

UNVEILING HUMAN NEEDS : ANALYSIS OF BILLIE EILISH'S SONG LYRICS (2019)

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ABSTRACT

human needs as reflected in Billie Eilish's song lyrics based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs theory using a humanistic psychology approach. This study was designed to analyze human needs in song lyrics and the factors that influence those needs. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with document analysis techniques on song lyrics as textual data. The researcher identified words, meanings, and themes corresponding to the five human needs outlined by Abraham Maslow. The research data consists of three Billie Eilish song lyrics: “Bury a Friend,” “Listen Before I Go,” and “Everything I Wanted.” The results of this study indicate that Billie Eilish's song lyrics reflect various human needs as outlined in Maslow's theory. The analysis results show that seven data points are related to physiological needs, seven to safety needs, four to love and belonging needs, five to esteem needs, and three to self-actualization needs. Supporting factors such as environmental conditions, resource availability, life experiences, social support, and freedom of expression play a significant role in fulfilling these needs. This demonstrates that song lyrics can also serve as a means of self-expression and a reflection of human experience, as well as depicting the psychological struggles in life.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as an artistic expression that mirrors human emotions, behavior, and experience. Through various forms such as poetry, novels, and song lyrics, literature provides insight into the human mind and social reality (Wellek & Warren, 1949). Music, as one of the most universal literary forms, functions as a medium for expressing psychological needs, emotions, and values. Song lyrics particularly serve as a reflection of individual experiences, emotional conflicts, and the pursuit of meaning in life.

One of the most influential theories in explaining human needs is Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. According to Maslow (1954), human needs are ranked in a hierarchy, with meeting basic needs coming before moving on to more advanced stages of psychological development. The five stages of this hierarchy are physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, self-actualization. Physiological needs are essential resources such as food, water, and shelter. When these needs are fulfilled, an individual seeks safety, which includes personal security, finances, and health. The third level, love and belonging, focuses on relationship formation, social interaction, and community integration. As one continues to develop, they seek esteem, which includes self-assurance, acknowledgment, and respect from others. Lastly, self-actualization is the highest of the five levels. It consists of pursuing personal development, creativity, and the realization of one's fullest potential (Maslow, 1954).

The concept employed in this research is literary psychology, which explores the psychological aspects expressed in a literary work, including emotions, thoughts, and motivations that shape human behavior (Endraswara, 2008). This study applies Abraham Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Human Needs theory to analyze how human motivations are reflected in Billie Eilish's song lyrics. Maslow's theory consists of five levels of needs—physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—which together illustrate the stages of human growth and fulfillment. Through this framework, the researcher identifies how Eilish's lyrics represent emotional conflicts, struggles for acceptance, and the desire for meaning in life. This concept is supported by the humanistic psychology approach, which emphasizes the

individual's potential for self-understanding and personal development (Schneider et al., 2014). The combination of Maslow's hierarchy and humanistic theory enables a deeper understanding of how the lyrics reveal the complexity of human needs and the pursuit of authenticity in facing emotional and social pressures. Therefore, this study aims to describe how Billie Eilish's song lyrics portray the stages of human needs and the factors influencing their fulfillment.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using content analysis to explore how human needs are reflected in the song lyrics of Billie Eilish based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. According to Sugiyono (2019: 15), a qualitative approach is a research method used to examine an object in natural conditions, where the researcher acts as the main instrument. This approach focuses on a deep understanding of a phenomenon based on the subjective meaning of individuals or groups.

The purpose of qualitative research is to investigate and comprehend the meaning that can be extracted from textual data instead of depending on numerical measurements. According to Sugiyono (2019: 15), qualitative research focuses on the richness of textual data in order to uncover underlying messages and motivations that may not be easily quantified. This approach enables researchers to understand human experiences in their natural context, where interpretations and subjective perspectives play a crucial role. Qualitative research emphasizes in-depth exploration of phenomena by analyzing patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge from the data.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Human Need Reflected in the Lyrics

1. Physiological Needs

The most fundamental level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is represented by physiological needs, which include the need for food, water, sleep, and physical comfort and various other bodily requirements. Human survival depends on these, and other requirements lose significance when they are not satisfied. While food and shelter are not specifically mentioned in Billie Eilish's lyrics, some phrases in her song "Bury a Friend" metaphorically convey sorrow, agony, and physical disruption—all of which can be connected

to unfulfilled physiological requirements. This can be seen from the song lyrics below:

