



APRIL WHEELER'S TRAGIC UNRAVELING: EXPLORING "REVOLUTIONARY ROAD" THROUGH MASLOW AND INNER CONFLICT

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Abstract

This analysis focus on the psychological struggles of April Wheeler, the female protagonist in Revolutionary Road (2008), a film directed by Sam Mendes and adapted from Richard Yates' 1961 novel of the same name. The study addresses two urgent issues: the persistent neglect of women's psychological needs in mid-20th-century domestic life and the internal conflicts that drive irrational decisions with devastating consequences. Focusing on April's unfulfilled needs and inner turmoil, the analysis applies Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Lewin's approach-avoidance theory to trace her psychological deterioration. Through qualitative methodology—comprising narrative analysis, transcription, and documentation—this research maps the progression of April's mental state and reveals how societal pressures, gender roles, and unmet aspirations culminate in her tragic end. The findings underscore the critical role of mental health in literary character development and highlight the film's powerful portrayal of psychological breakdown. This study contributes to an urgent discourse on the importance of mental well-being in literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a reflection of the human experience, evolving across centuries and genres (Blamires, 1974). As film emerged as a prominent literary medium, it carried forward the tradition of storytelling, now enriched by visual and psychological depth (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 2005). This evolution coincided with the 20th century's political, economic, and social upheavals, which spurred a surge in psychological approaches to literary and cinematic works (Holland, 1990).

As noted by Schedvin & Kindelberger (1973), such societal disruptions often lead to personal psychological instability—an idea echoed by Arianto & Septriani (2023), who emphasize the consequences of internal imbalance on mental well-being. Psychological motivation thus becomes a vital key in interpreting character behavior, particularly through frameworks like Maslow (1987) and Lewin's theory of inner conflict (Ambarsari, Lubis, & Ritonga, 2023).

Several studies have previously applied Maslow's theory, such as Montag, Sindermann, Lester, & Davis (2020), who linked personality traits with need fulfillment, and Maharani & Mubarak (2023), who explored motivational dimensions through speech acts. Other local research Sari, Natsir, & Valiantien (2017) has highlighted character development in relation to Maslow and Lewin, though often within novels rather than film, it aims to offer fresh insights

into April Wheeler's tragic psychological arc and contribute to a deeper interdisciplinary understanding of how unresolved needs and conflicting motivations can shape not only fictional characters but also reflect real-world psychological struggles comparing to the rest of previous researches before.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The twenty-first century witnesses psychology as a diverse domain, extending from scientific inquiry to practical applications (Schinka, Velicer, & Weiner, 2003). As highlighted by Maharani & Mubarak (2023) in *eScience Humanity Journal*, the integration of speech acts can shape communication patterns which is relevant to this research. Similarly, Arianto & Septriani (2023) discussed how psychological imbalances emerge from environmental instability, aligning with the current study's approach to character analysis.

In the realm of literature, particularly in film, the psychological impact on the audience has become a significant focus (Carroll & Seeley, 2013). Psychology, intertwined with literature, explores observable human behavior patterns and the profound impact of literature on readers (M. K. Maharani, 2020). This growth in psychological studies has led to diverse approaches, such as the foundational insight into character comprehension proposed by Guerin et al., (2005). Within this rich tapestry, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Lewin's Inner Conflict theory emerge as invaluable tools for analyzing characters and their psychological struggles.

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This section provides a historical background on Abraham Maslow's influential Hierarchy of Needs, comprising five-tier stages—physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem needs, and self-actualization.

A. Physiological Needs: Maslow emphasizes the fundamental nature of physiological needs, asserting their precedence over all others, including food, water, and shelter (Pangastuti & Murtiningrum, 2021).

B. Safety Needs: Once physiological needs are met, individuals seek safety and security, especially during emergencies, highlighting the intricate interplay between external circumstances and mental health (F. I. Sari, 2012).

C. Love and Belonging: With physiological and safety needs met, humans, as social beings, crave connection and meaningful relationships, seeking bonds with others and fostering emotional connections (Novilia, 2022).

