

**Character Development and Depression in
The Last of Us:
Video Game and TV Adaptation**

Versão Final Após Defesa

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Declaração de Integridade

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Resumo

Este estudo analisa e reflete sobre a conexão entre narrativa, caracterização de personagens e sintomas de depressão no contexto do videogame *The Last of Us* (parte I) e na adaptação televisiva do mesmo. A investigação procura averiguar e demonstrar como os personagens e os processos narrativos, em ambas as mídias, evocam e apresentam o espectro emocional da depressão, bem como o contributo destes para a sua caracterização e desenvolvimento.

O objetivo principal deste estudo é comparar e vincular o estado emocional dos personagens com os sintomas clínicos da depressão, destacando o modo como a narrativa pode ressoar com experiências reais de saúde mental. Através da análise de comportamentos, expressões faciais e diálogos dos personagens, este trabalho procura evidenciar o potencial dos videogames e das séries de TV como veículos para a transmissão e compreensão da complexidade da depressão enquanto fenómeno clínico e dispositivo narrativo.

Metodologicamente, procedeu-se, inicialmente, a uma revisão abrangente da literatura sobre narrativa, personagens e depressão. Posteriormente, realizou-se uma análise detalhada dos personagens de *TLOU* e da sua evolução narrativa e dramática nas duas mídias, recorrendo aos sintomas de depressão e critérios estabelecidos pelo *Manual diagnóstico e estatístico de transtornos mentais*.

Foi possível concluir que os sintomas de depressão apresentados pelos personagens os tornam mais verossímeis e os fazem ter uma maior conexão com o público de ambas as mídias, na medida em que essa identificação potencia uma empatia mais profunda por parte do público, dado que permitem que este não apenas compreenda, mas também se engaje com as lutas internas dos personagens. Dessa forma, as narrativas de *TLOU* oferecem uma representação tendencialmente autêntica e complexa da depressão, que se liga às vivências quotidianas do público, reforçando e ampliando a experiência narrativa, dramática e emocional de jogadores e espetadores.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento de personagem, personagem e emoções, personagem e narrativa, narrativa pós-apocalíptica, sintomas depressivos, saúde mental

Abstract

This study analyses and reflects on the connection between narrative, character development, and symptoms of depression in the context of *The Last of Us* (part I) video game and its television adaptation. The investigation seeks to examine and demonstrate how the characters and the narrative processes, in both media, evoke and present the emotional spectrum of depression, as well as their contribution to character portrayal and development.

The primary aim of this study is to compare and link the emotional state of the characters with the clinical symptoms of depression, highlighting how the narrative can resonate with real-life mental health experiences. By analysing behaviours, facial expressions, and dialogues of the characters, this work aims to reveal the potential of video games and TV series as mediums for conveying and understanding the complexity of depression as both a clinical phenomenon and a narrative device.

Methodologically, the study begins with a comprehensive review of the literature on narrative, character, and depression. Following this, a detailed analysis of the characters in *TLOU* and their narrative evolution in both media is conducted, utilizing the symptoms of depression and diagnostic established criteria from the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*.

It was possible to conclude that the depressive symptoms presented by the characters make them more realistic and foster a deeper connection with the audience in both media, as this identification enhances a deeper empathy from the public. It allows the audience not only to understand but also to engage with the characters' internal struggles. In this way, the narratives of *TLOU* offer an authentic and complex representation of depression, which resonates with the everyday experiences of the audience, thereby reinforcing and enriching the narrative, dramatic, and emotional experience of players and viewers.

Keywords: character development, character and emotions, character and narrative, post-apocalyptic narrative, depressive symptoms, mental health

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List of Acronyms

TLOU	The Last of Us
WHO	World Health Organization
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
OPP	Order of Psychology of Portugal
MHB	Ministry of Health of Brazil
DSM-5	<i>Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fifth edition</i>
APA	American Psychological Association
MDD	Major depressive disorder
Dysthymia	Persistent depressive disorder
DMDD	Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder

Introduction

This study focuses on the investigation about characters, narrative, and depressive disorder, a mental illness that has garnered increasing attention from researchers, clinicians, society, and media, specifically on the universe of *The Last of Us*. Depression manifests with varying degrees of impact on individuals. While understanding the full spectrum of depression's emotional and psychological dimensions is complex, a thorough review of the literature provides essential insights into the multifaceted nature of the illness. Despite the growing interest in mental health representations in media, there remains limited research on how interactive mediums like video games can portray the chronic and evolving nature of depression.

Video games, as an interactive medium, offer an opportunity to explore the symptoms of depression. The immersive nature of gameplay allows players to engage with characters and experience their emotions and struggles in real-time, creating a deeper sense of empathy. Through the player's active participation, the game can simulate the isolation, hopelessness, and emotional weight that often accompany depression. Furthermore, the long duration of gameplay enables a gradual unfolding of symptoms, mirroring the chronic and evolving nature of depression. This extended engagement with characters provides an effective path for studying how depression is portrayed, how it progresses, and how it affects relationships and decisions within the narrative. By embedding these psychological experiences within a story, games can also encourage players to reflect on mental health in a personal and meaningful way.

Considering the capacity of video games to simulate emotional experiences, *The Last of Us (Part I)* was selected for its immersive narrative and complex character development, making it an ideal case for examining the depiction of depression. Additionally, the TV show adaptation, which shares the same core narrative and characters, complements this analysis by offering distinct yet parallel perspectives. This dual examination enables a more nuanced exploration of depressive symptoms through the analysis of behaviours, facial expressions, and dialogues across both media forms, providing a comprehensive understanding of how depression is portrayed.

By analysing the characters in both media, this research seeks to investigate how depression is depicted and its contribution to narrative depth and character complexity. This portrayal aims to enhance the richness of character development, making them more multifaceted and engaging for both players and viewers of the TV show.

By correlating the characters' symptoms and emotional experiences with real-life manifestations of depression, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how depression is depicted within these narratives. Additionally, it examines how such portrayals may resonate with and reflect real-world mental health experiences. This analysis will be guided by the definition of depression and the diagnostic criteria outlined in the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, ensuring a more precise and relevant evaluation of depressive symptoms.

Problem statement

The portrayal of depressive symptoms in video game characters remains an underexplored area, particularly within specific titles such as *The Last of Us*. With the addition of its TV show adaptation, this study aims to explore how both media formats represent real-world depressive symptoms through characters' behaviours and interactions. By examining these portrayals, the research seeks to assess whether the depiction of depression in *TLOU* enhances the emotional depth and relatability of the characters, contributing to their appeal across both video game and TV show audiences.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to compare and connect the emotional states of the characters with symptoms of depression by examining their characterization. This analysis seeks to understand how depressive symptoms manifest and function as defining elements within the characters, shaping both the narrative and its dramatization. To achieve this, several secondary objectives must be addressed, including the analysis of character behaviours, facial expressions, and dialogues, the identification of depressive disorder symptoms, and the examination of character development throughout the narrative.

Methodology

The first step involves conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature on character, narrative, and depression. This review will help consolidate relevant data essential for analysing depression in the characters of *The Last of Us*, which will be used in the third chapter.

Subsequently, an in-depth analysis of the characters in both the game and TV show will be performed to understand how their behaviours and characteristics align with symptoms of depressive disorders. A table will be created to compare the main symptoms exhibited by each character with real-life symptoms as outlined in the *DSM-5*. This approach aims to provide insights that enhance understanding of depression and contribute to reducing the stigma surrounding the disorder.

Structure of the document

In the first chapter, the focus is on characters and narrative. This begins with a definition of character and an exploration of general categories across different media, such as flat, round, stock, and symbolic characters. This analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of character construction. Additionally, the use of avatars in video games and the psychological and social relationships between characters are examined to understand how these interactions unfold in both the game and TV show. The chapter also includes an exploration of narrative, drawing on Aristotle's classical study of narrative structure, as well as its application and evolution within video games.

The second chapter delves into the study of depression. It covers the definition, diagnosis, causes, symptoms, risks, prevention, and treatment of depression, referencing key resources such as the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association. The chapter then narrows its focus to different types of depression as defined by the *DSM-5*, including disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, major depressive disorder, and persistent depressive disorder. This information provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis.

In the third chapter, an analysis of depressive symptoms in the characters of *TLOU* is conducted. The chapter follows a chronological narrative of events from both the game and TV adaptation of *The Last of Us*. After each subchapter analysis, the symptoms observed are identified to determine the type of depression each character exhibits. This method offers insight into the mental health conditions depicted within the narrative.

1. Character

To start our work, a comprehensive understanding of character theory is mandatory. Fictional characters, in the realm of storytelling, serve as the bedrock upon which narratives unfold and resonate with audiences. As stated by Eagleton (2013, p. 63), "fictional characters serve the purposes of storytelling, entertainment, and artistic expression. They can embody themes, ideas, and conflicts, and they often serve as vehicles for exploring human emotions, relationships, and experiences". In short, they summarize the essence of the narrative.

Since it's important to understand the role of each character in *The last of us (TLOU)*, in this chapter we will delve into the nuances of character theory, starting with possible definitions and then exploring various typologies, such as: fictional and real characters, flat and round characters, stock and symbolic characters, central, recurring, secondary, guest, breakout, protagonists, foil, antagonist, anti-heroes, villains, and character avatar. Delving into definitions and typologies to equip ourselves with the theoretical framework is necessary for our analysis, which will be the focus on the subchapter 1.2.

We will also dig into the nuances of character and psychological and social relation theory, starting with an examination of the archetypes proposed by Carl Jung, delving into the fundamental patterns and motifs that underpin character construction. From there, we will delve into the six important aspects of dramatic personae, structure for a three-dimensional character, and the psychological nature of characters, exploring how their individual traits, motivations, and conflicts shape their identities and drive the narrative forward. Finally, we will undertake an in-depth analysis of the relationships between characters, elucidating the dynamics of interpersonal connections, conflicts, and transformations.

Also, we will do an examination of the use of narrative to understand characters, tracing its evolution from ancient theories to contemporary media forms. We will begin with the difference of narrative and plot, by revisiting Aristotle's theory of narrative, which laid the groundwork for understanding the structure and function of storytelling, the six qualitative parts of Athenian Tragedy, and verisimilitude.

Next, we move to digital storytelling on videogames. We will explore the emergence of transmedia storytelling, which interconnects narratives across multiple platforms. And

finally, we will discuss how the manipulation of the player's avatar, or in-game character, influences narrative immersion and character identification.

This theoretical groundwork will pave the way for our subsequent examination of how different types of characters within *TLOU* universe manifest signs of depression, a theme explored in depth in subsequent chapter. With these theoretical insights, we aspire to unravel the intricate tapestry of character classifications within the narrative landscape of *TLOU*, offering perspectives on the interplay between character and thematic exploration.

1.1. Definition

Throughout literary theory and criticism, diverse perspectives have shaped the understanding of characters in storytelling. Aristotle's *Poetics* famously suggests that characters are mere instruments of plot, saying that “the plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place” (Aristotle, 2016). However, later scholars challenge this reductionist view. For example, Forster (1927) said that “we have already decided that Aristotle is wrong, and now we must face the consequences of disagreeing with him” (p. 524). Characters possess depth and complexity, serving as vessels through which authors convey themes, emotions, and moral dilemmas. Also, he categorized characters as either flat or round. Flat characters are relatively simple and undeveloped, while round characters are more complex, and undergoing development throughout the story.

The development of characters, or characterization, which is “the observable aspects of a character, is an important part of building a character. This is because physical abilities and features contribute to assigning personality traits to the character” (Lankoski et al., 2003, p. 7). It involves creating and fleshing out these entities by providing them with distinct traits, backgrounds, motivations, and arcs. This process helps to make characters feel realistic and relatable, allowing audiences to understand their actions and decisions within the narrative context.

Also, for the process to make characters feel realistic, it's important the understanding of the different “character archetypes which are recurring patterns or types of characters that appear across different cultures, genres, and storytelling traditions. These archetypes serve as fundamental building blocks for creating characters and narratives, drawing on universal themes, motifs, and human experiences” (Pavis, 1998, p. 29). Then, their roles are crucial for both writers and analysts of narrative forms, such as TV series

or video games, which are our object of study. Each type of character serves a specific function within the story, contributing to the plot's development, the thematic exploration, and the emotional engagement of the audience.

Moreover, in the context of media such as video games, characters take on added layers of significance. While on video games the “players may come to identify themselves with the characters under their control” (Riis & Taylor, 2020, p. 174), the on-screen characters “draw the eye and prompt our imagination. As we watch a work of fiction, we become absorbed in the characters’ dilemmas, riven by the outcome of their conflicts, and engrossed in debates about their cultural import” (Riis & Taylor, 2020, p. 1). Characters in these mediums are particularly intriguing, given their dynamic interactions with the audience and the immersive nature of their portrayal. This exploration of differing perspectives on character definition lays the groundwork for our analysis of character types within the narratives of *TLOU* as we endeavour to unravel the intricacies of character portrayal and its implications for storytelling.

So, we can understand that the definition of a character is multifaceted and complex, encompassing their role as vehicles for plot advancement, vessels for thematic and emotional expression, and dynamic entities whose development and interactions engage audiences across various forms of media, especially on games and TV show, that is our object of study.

1.2. Types of character

The study of characters is crucial for our analysis of *TLOU* and their connection to depressive symptoms. By examining the characters in depth, we can better understand how their personal journeys, interactions, and psychological profiles reflect various aspects of depression. We will begin our work with some key information about the characters, their development, their roles in both the game and TV show adaptation, and the types this originates or from which they derive.

First, we will explore the distinctions and intersections between fictional and real characters, particularly focusing on how elements of real-life experiences and psychological traits are integrated into fictional characters in games and TV shows. This understanding is crucial for analysing characters in *TLOU* and examining how they exhibit symptoms of depression. Then, we will delve into the concepts of flat and round characters as defined mainly by Forster and explore how these types of characters are represented in both the video game and the TV show versions of *TLOU*. The forthcoming

we will undertake an analysis of stock and symbolic characters employed in both media. These character types provide greater depth and immersion for the audience. Then, we will proceed to the examination of central, recurring, secondary, guest, and breakout characters. Each of these character types plays a significant role in the narrative across both media formats. After, we will delve into the roles of protagonist, foil, and antagonist characters, concluding our study on this theme. This analysis will explore how protagonists drive the narrative forward, how foil characters provide contrast and highlight the traits of the protagonists, and how antagonists create conflict and challenge the protagonists.

Finally, we will delve into the role of character avatars in video games, exploring how these digital representations facilitate player immersion. We will analyse how avatars enable players to see themselves in the game world, enhancing the sense of involvement and personal investment in the characters' actions and experiences. Additionally, we will examine how TV shows can achieve the same level of engagement with their characters, despite being a so-called passive viewing medium.

1.2.1. Fictional and real characters

Characters can be either fictional or real, serving as pivotal elements in storytelling and narrative construction across various media, including games and TV format: “character, if it is character in its truest and highest form, is centrality; everything emanates from it, nothing is imposed upon it that it does not want or accept or welcome. This definition holds, I would argue, for both real and fictional characters” (DiBattista, 2010, p. 6). We are going to examine some examples to elucidate the differences between fictional and real characters, thereby enhancing our understanding of their distinct roles and impacts.

Starting with fictional characters, it can be said that they “emerge out of the crucible of imagination rather than the womb of nature.” (DiBattista, 2010, p. 6). In fiction, characters are created by authors, screenwriters, or game designers to fulfil specific roles within the story. So, “fictional characters exist only within the context of their fictional narratives” (Spiegel, 1999). Their existence, actions, and developments are confined to the realms created by their authors. That’s how “fictional characters serve the purposes of storytelling, entertainment, and artistic expression” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 60). They are crafted to engage audiences, convey themes, and evoke emotions within the context of their respective narratives. Finally, they leave impressions on the public and their culture, but the impact is within the realm of literature, film, or games. “They can inspire

emotions, discussions, and interpretations but do not have tangible real-world legacies” (Webb, 2014).

As for real characters, they are based on actual individuals whose lives and experiences are depicted in biographical or historical narratives: “They are not products of creative imagination but are instead historical figures, contemporary personalities, or documented individuals” (Foster, 2009). Real individuals are frequently chronicled in historical documents, biographies, autobiographies, and various other non-fictional sources: “their existence and actions can be verified through historical evidence, eyewitness accounts, and scholarly research”, as Spiegel (1999) states. “Real characters play various roles in society, history, and culture”, says Eagleton (2013). Their involvement shapes historical events, drives scientific breakthroughs, fuels social movements, and impacts various facets of human existence. So, “real characters leave behind legacies, memories, and historical impacts that continue to shape societies and cultures” (Webb, 2014). Their contributions, accomplishments, and failures are subjects of study, celebration, and remembrance across generations.

By analysing the characters in both media of *TLOU*, we can draw parallels between their fictional experiences and real-life phenomena such as symptoms of depression, coping mechanisms, and psychological profiles, even though they are fictional characters. Despite being fictional constructs, they are often crafted with depth and complexity, making them relatable to real-world experiences. Through their narratives, interactions, and reactions to various challenges, we can identify similarities with human behaviour and psychological processes observed. The immersive process of the narrative of *TLOU* is made in such a way that “you care about the fictional as if it were real, because sometimes you wish it was” (Bothersome Words, 2012). So, maybe we can say that this is a secret of the success of the game and the TV show, because the characters and their experiences resonate deeply with the audience, creating an emotional investment that blurs the line between fiction and reality. This connection encourages players and viewers to engage with the story on a personal level, making the narrative more impactful.

1.2.2. Flat and round characters

In this sub-chapter, we will delve into the concepts of flat and round characters as articulated by Forster (1927). Understanding these character types will help us analyse

the characters in *TLOU* and explore their connection to different symptoms of depression, or the absence thereof. Flat characters are often defined by a single, unchanging trait or a limited set of characteristics, and “in their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality” (Forster, 1927, p. 48). Also, according to Forster (1927), they were called ‘humours’ in the seventeenth century, are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. They are typically predictable and do not undergo significant development throughout the story. Flat characters can be used effectively to support the narrative by providing consistent, reliable roles within the plot.

Sarah on both media of *TLOU* is a flat character, her characteristics are as a loving, caring and innocent child. Those traits do not change since her character does not have the chance to develop due to her early death. She serves to set the emotional foundation for Joel's character arc.

Round characters, on the other hand, are complex and multi-dimensional. They possess varied traits and undergo development, showing different facets of their personalities and evolving over time. Round characters are more realistic and relatable because they reflect the complexities of real human beings, so they are “more contoured, have a volume and dimensions that prevent us from seeing round them” (DiBattista, 2010, p. 13). Joel and Ellie are considered round characters due to their evolving relationship and personal developments that are central to the game's engagement.

Starting with Joel, we can say that he is initially portrayed as a hardened survivor, deeply scarred by the loss of his daughter. His personality is complex, marked by his protective nature, grief, and the moral ambiguity of his actions. His relationship with Ellie forces him to confront his buried emotions and reevaluate his sense of morality and purpose. By the end of the game, Joel transforms from a detached, survival-focused individual to a father figure willing to make drastic choices to protect Ellie.

And Ellie is a brave, resourceful, and sometimes impulsive teenager. Her character shows considerable growth. She starts as a somewhat naive and curious girl but becomes more mature and hardened by the harsh realities she faces. Her experiences, including the traumatic encounter with David and the moral complexities of survival, contribute to her development as a round character.

The complexity of round characters like Joel and Ellie allows for a more profound exploration of psychological themes, such as grief and trauma, fit to perform tragically for any length of time, and are “capable of surprising in a convincing way” (Forster, 1927,

p. 55). Their multi-faceted personalities and evolving relationships provide a rich tapestry for examining symptoms of depression and coping mechanisms, which we will talk more on chapter 2.

1.2.3. Stock and symbolic characters

Undoubtedly, stock, and symbolic characters play crucial roles in shaping the narrative of *TLOU* and it effectively balances familiarity with depth, creating a rich and immersive storytelling experience that resonates with players. Here's how: in the context of *TLOU*, the infected can be categorized as a variation of the classic zombie archetype, which is a well-known stock character often used in games and other media set in post-apocalyptic or horror scenarios. Stock characters are archetypal figures that provide familiarity and predictability to the story while serving specific narrative functions. “They are usually stereotypical and are conventionally used repeatedly in the stories of a particular type and sometimes fits in the flat character definition” (A Research Guide, 2023). Instead, symbolic characters add layers of meaning and thematic depth to the narrative by representing abstract concepts, values, or themes. “They represent a concept or theme larger than themselves. They may have dynamic qualities, but they also exist to subtly steer an audience’s mind toward broader concepts” (Masterclass, 2021). Marlene can be interpreted as a symbolic character, for example, representing the hope of having a cure to the infection with Ellie’s immunity, her leadership on the Fireflies, making everything stay in order, and as a symbol of motherhood, using protective instincts towards Ellie, whom she has known since birth. With all this burden, she ultimately chose to sacrifice Ellie in the hope of creating a better world.

1.2.4. Central, recurring, secondary, guest and breakout characters

In this subchapter, we will delve into the typification of characters, focusing on the categories of central, regular, recurring, secondary, guest, and breakout characters, as proposed by some authors, like Sandler (2008) on his book *The TV writer’s workbook*, Epstein (2006) with the book *Crafty TV writing*, and finally, D. Corbett (2013) on his book *The art of character*. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for analysing the roles and functions of each character within the narrative framework of *TLOU* in both media formats, and subsequently on the study of depression on the next chapter.

Central characters are the primary focus of the narrative. Their journeys, development, and interactions drive the main plot forward: “in other words, the story is told from the central character’s point of view. It happens to him; and even more important, he makes it happen” (Sandler, 2007, p. 11). On *TLOU*, we can see that Joel is a central character because the narrative’s arc centres around his transformation from a grief-stricken father to a protective figure for Ellie. Also, Ellie is a character whose plot is about the evolution from a teenager to a resilient survivor, and her immunity to cordyceps infection. Both characters possess the essential traits to propel the narrative, demonstrating the evolution of their relationship throughout their journey. Joel becomes more open about his feelings, while Ellie overcomes her fear of being alone with his support.

Recurring characters appears intermittently but have a significant impact on the storyline. They often help to develop the main plot and provide depth to the central characters' journeys, and “are characters who keep coming back, but who don’t have to be in every episode” (Epstein, 2006, p. 22). On the case of the TV show, “their credit will appear at the end of each show they are in” (Sandler, 2007, p. 12). Marlene is an example of a recurring character, since her appearances are crucial to the plot’s progression, as the leader of the Fireflies, and she was the character that gave the mission to Joel and Tess to carry Ellie to the hospital. Also, the main plot behind the central characters happened because of that task.

Secondary characters are the support of the main characters, often providing essential context and subplots. It’s possible to “provide them the same uniqueness of personality, emotional range, and capacity for freedom as your main characters, with the understanding that you’ll need to exert control to guard against the threat all well-drawn secondary character’s present: scene-stealing” (Corbett, 2013, p. 173). On *TLOU*, Tess is a close partner to Joel and plays a critical role in the early of the story, and it’s noticeable how her sacrifice, as we can see on the Figure 1, gave another perspective to her partner to go on, especially on TV show, that her sacrifice is more impactful.



Figure 1

Guest characters make a brief but impactful appearance within the narrative. They “do not need to be carefully incorporated into the storyline with all its ramifications: they create a piece of drama and then disappear without consequences to the narrative structure” (Smith, 2007, p. 147). Bill is a good example, taking in consideration his appearance on the game, being a guest character, whose episode explores themes of survival, paranoia, and loss.

Breakout characters gain significant popularity or narrative importance beyond their initially intended roles: it is the character “that becomes the most popular and talked about. Usually from a guest character, he become so famous that come back as a breakout” (Weschler, 1999). Since Weschler (1999) says that usually a breakout character came from a guest character, we can use again the example of Bill, but this time exclusively from the TV show, where he gained a whole episode followed by Frank, the episode three, which is focused on the development of their relationship. Figure 2 was taken after Frank's decision to die, leaving Bill devastated. This image also serves as an excellent example of how we can study the symptoms of depression by analysing scenes from this medium.



