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Supremacy versus Solidarity:

Holding White Womanhood Accountable in *Candyman* and *Get Out*

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B.A., Muhlenberg College, 2014

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Master of Arts
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Abstract

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By Sara Grasberg

Drawing on previous horror scholarship centered upon issues of privilege, power, and punishment inherent in monster/victim dynamics as well as feminist theoretical frameworks, this thesis traces the evolution of representations between *Candyman* (1992) and *Get Out* (2017) considering how White womanhood as portrayed in both films is culpable and complicit in exploiting and oppressing Black men and Black women, and thus in upholding White supremacy. Each chapter within this thesis analyzes the films' White female characters in their interactions with Black men, Black women, and White men, respectively, thereby demonstrating how and why the representations of White womanhood change from *Candyman* to *Get Out*. By holding accountable these representations of White women—and by situating such readings of White womanhood also within the films' sociopolitical and historical contexts—both the horror genre and likewise scholarship on the horror genre may ultimately emerge as potent tools for reflection and advocacy, in terms of intersectional feminism and accountability within society.

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Table of Contents:

<u>Introduction: From Racist Horror to the Horror of Racism</u>

Throughout American horror cinema and likewise throughout scholarship on the genre,

racial and gender differences have frequently been represented and/or examined as abject and

monstrous. As Robin R. Means Coleman explains, "the [horror] genre "speaks" difference, that

is, marking Black people and culture as Other—apart from dominant (White) populations and

cultures in the US" (2). Despite this, or perhaps because of this, it becomes highly questionable

whether racial issues have ever been vented through American horror cinema—especially in

terms of how they intersect or overlap with issues of gender. At least, racial issues have not been

vented through horror cinema in the allegorical manner which other American cultural

preoccupations and social apprehensions have been.[1] The only notable exception might be

1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, which is often cited as such by Jordan Peele, the director of

2017's horror hit about race relations in modern-day America, *Get Out*. *Night of the Living

Dead*'s tale of "disorder, fear, and survival evokes similar themes to those at the forefront of

cultural consciousness during the Civil Rights movement;" the abundant political imagery

resulting from director George A. Romero's filmmaking choices (including especially his casting

of Black actor Duane Jones for the lead role) have indeed made it one of the most effective

horror films to ever deal with race—whether or not Romero intended that at the time (Ericson).

Jordan Peele, in an interview with NPR's *Fresh Air* shortly after the release of his feature

debut, further explains this relative absence of race allegories in horror as follows:

> [E]very true horror, human horror, American horror has a horror movie that deals with it
>
> and allows us to face that fear, except race in a modern sense, hadn't been touched. It

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[1] Some examples of other cultural preoccupations, briefly, include: nuclear fallout during the Cold War—
which manifested in and was vented through science-fiction movies featuring giant irradiated monsters
during the 1950s; and terrorism after 9/11—which manifested in and was vented through the torture porn
and found footage subgenres during the first decade of the 2000s.

really hadn't been touched in my opinion since *Night of the Living Dead* 50 years ago.

Maybe with the film *Candyman*. That to me, I just saw a void there. So [*Get Out*] really

started with this notion of like, this has to be possible, let's figure it out.

The void that Peele refers to here becomes even more noticeable given how 1992's *Candyman*—

the film Peele mentions as "maybe" touching on issues of race—has typically been read and

received by horror film scholars. One central debate that in fact does emerge throughout most if

not all existing literature on *Candyman* has been about whether the film is attempting to

highlight and critique issues of racism and economic disenfranchisement, or whether it merely

reinforces them. Robin R. Means Coleman for instance reads *Candyman* as racist, or at least

deeply problematic, claiming that "*Candyman* continues to exploit fears of the inner-city, making

a fearsome housing project home to gang violence, filth, and a most violent monster." (188).

Likewise, Judith Halberstam's reading contends that the film offers only surface-level

acknowledgement of social problems, none of which can truly mask the film's pervasive racism

(5). This debate even emerges to a certain degree in the film's DVD commentary. *Candyman*'s

lead actress Virginia Madsen claims that the film features "a lot of statements…about racism."

However, the film's producer, Alan Poul, expresses his own personal doubt that the film is

intended to be any "pithy statement" about America's history of racism.

Given these readings, most if not all scholarly work on *Candyman* attempts to also

address another related but even broader question: whether horror films more generally tend to

prove effective at highlighting and critiquing racism or, alternatively, if they are complicit in

reinforcing racism. Despite her reading of *Candyman* as racist, Means Coleman does position

horror throughout her scholarship as a meaningful platform for understanding or at least

examining race; her work is concerned with "what horror films can reveal, through

representations, [for] understandings of Blacks and Black cultural tropes, or Blackness, as well as what kinds of sociopolitical discourses these films contribute, and what meanings they might provoke" (2). Meanwhile, Briefel and Ngai in probing this very question, claim that "while [*Candyman,* specifically,] purports to subvert binary oppositions, its agenda appears less to undermine the difference between white middle-class mythologies and those of the economically disempowered than to force the former onto the latter" (302). This ultimately leads them to conclude that the horror genre may actually be "an inadequate vehicle for addressing the [kinds of racial] issues *Candyman* wants to address" (302).

Yet, 25 years later, *Get Out* debuted to record-shattering box office returns and critical acclaim. It earned over $176 million dollars domestically—making it the highest grossing debut feature from a Black male director (*Box Office Mojo*). It then went on to garner numerous prestigious nominations and wins during the 2018 awards season, including Best Original Screenplay at the 90th Academy Awards—making Peele the first Black man to ever win in this category. The film holds a 99% Certified Fresh rating on the film review aggregate site *Rotten Tomatoes*. Many film critics even chose to emphasize the ways in which the film "stares down some of the most damning truths about prejudice and intersectionality…[and] call[s] out white people for two-faced racism, taking particular exception to "the good ones" who are woke by day and sinister by night," as David Ehrlich wrote in his review for *Indiewire*. Thus, the film also spawned countless think-pieces across numerous other online publications in the weeks and months following its theatrical release, unpacking the film's potent and complex social commentary about race and racism in contemporary America. One could argue that *Candyman* fails to adequately comment upon the complex racial issues it superficially represents, cinematically reinforcing various negative racial stereotypes as a result, while *Get Out* succeeds

in offering timely and incisive critiques of some of those same stereotypes. Given the overall reception of Peele's film, it would seem to be more effective than *Candyman* at demonstrating those stereotypes' persistence in American culture (or, more precisely, within America's dominant, White, capitalist, patriarchal systems and institutions). Likewise, *Get Out* would seem to be more effective at exposing how those stereotypes are perpetuated specifically by the White, upper-middle class—even, or perhaps *especially*, by those who outwardly purport to be liberal and anti-racist, or who are indeed, as Ehrlich puts it, "woke by day and sinister by night."

That said, it is not especially useful to establish an overly simplistic compare-and-contrast discourse surrounding *Candyman* and *Get Out*—particularly in terms of how adequate, or not, their respective portrayals of racial myths and racial issues appear to be. Rather, the focus of this project is the shift in representations of Whiteness, but even more specifically, White womanhood. This project's primary concern is to examine and interrogate the White woman's function within the exploitation and oppression of Black men and Black women in these two films. I draw from, and intervene in, previous horror scholarship which specifically considers the issues of privilege, power, and punishment—especially, but not exclusively, in terms of how these issues typically undergird or come to define exchanges of looks between monsters and victims in horror cinema. I supplement this framework with an application of feminist theory—particularly that which centers upon race, Whiteness, solidarity, and intersectionality. I also situate the films within their respective sociopolitical and historical contexts and choose to do so for the following reasons. Firstly, in many instances, political events help spur or shape feminist theoretical frameworks. Thus, I cannot simply read the films in terms of those same frameworks, without a discussion of the sociopolitical contexts in and from which those theories emerge. Secondly, *Get Out* was inspired by the lack of horror films dealing with race; the potential

allegorical function of this film and, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree, *Candyman* cannot be ignored. Rather, both horror films can and indeed should be read as emerging from, responding to, or reflecting upon their respective sociopolitical contexts. Or, at least, I argue both films and my readings of them are better understood when placed in conversation with those contexts. I shall thereby demonstrate how, and argue as to *why*, the representation of White womanhood— that is, White womanhood's role within these two films' complex dynamics of racialized and gendered violence, victimization, and villainy—changes from *Candyman* to *Get Out*.

Race and Gender in *Candyman* and *Get Out*:

     Candyman, notably directed by a White male filmmaker named Bernard Rose, follows Helen (Virginia Madsen), a White female graduate student at the University of Illinois-Chicago, as she works toward a thesis project on urban legends. Helen and her friend and fellow graduate student Bernadette (Kasi Lemmons), a young African-American woman, become particularly interested in the tale of Candyman, whose legend according to the film first surfaced around 1890. A century later, the Candyman story becomes one of mythic proportions, especially among Blacks, giving rise to a popular urban legend: looking into a mirror while saying 'Candyman' 5 times supposedly summons the vengeful Candyman monster, who would then rip you with his hook of a hand from groin to gullet (Means Coleman 188). But well before the emergence of this urban legend, there was Candyman's folkloric, post-bellum origin story, in which his real name was Daniel Robitaille. He was the son of a former slave who became an accomplished artist and was commissioned to paint a portrait of a wealthy landowner's daughter. They fell in love, and she becomes pregnant. Outraged, the father organized a mob to exact revenge. With a rusty blade, they sawed off Daniel's right hand (which he had used for painting and, therefore, to make his living), and replaced it with a hook. They then stripped him naked, smearing him with honey

from a nearby honeycomb, and he was subsequently stung to death by hundreds of bees. Lastly, he was burned, his ashes scattered over what becomes the Cabrini-Green housing project, which is where he—at least, his mythic power and violent potential—primarily remain for the next hundred years, haunting and terrorizing its Black residents via his aforementioned urban legend.

Candyman's terrorization of Cabrini-Green's African-American residents is contrasted with Candyman's terrorization of Helen within her predominantly White-inhabited apartment complex, Lincoln Village. Also important to my analyses then is Helen's behavior toward and relationship to Cabrini-Green as a privileged White woman. She acts, at times, as a White savior, but with potentially exploitative professional goals which drive her to traverse the housing project in the first place. Helen's relationship to Candyman himself must also be considered, especially since she eventually learns she is the descendant of Candyman's former love. His preying upon her throughout the film seems ultimately to result directly from the interracial romance and miscegenation fears of his origin story. As Means Coleman puts it, "Candyman is not looking for real revenge, he is looking for love" (189). And, put another way by Steven Jay Schneider, in his essay "Mixed Blood Couples: Monsters and Miscegenation in U.S. Horror Cinema:" "considering how much Candyman suffered as a result of sleeping with a white woman in the first place, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that . . . Candyman hunts his prey not out of hatred or revenge, but out of a desire to (re-)unite" (85).

Candyman's miscegenation plot described here has often been considered with reference to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). But, it is *Get Out*'s narrative that is even more similar to that film's storyline, as Black protagonist Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) goes to meet his White girlfriend Rose's (Allison Williams) family for the first time. When he arrives at the Armitage home, however, he encounters Georgina (Betty Gabriel) and Walter (Marcus Henderson), the

Armitages' Black housekeeper and groundskeeper. As Black workers for a White family, they immediately evoke antiquated, anachronistic racial hierarchies. However, these evocations are soon overshadowed by their mysterious and odd behavior that is both observed by and, at times, directed toward Chris. Chris also forcibly undergoes hypnosis from Rose's mother Missy (Catherine Keener). And, he experiences objectification and microaggressions from the Armitages' White party guests. Through the accumulation of these observations and experiences, Chris begins to realize rather quickly, though arguably not quickly enough, that there is something more sinister occurring than mere interracial potential in-law awkwardness. Thus, "while [*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*] was about older whites overcoming their prejudices," as *Politico*'s Zack Stanton writes, "*Get Out* is, in large part, about the unbudgeable prejudices of white liberals who fancy themselves "post-racial" yet profit from inequity." The phrase "unbudgeable prejudices" can be used to describe some of the same persistent, perpetual racial stereotypes I referred to earlier, conveyed in this particular film through those aforementioned objectifying microaggressions. However, I do not wholly agree with the binary Stanton establishes between *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out*. This is because, as it can also be argued, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* actually "concerns a crisis in white patriarchy, a situation that questions the validity and the power of one aging member of the white elite" (Vera and Gordon 85-86). This reading is, in fact, quite a bit more similar to my own preliminary readings of *Get Out*. That is, one central premise that my reading both relies but also expands upon is the notion that there is a crisis in White patriarchy also on display in *Get Out*. This crisis ultimately drives Rose's family—and thus Rose herself—to exploit Black individuals, including but not limited to Chris, for the purposes of reclaiming and maintaining the social power they perceive as being threatened by diversity and by the prospect of true racial equality.

