

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This research comprehensively analyses how Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief theory manifests in the characters of Shang-Chi and Xu Wenwu in the film "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" (2021), utilizing a literary psychology approach and Roland Barthes' semiotics. The main findings reveal striking differences in the grief journeys of the two characters, which significantly shape their individual character development and the overall narrative arc of the film.

Shang-Chi demonstrates a transformative and adaptive grief journey, successfully navigating all five stages: **Denial:** Shang-Chi initially denies his true identity and traumatic past by creating a new persona ("Shaun") and avoiding family discussions. This denial, though painful, serves as a temporary defense mechanism allowing him to distance himself from the source of his trauma. **Anger:** His anger manifests through intense physical actions and deep resentment towards his father's cruel upbringing. This anger, though explosive, often serves as a catharsis and a catalyst for positive change, transforming his rage into a disciplined force. **Bargaining:** Shang-Chi's bargaining stage is more internal, evident in his attempts to mediate conflict with his father and deep regrets over "what if" scenarios. This reflects a sincere desire to prevent further tragedy or rectify past mistakes. **Depression:** His depression manifests as profound sadness and despair, particularly when confronted with the overwhelming burden of his past and the impending conflict with his father. This period of introspection allows for deeper processing of his pain, becoming a crucial phase in his healing process. **Acceptance:** Shang-Chi achieves holistic and transformative acceptance, integrating his grief into his identity and embracing his family's heritage. This is demonstrated by his acknowledgment of his full name, his use of the Ten Rings for good, and his strengthened bond with Xialing, signifying true emotional maturity and inner peace.

In contrast, Xu Wenwu's grief journey is a tragic tale of stagnation, destructive delusion, and self-annihilation. He fails to process the loss of his wife, Ying Li, and remains trapped in relentless obsession: **Denial:** Wenwu's denial is destructive and obsessive, rejecting the reality of Li's death and clinging to the delusion that his wife is still alive and calling to him from the Dark Gate. This denial is not about escaping reality, but rather about manipulating and imposing his desired reality.

**Anger:** His anger is vengeful, uncontrollable, and profoundly destructive, evident in his brutal massacre of the Iron Gang and his aggression towards Shang-Chi and Xialing. His anger is the primary driving force behind his destructive actions, blinding him to the suffering of others.

**Bargaining:** Wenwu's entire pursuit to open the Dark Gate can be interpreted as a misguided and manipulative act of bargaining. He believes that by fulfilling the "condition" of opening the gate, he can "negotiate" with fate to bring Li back, even if it means sacrificing entire worlds.

**Depression:** Wenwu's depression is often masked by his burning anger and powerful delusions. Fleeting moments of profound sadness and despair only briefly surface when the harsh reality of Li's absence momentarily penetrates his delusion, only to be immediately suppressed. His obsession serves as a destructive form of escape from his depression. **Acceptance:** Wenwu only achieves a brief and profoundly tragic moment of acceptance in his very final moments, when he passes the Ten Rings to Shang-Chi. This is an acceptance of his fate, not an acceptance that leads to healing or a new beginning, underscoring the irreversible consequences of his prolonged denial and destructive path.

Overall, the film effectively utilizes its intrinsic elements (characterization, plot, and setting) and Barthes' semiotics to vividly depict these two vastly different grief trajectories. This underscores that while grief is an inevitable and universal human experience, the manner in which individuals confront and navigate it fundamentally determines the ultimate outcome of their emotional journey.

Based on the findings of this research, several suggestions can be proposed for future studies and a broader understanding of grief representation in fictional narratives: **Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis:** Future research could expand this analysis by comparing the representation of grief in films from different cultures. This could reveal how cultural norms and myths influence the manifestation and resolution of grief, offering richer insights into the universality and specificity of human experience. **Focus on Supporting Characters:** While this research focused on Shang-Chi and Wenwu, supporting characters like Xialing also experience significant loss. Further studies could explore their grief journeys, providing a more holistic understanding of family dynamics and the collective impact of trauma. **Impact of Music and Sound Design:** Music and sound design play a crucial role in shaping the emotional atmosphere of a film. Future research could analyze how these auditory elements contribute to the portrayal of

grief stages, enriching the semiotic analysis by considering the aural dimension. **Longitudinal Studies in Serial Narratives:** Given the cyclical nature of grief hinted at in previous studies (e.g., Wanda Maximoff), future research could analyze how characters in serial narratives (TV series, film franchises) experience grief repeatedly or in non-linear patterns. This could provide insights into the resilience and complexity of long-term grief processes. **Application of Other Psychological Theories:** While the Kübler-Ross model is highly relevant, future research could apply other psychological theories (e.g., attachment theory, trauma theory, or positive psychology) to analyze grief experiences in fictional narratives, offering diverse perspectives and interpretations. By pursuing these avenues of research, we can continue to deepen our understanding of how art, particularly film, serves as a mirror to human psychological experiences, providing value

