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'Imaginary Friend' as a Coping Mechanism in Zemeckis's *Cast Away*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Prabesh Chapagain has completed his thesis entitled “Imaginary friend as a Coping Mechanism in Zemeckis’s *Cast Away*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from December 2015 to December 2016 and completed it successfully. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for the final Viva voice.

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Sarbagya Raj Kafle

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Imaginary friend as a Coping Mechanism in Zemeckis’s *Cast Away*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Prabesh Chapagain has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Prabesh Chapagain

“Imaginary Friend” as a Coping Mechanism in Zemeckis’s *Cast Away*

Abstract

This research attempts to explore the concept of Imaginary friend in the context of the movie Cast Away by applying the psychological concepts of ‘imaginary friend’ and ‘social isolation’ along with techniques of cinematography such as ‘wide shot’, ‘extremely long shot’, ‘high angle’, ‘lighting’, ‘diegetic sound’ and ‘camera movement’, in order to demonstrate that imaginary friend is an effective coping mechanism. Our psychological well-being is akin to our personal and social relationships, and how we can maintain a sense of identity at a time when we are isolated from the society is the very focus of this research project. Chuck Nolan, a FedEx systems engineer, who believes that we live and die by time, finds himself alone and stranded in an uninhabited island. Chuck has no one to talk to; he misses Kelly, his girlfriend. Opening FedEx packages in order to discover things he might use, he comes across a Volleyball (the manufacturing company is Wilson). Chuck uses Wilson as a coping mechanism, in order to cope with the stress he is going through; he talks to Wilson as if it were a real person. Having an imaginary companion for social interaction, keeps Chuck motivated to stay alive in that uninhabited island for four years; the volleyball(Wilson)does successfully serve the function of fulfilling Chuck’s need for social interaction.

Key Words: Imaginary friend, coping mechanism, social Isolation, social Interaction, stress, and psychological well-being.

Human identity is greatly a matter of the social environment (personal and social relationships, physical objects etc) that surrounds him/her. The sense of how one perceives self or one’s self image is directly proportional to his/her external stimuli. Even a slight change in one’s social environment can cause loneliness and

isolation. In order to prevent the breakdown of the defenses, a human being can resort to any coping mechanism-one of these being the concept of 'imaginary friend'. In the context of the movie, Chuck Nolan, the protagonist discovers himself alone and stranded in a small island, after the plane he had boarded encounters a fierce storm and crashes. Socially isolated in the island, Chuck has absolutely no one to talk to. In an attempt to cope with the change, Chuck names volleyball 'Wilson' and talks to it as if it were a real person. Therefore, the researcher wants to prove that 'imaginary friend' is an effective coping mechanism at times of social isolation.

Cast Away, a movie released in the year 2002, was produced and directed by Robert Zemeckis, and features Tom Hanks in the leading role. The movie was a huge commercial success. Tom Hanks's outstanding performance in the movie also got him nominated for 'Best Actor in a Leading Role' at the 73rd Academy Awards. Some psychological issues depicted in the film deserve a thorough scrutiny and analysis. However, no relevant studies--save some naive movie reviews--seem to exist in association with the movie and this does not do justice to this fabulous work-of-art. As far as the researchers' knowledge is concerned, no other researcher has explored the relationship between the state of 'social isolation' and the concept of 'imaginary friend' using cinematography techniques in order to determine their correlation with human identity and that is precisely why the researcher wants to explore this issue in the movie *Cast Away*.

Cinematography is indicative of the photographing techniques of a movie. The strength to sincerely and accurately capture images of people and objects to create an emotional effect on the audience is the legacy of the camera. When reading or trying to understand a movie, it becomes crucial to take into account the kind of cinematography techniques that are used in the movie. This gives us a better insight

into not only the setting of the scene, but also the mood of the character and his/her feelings and motivations. In *Cast Away*, the researcher will be looking into some filming techniques like ‘camera shot’, ‘camera angle’, ‘lighting’, ‘diegetic sound’ and ‘camera movement’ in order to analyze the scenes of the movie in an attempt to get a better insight into the psychology of the protagonist.