D. Esteem Needs: Progressing along the hierarchy, individuals pursue self-worth and recognition, encompassing considerations of status, acknowledgment, and social success (Oktafia, 2022).

E. Self-Actualization: At the pinnacle, self-actualization represents the realization of one's full potential and the obligation to fulfill it in alignment with core values (L. Sari et al., 2017).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a valuable lens for examining human behavior, mental well-being, and the quest for fulfillment, underscoring the intricate relationships between fundamental requirements and loftier aspirations.

2. Lewin's Inner Conflict

Kurt Lewin's Inner Conflict theory explores conflicting desires, motivations, or beliefs within an individual, categorizing inner conflicts into three main types (Hehanussa, Nuryatin, & Doyin, 2022).

- A. Approach-Approach Conflict: Arises when choosing between two desirable outcomes, creating internal tension despite both options being appealing.
- B. Approach-Avoidance Conflict: Involves being drawn to a goal while simultaneously repelled by potential drawbacks, resulting in a struggle between desire and reluctance.
- C. Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict: Emerges when deciding between two undesirable options, each with negative consequences, requiring the individual to weigh tolerable outcomes.

Lewin's theory underscores the profound impact of inner conflicts on decision-making, emotions, and behavior, emphasizing the importance of resolving these conflicts for psychological well-being (Ahadini, 2021).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This scholarly article provides an in-depth exploration of the research methodology employed to scrutinize the psychological intricacies of the female lead character, April Wheeler. The selection of Maslow's and Lewin's frameworks is grounded in their relevance to character motivation and psychological tension. Maslow's theory provides a structured model to interpret April's unmet needs, while Lewin's conflict model offers insight into her indecisiveness and internal contradictions. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive view of psychological strain that suits both the narrative arc and thematic depth of *Revolutionary Road* (2008). By employing qualitative research methods rooted in psychological frameworks, the study aims to unravel the unfulfilled hierarchy of needs and approach-avoidance inner conflict experienced by April Wheeler, offering nuanced insights into her tragic journey.

Research design, as elucidated by (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2010), plays a crucial role in ensuring reliable and valid outcomes. This study adopts qualitative research methods, described by Creswell & Poth (2016) as inherently situated undertakings that position the observer within the world's context. The observer, in this case, diligently documents note and transcribes spoken dialogues from the film, forming the primary instrument for data collection. This meticulous approach facilitates thorough observation and analysis.

The data Source research focuses on examining the unfulfilled hierarchy of needs and approach-avoidance inner conflict experienced by April Wheeler in *"Revolutionary Road."* Employing Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Lewin's inner conflict theory, the study aims to elucidate the fulfillment and unfulfillment of needs, revealing the gradual manifestation of psychological symptoms. The film, set in the mid-1950s, portrays the challenges faced by the Wheelers and serves as a canvas for understanding April Wheeler's psychological journey.

Method of Collecting Data is the observation method employed, involving the researcher viewing the film multiple times to enhance comprehension (Lyons, 2015). Relevant dialogues and scenes are transcribed and documented along with its narration script to solidify the data

source even more and capture nuances essential for analysis. The researcher identifies needs influencing April Wheeler's tragic outcome and explores inner conflicts to comprehend the rationale behind her decisions. Reflexivity guides the data collection process, ensuring a nuanced understanding of observed behaviors, actions, and interactions.

Method of Analyzing Data uses the qualitative approach of thematic content analysis (White, Woodfield, & Ritchie, 2003), utilizing an inductive approach. The collected data is systematically arranged, and relevant data points are identified and labeled for effective examination. Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Lewin's conflict theories guide the categorization of data, examining satisfied and unmet needs. The analysis investigates instances of inner conflict, offering insights into imprudent decision-making. A comprehensive review ensures accuracy and completeness, refining the analysis as needed.

Method of presenting research results will be presented using a descriptive qualitative method Levitt et al., (2018), communicated through language rather than visual aids. The analysis will be presented in a clear, dense manner to ensure reader comprehension, providing a rich narrative of April Wheeler's psychological journey in "Revolutionary Road."

