



FULFILLING THE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS ON FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL *LEBIH SENYAP DARI BISIKAN* BY ANDINA DWIFATMA

Pemenuhan Hierarki Kebutuhan Tokoh Perempuan dalam Novel “Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan” Karya Andina Dwifatma

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Naskah Diterima Tanggal 23 September 2025—Direvisi Akhir Tanggal 7 November 2025—Disetujui Tanggal 9 Desember 2025

doi: <https://doi.org/10.26499/jentera.v14i2.8438>

Abstract

This study aims to describe the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs in female characters in the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* (*Quieter than a Whisper*) through the perspective of Jean B. Miller’s feminist psychology and Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. The research instrument used is a human instrument, in which the researcher develops indicators based on Maslow’s concept of the hierarchy of needs. Data were collected through reading, note-taking, and literature review. Then, it was analyzed in stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was ensured through data triangulation, while the consistency of the findings was strengthened using intra-rater techniques. The study focuses on how the female characters fulfill their hierarchy of needs as women, from physiological needs to self-actualization. The findings show that the female characters successfully fulfill these needs: 1) Mami can meet the physiological and safety needs by providing adequate housing and necessities for herself as a single parent and for her daughter; 2) Amara fulfills the need for a sense of belonging and affection from Mami, even though it comes from a single parent; 3) Macan meets her esteem needs through independence and the freedom to determine her life philosophy; 4) Meanwhile, Amara ultimately achieves self-actualization through self-acceptance after experiencing marital conflicts. Overall, the narrative illustrates the efforts of the female characters to meet their basic needs and ultimately achieve self-actualization.

Keywords: female character; feminist psychology; hierarchy of needs

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan pemenuhan hierarki kebutuhan pada diri tokoh-tokoh perempuan dalam novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* dengan menggunakan perspektif psikologi feminis Jean B. Miller dan teori pemenuhan hierarki kebutuhan Abraham Maslow. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan adalah human instrument, yakni peneliti yang menyusun indikator berdasarkan konsep hierarki kebutuhan Maslow. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik baca, catat, dan studi pustaka. Kemudian, data dianalisis melalui tahapan pengumpulan data, kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data dijaga melalui triangulasi data, sedangkan konsistensi temuan diperkuat dengan teknik intra-rater. Fokus kajian terletak pada bagaimana tokoh perempuan memenuhi hierarki kebutuhan sebagai perempuan, mulai dari kebutuhan fisiologis hingga aktualisasi diri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh-tokoh

perempuan berhasil memenuhi hierarki kebutuhan tersebut: 1) Mami mampu memenuhi kebutuhan fisiologis dan keamanan, dengan menyediakan tempat tinggal layak dan kebutuhan dasar bagi dirinya sebagai orang tua tunggal serta untuk anaknya, Amara; 2) Amara memenuhi kebutuhan akan rasa memiliki dan kasih sayang dari Mami, meskipun kasih sayang tersebut berasal dari seorang single parent; 3) Macan memenuhi kebutuhan harga diri dengan kemandirian dan kebebasannya menentukan pandangan hidup; 4) sementara Amara pada akhirnya mencapai aktualisasi diri melalui penerimaan diri setelah konflik rumah tangga yang dialami. Secara keseluruhan, cerita memperlihatkan berbagai usaha tokoh perempuan dalam upaya pemenuhan kebutuhan dasar mereka hingga mencapai aktualisasi diri.

Kata-kata Kunci: hierarki kebutuhan; psikologi feminis; tokoh perempuan

How to Cite: Yolanda, P. D., Wiyatmi, & Kristiyani, A. (2025). Fulfilling The Hierarchy of Needs on Female Characters in the Novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma. *Jentera: Jurnal Kajian Sastra*, 14(2), 339—357. doi: <https://doi.org/10.26499/jentera.v14i2.8438>

INTRODUCTION

Women, as a marginalized group, frequently encounter social pressures that limit their opportunities for self-actualization (Alfonso et al., 2018; Myumbo, 2021). In literary contexts, their efforts to seek meaning and construct a whole identity amid patriarchal constraints are often portrayed with particular intensity. This issue remains significant in literary studies because literary works serve not only as a reflection of reality but also as critiques of social structures that position women as subordinate (Miller, 1986; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Women are frequently denied recognition as autonomous subjects and instead constructed as the "liyan" within a male-dominated social-cultural order (Beauvoir, 2011). This condition explains why themes of women's struggle for intellectual and personal freedom, which are essential components of self-actualization, continue to appear across modern narratives.

In literary works, the depiction of how characters fulfill their hierarchical needs often reflects the complexities of women's identities, especially in navigating meaning, autonomy, and psychological growth. The novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* (*Quieter than a Whisper*) by Andina Dwi Fatma provides an intimate portrayal of a woman's inner world as she attempts to understand herself amid social expectations, familial issues, and personal trauma (Dwifatma, 2021). The protagonist, Amara, undergoes a series of psychological developments that align with the stages described in Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs. Her journey toward self-actualization illustrates the challenges of reaching one's highest potential when confronted with past wounds and restrictive social roles (Feist & Feist, 2008; Maslow, 1954, 1972).

Maslow (1943) conceptualizes self-actualization as the highest level of human needs, attainable only after physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, and esteem needs are sufficiently met. This stage involves the ability to realize one's full potential and to embody authenticity, independence, creativity, and meaningful action (Gelperin, 2020). In literature, such development is commonly represented through a protagonist's transformation as they question normative boundaries and move towards fuller self-understanding (Feist & Feist, 2008). This is also in line with the opinion of Wallace et al., (2007) that the hierarchy of needs system includes five categories of motives, arranged with the lowest needs that must be met first before higher needs. The theory is supported by Andjarwati's (2015) research on fulfilling employees needs to increase self-motivation. Maslow argued that human behavior is determined by the individual's tendency to achieve goals in order to make life happier and more satisfying (Feist & Feist, 2008; Kaufman, 2018; Maslow, 2012; Sahara et al., 2022).

