Much of the discussion on race relations in the United States has been shaped by the sociohistorical tendencies to disproportionately focus on the Black-White dichotomy. The Black-White dichotomy had been the prevailing framework for understanding race relations due, in large part, to the numerous examples of racism and discrimination that have been perpetrated by Whites toward Blacks (Root, 1996). In *Get Out*, Jordan Peele (in his directorial debut) takes a horrifyingly playful look at race relations between these two groups.

*Get Out* stars Daniel Kaluuya as Chris Washington, who is in an interracial relationship with Rose Armitage (played by Allison Williams). The movie opens with the apparent abduction of an African American man, Andre Hayworth (played by Lakeith Stanfield), that goes largely uninvestigated. Although this may seem a minor event, Peele’s inclusion of this event speaks to a very unsettling perspective on social commentary—that the value of Black life is negligible. Peele further reinforces this notion later in the movie as Stanfield’s character resurfaces in the least likely of places. Soon into the movie, the viewer learns that Rose has invited Chris to meet her parents at their estate in a rural part of the state. Upon hearing this news, Chris’s best friend, Rod (played by LilRel Howery), jokingly warns him of what could happen if he goes to visit. Rod’s concerns reflect a level of cultural mistrust that Whaley (2001) suggests provides a useful framework for understanding how many African Americans might approach interracial interactions. On the way to her parents’ home, Rose attempts to assuage some of Rod’s worries for Chris by explaining to Chris how her parents are likely to behave. Rose's description of her parents’ behavior is characteristic of what Ridley (1995) would refer to as covert unintentional racism. (The viewer later learns that the parents’ behavior—and Rose’s—is far more sinister.) Covert unintentional racism can be thought of as racist or discriminatory behavior that is not necessarily intended to be harmful but does perpetuate racist ideologies.

Just prior to arriving at her parents’ home, Rose (who is driving) and Chris hit a deer crossing the road, and what ensues is an exchange that is all too familiar to many African
Americans. Although Rose identifies herself as the driver, Chris is repeatedly asked to provide his identification to the officer. During this exchange, Rose zealously admonishes the police officer for asking for identification and pleads with Chris to not comply. The viewer is led to believe that Rose sees herself as the purveyor of social justice, only to later learn that her behavior may have been an attempt to conceal Chris’s identity. Upon arriving at the estate, Rose’s parents appear to be exactly as Chris has been told; they are welcoming, engaging, and interested in Chris. However, their comments reflect racial microaggressions (Sue & Sue, 2008). For example, Dean Armitage (Bradley Whitford) remarks that he would have “voted for Obama a third time.” The suggestion here is that Chris voted for Barack Obama and would continue to vote for Barack Obama if allowed to do so. This well-meaning behavior subtly insinuates that African Americans are best understood in a monolithic manner and whose interests are solely focused on race-related concerns. Missy Armitage (portrayed by Catherine Keener) seems oddly fascinated by Chris and his upbringing, specifically how he has coped with the passing of his mother and his unhealthy cigarette smoking behavior. The viewer also learns that Missy is a hypnotherapist, and one night when Chris has difficulty sleeping, she hypnotizes him without his consent.

While at the Armitage estate, Chris meets several other African American characters whose behavior he finds hauntingly bizarre. In Georgina and Walter (played by Betty Gabriel and Marcus Henderson, respectively), Chris encounters individuals who seem to possess no cultural closeness or recognition that they might share a cultural history. It isn’t until Lakeith Stanfield reemerges as Andrew King and yells at Chris to “get out” that Chris’s fears are heightened. We later learn that Andrew, Georgina, and Walter are the products of illegal and unethical medical experimentation on African Americans. Viewers discover that the Armitages, including Rose, have been luring African Americans to their home for quite some time and harvesting their organs for personal benefit. While this practice might seem farfetched to some, unfortunately this practice of treating Blacks as property and commodities is not without historical precedent. Most notably of these instances is perhaps the Tuskegee syphilis study in which African American male participants were not informed of the true nature of the experiment or provided appropriate treatment for their illness. Another example of the illegal and unethical treatment of Blacks is the story of Henrietta Lacks, whose cells were harvested without her knowledge or permission. These cells have come to be known as HeLa cells, and their contributions to medical and scientific understanding are immeasurable. A lesser known example involves James Marion Sims, who is often referred to as the “father of modern gynecology.” Sims performed repeated nonconsenting operations on enslaved Black women in his fanatical attempts to cure vesicovaginal fistula (Wall, 2006).

Get Out takes a horrifying yet playful (at times) look at some sociohistorical themes that have plagued Black-White interracial interactions. While some messages might require a second viewing to notice, many of the themes/issues are readily apparent. As someone who regularly teaches a course in multicultural psychology, I am frequently challenged with generating strategies and developing assignments to assist students in appreciating the influences that inform race relations; movies are one of the ways that students are able comprehend these influences on an affective as well as intellectual level. While I am not a huge fan of the horror genre, this movie could serve as a useful tool in better understanding race relations if it is presented as a pathway to more serious dialogue.


