

The Redemptive-Self Portrayed Through Richie Jerimovich's Character in *The Bear* (2022)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of Richie Jerimovich's redemptive self in the television series The Bear (2022) through Dan P. McAdams' theory of redemptive narrative. The research aims to identify the redemptive narrative themes reflected in Richie's character development and analyze how these themes collectively function in shaping his narrative identity throughout the series. Using content analysis, this study analyzes selected episode from Seasons 1 and 2 through narrative and "mise-en-scène" analysis, focusing on elements such as lighting, costume, framing, blocking, and spatial organization. The findings reveal that Richie's character arc reflects six themes of redemptive narrative proposed by McAdams: Early Advantage, Suffering of Others, Moral Depth and Steadfastness, Redemption, Power Versus Love, Future Growth. Early Advantage is reflected through Richie's familiarity and interpersonal closeness within The Beef, while Suffering of Others and Moral Depth and Steadfastness emerge through his experiences with grief, loyalty, and instability. The theme of Redemption becomes most visible when Richie reconstructs his sense of self through discipline, hospitality, and service. Meanwhile, Power Versus Love is reflected in his shift from seeking significance through authority and resistance toward finding meaning through attentiveness and relational care. Finally, Future Growth is demonstrated through the continuity of Richie's behavioral and emotional transformation in later episodes. Collectively, these themes construct Richie's redemptive self as an ongoing process of identity reconstruction shaped by emotional struggle, interpersonal relationship, and sustained behavioral change.

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1. Introduction

The narratives of mental health and personal growth are significant since they reflect psychological processes in concern of identity formation, emotional resilience, and the search for meaning, allowing audiences to get better understanding of human responses to hardships. In contemporary context, such topic becomes increasingly important as awareness of mental health and emotional well-being continues to expand, particularly in media representations that aim to portray psychological struggles more responsibly (Abbas et al., 2023; Yuniatun et al., 2025; Junaid et al., 2025; Tenrisanna et al., 2024). Furthermore, contemporary television series frequently depict characters navigating trauma, dysfunctional relationships, and high-pressure environments, positioning narratives of self-redemption as an essential framework for understanding how media reflects psychological recovery and personal transformation.

These themes are prominent *The Bear* (2022), an award-winning TV show created by American film producer, director, and screenwriter Christopher Storer. Produced by FX Production, the show is rated 8.5 on IMDb and received many accolades in 2023 and 2025 for its writing, directing, performances, technical quality, and production values. These accolades include twenty-one Primetime Emmy Awards and five Golden Globe Awards for Outstanding Comedy Series. Although the show nominated as comedy, it also offers depth in exploring the realism of trauma, grief, dysfunctional relationship, and workplace tension.

The show follows Carmy Berzatto, played by Jeremy Allen White, a New York City's award-winning fine dining chef, returned to his hometown of Chicago to run his chaotic family Italian beef sandwich shop, The Original Beef of Chicagoland, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic after the suicide of his brother, Michael Berzatto, played by Jon Bernthal, who left unresolved debts and unruly staff. One of them is Michael's best friend Richie Jerimovich, played by Ebon Moss-

Bachrach, who is later pronounced as the front-of-house manager of the restaurant after its renovation to The Bear. Richie's path toward becoming front-of-house manager is shaped by emotional instability rooted in personal loss and disconnection. His divorce and unresolved grieving of Michael's death deeply affect his behavior in treating people, particularly the restaurant staff, driven by his aggression. Unresolved grief that has been repressed could manifest to fuel aggressive behavior toward self or others (Abdoli et al., 2025). His life story aligns with redemptive sequences that capture the tendency to see and expect good things to come from bad experiences (Dunlop et al., 2020).

To analyze Richie's transformation, this research applies Dan P. McAdams (2013) concept of the redemptive narrative. Redemptive narratives are stories of suffering and negativity that turn into positive outcome. Without the negative emotions, there can be no redemption in the story (McAdams, 2013). McAdams identifies these six recurring themes as Early Advantage, The Suffering of Others, Moral Depth and Steadfastness, Redemption, Power Versus Love, and Future Growth. These six themes provide a structured framework to get deep understanding of how The Bear construct Richie's journey from grief and abrasion toward self-redemption and restored purpose. Additionally, *mise-en-scène* is employed as a supporting analytical concept to examine how visual elements reinforce and communicate Richie's psychological and moral transformation throughout the series. Through this framework, Richie's arc is positioned as a return to moral agency and humanity rather than a simple narrative of personal development. The objective of this research is to examine and identify how McAdams' six redemptive narrative themes are represented in Richie Jerimovich's character development in *The Bear* (2022).

The theme of redemption has been widely discussed in academic research. Such as in "Return to Humanity – Sense of Redemption in The Kite Runner" by Latha & Velusamy (2022) that examines the psychological transformation of the protagonist of the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini by analyzing how guilt, shame, and emotional conflict contribute to his acts of wickedness and cowardice, eventually shaping his path toward redemption and moral growth. Another work that also explore *The Kite Runner* is "Psychological and Emotional Trauma in The Kite Runner: A Deep Dive into the Consequences of Guilt and Redemption" by Bhattarai (2024) that focuses on how guilt and emotional distress shape the protagonist's behavior, relationship, and self-perception, positioning trauma as a central factor in his path toward redemption through textual and psychological analysis. Similarly, "The Psychology of Guilt and Redemption in Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky" by Mutar (2025) examines the relationship between guilt and redemption through psychological conflict, highlighting how guilt influences moral decision-making and the pursuit of redemption within the human condition.

