

Using the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): An Analysis of *Manchester by the Sea*

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Abstract

People may encounter different stages of grief during the course of bereavement, and not everyone can achieve a positive state of mind. This study intended to analyze how the characters in *Manchester by the Sea*, mainly Lee Chandler, Patrick Chandler, and Randi, manage their emotional responses when they are facing the loss of a loved one. The study used Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five-stage model of grief and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to analyze how these characters transition through their grief and whether they are likely to suffer from mental illness. Some people, like Randi and Patrick in the film, may recover from bereavement; however, some people, like Lee, may not, eventually becoming afflicted with mental illness or PTSD. The research results demonstrated that the film *Manchester by the Sea* can let viewers consider ways to make sense of traumatic grief and turn their negative psychological issues into something meaningful in life, thereby allowing their lives to flourish. Hopefully, seeing this film or reading this paper will help people to recognize that they might have PTSD. It might also help people in the health industry to realize that more needs to be done to help these people find their way back.

Keywords: grief, bereavement, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic grief

Introduction

When people are exposed to a traumatic event, they may experience a mental disorder or acute stress disorder. However, the mental disorder or traumatic grief may dissipate in the month following exposure to the traumatic event. Based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association; APA, 2013), most people's negative feelings pertaining to traumatic events fade within a few months, but if the duration is too long, they may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is defined as a mental disorder that can develop when individuals have been exposed to traumatic events, such as warfare, sexual assault, the loss of family members or loved ones, or the diagnosis of a critical



disease (APA, 2013). PTSD can be a kind of anxiety disorder, accompanied by other complications, such as major depression. It may last for a mere matter of months, or it could extend for years, thereby threatening one's life or life quality. Those with acute stress disorder or PTSD may experience the following symptoms for more than one month after a traumatic event: nightmares, numbness, insomnia, intrusiveness or avoidance of traumatic memories, excessive alertness, or a change of personality (APA, 2013).

Research has shown that the bereavement of children is the heaviest blow and the greatest loss in an individual's life (Dent, 2002), as it may challenge individuals' understanding of meaning in their life and their philosophical beliefs; they may even feel that their very existence has lost all meaning. Kubler-Ross (1973; 2005) found that parents of bereaved children are often emotionally unstable, with behavior ranging from numbness to a sudden bad temper; they may be quiet, negative, indifferent, resentful of the world, or even disgusted to see any child. Confronting a loss or a life-threatening situation requires a certain process in order to adjust to the new circumstances; that is, those experiencing loss need resilience or the ability to recover from grief and maintain a stable equilibrium. Expected grief refers to the grief that occurs before the actual loss occurs, hence allowing one more time to adjust to the situation or to communicate with a loved one. However, with unexpected grief, people need more time to recover and reintegrate themselves after experiencing a traumatic event.

Kubler-Ross (1973; 2005) proposed a five-stage grief model, composed of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, as a framework to allow those in mourning to identify their feelings and learn to live with bereavement. Most grieving people may have temporary difficulty in coping with their bereavement; however, with the passage of time, in itself a tool for self-healing, they can recover. Nonetheless, some grieving people cannot recover from grief or traumatic events, even after several months. If their grief symptoms worsen, lasting for more than six months, their daily life could be affected; these people are probably suffering from PTSD. Those suffering from PTSD may fail to recover after being immersed in their grief for so long. Also, it would be more difficult for those suppressing their grief or negative emotions to return to a normal life. In other words, denying or avoiding the pain of bereavement for a long time only forces a person to continue feeling the loss, hence leading to complex or pathological grief, which may endanger one's health, physically and psychologically.

In order to further realize how the traumatic events, bereavement, grief, and PTSD may endanger one's physical and psychological health, this study analyzed how the characters in *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016) manage their emotional responses while they are facing the loss of their loved one.

