

A Review of the Movie *Apocalypse Now*

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Abstract

Apocalypse Now is a film directed by Francis Frank Coppola. It follows the main character, Captain Benjamin L. Willard, through his last mission in Vietnam. Assigned with assassinating the rogue Captain Walter E. Kurtz, he is accompanied by four other crew members, Chief, Chef, Clean, and Lance, through the chaos of the Vietnam War. The film dives into the dark progression of these characters and how the mission Willard was desperate to finish affected them and those they encountered, friend or foe. This paper will explore the applications of Abnormal Psychology in the film, including correct and incorrect aspects of symptoms, diagnosis, and other disorders that are depicted in the film. Using the DSM-V as the source for determining the accuracy of disorders, Willard, Chef, and Lance will be examined to outline which disorder, or disorders, they exhibit and which the film may inaccurately depict. Because the film is based in the Vietnam War, the perspective when analyzing the characters will be shifted to fit the setting, potentially causing a diagnosis to be different than the diagnosis of a civilian life experience.

A Review of the Movie *Apocalypse Now***Introduction**

Apocalypse Now focuses on Captain Benjamin L. Willard and his last mission during the Vietnam War. The film opens with Willard experiencing images and sounds of the war, hearing the fan ~~as a chopper~~of a chopper, and watching tree lines be incinerated by air strikes. When he finally ~~snaps~~snapped out of his trance, he ~~realizes~~realized he is not in the jungle, where he ~~longs~~longed to be, but rather in a Saigon hotel. He ~~describes~~described his life back home after the first tour as boring, dull, and undesirable. He had divorced his wife, and only wanted to be back in action. While in the hotel room, he slowly ~~falls~~fell into madness. Drinking, smoking, wild dancing, punching glass, and other self-inflicted wounds finally ~~lead~~led up to him being called upon for a very particular mission, one he ~~describes~~described as "the last he will ever need" (Coppola, 1979).

After being assisted in getting cleaned up and presentable, Willard ~~meets~~met with his superior officers. He ~~is~~wad then assigned the mission: assassinate the rogue Colonel Kurtz, who ~~has~~had gone to Cambodia and built his own empire. Kurtz ~~is~~was being praised as a god, and ~~leading~~led with ruthless authority. ~~Being described~~Described as insane and off the rails, Willard is encouraged to kill with extreme prejudice.

As Willard ~~begins~~began his journey towards Kurtz, he ~~reflects~~reflected on his own actions, on how many "Charlies", or Vietcong, he ~~has~~had killed, and ~~begins~~began to wonder what happened to Kurtz (Coppola, 1979). What about the war really made him snap and go rogue?

He ~~meets~~met up with the Navy crew known as the PBR, consisting of the captain Chief, and three others, Chef, Clean, and Lance. They are assigned to take Willard where he needs to go. However, the mission ~~is~~was top secret, ~~so the crew is~~which made the crew very hesitant. Willard ~~informs~~informed them that the only way to reach the destination ~~is~~was through the Nung River, which Chief ~~is~~was somewhat reluctant to go on. The entrances ~~are~~were not always deep enough for the boat, and ~~are~~were typically crawling with enemies. However, the crew ~~begins~~began to boat towards the

Nung River, ~~light-hearted and expected nothing but the expected~~filled with light hearts.

Before reaching the river, they ~~rendezvous~~rendezvoused with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore, who ~~is~~was in charge of a helicopter air squadron. They ~~discuss~~discussed getting to the Nung River, and are met with great resistance until Kilgore ~~discovers~~
~~Lance is discovered~~Lance was a professional surfer. ~~Being a~~A surfing fan himself, and being informed one of the main entrances to the Nung River ~~has~~had six foot waves, he ~~agrees~~agreed to assist. When ~~arriving~~they arrived at the mouth of the river, Kilgore ~~shows~~showed his true colors, blasting "Ride of the Valkyries" while raining death onto the village below. After decimating the village, Kilgore ~~demand~~demanded two of his men test the waters for surfing, while mortars ~~are bombarding~~bombarded around them from the edges of the jungle~~around the village~~. Eventually, a napalm strike on the tree line ~~ends~~ended most of the fighting, but ~~begins~~began to end the good surf. Kilgore ~~pleads~~pleaded with Lance to stick around instead of continuing up the Nung River, but Willard craftily ~~gets~~got the PBR crew out, and even ~~manages~~managed to steal Kilgore's favorite surf board.

