** who tends to dramatize something that actually does not need to be dramatized.

3. 2. Safety Needs

Once the physiological needs have been satisfied, the next needs that can be fulfilled are safety needs. According to Maslow (1970: 39), the needs of stability, security, protection, freedom of anxiety, fear, and chaos, need for structure, order, law, and so on are examples of safety needs. If these needs can be fulfilled by people, they can feel secure, comfortable, stable, safe, and balance in living their lives. The movie scene below shows that Harley tries to fulfill her safety need in which it shows her personality.

[Data 2] Scene: Harley runs away from Montoya and a few angry cooks

After Harley bought an egg sandwich for breakfast, she tries to eat while walking on the street. However, Renee Montoya comes to arrest her after she knows that Harley is no longer in the Joker's protection. She runs away from her and a few people that she

had hurt also came after her for revenge.
(00:13:43 – 00:15:10)

Montoya : Freeze! Gotham PD!

[Prolog]

“Yeah, I don’t think so.” (Harley runs across the street)

Montoya : Are you fucking kidding me?

(Harley and Montoya chase each other on the street)

[Prolog]

*“It had been six shorts hours since my little stunt at Ace Chemicals announced to the world that Mr. J and I were dunzo. **The immunity I’d enjoyed for so long was gone. Cops who never would’ve dared come after me before were suddenly doing this. And what’s the worse? Every person I ever wronged now felt free to come and take their pound of flesh. Turns out I wronged a lot of people.**”*

According to the data above, Harley tries to fulfill her safety needs which in this case attempting to escape from Montoya, who is attempting to arrest her. She knows that Harley is no longer in the Joker’s protection after they broke up and she knows it after she finds Harley’s “J” necklace in the toxic industrial processing plant that Harley blows up for the announcement she has broken up with the Joker. Harley tries to escape from the people who want to revenge on her because when Harley was still the Joker’s girlfriend, no one dared to approach or fight Harley for her evil deeds and crimes with the Joker, even the police. Now, she could only run from their pursuit after she is not still in the Joker’s immunity of safety.

Actually, Harley is **vicious** which can be seen from the prolog’s sentences *“**Every person I ever wronged now felt free to come and take their pound of flesh. Turns out I wronged a lot of people.**”*. It can be said that some people who were hurt by Harley come to revenge. Therefore, she tries to escape from the police and criminals’ pursuit for her safety. It is in line with Maslow’s theory (1970: 39) which states people who are looking for this need because basically, they have a desire to feel

safe. In this scene, Harley’s goal in escaping the police and criminals is her desire to feel safe and secure. Harley becomes more **realistic** when she realizes she is no longer under the protection of her ex-boyfriend, the Joker that can be seen from the sentence *“**The immunity I’d enjoyed for so long was gone**”*. Moreover, the sentence *“**And what’s the worse? Every person I ever wronged now felt free to come and take their pound of flesh.**”* shows Harley is aware of the risk that would come after breaking up with the Joker. The risk is that the police start to arrest her and the criminals she has wronged with the Joker begin to come for revenge. Running away from them is the only way for Harley to feel secure and safe.

3. 3. Love and Belongingness Needs

Maslow (1970: 44) emphasizes that love and belongingness needs are not only about a sexual relationship. It may be the relation between someone with his or her family, children, mate, friends, group, and so on as a social being. He adds that love is about giving to others and receiving affection from others. In this part, the fulfillment of the love and belongingness needs of Harley is explained below.

[Data 3] Scene: Harley, Cassandra, Dinah, Montoya, Helena, and Zsasz a Booby Trap

After Helena kills Zsasz who wants to cut open Cassandra’s tummy to get the diamond, Montoya comes to arrest Harley. However, Cassandra realizes the arrival of Roman with his mercenaries. Roman who knows Dinah’s betrayal, comes to kill five of them and gets the diamond back. (01:21:37 – 01:23:14)

Cass : You guys. Hey, I think you should see this.

Montoya : Ooh! It’s Sionis.

Helena : We’re fucked. He bought himself an army.

Cass : They’re all here for me. Aren’t they?

Harley : No.