Existing studies on redemption narratives have predominantly focused on literary texts and films, using textual analysis and general psychological frameworks. While these studies provide insights into guilt, morality, and inner conflict, they tend to place less emphasis on redemption as character-driven developmental process within serialized television narratives. Moreover, limited attention has been given to audiovisual elements and narrative progression when examining character transformation in contemporary TV series. To address this gap, this research employs content analysis with redemptive narrative theory by Dan P. McAdams (2013) to analyze Richie Jerimovich's self-redemption arc in *The Bear* (2022), hence offering a more nuanced understanding of how modern screen narratives construct personal transformation through character development and visual storytelling. This application explains how modern cinematic storytelling reflect identity and redemption-related psychological processes that aims to enhance readers' understanding about the redemptive narrative framework by Dan P. McAdams (2013). Practically, this research contributes to the media industry which offers insights on how narrative identity functions through redemptive storytelling.

2. Methodology

The primary data of this research is the TV series *The Bear* (2022) directed by Christopher Storer under the production of FX Production. The data are analyzed using content analysis to breakdown every narrative both from the dialogue and visual elements. Content analysis is a qualitative research technique used to produce systematic, replicable, and context-sensitive interpretations of texts or other meaningful materials, enabling researchers to examine data that are significant, informative, and communicative within their specific social and narrative contexts (Krippendorff, 2019).

Important dialogues related to Richie's development will be transcribed along with their timestamps. In addition, visual elements such as setting, costume, lighting, and character positioning are observed and documented through screen captures using *mise-en-scène*. These elements carry narrative significance by constructing the film's world and conveying meaning, emotion, and character development beyond dialogue (Ghosh, 2022). Key content is identified by examining Richie's character, the narrative context, and significant scenes that reflect the six themes that occur in self-redemption narrative.

Scene coding is applied based on Dan P. McAdams' redemptive narrative framework, such as identifying moments that represent Early Advantage which establishes an underlying sense of worth or potential, while Suffering of Others cultivates empathy and moral awareness. Moral Depth and Steadfastness reflect the persistence of core values across adversity, whereas Power Versus love highlights internal conflict between autonomy and relational attachment. The Redemptive move itself transforms negative emotional experiences into meaningful growth, ultimately leading toward Future Growth, where the individual projects a renewed and coherent sense of self into the future. These six themes illuminate redemption as a dynamic and developmental process shaped by ethical orientation, emotional endurance, relational values, and future-oriented meaning-making. Rather than treating redemption as a singular turning point, this framework allows for a nuanced examination of how identity is gradually reconstructed through narrative coherence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Early Advantage

Early advantage in McAdams' redemptive narrative framework refers to the recognition of positive inner qualities, strengths, or capacities that suggest an individual has something valuable to offer (McAdams, 2013). Richie's Early Advantage is first visible through his already established position within The Original Beef of Chicagoland, also known as The Beef. In *System* (S1E1), Richie said, "F*cking with my program, cousin?" (S1E1, 00:08:38:02) that suggests, after Mikey's death, Richie remains one of the central figures sustaining the restaurant's day-to-day functioning. This places him in a role of informal authority, indicating that even before his redemptive development, Richie possesses a socially recognized place within the institution. The repetition of familial endearment in the environment (calling each other "family", "cousin") further reinforces that his role exceeds mere labor; he sees himself as part of a communal structure where he already belongs.

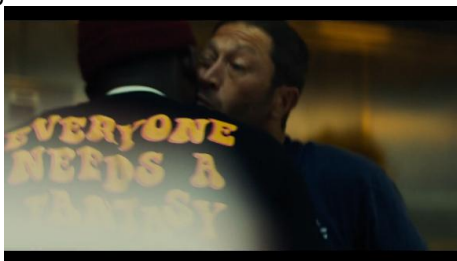


Figure 1. Richie cheek-kissing Marcus as a form of friendliness (S1E1, 00:08:37)



Figure 2. Richie cheek-kissing Tina as a form of friendliness (S1E1, 00:09:00)

Most importantly, Richie's Early Advantage emerges through his deep relational embeddedness within The Beef's social environment. In *System* (S1E1), his interactions with Marcus (Figure 1) and Tina (Figure 2) demonstrate a pre-existing familiarity that distinguishes him from newcomers such as Sydney. The close framing and limited spatial distance between the characters intensify the sense of interpersonal intimacy. This repeated bodily interaction functions as a visual marker of Richie's ease within The Beef's social environment.

