

SCOTT CARLIN'S GRIEVING PROCESS IN THE KING OF STATEN ISLAND (2020): A KÜBLER-ROSS PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies on *The King of Staten Island* (2020) have largely focused on themes of masculinity, adulthood, or autobiographical elements of the filmmaker, while psychological analyses of grief in the film remain limited and theoretically underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining Scott Carlin's grieving process through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, while critically acknowledging contemporary perspectives that conceptualize grief as non-linear and cyclical. Employing a qualitative narrative analysis, this research integrates an intrinsic approach focusing on characterization, plot development, and setting with an extrinsic psychological framework to interpret Scott's emotional responses to loss. Data were collected through systematic note-taking, in which selected dialogues, actions, and key scenes were categorized based on explicit emotional indicators corresponding to denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The findings demonstrate that Scott experiences all five stages in a non-linear pattern, with denial and anger recurring most prominently, while acceptance emerges gradually through relational transformation rather than emotional resolution. This study contributes to psychological film analysis by demonstrating how Kübler-Ross's model can be applied flexibly rather than sequentially, thereby reflecting the complexity of grief representation in contemporary cinema. Practically, the findings highlight the potential of movie scripts as a medium for fostering emotional awareness and understanding of unresolved grief, particularly among young adults.

Keywords: *Psychological film analysis, Grief representation, Kübler-Ross model, Character psychology, The King of Staten Island*

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INTRODUCTION

Psychology, as the study of the human mind and behavior, plays a crucial role in understanding how individuals respond to emotional crises, particularly experiences of grief and loss. In recent years, discussions surrounding mental health among young adults have become increasingly prominent, as unresolved grief is often linked to emotional withdrawal, maladaptive behavior, and prolonged difficulties in identity formation. While these issues are frequently examined within clinical and social frameworks,



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film offers a distinctive medium through which psychological struggles can be represented, explored, and critically interpreted through narrative and character development.

The American Psychological Association (APA, n.d.) defines psychology as the study of the mind and behavior, encompassing all aspects of human experience, from brain function to national actions, and from child development to elder care. Currently, according to the APA (n.d.), the primary psychological concern is the mental health crisis, particularly among young people, with increasing cases of anxiety and depression. Psychology and literature are interconnected, as literature can be regarded as a manifestation of the human psyche. Literary psychology enables readers to understand literary works from a psychological perspective, for example, by analyzing characters and conflicts. According to Endraswara (as cited in Minderop, 2016), literary psychology research plays an important role in understanding literary works for several reasons: first, it is essential for a deeper analysis of characterization; second, it provides feedback to researchers on character development issues; and third, it is particularly useful in analyzing literary works rich in psychological problems. The principles of literary psychology involve examining the motivations, mental states, and behaviors of characters in literary works, including their tendencies, internal conflicts, emotions, and motivations as depicted in the narrative. This approach enables a deeper understanding of fictional characters while also offering broader insights into human life.

Grief is defined as the emotional numbness, disbelief, anxiety about separation, hopelessness, sorrow, and loneliness experienced when losing a loved one (Santrock, 2010). This definition highlights the combination of emotional and behavioral expressions of loss, as emphasized by Jeffreys (2005), who stated, "Emphasis is on both internally (thoughts and feelings) and externally (behavior) responses". According to Stroebe and Schut (1998), grief is the primary emotional response to the death of a loved one, encompassing a wide range of psychological and physical symptoms and sometimes leading to adverse health consequences. One film that effectively represents the five stages of grief is *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020). This study examines the film through the lens of literary psychology, focusing on its portrayal of grief.

The King of Staten Island is a 2020 dramedy directed by Judd Apatow and co-written by Pete Davidson, who also stars as the protagonist, Scott Carlin. The narrative follows Scott, an emotionally immature 24-year-old living with his mother in Staten Island, following the death of his father, a firefighter, during Scott's childhood. The trauma of this loss has left Scott apathetic, frequently using marijuana, and lacking clear life goals, though he aspires to become a tattoo artist. His life begins to change when his mother starts dating Ray, another firefighter, forcing Scott to confront his long-suppressed grief and reconnect with the world. Through conflict, rejection, and eventual acceptance of Ray and his fellow firefighters, Scott learns the value of family and hard work, and gradually comes to terms with his past. Blending dark humor with emotional drama, the film explores themes of loss,

personal growth, and healing while providing a candid depiction of the transition to adulthood amidst unresolved trauma.