Research Method

This study used Kubler-Ross's (1973; 2005) five-stage grief model—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as a framework to analyze how the characters in the film *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016), mainly Lee Chandler, Patrick Chandler, and Randi, go through different stages of grief during their bereavement. Some may recover from bereavement, but those who do not may



hence become afflicted with mental illness or PTSD. The study used latent-content analysis (Babbie, 1995) as the qualitative research technique to comprehensively scrutinize the film and the script of *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016) in order to elicit replicable and valid inferences from the text and thus determine how some characters in the film go through the grief process and achieve integration with their traumatic past, whereas some fail to reach such integration, remaining endlessly haunted by traumatic events.

Findings and discussion

Traumatic Event in *Manchester by the Sea*

Manchester by the Sea was directed and written by Kenneth Lonergan (2016), and it portrays Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck), who is suffering from a traumatic event and, hence, endless grief during his bereavement. A flashback leads readers back to a time when Lee lived in Manchester with his wife, Randi (Michelle Williams), and his three young children. Lee was an outgoing person who always wore a smile on his face. He seemed happy, and he adored his wife and children. Unfortunately, while he was drunk, Lee's negligence caused a house fire that resulted in the deaths of his three children and, thereafter, a divorce from his wife. After experiencing the fire, the death of his children, and the divorce, Lee becomes depressed, irritable, and alienated. Filled with trauma and guilt, Lee leaves the town of Manchester-by-the-Sea and lives alone in a messy basement apartment in a town in Massachusetts, choosing to segregate himself from society.

The death of his brother Joe (Kyle Chandler) draws Lee back to his hometown of Manchester-by-the-Sea, a sad place burdened with the traumatic events he has attempted to escape from for so long. Upon his return, Lee runs into his ex-wife, Randi, who got married again and has a newborn. Randi sobs, expressing remorse over her mistreatment of Lee after the fire and the death of their children. She invites Lee to lunch, but with trauma-related guilt, Lee turns her down and, instead, goes to a bar, where he gets drunk, fights with strangers, and eventually, is knocked out. When he awakens in the house of George, a family friend, Lee finally breaks down in tears.

Because of his traumatic experience, even after the death of his brother Joe, Lee is unwilling to take responsibility for his brother's son, Patrick. Instead, he arranges for George and his wife to adopt Patrick Chandler (Lucas Hedges). When Patrick asks Lee why he cannot stay in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Lee says, "Come on, Patty...I can't beat it. I can't beat it. I'm sorry" (Lonergan, 2016, p. 108).

Kübler-Ross' Five-Stage Grief Model on *Manchester by the Sea*

The five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—form a grief model that was first introduced in *On Death and Dying* (1969) by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross; it is known as the "Kübler-Ross model." The model was initially intended for those suffering from terminal illness; however, it can also be used for those suffering from the loss of a loved one (see Figure 1) since, according to Kübler-Ross (1973; 2005), those experiencing terminal illness or the loss of a loved one will move through the stages of grief. Moreover, the model can be applied to all catastrophic personal losses, such as the loss of work, income, or freedom. The five stages of grief do not occur in a specific order. Grief is a complex process;



mourners may have their own unique steps to go through. Therefore, they may not experience all of the stages of the grief process. However, Kübler-Ross (1973; 2005) believes that mourners will go through at least two stages. The five-stage model is briefly illustrated below.