Research on novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* has explored the work through several perspectives. Setiawan et al., (2022) analyzed the novel through literary psychology and character education values. Feminist literary criticism has also been used in various studies, including those by Rizka et al., (2022) who examined the portrayal of female characters. Zahro

& Risdiawati (2024) analyzed the discrimination experienced by the protagonist, while Endriawati & Sulistyorini (2024) discussed forms of gender inequality and resistance within the narrative. Wulandari et al., (2025) further explored women's experiences, gender inequality, and resistance, and also discussed their pedagogical implications for literature teaching. From a different methodological approach, Restu & Shomary (2025) applied semiotic analysis to identify icons, indices, and symbols within the text.

Numerous studies have examined self-actualization in literary studies. For example, Mustafa et al. (2023) focused their research on the analysis of the character Boochani in his memoir *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*. The study found that, like most humans, Boochani is driven by a series of physiological and psychological needs, ranging from the most basic to the most complex. Although his life journey aimed at self-actualization, he never succeeded in achieving it and often failed to fulfill even the most basic needs (Mustafa et al., 2023). Similarly, Oktaviani et al. (2024) conducted a study to explore Maslow's hierarchy of needs among the main and supporting characters of the *Dear Allah* series. The study revealed differences in the outcomes of the characters' need fulfillment. Characters Naira, Wildan, and Silla met all levels of Maslow's hierarchy, from physiological needs to self-actualization, as reflected in their financial stability, experiences of affection, and self-acceptance.

In contrast, the character Zulfa was unable to meet her need for safety due to emotional and physical turmoil. Genta, on the other hand, achieved self-actualization by accepting unrequited love. In a similar vein, Amalia & Akhir (2025) conducted a study analyzing character development in *Yang Telah Lama Pergi* by Tere Liye and *Cinta Tak Pernah Tepat Waktu* by Puthut EA, using Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology. Their analysis focused on a comparative study of the two novels within the context of Maslow's five levels of needs. The findings revealed that characters in *Yang Telah Lama Pergi* developed within a dynamic, action-filled socio-collective environment. In contrast, those in *Cinta Tak Pernah Tepat Waktu* were more focused on personal reflection and emotional conflict.

In the context of feminist psychology research, Rosidah (2023) conducted a study to reveal and explore the forms of oppression and exploitation experienced by the character Marilyn. The study also aimed to investigate Marilyn Monroe's struggle in the film *Blonde* to fight against the injustices faced by her character. Furthermore, Sadriah & Juanda (2022) conducted a study that described the inner turmoil experienced by the main female character in *Perempuan Yang Menangis Kepada Bulan Hitam* by Dian Purnomo, using feminist psychology. The study found that the inner conflict depicted in the character's psyche, arising within a strong, culturally rooted society, became the main problem she faced.

This research interest stems from observing the abundance of literary works depicting female characters who face significant obstacles in fulfilling basic needs (Bahuwa, 2018; Mustafa et al., 2023; Palupi et al., 2020; Sinaga et al., 2018). However, there is a lack of studies that explore the efforts of these female characters to fulfill Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Chumairoh, 2018; Irmaida et al., 2023), particularly the gradual process of fulfilling needs, from physiological needs to self-actualization, while considering the social context that shapes women's identities. Specifically, research that examines the gradual process of fulfilling needs, from physiological needs to self-actualization, is scarce. Additionally, such studies should consider the social context that shapes women's identities.

Furthermore, this research distinguishes itself from previous studies in several important aspects. The key difference lies in the use of two complementary theoretical approaches: Abraham Maslow's psychohumanistic approach and Jean B. Miller's feminist psychology. Previous studies have tended to use a single theoretical approach to analyze female characters. In contrast, this study integrates two approaches to provide a more holistic understanding of their efforts to fulfill their needs. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on the

psychological or social aspects of female characters, this study employs Maslow's and Miller's theories explicitly to investigate the relationship between the fulfillment of individual needs and the development of female characters within a patriarchal social and cultural space.

The urgency of this research lies in the ongoing challenges women face in fulfilling their basic needs within a patriarchal structure that limits their opportunities for autonomy and self-empowerment. By examining the experiences of female characters in literature through the lenses of Maslow's theory and feminist psychology, this study aims to explore how women strive to meet their needs and how relational factors such as gender roles and social expectations influence their ability to fulfill those needs.

The present study draws on the previously discussed research to support the analysis by integrating Maslow's theory and Miller's feminist psychology. Furthermore, although many scholars have explored similar topics, no research has specifically examined Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the feminist psychological perspective on how female characters fulfill their basic needs in Andina Dwifatma's works, particularly in *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan*.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the efforts of the female characters in *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma to fulfill their hierarchical needs according to Abraham Maslow, and their connection to Jean B. Miller's feminist psychology perspective on the relational dynamics between female characters and themselves, society, or the community. The analysis will also include supporting female characters, not just the main female character. Thus, this study offers a new contribution to literary studies, one that is more structured and grounded in the integration of psychohumanistic and feminist psychological theories.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Synthesis of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Feminist Psychology by Miller