“I wanna see the world when I stop breathing Turnin' blue (Blue)”

The lyrics *“I want to see the world”* describe a desire to see the world at the moment of death. This describes a desire to experience the world, but this desire arises at the end of life, when it is too late to enjoy life in the world because the body is no longer able to survive. The lyrics of this song depict the biological functions of the body ceasing to function. The lyrics *“stop breathing”* signify the loss of the ability to breathe, the most basic and fundamental function of human life. Additionally, *“turnin' blue”* medically indicates cyanosis, a condition caused by oxygen deprivation, where the skin and lips turn blue. This analysis reveals that the song's lyrics describe someone experiencing a phase of deterioration, failure, and discomfort in bodily functions due to the disruption of human physiological needs. In the context of humanistic psychology, this state reflects a situation where the body no longer responds to breathing as a biological function of humanity. In relation to Abraham Maslow's theory, the lyrics of this song show the existence of physiological needs, namely the need for oxygen, which is a basic human need. The loss of breathing is an extreme form of the unfulfillment of physiological needs. If this need is not fulfilled, humans cannot continue their lives and will even find it difficult to move on to the next stage of needs.

Therefore, these lyrics not only express suffering and discomfort in the body but also reveal an internal conflict between a body that has given up and a mind that desires to experience life in the world. These lyrics are relevant to the discussion of physiological needs because they touch on the core aspects of human survival, such as breathing, oxygen, and other bodily functions.

2. Safety Needs

Safety Needs are the second level in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954), which also includes self-defense, emotional stability, protection, and physical tranquility from internal and external dangers. If these needs are not met, people will continue to feel insecure, fearful, and anxious. Humans will struggle to adapt to their environment and may experience chronic anxiety if they feel physically or emotionally threatened.

“Calling security, keepin' my head held down”

The lyrics *“Calling security, keepin' my head held down”* express a condition of intense internal pressure and feeling controlled and monitored by external forces. The lyrics *“Calling security”* do not only refer to physical security but also signify that the person in the song feels threatened and has no control over themselves. Meanwhile, the lyrics *“keepin' my head held down”* depict the degradation of self-defense and the internal pressure experienced, making it impossible to express oneself and ultimately leading to submission. This situation indicates that the person in the song feels they are in an unsafe environment, both physically and emotionally. They feel unprotected and psychologically pressured. Therefore, this situation can be understood as a failure to meet the need for security, as explained by Maslow (1954), where the need for security includes protection from physical and emotional danger. Psychological safety is crucial for an individual's emotional stability. If this need is not met, a person may feel threatened, stressed, and lose self-control. In the context of humanistic psychology, such experiences can lead to despair, as the absence of safety can result in the loss of life's meaning due to the unmet need for safety. Thus, the lyrics of this song depict a crisis in the need for safety and self-protection from the surrounding environment.

3. Need for Love and Belonging

According to Abraham Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs theory, the third level is the desire for love and belonging. Humans require emotional relationships with others at this stage, including friendship, acceptability in

social groups, affection, and attention. People may experience feelings of worthlessness, rejection, or loneliness if these requirements are not satisfied.

“And you say, as long as I'm here, no one can hurt you”

The lyrics of this song describe a fairly intense emotional relationship, in which the person mentioned in the lyrics feels emotionally secure. The lyrics describe the presence of someone who is full of love and attention, who serves as a source of psychological protection for them. In the context of Maslow's theory, this shows that the need for love and connection in relationships is fulfilled. As a result, individuals feel loved and protected, which is an important foundation for healthy psychological development.

4. Esteem Needs

The fourth level of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) is called "Esteem Needs." At this point, people require approval from others as well as acknowledgment, self-assurance, and self-worth. When this need is met, one feels appreciated and significant, but when it is not met, one may feel inferior, unimportant, and unappreciated both individually and socially.