Despite of being a newcomer intern at The Beef, Richie made no exception to interact with Sydney as how he interacts with the regulars by the casual use of endearment, such as calling her "sweetheart" (S1E1, 00:09:30:04) and shaking her hand friendly (Figure 3). This relational embeddedness is evidenced even further by the moment in Marcus' dialogue in *System* (S1E1) where Marcus recognizes Richie's cologne, "I guess I'm grateful that Richie didn't come in here wearing that cologne today that he always be wearing. You know, it smell like pine tree and sh*t." (S1E1, 00:22:14:02—0:22:22:01). The dialogue suggests long-standing intimacy among the staff, reinforcing Richie's place in The Beef is not superficial but affective and communal. These interactions indicate that, beneath his abrasive exterior, Richie already possesses one of the core traits later central to his growth, which is an instinctive ability to form and sustain interpersonal connection. This advantage is further acknowledged by Chef Terry in Season 2 Episode 7, *Forks*, when she was talking about how Carmy perceived Richie, "he [Carmy] told me. He said you're good with people. He's not wrong." (S2E7, 00:32:47:03—00:32:49:01)



Figure 3. Richie introduced himself to Sydney (S1E1, 00:09:31)

The episode's *mise-en-scène* further support this reading through the costume design and how the lighting is set. Clothing is an essential to convey sense and depth, which helps to show the character, mood, and give special meaning to certain moments (Bezruchko et al., 2024). Beyond Richie's interactions with the staff, his established position and sense of proximity within The Beef are also reflected visually in the way he dressed. While the other staff members wear aprons that mark their roles within the kitchen's formal workflow, Richie appears in a casual T-shirt that distinguish him from them. This contrast visually separates him from the restaurant's formal workflow and suggests that his place in The Beef is defines not by culinary function alone, but by informal authority, familiarity, and deep social embeddedness.



Figure 4. Richie in an informal kitchen setting (S1E1, 00:25:54)

Color is one of the strong factors that affect many visual perception and mood (Shahidi et al., 2021). In Figure 4, the restaurant interior is framed with warm-toned color, creating a sense of intimacy and familiarity despite the surrounding disorder and tension. Warm colors such as yellow, can be chosen when depicting a lively, positive role, to show the cheerful and upward mood (Zhang, 2024). This visual choice constructs The Beef as a lived-in communal space shaped by routine, closeness, and emotional attachment. The visible warm light table lamp suggests a domestic element into the commercial kitchen, softening the industrial environment and giving the space a lived-in, intimate quality. Within this warm-tones visual setting, Richie's casual T-shirt and relaxed posture further distinguish him from the kitchen's formal labor structure. Rather than appearing as a worker defined by technical function, he is framed as someone whose presence is naturalized within the environment itself, suggesting his long-standing attachment and sense of belonging.

3.2 Suffering of Others

The theme of Suffering of Others refers to when an individual has a heightened sense of other's pain that gradually shapes moral sensitivity (McAdams, 2013). In Richie's character, this theme is reflected through his awareness of the emotional struggles and loss experienced by people around him. Richie's recognition of other's suffering contributes to changes in his attitude and behavior, particularly as he becomes more attentive to the needs of others. The theme is particularly evident in *Braciolo* (S1E8) and *Fishes* (S2E6).



Figure 5. Richie points toward The Beef as the restaurant interior becomes the visual focus of his accusation (S1E8, 00:21:53)

In *Braciolo* (S1E8), the theme first emerges when Richie and Carmy discussed about Mikey's addiction outside The Beef, shifting the focus from grief alone to a recognition of Mikey's pain before his death. This scene marks one of the clearest moments in which Richie is confronted with the awareness of other's pain. In this moment, Richie points toward the restaurant and calls it "a f*cking disgrace," (in Figure 6) while also referring to Mikey as a "f*cking a*shole" (S1E8, 00:21:40:01—00:21:53:02). These expressions of anger are significant because they show that Richie is not merely mourning Mikey's absence, but confronting the consequences of Mikey's suffering, especially the disorder and emotional damage left behind by addiction and death. Richie's language reveals a more painful recognition that Mikey's struggles also harmed the people and spaces connected to him.



Figure 6. Richie's upward gaze and pause visually register lingering frustration and emotional burden (S1E8, 00:22:01)

Positioned outside The Beef, Richie and Carmy are framed against the restaurant window, while the brightly lit interior remains visible behind them. This arrangement creates a strong visual opposition between the cold stillness of the exterior space and the nightclub-like atmosphere inside, where string light and the glowing "Vienna Beef" sign produce a festive but artificial visual tone. The cold dominated color such as blue and violet color palette contributes to create depressed and melancholy atmosphere (Zhang, 2024). His gesture in Figure 5 where he points toward the interior externalizes his frustration, making The Beef itself central to the conflict. In Figure 6, his upward gaze while blowing the smoke and pause shift the scene from confrontation to emotional exhaustion, suggesting that his anger is rooted not only in irritation but also in unresolved grief. The partially obstructed view created by the window blinds further fragments the interior space, reinforcing the sense that the restaurant has become symbolically distorted and emotionally inaccessible. Through blocking, color grading, and the contrast between exterior stillness and interior spectacle, the *mise-en-scène* renders Richie's reaction as a visual expression of loss and burden rather than mere aggression.



Figure 7. Richie and his wife, Tiff, at the Berzatto family's Christmas dinner (S2E6, 00:51:48)

This theme further apparent in *Fishes* (S2E6) where in this flashback episode, Richie is immersed in the emotional instability of the Berzatto family's Christmas dinner (Figure 7). In this episode, Richie is positioned within an atmosphere marked by escalating tension, generational dysfunction, and visible psychological instability. The rapid camera movement and overlapping dialogue visually reinforces the intensity of collective distress that can be seen in Figure 9 below. Rather than functioning merely as background conflict, this environment situates Richie as both participant and witness to unresolved trauma.



