

Anthropomorphism and Self-Actualization of Kong in Adam Wingard's *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*

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KEYWORDS

anthropomorphism;
kong; self-
actualization

ABSTRACT

This article discusses about anthropomorphism and self-actualization process in a non-human main character named Kong in *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* directed by Adam Wingard. This research aims and focuses to determine the type of anthropomorphism, and hierarchy of needs based on Kong. To obtain a better comprehension about the anthropomorphic nature and motivation of Kong in *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*, this research employs John Andrew Fisher's anthropomorphism and Abraham Harold Maslow's hierarchy of needs model. Descriptive qualitative method is utilized to describe and explain the results of this research in detailed manner. The source data of this research is taken in the form of screenshots and character lines from the film. This research reveals the type of anthropomorphism displayed by Kong is imaginative anthropomorphism, as his character is treated as human through both his emotions and thoughts. Lastly, Kong fulfills every stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and achieves self-actualization. This article suggests that non-human in a film possess the means in achieving self-actualization, albeit one of the ways to prove that is to apply anthropomorphism as hierarchy of needs are only applicable to humans.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropomorphism, in courtesy of Cuddon (2013), is concept derived from two Greek terms, namely *anthros* (human) and *morphe* (shape). Hence, anthropomorphism is a concept about attributing human characteristics and qualities to non-human subjects such as animals. Anthropomorphism itself is widespread in various literary works including fables, as it offers countless possibilities and varieties for storytelling. In Fisher's (1991) article about anthropomorphism to further clarify the concept, he proposed that anthropomorphism is divided into two types, namely interpretive and imaginative anthropomorphism. Additionally, anthropomorphism allows this article to utilize a humanistic and motivation theory about the hierarchy of needs, specifically on self-actualization.

In Ciccarelli and White's book discussing about Maslow's hierarchy of needs (2016), self-actualization is a process where a person must work their way through their biological needs before making a progress into the next stage. Thus, self-actualization refers to the culmination of the person's previous needs such as physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging needs, and finally esteem needs to achieve their true potential and become the best version of themselves.

Although previous research that discuss non-human character's self-actualization in literature are rarely being discussed, the aim of this research is to reinforce that non-human characters can undergo a process of

self-actualization or at the very least try to fulfill the hierarchy of needs. In Dhiáfajri's et. al (2024) research about hierarchy of needs in *Godzilla vs. Kong The Official Movie Novelization* written by Greg Keyes, their research revealed that Kong had reached the safety and security needs by the end of the novel. Their research highlighted that the main character, Kong, possessed a motivation to find a new home through various obstacles and opponents he faced during his journey. Moreover, Meng's (2023) research regarding hierarchy of needs in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* suggested that the monster created by Victor Frankenstein never obtained the love and belonging needs, which resulted in him resorting to kill his creator for the sake of bringing him into the world and personal revenge. Based on the previous studies collected by the researcher, it is evident that these previous researchers are interested in the aspects of hierarchy of needs within film research, specifically on the hierarchy of needs belonging to non-human characters.

Though the concept of hierarchy of needs are limited to humans and with the help of anthropomorphism, the researcher can point out which factors that considers non-human to be human in certain aspects, thus allowing the concept of self-actualization in non-human characters. Therefore, as seen from the title of this article, the researcher is intended to examine phenomena about anthropomorphism and self-actualization through a monster character within a film. Fortunately, such portrayal of anthropomorphism and self-actualization are described or depicted in a film entitled *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*, specifically on Kong.

Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire is a 2024 film directed by Adam Wingard. The film specifically narrates the struggle of Kong in fulfilling his needs to unlock his true potential, which stands to the reason why this film is suitable to be analyzed within the discussion regarding anthropomorphism and self-actualization of Kong. Therefore, the research subject in this study will be focused on the non-human main character named Kong, as the entirety of the narrative is about how Kong is portrayed to be human-like and how he achieved his needs through various obstacles and opponents that he faced. From the results of this study, the researcher will be able to explain the type of anthropomorphism shown in Kong and how Kong achieved self-actualization.

