

A Psychology of Literature Study: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

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Abstract: This study examines the development of a child character in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) using Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The research focuses on Scout Finch as both the main character and the narrator, aiming to analyze how the fulfillment and lack of fulfillment of human needs influence her psychological development, empathy, and moral awareness. The findings indicate that Scout's physiological needs are relatively well fulfilled through a stable family environment, while her needs for safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem experience various disruptions due to social conflict, the educational environment, racial prejudice, and injustice within Maycomb society. In addition, the study finds that Scout's interactions with other characters who possess different backgrounds of needs also shape her perspective toward others, thereby fostering the development of empathy and a more mature moral understanding. Through a child's perspective, Harper Lee conveys a critique of racism, social prejudice, and structural inequality, while simultaneously emphasizing that understanding human needs constitutes an essential foundation for building justice and humanity. Thus, this study affirms the relevance of Maslow's theory in analyzing the development of child characters in literary works and its role in revealing the relationship between human needs, social structures, and moral development.

Keywords: Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Child Character Development, Scout Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been understood as an artistic form of expression that reflects human experiences, imagination, and social reality. Wellek & Warren (1977) define literature as a creative art produced by an author, emphasizing its aesthetic function and its ability to transform reality through language. In this sense, literature is not merely a means of delivering information but an artistic process that provides aesthetic experience and deeper understanding of life. This perspective is reinforced by Klarer (1998), who argues that literature refers to written expression that possesses artistic and aesthetic value, distinguishing literary texts from functional writings such as manuals or reports. In line with this view, Rahman and Weda (2018) emphasize that literature also contributes to social awareness, harmony, and tolerance within multicultural societies, suggesting that literary works do not merely reflect reality but actively shape the psychological and moral understanding of readers.

Within literary studies, literary works are commonly classified into fiction and nonfiction. Abrams (1999) defines fiction as imaginative narrative prose, including novels, novellas, and short stories, while nonfiction is described as factual prose writing such as biography, history, and essays. Among fictional works, the novel occupies a central position as a long and complex prose narrative that seeks to represent the quality of human experience and conduct (Abrams, 1981; Taylor, 1981). As a result, novels often function as a medium through which social, cultural, and psychological realities are explored and represented.

One of the most influential examples of such fictional works is Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is widely regarded as a classic of American literature (Asha et al., 2025; Junaid et al., 2023; Saadah et al., 2025). The novel combines legal drama, social criticism, and a coming-of-age narrative, portraying issues such as racism, prejudice, and moral conflict through the perspective of Scout Finch. These elements provide a rich foundation for analyzing the psychological and moral development of the main character within a socially oppressive environment.

To examine these dimensions, this study employs Abraham Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of Needs, a humanistic psychological framework that explains human motivation through the fulfillment and unfulfillment of human needs. Maslow (1943) originally proposed five levels of needs; physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Which were later expanded to include cognitive, aesthetic, and self-transcendence needs (Maslow, 1970; Rivera, 2006). Central to Maslow's theory is the idea that human behavior and moral growth are shaped by both individual experiences and social conditions.

By applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this study analyzes Scout Finch's moral growth as reflected in her interactions with other characters and her responses to racial injustice and social discrimination in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Scout's experiences demonstrate how unmet needs influence perception, behavior, and moral judgment, while supportive relationships contribute to her development of empathy and ethical awareness. Thus, the use of Maslow's humanistic psychology approach allows this study to highlight how literary texts not only reflect social reality but also reveal the psychological processes underlying moral development within a broader social context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Psychology of Literature

Psychology and literature are two distinct disciplines. However, both share a common focus on human life and human interaction. According to Darma (2004:138), "in writing literary works, the author may not know or realize that through the interaction of the characters in the literary work, he is actually dissecting psychological problems." In other words, character interactions in literary works often indirectly reveal the dynamics of the human psyche. Characters can reflect internal conflicts, moral dilemmas, and emotional development experienced by individuals in real life (Junaid et al., 2025; Jumriati et al., 2021; Mahdori et al., 2025). By analyzing these interactions, readers are able to gain a deeper understanding of human complexity and the psychological dynamics underlying characters' behaviors and decisions. In line with these perspectives, Endraswara (2008:97-99), states that psychology and literature have an indirect and functional relationship. Link indirect, because both literature and psychology share the same object, which is human life, while the functional link because psychology and literature both study the psyche of other, the difference is that in psychology the phenomenon is real, while in literature it is imaginative.

