

Finding the Monster in Us: A Semiotic Analysis

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Recommended Citation

Mathena, Alexandria () "Finding the Monster in Us: A Semiotic Analysis," *Access*: Interdisciplinary Journal of Student Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/access/vol8/iss1/5>

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Abstract

Using a sociological analysis, this paper attempts to uncover the true monster in Jordan Peele's *Us*. Beginning with an explanation of key terms and a film recap, a semiotic analysis of the film will unveil the monster. By revealing both the intended and unintended ideologies presented in the film, a better understanding of alienation, anomie, deviance, bureaucracy, class, race, and functionalism will be found. Media teaches society many things, this paper is meant to unmask what Jordan Peele is attempting to teach us.

Keywords: Us, Jordan Peele, Semiotic Analysis, Race, Alienation, Class, Ideologies, Lupita Nyong'o, American Dream

In the Beginning...

Adelaide started this story with fear. Red on the other hand started her story with a fairy tale beginning; “Once upon a time, there was a girl. And the girl had a shadow.” This girl is Adelaide Wilson (Lupita Nyong’o), the main protagonist of *Us*. The “shadow,” better known as Red (also played by Lupita Nyong’o), is a woman who is “tethered” to Adelaide and will do anything to become untethered. Red does not define herself as a tethered person; rather, she states she is American prior to handcuffing Adelaide to the table, declaring Adelaide as the tethered. By analyzing the film, *Us*, through a semiotic analysis, a better understanding of race, class, and society will be presented. This will be done through defining key terms and then relating those concepts back to the media at hand to provide a full sociological analysis.

Jordan Peele's *Us*

Us, released in 2019, was directed and written by Jordan Peele. It was produced by Jason Blum and Ian Cooper and starred famous Black actors such as Lupita Nyong'o and Anna Diop, alongside many others. After Peele's breakthrough film *Get Out* (2017) was released, his audience was confused about which genre his movies would fit, plus it was a bit chilling to watch. Jordan Peele decided to then make a horror movie to fulfill his audience's expectations. With many fears and monsters in mind, Peele spoke to the Los Angeles Times, who reported, "*Us* was inspired by the division and xenophobia he observed in post-election America." Peele further explained that ". . . we all feel we are the good guy in our own story [which] prevents us from facing our demons" (Yamato, 2019).

Sociological Terms

How every person acts, speaks, and forms opinions is based in societal standards that are subconsciously learned throughout our lives, as well as depicted through media consumption. Sociology, a term coined by Auguste Comte in the 1800s, combined the Latin term for society with the Greek word for reason, leaving various definitions alive today. Ellwood (1907), a professor at the University of Missouri at the time, created six definitions of sociology, touching on the "social evils" sociologists treat and the "social phenomena" that occur within society before settling on "sociology is the science of the organization and evolution of society" (pp. 300-303). This definition covers how society grows and changes with each individual person's impact. This field of study focuses on the developments of society and the people within society. Sociology studies key aspects of society, such as normal day-to-day social life and beyond it to social phenomena. By analyzing different media through a sociological lens, members of society will better understand the type of society that media, such as *Us*, is organizing through public consumption.

Alienation

Melvin Seeman (1959), a sociologist known for his social isolation research, created an entry for the *American Sociological Review* covering the meaning(s) of alienation. Before presenting the five differing meanings for alienation, Seeman declared its importance in “both the contemporary literature and the history of sociological thought” (p. 783), furthering its importance when analyzing modern media. To be alienated is to experience a range of loss, of power or meaning, or the feeling of normalcy and companionship. Or Alienation means to lose a sense of self. Seeman puts extreme emphasis on “-lessness,” with three of his five definitions surrounding this loss. Social groups are one piece of society that form easily, but those who do not fit within society’s constraints are alienated and separated from social groups.