Figure 2

1.2.5. Protagonist, foil, and antagonist characters and their archetypes

Now, we will examine the types of protagonists, including the antihero and the ghost, the foil, and the antagonist, including the villain, the conflict-creator, and the inanimate forces. Understanding these archetypes, will help us analyse how they influence and reflect depressive symptoms, which will be explored in the next chapters.

1.2.5.1. Protagonist

Like the central characters, that we studied before, the protagonist is the character around whom the story revolves. He is frequently defined by his journey, personal growth, and the obstacles he encounters. As the website MasterClass (2021) explains: “they should be carefully crafted with a logical backstory, personal motivation, and a character arc over the course of the story”. On the context of *TLOU*, we are going to analyse Joel, that is often described as an antihero, and his connections to characters with the archetypes of the ghost and the love interest.

An antihero is a protagonist that “subvert the traditional hero trope” (MasterClass, 2021), such as idealism, courage, or morality. Instead, antiheroes are often flawed, complex characters driven by personal motivations that can lead to morally ambiguous

actions. Those actions can be seen on both media, and an example of it is his willingness to kill, deceive, and prioritize his own survival and that of his loved ones over broader ethical issues. Despite his flaws, Joel is capable of profound love and loyalty, especially towards Ellie. His protectiveness and eventual emotional bond with her add layers to his character, making him relatable and human despite his darker actions. The depression symptoms he exhibits also contribute to his being seen as an antihero because they highlight his inner struggles and vulnerabilities, making his morally ambiguous choices more understandable and complex.

The ghost is an archetype represents unresolved past events or traumas “that continues to create a moral, emotional, or psychological problem for the protagonist” (Corbett, 2013, p. 173). This archetype is central to Joel's character development and can be seen with the death of her daughter. This loss haunts Joel throughout the story, as was stated by his sentence during the game (see Figure 3), influencing his decisions and interactions. Sarah’s memory acts as a ghost, constantly reminding Joel of his failure to protect her and, sometimes, driving his intense protectiveness over Ellie, other times being a cause of depression, as can be seen on the episode six of the TV show, when Joel had several panic attacks, fearing of not being able to take care of Ellie, as we will discuss later.



Figure 3

The love interest archetype involves characters who evoke deep emotional responses and often drive the protagonist’s emotional journey and “is the protagonist’s object of desire. A good love interest will be compelling and three-dimensional” (MasterClass, 2021). The

relationship between Joel and Tess is complex and multifaceted, embodying elements of companionship, mutual respect, and hinted romantic interest. Tess serves as a crucial figure in Joel's life, representing a form of partnership that goes beyond mere survival. It can be seen when their initial goal was to retrieve their stolen weapons from the Fireflies and evolves into a mission to escort Ellie. Tess's dedication to this mission, even at the cost of her own life, demonstrates her commitment to Joel and their shared objectives.

1.2.5.2. Foil

A foil character contrasts with the protagonist, being “effectively the opposite of the protagonist” (MasterClass, 2021), highlighting certain traits and adding depth to the protagonist’s character. Henry’s relationship with his brother Sam and his protective nature serves as a foil to Joel’s relationship with Ellie. Henry's ultimate decision to end his own life after losing Sam highlights the intense despair and hopelessness that can accompany loss, contrasting with Joel’s more enduring, though equally complex, emotional journey.

During the episode 9 of the TV show, Joel reveals to Ellie that he once contemplated ending his own life, which contrasts with his role as a foil to Henry. This event occurred years before Joel met Henry. By the time Joel encounters Henry, he has already undergone a significant transformation, becoming someone who can endure the loss of important people.

1.2.5.3. Antagonist

The antagonist opposes the protagonist “working against the protagonist’s or leading characters’ goal and creating the main conflict” (MasterClass, 2022), and driving the narrative forward, leading to a conflict, that is a “a result of the antagonistic forces of the drama” (Pavis, 1998, p. 75). It can also embody a conflict-creator and inanimate forces. The antagonist can be a villain, which is a character who opposes the hero, “a bad guy in the story, often working for evil purposes to destroy a heroic protagonist” (MasterClass, 2022), often embodying evil or malevolence. David is a villain on *TLOU*, his predatory and manipulative nature presents a direct threat to Ellie, and his character embodies moral decay and brutality.

As a conflict-creator the antagonist is essential in driving the plot forward, creating obstacles, and challenging the protagonists. “Sometimes, they’re just a character whose goals are in direct conflict with the protagonist’s” (MasterClass, 2022). On *TLOU*, the Hunters are a group of ruthless survivors who prey on other people to steal their supplies. They create constant danger for Joel and Ellie, leading to intense combat situations and strategic evasion. Their presence underscores the lawlessness and desperation that defines both media setting.

“An antagonist doesn’t have to be human—the main antagonist can sometimes be a force, like nature” (MasterClass, 2022). On *TLOU*, the post-apocalyptic world itself and the infected serve as antagonist inanimate forces. The first thing is that the world of *TLOU* is devastated by a fungal outbreak, leading to societal collapse and environmental degradation. The scarcity of resources and the constant threat of danger shape every aspect of the characters' lives. Also, the infected are humans who have succumbed to the cordyceps fungus, transforming into mindless, aggressive creatures. They come in various forms, including runners, clickers, and bloaters, each presenting unique threats. One example of them, during the game, is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4

1.2.6. Avatar on video games

“There is something magical about the character that a player controls in a game. So magical that we give that character a special name: the avatar” (Schell, 2008, p. 312). The

avatar, “are objects that not only represent people in the virtual world, but influence and propel the formation of identity and relationships” (Taylor, 2006, p. 96) of a character in a video game, which is a crucial element that enables players to identify with them, “with age, gender, sexual orientation, physical properties, and personality properties” (Riis & Taylor, 2020, p. 184). This identification process allows players to feel as though their actions and the actions of the avatar are one and the same. As a result, players can immerse themselves in the game world, experiencing it almost as an extension of their own selves: “in such a situation, I see a general pattern of embodied actions in a particular situation, and I identify that pattern as one that is at least partly within my own action repertoire” (Riis & Taylor, 2020, p. 183).

As some authors say, “I imagine and perhaps come to believe, through my amalgamated player–avatar experience, that I am still myself but also share some of the properties with the avatar” (Riis & Taylor, 2020, p. 183). By creating avatars that players can relate to, game developers facilitate a deeper emotional connection. In *TLOU*, this connection is particularly evident. Players can empathize with the characters, experiencing their emotions and struggles with depression during the development of the story. When players identify with their avatars, they are more likely to internalize the narrative and emotional journeys of the characters. This identification makes the portrayal of emotions more real, such as those experienced by the characters in *TLOU*, because “the power of empathy is strong, and when controlling a visible avatar, guests often wince in imagined pain upon seeing their avatar suffer a blow, or sigh in relief upon seeing their avatar escape physical harm” (Schell, 2008, p. 312). This can be felt when Ellie don’t know what to do after Joel being injured, as we can see on the Figure 5.



Figure 5

1.3. Psychological and social relationship

Our exploration will now delve deeper into the realm of psychological and social relationships of characters. Despite the criticisms surrounding Jung's work, we aim to harness his theories to gain a deeper understanding of archetypal patterns and their relevance to depressive symptoms.

We'll start with the archetypes, that is, "some sort of structuring principle that lies outside of everyday consciousness and, when it emerges suddenly, exceeds all subjective expectations" (Haule, 2010, p. 11), focusing particularly on those conceptualized by Carl Jung. By examining his archetypal theory, we seek to elucidate how these fundamental psychological constructs may manifest in the context of depression in both media of *TLOU*, since Jung suggested that archetypes influence various aspects of human behaviour, cognition, and emotion, shaping individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences.

Then, we will conduct a comprehensive character study utilizing three distinct methodologies to deepen our understanding of character nature in *TLOU*. These methodologies offer unique perspectives on character analysis, enriching our examination of the game and TV show's protagonists and supporting cast. They are the following: the six important aspects of dramatic personae by Berman (1997), a structured framework by Egri (2007), and the exploration of character psychology by Corbett

(2013). By employing these three methodologies, we seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characters in *TLOU* and to understand how it can be applied on the study of the depression on the chapter 2.

Later, we will delve into the intricacies of character relationships and how they influence the analysis of individual characters. Our study recognizes that characters within a narrative are often interconnected, and their dynamics with one another can significantly impact their portrayal and development.

We will explore how the relationship between characters serves as a lens through which their individual characteristics and behaviours are interpreted. Characters like Ellie may exhibit different traits, motivations, and reactions depending on their interactions with others in the *TLOU*. It's noticeable when Ellie believes on Marlene, while don't trust Joel and Tess on the first episode of *TLOU*.

Finally, we will delve into the character interpersonal circumplex, utilizing the graphic framework proposed by Schell (2008). This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interpersonal dynamics among the characters in *TLOU*. By mapping each character's position within the circumplex, we seek to elucidate the nature of their relationships and interactions within the narrative. Additionally, we will explore how symptoms of depression exhibited by certain characters may influence their interpersonal behaviours and alter the dynamics of their relationships with others.

1.3.1. Archetypes of characters by Carl Jung

Carl Jung, a renowned psychiatrist, leveraged his expertise to explore the depths of the human psyche, behaviour and identify archetypes that encapsulated universal human experiences and emotions within the realm of his field of study. As Pavis (1998) states: “in Jungian psychology, archetypes represent a set of acquired and universal inclinations of human imagination. They are held in the collective unconscious and surface in consciousness through dreams, imagination, and symbols” (p. 28). Drawing from his background in psychiatry, as well as his studies in anthropology, mythology, the repository of shared symbols, patterns, and instincts that shape human experiences, he “defined twelve primary types that symbolize basic human motivations. Each type has its own set of values, meanings and personality traits” (Carl Golden, 2019).

These archetypes, such as the lover, the hero, the magician, the outlaw, the explorer, the sage, the innocent, the creator, the ruler, the caregiver, the everyman, and the jester,

served as foundational concepts in Jungian psychology, offering insights into the profound and enduring aspects of human nature. “Also, the twelve types are divided into three sets of four, namely ego, soul and self. The types in each set share a common driving source, for example types within the ego set are driven to fulfil ego-defined agendas” (Golden, 2019), which we can see on the Figure 6.

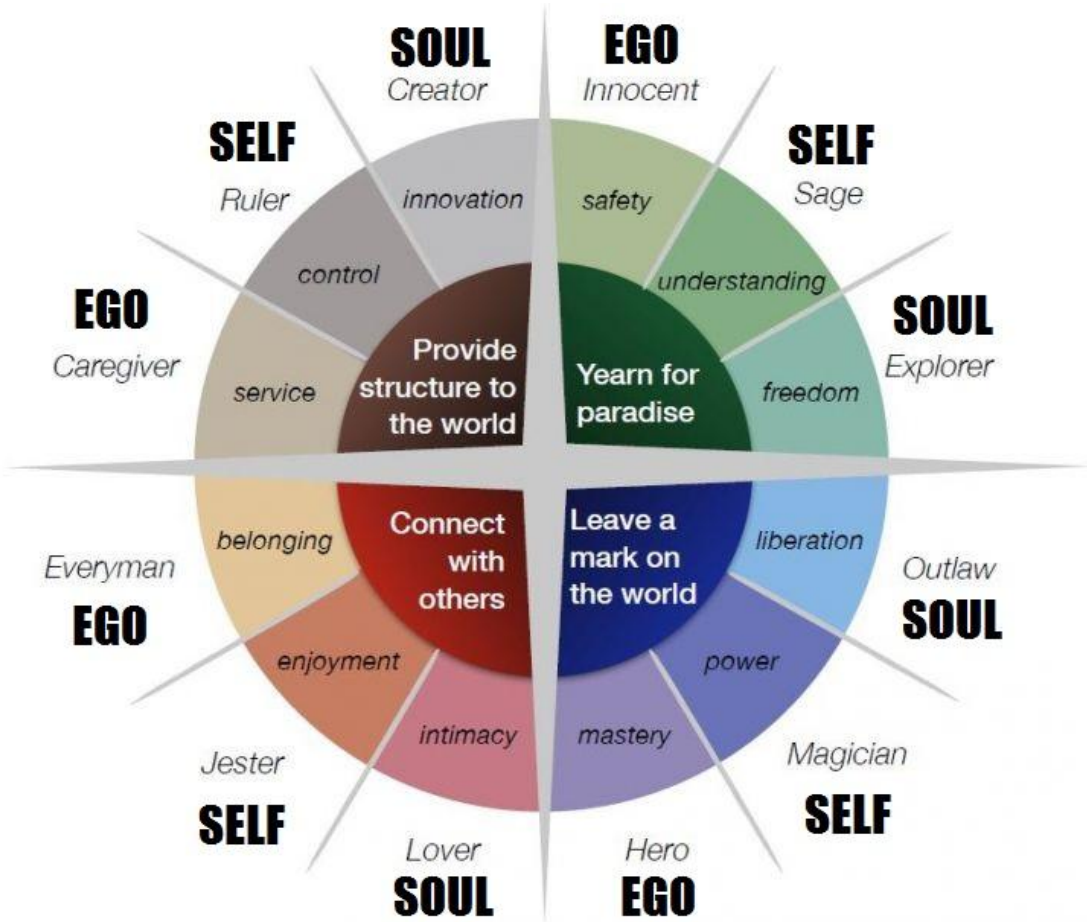


Figure 6

However, despite Carl Jung's significant contributions to psychology and the enduring influence of his archetypal theory, his concepts have not been without controversy. Some critics and scholars have raised concerns about the subjective and speculative nature of Jung's ideas, as well as the lack of empirical evidence supporting the existence of a collective unconscious or universal archetypes.

One point of contention revolves around the difficulty of operationalizing and measuring archetypes in a scientific manner. Archetypes, by their nature, are abstract and symbolic constructs that resist precise definition and quantification. This ambiguity has led some researchers to question the validity and reliability of using archetypes as explanatory frameworks within psychological research and practice. One critique is based on norms

established by Jung's archetypes. Foucault, for example, criticized these norms because of the "order defined by natural and observable processes" (Foucault, 1977, p. 179). He argued that Jung's archetypes reflect specific historical and cultural contexts rather than universal psychological structures.

Despite these criticisms, Jung's archetypal theory continues to resonate with many scholars, therapists, and individuals interested in depth psychology and symbolism. Jung's ideas have inspired a diverse range of fields, including literary criticism, film studies, anthropology, and spirituality, underscoring the enduring appeal and relevance of archetypal patterns in human culture and consciousness. By incorporating Jung's archetypes into our analysis, we're able to explore how universal symbolic patterns may manifest in individuals' experiences of depression. Jung proposed that archetypes are fundamental elements of the human psyche, representing common themes and motifs that resonate across cultures and time periods.

1.3.2. Characters study

The psychological nature of protagonists and other characters in video games holds paramount importance within the narrative and gameplay experience. These characters serve as the conduits through which players engage with and navigate the virtual world, shaping their immersion and emotional investment in the game. The protagonists often embody the central themes and objectives of the game, driving the plot forward and providing a focal point for player agency and decision-making.

Their traits, motivations, and development arcs can profoundly influence the player's journey, as they identify with and invest in the protagonist's struggles and triumphs: "by designing the characters of the game in detail and using the character design as a fundamental part of game design it is possible to create complex and well-designed protagonists for the games" (Lankoski et al., 2003, p. 7).

1.3.2.1. Six important aspects of dramatic personae

We'll start with Berman (1997), which lists six important aspects of dramatic personae: dramatic, point of view, attitude, change, weakness, and mannerism.

"Dramatic need provides a purpose, focus and direction of story; it is the reason why the protagonist is in the story" (Berman, 1997, p. 51). Joel, that is the protagonist, initially

have the task to take Ellie as a cargo to the Fireflies, and it evolves progressively to the point where his purpose is to save her from them.

“Point of view is how does the character see the situation” (Berman, 1997, p. 52). In the television series, David perceives himself as the ultimate saviour of his community, consistently employing manipulative tactics to sway individuals towards aligning with his point of view.

“Attitude explains the stance the character takes to the situation” (Berman, 1997, p. 52). The loss of his brother prompts Henry to contemplate ending his own life due to the unbearable prospect of existence without his sibling.

“Change makes the character intriguing and realistic” (Berman, 1997, p. 52). Tess undergoes a significant transformation from merely serving as a transporter of a cargo, namely Ellie, to harbouring a profound belief that the girl holds the potential to serve as the saviour for the humanity.

“Weakness/negative trait makes the character realistic and is also a convenient way of building obstacles” (Berman, 1997, p. 52). In the TV show, Sam initially harboured a sense of optimism regarding his safety alongside his brother. However, this sentiment undergoes a drastic shift following his infection, as he becomes acutely aware of his vulnerability and exposes his fragility to Ellie.

“Mannerism and habits are identifiable parts of the character that differentiate it from other characters” (Berman, 1997, p. 53). In both media, particularly emphasized in the TV show, Bill exhibits a consistent state of paranoia regarding the security of his living quarters. This heightened vigilance manifests in his adoption of highly unconventional habits, setting him apart from other characters in the narrative.

1.3.2.2. Structure for a three-dimensional character

The structured framework developed by Egri (2007) provides a comprehensive approach for analysing three-dimensional characters. This framework emphasizes the importance of understanding a character's physiological, sociological, and psychological profiles to fully grasp their skills and abilities. As Lankoski et al. (2003) illustrate: "the skills and abilities of a character must reflect its physiological, sociological, and psychological profile. For example, a gang member probably has different skills and abilities than a jet setter, even if their physiological and psychological profiles are identical" (p. 9). This

approach ensures a thorough and nuanced understanding of character development, and it is illustrated on Figure 7.

Physiology	Sociology	Psychology
Sex	Class	Moral standards, sex life
Age	Occupation	Goals, ambitions
Height and weight	Education	Frustrations, disappointments
Color of hair, eyes, skin	Family life	Temperament
Posture	Religion	Attitude towards life
Appearance and distinct features (tattoos, birthmarks, etc.)	Race, nationality	Complexes, obsessions
Defects (deformities, abnormalities, diseases)	Place/Standing in community (i.e. social status among friends, clubs, sports)	Imagination, judgment, wisdom, taste, poise
Hereditary features	Political affiliations	Extrovert, introvert, ambivert
Physique	Amusements, hobbies	Intelligence

Figure 7

Also, it's a valuable tool for identifying similarities and differences among characters and understanding how these factors influence their relationships and interactions within both media. Furthermore, it's useful to explore the potential association between different types of depression, which we will read on the chapter 2.2, and specific character traits. By considering the factors manifest in characters exhibiting symptoms of depression, it's possible to understand the nuanced portrayal of mental health issues within the game narrative.

For example, the shared goals among the characters of *TLOU*, especially Joel and Tess, underscore the connection of their narratives and the depth of their relationships. They initially share common objectives in both the game and TV series, collaborating closely to achieve their goals, which is carrying Ellie to the Fireflies. As the story progresses, their bond deepens, leading to the sacrifice of Tess in pursuit of their shared objectives.

1.3.2.3. Character psychological nature

The psychological nature of characters, as proposed by Corbett (2013), is an exploration of character psychology that offers a nuanced understanding of the psychological nature of characters within *TLOU*. Corbett's insights will delve into “her emotions, her feelings, her passions, her fears, her abiding loves, her poisonous hatreds, her hopes, her shame, her reservoirs of swagger, her echoing doubts” (Corbett, 2013, p. 121). There are thirteen different feelings on his study. We are going to use the fear, love, hate, guilt, failure and pride, because they are more aligned with the study. With examples from the *TLOU*, they are the following:

Desire: “the overwhelming majority of stories are premised on the pursuit of an identifiable desire, with the drama arising from the conflicts endured to fulfil that want” (Corbett, 2013, p. 121). Joel and Tess sought to retrieve their ammunition from the Fireflies, necessitating their undertaking of the mission to transport Ellie to them.

Fear: “a vast range of feelings and emotions lies within the fear spectrum, everything from panic attacks and existential dread to the creeps and the heebie-jeebies” (Corbett, 2013, p. 122). Joel's fear of losing Sarah and Ellie is palpable and pervasive throughout the narrative.

Courage: “given the essential role of fear, your story may well turn on how your protagonist learns to master or control a debilitating terror or dread—or how it ultimately undoes her.” (Corbett, 2013, p. 123). Ellie confronts David and his cohorts to ensure Joel's safety.

Love: “what your character loves is deeply connected, if not identical, to what she wants.” (Corbett, 2013, p. 123). In the TV show, Frank and Bill share a connection rooted in love. While their relationship is not explicitly stated in the game, Bill's references to Frank have led players to theorize that they also had a romantic relationship in the game.

Hate: “hatred can be irrational and even unconscious—it often again speaks to some deep-seated fear or reflects a part of the character's own personality he or she is ashamed of” (Corbett, 2013, p. 125). Ellie's resentment for failing to save Riley drives her aggressive behaviour towards others.

Guilt: “in contrast to shame, guilt concerns doing something you know to be wrong. It involves a violation of your own moral code, however that's defined.” (Corbett, 2013, p.

127). Tommy grapples with feelings of guilt after killing of innocent people alongside his brother.

Forgiveness: “to know when your character has been forgiven, or when she has forgiven someone else, is to know a lot about her heart, her conscience, her soul—and her luck.” (Corbett, 2013, p. 128). Tommy serves as an example again, as he receives forgiveness for his past transgressions during his association with Joel.

Failure: “no one achieves everything he sets out to do, and how your character responds to failure will be one of the cornerstones of who he is.” (Corbett, 2013, p. 130). Henry's profound sense of failure following the loss of his brother leads him to taking his own life.

Success/Pride: “you need to know when your character set out to do something and achieved it and felt that swell of pride in her own heart” (Corbett, 2013, p. 131). Joel displays pride in his daughter's achievements, such as winning the soccer tournament.

Death: “the guiding principle that character is developed through engagement with others finds its most significant qualification in our experience of death or some other shattering loss.” (Corbett, 2013, p. 135). Sarah's death looms over Joel, influencing his actions and decisions.

The psychological studies about characters provide a solid foundation for the analysis conducted in chapter 3 of this study. By drawing upon theories and frameworks from psychology, such as personality traits, motivations, interpersonal relationships between characters, and how characters exhibit symptoms of depression, we can delve deeper into the complexities of character development and behaviour within *TLOU*.

1.3.3. The importance of the characters relationships

“When we study any character in a play, we need to take account of their relations to all of the others and to the many functions and modes of signification.” (Aston & Savona, 1991, p. 41). In a game such as *TLOU*, careful observation of the formation and evolution of relationships is very important, as for example, on both media, the relations between Joel and Tess initially hints at a romantic interest. Further, Tess's perspective on Ellie undergoes a notable transformation. Initially viewing Ellie merely as an obligation to be transported to the Fireflies, Tess's stance gradually shifts, eventually imbuing her with hope that Ellie may hold the key to salvaging humanity's future. Figure 8, from the game,

illustrates when Tess decides to sacrifice herself to save Ellie, which she considers as a possible salvation of the world.



Figure 8

Also, in the television adaptation of *TLOU*, Bill is depicted as a character harbouring pronounced paranoia, characterized by his meticulous efforts to maintain the safety of his surroundings. Undoubtedly, “each behaviour of a character influences the rest. Sometimes, some depend on the others” (Tolmach, 2014). It is notable with the change upon encountering Frank, leading to a transformation in Bill's character. Gradually becoming reliant on Frank's presence, their relationship evolves into one of mutual dependency, marked by instances of disagreement alongside moments of partnership.

In the subsequent subchapter, our focus will be directed towards an in-depth exploration of one method for discerning these intricate relationships. Additionally, in chapter 3, we will delve into an examination of how the dynamics between characters can be correlated with the manifestation of symptoms associated with depression.

1.3.4. The characters interpersonal circumplex

The interpersonal circumplex, on the Figure 9, pioneered by psychologist Timothy Leary in 1957, serves as a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships between characters, since “historically, Leary's system for interpersonal diagnosis has had enduring impact in focusing research on interpersonal behaviour” (Paddock & Nowicki, 1986, p. 108). Leary's model “gathered information

from 200 people, the interactions were observed, recorded, and studied. In the end, the judge described 16 interpersonal styles, which could be ordered in a circumplex along two orthogonal continua: dominance-submission and hostility-friendliness” (Paddock & Nowicki, 1986, p. 110). These dimensions form the axes of a circular diagram, with varying degrees of warmth and dominance defining different regions within the circumplex. By mapping characters' positions within the interpersonal circumplex, we can gain insights into the nature of their relationships and interactions. For example, characters located near each other may share a bond characterized by mutual warmth and cooperation, while those situated farther apart may experience tension or conflict due to differences in dominance.

