

A Study of Superiority Complex in Chris Gardner's The Pursuit of Happyness

Kemal Alaydrus Zarkasy

Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Jalan Ketintang, Surabaya 60231, Indonesia
kemalzarkasy@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This research is taking objective to reveal the causes and impacts of superiority complex behavior which overwrites Chris Gardner that is appeared in Chris Gardner's The Pursuit of Happyness. Thus, this study is analyzing the psychology of the main character using individual psychology by Alfred Adler. Based on it, the formulated problems are; (1) how does superiority complex is being portrayed in Chris Gardner's The Pursuit of Happyness? (2) what are the causes of Chris Gardner's superiority complex? And (3) what are the impacts of Chris Gardner's superiority complex toward his personality? This study is using qualitative approach which the instruments are taking from documentation (quoting), and the analysis is critical interpretation. , and also reporter the finding of the study. The novel tells about the life of Chris Gardner who loves in struggling from superiority complex in his life. In the end of the story, Chris succeed to be a staff in a Dean Witter firm and soon he was been the found of the investment firm Gardner Rich in 1987.

Keywords: *Chris Gardner; Internal Conflict; Struggle; Superiority Complex*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan penyebab dan dampak perilaku kompleks superioritas yang menimpa Chris Gardner yang muncul di novel The Pursuit of Happyness. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menganalisis psikologi karakter utama menggunakan psikologi individu oleh Alfred Adler. Berdasarkan tujuan tersebut, masalah yang diformulasikan adalah: (1) bagaimana superioritas kompleks yang digambarkan dalam The Pursuit of Happyness Chris Gardner? (2) Apakah penyebab dari superioritas kompleks Chris Gardner? Dan (3) Apa dampak dari superioritas kompleks Chris Gardner terhadap kepribadiannya? Untuk menganalisis data, studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang diambil instrumen dari dokumentasi (mengutip). Novel ini bercerita tentang kehidupan Chris Gardner yang berjuang dari superioritas kompleks dalam hidupnya. Pada akhir cerita, Chris berhasil menjadi staf di sebuah perusahaan Dean Witter dan menjadi pemimpin perusahaan investasi Gardner Rich di 1987.

Kata kunci: *Chris Gardner; konflik internal; perjuangan; superioritas kompleks*

INTRODUCTION

There all human knows that happiness is the main goal of life, mostly agree about that. There are many theorized about happiness, many questions appear, but it yet a single actual answer comes how to predetermine it. Does it more than any other experience or how much percent do environmental thing have significant factor to affect the achievement of happiness, no one knows.

Although psychology and literature are having no similarity, it still has connection which is strong enough between them. The connection between them is called as psychological criticism (Scott, 2008:48). In this theory, the literary work studied from the psychological perspective. There are number of psychological aspects that can applied into literary work and has possibility to critic it work. As the Sigmund Freud said, most of the human mentality processes were revealed through symbols and codes, and it did most in the subconscious mind. Those codes are designed for the unconscious mind to suppress out the thought from it conscious mind. The psychological literary critics are searching for the meaning within the writer's work by analyzing the psychological theory that applied to the work of the writer (Kennedy, 2010:39).

Adler state that human being is an aggressive creature and it should be aggressive if they want to survive in this world. In other hand, they have to aggressive so they can be survive and those aggressive characteristic impulse developing their power both physically and symbolically in order to survive. Human is motivated by the main thought that they have to overcome inferior feeling and be superior. In other hand, human also a social being and it be, they cannot live without others (Ansbacher, 1964: 23-24). According to Adler, Individual who has or shows his/her superiority complex is a person who fails to conquer and control their inferiority feelings. Instead of hide those inferiority feelings, the person would cover it out with the superiority feeling which probably make him be better, the individual would always try to deny the inferiority feelings. One of the

characteristic of an individual which suffer from superiority complex used to pressing himself really hard to reach or achieve his personal goals (Ansbacher, 1964: 23-24).

