

HUMANITIES IN FILM: A REFLECTION ON
CINEMATIC CHARACTERS' GRIEF RESPONSES

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Renee A. Pistone
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey
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ABSTRACT

Humanities in Film: A Reflection on Cinematic Characters' Grief Responses

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

Renee A. Pistone

The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
Drew University

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This dissertation joins a vibrant conversation in an interdisciplinary study encompassing disciplines from the humanities and social sciences about the challenging nature of grief responses as well as discussions about self-awareness and self-actualization. Using eight films, it explores how cinematic forgiving characters accept themselves and reach self-actualization and how cinematic avenging characters are stuck in the anger stage of Kubler-Ross' grief cycle. Collectively, the films articulate how complicated grief can be. From this perspective, the project demonstrates a new application of social cognition theorist John Bargh's automatic discourse theory as applied to examine each cinematic character's respective behavior. This dissertation expands the range of grief responses making them more dynamic, as a form of cultural currency, that can be better understood by applying Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow's self-actualization process helps to explore, in particular, why cinematic forgiving characters possess the qualities necessary to grow and cinematic avenging characters do not. As an advocacy piece and didactic tool, the selections from the films featured aim to gently assist the readers through the grief processes, when applicable.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It is true that people are influenced by their religious values. The call to forgive others is echoed throughout world religions. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory places self-actualization at the pyramid's pinnacle and self-actualizers are more likely to forgive others. Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes five motivational needs that are shown as a pyramid with levels. The order of the pyramid top to bottom is as follows: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization behavioral motivations. The highest level is self-actualization and it means that the individual realizes personal potential, attains self-fulfillment, and achieves personal growth which leads the individual to forgive wrongdoers. For Maslow, life experiences including loss causes individuals to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy. Research about forgiveness within the social sciences is not rare.¹ For Chad Magnuson and Rob Enright, forgiveness can be defined as a release of resentment toward an offender in order to heal all wounds. It is usually a process that happens in stages and there is a psychological component. Kubler-Ross' cycle of grief theory is used to explore how the cinematic avenging characters get stuck in the grief process leading to low self-esteem. Their corresponding low levels of self-esteem render them unable to forgive themselves and others. In short, they do not reach self-actualization. Bargh's theory of automatic

¹ Chad Magnuson and Rob Enright, "Church Forgiving Community," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 36, no. 2 (2008): 36-38.

discourse shows how four specific cinematic avenging characters' behavior leads to violence. Meanwhile, Bargh's theory of automatic discourse depicts how four other cinematic forgiving characters' behavior leads to forgiveness.

In this dissertation, four of the films studied provide instances whereby cinematic characters are harmed and are able to reach Maslow's concept of self-actualization which leads them to forgive wrongdoers.² On the one hand, in four films, *Poetry*, *Philomena*, *Get Low*, and *The Railway Man*, the characters experience mental and physical anguish and they are able to forgive. On the other hand, the other four films provide a sharp contrast: *Mystic River*, *In the Bedroom*, *Edge of Darkness*, and *The Brave One*. In those films, the characters are stuck within the grief cycle process and fail to forgive the wrongdoers inhibiting their personal growth and development. Using illustrations from sacred writings, the writer seeks to explicate the types of divine forgiveness and examples from these films depict how some of the characters internalize this redemptive message. These films demonstrate hatred but they also feature redemptive acts that conquer hatred. The loving act of forgiveness leads the aggrieved character to personal development and growth.

² Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396.

According to Film critic John Bailey, at any moment, there will be a series of violent films showing at the theatre.³ The literary arts are the arena whereby both violent and spiritual acts that may be taboo are allowed to be carried out in a public way. Punishment and redemption are two themes that serve to heighten the drama as critic Richard Shusterman advises.⁴ These types of acts draw in the audience and make the audience return for more. Certainly, the revenge and forgiveness themes featured in this dissertation exist in real life. Film critic David Bordwell notes that in modern cinema, there is a need to resolve the plot's dilemma and that provides a form and structure for either revenge or forgiveness.⁵

While, the scholar John Portmann describes how violence-filled plots tend to leave the characters unfulfilled while spiritual films nurture the heart and soul.⁶ It is the understanding of social cognition theory connected to punishment as an inappropriate grief response that merits further study in the upcoming chapter. In the cinematic avengers mind the use of violence can be justified as it resonates with the American viewer's psyche. For the cinematic avenging characters, violent acts are done because of something very personal and this is still a common theme in American films.

Revenge themed films and literary works often feature the culmination of action through some sort of violent act. The viewers are trained to interpret the violent act as retribution that is deserved. The cinema continues to depict the desire for vengeance and the awesome spectacle of violence contrasted with the softness of spiritual films. In fact,

³ John Bailey, *Screening Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 79.

⁴ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (England: Rowman Publishers, 2000), 10-14.

⁵ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin Press, 1985), 158.

⁶ John Portmann, *When Bad Things Happen to Other People* (New York: Rutledge Press, 1983),

at any moment, there will be a series of violent films showing at the theatre. Vengeance and the stuckness that cinematic avengers face are two themes that serve to heighten the drama.

Another theme in American movies continues to be the powerful message to forgive others. One legal scholar, David Black, conveys that an understanding of socio-legal concepts that are connected to punishment and harm will not lead to justice in a film.⁷ It is about creating a discourse about these imagined communities that are depicted on film and in the pages of books. Clearly, revenge themes cross genres and a discourse can be developed to comment about how these works that feature revenge do not convey justice via the use of violence.

An emphasis may be placed on how violent acts are carried out because the violent acts are a measure of the justice being sought. In the context of these films and literary works, it is shown how avengers are trying to gain retribution for their losses. Therefore, Robert Solomon advises there are techniques that Directors and novelists employ that identify violent acts as belonging to mourners in pain, rather than to maniacal individuals, who may be insane or temporarily insane.⁸ Surely, readers and viewers are not encouraged to coin these avengers as crazy people who should be incarcerated. Instead, cinema and books reveal that people need to feel sorry for these avenging mourners and to support their violent acts because they are entitled to be violent.

Those real-life experiences viewers and readers have translated into cognitive understanding of what transpires on film and this is delved into further in Chapter three.

⁷ David Black, *Law and Film* (Illinois: University Press, 2000), 10-15.

⁸ Robert Solomon, *A Passion for Justice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Press, 1990), 20.

This level of understanding is related to particular moments in books and certain key audio-visual elements on film. Interestingly, the revenge films and literary works do not feature any limits on the severity of the punishment the avenger metes out while the spiritual films place no limits on the characters' abilities to forgive others. In an anthology written about violent films, Film critic David Slocum advises that the topic is important and it is often treated as an afterthought.⁹ Commentator Stephen Prince critically examines the aesthetic use of slow motion by Directors to demonstrate key moments Directors choose to emphasize so a viewer may digest the scenes.¹⁰ On the one hand, slow motion can numb the audience and undermine the devastating impact of violence on the human psyche. On the other hand, in spiritual films, the close ups depict the moments of self-actualization when the characters forgive their transgressors.

One can conceptualize punishment, as it is limited, only by an avenger's plan for carrying out in these films. Therefore, vengeance based cinema will feature victims who enforce violent punishments. In such instances, the role of self-actualization and forgiveness are not always central to the story lines. The avengers in this dissertation turn away from traditional justice as they seek to formulate their brand of justice. Examinations of these kinds of problems serve to fill an empty hole by adding to the limited research and commentaries on this subject. Scholarship about revenge as depicted in cinema and in literary works needs to be delved into in order to curtail future violence.

The more violence that people see and read about, the more they may become immune to it. The audience may conceptualize punishment, as it is limited, only by an

⁹David Slocum, *Violence and American Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 2001), 8.

¹⁰ Stephen Prince, *Screening Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 200.

avenger's appetite and imagination or plan for carrying it out. Therefore, vengeance--based cinema and literary works repress legal processes and feature the victims enforcing a violent punishment. In films like *Mystic River*, *In the Bedroom*, *Edge of Darkness* and *The Brave One*, the role of the characters' forgiveness and finding peace are not central to the story lines. Yet, it should not be forgotten that many aspects of religious teachings are actually designed to curtail violence, as legal theorist Robert Cover suggests.¹¹ This dissertation serves to fill an empty hole by adding to the limited research and commentaries on the subject of forgiveness in American films. Scholarship about forgiveness depicted in cinema needs to be delved into in order to curtail future violence. As the society becomes incensed by violence people just get so accustomed to it. The message is that violence is not an acceptable means to solve problems as seen in Chapter two; the writer turns to adults and their abilities to deal with grief which requires the ability to solve problems.

As mused by noted film critic John Fell, the modes of discourse may help to classify the relationship among the film, the Director, and the observer.¹² It is in this manner that viewing a film translates into a distinct artistic experience that directs the viewer's attention away from the film itself to the meaning that the Director wishes to communicate to the audience. The meaning is that adult life is constantly changing and circumstances can alter and change lifestyles. The Humanities encompasses different fields including psychology, philosophy, musicology, and law. In short, the humanities is

¹¹ Robert Cover, "Violence and the World," *Yale Law Journal* 95, no.8 (1986): 1601-1629.

¹² John Fell, *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1986), 29.

the study of human culture and film is the audio and visual presentation of human culture over time as interpreted by the Director. The Director tries to shape the viewers' experiences leading to a psychological impact that lasts. The viewers begin to empathize with the main characters or they may find that they are repulsed by the actions that a character is taking in a given scene. After viewing many films in preparation for this project, there is some ritualistic aspect to the art of filmmaking as some sort of celebration of the arts in general. The writer chooses the films in concert with recommendations by the dissertation committee as part of the process. The films are selected because of the strengths of the plots and due to the richness of the themes presented. *Mystic River*, *In the Bedroom*, *Edge of Darkness*, and *The Brave One* are logical choices since they feature characters who could not reach self-actualization and self-acceptance. Meanwhile, *Poetry*, *Philomena*, *Get Low*, and *The Railway Man* portray characters who are strong because they reach self-actualization.

Violence plagues American society and laws are created to deter and to punish offenders.¹³ Perhaps, democracies with their sense of freedom and sense of entitlement are vulnerable to proportionate levels of violence.¹⁴ Hannah Arendt advises that violence can be detrimental to forms of self-governance especially in democracies.¹⁵ Certainly, there is a question of how violence is inherent in democracies due to the open nature of this society. Contrarily, oppressive regimes are closed societies but those governmental regimes thrive on power using violence to control the citizens. People struggle to reach a

¹³ Maximilian LeCain, "Tarantino and Vengeful Ghosts of Cinema," *Senses of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 6.

¹⁴ Ray Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 11.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," *Crisis of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 17.

greater understanding about why violent acts are committed in society. The literature and films demonstrate and document the distinctive forms of random violence. The violence is carried out by ordinary citizens living under a democratic governmental regime.

What is the form of bloodshed ? What should our response be to public acts of violence carried out by citizens against citizens? Judith Shklar, a political theorist, mandates that in order to act ethically we must carefully consider the perpetration of violence.¹⁶ People should ask how should the wrongs of this violence be righted? Why do the perpetrators use violence as their means to right these wrongs? In their minds it is a necessary step in their healing processes. These Americans feel that they have the legitimate right to commit acts of violence as some form of retribution.

The American Revolution has long been considered one of the deadliest wars. This type of warfare underscores the rational basis for why ordinary citizens feel entitled to use random violence. While it is important to mention the role of the bloody American Revolution, American idealism also plays a part in this growing problem. Rugged individualism and the rhetoric that stem from what is considered to be the rights of an individual should be delved into. Where do these rights come from? Philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke frame these ideas and it is their ideas that shape the government. It is these ideas that lead Americans to feel privileged enough to use violence as a way to solve problems. Heretofore, John Locke's notions influenced the colonists to rebel against British Kingly rule. Certainly, Locke is responsible for our Republican form of government which has stood the test of time. Surely, Locke's discussion about society's

¹⁶ Judith Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 16.

right to revolt against and what follows is his outline for when society may employ such a right. Somehow the use of violence can be justified and this has become part of the American psyche. The American identity is closely linked to these ideas that if the rulers are corrupt then citizens take back the power they originally relinquished. This is the power to protect the citizenry and to deliver justice as citizens saw fit. People give up that power to enter into a collective society. What happens when society disappoints and people perceive some kind of intolerable injustice? In short, Americans are rugged individuals that conquered the untamed lands on the western frontier. Citizens struggle to establish law and order in those newly discovered lands in the Midwest. Steve Simkin, a film historian, advises that law and order has to be established in order to deal with the gold rush and the floods of people moving westward making it a theme of interest for screen writers.¹⁷

Collective forms of violence originate within the American citizenry starting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸ Violence can be carried out by groups or by those individuals who choose to act alone. Certainly, the motivation is different depending on who is carrying out the violence. For individuals, it is usually done because of something personal. Many groups use violence as a tool to bring forth political changes and to advance their agendas or to resolve some of their problems.

¹⁷ Stevie Simkin, *Early Modern Tragedy and Cinema of Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15-17.

¹⁸ Richard Brown, *Violence in America*, eds. Hugh Graham & Ted Gurr (California: Sage Publications, 1979), 31-33.

The current extremist groups such as Environmental Liberation Front came after the Weathermen, the Black Panthers, and the Wobblies. The average American film viewers are almost trained to interpret the violent act as retribution that is deserved. The cinema continues to depict the desire for vengeance and the awesome spectacle of violence. In fact, at any moment, there will be a series of violent films showing at the theatre. Interestingly, violence is the form of punishment that is used to punish violent and usually criminal acts.¹⁹ The literary arts are the arena whereby the violence is allowed to be carried out in a public way. These types of violent acts draw in the audience in order to return to the cinema for more. It is necessary to have an understanding of socio-legal concepts that are connected to punishment and the harm that leads to justice in the films.

In sum, violent acts on film can lead to the creation of a discourse about the ethics involved since some acts are gruesome. Certainly, revenge themes cross genres and a discourse can also be developed to comment about how these works that feature revenge convey justice through the use of violence. At this time, it is useful to emphasize how these violent acts are carried out because the violent acts are a measure of the justice being sought. In the context of these films and literary works, cinematic avengers feel that they need to carry out violent acts due to their losses.

¹⁹ Jonathan Rayner, "Masculinity, Morality, and Action: Michael Mann and the Heist Movie." In *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice*, ed. Paul Mason (England: Willan, 2004), 73-80.

Certainly, the techniques that Directors use serve to heighten the drama but the viewers do realize that these cinematic avengers appear to simply be bent on getting revenge. Viewers may feel sorry for these avengers but the violence does not solve any problem and it does not bring back the lost loved one. Directors use violent acts to instill shock and awe as the audience tries to comprehend this type of abnormal response by victims. These are issues of justice that require judgment within American culture. How is justice being sought?

Real-life experiences that viewers and readers have translate into cognitive understanding of what transpires in films. This level of understanding is related to particular moments and certain key audio-visual elements on film.²⁰ Harm is usually physical and is endured by the victim at the hands of a criminal. The law states that there should be a remedy for harm that is suffered and endured by victims in society.²¹ Slow motion can numb the audience and undermine the devastating impact of violence on the human psyche. This work seeks to offer an alternative approach to reading and to viewing explicit violence on film. It explores the spectacle that is violence to present readers with an understanding of revenge and forgiveness.

²⁰ David Pole, *Aesthetics, Form, and Emotion* (England: Duckworth Publishers, 1983), 32.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* 1065, no. 11 (1989-1990): 920-1146.

For Thomas Pogge and other world scholars, a debate about the notion of what justice is and how to apply it should be thought about on a local and global scale.²² In short, they propose a legal and ethical regime that is international in nature and in scope. Here, violent content in art forms continues to permeate American society and culture. Coincidentally, there seem to be more violent acts committed in this country each day.²³ Therefore, vengeance based cinema repress legal processes and feature the victims enforcing a violent punishment. Here, the role of forgiveness and peace are not central to the story lines.

The avengers featured, in this dissertation, turn away from the law. Examinations of these kinds of problems serve to fill an empty hole by adding to the limited research and commentaries on this subject. Scholarship about revenge as depicted in cinema and in literary works needs to be delved into in order to curtail future violence. As a society, people become incensed by violent acts as they get so accustomed to it. Violence becomes an acceptable, almost desirable, means to solve problems. Adults employ bereavement strategies in order to cope with loss. There are traditional and non-traditional grief strategies that individuals use to deal with significant losses in their lives. Loss features the removal of something that is cherished in life.²⁴

This featured loss can be a person or a thing such as a home. The grief, therefore, becomes the mental and physical response to the particular loss. Grief itself involves the

18. ²² Thomas Pogge and Darrell Moellendorf, *Global Justice: Seminal Essays* (Paragon Press, 2008)

²³ Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime* (New York: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 32.

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 10-16.

cognitive process as well as the bodily, so to speak.²⁵ Retribution, as an untraditional grief strategy, requires the brain and body in order for it to be planned and executed. Traditional grief strategies include mundane activities such as group or individual therapy.²⁶ There may be overwhelming feelings of a loss of control. Certainly, given enough time, most people are able to cope with loss and effectively deal with it.²⁷ Here, the mourners do not employ traditional grief strategies but follow non-traditional grief strategies including exacting violence as retribution. The violent acts signify the end of normal behavior. Dramatic scenes that include violence stimulate interest for the audience who is used to seeing the grotesque scenes. Can there be a catharsis that stems from this behavior? The catharsis takes the form of a resolution and leads the particular character through the emotional pain to some form of self-awareness. In the 1993 film, *Falling Down*, Michael Douglas' character William Foster is an unemployed man who becomes disturbed.²⁸ He is initially a victim of economic problems and then he begins to solve disputes in violent ways. This film features cinematic justice making at an extreme.

More importantly, cinematic and literary characters are displaying their anger and their frustration with the police and the legal system. Michael Douglas' character tears apart a convenience store because it charges too much money for soda. He aims a large gun at a construction site since it is causing considerable traffic delays. This character is upset and his actions or violent responses are completely unreasonable. In many ways, his demonstrated resentment is so outrageous that any of his claims for justice would fall

²⁵ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code* (New York: Random House, 1996), 25-27.

²⁶ John Bowlby, *Loss, Sadness, and Depression* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 5.

²⁷ Alan Wolfelt, *Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992) 7-9.

²⁸ *Falling Down*, directed by Joel Schumacher (1993; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1995), DVD.

upon deaf ears. The audience determines that he is a man who went crazy and that he acted unjust. It is time to consider a cinematic character that can engender sympathy from the audience.

Society often finds it difficult to recognize the deep needs of the bereaved.

Perhaps, people are too conditioned and too appropriate when it comes to grief. There are several other factors and problems associated with adequately dealing with grief. First, there is a marked absence of the support from the immediate family.²⁹ Also, people are increasingly mobile and many do not have roots in the community.³⁰ Further, relatives and friends will come together for funerals and lend some temporary support to the bereaved person.³¹ Then, they quickly disperse back to their homes that are usually in another location. Certainly, Americans are less connected to religious organizations that can provide pastoral care, largely due to busy lifestyles.³² It is a busy lifestyle that impacts the desire for spiritual connections that could help to render bereavement support. And technological advances in medicine give the idea that people are more in control over life and death.³³ Now, there are more people living with terminal diseases as medications slow the progress of deadly diseases. There is one clinician that provides answers in her widely interpreted grief theory. Now, it is time to consider the Kubler-

²⁹ Brenda Branson & Pail Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* (New York: Judson Press, 2007), 20-22.

³⁰ Peter Lovenheim, *In the Neighborhood: The Search for Community on an American Street, One Sleepover at a Time* (New York: Perigee Trade Press, 2010), 2.

³¹ Doreen McFarlane, *Funerals with Today's Families in Mind: A Resource for Pastors* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4-6.

³² Russell McCutheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent: Or, How to Live in a Less Than Perfect Nation* (New York: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 8-11.

³³ Thomas Easton, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Science, Technology, and Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2009), 20.

Ross grief cycle which features the many stages of grief.³⁴ Initially, the grief cycle is applied to terminally ill patients and it depicted their experiences. Later on, the cycle is found to have a broader application to anyone suffering a loss of any kind.³⁵ In fact, this grief cycle applies to loss of all kinds. These stages and the corresponding sub-stages are shock stage, denial stage, anger stage, bargaining stage, depression stage, testing stage, and the acceptance stage.

For Kubler-Ross, the shock stage involves a feeling of numbness upon hearing the bad news. Noted psychotherapist Charles Figley asserts that the person is immobilized practically in a paralytic state.³⁶ Often, the person is shocked and finds the gravity of the situation difficult to absorb, according to psychologist Fritz Heider.³⁷ The physical manifestation of this stage includes staring into space, an inability to focus or to concentrate which psychologist Linda Hartling mentions.³⁸ The bereaved person may not be able to articulate words or will speak very slowly. Next, the denial stage features just what it sounds like and that is classic avoidance.³⁹ The person tries to avoid what is inevitable. The bereaved will often delay in making funeral arrangements because doing so confirms that the loved one is gone. Whereas, the anger stage begins when the bereaved person vents the feelings and emotions that are suppressed as this person tried

³⁴ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1969), 10-30.

³⁵ Catherine O'Neill & Lisa Keane, *Love and Grief: The Dilemma of Facing Love After Death* (New York: Jessica Kingsley Press, 2005), 8-11.

³⁶ Charles Figley, *Stress and the Family: Coping with Catastrophe* (New York: Routledge Press, 1983), 19-21.

³⁷ Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Press, 1958), 10-12.

³⁸ Linda Hartling, *Strengthening Resilience in a Risky World: It's All About Relationships, Women and Therapy* 31, no 2 (2008): 51-70.

³⁹ Melissa Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and Practice of Ministry* (New York: Fortress Press, 2010), 14-16.

to avoid the bad news or event.⁴⁰ In the bargaining stage, the person will try to console himself or herself in any manner possible. While during the depression stage, the person reaches some sort of realization about what will happen and how it is out of his or her control. During the testing stage, the person begins to search for plausible solutions that could work for them. Finally, in the acceptance stage, the person begins to find his or her way, as therapist Alan Wofelt observes.⁴¹

Breakdown of Chapters

This interdisciplinary study from a psychological, social cognition theory, and theological perspective contains five chapters: an introduction including a discussion of how the attainment of self-actualization enables characters to forgive; the application of the use of the Kubler-Ross theory to show cinematic avengers get stuck in the grief cycle process. Chapters one and two address how the cinema continues to depict the film characters' desire for vengeance and then the other films depict how some characters forgive others. Chapter three provides an exploration of social cognition approaches to further help explain why the violent acts that Jimmy Markum, Dr. Fowler, Tom Craven and Erica Bain undertake stall their grief processes and do not lead to self-actualization inhibiting forgiveness. Chapter four examines Bargh's social cognition theory relative to the four cinematic forgiving characters: Yang Mija, Felix Bush, Philomena Lee, and Eric Lomax. In Chapter five, the writer analyzes acts of forgiveness comparing them to religious stories that help characters reach Maslow's self-actualization. The films and literary works that the writer shall examine are all uniquely American which signifies that

⁴⁰ Alan Wofelt, *The Understanding Your Grief Support Group Guide: Starting and Leading a Bereavement Support Group* (New York: Companion Press, 2004), 14-18.

⁴¹ Bara Chesser, *Seven Steps for Handling Grief* (New York: Sunstone Press, 2010), 10-13.

though American culture often is blood thirsty, there are some who reach self-actualization and forgive. The final chapter concludes and ties in the spiritual aspects of forgiveness showing how it is the best solution to most problems. When people choose not to forgive others, they tend to languish in a state of chaos. Certainly, the motivation is different depending on who is carrying out the violence. For individuals, violent acts are usually done because of something very personal. Revenge themed films and literary works often feature some culmination of justice through the violent acts in the following chapters of this dissertation.

Next, Chapter two features the exploration of how cinematic avenging characters do not advance in the human quest to grow in self-acceptance that leads to self-actualization. These characters have low levels of self-esteem that cause them to delight in harming others.

Chapter 2:

CINEMATIC AVENGERS GET STUCK IN KUBLER-ROSS' GRIEF CYCLE IN: *MYSTIC RIVER*, *IN THE BEDROOM*, *EDGE OF DARKNESS* AND *THE BRAVE ONE*

Adults employ bereavement strategies in order to cope with loss and to move into healing, according to Colin Parkes.⁴² There are traditional and non-traditional grief strategies that individuals use to deal with significant losses in their lives. This featured loss can be a person or a thing, such as a home, and grief includes the human response to the specific loss.⁴³ The grief, therefore, becomes the mental and physical response to the particular loss. This chapter analyzes those cinematic characters who do not employ traditional grief strategies but exact violence as retribution as result of an inability to forgive others.

It would seem that when people use non-traditional strategies, it is inherently more interesting to watch and read about. Their activities overcome the boring factor because violence is never boring to see on the silver screen. It is just disturbing to watch or to read about. There is something about violence that draws people in and makes it hard for them to be distracted, according to critic Richard De Cordova.⁴⁴ People, therefore, tend to focus more on the messages when violence is shown. The audience stays focused and may find it hard to look away as Legal commentator John Denvir advises.⁴⁵ This scheme works out well for publishers and for film producers who are dependent on revenues from the sale of these artistic works. It should be considered that

⁴²Colin Parkes, *Bereavement* (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), 32.

⁴³ Robert Romanyshyn, *The Soul in Grief* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1999), 20.