Scott's character reflects the younger generation of Staten Islanders who feel confined not only physically in a monotonous environment but also emotionally in unresolved trauma and uncertainty about the future. Growing up in a close-knit yet stressful community where aspirations often clash with reality has hindered his personal growth. In this research, Scott Carlin serves as the primary subject of analysis because he is the central figure whose experiences drive the narrative, particularly his profound grief over his father's death. As Jeffreys (2005) notes, "Everyone has a different way of grieving. They have unique relationships with those closest to them that influence how they grieve when their father dies". Scott's childhood memories with his father make the loss especially devastating, profoundly affecting his future, including his relationships and life goals.

This study applies Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages of grief theory: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, to analyze Scott's grieving process. Although individuals do not necessarily experience these stages in a linear order and may revisit certain stages (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2000), this approach enables an in-depth examination of how Scott's grief unfolds. The purpose of this research is to analyze how profound grief over the death of a father can alter a young man's psychological state. The findings are expected to highlight the importance of acknowledging grief as a crucial emotional process for alleviating pain and fostering psychological resilience. Furthermore, this study aims to deepen the understanding of young men's grief and promote healthier coping strategies by analyzing literary works through the stages-of-grief framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several previous studies have examined grief using psychological approaches in narrative texts, particularly novels, short stories, and manga, rather than movie scripts. Pambudi (2020) analyzed the grieving process of mothers following the loss of a child through Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, focusing on emotional responses expressed in narrative descriptions. Similarly, Muttaqien (2024) explored the grief experienced by Cheryl Strayed in *The Wild* (2014) and demonstrated that the stages of grief did not occur sequentially, emphasizing the non-linear nature of emotional processing.

Another relevant study was conducted by Laksana (2022), who examined the representation of grief in the manga *Jumyou Wo Kaitotte Moratta* using Kübler-Ross's framework. The study revealed that denial was the most dominant stage and that prolonged emotional isolation influenced the character's psychological development. These studies contribute significantly to the understanding of grief representation in written narrative texts; however, they predominantly focus on literary forms such as novels and manga, rather than screenplays.

In addition to grief-focused studies, research in literary psychology emphasizes the importance of intrinsic elements such as characterization, plot, and setting in understanding psychological conflicts in narrative texts (Endraswara, as cited in Minderop, 2016). Minderop (2018) further explains

that psychological analysis of literary works involves examining characters' emotional states, motivations, and behavioral patterns as expressed through narrative structure. These principles are particularly relevant to movie scripts, which present psychological meaning primarily through dialogue and character interaction rather than visual imagery. Despite the growing body of research on grief and psychological analysis in literature, studies that specifically examine movie scripts as primary texts remain limited. Existing discussions of *The King of Staten Island* tend to analyze the film adaptation, focusing on performance, visual storytelling, or the filmmaker's autobiographical elements, while overlooking the screenplay as an autonomous narrative text. Consequently, the representation of grief within the movie script, especially as articulated through linguistic choices, dialogue exchanges, and narrative progression, has received insufficient scholarly attention.

Based on this gap, the present study focuses on the movie script of *The King of Staten Island* (2020) to analyze Scott Carlin's grieving process using Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. By treating the screenplay as a literary text and applying a literary psychology approach, this research contributes to existing studies by offering a focused examination of how grief, particularly young male grief, is constructed and expressed in contemporary movie scripts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a literary psychology approach. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it aims to explore psychological phenomena represented in narrative texts through in-depth interpretation rather than numerical measurement (Moleong, 2016). The primary object of analysis was the script of *The King of Staten Island* (2020), treated as a written narrative text rather than an audiovisual film. The analytical framework integrates narrative analysis and literary psychology. Narrative analysis was used to examine how Scott Carlin's grief is structured and developed through dialogue, character interaction, and plot progression within the script (Riessman, 1993). Literary psychology, drawing on Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, functioned as the extrinsic psychological framework for interpreting the character's emotional responses. The intrinsic elements of the script, namely characterization, plot, and setting, served as the narrative context through which psychological meanings were identified and analyzed (Endraswara, as cited in Minderop, 2016). This integration allows the study to systematically connect textual features with psychological interpretation.