Such an argument does not negate readings of *Get Out* as a manifestation of Black male fears of exploitation and violence, especially when traversing White neighborhoods, as Peele himself has claimed; in his NPR *All Things Considered* interview, Peele states that *Get Out* is ultimately "about the African-American experience. It's about the feelings of being an outsider, of being the other that we confront." However, I claim that, again, *Get Out* simultaneously presents viewers with White paranoia and fears that arguably lead to such Otherness and, in turn, violent exploitation. To elaborate on this further, White fears in *Get Out* are not solely presented as being of African-Americans in and of themselves as the racial other; rather, the film also presents upper-middle-class White people's fears of an assumed imminent displacement from positions of power in society. These fears are symbolized via their aging White bodies in physical decline, with every microaggression perpetrated and directed toward Chris involving racial stereotypes about the Black male body. The dominant White fear in *Get Out* is then, arguably, no longer of a bestial, predatory Black male body, particularly as he threatens to take away or corrupt the virginal White woman as in *Candyman*; rather, the main White fear in *Get Out* is of a Black male figure (with perceived superior physical attributes and abilities) replacing the White male in society. The Armitages' horrific, hyperbolic solution to this fear is to offer those superior Black bodies to dying White individuals, first within the Armitage family, then as a paid service to others in their White upper-middle class community. Dean Armitage (Bradley Whitford), assisted by his son Jeremy (Caleb Landry Jones), perform a lobotomy of sorts after Missy has hypnotized, thus psychologically conditioning, the Black victim. The would-be victim is typically brought to the Armitage home by Rose under the same meet-the-parents pretenses which are, in a sense, another form of psychological conditioning. Through these means, the Black person's identity is replaced by that of whichever White person has bid the highest in a

ritualistic "bingo" game, as Dean calls it; but rather, this game of bingo reveals itself to be evocative of a slave auction. The Black body is then colonized and controlled by a White mind.

I have touched upon and will continue to explore issues and representations of both Black and White masculinity; but because I ultimately take as my main area of focus the depictions and functions of White womanhood in both films (especially as it upholds White supremacy), I will also be utilizing and unpacking the concept of White feminism. One central tenet of White feminism that is crucial to acknowledge at this juncture is that White women also benefit from White supremacist patriarchy. That is, White feminism entails an acceptance of, and thus a complicity (at times active and intentional, and in other cases, passive and unintentional—though no less dangerous) in, racial oppression. White feminism is itself a critical term for White women who are feminists striving for the elimination of gender oppression for women—but without considering, let alone combatting, the different forms of oppression faced by non-White women. This is because White women have the privilege of their Whiteness. White privilege allows White women to see gender oppression as the primary, if not the only, existent form of oppression; it likewise allows them to benefit from White supremacy. The White women of *Get Out* benefit from and thus stand idly by—if not actively participate in, as Rose and Missy do— the racism that is exhibited by their husbands in their choice to transfer their consciousnesses to the bodies of Black men. The White women of *Get Out* seek to benefit from their husbands' reclamation of physical—and thus, social—power through violent, exploitative, racist means.

The Armitages' surgical operation in and of itself is patriarchal in nature (having been passed down from one generation of Armitage men to the next, as we learn late in the film). Yet, it still relies heavily on the Armitage women's active participation. Thus, White female characters like Rose and Missy, through their active participation in White supremacist

patriarchy (as manifested in or exemplified by the Armitages' procedure) are constructed as more overtly villainous in *Get Out* than in *Candyman*. There is a noteworthy shift, that is, between Helen's apparent obliviousness in 1992's *Candyman* and Rose's more calculated culpability in 2017's *Get Out.* There is an evolution in how Helen and Rose exhibit, employ, and understand their White privilege, White feminism, and their unique place and participation within systems and institutions of White supremacy. Helen, as I have already touched on and will further demonstrate, is a flawed-White-savior turned monstrous-White-martyr. She purports to use her privileged racial, socio-economic, and educational standing to help the Black residents of Cabrini-Green overcome their fear of the mythical Candyman figure. And, she also uses that same privilege to advance her own standing within her male-dominated academic peer group at the potential expense or exploitation of those residents, and of her friend Bernadette.

With that in mind, I must also address questions of where privilege resides in horror cinema traditionally in terms of victim/monster dynamics. But, consideration must also be given to whether in *Candyman* and *Get Out,* being the monster is in fact a privileged position—one that carries with it the possibility of an erasure of racism and/or race itself. And, in asking this question, I must also analyze how Helen and Rose each oscillate between victimhood and villainy/monstrousness by exploiting their own White femininity and privilege. Rose in particular is presented as having a keen awareness of her privilege as a White woman—and how to use it to benefit her in different scenarios. She, at times, plays not just the part of the victim, but also the part of a White ally, and exploits her White femininity in a romantic sense to lead Chris and others to their demise. Rose's use of romance and sexuality in order to lure Chris into the Armitage home raises questions also of how interracial coupling is treated visually, narratively, and thematically in both films. In *Candyman*, miscegenation is punished, and that

punishment is what creates Candyman's monstrous body, as fearful White men punish him brutally for impregnating a White woman. In *Get Out*, however, interracial romance is the pretense that allows for Chris' exploitation—it is the method by which the White Armitage family victimizes Black individuals. Thus, I also consider the potential readings warranted by each film that find that miscegenation and interracial coupling are argued against or proven to be unsustainable, especially insofar as they lead to the Black male's exploitation and victimization.

Roadmap to the Following Chapters:

"Chapter 1: On Genre, Gender, Race, and Reality," functions as a literature review and, in that sense, as an addendum to this introduction; this chapter serves to elaborate upon certain claims, and supplement some of the preliminary readings, made throughout this introduction. It does so by establishing with greater depth and specificity the foundational theoretical frameworks that I draw upon and intervene in throughout the subsequent chapters. These subsequent chapters, then, are each largely devoted to exploring the filmic representations of a different racial/gender dynamic featuring White women. Each dynamic is thus framed in terms of the *racial/gender differences* themselves that comprise the dynamic. And, where applicable, the dynamic is also framed in terms of *victim/monster looking relations*. The latter is *how* the racial/gender dynamic's breakdown of power, privilege, punishment, and paralysis is predominantly, though not exclusively, manifested and, moreover, best understood within the horror genre and in these two horror films specifically. Thus, it is this particular thread within existing horror scholarship which has informed how I approach some of my own close textual analyses of the films. Through these close textual analyses, then, I seek to interpret the function of White womanhood within both the gender/race dynamic and the resulting victim/monster dynamic, by applying also feminist and race theory, and likewise by situating those dynamics'

representations within the films' respective sociopolitical contexts. Thus, in order to somewhat mirror this methodological approach, the literature review chapter first considers previous horror film scholarship on race/gender dynamics, followed then by horror film scholarship on looking exchanges that typically inform monster/victim dynamics throughout the genre. Then, the chapter necessarily addresses both feminist and critical race theory, as well as certain broad sociopolitical contexts, and begins to establish the links between theory and those contexts.

Then, "Chapter 2: Miscegenation & Interracial Relations" centers upon dynamics between White women and Black men. Specifically, this section's focus is on Helen with Candyman, and Rose with Chris, as well as, to a lesser extent, Rose with Chris' best friend Rod (Lil Rel Howery) and Chris with Rose's mother, Missy. As I am applying relevant feminist theoretical frameworks to each of these chapters, this chapter especially utilizes those which have a focus on Black masculinity. Next, "Chapter 3: Solidarity & Exclusion" looks at the dynamics between White women and Black women. This chapter mainly examines the interactions between Helen and Bernadette, as well as Helen and Anne-Marie (a young Black woman living with her infant son in Cabrini-Green, played by Vanessa Williams), and Rose and Missy with Georgina. This chapter especially utilizes feminist theories surrounding Black femininity and intersectionality. Both of these chapters will draw heavily, though not solely, from the work of bell hooks. Lastly, the conclusion chapter to this project, entitled "Culpability & Complicity," features analyses of the dynamics between White women and White men in order to adequately conclude the project and reflect upon its implications. The characters of focus in this section are Helen with her husband Trevor (Xander Berkeley), and another professor (a colleague of Trevor's) named Philip Purcell (Michael Culkin), as well as Helen's psychiatrist, and Rose and Missy with Dean and Jeremy. This conclusion thus utilizes and further

explicates theoretical conceptions and constructions of Whiteness, including but not limited to ineffectual White liberal anti-racism and ally-ship, both briefly mentioned here already. Again, this concluding chapter thus reflects upon the greater implications of this project where White women's accountability, and the potential role of horror cinema therein, are concerned.

Lastly, to elaborate briefly on the notion that horror may play a key role in holding White womanhood accountable: examining these films through the lenses of both horror film scholarship as well as existing race and gender theories concerning Whiteness and intersectionality warrants—indeed, necessitates—situating my analyses of White womanhood within the larger sociopolitical/historical contexts in which the films are made, released, and received. The representations of White women in each film, per my close textual analyses, are informed by or can be best understood in lieu of the films' differing cultural contexts concerning race and gender in America. These sociopolitical contexts, again, shape both the films' representations (and/or my readings of them), as well as the very feminist theoretical lenses through which I read those representations. Therefore, this project ultimately establishes how and why horror cinema, as well as ensuing scholarship on horror cinema, can indeed serve as a potent vehicle. This is especially so for horror films and horror film scholarship that take feminist and critical race theory into account, and which do respond to or manifest sociopolitical contexts. Horror can be a tool, in other words, for understanding racial/gender dynamics within American society at large, and White womanhood's role therein, and to what extent and in what ways this understanding can powerfully inform, or transform into, advocacy and, again, accountability.

<u>Chapter 1: On Genre, Gender, Race, and Reality—Theoretical Frameworks</u>

Horror Scholarship—White Womanhood and Black Masculinity:

Many of this project's central questions addressed in the introduction have been taken up before both with regard to these texts specifically, as well as to other horror films. Both *Candyman* and *Get Out* for instance have been most commonly considered through the aforementioned lenses of Black masculinity and miscegenation. And while Means Coleman's aforementioned readings of Helen as erasing Candyman and his history of racial violence are helpful in beginning to unravel the role of White womanhood in *Candyman*'s ending, her readings do not adequately encompass Helen's representation throughout the film leading up to that ending. This more holistic analysis of Helen is not only necessary to, but also warranted by, the Whiteness studies approach I am taking; this approach will in turn yield even more nuanced readings that account for White womanhood's place within the systemic sources and origins of Black masculinity's oppression and exploitation in the film—beyond notions of miscegenation.

That said, many think-pieces on *Get Out* do in fact claim that Peele actually does construct White womanhood as the most dangerous villain in *Get Out.* Aisha Harris points out in her *Slate* think-piece that "Peele doesn't explicitly state that white womanhood is the monster in *Get Out*, but [that] he does hint that in crafting the character of Rose he was indeed relying on our assumptions about how racial dynamics play out in Hollywood and real life;" she then includes the following quote from Peele himself: "I knew in my heart that anybody who's seeing a movie in a wide-release in America, would have to think, There's no way Universal Studios would allow the one good white person in this film to also be evil!" In other words, *Get Out* subverts audience expectations of White womanhood's function in film and in that sense relies also upon our preconceived notions of how White womanhood functions in society. Ultimately,

both facts further support the need for close textual analyses that center upon how White

womanhood and White feminism (and their links to White supremacy) are represented and how

they function in these two horror films. Further, no scholar to date has applied feminist

theoretical frameworks dealing with race (and Whiteness specifically) to these films. Even the

current literature on *Candyman* that does address and account for Helen's overall

characterization throughout the film often does so still with a main focus on miscegenation. Or,

such literature does not frame Helen's character within (nor utilize the terminology and ontology

of) White feminism and feminist studies of Whiteness.

In contrast to the relative lack of horror scholarship on Whiteness though, Rhona J.

Berenstein's piece on the 1930s subgenre of "jungle films," such as *Ingagi* (1930) *King Kong*

(1933), does shed some light on significant historical phenomena, cinematic themes, and

racial/gender theories that are relevant and useful to this project in this regard. Berenstein claims

these films "not only depict blacks as monstrous, but do so with the aid of an interstitial white

heroine" (315). Berenstein goes on to explain that White womanhood in the subgenre "is the

vehicle through which threats of inter-racial union are enacted and displaced. The danger and

lure of miscegenation are invoked by her sexualized encounters with dark males. Often missing

from this scenario, however, is that the heroine's response to these advances is sometimes

ambiguous" (319). In terms of *Candyman* and *Get Out,* I define this concept of ambiguity as the

White woman's agency within interracial relationships, paired with a simultaneous complicity in

furthering racist myths about such relationships. Racism against the Black male is, after all, often

enacted by White males in the name of protecting White females. As previously noted, both

Helen and Rose exhibit this ambiguity in different ways and to differing degrees in their

respective interracial romantic/sexual encounters. But Rose, again, navigates this spectrum of agency and complicity much more deftly and with greater intentionality than Helen does.