Figure 8. Richie in the Berzatto family's chaotic kitchen situation (S2E6, 00:11:20)

Sarcasm and reactive humor within Richie's response function as dark humor coping strategies associated with emotional distress (Dionigi et al., 2023). For instance, when tensions escalate in the kitchen before the dinner started (Figure 8), Richie mocks Carmy by asking, "You're gonna make Sprite? Are you a f*ckin' pop machine?" (S2E6, 00:11:00:02 – 00:11:05:08). Rather than functioning as harmless banter, the remark functions as displacement, redirecting anxiety into ridicule instead of addressing the underlying instability surround him. Exposure to others' suffering may initially produce defensiveness before moral awareness emerges (McAdams, 2013). In this way, *Fishes* (S2E6) establishes the experiential groundwork for redemption by situating Richie within sustained proximity to suffering that he neither caused nor fully understands. It can be seen in Figure 7 by the way he sits on the other side of the table across the Berzatto family, visually positioning him as a witness rather than main instigator of the conflict.



Figure 9. Close-up shot of Richie's reaction of the arguments (S2E6, 00:56:44)

In Figure 9, it shows the close-up shot of Richie's tight facial expression and the slouch of his posture that indicate his concern and suppressed frustration in the heat of Michael and Lee's arguments during the dinner. The dim lighting used throughout the episode indicates the tensed atmosphere of the family gathering casting the flashback in a tone of emotional heaviness and instability. Rather than presenting the Christmas setting as warm and nostalgic, the subdued illumination suggests that this memory is marked by unresolved tension and psychological discomfort. As a flashback, the low lighting further signals that the past remains shadowed and unresolved, shaping Richie's emotional responses in the present.

3.3. Moral Depth and Steadfastness

Drawing on McAdams' argument of moral steadfastness in narrative identity, this theme may be read as a character's effort to maintain a recognizable moral orientation even when experiencing conflict, failure, or disorientation. In Richie's case, these qualities do not emerge through immediate transformation, but through a visible tension between resistance, self-awareness, and loyalty during the restaurant's transitional period. In *Beef* (S2E1), this tension becomes explicit when Richie admits that he feels lost and questions his purpose, positioning Carmy as someone who appears to have a clearer sense of direction. However, Carmy's response complicates his assumption, indicating that purpose itself is not entirely stable or resolved. This moment of comparison reveals an emerging self-awareness, as Richie begins to recognize both his own lack of direction and the ambiguity of the standard he aspires to. This awareness is further reinforced when Richie insists that he is "trying so hard to be on board with all this new sh*t," (S2E1, 00:06:32:03—00:06:38:02) a statement that frames his resistance not simply as defiance, but as a conflicted effort to adapt. The contradiction between his stated effort and his continued frustration highlights the instability of his position within the restaurant's transition.



Figure 10. Richie and Carmy in the basement of The Beef discussing about life purpose (S2E1, 00:08:55)

The blocking where Richie and Carmy are positioned at opposite of a dim, cluttered storage room (Figure 10) creates a wide spatial separation between them, with Richie standing on the left side of the frame and Carmy seated alone on the far right, while a large table crowded with boxes, papers, and old memorabilia dominates the center of the composition. The worn set dressing, filled with leftover objects from *The Beef*, creates a sense of stagnation and unfinished transition, suggesting that Richie remains tied to a past that no longer offers him a clear role. This atmosphere is reinforced by the low-key lighting and muted palette of browns and greys, which produce a heavy, subdued visual tone that mirrors his uncertainty and unstable sense of belonging. The episode constructs Richie's moral depth as a process of self-recognition, where resistance is shaped not only by defiance, but by an emerging awareness of dislocation, limitation, and the difficulty of change.



Figure 11. Richie confronts Syd for accidentally tearing the Fenway poster after she tripped (S2E1, 00:14:46)

Within this framework, steadfastness can be understood as the persistence of emotional and ethical commitment despite instability or marginalization. In Richie's case, this commitment does not appear as clear moral resolution, but as a continued attachment to the restaurant and its identity. In *Beef* (S2E1) this attachment is made explicit in the moment when Sydney accidentally tears the Fenway poster (Figure 11), an object associated with Mikey and the restaurant's past, prompting an immediate and emotional reaction from Richie by saying "That's been there for five years," (S2E1, 00:13:48:03—00:13:50:02) and "'A,'" that's Mikey's favorite squad, so please show some respect, okay?" (S2E1, 00:14:00:03—00:14:02:01) with offended tone. His response frames the damage not as a minor accident, but as a violation of something meaningful, revealing the extent to which his loyalty is tied to memory, grief, and continuity. In this sequence, Richie's steadfastness is also re-emphasized by his effort to keep himself from saying offensive words in the dialogue "Look, I haven't said the G or R in over a week. In an effort of personal growth, I promise not to say gay or retarded," (S2E1, 00:14:11:02—00:14:16:04).

