

MANIFESTATIONS OF PATIENCE IN WINSTON GROOM'S *FORREST GUMP*: A LITERARY PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY BASED ON SZUTTA'S MODEL

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Abstract

This study examines the manifestation of patience as a moral virtue in Winston Groom's novel *Forrest Gump* through Szutta's (2020) theoretical framework of patience competence. Using qualitative methodology with descriptive analysis, this research investigates how the protagonist exemplifies patience through two core characteristics: perseverance and sincerity. The findings reveal that Forrest's perseverance manifests as sustained determination in overcoming life challenges, particularly evidenced in his shrimp business venture where he persists despite initial failures. Simultaneously, his sincerity appears through selfless actions and unconditional assistance without expectation of reward. The analysis demonstrates that patience in *Forrest Gump* represents not passive endurance but active competence - a strategic virtue enabling him to navigate bullying, personal loss, and social prejudice while maintaining moral integrity. The integration of perseverance and sincerity transforms his perceived intellectual limitations into extraordinary resilience, positioning patience as a transformative force in human experience. This study contributes to literary psychology by illustrating how virtue theory can illuminate character development while affirming literature's capacity to reflect complex psychological realities.

Keywords: *Patience; perseverance; sincerity; Szutta's model*

1. Introduction

Literature serves as a profound reflection of human experience, capturing the breadth of empirical and supernatural realities (Saryono, 2009). It is an expression of personality, encompassing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs through the concrete medium of language (Sumardjo & Saini, 1997). As Pardi et al (2021) affirms in his analysis of literary works, "novels not only reflect social realities but also actively construct cultural meaning through character representation." This positions literary works as a valuable lens through which to examine and comment on the complexities of human life, including fundamental psychological virtues such as patience. This study focuses on Winston Groom's 1986 novel, *Forrest Gump*, to explore the manifestation of patience in its protagonist.

The novel chronicles the life of Forrest Gump, a man perpetually labeled as an idiot by society. His journey resonates with what Pardi et al (2024, p.27) identifies in narratives as “the individual’s struggle against societal constraints while maintaining cultural virtues.” Raised solely by his mother after his father’s death, Forrest’s life represents a series of extraordinary events driven by his unique perspective and singular talents, including his enduring yet often unrequited love for Jenny Curran, his service in the Vietnam War, the loss of his mother, and his eventual rise to fame. Throughout these trials and triumphs, the protagonist demonstrates a remarkable and consistent quality of patience, which forms the central theme of this research. The concept of patience is defined as a calmness, self-control, and the willingness to tolerate delay - qualities that Pardi (2025, p.33) notes are essential in “navigating life’s transitions and maintaining cultural identity amid challenges.”

The theoretical framework for this analysis is drawn from the psychological concept of “patience competence” developed by El Hafiz, Al Maududi, & Amalina (2015). This framework posits patience not merely as a passive state, but as an active competence - an individual’s ability to consciously restrain emotions, thoughts, words, and behavior. For such restraint to qualify as patience competence, it must be an active and deliberate effort, serve as an initial response to a situation, be driven by a good intention, and be conducted within societal or moral rules. Research has substantiated the significant role of this competence in positive psychological outcomes. Studies indicate that patience competence enhances emotional maturity in adolescents and improves their ability to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, it acts as a critical moderator; for instance, high religiosity alone may not effectively resolve conflicts if it is not complemented by a strong competence for patience. This establishes patience as a vital trait of self-control and delayed gratification, applicable in managing stress, anger, and various life challenges.

The portrayal of such a positive and beneficial virtue in a literary character like Forrest Gump is highly relevant. His journey provides a rich narrative to explore how patience is characterized and manifested in the face of adversity, social prejudice, and personal loss. As demonstrated in Pardi et al’s (2024) analysis of literary texts, “character development often mirrors societal values and psychological resilience in facing life’s challenges”. Analyzing this portrayal bridges literary study with psychological insight, demonstrating how literature can vividly illustrate concepts that are empirically studied in psychology. Therefore, this study aims to identify the characteristics of patience exhibited by Forrest Gump and to analyze the portrayal of this patience throughout the narrative of the novel. By examining Forrest Gump through the lens of patience competence, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how virtuous behavior is narratively constructed and its significance to the human experience as reflected in literature.

However, few studies have analyzed the portrayal of patience in modern fiction using Szutta’s (2020) virtue ethics framework. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how patience as a virtue competence is portrayed and develops throughout the narrative in the novel *Forrest Gump*, and to understand its role and impact on the protagonist's life journey.