⁴⁴ Richard De Cordova, *Genre Reader* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2003), 130.

⁴⁵ John Denvir, *Legal Reelism: Movies as Legal Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 14.

the popularity of seeking revenge, as a way to achieve justice, can be considered a main staple within American films and literature.

As Legal commentators Lance Bennett and Martha Feldman advise, it is hard to attain justice through the legal system since it is complicated and obtuse.⁴⁶ Of course, using an alternative means to achieve justice, such as through violent retribution, renders the person unsatisfied. The catharsis takes the form of a resolution and leads the particular character through the emotional pain but it does not lead to personal growth. Certainly, as theologian Russell McCutheon asserts, Americans are less connected to religious organizations that tend to administer provide pastoral care services largely due to lifestyle.⁴⁷

It is a busy lifestyle that may impact any desire for spiritual connections that could help to render bereavement support. And technological advances in medicine, Ethics scholar Thomas Easton asserts, give people the idea that they are more in control over life and death.⁴⁸ In some ways, technology leads to a belief that people can live forever. Thus, some tend to believe that it is not necessary to develop a support group in response to grief.

⁴⁶ Lance Bennett and Martha Feldman, *Reconstructing* (New Jersey: Rutgers Press, 1981), 17.

⁴⁷ Russell McCutheon, *Religion* (New York: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 15.

⁴⁸ Thomas Easton, *Taking Sides* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2009), 14.

Grief theorist Charles Figley advises that in the Kubler-Ross grief cycle, the shock stage involves a feeling of numbness upon hearing bad news as the aggrieved is afraid and may not be able to work.⁴⁹ Further, grief therapist Fritz Heider notes that people are shocked and may find it hard to cope.⁵⁰ While, therapist Linda Hartling advises that the physical manifestation of this stage includes the inability to articulate feelings in connection with the loss.⁵¹ The bereaved person may mumble speech or speak slowly. The bereaved will often delay in making funeral arrangements because doing so confirms that the loved one is gone. Of course, during the depression stage, the person reaches some sort of realization of what will happen and how it is out of his or her control.

One main problem is the featured cinematic characters distort these stages as they fumble through them and getting stuck. It becomes a grotesque display of what happens when the grief process goes wrong. The traditional grief strategies are not followed and violence is chosen as the only rational course for individuals to grieve. It is known that the cycle works and is reliable as a means to express what is happening to people at this juncture in their lives. One's response to grief can be unpredictable but the ability to move through the grief process is uncanny. For grief counselor Susan Anderson, the cycle is universal and accepted in scholarly circles to help clinicians develop and to carry out effective and reliable treatment plans for their patients.⁵² The Kubler-Ross grief cycle can help to identify the struggles that the characters experience in the films. The audience can trace the steps that a character takes as the character moves through each stage of the grief cycle before getting stuck thwarting his or her growth and development.

⁴⁹ Charles Figley, *Stress and the Family* (New York: Routledge Press, 1983), 25.

⁵⁰ Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press, 1958), 34.

⁵¹ Linda Hartling, "Strengthening Resilience," *Women and Therapy* 31, no.2 (2008): 51-70.

⁵² Susan Anderson, *Journey from Abandonment* (California: Berkley Press, 2000), 22.

There are several other factors and problems associated with adequately dealing with grief. First, theorists Brenda Branson and Pail Silva assert that there is usually an absence of communal and governmental help.⁵³ Meanwhile, social commentator Jane Appell advises that most people think the grieving person should just get over it.⁵⁴ Also, commentator Peter Lovenheim advises that people are increasingly intolerant of others who seem to wallow in sadness.⁵⁵ Further, grief theorist Doreen McFarlane articulates that some people do not reach out to counselors or social workers due to pride and some privacy concerns.⁵⁶ Many communities do offer bereavement support groups and these groups tend to be faith-based organizations. The Kubler-Ross grief cycle identifies the stages that the cinematic characters are in to trace and to study the grief cycle process. In *Mystic River*, the first film of interest, Sean Penn plays the lead role as Jimmy Markum and he wins an Oscar. Tim Robbins wins an Oscar for best actor in a supporting role. Clint Eastwood is nominated for an Oscar as best Director. The film remains critically acclaimed as representative of American pop culture. The film writers also grab top honors at Cannes Film Festival where Clint Eastwood receives top honors.⁵⁷ According to Mike Clark, *USA Today* film reviewer, one exciting thing about the film is that Clint Eastwood directs and his body of work continues to dazzle audiences.⁵⁸ Clark advises that the men in the film strut their machismo and the award winning performances outshine the dismal plot that leaves viewers wanting more.

⁵³ Brenda Branson & Pail Silva, *Violence Among Us* (New York: Judson Press, 2007), 20-27.

⁵⁴ Jane Appell, *Divorce Doesn't Have to Be That Way* (New York: Impact Publishers, 2006), 15-18.

⁵⁵ Peter Lovenheim, *In the Neighborhood Search for Community* (New York: Trade Press, 2010), 9.

⁵⁶ Doreen McFarlane, *Funerals with Today's Families* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 17-19.

⁵⁷ Marc Elliot, *American Rebel: The Life of Clint Eastwood* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), 12-14.

⁵⁸ Mike Clark, "Mystic River Has Eastwood's Magic Touch," *USA Today*, retrieved from: www.usatoday.com

Mystic River is about three childhood friends, Jimmy, Sean, and Dave who are reunited in adulthood due to a tragic event.⁵⁹ Jimmy Markum's nineteen-year old daughter Katie's body is found and it is clear that a murder took place. Jimmy, an ex-con, vows to find the killer before the police do. Jimmy plans to carry out violent acts to exact revenge.⁶⁰ He carries out violent acts in order to stop blaming himself and as this serves as his main grief strategy. The plot unfolds when Dave's wife tells Jimmy that she suspects Dave killed Katie.⁶¹ Dave never recovers emotionally from being sexually abused as a child. He never really receives professional help and is understandably disturbed from the abuse. Sean is a State Police Investigator and continues investigating Katie's murder knowing that this is personal. Jimmy Markum continues to struggle with his grief. It is overwhelming and he cries throughout the film. Jimmy becomes frustrated when he cannot figure out who the killer is and he is annoyed that the state police are taking a long time to generate meaningful leads.⁶²

Filmmakers use the natural landscape to convey deeper meanings, as film critic Stuart Kaminsky advises.⁶³ The filmmakers use the metaphor of the river (which has levels of depth) to signify how Jimmy's grief process has many depths to it. The opening and closing scenes feature prominent displays of the river. The river mirrors the grief cycle which also has many levels. The film portrays American blue-collar culture in a tight-knit Boston community. Francis Hsu remarks that tough guys are depicted grieving

⁵⁹ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Stuart Kaminsky, *American Film Genres* (Chicago: Plum Publishing, 1974), 48.

differently and this relates back to the American history of rugged individualism.⁶⁴

Americans have a strong philosophical approach that places an emphasis on self-reliance, according to Charles Norman Fay.⁶⁵ When considering the theme of rugged individualism, it is the primacy of the individual that is most important. Therefore, individuals tend to grieve and suffer in silence because of an American cultural expectation that individuals are self-reliant.

In the opening scene, Jimmy Markum is outside Saint Cecilia's church when he hears police sirens and then sees a few cruisers rushing in the street.⁶⁶ He is concerned that his daughter did not come home last night. Down the road, Sean and the state police are conducting a crime scene investigation. Jimmy follows the sounds and sees the police in an area with search dogs. As he approaches the scene, he sees Katie's car and police are inspecting it.⁶⁷ Jimmy looks inside and sees blood and he becomes frightened.⁶⁸ He frantically demands the locals to radio for State Trooper Sean to come out of this wooded area to talk. Clearly, Jimmy fears the worst and there is something inside of him that appears to know that things are just not right. He calls out to State Trooper Sean and he begs to know if his daughter is dead in the weeds inside the park.

State Trooper Sean tries to remain calm since he knows Jimmy well and he anticipates that Jimmy will not continue to be patient for much longer. They continue to

⁶⁴ Francis Hsu, *Rugged Individualism* (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 39.

⁶⁵ Charles Norman Fay, *The President and Prohibition* (New York: Cosmos Press, 1929), 11.

⁶⁶ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

have a dialogue as search dogs race past Jimmy into the woods. Jimmy nervously yells out that his daughter's car is parked on the street near the crime scene.⁶⁹ The police continue to rope off the area with pieces of yellow police tape to keep people back so they do not interfere or contaminate the crime scene.

Jimmy is moving side to side in a frantic pace and he sees blood in his daughter's car. The police move toward Jimmy and they get ready to grab him. State Trooper Sean advises that his daughter is missing right now and they hope to learn more information as the day progresses. Sean is called away by a detective and he goes into the forest. Jimmy yells to Sean and questions him about his daughter's body.⁷⁰ Sean does not answer him but gives him this look that reveals that it is true and his daughter is dead. In this dramatic opening scene, five men have to hold Jimmy back as he tries to get into the woods to see her body. The scene is very powerful and emotionally charged since most crime victims' families do not actually go to the crime scene. The fact that Jimmy is there makes it sting even more and heightens his anger even further. In this instance, the police found Katie's body near the old bear cage in the woods. Suddenly, Jimmy breaks through the police barricade and screams out. The Trooper's silence indicates that Katie is dead and Jimmy becomes uncontrollable. Ten men have to hold him back as no one wants him to see his daughter like that. The scene changes to the morgue and Jimmy identifies the body. Barbara Glantz, a psychologist, would likely agree that he is catatonic and is clearly in shock.⁷¹ Jimmy does not scream or vomit. They have the funeral and back at

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Barbara Glantz, *What Can I Do?: Ideas to Help Those Who Have Experienced Loss* (New York: Augsburg Books, 2007), 27-30.

his house and he admits to being in shock. The conversation below depicts how Jimmy is in conflict with his domestic responsibilities and his need to find Katie's killer.

Theo, Jimmy's father-in-law, asks him if he is holding up okay. Jimmy tells him that the fact that she is gone has not sunk in yet. Theo explains to him that it will hurt like hell when it does. He knows from experience because when his wife died he could not function for six months.⁷² He says that his kids were grown and he did not have any responsibilities. He could take as long as he wanted to grieve but Jimmy has to wake up and take care of his family. Theo tells him that his kids ought to be his first priority right now and Jimmy starts to get defensive. Jimmy says that Katie's body appears as if someone beat her with a pipe. It troubles him to think about how her body looks.⁷³ Theo reflects on the horror that Jimmy imagines and mentions that it is good to die in one's sleep since it is peaceful.⁷⁴ Jimmy laments that his daughter did not have a peaceful death and he starts to get angry.⁷⁵ The medical examiner will perform an autopsy on her body using scalpels and the chest spreaders.⁷⁶ He does not care about his so-called domestic responsibilities as he remains mired in self-pity.⁷⁷ Alone and outside Jimmy says to himself that he feels responsible for his daughter's murder.⁷⁸

At this point, Jimmy blames himself for Emma's death. In the next scene, he is at the funeral parlor and tries to make the arrangements with the funeral coordinator but he

⁷² *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

is too distracted. Charles Morris explains how body language has meaning.⁷⁹ Jimmy cannot focus at all as he shifts his gaze and shifts in his seat. The funeral coordinator asks him simple details about viewing times and flowers. Susan Aldrich, a psychologist, would tend to agree that this behavior is characteristic of the shock state as he is in constant pain and sadness.⁸⁰ Jimmy is still coming to grips with Katie's death. The above dialogue gives a glimpse into his angry feelings and Jimmy begins to blame himself. Theo wants Jimmy to focus on taking care of his family and helping them through this difficult time. Jimmy abnormally begins to focus on the crude aspects of her death focusing on the unpleasantness of an autopsy procedure. Clearly, he lacks the ability to remember Katie as a young vibrant girl. Jimmy starts to move into a dark place.

Consequently, the viewers know Jimmy is in the denial stage when he imagines that he needs to bring about justice for Katie. He does not lean on anyone for support except for his thug companions who are his partners in crime. He attends the Read and Son's Funeral Home to make the arrangements by himself without his wife. Jimmy is disengaged and continues to look away throughout the conversation. The viewing audience sees that Jimmy cannot handle this one step in the grieving process.

⁷⁹ Charles Morris, *Signs, Language, and Behavior*, (New York: George Braziller Press, 1995), 16-18.

⁸⁰ Susan Aldrich, *Will I Ever Be Whole Again? Surviving the Death of Someone You Love* (New York: Winepress Publishing, 2006), 12-14.

The Funeral Parlor Worker wants to create an obituary for Katie. He asks Jimmy to provide the basic information and asks if he would prefer donations in lieu of flowers.⁸¹ Jimmy decides that he wants to see his daughter's body and he asks the funeral parlor director to take him to the basement.⁸² He is surprised by this strange request. Jimmy exhibits obsession-like behavior for the first time in this key scene.

In short, the questions that the funeral coordinator asks are forcing Jimmy to confront Katie's death. Social norms dictate that a "viewing" take place and an obituary be created and published in the newspaper. Jimmy is struggling to answer the questions and asks to see Katie's body. This is a somewhat unusual request but it is granted. The viewers realize that Jimmy is beginning to break down. Melissa Abraham, a bereavement counselor, would likely agree that viewing the body helps us to cope and to remember.⁸³ Here, it is necessary for him to view Katie's lifeless body as this convinces him of her death.

Jimmy views the body and whispers to Katie that he will find the guy and kill him. Jimmy becomes agitated and derives strength from his anger.⁸⁴ He whispers in her ear that he will find the murderer before the police do.⁸⁵ Surely, Jimmy plans to take care of this and to kill the murderer in order to avenge Katie.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Melissa Abraham, *When We Remember: Inspiration & Integrity for a Meaningful Funeral* (New York: Three Things Press, 2007), 22-25.

⁸⁴ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

At this point, a new formed strength is derived when he stops denying Katie's death. He is now able to dictate what the obituary should say. He takes a vow to avenge Katie's death. We see that he is mourning his loss of the caring fatherly role that he once relished. Jimmy was in prison for many years and he was not able to be a father to Katie. When he was released, he tried to make up for the missed time. Katie's untimely death will now rob him of the pleasure of being her father. He is mourning the loss of his fatherly role and the actual loss of his daughter. Cathi Hanauer, a psychologist, would likely assert that the loss of the fatherly role creates a partial identity crisis since his identity is linked with his fatherhood.⁸⁶ Jimmy will not easily relinquish this fatherhood role and it also fuels his desire to hunt down Katie's killer. He sees himself as a father who protects his daughters. Truly, Katie's murder conflicts with his parental responsibility to shield his three daughters from harm.

Clearly, Jimmy bargains with himself that if he can hunt down Katie's killer then he will have satisfied his parental responsibility. The mandate that parents must keep their children safe from harm. A father often will feel a heightened sense of this mandate in relation to a daughter, according to family therapist Joe Kelly.⁸⁷ In short, he cannot move on until he reaches some inner peace. Jimmy will reach the point when he can actually forgive himself for allowing Katie to be harmed on his watch.

⁸⁶ Cathi Hanauer, *The Bastard on the Couch: Men Try Really Hard to Explain Their Feelings About Love, Loss, Fatherhood, and Freedom* (New York: Harper, 2004), 10-12.

⁸⁷ Joe Kelly, *Building a Father-Daughter Relationship* (New York: Random House, 2002), 18-21.

At this point in the film, he struggles with his demons and holds himself personally accountable for her murder. Jimmy is not able to find Katie's killer and he launches an investigation. The neighborhood tough guys and Jimmy begin interviewing some local people. The conversation from this next scene demonstrates this plan.⁸⁸ Jimmy asks the State Police Investigator White how long it will take him to capture Katie's killer. Jimmy is not satisfied and the viewers get a sense that he will resort to drastic action on his own.

In this instance, Jimmy tries to move quicker than the police who are constrained by legal procedures. Jimmy is depressed because he wants to find the killer before the police do. He is growing uneasy and his ideas that he can solve this crime faster than police are taking shape. Jimmy begins to feel that he does not need to rely on the police and he can deliver the punishment himself. Jimmy uses violence as a grief strategy to deal with Katie's death. His wife agrees that ultimately this strategy is consistent with his personality.⁸⁹ She says that she wants to feel his heart and she tells the girls that their father has a big heart. Jimmy has serious character flaws. He is not a loving man and his personality does not allow him to sympathize with anyone.

In short, his wife proudly says that she tells his daughters that their daddy would do whatever he had to do. Jimmy's wife supports his vengeful plan and she also exhibits low self-esteem levels. They both have low self-esteem and their relationship brings them

⁸⁸ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

both down in a sense. She compares Jimmy to a King and he is a King who knows what he must do in the world.⁹⁰

In this instance, Jimmy comes to terms with what he has done. He commits an act of violence in killing Dave. Even though Dave was not the right guy, he is able to move forward emotionally. He needed an outlet for his anger that took the form of revenge. His wife encourages him and tells him that he is a King that cannot do anything wrong. Jimmy is merely worried that he killed the wrong man. He really does not have a conscience about it. He believes his wife that he did what he had to do. Jimmy smiles for the first time in a while. He tracked down someone and made him pay for the murder. Jimmy was wrong about the murderer's identity but his wife said that was alright. Jimmy is the King who could rule this town. The Director cuts to a parade in progress with a loud marching band and the viewers get the sense that something is still not quite right.⁹¹

New York Times film critic A.O. Scott advises that the shadows in the film serve to alert the viewers to the upcoming doom.⁹² The dialogue in the film is consistent with the fatalistic flavor from the book and reflects the Irish-Catholic tone.⁹³ Scott further muses that Dave, Sean, and Jimmy accept their lives filled with ordinariness. The plot is filled with twists since the characters all seem to have a hidden motive.⁹⁴ The critic praises Director Clint Eastwood for his selection of a cast that makes the film seem like an opera. According to the film critic, Sean Penn delivers a strong performance in the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² A.O. Scott, "Film Festival Review: Dark Parable of Violence Avenged, *The New York Times*, October 3, 2003, A1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

character of Jimmy Markum and he can handle the gravity of the weight of the abyss in which he finds himself in.⁹⁵

Critic Roger Ebert notes that the story is dark and evokes pain and faulty assumptions.⁹⁶ The film is about suspicion and pain spanning decades after the child abuse incident.⁹⁷ Ebert advises that the film is about the journey that the characters take and they challenges that they face.⁹⁸ Sean Penn's character Jimmy Markum does not gain release from acting violently as the film critic observes.⁹⁹ Another *New York Times* film critic David Edelstein reports that the two deaths in the film stun the audience.¹⁰⁰ Edelstein further laments that every act of violence in the film has deep meaning with rippling consequences. The Director illustrates this point since the camera pans over the river several times throughout the film. People are complicated and the path to self-actualization is obtuse with ripples in it.

Maslow's form of self-actualization occurs when individuals are able to resume their normal lives after trauma because of personal growth, according to Counselor Steven Kalas.¹⁰¹ Unlike the cinematic forgiving characters featured in the upcoming chapters of this dissertation, Jimmy has low self-esteem. Low self-esteem sets the stage for the violent acts and darkness that this character perpetrates throughout the film.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Roger Ebert, "Mystic River Review and Film Summary," retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ David Edelstein, "Dirty Harry Wants to Say He's Sorry Again," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2003, A1.

¹⁰¹ Steven Kalas, *Human Matters: Wise and Witty Counsel on Relationships, Parenting, Grief, and Doing the Right Thing* (New York: Stephens Press, 2008), 31-33.

There is not really any time in the film whereby he exhibits high levels of self-esteem. Psychologist Nathaniel Branden articulates that self-esteem is: greater self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-expression.¹⁰² Self-efficacy relates to the person's confidence in his ability to make decisions that are consistent with reality.¹⁰³ While, self-respect represents his assurance that happiness is a birth right.¹⁰⁴ There would be a deficiency in self-esteem when an individual lacks psychological well-being.¹⁰⁵ This person is a victim of events rather than a person who is part of a community that seeks fellowship with others for mutual regard.¹⁰⁶ The mind functions as the essential tool for survival.¹⁰⁷ The mind that is poisoned with thoughts of destruction and violence is contrary to well-being.¹⁰⁸

Brandon asserts that self-esteem is a human need and low levels of self-esteem contribute to addiction, violence, and seem to be like a time bomb waiting to go off.¹⁰⁹ An individual with low-esteem with cut corners morally and legally to show off his mastery.¹¹⁰ This person thinks that he is above good and evil and he challenges the world

¹⁰² Nathaniel Branden, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

to bring about his destruction.¹¹¹ These people lack a sense of self-respect and self-efficacy, according to Brandon.¹¹²

Hence, the violent act of killing Dave gave Jimmy an outlet for his anger and frustration. Committing violence does not result in personal growth or development in any way. Jimmy does not find the ability to return to his family and his former life style. Jimmy resorts to his old unlawful behaviors and unconventional way to solve problems. He utilizes violence, as a grief strategy, and conducts his flawed investigation. The legal system triumphs over Jimmy's crude methods since following the legal rules actually led to the correct killer. The film sends viewers the message that the legal system may be slow and flawed but it is accurate. Jimmy's method of finding the killer and administering his version of justice fails since he targets the wrong man.

In this Chapter, the examples show how the criminal justice system triumphs over Jimmy's crude methods since following the legal rules actually leads to finding the correct killer. The film sends viewers the message that the legal system may be slow and flawed but it is accurate. Jimmy's method of finding the killer and administering justice fails because he targets the wrong person. On a personal level, the violent act does not allow Jimmy to move through the grief cycle because he is now stuck since he refuses to seek and grant redemption.

The next film is aptly named, *In the Bedroom*. It brims with a talented showcase of actors and actresses who successfully navigate a web of deceit as they all experience trials in life. The action focuses on a cinematic avenger who does not fit the typical

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

profile of a gun slinging vigilante. *In the Bedroom* received the nomination for an Oscar. Sissy Spacek played a supporting actress role as Ruth Fowler and she won the Golden Globe. Marissa Tomei received a nomination for the Golden Globe award. The film also won for best picture at the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards. Director Todd Field received the nomination for an Oscar for best picture.

According to Mike Clark *USA Today* film reviewer, Director-writer Todd Field shows the viewers a little but not too much as he carefully weaves the viewers through a drama that could have spun out of control.¹¹³ Clark advises that the film draws power and buzz from what he dubs as creative casting.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, *In the Bedroom* (2001) features typical plot twists and has a legal context for the vigilantism that troubles viewers as the plot unfolds.¹¹⁵ Ruth and Dr. Matt Fowler's college age son Frank makes the fatal mistake of getting involved with an older woman Mrs. Natalie Strout.¹¹⁶ Marisa Tomei portrays Natalie who has an abusive husband Richard Strout who keeps coming to visit her. Although they are separated, Richard is jealous of Frank and Natalie's relationship. Richard has used violence against Frank. Richard is jealous that Frank sleeps over and is acting like a substitute father to the estranged couples' children. Richard enters the house and a struggle ensues. Richard shoots Frank in the eye and calls it an accident. In court, Natalie proves to be an ineffective witness and fails to justify the state's case. Her testimony collapses on cross examination as she seems to change her story, on the stand. Therefore, Matt Fowler's son's killer is free on bail until a jury trial is

¹¹³ Mike Clark, "Bedroom Is No Sleeper," *USA Today*, retrieved from: usatoday.com.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

scheduled.¹¹⁷ Dr. Matt Fowler carries out violent acts and the violence is done as part of their stagnating movements through the stages of grief. Ruth Fowler's role and desire that Richard Strout be hurt is revealed through her body language with Matt Fowler. They do not have a conversation about it.

Unlike Director Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River*, Todd Field directs *In the Bedroom* with a focus on the spoken word in order to convey his intended meanings. There is less visual imagery as this script includes the actors saying exactly what is on their minds. Field's film, *In the Bedroom* exploits character stereotypes as depicted in his casting choices. Film critic Samuel Weber asserts that the cast conveys deeper meanings through their words that otherwise would not have been readily apparent.¹¹⁸ Field directs the characters to display sad faces and hunched over posture to further indicate grief and sorrow as a visual cue to the audience.

Dr. Matt Fowler gets back to work, too soon, after his son Frank is shot to death. Matt seems to be on autopilot as he has not taken the time to digest what happened to Frank and appears to be in shock.¹¹⁹ Matt focuses all of his time and effort on what will occur during the criminal trial. Matt's best friend asks whether the bail hearing is set and if he is going to it.¹²⁰ Matt is not sure about what he and Ruth will do since the Prosecutor told them it is a formality and the trial is in October.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 33.

¹¹⁹ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003),

DVD.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Essentially, Matt is fine when he thinks that justice will be served and he can even wait until October which is months away.¹²¹ Matt focuses all of his time and effort on what will occur during the criminal trial.¹²² In an early scene, Matt's best friend asks him whether the officials set the bail hearing. Matt is a little dazed and responds that it will be held in a few days. His best friend asks if he will attend. Matt politely advises that the Prosecutor told him that it is a formality.¹²³ Matt really cannot reason too well and he has not talked with Ruth about whether or not they should go. Matt's best friend makes a kind offer to go with him in case Ruth is not strong enough to go.¹²⁴

Matt is fine when he thinks that justice will be served. He can even wait until October which is months away. After this conversation, Matt becomes anxious about when the trial date will be scheduled. Next, he speaks to the Prosecutor about why it is taking so long for the trial date to be arranged. Matt is shocked and bewildered and cannot comprehend his son's tragic death or its aftermath. The Prosecutor does not have any answers for him and Matt's frustration begins to mount. The Prosecutor's role as a representative of the legal system further depicts its uncertainty and its slowness. Clearly, the uncertainty of law and its corresponding slowness fuel anxiety in those who must unwillingly participate. Scholar Richard Sherwin finds that people often expect that justice will be expedient but it is lagging since it must be precise.¹²⁵ Matt has no idea how taxing the trial will be. He is completely unaware that there is a possibility that no

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Richard Sherwin, *When Law Goes Pop: The Vanishing Line Between Law & Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 40-42.

one will pay for his son's death. Natalie Strout's testimony, at the bail hearing, did not favor the Prosecution's case. In short, it will be difficult to get Frank's killer convicted.

