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MASTER THESIS

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The Portrayal of Psychological Disorders in
The Butterfly Effect (2004)

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Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my family for their endless love, support and encouragement throughout my pursuit for education. I hope this achievement will fulfill the dream they envisioned for me. I would like also to dedicate this work to my close friends and my lovely team in b.e.s.t club for their help, love and support.

Abstract

This dissertation tackles the portrayal of the psychological disorders in the film *The Butterfly Effect*. This particular film was employed for it portrays trauma and its relation psychological disorders. In other words, trauma and its manifestation is illustrated in the film. Hence, it is the ideal piece for this study. The main purpose of the study is to investigate and identify the psychological disorders in *The Butterfly Effect*. That is to say, this work attempts to investigate the manifestation of trauma in the film. It also seeks to identify the way characters coped with their pasts. Each characters reacted differently to the same traumatic events. Therefore, this works pursues to recognize the way trauma is unique. To reach this aim, the psychoanalytic approach was implemented to seek the reason or reasons that made the characters respond in certain way. Chaos theory was implemented to show the complexity of the plot in relation the characters' situations and past. This dissertation divulges that trauma is unique in the sense that each character in the film has a different reaction to the same traumatic events. In other words, the characters manifest different responses and ways to cope with their troubled past.

Key words: Trauma, Psychological disorders, The Butterfly Effect, Depression, PTSD.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الرسالة تصوير الاضطرابات النفسية في فيلم *The Butterfly Effect* (4002). تم استخدام هذا

الفيلم بالذات لأنه يصور الصدمة والاضطرابات النفسية المرتبطة بها. بمعنى آخر ، الصدمة ومظاهرها

موضحة في الفيلم. وبالتالي ، فهي القطعة المثالية لهذه الدراسة. الغرض الرئيسي من الدراسة هو التحقيق

والتعرف على الاضطرابات النفسية في تأثير الفراشة. وهذا يعني أن هذا العمل يحاول التحقيق في مظاهر

الصدمة في الفيلم. كما يسعى إلى تحديد الطريقة التي تعاملت بها الشخصيات مع ماضيها. تفاعلت كل شخصية

بشكل مختلف مع نفس الأحداث المؤلمة. لذلك ، يسعى هذا العمل إلى التعرف على الطريقة التي تكون بها

الصدمة فريدة من نوعها. للوصول إلى هذا الهدف ، تم تنفيذ نهج التحليل النفسي للبحث عن السبب أو الأسباب

التي جعلت الشخصيات تستجيب بطريقة معينة. تم تطبيق نظرية الفوضى لإظهار مدى تعقيد الحبكة فيما يتعلق

بمواقف الشخصيات والماضي. تكشف هذه الأطروحة أن الصدمة فريدة من نوعها بمعنى أن كل شخصية في

الفيلم لها رد فعل مختلف على نفس الأحداث المؤلمة. بعبارة أخرى ، تُظهر الشخصيات استجابات مختلفة

وطفقًا للتعامل مع ماضيهم المضطرب.

المفردات : صدمة. أمراض نفسية. تأثير الفراشة. اكتئاب. اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
iv	
المخلص	iv
Table of Contents	v
General Introduction	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Background: Psychoanalysis, Trauma, and Chaos Theory	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2. Definition of psychology	5
1.3. Definition of Psychological Trauma	6
1.4. Definition of Psychological Disorders	7
<i>1.4.1. Dissociative Identity Disorder</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>1.4.2. Definition of PTSD</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>1.4.3. Major Depressive Disorder</i>	<i>11</i>
1.5. Freud's Psychoanalysis	12
<i>1.5.1. Freud and the Mind</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.5.2. Freud's Theory of Personality</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.5.3. Defense Mechanisms</i>	<i>15</i>

General Introduction

The cornerstones of psychology are the examination of the mind and its influence on the body. To illustrate, psychologists are intrigued by the way the mind functions and interacts with other organs. They are also fascinated with the relationship between human behavior and the mind. That is to say, they seek to understand what motivates humans to behave in certain ways in particular situations. In the past, psychology was a part of philosophy. Currently, however, it is considered a scientific field that contains several branches. In other words, psychology is an umbrella that comprises other branches that focus on biology, cognition, and experiments. Psychologists attempted to uncover how the interactions between the mind and the body impact each other through various experiments. Psychologists conduct research that relies on scientific methods, such as observations, experiments, and tests. Through this particular field, psychologists aim to heal numerous problems, such as mental, physical, and even social defects. They also endeavor to examine and identify the elements that are unique to each individual by concentrating on interactions and behaviors.

Psychology seeks to treat psychological disorders. However, the task was rather arduous. Psychologists have attempted to ease the impact of mental problems such as depression. However, they faced obstacles in doing so because human psychological experiences are complicated. The problem arises when psychologists attempt to anticipate human behavior in certain situations by understanding the reasons behind them. The mind, however, works differently for each individual. In other words, the equation to predict behavior requires variables, but those variables are never stable. Thus, predicting behavior is a difficult task. For example, it is almost impossible to predict the behavior of a person with depression because the symptoms each individual experiences vary from others. Also, multiple factors influence human behavior. That is to say, external and internal factors such as

abuse, depression, and poverty affect behavior. Furthermore, the unconscious also impacts behavior, which makes understanding the causes that reflect on the behavior even more impossible to determine.

Psychological trauma is one of the most complicated areas of psychology. Trauma is commonly seen as a harmful event that causes damage to the human psyche. Stressful or painful experiences impact individuals on various levels. That is to say, people who endure difficult situations like sexual or physical abuse often suffer psychological damage, which has a tremendous impact on the individual. Due to traumatic events, many people end up processing complex emotions. Trauma evokes emotions of hopelessness, betrayal, fear, and confusion. These sentiments manifest differently, while others are universal. In other words, traumatized people react differently to trauma. In some cases, these people develop unique responses to traumatic events.

These events that people endure can manifest in various problems of cognition, emotion, and behavior. In other words, witnessing a violent event may lead to diverse issues.

Said issues could be detected through the alteration of behavior, cognition, and emotion.

These changes represent some symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. That is to say, people with depression or PTSD often exhibit these symptoms along with an alteration in behavior, which includes self-injury, substance abuse, and instability. To illustrate, individuals with depression battle with negative thoughts and emotions that, in some cases, resort to harming themselves or accepting abuse because they believe they deserve it. Also, professionals in mental health emphasized the relationship between traumatic events and psychological disorders.

Statement of the Problem

Trauma has a significant impact on the individual's psyche. It is a threat to life and mental and physical health. It also distorts the image and views one has of the world. Basic

assumptions will be eliminated due to traumatic events. Thus, the life they had will be destroyed, and their connection to the environment will be severed. Hence, this work attempts to investigate the manifestation of traumatic events in the film *The Butterfly Effect* of 2004.

Research Questions

In light of the above mentioned contextualization the present thesis aims at investigating the following research question:

How are psychological disorders portrayed in *The Butterfly Effect* (2004)?

This is going to be undertaken through the exploration of the following sub questions:

- How do the main characters react to trauma?
- How are psychological disorders represented in the film?
- How do the characters cope with their past?

Aims of the Study

Trauma in the film *The Butterfly Effect* is a dominant theme. The film depicts traumatic events and their impact on the psyche and the lives of the characters. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to address the portrayal of psychological disorders in the film. Moreover, this research investigates the manifestation of traumatic events in the movie. That is to say, the researcher will explore the characters' reactions to trauma. Also, the researcher will analyze the impact of trauma on the lives of the characters. In other words, this work will focus on altering the mind as well as life. In this sense, the researcher will endeavor to identify the ways the characters coped with their past.