Anomie

Coined by Emile Durkheim, “the term anomie is a French translation of the Greek *anomia*, which means ‘no laws,’” as per Marvin Olsen (2016). He stated that this simple explanation meant nothing when defining such a term. This state of “normlessness” was explained in parallel to alienation by Seeman (1959), where the traditional sense of anomie “denotes a situation in which social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior” (p. 787). In comparison to modern media and the societal norms presented within them, this usually translates to the underdog radicals pointing out a terrible government, as in the films *Divergent* (2014), *The Hunger Games* (2012), and *V for Vendetta* (2006), with the endings slightly adjusting with the times. Each of these once-a-book-now-a-film novelizations focused on the anomic character within. These can easily be characterized as the one (singular, but not always) who doesn’t understand the rules, and/or the one who doesn’t believe in the rules. The governments portrayed in these books/films are usually more controlling than the typically-portrayed American government and have rules that even the audience doesn’t agree with. The emerging anomic characters do not feel defined by laws, but rather, defined by their lack of laws, which invites many in the audience to support them.

Deviance

When defining deviance, Nicole Sweeney in *Deviance* (Alexander Street, 2021) provided a multitude of helpful examples. She first stated that anything “outside the mainstream” is deviant, before delving into a deeper definition of deviance being “anything that deviates from what people generally accept as normal.” A person’s environment dictates whether they are defined as normal or deviant. A prime example of deviance is hair color; there are different types of hair colors, but blonde won’t usually catch an American off guard, nor black, nor brunette. But blue? Some employers decline applications based on applicants’ “crazy” hair colors such as blue. Others don’t. At the end of the day, it is just hair different from the norm.

Bureaucracy

The word bureaucracy was formed from the French term *bureaucratie*, meaning “desked” government, or better translated as “a form of government that is predicated upon a desk – more precisely, an office” (Mathur, 2017). Mathur carried that definition from the 1815 London Times, describing bureaucracy as an “invisible and mischievous power which thwarts the most noble views” (“Introduction”), leading to the term “bureaucratization,” or the act of organizing a formalized structure that contains a well-defined hierarchy, divisions of labor, and regulations for people to follow. When using bureaucracy to study media through a sociological lens, we must focus on the everyday and the extraordinary events. Society must run in a specific way for it to develop and grow and bureaucracies tend to aid order. That said, spontaneous, unseen events tend to break these bureaucracies and cause members of society to act on their own accord, creating a deeper insight into people.

Class

Within the film *Us*, as with many films, different classes are represented, and sometimes they stand for different causes. In sociological terms, class regularly refers to socioeconomic class, or a person’s “level or place in the hierarchy of classes that exists in society” (Berger, 2019, p. 140). Finding the difference between each class represented within the film better

helps the audience find it in real life and understand their own level within the hierarchy. In the United States (where this film takes place), there are four classes. Of the two families represented in the film, the Wilson family falls into the middle class, whereas the Tyler family falls into the upper class.

Functionalism

Functionalism as a theory within sociology explains society not only as the whole of a “self-organizing...” system, but “...it is differentiated into elements, and the function of the elements can be said to be the part they play in maintaining the system in a persisting state” (Emmet, 2006, “Introduction”). Society, as a self-organized system, has so many minute pieces that play key roles, causing to be functioning members of society. The concept of large systems being made of smaller parts is not hard to grasp, but recognizing each tiny element within media analysis is a bit more difficult. The audience must connect the interconnected elements by finding functions and identifying different social patterns that exist to benefit members of society. If the audience prevails, they will be able to perceive how society functions.

Manifest Function

The manifest function is the outcome of how society is intended, anticipated, or known to be portrayed by the director within the film. These portrayals are consciously planned for the general public to digest due to its surface-level interpretation of the film.

Characters in the Film

The Wilson Family

The main protagonist within *Us* is Adelaide Wilson. Her counterpart, the lead antagonist, is Red, her tethered partner. These “tethered” characters are the clones of those found above ground, whereas the tethered used to remain solely underground. Adelaide is the matriarch of the family, with multiple scenes reinforcing her position as the family’s self-proclaimed leader. She is an upper-middle class Black woman. Her counterpart Red has all the same traits, aside from being less than lower-class. Red not only leads her immediate tethered family, but also

leads each citizen of the tethered society. Abraham, played by Winston Duke, is Red's partner; Duke also plays Gabe Wilson, Adelaide's husband. Gabe is a strongly-built Black man who wears glasses and makes a comfortable amount of money. Abraham has the same physical attributes as Gabe but does not wear glasses. Early in their meeting, Abraham tries on Gabe's glasses, but then immediately rips them off, breaking them; this keeps both Gabe and Abraham "blind."