At this point in the film, Matt is confused and advises that he thought there would be a jury trial. The Prosecutor said that Richard Strout is out on bail and the court date is always later in those cases. Matt starts to yell in desperation and he cannot believe that there is nothing that can be done until the trial is held.¹²⁶ It is not possible to appeal bail since it is not set up that way. The state's bail code is to ensure future court appearances. In this case, Strout's family put up a great amount of property as bail. That, along with his ties to the community made it hard to convince the Judge there is a flight-risk.¹²⁷ In this instance, Matt Fowler expects that the pain will be diminished if Richard Strout receives a long jail term. This is a man who has no idea about the justice system process and what is involved. Clearly, his solution is to take sleeping pills because he cannot sleep at all.¹²⁸ It appears to the viewers that Matt sleeps more just to avoid dealing with this tragedy and the grief that he feels. Matt begins working on Saturday and that is something that he has never done before. As part of the denial stage, Matt has no idea how taxing the trial will be. He is completely unaware that there is a possibility that no one will pay for his son's death. Natalie Strout's testimony, at the bail hearing, does not favor the Prosecution's case.¹²⁹ It will be difficult to get Frank's killer convicted, as a result. Matt cannot believe that Strout, his son's alleged killer, is free on bail.

¹²⁶ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

At this point in time, the Prosecutor appears less optimistic and suggests that Matt and Ruth file a civil suit for money damages. The reason being that the burden of proof is often easier to meet in such a civil case. The Prosecutor advises Matt that he thinks the evidence will support the lesser charge of manslaughter rather than murder.¹³⁰

Matt is unhappy with the complicated processes within the criminal justice system and he says that this case is not about an accident.¹³¹ The Prosecutor tries to explain to him that this how the criminal justice system works and they should be able to get a conviction for several years in prison.¹³² Matt is shaking and he says that he does not know what to expect or what outcome would take away the pain.¹³³ Matt Fowler is dealing with his anger since there is some local politics that need to be accounted for and this fuels his anger even more. It does not seem that justice will be served because Richard Strout is from a wealthy and powerful family in town. Stephen Klein, a legal scholar, would agree that money matters in criminal trials.¹³⁴ Matt Fowler is seemingly powerless to bring him to justice. The viewers begin to see the seeds of Fowler's own brand of justice making being planted.¹³⁵

In fact, during the anger stage, Matt Fowler begins to consider the conversation that he had with the Prosecutor and he shakes his fist. The recent conversations about the trial help to move him into the anger stage. Elaine Scarry, a body language expert, would

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Stephen Klein, *Predicting Criminal Justice Outcomes: What Matters?* (Washington: Rand Corporation Publishing, 1991), 25-28.

¹³⁵ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

likely agree, as he gestures wildly and raises his hands, that this body language exhibits extreme anger as part of his response to deep grief.¹³⁶ His angry disposition is communicated to the audience in an obvious way including certain faces that he makes.¹³⁷ And his frustrations with the lack of responsiveness from the actors in the criminal justice system start to reach a pinnacle. Matt continues to think about what the Prosecutor advises and the trial could last a month. It is possible that Strout will get probation and will not even go to prison.¹³⁸ The news is devastating to Matt and Ruth Fowler and they are not sure if they can live with this outcome.

In the bargaining stage, Matt Fowler's grief strategy is hatched out of a need for revenge. He begins to emerge from the cloud that hinders him from understanding that his son's killer will not be imprisoned for life. Matt Fowler's grief strategy is hatched out of a need for revenge. He begins to emerge from the cloud that hinders him from understanding that his son's killer would not be imprisoned for life.¹³⁹ Matt Fowler expects that the pain will be diminished if Richard Strout receives a long jail term or if he is at least kept in jail until the trial. Matt has no idea about the complexities involved with criminal justice system procedures and what is involved with bail hearings which are not appealable. Strout comes from a prominent family and this may also influence the process to a degree. Strout's family can afford to shuttle him out of the country, if necessary. Matt begins working on Saturday and that is something that he has never done before. He is looking for an outlet in order to avoid thinking about the tragic events. He

¹³⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (England: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

goes to a regular card game with all of his male friends and he screams at them. He wants to be treated normally but the men are all quiet during the game. Matt yells to them to say something but they are also in shock about everything that Matt is experiencing.

At this point, the men at the card game begin to understand that Matt needs to return to some form of normalcy. He desires to conduct the old conversations before the tragic death of his young son. Also, film scholar Rikke Schubart would agree that this game marks the shift, in the film, whereby Matt goes from being very passive to active.¹⁴⁰ He begins to confront people and to challenge their thinking. He tells people how he expects to be treated and wants them to do. He visits with the Prosecutor without an appointment. He decides that everything will be better if he can just get justice for his son. If he cannot get justice for his son and Richard Strout is not convicted, then he has to do something. He talks about his concerns with one of his closest friends who is there and they discuss a woman that everyone knew. This woman killed her husband with help and dumped his body over the river falls. The dumping is timed just right and the body is never recovered and she does not go to jail.

In fact, during the depression stage, Matt Fowler returns from his meeting with the Prosecutor in a morose state. The Prosecutor says it will likely be a manslaughter conviction and that involves a lesser penalty. Forensics has not been able to prove otherwise due to the condition of the crime scene. As a move to calm him, the Prosecutor advises that this case is still a priority.¹⁴¹ Yet, it seems like no one is really doing

¹⁴⁰ Rikke Schubart, "Passion and Acceleration: Generic Change in the Action Film," In *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge Press, 2001), 192-207.

¹⁴¹ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

anything. Frank begins his own investigation and he meets with the local people who know Richard. They advise him that Richard has not bragged or mentioned anything. Matt sinks into a depression and begins to feel desperate. Matt asks Ruth whether she wants to talk about things. Ruth is sarcastic and they begin to argue. He pleads with her and says that he really does not know what to do about the crisis situation. Ruth expresses her anger that Matt is not displaying his sadness.¹⁴² They both allow anger to flood their minds and their negative emotions take control. Matt flatly says that he does not want to have a grieving contest.¹⁴³

These characters break down and lose their ability to be respectful. They face low self-esteem levels that begin to interfere with the marriage. It is apparent to the viewing audience that the death of their only son has catapulted the relationship into serious trouble. Ruth and Matt often fight and self-esteem is vital to the success of any romantic relationship. A barrier to romance is erected and each cinematic character struggles to understand the tragic events. Frank's death may not have come as a surprise to the average viewer since Frank is seen as a threat to the unstable Richard Strout who has a history of violence. Frank is in the worst position possible since Richard Strout would show up at Natalie's house just looking for a fight. The violent encounter simmers throughout the first part of the film.

Ruth is visibly upset throughout the entire film as she continually expresses her frustration and anger while Matt suppresses his. As Psychologist Jason Swedene advises

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

the bereaved will play a blame-game to relieve guilty feelings.¹⁴⁴ Ruth starts to blame Matt for not being strict enough with Frank since she does blame herself for his death.¹⁴⁵

Matt and Ruth Fowler continue to experience marital stress related to the loss and the perceived lack of justice from the criminal justice system. Ruth asks him if he wants to talk about their dead son since they do not discuss it much at all. Matt feels helpless as he informs Ruth that this fight is unproductive. Ruth puts pressure on Matt to deal with his emotions and to stop acting like nothing has happened. Ruth blames Matt for their son's death. The viewers can see that Frank's death transforms Ruth into a cruel woman who does not feel love and can no longer express love. She projects her lack of self-respect and unfulfilled needs into some form of an emotional impoverishment. Her negative influences impact Matt and they begin to feed off of each other's negative comments and behavior.

As the film progresses, Matt's obsessional thoughts push him over the edge and he needs to find a way to make this right again. Ruth pushes him by laying on guilt and assessing blame. They make up and apologize for saying horrible things. Ruth tells him that she does not know how to deal with her anger and she is tired of seeing Richard roaming free around town. Psychiatrist Robert Lifton advises that the bereaved tend to exhibit signs of fragmentation and coming apart emotionally.¹⁴⁶

Surely, her son's tragic death is driving Ruth crazy and Natalie comes to her job seeking forgiveness since she blames herself. Ruth admits that she is unable to forgive

¹⁴⁴ Jason Swedene, *A Philosophy of Moral Dilemmas* (New York: Mellen Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁴⁵ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Lifton, *The Protean Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 40.

Natalie for putting her son in danger. These unresolved feelings lead to Matt and Ruth not being able to move past this grief stage. Grief counselor Eileen Boris-Dunchunstang notes that this kind of intense bitterness fosters violent behavior.¹⁴⁷ It becomes an insurmountable obstacle to forgiveness and normal healing. Also, the stalemate with the criminal case is not helping them to advance beyond this grief stage as their anger and frustration simmers.

Within the testing stage, Matt and his friend devise a plan to kidnap and murder Richard Strout. Matt muses that he cannot accept that Strout is out on bail and working at a bar. They both agree that they hate Strout and he will likely go to prison for five years which is not nearly long enough. His friend provokes angry feelings as they are getting stirred up since they realize that they both hate Richard. Behavioral expert Nancy Loucks asserts that there are specific reasons why the bereaved will often choose violence to solve a problem.¹⁴⁸ Matt and Ruth deliberately choose violent methods in this case and forgiveness is not an option. Matt rationalizes that this violent act will help him and Ruth as they grieve. At this point, they are desperate since they see Richard around town and it seems like nothing has changed and he has not paid for killing their son.¹⁴⁹ Their anger begins to reach a boiling point as they lose faith in the legal system's ability to deliver justice. They want to commit violent acts in order to gain relief from the frustration that they both feel. Violence tends to be expedient and easy. Matt and Ruth deliberately choose violent methods in this case and forgiveness is not an option.

¹⁴⁷ Eileen Boris-Dunchunstang, *Finding Forgiveness* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009), 17.

¹⁴⁸ Nancy Loucks, *Why We Kill* (England: Willan Publishing, 2009), 29.

¹⁴⁹ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

Matt rationalizes that this violent act will help him and Ruth as they grieve. This is the grief strategy that they choose to employ in order to move on. At this point, they are desperate. They are seeing Richard around town and it seems like nothing has changed and he has not paid for killing their son. Their anger begins to reach a boiling point and they lose faith in the legal system's ability to deliver justice. They want to commit violent acts in order to gain relief from the frustration that they both feel.

In an elaborate ruse, Matt Fowler tricks Richard Strout into going in the car with him. Richard thinks that he is taking him to the airport to help him escape the legal system.¹⁵⁰ In this scene, Richard tries to explain his behavior and seeks some type of redemption as he argues that Frank and Natalie's relationship ruins his chances of making the marriage work.¹⁵¹ The viewers can see that Richard is starting to feel a little uneasy about this situation.¹⁵² Matt advises that he wants Richard to jump bail and that Ruth cannot stand to see him walking freely around town. Also, the trial is too much for them to endure.¹⁵³

At this point in the film, it is increasingly stressful for Matt to follow through with his plan to kill Richard. Yet, in his mind, he feels that he must do it in spite of Richard's explanations and pleadings for mercy. Matt and his friend ambush Richard, kill him, and dispose of his body. Matt arrives home and tries to sleep. Matt says he wants to get home before Ruth's sleeping pill wears off but she knows what Matt is up to. Ruth's support of Matt's actions is suggested to the viewers since she does nothing to stop Matt from

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

carrying out these vigilante acts. Ruth gets up and starts to make an elaborate breakfast. The camera closes in on her face and she has an evil smile. Clearly, the intended message is that Ruth has no renewed sense of energy because of the vengeful acts. Meanwhile, Matt lives with a chronic feeling of uneasiness on his mind which does not take the form of guilt. Matt does not allow himself to express feelings of shame or regret for killing Richard.

Maslow's self-actualization process is achieved when people move to a state whereby they grow in personal development from the many disturbances in their lives. *New York Times* film critic Stephen Holden advises there is a tremendous amount of grief denial in this piece.¹⁵⁴ The film sustains a formidable dread for what is to come as each scene unravels.¹⁵⁵ Ruth and Matt turn on each other since they lose their abilities to hide their feelings and it contributes to the rising action.¹⁵⁶ Holden asserts that Matt's mission to kill Richard leaves him unsatisfied.¹⁵⁷ This plot twist adds to the richness in the film as the viewers see Matt struggle to carry out the violent act.¹⁵⁸ Film critic Roger Ebert mentions that Ruth and Tom Fowler present a hidden struggle with their emotions that is so characteristic of this type of grief.¹⁵⁹ Ebert notes that not all marriages can deal with these difficult times and this is a formidable challenge for the relationship.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Holden, "Film Review: When Grief Becomes a Member of the Family," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2001, A1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Roger Ebert, *In the Bedroom Film Review*, retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Psychologist Nathaniel Brandon advises that high levels of self-esteem require a strong sense of self-awareness.¹⁶¹ Dr. Matt Fowler does not show emotions and he goes through much of the film out of touch with reality. The danger according to bereavement expert, Roy Baumeister, is that grief denial leads people to lose touch with their conscious emotions and that can facilitate violent acts.¹⁶² Scholar Max Collins describes this behavior as a type of cold-hearted violence from an un-emotional person¹⁶³ Psychologist John Darley advises that anxiety leads to adrenaline rushes.¹⁶⁴ Matt is really bewildered and he suffers from anxiety and depression. Therapist Kim Anderson points out that forms of self-actualization are achieved when people reach a high level of self-awareness.¹⁶⁵ Matt Fowler kills Richard Strout and this action prevents him from reaching self-actualization since this action is inconsistent with morality. Fowler kills Richard Strout and remains numb and out of touch.

Certainly, their lives will not return to normal because of the violent act that Matt feels compelled to carry out. Scholar Janice Hume informs that the message in America is that after the loss of someone, it is normal to grieve and move on with life.¹⁶⁶ And it is Fowler's violent acts that reveal to the viewing audience his low self-esteem level which further prevents him from reaching personal growth and self-actualization. Fowler loses the ability to be part of the community since his violent acts isolate him from what is

¹⁶¹ Nathaniel Brandon, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 13.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Roy Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Cruelty and Violence* (New York: W.H. Freeman Publishers, 1997), 21-23.

¹⁶³ Max Collins, *Criminal Minds: Killer Profiles* (Signet Books, New York, 2008), 15-17.

¹⁶⁴ John Darley, *Justice Motive in Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45.

¹⁶⁵ Kim Anderson, *Enhancing Resilience in Survivors* (New York: Springer, 2009), 9.

¹⁶⁶ Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2000),

considered normal and acceptable behavior in society. It appears that he allowed conscious thinking to stop and some unconscious desires took over. Psychologist Nathaniel Brandon advises that people have a choice to think since it is not an automatic response in the body like breathing.¹⁶⁷

Chapter three of this dissertation explores the cognitive learning and choices that cinematic characters make via the lens of Bargh's automatic discourse theory. The next feature film highlights continued violence as perpetrated by a physically strong man that dark and edgy Mel Gibson brings to life on screen. *Edge of Darkness* does not win any awards but Bojana Novakovic receives the nomination for best actress by the Australian Film Institute. *Boston Globe* film critic Sam Allis advises that the film suffers due to the plot.¹⁶⁸ Mel Gibson carries the film just like Robert Redford can in his performances.¹⁶⁹ The film is based on an award-winning BBC television miniseries and marks Gibson's return to the silver screen.¹⁷⁰ Gibson's character struggles to go on in the face of emotional collapse.¹⁷¹ While, the film may not be critically acclaimed the viewers expect an action movie and it delivers a significant amount of violence for the viewers to process. The plot summary for *Edge of Darkness* is as follows: Mel Gibson plays Veteran detective Tom Craven who is part of the close-knit Boston police department.¹⁷² When Craven's twenty-four year-old daughter Emma is shot point-blank on the doorstep people on the force and in the community try to help solve the tragic crime. At first, it is believed

¹⁶⁷ Nathaniel Branden, *The Power of Self-Esteem* (New York: Health Communications Press, 1992), 25.

¹⁶⁸ Sam Allis, "Movie Review, Edge of Darkness," *Boston Globe*, retrieved from: boston.com.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

that Tom is the target due to his occupation which breeds enemies. He thinks that Emma is shot instead of him and this adds to his bereavement.¹⁷³ Tom frantically launches an investigation and grief leads him on a quest to bring the killer to justice. Emma is a Northmoor intern and the large corporation developed nuclear weapons for the government.¹⁷⁴ Emma apparently finds information about illegal activities.¹⁷⁵

Tom Craven takes on the corporation and hunts down Emma's killer. Further, he believes that Emma's ghost is supportive of the vengeful and violent acts that he undertakes. Tom employs violence as a grief strategy as opposed to a more traditional grief strategy. His commission of violent acts also helps him to deal with his guilt. He feels that he should have protected Emma. He is a proud father and a police officer and this all adds to his perceived guilt. Tom is particularly troubled over his inability to exert control over what transpires before and after the shooting.¹⁷⁶ The battle rages on throughout the film.

In this key scene, Director Campbell uses the image of Emma, as a child, as a visual metaphor for Tom's grief. Directors utilize the technique of subtlety to communicate things that are not spoken to the audience. The film opens with a home video of Emma, as a four year old, playing at the beach. Ironically, Tom spreads her ashes, at the beach, later in the film. Whenever, Tom is sad he imagines this child is there talking with him. She imitates him shaving and the viewers can see how deep his grief is. Also, he misses Emma so much that he imagines her, in the room with him. Almost every

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

action that he takes evokes her memory. The departed Emma depicted as an adult and as a child represents Tom's emotions and his state of mind.

Interestingly, the writer does not see any of this technique used by any other Director, so far. The other Directors in the other films do not touch on the supernatural in this manner. This effective use of subtlety is brought back at the end when Toms dies. He imagines that he sees Emma who depicts the angel of death. Felix Bush in *Get Low* also imagines the same thing and he imagines that his dead lover is the angel of death.

In the first few scenes that are shown as a flashback, Tom Craven has vivid nightmares and suffers after his daughter is gunned down right in front of him. He is in a catatonic state. They are going to the hospital as Emma just vomited blood when a man's voice yells, "Craven." Tom is closing the front door and immediately turned his head around thinking the voice is calling him. It is likely that the killer must have wanted to create some confusion over who is the intended target. The shooter comes up the lawn and is very close and fires. The impact hurled Emma's body through the closed front door and she bleeds to death in the foyer. Tom reaches for his gun to retaliate but he leaves it on the kitchen table. Tom has the added trauma of dealing with his own fear and frustration over being unable to strike back. He leans down beside Emma's body and wipes her blood across his face. This act can be seen as a ritualistic blood oath that he plans to avenge her death, according to David Ownby, a historian.¹⁷⁷ Marvin Harris, an

¹⁷⁷ David Ownby, *Secret Societies* (New York: Sharpe Publishers, 1993), 15.

expert on cults, advised such a blood ritual is also used by Pirates, Vikings, and other cultures to prevent a bad outcome and to promote a good one.¹⁷⁸

Detective Whitehouse clears the scene since the house is full of crime scene investigators and he wants to talk to Craven alone. Detective Whitehouse assures him that every available officer will investigate this murder since it is “Officer Involved.” Craven insists on staying at the house and he is not afraid that the perpetrator will come back to kill him. Tom’s confused state of mind reveals that he refuses change his clothes.

In scene four, the Director captures his state of shock when the only thing Tom can do is ask for some ginger ale. He wanted Emma to drink ginger ale because she vomited. Emma never had the chance to drink it. It is as if Tom drinks it for her.¹⁷⁹ He thinks that the shooter is out to get him and hit Emma by mistake. It is natural that he would think he is the target since he has many enemies as a police officer. Struggling with his flood of emotions, Tom orders everyone out of the house. As an investigator, he plans to look around and go in Emma’s room to think about her.¹⁸⁰

Here, his daughter is shot in cold blood and a gunman may be after him. Clearly, Tom’s strange behavior is indicative of shock. He wants to relive the moment and begins his obsession with the details about what happened. Staying at the crime scene will allow him to conjure up memories about Emma and her childhood.¹⁸¹ The next scenes feature

¹⁷⁸ Marvin Harris, *Culture, Man, and Nature* (New York, Crowell Press, 1971), 36.

¹⁷⁹ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Emma's child ghost as he mentally torments himself with details of Emma's childhood. He cannot leave her room though it is painful to touch her things.

There is yellow police tape all around the house.¹⁸² A long time has passed and Tom has to get ready to wash Emma's blood off. His long delay in not washing her blood off further depicts his confused mental state. Detective Whitehouse urged him to clean himself up hours ago. In scene five, Tom washes his face and stares at the blood stained face cloth. Tom handles the cloth carefully treating it like a sacred relic. We notice that he chooses not to look in the mirror. It is as if he blames himself for her death. Perhaps, there was something that he should have done to prevent her death. Ultimately, Emma is dead because of him. These are the thoughts that he torments himself with on a daily basis. Clearly, he is sad to see Emma's blood go down the drain. Her blood going down the drain is symbolic that every trace of her physical life is gone. Only the material things in her room remain and the memories that he has in his thoughts. In the next scene, he is lingering in her room and he picks up her things to remember her. He gazes at her degrees from Harvard and from M.I.T. and the audience can sense his pain.¹⁸³ She comes from a blue collar household and makes it to the Ivy League school and the best technological university. The viewers understand that Emma is a smart researcher. Tom imagines that he hears Emma's voice telling him that she loves him. The viewers also understand that her death represents lost potential. Ann Finkbeiner, a bereavement expert, would likely say that the loss of a child is particularly painful since the tragedy presents a

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

loss of what this child would have achieved.¹⁸⁴ In fact, in *Beyond Tears: Living After Losing a Child*, Rita Volpe explains that mothers and fathers cope differently and there is hope that grief will lessen in time.¹⁸⁵ Tom must now begin to grapple with this tragedy and to delineate what his response will be.

As part of the denial stage, Tom is now ready to wash Emma's blood off his clothes. His long delay in not washing her blood off further depicts his confused mental state. Detective Whitehouse urges him to clean himself up. In scene five, Tom washes his face and stares at the blood stained face cloth. Tom handles the cloth carefully treating it like a sacred relic. It is hard for him to look in the mirror. He wants to be around her personal effects and cannot bear to go in her room in the beginning. He will only go in there if and when he must. In the anger stage, the viewers see signs of anger and frustration in scene six.

The viewing audience can see that these are the two main characteristics of the anger stage in the grief cycle.¹⁸⁶ People who are in this stage will display an outpouring of bottled up anger that is difficult to watch. It can be described as a form of rage.¹⁸⁷ In this sobering scene, Tom falls asleep but is awakened by a nightmare. He jumps up covered in sweat with his fists clenched. His eyes are bulging as he looks for something to smash or to throw. This brief scene ends with him looking in the mirror ready to act on his angry feelings. Certainly, his anger is not expressed in words. Body language,

¹⁸⁴ Ann Finkbeiner, *After the Death of a Child: Living with Loss Through the Years* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1988), 29-30.

¹⁸⁵ Rita Volpe, *Beyond Tears: Living After Losing a Child* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 8-10.

¹⁸⁶ Karen Humphrey, *Counseling Strategies* (Virginia: American Press, 2009), 11.

¹⁸⁷ Phil Rich, *Grief Counseling Homework* (New York: Wiley Publishers, 2001), 17.

especially hand gestures, are just as effective as speech in conveying the emotion of deep anger or rage.¹⁸⁸ This Director does not rely on words alone and has Tom use body language a well in order to convey his feelings. He imagines that Emma speaks to him with supportive words and he slumps over in a sad state.¹⁸⁹

Here, Tom imagines that Emma guides him and supports his plan for vengeance as the viewer is left to assume that he is hearing voices in his head. In the next scene, Tom talks with a priest and tells him about his plan to find and kill the gunman. As a Catholic, Tom goes to a church in order to seek counseling from a priest. While at church, he explains that he does not believe in God. The priest tries to help him and says that it is natural to have doubts but he has to consider what will happen to his soul.¹⁹⁰ Tom advises that he sees his mother when he looks at his daughter Emma.¹⁹¹ The priest senses that something is wrong and asks Tom if they can try to pray together.¹⁹² The viewer can sense that this is the first real peaceful moment that Tom has after Emma is shot. Tom does not know what to pray for and the priest tells him to pray for himself and for Emma.¹⁹³ He informs the priest that Emma died in pain and that he plans to kill the shooter.¹⁹⁴ The priest promptly advises Tom that he will go to hell if he carries out that course of action.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ Allan Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language* (New York: Orion Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁸⁹ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

In this scene, Tom articulates that he is not afraid of hell which the viewing audience already knows that based on his rogue behavior. And he has the opportunity to ask for forgiveness during a confessional but consciously choose not to. The priest asks Tom to pray with him and the audience knows that Tom will employ alternate methods to deal with his grief.

