

The Stages of Grief in *The Shack* Novel by William Paul Young

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Abstarct

This study examined the grieving process and how it affected the main character's religiosity in William Paul Young's fiction book entitled The Shack. The study aimed to find the stages of grief and the impacts on religiosity in this novel. The key theories used by the writer were the Stages of Grief and the Religiosity Dimension. To collect the data, this study used library studies and interpretive-qualitative method to analyze the data. The data were collected from the utterances and narrations by the main character, Mackenzie Allen Phillips. This study showed that the stages of grief were portrayed through the four of five stages experienced by the main character through utterances, actions, thoughts, and narrations. In addition, grief also affected the main character's religiosity through his behavior, experience, utterances, actions, and decisions to deal with his past. This study could give a new reference to the readers about the relationship between grief and religious behavior.

Keywords: *Stages of Grief, Religious Dimension*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to find the stages of grief and its impact to the main character's religiosity in *The Shack* novel. William Paul Young wrote *The Shack* in 2005 as a reflection of his past relationship with his father. The novel was first written for his child's Christmas present, and suddenly the book became famous among his friends and relatives. Finally, Young self-published this book in 2007 and adapted it into a movie in 2009 (The WPY Team, n.d.). This novel told about the story of the main character, who has a bad relationship with God (also known as Papa in this novel) and tries to cope with grief. Moreover, it impacted his religious behavior and affected his past trauma. Through this research, it is expected that the reader get an insight that grief is also related to human's psychological condition especially on religious behavior. Also, this study also

can be used as a reference for another researcher who wants to do research with the same topic.

Furthermore, to support the research, it needs previous studies. The previous studies related with the novel taken from Ibrahim (2019) about analyzing the character development seen in *The Shack* novel shows that the tragedy experienced by the main character change his personality better and make him closer with God. In addition, another previous study by Putri (2018) about the novelist's world view in *The Shack* novel shows that the desire of the novelis tis to see the world without racism by showing a diverse character from diverse race. Through those previous stuies above, it shows that *The Shack* can be used to be an object of the research.

Grief is the main event experienced by the main character in this novel; it is one of the most difficult times humans must endure. This happens when a human loses something important: a job, someone, or a relationship (Sikstrom et al., 2019). This state also affects psychological and physical conditions such as frustration and sorrow (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018) and social isolation (Knowles et al., 2017). Besides affecting human psychology and physical condition, grief also affects someone's religiosity. The study about a grieving father who loses his daughter shows that he tends to follow religious activities to help him cope with grief (McNeil et al., 2021). Thus, there is a relationship between grief and religiosity because the previous study above shows the impact of grief on someone's religiosity behavior. Both grief and religion are connected since they influence psychological conditions through behavior.

When people experience grief, they need time to accept their condition; sometimes, it has some stages (Maranda & Wahyuni, 2019). Kubler-Ross (1969) proposed the theory to analyze the process of grief experienced by an extreme illness patient (Corr, 2020). However, by the following time, this theory analyzes the stages of someone grieving because of losing something meaningful in their life. For example, the analysis of grief stages in the movie "*The Girl on The Train*" by using Kubler-Ross's theory; it found that the main character experiences all the stages of grief (Pambayun et al., 2022). Then, in 2014, David Kessler re-wrote and became the co-writer of Kubler-Ross's book entitled "*On Grief & Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Grief*".

Furthermore, it explains the process of grief which is divided into five: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014). The first phase is denial, it is experienced by someone, which is indicated by feeling shocked and confirming the truth. Next, anger is when someone may feel angry with others, God, or himself. Then, bargaining is the condition of someone asking to turn back the time and would do anything to make their beloved one alive. Furthermore, depression is when someone feels numb because of grief. Last is acceptance, which is the condition of someone who already accepts reality and is ready to start a new chapter of his life. The portrayal of grief in *The Shack's* novel will be analyzed using this theory.

Moreover, since grief is connected to religion, this study also analyzes how grief can impact someone's religiosity. A standard of how someone applies religious values in life can be defined as the religiosity dimension (Purnamasari & Amaliah, 2015). Glock and Stark (1965) proposed this theory to analyze how someone applies his religious values. For example, in the analysis of *My Name is Chloe's* novel, the result is that difficult times influenced her religiosity, so the main character applies his religious values to be closer to God (Suryana, 2018). Then this theory is also used to analyze the main character's religiosity in the "*Squid Game*" film series; it shows that the religiosity of the main character is presented through the series (Rositama & Furaida, 2022).

