



The Representation of Racial Microaggression in the Film *Get Out* (2017)

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Abstract

*This study examines the representation of racial microaggression in the film *Get Out* (2017), directed by Jordan Peele, by applying Derald Wing Sue's theory of racial microaggressions. The study aims to analyze how racial microaggression is constructed through the experiences of the main character, Chris Washington, whose position as a Black man situates him within a predominantly white social environment. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research analyzes selected scenes and dialogues that portray subtle forms of racial discrimination, stereotyping, and everyday racism encountered by the protagonist. The findings reveal that racial microaggression operates as a central mechanism through which racial power relations are normalized and concealed within seemingly polite, liberal, and well-intentioned interactions. Furthermore, the film illustrates how repeated exposure to racial microaggressions generates psychological tension, marginalization, and a persistent sense of surveillance for the racialized subject. Overall, this study concludes that *Get Out* (2017) functions as a critical cultural text that exposes racial microaggression as a pervasive and systemic form of contemporary racism embedded in everyday social interactions and popular cinema.*

Keywords: racial microaggression; racism; identity; power relations; *Get Out*

INTRODUCTION

Racism in contemporary society often operates not only through overt acts of discrimination but also through subtle, normalized practices embedded in everyday social interactions. While explicit racism has been widely examined in academic discourse, recent scholarship has increasingly drawn attention to more covert forms of racial oppression that persist within ostensibly liberal, tolerant, and post-racial contexts. One such form is racial microaggression, a concept introduced by Derald Wing Sue to describe brief, commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial messages to marginalized groups. These microaggressions are often unintentional, yet they function powerfully to reinforce racial hierarchies and sustain systemic inequality.

Racial microaggression is particularly significant because of its invisibility and normalization. Unlike explicit racism, microaggressions are frequently framed as jokes, compliments, or expressions of curiosity, making them difficult to challenge without being dismissed as oversensitivity. As Sue et al. argue, the cumulative effect of these everyday encounters can produce psychological distress, identity conflict, and a heightened sense of surveillance for racialized individuals. Consequently, racial microaggression becomes a crucial lens for understanding how power relations are reproduced in contemporary social life, especially within spaces that claim to uphold racial equality.

Film, as a cultural text, plays a vital role in representing and shaping social perceptions of race, identity, and power. Cinematic narratives not only reflect social realities but also actively participate in the construction of meaning by visualizing ideological tensions and lived experiences. In recent years, horror films have emerged as a particularly effective medium for addressing racial anxiety, as the genre allows for symbolic and psychological explorations of fear, exclusion, and violence. Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) stands out as a landmark film that exposes racial tensions beneath the surface of liberal white society by depicting the everyday experiences of a Black protagonist navigating a predominantly white environment.

Previous studies on *Get Out* have largely focused on themes such as explicit racism, slavery metaphors, body politics, or the horror genre's social critique. While these analyses contribute valuable insights, they tend to emphasize macro-level racial violence or symbolic oppression. Relatively few studies have systematically examined *Get Out* through the specific framework of racial microaggression, particularly in relation to how subtle interactions, casual remarks, and seemingly benign behaviors function as mechanisms of racial power. This indicates a research gap in the existing literature, where the micro-level dynamics of racism and their psychological impact on identity formation remain underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the representation of racial microaggression in *Get Out* (2017) by applying Derald Wing Sue's theory of racial microaggressions. The study focuses on how the protagonist, Chris Washington,

experiences racialized interactions that appear polite and non-threatening but collectively construct an environment of control, marginalization, and surveillance. By analyzing selected scenes and dialogues, this research aims to reveal how racial microaggression operates as a subtle yet systemic form of racism that shapes identity and reinforces unequal power relations.

