



The Unhappiness of the Main Character in Lisa Jewell's *After the Party*

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Abstract

*This research explores the emotional struggles of Jem Patrick, the main character in *After the Party* by Lisa Jewell, through the lens of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1987). The study aims to analyze the causes of Jem's unhappiness, particularly the lack of attention and affection from her partner, the boredom in her domestic life, and the burden of raising a child alone. This qualitative research uses a descriptive analysis method. The data were collected from narrative passages and dialogues in the novel. The researcher classified the data based on the research problems and interpreted them using Maslow's theory to identify unmet psychological needs that cause emotional distress. The analysis reveals that Jem's unhappiness stems from the failure to meet essential psychological needs such as love, belongingness, and esteem. Jem feels emotionally neglected, unappreciated, and isolated in her relationship. The imbalance of household responsibilities further contributes to her frustration and mental exhaustion. This research highlights how the absence of emotional support and psychological fulfillment can lead to deep dissatisfaction in personal relationships.*

Keywords: *Emotional Struggle, Jem Patrick, Maslow, Psychological Needs, Unhappiness.*

INTRODUCTION

Unhappiness is a complex psychological condition that emerges when an individual's emotional and psychological needs go unmet. Diener et al. (2020) argue that emotional dissatisfaction often stems from the failure to fulfil basic psychological needs, leading to a decline in subjective well-being. This phenomenon may arise in various life contexts, including personal relationships, domestic roles, and unachieved personal aspirations. Understanding the psychological roots of unhappiness is thus essential for addressing emotional well-being in both real-life and fictional contexts.

A widely accepted theoretical framework that explores the relationship between human needs and well-being is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987), which posits that individuals progress through five levels of need, physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Emotional dissatisfaction is likely to occur when needs at the love/belonging or esteem levels remain unmet (Kenrick et al., 2010). Although Maslow's theory was introduced decades ago, its relevance persists in modern psychology. Studies by Wahba and Bridwell (2019) and Tay and Diener (2011) reaffirm the theory's validity by showing that the lack of fulfilment in love, esteem, and self-actualization is strongly associated with psychological distress across cultures.

Literary works frequently depict emotional struggles caused by unmet psychological needs. Hogan (2020) emphasizes that analyzing fictional characters' emotional structures can uncover universal patterns of psychological conflict, while Vermeulen (2017) suggests that literature is capable of representing deep emotional narratives that mirror real-life experiences. One such novel

is *After The Party* by Lisa Jewell, which tells the story of Jem, a woman facing emotional dissatisfaction despite being in a long-term relationship. Jem's unhappiness is shaped by the lack of affection from her partner, the monotony of domestic life, and the burden of raising a child with limited support, factors that correspond to unmet needs in the love/belonging and esteem levels.

This study aims to analyze the causes of Jem's unhappiness using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as the theoretical lens. It focuses on how her emotional dissatisfaction is constructed through unmet psychological needs, and how these needs influence her internal struggles. The analysis seeks to demonstrate how fiction can reflect real psychological conditions, and how understanding these patterns can contribute to both literary studies and psychological research.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Unhappiness can be understood as a psychological state that occurs when basic emotional and psychological needs remain unmet or when personal expectations fail to align with reality (Diener et al., 2020). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987) explains this condition through five levels, physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, where the failure to satisfy one or more stages may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. Subsequent studies (Kenrick et al., 2010; Tay & Diener, 2011) reaffirm that the fulfillment of these needs is strongly correlated with emotional well-being.

In literary studies, characters are central to narrative development and thematic exploration. They are defined by actions, emotions, and conflicts that shape the story (Dufresne, 2021; Leitch et al., 2020). Nurgiyantoro (2018) further classifies characters into various categories, such as main and supporting, protagonist and antagonist, simple and complex, as well as static and dynamic, each contributing to the progression of the plot and the representation of human experiences.

The novel, as a long-form prose narrative, provides a platform for exploring human emotions, conflicts, and social realities through its complex plots and multidimensional characters (Aliyev, 2021; Thompson, 2022). Unlike shorter forms, novels allow deeper engagement with philosophical, cultural, and psychological themes, making them one of the most enduring and influential literary genres.