- Helena : They are not?
- Harley : No, they're not. Do you know what that means? That means he's not just after the kid anymore. He's after all of us. He's sure as hell after me. I just robbed him. You just betrayed him. You just killed his BFF. And you're dumb enough to be building a case against him. **So, unless we all wanna die very unpleasant deaths and let Roman go finger-fishing in the kid's intestinal tract, we're gonna have to work together.**
- Montoya : With you?
- Harley : **Yeah. We're gonna work together, and we'll get outta here in one piece, okay?**

The data above shows that Harley tries to fulfill the third tier of hierarchical needs, the love and belongingness needs. The need for belongingness as a team to fight against Roman as known as Black Mask and his mercenaries. They come to kill the ladies and get the diamond back. Harley wants Cassandra, Dinah, Montoya, and Helena to set aside their own goals and teams up to fight together as a team against their common enemy. Harley tries to build a "sense of belonging" to each other. This situation is in line with Maslow's opinion about the hunger for belongingness. He states "My strong impression is also that *some* proportion of youth, rebellion groups-I don't know how many or how much-is motivated by the profound hunger for groupness, for contact, for real togetherness in the face of a common enemy, any enemy that can serve to form an amity group simply by posing an external threat" (Maslow, 1970: 44).

From the scene, Harley seems **optimistic** that if they come together as a unity, they would be able to defeat their enemy. It can be seen from the sentence "**So, unless we all wanna die very unpleasant deaths and let Roman go finger-fishing in the kid's intestinal tract,**

we're gonna have to work together". The reason why they must work together as a team because each of them has a serious problem with Roman Sionis and if they run away or fight for their own self, they may not survive in battle because they are outnumbered. Although at first Montoya hesitated by saying "**With you?**" because they all know who Harley Quinn is, Harley convinces that they can get out of the amusement park in a state of intact without a single person died.

3. 4. Esteem Needs

Maslow (1970: 45) divides the esteem needs into two subsidiaries. The further is self-esteem (the desire for strength, mastery and competence, adequacy, achievement, confidence to face the world, independence, and freedom). The latter is esteem from other people (the desire for prestige, reputation, status, glory, dominance, fame, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, and appreciation). The following data shows Harley satisfies her esteem needs as the fourth tier of hierarchical needs which shows her personality.

[Data 4] Scene: The Booby Traps exit

After defeating the Roman mercenaries inside the Booby Traps, the women are restrained when they try to get out of the Booby Traps because Roman is waiting at the exit and he shoots Montoya. Then, he kidnaps Cassandra and goes away from the amusement park by car. The fire is inevitable. (01:29:52 – 01:30:36)

- Dinah : Get down. Get down.
- Harley : You're okay. You're okay. Just breathe. Just breathe. Let me check it. I got you. Ooh! Aren't you glad you wore that? Sexy and bulletproof.
- Cass : Harley! No! Get off me!
- Harley!
- Harley : They got the kid. Shit!
- Montoya : **We can't let them get her. I trust you. (while she gives a gun)**
- Harley : One bullet?

Cass : Please help me!
 Harley : Has anyone got any bullets?
 Dinah : Fuck! I'm out.
 Harley : **I can't get out there. I just need to get through.**

Montoya : We gotta go. We gotta move.

From the scene above, Harley gets esteem from other people which in this case, she gets it from Montoya. After Montoya has been shot by Roman, she cannot continue the resistance. Although she is not dead because Harley gave her a red bulletproof corset, she is still in pain. While Harley tries to calm down her, Cassandra is kidnapped by Roman. Montoya, who began to believe in Harley, gives a gun to her to save Cassandra. It can be said that Harley receives esteem from others, as described in the Human Motivation theory: "the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), status, fame and glory, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation" (1970: 45).

In addition, in line with Maslow's definition of self-esteem as the desire for strength, achievement, mastery and competence, adequacy, confidence to face the world, and for independence and freedom (1970: 45), Harley begins to realize her strength and competence to save Cassandra while Montoya could not help her because she was shot. On the other hand, Dinah and Helena are too busy shooting the enemy and run out of bullets. The sentence "**I can't get out there. I just need to get through**" shows Harley believes in herself and needs support from Dinah and Helena to clear the area first, so she can pursue Roman's car.

The fact that Harley, who used to be known as a manipulative and untrustworthy person when she was the Joker's boyfriend, is now starting to turn into someone who could be trusted in certain circumstances. The sentence "**We can't let them get her. I trust you**" shows how Montoya who at first wants to arrest Harley because of her criminal records,

trusts Harley to save Cassandra who has been kidnapped and she gives her gun to Harley. Montoya indirectly acknowledges the importance of Harley's role in the situation to save Cassandra while Dinah and Helena are busy shooting the enemy. On the other hand, Harley realizes that she is trusted by Montoya and she receives the gun. Therefore, it can be said that Harley is a **trustworthy** person in certain circumstances.