By detailing the manifestations of *Forrest Gump*'s patience through a systematic theoretical framework, this research is expected to contribute to literary psychological studies by demonstrating how virtue ethics theory can be applied to examine character

development in depth, while affirming literature's capacity to reflect complex psychological realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Conceptual Foundation of Patience

Patience is widely recognized as a foundational virtue integral to the human experience, intersecting with domains of faith, free will, life attitudes, humility, and the endurance of suffering (Maxwell, 1979). Its relevance is considered timeless, extending beyond immediate mortal concerns. In a more secular, psychological context, patience is categorized among the cardinal virtues of willpower – alongside self-control, persistence, moderation, and diligence – that empower individuals to overcome internal and external obstacles to achieve their goals (Steutel, 1999; Szutta, 2020).

A modern and nuanced understanding of patience moves beyond passive waiting. As Szutta (2020) argues, a patient person is not one who waits indefinitely or allows exploitation, but rather one who possesses the wisdom to discern the optimal balance between impulsive action and protracted delay. This positions patience as a component of a balanced life, closely linked to self-regulation and prudent decision-making. Grossman (2015) further emphasizes that patience is not cultivated in isolation but must be practiced alongside other pro-social behaviors like kindness, acceptance, and tolerance. This combination fosters trustworthiness, a key social asset, as patience allows individuals to forgo immediate gratification for the sake of cooperative, long-term relationships (Anomaly, 2017; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Supporting this, neuroscientific and behavioral studies, such as that by Liberman et al. (2007), suggest that having sufficient time to deliberate, a state afforded by patience, increases the likelihood of adhering to moral standards, as opposed to decisions driven by rash, emotional reactions.

The profound personal significance of patience is encapsulated by Ashton (1973), who describes it as a “great achievement” and a “great strength.” However, its moral impact is not inherently positive. Szutta (2020) crucially notes that the virtues of willpower, including patience and perseverance, are morally ambivalent; their value is determined by the character traits they serve. When coupled with compassion, kindness, and justice, they contribute to great good. Conversely, when harnessed by jealousy, greed, or selfishness, the same persistent patience can be employed to achieve malevolent ends.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Szutta’s Model of Patience

This study adopts the theoretical model of patience proposed by Szutta (2020) as its primary framework. The researcher argues that this model’s structured breakdown of patience into core characteristics provides a robust and applicable tool for literary character analysis. While other theories will be incorporated to support the analysis, Szutta’s conceptualization forms the foundational grant theory. According to Szutta (2020), the essential characteristics of patience are perseverance and sincerity.

2.2.1 Perseverance

Perseverance is defined as the continuous and determined effort to achieve a goal despite difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. It is the quality of persisting in a course of action through repeated efforts and methods until success is attained. In the context of patience, perseverance provides the active, enduring component. It is what

allows an individual to remain steadfast in the face of adversity. A perseverant person does not succumb to boredom or despair; instead, they exhibit resilience, enabling them to navigate challenging times with greater care and wisdom. This characteristic aligns with the concept of "grit," defined by Duckworth et al. (2007) as passion and perseverance for long-term goals, which is a significant predictor of success.

2.2.2 Sincerity

In Szutta's (2020) framework, sincerity pertains to the internal attitude and motivation behind patient endurance. It can be understood as a state of acceptance and wholehearted willingness. This involves accepting circumstances without unnecessary resistance, which in turn empowers the individual and conserves emotional energy that would otherwise be spent on complaint and frustration. In interpersonal relationships, sincerity manifests as providing help with genuine honesty and selflessness. An individual with sincerity performs tasks, even difficult ones, without begrudging the effort, making the burden feel lighter. This trait often fosters a tough and resilient personality that is positively regarded by others, as actions are perceived as authentic and well-intentioned.