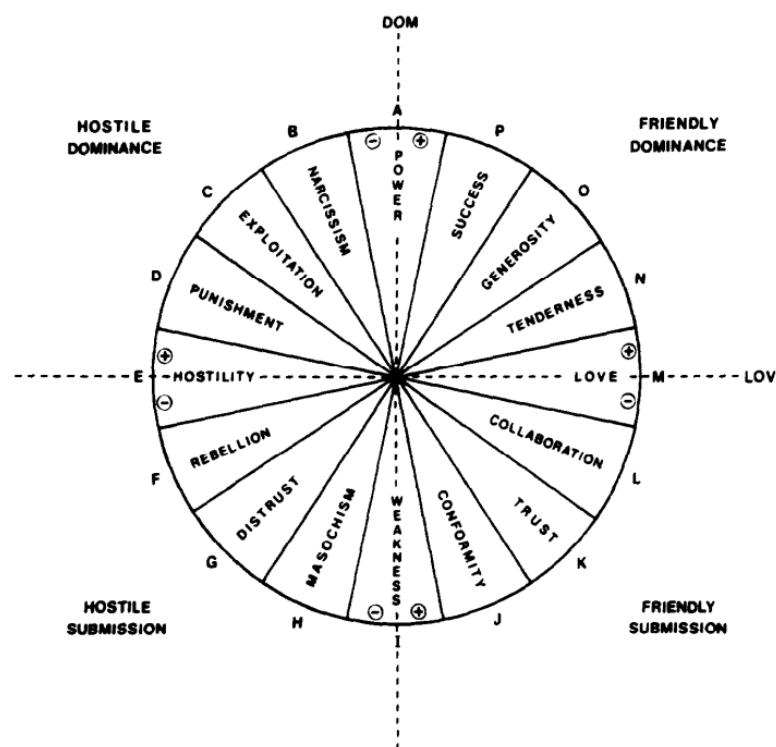


Figure 9

While Leary's work made significant contributions to psychology, including his exploration of consciousness and personality, his model of the interpersonal circumplex did not receive widespread acceptance within the academic community.

Despite the criticisms levelled against Leary's circumplex, its conceptual framework still holds potential as a tool for game designers seeking to create compelling character interactions within their narratives. They can adapt and modify the circumplex model to suit the specific needs and constraints of their game worlds. By considering factors such as character traits, motivations, and relationships, it's possible to map out the dynamics

between characters and use them to inform gameplay mechanics, dialogue options, and narrative branching paths.

The Figure 10, taken from the book *Art of game design*, demonstrates a preservation of the structural framework made by Leary, with a discernible augmentation characterized by increased complexity. This augmented rendition is poised to offer a more nuanced portrayal of character archetypes within the realm of video games.

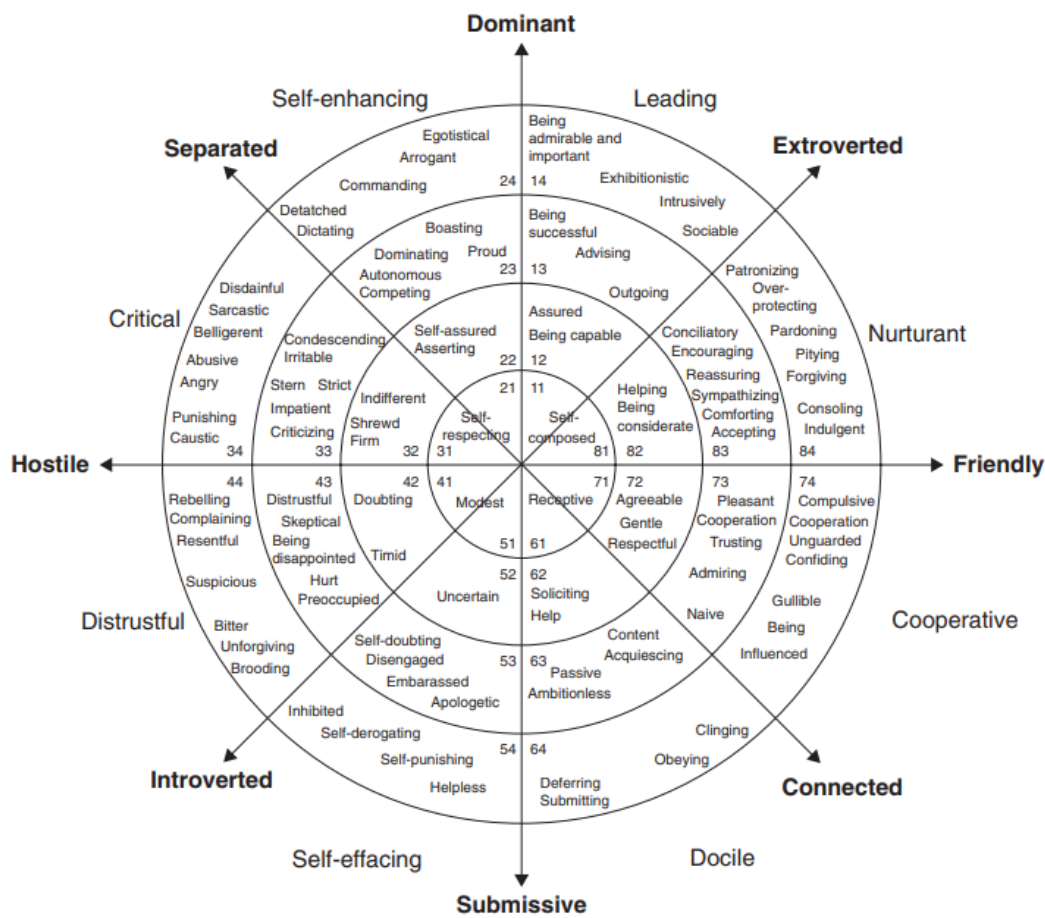


Figure 10

1.4. Characters and narrative

Our current focus will delve into the study of characters and narrative, particularly examining how a well-crafted narrative can enhance the role of characters within a game's story. This exploration will provide a solid foundation for understanding how the effects of depression can be effectively portrayed through narrative elements, such as the plot, and verisimilitude.

We will begin by discussing the differences between narrative and plot to better distinguish these concepts. This section will cover the basic definitions and then delve deeper into the plot, breaking it down into its five essential elements: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. Examples from *TLOU* will be used to illustrate these elements in practice.

Then, we will explore Aristotle's study of tragedy, specifically focusing on the six qualitative parts of Athenian tragedy. Each part will be examined with examples from both the game and TV show versions of *TLOU*. This section will conclude with a discussion on the concept of verisimilitude, highlighting how realistic character portrayals resonate with real-world experiences.

Finally, we will provide an overview of how narrative functions in video games. This section will emphasize the importance of maintaining player engagement through effective storytelling techniques and pacing. Additionally, we will explore the role of transmedia storytelling, using the third episode of the TV show as a case study to demonstrate how it contributes to world-building and narrative depth.

1.4.1. Narrative and plot

Here, we will explore the distinction between narrative and plot. “A story is not the same as a plot. It may form the basis of one, but the plot is an organism of a higher type” (Forster, 1927, p. 24). What Forster means is that the difference between the narrative and plot is something that involves the arrangement of events with causality and structure, transforming a mere sequence of incidents into a cohesive and compelling storyline. We will provide an analysis of the Freytag’s pyramid structure of the plot and use examples from both the video game and TV show versions of *TLOU* to elucidate these concepts.

The narrative refers to the way a story is told, so “story can be defined as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence – dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on” (Forster, 1927, p. 22), the perspective from which the story is presented, and the style of storytelling. The plot is the sequence, so it’s when “the time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it” (Forster, 1927, p. 61) It includes the main actions, conflicts, and resolutions that drive the narrative forward, so it requires with that, “the plot-maker expects us to remember, we expect him to leave no loose ends. Every action or word in a plot ought to count” (Forster, 1927, p. 62).

The structure of a plot can vary significantly depending on the narrative style, genre, and the creator's intention. However, several classic plot structures are commonly recognized on the narrative, some of them are: three-act structure, five-act structure, hero's journey, Freytag's pyramid, circular narrative, and non-linear narrative. We chose to use Freytag's pyramid structure because it allows for a clearer understanding of the plot, enabling us to effectively separate and analyse the narrative of the video game and each episode of the TV show. The Freytag's pyramid structure of a plot is illustrated in Figure 11, and it can be divided into five key elements, which are:

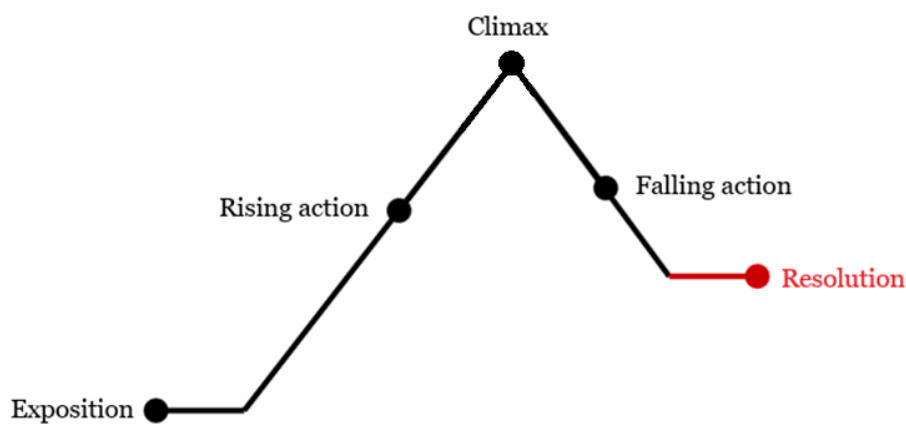


Figure 11

Exposition is the start and “should be kept free from anything distracting, and its task is to prepare for the action” (Freytag & MacEwan, 1900, p. 120). On both media of *TLOU*, the exposition begins with Joel's life before the outbreak, introducing his daughter Sarah and establishing their bond, leading to the transition from the world before the infection and the post-apocalyptic world.

Rising action builds tension through a series of conflicts and challenges, it means that “the action has been started; the chief persons have shown what they are; the interest has been awakened. Mood, passion, involution have received an impulse in a given direction” (Freytag & MacEwan, 1900, p. 125). The rising action involves Joel and Ellie's journey, facing numerous dangers from infected, bandits, and other survivors, and the TV show mirrors it.

Climax is the “place in the piece where the results of the rising movement come out strong and decisively; it is almost always the crowning point of a great, amplified scene, enclosed

by the smaller connecting scenes of the rising, and of the falling action” (Freytag & MacEwan, 1900, p. 128). On both media, the climax occurs when Joel decides to rescue Ellie from the Fireflies, choosing her life over the potential cure for humanity.

Falling action are the events that follow the climax and begin to resolve the story’s conflicts, “or, as it may well be called, the return; specially in powerful plays in which the heroes are the directing force” (Freytag & MacEwan, 1900, p. 133). At this point, Joel has already made his decision: he saved Ellie from the Fireflies and killed Marlene. Afterward, he decides to take Ellie with him to his brother’s refuge.

Resolution is the conclusion where the story’s conflicts are resolved, and the characters’ futures are hinted so “in it the embarrassment of the chief characters is relieved through a great deed.” (Freytag & MacEwan, 1900, p. 137). Similarly, the term denouement was used “in classical dramaturgy, and is situated at the end of the play, when the contradictions are resolved and the threads of the plot unravelled” (Pavis, 1998, p. 93). Also, it can be done on a way that the end is left open, this concept being called cliffhanger, which was often used by Dickens, for example, on the “endings of his serial publications to keep readers in suspense” (Nussbaum, 2012).

Both, the game and TV show, concludes with Joel lying to Ellie about the Fireflies, leading to a complex and morally ambiguous ending, leaving the players and viewers with questions about the future of the characters. The Figure 12, right before the TV show finale, leaves viewers wondering what will happen next.



Figure 12

1.4.2. Aristotle characters and narrative

In this subchapter, we will delve into the contributions of Aristotle, “which lead some important aspects, that marked and still do it nowadays” (Brait, 2017, p. 19), to the understanding of characters, story, and plot. Aristotle’s foundational concepts provide essential references that enrich our analysis of these aspects in *TLOU*. His six qualitative parts of Athenian tragedy are: mythos, ethos, dianoia, lexis, melos, and opsis. Among those six concepts, we opt to delve deeper into two of them as they exemplify more effectively the important points of our study. Also, we’re going to study the concept of verisimilitude. With those themes, it is possible to understand better the nuances of the characters, which can be used on the chapter 3 of our study.

1.4.2.1. Six qualitative parts of Athenian tragedy

As mentioned earlier, we will explore two out of the six concepts, as they will significantly enrich our analysis of *TLOU*. They are the following:

Lexis: the diction, is the choice of words and style of dialogue. It’s the dialogue, “which in addition to action, is a tactic characters utilize to achieve their, often opposing, objectives” (Tylie Shider, 2021). On *TLOU*, it’s the realistic and emotionally charged dialogue that enhances character development and immersion.

Melos: the song, also known as the musical elements and the “rhythm of speech or the use of literal music. Both of which are utilized to drive a narrative forward, or delineate character and emotion” (Tylie Shider, 2021). On *TLOU*, the utilization of music and sound design to evoke emotions and create atmosphere is crucial in both media, particularly because “sound design in horror games is carefully crafted terror that manipulates players’ emotions, keeping them on the edge of their seats” Christina (2024).

We’ll consider Lexis and Melos for this study. Lexis focuses on dialogue and word usage, which is invaluable for understanding the signs of depression through characters’ actions and expressions in the game or TV show. Dialogue and character expressions provide a powerful means to interpret their symptoms. Melos, as Christina (2024) notes, highlights the use of music in horror games, which is crucial for capturing players’ attention and creating an immersive atmosphere. This principle also applies to the TV show, as both mediums convey a sense of impending danger through sound changes.

Analysing these two contexts enhances our understanding of events in both media and reveals how depression is depicted.

1.4.2.2. Verisimilitude

“Those who imitate, imitate agents; and these must be either admirable or inferior” (Aristotle, 1988, p. 5). It’s one of Aristotle's sentences that led to the creation of the concept of verisimilitude. When he refers to being admirable, he's talking about those who create tragedy, while inferior refers to comedy. The main point of verisimilitude is to enhance the realism and believability of a story.

In *TLOU*, verisimilitude is achieved through meticulous world-building, authentic character development, and emotionally resonant storytelling. This realism is particularly significant when exploring themes of depression and mental health, as it allows audiences to engage deeply with the characters' experiences and emotions. “This means, in short, that it is the responsibility of the playwright to organize their material in such a way that everything—practically everything—once prepared, properly presented, and adequately introduced, gains credibility, becomes possible, acceptable, and, in short, assures its verisimilitude” (Pallottini, 2012, p. 23). Now, we are going to use two examples of it on *TLOU*:

Character development: Consistency is essential for character development: "even if the subject of the imitation is inconsistent, and that is the kind of character that is presupposed, it should nevertheless be consistently inconsistent" (Aristotle, 1988, p. 24). This means that character development must maintain a constant trajectory to fulfil the story's intended narrative. For example, Joel and Ellie are portrayed with depth and nuance. Their backgrounds, motivations, and personal struggles are intricately developed, making them relatable and believable. Figure 13, during the game, illustrates the moment they begin to grow closer.



Figure 13

Emotional resonance: *TLOU* explores universal themes such as grief, love, hope, and despair. These themes are presented in a way that feels genuine: “the actions of the characters and their performance looks real to the spectator” (Pavis, 1998, p. 431), and impactful, enhancing the emotional connection with the audience. We will delve about it more closely on the chapter 3.

1.4.3. Narrative in video games

“Normally, when video games feature stories, they stick for the most part to Aristotle’s concept of a beginning, middle and end” (Farca, 2011, p. 18). In the realm of video games narrative, the story is important, because “many players need a story to motivate them to play” (Adams, 2014, p. 156). Indeed, the way stories are crafted and presented can drive players to have a “greater emotional satisfaction by providing a sense of progress toward a dramatically meaningful, rather than an abstract, goal” (Adams, 2014, p. 155). Therefore, we can say that the narrative structure in video games not only motivates players but also enriches their gaming experience by giving them a purposeful and emotionally resonant journey.

The conclusion of a video game can evoke a wide range of emotions in players, from joy and satisfaction to sadness and contemplation, making “the ending of a story one of its most critical emotional moments. Storytellers craft their endings to evoke specific feelings in the audience—sometimes even in the very last sentence” (Adams, 2014, p.

177). Crafting an impactful ending is a crucial aspect of game design, as it leaves a lasting impression and can significantly influence how players remember the experience.

Writers and designers use various techniques to ensure that the ending resonates with players, keeping them engaged and sparking curiosity about what might come next. One of the key methods used by game writers is to develop a narrative that builds up to a powerful climax, as we can see on *TLOU*, when Joel decides to kill all the Fireflies to rescue Ellie. Also, we can see the use of the narrative device to keep players thinking about the ending of the game, as for example, a cliffhanger on the end of both media, when Joel promised Ellie that the story he told about what happened on the Fireflies was true, which we can see on the Figure 14, from the game.



Figure 14

The length of a video game is a crucial factor in its storytelling potential. “The longer a game, the more it benefits from a story” (Adams, 2014, p. 157), exploring intricate details and developing complex plotlines that enhance the overall experience. With an extended playtime, writers and developers can introduce more characters, subplots, and world-building elements, enriching the story and making it more immersive for players, by tying “the disparate events into a single continuous experience and keep the player’s interest” (Adams, 2014, p. 157).

Another critical aspect of narrative development in video games is the use of cut scenes. Cut scenes, which are non-interactive sequences that advance the story, must be used properly; they can be “rewards, pure and simple, each chapter ending with a cliff-hanger

that exists to pull the player forward through gameplay to the next one” (Farca, 2011, p. 47). While they also can provide essential context, character development, and plot progression, they also have the potential to disrupt the gameplay “flow and rhythm of the player’s actions” (Adams, 2014, p. 162). This approach allows for a detailed examination of characters' facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, aiding in the identification of emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, and irritability, which are common symptoms of depression.

In summary, the length of a video game and the careful use of cut-scenes are vital components of effective storytelling and exploring the facial reactions of characters, as we can see on the Figure 15. A well-paced, longer game allows for deeper narrative exploration, while thoughtfully implemented cut scenes can enhance the story without disrupting gameplay. In *TLOU*, the game's length effectively allows for in-depth exploration of character traits and the narrative. Additionally, the use of cut scenes is expertly handled, keeping players immersed and eager to discover what happens next, especially when cliffhangers are introduced before seasonal changes in the game.



Figure 15

1.4.3.1. Transmedia

Since we are examining two different media adaptations of *TLOU*, it's crucial to highlight the variations in how the story of Bill and Frank is portrayed in the game versus the TV show. Transmedia storytelling “disperses its story across different media”, and that’s how

“the story becomes transmedial, as Bolm says. This means that “its characters become transmedial as well” (Blom, 2023, p. 17), because, ideally, “each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (Jenkins 2011) and similarly, we might say, to the building of the characters. As we will see, in episode three of the TV series, the narrative diverges significantly from the game, providing a richer exploration of their characters. This is where the concept of transmedia storytelling becomes particularly significant. By using different media formats to tell various aspects of a story, creators can expand the universe and provide audiences with a more detailed and immersive experience; that way, “they facilitate the telling of many stories” (Schell, 2008, p. 306). In the video game, Bill is depicted primarily as a survivalist who aids Joel in obtaining a car battery. His relationship with Frank is subtly mentioned, with Bill referring to Frank as his partner, but the nature of their relationship is left ambiguous and largely unexplored. The TV show takes a more nuanced and expansive approach to Bill and Frank's story, portraying them as a couple living together in a fortified town, presenting a deeper, more intimate look at their relationship, as we can see on the Figure 16. This adaptation shows their life together, highlighting their emotional connection. This portrayal not only humanizes the characters but also enriches the overall narrative, providing viewers with a more comprehensive understanding of their lives.

Consequently, the TV show leverages transmedia storytelling to delve deeper into Bill and Frank's relationship (see Figure 16); this way the utilization of transmedia storytelling in *TLOU* allows for a broader and more nuanced exploration of characters and their backstories. The TV show's expansion of the game's narrative exemplifies the potential of transmedia storytelling to enhance and deepen the story.



Figure 16

2. Depression

Now that we have laid the groundwork regarding character theory, we turn our focus to the exploration of depression. This thematic element will serve as a pivotal lens through which we analyse the actions and behaviours of characters in both the video game and TV show adaptations of *TLOU*. By examining the symptoms and manifestations of depression within the narrative context, we aim to draw parallels between the experiences of the video games characters and their TV show counterparts. This comparative analysis will shed light on the nuanced portrayal of mental health themes within the storytelling landscape of *TLOU*, offering valuable insights into the intersection of psychological depth and narrative complexity.

Consequently, to achieve what was said before, we'll need to delve on the literature of depression. In general, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the depressive disorder, or just depression, as a common mental disorder: "it involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time" (WHO, 2023). This statement serves as the inception of our journey into the exploration of depression. In our quest to understand this complex mental health disorder, we will delve into the definition, symptoms, causes, risks, and diagnosis of each type of depression. Drawing upon a diverse range of reputable sources including the WHO, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Order of Psychology of Portugal (OPP), Ministry of Health of Brazil (MHB), and the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5)*, we aim to construct a comprehensive framework for understanding depressive disorders. These sources provide invaluable insights into the nuances of depression, offering a wealth of information that will inform our analysis and classification of characters within *TLOU* who may exhibit similar mental health challenges.

2.1. Definition

Every source cited on the last paragraph agrees that depression is a common mental disorder, and "it can affect all aspects of life, including relationships with family, friends and community" (PAHO, n.d.). WHO adds that a depressive episode is different from regular variation of mood: they can last for a day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks. And it can cause difficulties in all aspects of life. The depressive episode can be categorized as mild, moderate, and severe, depending on what the individual feels on a depressive episode. (WHO, 2023). As highlighted by the findings of OPP, individuals

experiencing bad days may find their daily functioning significantly impaired to the point where accomplishing tasks becomes nearly impossible (2021). This phenomenon of fluctuating between good and bad days is prominently depicted in both the video game and TV show adaptations of *TLOU*. In Chapter Three of this study, we will delve deeper into the portrayal of these fluctuations and their effects on the characters within the narrative.

However, the OPP also says that “it doesn’t mean that we can’t have good moments while depressive” (2021). As we can see on Figure 17, Joel and Ellie had a good time together during episode nine of the TV Show.



Figure 17

Moreover, there are moments in which it is common to happen a trigger, a term used to describe a stimulus or event that elicits a strong emotional response, typically a negative or distressing one, in an individual.

Therefore, it becomes evident that the gravity, frequency, duration, and symptoms of depression vary from person to person, a notion we will explore further through a comparison of symptoms and characters in *TLOU*. It's essential to recognize that depression differs significantly from the normal fluctuations in mood or daily challenges we encounter. Depending on the severity of symptoms—ranging from mild to moderate to severe—depression can lead to dysfunction in various aspects of life, including work and relationships.

2.1.1. Diagnostic

The diagnosis of depression is a meticulous process that requires the expertise of qualified healthcare professionals and adherence to established criteria and guidelines. At the forefront of diagnostic criteria for depression lies the *DSM-5*, published by the APA. This comprehensive manual outlines specific diagnostic criteria for various types of depressive disorders, providing a standardized framework for assessing and diagnosing individuals experiencing depressive symptoms. Identifying and diagnosing involves additional steps. For instance, healthcare professionals perform a comprehensive clinical assessment, which includes an in-depth interview to analyse the individual's symptoms, medical history, and family background.