The theoretical foundation of this study aligns with its objective of describing how the female characters in *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* strive to fulfill their hierarchy of needs using Abraham Maslow's basic needs theory and Jean B. Miller's feminist psychological perspective. The concept of literary psychology provides the overarching analytical framework, as it investigates characters' psychological processes, motivations, and emotional dynamics within fictional narratives (Han et al., 2020; Rokach, 2019). Through this lens, characters' inner experiences are understood as reflections of broader human issues, allowing the researcher to interpret their psychological development in a systematic and theory-driven manner (Brabeck, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Minderop (2016), literary psychology is particularly effective in uncovering complex emotional and cognitive struggles experienced by characters. Thus, literary psychology not only explains what characters' experience psychologically but also why those experiences matter within the social and cultural context of the narrative (Lestari et al., 2019; Sartika et al., 2023)

Within this framework, Maslow's hierarchy of needs serves as the primary theoretical structure to analyze how the female characters attempt to meet their basic and higher-level needs (Maslow, 2012, 2021). Maslow asserts that human motivation develops through sequential fulfillment of physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Boogren, 2018; Feist & Feist, 2008; Kaufman, 2018). These "*instinctoid*" needs Maslow (1972) are universal and biologically grounded, offering a clear conceptual basis for identifying how each character's actions and decisions correspond to unmet or emerging needs. This theoretical structure directly supports the study's aim by providing explicit analytical categories to examine the characters' efforts to fulfill their needs throughout the narrative. The characters' struggles with economic stability, emotional security, relational attachment, self-worth, and personal potential can thus be systematically mapped using Maslow's hierarchical stages.

To complement Maslow's individualistic model, this study incorporates Jean B. Miller's Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), a feminist psychological framework that emphasizes the centrality of relationships in women's psychological development (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Miller (1986), argues that women's growth is relational rather than autonomous; therefore, connection, empathy, mutuality, and emotional responsiveness become crucial indicators of psychological well-being. This theory is highly relevant to the research focus because it explains how and why relational dynamics such as support, disconnection, or relational disruption, affect the female characters' ability to fulfill their needs. By integrating RCT, the study can examine gendered relational experiences that Maslow's model does not fully address, especially within a patriarchal social structure represented in the novel.

Combining Maslow and Miller allows the analysis to capture both individual psychological needs and relational-cultural factors that influence the female characters' emotional and psychological trajectories. This dual-theory approach provides a coherent and logically connected basis for interpreting how the characters navigate physiological challenges, pursue safety and love, maintain self-esteem, and seek personal fulfillment while simultaneously negotiating relational expectations, identity formation, and gender-based constraints. Based on this integrated theoretical lens, the female characters' efforts in the novel can be understood through their attempts to fulfill physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs, while also navigating the relational dynamics that shape their psychological growth, empowerment, and identity. These processes are revealed through narrative descriptions, character's interactions, and dialogues that reflect the author's portrayal of women's emotional journeys and sociocultural struggles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design. The primary data source is the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* (*Quieter than a Whisper*) by Andina Dwi Fatma, published in 2021, consisting of 155 pages (Dwifatma, 2021). The research adopts a literary psychological approach grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs and psychological feminism by Miller. The subjects of the analysis are the female characters whose psychological experiences reflect the theoretical framework.

This study focuses on examining the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs among the female characters in the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by employing a human instrument approach, in which the researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. This analysis integrates Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs with Jean B. Miller's feminist psychology, particularly the Relational-Cultural Theory, to interpret the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs in female characters not only as an individual pursuit of personal growth but also as a relational process shaped by connection, mutual empathy, and empowerment (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Data were collected through systematic reading, detailed note-taking, and a review of relevant supporting literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The data collection procedures were carried out through the following stages.

First, the researcher conducted an initial reading of the entire novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, character development, and the psychological context embedded within the narrative. This stage aimed to identify the overall structure of the story and to locate textual segments potentially aligned with the principles of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Jean B. Miller's relational-cultural theory.

Second, the researcher performed a close reading of narrative sections that depict the characters' behaviors, thoughts, and emotional experiences related specifically to the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs. At this stage, both Maslow's levels of human needs and

Miller's relational dynamics were considered, focusing on how the female characters navigate their psychological development through meeting their fundamental needs and through the relational connections they establish or fail to maintain.

Third, the researcher compiled data through systematic note-taking and coding by transcribing relevant excerpts into data cards or screening tables containing textual quotations, contextual explanations, and preliminary interpretations. These data were then assigned thematic codes corresponding to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization) and to Miller's relational categories (the role of relationships in shaping identity, connection, mutual empathy, and self-empowerment). This dual-framework approach enabled an exploration of how the female characters strive to fulfill their hierarchical needs and how relational dynamics influence their ability to meet these needs.

Fourth, the data collected were revisited through repeated readings to ensure consistency, accuracy, and relevance of the findings in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Miller's relational-cultural theory. This process involved a thorough verification of the data's alignment with the theoretical frameworks. The iterative review confirmed that the findings accurately reflected the theoretical concepts under investigation. Ultimately, this step ensured that the data were both valid and meaningful within the study's theoretical framework.

The data analysis employed in this study refers to the model developed by Miles et al., (2019), which consists of several systematic stages. The first stage is data collection. The data collection was conducted through the techniques of reading and recording. Textual or narrative data served as the objects of interpretation. Here, the researchers gathered dialogues and narrative descriptions from the novel. This stage was followed by data condensation, which involves selecting, simplifying, and abstracting the collected data. In this process, the data were filtered to identify key elements that possess high interpretive value, including themes, symbols, and motifs present within the text. The subsequent stage was data presentation. It was organized in a narrative format to illustrate how various parts of the text relate to one another within the broader context of the novel, thereby enabling a more profound understanding of its meaning. The final stage involved concluding. The researchers interpreted the overall meaning of the text and formulated substantive statements related to the research problems and objectives (Miles et al., 2015).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation was applied by comparing interpretations across multiple textual sources and reading stages to strengthen accuracy and reduce bias (Maidan et al., 2014; Mezmir, 2020). Intra-rater reliability was ensured through repeated coding and re-examination of data to maintain consistency in interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Meseguer-Henarejos et al., 2017). Additionally, extended engagement with the novel and peer debriefing contributed to enhancing credibility by ensuring that the interpretations remained grounded in the narrative and theoretically coherent. Collectively, these procedures strengthen the accuracy, trustworthiness, and methodological rigor of the analysis conducted in this study.