To understand the dynamics of the human psyche through behavioral patterns of behavior and individual characteristics more systematically, psychologists have developed a specialized field known as personality psychology. According to Darma (2004), introductory book on literary theory, it is explained that in the twentieth century, the study of personality psychology developed rapidly through three major schools of thought: psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanistic psychology. The psychoanalytic school, pioneered by Freud, Jung, and Lacan, emphasizes the role of the unconscious in shaping human personality and behavior, particularly in the context of psychological disorders. Meanwhile, behaviorism, developed by B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson, views human behavior as the result of environmental conditioning processes. In contrast to these two approaches, humanistic psychology, pioneered by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, focuses on psychologically healthy individuals and the potential of humans to grow and achieve self-actualization.

Psychoanalytic and behaviorist theories have been widely applied in literary analysis and have become the main foundation of psychological approaches in literary studies (Firdausah et al., 2026;

Nahdhiyah et al., 2022; Junaid & Andini, 2025). However, the humanistic psychological perspective pioneered by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers has not been extensively employed as an analytical framework, particularly in examining literary works such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In fact, the humanistic perspective offers a different point of view because it emphasizes positive individual development, intrinsic motivation, and the process of achieving self-actualization. In studies of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, previous research has tended to highlight sociological issues such as racism, social inequality, and linguistic aspects. Only a limited number of studies have examined the moral and psychological development of child characters and explored how the issues presented in the novel shape this developmental process through a humanistic psychological lens.

B. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One important approach in the study of personality psychology is humanistic theory, which developed as a response to earlier psychological perspectives. According to Hambali & Jaenuddin (2013), humanistic theory emerged in the 1950s as a critique of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, which viewed human behavior as being controlled by drives, the environment, and past experiences. In contrast, humanistic theory views humans as free and responsible beings who possess the potential to grow and to direct their own lives.

This humanistic perspective reflects a shift in the way psychology understands human beings, from an earlier emphasis on behavior as determined by unconscious drives or environmental conditions toward the view that humans possess self-awareness and the capacity to make choices. Humans are no longer seen as passive beings entirely controlled by external factors or past experiences, but rather as active individuals who shape the direction of their own lives. Therefore, personality development from a humanistic perspective is understood as a dynamic process that occurs alongside an individual's efforts to understand themselves, develop their potential, and achieve optimal personal growth.

According to Krech (1974:591), humans seek to fulfill and express their potential and talent, which are often hampered by the condition of society that rejects them. This condition makes a person deny their existence and inhibits themselves from reaching their real self. This kind of situation can also cause a person to experience mental problems and behavioral imbalance. Such individuals need therapy in order to give themselves the opportunity to express themselves freely and to work on releasing their hidden and avoided feelings and thoughts. If he is able to accept himself fully, he will be able to achieve satisfactory psychological integration.

Abraham Maslow explains that human beings are driven to understand and accept themselves optimally. His most important idea is the Hierarchy of Needs theory, which states that human behavior is influenced by efforts to fulfill life needs that are arranged in stages, beginning with the most basic needs and culminating in the highest, namely self-actualization. Maslow elaborates this hierarchy in *Motivation and Personality* (1970: 39–52) as follows.

1. Physiological Needs

Maslow (1970: 39) states that a person's food choices can reflect bodily needs. Physiological needs lie at the base of the hierarchy and include food, water, air, and sleep. When these needs are unmet, individuals will focus solely on eating, drinking, and surviving, making it difficult for them to pursue other needs such as security, social bonds, or esteem.

2. Safety Needs

At the second level, Maslow describes the need for safety and protection so that individuals feel secure. This includes the need for certainty, stability, protection, freedom from fear, law, order, and clearly defined limits.

3. Belongingness and Love Needs

The third level indicates that human beings require emotional relationships, both giving and

receiving affection. This need is related to the sense of belonging and is manifested in the social relationships among characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

4. Esteem Needs

The fourth level involves achievement and a sense of capability. Maslow divides this need into two categories: Internal esteem, such as self-confidence, competence, and independence; External esteem, such as status, recognition, and respect from others. In the novel, this need is reflected when characters strive to reach goals and gain acknowledgment.

5. Self-Actualization

The highest need is the desire to fully develop one's potential and gain deeper self-understanding. This need emerges after the four previous levels have been fulfilled.