In sub-chapter 2.2 of our study, we will delve into the diagnostic criteria outlined in the *DSM-5*, explore how they apply to each character within the universe of *TLOU* and use the knowledge gained from it to conduct a deeper analysis of the characters on the chapter three. By systematically analysing the behaviours, emotions, and experiences of characters in relation to the diagnostic criteria for depression, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of their mental health struggles and the implications for their narrative arcs. Given the absence of a specific doctor or diagnostic process within the narrative of *TLOU*, we must adopt alternative methods to assess and identify depressive symptoms exhibited by characters. One approach involves analysing visual cues, such as facial expressions and dialogues. For instance, Ellie's reaction in the game (see Figure 18) exemplifies how facial expressions can be effectively utilized in this study.



Figure 18

2.1.2. Causes

WHO states that the pivotal events that occur throughout one's life can serve as significant triggers for depression. Stressful experiences have the potential to set in motion the onset of depressive symptoms (2023). Psychological factors, such as low self-esteem and personality traits like neuroticism can increase vulnerability to depression. We can also talk about “social support, poor interpersonal relationships that can contribute to the development and exacerbation of depression” (Hawton & Fortune, 2008, p. 893), and “substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs. These substances can disrupt brain chemistry and worsen depressive symptoms” (Regier 1990, p. 2511).

In the context of *TLOU*, we can identify several specific scenarios that mirror potential causes of depression. The first example is the death of Joel's daughter, Sarah, in the opening sequence of both media; the second is the loving conflicts of Bill and Frank on the third episode of the TV Show: while on the game, there's not so much we know about the partnership of Bill and Frank, still, we can notice by Bill's reaction that it was a complicated relationship, as it is described on the letter, on Figure 19, that Frank left for Bill, on the game.

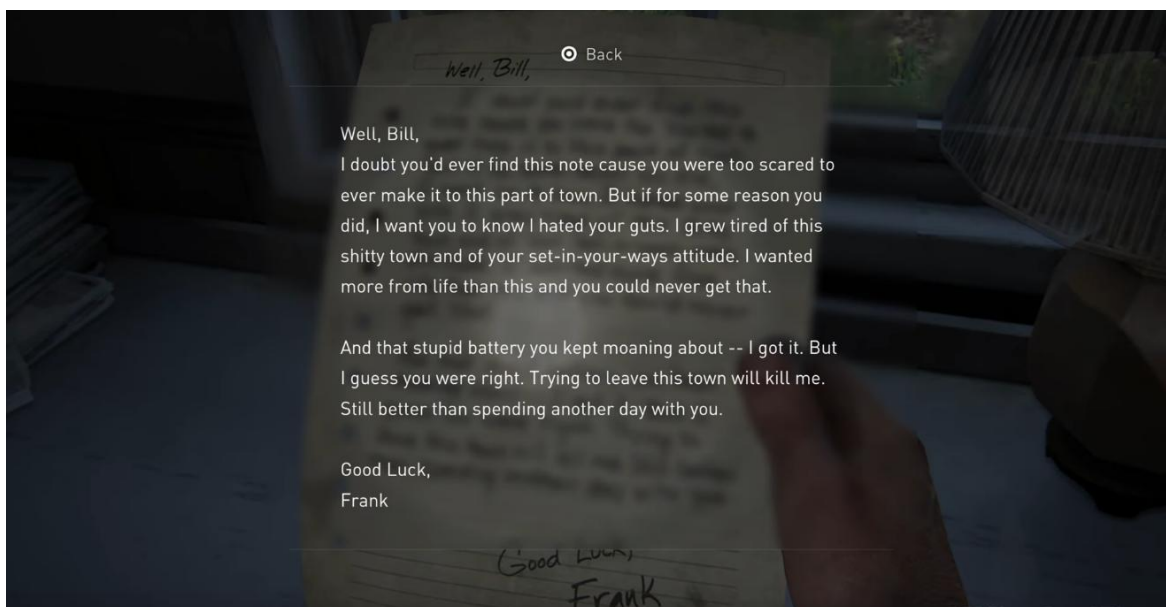


Figure 19

However, there's still more causes that can be considered to our study, such as:

Genetics: on that case, according to the webpage Stanford medicine “heritability is probably forty to fifty percent and might be higher for severe depression” (Major Depression and Genetics, n.d.). This study also says that around fifty percent of cases of

depression are from genetics and the other fifty are from external factors, that we will talk on the next topic. While genetics may not be explicitly depicted as a cause of depression in *TLOU* media, we can discern other significant factors at it.

Childhood problems: “severe childhood physical or sexual abuse, childhood emotional and physical neglect, and severe life stress are probably all risk factors.” (Major Depression and Genetics, n.d.), specifically, instances of childhood emotional and physical neglect, as well as severe life stress, emerge as prominent themes within the narrative.

Physical health conditions: “the presence of a physical health condition can increase the risk of depression” (Remes et al., 2021, p. 3). In that case, people can start to be depressed with other kinds of illness, because they tend to think that their life is worthless if they have obesity, diabetes, forms of cancer and any physical illness that can prejudice one’s life. An example of how illness can intersect with depression is illustrated through the character of Frank in *TLOU* TV series, as we will see on subchapter 3.4.3.2.1.

Brain biochemistry: some brain substances are important to correct functionality of this organ, called neurotransmitters, such as “noradrenaline, serotonin and dopamine, that are involved on the regulation of motor activity, of appetite, of sleep and humour” (MHB, n.d.). While not explicitly addressed in either medium, the physiological well-being of characters in *TLOU* is undoubtedly affected by the harsh realities of their environment. The scarcity of quality food, chronic sleep deprivation, and exposure to constant danger all contribute to a myriad of physical and psychological challenges faced by the characters. These adverse conditions likely disrupt the characters' biochemical balance, potentially exacerbating existing mental health issues or predisposing them to develop such conditions.

Microbiome: “a disorder microbiome can lead to inflammation, which can lead to depression” (Remes et al., 2021, p. 5). It’s important to note that it can “interfere with emotional regulation and contribute to harmful inflammatory processes and mood disorders” (Remes et al., 2021, p. 5). Such theme still needs more study to be understood completely, since it’s a complex aspect of a symptom leading to depression. The concept of microbiome changes finds a compelling illustration in the character of Tess in *TLOU*.

Culture: “cultural meaning, habits, and traditions can also contribute to either stigma or support in the social and familial response to mental illness” (APA, 2013). The culture may provide coping strategies that can help the person with depressive disorder, it can

help on searching for accessing health care of various types, including alternative treatments, can either seek for a better treatment or worse, depending on the place on which the person is, it can also change the way that the professionals take care of the person, because of the cultural acceptance or denying of the symptoms depending on the person's decision. The upheaval caused by the post-apocalyptic world in *TLOU* necessitates drastic adaptations to survive in the face of overwhelming challenges.

With an understanding of the causes of depression in mind, we can observe how these factors manifest in the post-apocalyptic world of *TLOU*. Set against a backdrop of societal collapse and constant peril, the characters face an array of stressors that contribute to depressive symptoms. The pervasive threat of microbial infection, exemplified by Tess's sacrifice and fear of becoming infected herself, on the TV show, underscores the physical and psychological toll of living in a world overrun by disease. Additionally, the ongoing conflict between factions such as F.E.D.R.A, that stands for Federal Disaster Response Agency which is the government agency to deal with the mass infection on both media, and the Fireflies, that is a militia that is fighting against the control of F.E.D.R.A to give freedom for the people that survived, as well as the threat posed by raiders, that are an independent group that are stealing from innocent people to have their own equipment and food, creates an environment of perpetual danger and uncertainty, further exacerbating feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Moreover, the complex interpersonal dynamics depicted in the game, such as the relationship between Bill and Frank, shed light on the psychological factors at play. While not explicitly stated in the game, clues within the narrative suggest a romantic relationship between the two characters, with Frank's suicide having a profound impact on Bill's emotional well-being. This example illustrates how interpersonal relationships, and the loss of trust can contribute to depressive symptoms in a world where survival often depends on self-preservation at any cost.

Furthermore, the prevalence of substance abuse, particularly drug use among soldiers of F.E.D.R.A, highlights the reliance on pharmacological interventions to cope with the demands of daily life. The soldier's dependence on drugs to fulfil his duties underscores the pervasive nature of substance abuse in a society grappling with trauma and uncertainty.

2.1.3. Symptoms

According to the MHB, depression symptoms typically begin with a “range of emotional and cognitive changes, including feelings of sadness, guilt, irritability, apathy, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating, and memory impairment (n.d.), that can be observable in characters in *TLOU*. Characters such as Ellie exhibit symptoms of irritability and feelings of guilt, as evidenced by her reaction to the traumatic event of killing David on both media or the loss of her friend on the DLC, which stands for Downloadable Content after the game release, and the episode with the same name: *Left Behind*. The range of symptoms, from a depressive mood to feelings of emptiness and self-judgment, are subtly conveyed through facial expressions and reactions to triggering events throughout the narrative, as we can notice on Figure 20.



Figure 20

Moreover, the duration and impact of depressive episodes, as described by the WHO further resonate with the experiences of characters in *TLOU*. And it can be coupled with the associated difficulties in various aspects of life, that mirrors the enduring struggles faced by characters in the post-apocalyptic world. Additionally, the fluctuation between emotional states, as exemplified by characters like Henry and Sam, underscores the complexity of psychological responses to trauma within *TLOU*. Sam's transition from optimism to despair upon becoming infected exemplifies the profound impact of traumatic events on mental health and the potential progression towards depression.

2.1.4. Risks

Individuals with depression face a multitude of risks that extend beyond the realm of mental health. The adverse effects of depression can manifest in various aspects of life, including physical health, substance abuse, social relationships, and ultimately, the risk of suicide.

Physically, depression is associated with an increased susceptibility to health problems such as “cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic pain” (Whooley & Wong, 2013). The debilitating effects of depression extend beyond mental health to encompass physical well-being and lifestyle habits. Individuals grappling with depression often struggle to muster the energy or motivation to engage in healthy behaviours such as exercise or proper nutrition. The pervasive sense of fatigue and lethargy associated with depression can deter individuals from participating in physical activity or even simple tasks like taking a walk. Moreover, the psychological burden of depression can disrupt appetite regulation and lead to erratic eating patterns, with some individuals finding it challenging to maintain a balanced diet; it is confirmed by the statement of Katon, saying that depressive people “neglect their physical health, leading to poor self-care practices, missed medical appointments, and reduced adherence to treatment plans for other medical conditions” (2003, p. 217). In the context of *TLOU*, where survival is a constant struggle against the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic world, characters face heightened challenges in maintaining healthy behaviours amidst the chaos and uncertainty. The harsh realities of their environment, coupled with the psychological toll of their experiences, exacerbate the barriers to self-care and healthy living.

It can also lead to individuals with depression to start with substance abuse and addiction as a means of coping with their symptoms. The reliance on drugs or alcohol to alleviate emotional pain can exacerbate the severity of depression and lead to further complications, as it is confirmed by the study of Swendsen *et al.* (2010), where it is said that “depression is a common co-occurring condition with substance use disorders. Individuals with depression may use substances to cope, leading to addiction and its associated risks” (p. 6). It is important to note that substance addiction and depression creates a complex and often debilitating cycle that significantly impacts individuals' daily functioning. For individuals struggling with depression, the allure of substances as a means of alleviating emotional pain can quickly escalate into a dangerous dependency. The consequences of substance addiction among characters of *TLOU* grappling with depression are particularly stark. The reliance on substances to muster the energy to

carry out basic tasks such as preparing meals or leaving the bed underscores the profound impact of addiction on individuals' ability to navigate the challenges of their environment, as can be seen on the first episode of TV show, when Joel needs to drink alcohol and use drugs to carry the day (see Figure 21).



Figure 21

Social isolation is another significant risk factor for individuals with depression. Feelings of loneliness and disconnection from others can perpetuate a cycle of despair and it can “exacerbate depressive symptoms and impact overall well-being” (Teo et al., 2013, p. 1). The consequences of social isolation among characters in *TLOU* are particularly pronounced. The absence of meaningful connections with others leaves characters vulnerable to the ravages of their mental health struggles and makes it harder to survive on a post-apocalyptic world.

On the worst scenario, some people consider the experience of depression so hard that they think about ending their life. The overwhelming sense of hopelessness and despair can culminate in thoughts of self-harm or suicide as a perceived escape from suffering. According to the OPP, suicide can be understood through three distinct phases, each with its own unique characteristics and implications, those are: thoughts or suicidal feelings which can vary from thoughts, abstract feelings about ending the life or suicidal feelings; trying to commit suicide that corresponds to actions with the intention to end the life; committing suicide, that is, “when someone, intentionally, wants to end its life and it happens because of the actions that the person chooses to do it” (OPP, 2021). As

previously discussed, characters such as Henry, tragically succumb to the depths of despair, with his suicide, on both media, serving as stark reminders of the devastating consequences of untreated mental illness. Additionally, the abuse of drugs by characters like Joel, on TV show, underscores the desperate measures individuals may resort to cope with their psychological struggles.

2.1.5. Prevention

The prevention of depression is a critical aspect of mental health care that is not prominently depicted within the narratives of *TLOU*.

In exploring the prevention of depression on real life, it is instructive to draw upon resources that offer evidence-based strategies for promoting mental wellness and resilience. Starting with the style of life, it is important to “have a good diet and practice physical activities regularly” (MHB, n.d.): “engaging in regular physical activity has been associated with a reduced risk of depression” (Mammen & Faulkner, 2013, p. 653), and “avoiding the consumption of alcohol and not using illegal drugs” (MHB, n.d.).

Going back to the universe of *TLOU*, Joel's coping mechanisms serve as a poignant reflection of his resilience and resourcefulness in the face of profound loss. Following the devastating breakup with his wife, Joel finds solace in caring, as seen on Figure 22, from the game, and participating in activities with Sarah. These moments of connection and bonding offer a temporary reprieve from the emotional turmoil and provide Joel with a sense of purpose and meaning.



Figure 22

2.1.6. Treatment

The depressive disorder ranks among the leading causes of disability, represents a significant public health concern with a high prevalence worldwide, and is associated with heightened risk of suicide, since “it tends to be chronic and recurrent, mainly when it’s not treated” (MHB, n.d.). The recommended treatment for depressive disorder, according to OPAS (n.d.), WHO (2023), and APA (2013), typically involves a combination of psychotherapy and, in some cases, when the symptoms are severe, medication may be considered as a second-line treatment option, but they warn that it can’t be used on children and adolescents. Psychotherapy is used by trained professionals, such as psychologists, and plays a central role in addressing the underlying causes of depression, equipping individuals with coping strategies to manage their symptoms effectively.

In the world of *TLOU*, the availability and utilization of conventional treatments for depression, such as antidepressant medications, are conspicuously absent due to the collapse of modern civilization and the scarcity of resources. During the initial stages of the game, players may observe that Joel has anti-anxiety tablets on his table, observable on Figure 23, suggesting that he may be grappling with symptoms of anxiety and potentially depression. While the specific nature of these tablets is not explicitly stated, their presence underscores the psychological toll of Joel's experiences and hints at the depth of his emotional turmoil, as we will see at subchapter 3.2.1.

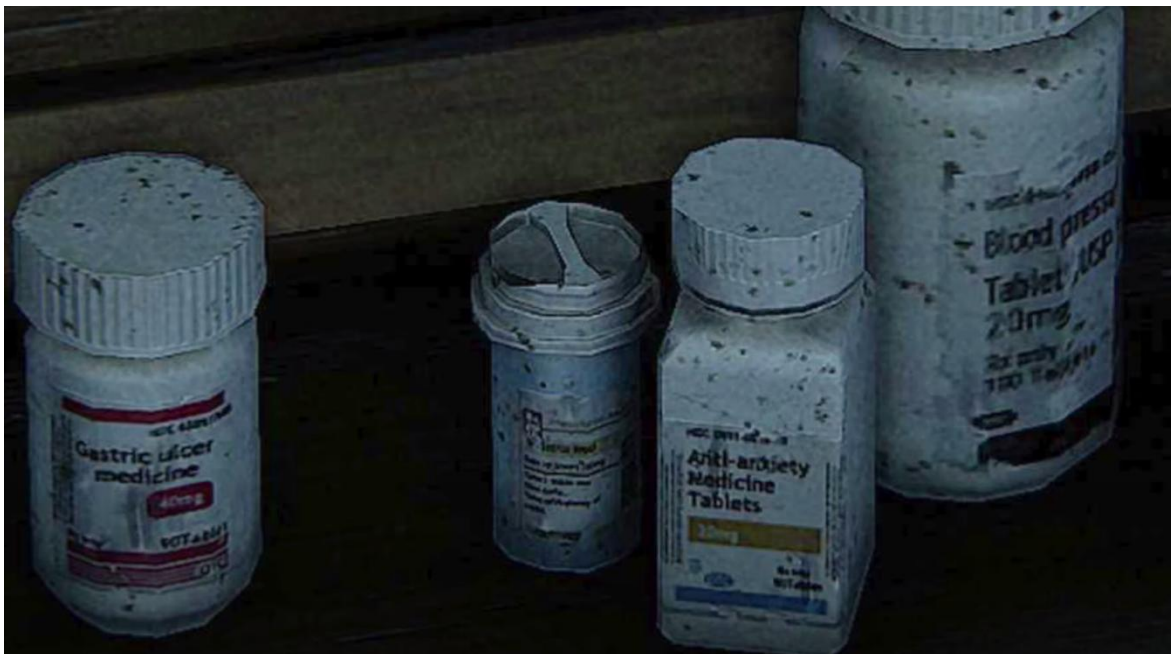


Figure 23

2.2. Types of depression according to *DSM-5*

Before we begin to dive into the types of depression, we must know the importance of *the DSM-5* that represents a cornerstone in the field of mental health assessment and diagnosis. Published by the APA, it's "widely used in both research and practice. Researchers rely on its standardized criteria to ensure consistency in studying depressive disorders, while clinicians use it as a guide for making accurate diagnoses and developing appropriate treatment plans" (First et al., 2015, p. 85). It means that the *DSM-5* provides a comprehensive framework for classifying and diagnosing mental health disorders, including various types of depression. Functioning as an important tool for clinicians, it holds intrinsic value as an essential educational asset for students and practitioners, offering essential information, and revisions must be feasible for routine clinical practice.

Acknowledging the limitations of analysing all aspects, potential causes, and treatment plans for depression within the narrative of *TLOU*, it becomes imperative to adopt a more nuanced approach focused on interpreting the reactions and behaviours of characters within the context of different types of depression. While the explicit depiction of diagnostic criteria and treatment interventions may be absent from *TLOU*, the richly drawn characters and immersive storytelling provide fertile ground for exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions of depression. Through careful observation and analysis, we can discern patterns of behaviour, interpersonal dynamics, and coping mechanisms that align with recognized subtypes of depression, that will be shown on the next paragraph.

Finally, it makes sense to focus on the types of depression that are most readily discernible based on observable behaviours and expressions within the game and TV show. By prioritizing the types of depression that are most conducive to interpretation within the context of *TLOU's* storytelling, we can ensure a more focused and meaningful analysis of character dynamics and psychological themes. While it may not be feasible to cover every subtype of depression, selecting those that align most closely with the observable cues and thematic elements present in *TLOU* allows for a more targeted and insightful exploration of the characters' emotional journeys.

2.2.1. Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder

2.2.1.1. Diagnostic features

Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder (DMDD) is characterized by the central feature of enduring, intense, and chronic irritability and can be “present for 12 or more months, on places like at home, at school, with peers, etc.” (APA, 2013, p. 156). This heightened irritability is clinically evident through two primary manifestations, the initial of which involves “recurrent temper outbursts, that are inconsistent with development level and occur, on average, three or more times per week” (APA, 2013, p. 156). These outbursts commonly arise in reaction to situations of frustration and may “manifest either verbally or behaviourally and the intensity or duration depends on the situation, and it’s also observable by others” (APA, 2013, p. 156).

2.2.1.2. Prevalence

This type of depression emerges as a prevalent condition observed in “children and adolescents with more than 6 and maximum of 18 years” (APA, 2013, p. 156), seeking services within paediatric mental health clinics. “Rates are expected to be higher in males and school-age children than in females and adolescents.” (APA, 2013, p. 157).

2.2.1.3. Development and course

“The onset of disruptive mood dysregulation disorder must be before age 10 years, and the diagnosis should not be applied to children with a developmental age of less than 6 years.” (APA, 2013, p. 157). The evolving nature of symptoms is set with the maturation process of the children and is different for each case of this illness. As children progress through developmental stages, the potential for alterations in the presentation and characteristics of symptoms introduces a level of complexity, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the condition across various developmental phases. “The use of the diagnosis should be restricted to age groups similar to those in which validity has been established, from 7 to 18 years.” (APA, 2013, p. 157).

2.2.1.4. Risk and prognostic factors

Paediatric individuals characterized by chronic irritability often present intricate psychiatric histories. In these cases, an extensive and pronounced history of chronic irritability is frequently observed, often preceding the fulfilment of complete diagnostic criteria for the syndrome. “Many children with disruptive mood dysregulation disorder have symptoms that also meet criteria for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and for an anxiety disorder, with such diagnoses often being present from a relatively early age. For some children, the criteria for major depressive disorder (MDD) may also be met.” (APA, 2013, p. 158).

2.2.1.5. Examples in *The Last of Us*

Ellie's aggressive outbursts towards others, on TV show, including recruits and individuals conducting tests on her immunity, suggest a pervasive pattern of irritability and anger that exceeds what is considered typical for her age and developmental stage. This chronic irritability and reactivity to perceived provocation are characteristic symptoms of DMDD.

Furthermore, Ellie's aggressive tendencies may be compounded by unresolved trauma and grief stemming from the loss of her friend and presumed lover, Riley. The profound impact of this loss on Ellie's emotional well-being is evident in her interactions with others and her propensity for lashing out in response to stressors or threats.

Additionally, Ellie's confrontation with David, on both medias, who attempts to assault her, elicits a visceral and intense emotional response characterized by defiance and self-preservation; on the Figure 24, from the game, we can see Ellie's reaction while killing David after her battle to survive.



Figure 24

2.2.2. Major depressive disorder

2.2.2.1. Diagnostic features

The criterion symptoms for MDD “must be present nearly every day to be considered, except for weight change and suicidal ideation. Depressed mood must be present for most of the day, in addition to being present nearly every day, also people with MDD complains about insomnia, sleep disturbance, psychomotor disturbance, and fatigue” (APA, 2013, p. 125). In this research, most precisely on the chapter 3, we will examine the facial expressions and dialogues of the characters as a method to discern the potential presence of symptoms related to depression. By evaluating whether the cumulative expressions align with the manifestations specified in the *DSM-5*, we aim to derive accurate insights into the possible occurrence of MDD among the characters of *TLOU*. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the characters' emotional states, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of depressive symptomatology in the context of the established diagnostic criteria. A five (or more) of the following symptoms must be present during the same 2-week period, to be characterized as an MDD, and represent a change from previous functioning, so at least one of the symptoms is either depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure.

In some cases, “individuals complain of having no feelings, feeling anxious, bodily aches, and irritability” (APA, 2013, p. 163). Closely analysing facial expressions, nonverbal, and

verbal cues can provide valuable insights into the emotional state and psychological well-being of characters within *TLOU*. The chapter three of the study will serve as a dedicated exploration of the characters, with particular emphasis on the pattern stated at the paragraph's beginning.

In other cases, “loss of interest or pleasure is nearly always present, at least to some degree. Individuals may report feeling less interested in hobbies, not caring anymore, or not feeling any enjoyment in activities that were previously considered pleasurable” (APA, 2013, p. 163). The loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed activities is often observable by the others, such as family members, friends, or work colleagues, because the person starts to make excuses to not do the activities they used to do. In *TLOU*, Joel's behaviour reflects a profound sense of emotional numbness and disconnection from the world around him. He withdraws from interpersonal interactions and avoids engaging in activities that once brought him joy, like playing guitar.

Still in other situations, “appetite change may involve either a reduction or increase. Some depressed individuals report that they must force themselves to eat.” (APA, 2013, p. 161). The weight change can be either gain or loss on adults and on children. Identifying the criterion is also possible by noticing its manifest in various situations within both form of media on *TLOU*. This study seeks to acknowledge its potential occurrence across diverse scenarios in both representations' examination.

