

Chris Gardner's psychological development as an emerging person in *The Pursuit of Happyness*

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Abstract

This study examines Chris Gardner's psychological development in The Pursuit of Happyness using Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. This study focuses on identifying how the main character reflects the characteristics of an emerging person, including openness to experience, trust in one's organism, internal locus of evaluation, and willingness to be a process. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected from dialogues, monologues, and narrative scenes from the film and its script. The data collection process involved watching the film repeatedly, identifying relevant data, classifying them based on the theoretical framework, and reducing the data to focus on the significant findings. The analysis applies a psychological approach to the literature based on Carl Rogers' humanistic theory. The results show that Gardner demonstrates all the key characteristics of an emerging person throughout the film. He shows openness to experience by accepting reality and seeking new opportunities, trusting his organism through confidence in his own judgment, and having an internal locus of evaluation by making decisions based on personal values rather than external approval. In addition, his persistence, adaptability, and continuous efforts reflect his willingness to undergo the process. These findings indicate that Chris Gardner's character represents an individual who is continuously developing and striving for personal growth, as proposed in Rogers' concept of the emerging person.

Keywords: Carl Rogers; Emerging person; psychological development; *The Pursuit of Happyness*

INTRODUCTION

Literature represents human life through the expression of thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It is not only imaginative but also reflects moral values relevant to everyday life. As stated by Taum, literature may be creative and even fantastical, yet it still carries meanings that can be applied to real human situations (40). In addition, literature mirrors society, including its culture, values and psychological conditions. Esten explains that literature serves as a reflection of human behavior and life (9). Therefore, literary works can be understood as a medium that portrays human experiences, emotions, and perspectives within a certain social context (Upadhyay 3).

The connection between literature and psychology is very close, since both focus on human behavior and mental processes. Through literary works, the psychological aspects of characters can be explored in depth. Hermawan states that literature often presents characters that represent real psychological conditions, even in fictional narratives (199). Thus, applying psychological theories to literary or film analyses helps reveal deeper insights into character motivation, development, and transformation.

One of the relevant psychological theories for analyzing personal development is Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, particularly his concept of the emerging person. This concept refers to individuals who are open to experiences, trust themselves, live authentically, and grow continuously toward their full potential. According to Rogers, such individuals are driven by an inherent actualizing tendency that leads them toward psychological maturity and self-development (p.115). These theories can be clearly seen in the film *The Pursuit of Happyness*, directed by Gabriele Muccino. The film tells the true story of Chris Gardner, a man who struggles with poverty and homelessness while striving for a better life in the United States. His journey reflects not only external success but also internal and psychological growth. Chris demonstrates persistence, self-belief, and strong personal values, which gradually lead him toward becoming an emerging person. His

transformation also reflects how the fulfillment of psychological needs supports personal development.

Several previous studies have examined *The Pursuit of Happyness* or related psychological approaches. Adriani and Nugroho (2021) analysed Chris Gardner's struggles using a psychological perspective, but their study did not specifically explore his transformation through Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. Similarly, Saroj Gc (2023) focused on Gardner's identity struggle and his pursuit of happiness, highlighting his life challenges rather than his process of psychological growth based on Rogers' framework. Although these studies provide valuable insights, research that specifically examines Chris Gardner's development using the concept of the emerging person remains limited.

Therefore, this study focuses on analysing Chris Gardner's psychological development by applying Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. The title of this study is "Chris Gardner's Psychological Development as an Emerging Person in *The Pursuit of Happyness*". This study is limited to analysing Chris Gardner's character in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, with a focus on his psychological transformation. The analysis is based on the main characteristics of the emerging person according to Carl Rogers, including openness to experience, trust in one's organism, internal locus of evaluation, and willingness to be a process, as reflected in the character's experiences throughout the film.

This research is guided by one main question: How does Chris Gardner reflect the characteristics of an emerging person in *The Pursuit of Happyness*? This question becomes the central focus of the study, emphasizing the process of personal growth and self-development. In line with this question, the objective of this study is to examine how Chris Gardner reflects the characteristics of an emerging person based on Carl Rogers' humanistic theory. This study is expected to contribute to literary and psychological studies by providing a deeper understanding of how Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person can be applied to film analysis. It also highlights the importance of personal growth, authenticity, and psychological development in character analysis, and may serve as a useful reference for students, researchers, and educators interested in humanistic psychology.

