



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Linda's Self-Actualization: A Maslowian Analysis of Paulo Coelho's *Adultery*

<sup>1</sup> Urooj Fatima \*, <sup>2</sup> Muhammad Bilal Khan and <sup>3</sup> Aqib Mujeeb

1. M. Phil, Department of English Language and Literature, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Dept. of English Language and Literature Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan KP, Pakistan
3. Graduated Department of English Language and Literature, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan KP, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author** | fatima420274@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to psychoanalyze Linda, the protagonist of Paulo Coelho's *Adultery*, through Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, focusing on her journey toward self-actualization. Linda experiences emotional stagnation despite fulfilling her basic and psychological needs. Her dissatisfaction with a seemingly ideal life leads her to seek deeper meaning and personal growth, consistent with Maslow's theory. Using a qualitative psychoanalytical approach, the study analyzes Linda's motivations and behavior through close textual analysis, framed within Maslow's theoretical method. Findings show that Linda's extramarital affair, while socially controversial, becomes a psychological route to explore unmet needs for passion and authenticity. Her actions reflect a natural drive for development, aligning with Maslow's concept of self-actualization. This research encourages deeper exploration of how psychological constructs like happiness, well-being, and resilience interact with self-actualization and how literature provides unique insights into personal growth, enriching both psychological theory and literary understanding.

**KEYWORDS** Self-actualization, Humanistic psychology, Psychoanalysis, Adultery, Paulo Coelho, Hierarchy of needs

## Introduction

In the domain of human subsistence, emotions and feelings play a paramount role, which sets us apart from the animal kingdom, where the focus preeminently revolves around physiological needs. Humans, however, exhibit a unique bifurcation in their needs, embracing both physiological and psychological dimensions. These twofold needs intertwist and conflate in concord, chiseling the detailed curvature of an individual's personality.

Novels, as a face of literary art, hold a one-of-a-kind power to drench readers in a rich mosaic of emotions and milestones by skillfully portraying the disagreements happening in the lives of their characters. Within these expositions, characters often combat the complexly woven web of their unfulfilled needs, comprehending a gradient that ranges from the most primary and rudimentary, such as hunger, sex, and shelter, to the elevated areas of esteem and self-worth as elucidated by Lestari and Wardani (2019).

Paulo Coelho's celebrated novel, "Adultery" is an example of such pristine work. This literary classic scrutinizes the pilgrimage of self-discovery pursued by its chief figure, Linda. Linda, despite seemingly serene outwardly, tussles with an extreme sense of

listlessness, tumbling into a state of melancholy and woe. She sets off on an unorthodox romantic alliance to pave her way toward reinvigorating her passion of liveliness. However, there happens to be an epochal parachute cruise with her husband that tends to spark the cleansing and, consequently, self-actualization. It is the novel “*Adultery*”, that lets us see how the breakage of steadfast trust in a pure relationship like marriage results in the emergence of complex and complex human emotions.

Abraham Maslow's framework sets forth a hierarchy of human psychological needs, with five fundamental levels sculpting the decision process. These needs subsume physical contentment, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, shaped in the form of a pyramid, demonstrating self-actualization at the summit and basic physiological needs as the footing (Corporate Finance Institute, 2022). While the lower four levels need to be considered deficiency needs, all the needs subsequent to every other depend upon the lower one for their attainment. It is impossible to attain a higher-level need like self-actualization before completing procuring a lower-level need.

Self-actualization, a term that might initially appear narcissistic and self-obsessed, is, as defined by Maslow, a concept that envelops the sacredness of self (Greene & Burke, 2007). Symbolized by self-confidence and courage, it involves ascending from low homonymy, characterized by weakness and fear, to high homonymy, according to Maslow.

Self-actualization is portrayed as a motivational and positive phenomenon in psychology by Abraham Maslow in his pioneering work, leading to significant crosshatches with the discipline of positive psychology (Goud, 2008). He emphasized that activities that fuel self-actualization are those that are related to self-development. For instance, a musician must create music, and an artist must paint to achieve contentment (Maslow, 1943). Self-actualization evokes the expedition of personal accomplishment and fulfillment (Masterclass, 2020).

