
**AN ANALYSIS OF STAGES OF GRIEF IN OTTO AS THE MAIN CHARACTER
IN A MAN CALLED OTTO (2023) MOVIE**

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Abstrak

Setiap individu akan merasakan kesedihan ketika kehilangan sesuatu yang berarti atau ditinggal oleh orang yang dicintainya, terutama saat menghadapi kematian. Kehilangan tersebut menimbulkan duka mendalam bagi siapa pun yang mengalaminya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap tahapan-tahapan duka dan bentuk ekspresi emosional yang dialami oleh tokoh utama dalam film *A Man Called Otto* (2023) yang disutradarai oleh Marc Forster. Teori Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2014) digunakan dalam penelitian ini untuk mengklasifikasikan lima tahapan berduka, yaitu Penyangkalan, Amarah, Tawar-menawar, Depresi, dan Penerimaan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menerapkan konsep Mode Ekspresi dari Corless (2014), yang mencakup empat kategori: Respon Verbal, Respon Non-verbal, Respon Fisik, dan Aktivitas Fisik. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, menggunakan data dari naskah dan visual film untuk mengidentifikasi tahapan berduka serta ekspresi emosional karakter utama. Hasilnya, ditemukan 20 data yang terbagi atas 5 penyangkalan, 4 amarah, 2 tawar-menawar, 5 depresi, dan 4 penerimaan. Berdasarkan Mode Ekspresi, ditemukan 3 respon verbal, 16 respon non-verbal, dan 1 respon fisik. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tokoh utama mengalami kelima tahapan duka, dengan penyangkalan dan depresi sebagai tahapan yang paling menonjol.

Kata Kunci: Film, Karakter Utama, Tahapan Duka

Abstract

Every individual will feel sadness when they lose something meaningful or are left behind by a loved one, especially when faced with death. Such loss causes deep grief for anyone who experiences it. This study aims to reveal the stages of grief and forms of emotional expression experienced by the main character in the film *A Man Called Otto* (2023), directed by Marc Forster. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory (2014) is used in this study to classify the five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Additionally, this study also applied Corless's (2014) concept of Expression Modes, which includes four categories: Verbal Responses, Non-verbal

Responses, Physical Responses, and Physical Activities. This study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing data from the film's script and visuals to identify the stages of grief and the emotional expressions of the main character. The results revealed 20 data points, divided into 5 denial, 4 anger, 2 bargaining, 5 depression, and 4 acceptances. Based on Expression Mode, 3 verbal responses, 16 non-verbal responses, and 1 physical response were identified. The conclusion of this study indicates that the main character experiences all five stages of grief, with denial and depression being the most prominent stages.

Keywords: Main Character, Movie, Stages of Grief

INTRODUCTION

Movie is a form of artistic expression that merges visual, sound, and story to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences. As Wei & Chang (2024, p.1), proposed that movies as a form of visual art that conveys stories, ideas, and experiences by presenting it through the use of moving images. Movies are typically presented in cinema, television, or through streaming platforms. As Anggraeni (2021, p.37), mentioned that movie is defined as a narrative captured on film to be shown on television or in the cinema. Movie have a powerful impact on both culture and society. They can shape people's perceptions, encourages new ways of thinking, and influence people's behavior. As Prabakaran & Sudharsan (2024, p.34), suggest that movies have the capacity to shape people's attitudes and behavior.

Movie frequently serves as a vehicle to convey point of view, messages, feelings, and emotions. Emotions are complex reactions encompassing both mental and physical reactions, often triggered by specific events and situations. According to Bettina Bergo (2021, p.177), there are six universal emotions that humans could experience. These emotional responses are including pleasure, fear, rage, disgust, and suffering or grief.

According to Boerner, Kathrin, Gleason, & Barooah (2016, p.189-195), grief is the emotional response experienced by individuals who has lost someone or something. Most people experience grief in their lives. Grief refers to the complex emotional response involving various psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions that a person may experience after the death of a loved one (Stroebe, Boerner & Schut, 2017, p.1). Grief could arise from various life events, including relationship problems, health issues, significant life change or the loss of a personal dream or goals.

Grief is a natural, typical response to bereavement—an event that eventually affects most people, therefore grief is considered a normal part of life (Stroebe, Boerner & Schut, 2017, p.1). Grief may persist for months or even years, depending on the person who experiencing it. As Fitriani, Berek, Anakaka & Kiling (2021, p.484) stated that the experience of grieving could be deeply painful and lasts for a very long time.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist born in Zürich, introduced the influential Stages of Grief model in her book entitled *On Death and Dying* (1969). She introduced a theory named Stages of Grief to describe the psychological journey individuals after experiencing death or profound loss. She introduced a theory named Stages of Grief to distinguish every stage that humans go through after facing death, loss, and grief.

