

Movie: Psycho (1960)

Synopsis

Marion Crane steals money from work, but her escape is thwarted when a storm forces her to take refuge at the vacant Bates Motel. After the schizoid-like caretaker gives her the key to Cabin 1 (does *Psycho* deserve consideration for a Top 10 Cabin in the Woods movie?), Norman Bates peeps at his new patron through a hole in the wall of the parlor off the main office. Norman's voyeuristic deviance is only the beginning of the story, which has its roots in one of the most notorious serial killers in US history. Author Robert Bloch was inspired by Ed Gein to create Norman Bates, the central character of the Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller, *Psycho*.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

The Schizophrenogenic Mother of a Wisconsin Butcher

In 1948, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's focus on faulty parental communication as causing Schizophrenia resulted in the theory of the *schizophrenogenic mother*. Fromm-Reichmann proposed that maladaptive parental traits (see below) significantly influenced the risk of developing Schizophrenia. Although debunked with the dopamine hypothesis and the antecedent discovery of Chlorpromazine, her psychoanalytic theory remains of historical interest.

Edward Theodore Gein was born on August 27, 1906, to Augusta and George Gein in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Augusta was a cold and domineering woman. Her personality traits match Fromm-Reichmann's description – overprotective, rigid and insensitive, moralistic about sex, rejecting, fearful of intimacy, and conflict-inducing – of the schizophrenogenic mother. Despite never being good enough, Augusta was all that Ed had following the deaths of his father and older brother, Henry. Unfortunately, on December 29th, 1945 (3 years before Fromm-Reichmann's landmark paper), Augusta died. Ed Gein's life fell apart after he "lost his only friend and one true love" (*Deviant* [book] by Harold Schechter)

"A boy's best friend is his mother" –N. Bates

Like Norman Bates, Ed remained in the house after his mother's death and developed a morose interest in taxidermy. On November 17, 1957, police in Plainfield, Wisconsin arrived at the old Gein farmhouse. The more they looked through the house, the more human trophies they found, including a suit made entirely of human skin. Norman Bates shared Gein's passion for taxidermy. However, where Gein was driven by a domineering and conflict-inducing mother,

Bates's motivation was quite different (despite her being described as demanding by the psychiatrist); "*Birds are stuffed because they're passive...* (and then saying his mother is) *as harmless as a bird.*"

Dissociative Identity Disorder

[Spoiler Alert] When it is discovered that Norma Bates has been "dead and buried in the Greenlawn Cemetery for the past 10 years," it is revealed that "mother" only exists in Norman's mind. Like Gein, Norman was predisposed to severe mental illness due to the death of his father and brother. When Norma met a man, Norman's sense of abandonment resulted in his killing his mother and her new lover. The murders are the precipitant(s) of Norman's exacerbation. He consequently developed a distinct personality state to erase the crime and protect himself against the guilt of matricide. *Psycho* is a sensational case study of Dissociative Identity Disorder where Norman's "alter" (Mother) takes over at the film's end as we part with the words, "Well she wouldn't even harm a fly."

Key words: Psycho, Ed Gein, Augusta Gein, Mother, Wisconsin butcher, Hitchcock, Bates Motel, Norman Bates, taxidermy, Fromm-Reichmann, schizophrenogenic mother, Schizophrenia, Dissociative Identity Disorder, multiple personality disorder

Psycho-nicity: '*Synchronicity*' is a Jungian term depicting the acausal connection of two or more psycho-physic phenomena. For our purposes, it serves as the root for a neologism (newly coined word), psycho-nicity; suggestions that make a movie a transcendental experience. A triple feature of *Psycho*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Silence of the Lambs* may be the most chilling movie series created given that Ed Gein inspired the creation of all 3 films.

Anthony Tobia, MD, Copyright © 2014 Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. All rights reserved.