The problem under investigation in this research paper pivots on the extreme and tortuous journey of self-actualization as experienced by the lead character, Linda, within the literary backdrop of Paulo Coelho's novel, “*Adultery*”. This inquiry scrutinizes the variegated challenges, psychological delicacies, and emotional complexities that characterize Linda's voyage of self-actualization – a concept deeply embedded in Abraham Maslow's renowned hierarchy of needs.

Leveraging Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization as a prism for apprehending complex emotional and behavioral transformations of humans this research probes into the psychoanalysis of characters like Linda within the context of Paulo Coelho's novel “*Adultery*”. Despite evidently leading content lives, these characters contemplate intense inner upheaval, shedding light on the sophisticated synergy between human needs, emotions, and behaviors. Through a fastidious analysis, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of human psychology and the prospects for personal growth and self-fulfillment.

## Literature Review

Given Paulo Coelho's widespread popularity as an author, it is important to explore the existing body of research on *Adultery*, the selected text for this study. Doing so will help identify the areas that have already been explored and uncover potential gaps that future research can address

Wijayanti (2017) focuses on the use of figurative language in *Adultery*. Analyzing 115 examples from the text, she found that comparative figures of speech—such as similes, metaphors, personification, and allegory—were used most frequently, with personification appearing more often than any other type (Wijayanti, 2017).

Mayer and Maree (2017) adopt a psychobiographical single-case study approach, grounded in Husserl's phenomenological framework, to delve into the role of magic and magical thinking in both Paulo Coelho's life and his writings. Their findings suggest that magical thinking not only supports personal growth but also serves as a powerful source of creative inspiration (Mayer & Maree, 2017).

Several studies have explored different perspectives on the novel. For instance, Maryono and colleagues (2017) compared Paulo Coelho's *Adultery* with Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, examining how the main characters' pursuit of happiness reflects Albert Camus' concept of absurdity. On the other hand, Utama (2018) takes a more text-focused approach. Using the principles of New Criticism, she analyzes the character development, plot structure, and underlying paradoxes to reveal how the protagonist's affair unexpectedly plays a role in healing her marriage (Maryono, 2017).

Nurhayati (2017) explores the female protagonist's personality through a psychoanalytic lens, highlighting how her behavior is largely driven by the influence of the superego. The study also reveals that she often relies on defense mechanisms such as denial and repression to cope with the challenges she faces (Nurhayati, 2017).

Unlike the previous four studies, Dorcas E. and Stylus (2018a) broaden their focus beyond *Adultery*, examining female protagonists in three of Coelho's novels—*Eleven Minutes*, *Adultery*, and *The Spy*. Their analysis highlights how the characters' experiences during adolescence play a significant role in shaping their personalities and influence how they navigate the challenges they face later in life (Dorcas & Stylus, 2018).

Tanmoy Mazumder (2020) draws on Murphy's theory of characterization alongside Hurlock's theory of personality development to explore how the female protagonist's character evolves throughout the story. The study reveals that her personality growth is shaped not only by her self-perception but also by the impact of societal expectations and the influencing of important individuals in her life (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020).

## Material and Methods

This research, hinged on scrutinizing Linda's self-actualization voyage within Paulo Coelho's novel *Adultery*, leveraged a qualitative analysis of Linda's experiences, thoughts, and emotions.

The research methodology deployed herein incorporates close reading and thematic analysis as the key assets for data collection and analysis. To unearth and assimilate the delicate journey of self-actualization as essayed in the novel *Adultery*, close reading and thematic analysis serve as resilient instruments. Close reading of the novel served as the primary source of data collection. A close reading was conducted by the researcher, and the data collected were then scrutinized through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a recurrent qualitative data analysis skillset that incorporates identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns and themes in the data. This allowed the researcher to discern and comprehend the themes related to self-actualization and Maslow's hierarchy of needs in Linda's experiences described in the novel.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance throughout the research process. To ensure validity, triangular validation was employed, a method that involves multiple individuals to validate findings from disparate viewpoints. To ensure reliability, triangulation was applied, which means cross-verifying data for correctness. The use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as the theoretical framework provided consistent elucidation.