METHOD

The method used in this research paper is descriptive qualitative research method. Based on Nassaji (2015: 129), descriptive research is a research that primarily describes certain phenomenon and its characteristics, as this type of research is focused on the aspect of what rather than how or why it happens. In accordance with Jaya (2020), qualitative research is a research that gives detailed descriptions about certain circumstances or phenomena contained in the research subject. He also added that the result of this research is in a form of words through valid data, not statistics. Therefore, it can be simplified that descriptive qualitative research is a research utilized to gather, describe, and explain the research data presented in the form of explanations, not statistics.

In order to complete this research, the researcher will collect and gather the research data taken from the source data according to the following steps:

1. Observe the film for multiple times in order to obtain the primary data.
2. Search the relevant previous research, books, and journal articles to provide the secondary data of this research as many as possible.
3. Capture several supporting evidence of this research in the form of screenshots and character lines from the film.

4. Compile the data into the data recapitulation.

After the research data is compiled, the researcher will be able to answer the problems found in this research according to the following steps:

1. Identify the compiled data found in the film based on the problems of this research.
2. Classify the data according to the descriptions provided by the evidence in the data and the statement of the problems in this research.
3. Analyze the compiled data based on John Andrew Fisher's type of anthropomorphism and Abraham Harold Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
4. Provide the explanation of this research into two sections in the discussion of the problems found by the researcher, namely anthropomorphism to provide the type that can be found in the film and hierarchy of needs to explain Kong's process of acquiring self-actualization.
5. Conclude the problems of this research based on the discussion about Kong's type of anthropomorphism and self-actualization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher will present his findings about Kong's type of anthropomorphism and hierarchy of needs. Kong's type of anthropomorphism is shown to be imaginative anthropomorphism, due to Kong's character is treated as a human in the film. Following that, the film also proves that Kong fulfils every stage from the hierarchy of needs and eventually achieves self-actualization. To further reinforce the results of the study, the researcher provided the in-depth explanation about imaginative anthropomorphism and hierarchy of needs shown in Kong.

Imaginative Anthropomorphism

Imaginative anthropomorphism usually concerns with how non-human subject is represented as a human in various literature works by the author. In Kong's case, he is represented as the main character of the film instead of a background character. Additionally, since Kong can be considered as a primate and primates share the same physical structures with humans, audiences are able to relate to Kong through his journey in the film. In order for the audiences to invest and establish a connection with Kong, Adam Wingard along with the film's production team purposefully applied some human qualities onto Kong. These qualities can be shown in how he expresses his emotions and how he thinks.

1. Emotion

Aside from being a monster, Kong is capable in expressing his emotions throughout the film. While it is true that some animals are able to display their emotions in some degree, the emotions shown by Kong are relatively more expressive to audiences instead of normal animals in reality, where they have to infer the animal's intentions. There are multiple instances where he displays human-like emotions.



Figure 1 Kong expressing his sadness [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:04:58].

One of those emotions were sadness. Kong could be seen expressing his sadness due to him being tricked by a Parrotfrog mimicking his roar, expecting that the roar might belong to another member of Kong's species. Adding the fact that he suffered from loneliness and also suffered an infected tooth, Kong frowned immediately and began to touch his mouth to indicate which tooth got infected while feeling that this was another unfortunate day for him. Regardless of Kong's current circumstances, eventually this emotion led him to find another one of his kind, the Great Apes.

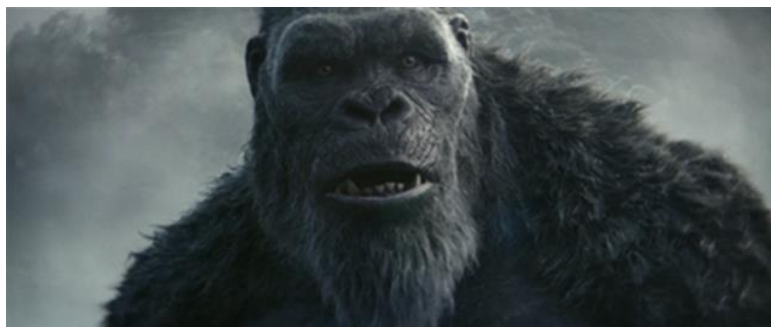


Figure 2 Kong expressing his shock [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:35:58].