While hiding out from Kilgore's search parties under the low overhang of trees, Chef and Willard ~~decide~~decided to wander into the jungle in search of mangoes. After a short walk and discussing the origin of Chef's name, Willard ~~hears rustling and~~
~~becomes~~heard rustling and became extremely alert. He ~~pulls~~pulled back some large brush, only to reveal a tiger, which ~~attacks~~attacked. The two ~~scramble~~scrambled back to the boat, screaming hysterically and forcing Clean to unload the machine gun. When they finally get back on the boat and ~~explain~~explained what happened, Chef ~~starts~~
~~started~~ to curse and swear that he is done with the war, demanding to leave. However, he ~~is~~was calmed down while Chief ~~starts~~started the boat and ~~continues~~continued on.

Eventually the crew ~~reaches~~reached Hau Phat, a resupply camp they desperately ~~need~~needed. After being brushed off when asking for more fuel, Willard ~~takes~~took actions into his own hands. He ~~grabs~~grabbed the soldier in charge of distributing supplies and ~~demand~~demanded fuel. The soldier ~~agrees and apologizes~~agreed and apologized, also giving the crew free tickets to the Playboy bunnies' show.

The crew is gathered ~~in~~ with hundreds of other US soldiers as the show ~~begins~~began, all of them raving maniacally to have the women sign their photos ~~;~~and touch them. They eventually ~~swarm~~swarmed the stage, forcing the women to leave. As their helicopter ~~takes~~took off, two soldiers ~~cling~~clung onto the helicopter rails. Their efforts ~~are~~were futile, and they eventually ~~splash~~splashed into the water below.

Although only temporarily sated with that distraction from the war and the mission, the crew ~~continues~~continued up the river further towards Kurtz. They eventually ~~reach~~reached a Medevac camp during a torrential downpour. While trying to find the commanding officer of the camp, Willard ~~stumbles upon the "agent"~~stumbled upon the pimp of the Playboy models from the show, and ~~strikes~~struck a deal for his crew to spend time with the women. While Chef and Lance ~~spend~~spent time with two of the bunnies, it ~~becomes~~became apparent the bunnies are not entirely willing to be there. Lance ~~is~~was told by the woman he ~~is~~was spending time with, the Playmate of the Year, she ~~has~~had done things that she was very against because it ~~is~~was almost a survival instinct. Chef ~~ignores~~ignored the woman he ~~is~~was with, Miss May. As she ~~talks~~talked about her love for birds, Chef ~~undresses and poses~~undressed and posed her to be a mirror of his favorite picture of her from the Playboy calendar. Eventually, he ~~begins~~began to act like a bird, causing her to become sexually aroused and leading to them having sex. After leaving the Medevac camp, Clean ~~complains~~complained about not being able to spend time with either bunny, ~~and gets~~but got shrugged off by both Chef and Lance. Chef in particular ~~makes~~made fun of Clean and how "he still needs to pop his cherry" ~~;-Lance is~~(Coppola, 1979). Lance was very quiet about his ~~experiences~~experience, and instead ~~paint~~painted camouflage on his face, saying it will save him from the "Charlies" seeing him (Coppola, 1979).