C. Domains

Spolsky (1998, p. 34) stated that a useful way of classifying social situation is to analyze them into three defining characteristics: place, role-relationship and topic. Spolsky said "together, these make up a set of typical domains, and the common domain is home". Domains are named usually for a place or an activity in it. Home, then is the place. The role-relationship associated with home (the people likely to be involved to speech events) include family members (mother, father, son, daughter, grandmother, baby) and visitors. There are suitable set of topics depending on the cultural pattern) such as activities of the family members, the meal, the household. A particular variety of language is appropriate to the domain. In a multilingual community, different languages may well be considered appropriate for different domains. In multilingual family, different role-relationships might involve different language choice. For instance, husband and wife might use one language to each other. But father and children might use another.

Another common domain is work. The place might be a factory or an office a store. The role-relationship include boss, worker, colleague, customer, foreman, cliens, to mention just a few. The topic is worked related. Ayuningsih et.al, (2020) stated that Domain is a term created by Joshua Fishman. He defines domain as an abstract illustration of sociocultural from communication topics, relations between communicators, and where the communication takes place according to the social structure of the speakers. Also, Fisman (1972 in Ayuningsih et.al, 2020) revealed that certain social factors, speakers, social context of the conversation, functions and topics of the conversation are important in the consideration of language choice in different kinds of speakers.

Hence, Ayuningsih et.al, (2020) said the birth of language choice and language attitude phenomenon is caused by the speaker having two languages to use alternately. The language phenomenon that possibly occurs as the result of language contact in sociolinguistics is called bilingualism (Chaer & Agustina, 2004 in Ayuningsih et.al, 2020). Bilingualism is the use of two languages alternately by a speaker in their contact with other people (Mackey, 1962 in Niza, et.al, 2020). Language choice as a social phenomenon is not only influenced by linguistic factors but also external factors. Language choice is closely related to the situation of the speaker's social community. The difference in age, and level of education can affect people's language choice.

Thus, the Language Choice of the English instructors communicate with the students because they are bilingual or multilingual. Also, the situation in which the conversation happens also affects how a language will be used. Language choice is a person in bilingual or multilingual community speaking two or more languages and has to choose which language to use (Fasold, 1984, in Niza et. Al, 2020).

Kasim (2023) stated that a multilingual community uses two or more languages according to the settings. Such use of language is known as the domain of language usage. Fishman (1972) introduced five domains of language usage; family, religion, education, friendship and occupation. Based on the domain introduced by Fishman (1972), Kasim stated that we could see and determine

the language use among the multilingual community. Then, a domain determines the choice of language or code in the multilingual community. He gave the example such as, at home, a person may use the Malay language with his or her parents, but at work, the person may use his or her second language, English. If the person is a Muslim, he or she may also use the Arabic language during prayers.

III. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach as explained by Creswell (2016), which enables researchers to understand the meanings underlying social phenomena in literary texts. The qualitative descriptive method is applied following the explanation of Rakhmat (2002), who emphasizes observation in natural conditions without manipulating research variables. The data collected in this study consist of words and images, in accordance with Berg's (2001) statement that qualitative research yields non-numerical data.

Data were analyzed using content analysis based on Krippendorff's concept (as cited in Mumpuni, 2018), which states that content analysis is conducted by examining texts to draw conclusions according to their context. In this research, the researcher analyzes the content of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee using Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1970), which consists of five levels of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Textual quotations that reflect fulfilled or unfulfilled needs are collected, classified, and analyzed according to these levels.

The primary data source is the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), while secondary sources are obtained from journals, film adaptations, and reliable online resources related to Maslow's theory (1970). Data collection was carried out through systematic note-taking with categorized tables, which helped the researcher identify patterns of character needs in the novel. Repeated reading was also conducted to ensure data validity, as recommended in qualitative research.

Through the application of Maslow's theory (1970), this study seeks to demonstrate how the hierarchy of needs influences character development and interpretation in the narrative, and to reveal how these needs interact with issues of law, justice, gender, and race within the novel.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used to examine the fulfilled and unfulfilled needs of Scout Finch and their influence on her psychological and moral development. While the fulfillment of physiological and safety needs provides a foundation for her childhood, social conflict, racial prejudice, and injustice in Maycomb disrupt her needs for security, belonging, and esteem. Scout's interactions with characters such as Atticus, Jem, Calpurnia, and Boo Radley further develop her awareness of others' needs and guide her toward self-actualization. Therefore, Maslow's theory serves as a framework for analyzing the relationship between human needs, empathy, moral growth, and social awareness in the novel.