There are times when “sleep disturbance may take the form of either difficulty sleeping or sleeping excessively” (APA, 2013, p. 161). With insomnia, it can be waking up at night and having difficult to sleep again, while the oversleep, or hypersomnia, is characterized by a prolonged sleep at night or increased sleep at daytime. It's notable the disruption in the sleep patterns of characters on *TLOU*; in the case of Joel, his experiences with sleep disturbances are present on both media, when he wakes up at the night.

Other times, there are “psychomotor changes, including agitation or retardation” (APA, 2013, p. 161). In the context of *TLOU*, these psychomotor changes may be reflected in subtle alterations in the tone of voice exhibited by characters during discussions about sensitive themes or emotionally charged topics.

Sometimes, “decreased energy, tiredness, and fatigue are common symptoms” (APA, 2013, p. 163). Everyday tasks, no matter how trivial, may appear to demand an excessive amount of effort. Joel in *TLOU* sells drugs to the soldiers to stabilize their fatigue while they are working.

In other cases, “the sense of worthlessness or guilt associated with a major depressive episode may include unrealistic negative evaluations of one’s worth or guilty preoccupations or ruminations over minor past failings” (APA, 2013, p. 164). People with this symptom tend to misinterpret trivial events and have an exaggerated sense of responsibility, sometimes leading to feel guilty for their actions, that are out of their control. Going to the world of *TLOU*, Henry has an exaggerated sense of responsibility with his little brother, since he blamed himself for not being able to protect him, leading to his suicide.

Many times, “individuals report impaired ability to think, concentrate, or make even minor decisions” (APA, 2013, p. 164). Usually, patients that are present on this criterion are “easily distracted or complain of memory difficulties” (APA, 2013, p. 164). “Memory difficulties are a common cognitive symptom reported by individuals with depression. The neurobiological changes associated with depression can influence synaptic plasticity and, consequently, impact memory function” (MacQueen & Frodl, 2010, p. 252). Going to the world of *TLOU*, Joel said on the episode nine of the TV show that he had lost almost all the memories of the day that he loses Sarah, so it could be a representation of a depressive symptom.

Finally, “thoughts of death, suicide ideation, or suicide attempts are common” (APA, 2013). When people think they are a burden to the other, that it would be better to be dead, or don’t see a way out of the unhappiness, they tend to choose the last resort, that is, suicide. It can be planned where, when, and how it will be done and usually the people around this person don’t notice the signals. On the TV show of *TLOU* Joel said to Ellie that he tried to commit suicide after losing Sarah.

2.2.2.2. Development and course

According to APA (2013), “recovery typically begins within 3 months of onset for two in five individuals with major depression and within 1 year for four in five individuals.” (p. 165). It is important to recognize the individualized nature of each case concerning the impact of depression, whether of a positive or negative nature. External factors, such as experiences of grief, familial challenges, or workplace issues, introduce unique variables that can significantly influence the trajectory and duration of an individual’s recovery.

2.2.2.3. Suicide risk

“The possibility of suicidal behaviour always exists during major depressive episodes. The most consistently described risk factor is a history of suicide attempts or threats, but it should be remembered that most completed suicides are not preceded by unsuccessful attempts” (APA, 2013, p. 167). Again, we can remind the case of Joel, that tried to commit suicide after losing his daughter, of Henry, after losing his brother (Figure 25), and Bill’s decision on the TV show to die with Frank. They hadn’t the history of trying to kill themselves, but their idea came right after a traumatic event, without further notice.

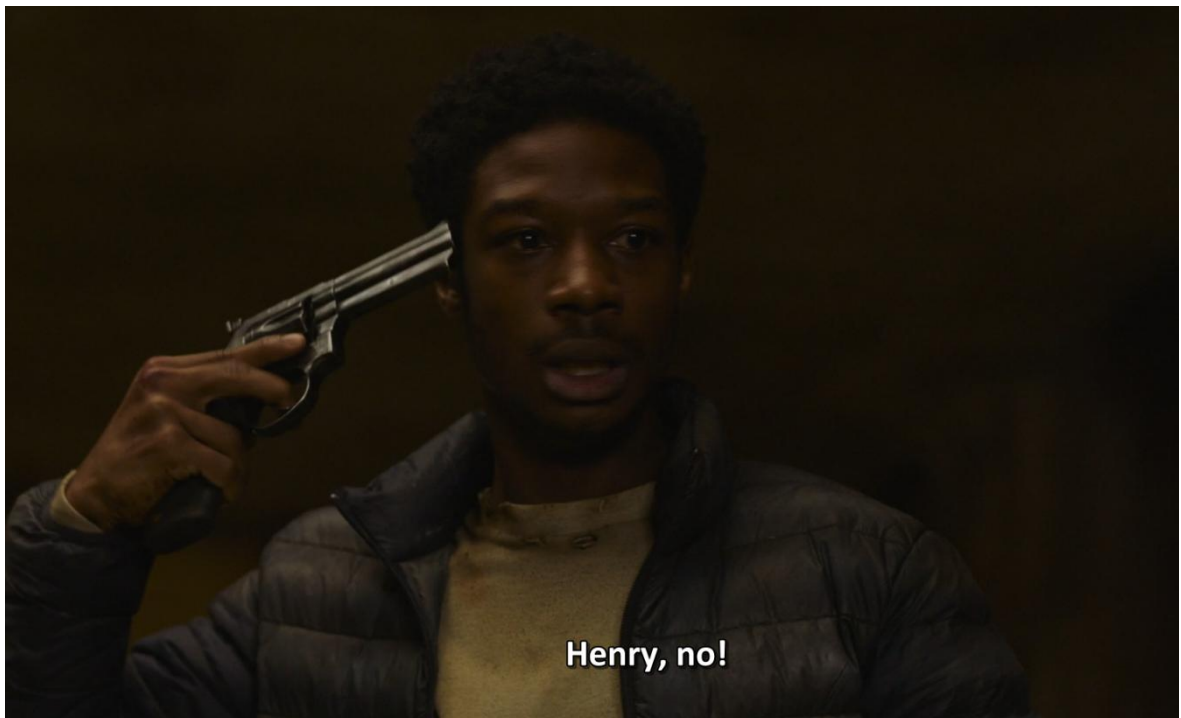


Figure 25

2.2.3. Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia)

2.2.3.1. Diagnostic features

It is a chronic and enduring form of depression. It is characterized by a persistent low mood and a sense of hopelessness that lasts for an extended period. It's important to note that dysthymia can co-occur with other mental health conditions, and its diagnosis requires careful consideration of the chronicity and impact of symptoms on daily functioning. “Major depression may precede persistent depressive disorder, and major depressive episodes may occur during persistent depressive disorder” (APA, 2013, p. 169). It's crucial to recognize that individuals grappling with dysthymia may concurrently

experience MDD. In expressing their emotional state, they often describe a persistent sense of sadness or depression. Throughout both media, Tess is depicted as a pragmatic and hardened individual who navigates the dangers of her world. Despite her outward toughness, Tess harbours a persistent sense of sadness and disillusionment that influence her interactions and motivations.

2.2.3.2. Criterion of dysthymia

According to the *DSM-5*, the diagnosis of dysthymia necessitates the “fulfilment of two out of six specified following criteria, persisting for a minimum of a 2-year duration, with symptom-free intervals not exceeding two months, and it must be observable by others, for at least 2 years” (APA, 2013, p. 169).

Distinguishing between dysthymia and MDD is crucial for accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment planning. While both conditions share common symptoms, such as “poor appetite or overeating; insomnia or hypersomnia; low energy or fatigue; low self-esteem; poor concentration or difficulty making decisions; feelings of hopelessness” (APA, 2013, p. 168), they differ in terms of duration, severity, and functional impairment. Despite his pragmatic approach to survival, Bill's underlying low self-esteem, sense of sadness and hopelessness is palpable, underscoring the chronic and enduring nature of his depressive symptoms. While he may not exhibit the acute intensity of symptoms characteristic of MDD, his persistent low mood and diminished sense of hope are consistent with the diagnostic criteria for dysthymia.

2.2.3.3. Risk and prognostic factors

“Factors predictive of poorer long-term outcome include higher levels of neuroticism (negative affectivity), greater symptom severity, poorer global functioning, and presence of anxiety disorders or conduct disorder” (APA, 2013, p. 170). In the forthcoming exploration of chapter three, our focus will delve into the intricacies of this mental health condition, aiming to identify characters within its characteristics. A cursory reflection prompts the recognition that Joel emerges as a potential candidate for this category. His prolonged suffering, initiated by the profound trauma of losing his daughter, offers a preliminary indication that aligns with the characteristics associated with this form of depression, as we can see on the dialogue of the Figure 26, during the TV show. As we delve deeper into the analysis, a more nuanced understanding of Joel's portrayal and his

reaction during the development of his character will show us the context of this specific mental health framework.



Figure 26

3. Analysis of depressive symptoms in *TLOU*

3.1. Introduction

In this final chapter, we will leverage the knowledge acquired from the first two chapters to conduct a detailed analysis of how the narrative of *TLOU* progresses and how depression manifests within its characters. As outlined in subchapter 1.4.1, we are using Freytag's pyramid as a structural framework because it facilitates a clearer comprehension of the narrative sequence, allowing us to effectively separate and analyse the narratives in both media. Figure 27 presents the narratological structure of the game, mapped using Freytag's Pyramid as the analytical framework. For the TV show, Table 1 outlines the corresponding episodes that align with each narrative section from the game. This method enables us to correlate the narrative segments in the game with their corresponding episodes in the TV show, following the narrative chronological order of events: before the apocalypse, DLC *Left Behind*, summer, autumn, winter, and spring, providing a comprehensive mapping. Further, the four seasons of the year are separated using cut-scenes during the game.

Additionally, the *Left Behind* DLC—Downloadable Content released after the game's initial launch—is addressed only after the main gameplay and corresponds to the seventh episode of the TV show. In the game, it depicts moments of Ellie searching for medicine to treat Joel's injury, interspersed with flashbacks to her time with Riley. In contrast, the TV show focuses primarily on Ellie's encounter with Riley. As most of the content centres on Ellie and Riley's relationship, and since this study follows a chronological narrative order, the events take place after the start of the apocalypse and approximately three weeks before the onset of summer. Therefore, it will be analysed after the initial outbreak of the apocalypse. Referring to Table 1, the noticeable gap in the timestamps and episode sequence for *Left Behind* stems from the decision to adhere to the narratological timeline of events across both media.

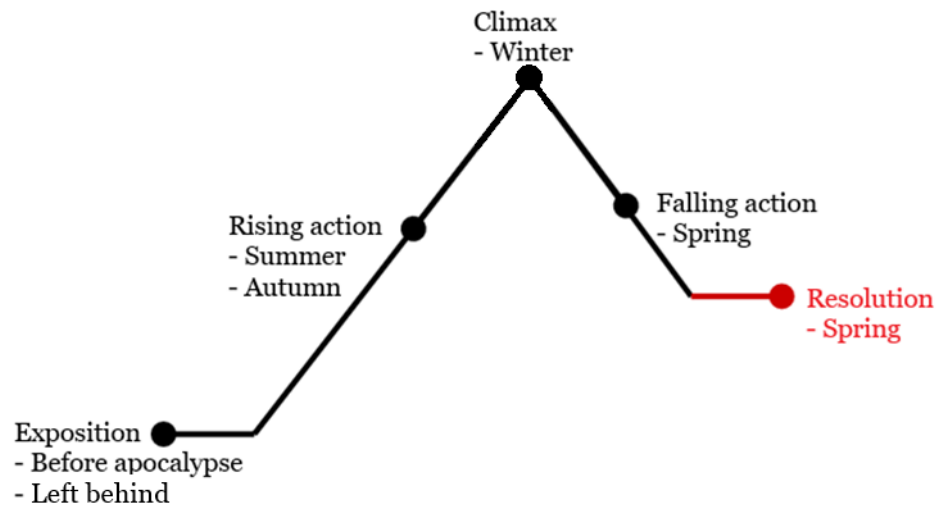


Figure 27

For the game analysis, screenshots and timestamps listed in Table 1, we utilized a YouTube video titled *The Last of Us Part I (2022)*, published by the YouTube channel MKIceAndFire. This video was selected following an extensive search on the platform. Many available videos focused primarily on analysing key moments in the game, often overlooking smaller but equally important details. In contrast, the MKIceAndFire channel provides a full playthrough of the game without commentary, capturing all in-game interactions. This allowed us to extract crucial images and scenes that were not highlighted in review or analysis videos. For the TV show analysis, we used the streaming platform of the HBO Max *The Last of Us (2023)*. Both links are referenced on the bibliography of this study.

Table 1

Narratological event	In the game	In the TV show
Before the apocalypse	From start to 01:15:39	Episode 1
DLC <i>Left behind</i>	From 10:04:32 to the end	Episode 7
Summer	From 01:15:39 to 06:17:17	Episodes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
Autumn	From 06:17:17 to 07:45:11	Episode 6
Winter	From 07:45:11 to 08:47:17	Episode 8
Spring	From 08:47:17 to 10:04:32	Episode 9

Each subchapter will include: a brief contextual overview of the narratological event as depicted in both media with the current stage of Freytag’s pyramid (see Figure 27). This will be followed by a character introduction, offering a concise overview of the character to be analysed. Key scenes will be presented as figures of important moments, providing visual references for subsequent analysis; some figures will incorporate dialogues to clarify the context and actions taking place. The subchapter will then proceed with an analysis of the potential depressive symptoms represented in the figure used as an example. Finally, a table (as exemplified on Table 2) will be provided, detailing the specific depressive symptoms observed and the frequency of their occurrence throughout the character's narrative section. This data will be used to assess whether the criteria for a depressive disorder diagnosis are met.

Table 2

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Before the apocalypse	Joel	(MDD - old) Tiredness	X	X
		(MDD - old) Anxiety	X	
Total	Joel	Major depressive disorder	2	1

Table 2 illustrates the framework we’ll use at the end of each subchapter. The segment columns will indicate the corresponding period of the narrative where the depressive symptoms were observed. Each symptom will be associated with a specific character. In the symptom’s column, we will use the acronyms for the three types of depressive disorders detailed in subchapter 2.2: DMDD, MDD, and dysthymia.

For the *Before the Apocalypse* subchapter, we will use the label “old” to denote that these events occurred years before the main narrative begins. It is important to note that both the game and TV show include a twenty-year time skip, which is crucial for understanding potential cases of dysthymia. The total row will summarize the number of different depressive symptoms identified, distinguishing between those observed in the game and in the TV show.

Through this methodological approach, we aim to elucidate the development of each character within the narrative and their psychological trajectory, particularly focusing on the manifestations of depression. The definitions and concepts introduced in the previous chapters will be pivotal to this analysis, helping to classify the type of depression each character exhibits.

3.2. Before the apocalypse

This subchapter encompasses the initial segments of both the video game and TV show adaptations of *TLOU*. The initial segment of the narrative serves to introduce Joel, the main protagonist, as well as his daughter and brother, who are secondary characters. This early exposition is crucial for establishing the foundational relationships, emotional dynamics, and depression symptoms that drive this study forward.

3.2.1. Joel

In this brief yet significant portion of the story, Joel is portrayed as a loving and caring father and brother, who works diligently to provide for his daughter, Sarah, while also offering support to his brother, Tommy. His characterization is marked by a profound selflessness, often prioritizing the well-being of his loved ones over his own needs. This is evidenced by his desire for those around him to focus on themselves rather than on him. The depiction of Joel's interactions with his family members reveals a deep emotional attachment, highlighting his role as a protective and devoted family figure. This early portrayal is crucial for understanding the motivations behind Joel's subsequent actions and decisions throughout the narrative.

We will now begin examining the scenes in both media:



Figure 28

In the two media portrayals of *TLOU*, notable differences in the initial presentation of the narrative are observed. In the video game, the story begins directly with Sarah waiting for Joel to return from work so she can wish him a happy birthday. In contrast, the television show provides an introductory segment that explores Sarah's daily life and her efforts to repair her father's watch. As the scenes converge in both media, we see a very fatigued Joel returning home after a long day of work (see Figure 28). Despite his

exhaustion, Joel tries to spend quality time with his daughter, recognizing the importance of his birthday to her and wanting to make her happy.

At this early stage in the narrative, Joel's tiredness and low energy are evident (see Figure 28). In the same picture, these symptoms are particularly noticeable, along with his lateness, which suggests he is struggling with time management. Persistent tiredness is recognized as a symptom of MDD, while low energy is a symptom of dysthymia. Consequently, these two symptoms will be added to Table 3 for further analysis.



Figure 29a and 29b

The Figure 29 is exclusively from the game. The brief gameplay segment features Sarah, a secondary character who serves as a primary motivation for Joel. We observe that Joel uses some medications. Upon closer inspection, one of these medications is identified as an anti-anxiety tablet (see Figure 29b). While the presence of anti-anxiety medication alone does not confirm that Joel is experiencing depression, it does indicate that he is dealing with significant anxiety or stress-related issues. It could potentially contribute to depressive symptoms, highlighting underlying problems that occur during MDD, making it the second symptom for the game medium.

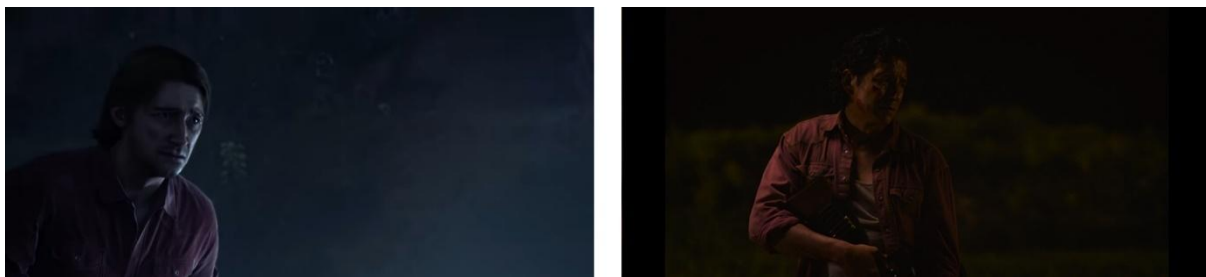


Figure 30

In the Figure 30, we observe Tommy's reaction, on both media, after he shoots the soldier who had already fired at Joel and Sarah, resulting in Sarah being hit. Tommy, a secondary character, is deeply attached to his family and is profoundly affected by the loss of his niece. This traumatic event alters him significantly, leading to a series of poor

decisions, which impacted his relationship with his brother, which we're going to study in greater detail in subchapter 3.5.1.



Figure 31

At the conclusion of the first part of both media, we witness the scene of Sarah's death (Figure 31). Her death transforms her into an archetype of a ghost character, continuously influencing Joel's decisions and actions throughout both media. This pivotal moment marks the beginning of a significant shift in Joel's personality, which will be explored in subsequent subchapters. Combined with Joel's already known anxiety, this traumatic event will make the symptoms of depression more apparent.

Table 3

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Before the apocalypse	Joel	(MDD - old) Tiredness	X	X
		(Dysthymia – old) Low energy	X	X
		(MDD - old) Anxiety	X	
Total		Major depressive disorder (old)	2	1
		Persistent depressive disorder (old)	1	1

The symptoms listed in Table 3 are from a period twenty years prior to the start of the game and TV show, rendering them insufficient on their own to provide a conclusive diagnosis. However, by examining the narrative across other periods, we can identify similar symptoms and tendencies in Joel, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis.

At this stage, based solely on the analysis of Table 3, the symptoms observed before the apocalypse are inadequate to meet the diagnostic criteria for MDD or Dysthymia. This means that the symptoms observed in this subchapter will be carried forward for continued examination.

3.3. *Left behind*

This subchapter encompasses the DLC *Left Behind*, which include the search of medicine for Joel, and the flashback with Riley's relationship. And it corresponds to the seventh episode of the TV show, which is about Ellie and Riley. Following the timeline, these events take place three weeks before the start of the summer season on both media. This segment introduces Ellie, the second protagonist, and serves to illuminate her background. It's possible to observe some roundness in Ellie's character and note her differing reactions across the two media formats. Riley is also introduced, who serves as a secondary character, highlighting key aspects of Ellie's history and emotional state. This exposition part is a critical component of Freytag's pyramid, as referenced in Figure 27, establishing the emotional dynamic and depression symptoms that follow Ellie.

Through the interactions of both characters, the narrative delves into the complexities of Ellie's feelings of loss, guilt, and her coping mechanisms. This relationship highlights Ellie's fear of being alone.

3.3.1. Ellie and Riley

As noted in subchapter 1.2.4 of this study, secondary characters effectively support central characters by providing additional context to their actions and motivations. By analyzing these interactions, we can discern the underlying reasons for Ellie's actions and decisions in subsequent chapters. Similarly, Joel's portrayal in the previous subchapter aids in contextualizing his motivations and responses throughout the narrative. We will now proceed to examine the figures in both media:



Figure 32a and 32b

After leaving the F.E.D.R.A. with Riley, it became evident how significant Riley was to Ellie. Ellie enjoyed her time with Riley until she learned that Riley was planning to leave

the town with the Fireflies. This revelation highlighted Ellie's fear of being alone and indicated early signs of potential depression.

Examining the Figure 32 to observe the characters' reactions, it reveals a distinct contrast between Ellie's response in the game and the TV show. In the game (Figure 32a), Ellie exhibits sadness, whereas in the TV show (Figure 32b), her reaction is more aggressive towards Riley. Ellie's initial reaction of sadness in the game aligns with symptom of dysthymia. Ellie feels lost upon discovering that Riley is leaving, which corresponds with one of the diagnostic criteria for dysthymia. Conversely, Ellie's aggressive reaction in the TV show indicate symptoms of both MDD and DMDD. For MDD, her agitation and change in tone of her voice, and irritability during the discussion with Riley are indicative of the disorder. For DMDD, the presence of irritability in individuals aged 7 to 18 is a key symptom. Given Ellie's age, this reaction could be consistent with DMDD, but the irritability must be observable for at least 12 months. However, Ellie's initial appearance alone is insufficient to confirm a diagnosis of DMDD. More longitudinal data is required to draw conclusive insights regarding these depressive symptoms, which will be examined as we progress through our analysis.



Figure 33

Now we observe the same action on Figure 33, from both media, but from Riley's perspective. Riley only exhibited a reaction of sadness when Ellie discovered that she was leaving town, on both media. Riley having the same reaction in different media is an indice that Riley was more of a flat character, maintaining her essence consistently from the first scene to the last. In contrast, Ellie is depicted as a more rounded character, demonstrating different facets of her personality during this brief period. Riley's consistent emotional response highlights her static nature, while Ellie's varying reactions underscore her complexity and potential for character development.



Figure 34

The Figure 34, from both media, is after they being attacked by an infected. They found themselves at a loss for what to do next until Riley proposed that they spend their remaining time together. We choose to take this briefly dialogue from the TV show to illustrate better their reaction:

Ellie: What are we gonna do?

[...]

Riley: It will be, but not yet. It ends this way for everyone sooner or later, right? Some of us just get there faster than others. But we don't quit. Wether it's two minutes or two days we don't give that up. I don't wanna give that up. We can just be all poetic and shit and lose our minds together.

From the dialogue, we can extract three significant points. First, Ellie exhibits uncertainty about what to do after being infected. However, she is still seeking an option to stay alive, primarily because she is with Riley, but don't have hope about their future anymore. This feeling of hopelessness is a symptom of MDD and dysthymia, and this feeling is present on both media. Second, Riley's decision to stay alive despite the risk of infection highlights her character's flatness. Her primary motivation is to remain with Ellie, even at the cost of becoming infected. This decision underscores Riley's consistent and unchanging nature, contrasting with Ellie's evolving emotional state. Lastly, Ellie regards Riley as the last person she can trust and be with. This intensifies Ellie's fear of being alone, especially after realizing she has not turned into an infected being.