Lastly, by noting that the White heroine serves a mediative racial function, Berenstein acknowledges a risk (that I too hope to mitigate) of: "performing an important oversight in a significant segment of white feminist writings: the conflation of racism with sexism" (319). As she explains, her intention (which is similar to my own in embarking on this project) "is not to repeat that conflation, but to study the convergence of race and biological sex in one textual form" (319). In this project, *Candyman* and *Get Out* together serve as my textual form for exploring "the ambiguous position of white women within discourses of race and gender" that has traditionally been reinforced in film. And, this ambiguous position within race and gender discourses can best be described as follows: "while [White women] are subject to sexism and occupy an inferior social position vis-à-vis white men, their inferior status is often recuperated via their 'superior' racial membership when compared to blacks" (Berenstein 319).

Horror Scholarship—Sexual Difference and Looking Relations:

In addition to White womanhood's ambiguous position in the jungle film subgenre, as acknowledged by Berenstein in her work, White womanhood in horror cinema has also, indeed most often, been conceived of as occupying a victimized position. And, White womanhood throughout scholarship on the horror genre has also been associated with the given text's monster in ways that are, again, not usually defined explicitly in terms of Whiteness (but which can nevertheless benefit from such definitions, as evidenced by Berenstein's work). In her essay "When the Woman Looks," for instance, Linda Williams "examine[s] the various ways the woman is punished for looking in…horror film…[in order] to reveal not only the process of punishment but a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman, the

sense in which her look at the monster recognizes their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing" (62). Williams goes on to argue that "the power and potency of the monster body in many classic horror films…should not be interpreted as an eruption of the normally repressed animal sexuality of the civilized male…, but as the feared power and potency of a different kind of sexuality (the monster as double for the women)" (63). Berenstein's piece likewise deals with notions of the woman's animal sexuality but argues that, again in the case of jungle films, "although threats of a male/female binary opposition are invoked via the heroine's exchanges with black men and monkeys, those encounters cannot be reduced to sexual difference" (319). She claims that "they are also inflected by racial liminality and…by the figuration of the heroine as a discursive vehicle through which the conventional physical and psychological distances between white/black…and fear/desire are bridged" (319). Berenstein's work, in factoring race into these equations, proves to be an advance in such analyses which otherwise typically focus primarily on binary differences in sexuality, and how sexual Otherness connects the innocent White woman with the monster. That is, such works usually forgo any overt or deliberate considerations of racial difference, thus ignoring how race (and Whiteness in particular) fits into or informs those "patriarchal structures of seeing" (62).

This may be, in part, because Whiteness, across multiple disciplines and discourses, has often been taken as a default rather than a racial construction unto itself. As explained by Richard Dyer in the introduction chapter of his book *White*, "as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm" (1). Dyer further explains the importance of studying images of White people in the following terms:

We are often told that we are living now in a world of multiple identities, of hybridity…The old illusory unified identities of class, gender, race, sexuality are breaking up…Yet we have not yet reached a situation in which white people and white cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant…We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to—but we aren't there yet and we won't get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule. This is why studying whiteness matters. (3-4)

While these particular insights do not include Dyer's discussions of the horror genre[2], they are crucial to this project rather for their theorizations of Whiteness and are therefore necessary to establish even at this early juncture. Viewing these films through intersectional lenses, then—lenses that highlight in particular the functions of Whiteness as a racial construct unto itself—will allow this project to deviate productively away from Whiteness as a norm that inherently connotes goodness. These lenses will thus allow for considerations of Whiteness as potentially villainous, and thereby will prove intersections of race, gender, and class to be useful in unpacking and understanding more aspects of these two films than just their respective narrative, visual, and thematic treatments of miscegenation. Specifically, intersectionality offers an underutilized theoretical foundation for considering White womanhood in horror as not merely exhibiting an affinity with the monster based on mutual sexual difference from patriarchal norms of masculinity and male sexuality (whether literally or symbolically). Rather, the notion of White feminism allows us to read White women as monsters themselves. This opens up many of this project's central questions touched upon in the introduction, regarding

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[2] Dyer does discuss horror films in the conclusion chapter of *White*, as will be addressed later in this chapter in the context of how Whiteness is reproduced biologically as well as ideologically.

[White] privilege within victim/monster dynamics as they play out in the horror genre—and in these horror films in particular—especially where ideas about patriarchal structures of looking/seeing are concerned, and where race fits into those structures, as well.

Patriarchal structures of looking, specifically as they inform horror cinema, have been addressed also by noted horror scholar Carol J. Clover in her piece "The Eye of Horror," in which Clover establishes that there is an assaultive gaze which is to be read as masculine and a reactive gaze that is figured as feminine. The assaultive (male) gaze, Clover argues, is the gaze of the camera, especially as it is often aligned with the male killer and his use of a phallic weapon. The reactive (female) gaze, meanwhile, is the gaze of the spectator; rather than the camera gaze and spectator gaze being aligned, Clover's work posits that the spectator is often aligned with the objectified female victim (181). Clover's idea that the camera can be read as gendered in this assaultive/reactive binary of looking is noteworthy given that, again, *Candyman* is directed by a White male and *Get Out* by a Black male; the camera thus can no longer be read simply as gendered in the contexts of these horror films' dynamics of looking, but rather, it is also deeply and decidedly *raced* or racialized, as well. I intend to bring this perspective into these ongoing scholarly conversations about privilege and looking in the horror genre, by examining these films through lenses of Whiteness and by viewing Clover's work as a foundation upon which to build new intersectional readings of power and victimization in horror. For example, Clover's statement that "horror movies are obsessively interested in the thought that the simple act of staring can terrify, maim, or kill its object—that a hard look and a hard penis (chain saw, knife, powerdrill) amount to one and the same thing" is both exemplified but also complicated by *Candyman* and *Get Out* (182).

That is, the exchange of looking in and of itself is indeed both terrifying and deadly in both films, particularly as they each feature characters who are hypnotized (and paralyzed by their hypnosis). However, the hypnotic state of paralysis that ensues from exchanges of looks does not necessarily carry any strong phallic symbolism driving the look's potential deadliness. Helen becomes dazed when Candyman interacts with her, but because his hook-hand has often been read in phallic terms especially in scenes of Helen's hypnosis (and due to the miscegenation fears and myths that are connoted in their exchanges). By contrast, it is Chris' even more physically powerless state that leads to such predominantly racial, rather than predominantly gendered, readings. When Rose's mother Missy hypnotizes him, she sends him to what she calls the sunken place; it is the state of subconsciousness in which Chris' identity is seen floating in a vast vacuum, seemingly both within and outside of his own body, unable to control it, viewing his body's surroundings through an ever smaller, square, screen-like frame. Stanton of *Politico* writes about *Get Out*'s "sunken place" in racial terms, stating: "It's a fitting metaphor for the African-American experience in the face of persistent racism" and supporting this claim with a tweet posted by Jordan Peele shortly after his film's release, which read: "The Sunken Place means we're marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us." Thus, acts of looking in these films—which do notably take place between Black *men* and White *women*— becomes powerfully tied up with racialized forms of looking, and the privileges or lack thereof within that dynamic. Dyer supports this idea that even just racialized acts of looking and seeing both connote and often carry death, claiming that "it is said that when sub-Saharan Africans first saw Europeans, they took them for dead people, for living cadavers. If so, it was a deadly perception, for whites may not only embody death, they also bring it…The image of the Ku Klux Klan decked out in white is an[other] image of the bringing of death" (209).

There are also racial and gendered implications to be read into the shift in power dynamics that takes place from *Candyman*'s depictions of hypnosis to *Get Out*'s. Through Candyman's hypnotic hold over Helen, he successfully frames her for violent, gruesome attacks, including the kidnapping of a Black infant boy in Cabrini-Green, the beheading of a dog, and the murder of Bernadette. And, moreover, many of their interactions in which she is in her trance-like state are, again, sexually charged as well. Through visual emphases on Candyman's bodily abjection (namely his phallic hook-hand) and Helen's White beauty during her state of hypnosis (arguably fetishized via hazy filters and close-ups), their interactions connote the "ambivalent driving desire at the heart of racialism: a compulsive libidinal attraction disavowed by an equal insistence on repulsion" (Young 149). In *Get Out*, however, we are aligned with Chris' powerless spectatorship of his own suffering, as viewed by the screen-like square through which he views Missy after she has first hypnotized him. She has complete power over him, and notably, we are left to view her from Chris' point of view: from afar, and through what is essentially a frame inside of the film's frame—a frame that stands in for Chris' eyes and which alienates him from himself, that is psychically *and* physically.

Thus, unlike much of this previous scholarship, I will consider how these exchanges of looks engage with race as well as gender and sexuality, or how those identities interact and intersect within the looks themselves. My work emerges from and will indeed intervene in those previous theories about privileged looking in horror cinema which had mainly been concerned with gender/sexual difference, but not race nor, especially, Whiteness. Along these same lines, both films also feature photography prominently as a tool used by both Helen and Chris, though with different goals and different implications. These implications depend not only on their own respective identities, but also on the racialized nature of whom or what they are choosing to

photograph, and for what purpose. In the following chapters' considerations of eyes as openings

for and windows into characters' powerlessness and paralysis, and of photography as potentially-

powerful extensions of characters' eyes, Clover's piece proves invaluable as a foundational text.

However, Clover's most influential and well-known conceptual contribution is that of

the "Final Girl," a term which she coined in her seminal work on gender in the slasher subgenre,

"Her Body, Himself." Clover's term has become so ubiquitous and universally understood, that

the aforementioned think-piece on *Get Out* written by Aisha Harris for *Slate* even draws on the

idea, claiming that "Chris takes his place within the horror canon as an inverse of the Final Girl.

The Final Girl is almost always a white woman (and usually a brunette) who manages to defeat

the monster and save herself. She is often young and virginal." This statement, particularly

Harris' definition of the Final Girl, is fairly accurate and certainly useful for applying the concept

to *Get Out* as a work within the "horror canon." But, it is not entirely comprehensive, as her use

of the term "virginal" only alludes to the much more complex sexual dynamic at play in typical

slasher films, in which the monster is, again, often conceived of as sexually stunted or is

presented as otherwise divergent from normative male sexuality. The slasher subgenre offers

voyeuristic, indeed scopophilic moments in which the killer, with the audience placed in his

point of view, looks at the promiscuous female characters and their male companions—usually

right before killing one or both of them. At times, however, the slasher is also presented as

physically monstrous, as explored by Williams in terms of women's gaze at the monster

resulting in a recognition of herself. In either case, monstrosity is equated with sexual deviance

and sexual difference. The Final Girl is conflated with the masculine monster by more than just

recognition via an exchange of looks; she is regarded as becoming masculinized symbolically

through her use of a phallic weapon (i.e., a chainsaw, axe, or knife) used to defeat the monster.

Williams' piece and both pieces by Clover are certainly important to understanding the sexual/gendered dynamics that often do imbue, and at times even collapse, the victim/monster binary in many horror films. However, all three essays take psychoanalytic approaches to the genre, which allow Williams and Clover respectively to frame the victim/monster binary as being informed *solely* by sexual/gender differences. As mentioned earlier, these kinds of scholarly works simply do not take into consideration racial differences. This is not only because Whiteness has not often been taken as an object of study, as addressed earlier through Dyer's work. It is also because historically, psychoanalysis has *not* been an approach that adequately factors race into its formulations. *Candyman* and *Get Out* are two horror films in which racial difference *must* be factored. In these films, race interacts and indeed *intersects* with gender in order to mutually inform the films' constructions of victims and monsters—and, likewise, the power dynamics implied, in part, by their exchanges of looks.

This neglect of race within psychoanalytic film theory is taken up by Jane Gaines in her 1986 essay "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory." While this essay is somewhat dated, it nevertheless importantly posits feminist film theory—and psychoanalysis as an approach to reading film therein—as concerning itself solely with the male-female binary and differences in sexuality; such concepts of sexual difference, she argues, are "unequipped to deal with [any] film which is about racial difference and sexuality" (198). Gaines goes on to argue that the "psychoanalytic mode…works to block out considerations which take a different configuration; as an example, she claims that "the Freudian scenario, based on the male/female distinction, is incongruous with the scenario of racial and sexual relations in Afro-American history. Where we use a psychoanalytic model to explain Black family relations, we force an erroneous universalization, and inadvertently reaffirm white middle-class norms" (198).

Gaines' work helpfully affirms that "the male-female division under patriarchy has obscured the function of race" and that the "notion of patriarchy is most obtuse when it disregards the position white women occupy over Black men as well as Black women" (201; 202). The latter point is especially pertinent to the work that follows; I will engage with a definition of patriarchy that encapsulates its capitalist White supremacist nature and that does indeed place White women into positions of power, privilege, and therefore oppression over men and women of color.