This theory divides the religiosity dimension into five: ideological, ritualistic, experience, knowledge, and effect. Ideological is the first dimension when someone believes in his religious doctrine, and ritualistic is when someone applies his religious practice, such as praying and going to their worship place. Next, experience is when someone feels closer to their God. Then, knowledge is the dimension in which someone understands the knowledge from their holy book. Last is effect is the dimension when someone gets an effect from his religious values after applying those dimensions before. This theory is used to analyze the impact of grief on the main character's religious behavior.

METHOD

The utterances and narrations related to the topic are the data collected from the novel entitled *The Shack* by William Paul Young (2007). Then, the references to support the analysis are collected from library sources (articles, journals, books, and other

previous studies). Since the data were acquired through library sources, a library study is used to collect the data. This study is one of the studies to collect data from library sources (Bauana, 2022). In order to collect the data, the narration and quotation related to the topic are collected. Then, the references are also quoted to support the analysis. Next, the data related to the topic and theory are sorted to be analyzed.

Qualitative research is used to analyze the data which gathers the data through text, observations, or documents rather than numbers (Crossman, 2020). Since this study needs an interpretation, the interpretive-qualitative method is used to analyze the data. This method means that it interprets the already collected data (Manzilati, 2017). According to (Elliott & Timulak, n.d.) there are eight steps of analyzing the data using interpretive-qualitative method: preparation, delineating, processing meaning units, finding an overall organizing structure for the data, generation category, abstracting the main findings, the validity of analysis, and interpretation of the result. Then, it was applied to analyze the data in this research. First, obtaining the data through collecting quotations and utterances related with the topic. Then, identifying and classifying the data related with the theories. Next, analyzing and describing the main findings of the data after analyzed using the theory. Finally, interpreting the data based on the analysis and description of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research has two results: the portrayal of stages of grief and the impact on religiosity. The first part discusses the portrayal of stages of grief in the novel. The second part discusses the impact of grief on religiosity.

The Portrayal of Stages of Grief

The grief phases are portrayed through the experiences of the main character. The main character's thoughts, narrations, utterances, and actions portray the phase itself. The phase is divided into five: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, as proposed by Kubler-Ross' book in 1969 and re-written by David Kessler's book in 2014 about stages of grief. From the five stages of grief, the main character experience all the stages except the bargaining stage.

Denial

Denial is the first stage of grief which is indicated by feeling shocked and denying that their beloved one is gone by saying: *does it really happen?* or *this is not true!* (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.8 and p.10). In this novel, the main character experiences denial stages by confirming the truth and denying the fact, as mentioned on page 55. The pages mentioned before show how the main character tries to deny that his daughter is dead by confirming the truth; he tries to process the tragedy in front of him; that is, the state when he tries to deny the fact because he wants to confirm the truth in front of him.

Another indication of the stages of grief portrayed by the main character is his effort to deny the fact by running from reality, as is mentioned on page 64. It shows the main character's thoughts about running from reality by thinking he could turn into something so he does not need to feel the sadness and grief that will come to him. He anticipates the feelings by denying that his daughter is gone, which means that the main character enters the denial stages of his grief. The quotation above shows that the first stage of grief is portrayed through the main character's thoughts and desires.

Anger

Anger is the second stage of grief, indicated by feeling angry towards God, condition, others, or himself (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, pp. 11-12). Mack, the main character, expresses his anger toward God by blaming Him, as mentioned on page 68. The main character's question about the purpose of following God after his tragedy shows his anger toward God; his main question, the main character thought that following God is nonsense because bad things that he faced.

Besides expressing his anger through considering following God is nonsense, the main character is angry towards God by blaming him on page 126. Blaming God is one of the results of anger experienced by someone during grief. Besides blaming God, anger stages are also portrayed by decreasing trust in God (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.13). The main character's trust on page 158 is decreased because he feels angry towards God, who let bad tragedy happen to him. The main character's tragedy gives him an understanding that God does not love His children well, as proven by what he faced. Decreasing trust in God is also the result of anger experienced by someone.

Moreover, besides being angry with God, the main character is also angry with the murderer. Feeling angry towards others, especially the murderer, is normal when someone loses their beloved one because of being murdered (King, 2004). It is mentioned

on page 226. Mack proposes the “revenge” term in the previous page to the murderer even though the main character already accepts his loss, because he still wants the murderer to get his revenge. Hence, the reason behind his revenge because he is still angry with the murderer for killing his daughter. Committing to revenge is one of the results of anger. The analysis above portrays the second stage of grief through the main character’s utterances and statements.