The relationship between literature and psychology highlights the extent to which literary texts mirror human cognition and emotions. Applying psychological perspectives to literature enables readers to analyze motivations, behaviors, and mental states of characters, while also reflecting broader cultural and social issues such as trauma, identity, and mental health (Mitchell & Johnson, 2021; Harlan, 2022). Thus, the intersection of literature and psychology enriches the interpretation of texts by situating individual experiences within wider human contexts.

METHODS

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method to analyze Jem Patrick's psychological discontent in Lisa Jewell's *After the Party*. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used as the main framework to explore factors such as partner relationships, motherhood obligations, and personal dissatisfaction. The primary data source is the novel itself, focusing on Jem Patrick's actions, dialogues, and experiences that reflect unmet psychological needs, particularly love, esteem, and self-actualization. Data were collected through close reading to identify Jem's psychological struggles, selecting and categorizing scenes related to Maslow's theory, and systematic note-taking to document significant evidence of dissatisfaction and emotional conflict. The analysis was conducted by reviewing and classifying relevant excerpts into categories such as lack of affection, domestic dissatisfaction, and parenting burdens, followed by interpreting these findings through Maslow's theoretical framework. Finally, conclusions were drawn to explain how the failure to fulfill basic psychological needs contributes to Jem's unhappiness as portrayed in the novel.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section addresses the research questions concerning the unhappiness experienced by the main character, Jem Patrick, in *After the Party* by Lisa Jewell. The analysis focuses on three dimensions of Jem's unhappiness: the lack of affection and attention from Ralph, the sense of boredom within her marriage, and the burden of raising a child independently.

Furthermore, the discussion examines the underlying factors that intensify Jem's unhappiness through the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1987). Particular attention is given to how unmet psychological needs shape Jem's emotional and mental state. Finally, the analysis explores Jem's coping mechanisms in dealing with her unhappiness and the subsequent consequences for her overall life.

1. Due to the Lack of Affection and Attention from Ralph

Unhappiness in marriage often arises when a person's emotional needs are not fulfilled, especially in the form of attention, support, and appreciation from a partner. Jem, the main character in *After the Party* by Lisa Jewell, experiences deep disappointment because she feels neglected by her husband, Ralph. One of the main sources of her unhappiness is the lack of attention and emotional support from Ralph as a partner. According to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, the need for love and belongingness is one of the important stages in an individual's psychological development. This need includes feeling loved, accepted, and being part of a warm relationship. When this need is unmet in a marriage, an individual may experience loneliness, alienation, and emotional emptiness.

One part of the novel that reflects this condition is when Jem reminisces about the early days of her relationship with Ralph. During that period, Jem felt love and genuine appreciation from her partner. She often felt special because Ralph consistently showed deep affection and care. This emotional experience became a memory that stayed with her, especially when she began to realize how significant Ralph was in shaping her sense of worth as a woman. One quote that reflects Jem's feelings about Ralph's treatment in the past can be seen in the following narrative:

“It was all about him and the way he looked at her. It was about the way he made her feel like a queen and a princess and a mate and a mucker, and the best and most incredible girl in all the world.” (After The Party, 2010, p. 273)

This quote illustrates how significant Ralph's role was in Jem's emotional life. In the past, Ralph made Jem feel loved, special, and valued. Phrases like “he made her feel like a queen and a princess” show that Ralph used to treat Jem with love and appreciation, making her feel like the most extraordinary woman in the world. However, that feeling is no longer experienced. Ralph's change in attitude, from being caring to becoming indifferent and cold, has made Jem lose the sense of being valued and loved.

In the context of Maslow's theory of needs, this shows that Jem's need for love and belongingness is no longer fulfilled. When the affection that once strengthened her began to fade, Jem started to experience deep emotional emptiness. She no longer felt like an important part of Ralph's life, and the loss of warmth in their relationship became the primary source of her unhappiness. The absence of attention and affection from Ralph made Jem feel alone in her own marriage.

Furthermore, a concrete form of Jem's unhappiness in her marriage is evident in Ralph's cold response to her excitement when she tries to share important news. Jem, who once considered Ralph her closest friend and the first person she wanted to talk to, can no longer find warmth in their communication. This is illustrated in the following quote:

“Jem inhaled. She'd called Ralph in a burst of pure, childlike excitement, because he was her best friend and because he was always the first person she wanted to talk to when something important happened to her, but

everything about his attitude and tone of voice suggested that he wished she hadn't called." (After The Party, 2010, p. 105)

The quote shows that Jem still sees Ralph as someone very important in her life someone she believes can provide her with support and a sense of belonging. She calls Ralph with joy and hope, because to her, Ralph is "her best friend" and the first person she wants to talk to when something important happens. Unfortunately, that hope is not fulfilled. The sentence "everything about his attitude and tone of voice suggested that he wished she hadn't called" indicates that Ralph did not respond warmly and even seemed displeased to receive Jem's call.