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. April Wheeler's Maslow's Fulfilled and Unfulfilled

4.1.1. Psychological Needs

Maslow proposed that the most fundamental needs, such as sustenance, hydration, and shelter, are prioritized over other requirements. From the beginning to the end of the movie, it is depicted that April always had her physiological needs fulfilled, including housing, intimacy, warmth, and food. The movie illustrates that she successfully met all these needs without any obstacles. Below is the data to support this statement.

Data 1: 00.13.15 – 00.13.23

Woman: "The perky way it sits there on its little slope? Charming, isn't it?"

April: "Oh, yes."

From the preceding conversation and scene, it becomes evident that April is deeply content and pleased with her present dwelling, which effectively serves as a shelter to fulfill this fundamental need, as indicated by the joyful expression on her face upon seeing the house.

Data 2: 01.36.12 – 01.36.17



Picture 2A

April and Frank sit across each other while eating breakfast.

In this scene, April is depicted having breakfast with her husband Frank, illustrating the essential nature of fulfilling the basic human need for food. In the previous research of Citra, Natsir, & Astuti (2020), they mentioned that food is essential as a human basic need.

4.1.2. Safety Needs

After fulfilling their physiological requirements, people desire a feeling of safety and security. They will take actions to guarantee safety and security when confronted with situations that provoke feelings of insecurity. Researchers have found some findings related to the character April Wheeler, where she felt unsafe. Below are the data for this unfulfilled need analysis:

Data 3: 00.08.28 – 00.08.33



Picture 3B

Frank raises his fist towards April as she reflexes to look away. Afterwards, many Bang sounds can be heard, but he punches the part of the car instead.

In this narration, it is portrayed that the couple engaged in a heated argument, leading to Frank, in a state of outrage, raising his fist. Observing this, April instinctively flinched away, indicating her feeling of unsafeness and a reflexive response to protect herself.

Data 4: 01.44.32 – 01.46.17



Picture 4B

April stands by the picture window, her face pale and trembling. A droplet of blood slides down her knee, and as she looks down, two more droplets appear between her bare feet on the floor. Eventually, a vivid maple leaf of blood seeps through her skirt. Her trembling intensifies as she walks slowly out of the room, making her way towards the kitchen to reach the phone.

April: "I think I need help. 115 Revolutionary Road."

In this narrative and scene, following April's self-abortion, she experienced significant bleeding, and panic was evident on her face, accompanied by trembling. Overwhelmed, she attempted to seek assistance by calling the hospital, providing evidence of her sense of unsafe feeling.

4.1.3. Love and Belonging

Humans, being inherently social beings, naturally pursue connections and meaningful relationships. It is not unexpected that individuals seek relationships with others that are mutually beneficial whether that is in emotions or even value. Here findings that researcher found in April Wheeler character where her love and belonging are not fulfilled until lead her to feeling out of love, yet deep down she does still have love.

Data 5: 01.17.13 – 01.18.31

In a moment charged with urgency, April remains motionless, granting him the liberty to kiss her, explore beneath her garments, caress her skin, and ultimately, to engage in intimate union against the vinyl seat cover. Abruptly, the encounter concludes, leaving Shep slumped against her. April gazes into the enveloping darkness.

In this conversation and scenario, April permitted her neighbor, Shep, to engage in a romantic encounter with her, indicating an act of infidelity while still being married to her husband, Frank. The catalyst for this action is the deterioration of her love and belonging needs, primarily influenced by value differences with her husband.

Data 6: 01.27.53 – 01.28.27

Frank: "No, wrong! You're not crazy and you do love me, and that's the point, April."

April: "But I don't. I hate you."

In this narration and dialogue, Frank talks about the inability to love and April made it clear that she harbors hatred towards Frank, her husband, indicating the absence of fulfillment in her love and belonging needs, ultimately resulting in this strong negative emotion.