In fact, Tom does not seek approval from the priest as he hints at his diabolical plan. On the one hand, Tom is a parent who rejects another traditional strategy to ask for guidance from the church. On the other hand, grieving mother and writer, Judy Shepard, inspires vigils and memorial services across the nation. Shepard garners strength from the vigils and the memorial services helped this mother cope with her son's senseless murder. Her son, a hate crime victim, was murdered by an angry mob solely because of his sexual orientation. Shepard dealt with the grief by transforming her life and becoming an activist. Here, Tom refuses to pray or to seek help via religion or any other form of community support. Community support through vigils and memorials are considered to be more traditional grief strategies.¹⁹⁶

As part of the bargaining stage, Tom bargains that if he avenges Emma's death then she will forgive him, for not protecting her, in a fatherly way. Psychologist Gabriel Cervantes advises that most father's see their primary role as a protector.¹⁹⁷ In the scene when he has to identify the body, he sees Emma's child-like ghost and she looks at him through her hair. While there at the coroner's lab, he decides to cut off some of her hair. Tom turns away from this apparition and has a conversation with Emma's ghost and

¹⁹⁶ Lorene Duquin, *Grieving With the Help of Your Christian Faith* (New York: Our Sunday Press, 2006), 7-9.

¹⁹⁷ Gabriel Cervantes, *All About Dad* (New York: Adams Press, 2007), 28.

Emma's ghost tells him that he is strong. The viewers see signs of anger and frustration in scene six. These are the two main characteristics of the anger stage in the grief cycle.¹⁹⁸ People who are in this stage will display an outpouring of bottled up anger that is difficult to watch. It can be described as a form of rage.¹⁹⁹ Finally, Tom makes the arrangements with the funeral director. The depression stage features the final realization of the inevitable, according to grief therapist Elizabeth Levang.²⁰⁰ Clearly, his depression is severe and he does not have a wake which is a sign of the instability in his life and the distortions in his mind.²⁰¹

Tom cannot handle a wake and has Emma's body cremated without giving other family members or friends the chance to pay their respects to Emma. It is a selfish decision and reflects the kind of person that Tom turns into due in part to his response to the violent loss. Here, Tom advises the undertaker there would not be a wake. He had not even called family members and they had a small family anyway. The undertaker is shocked by all of this but Tom cuts him off mid-sentence. With his checkbook in hand, Tom tells the director to write up two funerals as he does not want anyone to worry about burying him. Later on, at the pharmacy, Tom looks at a few sleep aids and leaves when he spots a car following him. In the next scene, Tom is on the phone with other cops and advises that he wishes the killer would return. He desires to engage the killer because he has no leads. The audience knows that Tom wants to confront and destroy Emma's killer.

¹⁹⁸ Karen Humphrey, *Counseling Strategies for Loss and Grief* (Virginia: American Counseling Association, 2009), 5-7.

¹⁹⁹ Phil Rich, *Grief Counseling Homework Planner* (New York: Wiley Publishers, 2001), 11-12.

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Levang, *When Men Grieve: Men Grieve Differently and How You Can Help* (New York: Fairview Press, 1998), 30-31.

²⁰¹ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

Tom imagines that Emma guides him and supports his plan for vengeance. In the next scene, Tom talks with a priest and tells him about his plan to find and kill the gunman. The priest is concerned about Craven's soul and he encourages Craven to move on and have another family. They pray together but Craven is disoriented.²⁰²

Here, Tom articulates that he is not afraid of hell and does not believe in God. The priest asks Tom to pray with him and the audience knows that Tom will resort to violence to avoid dealing with his grief. He does not seek approval from the priest to carry out his plan. The priest tries to scare Craven and tells him that he will end up in hell in the afterlife if he carries out that course of action. Also, Tom rejects another traditional strategy that often includes prayers for guidance from religious figures.

The testing grief stage involves finding realistic solutions.²⁰³ While looking around in Emma's room, Tom goes through Emma's personal things. He finds a gun and a Geiger counter. The Geiger counter goes off when it gets close to the lock of hair in his pocket. It is clear to him that Emmy's hair contained radioactive particles. Now, he begins to wonder why she had a gun. In the next scene, he traces the serial number on the gun to Emma's boyfriend. He continues his own investigation and calls people from Emma's cell phone. The boyfriend tells him that he is scared but does not really offer too much information. During a meeting with Emma's friend Melissa Conway, details about why Emma was killed are revealed. When their meeting ended, Tom saves Melissa's life when a hired killer runs her down with his car. Tom is feeling even more determined since he is close to exacting the violent acts in revenge for Emma's violent death.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ James Miller, *When a Man Faces Grief: A Man You Know is Grieving* (New York: Willowgreen, 1998), 29-30.

At Northmoor, he questions Mr. Bennett, Emma's boss about her work there. The conversation below turns to a discussion about parental loss of a child. Mr. Bennett articulates that Northmoor is a research facility and the company is working on fusion technology as a clean energy source.²⁰⁴ Mr. Bennett explains further that the corporate mission is to develop an alternative energy source that is good for the environment and good for people.²⁰⁵ Tom questions him about any possible weapons that are being developed. Mr. Bennett proclaims that it is their duty to help the government and he is sorry about Emma's death.²⁰⁶ As a parent, Tom articulates that he wishes for his own death since the pain of his loss is difficult to bear.²⁰⁷

At this point, Tom begins to articulate his violent plan and almost issues a warning of future violence. This meeting is not warm at all and Bennett tells Tom that he would have sent flowers to honor Emma. Bennett said that no one was aware of any funeral arrangements. Oddly, Tom cut off other people's ability to grieve because he refused to hold a wake so mourners could view the body. The mourners would have the chance to pay their respect in order to commemorate Emma's life. Karen Carney explores how wakes are consistent with society's traditional response to death and how they help us grieve.²⁰⁸ Emma's friend Melissa also said she wished that he held a funeral. Tom

²⁰⁴ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Karen Carney, *Honoring Our Loved Ones: Going to a Funeral* (New York: Dragonfly Publishing, 1997), 8-10.

expresses his grief as a man with nothing left to lose who, in a sense, has a death wish. He has already paid for his funeral.²⁰⁹

In this instance, Tom figures out who the killer is and he confronts him at Bennett's house. It is one of Northmoor's agents and Tom tells him to scream "Craven." His identity as the shooter is confirmed as Tom remembers the way he shouted it. One of the last and most violent scenes includes a gun battle when Tom confronts the shooter and fires the gun so many times that the chamber is empty.²¹⁰ He apologizes to Emma's ghost and says that he wishes that she did not see that action. In short, Tom completes his violent plan and he shoots each person involved with Emma's murder. The only jurisprudence that he renders is to check the killer's identity with voice recognition. In the process, Tom makes it clear that someone has to pay for exposing Emma to Northmoor's new radioactive weapon and for Emma's murder.

The viewers realize that Northmoor's power as the executives are shown meeting with high level government personnel and senators. Emma apparently found information about illegal activities.²¹¹ She makes a tape and asserts that she is radiation poisoned while the company works to develop a new secret weapon. This secret weapon turns into something that Northmoor officials would kill for, just to keep it classified. Tom Craven takes on the corporation and hunts down Emma's killer. Further, he believes that Emma's ghost is supportive of the vengeful and violent acts that he undertakes.²¹²

²⁰⁹ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

In sum, Tom employs violence as his chief grief strategy as opposed to a more traditional grief strategy. His commission of violent acts also helps him to avoid dealing with his imagined guilt. He carries out his own daily pity party. The viewers can see that Tom is particularly troubled over his inability to exert control events leading up to and after Emma's shooting.

Moreover, Director Campbell uses the image of Emma, as a child, as a visual metaphor for the viewing audience to understand Tom's grief and desperation. The Director often shows clips from a home video of Emma, as a four year old, playing at the beach. Ironically, Tom would spread her ashes, at the beach, later in the film. Whenever, Tom is sad he imagines this child is there talking with him. She imitates him shaving and the viewers can see how deep his grief is. Also, he misses Emma so much that he imagines her, in the room with him. Almost every action that he takes evokes her memory. The departed Emma depicted as an adult, and as a child, represents Tom's emotions and his state of mind. No other cinematic avenger sees a ghost or really imagines a ghost of any kind. This effective use of subtlety is brought back at the end when Toms dies. He imagines that he sees Emma but it is a nurse checking on him. Minutes later, Emma's ghost does come for him. She is an adult ghost who depicts the angel of death. Emma leans over and whispers in his ear. His ghost or spirit gets up and follows her out of the hospital room.²¹³ Emma puts her arm around him purportedly leads him to heaven. The message to the viewers is that Tom can only find peace in death when he imagines that he will join her in a spiritual reunion.

²¹³ Ibid.

Maslow's form self-actualization explains how people have meaningful lives that can handle stressful events. Abnormal behavior, Psychologist George Bonanno advises is linked to low levels of self-awareness as the person wanders through life without any normal purpose.²¹⁴ Michael Hand, a psychologist, asserts that self-awareness leads the person to think and to grow as a result of adverse events.²¹⁵ Behavioral expert Sung Kim advises cinematic avenger commits violent acts as they are out of touch with society and with their respective communities.²¹⁶ *New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott advises that Mr. Gibson's role as Thomas Craven features a grim story that calls for the character to unravel a conspiracy that leads to his daughter's murder by gunshot at close range.²¹⁷

Noted film critic Roger Ebert remarks that Gibson's character is on a mission and he has nothing to lose.²¹⁸ The corporation called Northmoor does not seem credible to him and he felt that the movie had no ambition..²¹⁹ Mel Gibson's character is in a dark place and some viewers and critics do not find it enthralling to watch cinematic avenging characters who are not on the path to self-actualization. Moreover, the next film is *The Brave One* and it is not a critically acclaimed film, according to *Rolling Stone* film reviewer Peter Travers.²²⁰ Jodi Foster received the nomination for a Golden Globe award as best actress. Terrence Howard was nominated for a Black Entertainment Award as best actor.

²¹⁴ George Bonanno, "Resilience," *Current Psychological Science* 14, no. 3 (2005): 135-138.

²¹⁵ Michael Hand, *Psychological Resilience* (New York: Verlag Press, 2008), 8.

²¹⁶ Sung Kim, "Revenge and Conflict Escalation," *Negotiation Journal* 5, (1993): 37-43.

²¹⁷ A.O. Scott, "Jaw-breaking Boston Detective Unravels His Daughter's Murder," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2010, A1.

²¹⁸ Roger Ebert, "Edge of Darkness Review and Film Summary," retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Peter Travers, "The Brave One Movie Review," *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 2007 retrieved from: [rollingstone.com](http://www.rollingstone.com).

In fact, Peter Travers advises that crime rates are lower in the city but the film captures the fears that the public still harbors.²²¹ Travers thinks that the script is implausible but the film has to compete with stronger previous vigilante films.²²² The history of strength of the body of work in this area is impressive. It is not easy to select certain films over other ones since each one tends to have something redeemable in it.

The film offers viewers genuine provocation since the line that Foster's character crosses does command some attention and interest, according to Peter Travers.²²³ To say that the film does not receive any critical acclaim would not capture its essence since it tries to teach the audience a few things about the lonely road of using violence as retribution. *The Brave One* (2007) firmly plants itself in the revenge-as-justice camp.²²⁴ Revenge is presented and defined here as conflict with the legal system as the police department is slow to investigate. The New York City police department is short staffed and too busy to find the people responsible for ruining the main character's life. Jodi Foster portrays Erica Bain and she is the main character who drives all of the action in this somewhat disturbing film. Foster's character is a famous New York radio host with her own talk show. She describes a story about a homeless girl Eloise who is lost amidst the starkness of the New York City and the construction of an imaginary place that holds all memories.²²⁵ After that clip, her producer advises that the Bravo television network wants Erica to do some shows for their network with a possible syndicated show on a major network. She is unable to focus on her ambitions for career achievement. Erica is

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²²⁵ Ibid.

not terribly interested in showing her face to the world. The robbery and violent attack happen right in the beginning of the movie. Also, the clip and Erica's talk show host job inform the viewers that she knows her way around the City well and is extremely perceptive and is keenly in tune with the environment.²²⁶ In short, these are the tactics that she will rely on, later in the film, as she conceals her violent acts.

One evening the couple takes the dog for a walk. She and her fiancé David are savagely attacked by three men in Central Park. David tries to resist the robbers and is killed during the attack.²²⁷ Erica survives her beatings, awakening from a three-week coma. She misses the funeral service that David's family has for him.²²⁸ Erica tries to piece her life back together but she is wounded and mentally disturbed by the attack.²²⁹ There are several early scenes whereby she tries earnestly to follow up with the police about finding the attackers.²³⁰ Each time she interacts with the police it is clear that she is being treated like just another statistic. Erica is unable to move on with her life and she is in grave emotional pain. She closes her blinds and shuts out the world. She ignores phone calls from friends and well-wishers.²³¹ Her life is turned completely upside down.

There are intended directorial visual metaphors for grief. Neil Jordan, the Director, uses visual imagery to depict subtle changes. According to David Crenshaw, the problem is that people go through the stages of grief and can get stuck in between them or revert

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

back to previous stages.²³² In short, before the attack, there are smiling faces and light shades throughout the film. The sun shines and the weather is good in the early scene. Then, after the attack, the scenes are dark and cloudy. At times, it is very surreal, similar to Spielberg's critically acclaimed *Schindler's List* (1983) which depicts the horrors of the Holocaust.²³³ Even her wardrobe changes and she begins to make a dramatic shift in her outlook on life.²³⁴ Her outlook moves from a sunny disposition to one of extreme hostility and paranoia. In fact, Bain's demeanor is altered and she starts to wear dark sunglasses and a hooded jacket. Film critic Fran Mason suggests, the Director focuses on the characters to depict visual images that change.²³⁵ The Director in the previous films seems to utilize the setting and backgrounds even more. Erica Bain's clothing reflects the changes that she is going through mentally. Initially, she wears brighter colors and she never wears any sunglasses. After the tragedy, she begins to dress in clothing that is distinctively not feminine and look like combat uniforms to show the war that she is having with her own feelings.

She trades in skirts, satin blouses, and high heels for dark pants and black boots. It becomes clear to the viewers that something is changing.²³⁶ She often is depicted as wandering the streets during the evening hours. She has taken on an alter ego.²³⁷ There is one scene when she shoots the men on the subway. In short, the physical appearance of

²³² David Crenshaw, *Bereavement* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 35.

²³³ *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg (1993; Burbank, CA: Universal Home Video, 1995), DVD.

²³⁴ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²³⁵ Fran Mason, *American Gangster Cinema* (New York: McMillan Press, 2002), 23.

²³⁶ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²³⁷ Ibid.

the subway car depicts the degradation of society's moral code. The characters like their environments, suffer from shortcomings that are seen visually. The environment reveals something about a character's state of mind. A littered environment also gives wrongdoers the impression that no one is watching or paying attention. To the viewing audience, it is shown as an opportunity to commit crime or more specifically, a violent act. In sum, there is no one cleaning up the area and the neighborhood or area is in decline. The viewers can trace the steps that Erica Bain takes as she moves through each stage of the grief cycle. It is necessary for her to go through this process and to carry out violent acts but she remains stuck and does not ever reach self-actualization.

Erica Bain loses her fiancé David and her dog who is taken during the attacks. She must face the dreaded and devastating news.²³⁸ David's mother tells her that they had to bury David and could not wait for her to emerge from the coma. Erica is upset because she wanted to say goodbye by spending time with his body just to see him for one last time.²³⁹ Surely, the reality of his death would have sunk in and helped her to accept it has she been able to attend the funeral. David's mother tries to console her by saying that David would have been happy that she lived because he protected her.

Bain is dazed and confused because she wants to experience the closure with which the funeral would have endowed her.²⁴⁰ A viewer begins to understand that Erica Bain deviates from this normal grief process or cycle. She is in shock and all that she can mutter is that she wants to see David again. Her inability to start the grieving process by

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

the traditional means of a funeral whereby the body is viewed takes its toll.²⁴¹ As the plot unfolds, the viewers will witness Erica's transformation from an easy-going mild mannered female into a person that seeks revenge. Surely, bereavement expert Joseph Cranston would tend to agree that seeking revenge or taking part in violence, in general, cannot be considered a normal stage of grief.²⁴² It is necessary to trace how and why she begins to deviate from the grief cycle pattern. Her grief cycle and the strategy she develops leads to a violent end. Of course, this is common in real-life too.

Therapist John Welshons advises that when people are in the denial stage they pretend that nothing bad has ever happened.²⁴³ Erica sulks and completely disconnects from everyone. She retreats into her own inner world, a sanctum whereby she dotes and dwells upon her memories of her life before the dreadful attacks. The answering machine tape still beeps, "please leave a message for David and Erica."²⁴⁴ Erica does not update the message on the tape though David is gone. It is too painful for her to take such action right now. Truly, feelings of immobilization and a kind of emotional paralysis take hold of her. She remains in contact with the police but there are no new developments in the case.²⁴⁵ She is told to sit and wait after reminding them that her boyfriend was beaten to death. The officials ask her for a complaint report number which she does not have. All of this begins to make her angry.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Joseph Cranston, *Reincarnation* (California: Theosophical University Press, 1998), 16-19.

²⁴³ John Welshons, *Challenging Times* (California: New World Press, 2010), 11-13.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

She decides not to wait anymore and hits the streets and wants to buy a gun. The gun store clerk asks if she has a license and she does not. He tells her to fill out the form and it will take thirty days and she tells the gun store clerk that she will not survive thirty days. She walks out angry and frustrated. A street thug witnesses the exchange with the gun shop clerk and sells her an unregistered gun for a thousand dollars. The street thug shows her how to load, unload, point, and shoot the gun. Another indication that she enters this phase is that she displays the outward appearance of mental and emotional disturbance.

The Director presents a tale of retribution that is in conflict with the legal system. The New York City police department is short staffed and too busy to find the people responsible for ruining the main character's life. Erica Bain is the main character who drives all of the action in this somewhat disturbing film. The Director depicts how normal and successful Erica Bain is from this opening movie clip. After that clip, her producer advises that the Bravo television network wants Erica to do some shows for their network. She is on the brink of major success with a possible syndicated show on a major network.²⁴⁶ She is unable to focus on her ambitions for career achievement. Erica is not terribly interested in showing her face to the world. Her refusal to show her face is characteristic of an unusual grief process. The robbery and violent attack happen right in the beginning of the movie. Also, the clip and Erica's talk show host job inform the viewers that she knows her way around the city very well.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Further, she is extremely perceptive and is keenly in tune with her environment. Therefore, she has hunting and tracking skills. In short, these are the tactics that she will rely on, later in the film, as she conceals her violent acts. Bain often stares into space in several scenes. This tells the viewers that she is not in contact with her true self. There is one scene when she shoots the men on the subway. The Director skillfully shows how the subway car was dirty.²⁴⁷ The environment reveals something about the character's state of mind. A littered environment also gives wrongdoers the impression that no one is watching or paying attention. It is an opportunity to commit crime or more specifically, a violent act. There is no one cleaning up the area and the neighborhood or area is in decline. The environment or neighborhood is neglected and therefore, one can get away with things. It is less likely that the authorities will catch violent perpetrators, since no one is watching too closely, if at all.

One main problem here is that the featured character Erica Bain twists and distorts these stages as she fumbles and stumbles through them. It becomes a grotesque display of what happens when things go wrong. The traditional grief strategies are not followed and violence is chosen as the only rational course for the individual to move on with her life. The cycle is universal and accepted in scholarly circles to help clinicians treat their patients, as therapist Susan Anderson advises.²⁴⁸ The Kubler-Ross grief cycle can help us to identify exactly what we are seeing depicted in the film. Viewers can trace the steps that Erica Bain takes as she moves through each stage of the grief cycle. She

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Susan Anderson, *The Journey from Abandonment to Healing* (California: Berkley, 2000), 8-10.

must face the dreaded and devastating news once David's mother informs her that they held the funeral without her.²⁴⁹

In this early scene, Erica is dazed and confused. The viewers begin to understand that Erica Bain deviates from a normal grief process or cycle. She is in shock and all that she can mutter is that she wants to see David again. As the plot unfolds, the viewers begin to see Erica's transformation from an easy-going mild mannered female into a person that seeks revenge. Surely, seeking revenge or taking part in violence, in general, cannot be considered a normal stage of grief. It will be necessary to trace how and why she begins to deviate from the grief cycle pattern. Her grief cycle and the strategy that she develops to cope with the losses meets with violent ends. She sulks and completely disconnects from reality. She refuses to answer the phone and ignores telephone messages from outside. Erica has not updated the message on the tape though David is gone.²⁵⁰ It is too painful for her to make changes in the household arrangements.

She begins meeting with the lead Detective on the case.²⁵¹ The department is busy and there are few people working on the case. A complaint number is generated and a formal complaint is filed. Her response to the trauma is to handle it alone. She does not seek any help or counseling.²⁵² Erica Bain bargains with herself. She decides that if she can carry out some form of revenge then she will be alright.²⁵³ Her grief strategy takes the form of

²⁴⁹ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

vengeful violent acts.²⁵⁴ She begins to communicate with people again. Bain develops connections with people that help her to track down her attackers. In fact, she begins to discuss violence on her radio show. She summons the strength to return to work, as a radio personality, and her topics are centered around city violence. She has a split personality. She exhibits a professional image with callers.²⁵⁵ She hides her dark side. The bargain is that she needs to track down the attackers and destroy their lives. Bain rations that she needs to do this in order to restore order and control to her life. This is the point whereby the film shifts into this dark plot twist. It could be debated about whether Bain engenders sympathy from the audience or whether she appears to be unreasonable. She begs for her job back, “I don’t want to disappear.”²⁵⁶

In a later scene, after a radio broadcast, Erica shoots one of her attackers. She finds one attacker on the subway. Erica ends up shooting two men in cold blood after they threaten her. She has nightmares and re-lives the attacks in her mind every day. Erica remembers the curse words that they yelled at her.²⁵⁷ She notices that her hands begin to shake after she shoots the gun. As she continues to kill, her hands stop shaking and an anger management therapist, Lundy Bancroft, would likely agree that she is now de-sensitized to committing violence.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do that? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, (California: Berkley, 2003),33-35.

Clearly, she reaches a point whereby she has no conscious at all. Detective Mercer public commented on the subway killings that, “It is like maybe the average Joe just decided, ‘I’m not going to take it anymore.’”²⁵⁹ The press conference gets even more intense and Detective Mercer said, “He would be the kind of guy you would not even notice... He’s getting better at this-every bullet hits home.”²⁶⁰ In another scene, Erica is slow to leave the crime scene and she is almost caught. She covers up by acting like a member of the press who just heard about the subway shootings. She befriends Detective Mercer and asks for an interview about police procedures which intrigue her. Jean-Francois Abgrall, a psychological expert, would likely argue that Erica is starting to probe the reasons why she is able to kill so easily.²⁶¹ Detective Mercer recognizes her voice from the radio and agrees to an interview the next day.²⁶² He comments that he saw in the hospital and he knew what happened to her. Appearing as a sympathetic friend, he says that a lot of people would not make it back to reality after a crime like that touches their lives.²⁶³ As a typical investigator, he asks her how she can cope with such loss and devastation. She tells him that she walks the streets since she cannot sleep and wants to know what he looks for at a crime scene.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Jean-Francois Abgrall, *Inside the Mind of a Killer* (New York: Profile Books, 2005), 7-8.

²⁶² *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

He explains that he looks for DNA evidence and the dead bodies provide the most clues.²⁶⁵ She asks if he ever shot anyone and if his hands shake. The Detective tells her that his hands do not shake and it is a benefit of being on the side of justice.²⁶⁶ In this instance, Erica is guilty of crimes and she gets details from Detective Mercer about how to evade capture. Clearly, Erica is not finished since she has not completed her course of revenge on all the attackers.²⁶⁷ She is motivated by revenge as it drives her to move forward. She is in pain and often suffers from nightmares with vivid details from the attacks. James Hillman, an expert would likely agree that this common when a person is a survivor or witness a loved one's death.²⁶⁸ These nightmares serve to propel her forward and give her the fuel to continue taking out her revenge.

Erica Bain feels that she will never be happy again. Her life will never be fulfilled. Erica moves in and out of this stage. She often describes herself as a stranger. Her violent acts have forced her to invent another persona. Erica does not experience severe depression that keeps her in bed all day. She does draw the curtains and close the blinds. She helps a hooker named Chloe who is being abused. The hooker asks her, "Who the hell are you?"²⁶⁹ Erica replied, "I'm nobody...there is no going back...to that other...she is gone."²⁷⁰ Erica thinks to herself, "This thing, this stranger...it is all you are now."²⁷¹ Erica is suffering from depression and Detective Mercer tells her not to blame herself for things. He tells Erica that she is a survivor. In an effort to lift Erica out from the

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Press, 1976), 12-14.

