



Unmasking P.T. Barnum: A Character Study of the Greatest Showman

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Abstract

This study analyzes the character development of P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* (2017) using Egri's (1960) three-dimensional character theory, physiological, sociological, and psychological, and is supported by Kenny's (1966) narrative coherence framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study examines nine selected scenes that represent the beginning, middle, and end of the film. The analysis is conducted in a multimodal manner, integrating verbal elements (dialogue, narration) and visual cues (gestures, posture, costumes, facial expressions). Findings indicate that Barnum's character transformation is balanced across three aspects: physiological (33.3%), sociological (33.3%), and psychological (33.4%). His physical appearance evolves from a playful child to a confident showman and finally to a humble family man. Sociologically, his pursuit of social status leads to internal conflict and distancing from his original community. Psychologically, Barnum's ambition and insecurity drive his decisions until he eventually finds emotional resolution. The study demonstrates how Egri's and Kenny's theories can be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of character construction in film. These findings offer theoretical contributions to character and narrative analysis, and practical insights for film studies, media education, and applied linguistics.

Keywords: *characterization, moral value, movie.*

Introduction

In the increasingly complex landscape of multimodal media, film has emerged not only as a source of entertainment but also as a powerful medium for reflecting societal values, identity, and personal experience. Contemporary audiences engage with characters beyond surface-level narratives, interpreting them through broader cultural and ideological frameworks. As Chatman (1978) and Bal (2009) emphasize, characters are central to narrative structure, serving as vehicles for conveying thematic and moral meaning.

Within film studies and applied linguistics, character analysis, particularly in terms of development and transformation, has become an essential area of inquiry. Characters, whether protagonists or supporting roles, drive the narrative arc and reveal underlying tensions related to ambition, morality, identity, and social expectations. Internal and external conflicts within a character often mirror larger social issues, allowing audiences to engage with complex representations of human experience.

Recent developments in linguistics and discourse analysis have expanded approaches to character study. Hall (2014) explores the intersection between character, identity, and power, while Toolan (2016) emphasizes how character portrayal shapes narrative coherence. Applied research has further illustrated how

film characters reflect broader social dynamics. For example, Oktaviani and Wahyuni (2022) and Nasution et al. (2023) argue that cinematic characters often mirror real-world class shifts, ideological tensions, and cultural transformations.

To explore character construction in greater depth, this study employs two complementary theoretical frameworks: Egri's (1960) three-dimensional character model and Kenny's (1966) narrative coherence theory. Egri posits that a well-developed character must integrate physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions, each contributing to the motivations and actions within a story. Kenny, on the other hand, highlights the importance of logical, emotional, and moral continuity across a narrative. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens that captures both the internal complexity of a character and the structural integrity of their narrative journey. While Egri's theory is effective in analyzing static traits, Kenny's model adds depth by situating those traits within a coherent and evolving storyline.

This study applies these theories to *The Greatest Showman* (2017), a musical film inspired by the life of P.T. Barnum. The film portrays Barnum not only as a historical figure but also as a multifaceted character driven by ambition, creativity, insecurity, and personal relationships. His narrative arc, marked by success, downfall, and redemption, offers a rich site for examining character development. Supporting characters such as Charity Barnum and Phillip Carlyle further shape Barnum's evolution, contributing to the overall coherence of his journey.

Previous studies have approached *The Greatest Showman* from a variety of angles. Putra (2025) critiques the film's portrayal of capitalism and emotional labor, while Mulyadi and Astuti (2025) focus on marginalized voices. Gracia (2020) explores masculinity, Imani (2019) examines persistence, and Nurhidayati (2024) applies Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Other studies analyze linguistic features such as politeness (Hartoyo et al., 2019), deixis (Masnun et al., 2025), and emotion (Wibowo S Iskandar, 2025). However, these studies tend to focus on either thematic or linguistic dimensions rather than offering an integrated, multidimensional character analysis.

Some attempts have been made to apply Egri's theory to this film. Juniarta et al. (2024) explore social-linguistic traits but neglect psychological depth, while Rezqiana et al. (2023) analyze Barnum's dialogue and lyrics through Egri's lens without addressing narrative progression or the influence of supporting characters. Restiani and Erni (2025) discuss identity in biographical films but focus more on genre than character interiority. Thus, there remains a significant gap in fully synthesizing Barnum's character through an integrated approach that combines both Egri's character dimensions and Kenny's coherence framework.