Ralph's cold attitude makes Jem feel unwanted and no longer an important person in her husband's life. This is closely related to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, particularly the need for love and belongingness. Everyone needs to feel loved, accepted, and cared for in close relationships such as marriage. When this need is unmet, individuals may feel lonely, disappointed, and emotionally isolated. In Jem's case, Ralph's cold response makes her feel alienated and emotionally distant from her husband. This is one of the main reasons why she feels unhappy in her marriage.

In addition to the emotional pressure Jem feels due to her husband's change in behavior, she also experiences deeper dissatisfaction caused by the lack of support for her aspirations outside of her domestic role. Jem not only feels neglected in her household life but also feels belittled when it comes to her work and professional achievements. One part of the novel that reflects this situation is when Jem excitedly talks to Ralph about her job, but his response is dismissive:

"OK," said Ralph, dismissively. "Whatever. He's your client. It's your job... I just personally think he'll laugh in your face." (After The Party, 2010, p. 105)

This quote reveals Ralph's unsupportive and dismissive attitude toward Jem's abilities. The word "dismissively" indicates indifference, implying a lack of empathy and interest in what Jem is doing. Instead of offering encouragement or appreciation, Ralph directly questions his wife's credibility. For Jem, this comment is not only personally hurtful but also signifies the absence of support from the person who should provide her with validation and trust. Ralph's attitude shows that Jem's need to be valued and supported in her professional role is not being fulfilled.

In the context of Maslow's theory, Ralph's failure to acknowledge Jem's abilities reflects his inability to meet Jem's esteem needs in their marriage. According to Maslow, esteem needs include the feeling of being respected and accepted for one's achievements or competencies. The lack of fulfillment of this need directly affects Jem's emotional state, making her feel unappreciated, unsupported, and lacking a sense of purpose in her individual role. Ralph's indifference to Jem's feelings and accomplishments becomes one of the main causes of her unhappiness, as she no longer feels loved or valued in their relationship.

Furthermore, Jem's unhappiness is also evident in how she views her role as a housewife, which she often feels is unappreciated by Ralph. Jem believes that her contribution to the family is not recognized equally compared to other "more valuable" jobs in the eyes of her husband. This feeling is clearly expressed when she says:

"Maybe if I was a lawyer, or maybe even an artist, like him, maybe then he'd be more supportive of me trying to find my way outside the home." (After The Party, 2010, p. 31)

This quote shows that Jem feels undervalued by Ralph because of her role and choice as a housewife. She compares herself to professions that are considered "more valuable" in her husband's eyes, such as lawyers or artists. This highlights Jem's perception that Ralph applies certain standards in giving support or respect. In the context of Abraham Maslow's theory, Jem does not receive the fulfillment of her esteem needs, the need to be respected and recognized. The lack of support and appreciation from Ralph makes Jem feel worthless and trapped in a role that does not bring her

happiness. This situation deepens Jem's emotional dissatisfaction and becomes one of the reasons she feels unhappy in her marriage.

Jem's unhappiness becomes even more apparent when she reminisces about the early days of her relationship with Ralph. During that period, Jem felt sincere love and appreciation from her partner. She often felt special because Ralph consistently showed affection and deep attention. Those emotional experiences remain vivid in her memory, especially when she begins to realize how much Ralph had shaped her sense of worth as a woman. This is reflected in the following quote:

“It was all about him and the way he looked at her. It was about the way he made her feel like a queen and a princess and a mate and a mucker, and the best and most incredible girl in all the world.” (After *The Party*, 2010, p. 273)

This quote illustrates how significant Ralph's role was in Jem's emotional life. In the past, Ralph made Jem feel loved, special, and meaningful. Expressions such as “he made her feel like a queen and a princess” show that Ralph once treated Jem with deep affection and appreciation, making her feel like the most extraordinary woman in the world. However, she no longer feels that way. Ralph's change in behavior from being attentive to becoming indifferent and distant has made Jem feel unloved and unappreciated.