Adelaide and Gabe give birth to two children: Zora (Shahadi Josep) and Jason (Evan Alex). Both Zora and Jason are thin Black children. Zora plays sports and likes to run, creating a more athletic stereotype, whereas Jason fits more of the "weird kid" stereotype. Their counterparts are the offspring of Red and Abraham: Umbrae and Pluto. Umbrae looks identical to Zora aside from her eyes being open wider throughout the film. She is also equally athletic. Pluto, with an identical build to Jason, has burn scars covering his face due to his pyromania. Adelaide, Red, Abraham, Umbrae, and Pluto all show strong, aggressive behaviors, whereas Gabe, Zora, and Jason have more normal attributes within their character types. As the film progresses, how the characters are portrayed changes, however, and the true monsters of the story become unveiled.

The Tyler Family

The second family are the Tylers: an upper-class White family. Although not very prominent within the film, they are the other main characters. The Tylers are characterized as stuck-up, rich, and stupid. Josh is the father of the Tyler family; Kitty is his wife. Their two daughters, Becca and Linsey, are especially characterized as annoying White teenagers. Each of these people also have an identical tethered counterpart, not that it matters for long because their family and then their tethered are eradicated quickly in comparison to the Black families portrayed in this film.

Following the Film

The film *Us* starts with a boxed television and a glimpse of hope. The static from the TV dissipates to reveal Hands Across America: Good Samaritans. Coupling the video of people holding hands across a globe, the phrase “six million will tether” reverberates as the scene changes.

The next scene shows a little girl (Madison Curry) and her parents walking through a carnival playing games. This little girl is perceived to be Adelaide, though her parents refer to her as Addy. Her parents bicker, leaving Addy to wander the carnival until confronted with a house of mirrors. Her “Thriller” t-shirt reflects off the mirrors with each turn she takes. No longer knowing where to turn, Addy starts to slowly whistle the tune of The Itsy-Bitsy Spider. Softly and slightly off-key, someone whistles back. Following the sound leads Addy to an identical version of herself staring directly at her. It is assumed the scream that follows is Addy’s. Before the audience can dissect what happened, the screen cuts to a wall of caged White rabbits.

The White rabbits could symbolize a multitude of things, but within this film, they teach the audience “to measure our surroundings, and know when to duck” (Jeffries, 2020). When thinking of key White rabbits within media, the first that comes to mind is the clock rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland* (2010 or other variations). He symbolizes time running out, the importance of acting now. And with his fearful antics, he reminds us to keep cautious. Although the tethered do not make this correlation, brute strength and power are not the best choices in every situation. Speed and agility can triumph when used properly, as seen when Adelaide enters the tunnels at the end of the film to kill Red and find Jason. Adelaide knows the White rabbits are the tethered’s only food source, yet lets Jason keep one of them anyway. In their media review, Jeffries brings up the correlation between *Get Out’s* (Peele’s first film) *Run, Rabbit, Run* and the countless rabbits in *Us* leaving as an open question whether these are just Peele’s own fear.

Adelaide, as an adult, is convinced by her husband and kids to return to the same beach where Addy got lost. Through a multitude of screen cuts to the past when Adelaide was found, the audience sees the young, traumatized Adelaide who came back unable to speak. As the film

progresses, both Zora and Jason give aggressive or agitated attitudes or comments. Adelaide continuously waves off her children's behavior while Gabe, her husband, continues to get upset. Arriving at the beach where the carnival takes place, the Wilson family spends time with the Tyler family. Adelaide's jumpy personality causes a dramatic scuffle as Jason disappears from her line of sight. Before being grabbed by his mother, Jason finds a man holding his arms out at the beach. With a closer look, he recognizes the man as the one he saw earlier being carted out on a gurney. The key difference this time is the man on the beach has blood dripping down his hand. This same man was also seen during Addy's flashbacks, holding up a sign with the religious verse "Jeremiah 11:11" written on it: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them" (King James Version).