Through *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee conveys a moral message about understanding humanity from a child's perspective. Scout Finch functions as the central lens through which the influence of human needs in social life is observed. Her interactions with various characters reveal different levels of need fulfillment within Maslow's hierarchy, shaping attitudes, behavior, and moral values. Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that human actions are deeply influenced by underlying psychological needs, particularly in response to injustice, prejudice, and social discrimination in Maycomb.

1. Hierarchy of Needs

As previously explained, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory that highlights human motivation based on the fulfillment of needs ranging from basic requirements to self-actualization. In the context of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this theory is used to trace the fulfilled and unfulfilled needs of the characters and to examine how the social conditions in Maycomb influence their psychological development. Through this analysis, physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization can be observed in the actions and experiences of each character. Several pieces of evidence will be presented below.

2. Physiological Needs

Extract 1

We live on the main residential street in town Atticus, Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook. Jem and I found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment. (Lee, 1960, p. 6)

The quotation above indicates the fulfillment of the Finch family's basic needs in the form of shelter and a cook, which are closely related to the physiological need for food. Scout Finch illustrates that her family's physiological needs are fulfilled through the presence of a cook named Calpurnia. The portrayal of Calpurnia within the Finch family helps sustain the family's bodily functions and physical health. Calpurnia ensures that these basic needs are met, enabling the Finch family to carry out their daily lives effectively. Calpurnia's role as the cook in the Finch family is further reinforced through her character description in the following quotation.

Extract 2

Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen" (Lee, 1960, p. 6-7)

The quotation clarifies Calpurnia's position within the Finch family. Although it does not explicitly depict the fulfillment of physiological needs, Calpurnia nonetheless contributes to demonstrating that these needs are met, particularly through her activities in the kitchen related to food preparation. Calpurnia's role in fulfilling the children's physiological needs is further emphasized in the following quotation.

Extract 3

Calpurnia appeared in the front door and yelled, "Lemonade time! You all get in outa that hot sun 'fore you fry alive!" Lemonade in the middle of the morning was a summertime ritual. Calpurnia set a pitcher and three glasses on the porch, then went about her business. Being out of Jem's good graces did not worry me especially. Lemonade would restore his good humor. Jem gulped down his second glassful and slapped his chest. "I know what we are going to play," he announced. "Something new, something different (Lee, 1960, p. 51)

The quotation above explicitly depicts Calpurnia's role in fulfilling Jem and Scout's physiological needs through the provision of beverages in the form of lemonade. By ensuring that the children do not become dehydrated under the hot sun, this illustrates Calpurnia's care for their basic bodily needs. This role is further demonstrated in the following quotation.

3. Safety Needs

Extract 4

Atticus got up from his chair, but he was moving slowly, like an old man. He put the newspaper down very carefully, adjusting its creases with lingering fingers. They were trembling a little.

"Go home, Jem," he said. "Take Scout and Dill home."

We were accustomed to prompt, if not always cheerful acquiescence to Atticus's instructions, but from the way he stood Jem was not thinking of budging

"Go home, I said." (Lee, 1960, p. 203)

This quotation illustrates Atticus's concern for his children's safety when a lynch mob arrives at the jail to attack him and forcibly seize Tom Robinson in order to commit an act of violence without due legal process. Atticus's firm instruction for Jem, Scout, and Dill to return home immediately reflects his effort to protect them from a physically threatening and potentially dangerous situation.

This action demonstrates the fulfillment of safety needs according to Maslow, as Scout gains a sense of security through direct protection from a trusted authoritative figure her father. However, although Scout experiences a strong sense of safety within her family, she still encounters insecurity when facing the surrounding environment, which is filled with rumors, prejudice, and unfamiliar figures, as illustrated in the following quotation.

Extract 5

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions. (Lee, 1960, p. 10-11)

The rumors circulating about Radley Place create a condition of psychological insecurity for Scout, as the social environment in Maycomb constructs Boo Radley as a dangerous and threatening figure. This narrative construction within the community generates irrational fear, causing Scout's basic need for psychological safety to remain unmet during her childhood. She grows up in an atmosphere of anxiety shaped by frightening stories that lack clear factual foundations, leading Scout to associate various mysterious events and minor criminal acts with Boo Radley.

This condition indicates that Scout experiences a persistent sense of threat. In addition to psychological insecurity, Scout also faces physical and emotional threats when she becomes the target of insults and verbal attacks from the people of Maycomb as a result of her father Atticus Finch's actions in defending Tom Robinson during the trial. Such social pressure further reinforces the lack of fulfillment of her need for safety, both emotionally and physically, as Scout must confront an environment that fails to provide stable social support and protection, as illustrated in the following quotation.