²⁶⁹ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009),

DVD.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

depression her producer suggests that she take calls from the listening public. This is the first time that Erica has ever done that. It is interesting how Erica is presented with different opinions about her violent acts. One caller characterizes her actions as vengeful pleasure. Therefore, she takes pleasure in killing these people. That evening, Erica experiences a brief emotional breakdown and an expert would agree taking pleasure in violence is not normal. At night, one of her neighbors sees her crouching down beside a bush outside the apartment building. The neighbor asks her what kind of trouble she is in. Erica told her that she killed a man tonight. The neighbor said, “anyone can be a killer. Even death leaves a hole waiting to be filled.”²⁷²

Erica never reaches this stage after she completes her plan of revenge. She has to kill all three of her attackers to punish them for killing her fiancé and her dog. Detective Mercer sees Erica pointing the gun at the attacker and he tells to drop it. He said you do not have the right. Erica said, “Yes, I do.” She shoots the attacker.²⁷³ Erica is hiding on the roof as she tries to make her escape. She muses to herself about her time with David. She talks to herself whispering that she felt blessed to have spent the short amount of time with David. His spirit and love will always stay with her forever. She tells herself that she has to move forward and her future remains uncertain. Here, the scene reveals how Erica was slowly transformed from a radio personality who loves the city into a woman who comes to fear the city.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Her intense level of fear leads her to lash out. As the film progresses, she changes into the woman who is capable of violence and revenge. The plan of revenge does not lead to satisfaction. Detective Mercer comments that he knows Erica from the hospital and he seems to hint that he may be aware of her violent acts.

Later, in another scene, Detective Mercer talks with Erica again and expresses his concerns about her coping skills because she witnesses her fiancé's brutal murder. He explains that it takes a certain kind of strong person to make it back to reality after this kind of tragedy. It is worse for her since it all happened right in front of her and he suggests a referral to health services for stress management.²⁷⁴ Bain tells him that she deals with the tragedy by becoming someone else. Interestingly, she asks him if his hands ever shake when he shoots perpetrators. He advises that they do not because he is on the right side.

Erica is guilty of crimes and she gets details from Detective Mercer about how to evade capture. Clearly, Erica is not finished since she has not completed her course of revenge on all the attackers. She is motivated by revenge as it drives her to move forward. She is in pain and often suffers from nightmares with vivid details from the attacks. Psychologist James Hillman asserts that this behavior is common after a person is brutally attacked.²⁷⁵ These nightmares serve to propel her forward and give her the fuel to continue taking out her revenge.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Press, 1976), 12.

During the testing stage, as Criminologist, Jeff Mariotte advises vigilante killers rarely exhibit regrets about their violent acts.²⁷⁶ She only expresses regret about losing her innocence with guns and there is no going back to that other innocent person. She recalls that the mugger dares her and asks if she ever felt a knife just before she shot him. She knew that she could have just shown him the gun but she chose violence as a means to solve a problem. Her conscious begins to bother her. Here, Erica characterizes herself as a stranger. Only a stranger could kill these people as acts of revenge. She cultivates a friendship with Detective Mercer as a way to almost confess but Erica never confesses anything. Theorist Greg McCrary stipulates that vigilantes do not spend time contemplating their violent acts.²⁷⁷ In short, Erica never considers making a confession or ending her violent rampage. It would seem that doing violent acts are a part of her bargain with herself or with God and she might feel better when the revenge is complete. She muses that she is entitled to this revenge and everyone will understand why and everyone will support her choice to commit these violent acts.

In the end, she is correct because Detective Mercer looks the other way when he tracks her down near the end of the film. Bain commits a final act of revenge. He has some sort of admiration for her. He sets up the crime scene to trick the forensics unit. Detective Mercer instructs her to shoot the perpetrator in the shoulder at close range. In short, Detective Mercer is tired of criminals being released by the judicial system and he permits Bain to carry out her vigilante acts.

²⁷⁶ Jeff Mariotte, *Criminal Mind* (New York: Wiley Publishers, 2010), 17.

²⁷⁷ Greg McCrary, *Unknown Darkness* (New York: Harper Press, 2004), 41.

Erica never moves beyond the acceptance stage and is stuck in it. Sadly, Erica never reaches this stage of resiliency. She has to kill all three of her attackers to punish them for killing her fiancé and her dog. She is not able to reach this stage of the grief process. Detective Mercer sees Erica points the gun at the attacker and Mercer tells Erica to drop it but Erica shoots the attacker. Erica is hiding on the roof as she tries to make her escape.

The violent acts in the form of vengeance never lead to any form of closure. She does not find any level of inner peace which is not ironic considering all the violence she carries out. According to grief therapist David Oliviere, resiliency occurs when individuals exhibit behavioral adaptations that help them deal with traumatic events.²⁷⁸ Erica does not achieve resiliency since she carries out violence. The excerpts above reveal how Erica is slowly transformed from a radio personality who loved the city into a woman who fears the city. Her intense level of fear leads her to lash out. As the film progresses, she changes into the woman who is capable of violence and revenge.

Psychologist Elaine Aaron advises it is warped and proves to be an abnormal grief process.²⁷⁹ Although it is not normal, the violent acts are Erica's failed grief strategy that stalls her development. Violence is her coping mechanism and forgiveness does not enter her mind. Peacefulness features the ability to rebound and recover from adversity and trauma.²⁸⁰ A marked lack of self-actualization leads to chronic health problems and

²⁷⁸ David Oliviere, *Resilience in Palliative Care* (England: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

²⁷⁹ Elaine Aaron, *The Highly Sensitive Person* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 19.

²⁸⁰ Michael Hand, *Psychological Resilience: The Influence of Positive and Negative Life Events Upon Optimism, Hope, and Perceived Locus of Control* (New York: Verlag, 2008), 16-17.

mental health issues. It can result in anxiety, depression, and burnout. There is a lull in the action after the cinematic avenger commits violent acts.

Examples of non-traditional grief strategies are presented along with their resulting impact. They stagnate between their respective grief cycles. The process of grief varies with intensity and meaning for these characters. These characters do not seek assistance from specialists. Each daily task becomes a complicated process as the character must struggle through the stages. Cinematic avengers do not find such consolation in traditional grief strategies. Traditional grief strategies lead to such healing and a return to the soul. The employment of violence, as a grief strategy, does not lead to self-actualization. Violence is not a traditional grief strategy and it is not the desirable choice. Violence is portrayed in films as an acceptable choice in America's death-denying culture.

Historically, the Western roots and rugged individualism call for endurance and strength. There is no room for showing signs of any perceived weakness. People used to be less mobile and death usually occurred at home. Also, before advancements in medicine, people died young and one's experience with death occurred at a younger age. Family support systems may have been strengthened since families were located closer. These cinematic characters do not have a lot of family involvement with their bereavement. Jimmy Markum has the most interactions between his immediate and his extended families. Jimmy's father-in-law tries to persuade him to focus on taking care of his immediate family rather than pursuing his own justice-making. While, Tom Craven

has the least familial interactions and derives no support from any extended family members.

Cinematic avengers decide to communicate their form of justice-making through their violent outtakes. Erica Bain's desire for revenge in *The Brave One* is fraught with anxiety when she realizes that her hands no longer shake after she fires the gun. This conflict ultimately results in Erica Bain's justice being temporarily confounded. Dr. Matt Fowler's violence is altogether different from Erica Bain's since he was not a victimized by violence. For Tom Craven, in particular, there may be some pleasure derived from carrying out the violence.

Violence can be considered the inversion of law. Therefore, law within this framework loses authority since the methods used to enforce it are contrary to its embodiment. The embodiment of legitimate laws stem from community. It is derived from individual who freely choose to enter into the social contract. The characters are so devastated by their grief and they employ violence as a grief strategy. In so doing, they reject the legal system's authority because it has failed them in some way. The failure and slow process inherent in the legal system culminates in its inability to render lawful justice for these characters. For Jimmy Markum, it took too long for the State Police to finally figure out who killed Katie. Erica Bain also experienced long delays with the New York Police and it was not until she became friends with a Detective that her case received attention. For Dr. Fowler, Richard Strout used money and political influence to escape the long arm of the Law. While, Tom Craven was fooled into thinking that he was the murderer's intended target to distract him from pursuing Northmoor. All these

characters sensed that justice is denied to them and they could not move through the grief cycle.

These films depict how cinematic revenge often takes a form of masochism. When Erica Bain, Dr. Matt Fowler, Jimmy Markum, and Tom Craven punish their respective victims, it becomes a form of masochism. This masochism alters punishing violence from painful enforcement of law's authority to a source of enjoyment. In some sense, the masochism leads these characters through the grief cycle. The violent acts that the characters undertake are antithetical to law and reflect a breakdown of traditional power. Ultimately, this disorder or chaos is unsettling to the audience. The audience is left scarred in many ways.

These avenging cinematic characters do not experience satisfaction. Feelings of satisfaction are not meant or intended for the audience either. Revenge cinema is unique and clearly the message is atypical of what most audiences usually expect. In short, the audience should not expect a happy ending. The audience follows the characters through the flighty emotions or the emotional roller coaster that is part of the grief cycle. Steven Shaviro states, spiritual redemption is no longer available to inure people to the excruciating passion of the subjugated body; yet films such as *The Brave One*, *In the Bedroom*, *Mystic River*, and *Edge of Darkness* portray stories of revenge-takers who struggle and succeed in finding the point where the justness of their violence remains intact while still flirting with the violent blockage of their selfhood.²⁸¹ Certainly, the

²⁸¹ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1993), 129.

identity-loss theme embodied in Erica Bain's character is a calculated risk exploited in revenge-films that continue the popularity of the theme.

These films reinforce the authority of the law's repressive violence as they do give in to the pleasure in its excesses. These films exacerbate what is not socially acceptable. It is not socially acceptable or desirable to use violent acts as a means to grieve. As a result, the audience comes close to experiencing the feelings of losing control. Erica Bain, Dr. Matt Fowler, Jimmy Markum and Tom Craven draw the audience in as it becomes willing spectators to a form of masochism. These films rely upon on our physical senses and our antisocial tendencies. Repression is the true price for being social and fitting in with the world. Therefore, we are to undermine instinct or animal instinct and consider the Law. When these films make violence pleasurable, rather than proportionate, violence is the central focus of the narratives. The American audience volunteered to partake by paying the money for these revenge films. In fact, these films were highly celebrated by the cinematic Academy of Awards.

Many of the cast members won awards for their portrayals of these characters. This does reflect our cultural values and norms in that violence is not readily rejected in America. It is often prized, understood, justified, and embraced. It could even be encouraged if it leads a grief stricken to finally get over it. Americans hire others to transport the dead body, to provide mortuary care, and to dig the grave. In the past, the bereaved person would bury or cremate the body. The smells associated with death truly made it harder to deny. Jimmy Markum does not deny Katie's death as seeing her limp body on the steel table awakens him. He then takes his vow to avenge her death.

There are limited support structures in place to stop Erica Bain's detachment from society as she assumes an alter ego. The filmmakers want to depict the solemn nature of grief. The bereaved person often does not seek out company nor do others look for this person due to the awkwardness. People do not know what to say in order to console the grief stricken individual. Lacking any meaningful insight, they tend to avoid bereaved people, thus further hindering their ability to cope. The fact that people have such limited insight or knowledge about grief often results in disenfranchised grief. Grief theorist Kenneth Doka's work defines types of losses that are not openly mourned or socially supported.²⁸² This concept documents that societies have grieving rules that stipulate when, how long, and where people may grieve.

The viewers see how angry Ruth Fowler became since Dr. Matt Fowler continued to go to work after their son's death. He did not stop in order to mourn. Ruth accused him of acting like everything was alright. Clearly, his behavior offended traditional notions about what is acceptable behavior while mourning. Our social norms dictate that it is alright, even expected, to act like something is wrong. There is a time frame and for American society it is not very long. Most American corporations give an employee one or two days to grieve after a familial loss. Any time needed beyond that is personal that the employee must absorb. The insensitivity or get over it mentality may breed violence as people struggle for the means to vent their anger.

²⁸² Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief* (Illinois: Research Press, 1989), 10-11.

Often, it seems like no one understands and they probably do not. Who has the right to grieve? Erica Bain was not married to David. Seemingly, her right to grieve is diminished because of her status in the relationship. Did Erica receive less preferential treatment by police during the initial investigation because she was cohabitating with David? In short, her social status as an unmarried live-in can lead to disenfranchised grief. Society treats her differently with even less sympathy due to her social status.

Audiences are looking for those cathartic feelings.²⁸³ Does this explain the American thirst for violence? Why does it please the viewers to see the cinematic avengers in action? In what ways does the violence differ? Here, these deliberately selected narratives feature losses of close kin. Americans place emphasis on these type of relationships.²⁸⁴ For example, no character is avenging a friend's death. These cinematic avengers depict violence in a desperate effort to reach self-actualization. The characters are stuck in a rut bouncing between the levels of the grief cycles. In reality, some bereaved people can take a year to move out of the shock stage.²⁸⁵

On film, these characters move through the stages quickly and there is little time for reflection. It would seem that Erica Bain could be considered to be the most violent out of the three characters. Truly, her grief is more likely to be disenfranchised since she was his fiancé and they were cohabitating. In such a situation, though the loss is experienced, society in general will not see that the loss should cause a deep reaction. Erica Bain proves them wrong as her grief takes over and she becomes someone else.

²⁸³ Steve Redhead, *Unpopular Cultures: The Birth of Law and Popular Culture* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) 20-21.

²⁸⁴ William Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8-9.

²⁸⁵ Nancy Copeland Payton, *The Losses of Our Lives: The Sacred Gifts of Renewal in Everyday Losses* (New York: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009), 17-20.

Erica Bain's shootings on the subway can be contrasted with the scene when Jimmy Markum knifes Dave. Jimmy Markum and his cohorts experience pleasure and relief from stabbing Dave. Yet, the violence that Erica Bain inflicted on her attackers provides a kind of contractual relationship with the American spectator. Erica Bain is an avenger expected to return the harms inflicted against her back on her attackers. Consequently, the greater her anguish, the more we can delight in its spectacle knowing the returning violence will be equally excessive to satisfy the audience.

Furthermore, the violence that Dr. Matt Fowler inflicts on Richard Strout is purposeful and showed more restraint. It is less gory than the acts inflicted by Erica Bain and Jimmy Markum. The gory aspects of those killings suggest that Erica Bain, Jimmy Markum, and Tom Craven are being excessive. Interestingly, each cinematic avenger had some form of help. Erica Bain is aided by the Detective who looks the other way and then showed her how to cover up the crime. Jimmy Markum is encouraged by his cohorts from his old crime days. Dr. Matt Fowler's best friend helps him carry Richard Strout's body.

Cinema reveals itself its insight into why bereaved people carry out violent acts and how this is a cathartic means to overcome grief.²⁸⁶ For these cinematic characters, violence is the only way for them to reach resiliency because of perceived injustices. These perceived injustices were caused by slow law enforcement procedures and a legal system that is even slower because it must be accurate. Jimmy Markum's violent acts targeted the wrong man. The filmmakers eloquently depict how law enforcement officials

²⁸⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5-7.

were able to put all the pieces together and to solve Katie's murder. In the end, law triumphs as the paramount and most effective means to achieve justice. The viewers see in *The Brave One* how Erica Bain corrupts law enforcement and the Detective subverts the law to protect Erica. Dr. Matt Fowler is denied lawful justice for the murder of his son. Dr. Fowler decides it is necessary to kill Richard Strout because he cannot endure a lengthy trial that may not even bode well. These cinematic avengers choose their brand of justice in order to punish the wrongdoers.

These cinematic avengers become the wrongdoers that commit evil and it is a vicious cycle. These cinematic avengers are victims who never break free from their hatred and discontent. They must live with the guilt that results from their action. Justice that is given in the legal system does not have any guilt associated with it. It is a pure form of justice with punishment that fits the crime. The punishment and guilt are decided by peers from the community rather than by a biased individual. This preserves the dignity of the legal system and legitimizes legal rulings in criminal cases. The system is not perfect but it works according to community standards of morality. It can never be right for one person to be the judge and punisher in a democratic nation.

New York Times film critic A.O. Scott advises that the Director's underlying message seems to exaggerate how dangerous the city is.²⁸⁷ Scott laments that the Director suggests that anyone can be a killer if aggrieved enough and this is what all people are truly capable of.²⁸⁸ The film is dark and Jodi Foster's character moves from

²⁸⁷ A.O. Scott, "Packing Heat After a Coldhearted Crime," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2007, A1.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

happiness into an urban life of horror.²⁸⁹ The critic remarks that the time for the film is bad when compared with other vigilante films.²⁹⁰ Noted film critic Roger Ebert articulates that Jodi Foster's character Erica displays a fear which turns into anger alarmingly fast.²⁹¹ Ebert also suggests that the film's ending is not entirely satisfying or logical.²⁹²

Next, Chapter three will specifically acknowledge the necessary and integral place of violence in film. It will address the role of the media and the viewers' feelings about exacting revenge. John Bargh's ideas help to explain automatic discourse theory and the relationship between social cognition and the brain's processing of emotions that lead to violent acts.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Roger Ebert, "The Brave One Review and Film Summary," retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 5.

Chapter 3:

CINEMATIC AVENGERS AND BARGH'S SOCIAL COGNITIONS IN: *MYSTIC RIVER*, IN *THE BEDROOM*, *EDGE OF DARKNESS*, AND *THE BRAVE ONE*

There are ways to study human responses to stressors. It is necessary to study cognition in order to reach conclusions for why these cinematic avengers get stuck in the grief cycle process and never reach self-actualization. Films provide a didactic way to explore the characters' cognitive processes and propensity for violent behavior. For example, when a cinematic character carries out vigilante acts the characters' actions may seem to be an accurate depiction of vigilantism leading to a justification for vengeance. Depictions of what is moral and immoral, what is normal, and what issues are important are disseminated within each and every film's context scene by scene. The avenging characters' actions appear to justify vigilantism as a form of justice. These four films serve as visual chunks of knowledge to provide a diverse source of socially relevant information to help explain behavior. In short, these cinematic avenging characters are stuck in the grief cycle process and do not grow personally. They are unable to reach Maslow's definition of self-actualization making forgiveness impossible for them.

The message is that the victim who takes the law into his or her own hands should be supported and this approach is desirable as shown by heroic characters on film. As a result, a compulsion for violence becomes embedded in the avenging characters' social cognition processes.

The media's ability to influence societal perceptions is prolific because cinematic avengers are continuously exposed to violence. The four cinematic avenging characters' thinking processes lead them to commit violence acts, which is the subject of this behavioral analysis. The behavioral analysis is through the application of John Bargh's social cognition theory of automaticity with four categories: awareness, intention, efficiency, and control. Bargh's social cognition approach provides an underpinning to explain why being stuck in the grief cycle process motivates these four cinematic avenging characters to commit violence rather than to work on their personal development and growth to reach self-actualization. According to John Bargh's work, there is a phenomenon called automatic discourse and this theory provides a way to explain social cognition and mental processes.²⁹⁴ The theory of automaticity applies to all four characters. These cinematic avengers are analyzed using this mental process starting with awareness.

The first behavioral analysis tool is awareness: Bargh argues that there are three ways that people could actually be unaware of a mental process.²⁹⁵ First, it could happen during times when people are not cognizant of the stimulus and it is largely subliminal. Second, certain people may not understand consciously the manner in which a stimulus event is processed. Third, according to Bargh, the people may be largely unaware of how they are interpreting feelings and the validity of the perception of a given event that takes place in time.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 5.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 7.

Next is Intentionality; as Bargh points out , intentionality relates to an ability to control thoughts and behaviors.²⁹⁷ It includes and measures how much people begin a thought process or whether they have the ability to stop a thought process that leads to some particular direct action. Therefore, at times, the environment can have an impact on behavioral processes and specific judgments on which people choose to act.

The third behavioral tool is Efficiency; people experience certain traits without much effort and this is the efficiency of the human thinking process, that facilitates behavior, according to Bargh.²⁹⁸ Since behavior is tied to the thinking process, it corresponds to the efficiency of a mental process which does matter. The ability to efficiently reach conclusions based on what the senses reveal leads to judgment about which actions to take that are most appropriate for a given situation.

Finally, the fourth behavioral tool is Controllability and it is useful to consider the specific influences that motivate judgment ultimately controlling behavior.²⁹⁹ Often, certain emotions depend on the situation and those particular circumstances may induce the motivation for behavior in a certain way. As Bargh suggests there are motivations that come from inside the mind based on prior experiences from a past situation and those past experiences impact the response in the future.³⁰⁰

In fact, the application of automaticity explains Jimmy Markum's stuckness in the grief cycle and how it led to violent acts in the film entitled, *Mystic River*. Jimmy becomes aware of his extreme pain and hostility. He is outside on the back porch

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

listening to the sounds in the neighborhood. He is alone and starts to stare at the night sky and he talks out loud to Katie as he imagines her there. Jimmy whispers in the air that, “there is something in his soul that is responsible for her death.”³⁰¹ This scene reflects the first time that he is aware of his deep feelings of anger. As a social cognition process, obsessive thoughts begin to swirl in his mind and he now takes ownership of his awareness that he is capable of vengeance. Jimmy begins to voice the anger through his words.³⁰²

Clearly, the features of the environment seem to have influences on behavior that are not always known to the person. Therefore, it is through the pain that stems from the emotion that makes the person keenly aware. It is in this manner that the person begins to fixate on the cause of the pain. Thus, under Bargh’s theory a person may have memories of being unconsciously influenced toward violent actions.³⁰³ Yet, the environmental forces are also strong and help to formulate the ideas that lead to violence. The environment can influence the person’s will and this explains why these cinematic avengers behave normally prior to some event in their environments that sets up a chain reaction of violence in their lives.

Another example of awareness occurs when Jimmy is talking to Celeste, Dave’s wife, and she intimates to him that Dave may have killed Jimmy’s daughter Katie.³⁰⁴ Bargh’s theory mentions that people choose and control their actions and this serves as

³⁰¹ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 11.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

what is frequently considered to be the person's acts of will.³⁰⁵ And it appears that the person's will can be influenced by crisis situations within their environment that specifically leads to emotional distortions. Sigmund Freud's theory mentions that human behavior is influenced by biological impulses.³⁰⁶ Also, this psychological theory is consistent with Maslow's assertion that people need to satisfy their biological needs, which is a primary motivator for human behavior.³⁰⁷

In the early scene when Jimmy learns of his daughter's murder, the Director has the camera zoom in to Jimmy's face and his eyes for the reaction to this sad news.³⁰⁸ His grimace alerts the viewer to Jimmy's newly discovered intention since he knows whom to target for his plan to exact revenge.³⁰⁹ Jimmy's behavior is linked to a specific thinking process that is directly being influenced by his environment.³¹⁰ Interestingly, his biological impulses are to protect Katie since he is her father and this is no longer possible. His biological impulses lead him to develop feelings of revenge. These feelings turn into some form of an obsession which facilitates his intentional act to hunt down Katie's killer without police involvement.

Later on in the film, as Jimmy forms a vigilante gang of sorts, it is clear that revenge can be facilitated by efficiency that is related to his flawed mental process. His inability to think rationally compels him to re-live traumatic events.³¹¹ He recruits other

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

³⁰⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton Press, 1965), 90-92.

³⁰⁷ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

men in his diabolical plot. Surely, Jimmy does not possess a strong character as he has a history of criminal mischief. The viewers are made aware that Jimmy has a record and is not known for particularly ethical behavior. It does not take too much to push Jimmy back into his former criminal lifestyle and he remains in touch with men from his past who are willing helpers in his revenge plot. Jimmy's behavior is adapted to suit his criminal environment and it is a conscious choice to revert back to using violence to solve problems. For Jimmy, there is no need for any mediator between his environment and his responses to it. Unlike *In the Bedroom*'s Dr. Matt Fowler, Jimmy does not really struggle at all between his motivations to perform violent acts and as there is no self-regulation to stop the behavior.

Vivid traumatic experiences can mold the obsessional thoughts that lead to violent behavior that may not be easily controlled.³¹² In one scene, Jimmy and his vigilante gang track down Dave. Jimmy is enraged with anger. He murders Dave after forcing him to make a false confession.³¹³ Here, the problem is that Jimmy really has no interest in controlling his violent impulses. Unlike *The Brave One*'s Erica Bain who shows concern when her hands shake after killing a thug, Jimmy never has any doubts about his conduct. For Jimmy and for Ruth Fowler, the violence is a means to an end. Clearly, Dr. Matt Fowler is chiefly concerned with pleasing his wife who wants Richard Strout out of her sight.

³¹² John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 6.