Chuck Nolan is cast away in an island, alone, and with absolutely no relationships whatsoever: professional or personal. After his first failed attempt to make fire by rubbing a stick against wood, Chuck talks to Wilson the volleyball as if he were talking to a real person, “You wouldn’t have a match by any chance, would you?” (1:10:45-1:10:47), and sets out to rub the stick against the wood again. “Air got to it, air got to it” he projects his frustration to Wilson. And shortly, he is able to make fire. It is obvious that Chuck is using Wilson as a means to compensate for his loneliness; in order to fulfill his ‘lack’ of social relationships; to interact things that matter to him. Wilson, though an imaginary companion for Chuck, serves the real life function of preserving his identity by guarding his defenses and keeping him motivated. The protagonist, without going insane, lives a primitive life in the island for four years; this could not have been possible if not for his imaginary creation ‘Wilson’.

Human beings are social beings. We need family, friends and relationships for a sound mental health. ‘Imaginary friend’ can be an effective coping mechanism in order to prevent loneliness and foster psychological well-being at times of social isolation (and/or when a person lacks the necessary quality relationships he/she desires).

Human beings’ psychological well-being is greatly a factor of social interaction: be it for sharing one’s thoughts and ideas, spending time together, or

simply avoiding the feeling of loneliness. The need for social interaction is well documented in the movie *Cast Away*.

A perspective that emphasizes the benefits of having a friend circle is put forward by Connids, Ian and et. al, as “The benefits of belonging to a set of interlocking networks can lower the risks of social loneliness” (20). From this perspective, we might as well to be true: a person who does not belong to a set of interlocking networks has a higher risk of social loneliness. And this is only evident for the protagonist Chuck Nolan, who finds himself strangled in an uninhabited island without a single person to talk to.

According to De Jong Gierveld, “Loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations, in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized” (65). Chuck Nolan, who has been portrayed in the text as a time-fanatic-workaholic, suddenly discovers himself utterly alone in an island and with absolutely no relationships whatsoever: professional or romantic.

Researchers in Social Psychology believe that since all people seek happiness, it is likely that they desire to be happy and the feeling of loneliness is a common state evidenced by people of all age group: children, adolescents and young adults, and that loneliness is a severe problem in the society. Loneliness is a psychological reality irrespective of age which is effectively portrayed in *Cast Away*.

Jake Norsworthy and Mark Tiller Whitley state that “the creation of an imaginary companion is the result of confusion between fantasy and reality” (134). Two important aspects in this statement are noteworthy. One, imaginary companion is

an outcome of a confused mind, and two, it is a mechanism to bridge the gap between fantasy and reality in order to kindle psychological comfort. Chuck Nolan, the protagonist of *Cast Away* is all alone and in a state of utter confusion in an island. Although Chuck is attempting to understand his surrounding environment via exploration, it is evident that his mind lingers between fantasy and reality.

Micheal Svendsen defines “imaginary companions as invisible characters with no objective basis with which children play for a significant period of time at least several months” (2). The rejection of an objective basis, as Svendsen puts ample room for ‘imaginary companion’ to be just about anything; anything befitting the imagination of the subject. And in case of the movie *Cast Away* it is a white volleyball.

Since its release in the year 2002, the movie *Cast Away* has received many reviews, varying responses and criticism.

Chuck is stranded in an uninhabited island. He faces a challenge to adapt himself to an isolated life; a life without friends and social relationships; a life without Kelly. Chuck suddenly confronts an absolutely new world and is obliged to depend on his love and memories of Kelly in order to survive. He not only has to remain strong and keep his sanity, he also has to stay alive. Zemeckis’s decision to not include any dialogues for almost an entire half of the movie (four years that Chuck spends alone in the island) perfectly captures the turmoil that the protagonist feels.

Sam Froster in his article “Psychological Concepts in *Cast Away*” states “He must adjust to his surroundings on the island in order to survive” (1). The same article further states: “Another psychological concept in the movie is that humans need social interaction. Being stranded all alone on an island, Noland obviously has nobody to explain his emotions to” (1). To depict the state of confusion between fantasy and

reality that Chuck experiences, the same article further states: “While struggling to make fire, Chuck cuts his hand. In frustration, he grabs the closest thing to him, which happens to be brand-new volleyball he had opened earlier, and he throws it against a rock. He realizes he has left his mark: a hand print of blood easily made into a face. Meet Chuck’s new and only friend, Wilson” (1). This very article again states “Chuck projects his thoughts on Wilson, and then adds Wilson’s half of his conversation in his head” (2). It is evident that socially isolated Chuck is using his imaginary creation ‘Wilson’ as a means to fulfill his need for social interaction.