Data were collected using a note-taking technique. According to Sporryng (2023), note-taking is a systematic process of recording, organizing, and interpreting relevant information to support analytical accuracy and consistency in qualitative research. In line with qualitative research principles proposed by Moleong (2016), note-taking in this study functioned as an analytical tool rather than mere transcription. The researcher documented selected dialogues, stage directions, and narrative contexts that explicitly or

implicitly indicate Scott Carlin's emotional responses to grief. Data were collected using a structured note-taking technique, focusing on dialogues, stage directions, and narrative situations that indicate Scott Carlin's emotional responses to his father's death. The data selection followed specific criteria:

- 1) dialogues or actions that explicitly express emotional reactions related to loss,
- 2) Interactions that reveal psychological conflict or emotional resistance.
- 3) Narrative moments that mark shifts in Scott's attitude toward his grief. Each selected datum was recorded along with contextual information such as the scene description and interacting characters.

The data analysis process consisted of several stages. First, the script was read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding and reduce interpretive bias. Second, relevant data were coded according to Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance based on identifiable emotional indicators such as rejection of loss, expressions of hostility, attempts to negotiate reality, emotional withdrawal, and signs of reconciliation. Third, the coded data were interpreted by examining how each stage is narratively constructed through characterization and plot development. Importantly, the analysis did not assume a linear progression of stages but allowed for repetition and overlap, in line with contemporary understandings of grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2000).

To enhance the validity of the findings, this study employed theoretical triangulation by comparing the textual evidence with psychological definitions of grief proposed by Santrock (2010), Jeffreys (2005), and Stroebe and Schut (1998). In addition, repeated reading and cross-checking of the data were conducted to ensure consistency in categorization and interpretation. These strategies help minimize researcher subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the qualitative analysis. Through this methodological approach, the study ensures transparency and analytical rigor in examining how grief is represented in the script of *The King of Staten Island*, particularly in relation to the main character's psychological development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Kübler-Ross's theory of the five stages of grief proposes that individuals may experience a series of emotional phases following the loss of a loved one. These stages, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, represent common responses to grief, although they may not occur in a fixed sequence and can be revisited at different times. As noted by Kübler-Ross (as cited in Pambudi, 2020), these stages serve as a framework for understanding the grieving process, acknowledging that each individual's experience is unique.

In *The King of Staten Island* (2020), the protagonist Scott Carlin undergoes a grieving journey shaped by the death of his father, a firefighter who passed away when Scott was a child. The film illustrates Scott's emotional progression through the five stages of grief, providing insight into how loss influences his psychological development, personal relationships, and life

trajectory. The following sections analyze each stage as reflected in Scott's dialogue, actions, and interactions throughout the narrative.

1. Reflection of Denial

Denial Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Dialogue.

The first stage, Denial is primarily manifested through Scott's verbal minimization of his father's death and his reliance on humor and social distraction. Rather than explicitly rejecting the reality of loss, Scott employs avoidance strategies that allow him to distance himself emotionally from grief-related vulnerability. This form of denial is reinforced by the narrative context, where moments of apparent emotional detachment are juxtaposed with unresolved references to his father, indicating suppressed rather than absent grief.

In this movie script, there are several data points that indicate the reflection of Scott's denial stage based on the characterization through dialogue, as follows:

KELSEY: He didn't care. It's fine. Just look at him. He laughs so hard.

OSCAR: We talked about his deceased father all the time!

SCOTT: I really don't care! I didn't miss him at all!

(Scott bursts out laughing)

(Apatow, 2020, p. 5/135).

Based on the quotation above, the use of the characterization method through dialogue is seen in the conversation between Scott and his friends. His friends think that Scott does not care about his father's death. But from the bottom of his heart, Scott really lost a father figure. Scott reflects an emotional Denial stage by saying, "I really don't care! I didn't miss him at all!" which indicates that he lied to his friend about his feelings.

The next quotation from another scene shows Scott's denial. When Scott was hanging out with his friends, one of them was curious about one of Scott's tattoos with a date on it. Scott casually replied that it was the date of his father's death. Sometimes grief can have a bad impact on Scott, which makes him have a strong wall to cover his grief by denying, as in the following quotation:

SCOTT: Don't be like that. That's fine. It's totally cool.

(Apatow, 2020, p. 5/135).

Based on the quotation above, the use of characterization through the dialogue method reflects Scott's denial. As if it is a normal thing. However, Scott actually lost his father so much that he tattooed the date of his father's death. In accordance with the quote above, "Don't be like that. That's fine. It's totally cool". Scott just didn't want to look sad in front of his friends and tried hard to cover up his grief.

