

*To The Editor:* With overwhelming anticipation of Star Wars VII premiering in 2015, we thought it relevant to reference the letter previously published by Bui et al. titled “Is Anakin Skywalker suffering from borderline personality disorder? (1)” In their letter, the authors propose that Anakin Skywalker is afflicted with borderline personality disorder (BPD) as he fulfills six of the nine DSM criteria. Additionally, a dynamically-orientated exploration of Anakin’s history emphasizes elements associated with BPD. Specifically, the authors identify the absence of Anakin’s father and his early separation from his mother as contributing to his maladaptive personality traits. What the authors should be most commended about is their conclusion that Anakin’s case study could prove useful in teaching the criteria of BPD to medical students and residents. At Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, we also reference Anakin’s case with respect to his maladaptive coping of his mother’s death, and compare his development with another iconic character from an equally popular franchise: Star Trek.

Both Anakin and Mr. Spock have similar histories, as both have experienced early maternal separation due to the premature deaths of their mothers. In Spock’s case, his father (Sarek, a Vulcan) served as a stabilizing influence. Sarek encouraged Spock to embrace “pure logic,” a cortical process that parallels superego integrity. In the TV series and movie franchise, the interplay of emotion (from Spock’s human mother) versus logic is central to Spock’s character analysis. Given the stabilizing presence of his father, “pure logic” wins out (much to the dismay of Spock’s fellow officer, Dr. “Bones” McCoy).

Spock’s unconscious battle also parallels Anakin Skywalker. However, without the influence of a stabilizing father figure, Anakin’s fate takes a different path than Spock’s. When Padmé Amidala (the princess) dies after giving birth to twins (Luke and Leia), Anakin re-experiences the abandonment he felt upon the death of his mother. As a displaced mother object, Padmé had strengthened Anakin’s superego. Upon her death, Anakin lost the ability to assess the reality of the external world and became susceptible to the Dark Side. Anakin’s search for a father figure increased his risk of victimization by Palpatine (the evil emperor) who convinced him he could undo Padmé’s death by turning to the Dark Side: “Darth Plagueis was a Dark Lord of the Sith, so powerful and so wise he could use the Force to influence the midi-chlorians to create life. (2).” Anakin’s turning to the Dark Side also serves to remind that a grieving individual may fixate in two discrete stages of grief: denial and anger (3).

In the above cases, there is the classic conflict between the id (Dark Side/emotion) and the superego (the Ashla/pure logic). For the purposes of this article, the latter represents the child’s internalization of his parents’ moral standards, a process greatly aided by a tendency to identify with the parents. The superego is the ethical component of the personality and provides the moral standards by which the ego operates. Ego strength is often used to describe one’s ability to maintain one’s sense of self in the face of pain, distress and conflict, i.e. balance the force. Low ego strength may cause difficulties in interpersonal functioning that may lead to the development of psychiatric symptomatology including borderline traits (4). Without a father figure, Anakin taps into the dark side of the force as a Sith by giving into extreme emotion (id). Conversely, Spock’s ability to effectively deal with the demands of the id and superego is testament to his ego strength (or the extreme development of an overwhelming superego). As these two franchises serve to teach residents and medical students about complex human behavior, Mr. Spock’s “pure logic” may be also formulated as emotional numbness, which is a

symptom of both posttraumatic stress --he lost his mother traumatically--, and persistent complex bereavement disorder (5).

The central plot of the Star Wars franchise parallels the goals of psychotherapy. In situations involving psychological disorders such as BPD, weak ego strength results in a struggle to cope in the face of acute problems (4). Subsequently, following Padmé's death, Anakin avoids reality through defense mechanisms such as denial and fantasy as exemplified by his belief in Palpatine's promise of resurrection. Psychotherapy's aim would be to support the ego by resolving the unconscious conflict, thus fostering adaptive coping strategies. The personification of this is Luke Skywalker, Anakin's son, the 'chosen one' prophesized to restore balance to The Force (id versus superego) and restore peace (of mind) to the universe.

## References

1. Bui et al. Is Anakin Skywalker suffering from borderline personality disorder?
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## Authors

Anthony Tobia, MD, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School  
Thomas Draschil, MD, Wood Johnson Medical School  
Aphrodite Zimmerman, MD, Wood Johnson Medical School  
Jason Breig, Wood Johnson Medical School  
Stephanie Peters, Wood Johnson Medical School  
Derek Rudge, Wood Johnson Medical School  
Danielle Velez, Wood Johnson Medical School