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The Stages of Grief and Response of Cameron Turner in Confronting Death depicted in Benjamin Cleary's *Swan Song*

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Abstract. The underlying theory of grief is rooted in understanding the concept of loss. Stages of grief define the journey of accepting the reality of loss. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross shows these stages of grief by interviewing a terminally ill patient who was confronting the end-of-life transition. Stages of grief consist of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Throughout the end-of-life transition, some may have a different response to grief at certain stages. This study aims to identify the stages of grief and the response to grief that Cameron Turner, the Swan Song film's main character, portrays. The data analysis exercises the qualitative descriptive method. The steps were watching the film and reading the script, identifying the data, classifying the data, reducing the collected data from the film and script, and analyzing the data. The findings of this study show that Cameron Turner was going through a complete grief stage of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression down to the acceptance stage. To respond to each stage, Cameron had a variety of modes of expression that differed in each of the stages of grief, such as verbal response, nonverbal response, physical response, and physical activities.

Keywords: grief, stage of grief, modes of expression, response of grief

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INTRODUCTION

Literature can be defined by written and spoken words that form a meaningful understanding. As stated by Bennet and Royle, literature was seen as something uncanny because it correlated with uncanny aspects of experience, thought, and feeling (2014). Literature itself had a relationship with film in dealing with the narration aspect. The relationship between literature and film is in their mutual visual, dialogical, and narrative aspects. Narration of literature could create mental images in the readers' minds to make imagery beyond the reader (Cruz, 2014). The film narration is in the form of a film script that digitalizes to be a visual storyteller. The selected film scripts provide an understanding of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis needs the process of explaining literature in which the literature is a source for psychoanalytic conceptions (Hossain, 2017, p. 41).

Stroebe et al. state that grief is one of the psychological aspects that affect after bereavement occurs and is a part of a normal part of life (2020). In other words, humans as mortal beings would not be able to avoid the matter of death either from sickness, accident, or even age. Sooner or later, grief may occur in the loss of someone's life. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross shows stages of grief after her study on terminal illness patients. The underlying understanding of grief not only occurs to the close one to the bereavement but also to the one who is facing an end-of-life transition. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross portrays the stage of grief in her book On Death and Dying in 1969, which consists of five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

In the denial stage, someone who is facing grief tries to deny any reality of the loss. This stage signifies the one who experiences the end-of-life transition. According to Ritchie, denial refers to the reaction to shield or protect someone from an imaginary or real threat that invades their reality of loss that they cannot accept (Ritchie, 2014). Denial may occur after the bereaved experiences a loss they cannot bear.

Anger is a common emotion that humans convey. According to Novaco, anger is an experience of a justified response to some wrongdoing that was triggered or provoked (Novaco, 2020). In the anger stage, the trigger of the bereaved is something or people against their beliefs. In grieving, the bereaved are sensitive to the threat of the loss that they cannot bear.

The bargaining stage takes the bereaved to be a bargainer as the bereaved are about to take an argumentation. Corr relaying the understanding from Kübler-Ross about the terminal illness patient has an understanding that the bargainer or the bereaved see the objective bargaining to reach some agreement to postpone the grief that they are going through. They usually want to extend their life and to stop the suffering they have been through (Corr, 2019). The bereaved in the bargaining stage mostly wanted to have a bargain or an agreement to oppose the grief that they suffered.

According to José Eduardo Rondón Bernard, depression is a sinking feeling of a person with a weight on their existence. The main symptom that depression consists of is a decayed mood. Furthermore, there are also painful feelings, inappropriate humor, anguish, and panic attacks (Bernard, 2018). In the depression stage, the bereaved suffer from a psychological illness that indicates a decayed mood or a loss

of feeling or numbness. Many mental illnesses could develop in the depression as depression is a mental illness symptom that mental illness has.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler's acceptance stage is a stage when the bereaved cannot bear the death of someone they care about. Acceptance is about accepting and realizing the new reality of life without someone they care about (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005). The acceptance stage is the final stage of stages of grief, which are different for each. The final stage is the acceptance of the closure of grief that the bereaved have been through. The bereaved who are confronting their death are most likely to have peace or accept their end-of-life transition.