Table 4

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
<i>Left behind</i>	Ellie	(Dysthymia) Sadness (MDD) Change of tone of voice (DMDD) Irritability	X	X X

		(MDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X
Total		Major depressive disorder	1	3
		Persistent depressive disorder	2	1
		Disruptive mood dysregulation		1

Given that the events of *Left Behind* occur three weeks prior to the onset of summer, the symptoms identified in this subchapter will be counted into Ellie’s analysis in subsequent subchapters, distinct from Joel’s analysis presented in Table 3. For MDD, Ellie displays the symptom of hopelessness in the game. In the TV show, she exhibits three symptoms: loud voice during discussions, irritability, and hopelessness. Regarding Dysthymia, Ellie shows two symptoms in the game and one symptom in the TV show. The criteria for Dysthymia require at least two symptoms observable over a two-year period. While the first criterion is met with two symptoms in the game, the second criterion cannot be conclusively assessed until subchapter 3.7.2, which is the final analysis for Ellie. For DMDD, the criteria are met in the TV show, but as with dysthymia, more data is required for a definitive diagnosis. Specifically, DMDD requires frequent irritability in individuals aged seven to eighteen years.

3.4. Summer

The summer season emerges right after the start of the apocalypse of *TLOU* and is depicted in the earlier episodes of the TV show. According to Freytag's pyramid, this segment corresponds to the rising action of the narrative.

During this season, Joel and Ellie begin their journey together, on both media, after initially meeting. At this point in the narrative, Joel is still grappling with his reluctance to bond with Ellie, but the seeds of their relationship are being sown. However, as they face various dangers and challenges, Joel starts to recognize his growing responsibility for Ellie. The summer season marks the beginning of Joel’s internal struggle between maintaining his emotional defences and allowing himself to care for Ellie as more than just a charge.

Also, during this period, secondary characters are utilized as narrative devices to facilitate the deepening bond between the main characters. These characters play essential roles in driving the story forward and contribute to the emotional and

psychological development of the protagonists. The characters introduced in the summer segment provide valuable insights for studying depressive symptoms, both in themselves and in how these symptoms influence and impact the main characters' actions and relationships.

3.4.1. Joel

During the summer, Joel is tasked by Marlene to escort Ellie, with the help of Tess, to the Fireflies, under the promise of receiving ammunition from them. Joel is reluctant to take on this responsibility, burdened by the memories of his past losses and the weight of his current mission. However, he eventually accepts the task and decides to accompany Tess and Ellie.

Joel's interactions during this period highlight his hardened personality, making it hard to get in touch with him. His relationships with Tess, Bill, Henry, Sam, and Frank—Frank being a character more explored on the TV show, as we'll study in subchapter 3.4.3.2.1—are all deeply influenced and shaped by his overarching mission to escort Ellie.

At the same season, Joel faces significant losses, including Tess, Henry, Sam, and Bill and Frank—the last two being exclusive from the TV show—, individuals who had become part of his world. These losses deeply affect him, hardening his resolve but also making him stop to see Ellie just as a mission. His growing attachment to her is still not evident as he still has to deal with the emotional scars from his past, particularly the loss of his daughter, Sarah, which continues to haunt him and influences his every decision. We will now proceed with a detailed examination of key scenes of Joel from both media.



Figure 35a and 35b

Now, we see two images that depict Joel's struggles with sleep. The Figure 35a, from the game, illustrates Joel waking up abruptly after a nightmare, while the second image, from the TV show, shows him lying awake, clearly having difficulty sleeping (Figure 35b).

These disturbances in sleep patterns, such as having nightmares on the game, are significant as they represent symptoms of MDD. The inability to sleep, as seen in the TV show, aligns with insomnia, which is associated with dysthymia, and with problems sleeping, making it a symptom associated with MDD. These sleep-related issues are recurrent for Joel, as will be further explored in the subchapter on Autumn (see subchapter 3.5.1), highlighting his ongoing battle with depressive symptoms. The presence of these symptoms across both media forms deepens our understanding of Joel's psychological state and the toll that his traumatic experiences have taken on his mental health.



Figure 36a and 36b

This scene, which is exclusive to the TV show, depicts a tense moment where a soldier threatens to shoot Joel, Tess, and Ellie after Ellie injures him with a knife. In a sudden and intense reaction, Joel attacks the soldier, repeatedly punching him until he dies, as shown in Figure 36b. This scene strongly mirrors the traumatic event in which a soldier shot Joel and his daughter, leading to her death. It illustrates how unresolved trauma and an inability to effectively cope with past experiences can manifest in unexpected and potentially harmful ways. Joel's reaction is not just an act of self-defence but a visceral response to the deep emotional scars left by his past, highlighting the psychological burden he continues to carry. This incident underscores the importance of addressing past traumas to prevent such destructive behaviours.

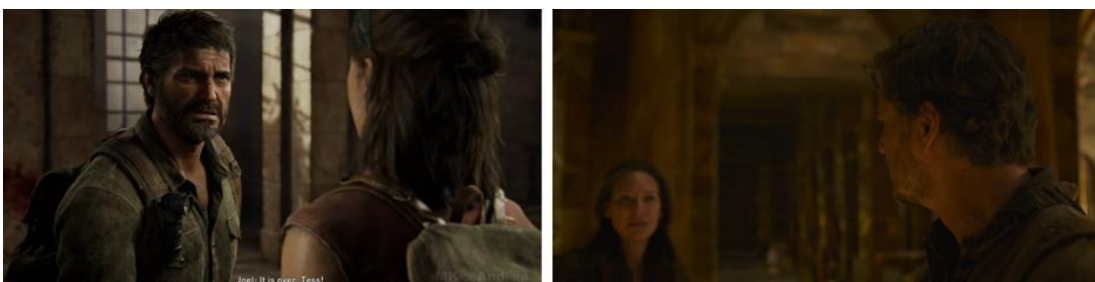


Figure 37

In Figure 37, which contains images from both media, we first observe Joel's reaction upon discovering that Tess is infected. Tess urges Joel to continue the mission and find the Fireflies, with the assistance of Tommy. There is a heated discussion, as Joel initially resisted accepting the mission to escort Ellie, only agreeing to it because of Tess. In both picture, Joel is visibly saddened by Tess's imminent sacrifice, as she was not only his partner in many missions but also his love interest. This scene highlights three symptoms of MDD. First, there is an increase in Joel's vocal intensity during his argument with Tess, leading to the second symptom, which is irritability. Finally, Joel experiences a profound sense of guilt, linked to his sadness, for having contributed to the circumstances that led to Tess's sacrifice.

Also, there is a symptom of dysthymia, which is his evident sadness over the inability to save Tess during their mission, which are going to be added to both media column in Table 5. This analysis underscores how these emotional responses are not isolated incidents but are intertwined with the broader narrative of Joel's character development.



Figure 38

In Figure 38, from the game, we observe the first instance where Ellie attempts to discuss Tess with Joel. Joel is visibly struggling with the loss of Tess, his partner, but his relationship with Ellie remains distant, as he continues to view their journey as merely a mission. In this figure, Joel's posture suggests a possible symptom of MDD: decreased energy. His body language implies that he is physically and emotionally drained, even though he maintains a facade of normalcy, pretending that he is unaffected by the events

around him. This effort to appear fine, despite internal turmoil, is indicative of a broader struggle with grief and loss, but without the trust in Ellie to be open about his feelings, Joel’s emotional state remains guarded and unresolved.



Figure 39

After Joel and Ellie meet Bill, who agrees to help them only out of obligation for past favours, a tense moment arises when Bill sarcastically mentions Tess. This remark provokes a visible reaction of anger in Joel, as seen in Figure 39, during the game. This scene further illustrates Joel's ongoing struggle with Tess's death, which he has yet to fully process. Bill's casual and dismissive reference to Tess triggers irritability in Joel—a symptom commonly associated with MDD. The anger Joel displays here is not just a reaction to Bill's insensitivity but also a reflection of his unresolved grief and difficulty coping with the loss of Tess. This irritability, as shown in this interaction, reinforces the idea that Joel is still deeply affected by Tess's death, and it adds another layer to the understanding him.

Table 5

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Before the apocalypse	Joel	(MDD - old) Tiredness	X	X
		(Dysthymia – old) Low energy	X	X
		(MDD - old) Anxiety	X	
Summer	Joel	(MDD) Sleeping disorder	X	
		(Dysthymia) Insomnia		X
		(MDD) Sleeping disorder		X

	(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
	(MDD) Irritability	X	X
	(MDD) Guilt	X	X
	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X
	(MDD) Lack of energy	X	
	(MDD) Irritability	X	
Before the apocalypse	Major depressive disorder (old)	2	1
	Persistent depressive disorder (old)	1	1
Summer	Major depressive disorder	5	4
	Persistent depressive disorder	1	2
Total	Major depressive disorder	5	4
	Persistent depressive disorder	1	2

As the study progresses, we will continue to gather evidence, which will lead to more definitive conclusions regarding the specific types of depression that Joel may be experiencing. This ongoing investigation will help to clarify whether the symptoms he exhibits are consistent with MDD, dysthymia, or another form of depressive disorder.

Turning to the symptoms observed during the summer (see Table 5), Joel has exhibited five distinct symptoms of MDD in the game and four in the TV show. The first criterion for MDD is met during the summer on the game, but we need more data to conclude, which will be evaluated during the other subchapters, if he meets the second criterion. For the TV show, both criteria are not met. While these are significant, they still need more data for a conclusive diagnosis of MDD, according to the *DSM-5*.

Regarding dysthymia, Joel has shown one symptom in the game and two in the TV show. On the game both criteria are not met. However, for the TV show, as outlined in subchapter 3.1, he meets the initial criterion for dysthymia, which requires the presence of at least two symptoms, although confirming the second criterion, which is having these symptoms for at least two years, requires further analysis.

3.4.2. Ellie

During the summer, Ellie is introduced to Joel and Tess, and is informed, by Marlene, that they will be escorting her to the Fireflies in the hope of developing a cure for the cordyceps. Initially reluctant, Ellie eventually accepts that she has no other choice but to go with them.

Her interactions highlight her evolution as a character, showcasing her ability to balance empathy with resilience. Her relationship with Joel becomes complex, characterized by a mix of dependence, loyalty, and shared trauma, despite Joel's emotional distance. Throughout the season of the year, Ellie experiences significant losses, including Tess, Henry, and Sam, individuals she had begun to trust. These losses profoundly affect her, leading to a more aggressive demeanour and intensifying her fear of losing Joel as well. Also, it reveals her determination to protect those she loves, while struggling with the emotional scars from her traumatic experiences. This is particularly evident when considering her past loss of Riley, as discussed in subchapter 3.3.1, which mirrors the tragic losses she faces now. We will now proceed with a detailed examination of key scenes of Ellie from both media.



Figure 40

The Figure 40, exclusively from the TV show, depicts Ellie's reaction to Tess's death, marking the first significant loss she experiences alongside Joel. In this scene, Ellie is visibly shocked by Tess's death. This event also triggers a profound sense of guilt within Ellie, as she recognizes that Tess's fate is directly linked to the decision to escort her to the Fireflies' base—a mission that ultimately failed when they discovered the Fireflies were already dead.

This sense of guilt, a symptom of MDD, is recurring for Ellie, previously observed in the game within the context of the DLC. However, this figure from the TV show reveals that

Ellie experiences the feeling of guilt during it as well, expanding this symptom to both media.



Figure 41

The Figure 41, exclusively from the game, depicts a moment where Ellie attempts, for the second time, to express her sorrow to Joel regarding Tess's death. However, Joel abruptly cuts her off, unable to cope with the loss himself. This scene highlights Ellie's recurring sense of guilt, a feeling she had experienced in the previously analysed figure from the TV show but is now observed within the game's narrative.

Ellie's persistent guilt (see Figure 40), as demonstrated in both media, emerges as a notable depressive symptom that consistently accompanies her throughout various situations. Despite the brief time she has spent with Joel, this scene reinforces that guilt is a deeply ingrained aspect of Ellie's emotional response, manifesting repeatedly in her interactions and experiences.



Figure 42a and 42b

The Figure 42 presents two pictures, Figure 42a depicts Ellie after she shoots a man to save Joel, an action shared between both the game and the TV show, and the Figure 42b exclusively to the TV show. The second image fits for your study, because of the understanding of the differing emotional outcomes by her action on the series. The second picture further illustrates Ellie's emotional state, showing her in a defensive posture, with expressions of sadness and disappointment. These feelings are exacerbated

by Joel's lack of acknowledgment for her life-saving action. Ellie's expectation for a word of thanks or validation from Joel goes unmet, leaving her with a profound sense of emptiness and disappointment.

This scene highlights the complex emotional interplay in Ellie's character. Her sadness and defensiveness are closely tied to an unmet need for recognition and approval, which deepens her emotional struggle. However, while the desire for validation and feelings of emptiness are often associated with depressive symptoms, they are not explicitly listed in the *DSM-5*. As such, those emotional responses cannot be included in Table 6, which is reserved for *DSM-5* recognized symptoms. However, sadness is highlighted as one of the symptoms of persistent major depressive disorder (dysthymia) by *DSM-5*, which we'll include as a symptom that happened in the TV show.



Figure 43a and 43b

Figure 43a, from the game, captures a moment of the dialogue between Ellie and Sam. This figure reveals Ellie's deepest fear—ending up alone—stemming from the numerous losses she has endured, such as Riley and Tess. In the Figure 43b, it shows the same fear, but from the TV show. The dialogue notably highlights Ellie's sadness when discussing this fear with Sam, whom she has come to consider a friend. This scenario mirrors the emotional depth explored in previous analyses, particularly the recurring theme of sadness. Consequently, sadness is a significant emotional response for Ellie, and it's included as a dysthymia symptom, so we are going to count it also for the game medium in Table 6.



Figure 44

Exclusively from the TV show, Figure 44 depicts Ellie’s remorse for not being able to save Sam from the infection, which ultimately led to his death at the hands of his brother, Henry. This scene, which will be further analysed in subchapter 3.4.3.3, reveals Ellie’s attachment to Henry and especially Sam, given her close age to him and their shared interests.

This scenario once again highlights Ellie’s recurring guilt, a symptom also observed in her responses to the deaths of Riley and Tess. The reemergence of this guilt in the wake of Sam’s death forces Ellie to relive these painful emotions, contributing to a profound sense of sadness. From this figure, we can identify guilt as a depressive symptom in the TV show, a symptom that is already accounted for in Table 6. Additionally, this analysis is instrumental for the broader conclusion of Ellie’s psychological profile, which will be discussed in subchapter 3.7.2.

Table 6

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
<i>Left behind</i>	Ellie	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice		X
		(DMDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X

Summer	(MDD) Guilt		X
	(MDD) Guilt	X	
	(Dysthymia) Sadness		X
	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X
Total	(MDD) Guilt		X
	Major depressive disorder	2	4
	Persistent depressive disorder	2	2
	Disruptive mood dysregulation		1

During the summer, Ellie consistently experiences feelings of guilt, and sadness which is understandable given the significant losses she endures during this period. For Table 6, this observation adds one more symptom to the TV show for MDD, bringing the total to two symptoms, and one symptom of dysthymia for both media, when evaluated with the *DSM-5* criteria.

3.4.3. Other characters

In this subchapter, we will examine the narrative context and its impact on secondary characters, who, while not the protagonists, play crucial roles in shaping the main narrative. We begin with Tess, Joel's love interest, whose influence was pivotal in his decision to take on the task of escorting Ellie. Next, we explore Bill and Frank, characters who are present in two distinct versions: in the game as secondary characters and in the TV show as breakout figures due to a transmedia episode that significantly expanded their storylines. Finally, we turn to Henry and Sam, who serve as foil characters to Joel and Ellie, highlighting their differences in a way that accentuates the protagonists' development. Given their limited screen time in both media, we maintain the *DSM-5* framework for analysis but also examine each symptom individually. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how depressive symptoms manifest in their behaviours and characteristics during their brief appearances.

These secondary characters are not merely background figures; they are integral to key narrative arcs that facilitate the growth and transformation of Joel and Ellie. Through their appearances and interactions, these characters also contribute to a deeper understanding of depressive symptoms as they manifest within the storyline, offering a richer analysis of the emotional and psychological development of the main characters.

3.4.3.1. Tess

Serving as Joel's love interest and partner, despite her relatively short screen time, Tess is the key that convinces Joel to take the task of transporting Ellie to the Fireflies. Before this mission, they were working together to smuggle, sell ammunition, and drugs. Her character is defined by a hardened exterior, yet she also exhibits a sense of loyalty and pragmatism that underscores her decisions. Also, they share a complex relationship, built on mutual respect, shared experiences, and by knowing each other's traumas and motivations. Although their relationship is never openly romantic, they care deeply for one another.

Upon discovering about Ellie's infection, Tess undergoes a significant transformation. She develops a profound hope that Ellie might be the key to humanity's survival, a hope that propels her to push for the mission's completion at all costs. This shift reveals a more vulnerable side of Tess, exposing her underlying desperation for something to believe in. Her unwavering determination to the possibility of a better future ultimately drives her to sacrifice herself for the cause. Tess's importance to Joel is profound. Her death makes him to continue the mission out of a sense of obligation to her memory. In this way, Tess becomes a ghost archetype to Joel's, much like his daughter Sarah. As we proceed, we will analyse two images from Tess's scenes.



Figure 45

In Figure 45, which is exclusive to the game, Tess is depicted using alcohol as a coping mechanism to manage the emotional and psychological stress she encountered while

searching for Robert. This behaviour is a response to the frustration and irritability stemming from her inability to secure the car battery, a critical component for Joel's mission.

As observed in Tess's behaviour, irritability is recognized as one of the symptoms of MDD. This instance marks the first identifiable symptom of MDD in Tess's character in the game, offering an early indication of the underlying depressive tendencies that may influence her actions and decisions as the story progresses.



Figure 46

In Figure 46, which appears in both media, we have her reaction after Joel discovers that she is infected. She implores Joel to continue their mission in her place. During this scene, a noticeable discussion unfolds between them, where Tess expresses regret for their past actions, suggesting that completing the mission could serve to fix the things.

The scene reveals two symptoms of MDD. First, an increase in Tess's vocal intensity during the discussion. Second, Tess's expression of guilt for her past actions, as feelings of guilt is also a criterion for the disorder.

Table 7

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Summer	Tess	(MDD) Irritability	X	
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
		(MDD) Guilt	X	X
Total		Major depressive disorder	3	2

From Table 7, we observe that during Tess's brief appearance, she exhibited three distinct symptoms of depression in the game and two in the TV show. According to the diagnostic criteria for MDD, a minimum of five different symptoms must be present, and persisting

for at least two weeks. The two-week criterion is met. Also, considering her change of tone of voice on TV show, we could use it as a symptom of irritability to this medium.

Although Tess does not meet all the *DSM-5* criteria for MDD, her behaviour in both the media strongly aligns with such a diagnosis. Her narrative reveals a character grappling with daily struggles, guilt, persistent irritability, and a loss of hope in the post-apocalyptic world. This outlook only shifts when she encounters Ellie, leading to a subtle transformation. Tess, who is predominantly portrayed as a flat character, gains depth as she begins to believe in Ellie's potential as a cure for the infection. This shift adds complexity to her character, even as she continues to exhibit symptoms of depression.

3.4.3.2. Bill and Frank

This subchapter will be divided into separate analyses for the game and TV show, beginning with the game. The division is necessary for two main reasons: first, in the game, Frank is not alive during Bill's brief appearance, limiting the scope of their relationship. Second, the TV show delves deeper into the transmedia exploration of Bill and Frank's relationship.

While the TV show's narrative significantly expands on Bill and Frank's storyline, this section will focus on Bill's character as presented in the game. The more detailed exploration of Bill and Frank's relationship in the TV show will be addressed in the subsequent subchapter.

Bill is a guest character in the game, appearing to assist Joel in finding a battery for his truck as a repayment for a favour. Throughout his time with Joel and Ellie, Bill exhibits extreme paranoia, particularly concerning his security and his reluctance to trust others. However, as the narrative progresses, Bill gradually opens up, revealing more about his personal losses. We will now analyse these moments to better understand Bill's character on the game.

3.4.3.2.1. Game



Figure 47

In the Figure 47, Bill finally reaches a level of trust with Joel sufficient to share details about Frank, who was not only someone he cared deeply for but also his partner. The dialogue, coupled with Bill's facial expression, reveals a profound sadness and a sense of guilt regarding what happened to Frank.

Bill's expression of frequent sadness aligns with symptoms of dysthymia. Although persistent sadness is recognized as a symptom of dysthymia, it is not directly classified as a symptom of MDD by the *DSM-5*.

This could be particularly useful for understanding Bill's emotional state in greater depth and comparing it with how his feelings are portrayed in the TV show medium.

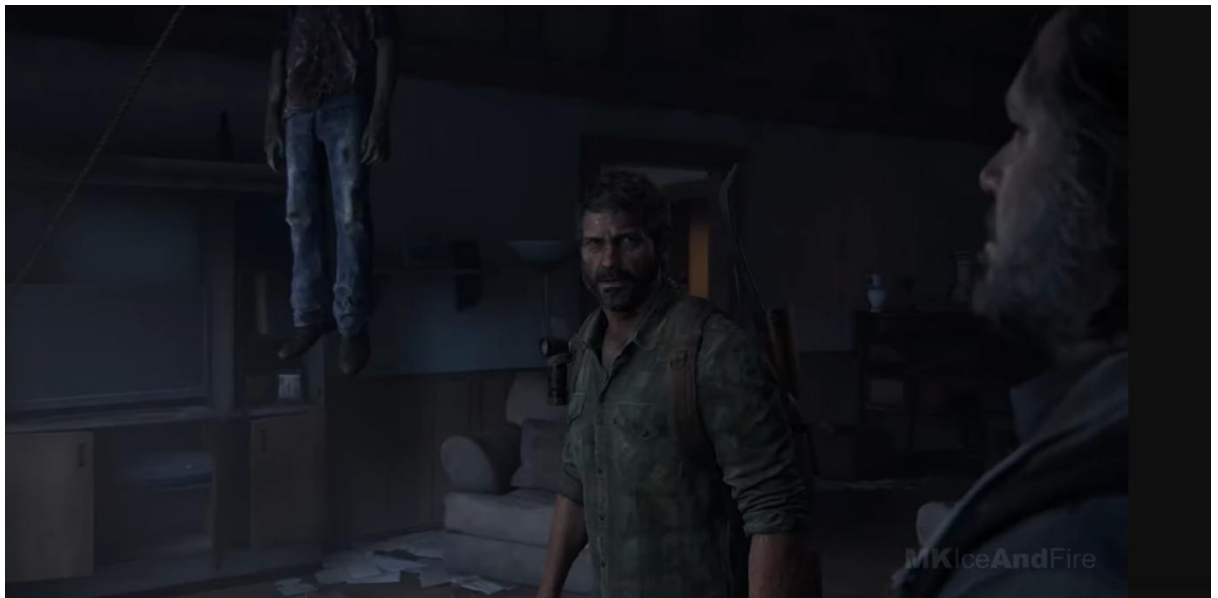


Figure 48

In Figure 48, Joel and Bill discover the corpse of Frank, who had chosen to hang himself after becoming infected. Frank's character in the game serves primarily as a narrative

device, or even as a ghost archetype, like how Sarah functions in relation to Joel. This choice enhances the impact of Bill's guest appearance, underscoring Joel's evolving sense of responsibility toward Ellie, even though he remains emotionally distant from her during the summer.

Regarding Bill's reaction to finding Frank's body, the same expressions of sadness and guilt observed in the previous scene are evident. However, this scene reinforces Bill's emotional complexity and the significance of his relationship with Frank.

3.4.3.2.2. TV show

The appearance of Bill and Frank occupies a significant portion of the third episode of the TV show. This episode serves as an example of transmedia narrative expansion, enriching Bill's backstory by illustrating how he constructed his fortified town and by introducing Frank, who is alive in the show—a contrast to his portrayal in the game. This addition not only deepens the plot but also turns both characters into breakout figures, surprising audiences with their expanded roles and the emotional depth they bring to the story.

Crucially, for the purposes of this study, the episode also reveals symptoms associated with depression in the characters of Bill and Frank. These symptoms will be examined in detail in the following figures, providing a closer look at the psychological dimensions of their relationship and how it contributes to the overall narrative.



