

Movie: Carrie (1976; 2013)

Synopsis

The original 1976 film is about a misfit high school girl, Carrie White, who discovers that she has telekinetic powers. Repressed by a domineering mother and bullied by her peers at school, her efforts to fit in lead to a dramatic confrontation during the senior prom. Following a mass murder in the high school gymnasium, Carrie breaks down in her mother's arms at home. Believing the devil has possessed her daughter, her mother tries to kill her. Carrie is cornered in the kitchen, but sends knives flying at her mother, pinning her to the wall and killing her.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

The Feeding and Eating Disorder section of the DSM-5 includes feeding and eating disorders of infancy or early childhood as well as 3 specific diagnoses including Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. Extensive research followed the dissemination of preliminary criteria for Binge Eating Disorder in Appendix B of DSM-IV, and findings supported the clinical utility and validity of its inclusion in the DSM-5.

Films that depict possession serve as a metaphor for dissociation. Accordingly, these films may be viewed as illustrations of mental disorders including dissociative and related disorders such as the feeding and eating disorders. Anorexia Nervosa may be conceptualized in psychodynamic terms as a reaction to the demand that adolescents behave more independently and increase their sexual functioning. Patients then replace preoccupations about eating for other age-specific pursuits.

A character analysis of Carrie reveals an adolescent who is unable to separate psychologically from her mother. Her body is perceived as though it is possessed by an introject of an intrusive, domineering and unempathic mother. Starvation serves as an unconscious means of starving and destroying the internalized mother-object. The tension between Carrie and her mother is evident throughout the movie and begins to crescendo before the senior prom. As Carrie gets ready for the evening, her mother tells her that everyone will laugh at her. Carrie defies her mother, leaving with her boyfriend, Tommy. In the movie's penultimate scene, Carrie kills her mother in the kitchen by impaling her with knives, an act symbolic of her unconscious wish to destroy her intrusive mother. The setting (kitchen) and means (cutlery) are metaphorical for Anorexia Nervosa.

Key Words: Carrie, Stephen King, dissociation, dissociative disorders, feeding and eating disorders, Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, internalized mother-object

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