

Movie Review - Psychological Standpoint

'The Aviator'

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Synopsis

The film begins in 1913 with nine-year-old Hughes being bathed by his mother, who warns him of disease: "You are not safe." The film next shows him in 1927, as a 22-year old preparing to direct Hell's Angels. Hiring Noah Dietrich (John C. Reilly) to run Hughes Tool Co, while he oversees the flight sequences for the film, Hughes becomes obsessed with shooting the film realistically, even re-shooting the dogfight himself. By 1929, with the film finally complete, when *The Jazz Singer* is released, Hughes re-shoots the film for sound, costing another year and \$1.7 million. Nevertheless, *Hell's Angels* is a huge hit, and Hughes makes *Scarface* and *The Outlaw*. However, there is one goal he relentlessly pursues: aviation. During this time, he also pursues Katharine Hepburn (Cate Blanchett). The two go to nightclubs, play golf and fly together, and as they grow closer, move in together as well. During this time Hepburn becomes a major support and confidant to Hughes, and helps alleviate the symptoms of his obsessive-compulsive disorder. As Hughes' fame grows, he is seen with more starlets.

Hughes takes an interest in commercial-passenger travel, and purchases majority interest in Transcontinental & Western Air (TWA), the predecessor to Trans World Airlines. In 1935, he test flies the H-1 Racer but crashes in a beet field; "Fastest man on the planet," he boasts to Hepburn. Three years later, he flies around the world in four days, shattering the previous record by three days. Meanwhile, Juan Trippe (Alec Baldwin), owner of Pan American Airlines, and Senator Owen Brewster (Alan Alda) worry over the possibility that Hughes might beat them in the quest for commercial expansion. Brewster has just introduced the Commercial Airline Bill, which will give world expansion solely to Pan Am. Trippe advises Brewster to check to the "disquieting rumors about Mr. Hughes."

Hepburn and Hughes eventually break up when she announces that she has fallen in love with her movie co-star (although he is briefly seen but never clearly stated, the viewers already know that the costar is her would be life-long partner Spencer Tracy). He soon has a new interest: 15-year old Faith Domergue (Kelli Garner) and later, Ava Gardner (Kate Beckinsale). He also fights the Motion Picture Association of America over the steamy scenes in *The Outlaw*. He learns of Pan Am's efforts to run TWA off the map yet secures contracts with the Army Air Force on two projects, a spy plane and a troop transport. By 1946, Hughes has only finished the XF-11 reconnaissance aircraft and is building the H-4 Hercules ("Spruce Goose") flying boat.

With the strain of meeting deadlines and budgets, Hughes starts to show signs of alarming behavior, repeating phrases over and over and exhibiting a phobia over dust and germs. That July, he takes the XF-11 for a test flight.

One of the propellers malfunctions, causing a crash in a Beverly Hills neighborhood. Rushed to the hospital, he slowly recuperates but learns the H-4 Hercules transport is no longer needed but orders production to continue. When he is discharged, the whole TWA fleet is built and ready to go, but he is in danger of being bankrupted by the airline and his flying boat. Afraid of the media trying to find him, Hughes places microphones and taps Ava's phone lines to keep track of any suspicious activity. After being confronted by Gardner, he returns home to find the FBI searching his house for incriminating evidence that he embezzled government funds. The incident is both a powerful trauma for Hughes and gives his enemies knowledge about his condition. Hughes meets with Brewster, who offers to drop the charges if Hughes supports the CAB Bill and sells the TWA stock to Trippe. Hughes sinks into a deep depression afterwards, shutting himself in his screening room, growing ever more paranoid and detached from reality; terrified of germs, he urinates into dozens of empty milk bottles. Hepburn tries to visit him, but is unable to help. Trippe then pays Hughes a visit, but an enraged Hughes vows he will never sell TWA. Trippe warns Dietrich that the world will see what Hughes has become if he goes to the Hearings. After nearly three months, Hughes finally emerges and prepares to face the Senate, with encouragement from Ava Gardner, who helps him get cleaned up.