In summation, then, most horror scholarship takes a psychoanalytic approach that obscures racial differences in favor of sexual difference. Such an approach ends up assuming Whiteness. And such an assumption, in turn, neglects any critical engagement with Whiteness. The failure of psychoanalysis to interrogate Whiteness therefore eliminates the possibility of new and important conclusions about Whiteness' function—as informing gender and race constructions, interactions, and intersections within the horror genre and beyond. That said, Tiffany Bryant's piece on *Halloween* does somewhat illuminate how White capitalist patriarchy in America reasserts itself as the norm—a norm which oppresses people of color. She claims it does so, in terms of filmic representations at least, by an act of omission, explained in terms of the *Halloween* franchise in particular and extending toward the horror genre at large, as follows:

> The glaring omission of diversity speaks to a wider issue within the horror film industry;
> a problem that embodies the exclusion of racial diversity due to, perhaps, one or more the
> following "rationalizations" (read: excuses): (1) the context of the story's setting in areas
> of the country normally/realistically devoid of cultural diversity, (2) the context of the
> characters' economic, social, or political backgrounds in opposition to detrimental
> stereotypes normally attributed to people of color (less affluence, less education, more
> insular communities, etc.), (3) an inability to know how [to] write/create inclusive

characters of color without seeming forced. But the invisibility of nonwhite bodies inadvertently reinforces the importance of the visibility of whiteness as the norm--not showing other demographic representations of the American society denies their existence of racial and ethnic difference. And considering the global power of film as a medium that spreads cultural impressions of groups of people, the omission of marginalized identities problematically suggests/reinforces patriarchal discriminations of those identities as inferior.

In this view, race is not just absent from or ignored in feminist/psychoanalytic film theory and its application in horror scholarship. Rather, I return now to the idea raised by Jordan Peele himself; horror films themselves have often evaded racial diversity, or if they did include racial differences in their narratives, they often did not deal with racial issues in any comprehensive or deliberate fashion that would lend itself to comparable theoretical readings of their racial representations. Bryant goes on to unpack certain racial ideologies that can be read into Michael Myers' characterization and physical presentation; "the stark whiteness in both Michaels' masks exaggerates their Caucasian racial identities, which symbolically plays into racial ideological emphasis on the power that has been naturalized within the white male's authority." Despite Bryant's useful application of racial ideologies, particularly those dealing with Whiteness, to her analyses of Michael Myer's "non-normative masculinity," she ultimately still emphasizes that "while Michael is non-normative due to his apathy and irrepressible violent inclination, critics have argued that the filmic nature of the slasher stands for an active patriarchal expression against unrepressed female sexuality." Once again, sexual difference emerges still as a primary factor (alongside a reaction to feminism's emphasis on liberated female sexual agency) in the victim-monster binary established at least by this horror film.

Supplementing Horror Scholarship with Feminist Studies of Whiteness:

In order to make an intervention into this previous horror scholarship that successfully fills in psychoanalysis' absence of racial considerations, I will also be drawing upon feminist and critical race theory, particularly that which centers on Whiteness. In so doing, I will adequately factor race into my discussions of victim/monster constructions and dynamics in *Candyman* and *Get Out*. As I will be mapping feminist theories of Whiteness onto my close textual analyses, I will be offering here a cursory overview only of the most foundational of these theoretical lenses.

First, the work of bell hooks proves essential to grasp more fully the complex connections that exist between these notions of White feminism and intersectionality, and the concept of White womanhood's role in upholding White supremacy. She writes:

> The contemporary feminist movement…started a profound focus on whiteness, white privilege. And it allowed women to see clearly that a politically grounded solidarity across race was utterly threatening to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. …[I]t is easy to see how patriarchal thinking… stoke[s] the fires that aim to burn away all evidence … that women can bond across race to establish forms of solidarity that enable us all to have greater access to lives of optimal well-being. Given the patriarchal white supremacist anti-feminist backlash, it is crucial that we…look at the ways individual unenlightened white women are linking struggles for female advancement with the maintenance of white supremacy. (40)

This passage, from her 2012 book *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* highlights the connections between White feminism and White supremacy. She indicates that intersectionality and inclusivity would lead all women (rather than just White women) to better lives. And, she claims that "individual unenlightened white women" problematically pursue their

aims for gender equality in ways that sustain White supremacy. Again, Helen fits this description in her strides for female advancement at the expense and under the guise of helping Cabrini-Green's Black residents. But Rose is not positioned as unenlightened at all. In fact, she privileges the maintenance of her family's White patriarchal power structure above any kind of feminism. Thus, this work will necessarily grapple not just with how but also why *Get Out* presents us with a White woman who is entirely aware and in control of her role in maintaining White supremacy.

Another useful approach to these ideas is to acknowledge the issues that arose in the second wave of feminism that in fact led to intersectional thinking and "feminist studies of whiteness;" as Emily R.M. Lind explains, second wave feminist discourses implicitly reinforced whiteness by highlighting gender as a singular category of analysis (231). She goes on to articulate that this White Western feminism, with "its over-reliance on sex and gender differences…at the expense of other categories of identity[,] creates a "universal woman" within feminist theory who is assumed to be white and that this practice reinforces the subject position of white middle class women" (Lind 231). In the 1980s, then, Black Feminism emerged as a powerful theoretical challenge to this mainstream brand of feminism, as high-profile theorists (including bell hooks) began contributing to its theorization of race, sex, class, and sexuality as interlocking oppressions; "unlike what became referred to as "white" feminism, [in] Black Feminism's ontology…hierarchies of oppression were rejected in favor of a holistic model that understood all social identities as embedded in relations of power" (Lind 232). Even Jordan Peele, in his interview for NPR's *All Things Considered*, suggests a nuanced, almost intersectional reading of his own film, stating that "one of the big problems with how we talk about race through is us versus them. They're racist. I'm not. This movie is not about this idea that white people are racist and no one else is or that white people are villains. We all have issues

to deal with in regards to race internally." Peele's claims that the film is not about White people as villains may seem unconvincing. But, any readings of Rose and Missy—especially their death scenes—must be tempered by the fact that Peele is biracial; both his mother and his wife are White women. Nevertheless, I shall demonstrate that nuanced readings of race and racism in *Get Out*—particularly when juxtaposed with readings of race and racism in *Candyman*—are made possible through and benefit from the application of certain theoretical frameworks. Specifically, I will apply theoretical frameworks that posit White feminism and White supremacy as interrelated oppressive forces which can, and I still argue should, be read as villainous in nature.

Sociopolitical/Historical Contexts and Other Theories of Whiteness:

Again, applying feminist studies of Whiteness to my close textual analyses of these films helps supplement existing horror film scholarship which neglects any deliberate considerations of race. But, as mentioned previously, this thesis will also attend to each film's respective sociopolitical contexts which manifest themselves in the films' differing representations of White womanhood and also impact the theoretical frameworks I am using to read those representations. The various shifts I have outlined so far between *Candyman* and *Get Out* in terms of the nature of Black exploitation and of White women's role therein especially indicate a shift in how American society thinks and talks about—and indeed enacts, both overtly and covertly—racism and Whiteness: especially given the allegedly post-racial era ushered in by Barack Obama's presidency and ushered out, violently, by Donald Trump's candidacy and election win. Both serve as the backdrop for *Get Out*. Regarding White womanhood specifically, this project will contextualize each film in terms of how aware the contemporary feminist movement is of exclusionary White feminism (versus inclusive intersectional feminism). And,

likewise, this project considers how open the cultural discourse has become concerning White women's role in upholding White supremacy as a result of these and other political upheavals.

Given the correlations that exist between sociopolitical contexts/historical events and racial/gender discourses, the remainder of this literature review will present these contexts and events in tandem with those discourses. More specifically, I will be expounding upon other theoretical conceptions of Whiteness and White supremacy in conversation with, or at least within the same discussion as, sociopolitical factors. First, it must be noted here that the aforementioned term "intersectional feminism" was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading thinker on race theory. Intersectional feminism considers how overlapping identities such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, ability, and sexual orientation, are likely to impact the specific ways in which different women will experience discrimination and oppression. Again, a White woman may be disadvantaged because of her gender, but still has the White privilege her race affords her. A Black woman on the other hand is disadvantaged by both her gender and her race. Despite the emergence of this term in 1989 within a seminal paper Crenshaw wrote on the topic, *Candyman* emerged rather in the cinematic context of the New Black Cinema of the early 1990s, when issues surrounding Black masculinity were made more visible by young Black filmmakers behind the camera, and more diverse casts acting out these narratives on screen. *Candyman* also followed certain 1980s slasher film traditions. It was released also in the wake of the Los Angeles riots earlier that year (in response to the Rodney King incident and lack of a conviction for the police officers involved). This was not lost on star Virginia Madsen; in the DVD commentary for *Candyman*, she states:

> The Rodney King tape was played on the nightly news and nothing was done about it and everybody was outraged. There was a trial, and the verdict was not guilty, and the city

erupted into flames…After things began to settle down a little bit after several weeks…I

started to think about the film again and wonder if it was going to be released or what the

reaction was and I think that's why I took particular delight in people being shocked by

it. I was…fresh from a really furious debate in my city so I kind of liked the timing of it

all.

Thus, even though intersectional feminism has been part of feminist discourse since 1989, it

reemerged with renewed mainstream attention and increased consideration in the wake of

Donald Trump's election win in November of 2016, his inauguration in January of 2017, and the

Women's March in Washington D.C. on January 21st, 2017 protesting Donald Trump's election.

The March was criticized for initially not including any women of color as organizers (Bates).

And, "Tension over diversity questions plagued the march in the weeks before the event [also

because of] the event's original name, the Million Women March, which echoed, without

attribution, an important 1997 march by African American women in Philadelphia"

(Ramanathan). But, even after the name changed and the March added three young women of

color to positions of leadership, some women of color sat out the March itself, largely arguing

that they had done the work of showing up to the polls for Clinton, while 53% of White women

voted for Trump; "The fact that the feminist movement was so white for so long…is the reason

so many women of color steered clear of it" (Bates). Then, after the violent events of the "Unite

the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA in August of 2017—which saw White supremacists,

White nationalists, and Neo-Nazis marching with confederate flags and flags bearing

swastikas—even popular publications for women such as *Allure* and *Glamour*, along with more

news-oriented sites like *The Atlan*tic and *Huffington Post*, published articles interrogating White

women's complicity in upholding White supremacy. Many of these articles urged for White

women to confront their role in White supremacist systems and structures. They likewise urged

against only disavowing overt racism (like that which was displayed at the rally) without also

thinking critically about one's own covert racism and, further, taking action to dismantle the

larger systems of White supremacy from which White women have historically benefitted.

In order to fully understand *Candyman* and *Get Out* as situated in and, in many ways,

emerging from these sociopolitical historical contexts, one must first consider the notion, as

stated by George Lipsitz, that "Even though there has always been racism in American history, it

has not always been the same racism. Political and cultural struggles over power shape the

contours and dimensions of racism in any era" (371). This speaks to and supports my goal of

reading these two films' representations of racism—but specifically White womanhood's role in

upholding White supremacy—by situating them within those political and cultural struggles over

power; these struggles over power shape racism and therefore influence White feminism in

society and inform cinematic representations of such issues. Secondly, and on a related note, one

must also consider the complicated and correlated histories of feminism and White capitalist

patriarchy and supremacy. That is, one must also understand America's seemingly endless cycle

of: (1) social progress in reaction to oppression; (2) fear, in reaction to that social progress,

among those in power; and (3) attempted [re-]oppression in reaction to the fear of losing power

as a result of the initial social progress. For instance, beginning with the feminist movements of

the late 1960's, as Bryant states, "the privileged white male was (more) [publicly] demonized as

a cultural oppressor; and by questioning his right to power, identity politics…threatened that

patriarchal capitalistic authority…Incited through frustration, anti-feminist and anti-integration

responses increased through which white men identified themselves as the true victims." Further,

as the feminist movement of the 1980s gained traction in the form of [White] women entering

the workforce, such a shift in gender roles **"raised the plight of the American white male whose agency was perpetually threatened as the benefactor of patriarchal factors for too long, and forced into discretionary silence"** (Bryant).

So, racial fears of miscegenation (and so, racism in the name of White women) create Candyman-as-mythic-monster. But it is arguable that the White male fear that supplants those concerns by the end of the film are of Helen's agency and authority—first as a White woman threatening their livelihood at the university, and then as a threat to their actual lives once Helen does become the violent, vengeful, mythic monster in Candyman's stead. Meanwhile, in Peele's conceptualization of White male fears, there is yet another shift; the fear is no longer of being replaced by White women (nor even, having those White women be taken away by supposedly sexually-bestial Black men) but, again, of being replaced by Black men, or else being inferior to them. This is a fear in which White women also would have a stake though, or else which White men feel they must fight back against, once again, for the sake of White women. These women are exemplified by the wives in *Get Out* who would, as previously established, arguably continue to benefit from their husbands' prolonged existence within a Black male body.

In other words, then, the interrelated emotions of anger and fear more recently seem to take as their target Black males, rather than White females and [White] feminism. As bell hooks writes, "as white culture has responded to changing gender roles and feminist movement, they have turned to black culture and particularly to black men for articulations of misogyny, sexism, and phallocentrism. In popular culture, representations of black masculinity equate it with brute phallocentrism, woman-hating, a pugilistic "rapist" sexuality, and flagrant disregard for individual rights" (*Black Looks* 102). hooks' main example of this type of representation is Eddie Murphy's 1987 stand-up comedy film *Raw*, which "did not only not address the struggle of black

people to resist racism…[but also] celebrates a pugilistic eroticism" (*Black Looks* 102-103).