Research Methodology

The research that is going to be conducted is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical in the sense that the collected passages, which are related to trauma and psychological disorders, will be described and examined. Since this research is based on a qualitative approach, the

data is collected through the examination of books, documents, and journals. In other words, data is gathered through the analysis of secondary sources and primary sources if they are found. This dissertation aims at identifying the psychological disorder in the film. Thus, the psychoanalytical approach is used to investigate the manifestations of trauma. In other words, the psychoanalytic theory assists the researcher in investigating and explaining the impact of trauma on the characters. Hence, it sheds light on the manifestation of said trauma. Chaos theory is implemented to demonstrate the complexity of the plot in relation to the characters' situations and past. That is to say, this theory allows the researcher to trace back the traumatic events the characters endured and attempt to find the ways in which the characters coped with said events.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis contains two chapters: a general introduction and a general conclusion. The general conclusion provides a broad idea and introduces the topic. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework. It provides background on the topic and provides the information needed for the analysis. The second chapter offers a thorough and detailed analysis of the film titled *The Butterfly Effect* (2004). The general conclusion grants answers to the problem presented in this thesis.

Chapter One Theoretical Background: Psychoanalysis, Trauma, and Chaos Theory

1.1 Introduction

The human psyche has a fragile nature that is often undermined by violent and painful events. These events can alter the human mind. That is to say, traumatic events can change the function of the brain. To illustrate, many people who suffered traumatic experiences ended up having emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems. Hence, it fails to regulate the emotions of an individual, for instance. Also, traumatic events can alter human behavior. Many traumatic individuals developed violent or aggressive natures after surviving traumatic events. Others withdrew from society and alienated themselves so that they would not be reminded of what occurred. The response to traumatic events is unpredictable. In other words, traumatic people do have the same reactions to the same traumatic events. Therefore, this chapter will provide theoretical background research as well as detailed descriptions of certain psychological disorders.

1.2 Definition of psychology

Psychology is the academic discipline that confounds the examination of the mind. Psychologists tend to focus on understanding consciousness, behavior, perception, and motivation. They also examine the connections between the mind and other aspects of human life. For example, they scrutinize the relationship between biology and the mind. That is to say, psychologists endeavor to inspect the influence the nervous system has on the mind. Moreover, psychologists analyze human cognitive processes and attempt to uncover the aspects which contribute to the variations of personalities in individuals. Also, they explore human behavior in social settings to identify the way the brain acts in specific situations (Matsumoto 411).

1.3 Definition of Psychological Trauma

In the APA Dictionary of Psychology, the term 'trauma' refers to painful and disturbing events that might evoke extreme fear and confusion, a sense of hopelessness, and detachment. Trauma can also result from other upsetting emotions that harm the individual in the long run. Traumatic experiences can be caused by other individuals, like rape, abuse, murder...etc, or they can be the result of natural disasters (VandenBos1104).In other words, trauma refers to violent or painful experiences that have a long-lasting impact on individuals in the sense that it would impact their behavior, Identity, or psyche. Said events could cause intense emotions that might psychologically overwhelm the individual.

The definition of trauma is difficult to pinpoint. In relation to psychology, however, the term indicates the hardships that individuals endure in their lives and their impact. People who are traumatized often have stressors that are physical, psychological, or both. For example, psychological and physical stressors appear in the cases of soldiers who suffer traumatic brain injuries and psychological shock. Many traumatized individuals do not have physical stressors. Nonetheless, the effect of their trauma is not less significant on the body of the victim (Reyes et al. 657).

During stressful events, people experience psychological trauma because their defense system is stunned by complex emotions. That is to say, in dangerous situations where the body and mind of the individual are compromised, said individual suffers from psychological trauma when this particular defense system cannot cope with the event that occurred (Figley 489). Traumatic events are not processed in the same way. Each individual reacts and responds to trauma in a distinct way. That is to say, it is impossible to predict a specific response to a specific trauma, for there are multiple factors that alter from a person to another. These factors vary from genetics to family dynamics. Thus, trauma is exclusive to each person. Moreover, the impact of traumatic events could manifest years after the initial

experience. For example, a veteran, who was traumatized in a war, may startle each time he hears a loud noise coming from a car (Levine 15). In other words, the emotion evoked by a violent event might surface years later due to certain stressors that sparked memories that tormented the sufferer.

1.4 Definition of Psychological Disorders

Psychological disorders refer to any disruption in the cognitive, emotional, behavioral patterns of an individual. In other words, any abnormalities that impact the mind, emotions, and behavior are associated with psychological disorders. Also, psychological disorders cannot be solely attributed to the circumstances, in which a person with psychological disorder was brought up. There are several aspects that must be taken into consideration. Said aspects can be genetic, chemical, psychological, or social (VandenBos 639). According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5)*, psychological disorders are:

Syndrome[s] characterized by clinically significant disturbance[s] in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. (qtd in. Seefeldt 3-4)

Psychological disorders occur when the psychological, biological, and developmental processes that contribute to mental functioning are impaired. These malfunctions manifest in a disruption of cognition, emotion, or behavior. People who have psychological disorders are often stressed and unable to function in social or other important settings.

1.4.1 Dissociative Identity Disorder

In the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Dissociative Identity Disorder is listed within the category of dissociative disorders. Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is also known as alternative identities. Individuals with DID have two or more separate identities. More often than not, DID patients have a primary identity and secondary ones. The original identity of a person with DID uses the name attributed to the person at birth. The primary identity is known to be passive, reliant on others, guilty, and desolate. Individuals with DID tend to create other identities that are different from their primary one. Unlike people with DID, others who do not have psychological disorders tend to have one specific identity. Individuals, who do not have Dissociative Identity Disorder, might undergo vacillations in the way they see and feel about themselves. Nonetheless, they are aware that they are a person with a single identity instead of a plural. Also, the personalities of DID patients are distinct in the sense that each identity has its self-perception, attitude...etc. The person with DID does not control who controls his behavior. In other words, the transition between these distinct identities occurs suddenly. Hence, the individual's behavior would shift according to the Identity, which is in control (Figley 215). The National Alliance on Mental Health provided a clear explanation for Dissociative Identity Disorder:

The different identities, referred to as alters, may exhibit differences in speech, mannerisms, attitudes, thoughts, and gender orientation. The alters may even differ in "physical" properties such as allergies, right-or-left handedness, or the need for eyeglass prescriptions. These differences between alters are often quite striking. (qtd in. Doctor and Shiromoto 27)

The identities of a person with DID are separate, unique, and independent. Each one of the identities can develop its own exclusive characteristics, such as different writing styles

and accents. They could also vary in age and gender and have entirely different histories. Dissociative Identity Disorder has been linked to childhood trauma. According to the studies conducted in both Western and Non-Western societies, the percentage of adults and children with DID who experienced traumatic events during childhood is approximately between 85% and 97% (Rayes et al. 225). In other words, this psychological disorder is linked to traumatic events during childhood.