But that the characteristic traits of Wilson serve a special function for Chuck, is well documented in “The feeling of what happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness” by Antonio R. Damasio state “Wilson is not merely an invented friend of random characteristics . . . Wilson possesses specifiable dissociate traits of Noland, himself. His is the discourse of the reasonable, prudent, civilized man Noland once was” (29). Since his coming to the Island, Chuck has been forced to adapt to the isolated life of the island. As a result he has been forced to inhibit some of his characteristics traits. Wilson possess some of these very dissociate traits of Nolan, himself.

Tyler Black’s article “Wilson, Apostrophes, and the Analytic Relationship” reads: “Wilson is an apostrophe . . . rhetorical term referring to something that is used to represent something else that is absent or gone. It was Lacan’s contribution, or maybe his trick, to partially reference what these days we call defense mechanism” (3).



Figure 1: Chuck and Kelly displaying love (00:13:32-00:13:33)

Figure 1 is a snapshot from one of the earliest scenes of the movie. This is a close up shot of the camera that captures Chuck and Kelly getting intimate with each other.

Kelly tells Chuck that he is home; Chuck affirms that he is home indeed and they kiss and dance. Chuck's happiness is clearly expressed in his content mood and it is only evident that Chuck loves Kelly very much. A few scenes later there is a social gathering of about 15 people eating together.



Figure 2: Chuck eating with his friends (00:14:52-00:14:53)

Figure 2 is a snapshot from the scene where Chuck is dining with his acquaintances. Here, the movement of the camera is made in such a manner that we get a complete view of the dining table and also the Christmas tree and lights in the background. In this scene, Chuck and his friends talk about work and personal relationships, and things that matter to them, things that connect them, things that make them happy. Chuck is an active member of a strong social network that is both intimate and supportive. The benefit of this ‘belongingness’ is clearly facilitating Chuck’s psychological well-being. This is parallel to the perspective of Connids, Ian and et. al, “The benefits of belonging to a set of interlocking networks can lower the risk of social loneliness” (20).

Kelly gives Chuck a wrapped gift and wishes him “Merry Christmas” (18:01-

18:02). Chuck opens the gift to discover a pocket watch with his favorite picture of Kelly. “My grand daddy used it on the southern pacific” (18:45), Kelly tells him. I’m always gonna keep this on Memphis time, Kelly’s time” (18:00-18:55), Chuck retorts. Kelly, being very close to Chuck, is well aware of the fact that ‘time’ is valuable for Chuck, and gifting him the pocket watch which had belonged to her grandfather is indicative of the fact that Chuck is as dear to her as her beloved grandfather.

Before boarding the flight bound to Malaysia, Chuck gives Kelly a gift. “Take it, and hold on to it and you can open it on new years’ eve; I love you; I will be right back” (20:00-20:40), he tells her. The expression on Kelly’s face when she receives the gift is evidence of the fact that she is going to miss Chuck very much while he is away. This scene further affirms of Kelly’s strong romantic feelings for Chuck.

While Chuck is still air bound, there is a fierce storm and the plane experiences severe turbulence; the plane falls into the ocean and is filled with water. Chuck struggles to get himself out of the drowning airplane. Chuck is cast in the Pacific Ocean; he swims away from the airplane and the plane burns down. The existential struggle on the part of Chuck confirms that he has strong survival instincts; Chuck is a fighter with a strong will-power.

Chuck coughs; opens his eyes in a shore; he’s in an island (31:24- 31:28). It is, at this point, that the audiences (of the movie) realize that Chuck is alive. Chuck remembers and checks for his beeper, it’s useless; he brings his pocket watch near his ears and listens to it, the watch is useless too (32:32-33:40). Chuck, conditioned by habit and schedule, does what he had done persistently all these years: ‘live by time’. The beeper going useless and the watch not being able to tell the time is foreshadowing towards a drastic ‘change’ in Chuck’s life; a change Chuck has to cope with, or die.

