

Movie Analysis: The Fault in Our Stars

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“Pain demands to be felt” (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). Hazel Grace Lancaster was diagnosed with stage 4 thyroid cancer with metastasis forming in her lungs when she was 13. Her lungs would fill with fluid at times making it extremely painful and difficult to breathe. She kept it under control with a fictional drug called Phalanxifor. Hazels mother believing Hazel might be depressed as a side effect of cancer should go to a support group. When in fact depression, as Hazel said, was a side effect of dying.

After a few sessions in the church basement support group “in the heart of Jesus” she meets a boy named Augustus Waters (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). Augustus Waters was at the support group not because of his previous touch of Osteosarcoma which left him without a leg but to instead support his friend Isaac. Isaac who had retinal blastoma which would soon leave him blind. Augustus Waters only fear was oblivion. Hazel believed if oblivion scares you, you should ignore it. Whoever knew Augustus Waters knew he was determined to live an extraordinary life one that is “on a roller coaster that only goes up my friend” (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). Augustus wanted to be remembered after death. After their discussion and encounter at the support group, you begin to see their relationship develop. Augustus loved to look at beautiful things like Hazel and live in the moment. As a part of trying to live in the moment, he loved having, a cigarette between his teeth. He would never light it meaning he would never giving it the ability to kill him. Augustus waters was confident and knew he had a hamartia just like Hazel. He knew death was inevitable.

As time passes Hazel Grace as Augustus likes to call her starts spending time together, texting, talking on the phone and even switching books to read. Hazels favorite book is *An Imperial Infliction* by Peter Van Housing. A book about cancer which Augustus learns to love after he reads. Hazel has written to Peter Van Housing many times but never received a response

but leave it up to Augustus who found a way. After contacting Van Housing, he extended the message if they were ever to find themselves in Amsterdam they should visit. At first, the idea sounded magical to Hazel, but it was a trip her mother reminded her they could not afford.

Augustus being the boy he was used his saved wish from what he calls the Genie Foundation to go to Amsterdam with Hazel and her mother to meet Peter Van Housing. He told Hazel his plan during a picnic at Funky Bones art installation which has children use large skeleton benches as a playground. This is something that caught my attention. Children were being exposed to the theme of life and death in an artistic manner of a Skelton and associated with it in a positive and child like demeanor since it is in a park setting. Art is all about perception just like death.

Challenges presented themselves as Hazel got sick once more and doctors refused to let her go on the trip. This is something I understood because after being so ill Hazel it would be a risk for infection or fluid buildup on the plane. She would need an onsite oncologist as well as equipment. Her mother then gave Hazel the news that they figured it out with her doctors and she could go. If I were Hazel's mother I would want her to live her dream, but I would have had my reservations as she was very ill, and death could always be a possibility. The possibility of death should not stop Hazel from living and it did not. Despite the challenges, Augustus kept trying to make sure Hazel was living her life.

Augustus Waters was falling in love with Hazel Grace and decided to tell her on the trip while at dinner. She reminded him to tread carefully as they had discussed previously they were better off as friends. Augustus wanted to protect Hazel Grace from the world by giving her a different perspective on death altogether. She believed in God but not necessarily in an afterlife, but he believed in it all. Death is not perceived the same way by all individuals. Death is different depending on culture, religion, and tradition. Death is a delicate and complicated topic

which they treated like didn't completely matter. Being present mattered to them more not the fact that they both went to a Christian church but believed in different afterlives.

Augustus challenged Hazel, respected her and though she was "What else? She is so beautiful. You don't get tired of looking at her. You never worry if she is smarter than you: You know she is. She is funny without ever being mean" (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014).

Augustus and Hazel became boyfriend and girlfriend on the trip. Hazel and Augustus were friends at first because Hazel didn't want to break his heart if she were to pass which is understandable from my viewpoint. Hazel was one who accepted her fate but felt the constant need to remind others especially her mother that her time is limited. Hazel wanted her mother to continue living life after she passes. She did not want her to become depressed, stay home and isolate herself from the world. This was a big fear of Hazels. She didn't want the decline of her health and impending death result in negative family coping. Hazel was pleasantly surprised when her mother said she would be devastated when she dies but wants to help other families. She was going to school secretly to peruse counseling for families.

That was how Hazels mother planned on coping with the loss of a child. "Coping is defined as - conscious volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances" (Dunn, 2012). She was using what she was feeling as a mother to help her cope, become and advocate in helping other mothers and families who are in the same circumstances. According to *Changes in parents after the death of a child from cancer* "Parents and siblings identified two major categories of change experienced by bereaved parents. These changes occurred in their personal lives (e.g., emotions, perspectives and priorities, physical state, work habits, coping/behaviors, spiritual beliefs, and feeling something is missing) and relationships." The first time Hazel almost died at 13 no one

could have consoled Hazel's mother. Hazel remembers the moment where she told her it was ok to let go while following it by crying hysterically into her husband's arms saying she wasn't going to be a mother anymore. With time her mother's perception of death changed. She knows that Hazel will always be her daughter, she will still be a mother and death does not change that.