Extract 6

My fists were clenched and I was ready to let fly. Atticus had promised me he would wear me out if he ever heard of me fighting anymore; I was far too old and too big for such childish things, and the sooner I learned to hold in, the better off everybody would be. I soon forgot.

Cecil Jacobs made me forget. He had announced in the schoolyard the day before that Scout Finch's daddy defended niggers. I denied it, but told Jem.

"What'd he mean sayin' that?" I asked.

"Nothing," Jem said. "Ask Atticus, he'll tell you.

"Do you defend niggers, Atticus?" I asked him that evening.

"Of course I do. Don't say nigger, Scout. That's common."

"What everybody at school says."

"From now on it'll be everybody less one"

"Well if you don't want me to grow up talkin' that way, why do you send me to school?" (Lee, 1960, p. 99)

This quotation indicates that Scout's need for emotional and social safety is not fulfilled, as she experiences social pressure and verbal attacks from her peers due to Atticus's decision to defend Tom Robinson, a Black man accused of rape. The insults directed at Scout by Cecil Jacobs cause her to feel psychologically threatened and subject her family's reputation to public humiliation, resulting in a loss of security within the social environment that should support her development.

This condition reflects that Scout not only faces symbolic threats to her identity and self-esteem, but is also required to regulate her emotional responses in order to maintain family stability, thereby indicating an instability in her sense of safety and protection, which are fundamental components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Scout's need for safety in the physical aspect is also unfulfilled in her living environment when she is forced to confront Bob Ewell's attack, which nearly threatens her life, as depicted in the following quotation.

Extract 7

Shuffle foot had not stopped with us this time. His trousers swished softly and steadily. Then they stopped. He was running, running toward us with no child's steps.

"Run, Scout! Run! Run!" Jem screamed.

I took one giant step and found myself reeling: my arms useless, in the dark, I could not keep my balance.

"Jem, Jem, help me, Jem!"

Something crushed the chicken wire around me.

Metal ripped on metal and I fell to the ground and rolled as far as I could, floundering to escape my wire prison. From somewhere nearby came scuffling, kicking sounds, sounds of shoes and flesh scraping dirt and roots. Someone rolled against me and I felt Jem. He was up like lightning and pulling me with him but, though my head and shoulders were free, I was so entangled we didn't get very far. We were nearly to the road when I felt Jem's hand leave me, felt him jerk backwards to the ground. More scuffling, and there came a dull crunching sound and Jem screamed."

(Lee, 1960, p. 350-351)

This quotation indicates that Scout and Jem Finch's safety needs reach their most critical point due to a direct, life-threatening attack. In this situation, the intense sensory descriptions convey an atmosphere of extreme fear and a loss of control over personal safety, as the threat they face is no longer symbolic but a real physical danger with the potential to cause serious harm.

This event underscores that the environment in which Scout grows up does not provide the stable sense of security required during childhood development, as she must confront violent threats arising from broader social conflicts in Maycomb. Although Scout and Jem's need for physical safety is at its most threatened during Bob Ewell's attack, the situation reaches a resolution when Boo Radley emerges as a rescuer who protects them from mortal danger. This is reflected in the following quotation.

4. Love and Belonging Needs

Extract 8

We lived on the main residential street in town, Atticus, Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook. Jem and I found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment." (Lee, 1960, p. 6)

The quotation depicts a strong emotional relationship among Scout, Jem, and their father, Atticus Finch. In this passage, Scout explains that Atticus consistently treats his children with affection, care, and respect. Such treatment represents a tangible form of affection and emotional intimacy within the family, indicating that Scout and Jem are accepted, loved, valued, and regarded as important. The fulfillment of love and belonging needs serves as a solid foundation for Scout's psychological development, enabling her to grow into a confident, courageous individual who is capable of understanding empathy. Thus, the harmonious relationship with Atticus not only strengthens family bonds but also plays a significant role in shaping Scout's character throughout the narrative. Nevertheless, as shown in the following quotation.

Extract 9

Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery, Atticus met her when he was first elected to the state legislature. He was middle aged then she was fifteen years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack. They said it ran in her family. I did not miss her, but I think Jem did. (Lee, 1960, p 7)

This quotation indicates that Scout's love and belonging needs are not fully fulfilled in terms of her bond with a maternal figure. This is because Scout lost her mother at a very young age, leaving her without the opportunity to directly experience maternal affection. Scout is also aware that Jem experiences a much deeper sense of loss, as he was old enough at the time of their mother's death to form strong emotional memories and a closer attachment to her. The absence of a maternal figure means that Scout never experiences the warmth and emotional closeness typically provided by a mother, resulting in the unfulfillment of her need for love and belonging in the form of a maternal relationship.