That same evening a family of four appears outside the Wilson family vacation home. With the darkness of the night setting in, the Wilsons acknowledge the four, noting their matching red jumpsuits, but nothing else. Gabe steps outside with a bat in hand ready to confront these strangers, only to see them silently scatter, surrounding the house in the process. This family of four is then revealed as the Wilson family's shadows: Red, Adelaide's counterpart, and her partners, Abraham, Umbrae, and Pluto.

Upon entering the house, Red gathers the families into the living room and gives her speech. While petting Pluto lovingly, Red spits out her hatred and anger, even going so far as to call Umbrae, her daughter, a "little monster."

All the tethered speak with guttural sounds, except for Red. Although she "absorbed the feral mannerisms of her new community, she also held onto her memories and channeled her sense of rage and dispossession into a belief in her own special destiny" (Murphy 2022 p. 262). Red's voice is raspy from years of unuse, but she speaks simple English all the same. Starting the fight in this film, Red handcuffs Adelaide to the table and sets each tethered person onto their counterpart. Each tethered uses a different form of attack, showing the limited yet present

distinctions between the tethered's capabilities. Gabe is met with brute force from Abraham, whereas Zora is chased by an agile moving Umbrae. Jason and Pluto hide in a closet as they play with a match and a fire-starting magic ring. Each member of the Wilson family escapes their tethered partner, with Gabe killing his first. After meeting back up, they all board Gabe's new boat and head to the Tyler family's vacation house across the lake.

The Tyler family is dead on their arrival. Gabe once again takes the initiative to kill Josh, Tyler's tethered, while the Wilson family fights together to kill the remaining tethered Tylers. Only here do the Wilsons understand the severity of the situation as news feeds play on a flat screen showcasing the killings nationwide. The key murdering tool used by the tethered are golden scissors, which they seem to discard before joining the Hands Across America chain. This is a turning point for the Wilsons as they realize their need to flee.

Zora takes the wheel of the Tyler family's car in a rush to kill her tethered. Successfully doing so, Adelaide rushes from the car and watches Umbrae as she struggles to breathe in her final moments. Although the audience can see the visible sadness Adelaide feels, she rushes back to the car all the same. Passing hundreds of dead bodies, the Wilson family gets blocked by Pluto, a known pyromaniac. Mimicking the trick Jason taught him earlier, Pluto attempts to blow up the Wilson's only form of transportation. Thankfully, Jason sees the warning signs of his trick and kills Pluto first.

As the family is distracted, Red appears and steals Jason. Running back to the hall of mirrors and to the tunnels where the tethered stayed, Red locks Jason in a cupboard and waits for Adelaide to find her. Adelaide shows the audience how easy it is for her to maneuver through the tunnels, moving "about the facility with military precision" (Jeffries, 2020, p. 294). Red states that she is a "person of God," saying that she danced her way into leading the tethered out of the tunnels.

Scenes of fighting pass before Adelaide pierces Red through the heart, laughing maniacally and making guttural sounds similar to that of the tethereds. Unknowingly, Jason

lingers in a closet watching as her mother brutally murders a human-appearing being. Still, he leaves with his mother to find Zora and Gabe. The film ends with a bird's-eye landscape shot of the tethered line spreading over the nation while the Wilson family drives away.

The conclusion of this film provides insight into how the tethered became the tethered: through a failed government mind-control experiment. Alongside this, the film shows what truly happened to Addy through a selection of elongated flashbacks of her kidnapping by her tethered counterpart, chained to a bed in the tunnels as this new Adelaide took her place. Addy, who at this point became Red, lived with the original tethered, dancing for them as Adelaide lived her life above ground, away from her people.

Analysis

The focus of *Us* on the “normal” Wilson family and their tethered counterparts lays an easy-to-follow sociological footprint of the “othering” experienced by the tethered population. They are a society that did not ask to be grouped together yet were forced into the world they lived in. Labeled a minority group, the tethered were banished underground in inhumane conditions while their above-ground counterpart lived better, parallel lives. Sociologists continuously state that we are double, both directly ourselves and as ourselves in society. This correlates to Red/Addy, a person removed from society—their rawest self—as well as Adelaide, a person conformed to fit in with society. Adelaide is a mirrored Red, apart from the societal influences she endured throughout her life. Due to sociological analysis relating to relationships and why they matter, the majority of this analysis will cover the tethered and their relationship, or lack thereof, with society.