In the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this indicates that Jem's need for love and belongingness is no longer being fulfilled. When the affection that once gave her emotional strength began to fade, Jem started to experience a deep sense of emotional emptiness. She no longer feels like an important part of Ralph's life, and the loss of warmth in their relationship has become the main source of her unhappiness. The absence of Ralph's attention and affection leaves Jem feeling alone in her own marriage.

Beyond emotional dissatisfaction and the lack of support in her career, Jem also begins to realize that her initial dreams of a happy marriage have gradually turned into a relationship filled with indifference and discontent. In a moment of reflection, Jem describes how Ralph has changed from the ideal partner into someone who no longer provides the attention and support she needs:

“...dream men who turned into unsupportive partners who mocked your job, left you with all the cruddy chores, pestered you for sex and then thought it OK to disappear to America for week-long birthday parties.” (After *The Party*, 2010, p. 47)

This quote highlights the depth of Jem's disappointment toward Ralph, who was once her dream man but has now turned into an unsupportive and self-centered partner. The phrase “dream men who turned into unsupportive partners” indicates that Jem feels betrayed by her own expectations of marriage. Ralph not only belittles her work but also leaves her to shoulder all the household responsibilities alone. This imbalance adds to the emotional burden Jem experiences in their relationship.

In the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this situation clearly reflects Jem's dissatisfaction with the fulfillment of her esteem needs, the need to be appreciated, recognized, and supported in the roles she performs. Ralph fails to provide both emotional and practical support, and his dismissive attitude toward Jem's contributions at home further reinforces her feelings of being undervalued. Jem's unmet need for recognition and validation leads to frustration and unhappiness. This state deepens her sense of being trapped in a relationship that has strayed far from her original dreams and highlights the need for change to rediscover her happiness.

These feelings of neglect and lack of appreciation slowly erode Jem's self-confidence and cause her to doubt her own worth as a woman. She feels alone in her marriage, no longer loved or desired by her husband. As a result, she begins to seek validation from outside the relationship as a way to fill the emotional void she is experiencing. This condition is clearly reflected in the following quote:

“She was nearing forty. Her partner had run away from home. She didn’t feel pretty any more. She wanted someone to make her feel pretty. And that man could be anyone. Joel just happened to be the only one she knew who looked like he might want to.” (After The Party, 2010, p. 84)

This quote illustrates that Jem feels lonely, unloved, and has lost confidence due to Ralph’s emotional detachment and lack of attention. The sentence “she didn’t feel pretty anymore” reflects Jem’s growing doubt about her self-worth as a woman. She not only feels unattractive but also emotionally undesired. This drives her to seek attention from others as a way to fill the emotional void left by her husband. In the context of Abraham Maslow’s theory, Jem’s unmet needs for love and belonging, as well as esteem, are clearly evident. The absence of fulfillment in these two essential levels explains the depth of her unhappiness, as she no longer feels meaningful within her marriage.

2. Jem's Unhappiness Due to the Boredom in Her Marriage to Ralph

In marriage, boredom is often a challenge faced by couples, especially when the daily routine begins to replace the passion and intimacy that once existed. For Jem, the main character in Lisa Jewell's *After The Party*, boredom in her marriage to Ralph gradually emerged after several years of marriage. What once was a life full of happiness and enthusiasm began to turn into something routine and mundane. Jem felt trapped in a monotonous lifestyle and could no longer experience the same warmth as before. This boredom raised doubts within Jem whether this feeling meant she no longer loved Ralph, or if it was simply the result of a lack of attention and appreciation she had been receiving in their relationship.

In the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1987), the boredom Jem experiences can be understood as a consequence of Ralph’s inability to fulfill the need for love and belongingness. According to Maslow, humans have a basic need to feel valued and connected to others, especially in close relationships such as marriage. When these needs are not met, individuals tend to feel alienated and less motivated. Jem, who once felt loved and cared for, now faces the reality that Ralph no longer provides the necessary attention to maintain their emotional bond. This has led her to feel bored, which is one of the consequences of a lack of love and support in their relationship.

One of the most striking aspects of the boredom Jem Patrick experiences in her marriage is the emotional shift towards small things that once had great meaning to her. One example of this is how Jem responds to Ralph's characteristic smile once a smile that made her feel loved and special, but now it feels empty and no longer touches her emotional side.