The blocking where Richie stands in the doorway while Carmy and Sydney face him from within the interior space separates him from the pair who now represent the restaurant's new collaborative direction, as Carmy and Sydney are positioned close together while Richie remains isolated at the threshold. The doorway functions as a liminal frame that places Richie between belonging and exclusion, suggesting that he is neither fully integrated into the restaurant's transformation nor entirely detached from it. Costume and set dressing deepen this sense of attachment. Richie's "Original Beef" shirt explicitly ties his identity to the restaurant's past, while the damaged Fenway poster beside him becomes a visual marker of disrupted continuity, memory, and personal investment. Through these elements, Richie's presence is framed not simply as resistance to change, but as an attempt to preserve a connection to a space and identity that continue to define him. Read through McAdams' framework, this persistence can be understood as a form of steadfastness grounded in continuity of values and emotional attachment, where loyalty remains intact even as its place within the present becomes increasingly uncertain. In this way, the *mise-en-scène* presents Richie's commitment as emotionally complex, shaped by both his inability to move forward and his unwillingness to let go.

3.4. Redemption

Redemption refers to a narrative movement in which negative or uncertain experiences are reinterpreted into positive meaning, enabling the reconstruction of identity and the emergence of a more coherent sense of self. Within *Richie*, this theme is manifested through his reinterpretation of past experiences of loss, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction into a renewed sense of purpose. This theme is apparent in *Forks* (S2E7) where his transformation challenged his previous understanding of himself and allowing him to grow a more positive sense of identity, purpose, and connection with others.



Figure 12. Richie staring at his own reflection under the dim light (S2E7, 00:01:36)

Forks (S2E7) opens with Richie waking up and briefly confronting his reflection under dim, warm light that establishes a visual sense of familiarity, suggesting Richie's continued attachment to a prior identity before entering a space that challenges it (Figure 12). However, this sense of familiarity is disrupted upon his arrival at Ever, a three-star Michelin restaurant, where the interior (Figure 13) is dominated by dark blue color grading that introduces a sense of both the tranquility of Ever and Richie's emotional turmoil (Xu, 2025).



Figure 13. The blue dominated lighting when Richie arrived at Ever (S2E7, 00:02:47)



Figure 14. Richie quietly observing the kitchen (S2E7, 00:03:39)



Figure 15. Richie touches the surface of kitchen counter (S2E7, 00:03:41)

Inside the kitchen, the lighting shifts into a brighter, blue-white neutrality, emphasizing sterility, precision, and institutional order. Within this space, Richie's movement are tentative and observant, he scans the environment and touches surfaces with facial expressions that show confusion and uncertainty (Figure 14 & 15). This sense of dislocation reaches a turning point when Garrett instructs him to change his shirt for a seemingly minor task. As Richie hesitates, the camera pans toward the "The Original Beef" logo on his shirt (Figure 16) before he covers it with the chef jacket (Figure 17), visually capturing a moment of identity conflict in which attachment to the past is confronted by the necessity of change.



Figure 16. Richie hesitating to put the chef jacket on (S2E7, 00:04:07)



Figure 17. The close-up shot of The Beef logo on Richie's shirt (S2E7, 00:04:08)

Richie's internal resistance persists even as he begins to participate in the system, as reflected when he quietly mutters "f*ck you, cousin," (S2E7, 00:05:16:01) while performing the repetitive task of polishing forks. Framed in an out of focus close-up that isolates his expression against the cool-toned environment (Figure 18). The moment reveals a lingering tension between external compliance and internal reluctance, suggesting that transformation involves not only behavioral adjustment but also an ongoing negotiation of self.

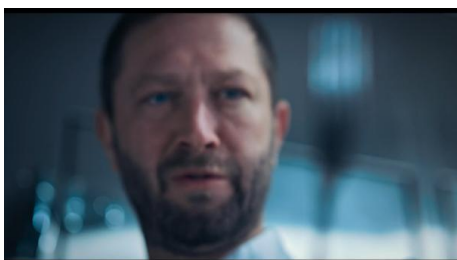


Figure 18. Richie's internal resistance during routine task (fork polishing) (S2E7, 00:05:16)

Following this, the episode introduces a structured pattern of repetition, particularly through the recurring sequence of Richie waking up early, confronting his reflection, and engaging in routine tasks within the kitchen. These repeated actions do not signify stagnation, but rather the gradual internalization of discipline, as routine becomes a mechanism through which identity is reconstructed. This process is further reinforced through the recurring image of the kitchen clock paired with the phrase "Every Second Counts," which functions as a visual motif that accumulates meaning over time, gradually shifting from a background detail into an internalized principle (Figure 19—Figure 21).



Figure 19. First appearance of "Every Second Counts" sign in Ever's kitchen (S2E7, 00:04:00)



Figure 20. Second appearance of "Every Second Counts" sign paired with digital clock (S2E7, 00:33:33)

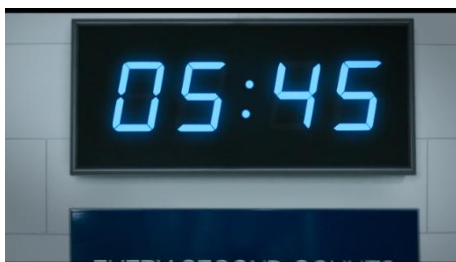


Figure 21. Close-up shot of the digital clock in Ever's kitchen (S2E7, 00:09:14)

This gradual internalization is further marked by a symbolic shift in costume, as Richie is eventually entrusted with a tailored blazer (Figure 22), signaling his transition from performing invisible, repetitive labor to assuming a more visible and responsible role within the system. Framed in a close, partial shot that emphasizes the garment rather than the individual, the moment suggests that Richie is in the process of inhabiting a new identity, one that is structured, disciplined, and externally recognized, yet still in the process of being fully internalized.