This research is focused on discussing superiority complex that occurred in the main character of *The Pursuit of Happyness* novel, Chris Gardner. It is important to study how superiority feelings led Gardner's mental development of a failed person, how superiority complex works not only as bad a kind of behavior, how superiority complex leads Gardner meet a better life, a very-success person. Personality is the way to person which shows the moods, speaking and acting, attitudes, motivation, perceiving, motivations and the style of thinking of its interactions with others. Human usually implements their attitude into two kinds of act; good bad behaviors. Both of them is going to influence the individual's personality. The good behavior is reflected into Gardner's personality in *The Pursuit of Happyness* which has good attitudes, superiority, style of thinking, fictional goals, and motivation to change his life.

This research is taking focus on the Chris Gardner's superiority complex behavior from psychological criticism point of view. By using psychological criticism as the literary approach, the writer is trying to uncover the neurotic behavior of the main character in the novel *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner.

RESEARCH METHODS

Throughout the author intends to examine Chris Gardner's *The Pursuit of Happyness* in the lens of theory of personality by Adler. To do so, the author will brings instances and quotations from key of personalities thinkers in general and collect the data which is focusing the idea toward the significant information that support the idea such as in speeches, actions, thoughts, and attitudes of the character. Then, this step is followed by the observation to view Chris Gardner's superiority complex in Chris Gardner *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

The research problems are seek meaning to show the portrayed of Chris Gardner's superiority complex, what are the causes of superiority complex, and the

impacts of superiority complex toward Chris Gardner's personality. Adler's "The Theory of Personalities" is the major theory to build a way for understanding the superiority complex in Chris, the causes and the impacts of superiority complex toward Chris Gardner's life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Adler been the first psychologist that giving emphasis of the social elements in the psychological development. He believed that every individual was born as a social being. Adler thought that each individual is a social being primarily. Social environments and interaction through the time build individual's unique personality, absolutely not by satisfying biological needs effort. However, sex is an important factor to Freud as determining personality, Adler believes the conscious mind is the core of personality (Feist, 2008: 79).

The physical deficiencies ignite the inferiority feelings. Individual's basic drive is to overcome the inferiority feelings and a consequent dependence on other individuals. The feelings are the root of unity feeling with others or social interest. If individuals cannot face the inferiority feelings, they would become too focused on themselves. As they concern more toward themselves, they would not afford to think of others. The inferiority feelings would cause timid, shy, insecure, cowardly, submissive, and compliant feelings. (Feist, 2008: 72).

Superiority Complex

Superiority complex is a psychological interference where the individual thought that the individual was better in every part in his life from other people. Those thoughts made him feel superior than other people around him. Individuals who are suffering from superiority complex will always creating excuses to cover up their mistakes. Excuses are weak senses of self-worth protection. Individual who give excuses, used to deceive others into believing that they are more superior than they really are. Then usually make a little chatter to avoid the mistakes that they did (Feist, 2007).

The third or fourth time she brought up the issue, I barked backed back, “Don’t you think it’s a little late to ask me to fill out a father application?” “What’s that supposed to mean?” “Maybe you should have asked about my resume before you got pregnant. Because you knew I didn’t have a father of my own!” in a flash, Jackie turned silent and cold (page. 178).

Chris Gardner tries to proclaim his superiority. He doesn’t want being floored by his wife anymore. It also intimidates Jackie’s mentality because Gardner need to fight her back, he wants to be believed by his wife that he can do that role, he can be a good father of their son. Though it might be one of his inferiority, Gardner hides it out by showing his superiority although he had to do excuses. Excuse is kinds of superiority also.

Individuals are aggressive and they should be like that if they want to survive (Friedman & Schustack, 2008:139). Aggressiveness is impossible happening without any trigger. The form could be spoken or physical action. Individuals who are aggressive may threaten bad by other, physically or mentally. Refusing to acknowledge me, she starts down she steps and I run after her and attempt to take her by the hands and turn her toward me. As she pulls away, I grab her both wrists and she pull back again, trying to get away. Upset that I’ve stooped so low, I release my grip and let go, only to watch her fall back into the rosebushes (page. 204).