Another evidence of Kong's emotions were seen in his shocked expression above. Kong displayed his flabbergasted expression when he first encountered another member of his species, indicating that he never met one of his kind throughout his entire life. Since this was Kong's first time meeting another Great Ape similar to him, he paused momentarily to process what he had just seen in front of his eyes, still in disbelief. Eventually, Kong knew what to do towards the other Great Ape after he was being stiff for a moment.



Figure 3 Kong expressing his pride [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 01:08:03].

As evidenced by the screenshot above, Kong displayed his emotion of pride to the other Great Apes. After Kong managed to win the duel with Skar King, Kong immediately roared to prove his pride in defeating Skar

King to his followers in his own kingdom. While dominance display over defeating the leader of a pack was not that common in the animal world, the celebratory shown in Kong was rather excessive as he pounded his chest and roared loudly to the rest of the Great Apes.

2. Thought

To further reinforce the discussion about Kong's imaginative anthropomorphism aside from emotions only, the researcher adds findings about Kong's human-like thoughts. Despite Kong still being treated as a giant monster, Kong displays his process of thinking to be not as animalistic as real life primates do. Moreover, Kong's thoughts can also be considered to be much more complex than primates, comparable to human's process of thinking.



Figure 4 Kong triggering a trap [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:02:33].

Though real life apes such as chimpanzees were observed capable in crafting tools like spears, Kong was able to prove his elevated craftsmanship by deploying these sharp spears or spikes as part of his traps. Moreover, while it was true that the inspirational materials behind Kong such as chimpanzees and gorillas were able to utilize tools, Kong took it to another level when it was shown that he was capable in constructing complex traps similar to humans.



Figure 5 Kong taking a bath under a waterfall [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:03:27].

Most animals in real life did self-maintenance by cleaning themselves with water, dust, and such, though the inspirational material of Kong such as the silver-back gorilla tend to avoid large body of waters. However, this wasn't the case with Kong in the screenshot as he took his time in cleaning himself by utilizing nearby waterfall as a shower.

Hierarchy of Needs

In this section, the researcher will present his findings about the hierarchy of needs from the film. Maslow's theory is all about human motivation while the research object of this thesis is Kong, that is not a human.

Thanks to previous discussion about the intrinsic elements and the anthropomorphism of Kong, it enables the concepts from Maslow's theory to be applicable since Kong is shown to have human qualities. In order to reach self-actualization, Kong must fulfill all of the previous needs first to obtain the final stage of the hierarchy of needs. The following sub-chapters will discuss the hierarchy of needs starting from physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization serving as the primary discussion of this research.

1. Physiological Needs

Achieving physiological needs meant that a person must fulfill their biological sustenance in order to keep on living. This specific need included food, drink, copulation, and sleep to satiate hunger, thirst, lust, and fatigue. If any of these aspects were fulfilled by a person, then they could be considered successful in acquiring physiological needs.



Figure 6 Kong lifting a dead Wartdog [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:02:57].

On one of his usual routines in Hollow Earth, Kong hunted other living entities to satisfy his hunger by utilizing both his superior intelligence and immense strength. His intelligence could be seen in him having constructed traps in order to catch and kill his prey, such as the Wartdogs. In addition, his strength were proven in him having to lift a huge log of tree to trigger one of his traps. Thus, his daily activity alone reflected his desire to sustain himself and make sure that he was able to live for another day. During the film's opening, Kong managed to retrieve two dead corpses of Wartdogs from hunting. Therefore, it was concluded that Kong achieved his physiological needs when he brought two dead Wartdogs as his source of food to his lair.

2. Safety and Security Needs

To acquire safety and security needs, a person must felt that there are not any external or internal threats that might endanger their wellbeing. External threats can come from their surroundings, while internal threats may include diseases and illness. Therefore, a person should make sure that they are safe from both external and internal threats.