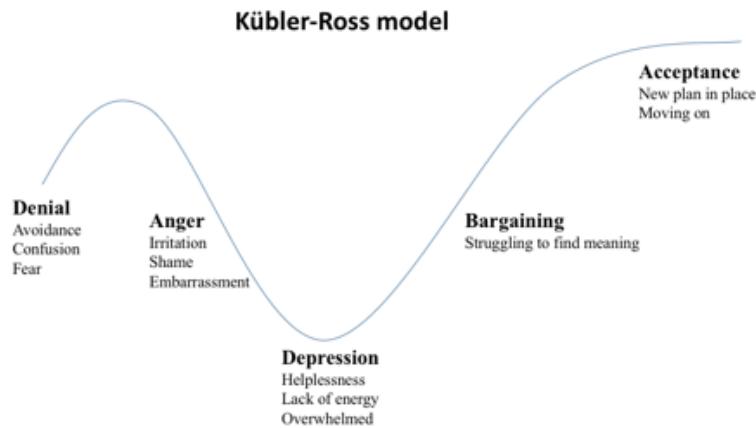


Figure 1. Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of grief

1. Denial

In this stage, grieving people, consciously or unconsciously, refuse to accept the truth, that they are losing their loved one, because the loss would leave them heartbroken. Hence, they deny reality and accept their preferred reality, believing that their loved one is still alive. This is a way to protect themselves and to avoid having their heart broken by the truth. For instance, in the film *Manchester by the Sea*, Lee refuses to accept the fact that a house fire caused by his negligence resulted in the deaths of his three children. While in a state of shock at losing their loved one, mourners use denial as a mechanism to pacify their feelings of grief and, moreover, to find a way to manage their grief by degrees. As they gradually accept the reality of their loss and start to face their painful emotions, all the feelings they have denied begin to surface.

2. Anger

Having no choice but to face the truth, that they are losing their loved one, grieving people project their anger or other negative emotions on others or on themselves, because the truth is unbearable. As in *Manchester by the Sea*, while knowing that the carelessness of her husband, Lee, resulted in the death of her three beloved children, Randi pours her anger onto Lee and finally has a divorce with Lee. Those losing their loved one may become angry or frustrated because they feel guilty, thinking that they may have done something to cause the situation, or they don't understand why this is happening to them. Sometimes, they may feel regretful for what has happened. For example, they may regret being too busy working to pay much attention to their loved one.



3. Bargaining

In order that their loved one might be spared, mourners attempt to change reality. As in the film, Patrick does not like to see his father being in a freezer, pretending that his father is still alive. Moreover, they may want their loved one restored, so they start to believe there must be something they can do to help save the loved one. They suppose that, if only they could do something different, they might be able to alter reality, and somehow, their loved one could survive. By using the phrase “if only” or “what if” to instill hope, mourners provide themselves with a temporary escape from their grief. They try to bargain and negotiate to deal with the reality of losing the one they love, thinking that “if only” or “what if” could prevent their loved one from dying. I just don't like him bein' in a freezer.Pa

4. Depression

However, though trying to bargain with God through prayer or using “what if” to instill hope, those grieving people do know that the facts cannot be changed. Therefore, they fall into despair or depression. This depressive stage leads mourners to feel numb about everything. Moreover, depression may bring additional negative effects, mentally or physically, such as insomnia, a loss of appetite, and even suicide attempts. For instance, in the film Lee cannot bear the loss of his children and hence intends to use gun to shoot himself.

5. Acceptance

For those grieving, this stage is about acceptance of the reality that their loved one is dead or is going to die. Though not comfortable about the loss of their loved one, mourners eventually realize that they cannot freeze the past; hence, they learn to adjust and to accept the reality that their beloved one has passed away. As in the film, after going through anger and depression, Randi manages to recover from the traumatic event and accept the fact that her children are dead. For those experiencing the grief process, acceptance is the final stage, as those grieving begin to accept either that death is inevitable or that it has actually happened.

Based on Kübler-Ross's model (1973; 2005), the five stages of grief vary from person to person. Not every person goes through every stage; some people may go through only a few of them. Kübler-Ross believes that everyone will go through at least two of them. However, no matter how many stages one experiences, the final stage is always acceptance. In order to give a further illustration of the varying stages of grief during the bereavement process, the study would further analyze those characters suffering bereavement in *Manchester by the Sea*: Lee, Patrick, and Randy.