## **Results and Discussion**

Literary works serve as conduits for condensing and transferring the core of human existence through the medium of language, be it spoken or written. They represent a unique form of aesthetic manifestation that abridges both innate value and aesthetic elegance (Wiyatmi, 2006). In the realm of human needs, it is acknowledged that while these needs are across the board, the countermeasure to each need can substantially fluctuate among individuals. The need for self-actualization springs up as a predominant influence molding human behavior, but it typically surfaces once the more foundational needs have been satisfied. Even individuals who have ostensibly secured their basic needs can encounter dilemmas on their journey toward self-actualization.

Despite satisfying lower-level needs like security, belonging, love, and self-esteem, handicaps to self-actualization can induce malaise and obstruct psychological well-being. This subtle interaction accentuates the perplexity of human motivation (Budiantoro and Mardianto, 2016).

The study's findings reveal Linda's progression through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting from physiological necessities to self-actualization. Conspicuously, the research highlights several leading qualities shaping this journey, including depression, revenge, the pursuit of change for enjoyment, and ultimately, remorse. These attributes collectively construe the eclectic path toward self-actualization for individuals.

## **Physiological Needs**

Physiological needs, encompassing essentials like food, water, and sexual fulfillment, constitute the cornerstone requirements for human survival. An appreciation of Abraham Maslow's philosophical framework is contingent upon comprehending the essence and relevance of physiological needs in human existence.

Let's have a look at the following excerpt of novel:

I have a wonderful husband who is not only madly in love with me, but also the owner of a large investment fund. Every year – much to his distaste – he appears in Bilan magazine's list of the three hundred richest people in Switzerland. (Coelho, 2014, p.1).

Linda's situation in the text suggests that her cardinal physiological needs, such as food, water, and sex, were not only met but also enjoyed with bountifulness and grandeur due to her wealthy husband. Thus, it aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, indicating fulfillment of these fundamental requirements.

## **Safety needs**

Safety needs, as outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, circumscribe the fundamental human requirement for pledge and shelter against physical and emotional harm. Financial stability and job security are also intrinsic elements of safety needs, as they contribute to an individual's sense of security. Her concern over her safety can be seen through this excerpt. "Would I be capable of facing the world alone if my husband died?

"Yes," I told myself, I'm a highly regarded journalist at a respectable newspaper I live in the safest country in the world" (Coelho, 2014, p.3).

Evidently, the narrative emphasizes that Linda's safety needs were significantly fulfilled, leaving her with little perturbation for her future. Her life was characterized by economic and financial security, making it congruent with the criteria outlined for safety needs. Linda held an eminent job, which, according to the definition of safety needs, contributes to one's sense of security. Moreover, she resided in a location that met the criteria of a safe environment. Linda's appraisal portrayed her residence as the safest country globally, devoid of abuse or potential trauma. Thus, her circumstances aligned with the constraints of safety needs as per the definition.

### **Love and belongingness needs:**

Under Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the needs of love and belonging emerge as intrinsic necessities following physiological and safety needs. Accommodating these needs is not merely beneficial but assuredly inevitable for mental and physical well-being. On the flip side, dismissing these needs can precipitate emotional upheaval, chiefly manifesting as loneliness (Boardman, 2020). Such emotional challenges present a formidable roadblock to the acquisition of self-actualization.

"I have a wonderful husband who is not only madly in love with me" (Coelho, 2014 p, 1)

The aforementioned passages provide insight into Linda's perceptions regarding her husband and kinship dynamics. It is evident from this analysis that Linda perceives a deep-seated sense of love and affection from her partner. Accordingly, within the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it can be corroborated that her need for love and affection is being proficiently achieved.

### **Self-esteem needs**

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs prominently points out the significance of self-esteem as a key psychological need for human growth and well-being. It's considered a higher-level need realizable once lower-level needs are met. Self-esteem comprises two aspects: appraisal by oneself and others, and self-respect, which relate to feeling valued and capable. Meeting these needs is critical for personal growth, persistence, relationships, and motivation, as individuals with healthy self-esteem are more open to setbacks and have an augmented sense of well-being (Cherry, 2022).

How many men have fallen in love with me in the past and not been loved in return? And yet they still sent me presents. I was at secondary school, and the boys were always hitting on me, no One day, my children will be proud of their mother, and my childhood friends will be more frustrated than ever. (Coelho, 2014 p.98)

This was Linda's perception about her self-image while she was in her teenage. She also wanted to make others jealous of herself.