In one of the early scenes in the Island, Chuck looks around in confusion and pain and yells for help. After no one responds to his calling, he writes 'Help' on the shore with his feet. Chuck is well aware that he's going through a crisis and his social pain is only logical, something that any sane person would feel under similar circumstances. Human beings are creatures of habit and it is a perfectly normal phenomenon that a drastic change in circumstances and surroundings bring about anxiety in them. Chuck's confusion- and his appeal for help- is most certainly his immediate reaction to the sudden change he senses in his life.

The scene that immediately follows shows Chuck looking at Kelly's picture with a lot of dedication and nostalgia, and it is obvious that he is experiencing social pain. Cacioppo John and Louise Hawkley, in their dissertation on Social isolation state "the social pain of loneliness evolved as a signal that one's connection to others is weakening . . . feeling socially disconnected and isolated triggers social pain, an aversive signal that evolved to motivate one to take action that minimizes threats or damage to one's social body" (19). In order to subdue the effects of the social disconnectedness and minimize the threat of the social pain it is normal for a human being to look for comfort and there is no doubt that Chuck is trying to combat his social pain by searching for solace in Kelly's memories.

Chuck suddenly wakes up by a sound and gets defensive (37:42-37:44). Chuck's body language at this moment reflects the insecurity he feels inside. Here, we can also understand that Kelly's picture alone is not motivating Chuck to cope with the social pain of loneliness. There is the same sound again; Chuck gets curious and calls out "hey, anybody" (39:10-39:20), expecting that it could be a human being. It is only obvious that a person who has lived in a society will associate sound with human activity. The same sound is now paired with a coconut falling in front of him (40:10-

40:12). Chuck shudders in alarm. Chuck's shuddering is a body response to his body's heightened sensitivity to predator evasion; and that Chuck is motivated to renew his social connections is only obvious, but to no avail, for there is absolutely no one in that island he can talk to.

He tries to escape the island in a rubber raft (from the airplane) but the high breakers flip the raft over, he is tossed onto the reef as a result, severely injuring his thigh; chuck bleeds and cries in agony (54:00-55:52). When human beings face a crisis, it is obvious that 'fright and flight' is their natural response; this is in accordance to human body's natural defense and is the first priority at times like these. Chuck, finding himself alone and away from human contact does not take long to comprehend that he is entangled in a crisis and it is only normal that he try to escape the situation. But Chuck's thigh injury is also a pointer towards the fact that 'escape' is not going to come that easily.

Cacioppo, John and et. al, in their article entitled 'Social isolation' view:

Loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations, in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized. (65)

A person is likely to feel lonely when s/he lacks certain (valued) relationships and in this matter both the quality and the quantity of relationships matter. In the context of the movie *Cast Away* the protagonist Chuck lacks social relationships absolutely. He does not have a single person to talk to in that island. There is no doubt he feels extremely lonely.

Chuck opens a FedEx package and discovers a volleyball (1:03:00-1:03:02). Chuck tries to accommodate to his surroundings; he makes net; catches fish (1:04:40-1:04:42). Chuck has retorted to explore the surroundings around him in order to wander his mind away from the social pain that he is experiencing. At this point, it is clear that Chuck has accepted that he is all alone in that island. It is also clear that he is exploring the resources available to him on that island in order to occupy himself for staring at Kelly's picture alone and thinking about her is not being able to keep him motivated. Chuck's solitary activities demonstrate that he is trying to adapt to the isolated life of the Island.

We can draw parallels between the protagonist Chuck's coping techniques and Kyle Steven Rook, a researcher in social psychology who points out that, "although encouraging lonely individuals to develop enjoyable solitary activities seems like a last resort, Solitary activities relieve people from dependence on other and thus may increase their sense of control" (39).

Rubbing a stick against wood, Chuck tries to make fire but cuts his hand and bleeds. He gets a hold of the volleyball with his bloody hand and hurls it away in anger (1:05:44-1:07:56). We see that the frustration of being lonely and not having things under his control is getting the best of him. Away from Memphis, his home, away from his girlfriend Kelly, and far from any human contact, it is only normal that Chuck go through a varying range of negative emotions. All this time prior, 'work' was his only priority, his only motivation; and now, all of a sudden, his life has become an existentialist question; Chuck has to survive, no matter what; he has to get back to Kelly.

