

## Fetishism of the Black Body in *Get Out* (2017)

By Lizzy Human

### **This article contains spoilers**

Having won the academy award for Best Original Screenplay at this year's Oscars, Jordan Peele's chilling horror *Get Out* has been celebrated for its experimental depiction of modern racism in America.

When looking retrospectively at representations of race in both media and literature it can often be observed that the central characters are typically middle class white individuals. It should be noted that over the years the representation of minorities is either significantly lacking or the character's status as a minority is utilised as a way to depict them as the antagonist. However, this narrative is subverted by Peele through the decision to characterise the psychopathic villains in the film as white middle class liberals, known as the Armitage family.

It is through the active avoidance of using the stereotypical paradigm of a racist when constructing the family that truly engages with the genre of horror. They aren't neo-Nazis or fascists, the Armitage family primarily appear to be open-minded and kind individuals. This can be seen in one scene where Rose (played by Allison Williams) uses her own white privilege to protect Chris (played by Daniel Kaluuya) after being pulled over by a police officer. With police brutality taking the lives of many

innocent black people in today's America this scene perfectly encapsulates how white people should be reacting to everyday racism.

As the title of this article suggests, *Get Out* specifically centres on racial fetishism and the intense obsession with the black body. Whether it's the ominous music whenever a white person is shown on screen or the uncomfortably racist cliché life the Armitage family are living, Peele makes it incredibly clear that there is something lurking beneath the surface.

*Get Out* depicts examples of racial micro aggressions, subtle racism that appears innocent on the surface but is still damaging. For instance, Chris faces questions about his 'genetic makeup' and falls victim to common stereotypes, such as the notion that all black people know each other. Despite this, it is clear that Peele's film focuses primarily on the Armitage's and their friends obsessive desire to be black, using their daughter Rose to lure young black men to their family home where they perform brain transplants, transporting the minds of white men into the bodies of black men.

One of the most chilling scenes during the film takes place in what initially appears to be a game of bingo but what is actually the auctioning off of Chris' body to a group of white people, echoing the slave trade. With the white guests admiring Chris' appearance and stating how 'black is in fashion' not only is the racial fetishism prevalent but Peele explores the idea of black people being considered commodities. The entire scene provokes a particular anxiety about what their intentions are

as Peele begins to blur the line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. It appears that the only cure to the insecurities in which the white guests at the party have is to inhabit the bodies of black people.

The character of Jim Hudson, who essentially buys Chris and consequently gains control over his body, states that 'people want to be stronger, faster, cooler'. It is through their active denial of admitting their fixation with being black and inhabiting a black body in particular that is truly terrifying. They believe that because they want to be black their actions are almost justified as means of positive discrimination, favouring minorities because of their differences and as *Get Out* explores, wanting to claim their differences to improve themselves.

Another prevalent image during the movie which depicts an engagement with the fetishism of the black body is during the final scenes where Chris is escaping and Rose is sitting unknowingly in her room. What is striking is that when the camera pans to her sitting in her bed, the wall behind her is covered in Rose's personal trophies which happen to be framed pictures of her with the black men she lured into the family home. There is something truly terrifying about the decision to immortalise these innocent black men when they are at their most vulnerable through framed pictures.

When accepting his award at the Oscars in March, Peele stated:

**'I knew that if someone let me make this movie that people would hear it'**

Emphasising the importance of allowing authentic representations of race in the media. Although the movie is fictitious and this article in particular focuses mainly on the fetishism of black bodies, in this moment Peele is directly discussing the issue with internalised racism that proceeds to make black people's lives more difficult.