“What, in sexual favours?” He threw her his wonky smile, the wonky smile that used to make her feel like the luckiest girl in the world, that now just made her think, yeah yeah.” (After The Party, 2010, p. 38)

The quote reflects a drastic change in Jem's perception of her husband. The phrase “used to make her feel like the luckiest girl in the world” indicates a past full of love and warmth, while the response “yeah yeah” suggests indifference and emotional weariness that has begun to take root. Jem no longer feels the same positive sensation when interacting with Ralph, even in situations that once sparked feelings of happiness and being loved. Ralph’s smile, which once symbolized intimacy and affection, has now become a symbol of emptiness and emotional alienation.

When linked to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this situation reflects that Jem's needs at two crucial levels namely the need for love and belonging, and the need for esteem are not being met. After basic needs like food, clothing, and safety are fulfilled in their marriage, Jem naturally expects emotional intimacy, attention, recognition, and feeling valued from her partner. However, Ralph’s change in behavior, where he no longer provides emotional or physical attention, causes Jem to feel unseen and unappreciated as an individual.

Jem's boredom is not just a result of marital routine, but rather the outcome of emotional emptiness and the failure to fulfill her psychological needs. She begins to feel trapped in a stale relationship, where the interactions no longer hold meaning that could satisfy her inner needs. This clarifies that Jem's unhappiness does not stem from a lack of love, but from the loss of meaning and

appreciation in the relationship, which ultimately triggers deep boredom in her married life with Ralph.

In addition to losing interest in her husband, Jem Patrick begins to experience an emotional crisis that leads to unhappiness in her married life. The ongoing boredom Jem feels is not only the result of the monotonous daily routine, but also of her unfulfilled emotional needs. She begins to doubt herself and question her need to feel wanted, seen, and appreciated by her partner. This situation is reflected in the following quote:

“She questioned her lack of physical interest in Ralph. Did it mean that she didn’t love him any more? ... it just meant that she wanted someone to notice her and see her for what she used to be...” (After *The Party*, 2010, p. 43).

This quote shows that Jem does not immediately lose love for Ralph, but rather feels a loss of meaning in their relationship. She no longer feels valued as an individual, but only as a part of the household system that runs automatically. The phrase “she wanted someone to notice her” indicates a deep desire to be noticed and recognized, a basic human need according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, namely the need for love and belonging, and the need for esteem.

According to Maslow, when these needs at two levels are unmet, individuals will experience psychological crises that lead to unhappiness and a loss of motivation in fulfilling their life roles. Jem yearns for the version of herself that once felt attractive, loved, and appreciated. However, in her marriage, she feels as though she is no longer “seen” by her husband, and this condition makes her feel alienated from herself.

Thus, Jem's unhappiness is not solely the result of conflicts in the marital relationship, but rather the consequence of neglected emotional needs. Jem wants more than just to be a wife and mother; she wants to be understood as an individual who still deserves love, attention, and recognition. This unhappiness is a clear portrait of how boredom in marriage can erode one’s personal identity and emotional well-being when basic psychological needs are not fulfilled.

Not only has Jem lost emotional attraction, but she also feels that physical intimacy in her relationship with Ralph has turned into an obligation that she must endure, rather than something she desires or enjoys voluntarily. She begins to feel that their relationship has lost the passion and spontaneity that once brought their bond to life. Now, intimacy feels more like a tiring routine, merely to maintain the balance of their household:

“I do everything, and having sex with Ralph just feels like yet one more thing I have to do, just to keep everyone happy...” (After *The Party*, 2010, p. 89).

This quote reflects a deep sense of monotony in Jem's marriage. The phrase “just to keep everyone happy” indicates that Jem feels trapped in the gender role expectations of being a wife and mother, where she constantly has to “please” others at the expense of her own needs. Intimacy, which should be a form of affection, has instead become an emotional burden that exacerbates her sense of alienation in the relationship.

In the context of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Jem seems to be in a situation where her basic psychological needs and sense of security may have been met, but higher-level needs, such as the need for esteem and self-actualization have not been fulfilled. When physical intimacy is carried out not out of personal desire but due to social pressure within the household, Jem's need to feel valued as an individual with her own desires and voice is neglected.