When the bereaved are facing grief, they are most likely to have a mode of expression that shows the manner of grief. The modes of expression classify the response of grief that the bereaved went through. According to Corless et al., an example of manners in dealing with grief are in the forms of a child's paradigm of grief, such as clinginess, thumb-sucking, trouble sleeping, wearing deceased clothing, or even fear of abandonment (2014). The theory of grief languages by Corless B. Inge., et al. indicates the response of the bereaved can be different in various ways. Modes of grief expression are in the forms of verbal (written or oral) responses, nonverbal (silent or reflective) responses, physical responses (somatic or expressions), and physical activities (rituals or objects).

The response of grief commonly shown by the bereaved is in the form of a verbal response. Verbal responses are those that communicate one's reaction to bereavement with the use of words (Corless et al., 2014, p.135). A verbal response is easy to identify because the bereaved will communicate their grief response using written or spoken language that someone else can understand.

The nonverbal response is another form of response that the bereaved may show. Corless et al. stated that nonverbal responses consist of the thoughts or reflections that the bereaved keep for themselves in the form of silent or reflective reactions toward the experience of grief (Corless et al., 2014). The nonverbal responses are not visible. The bereaved keep their grief in their thought for themselves. Nonverbal responses are often in self-talk.

The physical response is a visible response that the bereaved shows. This response shows physical signs, bodily expressions, and sensual aspects like seeing and hearing (Corless et al., 2014, p. 136). The bereaved react to grief in physical response in their body language that someone else can notice. The forms of physical responses include weeping, sobbing, sighing, intense emotion, or other somatic physical responses (Corless et al., 2014).

Physical activities are different from physical responses. In physical activities, the responses are intentional and conscious. Corless et al. stated that physical activity includes attending, planning, or organizing a wake. Another activity refers to a physical activity to the extent of respecting the dead (Corless et al., 2014). Physical activity that the bereaved does could be a response to grief as the response that the bereaved shows is intentional to respect the dead.

This study uses *Swan Song*, a 2021 science fiction film by Benjamin Cleary. The aim is to identify the stages of grief and how the main character responds to the stages of his grief. Cameron Turner, the main character, is the subject of the study as he is the one going through the stages of grief. The grief that Cameron experiences is anticipatory as he is a terminal illness patient who is facing an end-of-life

transition. This study's results aid in having a better understanding of stages of grief in the perception of end-of-life transition.

Swan Song is centered on the end-of-life transition of Cameron Turner as he went through the stages of grief. Cameron deals with his terminal illness by cloning himself to replace his position in the family that he is about to leave after he passes away. This study brought back the core of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' stages of grief model dealing with terminally ill patients as they went through grief rather than focusing on the surrounding people who lost someone close to them.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on *Swan Song* film and applies the qualitative research method to provide quality, different manifestations, the context in which this study appears, or the perspectives from which it can be perceived, especially in a psychological literature aspect. This study focuses on a psychoanalysis approach that analyzes the stage and the response to grief. The data are the primary data and secondary data. The main data are from dialogue and narration of the original film script taken from *the Deadline* website that covers the original script from Benjamin Cleary. Meanwhile, the secondary data are from journals, books, and articles related to the study.

In analyzing the film, the steps were identifying the collected data on the stage and response to grief. The first step was watching the film and reading the film scripts to get a better understanding of the context of the film. The second step was identifying the data from the film by highlighting, underlining, or giving a code to the data. The third step is classifying the data. The fourth step was reducing the data to select the best data to support the analysis. The final step was analyzing the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study shows results related to the stage of grief that Cameron Turner goes through and the response he reacts towards each stage in the following. The first result covers how Cameron Turner experiences the stages of grief, and the second result captures how Cameron Turner responds to his grief.

1. Stages of Grief

The stages of grief model of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969 shows the stages that someone goes through in the end-of-life transition and also for someone that lost their close one. The stages of grief consist of five stages, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, which are not in a specific order but end with the acceptance stage.

1.1 Denial

Cameron Turner starts his stage of grief in his end-of-life transition through the denial stage. As stated by Ritchie, denial encompasses when someone experiences a threat, and they are most likely to deny the peril to protect themselves from the reality of loss that they have not accepted (2014). Based on the definition above, Cameron's denial stage experience is in the following quote.