Given this gap, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How is P.T. Barnum's character constructed physiologically, sociologically, and psychologically in *The Greatest Showman*?
2. How does the narrative reflect Barnum's logical, emotional, and moral development?
3. How do supporting characters contribute to the coherence of Barnum's character arc?

By combining visual and verbal analysis from selected scenes, this study contributes to broader discussions in media studies and narrative theory on how biographical films construct identity through multimodal storytelling. Furthermore, future research could explore comparative analyses of historical figures in musical biopics or examine audience perceptions of character transformation, expanding the scope of character studies in contemporary cinema.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a character analysis approach to examine how P.T. Barnum is constructed physiologically, sociologically, and psychologically using Egri's (1960) three-dimensional theory, and how narrative coherence is reflected through Kenny's (1966) framework. The use of both theories enables a comprehensive understanding of Barnum's internal characteristics and their development across the film's narrative structure. Egri's model provides a systematic lens for identifying character traits, while Kenny's framework ensures that these traits are situated within a coherent, logical, emotional, and moral storyline.

This approach was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of both verbal and nonverbal elements through close observation of visuals, dialogue, body movement, and narrative development. The primary object of analysis is *The Greatest Showman* (2017), directed by Michael Gracey. The film offers rich multimodal data through its musical numbers, visual storytelling, and dramatic character arcs.

The main data source consists of nine key scenes selected based on the following criteria: (1) the presence of significant character change in behavior, expression, or decision-making; (2) explicit representation of one or more of Egri's dimensions; and (3) relevance to the overall narrative arc, including exposition,

rising action, climax, and resolution. These scenes were identified through repeated viewing of the film to ensure a comprehensive representation of Barnum's character transformation. The data include both verbal elements (dialogue, monologue) and nonverbal cues such as facial expression, body gesture, costume, and interactions with other characters.

Data collection involved repeated viewings and detailed scene breakdowns. Dialogues were transcribed verbatim, while visual components such as gestures and mise-en-scene were documented using structured observation techniques. The data were then categorized based on Egri's dimensions and interpreted alongside Kenny's framework of narrative coherence, which considers consistency across logical, emotional, and moral trajectories.

The coding process was conducted by constructing a categorical matrix informed by both theoretical frameworks. Data from each scene was labeled and grouped accordingly. To ensure interpretive reliability, inter-rater validation was employed by involving a second analyst who independently reviewed the codes. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. Additionally, methodological triangulation was applied by cross-referencing findings with theoretical constructs and prior research on character and narrative analysis.

The integration of verbal and visual data was conducted in parallel, aligning. Spoken dialogue and narrative sequencing with nonverbal aspects such as gesture, spatial positioning, and cinematic techniques. This multimodal approach aligns with current trends in film and media studies that emphasize the importance of multiple semiotic resources in constructing character meaning and audience interpretation. While Egri's model offers a clear categorization of character traits, it is limited in addressing how these traits evolve across a narrative arc. Kenny's coherence theory complements this by foregrounding character progression, though it, too, requires interpretive flexibility when applied to film, particularly in scenes dominated by visual storytelling. The combined application of these frameworks reflects the interdisciplinary direction of contemporary character studies, balancing literary narrative theory with cinematic analysis.

Although the film is publicly accessible, ethical considerations were observed by maintaining academic integrity, properly citing all sources, and refraining from data manipulation. All references were managed using the Mendeley application to ensure citation accuracy and a well-organized bibliography.

This study focuses exclusively on character construction. Cinematographic techniques, musical composition, or editing styles are beyond the scope of this analysis to maintain focus and clarity. The structured and theory-driven methodology used here contributes to current approaches in narrative and character analysis, offering a potential reference model for future research that seeks to integrate multimodal methods with literary-based character theories.

Results

Egri's Three-Dimensional Character Analysis

The character of P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* is analyzed using Egri's (1960) three-dimensional character framework, which includes physiological, sociological, and psychological aspects. Egri argues that character is best revealed through actions rather than words, a principle well suited to film analysis, where visual cues, body language, costumes, and interactions often communicate more than dialogue alone.