Since the Hollow Earth was filled with dangerous creatures and hazardous environments, Kong must utilize his intelligence to avoid these types of dangers. In order to further increase his chance of survival, Kong wielded the battle axe and set up traps for dangerous creatures to make sure he stayed alive. Although during the beginning of the film, one of Kong's canine tooth got infected. Even though Kong was mostly safe from external threats, Kong needed to treat his infected tooth to rid himself of internal threats. Hence, Kong went up to the surface into the Hollow Earth Access Point, knowing that humans would have a treatment for his infected tooth.



Figure 7 Kong checking his new metal tooth [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:21:41].

Luckily, a Titan dentist named Trapper came and patched up his infected tooth. Thanks to Trapper for treating Kong's infected tooth ensuring him from internal threats, Kong achieved safety and security from both external and internal threats. Thus, Kong achieved the safety and security needs when Trapper replaced his infected tooth with a metal one.

3. Love and Belonging Needs

For a person to earn love and belonging needs, it does not have to come necessarily from a relationship between lovers or sweethearts. Anyone can achieve this specific need from a relationship among friends, families, and even between two completely strangers. What matters is that person cares about the other person and the other person will reciprocate the exact same feeling to that person.

Ilene : His species was a very social one.

Ilene : It's not natural for Kong to be so alone.

Ilene : He's the last of his kind.

Ilene : Every day he searches for a family that he'll never find.

(*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:05:44 → 00:05:59)

Based on Dr. Ilene Andrews' statement about Kong and his species called the Great Apes, Kong had always been living in lonesome without the presence of another creature similar to him. In this film, he had always longed to meet another one of his kind and to form a relationship with a member of his species, though sadly he was stated to be the last of his kind. Fortunately, the statement about Kong being the last of his species was proven wrong and he got the chance on obtaining love and belonging needs in this film.

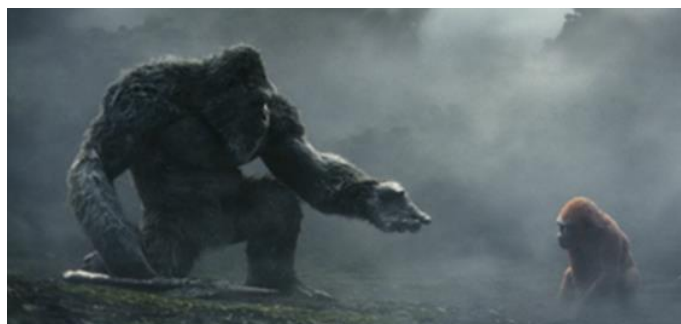


Figure 8 Kong extending his left arm to Suko [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 00:36:19]

During the middle part of the film's duration, Kong went into the Subterranean Realm in Hollow Earth, which was opened near his hunting ground in Hollow Earth. Kong would eventually meet one of his supposedly extinct kin in the form of a juvenile named Suko. Initially, Kong felt surprised since this was his first time meeting another member of his species albeit in a child-like form.



Figure 9 Suko helping Kong to treat Kong's injured hand [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 01:16:13]

Eventually, through multiple hardships and Kong treated Suko with genuine kindness, Suko's action in this the selected screenshot above proved that Kong's kindness in the film was reciprocated by Suko. Thus, Kong achieved the love and belonging needs through his genuine affection and kindness to treat Suko nicely.

4. Esteem Needs

Esteem needs usually concerned with how a person gain their achievement, confidence, and recognition. Although in order to gain one of these aspects of esteem needs, one must accomplish an action that can raise awareness of their potentials from both themselves and others.



Figure 10 Kong roaring to the Great Apes [*Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* - 01:08:03].

On one of his attempts to gain recognition from the other Great Apes, Kong had to come out as the victor in his duel with Skar King. After a gruesome fight with Skar King and Kong emerged victorious, Kong immediately roared to prove that he was stronger than Skar King to the other Great Apes. This celebratory display of dominance over Skar King's defeat indicated Kong's desire to be recognized as the strongest by the other Great Apes.