Denial Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Action

In this movie script, there is data that indicates the reflection of Scott's denial stage based on the characterization through the action, as follow:

SCOTT: We didn't go out.

KELSEY: Why do we just sit here all day and smoke weed and talking nonsense?

SCOTT: This is so much fun.
(Apatow, 2020, p. 2/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through action. As seen in the quotation above, Scott's denial is reflected in characterization through action. Scott is portrayed as a person who refuses to interact with the outside world and social activities and chooses to confine himself to his comfort zone. This shows a rejection of change and fear of the outside world. This shows that Scott chooses to hide in false comfort, unwilling to face the realities of life that require maturity and a clear direction in life on quote above: "We didn't go out, this is so much fun". His actions reflect emotional immaturity and the need to avoid the pressures of the real world. Anger Appears in Anger in Character and Characterization. The second stage Anger is considered necessary in the process of recovering from grief. In anger, there is pain, and it is very common for an angry person to feel abandoned, to start blaming the people around them. The more it is experienced, and the more it provides you with a new relationship with the people around. Furthermore, Scott's anger was released into a new situation to live with. Experiencing and processing the changes in his life that occurred while releasing his anger. Thus, I can conclude that Scott reflects the second stage of grief, anger.

Denial Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Reaction of Other Characters.

In this movie script, there is data that indicates the reflection of Scott's denial stage based on the characterization through the reaction of other characters, as follows:

CLAIRE: Are you going to be okay without me here?

SCOTT: Seriously? You really think I can't survive without you?

CLAIRE: Just don't make me worry, okay? Be kind to Mom.

(Apatow, 2020, p. 22/135)

The quotation above shows a characterization through the reaction of other characters, as described above. Scott's sister, Claire is worried about her brother. Claire intends to move because she wants to continue her education in college. From the quotation "Be kind to Mom" Claire still worried because Scott still likes to make trouble and makes his mother feel overwhelmed by his

bad habits. A reaction given by Claire to her brother, who is still lost in his life but still denies that he looks okay.

2. Reflection of Anger

This second stage (Anger) is considered necessary in the process of recovering from grief. In anger, there is pain, and it is very common for an angry person to feel abandoned, to start blaming the people around them. The more it is experienced, and the more it provides you with a new relationship with the people around. Furthermore, Scott's anger released into a new situation to live with. Experiencing and processing the changes in his life that occurred while releasing his anger.

Reflection of Anger in Character and Characterization from the movie script:

Anger Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Dialogue

The reflection of Scott's anger stage, based on characterization through dialogue, is as follows:

MARGIE: His name is Ray, he's really nice to me, and he's a fireman by the way

SCOTT: What? Are you serious? Oh my god. Do you want to repeat the sorrow from the past? Mom! Dad used to be a fireman!

(Apatow, 2020, p. 53/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through dialogue, a scene of intense conversation between Scott and his mother, Margie, Scott learns that the man who dated his mother was Ray, the man who reprimanded him for the reflection of anger through this dialogue, a scene of intense conversation between Scott and his mother, Margie, Scott learns that the man who dated his mother was Ray. The quote above "What? Are you serious? Oh my god." is an expression of Scott's anger when he knows that his mother's boyfriend is a fireman, which means someone who has the same job as his dead father.

Anger Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization through Action

The reflection of Scott's anger stage, based on characterization through action, is as follows:

(Drive a car in a rage while closing his eyes, almost killed himself and the other drivers on the road) **SCOTT:** Forgive me.

(Apatow, 2020, p. 1/135).

The quotation above reflects characterization through action. This scene shows Scott's reckless action by endangering himself. Scott vents his anger by driving fast

while blindfolded. In this quotation, "Drive a car in a rage while closing his eyes" signifies an outburst of anger, displacement, and self-destruction.

Anger Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through the Reaction of Other Characters

The reflection of Scott's anger stage based on the characterization through the reaction of others' characters, as follows:

SCOTT: I do for our best. If I do nothing, I'm going crazy. You'll see what I'm doing!

CLAIRE: Leave her alone! She deserves to be happy!
(Apatow, 2020, p. 90/135).

The quotation above shows a characterization through the reaction of other characters. As described above. Scott's sister, Claire, was very upset with Scott's behavior, who was outraged by the seriousness of his mother's relationship with Ray. Scott expressed his anger by devising a plan and taking his own actions to make Ray's relationship with Margie fall apart. And for the quote "Leave her alone! She deserves to be happy!" is a reaction from another character through Scott's irritating actions.