³¹³ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

In this next film entitled, *In the Bedroom*, Dr. Matt Fowler's stuckness leads to his commission of violence that can also be explained using Bargh's theory. Dr. Fowler struggles with vivid images that are painful reminders of his son's tragic and untimely death.³¹⁴ These scenes appear to awaken feelings of awareness in Dr. Fowler and he develops his plan for justice. Dr. Fowler carries out mental acts that he is keenly aware of since he is not in touch with reality during their commission. The legal system fails to provide him with redress and as the verdict is read the Director has the camera zero in on Dr. Fowler's face and his expression is one of awareness and anger.³¹⁵ Henceforth, a way to measure intentionality is based on where the thought process stems from regarding a particular motivation to act. Here, the intentionality aspect involves launching the plan of vigilante justice that he contrives. The Director shows the audience how he meets with his friend and concocts a plan for revenge. They decide to kidnap the man who shot his son by driving him to his cabin in the woods for the sole purpose of harming him.³¹⁶ The specific thoughts that come easily to some people are part of an efficient system that works in a cohesive manner in order to facilitate certain desired behaviors. Dr. Fowler experiences vengeful thoughts easily and efficiently making it possible to devise a scheme to kidnap and murder the man who shot his son.³¹⁷ The Director uses the scene whereby Dr. Fowler's wife is crying uncontrollably because she misses her son and the legal system really does not provide them with justice.³¹⁸ Dr. Fowler's angry thoughts are uncontrollable and he begins to dwell on his situation and experiences feelings of

³¹⁴ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

helplessness.³¹⁹ Meanwhile, Tom Craven's stuckness in the grief cycle may be analyzed using Bargh's theory since it led to violent acts in *The Edge of Darkness*. The Director in *The Edge of Darkness* makes distinctions when Tom works with the department investigating the murder of his daughter up until the time when Tom starts working alone conducting un-authorized interrogations.³²⁰ The viewer is advised of this when Tom becomes aware of the change in his thinking process. For Bargh, there is no consensus regarding the features of this automatic process in the mind.³²¹ Sadly, his thoughts are more obsessed with violence. He is conducting an unauthorized stakeout and then follows and harasses the Northmoor senior executive. He is in an obsessive state and is ready to commit violence. There are corporate security goons that try to run him off of the road and then follow him into the bathroom in order to harm him.³²²

Tom escapes in this particular scene and catches up to the Northmoor senior executive's car.³²³ Tom forces the car off of the road and punches the driver in the face and knocks him out. He gets in the car and puts a gun to the Northmoor executive's head in order to get information and to frighten him.³²⁴ It appears to be at this point that Tom crosses over from being a legitimate cop conducting an investigation into a vigilante.³²⁵ He exceeds his authorization by using deadly force on a suspect instead of taking the executive into custody for questioning.³²⁶ This scene marks Tom's awareness and the

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

³²¹ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 16-18.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

audiences' awareness of Tom's status from investigating officer to vigilante.³²⁷ Further, the Director shows the audience Tom's intention and inclination toward vigilante justice when Tom meets with a key witness in his car rather than at the precinct.³²⁸ This key witness explains to Tom that Emma told her about a conspiracy involving her employer and this is the reason for Emma's murder.³²⁹ The witness gives Tom a diskette with video on it that shows Emma explaining that she is a whistleblower.³³⁰ As Bargh suggests, certain skills and thought focus on goal-directed processes that are efficient over time and operate without any conscious process.³³¹ In fact, Tom's resolve is communicated after he views the video and slams his hand down, in the next scene.

Tom never relays his investigative strategy or findings back to any departmental officials and he relies on his own interpretation of the evidence.³³² Moreover, when it is learned that the assumptions are real based on some objective evidence the thinking process becomes more efficient as people do not hesitate to formulate and to execute a particular plan toward that goal.³³³ The brain will create thoughts that can be organized in an efficient manner in order to make a checklist for carrying out a criminal investigation.³³⁴ Tom wants to make sure that he does not miss anything since he is emotionally involved in the investigative process.³³⁵ Therefore, as a typical vigilante he prefers to carry out his agenda alone. The Director uses the camera to zoom in on his face

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 18-21.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid., 8.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

and light and dark shadowing is employed to further accentuate Tom's isolation.³³⁶ And Tom is marred by his lack of control as events are moving fast as the drama unfolds. The Director displays Tom's lack of control in any scene that relates to interrogating the suspects in his daughter's murder.³³⁷ These interrogations are depicted as violent indicators that Tom is carrying out his own brand of vigilante justice.³³⁸ Tom punches the man who works for Northmoor in the face and is not interested in what he has to say at all. Acting as a stereotypical vigilante, Tom does not follow any code of ethics and executes all the punishments that he deems are necessary and just given the situation.³³⁹

Further, Tom does not act like an officer of the law that is bound by the law, so to speak. Erica Bain's feelings of stuckness within the grief cycle led to vigilante violence and it can be analyzed through the application of automaticity. The Director in *The Brave One* takes the viewers through the four stages of automaticity as the film progresses.³⁴⁰ The viewers are shown several scenes whereby Erica Bain walks the streets at night, as a young female, who is anything but innocent and vulnerable the way she makes herself out to be.

Clearly, Bain is shown to manifest signs that any fearlessness and feelings of invincibility are in part subliminal. For example, there are not any scenes whereby she cocks a gun or displays some other sort of conscious presentation of strength until later

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

parts in the film's sequence of events.³⁴¹ For Bargh, under his theory the inclinations toward violent behavior becomes so strong, for example, that the thoughts come to Erica Bain without conscious guidance.³⁴² And the Director clearly employs some element of timing in order to help the audience mentally process the visual images that represent Bain's specific vigilante behavior. These violent acts reflect Bain's twisted state of mind as she faces an inner struggle.

As the film continues, Erica Bain transforms herself from a scared victim into a woman who exhibits an inescapable intention to commit violent acts as a form of revenge for the murder of her fiancé.³⁴³ Moreover, Bain gradually becomes obsessive with her thought process as a vigilante bent on revenge.³⁴⁴ Erica Bain is not presented to the viewers as reluctant to give in to her senses. Bain's senses are efficient as she relies on them in order to give in to the judgment that she must exact revenge rather than work more closely with the police.³⁴⁵ Bain's sole influence on any willingness to carry out vigilante behavior stems from the violence that she witnesses.³⁴⁶ Those unique circumstances provide her with the motivation to enter into the frame of mind that allows her to carry out violent acts. She does not seek traditional grief strategies. Her family is markedly absent from her life during this difficult time. She does not have a kinship with David's family either.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid., 19-22.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

Next, in chapter four, the writer explores how these forgiving cinematic characters experience strong levels of personal growth in order to reach the highest level which is self-actualization.

Chapter 4:

THE CHARACTERS IN: *POETRY*, *GET LOW*, *PHILOMENA* AND *RAILWAY MAN* REACH MASLOW'S SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Here, these films, in particular may have more than one character who forgives, but there are four main characters who experience shocking hardship and choose to forgive because they accept themselves and reach self-actualization. Therefore, the central characters featured in this Chapter are: *Poetry's* Yang Mija, *Get Low's* Felix Bush, Philomena Lee from *Philomena*, and *The Railway Man's* Eric Lomax who complete the grief cycle and reach the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory which is self-actualization.³⁴⁷

Self-actualization is personal growth and fulfilment and it leads directly to forgiveness which makes it relevant to this discussion. The characters who reach self-actualization show higher levels of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the level just below self-actualization and an individual has to do a lot of work to reach these levels on the pyramid.

³⁴⁷ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396.

Psychologist Nathaniel Brandon advises that high self-esteem helps individuals to cope with life's tribulations.³⁴⁸ High self-esteem helps individuals to resist the pressure to be defeated by hatred and bitterness. The cinematic characters that exhibit forgiveness have such high self-esteem levels. Brandon laments, the higher the self-esteem level the more likely the individual will form nourishing spiritual lives and well-balanced relationships. These people accept themselves. Those with high self-esteem are more likely to treat others with respect which facilitates acts of forgiveness.

Unlike the cinematic avengers these characters overcome the grief process and these films have deeply rooted spiritual messages. In some respects, these grieving characters need to dream some myth or to hear laughter during this most difficult time as they struggle to find deep healing that reaches their souls.³⁴⁹ Cinematic avengers do not find such consolation in spirituality because they do not accept themselves and cannot forgive their wrongdoers, as a result.

On the contrary, this Chapter chronicles cinematic characters that follow peaceful grief strategies completing the Kubler Ross Grief cycle. These characters, in particular, have an alternate set of mental processes that provide a theoretical reason, according to Bargh for why they forgive. The completion of the grief cycle without getting stuck leads to soulful healing that makes Maslow's self-actualization possible.

³⁴⁸ Nathaniel Brandon, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem* (New York: Random), 7-10.

³⁴⁹ William Worden, *Grief Counseling* (New York: Springer, 2008), 9.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs begins with biological needs progressing onto safety needs, then belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and finally self-actualization which is personal growth and fulfilment.³⁵⁰ Chapters two and three of this dissertation show that the employment of violence by cinematic characters is a failed grief strategy because violent acts will not lead to self-acceptance and render the characters stuck, unable to accept their losses.

The first feature film to mention in this chapter is aptly named *Poetry*. The film is critically acclaimed and Chang-dong Lee wins the Asia Pacific Award for Director. Jeong-hie Yun wins the award for best performance by an Actress for her portrayal of the character named Mija. It is considered to be the best film by the Asian Film Awards Guild. Also, the film wins best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival where Director Chang-dong Lee receives honors. Noted film critic Roger Ebert advises that the Director slowly pans across the river to let the viewers slowly come to the understanding that there is a young girl's body floating on top.³⁵¹ Ebert comments that the viewers do not ever know what the characters are thinking since none of the characters wear their emotions out in the open.³⁵² The Director uses poetry as an abstract way for the viewers to experience the main characters' lives.³⁵³ In this manner, the poetic form can mirror the complexity of the cinematic forgivers' thoughts and deeds.

³⁵⁰ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396.

³⁵¹ Roger Ebert, "Poetry Film Review and Film Summary," retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews>.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

Further, *Poetry* the movie begins with Agnes' dead body floating in the river.³⁵⁴ Agnes is a sixteen year-old girl in middle school and is wearing her school uniform when she jumps from the bridge near the school. The film traces the life of Yang Mija, a sixty-six year-old grandmother who tries to care for her sixteen year-old troubled grandson, Jong-wook. Jong-wook, along with three others, is involved in gang-raping Agnes in the school science lab, for six months, and the trauma led her to commit suicide as he acts unremorseful.³⁵⁵

Before formal allegations surface, the fathers of the gang rapists meet with Yang Mija to give Agnes' mother settlement money in order to buy her silence to protect their sons. The fathers enlist Yang Mija, as a woman, to convince Agnes' mother to accept the settlement and to remain silent. As the story unfolds, the Director shows how Yang Mija enters into a kind of psychic relationship with Agnes. The story is transformed into a tale about betrayal and redemption as Yang Mija seems to receive forgiveness from Agnes in the last scene. Yang Mija creates a poem about Agnes' plight and the Director uses voiceover to have Agnes read the poem as Yang Mija walks to the bridge and apparently commits suicide as the ultimate plea for Agnes' forgiveness. It is touching and cements the psychic bond between them as Agnes becomes the muse for the poem that Yang Mija composes about Agnes' plight. There are several scenes whereby Yang Mija seeks forgiveness and redemption for her grandson who remains stoic about his criminal acts.

³⁵⁴ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

N.T. Wright, a Biblical scholar, advises that the Gospels themselves recount Jesus' life and call for followers to forgive others and *Poetry* features such examples.³⁵⁶ Counselor Judith Anderson muses that any decision to forgive may also be determined based on cultural values.³⁵⁷ The Korean characters in *Poetry* highlight the subtle cultural differences when compared with the cinematic avengers featured in: *Mystic River*, *In the Bedroom*, *Edge of Darkness*, and *The Brave One*, the films profiled in Chapters two and three. One important example from the Christian tradition is the Gospel of Matthew where it is a central theme of the Lord's Prayer regarding God's action and humanity's response.³⁵⁸ The message in this passage is that the request for God's forgiveness comes first before people can forgive others. As Ernst Lohmeyer suggests, it may be inferred that the Lord's Prayer does not even call for repentance in order to receive God's forgiveness.³⁵⁹ God's forgiveness is responded to and may not be something that is earned. There is a link between an experience of God's forgiveness and peoples' attitudes toward others. According to Bill Davies and Dale Allison, God's forgiveness must be received but it may not be received by any person who does not possess the will to forgive others.³⁶⁰

In the spiritual film *Poetry*, Yang Mija attends the funeral services in church and she stands in the back and takes a framed picture of Agnes that is surrounded by

³⁵⁶ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 250-51.

³⁵⁷ Judith Anderson, Forgiveness, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counseling* 9, no.1 (2007): 63-76.

³⁵⁸ 6 Matt. 12:14-15. (New International Version)

³⁵⁹ Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965), 182.

³⁶⁰ Bill Davies and Dale Allison, *Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988), 610.

candles.³⁶¹ The Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle is applied to this character who also reaches a level of self-actualization as theorist Maslow defines it to be personal growth and fulfilment. Yang Mija in contrast to the vengeful characters in *Mystic River*, *In the Bedroom*, *Edge of Darkness*, and *The Brave One* reaches the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs chart. Her acts in the film are deliberate and have the effect of making things better for society and for herself. The Director uses the water where Agnes' body is found to mirror the grief cycle and the film opens and ends with the sequence of screen shots that pan the water.³⁶² Yang Mija, unlike the cinematic avenging characters, completes the Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle and is also able to reach the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Chart which is self-actualization.

During the shock stage, Yang Mija has to face the realization that her nephew has been involved in the repeated gang rape of the pre-teen Agnes that leads her to kill herself.³⁶³ In a clear attempt to subvert the legal process, the men from the other families involved hold a meeting to make a plan to bribe Agnes' mother not to file criminal charges against their sons. The camera zooms in on Yang Mija's face and her eyes are widened with concern. She remains in shock and does not nod to the boys' fathers demands that she raise her fair share of the money that is needed to entice Agnes' mother to keep quiet.³⁶⁴ The teen rapists' fathers ask Yang Mija if she has her half of the money ready and how long it will take to get it. They urge Yang Mija to call her daughter but there is some reason why she does not contact her daughter to deal with the problem.

³⁶¹ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

The viewers can see that Yang Mija, a poor woman, who could not really raise a large amount of money. The teen rapists' fathers advise her that the negotiations are moving along and it looks like Agnes' mother will accept the money in exchange for her silence.³⁶⁵ One thing is clear and she is not supportive of the plan to bribe Agnes' mother and she appears to be stalling for time in order to figure out what to do in this crisis.³⁶⁶ Moreover, it is not entirely clear to the viewers what Yang Mija will do in this situation and she is often shown in deep reflection perhaps contemplating what the most ethical course of action would be. There is one scene when she is outside on a sunny day and she begins to write a poem. The composition of the poetry allows for her to attempt to escape the dilemma in which she finds herself. She actually cracks a half smile since throughout the film her facial expressions change from sadness to glee. There is another scene when she goes to a karaoke lounge and she sings a relatively upbeat song.³⁶⁷ The teen rapists' fathers are pooling large sum of money in order to save their sons from going to prison. In this scene, Yang Mija abruptly walks out of one of several meetings with the boys' fathers and the camera zooms in on her leaning down to smell flowers outside. She is deeply troubled about the actions that her grandson takes. She quickly moves into the denial stage and ignores the men as they sit around inside discussing their unethical and unlawful plan to handle this crisis.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

It is no surprise to the viewing audience that Yang Mija, an ethical person, withdraws from them. Hence, she muses and begins to wince in anger about the plan to protect the boys' collective futures. In direct contrast to *Mystic River's* Jimmy Markum, Yang Mija's anger and moral compass lead her to do the right thing and to follow the law. Contrarily, in the film *Poetry* the lesson is that ethical behavior is consistent with obedience to the law rather than taking the law into one's hands. It is not easy to do the ethical thing in this case when dealing with a relative but Yang Mija proves that she operates on a higher level than most people do. These characteristics are consistent with the actions of a self-actualized person. Furthermore, in the next scene, Yang Mija sees Agnes' mother working in a dirt field and she holds her head down low in front of the woman. At this point in the film, she moves into the bargaining stage since she realizes that this woman could really benefit the bribe money. Yang Mija does not get into a discussion with her regarding the bribe even though the men want her to have that so-called woman to woman talk.³⁶⁸ Yang Mija continues to look away just like a shy girl and she is too ashamed to bring up the painful subject of Agnes' death. The encounter ends and Yang Mija simply smiles and walks away without ever mentioning the bribe money. Again, in this scene, the viewer realizes that Yang Mija's ethical actions are consistent with a person who reaches self-actualization. The film's message is that Yang Mija will not lower herself to demean Agnes' mother by convincing her to take the bribe simply because she is poor.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

Consistent with a self-actualized person, Yang Mija does not appeal to Agnes' mother and her selfish side because Yang Mija is not portrayed as a selfish and greedy woman. These ethical behaviors in this film are in sharp contrast to the cinematic avenging characters who are motivated by selfish behaviors that deteriorate into senseless violence. Next, in another telling scene, Yang Mija is home and her nephew Jong-wook appears to be unremorseful since he is conducting his daily business and playing in his room. The viewer can sense that Jong-wook does not appear concerned at all about his fate concerning the crimes that he commits against Agnes. In fact, he never even opens up to his grandmother to confess his crimes and to ask anybody for forgiveness.³⁶⁹ Surely, the average viewer can see that Jong-wook is old enough to appreciate the seriousness of his actions and to accept responsibility for the consequences.³⁷⁰

It becomes clear to the viewing audience that one intended underlying message of the film is that Jong-wook and the other teen rapists are responsible for driving Agnes to be despondent enough to commit suicide. The teen rapists have faith that their fathers will protect them and keep them free from prosecution in what appears to be a male-dominated culture. In fact, the teen rapists all appear to be rather cold about the crimes which reflect cultural attitudes toward women that are patriarchal. Meanwhile, Yang Mija appears sad since she knows that Jong-wook must pay for his wrongful acts. She finds it hard to hide her serious disappointment in his conduct and may even blame herself for poor parenting skills.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

The film's message is also that society plays a part in the blame as well. The boys' fathers are not going to report them to the authorities and no one thinks that Yang Mija has the inclination to do it. The boys' fathers trust her and immediately make her part of their diabolical plan without even obtaining her express consent.³⁷¹ They take it for granted that she is unethical like them which is not true in her case. Also, they know that they can try to exert pressure and dominance over her since she is the only female at these meetings. Therefore, Yang Mija will have to take action alone to defy the boys' fathers and she has to be brave. Bravery is another key trait that is associated with a person's attainment of self-actualization. Yang Mija uses her boldness to bring forth a good and just result as opposed to the cinematic avengers who use bravery and boldness to carry out murders.

In a key scene, Yang Mija asks Jong-wook about Agnes as she leaves the framed picture of Agnes next to his breakfast cereal one morning.³⁷² Yang Mija appears to be stunned by Jong-wook's cold reaction as his facial expressions and eyes do not show fear and regret about the gang rape of Agnes. Film critic Justin Chang describes Jong-wook as "a wretchedly ungrateful cipher whose horrific actions are left chillingly unexplained."³⁷³ This scene angers Yang Mija and may convince Yang Mija to surrender Jong Wook to the police and further forges the psychic connection to Agnes since that act is in Agnes' best interest to see justice served.³⁷⁴ Also, it can be construed as Yang Mija's step toward asking for Agnes' forgiveness since her grandson does not.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

³⁷³ Justin Chang, "Poetry Review," *Variety*, May 19, 2010, 15.

³⁷⁴ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

In one memorable scene, the viewers can see that something serious is about to happen since Yang Mija walks swiftly with determination and speed. She finds Jong-wook in an arcade laughing along with his co-perpetrators. Yang Mija plays the role of the disciplinarian and she informs Jong-wook to go home right now. She practically pulls him by the ear to leave the arcade. Her entire demeanor in the film shifts and she turns into a determined woman. She becomes bossy and directive. Yang Mija then informs Jong-wook that he must take a bath, perform grooming, and cut his nails since his hair is short enough.³⁷⁵ She advises him that his mother is coming to town. She looks him over and tells him to scrub himself thoroughly and that a clean body leads to a pure thought.³⁷⁶

Further, there is one critical scene that cements the psychic bond that seems to develop between Agnes and Yang Mija, according to movie critic Michael Phillips who reviews the film.³⁷⁷ It is the scene when Yang Mija, in an act of devotion, takes Agnes' framed picture from the church memorial service. The act opens up Agnes' heart to a form of forgiveness that transcends her physical death. In some respects, it almost seems like Agnes is using Yang Mija to carry out her un-fulfilled desires prior to her death.

Those desires are likely to: (1) bring her transgressors to justice, (2) obtain financial compensation for her indigent surviving mother, (3) serve as the muse for a poem about her tribulation and (4) forgive Yang Mija since Yang Mija accepts ethical accountability for her grandson Jong-wook's betrayal. Throughout the film, the viewers are likely shocked by the fact that Jong-wook does not appear to accept legal or ethical accountability for his cruel actions. In an interview with Director Lee Chang-Dong, he

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Michael Phillips, "Poetry Film Review," *Chicago Tribune*, February 24, 2011, sec A.

describes Yang Mija's character as having some quality within the film, as in poetic works that people have to put meaning into.³⁷⁸ Thus, Yang Mija's character's role deliberately is written to be multi-dimensional and complicated.

In the final moving scene during poetry class the poem that Yang Mija writes is read aloud by the Professor.³⁷⁹ Agnes' voice is used as a voiceover technique. The poem demonstrates Yang Mija's attempt to form some type of psychic bond with Agnes and it takes the whole film for her to finish the poem. During one of the final scenes in the film, the Professor in Yang Mija's Poetry class finds her poem on his podium and he reads it to the class.³⁸⁰ The title of the poem is called "Agnes' Song" and as the Professor reads it out loud there is a girl's voice over that is dubbed in.³⁸¹ Agnes is actually reading the poem to the viewing audience and the poem is about loss and love.³⁸²

Next, the scene flashes to the bridge and the viewers see Yang Mija walking over to the edge and she is wearing a lovely Spring hat.³⁸³ It appears to be a theme of renewal in this scene and uncertainty since the viewers do not know what Yang Mija will do next. The next scene features Yang Mija's daughter in the house looking for her and calling out to her.

In the end, Yang Mija is creative and uses the poem as a way to confess the sadness and the regret that she feels about what happened. She deliberately selects the word confession as a prominent word in the poem and the camera pans over the water as

³⁷⁸ Soo-mee Park, "Q&A: Lee Chang-dong," *Hollywood Reporter*, May 15, 2010, 2.

³⁷⁹ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

the birds fly by.³⁸⁴ Perhaps, the birds represent the freedom that Agnes' soul may now experience since the suffering in this life is finally over. It is moving for the viewers to watch and it is sad to think about the lost potential in Agnes who dies very young. Sadly, her death could have been prevented through awareness, counseling, and victim support services. It is interesting to consider both mothers are completely unaware about what is going on their respective teenagers lives. Agnes' mother did not know that the boys were raping her daughter in the science lab.³⁸⁵ Agnes chooses to keep her victimization a secret maybe due to some shameful feelings. Likewise, Jong-wook's mother does not have any idea that he is raping Agnes along with the other boys.³⁸⁶ Yang Mia uses the construction of the poem as a healthy and safe outlet to vent her grief.³⁸⁷ Unlike the cinematic avengers who carry out unhealthy and unlawful strategies for dealing with their grief. Contrarily, Yang Mia employs normal grief strategies. Hence, it is the abstract nature of poetry that serves as a theme since the poetic form requires deep thought and reflection. Yang Mia allows herself to retreat into the writing process as a way to escape the harsh realities of her life. There are further clues that Yang Mija reaches self-actualization the pinnacle of personal development as she does not waiver in her commitment to turn her grandson over to the authorities.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

By the end of the film and after the police pick him up for questioning, it is clear that she accepts her actions and feels that these acts are required for the dignity of Agnes' life as the following lines represent as she plays badminton with the Detective after they take her grandson to jail. In fact, in the last scene, she dramatically returns to the water where Agnes' body is found and Agnes' voice is reading the poem that she wrote for her. It is not entirely clear what exactly happens next but the viewers can infer that Yang Mija reaches a peacefulness and level of growth and fulfilment because of her prior actions. She makes sure that justice is done and that Agnes' mother secures the money that will ease her burdens in life. The next film is *Get Low* which wins tenth place on the list of top ten films by the African-American Film Critics Association. Robert Duvall is nominated for the Screen Actors Guild Award for outstanding performance by a male actor in a leading role. Robert Duvall is also nominated by the Broadcast Film Critics Association for the best actor award. Duvall plays a noble character who is just trying to do the right thing and this makes him similar to Yang Mija's leading character in *Poetry*. Noted Critic Roger Ebert advises that Robert Duvall's portrayal of Felix Bush is credible as Bush lives with past secrets that haunt him. Meanwhile, in *Get Low* the character Felix Bush requests a funeral party for himself while he is still alive and the story about his past unfolds.³⁸⁸ Felix Bush lives in on several acres of land in the woods and his hermit lifestyle is a reaction to his grief and a depraved form of self-punishment.

³⁸⁸ *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

In the early scenes in the film, the viewing audience can ascertain that he is still in shock. The sponsoring of his own funeral party while he is still alive begins to draw him out of his solitude which is not healthy.³⁸⁹ Felix Bush does not interact with others very often and much like Yang Mija he also wants forgiveness from someone.³⁹⁰ *New York Times* Film Reviewer Aron Scott describes Felix Bush as “cussedly secular and stubbornly monastic.”³⁹¹ Felix Bush has a story to tell and he seeks forgiveness from Mattie Darrow because he feels responsible for her sister Mary Lee’s tragic death.³⁹²

In one key scene, Bush is coming back from the funeral parlor after giving Frank some money to pay for the party and he makes him stop the car. He wants to walk home so he can pass Mattie’s house. He walks in the rain at night and stops by Mary Lee’s grave in the yard. He says to himself that everyone is talking about getting forgiveness from Jesus and he muses that he did not do anything to him.³⁹³ Bush starts to feel sick and he stumbles to the Mattie’s front door.³⁹⁴ His clothes are soaked and she gives him her deceased husband’s clothes to wear. She begins to ask him about the past and he shuts down and becomes defensive. She takes his pulse and then sends him home since she is frustrated by his evasiveness regarding her sister’s death.³⁹⁵

The meeting with Mattie strengthens his resolve. The viewers see that he moves into the anger stage as he now desires to confess and to recount the details about Mary

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Aaron Scott, “Get Low Film Review,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2010, sec B.