“I had a dream, I got everything I wanted” “But when I wake up, I see, you with me”

The lyrics of this song describe someone who dreams of getting everything he has always wanted, which can be considered a form of achievement and success. However, in reality, these achievements do not bring inner satisfaction. When they wake up, what truly matters in life is the presence of someone they love. In the context of esteem needs, this situation reflects that the recognition achieved, such as accomplishments and social status, is insufficient to build true self-worth. Self-worth that is not combined with healthy emotional relationships feels hollow and creates a meaningless sense of emptiness. The feeling of disappointment because the recognition does not bring satisfaction is also reflected in the lyrics of other songs, which describe that a person's self-worth is not only shaped by external achievements but also by acceptance and the meaning of relationships with others.

5. Self-actualization

Self-actualization is the highest level in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1954). This need emerges when an individual has satisfied their basic wants (love, security, physiology, and self-esteem) and starts pursuing their potential, life's purpose, with goals that go beyond material gain or notoriety. In the song Everything I Wanted, the need for self-actualization is depicted through the following lyrics:

"I had a dream I got everything I wanted" "But it might've been a nightmare"

These lyrics indicate that something that is dreamed of will not be emotionally satisfying. This situation illustrates the need for full self-actualization has not been achieved, even though it has achieved a success. Maslow (1954) explains that a person who has fulfilled basic needs will feel empty if he does not live a life with value, meaning his personal purpose. The lyrics also show the characteristics of individuals who are in the stage of self-actualization, the lyrics of the song begin to question the meaning of the success achieved and the impact on him. The dream that was previously coveted became a '*nightmare*' because it did not match reality, this reflects that self-actualization is not only about external achievements but also about life goals and self-identity.

Analysis of Factors Influencing the Fulfilment of Human Needs

1.Environmental Conditions

The environment in which a person lives greatly influences the extent to which their needs can be met. Maslow (1954) emphasized that freedom of self-expression, social stability, and economic security are key factors that support the fulfillment of basic human needs. If environmental conditions are not supportive, individuals will experience difficulties in meeting their needs and will be vulnerable to pressure, stress, and emotional instability.

"Nobody cried, nobody even noticed"

The lyrics “Nobody cried, nobody even noticed” describe a social condition full of indifference. This situation shows that people's need for attention, affection, and recognition from their environment is not being met. According to Maslow (1954), emotional support from others is an important part of building psychological balance.

The absence of empathy, as reflected in these lyrics, shows how an apathetic environment can lead to feelings of alienation and emptiness. When the need for social care is not met, individuals are at risk of experiencing emotional distress and difficulty progressing to higher levels of need. This verse represents how the lack of response and concern in the social environment acts as a significant barrier to the fulfillment of human needs, particularly the need for attention and acceptance from others.

2. Resource Availability

Basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and security can only be met if adequate resources are available. Maslow (1954) explains that individuals who have access to resources are more likely to achieve higher levels of needs, while those who lack resources will be stuck trying to meet their basic needs. *“Taste me, the salty tears on my cheek, that’s what a year-long headache does to you”*

The lyrics “Taste me, the salty tears on my cheek, that's what a year-long headache does to you” from the song Listen Before I Go describe the limitations of emotional and health resources experienced by individuals.

The tears and headaches described throughout the year symbolize physical and mental exhaustion that has not been relieved due to a lack of support from the environment. In the context of Maslow's theory (1954), the fulfillment of basic needs such as physical health and emotional stability can only be achieved if individuals have sufficient resources, whether in the form of energy, social support, or a healthy environment.

When these resources are unavailable, individuals remain trapped in the struggle to meet their most basic needs, making it difficult to progress toward higher needs such as safety, love, or even self-actualization. This lyric emphasizes that limited access to resources—both physical and psychological—impedes individuals from achieving a balanced life. This aligns with Maslow's view that without adequate resources, humans struggle

to advance to the next stage in the hierarchy of needs and instead become vulnerable to stress and despair.

3. Life Experience and Education

Life experience also plays an important role in fulfilling human needs. Maslow (1954) explains that individuals with a good education and positive life experiences tend to be better able to understand themselves and direct their lives toward self-actualization, compared to those who experience obstacles in education or socioeconomic conditions.

“I had a dream, I got everything I wanted”

The lyrics “I had a dream, I got everything I wanted” describe a life experience that on the surface appears to be full of achievements, but in reality does not bring true happiness to the individual. This highlights the paradox that material success or external achievements are not always synonymous with inner satisfaction. Maslow (1954) emphasizes that healthy life experiences and positive education provide essential tools for individuals to recognize their potential. Such experiences help shape self-awareness and a clear life direction, enabling one to develop toward self-actualization.