According to Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.18), there are five stages of grief namely; anger, denial, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. The five stages of grief model was designed to outline the range of emotional responses a person may go through when grieving the loss of someone or something. These stages are not happening in a fixed sequence or specific order, every person processes grief in their own unique way. As Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.18), stated that not everyone goes through all of the stages or in a prescribed order.

Grief could be expressed in various ways, through spoken or written words, behaviors, or expressions performed by individuals. The expression of grief are introduced by Corless and her friends (2014, p.134) in their journal through the concept of Modes of Expression. According to Corless et al (2014, p.134-136), modes of expression is a form of a person's expression in dealing with their grief. These modes are divided into four different responses, which are verbal responses, non-verbal responses, physical responses and physical activities. Each modes has its own unique characteristics and varies from one another.

This research integrates Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' (2014) stages of grief theory as a grand theory and Corless' (2014) modes of expression theory as a supporting theory. This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how grief is processed and expressed by Otto as the main character in *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie.

METHODOLOGY

Type Research

In analyzing the data, this research uses a descriptive qualitative method. According to Susanto, Yuntina, Saribanon, Soehaditama, & Liana (2024, p.262), descriptive qualitative method is a research method that emphasizes understanding of a phenomena that cannot be explained simply with numerical or statistical data. This research utilized this descriptive qualitative method to investigate more deeply about the object, as the research object consists of dialogues and expressions from *Otto* as the main character in *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie.

Object of the Research

The object of this research is *Otto*, the main character in a movie entitled *A Man Called Otto* (2023). The data for this research will be obtained from the utterances spoken by *Otto* and his expressions which are categorized as Five Stages of Grief theory by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Corless' Modes of Expressions concept.

Data Collection

The focus of this data collection is the stages of grief and Modes of Expressions represented by *Otto* as the main characters through his utterances and expressions. There are several steps to collect the data in this research:

- a. Getting access to *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie on Netflix streaming platform
- b. Watching the movie intensively for several times
- c. Select and collecting the new data found in the form of dialogues script and visual data in the movie
- d. Classifying all the selected data which represented by *Otto* as the main character found in *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie related to the stages of grief theory by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2014) and Modes of Expressions by Corless (2014).

Data Analysis

The data analysis focused on the stages of grief and the modes of expression in *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie which are presented by *Otto* as the main character. The data obtained through *Otto*'s utterances and also his expression that will be analyzed to identify the stages of grief and the modes of expression. The following steps are taken in analyzing the data:

- a. Identifying the stages of grief and the modes of expression portrayed in the main character through dialogues and scenes in *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie.
- b. Grouping the data into different parts of the five stages of grief and modes of expression.
- c. Analyzing the data that have been categorized into the five stages of grief and modes of expression experienced by *Otto*.
- d. Provides a detailed explanation about the stages of grief and modes of expression presented by *Otto* as the main character
- e. Drawing the conclusion based on the comprehensive analysis of the presented data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research applies the Stages of Grief theory by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2014) and the Modes of expression concept by Corless (2014) to *Otto* as the main character in *A Man Called Otto* movie. From the analysis, there are 20 data that being analyzed using Kübler-Ross' stages of grief theory in this section, which consist of 5 Denial, 4 Anger, 2 Bargaining, 5 Depression, and 4 Acceptance. To support the analysis of this research, this research also uses incorporates Corless et al (2014, p.134-136) to support the analysis by exploring the

Modes of Expression used by Otto, the film's main character. According to Corless et al (2014, p.134-136), Modes of expression are categorized into four different types, which are verbal responses, non-verbal responses, physical responses and physical activities. Within this research, there are 20 data that are categorized under Corless's framework, which consists of 3 verbal responses, 16 non-verbal responses, and 1 physical responses.

a. Denial

Denial is typically the initial stage experienced by someone when they are facing loss or any significant changes in their life. In this phase, individuals often struggle to accept or even recognize what is happening and find ways to escape their emotional pain. They will feel that the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.20). Below are the expressions of Denial stage exhibited by Otto:

Datum 1

"I don't wanna move on." (01:21:15-01:21:31)



Picture 1. Otto is talking to Marisol

Marisol is Otto's new neighbor who lives right across the street from him and has a close relationship with him. She realizes that Otto is still grieving over the death of his wife. To help relieve Otto's emotional burden, she took the initiative to tidy up Sonya's belongings. However, when she offered this to Otto, he immediately refused it because he still wanted to keep his wife's belongings so that the memories would remain alive. This datum shows that Otto is still in the denial phase and has not yet fully accepted the sadness of his wife's passing. According to Kübler-Ross (2014, p.20), most individuals deny what is happening to them and they still unable to accept what has happened to them when they are facing the denial stage. Through the sentence **"I don't wanna move on"** uttered by Otto above are emphasizes his inability to accept his wife's death.. From this, it can be concluded that Otto is in the denial stage of the Five Stage of Grief.