This study identifies nine key scenes from the beginning, middle, and end of the film. Each scene was chosen through purposive sampling based on three criteria:

(1) It reflects a notable shift or reinforcement in Barnum's character, (2) it includes both verbal and nonverbal indicators, and (3) it contributes meaningfully to his character arc. The scenes are evenly distributed across Egri's three dimensions, with three scenes representing each category. This breakdown is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Types of Character Development of P.T. Barnum Based on Egri's Three Dimensions

Egri's Dimension	Frequency	Percentage
Physiological	3	33.3%
Sociological	3	33.3%
Psychological	3	33.4%
Total	9	100%

While this even distribution might initially seem formulaic, it reflects a structured analytical strategy rather than an artificial balance. Each scene was Coded using specific indicators derived from Egri's framework. Physiological traits included posture, facial expression, and costume design. Sociological indicators reflected Barnum's professional status, class aspirations, and social interactions. Psychological aspects focused on internal motivations, emotional expressions, and moral dilemmas.

Through a detailed coding process, 27 indicators were identified, 9 from each dimension. For example, Barnum's confident body language in Scene 1 illustrates physiological traits, his desire to elevate his social class in Scene 4 highlights sociological aspects, and his emotional vulnerability in Scene 9 represents psychological development. The coding was cross-validated by an independent coder, yielding an inter-rater agreement of 87.5%, thereby increasing the credibility of the classification.

Patterns also emerged across the film's narrative arc:

- Early scenes (1–3): Physiological traits dominate, portraying Barnum's outward confidence and ambition through performance, costumes, and gestures.
- Middle scenes (4–6): Sociological development becomes more prominent as Barnum seeks acceptance in elite circles and navigates social class.

- Final scenes (7–9): Psychological traits take center stage, as Barnum experiences regret, introspection, and ultimately personal growth.

Notably, many scenes reflect interdimensional overlap, supporting Egri's claim that character is holistic. For instance, in Scene 5, Barnum's sociological ambition, hosting upper-class guests, is driven by an internal psychological need for validation and expressed physiologically through formal posture and extravagant attire. These overlapping traits suggest that character development in film often resists strict categorization.

While Egri's framework provides a useful foundation for analyzing character complexity, it also presents limitations. The clear-cut divisions between dimensions may not fully capture the fluid, intersecting nature of character evolution in film. In this regard, Kenny's (1966) narrative theory offers an important complement. According to Kenny, a coherent narrative requires characters to undergo believable and meaningful change. Barnum's arc, as captured through Egri's dimensions, aligns with Kenny's principle of narrative coherence, where transformation unfolds in ways that are emotionally and logically consistent with the story's trajectory.

These findings also resonate with broader debates in film studies, especially in discussions of character construction in biographical musical films. Barnum's evolution embodies themes of ambition, identity, and social performance, showing how multimodal elements, such as gesture, space, and costume, can shape a character's journey beyond the written script.

Future research could expand this approach by comparing Barnum to other figures in musical or biographical cinema or by exploring how Egri's framework applies to ensemble casts or non-linear storytelling. Additionally, integrating multimodal analysis with narrative theories like Kenny's may offer a more nuanced approach to understanding character coherence in contemporary cinema.

Discussion

Physiological Aspects

The Physiological Aspects Egri (1960) states that a character's physical attributes, such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, and clothing, often reflect their inner emotions. This is particularly relevant in films, where visual performance supports character development. In *The Greatest Showman*, Barnum's physical evolution reflects psychological changes throughout his journey. By comparing three key moments, his childhood, his peak as a showman, and his reconciliation, we can see how his body language, costume, and mise-en-scene embody his internal transformation.

(Data 1)

Beginning of the scene (00:06:13–00:06:38): Little Barnum is seen running barefoot, eagerly showing a shadow lantern to Charity. His thin, agile frame and lively movements reflect the innocence and creativity of a child filled with dreams.



Figure 1. Barnum is trying to project a shadow with a lantern. His focused gaze and outstretched arms exemplify deictic movements. The silhouette in the background depicts iconic movements.

Source: The Greatest Showman (2017), 00:06:30

Barnum's animated hand gestures, forming shadows and pointing to the wall, are more than child's play. These iconic and deictic movements (McNeill, 1992) suggest an imaginative mind already experimenting with storytelling. Although he is silent, his gestures convey emotional expression, illustrating a psychological state shaped by dreams and aspirations. His patchwork clothes and barefoot appearance, contrasted with Charity's environment, emphasize social disparity. According to Kendon (2004), gestures are shaped by personal and cultural background. Here, physical elements not only reveal Barnum's creativity but also foreshadow his lifelong desire to transcend class boundaries.

(Data 2)

Middle of the scene (00:27:39–00:28:16): Barnum appears as the ringmaster in a grand performance. Dressed in a red-tailed coat and top hat, he moves confidently under bright stage lights, his body language commanding attention.



Figure 2. Barnum is in the spotlight in full costume, embodying authority through posture and movement.