Figure 49

Figure 49 captures a pivotal moment during the meeting of Bill, Frank, Joel, and Tess. In this scene, while Frank and Tess exhibit trust and openness towards each other, both Bill and Joel display apprehension—highlighted by Bill’s decision to keep a gun on the table. This detail underscores Bill’s persistent paranoia about strangers entering his space, a trait that remains consistent with his character in the game. Although this scene does not explicitly reveal any depressive symptoms for analysis, it is important for understanding the nuances of Bill’s character in the TV show, particularly how his paranoia parallels his game portrayal. This context will be instrumental in analysing an upcoming moment (see Figure 52) where the emotional and psychological aspects of Bill’s character will be further explored.



Figure 50a and 50b

In Figure 50, we observe a significant moment where Frank, who has been suffering from a degenerative neuromuscular illness for an unspecified period, chooses to end his life. Frank’s decision stems his desire to avoid further suffering. Bill’s reaction is marked by profound sadness (Figure 50b), coupled with an initial denial of the reality. This reaction from Bill is particularly poignant, as it highlights a symptom of dysthymia—persistent sadness—evident in his emotional response to the impending loss of his partner of twenty years. Bill’s sadness is not just a fleeting emotion but rather a reflection of the long-term emotional toll that this relationship, and now its impending end, has had on him. Moreover, considering Bill’s character, known for his paranoia and distrust, this scene illustrates a significant emotional evolution. Over two decades, Bill moved from being a solitary, paranoid individual to someone capable of deep love and trust, particularly with Frank.



Figure 51a and 51b

In Figure 51a, Bill continues to struggle with the impending loss of Frank, reinforcing the deep sadness he feels as the reality of Frank's decision looms closer. However, as the scene progresses, Bill listens carefully to Frank's reasoning, which gradually leads him to accept Frank's decision. This emotional shift is crucial as it marks a significant moment of character development for Bill. Despite his initial resistance, Bill chooses to support Frank's plan, demonstrating a deep, albeit painful, acceptance of the situation.

The Figure 51b, captured during the dinner they share after fulfilling all of Frank's final wishes, signifies the culmination of this acceptance. Notably, Bill decides to end his own life in the same manner as Frank. Bill's rationale, as expressed in the scene, is that Frank was the purpose of his life, and without him, there is no reason to continue. This decision to commit suicide alongside Frank underscores the depth of Bill's attachment to him. This outcome contrasts sharply with Bill's storyline in the game, where he continues to live alone after Frank's death. The TV show's portrayal of Bill's choice to die alongside Frank adds a layer of emotional complexity to his character, highlighting his profound sense of loss and the role that Frank played in giving his life meaning.

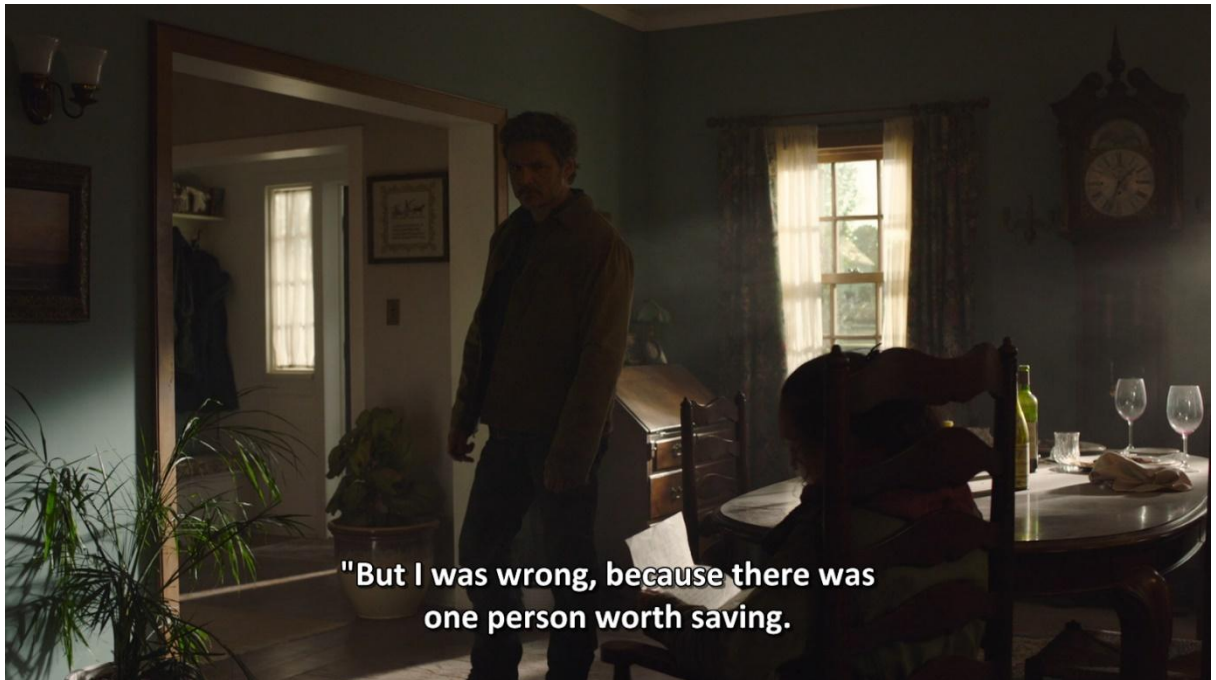


Figure 52

After a long journey, Ellie and Joel finally arrive at Bill's place in search of a working car. Initially, they do not find either Bill or Frank. As they search the premises, Ellie stumbles upon a letter (see Figure 52) and reads it:

Ellie: "I used to hate the world, and I was happy when everyone died. But I was wrong, because there was one person worth saving. That's what I did. I saved him. Then I protected him. That's why men like you and me are here. We have a job to do, and God help any motherfuckers who stand in our way. I leave you all of my weapons and equipment. Use them to keep—"

Ellie: To keep Tess safe.

From Joel's first encounter with Bill and Frank (see Figure 49) to the moment of reading the letter, significant changes in Bill's character are evident. Bill reflects on his transformation, particularly when he acknowledges that there was a person worth saving: Frank. It marks a profound shift from the guarded, isolated man introduced earlier in the story.

Bill's words also extend to Joel, advising him to keep Tess safe. Although Tess had already died, this message plants the seed for Joel's evolving perspective on Ellie. It subtly influences him to begin seeing Ellie as someone who might be worth protecting, even though he does not openly admit this to her. This moment signals the beginning of

Joel's emotional shift, laying the groundwork for the deep bond that will eventually form between him and Ellie.

Table 8

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show	
Summer	Bill (game)	(MDD) Guilt	X		
		(Dysthymia) Sadness	X		
		(Dysthymia) Sadness	X		
		(MDD) Guilt	X		
	Bill (TV show)	(Dysthymia) Sadness			X
		(Dysthymia) Sadness			X
(MDD) Suicide				X	
Frank	(MDD) Suicide			X	
Total	Bill (game)	Major depressive disorder	1		
		Persistent depressive disorder	1		
	Bill (TV show)	Major depressive disorder			1
		Persistent depressive disorder	1		1
	Frank	Major depressive disorder			1

Table 8 presents an analysis of Bill's symptoms occurred during the game and the TV show, while Frank is only from the TV show. The only common symptom found is the sadness associated with dysthymia in Bill.

In the game, Bill exhibits the symptom of guilt, which is an indicative of MDD. Then, sadness, which aligns with dysthymia. However, these symptoms do not meet the criteria for either type of depression, making it impossible to conclusively diagnose Bill with depression in game, using the *DSM-5* lenses. By examining the symptoms individually, we see a character who, in the game, lived in isolation for an unknown period, experiencing guilt over the loss of his partner, which also led to feelings of sadness. These symptoms contribute to the complexity of his character. Initially introduced as someone displaying primarily paranoid tendencies, Bill's later-revealed symptoms of depression add significant depth to his persona. This shift transforms him into a more empathetic and layered character. The symptoms he exhibits strongly suggest that he is grappling with a complex internal struggle, characteristic of individuals dealing with depression.

In the TV show, Bill exhibits the same sadness linked to dysthymia as seen in the game, along with a suicide associated with MDD. His decision to end his life, made without

Frank's consultation and after a day of reflection, reflects his inability to envision a future without his partner. This provides sufficient reason to consider the depth of his emotional struggle. While he does not meet the full *DSM-5* criteria, his portrayal in the show, much like in the game, demonstrates symptoms that align with depression. His brief appearance, coupled with his final choice, illustrates a character shaped by depressive symptoms.

Frank also exhibits suicide as a potential symptom of MDD. Similar to Bill, while he does not meet the full *DSM-5* criteria, his choice to end his life aligns with the discussion in subchapter 2.1.2 of this study, which notes that other illnesses, such as the loss of physical autonomy, can contribute to depression and suicidal ideation. Frank's decision reflects his inability to face his deteriorating condition, even though he exhibits few other symptoms of depression. This shift from optimism to pessimism due to his mobility issues signals a depressive state, marking a significant change in his character.

3.4.3.3. Henry and Sam

As we did with Bill and Frank, we'll analyse Henry and Sam together, as they serve similar narrative functions in both media. The brothers act as foil characters. Henry's protective nature towards his brother starkly contrasts with Joel, who is still in the developmental phase of his relationship with Ellie. Similarly, Sam serves as a foil to Ellie; due to his brother's overprotection, Sam is less equipped to handle the dangers of the world of *TLOU*, unlike Ellie, who has already gained experience through her time with F.E.D.R.A.

Despite their brief appearance in both media, Henry and Sam play a crucial role in helping Joel and Ellie escape a dangerous situation. Their presence also catalyses a shift in the protagonists' relationship, moving from a mere cargo transport dynamic to a more caring relationship. In the following section, we will analyse scenes involving Henry and Sam:



Figure 53

During the game, Henry initially waited for a larger group to join them, but after a prolonged period, he concluded that the group members were likely dead. This realization led to a sense of hopelessness, a common symptom, of both, MDD, and dysthymia. Despite this, Henry attempted to conceal his feelings from his brother, Sam, as he consistently sought to shield him from the harsh realities of their reality. However, the weight of this despair is subtly evident in Henry's facial expression, as depicted in Figure 53, highlighting the internal struggle he faced while trying to maintain a semblance of normalcy.



Figure 54

In the TV show, the brothers were anticipating the arrival of their contact, who was supposed to reunite with them along with his group. However, when this person failed to return, it led to an emotionally charged moment for both characters, as depicted in Figure 54.

Like the situation described in the previous figure, Henry attempted to remain composed, despite the growing realization that their chances of survival had significantly diminished. This led to a deep sense of hopelessness, mirroring his struggle to maintain calm and protect Sam from the harsh reality of their situation.



Figure 55

During an attack by the infected, Henry was unable to protect his brother, resulting in Sam becoming infected. In a moment of desperation, Henry chose to kill his brother, who was attacking Ellie. At this point, Henry could no longer conceal his emotions, as this act represented the loss of everything he held dear. Figure 55 from both the game and the TV show illustrates Henry's reaction following this tragic event and his subsequent decision to take his own life.

Suicidal ideation and suicide are recognized symptoms of MDD. However, Henry's decision to take his own life appears to be an impulsive response, occurring immediately after he kills his brother. This suggests that Henry's actions may not be directly linked to depression, but rather to an acute emotional reaction to a traumatic event. Henry's suicide will be further explored in Table 9.



Figure 56a and 56b

The following dialogue takes place after Sam's infection, on the game, which he chose to keep secret. By analysing this dialogue, we can observe a notable shift in his character, who was previously optimistic due to the protective presence of his brother:

Ellie: Is everything alright?

Sam: Everything's fine.

[...]

Sam: What are you scared of?

Ellie: Let's see... Scorpions are pretty creepy. Um... Being by myself. I'm scared of ending up alone. What about you?

Sam: Those things out there. What if the people are still inside? What if they're trapped in there, without any control of their body? I'm scared of that happening to me.

By analysing the dialogue and Figure 56a and 56b, we can identify two distinct symptoms of MDD in Sam. The first symptom, evident in both media, is a profound sense of hopelessness, mirroring the emotional state of his brother, Henry. The second symptom, specific to the game, is a marked loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, which is also a characteristic of MDD.

Earlier in the game, Sam demonstrated an interest in toys and collecting them, despite his brother's disapproval of such hobbies. Ellie, noticing this, discreetly took one of the toys and gave it to Sam. However, after his infection, Sam's response was to throw the toy on the floor (see Figure 56b), highlighting a significant shift in his character and a clear manifestation of depressive symptoms.

Table 9

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Summer	Henry	(MDD) Hopelessness	X	
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	
		(MDD) Hopelessness		X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness		X
		(MDD) Suicide	X	X
	Sam	(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X
		(MDD) Loss of interest on hobbies	X	
Total	Henry	Major depressive disorder	2	2
		Persistent depressive disorder	1	1

	Sam	Major depressive disorder	2	1
		Persistent depressive disorder	1	1

By analysing the table, we can observe that Henry exhibits two symptoms of MDD in both the game and the TV show, culminating in his decision to commit suicide. According to the *DSM-5* criteria, however, Henry does not meet the diagnostic threshold for depression. Additionally, he displays one symptom of dysthymia in both media but does not meet the *DSM-5* criteria for that condition either. Upon examining his character, it becomes evident that Henry was consistently pretending to be well for the sake of his brother, Sam, aiming to protect him emotionally. His protective role shaped his behaviour to such an extent that, upon losing Sam, he impulsively chose to take his own life. While Henry is not clinically depressed, the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) notes that "suicide can also occur in individuals who are not clinically depressed" (2009). However, given his constant sense of hopelessness and eventual suicide, it is reasonable to conclude that Henry exhibited enough depressive signals to suggest he was struggling with underlying emotional turmoil.

Regarding Sam, we observe two symptoms of MDD in the game and one in the TV show, as well as one symptom of dysthymia in both media. Like Henry, Sam does not meet the full diagnostic criteria for depression according to the *DSM-5*. However, upon analysing his character, it becomes clear that Sam was always sheltered and protected by Henry. When Sam becomes infected, he loses all the hope and optimism he once had about the world, which is particularly noticeable in his loss of interest in his favourite hobby. His character undergoes a significant shift—from being guarded and optimistic to feeling utterly lost—which reveals further depressive signals.

Through the analysis of Henry and Sam's characters, we can also observe the evolving relationship between Joel and Ellie. What happens with the brothers serves as a pivotal moment, deepening Joel and Ellie's connection and leading the protagonists to become more mindful and caring toward one another, with their development influenced by the themes of depression observed in Henry and Sam's narrative.

3.5. Autumn

The autumn season emerges in the middle of *TLOU* game and is depicted in the sixth episode of the TV show. According to Freytag's pyramid, this segment corresponds to the rising action of the narrative.

During this season, Joel and Ellie arrive in the city that Joel's brother, Tommy, and his wife are building. At this juncture in the narrative, Joel has grown significantly closer to Ellie. His fear of losing her due to his perceived inadequacy in completing their mission becomes evident. Consequently, Joel's intention is to pass this responsibility to his brother, Tommy, whom he trusts to be capable of protecting and guiding Ellie.

3.5.1. Joel

The primary objective for Joel during this season is to reunite with his brother, Tommy, and to delegate the task of leading Ellie to the Fireflies. Joel's uncertainty about his ability to successfully complete the mission underscores his deep-seated fears and self-doubt. This pervasive insecurity significantly impacts his behaviour and decision-making throughout the autumn season, both in the game and the corresponding episode of the TV show.

In the following figures, particularly Figures 55, 56, and 57, we will delve deeper into the manifestation of Joel's fears and insecurities. One of the consequences of Joel's insecurities is the erosion of Ellie's confidence in him. This loss of trust becomes increasingly evident from the start of autumn and persists through to the final moments of the season and episode.

In both media, Joel's reactions are portrayed differently, highlighting distinct facets of his character. In the game, Joel's reactions are more aggressive, showcasing his frustration and desperation. Conversely, the TV show presents a more concerned and fragile Joel, emphasizing his vulnerability and emotional depth. We will delve deeper into these differences, analysing specific scenes and images to explore how depression is portrayed through Joel's character in both the game and the TV show.



Figure 57

The following dialogue occurs after the initial reunion of the brothers on TV show:

Tommy: I'm gonna be a father. Maria's a few months along now. So, I just gotta be more careful. To be honest, I'm scared to death. But I don't know. I feel I'd be a good dad.

Joel: Guess we'll find out.

Tommy: "I guess we'll find out"? That's all you got?

Joel: What else am I supposed to say?

Tommy: Just because life stopped for you doesn't mean it has to stop for me.

Joel: We'll grab some supplies and be outta your hair in the morning'.

In both media, it is evident that Tommy has moved on with his life, choosing to continue forward, while Joel remains trapped in the past trauma and haunted by the memory of Sarah. Tommy highlights that Joel has been unable to move beyond his grief, triggering Joel's irritability towards his brother. This confrontation leads to a noticeable change in Joel's irritability towards his brother. This confrontation leads to a noticeable change in Joel's tone of voice, a reaction fuelled by his anger. The alteration in vocal tone and irritability observed are both symptoms of MDD. These manifestations highlight two key indicators of MDD in his character.



Figure 58

In Figure 58, from the TV show, Joel exhibits signs of anxiety, which is indicative of MDD. This behaviour mirrors the earlier use of anti-anxiety medication, which is set before the apocalypse. This continuity underscores that Joel continues to struggle with anxiety, even after twenty years, highlighting the persistent nature of his condition.



Figure 59

On the Figure 59, from the TV show, Joel is more willing to talk about his feelings, but the only person he feels comfortable confiding in is his brother. He has not yet developed enough trust in Ellie to share his inner turmoil with her. This scene underscores Joel's struggle with vulnerability and trust. From the dialogue, corresponding from the same figure, we can discern the depth of Joel's struggle with the traumatic loss of his daughter:

Joel: [...] You think I can still handle things but I'm not who I was. I'm weak. Lately, there are these moments where the fear comes up outta nowhere and my heart feels like it's stopped. And I have dreams. Every night.

Tommy: What kinda dreams?

Joel: I don't know. I can't remember. I just know that when I wake up I've lost somethin'. I'm failin' in my sleep. That's all I do. All I've ever done is fail her again and again.

Tommy: You want me to take her.

Joel: I'm just gonna get her killed. I know it. I have to leave her.

The recurring nightmares he experienced, as shown in Figure 35 from the summer, revolve around his inability to protect Sarah. Now, he fears he will fail to protect Ellie in the same way. It is evident that their father-daughter relationship is increasing.

During the last dialogue, it becomes evident that Joel continues to experience nightmares and persistent guilt over his inability to save his daughter from death. This guilt extends to his current mission with Ellie, as he fears losing her as well. From this dialogue, we can infer that Joel's symptoms of guilt, and nightmares have been ongoing since the death of his daughter. Additionally, Joel's increasing difficulty in making decisions that could potentially put Ellie at risk introduces a new symptom of major MDD, that will be further analysed on the Table 10.



Figure 60

Joel decided to leave the task of taking Ellie to Tommy after their dialogue on the last picture and that it would happen the next day. This revelation profoundly disappoints Ellie. At this stage, she had already grown significantly closer to Joel, but his decision felt like a rejection to her, causing her to relive past traumas.

The pictures and the following dialogue, from the game and TV show, serve to illustrate Joel's reaction to Ellie's words (see Figure 60), highlighting struggles to openly discuss his daughter, Sarah, with her.

Ellie: Admit that you wanted to get rid of me the whole time.

Joel: Tommy knows this area better than-

Ellie: Agh, fuck that-

Joel: Well, I'm sorry. I trust him better than I trust myself.

Ellie: Maria told me about Sarah. And I-

Joel: Ellie. You are treading on some mighty thin ice here.

From Joel's dialogue, we can discern two symptoms of MDD manifesting in his behaviour. Firstly, Joel exhibits a lack of self-confidence in his ability to complete the

mission of delivering Ellie to the fireflies. This self-doubt and feeling of worthlessness are a hallmark of MDD.

Secondly, Joel's reaction to Ellie mentioning Sarah is marked by significant irritability. He abruptly shuts down the conversation, indicating a refusal to engage with the painful memories associated with his daughter. This irritability aligns with symptoms of MDD, already noticed on early analysis.

Table 10

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Before the apocalyse	Joel	(MDD - old) Tiredness	X	X
		(Dysthymia – old) Low energy	X	X
		(MDD - old) Anxiety	X	
Summer		(MDD) Sleeping disorder	X	
		(Dysthymia) Insomnia		X
		(MDD) Sleeping disorder		X
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
		(MDD) Irritability	X	X
		(MDD) Guilt	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X
	(MDD) Lack of energy	X		
(MDD) Irritability	X			
Autmun	(MDD) Irritability	X	X	
	(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X	
	(MDD) Anxiety		X	
	(MDD) Sleeping disorder		X	
	(MDD) Guilt		X	
	(MDD) Difficult on making decisions		X	
	(MDD) Worthlessness	X	X	
	(MDD) Irritability	X	X	
Before the apocalyse	Major depressive disorder (old)	2	1	
	Persistent depressive disorder (old)	1	1	
Total	Major depressive disorder	6	7	
	Persistent depressive disorder	1	2	

By analysing Table 10, we can see that Joel exhibits an additional symptom in the game—worthlessness—and three additional symptoms in the TV show—anxiety, difficulty making decisions, and worthlessness. This brings Joel's total to six distinct symptoms of

MDD in the game and seven in the TV show, meeting the criterion for MDD diagnosis on both media.

Although we lack a precise timeline for the interval between the first symptom in the summer and the last symptoms analysed (as in Figure 60), the recurrence of these symptoms suggests their continuous presence, so we can conclude that he meets both criteria for MDD as defined by the *DSM-5*.

3.5.2. Ellie

During their journey to find the Fireflies, Ellie continues to follow Joel, not knowing that he plans to leave her in his brother Tommy's care. Joel's intention stems from his insecurity about being able to protect and deliver Ellie to the Fireflies himself. This plan, unknown to Ellie, leads to a significant emotional upheaval when she discovers it.

In both the game and the TV show, Ellie's reaction to Joel's plan is rooted in her trust and emotional dependence on him. She feels safe and no longer alone with Joel, and his decision to leave her with Tommy shatters this newfound sense of security. Following Ellie's confrontation, Joel decides to continue the mission with her. At a certain point, Joel is injured, and the season ends with Ellie worried about him, creating a cliffhanger for the next season of the game and episode of the TV show. We will delve deeper, analysing specific pictures to explore how depression is portrayed through Ellie's character.



Figure 61

By this point in the narrative, Ellie has grown to trust Joel enough to openly discuss the events surrounding Sam on the TV show, as we can see on the Figure 61. This trust is significant, as it marks a deepening of their relationship and indicates Ellie's reliance on Joel for emotional support. The subsequent dialogue illustrates that Ellie tried to save Sam's life in the only way she believed might work:

Ellie: I tried, with Sam.

Joel: Tried what?

Ellie: I knew he was infected. I rubbed some of my blood into his bite. I know, I know, it was stupid. But I... I wanted to save him.

Joel: Well, I reckon it's a lot more complicated than that. Marlene, she's a lotta things, but she's no fool. If she says they can do it, they can do it.

Through this dialogue, it becomes evident that Ellie consistently attempts to save those she cares about, even when success is uncertain, as exemplified in her efforts with Sam. Ellie's attempts to save others, and her inability to prevent another tragic loss, contribute significantly to her depressive symptoms. This persistent feeling of guilt is a hallmark of MDD, and it keeps following her during the narrative, as we can notice on the Table 6.



Figure 62

Figure 62, from both media, shows Ellie's reaction upon discovering Joel's plan to leave her with his brother to finish the mission. Ellie was not okay with this decision, and her response during the ensuing discussion highlights significant psychological distress. We can observe a change in the tone of her voice as she begins to argue, driven by her desire for recognition and validation from Joel, where Ellie expresses her frustration over not being seen as someone important to Joel, despite her own experiences of loss. This change in tone and irritability are symptoms of MDD, which are going to be included on the Table 11 on the category of the symptoms on the game.

Additionally, this scene reveals a significant emotional outburst, the first time seen on the game, and the second time observed on the TV show. This outburst aligns with symptoms of DMDD, which is characterized by frequent temper outbursts. To determine whether Ellie meets the criteria for DMDD, we would need to continue monitoring the frequency and severity of these outbursts throughout the narrative.