The Grief Process in *Manchester by the Sea*: Lee, Patrick, and Randy

Among all the forms of traumatic grief, the trauma from a death or loss is the most severe because it is reinforced by the repeated absence of a loved one and the recurring realization that the loved one is dead, which pulls the grieving person back to that initial trauma of death and loss, with no end. According to Worden (2018), the type of death that occurred would affect the mourning or grieving process of the living. In *Manchester by the Sea* (Lonergan, 2016), Lee, Patrick, and Randi experience different stages of grief during their bereavement. Also, their reactions vary. Lee, knowing that his three children burned to death, Lee cannot accept what has happened, and he feels guilty. He cannot forgive himself; consumed with anger and depression, he does not know how he can go on. Filled with sorrow and traumatic grief, he yearns to do away with himself, so he “GRABS a YOUNG COP



from behind, pulls the GUN out of his holster and shoves him away. SHOUTS and GUNS come out everywhere. LEE puts the GUN to his own HEAD and pulls the trigger....” (p.52). Fortunately, the safety catch is on, giving the cops a chance to grab the gun in time.

In the depression stage, people, like Lee, cannot accept the truth, so they try to escape from reality. Their mind full of pain, sadness, fragility, and depression, their traumatic grief is more than they can bear. Moreover, some mourners also suffer from other mental disorders, such as severe depression, anxiety, or even various addictions. Their mental condition may continuously worsen if they do not obtain professional help. Someone who cannot move through this depression stage will choose to end their life (Wortman & Latack, 2017; Worden, 2018).

Three of the stages of grief are clearly shown in Randi: anger, depression, and acceptance. Once knowing that the house is completely on fire, Randi, though “smeared with smoke and water,” violently shakes two policemen off so that she can run into the burning house to save her three little children, saying hysterically, “Let me go! Get your hands off me! Let go of me! Somebody go in there! Let me go! Get them outta there!” (p. 49). While experiencing losing her beloved children and having a divorce after the fire accident, Randi pours her anger onto Lee. However, after depression, Randi manages, over time, to recover from the traumatic event, finally getting married and have a new baby. Aware of Joe’s death, Randi even tries to help Lee go through the grief process, saying “So, I don’t know if you planned a service yet, but I was also gonna ask you if you wouldn’t mind – I’d like to be there, if it’s OK with you” (p. 69)

Patrick also go through some stages of grief: denial, bargain, depression, and finally acceptance. As for Patrick, initially, he refuses to accept that his father is dead. Hence, when he sees the frozen meat in the refrigerator, he “starts to breathe hard” (p.76), because the frozen meat reminds him of his father. Feeling sick, he puts the meat back inside, leans “his head against the freezer door then backs away” (p. 76). When Lee comes in, Patrick can no longer control himself; he wipes his eyes, saying,

Patrick: I don’t want it. I don’t want it.

Lee: Patty—

Patrick: somethin’s wrong with me.

Lee: What do you mean? Like what?

Patrick: I don’t know! I feel really weird! I’m havin’ like a panic attack or something.

Lee: Are you sick?

What do you mean?

Patrick: Could you get that shit outta the freezer? I feel really weird.

Lee: Get ridda what? The chicken? . . .

Patrick: I just don’t like him bein’ in the freezer!

Lee: You’ve expressed that very clearly. I don’t like it either. But there’s nothin’ we can do about it (p.76).

Patrick knows that he has lost his father, and he does not want his father to stay in the freezer for a long time. Therefore, upon seeing the meat in the overcrowded



freezer, he can no longer restrain himself; his words and cries signal a release from his depression regarding the death of his father. As noted in Kübler-Ross's grief model (1973; 2005), those who are grieving cannot help but cry, scream, or yell to release their negative emotions, whether the death was unexpected or expected. They often feel much better when they unleash their true feelings. Only by expressing their depressing or negative feelings can grieving people come to the final acceptance stage, whereupon they can reintegrate themselves and allow their lives to continue.

From Traumatic Grief to Reintegration: Patrick and Randi

Those experiencing traumatic events may be aware of their own grief trauma and illness; hence, they may have a self-healing ability toward the traumatic events (Nanni, Tosato, Grassi, Ruggeri, Prigerson, 2015). Research has shown that most people experiencing bereavement finally come to terms with their traumatic loss six months after the death, and they integrate this traumatic experience into their lives (Arizmendi, O'Connor, 2015; Zisook, Simon, & Reynolds, 2010). Though some people may suffer from intense traumatic grief or PTSD symptoms, most people are able to adapt and self-heal. People who have good self-healing capacities can return to normal life by themselves. Unfortunately, some bereaved people may not have good healing abilities; hence, they are unable to fully integrate their loss into their life, continuing to suffer from severe depression even years after the bereavement (Nanni, Tosato, Grassi, Ruggeri, Prigerson, 2015).