Once they arrived in Amsterdam they quickly realized that Peter Van Housing was not what they had expected as he was a drunk who didn't want Hazel or Augustus in his home, to begin with. They later discovered his assistant extended the invitation. Van Housing who was inebriated told Hazel after refusing to answer her questions about the book said as he referred to her cancer "You are a side effect of an evolutionary process that cares little for individual lives. You are a failed experiment in mutation" (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). Hazel was furious as was Augustus. The assistant later tried to make it up to Hazel and Augustus. Little did Hazel or Augustus know that Peter Van Housing was affected by the death of his six-year-old daughter from cancer. He was a parent coping and self-medicating the only way he knew how. When parents lose a child, their loss can make others uncomfortable because they can struggle to find peace or happiness. That is what I feel happened with Van Housing at the time of the Hazel and Augustus meeting. He was too far gone, and no one could have helped him at that moment especially not knowing what he had been through himself. The loss of a child and its circumstance impacts a family for a lifetime (Von, Otto, Hechler, Metzinger, Wolfe, & Zernikow, & 2012). The loss of a child makes parents vulnerable and more likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. "PTSD symptoms include feelings of detachment and estrangement from others and a restricted range of affect, typically described as an inability to experience affection towards others, as well as irritability and anger, and physiological hyperarousal and intrusive thoughts that can interfere with cognitive ability and executive functioning" (Dunn,

2012). When individuals or parents like Van housing experience PTSD and drink as a result of it coping becomes extremely difficult as they can have issues with emotion regulation and expression (Dunn, 2012). They don't always know how to confront the stressors associated with death or do not want to confront the stressor.

Some ways that can help with the coping of the loss of a child could be talking about your loved one, talking about the death, helping others who are dealing with loss, and making the most of the life you have. When speaking to an adult who has lost a child it is important to keep in mind what it is like speaking to children as it is similar to how you would help an adult. When talking about the death, we must be there for them, be honest, talk slowly, identify feelings, encourage expression, provide policy and offer support (Kastenbaum, & 2018).

As the trip was ending Augustus told Hazel that his scans lit up like a Christmas tree. The cancer was back in his chest, left hip, liver and anywhere else she could think of. He didn't want it to ruin their trip, but he had to tell her because he found out before going to Amsterdam. She was heartbroken but was not leaving his side. Once they were back home one night in the middle of the night, Augustus calls Hazel, and he is at a gas station and doesn't know what's wrong with him. She rushes over to where Augustus is in the car, and he is sweating, with an infection, lips turning blue, and saliva dripping from his mouth. He wanted a new pack of cigarettes because he misplaced his. Saying he will never forgive her for calling an ambulance or his mother. She does it anyway. Those calls saved his life for a few more weeks. Despite the challenges, Hazel kept trying to make sure Augustus had a chance to live his life.

A week and a day before Augustus Waters dies he decides he wanted to attend his own funeral before it occurs where he had Isaac and Hazel Grace speak. He wanted to see what kind of mark he left on their lives which he enjoyed being a part of. Hazels parents get a phone call in

the middle night and without her parents saying a word her parents walked in and Hazel instinctively knew Augustus has passed. she was heartbroken, but she was his girlfriend who knew joy because of him. She rated the pain as a 10 when the highest she ever rated pain in the hospital was a 9.

Hazel coped with the death of Augustus by changing the eulogy the way she did, placing a pack of cigarettes on his casket, correcting the priest by saying she was his girlfriend and by reading the eulogy he left for her. She also did what any teenager would do by becoming upset and crying. When Hazel was called a friend by the priest she used selective attention. Selective attention is when “the individual is not “in denial,” but simply directing his or her attention to whatever seems most novel or salient in the immediate situation” (Kastenbaum, & 2018, p.25). When she gave his eulogy, she coped by using selective response (Kastenbaum, & 2018, p.25). She knew that in that time and place she should not be expressing her emotions how she would in front of Augustus but in a respectful and understanding way his family would understand.

Hazel grace demonstrated her developmental understanding of death when she decides to start living her life instead of reading *An Imperial Affliction* over and over and barely eating. She begins to understand that death is a way for us to value and cherish what we have in this life. Hazel grace demonstrated her developmental understanding of death again when at his pre-funeral she says, “Without pain, we would not know joy” (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). Hazel grace demonstrated her developmental understanding of death for the third time when she says, “Funerals are not for the dead they are for the living” (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014). She followed by changing her eulogy to what Augustus family and friends needed to hear not what Augustus need to hear.

Instead of ignoring death they both challenged it head-on with each other. As you know, Hazel wrote a eulogy for Augustus, but he went back to writing to Peter Van Housing asking for his help to write Hazel's eulogy. "See, the thing is...we all wanna be remembered. But Hazel's different. Hazel knows the truth. She didn't want a million admirers, she just wanted one. And she got it. Maybe she wasn't loved widely, but she was loved deeply. And isn't that more than most of us get?" (Boone, Godfrey, & Bowen, 2014)

In conclusion, everyone has different views and perceptions about death based on their circumstances. That is what I took after analyzing the relationship between Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters including protective/positive factors and challenges, examining ways in which Hazel's mother copes with Hazel's inevitable death, demonstrating the understanding of Hazel's developmental understanding of death and describing some best practices on coping with the loss of a child. Everyone deals differently when faced with life and death challenges. Like Mr. Van Housing a parent can cope by relying on a vice as they stop living their life or cope like Hazel's mom and become an advocate. Both styles of parents are or will be overcome with unimaginable grief. After watching *The Fault in Our Stars* for the first time and reflecting I feel like it is a story about how confronting death as your living can make your life full in a different capacity. Knowing what Augustus and Hazel know they still fell in love and Augustus wanted to fulfill the dreams he and Hazel had. I also loved the contrast between Hazel and Augustus. They were so different, but his love for her helped her understand that a short life can be a meaningful life.

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