

Operations of grief and loss

Business



Loss presents itself throughout society on a regular basis, whether fatal or minor in severity. Often, losses of large importance affect a person's general wellbeing and health. When a life is lost or a serious event impacts a person greatly such as in the case of bereavement, these effects manifest themselves as grief. Grief and loss, though not always present together, provide similar needs for various coping methods.

Healthy coping for the sake of recovery, its intended use, consists of a wide spectrum of techniques and practices. These unfortunate circumstances, while present often in lives of many, are also depicted in literature. In the novel *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman and modern sources, the authors explore the operations of grief and loss. In the novel, Mia's loss of her parents and brother cause her to experience negative effects on her life, similar to those analyzed in a study of grief. Her initial thoughts when seeing her family dead manifest the impact of sudden loss immediately on one's life. Mia narrates, "This isn't right.

This cannot be happening... This isn't real... I stare down at my wrist, the one that looks fine, untouched by blood and gore, and I pinch as hard as I can. I don't feel a thing" (Forman 18). First, Mia expresses a refusal to acknowledge her situation when she says, "This isn't real," and then a lack of sensation when she says, "I don't feel a thing" (Forman 18). Thus the initial effects of Mia's experience are neither normal or positive. This is proven by her internal monologue's stark contrast from earlier in the novel, where she discusses mundane and normal events, such as her family's music tastes. The sudden change in her narration following her parents' sudden death can signify the presence of early emotional effects.

Further, this sudden loss is followed by grief, which is distinct and classified by several stages and characteristics. A paper exploring these characteristics, called “ Predicting Grief Symptomatology among the Suddenly Bereaved,” by Mark D. Reed, states that several stage models of grief “ refer to an initial reaction characterized by shock, numbness, and disbelief, followed by a period of depression, anxiety, anger, pining, social and personal withdrawal, and, for some, somatic symptoms” (Reed 286). This is true in the novel, as earlier proven characteristics of Mia’s loss are numbness and disbelief. Therefore, it is evident that she, after waking from her out-of-body state, will express symptoms similar to those Reed has examined, such as depression and anxiety. From these analyses of patterns of grief and Mia’s own experience in the novel, it is found that grief is a result of loss and has several mental consequences.

Stimulated by the loss of her family and validated by a study on social support, Mia uses the social support of Adam to cope with her family members’ demises. As Mia wakes from her out-of-body state, she essentially uses Adam as motivation for this under the assumption he is willing to support her in rebounding from her loss. This moment is captured when Forman writes, “ But then I feel Adam’s hand. Not sense it, but feel it... I’m lying on my back in the hospital bed, one again with my body” (Forman 233). Her mention of solely Adam here, rather than any other possible thoughts of her past or future, manifests her intended use of him as a coping technique. In other sections of the stories, Mia ponders her past with him and provides a significant focus on Adam’s attempts to visit her; despite all other areas on

her life she could focus greatly upon, she chooses to receive Adam's support solely.

Therefore, her acceptance of his impact on her life and the motivation to live she conjures based off his presence manifests with clarity the social support she chooses to admit from Adam. The effectiveness of this practice, however, has been researched profusely in a sense of whether or not it helps. In a study called "Does Social Support Help in Bereavement?", Wolfgang Stroebe theorizes, "Thus, the knowledge that one can call on the support of friends and family members and that one does not have to face a lonely future (i. e. loss appraisal) may help to soften the blow of the loss and buffer one against the deleterious effects of bereavement" (Stroebe et al. 1031).

From this, it is true that social support can, indeed, help in cases such as in *If I Stay*. This therefore validates Mia's motives in receiving social support from Adam, who can be considered a friend of hers. From Mia's use of Adam and research done on bereavement and coping, it is proven that social support is used to buffer oneself from loss. In *If I Stay*, Mia uses classical music involving her cello as a coping mechanism against her sorrow, while a study on music therapy explores the effectiveness of this. Toward the end of the story, Mia describes music implying that it helps her in such a way that the medical treatment she receives, if not in a more effective manner.

This is portrayed when Mia tells, "Yo-Yo Ma continues to play, and it's like the piano and cello are being poured into my body, the same way the IV and blood transfusions are" (Forman 232-233). This supplements the significance

of the cello in her life, adding to her memories with it told throughout the story. It is used as a coping mechanism because Mia herself considers it as important as medical treatment, as if the music is her emotional medicine, and ultimately decides to stay for two main reasons. One being the lasting support of her friends and more distant family, and the other being to pursue cello at Julliard. This goal of creating a musical career evidently motivates Mia and serves as a reason for her to live, effectively defining it as a method to cope. Further, a study of music therapy on grief symptoms provides similar situations in which music is a proved coping mechanism.

In it, Russell Hilliard writes that “ statistical analyses indicated that participants in the music therapy group significantly improved in the behaviors and grief symptoms, and those in the social work group experienced a significant reduction in their behavioral problems but not their grief symptoms” (Hilliard 123). This experiment testing the operations of music therapy versus those of social work overall concludes that music therapy is dominant in improving the condition of those suffering from grief. Mia’s use of the cello as a coping technique in the novel is therefore a valid method, seeing as along with some form of professional consultation, her personalized type of music therapy can assist in her mental recovery. Thus through analyses and Mia’s struggle in the novel with music and choosing her fate, it is revealed that classical music is a coping mechanism suited for grief. The workings of grief and loss are inspected by the authors of modern sources and Gayle Forman in *If I Stay*.

Grief, as a result of loss, is a common occurrence in life that has consequences and chronic effects. This is not only true in literature, but in <https://assignbuster.com/operations-of-grief-and-loss/>

the real world as well. Though grief is not always a definite outcome of loss, a direct correlation between the two exists in which the more severe the loss, the higher the chances having of grief as an after-effect. Causes of this anguish range from cases of bereavement to that of being seriously chagrined, but nevertheless have similar emotional tolls for individuals who are victim to grief. In these situations, it is important for one to rely on those around them and find effective, healthy coping mechanisms. Without this, it is truly impossible to recover and achieve a prosperous, vivid life.