3. Reflection of Bargaining

The third stage is Bargaining. Before loss and grief set in, a person is begging and trying to get what they want emotionally. This stage not allowed to go back into the mind of someone who is experiencing grief. These stages can go backward or forward, depending on how a person heals themselves from every sadness that comes.

Bargaining Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Dialogue

The reflection of Scott's bargaining stage based on characterization through dialogue, as follows:

MARGIE: I like him. Hey listen, in this situation, I just need someone and don't want to be alone forever

SCOTT: I know, it's terrible. I'm just afraid, is this fireman it's a right choice for you?

(Apatow, 2020, p. 54/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through dialogue. A scene where Scott attempts to negotiate with his mother to find another man. In the previous explanation, "is this fireman it's a right choice for you?" indicates that Scott disagrees with his mother's decision to date a fireman. Scott still felt that his mother could still consider her decision to continue Margie's relationship with Ray.

Another quotation indicates when Scott talked to Claire to ruin his mother's relationship with Ray. In this quotation, Scott insists on negotiating

with Claire and even tries to manipulate his sister to go along with his plan. An explanation of this scene can be seen in the following quotation:

SCOTT: Okay, let's focus on the problem.

CLAIRE: What's the problem?

SCOTT: The problem is Ray; you have any plan to make mom break up with him?

The Reflection of Bargaining through this dialogue, when Scott has his own goal of delaying a change in his life when his mother will have a new partner, an attempt to delay the pain he is receiving and try to negotiate so that the new reality for it does. The bargaining attempt is found in the quote above "you have any plan to make mom break up with him?".

Bargaining Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Action

The reflection of Scott's bargaining stage based on characterization through action, as follows:

SCOTT: Can I stay here for a week?

KELSEY: What do you mean by that?

SCOTT: I got kicked out by my mom, and I need a place to stay for a while

KELSEY: I thought you miss me? You're only come here for shelter?!

(Apatow, 2020, p. 102/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through action. The dialogue above shows the bargaining stage of Scott, as he tries to find a place to live after being kicked out of the house by his mother. Scott does not completely accept the consequences of his own actions. At this moment, he still explores other alternatives to solve his problem temporarily. In the quote above "Can I stay here for a week?" is Scott's first attempt to negotiate with Kelsey to stay in her house temporarily, then continued with the quotation "I got kicked out by my mom, and I need a place to stay for a while" in this scene, Scott is looking for the best opportunity to cover up his loss of his home which is his comfort zone.

Bargaining Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Reaction of Other Characters

Reflection of Scott's bargaining stage based on the characterization through the reaction of others:

SCOTT: While you still in here, it is okay if I stay in your house for a few days?

OSCAR: You came from a long way and just for ask me that thing?

SCOTT: I just want to see you, man
OSCAR: No, you don't. You don't care about me.
(Apatow, 2020, p. 100/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through the reaction of other characters as seen in the scene where Scott comes to Oscar in prison. Oscar is one of Scott's friends who was arrested as a result of their actions for attempting to rob a pharmacy. In this scene, Scott's actions show the bargaining stage as he tries to find a temporary place to live after being kicked out by his mother. Scott's efforts to avoid losing his home and comfort zone. Moreover, through Scott's efforts, Oscar gives a reaction of disappointment in the quote above, "You don't care about me". Oscar feels disappointed when he surprisingly knows that Scott only cares about himself to ask for a temporary place to stay.

4. Reflection of Depression

The fourth stage is depression. After passing through the bargaining stage, a person will enter the depression stage. When they return to reality, realizing that they get a feeling of loneliness after losing a loved one. At this stage, someone will realize that what was lost will not return. Feelings of anger, disappointment, sadness, upset, and pain are in this stage, someone who experiences grief slowly feels deep depression. Depression is the fourth stage of grief, where the grieving person comes to accept the certainty of death.

Bargaining Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Dialogue

The reflection of Scott's bargaining based on the characterization through dialogue, as described below:

MARGIE: I like him. Hey listen, in this situation, I just need someone and don't want to be alone forever
SCOTT: I know, it's terrible. I'm just afraid, is this fireman it's a right choice for you?
(Apatow, 2020, p. 54/135).