In order to reach the acceptance stage, reintegrate, and carry on with life, those who are grieving should not only accept that their loved one is truly leaving them, but also accept the mistakes they may make, if any, in order not to let themselves live guiltily afterwards. In the film, for instance, Patrick goes through the depression stage and enters the acceptance stage, realizing that his father is leaving him because of his cardiac arrest. Randi, after going through the denial, anger, bargaining, and depression stages of the grief process, finally enters the acceptance stage; she accepts the fact that her daughters burned to death accidentally. Moreover, she tries to be rational, not blaming Lee, for she knows that he did not deliberately cause the fire. She even apologizes for her earlier harsh words toward him. Both Patrick and Randi go through their grief process, reintegrate with their traumatic past, and hence, return to normal life.

According to Kübler-Ross (1973; 2005), in order to go through the grief process and reach meaning reconstruction, those who are grieving must go through the acceptance stage of grief. In contrast with Patrick and Randi, Lee traps himself in the depression stage and does not accept the reality of the traumatic event, feeling guilty and regretful about the mistake he made. Therefore, unable to forgive himself, Lee cannot return to his usual life. Instead, he is stuck within a traumatic grief trap, which causes negative effects in his life, both physically and psychologically.

Only when mourners can carry out meaning reconstruction in their grief process can they enter the acceptance stage, where they reconstruct the meaning of the traumatic events and further release their grief (Neimeyer, 2006; 2009). In other words, the grief process becomes the process of meaning reconstruction, by which those grieving should manage to find and construct meaning to justify their experience of bereavement. In this way, grieving people can reintegrate their traumatic past and allow themselves to move forward.



Randi, Lee's ex-wife, successfully goes through the grief process, carrying out meaning reconstruction and reaching a reintegration with herself. In other words, she has the ability to adapt and go through the grief process by herself, reaching a good self-healing effect. Through self-healing, she has insight into her traumatic grief, and she manages to deal with the problems/symptoms of traumatic grief. Therefore, by reintegrating with her past, Randi can recover over time and start her new life and a new family. Moreover, she forgives Lee for his mistake and tearfully apologizes for her condemnation of him. After recovering from the trauma, she even tries to help Lee recover from his grief, but he turns down her assistance.

When Lee and Randi run into each other on the street, Randi apologizes for scolding him in the past; she realizes that no one wanted that tragedy to occur. While apologizing, she hopes that Lee can restart his life and not be trapped by the trauma.

Randi: But let me finish. However it – my heart was broken. It's always gonna be broken. I know your heart is broken too. But I don't have to carry...I said things that I should--I should fuckin' burn in hell for what I said. It was just—

Lee: No, no...

Randi: I'm just sorry. I love you. Maybe I shouldn't say that. And I'm sorry—

Lee: I can't--You can say it, but-- o, it's just--I--I can't—I gotta go.

Randi: We couldn't have lunch?

Lee: I'm really sorry. I don't think so.

Randi: You can't just die...! But honey, I see you walkin' around like this and I just wanna tell you--But Lee, you gotta--I don't know what! I don't wanna torture you. I just wanna tell you I was wrong. That's not true! Can't be true...!

Lee: Thank you for sayin' everything--I'm not! But I can't--I'm happy for you. And I want...I would want to talk to you--But I can't, I can't... I'm tryin' to—ou're not. But I got nothin' to--Thank you for sayin' that. But--There's nothin' there ... You don't understand...

Randi: Of course I do!

Lee: I know you understand...But I've gotta go—I'm sorry.

Randi: OK. I'm sorry.