This condition helps explain why Scout grows up as a tougher, more tomboyish child who has a limited understanding of feminine emotional expression, in contrast to Jem, who continues to carry a sense of attachment and loss toward their mother. In this situation, Atticus functions as a single parent who raises both children in a fair and impartial manner, as shown in the following quotation.

Extract 10

I said if he wanted to take a broad view of the thing, it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn't run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama, and where would we be if he hadn't? We were far too old to settle an argument with a fist-fight, so we consulted Atticus. Our father said we were both right. (Lee, 1960, p 3)

The quotation shows a close and supportive emotional relationship between Scout, Jem, and Atticus, as the children feel comfortable seeking his guidance in resolving conflict. Atticus's affirming response creates a sense of acceptance and emotional security, fulfilling Scout and Jem's love and belonging needs despite the absence of a mother. His consistent presence fosters a harmonious family relationship and provides emotional fulfillment for both children.

Atticus's ability to nurture this environment is shaped by his own strong social bonds within the Maycomb community. His warmth, openness, and respect for human values are reflected in his parenting, allowing Scout and Jem to experience a stable sense of belonging both within the family and the broader social environment, as illustrated in the following quotation.

5. Esteem Needs

Extract 11

It certainly was. Before the first morning was over, Miss Caroline Fisher, our teacher, hauled me up to the front of the room and patted the palm of my hand with a ruler, then made me stand in the corner until noon. (Lee, 1960, p 21)

The quotation above illustrates Scout's experience of unmet esteem needs, as she perceives her teacher's action. Namely, Miss Caroline's decision to punish her in front of the class as damaging to her self-worth and public image among her peers. Such treatment has the potential to affect Scout's psychological development and self-confidence, thereby diminishing her self-esteem. Consequently, the interaction between Scout and Miss Caroline in her new school environment leads to the non-fulfillment of Scout's esteem needs. However, the following quotation shows.

Extract 12

I mumbled that I was sorry and retired meditating upon my crime. I never deliberately learned to read, but some-how I had been wallowing illicitly in the daily papers. In the long hours of church-was it then I learned? I could not remember not being able to read hymns. Now that I was compelled to think about it, reading was something that just came to me, as leaning to fasten the of my union suit without looking around, or achieving two bows from a snarl of shoelaces. I could not remember when the lines above Atticus's moving finger separated into words, but I had stared at them all the evenings in my memory, listening to the news of the day, Bills to Be Enacted into Laws, the diaries of Lorenzo Dow anything Atticus happened to be reading when I crawled into his lap every night. Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing. (Lee, 1960, p 23).

The quotation indicates that Scout begins to recognize the value of her reading ability when she becomes afraid of losing it. She starts to appreciate her reading skill as an important achievement and perceives it as an integral part of her identity. This sense of pride represents the fulfillment of her esteem needs, as she comes to understand the significance of her abilities, which in turn supports her self-confidence. Nevertheless, she does not receive corresponding esteem or recognition from others,

as illustrated in the following quotation.

Extract 13

"If I didn't have to stay I'd leave. Jem, that damn lady says Atticus's been teaching me to read and for him to stop it"

"Don't worry, Scout," Jem comforted me. "Our teacher says Miss Caroline's introducing a new way of teaching. She learned² about it in college. It'll be in all the grades soon. You don't have to learn much out of books that way it's like if you want a learn about cows, you go milk one, see?"

"Yeah Jem, but I don't want a, study cows, I"

"Sure you do. You hafta know about cows, they're a big part of life in Maycomb County."

I contented myself with asking Jem if he'd lost his mind.

"I'm just trying to tell you the new way they're teachin' the first grade, stubborn. It's the Dewey Decimal System." (Lee, 1960, p 23-24)

The quotation illustrates Scout's emotional reaction toward Miss Caroline, who belittles her reading ability. This reaction is closely related to Scout's sense of self-worth and the value she places on her ability to read, as well as her feeling of being threatened when that ability is not acknowledged by others. As a result of the treatment Scout receives from Miss Caroline regarding her reading ability, she experiences a decline in her esteem needs. Scout's emotional reaction to these remarks reflects how her sense of self-worth is threatened when the ability she takes pride in is not acknowledged by an authority figure. However, this condition does not remain static. In the subsequent part of the narrative, a shift in Scout's psychological experience is revealed through the presence and response of Atticus Finch, who functions as a figure of understanding and validation, as reflected in the following quotation.