The quotation above uses the method of characterization through dialogue. A scene where Scott attempts to negotiate with his mother to find another man. In the previous explanation, "is this fireman it's a right choice for you?" indicates that Scott disagrees with his mother's decision to date a fireman. Scott still felt that his mother could still consider her decision to continue Margie's relationship with Ray.

Bargaining Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Action

The reflection of Scott's bargaining stage based on characterization through action is as follows

SCOTT: Can I stay here for a week?
KELSEY: What do you mean by that?
SCOTT: I got kicked out by my mom, and I need a place to stay for a while
KELSEY: I thought you miss me? You're only come here for shelter?!
(Apatow, 2020, p. 102/135).

The quotation above uses characterization through action. The dialogue above shows Scott's bargaining stage as he tries to find a place to live after being kicked out of his mother's house. Scott does not completely accept the consequences of his own actions. At this moment, he still explores other alternatives to solve his problem temporarily. In the quote above "Can I stay here for a week?" is Scott's first attempt to negotiate with Kelsey to stay in her house temporarily, then continued with the quotation "I got kicked out by my mom, and I need a place to stay for a while" in this scene, Scott is looking for the best opportunity to cover up his loss of his home which is his comfort zone.

Depression Appears in Scott Carlin Based on the Characterization Through the Reaction of Other Characters

The reflection of Scott's depression stage based on the characterization through the reaction of others' characters, as follows:

SCOTT: You have amazing life, your kind.
You're the best
KELSEY: I know you will say that. But I just sad if you think you're worthless
(Apatow, 2020, p. 8/135)

The quotation above shows a characterization through the reaction of other characters, as described above. In this scene, Scott's depression is not only portrayed through his own expression, but also through Kelsey's reaction. When Kelsey expressed that she felt sad because Scott thought he was worthless, in the quote "But I'm just sad if you think you're worthless", this confirmed a characterization of Scott's depression through another character's opinion. Kelsey's reaction is an indication that Scott is experiencing a significant drop in self-esteem, one of the characteristics of the depression stage.

5. Reflection of Acceptance

The last stage is Acceptance. This stage is about embracing the fact that our loved one is no longer with us and recognizing that this new reality is a permanent reality. We are never going to like this reality or find it pleasant, but finally we accept it. We are learning to live that way. This is the new

standard that we must adapt to live in. This is where our healing and adjustment can most crucially take a strong place, despite the facts that healing often simply looks and even feels like an unachievable state.

Acceptance Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Dialogue

In this movie script, there is a quotation that indicates the reflection of Scott's acceptance stage based on the characterization through dialogue, as follows:

RAY: What about you give me a tattoo? You can practice on my back

SCOTT: Are you serious, man? Thanks for trusting me

SCOTT: I saw your drawing from Harold's book. That's amazing
(Apatow, 2020, p. 120/135).

Acceptance Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through Action

There is a quotation that indicates the reflection of Scott's acceptance stage based on the characterization through action, as follows:

Scott sings along with Ray and others fireman at the Bar, he hugs Ray

SCOTT: Yeah!
(Apatow, 2020, p. 120/135).

Based on the quotation above, the use of characterization method through action, the moment Scott started to integrate with the firefighters, indicated that he had accepted a community he used to avoid. Scott has accepted Ray along with the community of firefighters who have been reminding him of the trauma of losing his father. The quotation "Scott sings along with Ray and other fireman at the Bar, he hugs Ray" implies a characterization of acceptance through action by showing Scott's openness to accept Ray.

Acceptance Appears in Scott Carlin Based on Characterization Through the Reaction of Other Characters

There is data that indicates the reflection of Scott's acceptance stage based on the characterization through the reaction of others' character, as follows:

Margie pulls Ray and Scott to hug with her, their hugging

MARGIE: Finally, my gentleman...

SCOTT: Ah mom his mustache is flapping on my face

RAY: Hahaha
(Apatow, 2020, p. 130/135).

Based on the quotation above, the use of the characterization method involves the reaction of other characters. Scott's acceptance is also evident in the other characters' reactions when Margie learns that Scott and Ray have become close. The beginning of the quote, "Margie pulls Ray and Scott to hug with her, their hugging," shows Margie hugging them both and saying, "Finally, my gentlemen..." It conveys relief and happiness that the problem between Scott and Ray has been solved, and they become a family.