Turner in Confronting Death depicted in Benjamin Cleary's Swan Song

Cameron looks down at Jack, a long beat, his mind racing. **He diverts his eyes now, shakes his head**. Jo looks into the Control Room at Dalton, sensing that Cameron is struggling.

CAMERON:

I'm sorry... (beat)

I can't do this.

(Swan Song 0:13:20 - 0:14:02)

In the quotation above, Cameron sees Jack, his clone, as a potential threat that is about to attack his reality of loss. In denial, people only let in as much as they can handle to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the sense of loss (Rimiru and Mokua, 2020). Cameron's reaction when he diverts his eyes and shakes his head shows how he will not believe his reality that he is getting replaced by Jack.

1.2 Anger

The second stage that Cameron goes through was the anger stage. Anger signifies a justified response to some "wrong" to have been done to the subject person. It is triggered or provoked by events perceived to constitute deliberate harm done by an instigator toward oneself or those to whom one is endeared (Novaco, 2020, p. 167). A threat triggers anger. The proof of the peril Cameron has through in the anger stage is in the quote below.

Cameron seamlessly transitions into his workspace now to work on the design for the packaging of the organic tea company.

A new message appears from Jo, taking him out of his stride. He minimizes his array of screens and sits there, glum, as a memory emerges... (Swan Song 0:17:13 - 0:18:34)

The message that Jo sends is an indication of the anger that he is experiencing. Jo asks Cameron to meet her as she wants Cameron to continue the cloning process, but he does not want to. The indication of Cameron's anger by the provocation message is seen in the quote below.

Back to the present with Cameron, sitting at his desk. **A sudden surge of anger.** He punches his desk. Hard. It hurts.

We read the message from Dr Jo Scott on his AR screen: Can we meet, please? Cameron looks at the message, sighs.

(Swan Song 0:18:45 - 0:19:01)

A message from Jo on the computer that insists Cameron continue the cloning process becomes a threat to Cameron as he does not want to continue the cloning process. This event made Cameron angry as he saw that Jo was doing wrong or annoyed Cameron until he projected his anger.

1.3 Bargaining

In the third stage, Cameron goes through the bargaining stage. According to Corr, as she relays Kübler-Ross' understanding, she views the purpose of bargaining as an

entry to an agreement that may postpone the inevitable happening (Corr, 2021). Cameron's form of the bargain is in the quote below.

CAMERON

...I don't like this.

Cameron gets up to go. Jack stands too and pursues him.

IACK

And you think I like this? Talking to my wife under a spotlight.

CAMERON

...She's not your wife!

(Swan Song 0:55:19 - 0:56:52)

At this stage, Cameron bargains when he distastes his clone bonds naturally with his wife. Cameron does not want someone else to replace his wife. This conversation is a form of Cameron's bargain when he enters to have an agreement to postpone the cloning. Cameron tries to prevent Jack from meeting Poppy. He sees Jack as a stranger, though he is a duplicate of himself.

1.4 Depression

The fourth stage in Cameron's stage of grief is the depression stage. According to José Eduardo Rondón Bernard, depression is a sinking feeling of a person with a weight on their existence. The main symptom of depression is a decayed mood. Furthermore, There are also painful feelings, inappropriate humor, anguish, and panic attacks (Bernard, 2018). Depression begins to be Cameron's fourth stage of grief. His depression stage is in the quote below.

Next day. Cameron stands at the edge of the forest, battling with a growing inner turmoil. He turns back to face Barra. In an upstairs window he spots Jo and Dalton having a heated argument. He crouches behind a tree and watches them like a hawk.

(Swan Song 1:18:57 - 1:19:11)

In the depression stages, Cameron struggles with a growing inner turmoil as a state of panic attack that causes him to explode his emotions. According to Dimitar Bonevski and Andromahi Naumovska, a panic attack is an intensive fear characterized by unexpectedness and immobilizing intensity (Bonevski and Naumovska, 2020). Cameron struggles with inner turmoil when he fears unexpectedness. He is unable to see his family again, therefore he is worried about his family being taken care of by Jack.

