

Movie: *Us* (2017)

Synopsis

A young girl wanders away from her inattentive father at a carnival in 1986 Santa Cruz and enters a beachside funhouse where she encounters more than her reflection in a mirror. Now in her thirties and with a husband and two kids of her own, Adelaide is apprehensive about returning to Santa Cruz on a family vacation. She feels like an evil is drawing closer when they enter their vacation home. When she discovers that her family has arrived in greater number than she'd realized was possible, a night of horror reveals much about Adelaide's family and a culture's anxieties. **This blog contains spoilers.**

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

Adelaide/Red's experience can be viewed as a case of maladaptive personality development (such as in Borderline Personality Disorder) as a consequence of childhood trauma. There is ample evidence in the movie's opening carnival scene to suggest domestic problems in Adelaide/Red's home. We see that her mother and father are engaged in a struggle to see who will be responsible for Adelaide/Red as they move through the carnival. We further observe the father to be neglectful of Adelaide/Red's well-being when she wanders off, unnoticed, to the funhouse. In addition, Adelaide/Red's father has an ataxic gait and is drinking a beverage from a cup, which might signify the presence of alcohol use disorder (e.g. important role obligations are neglected).

The development of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) as a consequence of childhood trauma is suggested in various components of the film. 'The Tethered' inflict much of their harm on others using golden scissors, symbolizing the tendency of some BPD sufferers to engage in self-harm (cutting). Frequently, individuals who suffer from BPD attempt to relieve negative emotional states or numbness through self-injury. The self-harm/emotional dysregulation theory (Linehan MM, 1993) is further supported by the fact that the Tethered seek first to harm their individual Doppelgängers.

The existence of a parallel universe also aligns with a provisional diagnosis of reduplicative paramnesia/doppelgänger delusion; a condition in which a patient believes that a location has been replicated and exists in another place. A variant of reduplicative paramnesia, Capgras syndrome, which is marked by the patient's belief that family members have been replaced by identical imposters, would be included in the differential diagnosis. Both conditions can arise as a result of physical or psychological trauma, as can spasmodic dysphonia, which describes a vocal cord dysfunction similar to that seen with Red (and possibly Abraham).

Lastly, *Us* journeys into psychodynamic theory. Red could symbolize the id, a component of personality that seeks to bring the most animalistic and base impulses to action. The id is held in control by the superego (Adelaide), but seeks to find its opportunity to overpower and assume command. Patients with weak ego strength (balancing id impulses with the superego's reality principle) are prone to episodes where the id dictates action. In Jungian psychology, the id parallels the "shadow", an archetypal term for the Tethered which perhaps not-too-ironically is used throughout the film.

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