But later on, the shifts occurred in her thought process that can be observed through her feeling expressed by her. "I feel disgusted. I waited so long to act like a tigress and ended up being used like a mare. He treated me with zero respect, left me stripped of my dignity".

The noteworthy transformation occurred in Linda's psychological equilibrium following her confrontation with Jacob and Mme König, the wife of Linda's teenage

boyfriend and an additional love interest. The transmutation is appreciable in the text snippets provided, showcasing an obvious deterioration in Linda's self-esteem coupled with the emanation of jealousy towards Mme König and her subjugation by Jacob and this is illustrated through Linda's exchange of words with Mme after sharing bed with Jacob. Linda claims, "I think jealousy is for sick, insecure people with no self-esteem, people who feel inferior and believe anyone can threaten their relationship" (Coelho, 2014 p. 222). When Linda Confesses her sin finally, and her husband does not blame herself at all. Linda feels quite at ease which can be seen when she says, "But he does know. And that's what allows me to get back my self-respect and regain my self-esteem" (Coelho, 2014 p. 257).

However, later on, she started regaining her self-esteem when she thought that she was successful in snatching Mme König's husband

The narrative makes clear that Linda initially had strong self-esteem but faced a transformation after rekindling a relationship with Jacob. Paradoxically, her quest for passion led to a decline in her self-respect and esteem. Her intense jealousy toward Mme König and a plan to frame her demonstrated this decline. Self-esteem plays a crucial role in her journey towards self-actualization, and its absence hindered her progress. Luckily, by the novel's end, Linda begins to regain her self-esteem, suggesting a path to self-actualization.

### **Self-actualization needs**

In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for self-actualization stands as the culmination of human motivation. It designates the innate aspiration to reach one's highest potential and become the best version of oneself. However, the path to self-actualization is not exclusively driven by self-interest. While personal well-being is essential, a key aspect of self-actualization is the ability to balance one's needs with the welfare of others. Self-actualized individuals manifest prosperity, affinity, and copiousness, epitomizing a synchronized combination of personal and collective interests (Llego, 2022).

Following were the phases that Linda passed through before achieving her final self-actualization.

### **Depression**

Marked by persevering feelings of sadness and lessened intrigue or joy in previously pleasurable activities, depression is a condition that can disrupt normal eating and sleeping patterns, often leading to lethargic feelings and difficulties in concentration. Depression is rooted in the complex interdependency of social, biological, and psychological factors. Experiences such as traumatic childhood, loss, and unemployment can significantly contribute to its onset.

I discovered what was really troubling me: a lack of passion and adventure. Melancholy. That is always the first word that comes into my head when autumn arrives, this loneliness exists and eats away at the best parts of us. Am I the problem or is it the coming of Christmas? This is the time of year that depresses me the most. But our life together is verging on monotony (Coelho, 2014 p. 139)

Linda's loneliness, despite her loving spouse, emanated from an emotional disengagement with her husband, who expressed affection but kept his inner thoughts in the veil. Her childhood tendency toward depression escalated this emotional vacuity.

Consequently, Linda felt a lack of innovation and passion in her life, perceiving it as dull and boring. These emotions drove her towards adultery and eventually self-actualization.

### **Revenge**

Revenge, also termed retaliation, entails purposely causing harm to someone in response to an injury or wrongdoing they have committed. This revenge is evident when she claims "Actually, I want him to be really unhappy. The desire to destroy someone I met only once, on the pretext that it will do away with my inner ghosts" (Coelho, 2014 p.40)

Linda's recurring propensity to harm those who obstructed her pursuit of love and pleasure is evident in these text snippets. Linda's determination to harm others was unshakable ever since she was young, when she harmed an innocent animal, to her adulthood, where jealousy and desires for revenge were eminent. Her dire straits, such as procuring cocaine to frame Mme Konig, showcased the extent of her retribution.

### **Enjoyment through change**

"Life is becoming fun again, my previous apathy replaced by fear. How wonderful it is to be afraid of missing an opportunity!"

This conveys Linda's emotional transition after she developed a physical relationship with Jacob. This tryst brought instant pleasure and excitement into her previously commonplace life. Her pursuit of Jacob for such happenings injected passion and newness into her existence. Each exposure, from oral sex in his office to extreme moments in a hotel room, heightened her happiness. Her joy sprung from the revived passion she experienced and her success in taking Mme Konig's husband, whom she begrudged.