³⁹² *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

Lee's death. In the bargaining stage, he asks the funeral parlor manager played by Bill Murray to plan the funeral party while he is still alive. He figures that this is his chance to get everyone together so he can come clean about the past. Felix Bush faces depression and uncertainty about how things will all work out and the character played by Bill Murray has to convince him to carry out the plan.

The funeral party will provide the means necessary for him to ask in public and admit to an affair with Mary Lee, a married woman. He believes the affair is a key reason why she dies. Felix Bush is desperate to be forgiven by Mattie Darrow since he fears death and God's judgment.³⁹⁶ It is natural for someone who knows that death is imminent to want to cleanse the soul and Felix Bush has chest pains and shortness of breath episodes that scare him and propel him forward on his quest.³⁹⁷ The Gospel provides an interesting example in *Luke* when Jesus is not shown hospitality by a host and a prostitute comes in and anoints his feet with expensive oil and then wipes it with her hair to show love and respect.³⁹⁸ Theologian Kenneth Bailey suggests that there is a question whether the prostitute is forgiven in response to her act of love or her act of love is a direct response to receiving God's forgiveness for her multitude of sins.³⁹⁹ Thus, the message in the passage is that the prostitute's faith and trust in God's willingness to forgive her earns her the free gift of God's forgiveness. Felix Bush appears to be confident that if he could

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Luke 13:36-50. (New International Version)

³⁹⁹ Kenneth Bailey, *Literary Cultural Approach to Luke* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.

just get the story out in the open and ask Mattie Darrow for forgiveness then she will grant it.⁴⁰⁰

In a key scene near the end, Felix Bush talks with Reverend Charlie Jackson of Illinois and he intimates that his dying wish is to tell the story about the fire and to gain redemption for Mary Lee's death.⁴⁰¹ He wants to tell the story at his funeral party but if he cannot do it then he makes a pact with Reverend Jackson to speak on his behalf. During one of the last major scenes in the film, the camera zooms in on Felix Bush's eyes and hands.⁴⁰² Bush is on the stage and he stares out at the crowd but his voice freezes up and he simply cannot speak to the crowd.⁴⁰³ He has a bout of stage fright and Reverend Jackson moves over to the giant microphone. Reverend Jackson advises the crowd that good and bad choices are close together and it is not good to judge other people.⁴⁰⁴ He counsels the crowd that forgiveness is an important part of life. Reverend Jackson explains that Felix Bush built a beautiful church for his congregation about forty years ago.⁴⁰⁵ Bush edges over to where Reverend Jackson is standing and he gestures that he is now ready to tell his story.

Bush tells the people that he is not the smartest man alive as he speaks into the giant microphone. He said that he thought he would travel but he did not go anywhere. Bush punishes himself and his life is filled with regret about some events from his past that he could not ever face up to or correct.⁴⁰⁶ Bush says that he is sick every day because

⁴⁰⁰ *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

he does not seek forgiveness. He needed to hold onto his bad acts and he sequestered himself on a ranch in the woods.⁴⁰⁷ Bush denies himself all form of human pleasure as he punishes himself each year. He stares at Mattie and proclaims that he fell in love with a married woman. They make a plan to run away together and she does not show up at the meeting place at the right time. Bush admits to the affair and advises that it is a matter of love at first sight and it is still going on for him.⁴⁰⁸

Mary Lee's husband answers the door and a scuffle ensues.⁴⁰⁹ It appears that Mary Lee's husband beat her to prevent her from leaving him since she is described as bleeding from the head and crawling around on the floor.⁴¹⁰ Mary Lee's husband set the house on fire and Bush is thrown from the house in the chaos as the others perish in the fire.⁴¹¹ Bush comes to realize that the whole thing including Mary Lee's death is his fault but he could not control his heart.⁴¹² Their only desire is to be happy in love together and it is not possible in this life for them. The film wants to explore the possibility of love and togetherness in some form of an afterlife as the viewers see in the last film clip.

In one of the last scenes, after hearing Bush's tearful appeal for her forgiveness for the role he plays in her sister's death, Mattie Darrow sits with Bush. She tenderly takes his hand in a gesture to grant forgiveness.⁴¹³ Bush will also receive God's forgiveness because that comes first as mentioned before with Yang Mija's somewhat awkward quest for forgiveness in *Poetry*. It is interesting to consider how Yang Mija

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

blames herself for her grandson's horrible deeds. Meanwhile, Felix Bush blames himself for the cruel actions that Mary Lee's husband takes when he attacks her and sets the house on fire. It is only after he makes a full and complete confession to Mattie that he realizes with her help and loving guidance that Mary Lee's death is not his fault. It appears that he is now ready to forgive himself for what he has done. Surely, Bush is somewhat elated and appears ready to die as this horrible secret and the feelings of grief are released.⁴¹⁴ He accepts himself as a man who does the right thing. The viewer may infer that he is at peace with himself. Prior to his public confession, he could not move beyond the esteem portion of Maslow's hierarchy of needs chart.

His reputation and his status suffered. The public confession and detailed story cleared the air and enabled him to move up to the self-actualization top portion of the chart. The Director cuts to the scene of Bush's ghost meeting up with Mary Lee as she is walking toward him wearing a white gown in order to manifest this stage of personal fulfilment. Film Critic Terry Morrow articulates that "it is a touching tale of a hermit's quest for closure."⁴¹⁵ Reviewer John Anderson muses that Bush keeps this secret for over forty years which is a long time to suffer in silence.⁴¹⁶

In the end, Bush obtains closure and the forgiveness that he yearns for at the same time. The film concludes with a satisfying end and sends the message that asking for forgiveness has its rewards since he is re-united with his true love. In the next film, one based on strong Roman Catholic roots and entitled, *Philomena*, the character Philomena

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Terry Morrow, "Get Low Review," *Knoxville Times*, December 11, 2010, 1.

⁴¹⁶ John Anderson, "Get Low Rides High," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2010, 15.

Lee searches for her son and grants forgiveness to a nun in the process.⁴¹⁷ *Philomena* is nominated for an Oscar as best picture of the year by the Academy Awards. Judi Dench also is nominated as best performance by an actress in a leading role as Philomena Lee. The film is nominated for a Golden Globe. Film Critic Susan Wloszczyna from Roger Ebert's office advises that the film surprises the viewers with its twists.⁴¹⁸ Wloszczyna remarks that the film is more than a mere tear jerker.⁴¹⁹ Judi Dench portrays an average character in *Philomena* who has an endless reserve of emotional strength and perseverance.⁴²⁰

Yang Mija and Felix Bush desire forgiveness from another while the characters Philomena and Eric Lomax from *The Railway Man* are in a position to grant their offenders forgiveness. Philomena faces hardship because her mother is dead and she is an unwed mother during 1952 when it is not socially acceptable.⁴²¹ Her father sends her to a convent and she gives birth without pain medication and works in exchange for the convent to support her and Anthony.⁴²² Later on, the convent finds a suitable home for Philomena's son Anthony and there appears to be some controversy about this adoption process.⁴²³ Fifty years later, Philomena decides to find her son Anthony and teams up with Martin who is a reporter and they visit the Irish convent, but they are not given much information.⁴²⁴ Philomena advises that she tries on several occasions to get

⁴¹⁷ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴¹⁸ Susan Wloszczyna, "Philomena Review and Film Summary," retrieved from: <http://www.rogerebert.com>.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

information from the convent and the nuns would say the records are gone due to a fire.⁴²⁵

Philomena and the reporter return to the convent and the nuns provide her with the past signed adoption contract.⁴²⁶ On the way home, Philomena insists that they pull over by a road side church.⁴²⁷ She is a devout Catholic and she desires forgiveness for her own sins related to the Catholic prohibition on pre-marital sex that makes her feel guilt.⁴²⁸ The priest comforts her and Philomena seems to believe that she has received forgiveness from the Catholic Church or this process of confession helps get her closer to forgiveness from God.⁴²⁹ Film critic Rex Reed notes, the priest leads her to work up the courage to ask God for forgiveness since she is raised to believe that she is a sinner.⁴³⁰ While, *New York Times* film reviewer Steve Holden comments that Philomena “makes one believe her character has the capacity to forgive.”⁴³¹

One poignant example of Christian forgiveness that is relevant is from the Gospel of Mark when Jesus heals the paralytic.⁴³² As Theologian Morna Hooker suggests, Jesus’ ministry concentrates on forgiveness and healing and in this passage the declaration of forgiveness is recited rather than the pronouncement of healing.⁴³³ In the passage, the crowd actually removes the roof and lowers the crippled man down in front of Jesus and

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Rex Reed, “Philomena Review,” *New York Observer*, November 19, 2013, sec. 1.

⁴³¹ Steve Holden, “Nasty Nuns Can’t Shake a Faith,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2013, sec A.

⁴³² Mark 8:1-12. (New International Version)

⁴³³ Morna Hooker, *The Gospel* (London: Associated Press, 1965), 182.

Jesus is impressed by all the trouble the crowd goes to.⁴³⁴ The passage reads, Jesus sees their faith and says to the paralytic, “son, your sins are forgiven.”⁴³⁵ These are the words of God’s assurance between him and his people further showing that believers should seek God’s forgiveness first.

One important scene in the film occurs when Philomena and the reporter return to the Irish convent to demand information.⁴³⁶ Their investigation leads Philomena to find out that her son died and she is in shock when they find out on the internet.⁴³⁷ For a minute, she is not sure and faces a level of denial but then her instincts tell her that it is true. She enters the bargaining stage and desires to get more information. The search for Anthony brings them to the United States and Philomena meets his lover and finds out that her son’s headstone is on the convent’s property waiting for her to discover it.⁴³⁸ She is depressed and cannot believe that the convent officials lied to her about his whereabouts but she decides to forgive the nuns in an explosive scene at the end of the film.⁴³⁹ For her, forgiveness is the key to letting go of past hurts as it allows her to accept herself and to live with her choices.

In a key scene, Sister Hildegard informs Martin, the reporter, that Jesus Christ will judge her and she will not even listen to his diatribes.⁴⁴⁰ Martin leans down and continues to confront Sister Hildegard as he moves closer to her face. He tells her that

⁴³⁴ Mark 8:1-3. (New International Version)

⁴³⁵ Mark 8:1-5. (New International Version)

⁴³⁶ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

Jesus just might tip her out of the wheelchair and he hurls other insults at her.⁴⁴¹ Martin is angry because Sister Hildegarde is staunch and unremorseful regarding her behavior toward Philomena and Anthony.⁴⁴² In her opinion, Philomena deserves to be punished for having pre-marital sex and that is the reason why she keeps Philomena and Anthony apart.

In the next scene, the drama continues and Philomena actually starts apologizing to Sister Hildegarde for Martin's behavior.⁴⁴³ Philomena says that Martin should not create such a spectacle. Martin's face bursts with anger.⁴⁴⁴ Sister Hildegarde believes that she is right and her faith makes her strong-willed.⁴⁴⁵ Philomena is the self-actualized person since she has high self-esteem levels. Her sense of self-worth is strong enough to overcome the sadness of not seeing Anthony prior to his death from (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)).⁴⁴⁶ Contrarily, Sister Hildegard is a cinematic character who exhibits poor self-esteem levels with her pronounced fear of the new and unfamiliar, irrationality along with passing judgment over others.⁴⁴⁷ Sister Hildegarde cannot even muster the courage to apologize to Philomena since she feels that she has not wronged her in any way.

In fact, Martin is surprised by how easily Philomena expresses forgiveness and she retorts that it is a difficult thing for her to do.⁴⁴⁸ There is a close up of her face and tears are falling from her eyes, she laments that she does not want to hate people the way

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

that he does.⁴⁴⁹ She tells him that he must be overwhelmed and lethargic due to his hateful feelings.⁴⁵⁰ Philomena's forgiving acts make her so unlike the cinematic avenging characters who lack self-respect and respect for others too.

The acts of forgiveness may be the ultimate path to self-acceptance and allows Philomena to move beyond the pain achieving closure to a painful part of her life. From a theological standpoint, she is able to solidify her relationship with God allowing for the power of his forgiveness to be experienced. For her, as a religious person, this act helps her to achieve personal growth and fulfilment reaching the pinnacle of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

In the next deeply moving and spiritual film entitled, *The Railway Man* the main character Eric Lomax suffers unspeakable torture during World War II and the story of his past leads to an example of forgiveness that is remarkable.⁴⁵¹ *The Railway Man* wins the Australian Cinematographers Society's prestigious Mill Award. Nicole Kidman wins the Australian Film Critics Association award for best actress. Jonathan Teplitzky wins for best Director at the Australian Film Critics Association awards. Chris Sawin, a film critic for the *Examiner* advises that the film is based on an autobiography about a soldier who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴⁵² Sawin remarks that the film progresses

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitzky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁴⁵² Chris Sawin, "The Railway Man Review: All the King's Horses and All the King's Men," April 25, 2014, retrieved from: examiner.com.

too slowly and it is hard for the audience to connect emotionally with the characters in the film.⁴⁵³

Eric Lomax is a British Officer who is in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and he is tortured for building a radio receiver.⁴⁵⁴ They attach a hose to his mouth and savagely beat his body almost to the point of death in the presence of Japanese Officer Takashi.⁴⁵⁵ During the torture, his body is in shock and he cries out for his mother, at times. Film critic Simon Johnson muses that Lomax returns to the scene of the torture years later in order to confront Officer Takashi in this dark film that is a tale of forgiveness, bravery, and redemption.⁴⁵⁶

In the later scenes, the viewer can see that he lives in denial about the extent of the torture that he endured at the camp. Lomax suffers from nightmares and his wife convinces him to try to overcome his bitterness and deep seated anger during a scene when she finds him on the floor screaming at what appears to be nothing at all.⁴⁵⁷ In his bout with anger, he recalls the events of the past and the explicit torture which is despicable. His wife (played by Nicole Kidman) talks with him and it is agreed that he should face his fears. He bargains with himself and realizes that he can find comfort by reaching out to Officer Takashi in love rather than by trying to kill him. Lomax's self-esteem is vastly improved when he controls himself and does not commit acts of violence

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Simon Johnson, "Railway Man Review," *The London Telegraph*, April 27, 2012.

⁴⁵⁷ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

against Officer Takashi but instead forgives him for the past crimes committed during warfare.

As the story unfolds, another army officer tells Lomax that he should return to the camp which is now a museum and kill Officer Takashi who is the curator there. *New York Times* film critic Steve Holden advises that Lomax has a “stiff upper-lip facade” and he tracks down Takashi years later and carries out his interrogation but does not kill him.⁴⁵⁸ Takashi sends him a letter and asks for forgiveness and Lomax and his wife travel back to the museum. In a moving final scene, the two men meet on the railroad at the torture camp and they are both much older men. Takashi sincerely asks in-person for forgiveness and it is moving as the two men hug as portrayed above. In a relevant Gospel passage, a servant owes a debt to a ruler and it cannot be paid in this case.⁴⁵⁹ The King is merciful and decides to forgive the debt rather than meting out some form of justice.⁴⁶⁰ The word for debt is the same word used for sin in the gospel, according to Biblical commentator Donald Hagner.⁴⁶¹ Here, Lomax, much like Philomena is the stronger party who is ready to forgive Officer Takashi and it is sealed with the handshake and hug. Lomax wants to abandon the bitterness and hatred in favor of peace and tranquility and Philomena is motivated by the same desire for self-acceptance. The following chapter will conclude the discussion and highlight forgiveness as the path to achieving self-actualization as described by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Chart.

⁴⁵⁸ Steve Holden, Railway Man Film Review,” *New York Times*, April 10, 2014, sec B.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (Dallas: Word Press, 1995), 538.

Lomax reaches self-acceptance and self-actualization and a heightened level of personal growth since he does not resort to violence. The Gospel provides guidance regarding the constraints of forgiveness in the passage about forgiveness for all believers.⁴⁶² Jesus calls for believers to act like little children and to be humble.⁴⁶³ The passage is about taking the initiative in forgiveness and reconciliation and forgiveness should not be limited as it relates to the state of the heart.⁴⁶⁴ A letter addressed to Lomax is sent from Soldier Nagase, one of his captors, and it details his plea to Lomax for forgiveness.⁴⁶⁵ Nagase starts the first part of the letter by explaining that he is someone who lives with guilt for the torturous acts in the war.⁴⁶⁶ Nagase advises Lomax that their prior meeting touches him and awakens his heart.⁴⁶⁷ He laments that images of Lomax's face haunt him in his sleep at night.⁴⁶⁸ Also, he recalls Lomax's hands and skinny arms.⁴⁶⁹

Lomax receives the letter and advises his wife Pattie that he has to return there.⁴⁷⁰ She tells him that she would not have lasted one day there. Lomax asks her to make the trip back to Singapore with him for moral support.⁴⁷¹ The two men meet and apologize and advise that they do not want to re-live those days during the war.⁴⁷² Nagase opens his arms and gestures widely as he apologizes in person to Lomax.⁴⁷³ Both men openly

⁴⁶² Matt.21:21-35. (New International Version)

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

agree that they do not want to re-live those moments stemming from the war times.⁴⁷⁴

Clearly, both of their lives continue to be haunted by the past during their time spent defending their own respective nations.

In this instance, they both demonstrate characteristics of healthy self-esteem with respect to their acts of: benevolence, goodwill, and fairness. Lomax demonstrates that self-respect is the foundation for respect of all people. Lomax's high self-esteem level allows him to avoid immediately interpreting all relationships in malevolent and violent terms. In short, Lomax does not encounter situations with an automatic expectation of: rejection, betrayal, or treachery which might be characteristic of his past hurts.⁴⁷⁵ Lomax, as a cinematic forgiving character signifies to the viewers that his well- developed sense of personal worth correlates with his generosity, social cooperation, and spirit of cooperation or mutual aid.

Next, Chapter five explores how cinematic characters reach self-actualization which leads them to forgive. While, the previous chapters depict those cinematic avenging characters who employ violence that solves nothing leading to hopelessness. Actually, those characters were not on the path to self-actualization. These cinematic forgivers exhibit altruistic behavior that can be analyzed using John Bargh's theory of automaticity.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 5:

CINEMATIC FORGIVERS AND BARGH'S SOCIAL COGNITIONS IN: *POETRY*, *GET LOW*, *PHILOMENA*, AND *RAILWAY MAN*

John Bargh's automatic discourse theory is used in order to study the theoretical reasons for why these particular cinematic characters are able to forgive. The characters in these four films provide a striking dichotomy as this theory helps to further illustrate how these characters are on the road to self-actualization and forgiveness. John Bargh's theory of automatic discourse has four categories: awareness, intention, efficiency, and control. The theory of automatic discourse is applied again here in this chapter. The application of automaticity explains Yang Mija's ability to move through the grief cycle and carry out acts of forgiveness in the film entitled, *Poetry*.⁴⁷⁶ It is an interesting foreign film that charms and helps to shed light on the healing powers of creativity and using the poetic form to express emotions. The film is about one woman's journey to reach self-actualization with the help of the creative form of poetry. In terms of the group of men, she is the only person to take a stand and do what is right and is just after her teen grandson takes part in the repeated gang rape of Agnes, a school mate.

⁴⁷⁶ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

In the early scenes, the viewing audience sees that Yang Mija is aware of her conflicting feelings. It is painfully evident by the expression on her face that she is not interested in doing anything unlawful or unethical. She is not eager to participate when the teen rapists' fathers suggest that they bribe Agnes' mother to settle and not turn their sons in. Yang Mija appears to live an average life that is somewhat uneventful. As a nurse who cares for the sick, she is not interested in hurting anyone. Her profession, as a caregiver, speaks volumes about her selfless devotion to others. When the men meet at the restaurant, she goes out alone and starts to pick flowers in order to get away from them as they conduct their meeting and finalize the plans to bribe Agnes' mother. It is clear that she is not onboard with this plan.

At this point, the viewers begin to see that she has a high level of self-esteem. She retreats into a creative state which also further illustrates her awareness of the high level in which she operates from. She joins a poetry class and begins to develop a psychic connection with Agnes which fuels her creative efforts throughout the film which begins and ends with poetry as an underlying theme. As a social cognition process, obsessive thoughts form in her mind and she is aware that she has to do something about this crisis to make things better in some way.⁴⁷⁷ As the film progresses, the viewers start to see evidence of her intention to follow her conscious which raises her self-esteem level. She desires group interactions and seeks companionship with people of all ages.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

She tries to relax and regularly attends poetry class. The class serves as an outlet for her creative impulses and to escape the realities of her life. For example, her instincts to carry out ethical behaviors is something that is not even thought about or obsessed over. Theorist John Bargh advises that this is really just an automatic mechanical device in the brain that leads an ethical person to just do the right thing and in a consistent manner.⁴⁷⁸ It is the reverse of the thinking process that cinematic avengers face because cinematic avengers merely obsess over violence and how they are wronged.

In order to carry out her plan, Yang Mija deliberately takes her grandson for a haircut even though he does not need one. Further, the viewers begin to figure out that she is preparing him for something and it is likely that she will turn him in to the police. Her senses and the path to personal growth and self-actualization logically demand it. As Bargh points out, many people think about what they are doing as a habit and this is a form of meditation.⁴⁷⁹ The viewing audience sees the opposite of her ethical behavior in her grandson's carefree attitude. He is playing in the arcade with his friends and this behavior upsets her which further fuels her intentions to act with integrity.⁴⁸⁰ According to theorist John Bargh, for the ethical person, acting with integrity is automatic and this means that it is something that just happens.⁴⁸¹

In a way, she becomes obsessed with helping Agnes' mother. Yang Mija is able to maintain control as the events in the film take shape. The boys' fathers think they are in control but it is Yang Mija who finds a way to raise the money in order to compensate

⁴⁷⁸ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 9-12.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 15-17.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 5-8.

Agnes' mother which is the outcome since the boys will pay for their crimes.⁴⁸² In the next film, *Get Low*'s Felix Bush takes the high road and after some careful deliberation finds out that he is able to forgive himself for his past acts. In comparison to Yang Mija, the forgiving acts are automatic and they also just happen stemming from the result of her thoughts. He moves through the grief cycle. In the film entitled, *Get Low*, the Director takes the viewer on Felix's journey of self-discovery as he struggles to finally come to terms with his past. He is sorry for falling in love with a married woman. Bush blames himself for her death when her husband finds out about the affair and her intention to leave.⁴⁸³ Moreover, Felix Bush lives alone on acres of wooded property outside of town. His deliberate solitude serves as his penance related to his past marital affair. He continues contemplate his life and is aware from his increasing acute chest pains that he will soon die.⁴⁸⁴ Bush decides to invite the entire town to his funeral party that he will host while he is still alive. Thus, he will auction off the acres of land. He forges a plan to tell everyone about his past and to use the party as his means to confess his unintended role in his beloved's death.⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, he is in control of the events and how they will unfold since he is paying for this funeral party.

In the final scenes and after much soul searching, he has decided to forgive himself and to announce it out loud to the crowd. The crowd assembles at the funeral party in the last few scenes and he confesses the whole story. He recounts a story in which he is thrown from a burning house.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

He advises that he could not save his beloved from the fire and he tells the crowd that if he left her in the burning fire then everything he knows about himself is wrong.⁴⁸⁶ In another film, *Philomena* Lee does not get stuck in the grief cycle. Philomena forgives a Nun for not disclosing her location to her dying son. Using key descriptions from the film *Philomena*, the writer uses Bargh's theory as a vehicle to analyze her behavior.⁴⁸⁷ Philomena is aware that she must forgive Sister Hildegard for not allowing her to reunite with her son Anthony after her biographer Martin Sixsmith confronts the Nun.

During one of the last scenes, Philomena searches the convent for Martin in order to stop him from fighting with the Nun about this issue.⁴⁸⁸ The camera zooms in on Philomena's face and she leans over by the elderly Nun's face and the viewer can sense the heightened emotions. Sister Hildegard looks back at her in a sincere way with a slight smile. The Nun clearly welcomes the closeness and anticipates what Philomena will say next.⁴⁸⁹ In fact, in the next poignant scene, Philomena realizes that she will not get this opportunity to tell the elderly Nun that she forgives her. She has traveled from America to Ireland for the second time and this is an efficient path to self-actualization.⁴⁹⁰

As the film approaches its final few takes, Philomena actually takes control of the scene after Martin chastises Sister Hildegard and Sister Hildegard's facial expression is pensive and she considers what she has done. As noted theorist John Bargh muses, most of life is driven by automatic unconscious actions and, yet for Sister Hildegard, she

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

believes that she is in full control all of the time.⁴⁹¹ In fact, Sister Hildegard blurts out that only Christ can judge her actions and she does not apologize to Philomena.

Philomena is not deterred by her lack of remorse and expresses her forgiveness to the Nun. Martin yells out that he cannot believe that she forgives the Nun. Philomena said this is hard for me.⁴⁹² Finally, in the film entitled, *The Railway Man*, Eric Lomax is a happily married man who wrestles with his demons. He survived extreme forms of torture during the war and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. He experiences vivid nightmares about his time being savagely beaten in a war prisoner camp.⁴⁹³ Eric Lomax's friend from the war prisoner camp hangs himself on a bridge overpass in town. Lomax begins to experience feelings of hatred and confusion. He decides to track down the man who tortured them in the camps. He travels back to the site of the camp which is now a museum and religious shrine. One of the soldiers is curator of the museum and they recognize one another.

