

Mental Health in the Movies

Movie: *American Sniper*

Character: Chris Kyle

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Movie Overview

American Sniper (2014),
directed by
Clint
Eastwood

Based on the
autobiography
of Chris Kyle,
a Navy SEAL
sniper

Follows his
military
service and
struggles
adjusting to
civilian life

Themes:
trauma, duty,
identity, and
family

- **Character Overview**
 - **Chris Kyle:** U.S. Navy SEAL sniper with the most confirmed kills in U.S. military history
 - Highly patriotic and duty-driven
 - Deeply affected by experiences during multiple tours in Iraq
 - Struggles with reintegration after returning home
 - Develops symptoms of psychological distress following combat
- (American Sniper, 2014)*

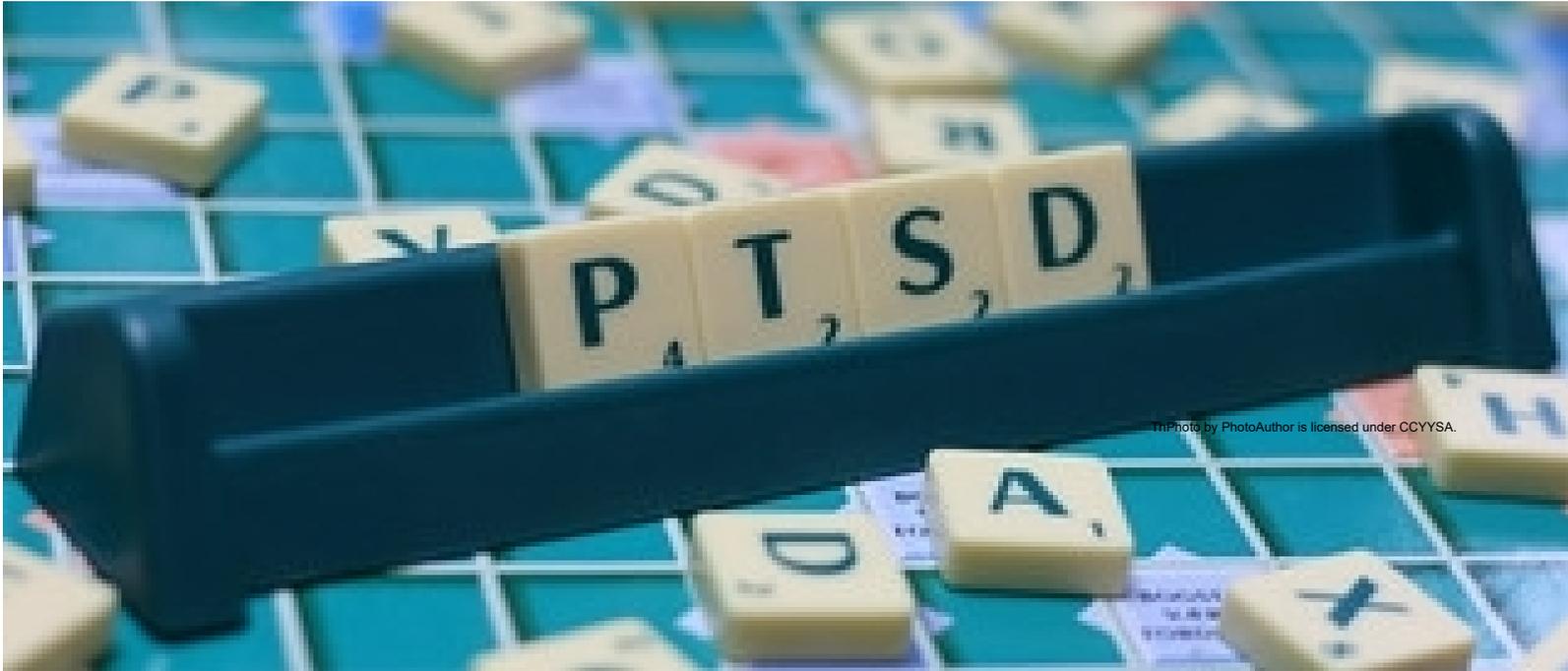


- **Symptoms Observed**

- Hypervigilance (e.g., scoping rooftops while driving at home)
- Flashbacks and intrusive memories
- Irritability and difficulty connecting with family
- Emotional numbing
- Avoidance of reminders of wars
- Difficulty sleeping and maintaining family relationships

(OpenStax, 2024; *American Sniper*, 2014)





Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Exposure to actual/threatened death or serious injury
- Persistent re-experiencing (e.g., flashbacks)
- Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli
- Negative changes in mood and thoughts
- Increased arousal/reactivity (e.g., angry outbursts, hypervigilance) "Chris shows classic PTSD symptoms, including intrusive thoughts and hypervigilance" (OpenStax, 2022)



Supporting Evidence of PTSD

- Repeated combat exposure
- Inability to relax even in safe environments
- Trouble sleeping
- Withdraws emotionally from his wife and children
- Statements like "I'm just trying to get back there [to war]"

Diagnosis #2 - Adjustment Disorder (Alternative)

- Considered if PTSD criteria are not fully met
- Emotional/behavioral symptoms in response to a major life stressor
- Symptoms: anxiety, difficulty adjusting to civilian life, strained relationships
- May be a more general diagnosis during transition periods





- **Impact on Functioning**
- Marital strain and emotional distance from family
- Loss of sense of identity without the military
- Difficulty holding conversations or expressing vulnerability
- Begins to reconnect through helping other veterans



Reflection and Takeaways

- Chris Kyle's story highlights the toll of war on mental health
- PTSD is complex and often misunderstood
- Shows the importance of support, therapy, and identity beyond trauma
- Encourages deeper empathy for veterans returning from combat

Treatment and Recovery Themes

- Peer support: bonding with fellow veterans through therapy and shooting range activities
- Gradual reconnection with family
- Suggests the importance of purpose and service in recovery
- Tragic ending reinforces the risks of untreated or under-treated mental health conditions



References

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