Lee: There's nothin' I can s—I gotta go. (p.102-103)

Instead of finding comfort in their shared loss, Lee just wants to escape from the traumatic experience, which threatens to destroy him. Lee stops Randi mid-conversation. He refuses to talk to her about anything regarding the accident. While Lee is trapped in the traumatic grief of losing his children, his ex-wife is remarried and welcoming her newborn baby, a rebirth.

Instead of renewing his life, as Randi does, Lee cannot forgive himself. With guilt and remorse, Lee immerses himself in a prolonged depression and traumatic grief, without realizing that he might be suffering from PTSD. The treatment of PTSD depends on patients' perception and awareness of their mental illness (APA, 2013; Quesinberry, 2009). It would be easier to overcome PTSD if patients knew that they were ill and if they were willing to see a doctor. However, some patients



may not know they are suffering from PTSD; others may know, but may be unwilling to see a doctor. Lee is the type of patient who does not recognize his PTSD; hence, he never seeks a doctor's help.

The Unbearable Loss: Lee's Traumatic Grief and PTSD

Compared with the death of the elderly, who have been ill and lying in bed for a long time, the unexpected death of children is particularly unbearable, steeping parents in traumatic grief and mourning. A death is considered traumatic if it is untimely, occurs without warning, involves violence or damage to the body of the beloved one, or is caused by a perpetrator with the intent to harm. Moreover, if those grieving regard the death as unfair, unjust, and preventable or if the death is caused by the grieving person's negligence or carelessness, they would have difficulty recovering from the traumatic events (Wortman & Latack, 2017). If the grief is too unbearable, mourners may consider committing suicide, as did Lee in *Manchester by the Sea*.

Those experiencing traumatic events, as Lee encountered the traumatic deaths of his three young children, must cope not only with their trauma, but also with their grief. Humans all experience variations of grief, which may arise when experiencing an expected loss, such as that resulting from terminal illness or aging, or an unexpected or violent loss, such as death due to an accident or a natural disaster (Kübler-Ross, 1969; 1997). It has been shown that violent deaths, especially those that are unexpected, result in irresolvable distress and depression, causing traumatic grief to the bereaved. They may even remain completely fixated within that painful memory or traumatic experience (Worden, 2018). Those experiencing traumatic grief or PTSD may have the following common traumatic symptoms: re-experience, avoidance, emotional numbness, and hyperarousal (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017). Re-experiencing refers to grieving people who may have recurrent thoughts, memories, dreams, or even nightmares about the traumatic experience. They may also act or feel as if the traumatic event is happening again, which is sometimes called a "flashback." They may have a very strong feeling of distress or depression when thinking of the traumatic event. Moreover, they may be physically responsive to the traumatic event when they think of it, by, for instance, experiencing a drastic surge in their heart rate. Avoidance pertains to mourners withdrawing from social activities and conversations. They may even attempt to move away from the people or places that remind them of the loss, bereavement, or traumatic event they have suffered. Sometimes, they may have difficulty remembering some important aspect of the traumatic event. Numbness refers to those suffering from PTSD losing interest in the activities that they were once so fond of and distancing themselves from others. Moreover, they lose the ability to have positive feelings; for instance, they are unable to experience happiness or love. On the other hand, when experiencing hyperarousal, they may have difficulty managing their temper and behavior; they may easily explode in anger. They may also experience anxiety, restlessness, or difficulty sleeping. Moreover, they cannot concentrate. They become neurotic and suspicious of everything around them (Beckner & Arden, 2008; Quesinberry, 2009).

In *Manchester by the Sea*, Lee has suffered from the traumatic symptoms of re-experience, avoidance, emotional numbness, and hyperarousal for five years. As these are the four common symptoms of PTSD, it can be concluded that Lee has PTSD. These PTSD symptoms cause significant problems and negative effects for



those grieving, particularly in social situations, as they are unable to maintain a stable relationship with others. Moreover, these symptoms interfere with daily life, preventing mourners from returning to a normal life. The four effects of PTSD and their exemplars are briefly shown below.