1.5 Acceptance

The last stage of stage grief is acceptance. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, this stage is about accepting that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is permanent (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005). Cameron finally goes through the acceptance stage to complete his stage of grief. His acceptance stage is in the quote below.

JO: ...As of this morning, he's officially Cameron Turner. He'll never know about any of this.

Cameron digests this information. It seems to give him some comfort. He looks back out to the surrounding landscape.

(Swan Song 1:39:00 - 1:40:15)

In the last stage, Cameron has an acceptance stage that allows him to accept that he is going to die soon and his clone will replace his position in his family. He feels comfort knowing his family will be alright without him because he already trusts lack.

2. Response of Grief

The expression of grief might differ from one to another; these expressions can be the medium for a person to grow and to achieve the acceptance of grief. To capture the manner of grief indicated, modes of expression distinguish which manner is classified. In the acceptance stage, Cameron responds to every stage of grief in a certain way based on the modes of expression to responds to during those stages. Modes of expression are in the forms of verbal (written or oral) responses, nonverbal (silent or reflective) responses, physical responses (somatic or expressions), and physical activities (rituals or objects).

2.1 Cameron's Denial Response.

The first stage that Cameron goes through is denial. In this stage, Cameron expresses his denial of the reality of his loss, which eventually happens due to his terminal illness. In this denial stage, Cameron uses verbal responses.

Cameron looks down at Jack, a long beat, his mind racing. He diverts his eyes now, shakes his head. Jo looks into the Control Room at Dalton, sensing that Cameron is struggling.

CAMERON:

I'm sorry... (beat)

I can't do this.

(Swan Song 0:13:20 - 0:14:02)

The quotation above shows Cameron's denial in a verbal response. He said that he would not do the cloning project. His statement of his rejection of continuing the cloning process indicates how he denies the reality of his loss. Corless et al. stated verbal responses communicate a reaction to be reavement in words (Corless et al., 2014). Cameron expresses his denial to Jo in words of his agreement of getting cloned.

2.2 Cameron's Anger Response

In the second stage, Cameron goes through the anger stage, which shows his rage of emotion as the manifestation of facing a threat. Cameron expresses his anger toward the message that Jo gives by the narration of the script and the scene in the film. Cameron only showed one response to express his anger, a physical response.

Cameron shows his form of expression as the response in the anger stage in the quote below.

Back to the present with Cameron, sitting at his desk. A sudden surge of anger. **He punches his desk**. Hard. It hurts.

(Swan Song 0:18:35 - 0:19:01)

Corless et al. stated that physical responses are the response of grief by composing the physical signs, bodily expressions of reaction, and sensual aspects such as seeing and hearing (Corless et al., 2014). As the sudden surge of anger hits him, Cameron punches his desk. His reaction to anger is a form of a physical response that he projects physically by body language to punch his desk.

2.3 Cameron's Bargaining Response

Entering the third stage, Cameron goes through the bargaining stage when he wants his old life back with his family. The responses that Cameron shows are in a long sequence of dialogue. It shows the verbal response. The point of Cameron's bargaining response is the following quotation. The first statement that Cameron shows is his argumentation with Jack. Cameron points out when he bargains his life in a dialogue with Jack.

Cameron shoves him with a flash of aggression.

JACK (CONT'D):

Yeah? Come on! Do it. Do it.

Rafa enters Lab One to intervene but Jo stops him with a stern look and a hand up. Leave them. Cameron shoves Jack now and moves forward, inches from Jack's face. He speaks with venom in his voice.

CA MERON:

You won't leave this place. I'm going home and I'm telling them everything. Everything!

(Swan Song 0:56:07 - 0:56:52)

After seeing how Jack and Poppy interact during the video call, Cameron goes through the bargaining stage by showing verbal responses that symbolize how he wants to bargain or negotiate about how he wants to be back with his family rather than dying. According to Corless et al., verbal response communicates the bereavement through words or spoken language (Corless et al., 2014). In the sequence above, Cameron expresses the bargain of his old life to everyone in the room as his verbal response.