2.3 Patience in Literary Analysis

The application of virtue theory, including the analysis of patience, to literary characters provides a rich avenue for understanding human psychology in a narrative context. As Nussbaum (1990) argues, literature offers a unique exploration of moral character and ethical dilemmas, making it a fertile ground for examining how virtues are enacted and tested within a human life. The portrayal of a character like Forrest Gump, whose life is a tapestry of extraordinary events navigated with a seemingly simple, steadfast demeanor, presents a compelling case study for analyzing the concrete manifestations of theoretical virtues like perseverance and sincerity as defined by Szutta (2020). This study will, therefore, use this framework to dissect and understand the nature and portrayal of patience in the protagonist of Groom's novel.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to investigate the portrayal of patience in the protagonist of Winston Groom's novel, *Forrest Gump*. Following Creswell's (2016) qualitative research framework, this study implemented a systematic procedure for data collection and analysis that ensures comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The data collection procedure followed Creswell's recommendations for qualitative inquiry. The primary data source was the literary text of *Forrest Gump*, with data collected in the form of words, clauses, sentences, and narrative passages relevant to patience manifestation. As emphasized by Pardi (2025, p.45) in his analysis of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, "repeated reading of the primary text is fundamental to identifying nuanced patterns of behavior and thematic development." Accordingly, the data collection process involved: repeated reading of the novel for comprehensive understanding; systematic identification and marking of relevant textual elements; and preliminary categorization based on Szutta's (2020) theoretical framework of patience.

For data analysis, this study adopted Creswell's (2016) data analysis spiral, which involves a continuous process of data management, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, and interpreting. The analysis process began with data

management through careful organization of all marked passages. This was followed by reading and memoing with reflective notes about initial patterns. The description phase involved developing detailed accounts of patience manifestations, while classification organized the data into Szutta's (2020) core components of perseverance and sincerity. The final interpretation stage derived meaningful conclusions about the nature and portrayal of patience in the protagonist.

The entire analytical process maintained Creswell's emphasis on rigorous qualitative standards, including prolonged engagement with the text through repeated readings, thick description of the findings, and systematic application of the theoretical framework. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the textual evidence while providing meaningful insights into the research questions..

4. Discussion

This study reveals that the protagonist in Winston Groom's *Forrest Gump* demonstrates remarkable patience characterized by two fundamental virtues: perseverance and sincerity, as conceptualized by Szutta (2020). The analysis demonstrates how these characteristics manifest throughout Forrest's journey, transforming his perceived limitations into sources of strength.

4.1 Perseverance

Forrest Gump's character serves as a profound exemplar of perseverance, demonstrating an extraordinary capacity for sustained effort and unwavering commitment in the face of numerous obstacles and setbacks. See the following quotation.

“I have the passion and perseverance to take a job seriously until it's done (Groom, 1986, p.115).”

Based on the quotation above, His personal philosophy, encapsulated in the declaration, reveals a deep-seated resilience that forms the cornerstone of his character. This statement is not merely a casual remark but a fundamental principle that guides his actions throughout the narrative. It reflects Forrest's understanding of perseverance as an active, engaged process—one that combines emotional commitment (“passion”) with disciplined continuation (“perseverance”). This self-awareness is particularly significant given his social designation as intellectually limited, suggesting that perseverance operates independently of conventional intelligence and represents a distinct form of wisdom.

The scope of Forrest's perseverance extends beyond personal ambition to encompass moral and emotional commitments, particularly his promise to his deceased friend Bubba. The initial failure of their shrimp venture, where “the nets were empty and there were no shrimp”, represents more than just business failure; it tests Forrest's dedication to honoring his friend's memory. See the following quotation.

“We didn't give up hope, we kept trying until we got the shrimp we wanted (Groom, 1986, p.275).”

His response demonstrates perseverance as an active choice against despair. The phrase “didn't give up hope” indicates the psychological dimension of his perseverance—maintaining optimism despite evidence to the contrary, while “kept

trying” shows the behavioral manifestation of this mindset. This combination highlights how perseverance functions both as an internal attitude and external action.

The culmination of Forrest's persistent efforts reveals the transformative potential of sustained commitment. See his description below.

“We work all day, from sunrise to sunset... finally we realized the net... was so full of shrimp that we couldn't pull it (Groom, 1986, p.27).”

The quotation above represents a powerful narrative of redemption through perseverance. The temporal marker “from sunrise to sunset” emphasizes the exhaustive nature of their labor, while the physical impossibility of pulling the net symbolizes the overwhelming success that perseverance can generate. This transformation from empty nets to unimaginable abundance serves as a metaphor for how consistent effort can convert absolute failure into extraordinary success.