### **Personality changes**

"But I am discovering a more spontaneous, impatient, wild side. People have started to notice. "You're different!" they say" Coelho 2014 p. 204).

This indicates a noteworthy shift in Linda's behavior following her extramarital affair. Characterized by distinctiveness, agitation, and a newfound sense of wildness, her character was undergoing a transformation. Also, there was a noticeable increase in her happiness and an overall shift in her personality.

### **Regret**

It's my fault for wanting to go beyond my limits. I want to go back in time, only that's impossible. I need to make a plan to regain lost ground, but I can't think straight. All I can do is cry, feeling ashamed and hateful (Coelho, 2014 p.227).

The abovementioned statement provides a fleeting sight into Linda's psychological turmoil which is followed by an unmindful moment of truthfulness during a dinner invitation with Jacob's wife and her husband. She experienced extreme indignity and self-deprecation for exploring happiness outside of her evidently contented marriage.

### **Repentance**

"I need to reflect. I have to draw up a list of priorities. I tried to be honest and tell him everything to lift that weight off my shoulders" (Coelho, 2014, p.229).

The provided texts illuminate Linda's speculation that it is advantageous to acknowledge her mistake, nevertheless tardily, rather than propagate her betrayal. Overburdened by regret, she yearned to pay the penalty for her transgression, conscience-stricken for defrauding her faithful and loving husband.

### **Self-actualization**

I sit there for half an hour, crying. Tears of bliss that wash my soul. Finally, I realize that it is time to return to the world for good. Love. My eyes well up with tears of joy. No one can force himself to love, nor can he force another person. All you can do is look at Love, fall in love with Love, and imitate it. Those who know how to love, love Truth, rejoice with the Truth, and do not fear it, because sooner or later it redeems everything. They seek the Truth with a clear, humble mind lacking prejudice or intolerance – and are ultimately satisfied with what they find. Perhaps the word “sincerity” isn’t the best way to explain this characteristic of Love, but I can’t find any other. I’m not talking about the sincerity that demeans those close to you; True Love does not consist of exposing your weaknesses to others, but that things are better than what others said. (Coelho, 2014, p.280).

This passage encapsulates Linda's transformation after a transformative parachute gliding experience. Initially fretful about such risks, she cautiously took the flight at her husband's urging during a Christmas vacation. The flight that was guided by an instructor and soaring with eagles, recast her entirely. During the journey, she felt as if she had the universe within herself and her heart has filled with light and power. Her emotions disregarded the description, leading to a half-hour of tears upon landing, which she kept to herself, even from her husband.

This watershed moment allowed Linda to grasp the essence of love. She recognized that love cannot be compelled but must be freely given and received. Linda realized self-actualization which meant embracing the truth and loving it unconditionally. Furthermore, she understood that true love demands openness with those who hold value in our lives.

### **Conclusion**

This research which is aimed to explore Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the journey of self-actualization by analyzing Paulo Coelho's novel “Adultery”, involved a detailed examination of themes relevant to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, specifically self-actualization, within the novel's text. The study found that Linda's journey of self-actualization was driven by her inborn desire for personal growth and development, closely linked to motivation. Impediment in her personal growth had led to depression, even though her lower-level needs for self-esteem were seemingly met. Her extramarital affair was a response to her unfulfilled higher-level needs and a quest for passion and joy.

Linda's self-actualization struggle is rooted in self-examination, competitiveness, and an intense craving for love, often resulting in feelings of inferiority when she doesn't attain the desired attention and affection. Her path to self-actualization involves exploring new opportunities and embracing her passion for change. Ultimately, Linda's journey leads her to self-actualization, marked by happiness, passion, and euphoria.

### **Recommendation**

This research paves the way for deeper investigations into the diverse factors influencing self-actualization across varying cultural and social contexts. It is crucial to examine how different psychological constructs, such as happiness, well-being, and



resilience, interact with the pursuit of self-actualization. Future studies should also investigate how literature can offer unique perspectives on personal growth, thereby enriching both psychological theory and literary expression. Ultimately, this work provides a foundation for creating educational and therapeutic frameworks that facilitate personal growth and the fulfillment of human potential.

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