One of the most significant symptoms of Dissociative Identity Disorder is Dissociative Amnesia which is categorized as a separate disorder and a symptom of DID. Dissociative amnesia refers to the memory loss of important information. Many people with dissociative amnesia describe that usually, some gaps in their memory occur. That is to say, these individuals are often unable to have full recollections of memories. This type of memory loss is caused by abuse, severe stress, or traumatic events. In other words, the gap occurs right after a traumatic incident, for instance. It was also reported that some people with dissociative amnesia might fail to recall their own inflicted self-harm, like suicide and self-mutilation. Also, there are other significant symptoms of Dissociative Identity Disorder, such as confusion, emotional distress, and mild depression (Thackery and Harris 323).

1.4.2 Definition of PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when a person undergoes severe traumatic experience. That is to say, post-traumatic stress disorder is a reaction to a violent or painful event that a person witnessed or experienced, such as the death of a loved one. Furthermore, if there were reminders or stressors of said traumatic experiences, traumatized individuals will likely feel distraught when said stressors are triggered. Moreover, people with PTSD often emotionally and mentally withdraw from others or simply the world. They might struggle

sleeping or have anger issues (Joseph and Regel 8). In other words, post-traumatic stress disorder is caused by a:

serious threat to one's life or physical integrity; serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being, seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence. (qtd. in Gold 18)

In 1980, Post-traumatic stress disorder was added to the list of psychological disorders in the third publication of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the *American Psychiatric Association*. At the time, the symptoms of PTSD were restricted to veterans and rape victims. Later on, however, they extended to adult civilians. Various studies were conducted concerning PTSD and children. However, it was until 2000 that the fourth revised version of the DSM attempted to provide two criteria that would help diagnose children with PTSD. The first one maintained that the person with PTSD had to have witnessed, or experienced a severe traumatic event. This particular trauma could range from threats to one's life, serious injuries, or even witnessing the death of a person. The second criterion mandated that the individual's response to said events should include intense emotions. In other words, the violent event would have to elicit an emotional response. The individual would be overwhelmed with fear, hopelessness or shock. The manifestation of these emotions in children could be noted in disorganization or agitation (Ardino 1-2).

The symptoms of PTSD would rouse after a traumatic event. These symptoms could impact the psychological, physiological, and behavioral levels of the person who experienced trauma. That is to say, these symptoms may alter the psychology, physiology, or the behavior of the traumatic person. For instance, a traumatic person, who was outgoing and friendly, might alienate himself and avoid people after a traumatic experience (Wilson and Keane 11).

Symptoms of PTSD are important indicators of the mental health of traumatized people. Individuals with PTSD often experience three main symptoms: (1) Re-experiencing symptoms; (2) Avoidance and numbing symptoms; and (3) hyper arousal symptoms (Kase and Ledley 16).

People who suffer from PTSD often re-experience or re-live their trauma. To illustrate, they might have flashbacks of certain moments that would leave them disoriented. These flashbacks often carry a sensory medium like smell, taste, or even the initial emotions the person experienced during his trauma. People who re-experience a traumatic event might be able to detect the scent of the tormentor through a certain flashback. Also, PTSD patients tend to avoid certain people, places, objects, or situations that are related to the trauma. This avoidance can result in isolation or detachment. On rare occasions, people with post-traumatic stress disorder experience sudden panic or develop startle responses because of an external trigger that is linked to their trauma (Joseph and Regel 8-9).

1.4.3 Major Depressive Disorder

Generally speaking, depression refers to a state of mood in which the person who suffers from depression is passive, dependent, sad, and no longer has an interest in activities that usually amuse him. In his book, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, David Matsumoto defined depression as, "a state of mind characterized by negative mood, low energy, loss of interest in usual activities, pessimism, unrealistically negative thoughts about self and the future, and social withdrawal" (175).

Depressive disorders, however, differ from normal depressive states in the sense that these disorders cause psychological malfunctions. A person who experiences normal depression might feel sadness, and fatigue for no longer than two weeks. Others with a major depressive disorder, which lasts longer than the normal range, might have problems sleeping and eating. They might also have intrusive and disturbing thoughts that lead to complex

emotions (Roেকেlein 137). In other words, a major depressive disorder would impact the person's attitude and mental health. People who struggle with major depressive disorders might not be able to perform mental processes. Also, feeling unhappy on occasion is quite normal. However, when these depressive emotions dominate and control the life of a person causing mental and physical confusion, it becomes known as major depressive disorder (Thackery and Harris 291).

1.5 Freud's Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a theory that investigates the way the mind performs. It is also considered a method that helps the securitization and identification of the component of the mind. This theory is also a form of therapy that is employed to make the necessary changes to said components to ensure a happy life. Psychoanalysis highlights the importance of the unconscious mental process and defenses. This particular theory endeavors to understand the personality of the individual according to his childhood experiences (Kenny 1).

1.5.1 Freud and the Mind

To understand the mind, Freud illustrated an image of an iceberg. The conscious mind is located at the tip of the said iceberg. In other words, the part that is above the water. This part of the mind is aware of thoughts, feelings, memories...etc. The conscious is the part which facilitates communication with the outside world. The subconscious is located under the conscious mind. This particular part stores the memories and perceptions that are accessible to the conscious mind. In other words, when these memories are needed, the conscious mind could easily retrieve them. The unconsciousness, which is considered one of the most significant elements in the mind, contains all the components that are not available to consciousness (Sibi 76).

According to Tyson, unconsciousness is the storage of painful memories and the psychological wounds a person experiences. It is the part where the darkest part of the human

resides. It contains all the things a person does wish to know. In other words, the unconscious represents the area that hides our conflicts, painful memories, and dark wishes from all especially us. To Freud, unconsciousness is created out of repressed memories. Earlier in life, people repress certain memories from the conscious mind. That means that these memories are simply expelled from consciousness. The unpleasant and arduous experiences one might have are not erased. On the contrary, the consciousness gains power that would influence human behavior on current experiences. That is to say, individuals often act unconsciously in specific situations. For instance, some individuals might avoid certain pets unconsciously because of a repressed painful memory (12-13).

1.5.2 Freud's Theory of Personality

Freud divided the personality into three parts: the ego, the superego, and the id. He revised his ideas about the components of the mind, and replaced it with this theory (Schultz and Schultz 45).

The Id is one of the major components of the personality according to Freud because it is the place in which instincts, desires, and dreams dwell. That is to say, the id is the source of instinct and libido, which is the psychic energy that is generated from instincts. This part provides energy for the other two elements. This part of personality represents the unconscious level and it operates on the principle of pleasure because it is the prime source of instincts. That is to say, the id only seeks immediate pleasure. It seeks to gratify instincts and needs without any delay. The id is the selfish part of the personality which urges individuals to want what they want and urges them to have that without any thoughts of the consequences. The id is a primitive part that is completely ignorant of reality. To illustrate, a newborn cries whenever its needs are not fulfilled because the baby does not know how to fulfill them on his own. Similarly, the id is unable to satisfy its needs and desires. Thus, the id relies on reflex actions or creating imaginary or hallucinatory fantasies to fulfill its desires.

Freud Identified this process as the primary-process thought (Schultz and Schultz 45-46).