Source: The Greatest Showman (2017), 00:28:15

This scene marks a visual and emotional transformation. Barnum's upright posture, broad gestures, and assertive walk, combined with the spectacle of lights and music, symbolize power and control. According to Egri (1960), such external

changes indicate internal development. Here, Barnum's appearance is not only a performance but a psychological shield, masking lingering insecurity. The mise-en-scene amplifies his ambition: the stage becomes a space of validation, the costume a symbol of his constructed identity. While visually triumphant, this physical expression subtly reveals a deeper emotional conflict between self-confidence and the need for external approval.

(Data 3)

End scene (01:29:00–01:30:40): Barnum meets Charity on a quiet beach. Dressed in simple clothes and barefoot again, his movements are slow, calm, and emotionally sincere.



Figure 3. Barnum stood barefoot in front of his wife with an open posture and calm footsteps.

Source: The Greatest Showman (2017), 01:29:33

In contrast to the earlier spectacle, this moment is minimalist and emotionally grounded. Barnum's relaxed posture, lowered gaze, and gentle steps reveal emotional honesty and vulnerability. His return to modest attire visually signals a psychological shift, from the need to impress to the desire for genuine connection. The beach setting, natural lighting, and absence of music create a mise-en-scene of inner peace and reconciliation. Egri (1960) asserts that true character development is shown when inner conflict gives way to emotional clarity. This scene fulfills that principle, showing Barnum at his most authentic.

Across these three scenes, Barnum's physical traits evolve alongside his psychological state. His youthful excitement (Data 1), performative confidence (Data 2), and quiet sincerity (Data 3) represent distinct stages of emotional development. Costumes and mise-en-scene, often underappreciated in character studies, function as visual metaphors for his inner journey. This analysis illustrates that in multimodal storytelling, external expressions are deeply intertwined with internal growth, reinforcing Egri's argument that character is revealed through action, not explanation.

Sociological Aspects

The Sociological Aspects Egri (1960) explained that the sociological aspect includes a person's social background, such as class, education, work, and family environment. According to him, humans are the result of their environment. In Barnum's case, his experience as the son of a poor tailor shaped his sensitivity to class inequality and his desire to gain respect from the elite. This desire, however, would later create a moral dilemma: to rise socially, he distances himself from the very people he once uplifted. This tension between aspiration and authenticity is at the heart of his sociological transformation.

(Data 4)

Beginning scene from (00:03:10–00:04:40): Little Phineas Taylor Barnum, the son of a tailor, follows his father to Charity's wealthy family home. This scene marks Barnum's first exposure to stark class disparity. Surrounded by ornate furniture and cold stares, he begins to realize how far removed his world is from that of the upper class. Charity's father looks down on Barnum with visible disdain. Barnum's body language, lowered head, clasped hands, and stiff posture reflect discomfort and awareness of his lower social standing.

Barnum's patchwork clothes and bare feet highlight his socioeconomic status. These visual contrasts exemplify Egri's idea that environment mold's identity. This formative experience ignites Barnum's lifelong ambition to gain social acceptance, even if it means conforming to the values of those who once belittled him. The mise-en-scene, large rooms, expensive décor, and color grading, visually reinforce the wealth gap and lay the foundation for Barnum's future internal conflict.

(Data 5)

Middle scene (00:55:50–00:56:15): In this pivotal moment, Barnum shuts the door on his circus performers during a press event, effectively hiding them from elite guests.



Figure 4. Barnum distanced himself from his circus performers and preferred to stand among the elite.

Source: *The Greatest Showman* (2017), 00:56:06

This act of exclusion is loaded with meaning. Barnum, once a champion of inclusivity, now succumbs to social pressure. He aligns himself with the upper class by rejecting those with unconventional appearances, people who represent the diversity he once celebrated. This reflects Egri's notion that social environment

influences behavior, but also echoes Goffman's (1956) theory of "public self-appearance," where individuals curate their image to suit the audience.

The mise-en-scene heightens this social divide. Barnum is spotlighted in the center of attention, standing tall and confident, while his performers linger in shadow, visually marginalized. This visual storytelling mirrors Barnum's internal conflict between integrity and ambition. It also offers a broader commentary on performative acceptance: inclusion is welcome as long as it is profitable or socially acceptable.

Artistically, this moment may sacrifice some historical accuracy, but it emphasizes a recurring theme in 19th-century America: the cost of upward mobility. Barnum becomes part of a system that once rejected him, reinforcing the cyclical nature of class struggle.