DISCUSSION

Findings regarding the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs of female characters in Andina Dwifatma's novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* (*Quieter than a Whisper*) reveal the complexity of fulfilling basic needs and progressing toward self-actualization. The ups and downs of the characters' psychological states as needs are fulfilled can be seen in the following description.

Physiological Needs

Physiological needs include the necessities known as the pillars of life: food, water, shelter, and breathing. Maslow believed and proved that these needs are the most fundamental, and that all other needs are secondary. If humans are alive, they need physiological supplements to stay alive and breathe (Maslow, 1954).

Amara, the main character in this novel, successfully fulfills her physiological needs by having a home with Baron, her husband. At the beginning of the novel, Amara is described as having a reasonably happy life because she can meet basic needs, such as decent housing. Amara has fulfilled the basic need for housing, so she will likely achieve self-actualization, as seen in the following excerpt.

Datum 1

"Our days were perfect, like in family drama movies. A small house with a beautiful kitchen and a veranda. A small garden in the backyard where we would chat in the afternoons every weekend...."

Source: p.3

From the excerpt from the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma, the main character is portrayed as living a harmonious, ideal life, described as *"our days are perfect, like in family drama movies."* This description shows the fulfillment of basic and psychological needs, such as a sense of security, comfort, and happiness in family life. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), which states that physiological needs and safety are basic needs that must be met before a person can achieve self-actualization, this data reflects the fulfillment of the first two levels of the hierarchy of needs, namely the need for safety and the need for social relationships (belongingness and love needs). A *"cozy"* home and a *"beautiful kitchen"* indicate physical comfort, while *"a small garden in the backyard where we chat every weekend afternoon"* describes close social interaction among family members.

These findings reveal that fulfilling basic needs in household life, such as security and close social relationships, plays an important role in achieving psychological well-being. Maslow (1943) explain when these basic needs are met, individuals can further develop toward higher needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization. In this context, the *"tiny house"* that serves as a physical shelter and the *"small garden"* that provides a space for social interaction show that a harmonious family life is the foundation for the development of individuals within that family. This finding is reinforced by Oktaviani et al. (2024) who explored the hierarchy of needs of characters in the novel *Dear Allah*. The findings show that the characters can fulfill their physiological needs, as seen from the narration of characters who have livable homes.

Meeting these basic needs creates a sense of security and stability, which is the foundation for mental and emotional health. The trend variable seen here is the importance of fulfilling physical and social needs in creating favorable living conditions. This can be explained by humanistic psychology, which emphasizes the importance of an environment that supports individual development (Feist & Feist, 2008; Maslow, 2012).

A comfortable home and healthy family relationships can encourage individuals to reach their full potential. This is consistent with research showing that family stability and harmonious relationships can influence an individual's psychological and emotional well-being. The fulfillment of basic needs, as seen in the quote, is one of the key factors that can influence an individual's efforts to achieve self-actualization.

Therefore, these findings show that factors such as physical comfort and the quality of social relationships within the household play a significant role in supporting individuals'

psychological and emotional development. The fulfillment of these basic needs lays a strong foundation for the fulfillment of higher needs, which, in turn, supports self-actualization.

In this excerpt from *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan*, the description of an idealized family life “like in family drama movies” illustrates how the characters’ sense of identity and connection is shaped by their relational environment. According to Miller (1986), relationships are central to psychological growth, particularly for women, and in this case, the familial bond serves as a source of emotional security and support. The shared moments in the home and garden reflect a nurturing environment where the characters’ identities are reinforced through connection and mutual care. However, the idealization of this relational space may also highlight the pressure to conform to societal expectations of family life, potentially complicating their emotional growth if real-life experiences diverge from these ideals. Thus, the characters’ development is deeply influenced by both the positive and idealized relational dynamics within their family.

Datum 2

"Every corner of Mami's house is exactly as I remember it. The land is spacious because two plots have been combined into a single plot. There are two entrances, one for guests and one for residents. From the residents' entrance, you can see straight into the kitchen, which is connected to the dining room."

Source: p.148

From this excerpt from the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan (Quieter than a Whisper)* by Andina Dwifatma, it is revealed that Amara has, since childhood, been in an environment that provides stable, comfortable fulfilment of her physiological needs. In the context of Maslow's theory, a spacious and comfortable house with adequate facilities, such as separate entrances for guests and residents, reflects the fulfilment of basic needs for physical safety and physiological needs. The house, described as a symbol of physical and emotional stability, provides a strong foundation for Amara's psychological development. Memories of a childhood home that provided a sense of security, order, and affection became an important emotional anchor in her life, influencing her psychological well-being in adulthood.

These findings suggest that adequately fulfilling physiological needs in childhood has a significant impact on an individual's future psychological development. Based on Maslow's theory (2012), the fulfilment of physiological needs is a basic requirement for reaching higher levels of needs, such as the need for security, social relationships, self-esteem, and self-actualization. In this case, a spacious, comfortable home and a loving environment provided Amara with a sense of security and stability, creating a strong psychological foundation for her to grow and develop.