The ego represents the conscious part of the psyche. It is aware of thoughts, memories, and perceptions. Hence, it is responsible for the way we react and function. Also, the ego acts as a mediator between the id and the real world since the latter has no awareness of reality. The ego does not strive to prevent the id from satisfying its needs. However, it seeks to at least delay that gratification until it is obtained in a socially acceptable manner. Besides, the ego, like the id, seeks pleasure. Therefore, it endeavors to gratify its needs in logical ways. Thus, the ego utilizes realistic methods to achieve its goals. This part of the personality acts on reason and logic because it is responsible for the decision-making process. Furthermore, the concepts of right and wrong are meaningless for the ego, even though it takes into consideration what is acceptable in life before making a decision. To illustrate, the ego considers something good if it satisfied its and the id's desires. Moreover, the ego uses secondary process thinking, which is considered reasonable, and practical. All in all, the ego seeks to contain the id's impulses, for if it fails, the id would dominate the person's psyche (McLeod).

The last part of the personality that is acquired in childhood is the one that differentiates between right and wrong. It is the moral compass of the mind, which is ruled by morality. Freud called this part the superego. To him, the superego is a large component of unconsciousness that is usually developed at the age of five or six. At that age, this part of the personality is merely a representation of the parents who taught their child through encouragement and punishment. The sense of morality that characterizes the superego is created when parents teach their children what is good and bad. According to Freud, the superego is divided into a conscience and an ideal ego. To illustrate, the acts the children were punished for creating the conscience. Whereas, the ego ideal is formed by the actions the children were rewarded over. Through this method, the children would create sets of rules that

help them earn acceptance or rejection from their parents. Later on in life, the control of the parents is replaced by self-control when the children absorb those teaching. Thus, the person would reward or punish himself according to the rules he internalized. The superego seeks to achieve morality above all. In fact, it can be merciless to obtain this goal. It peruses no pleasure like the id or realistic ambition like the ego. Similarly, to the id, the superego does not compromise when aiming for moral excellence (Schultz and Schultz 47).

1.5.3 Defense Mechanisms

Freud identified several defense mechanisms in his theory of the mind. Defense mechanisms are the unconscious effort of the ego to protect its integrity against external threats such as traumatic events or internal ones. For instance, internal threats can surface when there is tension between the ego, the superego, and the Id. To illustrate, the ego constantly supervises the id, which seeks to fulfill its desires above all. The ego balances those desires using a defense mechanism. Also, the perpetual interaction between the ego and the superego is another reason for the ego to use those defenses. The superego constantly influences the ego since it urges the ego to achieve ideal moral decisions. Hence, emotions such as shame and guilt rise. The ego finds itself between the two conflicting sides whose demands often contradict. Consequently, it uses defense mechanisms (Waqas 1).

The mind, in difficult situations, attempts to block or seclude certain memories or ideas from the consciousness. These memories are not permanently removed. They are simply buried where the conscious mind cannot access them. In other words, when a person disassociates from a particular situation, the blocked memories will be locked away at the subconscious level. Consequently, said person might be able to recall what his mind blocked. To illustrate, the secluded part the mind sought to hide might rise to the conscious level spontaneously, or when the person is triggered to remember through an object or an event.

Also, it is worth noting that not all those who disassociate have psychological disorders (Thackery and Harris 320).

Repression is one of the most commonly used defense mechanisms. This defense mechanism refers to the unconscious extraction of disturbing or painful events that cause stress. In other words, repression is unconsciously forgetting something that has the power to disturb the psyche. Repression does not include memories alone. It encompasses events, people, human perception, and even physiological functions. Repression is rather difficult to reverse because the process began to protect the mind from a dangerous situation. For that repression to cease, the individual has to believe that the thought or the memory is longer dangerous. The problem with this is that the individual has to release the repressed memories to acknowledge whether they are still dangerous or not (Schultz and Schultz 49-50).

1.6. Chaos Theory

The assumptions of classical physics always assumed the predictability of the future according to the present. In other words, scientists of classical physics believed that the future was determined by the acts taken in the present. For them, the future is fixed and unchangeable. Therefore, if they comprehend the present accurately, they will ultimately gain knowledge of the future. That is to say, once they reach certain truths about the present, the future will be exposed to them (Faust et al. 14).

Through determinism, scientists made all kinds of perdition about the future or natural events such as the weather; for they believed that laws of physics were a tool that provided perfect predictions. However, that was far from the truth because it became apparent that nature is only deterministic but also unpredictable. In other words, the laws of physics did not guarantee perfect solutions or predictions. To illustrate, in the 1800s, Isaac Newton's law of motion was questioned. The king of Sweden at the time offered a reward to the one who can solve what was known at the time as the three-body problem. According to the laws of

Newton, if there was an interaction between two objects in the solar system, said laws will be able to provide the precise behavior of these objects. However, when the king of Sweden added another variable, which is a third body, to the equation, Newton's laws failed to predict the future of that system. In the mid- 20thcentury, a mathematician named Edward Lorenz discovered something of great importance as he was a model of the earth's weather. Lorenz used the same input for his experiment. Yet, each time he started the stimulation, new results would appear on the computer. As he checked his work, he found that he made a mistake which represented a single, small part in one million. Due to this experiment, he discovered chaos (Sutter).

Chaos theory is a scientific concept that was developed to study and investigate the behavior of non-linear systems. These systems are characterized by high sensitivity in the sense that any small changes might impact the entire system. In other words, the behavior of any system cannot be predicted, for each change would result in a different outcome (Mambrol). The theory of chaos is based on a principle called The Butterfly Effect. According to this theory, systems are complex and interconnected, and a tiny, insignificant event can have a tremendous impact on complex systems. That is to say, a small change in initial conditions would result in unpredictable results (Sinitsyn).

1.7 Conclusion

The mind is a complex structure that fascinates most psychologists. It is of great significance. Thus, said psychologists seek to discover what they can about it. They concentrate on understanding its influence on human behavior and other mental processes, such as emotional regulation. Regardless of the sophistication of this structure, the mind is rather fragile. More often than not, people experience violent or painful events that leave them in shock. The mind, in certain situations, fails to operate under stress. Thus, it becomes compromised. In other words, the mind gets overwhelmed by the severe emotions trauma

evokes. Therefore, in most cases, it fails to process and respond to that particular trauma. Also, violent and continued traumatic experiences often lead to various and serious psychological disorders that might leave some individuals unable to function properly. For that reason, psychologists seek to understand the impact of trauma on the mind to provide a sound treatment.

Chapter Two The Portrayal of Psychological Disorders in *The Butterfly Effect* 2004

2.1 Introduction

The *Butterfly Effect* is a complex film with an interesting plot. It discusses various themes. However, one of the essential notions, which is the focus of this work, is trauma. Traumatic events are repeated throughout the film. That is to say, each character struggles and endeavors to adapt on their own. They realistically paint their trauma and the way it shaped them. The film is the ideal piece that would aid the researcher to identify the character's response to their trauma. The research will concentrate on trauma and its impact on the characters. In other words, this work will examine and identify the psychological disorders depicted in the film.

2.2 An Overview of the Movie *The Butterfly Effect*

The film revolves around the character of Evan Terborn, who began to experience blackouts when he was a child. Due to these blackouts, he could not remember many significant events in his life because of his selective memory loss. In other words, Evan only forgot specific moments. Yet, no one seemed to explain what caused Evan's blackouts. Andrea Terborn, who was worried about her child, took Evan to see a specialist. The doctor explained that Evan's blackouts are likely to be associated with stress and the insecurity of not having a father figure in his life. Evan's life gets better after he moves away from his childhood house and friends. He did not have any blackouts for seven years. However, one day he stumbles upon the journals he wrote as a child to remember the events that occurred before and after his blackouts. Evan discovers a way to go back in time and alter the past by reading the journals he finds. As Evan travels to moments when he had blackouts, he uncovers the missing parts of his memories.