Jem's unhappiness reflects the imbalance in the fulfillment of her needs, particularly in terms of receiving esteem, recognition, and emotional fulfillment from her partner. When she feels that she no longer has control over herself, both emotionally and physically, feelings of boredom and emptiness arise within the relationship. This shows that Jem's boredom in her marriage is not just due to monotony, but also because of the failure of the relationship to meet her fundamental psychological and emotional needs, as explained by Maslow.

3. Jem's Unhappiness Due to the Burden of Raising the Children Alone

In a marriage, an unequal division of tasks can make one partner feel exhausted and unhappy. This is what Jem, the main character in Lisa Jewell's novel *After The Party*, experiences. Jem feels that she has to raise their children on her own, without much help from her husband, Ralph. This burden leaves her physically and emotionally drained, especially since she does not feel appreciated for everything she has done.

From the perspective of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987), Jem's condition relates to two important human needs: the need for love and belonging, and the need for esteem. When Ralph does not engage in family life and does not show support or appreciation, Jem feels lonely and unappreciated both as a wife and a mother. This leads to her growing unhappiness in their marriage. One clear manifestation of this unhappiness is reflected in her complaints about Ralph's inability to take part in raising their children:

You know, it's just ridiculous, he's there all day, in that house, nowhere to go, nothing planned, this is his son, his baby, yet I've had to bring him all the way over here so just so I can go into town for a few hours.' (*After The Party*, 2010, p. 31).

This excerpt illustrates how Jem feels unsupported by Ralph in raising their child, Blake. The phrase "he's there all day, in that house, nowhere to go, nothing planned" clearly shows that Ralph actually has a lot of free time at home, with no schedule or important activities to get in the way. However, despite having no obligations, he still chooses not to get involved in childcare. This indicates Ralph's neglectful and irresponsible attitude toward his role as a father. Jem, as a mother and a woman rebuilding her career, feels burdened because she has to raise their child alone. Even when she just wants to step out for a while, she has to find a solution herself, such as bringing Blake elsewhere.

The phrase "this is his son, his baby" strengthens Jem's feelings of disappointment. She emphasizes that Blake is not only her responsibility as a mother but also Ralph's child. This statement contains both a hope and a hidden anger that Ralph should be emotionally and practically responsible for their child. Ralph's reluctance to get involved not only burdens Jem physically but also psychologically, as she feels all the household and childcare responsibilities are piled onto her.

In the context of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this situation shows that Jem's needs at the "love and belongingness" and "esteem" levels are unmet. As a wife and mother, Jem needs support, affection, and a sense of being valued from her partner. However, Ralph does not show empathy, attention, or involvement in their family life. As a result, Jem feels alone in her marriage, as though she is only a caretaker and house manager, no longer a loved and valued partner. This feeling of being neglected triggers emotional exhaustion and makes Jem feel increasingly unhappy in the relationship.

This unhappiness does not stem from a single event but results from the accumulation of responsibilities that are not fairly shared. Jem has to handle everything on her own, even small things like finding someone to look after Blake so she can go into town. This highlights that Ralph does not function as an equal partner in their marriage. In the long term, this kind of pressure can create emotional tension, distance between the partners, and damage the bond that should be built on cooperation and mutual support.

The burden Jem feels is further worsened by Ralph's selfish attitude, preferring to have fun rather than help his wife with raising their child. Jem feels that Ralph is not only absent physically but also emotionally absent, even during the most difficult times after giving birth. This situation is clearly evident in the following quote:

“And you think now is a good time to be doing this? You think now, with a three-month-old baby, when I’m trying to get back to work, this is a good time to piss off to the other side of the world to get drunk with Smith?” (After The Party, 2010, p. 37)

Through this excerpt, it is clear that Jem feels burdened by having to take on all the responsibilities of motherhood without support from her husband. The phrase “when I’m trying to get back to work” shows that Jem is trying to balance her role as a mother with her desire to return to the workforce. However, this effort is not met with appreciation or support from Ralph. Instead, Ralph prioritizes personal pleasure, as shown in the phrase “to piss off to the other side of the world to get drunk”, reflecting Jem’s deep anger and disappointment. She feels abandoned in a stressful situation when Ralph should have been by her side.

