

One flew over the
cuckoo's nest



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The paper "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is a dramatic example of a movie review on visual arts & film studies. Director Milos Forman's film, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, starring Jack Nicholson, as R. P. McMurphy, a small-time criminal element who thinks he has gotten lucky because instead of being sentenced to jail time, he is going to the local state mental facility for an evaluation. Once there, McMurphy acts out, encouraging other patients to express themselves in less than commonly accepted therapeutic ways; being assertive about their rights, and other things that unnerve the charge nurse, Nurse Ratched, played by Louise Fletcher. Nurse Ratched understands McMurphy's situation, and especially that he senses he has escaped harder incarceration for the opportunity to upset her perfectly organized and institutionally structured psychiatric unit where she leads group therapy sessions. What McMurphy does not know, that Nurse Ratched does, is that Nurse Ratched has the power, based on the recommendations arising out of her observations, to keep McMurphy for much longer than his criminal sentence of 68 days.

This film is really about human behavior, about a time in medical history when psychiatric healthcare was at the horizon of a new era in psychotropic drugs and procedures; and patients in state facilities were often the human guinea pigs for those drugs and procedures.

The tension between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy increases, and she is especially resentful of the jest McMurphy makes of her serious job and her patients, who truly do suffer debilitating psychological maladies. However, because Nurse Ratched is aware that McMurphy sees his time amongst the truly handicapped as an opportunity to explore a new level of mischief, her resentment festers each time he undermines her authority. McMurphy

smuggles women and alcohol onto the unit; he encourages expression of pent-up and repressed anxieties amongst the patient population; he refuses to take his medications; and he commandeers the patient outing to a fishing expedition that puts the patients at risk, even though they have a wonderful time and it truly increases their self-esteem - and their love for McMurphy. Once McMurphy realizes that Nurse Ratchet has the power to keep him longer than he might need to be there, he discovers that many of his fellow patients are there voluntarily; they can leave anytime they want. McMurphy knows why he's there, but he doesn't understand why anyone would need to be in a psychiatric hospital voluntarily.

Unfortunately, Nurse Ratchet, who has responded to McMurphy with resentment, actually does use her power to prevent him from leaving, even after his doctor suggests transferring him. Nurse Ratchet turns on more charm than she showed any patient, and convinces the medical board that they can really help McMurphy. The board gives in to her, and she wins; McMurphy is delivered into the hands of Nurse Ratchet. Eventually, as the two come to fist-a-cuffs; Nurse Ratchet wins when an emergency lobotomy - the medical cure for incurable psychiatric disturbances, is performed on McMurphy. It leaves him a shell of a man.

Before being lobotomized, McMurphy, through this carefree and happy-go-luckily behavior tried to touch each of the patients with whom he came in contact with. He was fascinated by their dysfunctions because it never occurred him that to give in to his own psychosis in a way that would surrender his identity, his free will was an option. People, by McMurphy's law, were survivors, and you lived with whatever was dished out to you. He seemed adamant that all it would take to make his fellow patients realize

this; was real-world stimulation and encouragement. Nurse Ratchet was intimidated by McMurphy's philosophy.

Sarah M. Toman and Carl F. Rak (2000) comment on the use of film in the world of psychiatric therapy that is becoming a trend in contemporary counseling realms. This film - and it is odd that it is this film - has been suggested for use in therapeutic circles because it shows the benefit that other patients can derive from the support and persona of those people they share their counseling experiences with.

At any rate, the film exemplifies the abuse of power that a healthcare worker can exert over a person in vulnerable circumstances; and shows that the therapist, as well as the patients, have flaws and are subject to uncontrollable human emotions like jealousy, resentment, and experience humiliation, and even engage in antagonistic behavior.