2.3 Trauma in *The Butterfly Effect*

The term trauma, in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, refers to any disturbing event or experience that evokes emotions of fear, hopelessness, anxiety, confusion, and disassociation. The term is also used to describe the long-term impact of these emotions on the individual. In other words, emotions that result from traumatic memories could overwhelm the individual and impact his life in the long-term (1104).

Trauma, in *the Butterfly Effect*, is a dominant part of the film because all the characters in the movie experience traumatic events in their lives, which would later shape them as individuals in the future. For instance, Evan, Kayleigh Miller, and her brother Tommy Miller are traumatized after Evan and Kayleigh are forced to participate in a pornographic film. Also, the Miller siblings are abused by their father sexually, physically, and emotionally, which impacts both of them as they grow. Evan suffers another trauma after his mother takes him to meet his father for the first time. To illustrate, the doctor believed that the protagonist's blackouts were related to a complex he developed because he lacks a father figure. Therefore, he suggests that Andrea take her son to meet his father. The meeting, however, turns out differently than anyone expected. Evan's father turns violent and attacks his son, attempting to kill him. Hence, the guards intervene and strike Jason in the head, killing him in the process, right in front of his child.

Trauma occurs again in the *Butterfly Effect* when the friends are thirteen. At the time, they were hanging out in the basement of the Miller household. Tommy decides that they should blow something up using a blockbuster he found stored in that basement. Thus, the group of friends chose a mailbox and elected Lenny Kagan, the fourth member of their group, to put it there. The group failed to think of the consequences of their actions when the owner of the house approached the mail box and died with her baby. Lenny suffered a severe shock that made his mother admit him to a psychiatric hospital. When Lenny gets out of the hospital,

Evan and Kayleigh decide to go check up on him and urge him to go with them to the forest, where they found Tommy attempting to burn Evan's dog. In order to save his dog, Evan attacks Tommy. Yet, he ended up beaten and has no memory of what occurred.

2.4 Psychological Disorders in *The Butterfly Effect*

2.4.1 Evan's Psychological disorder in *The Butterfly Effect*

In the film *The Butterfly Effect*, the protagonist clearly suffers from a psychological disorder. The blackouts he kept having during his childhood were not the result of any physical illness since he checked multiple times and the doctor cleared him. Therefore, the memory loss Evan suffered could only be attributed to a psychological illness. The plot of the movie is complex. Hence, identifying the problem with Evan's memory is quite challenging. In other words, there are multiple factors that should be taken into consideration while attempting to uncover the reason or reasons behind Evan's memory loss.

Repression is the unconscious effort that prevents individuals from becoming aware of distressing memories. That is to say, individuals, who experience painful memories, would unconsciously block those memories from rising to their consciousness (Boag).

Throughout the film, Evan endures numerous traumas from childhood. However, after said traumas occur, Evan seems to blackout what happened. For instance, when Evan visited his friend's house and was forced to partake in pornography, he blacked out the memory as he was standing in front of the camera. In other words, Evan repressed those memories because of the emotions that threatened to overwhelm him. As Evan blinked, he was confused as to what happened since he had no recollection of entering the house, "Where am I? What happened? Where did we all go? I was just somewhere else -- how did I get here?" (*The Butterfly Effect*, 07:46–1:59:38). Evan had no idea how he entered the house or what happened that caused Kayleigh to tremble. That was apparent in Evan's voice and facial expression as he sought answers.

The protagonist in *The Butterfly Effect* repressed his memories once again during the blockbuster scene. When Lenny put the blockbuster in the mailbox and the group waited for the explosion, Evan covered Kayleigh's ears so that she would not hear the sound. The next thing he knows, he is running in the forest while helping Tommy drag Lenny, who was paralyzed with shock. When Evan realizes that he lost his blackout once again, he loses his footing and falls down, making Lenny fall on top of him in the process. As he looks around dazed and frantic, Evan demands, "What happened?? Where are we?!" (*The Butterfly Effect* 13:35–1:59:38). Evan did not know what happened or the reason behind Lenny's state. He unconsciously blocks the memory of the explosion. Thus, he feels dread and confusion when he sees Lenny in the ambulance.

Repression occurs once again when Evan witnesses the death of his dog. When Lenny is discharged from the psychiatric hospital, Evan and Kayleigh visit him and ask him if he wants to go with them into the woods. As they pass a junk yard, they see smoke and run to discover the source. Evan finds that Tommy is about to burn his dog. Thus, he and Kayleigh ran to save the dog. However, Tommy hits his sister with a wooden plank unintentionally, and she ends up unconscious. Tommy blames Evan for what happened and hits him in the kneecap, leaving him on the floor. But when Tommy goes near the dog to light it on fire, Evan stands up and attacks him. Nonetheless, later on, Evan wakes up in an unfamiliar place with no recollection of what happened, even though he had witnessed Tommy.

According to Susan Reviere, Freud believes that the memories that are repressed do not vanish from the brain. That is to say, these memories are not lost, as they are blocked by the conscious mind. They could manifest or surf through dreams (9). After a traumatic experience, the brain preserves the events that occurred, but the psychological defense mechanisms intervene and stop that event from rising to the conscious level (Robichaud).

This is illustrated in a scene when Evan is twenty years old and in college. The protagonist brings a date to his dorm room, and then she starts looking around until she discovers his journals. Heidi asks Evan to read her something from the journal titled "Thirteen." As Evan begins to read, he realizes that it is a passage he wrote about his dog, Crockett.

It's like my mind refused to believe what it was seeing. Hearing Crockett make those awful screams... Just writing about it gives me the shivers It was like Tommy was possessed or something. There was a hate in his eyes that I couldn't really call human. (*The Butterfly Effect* 31:39-1: 59:38)

As the protagonist read that passage from his journals, he felt the world around him shift, and a second later, he was thirteen again. Evan looked around in confusion, asking what was going on. Tommy stood smiling as he hit Evan in the face with the wooden plank. At that moment, Lenny yelled that he could not undo the rope of the sack the dog was in. Enraged, Tommy looked at him straight and said, "Drop it or I'll slit your mother's throat in her sleep" (*The Butterfly Effect* 32:38–1: 59:38). Evan, who managed to hold Tommy's leg, yelled at Lenny to free the dog. Yet Lenny was frozen with a faraway gaze, as though he were no longer with them. Tommy proceeded to hit Evan when the latter was on the ground, then went to the dog and lit him on fire. The protagonist woke up to someone shaking him. As he looked around, Heidi claimed that he was dreaming, to which Evan replied, "It didn't feel like a dream" (*The Butterfly Effect* 33:13–59:38).

The dream the protagonist had was not a dream but a locked memory his brain repressed, for it was a painful event that would have impacted his life had he not repressed it. The brain locked away those memories to keep its integrity. In other words, Evan's traumatic memories are buried within his unconscious mind without his knowledge because his mind identified them as threats.

When Evan realized that he had found a way to uncover his blocked memories by traveling back in time, he attempted to go back to a specific memory. However, his roommate Thumper warned him and asserted that, "maybe there's a reason why you've repressed the one day when some old lecher had you in your tighty whities, dammit!" (*The Butterfly Effect* 43:49–1:59:38). Thumper believed that the blackouts Evan experienced were the result of repressed memories. He warned his friend against attempting to unearth those memories because there was a reason Evan's brain repressed them.