Within a society, or even within a bureaucracy, people are trained to behave in a specific way. There are those who fit in to the “normal” mold in society—those who follow laws and regulations, even following the “social norms.” Then there are people who do not fit into that mold; they deviate from society. In *Us*, the tethered are othered; labeled as deviant and alienated from society. Alienation is not always an outcome of deviancy, yet in media it happens

frequently. Described in the film as a failed government experiment, the tethered population is seen as creations rather than people (that is, until they meet their counterparts). The tethered are consistent in every physical feature with those above ground, but since they were born failures, they were forced to survive life rather than live life: eating raw rabbit, walking into walls, forced to consummate with partners they may or may not even know. This goes much deeper than their social abilities and lack of free will.

Once Red brings the tethered together for a common goal, this alienated group shows signs of a bureaucracy. They band together under the same goal of alienating, or possibly even exterminating, the entire above ground population. The tethered population can be described as anomic, considering their lack of respect for the laws of society, yet they loosely listen to Red, the leader of their underground group. As the tethered come above ground, all social regulations break down in America, causing chaos and confusion, and letting the tethered gain an upper hand. Due to their abilities to exist at a bare minimum, the tethered population is not affected by spotty power and technology like above-grounders are.

In the film *Us*, it is obvious to see that Red leads this revolution of the tethered up to the surface by the way she orders her immediate family around. Alongside this, her ability to speak places her in a position of superiority among the tethered as the rest can only grunt at each other. In creating her hierarchy, Red placed herself on top with a goal in mind that all tethered agreed to. This bureaucracy she formed held regulations outside of “normal society’s” rules. These included the direct order to find the person that looks like them to kill them. The tethereds make a great effort to not hurt each other but also to not aid each other. Once sent to their counterparts, the division of labor becomes clearer. Material was handed out (the scissors), uniforms were created; this was an entire created system.

Red, the color of their jumpsuit uniforms, is a symbolic sign of power—but also the name of the leader of the bureaucracy: Red. She is Red and they all represent her and what she believes in. It could also be a more obvious connection and relate to the amount of blood being

spilt when the tethered came above ground. Paired with the jumpsuit is a singular glove, mimicking the Thriller t-shirt Addy wore when kidnapped. Alongside her Hands Across America idea, the glove is another example of media digestion on Red's part.

The first sign of class as an important sociological topic happens in the first ten minutes of the film where little Addy hums the tune to "Itsy Bitsy Spider," a song about the lower class never being able to climb up to a higher class. When looking into the history of the song, we can see it originates from the "Incy Wincy Spider," and if looking even farther back, possibly "The Topsy Dipsy Hobo." A few websites claim the Topsy Dipsy Hobo was the original song, teaching people (through nursery rhyme) that death is inevitable for the poor (Harker, 2023). This tune drop shows the audience pre-emptively that Red and Adelaide got switched. Red (or at the time Addy) was walking her way into a position of lower class while Adelaide started to climb the waterspout. Her newfound family was able to afford therapy, proving they were middle class at least. Adelaide was born into a position of poverty and when she heard little Red humming that tune, she knew it was her chance at escaping the lower class.

In terms of class, the Wilson and Tyler families were stereotyped as traditional Americans, with the Wilsons identified with a more working class standing than the Tylers. The Tyler family is visibly upper-upper class. They are portrayed as so wealthy that their daughters' key trait is being spoiled. The Wilsons are not poor by any means yet not close to the Tyler's wealth either. These socioeconomic differences are largely part of stereotyping the characters. The monetary status of either family is purposefully and prominently placed to draw the audience's attention to the differences between these White and Black families.