Refusing to acknowledge me, she starts down she steps and I run after her and attempt to take her by the hands and turn her toward me. As she pulls away, I grab her both wrists and she pulls back again, trying to get away. Upset that I’ve stooped so low, I release my grip and let go, only to watch her fall back into the rosebushes (page. 204).

Individuals who are suffering from superiority complex used to depreciate others, meaning to show their superiority. By doing depreciation, they try to undervalue other’s achievement. There are two methods that used by individuals who suffer from superiority to depreciate others by criticizing and gossiping. There were also morning rides to work that I hitched with my coworker and my friend, Latrell Hammond ... a force of nature, Latrell has a gift as one of the fastest-

talking, most scandalous women I'd ever seen in my life, with ability to sell you anything -including your own shoes that you had on your feet at the time (page. 165).

Chris also depreciating Latrell directly, he spoke directly to Latrell and showed that he does not like the circumstance around him when he we in the car with Latrell. As a best friend, he is not supposed to be that. Although Latrell is and outrageous person, he supposed to show a little respect because he can take advantages from Latrell. It all because Chris feels more superior than Latrell. The reason Chris feels more superior than Latrell is because Latrell is Gardner's coworker.

Factors of Chris Gardner's Superiority Complex.

According to Adler, distorted psychology would end up with superiority complex (1930). All human are born-blessed with inferior bodies, small and weak. These deficiencies trigger feelings of inferiority and it would be the source of human that they all naturally try to search the way to overcome their inferiority feelings. Further, they would push themselves continually in order to overcome their inferiority feelings and obtain the perfectness.

Adler categorized the factors that caused of superiority complex into two parts of groups. The first group is internal factor and the second is external factors. The internal factor is because of superiority complex that came from inside the mind of the individual (Feist, 2007).

Internal Factors

Internal factors of superiority complex also divide into two: overcompensated inferiorities and social interest.

The defense mechanism that mostly used by people is hiding their inferiority feeling and act like they are superior. They usually used it not only to hide their inferiority feeling but also automatically devalue anybody who doesn't threat them just like they were superior. But this way were strong enough to make the people believe that the individuals are superior enough.

The first time this happened I steamed. The second time I confronted my boss. "Let me see if I got this right? They're basically buying the stock in Commonwealth Edison, correct? To get the dividend yield, the income, it's not going to change based on who gets the commission. Same stock, same company. But they wanted someone with a little experience? He gets the commission that I set up?" (page. 226)

From the sentences above we could see that Chris Gardner try to shows his superiority to the branch manager. Because he doesn't want the injustice came upon him anymore. He felt that he was rigged by his boss, he was the one who set up the job finished the job but the one who gets the commission was his mate who has a little experienced than him. He want that injustice did it again although he knows that confronted the boss is kind of bad action. But, by showing his superiority would make the boss put a little respect to him and would not doing that thing anymore.

External Factors

Adler believed that humans are very social. The reason of someone to straight in a way with superiority is not only as the desire of themselves but also as part of their society. He (Adler) looked between individual and communities closely related, so people have to make a corporative work and together to make a better society. Individuals who have small social interest are used to have small empathy toward others because they only care about themselves. Adler states that social interest protects the individual from feeling inferior, giving healthier attitude, and makes a better cooperation to the individual (Crandall & Putman, 1980). Adler said that small social interest makes the individual come up into superiority complex (Feist, 2007).