Along these same lines, Wesley Morris writes in a piece for the *New York Times* entitled "Last

Taboo: Why Pop Culture Just Can't Deal With Black Male Sexuality," that "the late 1980s and

early 1990s might have been the nuttiest time for black male sexuality…On one hand, [Black

men] were the antagonists of news reports and America's nightmares…On the other hand, hip-

hop, African-American comedy and sports were moving them to the center of the

culture…America loved famous black men and feared the rest of them." Turning to the present

day, then, Morris concludes his piece by claiming that "there is still something missing from our

picture of black male sexuality… regardless of who's looking: romance. We know black men

can grind, but rarely do we see them love—as though we'd have to upend too many stereotypes,

shed too much pathology, making it impossible to get there."

It can be argued that these various conceptions are true for Candyman as monster, but not

so for Daniel Robitaille as man. In addition to the miscegenation fears involved in his origin

myth, he was said to be truly in love with the White woman he impregnated, not to mention well-

educated and talented, his father having become wealthy from an invention thus enabling him to

send Daniel to the best schools. This, in fact, proves what Carol Anderson writes: "the trigger for

white rage, inevitably, is black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people that is

the problem; rather, it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and

with demands for full and equal citizenship" (3). Miscegenation in *Candyman* may be the cause

of White fear; but Daniel's educational/professional accomplishments like those of Chris, who is

himself presented as a talented and successful photographer, suggest that it is indeed Black

achievement which drives White anger. Black achievement, after all, may be seen by Whites as

Black superiority, which is threatening to their own previously unchallenged social superiority.

White males have positioned themselves as the true victims—of feminism and, later, of diversity even more so (and, not of *just* diversity but of "black advancement" specifically); this idea has ramifications for how I will address and analyze White women's own oscillation between victim and monster in these films. C. Richard King and David J. Leonard, in "Racing Hollywood: White Power, Audience Response, and Cinematic Spectacle" from their book *Beyond Hate: White Power and Popular Culture*, analyze audience perceptions (via online blogging) of miscegenation and racial mixing as seen in Hollywood film and other popular media. In so doing, they find that Joel Schumacher's 1993 film *Falling Down* is often praised by White Nationalists as an example of White masculinity fighting back against such diversification. The film stars Michael Douglas as a middle-aged man dealing with divorce and unemployment, traversing Los Angeles wreaking racialized violence along the way to his daughter's birthday party. As a horror film, though, *Get Out* arguably offers its audiences an even more hyperbolic, horrific glimpse into the extreme solution(s) White people could conceive of to deal with that loss of power at the hands of diversity and racial mixing, and the fear and anger resulting from that loss. And yet, interestingly enough, Dyer also writes about *Falling Down* in conjunction with horror films, stating that "[*Falling Down*] may be felt to articulate the idea that whiteness, especially white masculinity, is under threat, decentered, angry" (222).

Indeed, Hollywood film according to King and Leonard's research is perceived as punishing White manhood, while simultaneously pushing miscegenation. However, *Candyman* and *Get Out* arguably punish both White men *and* the act of miscegenation (as mentioned earlier) through their respective endings. In *Candyman*, Helen gets her revenge on Trevor for cheating on her—but only after becoming the Candyman-esque monster who can be summoned via saying her name 5 times in front of one's bathroom mirror. In *Get Out*, Chris attacks and

escapes from Dean and Jeremy Armitage as they are attempting to perform the neurosurgical operation to replace Chris' Black identity with a White one. As for miscegenation being pushed upon viewers in Hollywood films, Dyer's discussion of "the horror at reproduction" (albeit in the context of other horror films, namely the *Alien* franchise) helps support the idea that many horror films do reflect a fear of racial mixing, or a "specifically white, aghast perception of the unstoppable breeding of non-whites" (Dyer 216). Dyer goes on to describe the "deep-seated suspicion that non-whites are better at sex and reproduction than are whites, [which contends] that, indeed, to be truly white and reproductively efficient are mutually incompatible" (216).

This notion of mutual incompatibility is addressed by Frances Cress Welsing's seminal theoretical work on White supremacy, "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation," which

> postulates that the whites desired and still do desire sexual alliances with the "non-whites", both male and female, because it is only through this route that the whites can achieve the illusion of being able to produce color. The extreme rage vented against even the idea of a sexual alliance between the black male and the white female, which has long been a dominant theme in the white supremacy culture, is viewed by the Color Confrontation Theory as resulting from the great fear that the white male has had of the black males capacity to fulfill the greatest longing of the white female - that of conceiving and delivering a product of color. (36)

It is this rage we see vented in Candyman's origin story. But Welsing's work predominantly centers on the ways in which racism and White supremacy are rather the products of a conversion "(at the psychological level) [of] some thing that was desired and envied (skin color) but which was wholly unattainable, into something that is discredited and despised;" she goes on to explain that "whites desiring to have skin color but being unable to achieve this end

on their own, said in effect, consciously or unconsciously, that skin color was disgusting to them and began attributing negative qualities to color and especially to the state of the most skin-color—blackness" (35). However, Welsing does also postulate that "whites are also vulnerable to their sense of numerical inadequacy," explaining that Whites therefore "structured and manipulated their own thought processes and conceptual patterns, as well as those of the entire "non-whites" world majority, [such] that the real numerical minority (the whites) illusionally feels and represents itself as the world's majority" (38).

Therefore, the fear of being "engulfed by the non-white multitudes," as Dyer puts it, proves multilayered in and of itself (216). For "the reproduction of whiteness is not [even solely] limited to gestation and birth," according to Shannon Sullivan; that is, "the perpetuation of whiteness, white privilege, and white supremacy [also] depends on their social, psychological, and political reproduction as much if not more than on the physical reproduction of human beings with stereotypically white features" (114). Therefore, White fears may also include not successfully reproducing White supremacy within and outside of the domestic sphere via racially White children. These fears manifest themselves in more than just cinematic reactions, horror or otherwise. These fears helped Donald Trump ascend to the presidency, especially when combined with voter-suppression laws (aimed at African-Americans and other disenfranchised communities) which had resulted from some of those very same fears in the first place. Many of Trump's supporters saw him as their last chance to "recreate a nation that reminded them of the good ol' days [of the 1950s]…pre-*Brown*, pre-Civil Rights Movement, and pre-Voting Rights Act" (Anderson 170-171). As Anderson states, there was a sense that Whites' influence in society was being reduced, fueled by "the country's growing diversity, Obama's very existence in the White House, and the ever-increasing visibility of African-Americans in colleges and

corporations" (170). Anderson also goes on to claim that Trump, in comparison with Hillary Clinton, "dangled a vision before his constituency where the vast resources of the nation would flow to whites, who in a few years would be a numerical minority, but whose comfortable lifestyle would be supported by a large but virtually rightless body of workers" (171).

One factor omitted by Anderson's analysis of the White rage phenomenon, though, is that around 53% of White women who voted in the 2016 election had voted for Trump. These women prioritized White supremacy even over feminism (which should have, one may argue, led them to vote for Hillary Clinton). The idea that they would benefit more from aligning with White supremacy (as embodied by this particular White male) outweighed any possible allegiance with a candidate of their same gender, sidelined any potential concerns for gender advancement, and persuaded them to give up the opportunity to elect the first woman president. As problematically White feminist (rather than intersectional) as Clinton's campaign may have been, many White women still aligned their racial interests with a misogynist, xenophobic White male rather than positioning their gender interests as the ultimate priority.

Postracialism is an important context to make note of, as well, then, at least when discussing *Get Out*. Postracialism suggests that racism no longer exists as evidenced mainly by Barack Obama's election to the presidency. However, as described by Anderson, Obama's presidency was very much a catalyst for overt racism to (re)emerge, culminating in Trump's presidency. In that way, Dean Armitage's statement of "I would have voted for Obama for a third term" becomes a moot point that does not denounce, deny, nor dismantle the White rage which drove America toward a Trump presidency. This is especially the case seeing as his actions throughout the film speak louder than his words in this one scene, proving covert racism (and a desire to maintain White hegemony within his family and his community) to be the truth.

However, Dean's words about Obama echo another important phenomenon besides covert racism, and that is White guilt. According to Sullivan, "throughout and following Obama's presidential campaign, the American public seemed fascinated and sometimes puzzled by why white people might choose to vote for a black president," citing political cartoons and popular jokes which posit "white guilt as the foundation of black success… [possibly suggesting] white guilt was the main motivator for white Obama supporters in 2008" in the first place (117-118). White guilt, according to Dyer, tends to be a blocking emotion; he notes that "the kind of white people who are going to talk about being white, apart from conscious racists who have always done so, are [likely aware of] … the history of what white people have done to non-white peoples. Accepting ourselves as white and knowing that history, we are likely to feel overwhelmed with guilt at what we have done and are still doing" (11). Guilt, in Dyer's view, prevents us from "examining what exactly [white people] have been, and in particular, how exactly their image has been constructed, its complexities and contradictions" (11). White guilt may be seen to pertain more to Helen in *Candyman*, especially as she behaves in ways that would indeed seem to inhibit any productive self-reflection of her own whiteness and privilege. That White guilt is even less applicable to *Get Out* may be further indicative of dominant race theories in their times. Instead, colorblindness, in which one does not "see" race or at least feels that race does not exist or is not important proves particularly pertinent in *Get Out*. This is especially exemplified by the blind man who ultimately buys Chris' body. He claims not to care about Chris' race. He claims only to want his eyes and talent as a photographer.

Postracialism, White guilt, and colorblindness are all important, interrelated theories to consider especially as they are further linked with other White emotional responses like White fear and rage/anger. And, White feminism may indeed also be reactionary. It is likely a reaction

to intersectionality's inherent demands that other forms of oppression be recognized and that White women therefore give up (or, rather, unselfishly utilize) the benefits afforded them by their participation in White supremacy. Intersectionality would likewise force White women to forgo any fight for gender equality which only benefits White women and thereby hurts women of color in their struggles for gender *and* racial equality. I am interested in how such White feminism is *reacted to* or treated within and by both of these films. That is, as Kinitra Brooks points out in an article for the website *Very Smart Brothas*, White women are arguably not adequately punished on-screen for their role in upholding White supremacy. In reference to *Get Out*, Brooks asks: "why does this film still find it problematic for its own protagonist to enact thorough, graphic revenge, and even righteous revenge on white womanhood for its steady betrayal?" Again, Peele's own identity as someone with a White mother and a White wife may have played a role in this problematizing of graphic revenge on White womanhood. And yet, it is still significant that in *Get Out,* Rose is represented as being completely aware of her actions and abilities as a desired White woman, seeming especially cognizant that "in American culture, sexual access to white women remains a sign of success and masculinity, and [that] for black men in particular, these relationships are often perceived as an emblem of their escape from (or disloyalty to) their race" (Catanese 78). With that, another seminal theory concerning interracial coupling must be at least footnoted here; Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin White Masks*, posits that Black men do indeed romantically involve themselves with White women as a way of feeling or indeed becoming White, due to the societal position of White women above Black men. And according to Harris' piece in *Slate*, "even Chris plays into the white-woman–as–consummate-object-of-desire narrative, when he attributes his uncomfortable interactions with the Armitages' black housekeepers, Walter and Georgina, to his theory that Walter has a crush on Rose and

Georgina might be upset to see a black guy with a white woman." Harris goes on to claim that "with Rose's mother Missy [being] able to control his mind through hypnosis…white women, who in *Get Out* initially seem to be less outwardly racist than the men, are the movie's greatest threat." This is likely directly because of, rather than despite, their ability to (whether intentionally or unintentionally) seem less outwardly racist. The following chapters will, fundamentally, continue to unpack and demonstrate this notion.

<u>Chapter 2: Miscegenation & Interracial Relations—White Women/Black Men</u>

The (Changing) Horror of Miscegenation:

I have chosen to first address and analyze the dynamics between White women and Black men in *Candyman* and *Get Out* for a number of reasons. Such reasons include, but are not limited to, the importance of "the assumption that white women are incapable of defending themselves from the sexual advances of black men;" or, in other words, that "race-mixing within the Hollywood imagination…[centers upon] the white female body as requiring protection from the naturally violent, hypersexual, and criminally minded black male" (King and Leonard 72-73). However, even more paramount than these concepts, is the simple fact of miscegenation's prevalence and persistence throughout existing writings on both films, not to mention its prominence within the films themselves. That said, I acknowledge the above concepts—of White womanhood being deemed vulnerable and in need of protection from Black men by White men—here now as well, because such ideas are at the very heart of these miscegenation fears and their ensuing myths. Indeed, they are as much (if not more) responsible for driving forth those fears and myths, as those notions discussed in my introduction—that mixed-race reproduction is dangerous to the prolonging of White dominance. The other reason I am bringing these concepts to the fore of this chapter, is because such ideas of White womanhood are important to understanding how and why White women have historically benefitted from White supremacy and racism—which is, again, a central tenet of this project.