The denial stage in this datum also illustrated from his expression in picture 5 above which describe that he still cannot accept the death of his wife. According to Corless et al (2014, p. 136), individual are often convey their feelings using non-verbal expression, including body language. The denial stage of Otto are seen in his **non-verbal response**, as he distancing himself from Marisol when she attempts to clean up Sonya’s belongings and told him to forget his wife.

b. Anger

Anger represents as the second stage in the Five Stages of Grief model. In this stage, People would react everything with anger and they will project their negative emotions towards their surroundings. They will angry at their loved one because they didn’t take better care of themselves, blame the doctors for failing to save someone they loved, and angry because they didn’t see this coming and when they did, nothing could stop it (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.21). Below are the expressions of Anger exhibited by Otto:

Datum 2

“I don’t want to clear Sonya from my life. She was everything. There was nothing before her and there’s nothing after!” (01:21:59-01:22:06)



Picture 2. Otto mad at Marisol

Otto had a deep love for his wife, Sonya. Even after she passed, he continues to think about her every day and is unwilling to let go of the memories they shared. He does not want to erase any memories that he has been through together with his wife. Therefore, this emotional attachment leads to anger when his neighbor, Marisol, suggests that he should move on from his wife's death. Otto interprets her suggestion as an attempt to erase Sonya from his life, which triggers a strong emotional response. He raises his voice at Marisol and say **“I don’t want to clear Sonya from my life. She was everything. There was nothing before her and there’s nothing after!”**. This sentence clearly illustrates his unwillingness to let go and he is angry towards Marisol. This datum reflects the anger stage of the Five

Stage of Grief where Otto gets angry when someone discusses about forgetting his wife as Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.22), proposed that anger can be boundless. It can extend not only to your friends, your family, yourself, and your loved one who died.

Otto's anger stage also conveyed through his facial expression in picture 9 above which visually captures that he is very angry towards Marisol. According to Corless et al (2014, p. 136), grieving individuals often communicate their emotions non-verbally, particularly through facial expressions. Otto's facial reactions represent a **non-verbal** manifestation of his anger stage, which shows a very upset and furious face.

C. Bargaining

Bargaining is the third stage in Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. As individuals move past denial and anger, they often enter a phase of bargaining. Guilt often accompanies the bargaining process, as individuals speculate about mistakes they could have avoided or actions they could have taken differently. This stage frequently involves "if only..." or "what if..." thoughts, such as hoping to undo the past. As Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.25) proposed that they want life returned to what it was; they want their loved one restored. Below are the specific bargaining expressions demonstrated by Otto:

Datum 3

(00:17:33-00:18:02)



Picture 3. Otto remembered his wife because of the book

The datum described shows Otto sitting alone in his living room, gazing at a pile of books beside him. He picks up one of the books that his wife, Sonya, used to read. As he flips through its pages, he suddenly remembered about his wife, Sonya. He remembered the moment when Sonya once asked him to build a new bookshelf because her existing one could no longer hold all her books. Otto really missed that moment where he spent time with his wife. The book he holds symbolizes his internal desire to reconnect with Sonya, reflecting his inner bargaining. According to Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.25),

individuals in the bargaining stage often wish for life to return to how it once was, they want their loved one restored. This moment clearly indicates that Otto is still experiencing the bargaining of stages of grief.

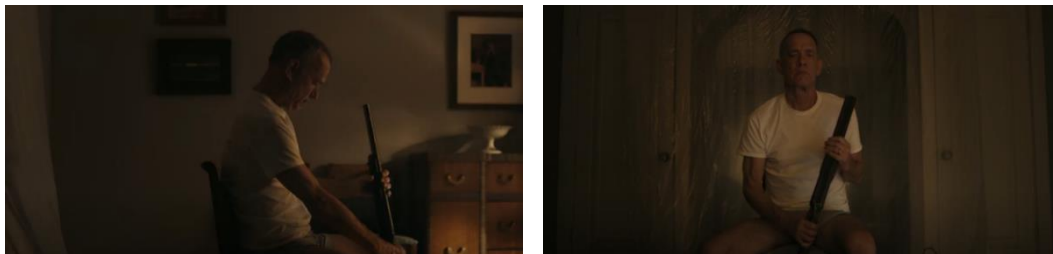
The bargaining stage in this datum also strengthened by his facial expression in picture 10 above where he was thinking about his past memories with his wife. According to Corless et al (2014, p. 136), when people are grieving they often rely on non-verbal expression, especially facial expressions to communicate with others. This facial reactions displayed by Otto in picture 10 above serves as a **non-verbal** manifestation of his bargaining stage, as he shows a regretful expression remembering his wife through the book.