Further down the river, they ~~stop~~stopped a trading boat for a routine ~~check for weapons or~~weapons check for Vietcong support. Willard ~~demand~~demanded they do not perform the check, but Chief ~~is~~was insistent, telling Willard they have more than just the orders from Willard to follow. Chef ~~is~~was ordered to check the boat, but ~~is~~was extremely resilient. Eventually he does, throwing anything he ~~finds~~found around in a

rage. Nothing ~~shows~~ showed up until a yellow barrel set everyone off guard, ~~causing~~ which caused a Vietnamese woman to frantically yell not to check it. Clean then ~~loses~~ lost it, and ~~begins~~ began firing the machine gun at the trade boat, leading Lance to fire maniacally as well, killing all but the Vietnamese woman. After the chaotic gunfire, all they ~~find is~~ found was a puppy, which Lance ~~takes~~ took as his own. While Chief ~~tells~~ told Chef to bring the woman ~~over to bring~~ to a hospital, Willard ~~kills~~ killed her, reinforcing his previous statement to not stop.

All crew ~~are~~ were silent moving on, until they ~~arrive~~ arrived at the last US station, the Do Long Bridge, a bridge constantly being destroyed at night and rebuilt in the day. Willard and Lance ~~begin~~ began the search for the commanding officer, slowly realizing the insanity and chaos the men at the bridge have fallen ~~into~~. Watching the bridge slowly collapse from Vietcong fire, they ~~leave~~ left with no fuel or assistance, and ~~continue~~ continued the increasingly chaotic path down to Kurtz. Shortly after passing through the Do Long Bridge, Willard ~~learns~~ learned the old commanding officer, Captain Colby, had been sent on the same mission he is on, but was converted into Kurtz's colony.

Out of nowhere, a barrage of fire ~~consumes~~ consumed the boat, ~~cause panie and~~ return ~~causing panic and~~ returned fire. In the heat of the firefight, Clean is downed, and only ~~after does~~ afterwards did the rest of the crew realize he is dead. The combination of all previous stressors from the war and the recent death of Clean ~~drive~~ drove Lance and Chef to excessive drug use. Devastated by the death of their 17 year old comrade, the sullen crew is stopped in the fog by ~~a mysterious by~~ mysterious French troops. After speaking with them, they ~~come~~ came to an agreement, letting the US soldiers bury and respectfully say goodbye to Clean. Afterwards, Willard ~~is~~ was invited to a dinner, where he ~~learns~~ learned about the French clan's plantation and how determined they ~~are~~ were to stay. After losing World War ~~1 and 2, these French demand I and II,~~ the French demanded victory even to death. When Willard ~~becomes~~ became befuddled and confused why they would be so committed, the French ~~become~~ became enraged with Willard and the US Army in general. They ~~point~~ pointed out the US may ~~win~~ have won every battle, but ~~have~~ had no chance to win the war. Nothing ~~can be gained~~

~~here~~ could be gained there for the US. This ~~drives~~ powerful statement drove everyone else to retire for the evening.

One particular women, Roxanne, ~~stays, and begins~~ stayed, and began connecting with Willard. Roxanne lost her husband, and ~~tells~~ told Willard about how she would tell him "There are two of you don't you see? One that kills. One that loves." ~~Willard begins~~ (Coppola, 1979). Willard began to realize he is exactly that, a man that ~~kills~~ killed, and a man that ~~loves. However~~ loved. However, his love had been lost when he left his home and his family, becoming enthralled in the war. Only during his time with Roxanne ~~does~~ did he briefly remember his love.

On the final stretch to Kurtz, Chief and Willard ~~flare~~ flared up at each other, arguing over whether the mission ~~has~~ had been worth the losses. ~~Another barrage floods the boat again, except this time of arrows. Chief orders return fire, but after Willard realizes~~ A barrage of arrows flooded the boat, and Chief ordered return fire. After Willard realized they are just toy arrows, he ~~demands~~ demanded a cease fire. Chief ~~becomes~~ became further enraged with Willard's desire for power. As he ~~spews~~ spewed slanders towards Willard, a spear ~~impales~~ impaled him. Coughing up his own blood, he ~~attempts~~ attempted to choke out Willard, a last effort to save his remaining crew, but Willard ~~responds and smothers~~ responded and smothered Chief.