Chuck picks Wilson-the-volleyball up. With his sweat and spit he soaks a cloth wet and makes eyes, nose and mouth on the volleyball as if trying to replicate a

person's facial structure (1:08:48-1:09:13). Chuck does so with a lot of patience and concentration and we get to know at this point that the schedule-accustomed-FedEx-employee Chuck is actually quite a creative person. Taylor, Majorie and et. al, in their book entitled "*Of Hobbes and Harvey: The imaginary Companions created by Children Adults*" in regards to imaginary companions (characters) assert that, "These characters can be created at any point during a lifetime, though western culture suggests they are most acceptable in preschool –and school-age children" (15). Although this statement does not put light on why 'imaginary companions' are created, it is quite clear on its take that the creation of 'imaginary companions' is not limited to children; even adults can create 'Imaginary friends'.

Jake Norsworthy and Mark Tiller Whitley state that "the creation of an imaginary companion is the result of confusion between fantasy and reality" (134). Two important aspects in this statement are worth considering. The first, that imaginary companion is an outcome of a confused mind, and the second, it's a mechanism to bridge the gap between fantasy and reality in order to kindle psychological comfort. Chuck, who is stranded in the island (with absolutely no one to talk to), is utterly confused and his creation of the imaginary 'Wilson' is a mechanism to cope with the social pain of loneliness and foster psychological comfort.

Likewise, Kyle Steven Rook in his PH.D dissertation asserts, "Some individuals recover from loneliness by using their own strategies. . . The most obvious approach is to help people develop satisfying relationships" (12). This perspective of Rook is concurrent with and precisely applicable in the context of the movie *Cast Away* where Chuck Nolan uses the strategy of an imaginary friend: Wilson, in order to develop a satisfying relationship. In the scene that follows, Chuck, fixes the

volleyball- facing him- atop a broken tree (1:09:52-1:10:00). Chuck's positioning the face-like-volleyball to stare at him depicts Chuck's readiness to use Wilson as a companion.



Figure 3: Chuck's creation 'Wilson-the-volleyball' (1:09:50- 1:09:51)

Figure 3 is a snapshot of Wilson-the-volleyball. This is a close up shot which clearly shows the blood imprint of Chuck's hand with the impression of eyes, nose and mouth on the volleyball. As a result, the audiences clearly notice that Wilson resembles a human face. Chuck's first conversation with Wilson: "You wouldn't have a match by any chance, would you?" (1:10:45-1:10:47). What on the surface appears like Chuck asking Wilson for a match that he could make fire the easy way without having to go through the pain of bruising and bleeding his hand again, is actually but driven by a deeper Psychological need, the need to express himself. And when Chuck

comments “air got to it, air got to it” (1:10:55-1:11:02), with a strange expression on his face, he seems to be relieving himself of his frustration of being alone and without control. It is clearly seen that Chuck needs company; he needs someone to interact with; someone who would hear him out.



Figure 4: Chuck being ecstatic after having made fire (1:12:00-1:12:01)

Figure 4 is a snapshot from the movie where Chuck is expressing his ecstasy of having created fire. If we analyze the scene taking into account the cinematography technique of ‘lightening’, we see that the color of Chuck’s upper body is similar to that of the fire; the background is completely black. As a result, the audience’s eyes are focused on Chuck and his activities only. Similarly, another cinematography technique that is used in this scene is the use of diegetic sound; we hear the sound of the burning fire. The use of diegetic sound in the scene helps create a feeling of

loneliness and isolation. When Chuck makes fire, he yells, “Fire . . . look what I have created, I have made fire” (1:12:04- 1:12:20), and since his life as a cast away in the island this is the first time he appears to be genuinely happy. For Chuck, this appears to be an accomplishment, something that assures him that he is still in control of things. Chuck is ecstatic of having made the fire as if he is the first person to do it. Overwhelmed with happiness he sings “common baby light my fire” (1:14:04- 1:14:08), a song by the famous musical band The Doors, and dances near the fire. If we look back at history, it was the invention of fire that marked the first revolution of mankind. Eating cooked food differentiated humans from animals who had no choice other than eating raw meat. The invention of fire laid the cornerstone of human civilization, turned savage humans into social ones. This invention of fire, the old way, also connotes towards a shift in Chuck’s life: from social to somewhat ancient.

Chuck does the math in the wall of the cave, “This is a search area of 500,000 sq. miles, twice the size of Texas. They may never find us” (1:15:10-1:15:20), he tells Wilson.