Christopher furrows his brow, as if trying to understand, gurgling unintelligibly. I explain, "I can't let nobody take you from me." He understands, I think, by the way he squints his eyes in recognition. Or maybe he's exhausted and needs to sleep. In any case, there's only one truth that matters: he is my son and I love him, and I'm never going to leave him, no matter the cost. (page. 182)

Chris wants to prove his son that he is really love her son, and nobody can take his son from him. He wants to be a real role model for his son, Christopher. Though he

had bad relation with Jackie, Gardner keeps a lot of socializing with others to keep and develop his business as medical devices salesman. Despite of the fact said that Chris Gardner has good social interest, he is still facing the superiority that he has to fight with. That social interest might bring him new responsibilities that he should be a success father for his son, he also should be get the job that gives him a new hope, a stockbroker. All the responsibilities that he should keep are going to haunt him around to get it.

Adler said that the other factor that caused superiority is External factors. The external factors that caused superiority complex are absolutely come from other people around them. Bad or wrong treatment from other people Individuals who have pampered by his parents would have a strong desire to preserve the pampered style that given by their parents. Because of the pampered of their parents, the individuals would like to assume that other individuals have to treat them just like what their parents did, such as overprotecting and satisfying them as well. People that been pampered by his parents would see the world with narrow perspective and believe that they must be first and obeyed in everything (Adler, 1969).

With a big smile on my face, even though I had no bank, I started to turn and strut off, one dollar richer, with Ophelia's daddy agreeing to be my daddy too, when I was met by Freddie's scowl as he bellowed, out of nowhere, "Well, I ain't your goddamned daddy, and you ain't getting shit from me!" (page. 33-34).

Chris Gardner was undergoing his childhood with almost no pampered by his parents. He got a lot of negative remarks from his stepfather, Freddie. Chris got lot of rejection from him while he was child.

Individual who live unloved, unwanted, and mistreated would live in the little bit lack of social interest during childhood. Those treatments cause individual have a little confidence or distrust to other. Consequently, they would have a strong inferiority feeling which is going to lead into superiority complex (Adler, 1959).

Later on in my adolescence there was one occasion when I pressed her about just who my father was and why he wasn't in my life. Moms gave me one of her searing looks, the kind that got me be quiet real fast. "But ..." I tried to protest. She

shook her head no, unwilling to open up. "Why?" "Well, because the past is the past," Mom said firmly. Seeing my frustration, she sighed but still insisted, "Ain't nothing you can do about it." She put a stop to my questions, wistfully remarking, "Things happen." And that was all there was to it. Even as my question continued, while waiting for clarification to arrive of its own accord, I went back to my job of trying to be as happy as possible—not a difficult assignment at first. (page. 22)

Chris Gardner's father is the greatest cause of superiority complex that suffered by him. He cannot find a warm affection from his father and got bad treatment from his stepfather, he could not establish a good relationship between father and son in his childhood moment. It brings inferiority that transform into superiority that later he has to be a good father for his son. Chris Gardner promises that he would let his son know who he was and never disappear from his son's life.

The Impacts of Superiority Complex Toward Chris Gardner's Personality

Adler stated that individual who are suffering from superiority complex, are individual who have abnormal psychological development conditions. Mostly, they are developing in anti-social conditions or maladjustment. Individuals who are suffering from superiority complex also develop hallmark their behavior. They try to set such as unrealistic goals and keep in line to reach it with their style of life (1956: 39)

Individuals who are suffering from superiority behavior used to set very high goals that might be cannot achieve, it near unrealistic goals or fictional goals, but the individuals believe that they can achieve that fictional goals and be more superior in people's sight. Chris Gardner has several fictional goals, such as he wants to be a good stockbroker after he saw a red-Ferrari man who work as a stockbroker.

Just then, after being momentarily blinded by the sun's glare, I see the red Ferrari 308 circling the parking lot. The owner of the car, dressed in that perfectly tailored suit, who is the beneficiary of my parking spot after he answers my question—"What do you do?" and "How do you do that?" —is a gentleman by name of Bob Bridges, a stockbroker with Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette, who commands a salary

of \$80,000 a month! With total sincerity, I announce, “I can do that.” Just for emphasis, I add, “Yep, I can do that. And you know what? I want to do that!” (page. 194-196).