Bargaining

The condition of someone who dares to do anything to make his beloved one alive can be called the bargaining stage. The phrase *if only* or *please let him alive* indicates this stage because this is the state someone wants to go back to the past and fix it so they are not losing their beloved one (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.17). However, this stage is not portrayed in this novel because the main character does not go through this stage.

Depression

The next stage is depression; this stage means that someone feels numb and empty during grief, which is normal (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014). Mack, as the main character, shows this indication of this stage as it shows on page 56. The main character enters his depression stage after losing his daughter. The feeling of numbness accompanies him because he does not know what to do next, so the phrase “*forever gray*” depicts the main character’s condition that he is feeling depressed after losing his daughter. On page 67, it also shows that he feels depressed during grief. Emptiness is a feeling that the main character feels after losing his daughter. It shows that the main character felt lost and depressed after losing his daughter. Because it is stated that his life cannot be normal again, starting from he loses his daughter.

Besides feeling numb and empty, uncontrolled crying also indicates someone feeling depressed during grief (Carrillo Alarcon, 2015). It is also shown on page 65. The main character felt his crying could not be controlled again because he had lost his daughter. He feels depressed because his precious child died, and he finds it difficult to cope with his feeling and condition, so he starts to feel depressed about his condition. Thus, the depression stage of grief is depicted through the main character’s feelings and emotions.

Acceptance

Acceptance is the last stage of grief; it shows the readiness of someone to start a new chapter of life, it is not the state when someone is totally fine with his grief, but it is the condition when someone accepts the reality that their beloved one is death (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.25). The main character also experiences this stage at the beginning of the novel, on page 65. The narration “*began the slow and painful track into everyday life*” indicates that the main character tries to accept his condition and start a new life slowly, even though it is painful.

In addition, it is also supported by page 172 that the main character accepts his condition. The page mentioned before indicates that the main character is not sad because of his tragedy; the phrase “*would not be part of his identity*” means that the main character accepts his condition and tries to get used to it. Hence, it can be concluded that the acceptance stage is portrayed through the main character’s decisions and thoughts.

The Impact of Grief on Religiosity

Grief also impacts the main character’s religiosity in this novel. By using the theory of religiosity dimension proposed by Glock and Stark (1965), the writers will analyze the impact of grief towards religiosity as portrayed in “*The Shack*” novel.

Ideology

The dimension in which people believe in God, heaven, hell, or some religious doctrines can be called ideology (Rositama & Furaida, 2022, as cited in Glock and Stark, 1965). In this novel, Mack, the main character, also shows the indication that he still believes in his religious ideology, On page 95, which explains the novel’s plot about Mack, the main character, meets God in a person (female), but he seems unsure because he believes God is a spirit. The statement of the main character’s thought above indicates that he believes God is a spirit. Because in Christian ideology, God is a spirit. In addition, it happens after the main character experiences grief.

Moreover, other quotation supporting that Mack holds his religious ideology even though he experiences grief is shown on page 181. The statement mentioned on the page before is proposed to Mack because Elousia (the representation of Father) emphasizes the concept of heaven that Mack fails to understand. The phrase “*stuck in your head*” means that Mack believes heaven exists, even though he has a wrong portrayal of that. Both quotations above happened during the journey of Mack to cope with grief; it can be

concluded that grief cannot change Mack's ideology about his religion. Grief does not have an impact on his beliefs about religious doctrines.

Ritualistic

Someone who applies his religious ritual, such as: fasting, praying, or going to the worship place, can be included as a religious practice dimension (Rositama & Furaida, 2022, as cited in Glock and Stark, 1965). One of the religious practices that the main character does is praying. On page 41, it is mentioned that the main character delivers his prayers to God, mostly about thanksgiving. The prayer mentioned above happened before the tragedy. Even during the tragedy, the main character Mack does not forget to pray to God, hoping his daughter is safe. It is shown on page 46. The page mentions that when the main character experiences grief, he remembers to pray.

Moreover, during the main character's journey to cope with grief, he does not forget to pray. It is shown on page 201. The page mentioned before contains the main character's indirect prayer to God during his journey to cope with grief. Even though it is not mentioned explicitly that he prays, the main character's wish can be granted as a prayer. It means that he tries to deliver his prayer to God. The analysis above can be concluded that grief does not impact the main character's religious practice. It is shown in his actions before, during, and after grief. He still prays to God.

Experiential

The third dimension is experiential, when someone feels closer to God (Rositama & Furaida, 2022, as cited in Glock and Stark, 1965). In addition, the experiential dimension also can be defined as someone who enters or has contact with a transcendent world (Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014). In this novel, Mack, the main character, experiences this dimension by entering the transcendent world, as it is mentioned on page 82 about the changing of the setting.