Figure 22. Blazer jacket on the countertop signaling Richie's entrusted role (S2E7, 00:15:03)

While Richie's apology to Natalie in S2E8 extends his redemptive arc, the specificity of his language reveals a deeper movement toward future growth. Richie articulates a pattern in his past behavior, admitting that he didn't really know where he fits and would force himself into spaces where he did not belong, often worsening situations and misdirecting frustration toward others. This acknowledgment reflects not only accountability, but also a growing capacity for self-reflection and relational awareness. Importantly, his apology is paired with a forward-looking proposition, that they "could fit good together", which reframes identity as conceptualized not as an externally imposed attribute, but as a dynamic, relational, process co-constructed through reciprocal contribution and mutual recognition (Janík, 2017).



Figure 23. Richie apologizes to Natalie about his past behavior with Gary as a witness (S2E8, 00:12:53)

This emerging stability is further reinforced through the scene's *mise-en-scène* as seen in Figure 23. The cold, blue-toned lighting and the stark, institutional setting that marked by lockers, clean lines, and a controlled spatial arrangement create an atmosphere of restraint and order. Within this composed visual field, Richie appears physically contained, seated and facing Natalie directly, his posture steady and his tone measured. His dark suit blends into the subdued palette while simultaneously signifying a deliberate shift in self-presentation, no longer performative but internally motivated.

As the episode progresses, Richie becomes increasingly integrated within the space, reflected in more balanced framing, fluid movement, and confident interaction with both staff and customers. Through these combined narrative and visual elements, *Forks* constructs redemption as an iterative and temporally grounded process, in which prior uncertainty and resistance are not erased, but reinterpreted as the foundation for growth. In this way, Richie's transformation emerges not as a sudden realization, but as a sustained reconfiguration of identity, where purpose is gradually formed through discipline, attention, and understanding that every action carries meaning (Dent & Ward, 2023).

3.5. Power Versus Love

The tension between power and love reflects the dynamic interplay between an individual's desire for control, authority, and self-assertion, and their need for connection, intimacy, and care (McAdams, 2013). In the opening season of *The Bear*, Richie represents a character whose identity is entirely depending on a fragile, performance-based version of Power. Following the suicide of his best friend Mikey Berzatto and the subsequent collapse of his own marriage, Richie finds himself in a vacuum of authority. In *Review* (S1E7), his exercise of power is purely defensive that he uses volume to mask his fear of becoming irrelevant in Carmy's new world. This version of power is ultimately self-sabotaging, as seen in the kitchen's total collapse in *Review*, proving that power without a grounding in communal purpose leads only to isolation and chaos.

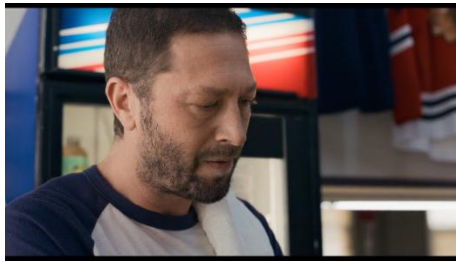


Figure 24. Richie's averting gaze when he's confronted by Sydney (S1E7, 00:09:37)

This theme is supported by the *mise-en-scène* in Figure 24 when Sydney challenged him to adapt to the new digital system. Richie is physically and metaphorically “cornered” by the new technology (the tablet) and Sydney’s authority that disrupts his sense of power and control over the environment that he’s familiar with. Richie avoids direct eye contact with Sydney. Eye contact is a form of engagement that signals when shared attention is high (Wohltjen & Wheatley, 2021). By looking away and down, Richie is performing a silent protest. He is refusing to acknowledge Sydney’s rightful authority, choosing instead to brood in his perceived loss of status. His casual, “The Beef” worn-in shirt reinforces his original identity that contrasts sharply with Sydney and Carmy’s chef’s white (Figure 25). This visual distinction highlights the Power struggle, in which Richie is dressed for the old sandwich shop while the restaurant is evolving into a high-stakes professional kitchen.



Figure 25. The distinction of Richie's attire with Sydney and Carmy's (S1E7, 00:10:21)

His time at the Michelin star restaurant, Ever, redefines his understanding of authority as “hospitality.” The pivotal moment occurs when he observes the staff’s obsessive attention to detail. The composition in the scene placed Richie in the center, surrounded by the staffs that move in professionally in rhythm. The deep focus of the shot allows the viewer to see Richie’s expression of genuine awe (Figure 26), showing that Richie is now not the loudest person in the room as he was in *The Beef*, but a student witnessing a community where hierarchy of Power exists to facilitate the Love of the craft. His slight astonishment and composure mark a behavioral readjustment, contrasting Jess’ alert posture and the deep focus of other staff. The rigid vertical lines of the background paneling and the clean lighting suggest a highly structured, institutional world built entirely on collaboration.