Through this approach, the study contributes to film studies and critical race scholarship by demonstrating how popular cinema can serve as a site for exposing everyday racism that is often overlooked in dominant discourse. Ultimately, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of racial microaggression as a pervasive social phenomenon and to highlight *Get Out* as a critical cultural text that articulates contemporary racial power relations through narrative, symbolism, and character experience.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze representations of racial microaggressions in the film *Get Out* (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it focuses on interpreting meanings, representations, and social phenomena embedded in cultural texts rather than measuring numerical data. As Creswell (2009, p. 22) states, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." Accordingly, this approach enables an in-depth examination of how racial microaggressions are articulated through cinematic scenes, dialogues, and non-verbal actions.

The primary data source of this study is the film *Get Out* (2017). Secondary data sources include books and peer-reviewed journal articles on racial microaggressions, particularly Derald Wing Sue's *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice* (2007), which provides the conceptual framework for microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. These secondary sources support the theoretical grounding and strengthen the interpretation of the film's textual and visual elements.

Data collection was conducted through several systematic stages. First, the film was watched repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative, character interactions, and visual symbolism. Second, scenes and dialogues were identified based on explicit selection criteria, namely: (1) interactions involving racialized communication between white characters and the Black protagonist, Chris Washington; (2) verbal statements, gestures, or behaviors that implicitly convey racial stereotyping, exclusion, or normalization of racial difference; and (3) scenes that illustrate everyday, subtle, and non-overt forms of racism rather than explicit racial violence. Using these criteria, a total of fifteen key scenes and dialogue segments were purposively selected as the primary data, while scenes unrelated to racial interaction or identity negotiation were excluded.

Data analysis was conducted using a theory-driven qualitative approach based on Sue et al.'s (2007) racial microaggression framework. The selected scenes and dialogues were first transcribed and organized systematically. The data were then coded according to the three categories of racial microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. After coding, the data were grouped to identify recurring patterns and dominant forms of microaggression represented in the film. Finally, each category was interpreted by relating the cinematic representations to the theoretical framework in order to explain how racial microaggressions function as subtle yet systemic mechanisms of racism within *Get Out* (2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study by analyzing selected scenes from *Get Out* (2017) that represent racial microaggressions within everyday interactions and multicultural spaces. The analysis focuses on the main character, Chris Washington, whose experiences reveal how subtle forms of racism operate through microinsults, microinvalidations, and their cumulative psychological effects in a seemingly liberal social environment.

1. Microinsults in Everyday Interactions

The findings indicate that racial microaggressions in *Get Out* (2017) operate as an interconnected and cumulative system rather than as isolated incidents. The film illustrates how microinsults are embedded in casual conversations and polite social behavior, allowing racism to appear normalized within liberal discourse.

Scene 1



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:18:56)

Racial microaggressions first emerge through microinsults embedded in everyday interaction. In Scene 1 (00:18:56), Dean Armitage tells Chris that he "would have voted for Obama for a third term." Although presented as a progressive statement, this remark functions as a microinsult by positioning Dean as morally enlightened while discouraging any acknowledgment of racial tension.

Scene 2



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:24:40)

Microinsults are further reinforced through the fetishization of Black physicality. In Scene 2 (00:24:40), Dean's admiration for Chris's "genetic makeup" reduces Chris to racialized biological traits, reflecting a form of positive stereotyping that objectifies rather than humanizes.

Scene 3



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:24:47)

This pattern continues in Scene 3 (00:24:47), when Jeremy Armitage challenges Chris to a physical confrontation during dinner, reflecting implicit assumptions about Black masculinity as inherently aggressive and physically dominant.

2. Microinvalidations and the Denial of Racial Experience

Beyond interpersonal interaction, racial microaggressions also appear through microinvalidations that deny or erase Black racial experience. In *Get Out*, microinvalidations are often expressed through liberal ideology that frames race as irrelevant.

Scene 4



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:17:07)

This is evident in Scene 4 (00:17:07), where the Armitage family repeatedly asserts tolerance and equality, reflecting a color-blind ideology. By positioning race as insignificant, these interactions invalidate Chris's lived racial experience and silence expressions of discomfort.