That said, this chapter will also interrogate, and thus hold accountable, White women for their ambiguous position within and toward miscegenation. As a reminder, I am using the term *ambiguous* to encapsulate the White woman's sense of agency within mixed-race romantic relationships, paired with her complicity (at times intentional and active, and at other times unintentional and passive) in upholding and furthering racist myths, particularly those

surrounding miscegenation. In terms of accountability though, this chapter will also necessarily go beyond the films' central interracial couples (Candyman/Helen, Chris/Rose) to include analyses of other Black-male/White-female interactions, as well; also examining Missy, for instance, and her hypnotic manipulation of Chris, will result in a more holistic and nuanced account of White womanhood's overall function within Black male exploitation and oppression.

That said, we must analyze miscegenation first, and acknowledge that it is itself represented, again, differently in each film. Firstly, unlike Chris in *Get Out,* Candyman is immediately presented as an abject and physically monstrous figure. But, the reason he is made so "at the hands of the White lynch mob is for the racially and sexually motivated crime of miscegenation" (Kydd 72). And, his ensuing bodily monstrosity plays a significant role in how his relationship with Helen is narratively constructed and visually presented. That is, it would seem easy enough to agree with Means Coleman's claims that "Candyman is to be viewed as a tragic, wounded monster…made by folks far more terrible than he is [until] the film strays from the monster-with-a-heart-of-gold theme by playing on fears of the big Black boogeyman coming in and taking away a White woman" (189). And yet, Steven Jay Schneider considers whether the dynamic between Candyman and Helen isn't so much Black-predator/White-prey at all, but that "more than just black male desire for white women is at stake here; the inverse also seems to be in place," alluding once more to Helen's ambiguity and dual sense of repulsion and desire for Candyman, which will be unpacked further momentarily (73). After all, Candyman is first "obliged," as he puts it in the film, to come to Helen as a result of her expressions of disbelief; but later, she intentionally calls for Candyman.

Meanwhile, the horror induced by miscegenation in *Get Out* is presented not as a fear *of* Chris. Rather, it is Chris' fear—of what myths and misconceptions about miscegenation might

be [up]held by Rose's family. This fear is conveyed first by a simple question he asks Rose early in the film before embarking on their trip to the Armitage home: "Do they know I'm Black?"[3] In *Get Out*, miscegenation is used, indeed relied upon, by the Armitages and their inner-circle comprised of White middle-aged, upper middle-class couples; miscegenation is feared, alternatively and subsequently, by Black people, aware of the potential danger and violence such relationships may bring them at the hands of angry Whites. This fear is hyperbolized by Candyman's example, and is expressed throughout *Get Out* by Rod, who is consistently presented as suspicious of the Armitages on principle alone. Thus, interracial romance also proves unsustainable in both films.

Myths of Bestial Black Masculinity—Candyman and Chris:

Helen, late in *Candyman,* finds out that she is directly involved in the miscegenation myth of Candyman's origin story; toward the end of the film, while in Candyman's lair at Cabrini-Green, she discovers that she is the reincarnation of his former love when she sees a mural stating "IT WAS ALWAYS YOU HELEN" accompanied by a portrait of Candyman's former love whose resemblance to Helen is indeed uncanny. Yet, both before and still after this revelation concerning her role within Candyman's mythos, Helen never quite similarly discovers or confronts her broader role as White woman within Black exploitation and oppression; this is evidenced in part by Helen's persistent ambiguity in her mixed-race relations with Candyman. In Helen's first encounter with Candyman in a parking deck, for instance, the camera remains fixed on Helen as he calls her name in an ominous tone and with a slight echo, and her first responses to Candyman's calling her name do not connote fear but rather curiosity and ignorance—she first replies, "Yes?" and then, "Who is that?" once she sees Candyman standing in the distance. Upon

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[3] This question references, and will thus warrant somewhat greater reflection on, 1967's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (and such reflection is therefore included later in this chapter).

his next ominous statement of, "Helen, I came for you," Helen becomes weak and dazed, collapsing against her car and ultimately removing her sunglasses. We're then shown a close-up of her face with a hazy filter to emphasize her hypnotic state[4] and ensuing sense of desire—as well as, arguably, her White, aestheticized, fetishized beauty. Given the dream-like nature of this moment, both visually and aurally (in terms of Candyman's booming yet hollow, sing-song vocal quality), it can be read through what Robert J. C. Young explains are "links between sex and race [that] were developed in the nineteenth century through fantasies derived from cultural stereotypes in which blackness evokes an attractive but dangerous sexuality" (97).

The tension between Helen's dazed desire and simultaneous repulsion, which I argue, again, translates to the concept of ambiguity—agency plus complicity—is accentuated further when they consummate their relationship toward the end of the film. The camera circles around them dizzyingly, further visualizing the hypnotic quality of their relationship. Then, we witness Helen's fear and repulsion as bees spill out of Candyman's mouth. Certain persistent race myths of Black masculinity are important to acknowledge once more and with greater specificity here. These include Joseph L. Graves' claims that "European males had manufactured the sexual bestiality of the African from at least the seventeenth century…To the European mind, [that is,] the larger sexual apparatus of the African was proof positive of his bestial sexual nature" (66). These theories and histories concerning Black male sexuality allow us to better understand Candyman's sexuality as monstrous and bestial in two ways; besides his race, he is visually depicted as literally bestial through the bees that now form part of his flesh, and which are expelled at the moment of romantic (re-)union with Helen. The motif of bees horrifically, hyperbolically symbolizes a racialized form of sexuality that is bestial and dangerous in nature.

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[4] Extra-textually, it is interesting to note that for these scenes, actress Virginia Madsen underwent hypnosis before shooting (*Candyman* DVD commentary).

This bestial sexual nature is alluded to in *Get Out* as well*,* but in the form of a joke. During dinner on their first night at the Armitage house, Rose's brother Jeremy makes various discomforting comments to Chris about his "genetic make-up" being an athletic advantage. Later that night then, when Rose and Chris are alone in her bedroom talking about the evening, Chris simultaneously makes fun of the sentiment while also using it to lead into what the audience is led to assume is a moment of sexual intimacy between Rose and Chris. The interaction is obscured by the camera angle, though; it decenters Chris as Rose moves down on the bed, disappearing out-of-frame. As Rose moves, Chris says, in a mocking, intentionally garbled, baritone voice, "with my genetic make-up, shit gonna go down, I'm a beast!" Thus, the bestial nature of Black male sexuality is still the abject, monstrous origin *and* manifestation of horror in 1992. Meanwhile, Black male sexuality being a source of horror at all, and the specific stereotypes of Black male sexuality as horrific within the White imagination, are played as a joke in 2017. Peele thus presents a paradox through Chris' jokingly pretending to embody the myth of bestial Black male sexuality, in the sense that this myth persists among the film's purportedly liberal White characters. This paradox is best captured by Morris in the following way:

> For white artists concerned with black life, the myth matters, and it should: It's a white invention. But attempts to dispel that myth tend to reinforce it, sometimes because the myth-busters' love for black men seems indistinguishable from what's supposedly despicable about them.

Chris' attempts to dispel such racial myths via humor, and numerous scenes in which the myths are nevertheless reinforced by White women, specifically, suggest Peele's awareness of these myths' White origins and their White gatekeepers; through Peele's showcasing Chris' inability, whether through joking embodiment or actual disavowal, to dispel these myths, the

film suggests they are not his to dispel in the first place. This is also evident in Rose and Chris'

first interaction in the film: the aforementioned scene in which Chris packs for his visit with

Rose to her family home. This scene evokes and seemingly inverts (or at least, trivializes)

stereotypes of bestial Black masculinity. And thus, it also inverts or trivializes antiquated and

stereotypical power structures between Black men (alleged aggressors) and White women

(presumed victims). Framed in a medium shot, with Rose on the bed (lower in the frame as a

result, than Chris who is standing), Chris asks her: "Do they know I'm Black?" to which she

replies, "No. Should they?" Rose goes on to jokingly say, "Mom and dad, my black boyfriend

will be coming up this weekend" even as the camera reverts to a view of Chris, in medium close-

up now. At one point in this scene, she even assures him that her father won't be chasing him off

the property wielding a shot gun. Given Rose's role as arguably the film's most insidious White

character, this is an ironic, important statement to briefly note here, since it is in fact Rose who

chases Chris down the driveway with a rifle in the film's climactic final sequence. Rose's

(admittedly fabricated) attitude toward making race into an issue within her relationship with

Chris, and likewise in presenting their relationship to her parents, is revealed here to be post-

racial in nature. After all, Rose treats the concept of bringing a Black man home to meet her

(allegedly) anti-racist, liberal parents for the first time as a joke. But, again, post-racialism is

only a guise for Rose anyway, in addition to being, more generally, a lazy, misguided, and

unproductive framework from which to operate regarding racial issues and, even more

specifically, miscegenation. Further, Rose would not be dating Chris if he were *not* Black, and

she has presumably been in contact with her parents about her progress in psychologically

grooming Chris, via their romance, for Missy to eventually take over and hypnotize him.

Rose continues, saying, "I just don't want you to be shocked, that he's a Black-man." Chris then feigns a lovingly aggressive move, pulling Rose by her feet and climbing on top of her on the bed. Yet, in contrast to the visual composition of their bodies which may otherwise recall Black male aggressor imagery, she still has the power in this scene—the power that her Whiteness affords her generally, but also specifically the power to convince Chris of her and her family's "good" Whiteness. It is important to note here that the White women in both films— especially if we are to read them as White feminists—seem to consider and present themselves as socially progressive and liberal. Likewise, they may believe they surround themselves with and are related to similarly progressive, liberal people. As Lanre Bakare writes in a review of the film for *The Guardian,* for instance:

> The villains here aren't southern rednecks or neo-Nazi skinheads, or the so-called "alt-right". They're middle-class white liberals…The kind of people who shop at Trader Joe's, donate to the ACLU and would have voted for Obama a third time if they could. Good people. Nice people…The thing *Get Out* does so well – and the thing that will rankle with some viewers – is to show how, however unintentionally, these same people can make life so hard and uncomfortable for black people. It exposes a liberal ignorance and hubris that has been allowed to fester. It's an attitude, an arrogance which in the film leads to a horrific final solution, but in reality leads to a complacency that is just as dangerous.

Such sentiments find their theoretical and historical foundations in Shannon Sullivan's work, as well; in the introduction to her book *Good White People,* Sullivan writes about Whiteness in relation to racial injustice/inequality:

For all the urgency of the whiteness question [of what individual white people can do to help the United States achieve racial justice for black people and other people of color] white people have done a miserable job of answering it…White people generally don't know how to live their racial identities in ways that promote racial justice…I'm not merely speaking here of the avowed white supremacist who clearly has no interest in eliminating racial injustice. I am, primarily, addressing the bulk of white people in the post-Jim Crow United States…These are the white liberals…the "good" white people whose goodness is marked by their difference from the "bad" white people who are considered responsible for any lingering racism in a progressive, liberal society. (3)

This concept of "'good' white people" is also inexorably linked with that of miscegenation, especially as White liberals might claim to have a more progressive stance on or reaction to mixed-race relationships. In fact, Rose's bringing Chris home to meet her "good" White parents is, generally, also the same would-be conflict as in the plot of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.* Thus, another brief digression is required here, to reflect more deliberately on these films' commonalities in terms of these miscegenation-related themes. Firstly, in terms of these notions of White liberalism and where and how that intersects with miscegenation, one

could argue that movies such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* which are designed to offend no one, rather than advancing the cause of anti-racism, do the opposite by easing the public's mind, suggesting that there is no real racial divide that cannot be bridged in the course of a day by a meeting of open minded whites and blacks of good will…these movies [thus] overlook the structural racism built into the Hollywood system in favor of individualistic quick fixes, and reassure the white audience of the fundamental decency and tolerance of the white self. (Gordon and Vera 89)

However, with its quick shot of a brief, chaste kiss between Sidney Poitier and Katherine Hepburn in the cab driver's rear-view mirror, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* also displays similar concerns over Black male sexuality, such as those held by Whites, and the likes of which also concerned African-Americans:

> By the end of the 1960s, some black people were wondering about Sidney Poitier: How much longer would a 40-year-old man have to stay a movie virgin? How many more times could he be made a mannequin of palatable innocuousness? In 1967, after black neighborhoods across the country burned in race riots, Poitier slapped the face of a haughty racist at the emotional apex of "In the Heat of the Night," when he was just about the biggest star in Hollywood and at the peak of his talent. By the end of the year, though, in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," he was back to his serene, tolerable self, playing the only kind of Negro a liberal white family could imagine as worthy of its young daughter: Johns Hopkins- and Yale-educated, excruciatingly well-mannered, neutered. (Morris)

Despite the differences in plot between *Candyman* and both *Get Out* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* the aforementioned visual composition in which Chris is positioned on top of Rose can now also be compared to a similar one that appears late in *Candyman*, in which Candyman hovers over Helen. In this scene, Helen is strapped down to a gurney in the psychiatric institution where she has been taken and held for seemingly committing violent crimes, most recently the murder of her best friend Bernadette. Candyman floats directly over Helen's body as she yells "murderer!" repeatedly. He has power over her without even being physically touching her from this position. Helen is later forced to watch surveillance footage of this exchange. At this point, we re-watch it with her, and there is no Candyman figure visible;

her body is the only potential monster, the only possible "murderer" that appears in the footage. Even so, Candyman horrifically, hyperbolically embodies stereotypes about bestial Black male sexuality particularly, as it has been characteristically conceived of as dangerous and yet, seductive (even if in a hypnotic sense) to White women. Further, his invisibility to White men in contrast to his palpability to White women in Helen's case may serve to deem him even more of a threat to White masculinity's fears of miscegenation; he can only be seen by those supposedly vulnerable White women, not by White men who seek to protect them.