According to Robichaud, Evan repressed all the traumatic events he experienced in his life because he simply did not wish to relive them or deal with the overwhelming emotions that resulted from them. *The Butterfly Effect* illustrated repression in a somewhat realistic way. Yet, Robichaud maintains that there are few flaws when it comes to this defense mechanism. For instance, traveling into specific repressed memories and altering the past is not realistic. However, this flaw was significant, for the plot would not be the same without it. Also, another flaw can be traced to Evan's childhood, when he repressed memories that were not in any way traumatic. For instance, when Evan was a child, he drew a horrific image after his teacher asked the class to draw what they wanted to be in the future. He drew an image of himself holding a bloody knife and scattering bodies at his feet. For some reason, he blocked the memory of drawing that image. Also, Evan blocked the memory of holding a knife while in the kitchen. To illustrate, Andrea found her son holding a knife while he was motionless. However, when she asked him why he was holding it, he said that he had no idea how it got there.

In the movie, *The Butterfly Effect*, Evan has symptoms of Dissociative Identity disorder. That is to say, the blackouts are, in fact, dissociative amnesia. People who have this type of amnesia often forget past events, which is not the thoughtless forgetting that is normal. Like repression, dissociation is another defense mechanism the ego employs to protect itself.

This means that perhaps Evan did not repress his memories when he drew that horrendous image or when he held the knife without conscious effort. Dissociative amnesia could be the explanation for the flaws regarding repression that were found in the film. In other words, the mind does not repress memories that are not painful or traumatic, which happened in Evan's case. Also, during certain events, Evan always asked where he was or what had happened. This means that he does not know that he blacked out unless someone tells him. Furthermore, each time Evan travels back into the past, he alters it. Consequently, the future changes, and all individuals with it do too. In the alternate realities, the protagonist is a frat boy in college, a prisoner, and an amputee. Also, Evan goes back to the past to find himself in the moments he had forgotten. In the film, the psyche of the old Evan goes back to the past and exists within the young Evan. The main character, who is young Evan, is not aware of the presence of his older version, an entire different personality. The blackouts occur because the personality of old Evan takes over. Thus, young Evan has no recollection of what took place when old Evan was present. The characteristics of this disorder occur in *The Butterfly Effect*. To illustrate, individuals who have this disorder have more than two distinct personalities. They also experience amnesia, and that is portrayed in *The Butterfly Effect* ("Psychological Disorders in Movies").

The Butterfly Effect is a complex film, for it is difficult to pinpoint the reason behind Evan's blackouts. Dissociative identity disorder is related to childhood trauma. However, this particular movie alludes to the fact that whatever is wrong with Evan is hereditary. To illustrate, when Evan experienced his first blackout, his mother rushed him to the psychiatric hospital for scans, saying, "Just tell me he hasn't inherited his father's illness" (*The Butterfly Effect* 5:18–1:59:38). Andrea was anxious that her son would end up in a mental institution like his father. When the protagonist is a teenager, he discovers that both his father and grandfather had histories of mental illness. Evan exclaimed, "My grandfather went crazy too!"

(The Butterfly Effect, 16:25–1:59:38).

The complicated life Evan had prevents the viewer from determining the source from which the mental problems sprouted. The film shed light on the mental illness of Evan's father. Thus, it is possible that the protagonist inherited his father's illness. When Evan had a seizure, his mother instantly took him to the psychiatric hospital, where his father stayed while he was alive, for a test. The doctor maintains that Evan's scans were unusual. The protagonist if the test were similar to his father. The doctor could not refute that, "Actually, these tests weren't available twenty years ago" (*The Butterfly Effect 1:23:50–1: 59:38*). The doctor could not determine whether Evan had his father's condition or not. He explains that, "I've never seen anything like this. I've compared these to the ones taken last year, and there's evidence of severe hemorrhaging and massive neural reconstruction" (*The Butterfly Effect 1:22:40–1: 59:38*).

Andrea asked the doctor to explain Evan's condition, and her son declared, "He's saying it's like forty years worth of new memories have been jammed in my brain since last year. Overload city. 'Sat about the gist of it, doc?" (*The Butterfly Effect, 1:23:50–1: 59:38*). In other words, each time he altered the past, he would gain memories of every life he altered. Consequently, his brain stored memories that a normal individual would gain in forty years. Another scene in the film that alludes to Evan's mental illness being hereditary is when he goes back in time to ask for help from his father. When the protagonist demands that his father tell him how to fix what he did. Jason exclaims, "I was praying this curse would have ended with me" (*The Butterfly Effect 1:26:36–1:59:38*). This shows that Evan's father knew exactly what his son meant because he experienced the same thing. In other words, Jason believes that Evan inherited his condition. Nonetheless, there is no way to determine the cause of Evan's psychological disorder if we take into consideration all the factors that could have contributed to his mental problem.

2.4.2 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in *The Butterfly Effect*

Post-traumatic stress disorder can result from a horrific traumatic event, such as a near death experience or seeing the death of a particular person (Gold 18). In *The Butterfly Effect*, trauma is a dominant notion in the sense that all characters experienced some sort of traumatic event in their lives. *The Butterfly Effect* portrays the psychological disorder with which Lenny struggled. The traumatic event in the film left Lenny struggling with PTSD, and it was apparent that he was the one who was impacted the most by his traumatic childhood ("Psychological Analysis of *The Butterfly Effect*"). To illustrate, when Lenny was thirteen, his friends asked him to put a blockbuster in a mail box. Even though he hesitated at first, fearing for his life, he complied with the plan, and in the end, a woman and her baby were killed in the aftermath. As he witnessed that horrific event, Lenny suffered a traumatic shock that rendered him immobile. His friends had to literally drag him away from the scene of the incident. His body did not function on its own. Thus, when Evan lost his footing and fell down, Lenny fell down with him. He stayed on the ground until the others hauled him up. This character had to be hospitalized because of what he witnessed. His guilt also contributed to his state, for he was the one who put the blockbuster in the mailbox of the woman's residence.

Another incident that contributed to Lenny's trauma was killing Tommy. In an alternative reality, Evan goes back in time to save his dog. He finds himself with Kayleigh and Lenny near the junkyard. Without any explanation, Evan hands Lenny a sharp metal piece and asks him to "cut the rope" (*The Butterfly Effect* 1:21:13–1: 59:38) of the sack that contained the dog. However, Evan manages to talk Tommy into letting his dog go. He argues that if Tommy kills Crockett, he will end up locked away and leave his sister alone with their abusive father. Just as Tommy releases Evan's dog, Lenny approaches him and stabs him in

the back, killing him. The trauma of killing his friend makes Lenny suffer such a shock that he spends his life in a psychiatric hospital, in almost a catatonic state.