In the context of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Jem’s situation reflects the failure to meet two crucial levels of need: the need for love and belongingness, and the need for esteem. As a wife and mother, Jem needs emotional support, attention, and recognition for her roles and struggles. However, because Ralph does not fulfill these needs either emotionally or practically Jem feels unloved, unappreciated, and neglected. The imbalance of roles in the household creates psychological pressure, loneliness, and deep disappointment, which ultimately strengthens Jem’s unhappiness in their marriage.

In addition to the physical and emotional pressure, Jem also faces another psychological dimension of her unhappiness: the feeling of loneliness that arises from the lack of support in her domestic life. The loneliness Jem experiences is even more pronounced because she has to navigate her household life without her husband's support. Despite having a child, Jem feels that her role as a mother only isolates her further. The limited opportunity for a social life and the lack of emotional support make Jem’s mental burden even heavier. This condition is clearly depicted in her following statement:

“It is lonely living alone, even when you have a child. Lonelier in a way, because you can’t get out and find some life to live, you know.” (After The Party, 2010, p. 142)

This excerpt shows that the presence of a child does not automatically eliminate the loneliness Jem feels. On the contrary, she feels more confined and lacks the freedom to seek a social or personal life outside of her role as a mother. The phrase “you can’t get out and find some life to live” reveals her longing for a broader life, which now feels unattainable due to the responsibilities she bears alone.

In the framework of Maslow’s theory, Jem experiences a failure to meet two important levels of need: the need for belongingness and self-actualization. She does not feel a strong emotional connection in her marriage, and the loneliness she experiences shows that the need for healthy social relationships is not fulfilled. Additionally, her desire to “find some life to live” reflects the drive to develop herself, pursue personal goals, and have a life beyond the domestic role. However, all of this is hindered by an unhealthy marital situation and the unbalanced burden of child-rearing.

The feeling of being trapped in an exhausting routine without support from her partner puts Jem in a fragile psychological state. She feels alone, constrained, and lost in her life. This strengthens the reason why Jem feels unhappy in her marriage because neither her emotional needs nor her self-development have room to grow.

In addition to feeling lonely, Jem also feels her life has become very limited since becoming a mother. Not only does she lose time for herself, but she also loses the opportunity to interact socially. Her life is filled with monotonous household routines, with no meaningful communication with other adults. This is clearly depicted in the following excerpt:

“You’re tied to your child, tied to your home, tied to the routines. And you’re just desperate for an adult to have a conversation with, even if it’s only about getting the drains cleared.” (After The Party, 2010, p. 142)

This excerpt illustrates how Jem feels bound by the constant and exhausting responsibilities. The phrase “tied to your child, tied to your home, tied to the routines” emphasizes that her life no longer has room for personal freedom. She feels constrained by her roles as a mother and wife, which leads to social and emotional isolation. In fact, she deeply longs for simple conversations with other adults “even if it’s only about getting the drains cleared”, which shows how strong Jem’s need for connection and social interaction is.

In the context of Maslow’s theory, Jem fails to meet the need at the level of love and belongingness, which is the need to have meaningful relationships and feel accepted by others. She also begins to experience barriers to self-actualization because her life is too locked into routines, leaving no room for personal development. When these two needs are unmet, one will feel empty, frustrated, and lacking meaning in life and this is what Jem experiences in her marriage.

This situation reinforces that one of the primary sources of Jem’s unhappiness is her sense of not having a healthy social life and losing herself in the role of an unsupported housewife. This imbalance creates significant emotional pressure and deepens her unhappiness in her marriage.

CONCLUSIONS

This research analyzed Jem Patrick’s unhappiness in *After The Party* by Lisa Jewell using Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The findings show that her unhappiness stems from the prolonged failure to fulfill love, belongingness, and esteem needs.

First, Jem feels neglected and emotionally disconnected from Ralph, especially during early motherhood when she needed support most. Ralph’s lack of affection and attention leaves her feeling unloved and unappreciated. Second, her marriage becomes monotonous and emotionally cold. The absence of meaningful communication, romance, and personal freedom leads to boredom, emotional fatigue, and a loss of independence. Third, Jem bears the burden of childcare almost entirely alone. Ralph’s lack of involvement creates imbalance and stress, making Jem feel unsupported and undervalued.

In conclusion, Jem’s unhappiness results from emotional neglect, lack of appreciation, and unequal domestic roles. Viewed through Maslow’s theory, the unmet needs for love, belongingness, and esteem lead to deep dissatisfaction and instability.

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