Chris Gardner stunned for a while when he saw Mr. Bob Bridges down from his car. He curious how could Mr. Bridges did that. He surely wants to be like him, obtained \$80,000 in a month, wearing perfect-tailor suit, and living classy. Chris really wants to be stockbroker as Mr. Bridges did, after he got the explanation which is given by Mr. Bridges, he thought that he could do that. Chris Gardner built his fictional goal as stockbroker only after he saw Mr. Bridges, he also only got little information about how stockbroker works. As a result, he surely wants to be a stockbroker as well and believe that he can do it.

Because of their high passionate to achieve their fictional goals, it leads into the second behavior which is being dogmatic (Feist, 2007: 35). Individuals which have fictional goals would develop their dogmatic behavior to achieve their goals no matter what. They know that they goals is very hard to achieve, they create their own dogma that really difficult to follow. They set their fictional goals because in the deepest heart they want to compensate their inferiority feelings.

The voice made me angry and made me fight harder. Who did I think I was? I was Chris Gardner, father of a son who deserved better than what my daddy could do for me, son of Bettye Jean Gardner, who said that if I wanted to win, I could win. I had to win, however I was going to do it. Whatever more I had to do, whatever burden I had to carry, I was going to rise up and overcome (page, 247).

Chris Gardner creates his dogmatic behavior because of he has extravagant goals, so he has to achieve it with all of abilities that he had. Although the all goals are hard to be achieved and the way to strive them is kind of difficult, Chris keep creates the dogma because he has to achieve it and makes all the people that he loves proud.

Chris Gardner's Successful Life

Adler said that the personality's core is the way how the individual searching and struggling to achieve the superiority (Friedman&Schustack

2008:137). Every individual has each way that might different with others because every individual has different desires and rate of success itself. The success that achieved by Chris Gardner is not as simply or easy as what people are thinking. In fact, Chris succeeded passed all the obstacles that make his life felt difficult.

It can be seen in the novel that the problems which are coming to his life generate the inferiority feeling in Chris. Adler's concept in inferiority feeling is the disability to solve the problems in his life or to do the responsibility. Refers to Adler's statement, there are so many problems that faced by Chris Gardner which he did not finish it well. It all bring him into inferiority feeling, but Chris did not let the inferiority feeling dominate his life and made him fall down into inferior complex, which is lead him into feeling impossible to achieve the goals no matter how hard he try. It did not happen to him because Chris Gardner fight his inferiority feelings back and not giving up with the condition, he worked really hard and took the opportunities that he had. The reactions that did by Chris Gardner are referred into Adler as aggression drive, such a reaction that counter back his inferiority feelings. The drive built motivation in Chris and up to get the superiority inside him.

All he need is a little trigger to wake up the superiority that live inside him, and a little support from someone he really love. He did everything that must be done great so he can be what he truly wants. Chris believes that if he dared to try everything and find success, superiority will automatically come to him. In developing part, Adler stated that human are social being. One of the main motivations to reach the superiority is social interest. Human always make a connection, participate in the collaboration and place where fit in their personal interest. He really wants to prove his son that his father could be a success person and could be a big inspiration to him. The hope and his lovely son are the triggers or the motivations of Chris Gardner's work hard. Finally, Chris Gardner succeeded to be a great stockbroker and end his financial problems. Chris Gardner succeeded to achieve his superiority complex by passing through all his inferiorities in *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

CONCLUSION

The Pursuit of Happiness indeed tells about hard struggle Chris Gardner's life which is having a strong motivation that accompanied him to achieve the superiority of his life. The motivation comes from some factors that mentioned in Adler's personality theory, such as the attempts of Chris Gardner overcompensate his inferiority feelings, did not fall into his despair of inferiority feelings, but trying to solve the problem and wanted to be a better person for his life and family.