According to Sian Watson , PTSD patients are often at risk of anger or aggression outbursts (1). In *The Butterfly Effect*, before Evan traveled to the past, Lenny isolated himself in an attempt to forget about his role in the deaths of the woman and her child. In other words, to avoid his distressing memories, Lenny isolated himself from the world. He spent most of his time in his room, creating airplane models. When Evan had a dream about the death of his dog and went to Lenny to ask him about it, Lenny answered that he could not cut the rope. As Evan pushed him to remember, Lenny repeated Tommy's threat, "Drop it or I'll slit your mother's throat in her sleep" (*The Butterfly Effect* 35:28–1: 59:38). The way he spoke those words conveyed anger. The fact that he remembered Tommy's exact words after so many years indicates that he often relived that particular memory. That is to say, Lenny, like many PTSD patients, re-experienced his trauma, which is apparent in this scene, since this character can remember exactly what happened. Also, this scene shows the aggression harbored by a person who shuns the world. To illustrate, Lenny, who was sitting during this entire conversation, attacked Evan out of nowhere and slammed him to the wall, while repeating a threat from another memory, "Make one peep and I swear it'll be your last, motherfucker" (*The Butterfly Effect* 36:00–1:59:38). After Lenny says those words, the violence and aggression that were evident in his facial expression and body language vanish, and he becomes the individual who visibly withdrew from the conversation. Lenny goes back to the desk where he previously sat and continues working. Yet, the viewer can almost witness the way Lenny disengaged from the world and the conversation.

2.4.3. Depression in The Butterfly Effect

Depression is a psychological disorder that is characterized by feelings of sadness, hopelessness, lack of enjoyment or interest, reduced self-esteem, low self-worth, guilt,

difficulty sleeping, and decreased energy levels (Debjit et al. 41). In *The Butterfly Effect*, both Kayleigh and Evan experience depression. In the first timeline, Kayleigh is sexually and physically abused by her father. She lives in constant fear of her father and what he might do. "We should go soon. If Dad catches us smoking down here, we're dead" (*The Butterfly Effect* 11:56–1:59:38). Kayleigh's body language in this scene indicates that she is highly uncomfortable just thinking about what her father might do if he caught them.

This female character is also traumatized by what she saw. In other words, the death of the mother and her baby left her struggling with guilt. This is apparent when Evan asks her about what happened when she clearly did not wish to even think about it. When Kayleigh was sure Evan did not remember what happened, she declared, "You're so lucky" (*The Butterfly Effect* 20:17-1 59:38). Kayleigh envied Evan for not remembering what happened, for her guilt was eating her. When Kayleigh, Evan, and Tommy went to the movies after the incident, Tommy admonished his sister, who was clearly depressed, "wipe that sad-assed look off your face before you get us all busted. You see the way Evan's mom was looking at you?" (*The Butterfly Effect* 18:48-1: 59:38).

Kayleigh was obviously shaken by what happened. That is to say, she had trouble sleeping, which is clear since she had bags under her eyes. She also appears tired and forlorn when they are watching a movie. Instead of being excited like other people, she is highly disturbed by what she is seeing. Thus, she leaves the movie theater in tears. Evan follows her and apologizes for their thoughtlessness since they thought that going to the movies during such a time was a sound idea. Furthermore, Kayleigh perceived herself as a person who has no value because her father's abuse and maltreatment made her believe that. The explosion incident made her resent herself more. To illustrate, when Evan noticed the bruise on Kayleigh's arm, he declared that she deserved a better father and brother. However, Kayleigh did not agree with Evan's judgment, for she said, "I deserve a lot worse" (*The Butterfly Effect*

20:35–1:59:38). This shows that the female character in *The Butterfly Effect* has little to no regard for herself as an individual. Years later, when Evan seeks Kayleigh and asks her about the movie they filmed when they were children, she snaps at him,

Who are you trying to convince, Evan?! You come all the way out here to stir up my shit just because you had a bad memory!?! You want me to cry on your shoulder and tell you that everything's all better now? Well fuck you, Evan! Nothing's gonna be all better! Okay?! Nothing ever gets better. (*The Butterfly Effect* 48:42-1: 59:38)

Kayleigh never got over what happened to her when she was a child. Her situation had gotten worse when she witnessed the death of the woman and her child. Consequently, her trauma and depression led to her committed suicide when Evan came and asked her about what happened during their childhood.

Kayleigh also experiences depression in an alternative reality when she witnesses the death of her brother. In this reality, She is a prostitute and a drug addict with sunken face and dark circles under eyes. When Evan seeks her out in this life and tells her that he can change the past, she would not believe him. He claimed that she was happy once and that he thought she would want to know. He also told her that he would not change any more, " Every time I try to help someone, everything goes to shit" (1:32:55-1: 59:38). As she hear his words, Kayleigh snaps at him, "Well, don't give up now, Slick. You've already done so much for me. Hell why don't you go back in time and save Mrs. Halpern and her baby. Then maybe Lenny wouldn't freak out and ruin my family" (1:32:58- 1: 59:38). Kayleigh believes that all her problems began with the explosion incident, for all their lives changed. In her head, if that incident did not happen, she would not be abused by her father, and witness the death of her brother. Therefore, she would not be depressed person who resulted to drugs to cope with her problems.

In another alternative reality, Evan is the one who is depressed. After Evan goes have that conversation with Kayleigh, he decides to go back to past and save Mrs. Halpern and her baby. However, when he runs to the mail box to warn the woman, the bomb goes off when he is near. When Evan wakes up in this reality, he finds out that his arms are amputated and he is in a wheelchair. He is bitter because the lives of all of his friends are great when he is stuck and unable to do anything by himself. To make matters worse for him, the girl he loves is with his friend Lenny. Evan becomes depressed, for he did wish to live, especially when he could no longer depend on himself on the simplest of tasks. Therefore, he commits suicide. Yet, his attempts fail because Tommy, who became a religious person, saves him.

guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration. These problems can become chronic or recurrent and lead to substantial impairment.

2.5. Chaos Theory

According to Muir, *The Butterfly Effect* provided a good representation of the chaos theory and the theory that was used for the title. The idea highlighted by this movie is that small, insignificant actions in a chaotic system can have unpredictable results or changes. That is to say, this movie the ideal portrayal of this theory, for each time Evan changes the past, he suffers. The consequences of each journey to the past end up with horrific impact on Evan's future and the other around him (270).

The chosen film for the study relies on the Butterfly Effect theory. To illustrate, when Kayleigh committed suicide when Evan went to see her, he decides to go back in time and prevent that from happening. As he read the passage on his journal, he found himself in front of Mr. Miller, who was about to shoot the video, "This is the very moment of your reckoning. In the next thirty seconds you're going to open one of two doors. The first door will forever traumatize your own flesh and blood" (*The Butterfly Effect* 53:11-1: 59:38). Due to this small insignificant conversation with Kayleigh's father, Evan's future along with all

those he knows alters. To illustrate, instead of being a lonely college student, Evan is a popular frat boy, who has Kayleigh for a girlfriend. He is happy during this time line because his girlfriend was not abused by her father. However, Tommy was the one who suffered at the hand of his father this time. Thus, he became a violent person who were fixated on Evan for daring to take his sister away from him. When Tommy wrecks Evan's car and attempts to kill him, the protagonist loses his temper and end up killing Tommy. Therefore, Evan is eventually incarnated.

In the prison, Evan is determined to go back and alter his fate once again. This time he returned to the moment when Tommy was about to burn Crockett. Evan hands a sharp metal piece to Lenny and asks him to cut the rope of the sack which contained his dog. When the group of friends rush through the forest to find Tommy, Evan manages to coax him into letting the dog go.

