



COPING WITH GRIEF IN KATHLEEN GLASGOW'S NOVEL *HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE DARK* (2019)

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Abstract

This thesis is a psychoanalysis reading of a novel which is written by Kathleen Glasgow entitled *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019). It explores the issue of coping with grief which is experienced by the main character while she is experiencing grief. It uses the qualitative method in analyzing the novel. The analysis of coping with grief is used the concept of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) of coping mechanism. It is also aimed to reveal how the main character copes with the grief. The result of this analysis shows that the main character copes with her grief through two ways, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Key words: *grief, coping mechanism, coping with grief*

A. INTRODUCTION

Grief is inevitable. It can come to anyone and anytime. Mostly, grief comes all of sudden without any reminder, which often makes people shocked and deny it. The term grief refers to the state of death or loss of someone or something. In order to deal with grief, humans tend to activate their coping mechanisms. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that coping is defined as continuously modifying cognitive and behavioral attempts to manage certain stressful internal and/or external demands. To deal with stress and/or trauma and to better manage their unpleasant and painful emotions, humans activate their coping mechanism. This issue is reflected in Kathleen Glasgow's novel.

A novel entitled *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019) by Kathleen Glasgow's reflects the issue of coping with grief. The issue of coping with grief is reflected by the main character in coping while experiencing grief. It is represented by the main character named *Tiger* whose mother suddenly died. It puts her into misery. Since *Tiger* does not have anyone but her mother, she lost. In facing the situation, she does sort of things to distract her mind from the grief. At

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the end, *Tiger* can accept the reality because some of the coping mechanism she did. In order to further realize how to cope with grief, this study analyzes how *Tiger*, the main character in *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019), copes with her grief while she is facing the loss of her loved one.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted by implementing the coping mechanism theory by Lazarus Folkman, using the perspective of psychoanalysis theory. It uses the qualitative method to analyze. According to the definition of qualitative method by Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a technique for examining and grasping the significance that individuals or groups attach to a social or human situation. In this research, the researcher focuses on analyzing the main character's way to cope with grief. The object of this research is a novel entitled *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019). The analysis passed four stages (reading, sorting, categorizing, and analyzing) the data which are related to Lazarus and Folkman's coping mechanism theory.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Problem-focused coping

Problem-focused coping aims to solve problems or alter the cause of stress. Problem-focused coping is a methodical strategy that seeks to alter the circumstance by altering the surroundings or the way the individual interacts with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In *How to Make Friends with the Dark* by *Kathleen Glasgow* (2019), the protagonist named *Tiger* copes her grief through problem-focused coping by seeking for social support.

1.1. Seeking social support

The point that portrays the problem-focused coping in the novel *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019) is seeking social support. It is described as an effort to look for emotional, practical, and informational help (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Seeking social support is shown in this novel by the protagonist when she needs someone to lean on, since she is alone without any relatives. It can be seen in the quotation below:

My fingers are trembling so badly, but I manage to text Cake.
I'm not in a good place. I'm freaking out. I'm having thoughts.
Cake answers, OMG, what?
Like bad stuff. The S word. I feel so bad, Cake, I feel so, so, so, so bad.

Based on the quotation above, it is shown that the protagonist still in her mind to find a help as soon as she has bad thought, *suicide*. She is aware that she should not let her mind drives her crazy. In this case, she let *Cake*, her best friend, helping her out from the bad thought. The protagonist finally can get rid of it.

Another statement that proves that the protagonist is seeking social support is shown in the quotation below:

“I sit up and smooth my hair. “Let’s go, then,” I say firmly. “Let’s go...find him. I mean, I like you, and thank you for taking care of me, but he’s my dad.”

It is shown that, the protagonist asking for help from LaLa, her foster care. The protagonist wants a hand from the foster care to help her figure out the problem that she faced by not having any relatives. The protagonist does not like the concept of foster house which is moved from one house to another. Since she finds one, it can help her out from the foster house.

2. Emotion-focused coping

Emotion-focused coping focuses to the managing the emotion to deal with the stress since the situations cannot be undone. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that emotion-focused coping strategies are more likely to emerge when it is concluded that nothing can be done to modify harmful, frightening, or unpleasant environmental situations. In *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019) by Kathleen Glasgow, the protagonist named Tiger, copes her grief not only through problem-focused coping, but also through emotion-focused coping which is included distancing self from stress triggers, doing escape avoidance, and accepting responsibility.

2.1. Distancing self from stress triggers

The first point that portrays emotion-focused coping is distancing self from stress triggers. Distancing itself described as efforts to detach oneself from the problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The protagonist is named Tiger. Tiger is not even a real name. Her real name is Grace Tolliver, but she prefers called by Tiger by everyone, especially the strangers she first met. It also happened to the social worker who take care of her. It can be seen in the quotation below:

“You’ll have to come with me, Grace. I’m sorry, but since you don’t have another relative to care for you while all this is sorted out, you’ll be placed in an emergency foster.”
Emergency. Foster.
I have no idea what she’s talking about.
The only thing I can think to say is, “Tiger,” and the frizzy-haired woman says, “What?” And I say, flatly, “My name is Tiger,”

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist does not want somebody called her as the way her mom does. It is because the nickname Grace, only used by her mom if she wanted to get the protagonist’s attention when saying

it and it happened only in crucial moments, as like when she was showing her affection to the protagonist.

Another statement that shows that the protagonist is being distancing from the cause of her stress can be seen in the following quotation:

“Your friend Cake is still inside the house. She’d gone to bed with you, but you got up after you heard her start to snore. You were more tired than you’d ever been in your life, but you could not sleep in that bed, in that house, at that moment. You practically ran out to the car, avoiding the couch, where you think it must have happened.”