D. Depression

This stage often proves to be one of the most emotionally challenging. Depression after a loss might give a feeling of being stuck in grief for a very long time, as Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.27) mentioned that this depressive stage feels like it will last forever. Seeking a way out of depression feels like trapped in a storm of sorrow with no apparent exit. Below are the **Depression** expressions demonstrated by Otto:

Datum 4

(01:27:26-01:31:09)



Picture 4. Otto tried to shoot himself

In the depicted scene, Otto is seated in a chair, holding a gun which he intends to use in an attempt to end his life. As he sits and recalling the memories he was in the tragic bus accident after their trip to Niagara Falls, which left his wife Sonya paralyzed and caused them to lose their child. Overcome by sorrow, Otto is unable to escape the pain, leading him to attempt suicide. This moment powerfully illustrates the depression stage of Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief where Otto is overwhelmed by the relentless weight of grief, unable to bear the emotional burden any longer. His sorrow is persistent, continually reminding him of Sonya's death, evoking a hopelessness that feels forever. According to Kübler-Ross &

Kessler (2014, p.27), the depression after a loss might give a feeling of being stuck in grief for a very long time, this depressive stage feels like it will last forever.

Otto's deep sense of loss is visually reinforced in Picture 16, where his facial expression conveys a struggle to move on from the past memories of his wife. According to Corless et al. (2014, p. 136), grieving individuals frequently express their emotions through **non-verbal** channels, particularly facial expressions. In the image above, Otto's somber and blank face serves as a non-verbal indication of his depression stage.

E. Acceptance

Acceptance stage is the fifth and final stage of the five stages of grief. Acceptance does doesn't mean that the loss is no longer painful. Instead, it reflects to an emotional shift in which a person begins to acknowledge the permanence of their loss and learns to live with their new reality. As Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p.30) proposed that individuals at this stage already accepts and recognize that their loved one is truly gone and embrace this as their new, unchangeable reality. Below are the **Acceptance** expressions exhibited by Otto:

Datum 5

“Sonya said we had to keep living. That’s what I did. I lived for Sonya.” (01:40:41-01:41:02)



Picture 9. Otto explaining about the accident to Marisol

In this scene, Otto shares with Marisol the hardships he endured with Sonya before her passing. He recounts how, during a trip to Niagara Falls when their child was just six months old, their return bus suffered a brake failure and crashed. The accident tragically left Sonya paralyzed and resulted in the loss of their baby. It was an incredibly painful period for both of them. However, Otto reveals that he has come to terms with what happened, believing that there is no use in revisiting the past. Instead, he focuses on moving forward, choosing to live on in memory of Sonya. This reflects Otto are in the acceptance stage of Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. As Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014, p. 30) explain, acceptance

occurs when a person acknowledges the permanence of their loss and begins to adapt to life without their loved one. Otto's statement, "**Sonya said we had to keep living. That's what I did. I lived for Sonya,**" illustrates his emotional resolution and willingness to move forward while honoring his wife's memory.

Otto's acceptance is visually underscored in Picture 19, where his expression reveals that he could already accept everything that happened to him, especially his wife's passing. Corless et al. (2014, p. 135) explain that **verbal responses**—such as spoken or written words—serve as a key way individuals express their grief and communicate their acceptance. In this instance, Otto articulates his feelings and thoughts directly to Marisol through dialogue, demonstrating his emotional reconciliation. His words act as a verbal affirmation of his transition into the acceptance stage of Kübler-Ross's model.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This research analyzed the Five Stages of Grief theory by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross which consists of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance which experienced by *Otto* as the main character *A Man Called Otto* (2023) movie. In addition, this research also analyzed the Modes of Expression theory by Corless that the main character utilized during facing the death of his wife. The stages of grief in this movie consist of 5 denial, 4 anger, 2 bargaining, 5 depression, and 4 acceptances. Regarding Modes of Expression, this research found 3 verbal responses, 16 non-verbal responses, and 1 physical responses. Through detailed analysis of Otto's dialogue, facial expressions, and body language in the film, this research identifies the stages of grief he experiences and maps his emotional expressions according to Corless's Modes of Expression framework in response to his wife's death.

Suggestion

This research successfully identified all five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as experienced by Otto in *A Man Called Otto*, directed by Marc Forster. Furthermore, this research also examined how these emotional stages were manifested through Otto's expressions, including his dialogue, body language, and facial expressions.

For further research, there are still many objects that can be expanded in the study of Stages of Grief. It is highly recommended to the future researchers to investigate more deeply about the Stages of Grief in various form of media, such as podcasts, novel, comics,

TV series, YouTube videos, etc. By selecting a diverse range of research objects, the perspectives that emerge can be broader, and the study results can be richer and more varied in understanding the stages of grief.

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