Another verbal response is during the bargaining stage of his stage of grief. This response shows a conversation between Jack and Cameron as a depiction that they tried to bargain about his life. Below is the quotation to support his bargaining verbal response.

JACK

Turner in Confronting Death depicted in Benjamin Cleary's Swan Song

I keep waking up. And I don't know where I am for a minute. I'm just me. Then it comes rushing back. (long beat) **Look I know you have to go back to see them**. I get it. **But do the right thing here.** Seven months man.

CAMERON

Don't do that...

JACK

If you tell her, you're saying it for you. I'm saying this for them.

CAMERON

Enough!

(Swan Song 0:59:58 - 01:01:07)

In the sequence above, Cameron continues the bargaining with his clone Jack as Jack tries to pursue Cameron to continue the cloning process, which shows how the bargaining begins for Cameron in exchange for his old life. Cameron refuses Jack's suggestion as he still wants his old life with his family.

2.4 Cameron's Depression Response

The next stage that Cameron goes through is the depression stage. In this stage, Cameron shows several repeated responses as he goes through the depression stage. The statement to prove Cameron's depression stage consists of narration and dialogue.

The first response shows that Cameron goes through a depression stage in a physical response. Cameron's trouble sleeping can be an indicator of depression. His response to grief is in the quote below.

...Back to Barra that moment as **Cameron jolts awake from the nightmare**. One of those hyper realistic dreams that lingers after you wake. **He buries his head into his covers, screams into them. His shoulders heave up and down.** (Swan Song 1:20:00 - 1:21:11)

Based on the sequence above, as Cameron gets through the depression stages, one of the responses that he shows in the film is that he has trouble sleeping as a physical response. He jolts as he wakes without intention. Corless et al. stated that physical response consists of bodily expression and sensual aspects, such as the sense of seeing and hearing (Corless et al., 2014). Cameron also shows the physical response as he screams in the covers and how his shoulders heave up and down.

Another physical response that Cameron shows is tears or crying. Cameron cries twice as he talks with his son, Cory, and his wife, Poppy. Cameron's cry is his expression of depression response in the quote below.

CAMERON

Come here, man.

Cameron can't hold back tears now. He hugs Cory for a long time, kisses his head. Cory seems to almost sense the finality of this moment.

CORY

You OK, Dad?

CAMERON

Let me look at you, man. Let me look at that face.

Cameron has tears in his eyes.

CAMERON (CONT'D) Yeah, I'm OK. I'm OK. (Swan Song 01:31:06 - 01:32:02)

Cameron shows physical response to how he cries and pours his emotions. According to Corless et al., body language is an example of a physical response, such as weeping, sobbing, sighing, sudden, intense emotion, or other somatic, physical responses typically occurring without intention (Corless et al., 2014). Cameron's cry is a form of physical response as he sobs at the reality of how that moment is the last moment he can physically meet his son. In another sequence, Cameron repeatedly shows his physical response by crying in front of his wife, Poppy, as he feels saddened by losing his wife, which is in the quote below.

CAMERON

If it's a boy... We should name him Andre.

POPPY

Yeah, I know.

They laugh together. **Tears come for Cameron now**. And for Poppy. They lie there for a long beat.

CAMERON

Poppy...

POPPY

Yeah?

Cameron struggles to get out the words.

(Swan Song 1:34:39 - 1:36:43)

In this sequence, Cameron cries as he is about to lose his family. The thought of how he cannot meet his future son, whom he is about to name Andre after Poppy's twin brother passed away, tore him up and made him cry even more.

In this stage, Cameron also expressed his depression of grief in verbal response, as he communicated his depression state with Cory and Poppy. Their sequence of dialogue is a form of verbal response to depression. This statement is in the quote below.

CAMERON

Hey, Doc? Doc? Wake up. Cory stirs. Cam shakes him gently again. Cory wakes, sleepy.

CORY

What's wrong?

CAMERON

I just had a really bad nightmare. Wanted to see you.

CORY

...What was it about?

CAMERON

It doesn't matter. It's OK now. (smiles) Hey, I have an idea.