Chuck was well aware of the airplane’s flight plan and also its last position prior to the plane crashing in the Pacific Ocean. At this point, what appears as Chuck discussing with Wilson his chances of getting discovered by the search team, is actually Chuck’s anxiety that he might never unite with Kelly and that he would die in the island. The other important thing to consider here is that he uses the plural ‘us’. Chuck using ‘us’ instead of ‘I’, clearly signifies that he has chosen to think of Wilson as a real person capable to reciprocate emotions and feelings. Wilson is Chuck’s deliberate creation and it’s clear that his use of the pronoun ‘us’ in order to refer to Wilson and himself collectively is also a deliberate (conscious) choice.

Sharing his pain with Wilson Chuck retorts, “This tooth is killing me; started

out just hurting my lip down, but now it hurts all the time, all the time. The good thing, there isn't much to eat around here . . . Just keep sucking on that coconut and that crab" (1:15:43-1:16:12). Chuck's social pain of loneliness is further enhanced by his physical pain (decayed tooth) and he seems to be expressing this very painful state to Wilson. It is also clear that lately Chuck has only been able to eat crab and suck on coconuts. His complaining with Wilson also gives the audience information on the recent food habits of the protagonist.

"And just like I used to avoid going to the dentist . . . if I were offered a second chance like that now, oh! What I wouldn't give to have a dentist right here in this cave. What the heck, I wish you were a dentist; Ya, Dr. Wilson" (1:16:25-1:17:30). Chuck seems to be regretting the fact that he did not go to his dentist James Balding back in Memphis. He also bizarrely explores the possibility of Wilson being a Dentist, and here it becomes crystal clear that Chuck has started to associate Wilson with comfort and wishes (although bizarrely) that Wilson would rescue him from this physical pain as well. His decayed tooth hurts so much that he wishes a dentist be present right there in that cave. The point to note here is that at this moment of pain the most important person to Chuck is a dentist, but realizing that Chuck and Wilson were the only two in that island Chuck resorts to wish for something that's more likely: that Wilson were a dentist, yet which is another impossibility. And all this leads him to Memphis, to thoughts of Kelly. Shortly, he gathers courage and uses the blade of a skate against his decayed tooth and hits it with a stone, thus getting rid of it.



Figure 5: Chuck with long hair and beard eating raw fish (1:00:01-1:00:02)

Figure 5 is a snapshot from the scene (four years after the plane crash) where Chuck is shown with long beard and hair. This is a close up camera shot which helps the audience notice the facial features of Chuck clearly. This filming technique to highlight the long beard and long hair does a wonderful task to exemplify the ruggedness and carefree nature of Chuck. Also, the diegetic sound of chewing that is used in the scene is concurrent to the theme of Chuck eating raw fish; the sound seems legitimate and makes the action appear natural (though it's least likely that the protagonist of the movie chewed an actual fish while filming the scene). In the text, this scene pinpoints towards the fact that Chuck no longer seem to care about meeting the standards of a social life, he still talks to Wilson- his imaginary friend- with whom he shares his feelings and emotions. A sound disturbs his sleep and he wakes up, "Shut up" (1:21:36-1:21:49), Chuck yells at Wilson. This is evidence of the fact that within the four years, somehow, Chuck has conditioned himself into believing that

Wilson is a real person. But just as immediately, Chuck looks away towards the origination of the sound. And here, the contrast between 'Wilson' being a coping mechanism rather than a defense mechanism becomes evident. The difference between the two being that Coping mechanism is a conscious choice whereas defense mechanism is an unconscious one. After having consciously conditioned oneself for four years to believing Wilson to be a real person who can reciprocate feelings and emotions chuck's first instinct is to project his frustration towards Wilson. This helps Chuck relieve himself of his stress and also helps himself feel good; it fosters his psychological well-being. But since Wilson is Chuck's deliberate choice, a part of Chuck does realize that Wilson is not capable of uttering a sound, that he is just a 'goddamn volleyball'.