3. 5. Self-Actualization Needs

As the last and the higher tier in hierarchical needs, self-actualization is the need that can be reached if the previous four tiers' needs have been fulfilled. According to Maslow (1970: 46), a person can reach this level when he has made peace with himself and acknowledges everything that has happened, whether it is positive or negative. He also adds that a person can be whatever he wants to be, but he must be faithful to himself (1970: 46). In this phase, someone will realize their ability and potential to become a better person. In line with the explanation of self-actualization needs above, Harley aims to meet this need as the last layer of hierarchical needs, as seen by the data below which her personality is shown.

[Data 5] Scene: Harley tries to save Cassandra from Roman Sionis at Founders Pier

After Harley killed all the mercenaries and makes Roman's car crashed, Roman takes Cassandra to the Founders Pier with full of fog. (01:34:29 – 01:37:10)

Harley : Kid.
 Cass : Harley.
 Roman : Well, we always did share a love of the dramatic. Didn't we? And look at us now. But you don't see? You're trying to kill me. I'm the only one who can protect you! You know you can't stand on your own, Quinn. You're not the type! But me? You need me!

(the faint murmur of his voices in the fog)

Harley : **Here's the thing, Romy baby. Your protection is based on the fact that people are scared of you. Just like they're scared of Mr. J. But I'm the one they should be scared of. Not you, and not Mr. J. Cause I'm Harley fucking Quinn.**

(then Harley shoots with one bullet but it misses. Roman laughed)

Harley : Shit.

Roman : That was super embarrassing.
(He appeared from behind the statue, clutching Cassandra in his arms and pointing the knife at Cassandra's neck)

Harley : Sure was.

Roman : You think you can beat me?
You're a fucking moron.

Harley : **I'm sorry, kid. And I'm sorry I tried to sell you. That was a dick move. For what it's worth, you made me want to be a less terrible person.**

Roman : Eww.

The scene above shows Harley's effort to save Cassandra from Roman which shows the fulfillment of Harley's self-actualization needs. She seeks to make peace with herself by admitting that she is not afraid of Roman anymore and thus she no longer needs protection from anyone, even him. The sentences "**But I'm the one they should be scared of. Not you, and not Mr. J. Cause I'm Harley fucking Quinn**" show that she is the one who should be feared by everyone because she starts to become an **independent** woman and she is not under the shadow of the Joker's protection anymore if there is any external threat.

When she tries to prove her words by shooting Roman. Unfortunately, the bullet she shot does not hit Roman and because there is only one bullet left, she says sorry to Cassandra that she cannot save

her. She also says "**And I'm sorry I tried to sell you. That was a dick move**" because previously she tried to barter Cassandra who brought the diamond that Roman targeted with her safety from his threats and she knows it is a big mistake for her. Furthermore, the sentence "**For what it's worth, you made me want to be a less terrible person**" shows that Harley is trying to be honest with Cassandra about her feeling when she was close to Cassandra who indirectly made Harley wants to be a better person. It is in line with Maslow's explanation about "This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1970: 46). Therefore, it can be said that Harley actualizes herself for what she had done to Cassandra.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study discussed the psychological analysis of Harley Quinn as the main character in *Birds of Prey and the Fantabulous Emancipation of Harley Quinn* movie. The movie tells the story of Harley Quinn's struggle to move on from the Joker and also against the Roman criminal dynasty with four other women. Harley Quinn's personality and her tendency toward suffering from Histrionic Personality Disorder are the concerns of the study. Harley shows her personality through the fulfillment of her hierarchical needs; namely physiological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs.

In the fulfillment of the five levels of needs, Harley shows herself as a kind, dramatic, vicious, realistic, optimistic, trustworthy, and independent woman. The way how Harley fulfilled all needs and the motivation behind each of them are the overviews of her personality. Harley is seen as a kind and dramatic person when she fulfilled the physiological needs. In the fulfillment of safety needs, Harley shows

herself as vicious and realistic. Optimistic is shown as Harley's personality when she fulfilled the love and belongingness needs. In the fulfillment of esteem needs, Harley shows herself as a trustworthy person. In self-actualization needs as the higher level, Harley becomes an independent woman.

Harley's ex-boyfriend, the Joker is the main reason for Harley's personality change from a beautiful psychiatrist to a Clown Princess of Crime. A desire of looking for emancipation causes Harley to fulfill the five needs that indirectly show her personality.

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