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## Heart Hurts from Higgig

by Nia Pettway

As times of life change and we transition into new events, I can't help feeling melancholy about what I am leaving behind in the wake of the new era I am stepping into. Through the drastic changes of college life, getting jobs, and moving on to being more mature and secure, people tend to change and become lost in the confusion of life. Following this change can bring about an influx of changes in the relationships that we hold dear, how we communicate, and the mindset we may take when interacting with others. The secure grasp that was once on life has suddenly slipped away with the changing times, and with it, the comfort, and often the people that came with the past. This dismal phenomenon comes about so frequently, yet naturally, oftentimes without us even noticing; having a word for this would help to better connect us with the specific feeling. I propose a neologism be created so that this feeling can be expressed beneficially in numerous ways.

### **Origins and Meaning**

“Higgs”: a word that describes the fear of losing someone or something that you find comfort in (Ocean). This puts a word to the feeling that precedes the often sorrowful change that may come about that distances you from the person or thing you once found immense enjoyment in. The word “higgs,” in this context, is the namesake of a 2016 Frank Ocean song that describes the feelings of abandonment that occurs at the end of a relationship when the person you love leaves you and how it parallels the feeling of mother and son (Ocean). Upon research of this

mysterious song title, I found no connections to the song. All references to the word “higgs” centered around the term “higgs boson” which, in short, is a particle action that gives mass to elementary particles (Barney and Goldfarb). To put it more simply, it is what fulfills the very content of the particles necessary for the existence of matter. In poetic, metaphorical contexts, the things and people we find comfort in help to fulfill us in life and give a sense of “matter.” From here on, there will be a focus on how specifically people we find comfort in can cause us to fear their departure. I describe “higgs” as: someone you may have spoken to every day and found immense comfort in; an old toy that you cherish; home videos of your family; or old pictures that fill you with a sense of warm nostalgia – all of these suddenly feeling like lost grains of sand slipping between your fingertips and the sense of loneliness that follows.

### **Contemporary Higgs**

*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, written in 1964, is a children’s book that tells the story of a growing boy and a tree. This piece of literature beautifully captures a metaphorical perspective of a bond resembling a mother and a son; it depicts the tree as a feminine figure who loves and cares for the boy at all costs, as well as the roller coaster she experiences as she watches him grow less dependent on her. The tree’s heartache is expressed as readers watch the boy change; her love for the boy creates a fear that causes her to act desperately whenever he does return (Silverstein). This shows a form of “higgs” that may be overlooked: the change in a child-parent relationship that comes as the child grows older. Silverstein illustrates, “But time went by. And the boy grew older. And the tree was often alone. Then one day the boy came to the tree and the tree said, ‘Come, Boy, come and climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and eat apples and play in my shade and be happy.’ ‘I am too big to climb and play... I

want to buy things and have fun. I want money" (Silverstein). As things change for the boy, the needs and wishes of his mother figure change as well, thus making the tree nostalgic for the time he was young, yearning for the boy to stay as he provides her happiness, fulfillment, and comfort.

Though a change in the manner of one's relationships can be presented in both positive and negative connotations, it often does not come without fear and nostalgia for the present that currently exists. For example, the song "White," sung by Frank Ocean in the group Odd Future, illustrates the feeling of fear of a changing time as the singer is pondering death and the fleeting nature of the present. He sings, "but I'll forget twenty-three like I forget seventeen. And I forget my first love like you forget a daydream. And what of all my wild friends, and the times I've had with them? We'll all fade to grey soon, on the TV station" (Odd Future). While current realities are cherished, the knowledge it is all destined to fade away one day challenges his preparation for the future ahead.

In addition to the soulful, melancholy vocals, Ocean utilizes metaphors to contrast past and present as if he is already experiencing the nostalgia he alludes to. The song muses, "I've slept in the darkness, it was lonely, and it was silent. What is this love? I don't feel the same. Don't believe what this is could be given a name" (Odd Future). This illustrates the change in reality for him where his cherished friends are no longer around to fulfill him and the imminent change that must come about. This brings a change in one's sense of security, completely altering their grasp on the relationships they once were so sure about and coveted. Just imagine the emptiness that must follow a sudden feeling of seclusion from someone you once were so connected to.

The feeling of loneliness and distance from those cherished has been elevated thanks to COVID-19 and the accompanying quarantine. With the safety-induced isolation, there dawned a new era where communication had to rapidly evolve, thus changing the way we spoke to others, and subsequently how often that took place as well. Face-to-face conversation became texts, social media shares, and the occasional Facetime call. School became Zoom meetings, and the large group of friends you hung out with every day became your parents, siblings, and the four walls of your home. This solitude coined the redefinition of life as we know it, in addition to our drastically-changed relationships. New “higgs” were easily brought about here as the communicative shift makes a lack of intimate communication with a friend a common occurrence. This sudden deprivation of social interaction would come with symptoms of loneliness, anxiety, and depression that would come to affect around a total of 41.5 percent of children tested within the first month of quarantine (Kluger 64). The effects of isolation took a toll on the interpersonal relationships and well-being of the subjects after the appearance of COVID-19, creating more “higgs” in its wake.

### **Amendment**

The feeling of “higgs” manifests in many forms and contexts, from describing a parent and child to a now-distant friend, even to a relationship. The concern of losing someone you find comfort in is an issue that many may encounter at some point in their life and that anyone can face. Putting a word to this phenomenon allows one to properly express how they feel. In doing so, we can propose a better understanding of ourselves as well as our interpersonal relationships to cope with the changing world around us.

As fear of changing relationships and loneliness persists, we can further address what is felt and how to amend the pain experienced in its wake. The feelings of loneliness and anxiety that may come about following “higgs” can alter one’s perception of social ability, making them feel helpless and awkward compared to normal encounters. The perception that one you love is moving beyond your reach can feel isolating; however, Olivia Laing describes intimacy as the best method to resolve this. Through intimate bonds and connections, we can bridge the gap that makes us feel separated from those we cherish. Rather than dwell on the feelings of detachment one has, instead we can treasure the intimate interactions and the time we still have with whomever we find comfort and happiness in (Laing). While fostering intimate bonds may not be an option in every situation, it can prove helpful to reassure and create a better understanding between whoever has a “higg” and who they “higg” for.

What I believe is the most important solution to the anxiety, fear, and loneliness that comes with “higgs” is introspection or self-reflection. Having self-reflective habits and tendencies helps one take a step back and look at the meaning of what is surrounding you as well as your own emotions. Introspection is a practice very common in self-actualization and many philosophical contexts due to its capacity for us to better understand our emotions and open our minds to better comprehend the world around us. Researchers also posit that introspection through the process of self-reflection helps with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and improvement of self-image (Ardelt and Grunwald, 189). To truly understand the root of our attachments may be the best way to ease the fear of losing what we are attached to; we may find that it comes from a place of love and appreciation after all. As the eloquent character Winnie the

Pooh once put it, “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard” (Milne).

### **The Takeaway**

The neologism “higgs” can become part of the solution. In having a word to describe this feeling, we may better reflect on our feelings on the matter and choose to take action more constructively. Through introspection, there can be a necessary change in action that rivals the immediate response of withdrawal and sadness that comes about with the establishment of a “higg.” Instead, we may choose to seek out more intimate interactions with the person we “higg” for and become more aware of the comfort we find in the relationship.

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