Chuck looks at the fiberglass portable toilet (standing on the shore), and then looks at Wilson-the-volleyball. It seems like Chuck is expecting Wilson to say something; waiting for his reaction or feedback. After a few moments of switching his glance from the fiberglass to Wilson and from Wilson to the fiberglass, Chuck says to Wilson "This could work, this could work" (1:23:45-1:23:59). It appears that Chuck is rekindled by the idea of using the broken fiberglass to make a sail and he seems to be motivated by the thought of rescue from that island; Chuck is expressing this very positive energy with his friend Wilson.



Figure 6: Chuck counting the logs (1:26:00-1:26:01)

Figure 6 is a screenshot from the scene where Chuck counts the logs. This is a wide shot filming technique. We can see that Chuck occupies only a small portion of the frame and there is ample space on the either side of the character. These spaces on the either side of the character create a sense of loneliness and isolation and are in perfect accord with the psychology of the protagonist; this scene also effectively captures the setting of the shore. “So we have to make rope again. Wilson, we gonna have to make a hell lot of rope” (1:24:38-1:24:57). Here, the use of the plural ‘we’ again is representative of both Chuck and Wilson. This is proof of the fact that Chuck believes he is going to make the escape for both of them: Wilson and him and not for himself alone. In order to come up with the necessary rope Chuck goes about chopping the trees of the island (that he might lay out his raft). He extracts bark of the trees and

braids them to make rope; he also uses the video tapes he found in one of the FedEx packages for this purpose.

“That gives us another month and half . . . need 424 feet of good rope, plus another 50 feet say miscellaneous, round that off to 475 feet of good rope . . . average 15 feet a day, plus we have to build it, stock it, launch it” (1:25:14:125:35). Chuck is discussing with Wilson his calculations of required rope to lay out the raft. Here again, he makes use of the pronoun ‘we’ as if Chuck and Wilson will both be building the raft together in order to make the escape.

“This is gonna be tight and there isn’t much time. But, we live and we die by time anyway. Let’s not commit the sin of turning our back on time. I know, I know we live and we die by time” (1:25:35-1:26:20). When Chuck says “we live and we die by time” (1:25:50-1:26:20), it appears as if his long repressed time-fanatic-self is surfacing. And when Chuck says “I know, I know” (1:25:38-1:25:50) to Wilson as if responding to Wilson’s feedbacks to his calculations, we clearly understand that Wilson’s thoughts are actually Chuck’s own, and that he has just been using Wilson as a means (a coping mechanism) to resolve his own inner conflict and keep his identity intact; call it creativity, or a meager insanity to protect against another yet larger one.

“This is all that’s left, Checked over the whole island . . . we are gonna be short . . . It’s time to make some more out of the video tape. Yes, NO, no, we have time . . . Look the wind’s still blowing in from the west. I know, ya I know there’s still 30 feet of extra rope but “I am not going back up there” (1:26:38- 1:28:37). The thing to be noted here is that Chuck’s speech appears like that of a ‘split personality’; there seems to be a hidden personality interacting with Chuck, contradicting with him; as if saying: ‘We don’t have time Chuck’. This hidden personality also seems to know

that Chuck had made around 30 feet of rope to hang him and that rope is still up in the cliff. And this scene is where it becomes crystal clear that Chuck is projecting his own thoughts to Wilson-the-volleyball.



Figure 7: Chuck climbing the cliff to withdraw the rope

Figure 7 is a snapshot from the movie where Chuck is retrieving the rope from the top of the cliff. Here the camera captures Chuck and his activities from a high angle (a cinematography technique) that makes the audience feel that the character inside the frame is vulnerable. The fact that despite of his initial denial, Chuck climbs back to the place where he had initially tried to hang himself and withdraws the rope is evidence that ‘Wilson’ has been an effective strategy (mechanism) for Chuck to get over his fears and anxieties and do what is required of him, do what feels right.

“You see . . . there yeah. You were right . . . just forget it. It was a good thing that we did a test, coz it wasn’t gonna be a quick little snap; we’d have landed on the

rocks, broken my leg, or my back or my neck” (1:28:39-1:28:40). Chuck shows Wilson the rope he withdraws from the Cliff as if bragging to Wilson about his achievement and proving to Wilson that he isn’t a loser. It’s evident that ‘quick little snap’ is referring to an easy death Chuck telling Wilson ‘You were right, you were right’ and ‘We would have landed on the rocks’ is hunching towards the fact that Wilson could be Chuck’s own alter-ego, a conflicting personality within chuck’s own self, who had persisted that Chuck not commit a suicide and fight with his present state of crisis. That the characteristic traits of Wilson serve a special function for Chuck is well documented in Antonio R. Damasio’s research article entitled “The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness” as: “Wilson is not merely an invented friend of random characteristics . . . Wilson possesses specifiable dissociate traits of Noland, himself. His is the discourse of the reasonable, prudent, civilized man Noland once was” (29). The characteristic traits of Wilson are Chuck’s own and it helps Chuck to come in terms with his new personality.