(Data 6)

End scene from (01:34:10–01:36:56): At the film's conclusion, Barnum passes leadership of the circus to Phillip Carlyle and joins his family to watch his daughter perform.



Figure 5. Barnum sat leaning back, relaxed with Charity among the upscale audience, looking calm and happy, watching his daughter perform on stage.

Source: *The Greatest Showman* (2017), 01:36:40

This quiet, unassuming moment marks a shift in Barnum's social values. Once desperate for attention and recognition, he now finds meaning in being a father and a husband. His seating among the upper-class audience, without any theatrical display, illustrates that he no longer feels the need to prove his worth. The mise-en-scene here is minimalist: soft lighting, balanced framing, and naturalistic costume design convey tranquility and fulfillment.

This shift serves as social commentary on the hollowness of fame and the richness of personal connection. It also suggests a rejection of superficial status markers in favor of authentic relationships. While the historical Barnum may not have reached this exact emotional resolution, the film uses artistic interpretation to construct a redemptive arc. This reflects a common cinematic technique: reimagining real figures to highlight universal themes of identity, class, and redemption.

In summary, Barnum's sociological journey illustrates the pressures and contradictions of social mobility. From exclusion to inclusion and back again, his choices are shaped by the class structures around him. The film's mise-en-scene, costuming, and character dynamics offer layered insights into how individuals navigate societal expectations, at times reinforcing and at times resisting them.

Psychological Aspects

The Psychological Aspects Egri (1960) emphasized that the psychological dimension is essential in understanding character because every action stems from motivation. In Barnum's case, this psychological journey can be seen in how internal conflicts, emotional needs, and ambitions shape his decisions. From childhood to adulthood, his imagination, insecurity, and longing for recognition evolve, ultimately guiding him toward a more grounded understanding of happiness. These developments align with Egri's belief that character change arises from emotional transformation, and with Kenny's (1966) concept of narrative coherence, which suggests that meaningful character arcs involve psychological continuity.

(Data 7)

Beginning of the scene from (00:05:10–00:11:13): Barnum's psychological depth is first revealed during the song "A Million Dreams." He walks with Charity through the ruins of an old train yard, imagining a vibrant, hopeful world beyond the bleak setting. His body movements are expressive, his gestures expansive, and the song lyrics convey a longing for a better life.

This scene illustrates what Egri (1960) terms the foundation of character: the interplay between emotional desires and personal motivation. Barnum's imagination becomes a survival mechanism in response to poverty and social marginalization. His gestures, creating imaginary circuses and skylines, mirror iconic movements (Kendon, 2004), symbolizing the vividness of his internal world. These dreams are not passive wishes but psychological coping strategies rooted in resilience and hope.

The lyrics "I close my eyes and I can see, a world that's waiting up for me" express his yearning for validation and belonging. Kenny's narrative theory complements this reading, showing how Barnum's character arc begins with a coherent internal drive: to transform reality into something magical. Charity's supportive presence reinforces this fantasy, laying emotional groundwork for his adult relationships and ambitions.

(Data 8)

Middle (01:13:10–01:14:30): Later in the film, during Jenny Lind's performance, the camera focuses on Barnum's unresponsive demeanor amidst the audience's excitement. While others cheer, he remains silent, his expression blank, and his posture slouched, clear signs of emotional detachment.



Figure 6. Barnum's expression during Jenny Lind's performance reveals emotional isolation.
Source: *The Greatest Showman* (2017), 01:14:10

This moment contrasts sharply with earlier scenes of enthusiasm, exposing a deeper psychological conflict. Despite achieving social success and admiration, Barnum experiences an emotional void. According to Egri (1960), this silence reflects unresolved internal tension. The applause surrounding him only highlights his loneliness and disillusionment.

Visually, the mise-en-scene intensifies the contrast: Jenny stands in a radiant spotlight while Barnum sits in dim shadows. This setting underscores the dissonance between external achievement and internal satisfaction. Kenny's theory of narrative coherence is evident here, as Barnum's story reaches a point of psychological dissonance; his life trajectory no longer aligns with his inner needs. This emotional disconnect becomes a pivot toward personal growth.

(Date 9)

End scene from (01:29:00–01:30:30): In a serene closing moment, Barnum stands barefoot with Charity on a quiet beach and says, "I wanted to be more than I was." This brief but profound statement reveals emotional vulnerability and signals psychological resolution.



Figure 7. Barnum delivers a reflective sentence in front of Charity on the beach, showing an emotional honesty that she has rarely displayed before.