Hughes arrives at the hearings, and starts off with counter-claiming Brewster's charges: "Why not tell the truth, Senator? Why not tell the truth that this investigation was really born on the day that TWA first decided to fly to Europe?" Humiliated and enraged by this turn of events, Brewster formally states that Hughes charged the Defense Department \$56 million for aircraft that never flew. Hughes defends himself and reveals that Trippe essentially bribed Brewster to hold the hearings. The H-4 hercules "Spruce Goose" transport. Hughes successfully test flies the flying boat himself. After the flight, he talks to Dietrich and his mechanic Odie (Matt Ross) about a new jetliner for TWA (The Convair 880 Coronado) and makes a date with Gardner at a celebration party on the Long Beach shoreline. Hughes seems free of his inner demons until he sees three attendants in business suits and white gloves edging towards him, which triggers an obsessive-compulsive fit as he begins repeating "The way of the future." Dietrich and Odie take Hughes in a bathroom and hide him there, while Dietrich fetches a doctor and Odie stands outside guarding the door. Alone inside, Howard has a flashback to his boyhood, being washed by his mother and resolving he will fly the fastest aircraft ever built, make the biggest movies ever and become the richest man in the world. As the film ends he mutters "the way of the future... the way of the future" into a darkened mirror.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder characterized by recurrent and disturbing thoughts (called obsessions) and/or repetitive, ritualized behaviors that the person feels driven to perform (called compulsions). Obsessions can also take the form of intrusive images or unwanted impulses. The majority of people with OCD have both obsessions and compulsions, but a minority about 20 percent, have obsessions alone or compulsions alone (about 10 percent).

The person with OCD usually tries to actively dismiss the obsessions or neutralize them by engaging in compulsions or avoiding situations that trigger them. In most cases, compulsions serve to alleviate anxiety. However, it is not uncommon for the compulsions themselves to cause anxiety -- especially when they become very demanding.

Examples of Obsessions and Compulsions

Common types of obsessions include concerns with contamination (e.g., fear of dirt, germs or illness), safety/harm (e.g., being responsible for a fire), unwanted acts of aggression (e.g., unwanted impulse to harm a loved one), unacceptable sexual or religious thoughts (e.g., sacrilegious images of Christ) and the need for symmetry or exactness. Common compulsions include excessive cleaning (e.g., ritualized hand washing); checking, ordering and arranging rituals; counting; repeating routine activities (e.g., going in/out of a doorway) and hoarding (e.g., collecting useless items). While most compulsions are observable behaviors (e.g., hand washing), some are performed as unobservable mental rituals (e.g., silent recitation of nonsense words to vanquish a horrific image). A hallmark of OCD is that the person recognizes that her thoughts or behaviors are senseless or excessive. However, the drive can be so powerful that the person caves in to the compulsion even though she knows it makes no sense. One woman spent hours each evening sifting through the household trash to ensure that nothing valuable was being discarded. When asked what she was looking for, she nervously admitted, "I have no idea, I don't own anything valuable."

Some people who have had OCD for a long time may stop resisting their compulsive drives because they feel it's just easier to give in to them. Most OCD sufferers have multiple types of obsession and compulsion. Someone with OCD may complain primarily of obsessive-compulsive symptoms involving asbestos contamination, but a detailed interview may disclose that he /she silently counts floor tiles and hoards junk mail.

Howard Hughes and OCD

Aviator is an amazing movie (directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Leonardo DiCaprio) that tells the story of Howard Hughes, an engineering mastermind in the first half of the 20th century, in two parts: his rise to fame and fortune and then his downfall as his Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) rapidly consumes him. I really liked how the movie portrayed how Howard's OCD destroyed his life, which detailed just how devastating the effects of OCD are and how if left untreated can bring down anyone, even the richest and most powerful people in America. The movie portrays OCD in a very realistic way and drops several cleverly placed hints in the beginning of the movie that fore shadow Howard's demise. When Howard's OCD fully sets in, we see many of the symptoms that are typical of an OCD patient and see how frightening the disorder can be.

Howard's OCD starts off simply. We see him, in the first scene, being lectured by his mom of the dangers of germs, setting in motion a future fear to germs. As an adult, in one scene, when Howard gets uncomfortable, he goes to bathroom to wash his hands and he continues to wash his hands long after what most people would call sufficient and necessary, indicating his obsession with absolutely clean and sterile hands (stemming from his fear of germs I would expect). His OCD continues to get worse and worse as the movie progresses. Later in the movie, Howard becomes disgusted with a business partner for having an almost unnoticeable speck on his jacket, and refuses to speak to and look at the man until the man has taken a clean handkerchief, wiped off the speck with that handkerchief, and then thrown the handkerchief into a specific trashcan. This reflects another symptom of OCD, an obsession with order and exactness, and this scene is rather strange to watch and is

perhaps the scene where the movie moves to the second act, where Howard's OCD begins to cripple his life. Other symptoms Howard displays that are common in OCD patients include: an inability to control what he says (constantly repeating the same phrase and being unable to stop saying it), collecting completely useless things (empty milk bottles full of his urine), refusing to shake hands and touch doorknobs, being fearful of seemingly insignificant things (afraid that his accountant is wiretapping his phone lines), and a need for order and symmetry (refusing to eat a plate of food after someone took a pea from it, which ruined the exact placement of the other peas).