The changing of setting on the page mentioned before is impossible because the first setting faced by the main character is snowy but suddenly changes into summer. It is supported on page 229 that the main character is saying goodbye to God. The phrase "*saying goodbye*" means that someone has met the others face to face; it also happened to the main character. It supports that the main character has met God in a person or entering a transcendent world. Because after he copes with grief, he says that sentence to God means that he ever met God in a person.

In addition, after entering the transcendent world, the experience dimension felt by the main character is shown on page 178. The expression about how the main character's love towards God grows during his process to cope with grief shows that the main character starts falling in love with God. The result of transcendent world experience makes him feel closer to God. As a result, the impact of grief on the experiential dimension is portrayed through the main character's experience of entering the transcendent world and his expression of loving God. It can be concluded that grief impacts the main character's religious behavior.

Knowledge

The fourth dimension is knowledge; it is stated that this dimension refers to how someone understands his religious knowledge through their holy book (Rositama & Furaida, 2022, as cited in Glock and Stark, 1965). In this novel, the main character gets new knowledge; the first knowledge obtained by the main character is shown on page 107 about relationships. During his journey to cope with grief, the main character experiences a transcendent world where he meets God face to face. The main character's thought above shows that he tries to compare what he was done and what he sees now. He sees a big difference between how he treats someone and what he just witnessed in his religious experience. The phrase "*he knew*" on page 107 emphasizes the meaning that the main character gets knowledge through his journey to cope with grief. The first knowledge obtained by the main character is about relationships; through his thought above, it can be concluded that the knowledge obtained by the main character is the beauty of relationships.

Another knowledge gained by the main character is the purpose behind his tragedy. Finally, it reveals on page 187. Through his tragedy, the main character knew that the purpose behind his grief was to make him close to God and heal this trauma about relationships. Because in the novel, it tells that the main character has trauma with his past, so through his grief and journey, the main character obtains new knowledge about relationships. By analyzing the impact of grief on religiosity, it founds that grief impacts his knowledge dimension and is portrayed through his thoughts and understanding.

Effects

The condition of someone getting an effect for experiencing all the dimensions above can be called an effect (Rositama & Furaida, 2022, as cited in Glock and Stark,

1965). The main effect gained by the main character is forgiveness. At the end of his grief, the main character proposes forgiveness for his father and the murderer. The first forgiveness is proposed to his father. As mentioned on page 217, Mack exchanges forgiveness with his father, and love heals them together. It shows that grief helps the main character deal with his past by having a transcendent journey. Because the main character's relationship with his father is worse, the main character finally forgives him after having a transcendent journey. The second forgiveness proposed by the main character is to the murderer. It is hard for the main character to forgive the murderer until he commits to revenge, but at the end of his grief journey, he finally decides to forgive the murderer. It is shown on page 239 when the main character tries to forgive the murderer. The page mentioned above indicates that the main character can finally forgive the murderer even though, for the first time, he feels hard to propose that. This is the first effect gained by the main character.

Furthermore, another effect gained by the main character is trust. Grief makes the main character put his trust in God more than before; it is shown on page 224. Trust is the result of the religious knowledge gained by the main character about relationships. It builds his trust in God more than before. The quotation on page 237 reinforces the main character's trust in God by believing that God never leaves him alone. This is the result of relationship knowledge gained by the main character during his journey to cope with grief. It can be concluded that the effect gained by the main character through his grief is forgiveness and trust.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that grief is portrayed through the 4 of 5 stages of grief that go through by Mack as the main character. The process of grieving are portrayed through utterances, narrations, thoughts, actions, and emotions. In the denial stage, the main character tries to deny the fact and wants to escape reality. In the anger stage, blaming God and the murderer is portrayed by the main character through his utterances and commitment. However, the main character does not experience the bargaining stage, which is not portrayed in the novel. Then, in the depression stage, the main character experiences numbness, emptiness, and uncontrolled crying. Finally, the acceptance stage

is portrayed through the main character's decision to back to the new life even though it hurts, and his feeling about sadness is not part of his life anymore.

Moreover, grief also impacts the main character's religiosity, as shown in his dimension of religiosity. However, grief does not impact his ideology and ritual dimension, but it impacts his experience dimension by having a transcendent journey and feeling closer to God. In addition, the knowledge dimension is portrayed by the main character's new understanding of relationships and the purpose behind his tragedy. Last, all the dimension that the main character experiences give affect his religiosity by his decision to forgive his past and the murderer, also besides forgiveness, the main character trust God more than before as a result of his grief journey. It can be concluded that grief is portrayed in this novel through the main character, and it impacts his religious behavior.

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