Awareness and Power—Helen and Rose:

Moreover, Helen (in these specific scenes, at least) does not have power over Candyman nor over her situation. But, when she does exert power throughout the film, it results from her White, middle-class privilege. And, it is typically exploitative of Cabrini-Green's African-American residents, even before Candyman frames her for crimes committed against them. As will be addressed further in the following chapter, Helen makes numerous assumptions about Cabrini-Green and its residents. She even, as a result of these assumptions, goes so far as to assume her right and ability to traverse Cabrini-Green safely—and without any potentially exploitative implications for those living there. Both assumptions ultimately prove to be false. One specific assumption she voices to Bernadette is that the young Black men they come across upon arrival think that Helen and Bernadette are cops. This speaks to Sullivan's ideas, which I will likewise return to again in the next chapter, that White people's "ignorance often poses as knowledge, making it all the more insidious" and that, "what is particularly…frightening about White liberals is that, unlike white supremacists, they usually think they know what white people can do to fight white racism" (3). One can read Candyman then, and specifically his framing Helen for gruesome acts throughout the film, as awakening her to her own penchant for violence

and monstrosity. His hypnosis of Helen awakens, or makes violently manifest, her previously somewhat dormant monstrosity, especially against Black women and eventually against White men (namely, her cheating husband, Trevor). But, besides the violent acts she is framed for while hypnotized, Helen's exploitation of Cabrini-Green's Black residents otherwise results from her unawareness of her White feminine privilege. There are but few fleeting moments, to be analyzed shortly, when Helen is presented as aware of her Whiteness and White privilege.

Rose, however, is always aware of her White feminine power and uses it with great intentionality to violent, exploitative ends, thus marking her as monstrous, albeit not in the same abject sense, for the entire film. Rose, unlike Helen, is consistently in control. She behaves in ways that prove an awareness of her White privilege, specifically as a White woman, as well as her ability to deftly navigate and exploit that privileged position for personal gain. Numerous visual and narrative elements even just throughout the sequence when they are driving to the Armitage home position Rose as in control—of Chris, and of her own White womanhood as a weapon. Firstly, Rose is the one who is driving, itself a symbol and sign of her dominance within their relationship. She is quite literally—that is, *actively*—bringing Chris home to meet her parents. Then, she even throws his unlit cigarette out the window. The Armitages' disapproval of Chris' smoking habit speaks to his purpose within their scheme as a soon-to-be vessel for the highest bidder's White consciousness. They have a specific stake in keeping his body as healthy and "perfect" as possible. However, in terms of White female power, cigarettes also become the same pretext Missy uses to hypnotize Chris; cigarettes prove a key tool for both White women in exerting control over him. It is also in this car-ride scene when Rose initially displays duplicitousness in her first of two phone conversations with Rod. Rod, on speakerphone, says to Rose, "you know you picked the wrong guy?" to which Rose responds that yes, her relationship

with Chris "is all just a ploy to get to" Rod. This response proves to be somewhat true by (or at least foreshadows) the second phone conversation she has with Rod, to be analyzed later in this chapter. In that second phone call, Rose once more invokes the earlier conversation's flirtatious banter. But, instead of doing so in a humorous, light-hearted way, she instead becomes darkly seductive. She tries to exploit actual romantic potential with Rod, which she assumes actually exists; because she is a White woman, she assumes she must be desired by Rod, a Black man[5]. She even claims in this conversation that she always saw Rod staring at her. After this phone call ends, Rod exclaims to himself that Rose is a genius. Indeed, she knows her status as desired White woman and how to exploit that in order to, in turn, exploit largely unsuspecting Black men. Allison Williams' star-text star image also helps convey these ideas about, and ensuing audience expectations[6] of, White womanhood's desirability and duplicity. According to Jason Guerrasio's *Business Insider* article on *Get Out*'s casting, Peele justified his decision to cast Williams by citing "her work on 'Girls,' [and] the wonderful risk she took with 'Peter Pan,'" claiming that "she just felt like the part…She felt cosmopolitan but also undeniably Caucasian."

Rod, though not realizing the extent of Rose's "genius" until late in the film, is nevertheless suspicious immediately of the conceit of going to "a white girl['s] parents' house" and warns Chris against it early in the film. He may not understand Rose's level of involvement. But he does understand that the family's Whiteness is potentially exploitative well before he

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[5] This is explained via the work of Brandi Wilkins Catanese and Frantz Fanon, both referred to in Chapter 1: White women are seen as desirable particularly by Black men who might view such relationships as a way of elevating themselves above their own race or becoming White by proxy. Thus, such relationships are also often seen by other members of the Black community as a betrayal of their race (and this idea reemerges in the following chapter).

[6] Also referred to in Chapter 1; to paraphrase here, Peele felt that no audience member seeing a studio film would suspect the one character who seemed like the only "good" White person to also turn out to be bad, speaking again to how White womanhood is perceived as functioning in society—as innocent and inherently good.

learns of the Armitages' creation of "inwardly whitened black people—black people cut off from their history and their self-consciousness and, therefore, deprived of the power to rebel and to free themselves" (Brody). And, further, Rose's flirtations with Chris about his jealousy over her previous flirtations with Rod, just after the phone conversation in the car ends, are what lead to their hitting a deer. Chris' ensuing powerlessness to save the deer they hit—presented to us in shot-reverse-shot, with a close-up on his face, when he goes to look at the dying animal—is carried through visually into the next scene. In this next scene, we are given a medium-close-up of Chris, while on the right-hand side of the frame, we see Rose speaking with a cop. Chris' powerlessness is also later presented to us in the flashbacks to when he watched TV while his mother had been dying from a hit-and-run. And, likewise, we see his powerlessness also when Missy hypnotizes him—the very act of which forces Chris to recall these flashbacks in the first place, as it relies upon (and so ultimately recreates) this paralysis he had felt as a child.

However, Rose's function within this encounter with the cop must be unpacked further here. The cop asks to see Chris' ID, to which Rose responds (sweetly and innocently) "Wait why? He wasn't driving." Chris, all too aware of repercussions of not obliging, offers his state ID. Rose eventually gets more aggressive, because she knows she can without any racially-motivated violent repercussions for disrespecting the cop: "fuck that, you don't have to give him your ID," she says. Rose, again displaying her extreme privilege, eventually wins. More interesting, however, is that once they are back in the car, Chris' response to the entire incident—or, more specifically, to Rose's behavior toward the cop—is that it was "hot." To this, Rose responds that she doesn't let anyone "fuck with her man:" except for her, and her family, that is. Aisha Harris explains that "Rose's sass toward the cop can be seen as her being a socially conscious white woman who stands up for her black boyfriend…but the truth is that she easily

could have made things worse for Chris, had the cop been less willing to take her backtalk;" she goes on to explain that "History tells us that had she been black, the cop probably wouldn't have taken her comments in stride. But that's the power she holds (and she's aware that she holds) as a white woman." But, Rose's pretend social consciousness ultimately serves to ensure that she and her family, not this police officer, will be the ones to victimize Chris, thus endangering him both unintentionally, as Harris reads, and intentionally. And, likewise, she would not want to leave any kind of paper trail that would later reveal or expose his true identity, given the erasure of his identity that awaits him at the Armitage home. So, White ally-ship reveals itself to be a dangerous, deceptive ruse, in addition to being "frightening [insofar as] white liberals…usually think they know what white people can do to fight white racism" (Sullivan 3). And, it is a ruse which, again, also harkens directly back to and indeed is deeply related to their interracial romance, as Chris at various points throughout the film claims to be attracted to Rose's "racial flow," as he calls it. Chris may use this term to mean her awareness of institutional/systemic racism, her enlightened or "woke" status in contrast to the microaggressions of her family in these early moments of the film. But, it is precisely this awareness, this enlightenment, which she exploits for her own benefit.

The power Rose possesses to invoke myths about Black masculinity—and moreover, her intentionality in wielding that power via an exploitation of her own White femininity—are particularly transparent in the film's final moments, after Chris has almost, but not quite, escaped the Armitage property. His attempts to clear the grounds are thwarted by desperate and ultimately violent encounters with Georgina and then Walter, who (before taking his own life) shoots Rose with the shotgun she had been toting only moments before. This is all due to Chris' successfully awakening Walter from his sunken place after Walter tackles Chris to the ground;

seemingly, Rose does not catch sight of Chris using his camera's flash during this struggle. After all, Rose only hands shotgun over to Walter because she believes he is still her grandfather, who is asking for the gun to shoot Chris. But Rose, like many slasher film villains that have come before her, seems immortal in her stubborn, uncanny ability to stay alive despite obvious injuries; she does not die from the initial shot, and it has also been argued that Chris does not do enough then to dole out her final, fatal punishment. This latter point, and the larger related question (of White women's punishment, or lack thereof) to which such a reading of Chris' behavior belongs will be explored more fully in the final chapter. That said, the question of why *Get Out* "find[s] it problematic for its own protagonist to enact thorough, graphic revenge, and even righteous revenge on white womanhood for its steady betrayal," posed by Kinitra Brooks in her think-piece for *Very Smart Brothas*, requires renewed attention here. This is especially so given the answer that Brooks goes on to offer in response to her own inquiry—that "white women are still valued as fragile and occupy a unique cultural privilege…even in the blackest horror film of this decade." For it is precisely this fragility which Rose employs and amplifies as Rod approaches them in his TSA squad car, just after Chris stops strangling her.

Before Rod pulls up though, and before Rose feigns victimhood thinking it is a [presumably White] police officer who would read the situation in her favor, Rose even tries to reassert her love for Chris, despite the fact that her ruse has now been exposed as such. After grasping at the shotgun, which Chris then pulls away from her, she reaches up to touch his face with her bloody hands. She tells him that she is "so sorry" and utters "it's me," as if Chris could, at this point, go back to believing that her former [false] identity and its "racial flow" were real and could be redeemed. Nevertheless, Rose continues to tell Chris "I love you" even as he begins to strangle her. The scene crosscuts between Chris' face as his eyes bulge and cheek muscles

quiver, back to Rose, whose facial expression morphs from one of fear to one of evil. As Harris states regarding this moment, in terms of racial stereotypes about Black masculinity, "as she lies bleeding out from her gunshot wound and Chris hovers over her with his hands around her neck…a devilish smile cracks upon her face, as if she is getting pleasure from Chris proving that he is indeed a brute." However, her smirk can also be read as her awareness, alternatively, that Chris is *not* a brute, and that he will not in fact be able to kill her. In support of this reading, and likewise in support of Brooks' complaints about the film's lack of punishment for Rose, Chris lets go of Rose's neck. But, he remains positioned over her body, recalling again the earlier scene in which they are positioned this way; in both scenes, Rose has power over Chris *despite* their positioning harkening back to racial stereotypes about predatory Blackness and White female victimhood. It is, in fact, these stereotypes which, as previously mentioned, give Rose said power. As the crosscutting continues, presenting us with the looks exchanged between Chris and Rose after he lets go of her neck, the sound of the squad car's siren is heard; the audience is, like Rose and Chris, unaware at this point that the squad car, just out of frame, belongs to Rod. A close-up of Chris' face shows his eyes widen in fear. This is followed by a series of different camera angles showing the squad car in the near distance from behind Chris, and then a closer shot of Chris still hovering over Rose. The next shot then is a close-up of Rose's face looking in the direction of the squad car, as she reaches her arm out and pathetically whimpers "help!" We continue to hear her yell "help me" as Chris begins to stand up and raise his arms up behind his head. Finally, Chris, Rose, and the audience all learn that it is Rod's TSA vehicle via a close-up of the word "AIRPORT" on the driver's side door as Rod opens it and steps out. As Harris points out, Rose's cries for help as if she were the true victim of this situation prove "she's not just a psychopathic racist; she's also a…manipulator of the subterranean, systemic racism in the world

at large." It should be noted here, therefore, that Peele in fact shot an alternate ending, in which it is indeed White police officers who arrive and Chris is, in fact, arrested; in this scenario, Rose does indeed emerge the victor as Chris falls victim to the systemic racism in law enforcement.