Having lost two men, the remaining crew, Chef, Lance, and Willard, finally ~~arrive~~ arrived at Kurtz's base. They are greeted by a single American photographer and hundreds of Kurtz's followers. The photographer ~~guides~~ guided Willard and Lance through the colony ~~; Chef staying on the boat, and continually praises and continually~~ praised Kurtz as a god. The two slowly ~~realize~~ realized the severity of madness that Kurtz ~~has~~ had descended into, ruthlessly murdering anyone who ~~defies~~ defied his reign and mutilating the bodies of fallen enemies. While exploring the camp, they ~~come~~ came across the practically brainwashed Colby, the ex-commanding officer of the ~~DO~~ Do Long Bridge and last man sent to assassinate Kurtz. As the new servant ~~stares~~ stared down Willard and Chef, they ~~realize~~ realized the extreme devotion these people ~~have~~ had for Kurtz.

~~They return from the boat again, this time~~ Willard and Lance ~~;~~returned to the village to talk to Kurtz, telling Chef to call an airstrike if they ~~do not return~~did not come back. While finally meeting Kurtz in person, Willard is captured and imprisoned, while Lance, having totally lost touch with himself and reality, ~~becomes~~became one of Kurtz's men. Willard, now beaten and tied to a pole, ~~is~~was visited by Kurtz, who ~~drops~~dropped the head of Chef on his lap. Willard ~~realizes~~realized Chef had not gotten the air strike called in and ~~becomes~~became distraught, crying out for the mistakes he ~~has~~had made.

Eventually he ~~is~~was set free, under prohibition, wandering the colony Kurtz ~~has~~ built. While under watch, Kurtz ~~lectures~~lectured Willard on the reality of war and humanity, reflecting the French plantation words that US ~~can~~could not win with the dedication of the Vietcong.

That night the colony ~~throws~~threw a celebration, so Willard ~~takes~~took the opportunity to sneak into Kurtz quarters. As Kurtz ~~reads~~read off quotes to be sent to the US army, Willard ~~attacks~~attacked him with a machete, eventually forcing Kurtz to the ground. As Kurtz ~~breaths~~breathes his final breaths, he ~~utters~~uttered the words "The horror...the horror..." (Coppola, 1979). As Willard ~~leaves~~left from Kurtz's quarters, praised by the ~~now aware colony as the new god~~colony, who were aware Kurtz had been killed, he grabs Lance to leave. The film ~~finishes~~finished with the two leaving the colony in silence, begging the question of who is really insane in war, particularly when it can not be won.

Applications to Abnormal Psychology

The film ~~portrays~~portrayed the psychological effects ~~have~~war had on many characters, prominently Willard, Chef, and Lance.

Willard ~~exhibits~~exhibited many symptoms throughout the film, many of which fall under the diagnosis of ~~Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder~~. ~~Using the DSM-V, the following symptoms can be evaluated as such~~Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The following symptoms of PTSD are exhibited by Willard (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013):

- Previous Vietnam tour, indicative of potential exposure to death or major injury.
- Vivid dream of previous combat, or repeated, intrusive exposure.
- Divorce after returning to the US, having said "The only words I spoke to my wife were 'Yes' when she asked for a divorce", showing both little interest in important events and feelings of detachment ([Coppola, 1979](#)).
- Excessive drinking, smoking, punching a mirror, and other self harm [acts](#), exhibiting irritable ~~and reckless,~~ [reckless, and](#) self-harming behaviors.
- Has been a changed person since the previous tour, over ~~1~~ [one](#) month ago.

Willard appears to be another not uncommon case of a soldier returning from war with PTSD, ~~however there a~~; [however, there are](#) few missing criteria from the DSM-V that Willard ~~fails~~ [failed](#) to show, or are the opposite of symptoms for the diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Willard desires to be back "in the jungle", or back on a mission, which would counter that the original trauma was during his first tour ([Coppola, 1979](#)).
- Willard has no exaggerated or distorted memories of the previous tour.
- Willard wants to return, which shows a lack of avoidance behaviors.
- Willard experiences happiness, as well as interacting with the crew well.