“Well, we might just make it . . . regardless, I’d rather take my chances out there in the ocean than to stay here on this shit-hole island spending the rest of my life talking to a goddamn volleyball” (1:35:20-1:36:00). Chuck grabs hold of Wilson-the-volleyball and kicks him out of the cave with his feet. From this statement it becomes clear that Chuck is well aware that Wilson is a volleyball after all.

However, that Chuck has sentiments attached with Wilson, too, is also absolutely true and clearly visible in the scene that immediately follows. Chuck, as if he were an altogether different person calls out, “Wilson, Wilson . . . Oh, Oh! Never again, never again, never again, you’re okay? Okay?” (1:37:20-1:39:10). Chuck cannot bear Wilson’s loss; he cries for Wilson; the separation makes him anxious and

insecure. And when Chuck finds Wilson outside the cave he caresses Wilson-the-volleyball like a child caressing her/his toy. This scene amplifies the emotional bond between Chuck and his imaginary friend.

The entire length of the movie focuses on the actions, thoughts, emotions and feeling of the protagonist Chuck Nolan. And although Chuck longs for social interaction, his only solace in that island is talking to Wilson-the-Volleyball: a viable alternative for all his personal and professional relationships, a remedy from his social pain, and also his motivation to get back to Memphis and unite with Kelly.

In conclusion, the present thesis examines *Cast Away*, a 2002 American movie which exemplifies human's need for social interaction and establishes 'Imaginary Friend' as an effective coping mechanism for fostering psychological wellbeing. After a meticulous study on the movie in the light of various researchers on social and behavioral psychology and some effective techniques of cinematography, it becomes clear that human beings' psychological wellbeing is largely co-related with the quality of their social interaction. Human beings have to communicate things that are important to them, this keeps them motivated. When a person lacks the necessary relationship and feels isolated, s/he can resort to any coping strategy to substitute for the lack of that/those relationship/s. And at times of social isolation 'imaginary friend', can work as an effective coping mechanism (strategy).

There is an inseparable relationship between humans and their social environment. A person's identity is greatly an outcome of factors like his/her social environment, and also the quality of his relationships with other people (personal and professional). A simple change in one's social environment can result in loneliness and isolation, causing the individual to react with different emotions: insecurity, anxiety, fear, aggression and the like. And if the favorable view of one's self cannot

be maintained, this can lead to the breakdown of the body's natural defenses. Coping mechanisms are strategies that help human beings cope with the stressful situations in their lives and maintain preferred views of themselves, thus keeping them motivated and confident. 'Imaginary Friend' is a creative strategy (coping mechanism) to help human beings maintain preferred views of themselves (and meet their psychological needs) when they sense a lack of quality relationships in their lives.

In *Cast Away* as well, this very social aspect of the human reality is exemplified. *Cast Away* in an uninhabited island (and away from people that are important to him), Chuck Nolan, the protagonist of the movie confronts 'social isolation' as his new reality. All his speech, actions and motivations are- consciously or subconsciously- targeted towards maintaining his sanity and staying alive. Wilson-the-volleyball, his imaginary friend (who seems to have Chuck's characteristic traits) does a wonderful job keeping Chuck motivated in the solitary existentialist process.

Although Wilson is incapable to reciprocate Chuck's feelings and emotions, the strategy does serve a realistic function for Chuck- Chuck interacts with Wilson, shares his concerns and anxieties, and also projects his frustrations towards his pretend friend. Chuck's imaginary creation Wilson (though not a real person) serves as a viable alternative for his lack of social relationships. And owing to this very strategy (coping mechanism) Chuck is not only able to keep his sanity intact, but also capable to gather his motivation to keep on living. Hence, at times of social isolation, 'Imaginary Friend' is an effective coping mechanism to maintain psychological wellbeing.

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