In datum 2, the description of Mami's house, which remains exactly as the character remembers it, reflects the deep emotional connection and sense of stability that the house represents. According to Miller (1986), the physical space described here is not just a backdrop but also a symbol of relational security and continuity. The house, with its specific design and layout, signifies the enduring relationship between the character and her mother, providing a sense of rootedness and identity. The familiar environment reflects the emotional ties that shape the character's sense of self, as relationships with family, especially maternal bonds, are central to identity formation and empowerment. The connection to Mami's house underscores how relational stability, even in its physical form, can foster a sense of belonging and emotional resilience. However, it also highlights the tension between the past and present, as the character navigates how these relational ties influence her personal growth and autonomy.

Datum 3

"I decided to rent a one-room apartment consisting of a small terrace, a TV room, a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom for nine hundred thousand rupiah a month. I put the wooden chair and table that Mami had given me on the terrace; a small bookcase, a desk and chair in the TV room, a bed, and a plastic wardrobe in the bedroom. I chose some kitchen equipment that I could still take with me: a stove, a bucket, a dipper, a broom, and a mop, and sold the rest in bulk. I paid three months' rent in advance."

Source: p.115

This excerpt describes Amara's efforts to meet her basic physiological needs after severe economic hardship, during which the bank seized her house due to her husband's irresponsible actions. Amara, who plays the role of wife and mother, is forced to face the reality that she must find temporary shelter on a limited budget, while also struggling to meet her family's physical needs. This finding shows that, despite her difficult economic circumstances, Amara still strives to meet basic physical needs, such as shelter, food, and daily necessities.

Amara's actions in selecting items that could still be used and selling the rest reflect her ability to adapt to limitations and to prioritize fulfilling physical needs amid difficulties. This decision shows that Amara focuses on fulfilling basic needs first, which is the first step in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although not easy, Amara's efforts to provide decent shelter and ensure that daily needs are met are part of her struggle to survive in a stressful situation. This phenomenon occurs because physiological needs are the first to be met in a crisis. When a person's life is threatened, as Amara experienced, the priority is to ensure physical survival and basic needs, such as shelter and food.

Using Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, Amara's actions also highlight the role of relationships in shaping her identity and sense of empowerment. Despite the economic hardship and the loss of her home, Amara's ability to adapt and make decisions based on her limited resources demonstrates a strong sense of self-reliance. The items she chooses to retain, gifts from her mother, also signify the importance of relational connections in her life, serving as a reminder of familial support that shapes her identity.

Safety Needs

According to Maslow's theory, the need for security includes protection from physical and psychological threats. This need includes financial stability, a safe living environment, health insurance, and protection from danger (Maslow, 2012). The fulfillment of the need for security in the female characters in the novel can be seen as follows.

Datum 4

"Mom worked hard to support me, and I repaid her by living the life she had planned for me. I got into my favorite high school even though my grades were mediocre."

Source: p.43

Datum 5

"Mami did her job as a mother so well that I lacked nothing. Mami monitored my schooling, facilitated my hobbies, made sure I dressed and ate properly, but I never got the impression she enjoyed it. With Yuki, Mami was so different."...

Source: p.71

From the quotes presented in datum 3 and datum 4, it can be concluded that Amara fulfilled the essential need for security in her childhood through her mother, Mami. The fulfillment of this need is reflected in the structural and emotional support provided by Mami, such as ensuring Amara got into her favorite school and fulfilling other basic needs, such as

food, clothing, and attention to her hobbies. Although Amara did not fully experience emotional satisfaction in her relationship with her mother, Mami succeeded in creating a stable, safe environment for her, which served as an important psychological foundation for her personal development. This reflects the fulfillment of safety needs according to Maslow, which include physical security, emotional stability, and protection from threats of uncertainty (Maslow, 2012, 2021).

These findings suggest that the effective fulfillment of safety needs in childhood serves as a foundation for strong psychological development in the future. According to Maslow (1943), the need for safety is the second stage in the hierarchy of human needs, which must be fulfilled after physiological needs. When these needs are met, individuals can develop further toward self-actualization. In this context, Amara received sufficient protection and stability from her mother, even though their emotional bond was not particularly close. Mami provided a stable structure and routine, ensuring that Amara's basic needs, such as education and health, were well met.

The role of a single parent, in this case, Mami, served as a guide for Amara's life, providing a sense of direction and protection, even though it was not aligned with Amara's personal desires. This creates a strong psychological foundation for Amara to overcome future crises, such as the financial difficulties and domestic problems she faces with her husband. Despite the crises in Amara's life, her childhood memories of security and protection remain an important source of emotional strength. Research on psychological development shows that the stability and sense of security received in childhood have a significant long-term impact on an individual's ability to cope with stress and life challenges in adulthood. The trend variable evident in these two data points is the importance of meeting the need for security in childhood as a foundation for future mental resilience. In addition, Boogren's (2018) research reinforces this study's findings, showing that efforts to meet these needs enable individuals to face life's challenges and crises with greater resilience.

Then, in datum 4, Amara reflects on her relationship with her mother, describing how she lived the life her mother had planned for her, despite her own mediocre academic performance. From the perspective of Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, this dynamic highlights how Amara's identity is shaped by her mother's expectations and the relational pressure to fulfill those expectations. The sense of obligation to "*repay*" her mother reflects a relational connection where Amara's self-identity is intertwined with her mother's desires, potentially limiting her self-empowerment in the process.

In datum 5, Amara describes her mother's dedication to providing for her every need. However, she perceives a lack of enjoyment in her mother's actions, particularly when compared to her relationship with Yuki (Amara's daughter). Miller's theory suggests that relationships that are characterized by care and support can play a significant role in shaping a person's identity. However, the perception that her mother's actions are not enjoyed indicates a potential relational disconnect, in which Amara may feel emotionally unsupported despite material care. The contrast with her mother's behavior toward Yuki could reflect the impact of relational dynamics on Amara's sense of self-empowerment. This relational tension may influence Amara's own identity, as it complicates her understanding of love, support, and self-worth in the context of her mother's care.