The quotation shows how the protagonist keeping away herself from the things that was happened to her mom in the past. She thinks that her mom might be collapsed in their living room couch. So that, when she went back to their house, she does not even can to stare to couch. It hurts herself.

The next quotation that shows the way the protagonist distancing herself from the stress is shown below:

There’s not much traffic. In a little while, we pass Randy Gonzalez’s ranch. The horses are out, sleek and pretty, nickering in the gold afternoon light. I press a hand against the window glass.

Karen looks at me in the rearview. “We can take a minute,” she says. “Want me to pull over? They’re so lovely, aren’t they?”

My mom brought me out here last week. She loves these horses. She packs bags of cold carrots and walks straight up to the fence and holds out a hand stuffed with orange sticks.

Just looking at the horses hurts. I shake my head. Karen says, “Suit yourself.”

Based on the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist does not want to do the same things as she ever did with her mom. She cannot bear the memories that slide out when they were together. In this line, “Just look at the horses hurts” the protagonist shows how she is suffering from the grief. It is not easy for her.

2.2. Doing escape avoidance

The second point that portrays the emotion-focused coping is doing escape avoidance. Escape avoidance is described as wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This item is much more different with the distancing self from stress triggers which more suggests on the detachment. In this novel, the protagonist does some behavior to

distract her from the grief. The first thing that she does is not eating properly. It can be seen in the quotation below:

These are the thoughts that make you suddenly jump off the couch, startling Sarah, who loves this show about picking wedding dresses, and you run to the toilet, where you heave everything you really haven't eaten in four days, gross yellow sticky stuff, until your stomach is sore and your jaw aches. You knew you never should have gotten out of the bunk bed.

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist cannot eat properly. In her fourth day of grief, she does not eat proper meal yet. Even when she tried to eat some snacks, it is still going outside. It is also shown up in the quotation below:

She wants me to eat, so I nibble two crackers with peanut butter and two slices of apple, chewing slowly, while Sarah and Leonard eye me over bowls of Cheerios.

Karen the social worker is coming to take me to the viewing.

I check my phone. It's been 6,360 minutes since my mother died.

I type: How many minutes is 50 years?

If I live fifty more years without my mother, I will be sixty-six, an old lady, and I'll have lived 26,280,000 minutes without her, each one more damn lonely and horrendous than the last.

Cake texts, You can do this. You can be brave.

No, I can't.

I can't.

I run to the bathroom. Throw up the crackers and apple.

It is shown up that grief affects the protagonist so dreadful. It is more painful to her when talking about the source of the grief itself. It shows in the line, *““Cake texts, You can do this. You can be brave. No, I can't. I run to the bathroom. Throw up the crackers and apple.”* It can be seen that the protagonist cannot bear the grief, when her bestfriend told her to face the grief, she could not do it. So, it ends up making her throw what she has ate before. She could not do the basic things human should do to living a life, eating.

Another escape avoidance that the protagonist did is overslept. It is shown in the quotation below:

I sleep for so long that when I wake up, the small bedroom is dark again. Below me, the girl named Sarah snores gently in her bunk.

It is shown that the protagonist sleeps from time to time, not realizing the day was passed by. She sleeps from daylight to darkness. Sleeping helps the protagonist to escape from reality. It makes her forget about the grief that comes towards her life.

2.3. Accepting Responsibility

The third point that portrays the emotion-focused coping is accepting responsibility. It is recognized as awareness of one's part in the issue and an attempt to make things right (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the novel *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019), the protagonist gradually can adjust herself with her new circumstances by acknowledging her real situation. The protagonist becomes aware of her situation since there are many bills that they, she and her half-sister, should pay. They have no one to help them pay up the bill. So, the protagonist shows to her half-sister how she and her mother used to get money. It can be seen in the following statement:

“Never mind that.” I pop up, pushing hair out of my face. “Outside. The Jellymobile. It’s Ma, Shayna. It’s time for the Jellymobile.”
I don’t think I’ve smiled so hard in months.

From the quotation above, the protagonist realizes the real life she faces currently. She tries to figure it out and accept it as it is. The protagonist can adjust herself with the new things she should face without her mom like she gets used to.

D. CONCLUSION

The issue of coping with grief can be revealed in the novel *How to Make Friends with the Dark* (2019) by Kathleen Glasgow. The fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting play a part in revealing the meaning beyond the novel. This analysis deals with the concept of coping mechanism by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Coping with grief in this analysis refers to the way the character copes with stress which is grief. Coping with grief can be seen through problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

In undergoing the problem-focused coping, the character does rational approach to change the situation by changing the way she interacts with the environment, she seeks for social support. As before, she refuses to interact with others. The setting also shows the situation where the protagonist has no one after her mother left. The protagonist aware that she should have someone’s help to facing her life to keep going on. In addition, through emotion-focused coping the character tries to regulate her emotion while facing the grief, so that she feels a bit better even the grief threatening herself. The setting also shows that the

protagonist tries some ways to distract her from the grief, the stress itself, by distancing self from stress triggers, doing escape avoidance, and accepting responsibility.

In this analysis, issue of coping of grief is reflected by the protagonist character in the novel named Tiger. The way she copes with her grief, alongside with the journey of grief itself, brings her into a new chapter of her life. The protagonist manages her grief by changing the situation through problem-focused coping and regulating her own emotion through emotion-focused coping. Thus, the analysis proves that coping mechanism helps to cope with grief.

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