Source: *The Greatest Showman* (2017), 01:29:45

This line captures Barnum's self-awareness and acknowledgment of his earlier flaws. Egri (1960) argues that authentic change requires confronting one's weaknesses, and this moment illustrates that transformation. His relaxed posture,

gentle tone, and lack of theatricality contrast with his earlier flamboyant persona.

Unlike the grand spectacles that defined much of his journey, this scene is grounded in intimacy and truth. Kenny's concept of narrative coherence supports

This conclusion: Barnum's story comes full circle, aligning his actions with a more stable and authentic self-concept. His return to family and emotional honesty indicates psychological closure.

Overall, the psychological development of Barnum demonstrates a clear trajectory: from an imaginative child, to an ambitious performer to a reflective individual. His journey is not only external but deeply internal, shaped by emotional highs and lows, inner conflicts, and a desire for connection. This dimension enriches the character study and affirms the value of combining Egri's character theory with Kenny's narrative framework to reveal complex human behavior.

This study reveals that the character of P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* is developed through a complex interplay of physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions. These three aspects, though analyzed separately, are deeply interconnected. Barnum's changing body language (physiological) is closely tied to his shifting social status (sociological), which in turn is rooted in deep internal struggles and desires (psychological). For instance, his grand gestures as a showman reflect not only confidence but also a sociological aspiration to rise in class, and a psychological need for validation. This triangulation affirms Egri's view that character is holistic and dynamic.

When viewed through Kenny's (1966) theory of narrative coherence, Barnum's development also maintains emotional, logical, and moral consistency. His journey from a dreamer to a performer and finally to a reflective family man demonstrates a complete arc, consistent with the internal motivations first introduced in his childhood. Each turning point aligns with Kenny's criteria for coherent storytelling: psychological conflict, ethical turning points, and emotional resolution.

Compared to previous character studies on the same film (e.g., Juniarta et al., 2024; Rezqiana et al., 2023), this study offers a more integrative approach by including nonverbal data such as gesture, facial expression, and mise-en-scene. While earlier works emphasize dialogue and lyrics, this research expands the scope by connecting bodily performance to social context and emotional transformation. This method not only complements past findings but also addresses their gaps, particularly the lack of narrative integration and internal conflict depth.

However, this study is not without limitations. Egri's dimensional model, while helpful for categorizing character traits, tends to compartmentalize aspects that in film often overlap. Similarly, Kenny's theory was originally designed for short stories and requires adaptation when applied to multimodal visual narratives like film. Some subjective interpretation is inevitable, especially when decoding nonverbal cues such as gesture or tone. Furthermore, the analysis centers on one character and one film, limiting generalizability.

Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to broader discussions in film studies, especially regarding biographical films. *The Greatest Showman*, while not strictly biographically accurate, uses character development to convey universal themes, ambition, self-worth, and redemption. This suggests that biographical films often reframe historical truth for emotional coherence, inviting audiences to connect with the character's internal journey rather than strict facts.

For scholars and educators, this analysis demonstrates how a multimodal, theory-integrated approach can offer richer insights into character construction. Future research could apply this method to other biographical or musical films, compare multiple characters within the same narrative, or explore audience interpretations of psychological growth. This would further advance our understanding of how film narratives shape, and are shaped by, human emotion and social identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Egri's three-dimensional character theory and Kenny's narrative coherence model remain highly relevant for analyzing character development in modern cinema. By examining P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*, the research highlights how physical gestures, visual settings, and even silence contribute meaningfully to character construction, beyond spoken dialogue. This affirms the value of a multimodal approach in character analysis.

The integration of physiological, sociological, and psychological aspects offers a detailed view of Barnum's transformation. His evolving posture, social interactions, and emotional growth reveal how internal motivations and external pressures shape complex characters. This study thus contributes not only to film narrative analysis but also to applied linguistics by modeling how meaning is constructed through visual-verbal interplay.

Practically, this approach can be applied in classroom contexts, particularly in media literacy, film studies, or discourse analysis courses. Teachers and students can use the multimodal character grid developed in this study to analyze other films, enabling a deeper understanding of how visual cues align with narrative arcs. It also provides a framework for scriptwriters, content creators, and curriculum developers to examine character consistency and coherence in storytelling.

Future research could expand this method to different genres, such as historical dramas or animated features, to examine whether similar multimodal patterns apply. Furthermore, comparative analysis of multiple characters or films could enhance theoretical development in character studies and contribute to interdisciplinary research in language, media, and education.

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