Need for Love and Belonging

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for love and belonging encompasses an individual's desire to form warm, caring, and loving relationships with others, whether through friendships, family, or romantic partnerships. This is evident in the following quote.

Datum 6

'Baron treats me like a princess. Sometimes he even calls me 'Princess,' especially when I get upset because I cannot reach him.

Source: p. 31

Scientific findings from this data show that Amara fulfills her need for love and belonging through her romantic relationship with Baron, as evidenced by his consistent emotional attention and affection, as reflected in endearments such as "*Princess*." This nickname, along with positive responses to Amara's emotional behavior (such as when she sulks), illustrates the validation of feelings and emotional closeness that fulfills her social need for love and affection, which is the third-level need in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943).

This emotional attachment underscores the importance of warm, supportive interpersonal interactions in shaping an individual's social and emotional identity. In the context of Maslow's theory, when individuals feel accepted and valued in social relationships, whether with partners, friends, or family, they can develop a sense of security within themselves and strengthen social bonds. This study is reinforced by findings from Chumairoh (2018), which show that harmonious relationships with parents, family, and friends can support the fulfillment of needs for love, belonging, and positive self-esteem.

In datum 6, Amara describes how Baron treats her like a "*princess*" often using the term when she is upset because she cannot reach him. According to Miller (1986), this relational dynamic emphasizes the role of relationships in shaping Amara's identity and sense of connection. Baron's treatment of Amara, though seemingly affectionate, may also reflect a power imbalance, as it positions her in a passive, dependent role ("*princess*") when she feels distressed. Miller's theory highlights that healthy relationships are built on mutual respect and emotional support, where both individuals are empowered to express their needs and concerns. In this case, Amara's identity and emotional well-being are shaped by how Baron interacts with her, offering her affection but potentially reinforcing dependency rather than fostering autonomy and self-empowerment. This dynamic suggests that Amara's connection with Baron may simultaneously provide emotional comfort while also hindering her ability to fully assert her independence within the relationship.

Datum 7

"There is something that people do not tell you about being a parent: I feel tremendous joy, a love that cannot be compared to anything else, but at the same time, you are vulnerable."

Source: p.58

The scientific findings from this quote show that Amara's experience as a mother became a crucial point in fulfilling her need for love and belonging in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, while also forming a new dimension of her identity. The statements "*incredible joy*" and "*a feeling of love that cannot be compared to anything else*" emphasize that the presence of a child provides a powerful object of affection, which not only fulfills biological expectations after nine years of waiting, but also fulfills Amara's socio-affective needs as a woman who wants to be loved and to love in return.

Psychologically, the experience of becoming a parent is often understood as one of the most intense forms of emotional attachment, where individuals feel meaningful because they are needed, missed, and become the center of attention for another being; this is where the need to "*belong*" and "*to matter*" are simultaneously fulfilled. Interestingly, the quote also acknowledges vulnerability ("*you are vulnerable*"), suggesting that the fulfillment of the need for love and belonging always goes hand in hand with the potential fear of loss, thereby

deepening the quality of emotional attachment itself. This finding is in line with the humanistic psychological view that authentic, loving relationships, especially those based on long struggles such as waiting for a child, not only satisfy social needs but also strengthen the psychological foundation for higher levels of needs, as individuals feel whole, meaningful, and worthy of loving and being loved.

In datum 7, the character reflects on the complex emotions of parenthood, experiencing both profound joy and vulnerability. According to Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, this quote highlights how relationships, particularly those between parents and children, shape identity and emotional experiences. The joy and love mentioned reflect a deep emotional connection that reinforces a parent's sense of identity and purpose. Miller's theory emphasizes that healthy relationships allow individuals to navigate both the nurturing and vulnerable aspects of connection, promoting self-awareness and empowerment (Miller, 1986). In this context, the speaker's vulnerability as a parent also suggests a need for relational support and a sense of security, which are vital for emotional growth.

Datum 8

"We both laughed. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I had a friend. That day, we celebrated my acceptance as a content writer at a lifestyle and health startup company in the Kebayoran area."

Source: p.123

The scientific findings from this excerpt show that Amara experienced the fulfillment of social needs, especially the need to feel accepted and have friends (*belongingness and love needs*), as reflected in the feeling of "*having a friend*." The context is that, previously, her household was plagued by conflict and the loss of a large sum of savings (Rp1.5 billion), causing Amara to experience psychological pressure, a loss of security, and emotional emptiness. In this phase, social relationships became the main support in filling the void of love and acceptance she had not received from her partner.

The quote describes an important moment in Amara's life, when she began rebuilding warm interpersonal relationships after experiencing emotional turmoil from domestic conflict and financial loss. According to Abraham Maslow, the need for love and belonging includes feeling accepted, having friends, forming emotional attachments, and maintaining mutually supportive interpersonal relationships (Maslow, 2021). If these needs are not met, a person will experience loneliness, social anxiety, and a crisis of meaning in relationships.

Furthermore, the moment of "*laughing with friends*" was not just a momentary emotional release, but an early indication of the restoration of Amara's social identity as an individual worthy of love and acceptance by her social environment. This is important as a prerequisite for self-actualization, as a person needs to feel emotionally stable and accepted by their environment to reach their full potential.