6. The Hierarchy of Other Characters' Needs in the Narrator's Self-Actualization Process

Self-actualization is one component of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. This concept belongs to the developmental stage and represents the highest level in the hierarchy of human needs. In this section, the researcher examines the narrator's process of self-actualization in her journey to understand the needs of other characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as demonstrated through the following quotations.

Extract 14

Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn't behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn't ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember. (Lee, 1960, p 6-7)

The quotation shows that Scout, as the narrator, initially views Calpurnia as a strict and unpleasant figure who often scolds her and orders her out of the kitchen. Phrases such as "our battles were epic and one-sided" and "her tyrannical presence" indicate that Scout has not yet understood Calpurnia's role as both a caregiver and a disciplinarian in the Finch household. At this early stage of the narrative, Scout lacks awareness of Calpurnia's emotional needs and her social position as a Black woman working in a white family. Her judgment is shaped by a childlike and self-centered

perspective, in which she evaluates others only from her own point of view.

This limited perspective also reflects Scout's inability to recognize the needs of others, including physiological needs, safety needs, and love and belonging needs. From Scout's viewpoint, these needs appear unfulfilled because she has not yet understood the deeper meaning behind Calpurnia's actions. The following discussion shifts to Scout's perspective on Dill's love and belonging needs, as shown in the quotation below.

Extract 15

"When Dill reduced Dracula to dust, and Jem said the show sounded better than the book, I asked Dill where his father was: "You ain't said anything about him."

"I haven't got one."

"Is he dead?"

"No..."

"Then if he's not dead you've got one, haven't you?"

Dill blushed and Jem told me to hush, a sure sign that Dill had been studied and found acceptable (Lee, 1960, p 9)

In this quotation, Scout has not yet understood the depth of Dill's emotional needs. She casually asks about Dill's father, assuming that having a father is normal for everyone. Dill's embarrassed reaction, followed by Jem telling Scout to be quiet, signals that Dill's family situation is sensitive and more complex than Scout realizes.

Scout's lack of awareness of others' needs is also evident in her view of Boo Radley. She does not see Boo as a person with emotions and needs, but as a frightening and isolated figure. Influenced by the town's rumors, Scout believes Boo is responsible for various strange events in Maycomb. This perception is reflected in the following statement.

Extract 16

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. (Lee, 1960, p 10)

The quotation depicts Boo Radley as a frightening figure in the imagination of Maycomb's children. Described as an "evil phantom," Boo is shaped by local gossip and folklore rather than by direct experience. Because Scout and Jem have never seen him, their understanding of Boo comes entirely from exaggerated stories that portray him as a mysterious and dangerous presence in the town.

This scene reflects Scout's early, childlike perception of Boo, which is based on superstition instead of reality. It shows how fear and rumor can lead a community to create negative myths about an isolated individual. From a psychological perspective, Boo's portrayal suggests that his need for belonging and social connection is ignored and replaced by suspicion, pushing him to the margins of society.

At this stage, Scout accepts these social myths without question and does not consider Boo's emotions or needs, such as safety and respect. A similar lack of empathy appears in Scout's interaction with Walter Cunningham. Although she understands his family's poverty, she fails to respect his feelings and publicly mentions sensitive information about him in class, as shown in the following quotation.

B. Discussion

This study demonstrates that *To Kill a Mockingbird* portrays human psychological development as deeply influenced by the fulfillment and disruption of basic and higher-order needs, as conceptualized in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Through Scout Finch's perspective, Harper Lee illustrates how social environment, family structure, racial injustice, and moral conflict shape an individual's psychological growth and ethical awareness. Scout's development is not linear; rather, it is marked by continuous negotiation between fulfilled and unfulfilled needs that gradually lead her toward empathy and moral maturity.

At the most fundamental level, Scout's physiological needs are consistently fulfilled. The presence of a stable home, food, and care—particularly through Calpurnia's role—provides a secure material foundation for Scout's childhood. This fulfillment allows Scout to focus on higher psychological and moral concerns rather than survival. Maslow emphasizes that higher-level needs cannot emerge unless basic needs are satisfied, and Scout's stable physical environment supports this theoretical claim. However, the novel also subtly reveals social inequality through Calpurnia's position as a Black domestic worker, suggesting that physiological security is unevenly distributed across racial and social lines in Maycomb.

