

Darth Vader Died a Jedi

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Recommended Citation

Richmond, Ray () "Darth Vader Died a Jedi," *Gravel*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 33.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/gravel/vol1/iss1/33>

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Darth Vader Died a Jedi

Ray Richmond

At the annual convention of the American Psychiatric Association in 2007, Eric Bui and his colleagues presented a study in which they diagnosed Anakin Skywalker with borderline personality disorder. Any Star Wars fan with this disorder could have told you that Anakin was borderline, as he's a textbook case of the illness, but it's nice to have some confirmation.

According to the DSM5, some symptoms of borderline personality disorder include:

1. Intense anger or difficulty controlling anger

After Anakin's mother died at the hands of Tusken raiders, he decimated the entire settlement: "They're dead, every single one of them. And not just the men, but the women and the children, too...*I hate them.*"

He was so overcome with anger that he did whatever he needed to do to feel avenged, including killing innocents. In that moment, his hatred was so intense that he had no hopes of controlling it. Children died. And he felt nothing.

2. Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging

In the midst of chasing the bounty hunters who were after the woman he loved in a flying speeder, Anakin leapt from his stolen vehicle and landed on the bounty hunter's as it passed under him. He did not seem to give thought to how this action could have ended in him falling to his death; he simply did it.

Anakin fell prey to no physical harm in this instance, but his luck was thinner in other moments of impulsivity. In a fight with Obi-Wan against Count Dooku, Anakin charged straight at the Count, directly against Obi-Wan's orders. He wanted to make him pay for everything he'd done, so he acted recklessly—his opponent hacked off Anakin's right arm with a lightsaber.

3. A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation.

When talking to Padme, Anakin praised Obi-Wan highly: "Obi-Wan is a great mentor. He's as wise as Master Windu, as powerful as Master Yoda. I am truly thankful to be his apprentice." A mere matter of seconds after saying this,

Anakin split on his Jedi master and his opinion entirely shifted:
 “He’s overly critical, he never listens. He doesn’t understand. It’s not fair.”
 Without any interaction with Obi-Wan between his two statements,
 Anakin went from viewing him as sublime, the peak of perfection, only
 to veer towards an opinion of absolute disdain.

4. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.

Anakin was willing to slaughter an entire temple full of Jedi
 in order to save the love of his life.
 He was willing to throw away everything he had worked
 for, he was willing. On the planet Mustafar, shortly after he was
 so very willing, Padme said something that made Anakin feel
 abandoned. He choked her, unable to face the idea of her
 not wanting him. He couldn’t handle that. Not that. Not her.

5. Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.

Does this one even necessitate an explanation? Anakin
 embodied this symptom when his anger, pain, hatred, and fear
 caused him to become something he swore he never would.
 His transformation into Darth Vader was a physical manifestation
 of an identity disturbance—Anakin entirely lost sight of who he was,
 so much so that Obi-Wan considered him to be dead,
 even when Vader was alive.

Anakin was a product of the things that happened to him,
 the people who hurt and manipulated him, and the illness
 in his brain. His actions are not to be excused, but they can be
understood by any borderline. Most of our experiences as people
 with BPD aren’t quite as dramatic as jumping from a flying speeder,
 getting an arm sliced off, or turning into the most malevolent
 villain in the universe. However, we can all relate to the emotions
 that caused these actions to occur. We all wonder, if we
 were in his shoes, would we turn dark-side too?

Most people who share Anakin’s diagnosis have also
 gone so far when they felt abandoned that they were sure
 they’d never come back.

To anyone who sees themselves in Anakin, my message to you is this:
 you can *always* come back.

You see, the most realistic part of Anakin being borderline

is that he *did come back*. When the Emperor was torturing his son to death, Darth Vader (that is to say, Anakin) turned against his master, turned against everything he had fought to achieve while one with the dark side, turned against his broken heart. Darth Vader sacrificed his own life, the entire empire he had built, everything; he sacrificed everything for his son. For Luke.

In Star Wars canon, only Jedi get to come back as force ghosts. Anakin may have left the Jedi order behind long ago, but his final act was one of selflessness, one of love, and when Luke was burning Vader's body, Anakin showed up as a force ghost to watch over him. This is to say, Darth Vader was redeemed in his final act of love. This is to say,

Darth Vader died a Jedi.