Also, Amara reflects on a moment of genuine connection with someone, feeling for the first time in a long time that she had a friend, and celebrating a personal achievement. From the perspective of Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, this moment illustrates the importance of relationships in shaping Amara's identity and sense of self-empowerment. The laughter and celebration with her friend represent the positive emotional impact of authentic, supportive connections, which Miller argues are essential for personal growth. This connection not only reinforces Amara's sense of belonging but also highlights how relational support can foster self-esteem and empowerment. By sharing this achievement with a friend, Amara's identity as a content writer and her professional success are validated, further strengthening her sense of self through relational recognition and emotional connection. This interaction underscores the

power of meaningful relationships in enhancing both personal development and emotional well-being.

Need for Self-Esteem

Once the three basic needs in the hierarchy have been met, individuals will begin to seek fulfillment of their self-esteem needs (Maslow, 1943). These needs include self-respect, recognition of personal abilities, and a sense of position or role in the social environment. At this stage, individuals strongly desire reinforcement and appreciation from others. They need to achieve specific goals and want their efforts' results recognized. In this context, the fulfillment of self-esteem needs is found in the supporting character, Macan. Consider the following excerpt from the novel.

Datum 9

"Marriage is a sweet version of slavery. If I marry Advent Bangun, I will take care of him, his children, his parents, his in-laws, all day long, continuously, until I die. Not to mention the comments from the neighbors. An old man who gets a young wife will be praised, while the young woman will be called stupid or greedy for money. I would be the one who gives and sacrifices the most, but for what?"

Source: p.120

Based on Maslow's theory (2013), self-esteem needs include the desire for appreciation, recognition, self-confidence, and achievement. The character's statement shows that she demands validation as an equal, not merely as an object of sacrifice within the institution of marriage. This critical attitude shows that the character is fulfilling her self-esteem by rejecting social norms that demean her existence as a woman. This research is supported by findings from a previous study by Rosidah (2023) which reveal the struggles and self-defense experienced by the character Marilyn in the film *Blonde*, culminating in her decision to leave the acting world she had pursued. This decision was triggered by a series of abusive incidents she experienced. It took Marilyn a long time to gather the courage to fight against the unhealthy system in the industry.

The scientific findings from these excerpts show that the character Macan in the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* has a critical awareness of gender inequality in the institution of marriage, as evidenced by her rejection of the role of women who are only asked to sacrifice without equal reciprocity. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), self-esteem needs include recognition, appreciation, and self-confidence, which are crucial to the formation of a healthy self-identity. Macan demands validation of herself as an equal individual, not as an object of sacrifice in a patriarchal relationship, where women's roles are often limited to domestic tasks without adequate appreciation. This rejection of social norms that demean women shows that Macan is trying to fulfill her self-esteem needs, which are essential for achieving self-actualization.

Macan's criticism also reflects an awareness of patriarchal social structures (Azizah, 2023), such as Miller (1986), view that women are often expected to live sacrificial lives without receiving equal recognition. In Maslow's view, this need for self-esteem is not only about individual recognition but also about broader social recognition, including appreciation for individuals' contributions, achievements, and roles in society.

This trend reflects a growing awareness among modern women of the importance of equality in marital relationships, which takes into account not only physical contributions but also appreciation for their personalities and personal needs. In this context, these findings align with Maslow's view that self-esteem is a basic need for self-actualization. This need is not only

achieved through individual appreciation but also through equal social recognition. For women, especially in patriarchal social structures, the achievement of self-esteem is often hampered by social norms that reduce their value to only subordinate domestic roles. Thus, Macan's rejection of this demeaning role illustrates an effort to fight inequality and demand equal recognition in marital relationships. This trend also underscores the importance of women's empowerment for psychological and social well-being, ultimately contributing to actual self-actualization.

Thus, in datum 9, the character reflects on the potential marriage to Advent Bangun, describing it as "*a sweet version of slavery*," where she would bear the burden of caregiving and sacrifice without receiving reciprocal support or recognition. From the perspective of Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, this passage highlights the role of relationships in shaping identity and self-empowerment, especially in terms of the expectations placed on women within societal and familial structures. The character's awareness of being the primary caregiver and sacrificial figure reveals the emotional and relational toll such expectations can have on her sense of self-worth and autonomy. Miller (1986) emphasizes that healthy relationships should empower individuals, but in this case, the dynamic described reflects an imbalance, where the woman's needs for support, recognition, and emotional connection are undermined by societal norms and gendered expectations. This relational strain shapes the character's identity, leaving her questioning the value of self-sacrifice without mutual empowerment. The tension between social expectations and personal desires in this passage reflects how relational dynamics can either nurture or hinder self-empowerment, as the character grapples with the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles.

Self-Actualization

The highest need is self-actualization. Self-actualization generally exhibits characteristics such as creativity, deep spiritual exploration, intellectual curiosity, realistic thinking, and acceptance of oneself and others (Maslow, 2012, 2021). The following excerpt describes Amara's self-actualization after successfully fulfilling her basic needs.

Datum 10

"On our wedding night, I realized: I had chosen my own life partner, someone my mother disapproved of, and the success or failure of my marriage would be the result of my own decision. For the first time, I felt free."

Source: p.43

In datum 10, Amara's realization that her marriage's success or failure rests on her own decisions, despite her mother's disapproval, marks a pivotal moment of self-empowerment and identity formation. According to Jean B. Miller's relational cultural theory, this shift from relational dependency to autonomy illustrates how relationships influence identity and the development of personal power (Miller, 1986). By choosing a life partner against her mother's wishes, Amara asserts her agency and embraces the freedom to define her life on her own terms, signaling a crucial step in her psychological growth.

This quote from the novel suggests that she has chosen her own path and feels independent in her life. Through her statement, "*I have chosen my own life partner*," there is a manifestation of independence in making important decisions, which is very significant in the context of culture and family relationships, especially since her decision goes against her mother's wishes. This shows that Amara no longer depends on validation or recognition from others but trusts her own values and inner voice. This aligns with the characteristics of individuals who actualize themselves, according to Maslow, namely autonomy and psychological freedom (Gelperin, 2020; Maslow, 2021).