DISCUSSIONS

This Study reveals the intricate dynamics of the grieving process; this research demonstrates that Scott Carlin's emotional path in *The King of Staten Island* (2020) mirrors these dynamics. According to the findings, Scott experiences the stages of grief denial, rage, bargaining, depression, and acceptance not in a linear manner, but rather in a cyclical and recurring process, which is in line with current understandings of grief as a non-linear and individual experience (Worden, 2018).

Scott's emotional growth is hampered by his tendency to remain "stuck" in denial and rage for extended periods. This is consistent with current studies showing that people who had trauma in their childhood are more prone to complex grief, in which the grieving process is delayed or suppressed (Boelen & Smid, 2020). In this setting, Scott's personality serves as an example of how unresolved loss may impact one's identity, relationships with others, and capacity for adult duties. Scott's interactions with Ray, a firefighter like his late father, are a major factor in his path to acceptance. According to current grief research, the "continuing bonds" theory emphasizes that recovery is not always about letting go of memories of the lost loved one, but rather about discovering new methods to keep connected (Neimeyer, 2020). This theory is supported by this. Ultimately, Scott comes to terms with Ray as a surrogate father and embraces a component of his biological father's identity that is represented in Ray's work.

Additionally, this research supports the notion that film may be a useful medium for portraying complicated emotional states, such as sorrow. In line with the cinematherapy method used in psychological therapies, film's visual and narrative depiction enables viewers to experience empathy and reflection on the grieving process (Sharp et al. , 2022). Films like *The King of Staten Island* offer viewers the opportunity to identify and validate their own feelings in addition to being fun.

In addition, this study emphasizes the significance of social support during the rehabilitation process. When the firefighting community accepts Scott and when his connection with his mother gets better, he starts to make headway. Recent research has shown that social support and environmental acceptance are protective factors in dealing with persistent sorrow, as seen in the study by Kokou-Kpolou et al. (2021).

This research, conducted within the fields of literature and psychology, shows that the literary psychology approach is still useful for analyzing characters and emotional conflicts in narrative works. Despite acknowledgment of the shortcomings of rigid stage models (Stroebe &

Schut, 2016), Kübler-Ross's theory is still widely employed in literary and film studies dealing with loss. Since cultural values play a significant role in how people experience grief, this study also provides avenues for additional investigation into how grief is portrayed in various cultural settings (Lowe et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the movie script *The King of Staten Island* (2020) by Judd Apatow, this study identified the core psychological issue of the protagonist, Scott Carlin, and analyzed his emotional journey through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief using both intrinsic elements—characterization, plot, and setting—and an extrinsic literary psychology approach. The findings reveal that Scott undergoes all five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—following the loss of his father. His characterization develops significantly over the course of the narrative, transforming from a young man dominated by denial and anger into someone who begins to accept his circumstances and take responsibility for his future. This transformation is conveyed indirectly through his interactions, behavioral choices, and personal relationships. The film's linear plot structure—comprising exposition, complication, climax, and resolution—mirrors Scott's gradual psychological evolution, with each stage of grief tied to a specific turning point in the storyline.

The denial stage is shown through Scott's attempts to hide his grief and avoid confronting reality by surrounding himself with friends and distractions. Anger emerges when he lashes out at those closest to him, particularly his mother and her new partner, Ray, a firefighter like his late father—reflecting unresolved trauma and feelings of abandonment. Bargaining is evident in Scott's efforts to regain control, such as persuading his mother to end her relationship or seeking temporary housing after being forced to leave home. Depression manifests in his feelings of emptiness, loss of direction, and realization of how deeply his father's death has affected his life trajectory. Acceptance appears as Scott begins to reconcile with reality, improve his relationship with Ray, and take steps toward self-improvement and independence. This progression illustrates that grief is neither uniform nor strictly linear, and that emotional healing often unfolds through a complex interplay of resistance, struggle, and gradual acceptance. The study affirms that *The King of Staten Island* effectively portrays the psychological depth of grieving through its central character, making it a compelling representation of trauma, loss, and recovery.

For future research in literary psychology, Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief provides a flexible analytical framework that can be applied to characters in various literary works or films dealing with themes of loss, trauma, and emotional restoration. Researchers may also compare the depiction of grief across different genres or cultural contexts to explore variations in coping mechanisms and narrative resolution. In addition, for individuals experiencing grief, Scott Carlin's journey offers a reminder that the grieving process is a deeply personal but universally human experience. It emphasizes that while

grief can be overwhelming, acceptance and healing are attainable over time, and the path toward them need not follow a fixed order.

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