Conversely, experiences filled with disappointment or pressure can create a gap between outward success and inner happiness. This lyric affirms that when life experiences do not provide positive meaning, individuals will face obstacles in the process of understanding themselves. This condition aligns with Maslow's theory, where failure to find meaning in life experiences can keep someone stuck at a lower level of psychological needs. In other words, even though an individual may appear to have achieved outward success, psychologically they are not yet ready to move to a higher stage. Thus, meaningless experiences or disappointment become significant obstacles in one's journey toward achieving their highest potential.

4. Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships

According to Maslow (1954), social connections are essential for fulfilling the need for love and belonging. Individuals who receive emotional support from friends, family, or the wider community tend to experience greater life satisfaction, whereas those who encounter rejection or social isolation often face difficulties in meeting their psychological needs.

“Call my friends and tell them that I love them”

The lyrics “Call my friends and tell them that I love them” reveal a fundamental need for the presence of loved ones as a source of emotional support. This statement arises in the most vulnerable situations, where individuals reaffirm the importance of social relationships as a last resort in facing life's pressures. This indicates that love and the presence of friends are not merely supplementary, but essential psychological needs that directly influence feelings of safety and the meaning of life.

According to Maslow (1954), the need for love and belonging occupies an important position in the hierarchy of human needs, after physiological needs and safety are met. Emotional support from family, friends, and community serves as a foundation for building self-confidence and psychological stability. Without such social support, individuals are prone to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and even failure in developing their potential. This lyric emphasizes that social bonds not only function as a source of emotional comfort but also as a crucial factor in motivating individuals to achieve inner balance and life satisfaction.

5. Freedom and Opportunity to Grow

Maslow (1954) argued that individuals are more capable of fulfilling their needs when they are granted the freedom to make choices and take action, particularly in the pursuit of self-actualization. When people are provided with opportunities to express themselves and fully

develop their potential, they are more likely to achieve both happiness and overall well-being.

“I tried to scream but nothing came out”

The lyrics “I tried to scream but nothing came out” describe the limitations individuals face in expressing themselves, as if there is a strong desire to release emotions but they are hindered by circumstances or internal conditions that suppress them. This reflects the psychological experience of someone who lacks a safe space or adequate opportunity to voice their deepest feelings. Maslow (1954) emphasized that the freedom to express oneself is a crucial foundation in the process of self-actualization.

The inability to “speak up” in the lyrics symbolizes stifled potential—a condition in which individuals feel trapped, powerless, and unable to grow. Without the freedom to choose and act, a person will struggle to find their true self and fail to fulfill higher psychological needs. Conversely, when individuals are given the opportunity to express themselves and develop their full potential, they are more likely to achieve happiness, emotional balance, and self-actualization. Thus, the lyrics affirm that freedom of expression is not merely an additional need, but a vital element that determines whether someone can grow or remain trapped in inner turmoil.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Billie Eilish’s song lyrics reveals that human needs are reflected through emotional, symbolic, and psychological expressions. Based on Abraham Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Human Needs, five levels are identified in the selected songs “*Bury a Friend*,” “*Listen Before I Go*,” and “*Everything I Wanted*.” **Physiological needs** appear in lyrics showing pain and exhaustion, such as “*Then my limbs all froze and my eyes won’t close*,” expressing physical and emotional distress. **Safety needs** are reflected in “*I’m not okay, I feel so scattered*,” which illustrates insecurity and emotional instability. **Love and belonging needs** are seen in “*Tell me love isn’t true*,” describing loneliness and the desire for connection. **Esteem needs** emerge in

"Everybody wants something from me now," showing that public recognition does not guarantee self-worth. Finally, **self-actualization** is expressed through the search for identity, meaning, and authenticity, emphasizing emotional honesty and personal growth. These findings indicate that Billie Eilish's lyrics portray the complexity of human emotions and the universal struggle to achieve fulfillment.

The study also identifies **five factors influencing the fulfillment of human needs**: (1) environmental conditions, (2) psychological and emotional resources, (3) life experience and education, (4) social support and relationships, and (5) freedom and opportunity for self-expression. These factors demonstrate that human motivation and need satisfaction depend not only on internal drives but also on social, emotional, and environmental contexts.

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