The Concept of Emerging Person According to Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person is an important idea within humanistic psychology that emphasizes personal growth, authenticity, and continuous self-development. Rogers explains that an emerging person is someone who is in the process of becoming more open, genuine, and self-aware in their life. Such individuals tend to rely on their own experiences rather than external authority, reject superficial values, and show empathy and concern for others. They are also willing to accept change and explore new possibilities as part of their personal growth (Rogers 123–124).

This concept is closely related to Rogers' idea of the fully functioning person, which highlights individuals who live authentically, accept themselves, and are open to experience. However, the emerging person is not a final or fixed condition. Instead, it represents an ongoing process of becoming, where individuals continuously develop toward their potential through what Rogers calls the actualizing tendency. This tendency drives individuals to grow, adapt, and achieve psychological maturity.

Furthermore, Patterson and Joseph explain that the emerging person is characterized by continuous development rather than perfection (117–118). Individuals in this process learn to accept both positive and negative experiences without defensiveness, trust their inner feelings, and make decisions based on personal values instead of external pressures. They also remain open to change and uncertainty, which allows them to live more authentic and meaningful lives.

To better understand this concept, Rogers identifies several key characteristics that indicate the development of an emerging person, including openness to experience, trust in one's organism,

internal locus of evaluation, and willingness to be a process (Rogers 124). These characteristics reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of human personality.

Indicators of the Emerging Person According to Carl Rogers

To understand how an individual develops into an emerging person, Rogers outlines several important psychological characteristics. These characteristics reflect a person's openness to growth, independence in making judgments, and readiness to accept life as a continuous process of change. The main indicators are as follows:

Openness to Experience

Openness to experience is one of the most essential characteristics of an emerging person. It refers to an individual's ability to accept all kinds of experiences, whether positive or negative, without denial or distortion. This openness allows individuals to become more flexible and realistic when facing new situations, people, and challenges.

Rogers explains that openness to experience involves a greater awareness of one's own feelings and attitudes as they naturally occur. At the same time, individuals become more capable of perceiving reality objectively, rather than interpreting it based on preconceived ideas (Rogers 115). Similarly, Zhu and Liu state that individuals who are open to experience are better able to deal with new situations realistically. They can face conflicting information without avoiding it or forcing premature conclusions (564). This quality supports personal growth because individuals are willing to learn from every experience.

Trust in One's Organism

Trust in one's organism refers to an individual's ability to rely on their own internal feelings and experiences when making decisions. In this stage, a person begins to see their inner self as a reliable source of guidance. According to Rogers, individuals gradually learn that their organism is trustworthy and capable of guiding them toward the most appropriate behaviour in different situations (118). This trust allows individuals to depend less on external validation or rigid rules and more on their own psychological experiences. As a result, individuals who develop this characteristic are more likely to make authentic decisions, adapt to challenges, and live in accordance with their true selves. Trust in one's organism therefore becomes an important sign of psychological maturity and personal authenticity.

Internal Locus of Evaluation

Important characteristic of the emerging person is having an internal locus of evaluation. This means that individuals evaluate their experiences based on their own standards and values, rather than depending on others' opinions. Rogers explains that recognizing "I am the one who determines the value of my experiences" can be both empowering and challenging (122). This realization encourages individuals to take responsibility for their own choices and judgments.

Patterson and Joseph argue that developing an internal locus of evaluation is essential for becoming a fully functioning person because it promotes authenticity and psychological well-being (122). In addition, Joseph and Murphy emphasize that individuals who rely on their own evaluations are more likely to develop resilience and personal growth (37–38). This characteristic helps individuals become more independent, confident, and capable of facing social pressure.

Willingness to be a Process

Willingness to be a process refers to the understanding that human beings are not fixed, but continuously changing and developing. An emerging person does not see themselves as a finished product but as someone who is always in the process of becoming. Rogers describes this idea by stating that a person is "a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity," meaning that human life is constantly evolving (122). This perspective highlights that growth involves ongoing change, self-discovery, and adaptation.