I'll do whatever you want. You don't want me to ever see Kayleigh again, fine. Just let Crockett go. Besides, you kill him now and they'll stick you in juvy for sure. And I know you'd never leave your sister alone with your father. (*The Butterfly Effect* 1:21:26-1: 59:38)

When Tommy releases the dog, Lenny stabs him in the back. In this life, Lenny is admitted to a psychiatric hospital when he was child. Kayleigh flees the house after her brother's death and becomes a prostitute to support herself. She uses drugs to cope with her traumatic past and depression. Evan realizes his selfishness, for each time he tries to alter something, all those around him suffer because of his intervention. When he goes back in time and asks his father to help him, Jason maintains that he could not play God. The impact of those changes are too significant. Jason exclaims that, "You can't change who people are without destroying who they were" (*The Butterfly Effect* 1:25:55-1: 59:38). Jason's words

summarize the gravity of alternation the past. Evan could control the changes that occur. Therefore, every time he alters the past, the situation become worse.

In an attempt to fix what he had done, and under Kayleigh provocation, the protagonist deduced that he need to save the woman and her baby. He concluded that if the woman did not die, no one would be traumatic, and Lenny would not end up admitted to psychiatric hospital. The outcome of this journey was not what he expected, and it turned the worst life he experience. To illustrate, as he run to warn the woman not to get close the mailbox, the blockbuster exploded near Evan. All of the protagonist's friends are happy; the girl he loves is with his best friend, and the bully who tormented them as children became a religious man. However, Evan is an amputee who needed a wheelchair to move. Not only that Evan's life was a nightmare, he discovers that this particular journey would cause his mother's death. That is to say, in the original timeline, before Evan learns that he could change the past, his mother stopped smoking after they moved away. In this newly created timeline After the incident in which Evan lost his limbs and the ability to walk, his mother began to smoke again, Hence, she was dying of lung cancer.

Evan could not return the moment of the explosion from this reality. That is to say, his arms were amputated. Thus, he never wrote about it in his journal. Nonetheless, Evan endeavors to change the past once again through travelling to the time when Mr. Miller was shooting the video. This time, however, instead of talking to Kayleigh's father like he had done in another reality, he light up the blockbuster that was in the basement and threatens him. As Mr. Miller threatens Evan that he would tell his mother about his mischievousness, Evan retorts, "And I'll tell the Child Protective Services about your kiddie porn endeavors. One step closer and I'll shove this up your ass!" (*The Butterfly Effect*1:46:19- 1: 59:38). After the two struggle, the bomb falls to the ground and Kayleigh picks it up and dies.

In his alternative reality Evan is the one who ends up in a psychiatric hospital for killing Kayleigh. After he realizes what he had done, he goes to the doctor and ask for his journals. The doctor's face falls as though Evan relapses, "It kills me to have to go through this again. There are no journals. There never were. It's part of this fantasy world your mind created to cope with the guilt of killing..." (*The Butterfly Effect* 1:47:55- 1: 59:38). For the doctor, this is not the first time Evan seeks him out for the journals. However, Evan denied all that heard. When he knew he could another way to go back to the past, he asked his mother to bring her videos of the time when she was pregnant with him. In the end, Evan acknowledged the damage he had done each time. The consequences of those small things he had done to alter the past turned his life upside down. Thus, in a final attempt to reverse all he had done, he return to the moment when his mother was pregnant and strangled himself with the umbilical cord. By doing this, even created a new timeline where he does not exist. Hence, he undid all the things he did.

2.6. Conclusion

The film titled *The Butterfly Effect* is a complex creation that was based on chaos theory, particularly on the Butterfly Effect theory. All characters struggle one way or another in this film because the main character Evan keep tempering with the past. Each time he changes something small and insignificant, he alters the future. His own future worsen with each attempt. Also, the film depicts the traumatic impact on the characters. All of them experienced violent events in their childhood. They were traumatized and struggled to adopt the their lives afterwards. These traumatic events did not only impact their lives during childhood, but also shaped them as adults. Almost Each character in the film developed a psychological disorder. For instance, the main character Evan and Kayleigh who were forced to participate in pornographic video and later on witness the death of a women and her child both developed psychological disorders. Kayleigh had a severe case of depression while Evan had

Dissociative identity disorder. On the other hand, their friend Lenny had post-traumatic syndrome. This shows that trauma is unique. Each character had witnessed the same event.

Yet, each reacted differently.

General Conclusion

The film, titled *The Butterfly Effect*, revolves around trauma and time travel. The characters in this film experienced some horrific events. The main character, Evan, witnessed the death of his father and later was forced to partake in pornographic film with his friend Kayleigh. During his teenage years, he and all his friends blew up a mailbox, killing a mother and her child. The protagonist and his friends also witnessed the brutal death of his dog. Each time Evan experiences horrid events, he blacks out. That is to say, Evan failed to remember any traumatic events he witnessed in his childhood until he was an adult and discovered that he could go back in time to those specific moments and change them.

This film shows that trauma is indeed unique. Each of the characters experienced the same trauma. Yet each individual reacted differently. Evan, for instance, blocked all the traumatic memories he experienced. The ego, fearing for his integrity in those situations, repressed those memories or simply dissociated from the event entirely. That is to say, Evan's mind blocked the memories from the protagonist's reach and awareness. Another plausible explanation of Evan's blackouts is that his trauma manifested in a psychological disorder known as dissociative identity disorder. This particular disorder supports the theory that a person can dissociate and create other identities while faced with traumatic or violent events. To illustrate, each time Evan returns in time, he finds himself in one of the memories he blocked. The movie shows that Evan's mature personality is present in his young body. Whenever this happens, Evan, the child, has no awareness of what took place when his other personality controlled his body. People with dissociative identity disorder do the exact same thing. They do not feel or acknowledge the transition that happens when their personalities switch. They experience blackouts because, like Evan, those memories do not belong to them but to their alters.

Because of her difficult upbringing, Kayleigh developed a severe case of depression. In the original timeline, Kayleigh was sexually and physically abused by her father. The parental figure in her life broke her trust when he forced her to be a part of a pornographic video. During her teenage years, she blamed herself for taking part in the murder of an innocent woman and her child. She displayed symptoms of depression during that period. She looked withdrawn, tired, and insomniac. She envied her friend when she realized that he truly did not remember what happened. Kayleigh also believed that her father's abuse was warranted because she deserved whatever happened to her. This indicates that her worth and value are very low. In other words, she did not believe that her life was worth anything. Thus, years later, she committed suicide when Evan came and asked her about what happened to them as children. He disturbed her life, even though she had struggled to cope with her past. In another reality, when Kayleigh's brother dies, her situation worsens. She leaves her home at the age of fifteen and ends up as a prostitute with a drug addiction. In a sense, Kayleigh assumed this destructive behavior to either cope with her trauma or punish herself for what she did or did not do. In this reality, she is depressed, destructive, and cynical because her trauma altered her worldview so that she always accepted the worst from people.

Lenny's trauma manifested as post-traumatic stress disorder. To illustrate, at the sensitive age of thirteen, his friends elected him to put an explosive object in a particular mailbox. A mother and her child were killed in the explosion, and he suffered a severe psychological shock and had to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Not long after he was released, he witnessed his friend cruelly burn a dog. This impacted his mental health in a major way. Due to his traumatic past, Lenny turned out to be an aggressive man who preferred isolation. In a specific scene in the movie, he recites the threats Tommy made. His ability to remember the exact same words means that he re-experiences his traumas occasionally. Some PTSD patients became aggressive after violent events. Lenny, who was this timid and kind child, attacks

Evan with a sudden move as he is reminded of his past. Lenny has never been shown to be anything but the friend who went along. He always did what the others asked him to do.

However, his behavior and personality altered due to his trauma.

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