Effects	Exemplars
Physical effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ pain without a clear cause ➤ difficulty sleeping ➤ overwhelming guilt
Psychological effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ major depressive disorder ➤ anxiety disorder ➤ low self-esteem
Social barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ interpersonal relationship problems ➤ employment problems
Self-injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ suicide attempt ➤ alcoholism ➤ drug addiction

Those suffering from PTSD may have all, or some, of the above-mentioned problems. If those grieving cannot face their trauma, they cannot have insight into their grief; thus, they will fail to achieve self-healing. Moreover, without receiving proper treatment, they will find that the effects of PTSD deeply affect their daily life, physically and psychologically.

Lee experiences some PTSD effects that lead him into trouble and create negative consequences. Before the fatal accident, Lee was an open-minded person, always wearing a smile on his face; he enjoyed having fun with his friends, cousin, and daughters. However, after the accident, overwhelmed with guilt, Lee could not face his wife, Randi, or his neighbors; hence, with low self-esteem, he avoided everything that was related to the accident. He divorced his wife and moved away from Manchester-by-the-Sea to a town nearby and lived a solitary life with no contact with his family and friends. Lee's avoidance of any connection with the accident and the accident site is quite similar to Kubler-Ross's research (1973, 2005), which showed that parents of bereaved children need to find a safe place where they can vent their emotions and scream without scruples.

People with PTSD may have trouble with close family relationships or friendships (Beckner & Arden, 2008; Quesinberry, 2009). They may also have some social barriers, such as interpersonal relationship problems and employment problems. Lee does not have friends and has no contact with his family. Although he moves away from the traumatic town, Lee is still filled with unbearable grief. As a janitor of a building, he cannot communicate with the residents easily; indeed, he tries to avoid eye contact with everyone. The fatal traumatic experience also leads Lee to have a severe depressive disorder: he never smiles, and he spends his life just trying to hang on. Moreover, to punish himself for the accident, Lee develops suicidal tendencies, using a gun to attempt to shoot himself. Indeed, even after years have passed, when Lee talks to Randi, he admits that he wants to die. Guilty about his children's deaths, he tortures himself daily with regret.



Lee suffers from emotional numbness and depression. Even when he hears the news of his brother's death, because of his permanent depression, Lee is numb. He shows no visible reaction, no facial expression or responsiveness toward the death of his brother, because another tremendous trauma is already buried deep in his mind, trapping him and cementing him in the depression stage. The depression and traumatic grief will force Lee to be numb forever.

Occasionally, Lee is in a state of "alertness" and "hyperarousal," which turns Lee into an irritable person after the traumatic tragedy; therefore, he finds himself in trouble frequently. Suffering from PTSD, Lee is very sensitive to his environment and the people around him. He believes that either something is wrong or everyone is against him; consequently, he cannot do his work well, and he occasionally quarrels with the building residents. Because he suffers from the symptom of "alertness," Lee cannot return to his normal life; instead, he becomes an alcoholic, always getting drunk in a bar and picking a fight with strangers.

Those suffering from PTSD are afflicted with the symptom of re-experiencing, having recurrent thoughts, flashbacks, or even nightmares about the traumatic experience (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017). Lee is also afflicted with PTSD symptoms. In one scene, after having a beer and falling asleep with the TV playing, Lee dreams about his daughters. One of them asks why Lee cannot see that they are burning:

Suzy: Daddy?

Lee: yes, Honey?

Suzy: Can't you see we're burning?"

Lee: honey... You're not burning.

Terrified, he wakes up and finds that the skillet in the kitchen is smoking and blackened. Obviously, Lee is haunted by his traumatic experience.

Similarly, Lee avoids contacting people who are related to the accident, and he avoids talking about it, which is a sign of avoidance (APA, 2013). Five years later, Randi calls Lee because she knows that Lee's brother passed away. After learning that Randi is married and is having a baby, Lee is in a hurry to hang up the phone, fearing that she will revive the traumatic memory.