In one memorable scene, Lomax confronts him and attempts to harm him until he becomes aware that this is not the right thing to do. He leaves him tied up in a prisoner cage but does not shed any of his blood.⁴⁹⁴ Lomax's anger changes into thoughtful reflection and the two men begin exchanging letters. According to theorist John Bargh, humans tend to be prone to distraction and boredom, automatic thinking processes free people from their limited conscious.⁴⁹⁵ And it is the more limited aspects of the person's conscious that suffer from inattention and the boredom that may lead to unethical conduct.

⁴⁹¹ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 10-12.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 7-11.

Lomax and his wife discuss the idea of taking a trip back there together to meet the soldier again. Lomax writes a long letter with the intention of giving it to the soldier in person.⁴⁹⁶ Lomax decides to return to the camp in order to forgive the soldier in-person. He is on the journey to self-actualization and in consultation with his wife decides to present the offer of forgiveness in-person. The two men meet face to face and they hug in a moving scene in the film.⁴⁹⁷ Eric Lomax is able to control the events and sets the pace for what will occur as each scene unfolds. It is clear to the viewers that the soldier seeks forgiveness as he slowly and somewhat awkwardly edges over to the place where Eric Lomax is standing outside of the camp. Hence, as a self-actualized person, the thoughts and the inclination to perform with integrity are automatic and therefore simply happen. Lomax is able to transcend the torture from the past and see the soldier for the man that he is today. He has dedicated his life to educating the public about the horrors of war and has converted the camp into a museum.⁴⁹⁸ These loving acts serve as a remembrance and a form of dedication to the soldiers from the war camp.

In short, Yang Mija, Felix Bush, Philomena Lee, and Eric Lomax rely on cognitive processes that Bargh terms as: awareness, intentionality, efficiency, and controllability. These cognitive processes enable these forgiving cinematic characters to move through the grief cycle. They all experience high levels of personal growth as a result. The high level that is necessary to reach Maslow's self-actualization which is a form of happiness and contentment with life.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

Now, it is time to move to the concluding remarks that will summarize the main ideas of the dissertation. The following conclusions are drawn from the research and films. The concluding ideas reflect what is expected regarding cinematic avenging characters and cinematic forgiving characters in terms of their respective inclinations. The characters choose different paths which adds to the interest of the scenes presented on film. Interestingly, the cinematic avenging characters and cinematic forgiving characters each face the same range of human emotions.

CONCLUSION

Cinematic characters accept themselves only after forgiving their wrongdoers and themselves in the process to attain self-actualization. These films are spiritual and there seems to be some communion with spirituality as the characters frantically struggle to reach a pinnacle and carry out what they need in their lives. *Poetry's* Yang Mija, *Get Low's* Felix Bush, *Philomena's* Philomena Lee and *The Railway Man's* Eric Lomax, overcome their adversity through forgiveness in accordance with high growth and personal development. While, Jimmy Markum, Dr. Fowler, Tom Craven, and Erica Bain are stalled in the middle of the grief stages and their inabilities to accept themselves makes them bitter.

Jimmy Markum, Dr. Fowler, Tom Craven, and Erica Bain do not have a lot of family involvement with their respective bereavement processes and they do not seek support from spiritual teachings. Therefore, the stage is set that these films are not spiritual since they showcase the darker side of humanity. For example, Jimmy Markum has the most interactions between his immediate and his extended families.⁴⁹⁹ Jimmy's father-in-law tries to persuade him to focus on taking care of his immediate family rather than pursuing his own justice-making.⁵⁰⁰ Yet, his father-in-law does not ever suggest that Jimmy forgive and forget. Jimmy's wife does not encourage him to speak with a pastor

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

and her words encourage his violent solutions which are against spiritual teachings and codified laws.⁵⁰¹

Meanwhile, Dr. Fowler has the least familial interactions and he derives no support from any extended family members.⁵⁰² Modernly, this attitude and widespread refusal to confront death continues to persist in films and within American culture. As Psychiatrist Therese Rando suggests, people tend to think that death is not natural.⁵⁰³ Most people turn to a religious establishment for counseling, as Rando muses, because they want comfort from the fear connected to death. Yet, Tom Craven meets with a priest in church and does not ask for help and guidance from the religious leader. The spiritual leader tries in earnest to get Tom to sit and pray with him. In short, the prayer would be a request for stillness and tranquility for him and his daughter Emma. Rather, in the scene profiled in this dissertation, Tom boldly informs the priest about his quest for vengeance.

Nevertheless, the pious priest advises Tom that he will surely burn in hell if he commits cold blooded murder. However, Tom Craven cannot be deterred from his violent plan since he does not fear the divine or care what happens to his soul in the afterlife, so to speak. The priest makes an attempt to bring Tom Craven into reconciliation and this is flatly rejected because Tom only seeks violence as a grief strategy. Surely, the viewer is left to wonder why Tom goes to the church at all and this issue is left largely unresolved.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

Clearly, the church visit represents the chance to seek self-actualization and to abandon the plot to enact vengeance. Unfortunately, Tom just embraces violence and rejects peace and self-development in favor of some form of self-loathing.⁵⁰⁴ People may try to ignore that life, just like the grief cycle is a cycle with a clear beginning, middle, and an end. It is unclear exactly whether Tom just wants to die too. These vengeance thrillers tend to feature characters that experience these self-deceptive thought patterns which occur over and over in each violent character. Therefore, the plots reinforce what many think they already know about death and the grief process.

Furthermore, noted psychologist Therese Rando describes losses as either normative or formative.⁵⁰⁵ Normative loss includes a child leaving for college and formative losses feature some untimely death.⁵⁰⁶ Truly, the losses that all of these cinematic characters experience will fall into the category of formative losses. These types of losses threaten existence and impact identities making them more likely to induce anxiety. In this instance, bereaved cinematic characters deal with major life altering losses without spiritual help and guidance from sacred passages that lead to forgiveness and peacefulness. In short, as the grief cycle process stalls, Jimmy Markum, Dr. Fowler, Erica Bain, and Tom Craven resort to violence.

⁵⁰⁴ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

Chapter two explores the cinematic avengers' violent acts as the notion to forgive never enters their minds. For Jimmy Markum, Dr. Fowler, Erica Bain, and Tom Craven vengeful acts do not lead to self-actualization. The compelling desire to perpetrate violent acts against others is indicative of low self-esteem which also translates into low self-respect. A high self-worth correlates with a foundation for appreciating and loving others. In short, Jimmy Markum lacks respect and enjoyment for who he is and can only give the world his unfulfilled needs.⁵⁰⁷ These characters never forgive their transgressors inconsistent with sacred teachings and fail to experience the peacefulness and self-actualization that the characters: Felix Bush, Philomena Lee, Eric Lomax, and Yang Mija in Chapter five do. The viewers learn that Jimmy Markum allows his grief to take over and his dark side appears. Markum and his cohorts experience a fleeting pleasure as he stabs Dave to death.⁵⁰⁸ And this temporary feeling of relief is taken away since Jimmy stabs the wrong man and realizes that Katie's killer is still at large.⁵⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the violence that Dr. Fowler inflicts on Richard Strout provides a kind of contractual relationship with the average American spectator, due to this nation's violent history.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

While, Dr. Fowler is an avenger that expects to return the harms but this path of violence inconsistent with sacred teachings creates a rift between him and society.⁵¹¹ Consequently, the greater his anguish, the more delightful is the spectacle knowing the returning violence will be equally excessive and it serves to merely satisfy an audience that is blood thirsty.

The violence that Dr. Matt Fowler inflicts on Richard Strout is purposeful and shows more restraint than any of the four cinematic avengers.⁵¹² The other three avengers are all excessive in their respective approaches to killing. Matt Fowler's vigilante acts are less gory than Jimmy Markum's evil plan. Interestingly, each cinematic avenger benefits from some form of help from another person that is loosely connected. Jimmy Markum is encouraged by his cohorts from his old crime days.⁵¹³ Dr. Matt Fowler's best friend helps him carry Richard Strout's body to the river. Yet, at no time does anyone connected with the main avenging characters encourage the avengers to seek out help or turn to their spirituality during their respective times of crisis. In sum, these cinematic characters reveal insight into why bereaved people carry out violent acts and how this is not a cathartic means to overcome grief.⁵¹⁴ For these cinematic avenging characters, violence is the path to a life of darkness.

⁵¹¹ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁵¹⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 11.

In short, they will be brought to justice and will suffer in prison. These perceived injustices are related to law enforcement procedures and a legal system that is even slower because criminal investigations must be fair and accurate. Jimmy Markum's violent acts target the wrong man.⁵¹⁵ The filmmakers eloquently depict how law enforcement officials are able to put all the pieces together and to solve Katie's murder.⁵¹⁶ In the end, the law which is consistent with communal values triumphs as the paramount and most effective means to achieve justice.

Dr. Matt Fowler is denied lawful justice for the murder of his son. Dr. Fowler decides it is necessary to kill Richard Strout because he cannot endure a lengthy trial that may not even bode well.⁵¹⁷ These cinematic avengers choose their own brand of justice in order to punish the wrongdoers. They commit violent acts but fail to ever reach the grief cycle's pinnacle which is resiliency. The unfortunate consequence is that these cinematic avengers also become the wrongdoers that commit evil. They are stuck and must live with the guilt that results from their actions. The punishment and guilt are decided by peers from the community rather than by a biased individual. When the legal system fails individuals they withdraw from the social contract and this consequence fractures the moral fabric of society at a sad time when people need to commune with the divine.

⁵¹⁵ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

Chapter five profiles how four cinematic characters: Yang Mija, Felix Bush, Richard Lomax, and Philomena Lee use forgiveness as a tool to reach self-actualization. Psychologist Nathaniel Brandon advises that there are six pillars of self-esteem.⁵¹⁸ High levels of self-esteem are essential to reaching Maslow's self-actualization since self-esteem is just below self-actualization on the pyramid.

The two concepts are inextricably tied together and cannot be separated in the self-actualized person. For example, Yang Mija is faced with a tough choice regarding her grandson and she determines that he must be held accountable for his despicable crimes.⁵¹⁹ Surely, it is the morally upright thing to do and in this case, she has to turn him over to the authorities. Also, the film does not explore what evidence, if any, the police have since the viewers just know that the boys commit the crimes. However, it does appear that Agnes jumps from the bridge rather than any other suspicious details surrounding her death. In other words, it is never suggested that she might be a murder victim because she threatens to expose the boys which might serve as an interesting plot twist. Of course, the audience is free to speculate about the exact nature and details about exactly how Agnes ends up floating in that river face down.

⁵¹⁸ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 11-14.

⁵¹⁹ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

Certainly, the cinematic forgiving characters exhibit high levels of self-esteem which enables them to do what most people cannot do. Sadly, some people are not able to forgive others who hurt them even for relatively minor infractions. In this dissertation, the cinematic forgivers depict loving acts of forgiveness since each character faces a unique challenge that he or she chooses to overcome. The lessons in forgiveness are most poignantly demonstrated through Felix Bush, the cinematic forgiving character.

First, the power of forgiveness is available to those who ask for it and Felix Bush does.⁵²⁰ Felix Bush demonstrates that self-forgiveness is a core component in human growth and development.⁵²¹ Second, it is not an easy thing to do and there is a lot of work that the self-actualizer must do in order to reach forgiveness. Third, it may also start with a having a healthy sense of who a person is and exhibiting kindness inward. Understandably, throughout the film, Felix Bush has to learn to raise his self-esteem as he finally stops blaming himself for Mary Lee's death.⁵²² Lastly, many people are very hard on themselves which appears to damage their self-esteem. Toward the end of the film , Felix Bush asks for forgiveness from Mattie, Mary Lee's sister, as he strives for greater self-acceptance.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

Felix Bush and Yang Mija, in particular, find it difficult to forgive themselves which may be the toughest thing to do since they are hard on themselves. Similarly, Yang Mija also struggles with self-acceptance in the early scenes in the film.⁵²⁴ She seems to hold herself responsible for her grandson's criminal actions during the early film clips but this issue quickly subsides.⁵²⁵ Her path to self-actualization begins when Yang Mija develops a plan to make everything right.⁵²⁶ Surely, her self-esteem level is raised especially after she sees Agnes' mother and she acts in an ethical manner.⁵²⁷ Hence, Yang Mija does not ever try to convince Agnes' mother to accept a bribe to cover up her daughter's rape.⁵²⁸

Henceforth, Felix Bush and Yang Mija do not engage in acts of self-sabotage like the cinematic avengers who have self-esteem do. Hence, the fact remains that self-esteem is a basic need that contributes to the ability to function properly. Therefore, problems with self-esteem will disrupt the proper functionality that hinders the life process. Also, another sign that Eric Lomax is a self-actualized person is that he does not express any need to perceive his Japanese captors as inferior to him.⁵²⁹ Interestingly, this form of ethnocentricity or any hints at racism is not in the book or in the film based on his life.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁴ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

According to psychologist Nathaniel Brandon, one sign of a person with low self-esteem includes the need to put another group down as inferior.⁵³¹ Further, as a self-actualized person, Eric Lomax does not fear condemnation which would lead him to act in ways that would actually bring about such disapproval in his life.⁵³² As Nathaniel Brandon advises when a person acts primarily out of fear, then the fear may help to bring about the thing the person dreads.⁵³³ It is a cause and effect type of problem that may stem from some paranoid feelings that are real or imagined.

Consequently, this high level of fear which is a main part of what the cinematic avengers experience also contributes to an impaired ability to live. The impaired ability to function remains until the self-esteem level is raised.⁵³⁴ In this case, prior to his forgiving act of love, Eric Lomax suffers from the war time flashbacks.⁵³⁵ In fact, his marriage falters since his wife cannot handle his fits of rage and fear.⁵³⁶ However, once he starts down the path of forgiveness and begins to exchange letters with his captor, his life immediately improves. In short, his basic need of reasonably high self-esteem is achieved through his letting go of the pain and resentment. Clearly, his ability to function is no longer impaired and his high self-esteem ultimately will ensure his survival.

⁵³¹ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 14-18.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 18-21.

⁵³⁵ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

In fact, he is restored and is able to enjoy happiness and a successful marriage.⁵³⁷ Likewise, Philomena Lee clearly enjoys happiness and tranquility in her life as well due to her high self-esteem level. Again, these two cinematic forgiving characters are actually real life people who survive painful loss and are both able to reach self-actualization. According to psychologist Nathaniel Brandon, low self-esteem can lead to suicide, drug overdose, and reckless driving.⁵³⁸ The thoughts that a person has will impact the self-esteem level and therefore the chance to reach self-actualization. Moreover, theorist John Bargh argues that thinking processes are usually automatic and that means that they just happen.⁵³⁹ A person's ethics can play a role in determining which thoughts will be followed and when. Therefore, it is in this very sense that actions just happen and ethical conduct is not thought about but simply carried out.

Violent or forgiving acts simply happen whether the thoughts are pre-meditated or not. For example, Philomena Lee immediately, almost without thinking gestures to grant forgiveness to Sister Hildegard.⁵⁴⁰ It is dependent on self-esteem levels which can help or hinder individuals on their paths in life. Self-awareness and living in a conscious way leads to higher levels of self-esteem.⁵⁴¹ Hence, true self-awareness requires thinking

⁵³⁷ The Railway Man, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁵³⁸ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 7-10.

⁵³⁹ John Bargh, *Automaticity in Social Cognition* (New Jersey: Erlbaum Press), 4-6.

⁵⁴⁰ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁵⁴¹ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 14-16.

about responses rather than merely reacting to adversity in negative ways. Self-awareness means that the person chooses happiness rather than simply being right about issues.⁵⁴²

Certainly, people with high levels of self-esteem are able to think about problems and to develop creative solutions because these people already tend to have high levels of creativity. According to psychologist Nathaniel Brandon, motivated people continue to work on themselves and to make improvements in their attitudes.⁵⁴³

On the one hand, the scenes from the films show that each cinematic forgiving character handles adversity in more positive and constructive ways. Thus, self-actualizers or cinematic forgivers respond to emotional and societal problems better than cinematic avengers. For example, Eric Lomax experiences transformational healing from his post traumatic stress disorder symptoms once he articulates the words of forgiveness to his captor from the war camp.⁵⁴⁴ In a real sense, it is like Eric Lomax is set free from the memory of the painful events that once held him captive in the form of tormenting nightmares and flashbacks.⁵⁴⁵ Lomax endures horrific forms of torture including water boarding and random beatings and yet, he is able to forgive his captor.⁵⁴⁶ The cinematic forgiving characters exhibit positive thinking and act like they know instinctively that their circumstances will improve. It could be that life experience has taught them this important and vital lesson.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 19-22.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

On the other hand, it appears that somehow by analogy their lives do get better as they experience peacefulness as the films progress. Meanwhile, the cinematic avenger will face justice for the murders that he or she commits in response to the event that produces the loss. Clearly, self-actualizers will respond to issues rather than react to them.⁵⁴⁷ It certainly appears to be true that if a person lacks self-love then it will be impossible to love others.⁵⁴⁸ In summary, the proclivity toward violence is increased in such cases whereby there is no self-love.⁵⁴⁹ In this case, the cinematic avenger does not feel lovable and therefore cannot accept love from others. Sadly, this cinematic avenging character acts like someone who has a cold heart with a compulsion to kill others. It is hard to imagine that Dr. Matt Fowler journeys from a successful member of the community into a pre-meditated killer who plans out a kidnapping and cold-blooded murder.⁵⁵⁰

As the revenge film progresses, this character transforms into the same type of cold hearted killer who shoots his son.⁵⁵¹ This cinematic avenging character sinks down to the level of the initial perpetrator Richard Strout as they both exhibit low self-esteem. Likewise, Erica Bain changes from a successful upper middle-class radio host into a night stalker who stands ready to kill anyone that she considers to be a thug.⁵⁵² The viewers

⁵⁴⁷ Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396.

⁵⁴⁸ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 11-14.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

⁵⁵⁰ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

are expected to believe that this make sense because she acts out of fear.⁵⁵³ And her fear is so intense that her behavior completely alters her life. Erica Bain changes into a killer who can never go back to living any semblance of a normal life again.

Erica Bain's violent acts reflect her low self-esteem level and lack of self-love which occurs after the first act in the film when her fiancé is murdered. Similarly, Tom Craven starts out as a savvy police detective with street smarts and a strong interest in serving justice.⁵⁵⁴ Meanwhile, his daughter's violent murder alters him and he becomes judge, jury, and executioner for the executives at Northmoor.⁵⁵⁵ In fact, all of the cinematic avengers continue to experience poor relationships with the people in their lives. These cinematic avenging characters' worlds are dominated by darkness and a marked lack of self-acceptance. The viewing audience can see that the characters live with an almost secret fear that they are destined only for pain. In short, they do not expect that anything good will happen to them. They are not optimistic about their futures and do not reveal any fears regarding how their lives will progress over time.

Hence, it is the particular loss in each of their lives that sets them up to carry out unlawful and violent acts that will land them all in prison. The message to the viewers is that these cinematic avengers possess low self-esteem levels. In fact, they know they are doomed and behave accordingly as they appear to take more risks than the average person. Additionally, there is never any moment, in any of the four films profiled, when the cinematic avenging characters express any regret for their actions.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

Also, they do not appear to have any fear of the criminal justice system and what their futures will be once they are caught. The Directors chooses to end the films prior to any resolution and the viewers are left to make assumptions about their futures. The scenes that are mentioned in the chapters of this dissertation relative to the cinematic avengers highlight the problems that lead to violent acts. This dissertation reflects examples whereby all of these actions take place within the eight films. Meanwhile, the scenes selected are deliberate and represent a fairly broad range of responses and reactions to the adverse events within these diverse plots. The plots and the characters are all different within the eight films but the specific motivations for the spectrum of their behaviors is not the same. The scenes profiled in this dissertation relate to the key moments on film when the character experiences some type of breakthrough that is adjudged to be either good or bad.

Interestingly, each script is different for all eight films and the circumstances are all diverse. The cinematic characters' integrity or lack of integrity is discoverable and makes the research worth doing. Surely, it is interesting to consider what motivates these characters to act in violent versus forgiving ways. The films are used here as a didactic tool to provide insight into human behavior. Certainly, it is the far reaching goal to prevent future violent conduct and to promote forgiving actions and the attainment of self-actualization.

In fact, some of the films are based on events that happen in real life which makes these cinematic characters even more relevant and compelling for this type of study. It is important to break down the films into two sections that feature characters who are forgiving and characters who are avenging. And the role of self-esteem is vital to securing an understanding about why the characters behave in the manner that they do. While, these films serve as entertainment for the viewing audience, they can also teach the viewers about the human condition. Certainly, those with high levels of self-esteem can also get knocked down by traumatic life events but they are more likely to pick themselves up, according to psychologist Nathaniel Brandon.⁵⁵⁶ The cinematic forgiving characters rarely brag or boast in their respective films which is a sign of high self-esteem. The cinematic avengers would often boast and describe their bad deeds and this just reinforces their low self-esteem level.

Cinematic forgivers do not try to prove their value to others by comparing themselves to some unknown standard. They are not arrogant and do not have any need to feel superior to others as Nathaniel Brandon points out.⁵⁵⁷ Cinematic forgivers are driven by joy rather fear in the film clips sampled in this dissertation. It is a sharp distinction such as this one that separates the forgiver from the avenger. The reason that this study is important is because self-esteem is vital and a person simply cannot live without it.

⁵⁵⁶ Nathaniel Brandon, *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 18-20.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

Truly, it is the developed self that is strongly aware and is working toward a life that is more fulfilling and joyful. In short, the cinematic forgivers appear to have lives that are more desirable to live than the cinematic avengers who are alone except for Matt Fowler who is married to Ruth.⁵⁵⁸ Interestingly, the eight cinematic characters featured here share the characteristic of loneliness to some extent. On the one hand, for the cinematic forgivers, the lonely times allow them to reflect and to meditate about their lifetime goals. Their actions focus on positive action that correlate with high self-esteem that eventually leads them to self-actualization through forgiving acts.

The scenes from the films that star cinematic forgivers feature times when the characters experience long periods of solitude. For example, Yang Mija spends time alone outdoors writing poetry.⁵⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Felix Bush is alone in his barn where he tends to his animals and constructs his coffin.⁵⁶⁰ Also, Philomena Lee attends church services and walks around as a hobby prior to travelling to America to find her son.⁵⁶¹ Finally, Eric Lomax tends to be alone in the beginning of the film when he experiences his bouts with post- traumatic stress disorder.⁵⁶² Toward the end of the film, Lomax is always in a scene with his wife who is his dearest companion and friend.

⁵⁵⁸ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

⁵⁵⁹ *Poetry*, directed by Lee Chang-Dong (2011; Seoul, Korea: Kino Home Video, 2012), DVD.

⁵⁶⁰ *Get Low*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; New York, NY: Sony Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁵⁶¹ *Philomena*, directed by Aaron Schneider (2010; London, UK: Pathe Home Video, 2011), DVD.

⁵⁶² *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitsky (2014; London, UK: Lionsgate Home Video, 2015), DVD.

On the other hand, for the cinematic avengers, the lonely times allow them to increase their obsessional and paranoid thoughts. The viewer sees how the character transforms from a normal or hum drum existence into a character who exacts violence without any provocation. For example, Jimmy Markum spends time in his house planning how he will find Katie's killer as he figures out whom to recruit for the job.⁵⁶³ Meanwhile, Dr. Matt Fowler works outside near the boat as he deliberates the best way to kidnap and murder Richard Strout.⁵⁶⁴ Also, Tom Craven is alone in his house as he imagines the ghost of his beloved daughter. She tells him to exact vengeance in his thoughts and in his imagination.⁵⁶⁵ Further, Erica Bain spends time alone in her apartment whereby she sulks and draws the blinds. Later on in the film, she walks the night streets all alone with a firearm. She imagines that thugs are out to harm her when she is walking at night.⁵⁶⁶ In short, Erica Bain looks for a fight.

The grief responses chronicled relate to a spectrum of behavior that may be adjudged as desirable or undesirable. Certainly, the need to follow and abide by the law makes unprovoked violent acts unlawful and therefore undesirable. The cinematic avenging characters present a glamorous approach to suffering that is unrealistic.

⁵⁶³ *Mystic River*, directed by Clint Eastwood (2003; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

⁵⁶⁴ *In the Bedroom*, directed by Todd Field, (2001; Burbank, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2003), DVD.

⁵⁶⁵ *Edge of Darkness*, directed by Martin Campbell (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

⁵⁶⁶ *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009), DVD.

Meanwhile, the forgiving characters suffer in large amounts but they are able to safely overcome the obstacles to a better life which is actually more stable.

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VITA

Full name: Renee Ann Pistone

Place and date of birth: Jersey City, NJ 12/19/1971

Parents Name: Raymond and Barbara Pistone

Educational Institutions:

<u>School</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date</u>
Secondary:	West Essex, Essex Fells, NJ,	H. S. Diploma	06/10/89
Collegiate:	Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ,	BA	05/10/94
Graduate:	University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA,	MA	05/10/96
	Drew University, Madison, NJ,	D. Litt	05/16/16

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Renee Pistone_____