

Movie: *The Omen* (1976)

Synopsis

The Omen (1976) is the initial installment of the supernatural horror franchise that tells the story of Robert Thorn, an American diplomat, who is convinced by Father Spiletto to adopt an orphan newborn boy to cover up the death of his own newborn son. Unknown to Katherine, Robert's wife, Robert presents the child as their own. They name him Damien. The family moves to England for Robert's job as an ambassador of Great Britain. However, traumatic and unusual events begin to take place once Damien turns 5 years-old which leads Robert to discover that Damien is not actually his sweet adopted son, but the antichrist and son of satan.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

The character Damien and the events that take place around him embody many of the traits seen in conduct disorder. Conduct disorder (CD) is diagnosed in children and adolescents, more commonly in boys, who display a persistent behavior that violates the basic rights of others or goes against social norms.

Aggression to people and animals

A precursor to antisocial personality disorder, a cardinal trait of CD that is demonstrated in the film is aggression to people and/or animals. When the Thorns bring Damien to a church, he becomes erratic and violently attacks Katherine. Later in the film, Damien purposefully rides his tricycle into Katherine, knocking her over the railing. As Katherine is hanging from the railing, Damien simply watches her beg for help before she falls from the second floor. Aggression towards animals is alluded to in the film (at the zoo, animals become fearful of his presence).

Destruction of property

Destruction of property is also a behavior that is seen in CD and is associated with Damien's presence in the film. When Robert and Keith, a photographer, are investigating the birth of Damien, they discover that the hospital and all of its documents were destroyed in a fire right after his birth. In the sequel *Damien: Omen II* (1978), destruction of property is demonstrated by Damien when he destroys the family's museum. Damien also shows no remorse for his actions or the deaths of people around him throughout the film. When his nanny commits a public suicide at his 5th birthday party, Damien is not traumatized by the event, but rather smiles and waves to a large dog on the outskirts of the property. At the death of his parents, Damien again does not show empathy, but simply smiles while holding the hand of the President of the United States.

The Omen is a fictional case study of a “bad seed” in the nature versus nurture discussion of the etiology of CD (and antisocial personality disorder). Similar to Samara (*The Ring*, 2002) and Rhoda Penmark (*The Bad Seed*, 1956), Damien’s behavior is a result of his genetic make-up and has little to do with his psychosocial environment. Robert is told that if Damien is the son of satan, he would possess a birthmark in the shape of three 6s (just like a genetic makeup that would cause the presence of a birthmark on his skin). This thought process is reinforced in the sequel of the film when a physician discovers Damien’s marrow cells greatly resemble those of a jackal.

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