4.1.4. Esteem needs

Maslow identified two types of esteem needs: reputation and self-esteem, encompassing the desire for self-respect, a positive self-image, and recognition from others. This need is further categorized into internal esteem (within April) and external esteem (from outside). The researcher has discovered data indicating that both her internal and external esteem needs are not adequately fulfilled, leading to a deterioration in her psychological well-being, as detailed below:

Internal esteem (Within April)

Data 7: 01.15.40 – 01.15.49

April: "Can't leave, can't stay. No damn use to anyone."

In this exclamation, April expressed to Shep, her neighbor, that she perceives herself as having no utility to anyone. This indicates a notable decline in her internal self-esteem, prompting her to openly belittle herself by using such terms in conversation.

External esteem (From others)

Data 8: 00.03.05 – 00.03.15

Random woman: "Thank God it is over, so much of the debut of the Laurel Players. And she was very disappointing."

In this scene and exclamation, a random woman's remark reveals her lack of acknowledgment for April's acting skills. April's expression further indicates her discontent with the play, illustrating the unfulfilled need for external esteem.

4.1.5. Self-Actualization

Self-actualization signifies the actualization of one's complete potential and the responsibility to fulfill it to remain authentic to one's nature. In exploring this aspect, the researcher discovered that April aspires to become an actress, but numerous obstacles hinder this dream. As a result, she desires to escape the conventional suburban life by relocating to Paris. However, even this pursuit encounters obstacles, ultimately leaving her self-actualization need unfulfilled. The analysis is detailed below:

Data 9: 00.01.55 – 00.02.00

Frank: "So, what do you want to do?"

April: "I'm studying to be an actress. You?"

In this dialogue and scene, when Frank asks what April wants to do or be in her life, April understands her potential of becoming an actress and is trying to achieve the goal of becoming an actress by going to acting school, in the previous study of Pangastuti & Murtiningrum (2021), they strongly clarified the desire where one will have in order to reach their potential such as April in this scene.

Data 10: 00.58.17 – 00.59.16

April: "I'm pregnant, that's all."

Frank: "What?"

April: "But there are things we can do. We don't have to let this stop us from going, do we? Remember that girl at school I told you about? As long as we take care of it before 12 weeks, it's fine. We've got to be together in this, Frank."

In this conversation, April discloses her pregnancy to Frank, expressing frustration instead of joy. This dialogue illustrates that April prioritizes her self-actualization, as she persuades her husband and considers abortion, fearing that the baby might hinder her from reaching her full potential.

Data 11: 01.43.03 – 01.43.09



Picture 11E

Arranging her shoes neatly on the closet floor, April extends her hand towards a shelf obscured behind some clothing. She retrieves a discreet brown paper package, unveiling its contents to reveal a syringe.

In this scene and narration, April's actions reflect a need for control over her own life choices, such extreme actions highlight the intense struggle she had internally when the pursuit of personal fulfillment is her priority.

4.2. April Wheeler Inner Conflict

4.2.1. Approach

April harbors a fervent aspiration to pursue an acting career, aspiring to a life imbued with purpose and significance. This signifies her inclination toward approach motivation, a pursuit of positive goals. (Data 9)

4.2.2. Avoidance

April's realization of her pregnancy brings forth avoidance motivation as she envisions potential drawbacks and constraints associated with impending motherhood, conflicting with her aspirations for self-actualization. (Data 10)

Main above explanation based on Lewin theory is to further solidify and clarify April's dilemma that led her to her tragic demise, in previous study by (Nurbaya, 2021), she strongly stated that approach-avoidance conflict emerges when two opposing forces, one propelling and the other inhibiting which is exactly what April is experiencing.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the examination of April Wheeler's life in "Revolutionary Road" reveals a poignant struggle as she navigates Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This scrutiny sheds light on the delicate balance between satisfaction and deprivation across various dimensions of her existence. While April attends to her physiological needs, marital turmoil disrupts the foundation of her security, creating an overarching atmosphere of uncertainty. The erosion of love and belonging, evidenced through emotional detachment and infidelity, intensifies her sense of isolation. Unmet internal and external esteem needs manifest in self-deprecation and a noticeable lack of recognition for her aspirations.

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