Individuals who possess this characteristic are open to new experiences, including mistakes and challenges, because they see them as part of personal development. They do not hold rigid views about themselves but remain flexible and adaptive. This willingness to embrace change is essential for achieving authenticity, resilience, and continuous growth.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative method to analyse Chris Gardner's psychological development in *The Pursuit of Happyness* based on Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. Qualitative research was chosen because it focuses on understanding human experiences, meanings, and psychological processes as reflected in literary or cinematic works. As explained by the National Institute for Health Research, qualitative research aims to explore how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences in social reality (3). Therefore, the data in this study were presented in the form of words, dialogues, monologues, and narrative expressions rather than numerical data.

The main source of data in this study was the film *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which was used to identify the characteristics of an emerging person reflected in Chris Gardner's character. The analysis focused on how Chris demonstrates key aspects of the emerging person, such as openness to experience, trust in one's organism, internal locus of evaluation, and willingness to be a process. The data were collected through several steps. First, the film was watched repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, and psychological changes experienced by Chris Gardner. In addition, the researcher also examined the movie script to ensure the accuracy of dialogues and to better understand the context of each scene. After that, relevant data in the form of dialogues, monologues, and narrative scenes were identified and documented. These data included moments that reflect Chris Gardner's personal growth and characteristics as an emerging person.

The collected data were then classified based on the indicators of the emerging person according to Carl Rogers' theory. The classification was organized into tables in the appendix, including information such as quotations, minute markers, types of analysis, and comments. Irrelevant data were reduced and excluded to ensure that the analysis remained focused on answering the research question.

The analysis was conducted in several stages, including selecting relevant data, organizing them into categories based on the characteristics of the emerging person, and interpreting them using Carl Rogers' theory. This process aimed to explain how Chris Gardner's psychological development reflects the process of becoming an emerging person. This study used two types of data: primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained directly from the film, including dialogues, monologues, and narrative scenes that illustrate Chris Gardner's psychological development. Meanwhile, the secondary data were collected from books, journals, and previous studies related to Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, which were used to support and strengthen the analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Chapter IV, while the complete data are provided in the appendix for further reference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chris Gardner as an Emerging Person in The Pursuit of Happyness

The analysis of Chris Gardner's character in *The Pursuit of Happyness* shows that his psychological development reflects Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. An emerging person refers to an individual who is in the process of becoming more authentic, open, and self-directed through life experiences. According to Rogers, this process is not a fixed state but a continuous journey of growth, where individuals gradually develop trust in themselves, accept reality, and live based on their own values (Rogers 123–124).

In the film, Chris Gardner's transformation is portrayed through several key characteristics of the emerging person, including openness to experience, trust in one's organism, internal locus of evaluation, and willingness to be a process. These characteristics are reflected in his actions, decisions, and emotional responses as he faces various life challenges such as financial struggles, homelessness, and career uncertainty.

Openness to Experience

Openness to experience refers to an individual's ability to accept both internal feelings and external realities without denial or distortion. According to Rogers, this characteristic involves becoming more aware of one's emotions and perceiving reality more objectively rather than through rigid assumptions (Rogers 115).

Linda: "Come back without that, please." Chris: "I'm going to say goodbye to it. Because I'm coming back without it."

Chris's decision to let go of his bone scanner represents his willingness to accept reality and move forward. Instead of holding onto something that no longer supports his life, he begins to recognize his situation more clearly. This reflects Rogers' idea that individuals who are open to experience are able to face reality honestly and adapt to change. Chris's action shows that he is no longer trapped by past failures but is ready to explore new possibilities.

Chris: "I want to see about a job there." Linda: "What job?" Chris: "Stockbroker."

This dialogue further illustrates Chris's openness to new experiences. After realizing that his previous job was unsuccessful, he does not resist change but instead actively seeks a better opportunity. His willingness to try a completely new career path demonstrates his openness to both his internal desires and external circumstances. This aligns with Rogers' view that openness to experience is essential for personal growth and transformation.