The statement "*the success or failure of my future marriage is my own decision*" shows that Amara takes full responsibility for her life, without blaming others. She understands that the consequences of life choices are part of the process of becoming a whole person. This shows that Amara not only makes decisions but also fully accepts the risks and responsibilities of those decisions, which is characteristic of someone who has achieved self-actualization.

In humanistic psychology, self-actualization is an achievement that involves fulfilling one's maximum potential, reflected in the freedom to choose, feel autonomous, and take responsibility for one's life (Gelperin, 2020; Maslow, 1943). The freedom Amara feels in the quote aligns with Maslow's theory that a person can realize their full potential only after gaining a sense of security, self-esteem, and love. Amara's statement that she feels free for the first time signifies an achievement in the peak stage of psychological development, where a person feels capable of exploring life in accordance with their personal values without being hindered by external influences. At the end of Amara's story, self-actualization is reflected in her acceptance of herself and the circumstances, as seen in the following quote.

Datum 11

"Are you safe, Mar?" "I'm safe, Mi," I replied, then looked down at Yuki, who was still staring at me intently with her bright eyes. I took her hand and gently kissed her fingers. "Yes, we're fine."

Source: p.152

From this excerpt, Amara, who has struggled with life's ups and downs, finally accepts herself and her current situation. Amara, who has been able to fulfill her basic needs and achieve self-actualization for a long time, faces difficulties and challenges in her life journey. However, in the end, she accepts everything that has happened to her, which represents a form of self-actualization that concludes the story of this novel.

This quote captures the peak of Amara's psychological achievement after navigating various phases of life marked by pressure, loss, and conflict. In the context of Abraham Maslow's theory, Amara's inner condition in this quote reflects self-actualization, which is the highest stage in the hierarchy of human needs.

Her statement, "*we are fine*," reflects inner reconciliation, which is the full acceptance of the realities of life, including wounds and loss, without denial or regret. Amara achieves inner peace and complete self-acceptance after struggling to fulfill her previous needs. Starting from physiological needs after the tragedy that befell her household and financial situation, a sense of security because she finally felt protected by her family again, love and belonging towards her children and single parents, even though she no longer had a romantic relationship with her husband, to self-esteem as part of her independence and life choices.

In datum 11, Amara's reassuring words to her mother and her nurturing care for her daughter, Yuki, further exemplify the role of relationships in shaping identity. The emotional bond between Amara and her family provides a source of connection and security, fostering her sense of self and reinforcing her empowerment through the act of caregiving.

Datum 12

"I am happy to see Macan go to college. Macan's stories about his life are my bridge to the outside world. Mami's house is like a safe and comfortable nest, and I am a wounded bird. ..."

Source: p.149

This quote illustrates the fulfillment of a deep need for self-actualization, primarily through higher education, in the context of Amara's life. Specifically, Macan, who has the

opportunity to attend college, represents the highest level of achievement in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, namely self-actualization. However, on the other hand, the character Amara, despite living in an environment that is considered "*safe and comfortable*" (Mami's house), harbors deep feelings of being trapped in the role that has been determined by her current status and experiences "*psychological turmoil*" after the conflict with her husband, Baron. Even so, Amara has begun a process of self-acceptance, which, in turn, becomes a path to self-actualization.

In datum 12, Amara reflects on the contrast between her own sense of isolation and her connection to the outside world through Macan's stories, symbolizing how relationships shape identity and connection. According to Miller (1986), Amara's description of Mami's house as a "*safe and comfortable nest*" highlights the role of nurturing relationships in providing emotional security and fostering identity. However, the metaphor of herself as a "*wounded bird*" suggests that while Amara finds comfort in her familial connection, she also feels constrained and disconnected from broader experiences.

Thus, these excerpts clearly show that the female characters, Amara and Macan, cannot achieve self-actualization through an easy and stable journey. Actualization is the result of a long inner journey, persevering through difficulties, and finally accepting oneself as an imperfect woman by dispelling one's fears.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the life journeys of the female characters in Andina Dwifatma's novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* (*Quieter than a Whisper*) illustrate the process of fulfilling Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. The female characters face significant challenges in meeting their basic needs, such as food, shelter, and other physical necessities, which are often hindered by social and economic limitations. Despite these constraints, the characters persist in their efforts to survive. At the safety needs level, uncertainty in interpersonal relationships and financial dependence contribute to a sense of insecurity. Nevertheless, they continue to seek stability and environments that support their well-being.

Furthermore, the narrative reveals that the female characters quest for love and belonging is inextricably linked to their struggle for esteem. Their interpersonal relationships, particularly with family and partners, often become sites of tension where the desire for emotional connection clashes with societal norms that limit their acceptance. In response, the characters strive to maintain self-worth as a form of resistance against these social pressures, ensuring their psychological survival even amidst conflict. This resilience ultimately paves the way for self-actualization, depicted not as a seamless ascent but as an active endeavor to develop potential despite structural obstacles, as exemplified by Macan's successful pursuit of higher education. Consequently, the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* illustrates that fulfilling the hierarchy of needs is a nonlinear process; it is a journey defined by effort and self-acceptance, where the characters manage to transcend pain and loss to reclaim their agency.

The study has several limitations. Although it integrates two approaches that provide strong insights, future research could adopt a more holistic, integrative approach that incorporates additional theories to deepen understanding of the female characters' needs in the novel. Future research could also incorporate other theories, such as psychoanalytic theory or contemporary gender theory, which may open new dimensions in understanding female characters in literary contexts.

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