Scene 5



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:12:34)

Institutional microinvalidations are depicted in Scene 5 (00:12:34), when a police officer requests Chris's identification after a minor car accident. Despite the absence of wrongdoing, Chris is subjected to suspicion, illustrating how racial profiling is normalized within institutional practices.

Scene 6



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:45:06)

The erasure of Black identity becomes explicit in Scene 6 (00:45:06) through the character of Logan King. His rigid speech and unnatural behavior reveal the suppression of Black subjectivity beneath polite multicultural interaction, exposing the violence hidden within seemingly inclusive social settings.

3. Microaggressions within Multicultural and Liberal Spaces

Racial microaggressions are most visible within the film's multicultural setting, particularly during the garden party sequence. In Scene 7 (00:43:37) and Scene 8 (00:54:42), white guests approach Chris with comments and questions that exoticize Blackness, framing racial difference as an object of curiosity rather than mutual engagement.

Scene 7



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:43:37)

Scene 8



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:54:42)

Although these interactions appear polite and admiring, they function as microaggressions that reinforce racial hierarchy by positioning Chris as an object of consumption. The liberal setting masks unequal power relations, allowing racial domination to persist under the guise of inclusivity.

Scene 9



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:59:39)

This dynamic culminates in Scene 9 (00:59:39), where the silent auction reveals how everyday microaggressions evolve into overt racial commodification. The auction exposes the structural logic underlying earlier interactions, demonstrating how multicultural spaces can facilitate, rather than dismantle, racial exploitation.

4. The Sunken Place as the Accumulation of Racial Microaggressions

The cumulative impact of racial microaggressions is symbolized through the concept of the Sunken Place, introduced during Missy Armitage's hypnosis of Chris in Scene 10 (00:35:19) and visually realized in Scene 11 (00:35:24). The Sunken Place represents silencing, loss of agency, and enforced passivity.

Scene 10



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:35:19)

Scene 11



Get Out (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. (00:35:24)

Rather than depicting racism as a single overt act, *Get Out* presents racial oppression as an accumulative psychological process. Chris remains conscious but powerless, reflecting the internalized effects of repeated microinsults and microinvalidations.

Taken together, these scenes demonstrate that *Get Out* portrays racial microaggressions as a systemic and cumulative phenomenon. The film reveals how racism persists not through explicit hostility alone, but through normalized social practices that render racial domination invisible within contemporary multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the representation of racial microaggressions in *Get Out* (2017) through the theoretical framework of Derald Wing Sue's racial microaggression theory. The findings demonstrate that racism in the film is predominantly articulated through subtle, everyday interactions rather than through overt or explicit acts of

discrimination. Chris Washington's experiences reveal how racial oppression is embedded in microinsults and microinvalidations conveyed through polite language, liberal discourse, and seemingly progressive social practices. These interactions function not as isolated incidents but as a normalized pattern that places the racialized subject in a position of constant discomfort and marginalization.

Furthermore, the study reveals that racial microaggressions in *Get Out* operate within liberal and multicultural spaces that claim tolerance while simultaneously reproducing unequal power relations. Chris's interactions with the Armitage family and their social environment position him as an object of fascination, admiration, and control rather than as an equal participant. Through color-blind ideology and positive stereotyping, Black racial experiences are subtly invalidated, allowing racial domination to persist under the guise of inclusivity.

The cumulative impact of these microaggressions is symbolically represented through the concept of the Sunken Place, which illustrates the psychological silencing, loss of agency, and internalization of racial oppression. This metaphor underscores how repeated microinvalidations gradually erode autonomy and subjectivity, transforming racism into an invisible yet deeply entrenched condition. Overall, this study concludes that *Get Out* (2017) functions as a critical cultural text that exposes racial microaggressions as a systemic and ongoing form of contemporary racism, emphasizing that racial discrimination endures not only through overt hostility but also through everyday interactions that appear polite, liberal, and well-intentioned.

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