The film itself does not contain a diversified cast, as it was majority Black, which is uncommon in most movies about Americans, or even movies produced in the US in general. The primary family is Black and the secondary family is White. Both families are structured like a nuclear family: two parents and two children. Having the primary characters in *Us* be Black helps the audience draw a better conclusion on how Black families compare to White families in

American society. When the tethered started their attack, the White family is unable to defend themselves. In the time it took for the Wilsons to get to their house, the entire Tyler family is dead. This alludes to the idea that Black people are inherently stronger, faster, and can handle more pain. Primary examples are Adelaide getting her head shoved into the table and recovering instantly, or Gabe breaking his ankle/leg and continuing to fight.

The tethered Wilsons were especially stereotyped by the use of guttural animal noises instead of actual words. Pluto, Red's youngest and favorite child, runs on all fours for the first part of the movie. Not only is his name more typically used as a dog's name, but he shows impressive loyalty and follows orders similar to that of a dog as well. Umbrae, Red's other child, gets impaled by a tree branch and laughs as she dies instead of showing an ounce of pain. The intent of this stereotyping stems from the writer and director, Jordan Peele, a Black man, which brings forth the idea that race has nothing to do with the plot or development of this film.

In the same way that Adelaide filled Red's previous role in society, Red's role within the tethered society is also functional. Both contribute to the maintenance and stability of their positions within society. This can be seen toward the end of the film when Adelaide stands up to Gabe, saying he doesn't get to make the decisions anymore and declaring herself the leader of the Wilson family. Red appeared to be elected as the tethered leader, chosen for her ability to dance and speak. This also changes the dynamics of their immediate families and roles within society. The Wilson family is less likely to listen to Adelaide than the tethered are to listen to Red due to her declaration, versus Red's vote-in. Both Adelaide and Red provide functional purposes to their groups, proving how parallel lives can remain so similar yet the dynamic of how they work can be very different.

Jason's willingness to kill his counterpart sheds light on Adelaide's willingness to kill Red. Even after watching his mother end her tethered's life, Jason gripped the White rabbit to his chest and walked out with his mother. This could signify Jason accepting his half-tethered heritage and his mother as a tethered person.

Society can shape how people feel alongside how they act. Adelaide gives various examples including the expressed sadness at the death of each tethered child, although she did not give birth to those specific children. When Pluto dies, she appears severely distraught, which makes sense considering her fondness for Jason. She was also visibly upset over Umbrae. Throughout the film, she shows concern and a weakness for Jason, but not for Zora. This could relate to Jason being the youngest in the family, as the “baby” is stereotypically the favorite—or it could be because he is male. Male favoritism can be found in both the above and tethered societies. Adelaide and Red lead their families, but Jason and Pluto are the favorite children, respectively, of Adelaide and Red. Zora and Umbrae are rarely given a second glance by their parents, aside from Adelaide when Umbrae dies. Even then, it’s a small moment compared to the drama that came with Pluto’s death.

Latent Function

The latent function is seen as an unintended social structure and is not usually recognized by society, causing outcomes that the writers, directors, and actors were not actively trying to portray. *Us* lays the groundwork for a multitude of such non-intended ideologies. This film invites us, the audience, to see Americans as deviant with no real definition of normalcy. With each person in America having an opposing tethered, there is a piece of everyone that is othered from society. The White tethereds were easier to kill, therefore weaker yet they were able to fall from two stories up onto a glass table and then stand up just fine. Similar to the (inaccurate) stereotype that Black people have higher pain tolerances than other races, the tethered are labeled as deviant for their unnaturalness in survival. Even when directly asked who or what they could possibly be, Red responds with “We are ... Americans.” The tethereds are incapable of understanding society as defined by the above-ground citizens and therefore do not fit either the Wilson or Tyler families’ standards of normalcy.

With Adelaide being the original tethered, her construction of normalcy is nowhere near that of the Tyler family, and not even her husband’s. Her children are half tethered, half “normal.”

Multiple times in the beginning of the film we see Zora and Jason having aggressive or weird behavior for which their father, Gabe, tries to call them out, but Adelaide brushes them off. Although we see the Wilson family's tethered counterparts most, we also see the brutal death of a White houseless man on the beach. The tethered Tyler counterparts are equally as vicious and animalistic as Abraham or Umbrae are, placing the othering on the more generalized of American nationality rather than any one race.

Since each tethered is a clone, DNA is used to get the accurate representation within the tethered population that is seen in *Us*. If normal people help make up these people, it might be an invitation from Peele, an American man himself, to see that we are all part monster, and monsters are all part us.