Figure 26. Richie in awe watching the staff's attention to detail for the dish (S2E7, 00:19:56:00)



Figure 27. Close-up shot of Richie's face as he volunteers to bring the dish to the table (S2E7, 00:20:08)

The close-up on Richie's face in Figure 27 plays as the most transformative visual beat in the series, serving as the evidence is a man whose perspective has shifted from a preoccupation with Power to an awakening of Love. Face appears to carry a more important narrative function, especially in cinema, where meaning is shaped through the shared viewing experience (Beato, 2022). Unlike the tight, defensive framing of the previous season, where Richie's face was often a mask of scowls and tension used to assert his dominance, this shot is defined by a startling vulnerability.

The lighting and color palette in this shot further emphasize the 'cooling' of his unstable nature. The high-key, cool-blue lighting of the Ever kitchen replaces the sweaty, orange heat of *The Beef*, mirroring Richie's transition from a hot-headed agent of chaos to a disciplined professional. By volunteering to run the dish, he is claiming a new kind of authority: the power to be the deliverer of a perfect moment. This is a shift from self-serving power to a professionalized version of Love, where his strength is redirected toward the act of service.



Figure 28. Richie on the phone with Tiffany (S2E7, 00:13:06)

Moreover, Richie's relationship with his ex-wife, Tiffany, serves as the emotional foundation for this shift. In season 1, Richie's powerlessness in his personal life makes him unstable, but in Season 2, he learns to prioritize the needs of his family over his own ego. This is most evident in the *Forks* phone call where Tiffany announces her engagement (Figure 28). Rather than lashing out to reclaim a sense of control, Richie offers his genuine blessing. This act of self-sacrifice marks the moment where his capacity for love finally outweighs his need for status. By choosing her peace over his pride, Richie demonstrates that he has finally gained the Power to be a stable, loving presence rather than a source of conflict.

Figure 28 captures the exact moment Richie's defensive power collapses into a quiet, painful act of selfless love. Isolated against a concrete pillar, Richie is physically leaning his weight into the stone, a visual acknowledgment of his emotional fragility where the pillar acts as a structural crutch for a man whose self-reliance has been leveled by the news of Tiffany's engagement. Most significantly, his closed eyes represent a total surrender. Closing them here functions as an act of visual avoidance that creates a private, internal space where he can be less vigilant of his surroundings (Otero & Levenson, 2019). This surrender of the need to "win" the conversation is the expression of love; he is silencing his ego to allow her the space to move on. The color palette and lighting further emphasize this transition from a "hot" chaotic temper to a "cool" professional maturity.

3.6. Future Growth

Future growth refers to the projection and enactment of continued development beyond a singular moment of transformation, where change becomes integrated into a stable and forward-looking sense of identity (McAdams, 2013). This stage highlights the persistence of change across time, where identity is not only redefined but continuously enacted through consistent behavior. This dimension is most clearly demonstrated in the episodes following Richie's transformation in *Forks* (S2E7), particularly in Season 2 Episodes 9 and 10, where the narrative shifts from individual realization to collective execution. Within these episodes, Richie is no longer framed as a character in crisis, but as one who has begun to stabilize within his role, allowing his development to be observed through continuity rather than conflict.

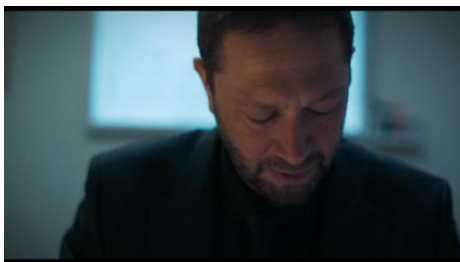


Figure 29. Close-up shot of Richie's face with black-on-black suit visible (S2E9, 00:10:25)



Figure 30. Richie checking the kitchen, wearing black-on-black suit (S2E10, 00:06:05)



Figure 31. Richie giving his speech before the official opening of The Bear wearing black-on-black suit (S2E9, 00:24:47)

One of the most immediate indicators of this stabilization is Richie's sustained self-presentation, particularly through his continued use of formal attire (Figure 29—Figure 31). Unlike its initial appearance as a symbolic marker of transformation, the suit in Season 2 Episodes 9 and 10 functions as an integrated aspect of his identity, no longer requiring emphasis or narrative justification. Its repetition across scenes signals that Richie's shift toward discipline and self-respect has been internalized, becoming part of his everyday mode of being. This continuity is not presented as exceptional, but as normalized, suggesting that his transformation has moved beyond performance into habit. Tajuddin (2018) in Thulasidas et al., (2024) argues that clothing is a cultural and social identity that function as a part of symbol that can explain a person's identity, in this case is the redeemed version of Richie.

In the close-ups of him interacting with the reservation tablet and marking off the menu, his hands that once used for chaotic movement or defensive posturing are now steady and operative. This emphasizes tactile precision, the focus on the tablet's organized layout and the highlighter crossing off "GRICIA" signals that he has internalized the idea that "every second counts." He is no longer only mingling in the restaurant; he is operating it. This "order and checking" behavior, performed in the cool-toned kitchen, shows he has replaced his need for external validation with a commitment to internal excellence.