Table 11

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
<i>Left behind</i>	Ellie	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice		X
		(DMDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X
Summer	Ellie	(MDD) Guilt		X
		(MDD) Guilt	X	
		(Dysthymia) Sadness		X
		(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X
		(MDD) Guilt		X
Autumn	Ellie	(MDD) Guilt		X
		(DMDD) Irritability	X	X
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
		(MDD) Irritability	X	X
Total	Ellie	Major depressive disorder	4	4
		Persistent depressive disorder	2	2
		Disruptive mood dysregulation	1	1

For Ellie (Table 11), the analysis reveals two additional symptoms of MDD in the game: irritability and change of tone of voice. Additionally, irritability is noted as a symptom of DMDD in the game. However, no new symptoms are identified for Ellie in the TV show during this analysis.

This brings Ellie to a total of four distinct symptoms of MDD in the game and one symptom of DMDD, also in the game. As a result, the criteria for MDD are not met in either medium. Also, for DMDD, further data is required to reach a conclusive result.

3.6. Winter

This section represents the climax of Freytag's pyramid, a crucial turning point in the narrative. During this season, Joel is severely injured and is fighting for his life. At the start of the narrative in both media, it is Ellie's turn to protect Joel and try to nurse him back to health, battling an infection from his injury. The DLC *Left Behind* explores Ellie's search for medicine to save Joel, providing an in-depth look at her determination. After recovering from his injury, Joel sets out to find Ellie, culminating in a dramatic rescue after she kills David. This sequence underscores the deepening parental bond Joel feels towards Ellie and highlights Ellie's resilience and ability to defend herself in dire situations.

The depiction of depressive symptoms during this period is strikingly similar in both the game and the TV show. We will explore the depressive symptoms in greater detail through the next figures.

3.6.1. Joel

Contrary to our previous assertion that Joel is the protagonist, during this specific season he assumes the role of a secondary character. He serves as Ellie's primary motivation, showcasing her deep care for him.

By the end of this season, Joel and Ellie's relationship has evolved into a profound father-daughter bond. This is illustrated when Joel calls Ellie as "baby girl," echoing a term of endearment he previously used for his daughter Sarah. For this reason, we are going to analyse this specific scene:



Figure 63

Regarding depression, these pictures (see Figure 63), from both media, highlights their mutual fear of losing one another, which, by itself, does not provide comprehensive data

on depressive symptoms. However, when considered alongside prior analyses, we can conclude that they have developed a coping mechanism through their bond with each other. This mutual reliance serves as a means of dealing with their past traumatic events.

3.6.2.Ellie

The main goal for Ellie during this season is to do everything possible to keep Joel safe. At the beginning of the DLC *Left Behind*, Ellie is depicted searching for medicine to aid Joel. The events following the DLC are quite similar in both media. Throughout this period, signs of depressive symptoms can be observed in the character, particularly in her interaction and the emotional weight of their experiences. These symptoms will be further explored in the upcoming figures.



Figure 64

The scene in Figure 64 is exclusive from the DLC. The main objective of Ellie is to find medicine to save Joel, but repeatedly she notices that there is nothing left. This narrative device effectively underscores the feeling of hopelessness, as she tirelessly searches with no positive outcome. When she finally discovers a medical kit, there is a momentary relief, representing the fragile hope of saving Joel. Hopelessness is a symptom of MDD, and dysthymia.



Figure 65

In Figure 65, from both media, after being captured by David and subsequently escaping, Ellie finds herself being relentlessly pursued by him, as his intentions towards her are malicious and predatory. In a desperate bid for survival, Ellie defends herself and ultimately kills David in an outburst of rage. Ellie's reaction to being chased by David and ultimately killing him can be understood as a normal survival response in both media. However, the way she carries out the act—with intense anger, only ceasing when Joel arrives—highlights her outburst of intense anger and irritability. These behaviours have been consistently observed throughout the media, as noted in Figures 32, and 62, and are characteristic of DMDD.



Figure 66

In Figure 66, from both media, we can also observe the evolution of their relationship into a father-daughter dynamic. Having Joel by her side has served as a coping mechanism for Ellie, just as it has for Joel (Figure 63), helping both characters navigate their emotional challenges and providing a sense of stability.

In this section, we observe that the symptoms Ellie displayed during the winter, in both the game and TV show, were previously noted in Table 11. However, it is crucial to highlight that Ellie exhibited symptoms of DMDD on two occasions in the game and three times in the TV show, as referenced in Figures 32, 62, and 65.

Ellie's outbursts of irritability are typically beyond her control. Considering the frequency and duration of these outbursts and aligning them with the criteria set by the *DSM-5*, we can conclude that Ellie meets the diagnostic criteria for DMDD. This conclusion is based on two key factors: first, Ellie's age falls within the required range of seven to eighteen years, and second, the repeated occurrence of these outbursts throughout the narrative.

3.7. Spring

This section represents both the falling action and resolution of Freytag's pyramid, bringing the narrative to its conclusion. Following the events of the winter, Joel and Ellie continue their journey to find the Fireflies. Along the way, they share conversations and moments of vulnerability, solidifying their father-daughter relationship. During their trip, they are captured by the Fireflies. When Joel awakens, Marlene informs him that Ellie is scheduled for surgery to remove the cordyceps from her brain to create a vaccine for the infection. However, the procedure will result in Ellie's death. Joel cannot accept this and sets out to rescue Ellie from the Fireflies, ultimately deciding to return to Tommy's place where they can live peacefully.

3.7.1. Joel

While on his journey in the game, Joel finally accepts the picture of him and Sarah from Ellie, signifying his recognition that it is difficult to escape from his past. An incident occurs, and Ellie passes out, causing Joel to worry deeply. Shortly after, they are found by the Fireflies and taken to their laboratory. Furthermore, on TV show, Joel reveals to Ellie that he was the one who "missed the shot," admitting that he attempted suicide.

After knowing about Ellie's surgery, Joel's reaction is to save Ellie at any cost. He kills almost all the Fireflies and Marlene. The story concludes with Joel assuring Ellie that his account—that there is no cure—is true, and Ellie chooses to trust him. Next, we're going to study the following figures to conclude Joel's analysis.



Figure 67

This Figure 67 occurs exclusively in the game, featuring an interaction between Ellie and Joel where she gives him a picture of his daughter, Sarah. Joel's response to this gesture is notably more adaptive compared to previous instances when Sarah was mentioned. He accepts the picture and expresses gratitude to Ellie, underscoring his development and the evolving of father-daughter-like relationship. The archetype of a ghost is invoked once more, but unlike earlier moments during the summer, Joel's reaction to memories of his daughter demonstrates significant emotional growth and acceptance.



Figure 68

This scene is unique to the TV show, where Joel gains enough trust in Ellie to reveal the reason behind his scar, which was the result of a suicide attempt. This is conveyed through the Figure 68, and the following dialogue:

Joel: It was me. I was the guy who shot and missed. There's no story. Sarah died, and I couldn't see the point anymore. Simple as that. And I wasn't scared either. I was ready. I couldn't have been more ready. When I—When I went to pull the trigger, I flinched.

In this dialogue, Joel reveals an openness about his reaction to Sarah's death, signifying that this trauma no longer weighs as heavily on him. This emotional shift is largely attributable to Ellie's presence in his life, which has helped him begin to heal.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge that Joel's previous suicide attempt is a significant symptom of MDD. Although this aspect is only depicted in the TV show, it marks one more symptom of MDD identified in Joel. Then, following the narrative, it will be added to the before the apocalypse area in Table 12, since it happened before the summer.

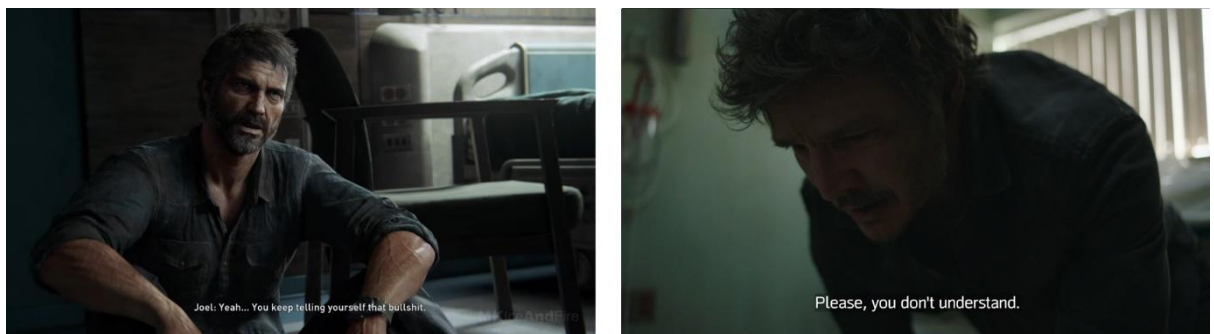


Figure 69

After everything he has accomplished alongside Ellie, Joel's reaction to the revelation that Ellie must die to potentially create a cure for the cordyceps infection is a complex blend of rage and a profound sense of hopelessness (see Figure 69). This hopelessness stems from his fear of being too late to save her from the impending operation. Joel's decision to do whatever it takes to save Ellie, even if it means resorting to extreme violence, mirrors his earlier actions with Sarah.

In this moment, two symptoms of depression that were previously noted before reappears. The first is his intense irritability directed toward the leader of the Fireflies, who has sanctioned the surgery on Ellie. The second is the overwhelming sense of hopelessness he experiences, fearing that he might be too late to save Ellie. The

irritability is a known symptom of MDD, while hopelessness is characteristic of both MDD and dysthymia.

These symptoms, which had not been prominent during the spring season until the analysis of Figure 69, from both media, suggest that Joel's depression is intricately linked to his fear of losing those he cares about.

Table 12

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
Before the apocalyse	Joel	(MDD – old) Tiredness	X	X
		(Dysthymia – old) Low energy	X	X
		(MDD – old) Anxiety	X	
		(MDD – old) Tentative of suicide		X
Summer		(MDD) Sleeping disorder	X	
		(Dysthymia) Insomnia		X
		(MDD) Sleeping disorder		X
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
		(MDD) Irritability	X	X
		(MDD) Guilt	X	X
	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X	
	(MDD) Lack of energy	X		
Autmun	(MDD) Irritability	X	X	
	(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X	
	(MDD) Anxiety		X	
	(MDD) Sleeping disorder		X	
	(MDD) Guilt		X	
	(MDD) Difficult on making decisions		X	
	(MDD) Worthlessness	X	X	
	(MDD) Irritability	X	X	
Spring	(MDD) Irritability	X	X	
	(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X	
	(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X	
Before the apocalyse	Major depressive disorder (old)	2	2	
	Persistent depressive disorder (old)	1	1	
Total	Major depressive disorder	6	7	
	Persistent depressive disorder	1	2	

Based on the analysis in Table 12, we can draw a definitive conclusion – a kind of diagnosis – regarding Joel's symptoms and the type of depression he exhibits.

- a) Major Depressive Disorder: Joel demonstrates six distinct symptoms in the game: sleeping disorder, change of tone of voice, irritability, guilt, lack of energy, and worthlessness. In the TV show, he exhibits the following seven symptoms: sleeping disorder, change of tone of voice, irritability, guilt, anxiety, difficulty in making decisions, and worthlessness.

Given that Joel displays six symptoms in the game and seven in the TV show, and considering the duration between seasons, it is possible to conclude that Joel meets all the criteria for MDD as defined in the study, particularly in subchapter 3.1.

- b) Persistent Depressive Disorder: For dysthymia, Joel exhibits the symptom of feeling sadness in the game. In the TV show, he shows symptoms of insomnia and feelings of sadness.

Considering that his grief over Sarah remains constant, along with his ongoing sleep issues (as depicted in Figure 57) and the low energy he exhibits during the initial moments of the game, Joel also meets the criteria for dysthymia.

This dual diagnosis suggests that Joel's untreated depressive symptoms have persisted for years, becoming an ingrained part of his life, leading to a chronic depressive state alongside his episodes of MDD.

3.7.2. Ellie

At the beginning of her journey through this season, Ellie is often remaining in silent or fails to respond to Joel's calls, indicating her anxiety about their mission nearing its end and the uncertainty of what will happen next, including the possibility of Joel leaving her. This changes when Ellie sees a group of giraffes from a building. This moment exemplifies that even those experiencing depression can still find joy and have positive experiences.

As they continue their journey, Ellie's behaviour reflects her underlying depressive symptoms, such as withdrawal and anxiety about abandonment. Despite these challenges, she experiences and appreciates positive moments. Let's now explore those moments:



Figure 70

The Figure 70, from both media, highlight Ellie's uncharacteristic behaviour. Normally talkative and attentive to every detail of the world around her, Ellie is shown not paying attention to her surroundings and only responding when Joel calls her back to focus. This deviation from her usual behaviour can be explained by her being apprehensive about the possibility of losing Joel and being alone again if he decides to leave her. Additionally, there are indications of poor concentration, and a sense of hopelessness, as already observed in her actions. Both are recognized symptoms of MDD. Furthermore, the persistent feeling of hopelessness is also a symptom of dysthymia.

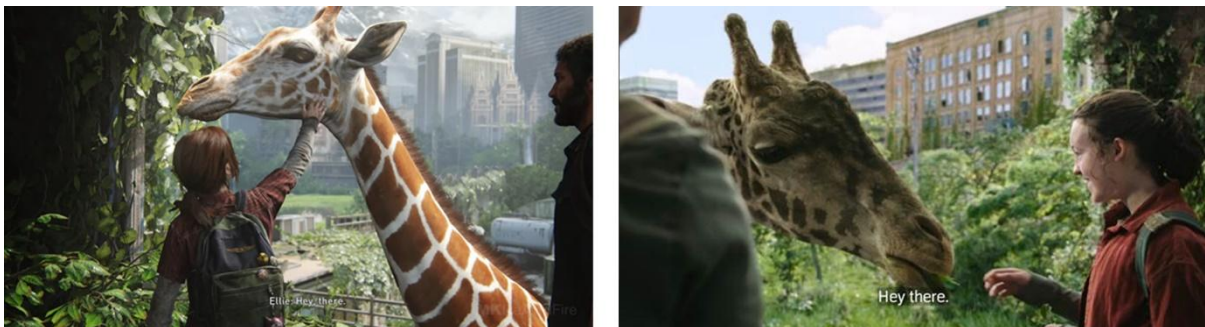


Figure 71

This scene, on Figure 71, from both media, illustrates the OPP assertion that individuals with depressive disorders can still experience moments of happiness, as discussed in subchapter 2.1. It captures a shared moment between the protagonists, highlighting how their relationship has deepened and how they have grown closer to each other.



Figure 72

This scene, on the picture 72, from both media, marks the moment when Ellie confides in Joel about how she got infected and that she was with her friend, Riley. This revelation is a profound signal of Ellie's trust in Joel and significantly impacts him, as he understands her deep fear of being alone. This fear is linked to the depression, and it has been recurrent in Ellie since the beginning. Concurrently, this marks the conclusion of her journey in both media. We can now assess the final count of symptoms exhibited during her journey, as well as the overall symptoms across the different types of depression.

Table 13

Segment	Character	Symptoms	Game	TV Show
<i>Left behind</i>	Ellie	(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice		X
		(DMDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Irritability		X
		(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X
Summer		(MDD) Guilt		X
		(MDD) Guilt	X	
		(Dysthymia) Sadness		X
		(Dysthymia) Sadness	X	X
		(MDD) Guilt		X
Autumn		(MDD) Guilt		X
		(DMDD) Irritability	X	X
		(MDD) Change of tone of voice	X	X
		(MDD) Irritability	X	X
Spring		(MDD) Poor concentration	X	X
		(MDD) Hopelessness	X	X
		(Dysthymia) Hopelessness	X	X
Total		Major depressive disorder	5	5
		Persistent depressive disorder	2	2
		Disruptive mood dysregulation	1	1

Based on the analysis in Table 13, we can draw a definitive conclusion regarding Ellie's symptoms and do a kind of diagnosis of the type of depression she exhibits.

- a) Major Depressive Disorder: Ellie displays five distinct symptoms in the game: feeling of hopelessness, feeling of guilt, irritability, change of tone of voice, and poor concentration. In the TV show, she exhibits the following five symptoms: change of tone of voice, irritability, feeling of hopelessness, feeling of guilt, and poor concentration.

Given that Ellie shows five symptoms in both the game and the TV show, and considering the timeline between seasons, it is possible to conclude that Ellie meets all the criteria for MDD as outlined in the study, specifically in subchapter 3.1.

- b) Persistent Depressive Disorder: For dysthymia, Ellie exhibits the symptoms of feeling sadness and feeling hopelessness. These symptoms are present in both the game and the TV show, at the same order.

Additionally, the analysis from Figure 64 concludes that Ellie also meets the criteria for DMDD.

Considering Ellie's struggles during her time with F.E.D.R.A., it is plausible that she could also have dysthymia, especially given the prolonged difficulties she faced in the quarantine zone.

From the comprehensive analysis of Ellie's character, it is evident that she meets the criteria for three types of depression discussed in this study: MDD, dysthymia, and DMDD. Furthermore, the consistency in symptoms across both media suggests that her character was designed with a strong sense of verisimilitude, accurately reflecting these depressive disorders.

Conclusion

This project originated from a pivotal event in the author's life, which sparked a desire to explore depression from a scientific perspective, starting from the analysis of fictional characters. The study represents a personal endeavour to delve deeper into how depressive disorder can profoundly affect an individual's life and the lives of those around them. It also reflects the author's journey toward understanding and accepting depression as a serious illness, confronting the societal stigma that still surrounds the disorder. The initial concept had to be adapted to ensure the creation of a scientifically grounded study that could serve as a valuable resource for individuals grappling with depressive symptoms.

Incorporating this subject into a video game analysis posed challenges. While there are games that explicitly address mental illness, often linked to depression, the author aimed to avoid a straightforward analysis of a game that overtly focuses on these issues, as it would lead to the predictable conclusion that such games naturally depict depressive symptoms. Instead, the author chose a game that evoked a deep emotional connection and understanding of its characters through immersive gameplay: *The Last of Us*. Although the game is not explicitly about depression or mental illness, its rich narrative and emotional depth enabled players to empathize with the characters, revealing complex backgrounds and struggles throughout the gameplay.

At the time of selecting *TLOU* for analysis, the TV show adaptation had also been released, offering additional material for examination. This led to the question of whether the characters in the TV adaptation would reflect the same depth and emotional complexity, particularly in terms of depressive symptoms, as those in the game. For instance, the transmedia episode of Bill and Frank provided new layers for analysis. At this point, it became evident that understanding the scientific concepts of depression, character development, and narrative structure across both media was essential for this study.

However, it became clear that simply exploring these concepts would not be sufficient. A comprehensive analysis of how depression is depicted in the characters across both media—examining the verisimilitude of their struggles in relation to real-life experiences of depression—was needed. Thus, the idea for a chapter dedicated to analysing specific scenes emerged. These scenes either depicted depressive symptoms or the development of coping mechanisms, highlighting how individuals with depression can adopt more

adaptive behaviours to manage the negative symptoms. With these elements in place, the structure of the study was organized into distinct chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of the research, ultimately leading to the final character analysis.

The structure of the chapters was developed as follows. It begins with a literature review in the first chapter, which laid the groundwork for analysing the characters, their behaviours, and their interactions with others throughout the narrative. This chapter was particularly insightful for the author, revealing that characters are not merely simplistic representations; instead, they involve a range of complex aspects that must be understood to portray them effectively in various narrative contexts. One key realization was that even flat characters can carry significant meaning beyond a one-dimensional portrayal. For example, the "ghost" archetype—representing the loss of a loved one—can profoundly alter a character's behaviour, mirroring the unresolved grief that real-life individuals experience when they lose someone. Additionally, the dynamics between characters can make them more relatable by reflecting the everyday challenges people face, as it offers a transformative understanding of how characters function within a narrative. The exploration of character relationships and their emotional depth allowed for a much more nuanced conception of what characters represent and how they can be crafted to resonate more meaningfully with audiences.

In the second chapter, the symptoms of depression were identified alongside the literature review. Although the topic of depression may seem distant from the realm of game development, the author's personal experiences with depression made the exploration of this subject more accessible, particularly when compared to the analysis of characters in the first chapter. Much of the content studied in the second chapter was already familiar to the author on a personal level but examining it through a scientific lens provided a deeper, more structured understanding of the disorder. One valuable aspect of this chapter is its potential to educate readers who may be unfamiliar with depression. By presenting the symptoms and experiences of depression in a clear, scientifically grounded way, it offers an opportunity for readers to develop a greater empathy for those who suffer from the illness, fostering a more compassionate perspective in various aspects of life. Additionally, the use of the *DSM-5* in the study allowed for a thorough scientific examination of depression and its various forms, aligning with the initial goal of approaching the subject from a clinical standpoint. Finally, with the symptoms and diagnostic criteria discussed in the second chapter, it became evident that *TLOU*—both the video game and the TV show—was an excellent choice for exploring depression. The depth of character development and narrative structure in these media make them well-suited for analysing how depression is

portrayed, underscoring the potential for a meaningful examination of the illness in the context of storytelling.

The insights gained from the earlier chapters culminated in a detailed character analysis, following the narratological progression of events in both media, as examined in the third chapter. This investigation revealed how narrative structures and character portrayals in *TLOU* effectively simulate the emotional and psychological weight of depressive disorders. Through the analysis based on the *DSM-5* criteria, it was determined that Joel exhibits two distinct types of depression: MDD and dysthymia, stemming from the loss of his daughter. In contrast, Ellie displays three types of depression: MDD, dysthymia, and DMDD, with her symptoms largely tied to her fear of abandonment. Moreover, it demonstrated how these depictions function as significant cultural tools by reflecting and resonating with real-world mental health experiences. A deeper understanding of this dynamic emerges through the analysis of the protagonists, Joel and Ellie, both of whom carry traumatic backgrounds leading to depressive symptoms. Joel's struggles are evident from the outset of both media, but they intensify with the loss of his daughter, marking a pivotal moment in his emotional state. In contrast, Ellie's turning point comes when she starts losing important people in her life, particularly her friend Riley. Throughout both the game and TV show, these two characters—each with their own distinct histories—are almost forced into cooperation. However, as the narrative progresses, their relationship evolves naturally, with time and mutual support enabling them to understand and rely on one another. Despite the heavy burden of these struggles, they resonate with each other, gradually transforming their relationship into a father-daughter bond. This evolution is made even more compelling by their ability to experience good moments together, demonstrating that people with depressive disorders can still have positive experiences. While this was supported by the scientific review in the study, witnessing it unfold in the game and TV show offered a fresh perspective and brought a sense of relief to the author, reinforcing the idea that improvement is possible, even amidst depression. Additionally, the analysis revealed that although the secondary characters do not meet the full clinical criteria for depression according to *DSM-5*, the symptoms they do exhibit still align with real-world experiences of the disorder. These characters play an essential role in shaping the emotional journeys of Joel and Ellie. Their interactions influence the protagonists' depressive symptoms, helping them develop more adaptive coping mechanisms as they continue to engage with others. While this does not imply that Joel and Ellie are free from depression, it does suggest that they are learning to manage their condition collectively, developing healthier ways to cope with the emotional weight they carry.

The initial goal of gaining a deeper understanding of depression was successfully achieved, as the author acquired substantial insights into character development and narrative structure. This foundation enabled a thorough analysis of the characters in *TLOU*. The choice of *TLOU* proved to be particularly well-suited for this study, given its rich and immersive narrative across both the game and its TV adaptation. However, as the research progressed, it became apparent that the scope of the study had evolved beyond the original objective. By concentrating on the comparison and correlation between the characters' emotional states and the symptoms of depression—especially through their behaviours—the research revealed that depressive symptoms and traits are integral to both the characterization of the protagonists and secondary characters to the progression of the narrative. These aspects not only enhance the depth of the characters but also play a critical role in making their choices and struggles more comprehensible to the audience. This, in turn, fosters a deeper empathy toward the depiction of depression, allowing viewers and players to form a meaningful connection with the characters across both media. The emotional resonance created by these portrayals strengthens the audience's engagement with the narrative and amplifies their understanding of the complexities of mental health.

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