Despite material stability, Scout's safety needs are repeatedly threatened, both psychologically and physically. The pervasive racism in Maycomb, the spread of rumors surrounding Boo Radley, and the violent hostility toward Atticus during Tom Robinson's trial create an unstable social environment. Scout's fear of Boo Radley, rooted in communal myths rather than personal experience, reflects how social narratives can undermine psychological safety, especially for children. This condition intensifies when Scout and Jem become targets of verbal harassment and physical violence, culminating in Bob Ewell's attack. These experiences indicate that safety, as defined by Maslow, extends beyond physical protection to include emotional security and freedom from fear. Atticus's efforts to shield his children highlight the parental role in restoring a sense of safety amid social chaos, yet the broader community consistently fails to provide this protection.

Scout's love and belonging needs are partially fulfilled through her close relationship with Atticus and Jem. Atticus's consistent affection, fairness, and emotional availability foster a strong sense of familial belonging, which becomes a crucial anchor in Scout's moral development. However, the absence of her mother creates an emotional gap that limits Scout's experience of maternal affection. This absence contributes to Scout's tomboyish behavior and her difficulty in understanding certain emotional expressions. Nonetheless, Atticus compensates for this loss by cultivating an environment of trust, dialogue, and mutual respect, reinforcing Maslow's view that belonging can be fulfilled through meaningful interpersonal relationships rather than traditional family structures alone.

In contrast, Scout's esteem needs are frequently disrupted, particularly in institutional settings such as school. Miss Caroline's punishment and dismissal of Scout's reading ability undermine her self-worth and illustrate how authority figures can negatively affect a child's confidence. Although Scout internally recognizes her intellectual capability, the lack of external validation leads to frustration and emotional distress. This tension reflects Maslow's distinction between self-esteem derived from personal competence and esteem gained through social recognition. Atticus's role as a validating figure becomes critical in restoring Scout's confidence, emphasizing the importance of supportive authority in fulfilling esteem needs.

The most significant development occurs in Scout's gradual movement toward self-actualization, which is achieved through her growing awareness of others' needs. Initially, Scout perceives characters such as Calpurnia, Dill, Boo Radley, and Walter Cunningham through a self-centered and simplistic lens. She fails to recognize their emotional struggles, social limitations, and unmet needs. Over time, however, lived experiences—particularly those involving injustice, fear, and compassion—enable Scout to reassess her judgments. Boo Radley's act of saving Scout and Jem becomes a pivotal moment, forcing Scout to confront the disparity between social myths and human

reality. This realization reflects Maslow's view of self-actualization as the ability to transcend egocentrism and develop empathy, acceptance, and moral understanding.

Overall, the findings suggest that Harper Lee uses Scout's childhood experiences to illustrate that moral growth is inseparable from psychological need fulfillment. Unmet needs—especially safety, belonging, and esteem—become catalysts for reflection rather than obstacles, pushing Scout toward greater empathy and ethical awareness. Through Scout's journey, the novel affirms that understanding humanity requires recognizing not only one's own needs but also the invisible struggles of others. In this way, *To Kill a Mockingbird* aligns closely with Maslow's humanistic psychology, presenting moral maturity as the outcome of fulfilled empathy, social awareness, and self-reflection rather than mere intellectual development.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* portrays the moral and psychological development of a child through the fulfillment and unfulfillment of human needs as formulated in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Through Scout Finch's experiences, the novel illustrates how a relatively supportive family environment provides a foundation for basic physiological and emotional needs, while broader social conditions marked by racism and injustice disrupt the fulfillment of safety, belonging, and self-esteem needs.

By applying Maslow's framework, this research reveals that Scout's understanding of other characters evolves alongside her growing awareness of their unmet needs. Initially influenced by social norms and prejudice in Maycomb, Scout gradually develops empathy as she learns to recognize the underlying human needs that shape others' actions, particularly in her changing perception of marginalized figures such as Boo Radley. This shift reflects Scout's process of self-actualization as a narrator and moral agent.

The analysis highlights that *To Kill a Mockingbird* not only critiques racial discrimination and social inequality but also emphasizes the importance of empathy and respect for human dignity as the foundation of moral maturity. Ultimately, this study affirms that Harper Lee's novel underscores the role of understanding human needs in fostering social justice, demonstrating how literature can contribute to a deeper awareness of moral responsibility within society.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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