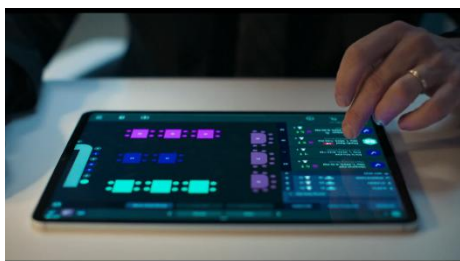


Figure 32. Close-up of Richie checking reservations on the tablet (S2E9, 00:10:21)

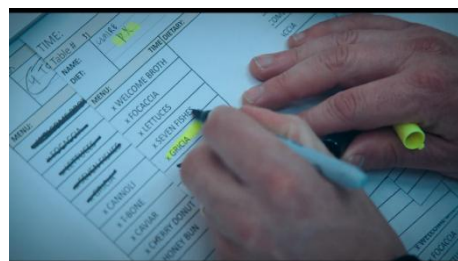


Figure 31. Close-up of Richie crossing the menu to call tickets (S2E10, 00:13:47)



Figure 34. Richie encouraging Fak because he was scared to deal with customers (S2E10, 00:15:36)

This transformation culminates in a leadership style defined by encouragement, marking the true what he calls the “New World Order” of the restaurant. The *mise-en-scène* of Richie holding Fak’s face is profound moment of intimacy that replace the physical aggression of his past with grounding, supportive touch. By physically steadying Fak and offering words of belief, “I can’t do this, but you know, New World Order, pal.” (S2E10, 00:15:28:01—00:15:31:02). Indicating that he himself has never called the tickets, yet still does it for the restaurant’s operation. Richie is using his presence to build others up rather than tear them down. This theme of perseverance is echoed by the “Keep Going” mantra on the whiteboard (Figure 36), which serves as a backdrop of his collaborative work with Natalie (Figure 35). In this final stage of his arc, Richie has traded the noise of the “Original” for the quiet strength of a mentor, proving that true leadership is the act of providing foundation for others to succeed.



Figure 35. Richie and Natalie discussing about the restaurant’s budget (S2E10, 00:10:55)

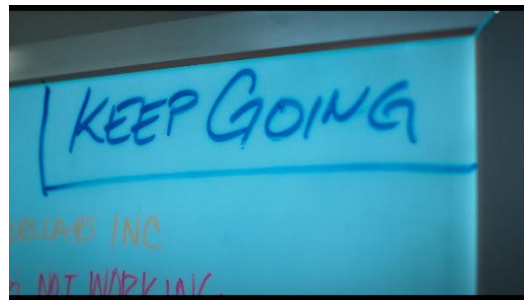


Figure 36. Close-up of “Keep Going” written on the whiteboard (S2E9, 00:10:27)

Richie Jerimovich’ arc across *The Bear* (2022) is a journey from using power as a defensive shield to employing it as a vehicle for love. Initially, his early advantage was rooted in his “Original” or “The Cousin” status at The Beef, which he guarded through loud intimidation and hyper-vigilance. His suffering of others is revealed during the flashback to the chaotic Berzatto family Christmas dinner, where he is trapped in a toxic cycle of family dysfunction, contributing to the noise and instability of the household. Despite this, his moral depth and steadfastness remained anchored in his loyalty to Mikey’s memory, providing the foundation for his redemption at Ever, where he stopped fighting and started focusing on the small, meaningful details of taking care of people. This internal shift was solidified during his emotional surrender on the phone with Tiffany, where she told Richie about her engagement. His future growth is visually defined by the “New World Order” of the Season 2 finale, where he trades his old clothes for a black suit and takes charge of the restaurant’s flow. This evolution concludes in a leadership style of encouragement, movingly captured as he steadies Fak with a grounding touch and verbal support, proving that his value is now measured by the stability and love he provides for his team.

4. Conclusion

This research has provided an in-depth examination of the redemptive arc of Richie Jerimovich in *The Bear* (2022), tracing the trajectory of a character who evolves from a manifestation of defensive chaos to an architect of disciplined service. By synthesizing the narrative themes of early advantage, the impact of his behavior on others, his underlying moral depth, and his future growth, this research demonstrate that Richie’s redemption is not an instantaneous event, but a thorough, systemic reconstruction of the self. This research has answered how McAdams’ six themes of redemptive narrative represented in Richie’s character development in *The Bear* (2022)

The research investigated the specific narrative themes that construct Richie's journey. The journey begins with his early advantage as "the original" employee or "The Cousin" at The Beef, a status he guarded through loud intimidation and defensive posturing to mask a deep-seated fear of being discarded. His role in the suffering of others acts as both a witness and a participant in the systemic dysfunction surrounding the Berzatto family, most noticed during the chaotic Christmas dinner where he is locked within a cycle of unresolved trauma. This suffering is further compounded by his internal conflict over Mikey's legacy, which is evident when he expresses resentment toward Mikey's past behavior. He is not merely venting anger but confronting the painful reality of Mikey's addiction and the lasting disorder it inflicted on their shared space. Despite this, his character possessed an underlying moral depth and steadfastness, rooted in loyalty to Mikey's memory, which ultimately served as the bridge to his redemption at Ever. He underwent a fundamental shift from seeking power through dominance to embracing love through service, learning that true authority is found in the care of the small things. His lesson solidified when he chose to let go of his need for control during his emotional phone call with Tiffany. This journey peaked in his future growth where he trades his old, cluttered identity for the clean lines of a black-on-black suit and a systematic method of coordination. By replacing his former instability with intense focus, Richie proves that his redemptive self is defined not by how much space he can command, but by the stability and support he provides.

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