Randi: You know. We're doin' pretty well. I should probably tell you—I'm gonna be—I'm pregnant. Actually.

Lee: Oh, I didn't know that.

Randi: I didn't know if I should tell you, but—

Lee: No, it's fine. Congratulations.

Randi: Thank you. You would probably deduce it for yourself when you see me.

Randi: So, are you still—

Lee: Actually, sorry--I don't mean to cut you off. I just gotta go pick up Patrick up and I'm slightly late (p.70).

Lee hangs up, unable to stay on the phone any longer. Even when they encounter each other on the street, Lee, with unbearable traumatic grief, just wants to escape from the unbearable traumatic experience before it knocks him down.



Due to the unexpected deaths of his three little children, even years later, Lee cannot move past his traumatic grief and PTSD, failing to make sense of the grief experience of bereavement and, hence, losing the chance to reach meaning-reconstruction toward the traumatic events. However, Lee may have the chance to reduce his level of traumatic grief when the death of his brother, Joe, forces him back to his hometown of Manchester-by-the-Sea. This may give Lee another chance to find meaning from his bereavement by making sense of what has happened to him: not only the death of his brother, but also the death of his three children. Unfortunately, with unbearable trauma deep inside, Lee once again evades this search for meaning.

While staying at the lawyer's office and learning that his brother assigned him to be Patrick's guardian, Lee is in a panic, totally horrified.

Lee: I don't understand.

Wes: What--part are you having trouble with...?

Lee: I can't be Patrick's guardian.

Wes: I understand it's a serious responsibility--

Lee: No--I mean--I mean, I can't—

Wes: Well--Naturally I assumed that Joe had discussed this with you--

Lee: No. He didn't. No.

Wes: Well...I must say I'm somewhat taken aback--

Lee: He can't live with me: I live in one room (p. 44-45).

Lee is unwilling to undertake the responsibility because the guardianship will always remind him of the unbearable loss and traumatic grief deep inside himself. Hence, there is an awkward relationship and between Lee and Patrick, a sixteen-year-old boy. Lee cannot forgive himself for his fatal mistake; thus, he is afraid of taking the responsibility of being a guardian, lest, someday, he makes another fatal mistake and reexperiences the death trauma all over again.

Lee may have had the chance to recover and reach a reintegration with his traumatic past as he stepped into his hometown, summoning his traumatic memory of his children and his ex-wife Randi. However, instead of cognitively managing his traumatic grief, Lee chooses a repressive mechanism to avoid reality and allows himself to be stuck in the traumatic grief process. In contrast with Randi's and Patrick's awareness and acceptance of their bereavement in order to continue their lives, Lee does not have insight into his PTSD or traumatic grief and, thus, cannot reach a meaning reconstruction of the traumatic event to further release his grief. Therefore, he loses the chance to reintegrate himself with his traumatic past; instead, his grief continues endlessly.

Conclusion

Human beings definitely encounter variations of traumatic loss, such as the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, or the loss of the capacities we are so proud of. Traumatic grief is the grief that accompanies loss, especially when it is unexpected. While suffering from traumatic loss, as well as from PTSD, people may have different survival mechanisms to deal with their unexpected loss and to pacify their traumatic grief. They may go through the traumatic grief process, a process of



meaning reconstruction, to make sense of and carry out meaning in their bereavement. Once mourners find meaning in the traumatic loss or bereavement, they can construct meaning, make sense of their bereavement or loss, and further reintegrate themselves with their traumatic past in order to continue their lives.

The film *Manchester by the Sea* is a film that lets viewers consider ways to make sense of traumatic grief and turn their negative psychological issues into something meaningful in life, thereby allowing their lives to flourish, as did Randi's and Patrick's. However, those who cannot find meaning in their grief, like Lee in the film, will fail to reintegrate themselves with their traumatic events and will let themselves fall into a repetitive loop within the traumatic grief process. Hopefully, seeing this film or reading this paper will help people to recognize that they might have PTSD. It might also help people in the health industry to realize that more needs to be done to help these people find their way back.

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