

Movie: *The Skin I Live In* (2011)

Synopsis

In *The Skin I Live In*, Dr. Robert Ledgard abducts, physically abuses, and psychologically tortures someone he believes drove his daughter to suicide. His prisoner becomes the subject for Ledgard's human experiments previously rejected by the medical establishment.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

Suicide

Badly burnt and disfigured in a terrible car crash, Gal lived in total darkness. One day, she hears her daughter, Norma, singing in the garden. When she walks over to the balcony to find her daughter, Gal accidentally saw her own reflection in the window. Traumatized by the sight, she jumped to her death.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Witness to her mother's suicide, Norma was recently discharged from an 8-year inpatient psychiatric hospitalization. Later, she demonstrates an exaggerated startle response when Vincent forcibly pins her to the ground. The traumatic event acts as a precipitant for her suicide, as Norma kills herself in the same manner that her mother did.

Cluster B Personality Disorders

Robert Ledgard personifies arrogance and haughtiness, traits that define the Narcissistic Personality Disorder. His grandiosity results in the abduction of Vera (explained next). While imprisoning her, Ledgard demonstrates a disregard for and violation of Vera's rights. This hallmark of Antisocial Personality Disorder allows for *The Skin I Live In* to be formulated as a case study of sociopathy.

Gender Dysphoria

[Spoiler alert] At the end of the film, it is revealed that Vera is Vincent. Having blamed Vincent for his daughter's death, Ledgard tortured him by performing radical gender reassignment surgery, making him in the image of his deceased wife, Gal. While the portrayed torture bears no relation to Gender Dysphoria (GD), Vincent's marked dysphoria and incongruence between his experienced gender (male) and that assigned by Ledgard (female) reinforces the DSM-5 definition of GD.

Key Words: Auschwitz, The Human Centipede; *The Skin I Live In*, Gender Dysphoria, suicide, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Gender Dysphoria

Anthony Tobia, MD. Copyright © 2017 Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.
tobiaat@rwjms.rutgers.edu All rights reserved.