The first three points would prevent a diagnosis of PTSD for Willard, while the last would not necessarily effect the diagnosis either way, since it is part of a subset of symptoms that Willard ~~exhibits~~ [exhibited](#) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

His obsession with returning to the jungle could ~~be though as part of~~

~~Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, however the obsession is~~ [exhibit symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, but the obsession was](#) not unwanted, not causing stress, and there

~~are-were~~ no cleansing compulsions to reduce or get rid of the obsession (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Chef ~~seems-seemed~~ a rather normal man by military standards, interacting with his crew, coping with the situations he ~~has-had~~ faced rather well. However, the hellish mission he ~~embarks-embarked~~ on with Willard ~~causes-this-caused his mental state~~ to change. As they ~~continue-continued~~ further up the Nung River, Chef ~~begins-began~~ to develop symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder as follows (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Chef is attacked by a tiger, having a near death experience. He also witnesses the death of 17 year old Clean, another traumatic event.
- While searching the boat, he is extremely resistance to begin the search and becomes enraged while searching, showing avoidance and arousal symptoms
- Chef consistently disagrees with Willard's mission, and questions why they are helping him anyways, exhibiting persistent negative behavior

Although he also ~~has-had~~ symptoms of a ~~substance-abuse-disorder~~Substance Use Disorder, specifically when he and Lance ~~start-excessive-started excessive drug~~ use after Clean's death, this ~~is-was~~ a response to the stress, and thus would not be Substance Use Disorder, ~~but~~ rather Acute Stress Disorder with a response of substance use. ~~However,~~ ~~But~~ even with these symptoms present, there ~~is-was~~ a definitive lack of ~~and-any~~ dissociative symptoms. He also ~~exhibits-exhibited~~ no intrusion symptoms since no flashbacks are present, and the intense and prolonged stress ~~is-was~~ not caused from the traumatic events specifically, but ~~are-were~~ rather the stressful events in the moment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Lance ~~begins-began~~ the film a very naive, California surfer, almost out of place in the Vietnam War. As more ~~and-more~~ significantly stressful events ~~occur, he-relapses occurred, he relapsed~~ into a shell, showing signs of Major Depressive Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Lance shows significant physical lethargy, or psychomotor retardation.

- Lance does not take interest in many activities, even ones outside the mission
- Along with the lethargy, Lance appears exhausted even when rested outside the stressful combat and other events
- Lance does not appear comfortable in any situation outside his times with the puppy
- There is no known excessive substance use to cause the distress

However, there are not enough ~~shown~~ symptoms to diagnose Lance with Major Depressive Disorder. Instead, he might ~~be experiencing Depressive~~ have experienced a depressive episode with insufficient symptoms. This ~~would be a more accurate diagnosis with the known symptoms~~ diagnosis would be more accurate given the symptoms exhibited in the film, as well as the lack of any manic episodes or other bipolar specific symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). He could also be diagnosed with PTSD, using the death of Clean and Chief as the trauma. Similarly to Chef, he could be diagnosed with a substance use response, since the substance use only appeared after the original symptoms for depression or PTSD.

Conclusion

According to the DSM-V, Willard ~~is was~~ the only person who ~~could get diagnosed with a disorder, in his case met the diagnosis for~~ PTSD. Chef could ~~possibly have~~ have possibly had more symptoms, however ~~the film does~~ the film did not portray them. Further, he could have an Unspecified ~~Trauma~~ Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorder, since his ~~symptoms are~~ lack of symptoms were not definitive of Acute Stress Disorder or another specific stress disorder. Lance could be diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, although it would require more symptoms to have be present. With the films portrayal, it is more likely he ~~is would be~~ diagnosed with a ~~Depressive~~ depressive episode lacking sufficient symptoms or PTSD with catatonic behaviors, since he changed his behaviors after the death of Clean. Lance and Chef could both also have ~~an Substance Use~~ Substance Use Disorder added as a response to their potential diagnosis.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Coppola, F. F. (Producer), & Coppola, F. F. (Director). (1979). *Apocalypse Now* [Motion picture]. United States: Omni Zoetrope Studios.