Trust in One's Organism

Trust in one's organism refers to an individual's confidence in their own inner feelings and judgments as a reliable guide for making decisions. Rogers explains that individuals gradually learn to trust their organism as an appropriate instrument for determining the most satisfying behaviour in each situation (Rogers 118).

Chris: "Because I'm getting a better job." Chris: "You have to trust me." Christopher: "I trust you."

In this scene, Chris shows confidence in his own decisions despite uncertain circumstances. His statement reflects his belief that he is capable of improving his situation. This demonstrates Rogers' idea that individuals who trust their organism rely on their internal judgment rather than external validation.

Chris: "I'm with you. You're going to be fine."

Chris's reassurance to his son also reflects his inner trust. Even in difficult conditions, he remains calm and confident, showing that he believes in his ability to handle challenges. This aligns with Rogers' concept that trusting one's organism enables individuals to act authentically and make decisions that reflect their true selves.

Internal Locus of Evaluation

Internal locus of evaluation refers to an individual's ability to evaluate experiences based on personal values rather than relying on external approval. Rogers states that recognizing oneself as the source of judgment is both empowering and challenging (Rogers 122).

Chris: "I don't think there's any such thing. I just don't want him to see me taking money." (Datum 7)

This dialogue shows that Chris makes decisions based on his own values, particularly his role as a father. Instead of focusing on how others might judge him, he prioritizes what he believes is right for his son. This reflects the development of an internal locus of evaluation.

Chris (v.o.): "A thirty dollar ticket every three days was a business expense."

This monologue further illustrates Chris's independence in decision-making. He evaluates his situation based on his own reasoning and takes responsibility for his choices. According to Rogers, this ability to determine the value of one's experiences is a key aspect of becoming an emerging person.

Willingness to Be a Process

Ambition refers to an individual's determination to achieve personal goals and become the version of himself he wants to be. Willingness to be a process refers to the understanding that human beings are continuously changing and developing. Rogers describes a person as a "fluid process" rather than a fixed entity (Rogers 122).

(Scene: Chris sits quietly with his son in a shelter)

Although this moment appears still, it reflects Chris's internal growth. He is adapting to his situation and preparing himself for future challenges. This shows that he accepts life as an ongoing process rather than a fixed condition.

(Scene: Chris participates in the internship exam)

Chris's participation in the competitive internship process demonstrates his acceptance of growth through experience. He understands that success requires effort, patience, and continuous development. This aligns with Rogers' idea that individuals who are willing to be a process embrace change and see life as a journey of becoming.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Chris Gardner's psychological development in *The Pursuit of Happyness* through Carl Rogers' concept of the emerging person. Through the analysis of selected dialogues and key narrative scenes, the study shows that Chris Gardner's character reflects a continuous process of personal growth, self-awareness, and authenticity. The concept of the emerging person emphasizes that individuals are not fixed, but are constantly developing through their experiences, challenges, and personal reflections. Chris Gardner demonstrates the characteristics of an emerging person throughout the film. His openness to experience is reflected in his willingness to accept reality and explore new opportunities despite repeated failures and uncertainties. Rather than remaining attached to past circumstances, he chooses to move forward and adapt to new situations. In addition, Chris shows trust in one's organism through his confidence in his own judgment and inner feelings when making decisions, even in difficult and unpredictable conditions. This trust allows him to remain resilient and committed to his goals. Furthermore, Chris develops an internal

locus of evaluation, as he increasingly bases his decisions on his own values and beliefs rather than seeking external approval. His actions are guided by what he considers meaningful, especially in fulfilling his responsibilities as a father. This independence in evaluating his experiences reflects his growing psychological maturity. Moreover, his willingness to be a process is evident in his persistence, adaptability, and continuous effort to improve himself. He understands that personal growth is not immediate but requires time, struggle, and ongoing development. Overall, Chris Gardner's journey illustrates Rogers' idea of the emerging person as an individual who is continuously becoming rather than a fully completed self. His character shows that personal growth is a dynamic process shaped by experience, self-awareness, and resilience. The film highlights that through perseverance and authenticity, individuals can gradually move closer to their true potential and achieve meaningful personal development.

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