Turner in Confronting Death depicted in Benjamin Cleary's Swan Song

(Swan Song 1:29:03 - 1:29:46)

Cameron expresses his nightmare as a term of his depression stage to his son, Cory. Corless et al. stated that verbal response uses spoken language to communicate to the bereavement (Corless et al., 2014). The way Cameron responds to Cory in a verbal response shows his expression of grief in the depression stage. Another sequence shows Cameron's verbal response, as in the quote below.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Poppy, wake up...

POPPY

Mmm?

Poppy opens her eyes, sees Cameron's pale, upset face.

POPPY (CONT'D) (concerned)

Bear? What's wrong? What's wrong?

CAMERON

It's nothing. I just... I just had a really bad dream.

Cameron smiles, just about holding it together. Poppy's rarely if ever seen him like this. She waits for him to continue.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

I lost everything...

(Swan Song 1:33:43 - 1:34:10)

In this sequence, Cameron expresses in a verbal response to communicate with Poppy how he has a nightmare and how he loses everything. Cameron's statement of losing everything shows his low self-worth in the depression stage.

2.5 Cameron's Acceptance Response

As the film is about to end, Cameron achieves acceptance at the final stage of grief. In this stage, Cameron responds to the acceptance stage by several expressions. The expressions of response include verbal response, physical activity, and physical response.

The first form of expression is the acceptance stage. It is the verbal response. Cameron shows the response as he knows that Jack finally replaced him. The quotation of this sequence is in the quote below when Cameron talks to Jo.

Cameron digests this information. It seems to give him some comfort. He looks back out to the surrounding landscape.

CAMERON:

Good... Good. Thank you, Doc.

Jo smiles, emotional now. He smiles at her (Swan Song 1:39:00 - 1:41:09)

In the quotation above, Cameron showed his acceptance through verbal response as he responded to the news of successful clone programs that replaced him with Jack as a symbol of him letting go of his past life to face the reality of his dying time.

Cameron expresses his acceptance response to grief through physical activities. According to Corless et al., physical activities are intentional expressions that involve actions or objects. Physical activities usually can be attending funerals, planning and holding memorial services, or other expressions of respect for the dead and the bereaved (Corless et al., 2014). In this scenario, Cameron's physical activities guide the other patient who is about to do cloning, as this is also what Kate did before she passed away as a former patient. This activity became a tradition to greet the new terminally ill patient with the cloning process. This statement is in the quotes below.

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JO (CONT'D) ...
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The new client is about to arrive. **Come down to us when you're done speaking with him.** Jack left you something.

Cameron looks at her, curious. But that's all she's saying.

EXT. BARRA HOUSE - FOREST CLEARING - DAY

We see **Cameron speaking to the new arrival on the bench where he first met Kate.** The new client is a YOUNG MAN, no older than twenty five.

(Swan Song 1:40:14 - 1:40:25)

At the near end of the film, Cameron expresses his last responses in a physical response. The final expression of his acceptance response is in a combination of different forms of physical response. The form of his physical reaction is in the quote below.

Cameron stands in Lab One looking at Poppy on the screen. Jo is welling up as she watches Cameron standing there, alone, in front of the screen. Back with Cameron, his eyes open again, looking at Poppy's beautiful smiling face, paused, looking right at him. Cameron's nodding his head now, smiling through his tears.

(Swan Song 1:42:25 - 1:42:48)

This sequence is the last response as Cameron finally reaches acceptance, lets his old life go, and is ready to depart in his dying moment. Corless et al. stated that physical responses are in physical signs, bodily expressions, and sensual aspects such as seeing and hearing (2014, p. 136). Cameron expresses his response by nodding his head and smiling through his tears.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Cameron experiences the full range of the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Cameron demonstrates a response of grief in each stage. He shows a verbal response in the denial stage. In the anger stage, Cameron produces a physical response. The bargaining stage that Cameron went through portrays him in a verbal response. In the depression stage, Cameron not only shows a physical response but also a verbal response. Lastly, in the acceptance stage, Cameron shows three different responses: verbal response, physical activity, and physical response. The implication of the findings is to advance theoretical understanding of the stage of grief. This study emphasizes that the stages

of grief that the bereaved experienced may differ from one another. Responses vary among stages, which implies diverse responses that someone can go through at the stage of grief.

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