Forrest's journey from failed initial attempts to establishing a profitable shrimp business, culminating in earnings of “\$9,700 dollars and 26 cents”, provides concrete validation of perseverance as a practical life strategy. The precise accounting of his earnings underscores the tangible rewards of his persistent efforts. Importantly, his success derives not from intellectual superiority or social advantage, but from what the narrative portrays as “dogged persistence”- a quality accessible to anyone regardless of their circumstances or abilities. This aligns with Szutta's (2020) conceptualization of perseverance as a fundamental component of virtuous patience, demonstrating how sustained effort, when coupled with genuine commitment, becomes a powerful moral and practical force that systematically overcomes life's challenges.

4.2 Sincerity

Forrest's actions are consistently marked by sincerity, manifesting as selfless assistance without expectation of reward. This is poignantly illustrated when he helps a neighbor with yard work:

“When I was done, he reached into his pocket for a dollar. I was speechless and all I could say was “I'm glad I could help you” (Groom, 1986, p.2). “

His refusal of payment underscores a genuine, intrinsic motivation to help others. The neighbor's observation, “You're retarded but you're so eager to help others”, highlights how Forrest's sincerity transcends societal labels, becoming a defining aspect of his character. This sincerity represents more than simple helpfulness; it reflects a fundamental acceptance of life's circumstances. Forrest performs laborious tasks “in the heat of the day” without complaint, demonstrating wholehearted engagement. This aligns with Szutta's (2020) conceptualization of sincerity as an empowering acceptance that facilitates patience. Forrest's sincere disposition enables him to approach challenges without resentment, viewing assistance as its own reward rather than a transactional exchange.

4.3 Portrayal of Patience in the Novel

The novel portrays patience as an active, transformative force through Forrest's responses to bullying and relational challenges. When confronted by bullies who “hit

me in the stomach until it hurt,” Forrest demonstrates emotional restraint in the following statement.

“I stayed calm and tried to be patience and not fight them. Finally I ran as fast as I could over the football field (Groom, 1986, p.20).”

This response exemplifies patience as conscious self-control rather than passive submission. His decision to flee rather than retaliate demonstrates strategic emotional regulation in threatening situations. Similarly, in his relationship with Jenny, Forrest exhibits profound patience amid emotional turmoil. Following a misunderstanding, he demonstrates steadfast commitment as stated in the following quotation.

“I was very patience waiting for her to come home. I waited on the steps of her house for most of the day (Groom, 1986, p.296).”

This persistent waiting, despite Jenny’s rejection and disappearance, reflects patience as enduring commitment rather than mere tolerance of delay. His actions embody what Szutta (2020) identifies as patience guided by virtuous intentions - in this case, genuine care and loyalty. The integration of perseverance and sincerity in Forrest’s character presents a nuanced portrayal of patience as both active endurance and wholehearted acceptance. His journey suggests that true patience combines determined pursuit of goals with selfless engagement with the world, creating a resilience that transforms apparent disadvantages into extraordinary strengths.

Based on the discussion above, the findings demonstrate that Forrest Gump’s character embodies patience as an active virtue comprising two interconnected dimensions: perseverance and sincerity, following Szutta’s (2020) framework. His perseverance manifests as determined endurance through challenges, evidenced by his unwavering commitment to the shrimp business despite initial failures, ultimately achieving remarkable success through sustained effort. Simultaneously, his sincerity emerges through selfless actions, particularly in his unconditional assistance to others without expectation of reward, reflecting an intrinsic motivation that transcends societal judgments. Furthermore, the analysis reveals Forrest’s patience as a strategic competence - whether in managing physical threats through calculated disengagement or maintaining steadfast commitment in personal relationships despite emotional turmoil. This integrated manifestation of patience transforms his perceived limitations into extraordinary resilience, demonstrating how perseverance and sincerity synergistically create a profound capacity for navigating life’s complexities while maintaining moral integrity and emotional stability.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis unequivocally demonstrates that Forrest Gump embodies a profound and active form of patience, conceptualized through Szutta’s (2020) framework as the synergistic integration of perseverance and sincerity. His character arc reveals that true patience is not a passive endurance but a dynamic, strategic virtue, manifested as unwavering perseverance in pursuing goals like the shrimp business against all odds, and as genuine sincerity in offering selfless help without expectation of reward. This dual competence enables him to navigate both physical threats and emotional turmoil with remarkable resilience, transforming his societal label of intellectual limitation into a unique strength. Ultimately, Forrest’s journey illustrates that such integrated patience serves as a powerful mechanism for not

only overcoming life's adversities but also for maintaining moral integrity and forging meaningful connections, positioning it as a transformative force that converts apparent vulnerabilities into extraordinary human triumph.

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