There are some causes of superiority complex behavior that overwrote Chris Gardner. The first is overcompensated inferiority. He could over compensating his inferiority feelings and rise up to be better. He even could not be fallen because the problems that smashed him intensively. He always trying to solve the problem and wanted to be better person for his life and family. The second factor is Chris Gardner's social interest. He had social interest in order to make people who his loved being happy because of him. He wanted to be a success person because of the people around him.

Chris Gardner's personality are Impacted by superiority complex that overwrites him. First, he creates fictional goals almost beyond his capability to achieve it. Those goals are actually made him being stronger. He always wants to achieve it and prove to people that he can achieved the goals which might be impossible achieved to him. He believe that if he wants something, he has to in that line, keep on it and doing right until he can have what he wants before. That passion of achieving the fictional goals brings him into being a person who has dogmatic characteristic. Being dogmatic person means he would do anything to achieve his goals no matter what. Chris knows that his goals might be hard to achieve, then, he create a dogma and set the mindset that he has to achieve his fictional goals in order to makes all the people that he loves proud and happy. Finally he found his succeed life because of what he has done. In the end of the story, Chris Gardner succeed to be a staff in a Dean Witter firm and soon he was been the found of the investment firm Gardner Rich in 1987.

REFERENCES

- _____.1994. Personality and working style predictors of integrative complexity: A study of scientists' thinking about research and teaching. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 67. 474–484.
- _____.1956. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler: A Systematic Presentation in Selections From His Writings* (H. L. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher). New York: Basic Books.
- Adler, A.1917. *Study of Organ Inferiority and Its Psychical Compensation*. New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing.
- Alexander, Paul.1999. *Salinger, a Biography*. Los Angeles: Renaissance Books.
- Ansbacher, H. L .1964. *Alfred Adler: Problems of Neurosis*. New York: Harper 7 Row.
- Apriyansyah, Vegi. 2008. *A Study of Adler's Personality Theory in Chris Gardner's Character in The Pursuit of Happyness Movie*. Brawijaya University.
- Feist & Feist. (7th ed).2007. *Theories of Psychology*. McGraw Hills: McGraw Hills Publishing.
- Feist, G. J., & Gorman, M. E.1998. Psychology of Science: Review and Integration of a Nascent Discipline. *Review of General Psychology*. 2. 3–47.
- Feist, G. J.1993. *A Structural Model of Scientific Eminence*. *Psychological Science*. 4. 366–371.
- Fibriyanti, Veni Masruchah. 2017. *Striving for Superiority Tokoh Keke dalam Novel Surat Kecil Untuk Tuhan*. The State University of Surabaya.
- Gogalniceanu, Razvab Cosmin. 2016. *Memory & Schema of Apperception – Conten, Sense, and A Concept – Process Profile*. ResearchGate.net Publication.
- Kuntjoyo. 2010. *Psikologi Individual*. Ebekunt in Psikologi Trackback.
- Ludlum, Emma. 2015. *A Framework for the Pursuit of Happiness: Personality as It Relates to Subjective Well-being*. Claremont McKenna College: CMC Senior Theses.
- Muccino, Gabriele. 2006. *The Pursuit of Happyness Movie*. Columbia Pictures.
- Mustafalia, Azizah. 2012. *The Need for Hardworking In Order To Be Successful In Gabrielle Muccino's The Pursuit of Happyness: An Individual Psychological Perspective*. Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

Putri, Oktavia Pratomo. 2011. *The American Individualism Reflected in Chris Gardner A Character in The Pursuit of Happyness Movie*. Diponegoro University.

Shekhar, Amit. *Psychology for IAS: Personality. Social Psychological / Interpersonal Approach to personality*. 119-139.

Sindelar, Brigitte and Gabriela Pap Gabriela. 2018. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. Accessed from: <https://docplayer.net/49023588-Individual-psychology-of-alfred-adler-brigitte-sindelar-gabriela-pap-the-individual-psychology-of-alfred-adler.html>, On February 2