Throughout the film, references to being American are brought forward. *Us* invites us, the audience, to see American society as both egalitarian and unequal. To be egalitarian, people must believe that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. Although true, in sending her children to murder their above-ground counterparts, the idea of Red being just an "American" seems unsettling. Peele spoke to the Los Angeles Times about the idea behind incorporating the American dream into this film: "The realization that our villains in this are a cult, are fanatics, and violent fanatics, who are, on a day to day level, engaged in sort of unimaginably crazy-seeming behavior was about the realization that you could say the same about the other world – about us," said Peele, "That we as Americans, as the United States, we are fanatics as well, and we are violent" (Yamato, 2019).

In the tethered's minds, they are only being fair in paying back their counterparts for the years of suffering they had to endure prior to their interactions. With the tethered population believing this, the world itself is seen as unequal. A prime example is the relationship between Kitty Tyler and Adelaide Wilson who maintain a suburban friendship, where "they know each other and speak to one another but are really more competitors than comrades" (Booker, 2021, p. 121). Not only are the wives fighting, but their husbands are constantly competing for who is

living the better “American Dream.” In an egalitarian society, these types of small rivalries wouldn’t exist. The actress who plays Adelaide/Red spoke about violence being excused when placed in a position of power within politics or culture: “it gives you permission to do certain things, and it can blind you from morality and ethics” (Yamato, 2019). Both of the lead families live middle- to upper-class lives comfortably, and both hold power within either the society pre-tethered, or within this new tethered world. Adelaide, as an ex-tethered, knew of the unequal lives they were living yet continued to act as though life is as fair as it can be.

The promotion of an egalitarian society within the film is meant to prove the unlikelihood of a true egalitarian society. In America, as with other countries, there are stark differences between those who believe the world is “fair enough” and those who cannot see past the mountains of indifferences between them and the wealthy. Society, as seen in the film, will always contain a group of people which others aim to be. The lower (or lower than lower) class will never feel equal when constantly compared to those of higher-class privilege.

With many more latent functions present in this film, not all can be expressed but there is one more this paper will discuss. *Us* invites the audience to see media as a key influence on American citizens. The Hands Across America advertisement that was shown at the beginning of the film was Red’s inspiration to have the tethered revolt against their counterparts. Sam Wilks (2024), an author and speaker, said, “the influence of Western media on global culture extends beyond news and entertainment, as it is a conduit through which cultural norms and values are disseminated, interpreted, and often reshaped” (para. 1). Alongside this, the scissors, as the tethered’s choice of weapon, were seen in the same Hands Across America commercial as the narrator seemed to cut up paper people to make a chain. At the end of the film, we see Red do this exact type of origami, proving she must have studied the commercial. Then, there is the one glove from Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*, the only outside influence that Addy had with her when she got swapped in the tunnel.

This media influence can be seen in current times as well with Covid-19. In an interview done with PBS News (2020), Shields and Brooks discuss Trump's public statement on not wearing a mask, followed by his Covid-19 diagnosis. If Biden, the current president, is declining health professional's recommendations, then there will be a multitude of other citizens in society that will follow his example. This poses serious health implications, not only for these individuals who are not immune to viruses, but also all individuals they choose to surround themselves with.

In Conclusion

The true monsters in *Us* are the parts of people that make them monsters. As seen in American society, each person has their bad or toxic trait that makes them less pleasing. These distinct traits are often developed by unfair or disproportioned societies that make people fight for basic necessities. Media consumption guides our beliefs on what is "normal" when it comes to "necessities," as seen with the Tyler family who appear to "need" more to be happy compared to the Wilson family. Taking a semiotic approach to analyzing the film *Us* has been beneficial due to the countless layers of impact society shows on each of the main characters. Each Wilson is gripped by a stereotypical American device (boats, music, cars, etc.), with the Tyler family being an extreme version of the stereotypical American. Sociological analysis was also used to examine the phenomena that happen in society, on which this entire film is based. Jordan Peele's layering of stereotypes and accompanying ideologies develop in each of his films; *Us* is no exception.

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