

Movie: The Conjuring (2013)

Synopsis

In 1970, Carolyn Perron purchased a Raggedy Ann doll for her daughter, Donna. Following a series of unexplained phenomena, the Perron family contacted an Episcopalian priest, who in turn consulted the world's most renowned paranormal investigators (opening credits) Ed and Lorraine Warren. The Warrens identified the doll as a conduit for a demon. *The Conjuring* is based on the true story of the Perron family, set in their 18th-century Rhode Island farmhouse built on a plot of land cursed by Bathsheba Sherman (whose sister was hanged in the Salem witch trials). The film depicts the Perron family's battle with the demon over the soul of their youngest daughter, Donna.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

At Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, the first module – titled *Necromancy* – of our year-long resident Psychopathology course incorporates ghosts (wraiths) and demons. While the former references disorders that are episodic in nature, tales of demonic possession serve to reinforce teaching points of chronic and persistent illnesses such as the Dissociative Disorders (DD). At the completion of the DD block, participants should appreciate that movies about demonic possession may be metaphorically interpreted as case studies of dissociation. Specifically, the hallmark characteristic of Dissociative Identity Disorder, a disruption of identity, may be described in some cultures as an experience of possession (DSM-5).

The seminal movie of the subgenre is William Friedkin's 1973 film adaptation of *The Exorcist* (but we'll have to wait until Week 36 for that!). *The Conjuring* is homage to Friedkin's film, thus reinforcing several teaching points germane to DID.

The experiences of the Perron children include imaginary friends and archetypal fears of sleeping above the covers (but not "four feet above her covers" - *Ghostbusters*, 1984). Cindy has an imaginary friend, Rory, who is seen "in the mirror behind you" when the music from the music box stops. Such childhood fantasy may be a defense against family dissonance which is intimated by Cindy demonstrating evidence of parasomnias such as sleepwalking and sleep-related rhythmic movement disorder (nocturnal head banging). While nocturnal head banging can occur during any stage of sleep, sleepwalking is differentiated from REM sleep behavior disorder in that it only occurs during non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep.

The movie ends with Lorraine Warren's comment, "There's a case in Long Island he'd like to discuss..." We too will visit the Amityville Horror house, but not before a brief stop in Connecticut (next week's movie!).

Key Words: The Conjuring, Carolyn Perron, Raggedy Ann, Lorraine Warren, Bathsheba Sherman, Dissociative Disorders, Dissociative Identity Disorder, William Friedkin, The Exorcist, imaginary friend, fantasy, parasomnia, sleep medicine, sleepwalking, sleep-related rhythmic movement disorder, REM sleep behavior disorder

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