Figure 11 Kong lifting the B.E.A.S.T. glove in his right arm [Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire - 01:23:11]

Yet, despite not being recognized by other Great Apes, Kong was still being recognized by Monarch due to his involvement in defeating Mechagodzilla. In Kong's case, he gained the second type of esteem needs when his past actions were recognized by humans in saving the world. In return, the humans viewed Kong as an ally to humanity and eventually built a weapon for him. The weapon was dubbed as B.E.A.S.T. (Bio Enhanced Anatomech Seismic Thunder) glove, serving as a protective arm piece, regenerative device for his frostbite, and also a battle gauntlet. Thus, Kong gained esteem needs in the form of B.E.A.S.T. glove as a form of recognition from the humans and further solidifying his self-esteem.

5. Self-Actualization

At the fifth stage of the hierarchy of needs, a person will realize their true potential and will possess the desire to achieve greatness for themselves. In self-actualization stage, people tend to do something that they have never done before to become more than they are.

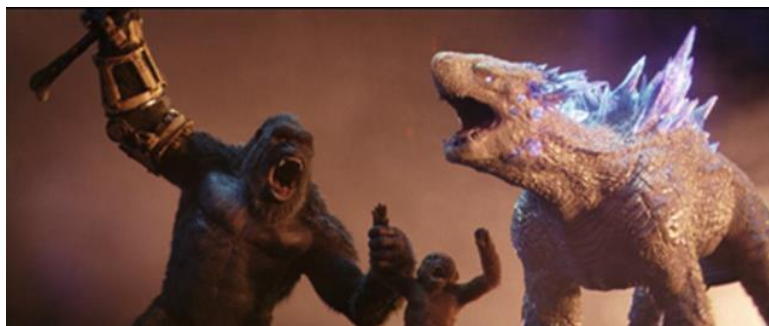


Figure 12 Kong, Suko, and Shimo roaring to the Great Apes [Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire - 01:23:11]

Kong earned his self-actualization by overthrowing Skar King's position as the king of the Great Apes, resulting in him earning the title of king and truly becoming King Kong. From an ape living in solitude without any form of accompaniment, Kong became the leader and king who would govern the Great Apes in the name of freedom and peace. However, it took a joint effort from Kong, Godzilla, Mothra, Suko, and Shimo to finally dethrone Skar King. Regardless of the various situation faced by Kong, he proved himself capable in having what it took to become something greater than his previous state.

CONCLUSION

Based from the discussion, the researcher concluded several points that answered the problems found in this research, namely from Kong's type of anthropomorphism and hierarchy of needs.

By utilizing John Andrew Fisher's concept about anthropomorphism, the type of anthropomorphism displayed by Kong was imaginative anthropomorphism, as his character was treated as human through both his emotions and thoughts. Kong displayed wide range of emotions including sadness, shock, and pride. In addition, Kong's thoughts were also considered to be human-like as his one of his real life counterparts could not construct complex traps and even bathing in large bodies of water. Therefore, anthropomorphism allowed Kong to display human-like traits and also allowed audiences to view Kong as human.

Through Abraham Harold Maslow's model about hierarchy of needs, Kong fulfilled every stage of the hierarchy including physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and finally achieved self-actualization. Theoretically, hierarchy of needs provided about the explanations of each stage's motive to fulfill the needs of Kong. Additionally, Kong showcased that every stage from the hierarchy of needs were fulfilled according to the order, albeit there was an overlap specifically on Kong attempting to achieve esteem needs when he had not acquired love and belonging needs. Nonetheless, this article proved that non-human character such as Kong were capable in fulfilling all humanistic needs from Abraham Harold Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

In conclusion, this article revealed findings about non-human characters in a film possessing the means in achieving self-actualization, albeit one of the ways to prove that was to apply anthropomorphism as hierarchy of needs were only applicable to humans. Moreover, this article also explained the process of Kong regaining his true name as King Kong in the Monsterverse franchise, which was something that had never been addressed in previous films before *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*.

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