This climactic final sequence makes clear that Chris is not the only character in *Get Out* who is aware of these stereotypes of Black male sexuality as predatory and bestial. He conducts himself in ways that point out the silliness and antiquatedness of these stereotypes. But humor is, again, ultimately not a strong enough tool in the space of this film—at least for a Black man—to use in trying to negate the potential for such stereotypes to still be read as horrific. Rose, however, as evidenced especially by this final sequence, *can* powerfully recall and rely upon these stereotypes. As mentioned before, these myths are, after all, White inventions. So, they are consistently rehashed and reaffirmed by the film's White characters through a combination of microaggressions, duplicitousness, and violent psychological and physical exploitation. As a result, Chris' earlier attempts via humor to reclaim (and thereby nullify) these myths of Black masculinity and Black male sexuality prove to be futile and ineffective. Peele is, arguably, the only Black man (within the context of *Get Out*) who can break down such stereotypes, but only by showing their persistence within the White imagination and Chris' inability to use humor to combat or quell this persistence. Thus, both Helen and Rose can *play* the ally or the victim. For Rose, this relates directly back to miscegenation myths and the role/representation of Black masculinity therein. Rose is aware that she is playing these roles. Helen, as previously mentioned and as will be explored even further, seems largely unaware that she is playing them.

Rose is also seen overtly playing a part—in this case, playing up her White womanhood as desirable—in the aforementioned scene late in the film when Rod calls Chris' cell phone. The call is answered by Rose, and the conversation that follows is informed by monstrous forms of

looking on Rose's part, at least. She stares off blankly, stoically, only using her voice to convey clearly (to the audience) fake emotions of fear and surprise concerning Chris' whereabouts before ultimately shifting to the attempted seduction of Rod described earlier. This is, in fact, similar to Candyman's disembodied voice seducing/hypnotizing Helen in their first scene together. The monster/victim dynamics are in fact complicated by the use of phones and, more generally, voices versus mere looks in these films. We see Rod and Rose but only through cross-cutting; these characters are not seeing each other. And thus, the power dynamic is rerouted from looks/seeing through voices and, specifically in the case of this scene in *Get Out*, cell phones.

Further, Rod's own role as the voice of reason, consistently positioning White women (or, more specifically, their families) as a potential danger to the Black men with whom they're involved throughout the film, serves to articulate certain myths and stereotypes surrounding Whiteness and White femininity, in particular. At one point, for instance, Chris tells Rod about Missy's hypnosis and the strange behavior of Logan (Lakeith Stanfield), another young Black male who has been, we find out, a victim of the Armitages. Logan was formerly Andre Hayworth. But as Logan he is now romantically involved with a middle-aged White woman named Philomena (Geraldine Singer). Rod then tells Chris that "White people love making people sex slaves," and that he thinks Missy is hypnotizing and having sex with everyone. Even slavery—which connotes its own painful and persistent racial history of trauma and violence and oppression—and sex are coalesced and conflated in Rod's theory of what the Armitages are doing; through hypnosis in both films, miscegenation is at times forced. But, these connections between sex and slavery also comprise and harken back to miscegenation itself and its historical origins, as described by Wesley Morris:

You can read the history of the black penis in this country as a matter of eminent domain: If a slave master owned you, he also owned your body. Slaves were livestock, and their duties included propagating the labor pool. Sex wasn't pleasure; it was work. Pleasure remained the prerogative of white owners and overseers, who put their penises where they pleased among the bodies they owned. Sex, for them, was power expressed through rape. And one side effect of that power was paranoia: Wouldn't black revenge include rape? Won't they want to do this to our women?

Notably, in *Get Out,* the White woman is positioned as the aggressor by Rod. Although, as will be addressed further in the next chapter, it should be noted again here that Rod's theories are deficient in a way that favors Rose; he doesn't (until midway through the aforementioned phone call scene) suspect Rose of involvement in whatever he believes the Armitages, and Missy in particular, are doing to/with their Black victims of hypnosis. Even when Rod rescues Chris, he reminds him of his earlier warnings not to enter a White woman's parents' house. But, Rod never actually says, "I told you not to date a White woman;" this deflects potential blame, or at least suspicion, away from Rose herself and projects it automatically onto her family.

Returning to the notion of White woman as [sexual] aggressor, this powerful positioning is also conveyed through Philomena's behavior at the Armitage party. She is presented as being in control of Logan. This is especially evident when she takes Logan to say hello to some other party attendees, or when she reprimands him for drinking after Missy re-hypnotizes him (following Andre's awakening and subsequent outburst toward Chris warning him to "get out"). Logan, when asked about the "African-American experience," says that it has been good for him mostly but that he hasn't wanted to leave the house lately—directed flirtatiously toward his older, White companion. Thus, his words allude once more to Black male sexual prowess which

Philomena has presumably been exploitatively enjoying. There are various other allusions to this among the microaggressions during the party sequence, including one woman exclaiming "how handsome is he!" as she touches Chris' arm, and asking Rose "so is it true? Is it better?" Among the party guests' many microaggressions spoken to and about Chris, these particular statements illuminate White myths about Black masculinity and Black male sexuality; and, while the White guests all appear to believe in these myths, within the White feminine imagination specifically there is a *desire* as well, concerning the sexual benefits to be reaped in an interracial relationship.

Photography, Hypnosis, Paralysis, and Tears:

By contrast, Helen, as mentioned earlier, is presented as occasionally and conditionally aware of her Whiteness and her privilege, but not necessarily of her ensuing role within White supremacy. Helen states "I'm not capable of that…No part of me, no matter how hidden, is capable of that" after she's been framed for and accused of the violent acts committed by Candyman. This statement can be read as highly racialized; by stating that she is incapable of the violence perpetrated by the Black figure of Candyman, she also, however unintentionally, reasserts her White, middle-class status by contrast. More specifically, she recalls and relies upon commonly held assumptions as to White feminine innocence and Black masculine brutality. Yet, she also tries to denounce the benefits that she knows her status affords her; she complains to Bernadette that when two Black people get brutally murdered at Cabrini-Green and the cops do nothing, but that when a White woman gets attacked (as Helen does when she meets the gang leader who calls himself Candyman) they "lock the place down," as she puts it. Ultimately, though, her White liberal remorse is replaced by privileged academic/professional euphoria when she learns that her attack has attracted positive interest in her thesis from publishers, and that the photos she took before her attack were miraculously salvaged from her destroyed camera.

Helen's camera and photography thus connote a certain kind of power, as well as a kind of exploitation, as she uses it in spaces which are not hers to truly see. These include Candyman's lair in Cabrini-Green, as well as the men's bathroom just outside the housing project where she is confronted by the gang leader Candyman. And, during the first encounter with the mythic Candyman, the editing as she becomes dazed is even akin to a camera flashing; we are given quick shots of Candyman's lair (which she had taken pictures of earlier in the film) intercut with Helen becoming weak and collapsing against the back of her car while Candyman calls her name. Chris, meanwhile, is a professional photographer. Thus, unlike Helen's photographs of Cabrini-Green, his photographs are imbued with his particular view of the world as an African-American man. His talent, nevertheless, is what appeals most to Jim Hudson (Stephen Root), the blind art gallery owner who eventually places the winning bid on Chris. Jim says to Chris, when they first meet at the party earlier in the film, that he didn't have "the eye" but that Chris does, claiming his photos are so brutal, and so melancholy. But, again, Chris does not merely have talent or "the eye" as if such things could ever be devoid of or separate from race, or other aspects of oneself; Chris' talents, his "eye," are inseparable from and informed by his Black identity. Chris' photographs are also our first introduction to Chris. These photographs are presented one after another via a series of still shots cut together toward the beginning of the film. One photograph features a pregnant Black woman's exposed belly in the foreground, with out-of-focus apartment buildings visible in the photograph's background. Another photograph shows a pit bull pulling on his leash such that his front legs are off the ground, the musculature of his body is pronounced, and his owner (though his face is cut off by the uppermost edge of the picture) is seen straining to pull the dog back. Following these shots is a tracking shot in which we see more of Chris' apartment, where such photographs are apparently displayed; in this shot,

there are two other photographs present, seen hanging on the walls. One features an upward angle snapshot of pigeons flying between two buildings; the other is of a tangled web of telephone wires. All of the photographs we are shown are indeed dramatic and unique in their black-and-white compositions and seemingly urban settings. And, it should also be noted, the non-diegetic song that accompanies all these shots is "Redbone," by acclaimed rapper Childish Gambino, a song whose chorus includes the phrase, "stay woke."

Thus, if we are to read cameras as extensions of eyes, and photography as an extension of the self, since we see Chris' photography before we even see Chris in the film, one could read Jim's blindness also as *colorblindness*. But, just as colorblindness itself is deemed a flawed way of thinking about race (because it avoids thinking about it at all), the film raises important questions about Jim's ability to possess Chris' talent; that is, even if Jim Hudson were to possess Chris' eyes, he would likely not possess Chris' unique perspective on the world as a Black man. As Lenika Cruz elaborates in a piece for *The Atlantic* entitled, "In *Get Out*, The Eyes Have It:"

> [O]f course the man who wants to steal Chris's body from him is not only blind, but also "colorblind." He comes off as the kind of person who'd say he doesn't "see race" while caring very little about the wellbeing of black Americans. But Jim wants something much more existentially fraught than Chris's artistic sensibility: He wants to possess the particular way that Chris views the world. I want those things you see through. In other words, I want to look at the world through your eyes. He wants to inhabit Chris's body for what he sees as its superior physical abilities. But it's hard to believe that Jim wants, or even fully grasps, any of the specific challenges or complexities that come with actually being black.

Further, Cruz claims "the camera functions as a kind of protective shield between Chris and the odd behavior he encounters…The camera simultaneously creates distance and closeness between Chris and his subjects; it's a way to both observe and to escape." Also, photographs ultimately serve as proof for Chris as to Rose's involvement in her family's charade, when he finds pictures of her former lovers, all of whom were in fact Black. The photographs awaken Chris in this sense, but the flash of Chris' cell phone camera is what awakens Andre out of his sunken place within Logan; his formerly distant eyes suddenly gloss over instead with a sense of horror and urgency, as his nose starts to bleed and he attacks Chris warning him to "get out!" Cruz claims one cannot read this scene "…without thinking of how important camera phones and video recordings have been for many African-Americans experiencing police violence—especially in light of [the] earlier scene in which Chris is the apparent target of racial profiling by an officer" and argues that "*Get Out* suggests somewhat plainly [that cameras] have the power to reveal."

While cameras arguably give power to Chris, and to an extent (and with differing racial implications/dimensions) to Helen as well, hypnosis in both films takes power away from both Chris and Helen. In terms of establishing monster/victim looking exchanges between Missy and Chris, it is notable that while Dean is talking about his own experience quitting smoking via Missy's hypnosis, the camera offers us a shot-reverse-shot of the look exchanged rather between Chris, skeptical and concerned, and Missy, with a big smile on her face. During the actual hypnosis scene, then, the camera frames Missy closer, at first, than it does Chris. Ultimately, then, we are given close-ups of both faces—with Chris' face covered in tears. Missy says to him, once he realizes that he cannot move, that he is paralyzed "just like that day you did nothing," referring to his watching TV all the while his mother was dying of a hit-and-run accident. Once she tells him to sink into the floor, sending him to the "sunken place," she leans in toward him,

her face filling the small screen-like frame within the larger frame. "'The "sunken place' that [Chris] falls into when he's under hypnosis, Peele [has also] said, was a metaphor. It's 'this state of marginalization that I've never really quite had a word for,' he said. 'The sunken place is the prison-industrial complex, it's the dark hole we throw black people in'" (Lopez). Peele has gone on in subsequent interviews to discuss other definitions of the sunken place. As reported by Elena Howe for the Los Angeles Times during their Directors Roundtable in November of 2017, Peele claimed that his film's sunken place is also a metaphor for "the lack of representation of black people in film, in genre." He went on to explain, "The reason Chris in the film is falling into this place, being forced to watch this screen, that no matter how hard he screams at the screen he can't get agency across. He's not represented…So the movie for me became almost about representation within the genre."

In addition to Peele's critiques of marginalization in both American society and horror cinema, the fact that Chris emits tears while he is otherwise physically paralyzed and mentally/psychically submerged in the sunken place can be read also in theoretical terms. That is, it can be read in terms of the theoretical connection between tears and feelings that likewise inform my analyses of Georgina in the next chapter; as Eugenie Brinkema explains,

> In the long history of the philosophy of emotion, the tear has been the supreme metonym for the expressivity of inner states…The tear has been a liquid volley in countless debates over whether emotion is an active production or a passive subjection; the relationship between interior states…and exterior expressions; the possibility of the bodily legibility of the amorphous mind or soul; the causality and ordering of physical sensations with mental impressions…That little lachrymal drop has been deployed to work through some of the most significant debates…about the relation between the body and mind, the interior and exterior, the will and that which overrides will. (3)

In the tears cried by both Chris and Georgina, the disconnect between internal and external is challenged, tested, almost bridged. The tears in both cases, that is, are discharged at the will of internal beings. These tears are propelled outward from their sunken places and then manifested in physical bodies. These bodies though, strikingly, cannot move at all. Or, their movements through the external world are not motivated by the same internal being who is causing those tears to fall; as will be further explained in the next chapter, Georgina's tears, like Chris', reflect the emotions of the Black person who is imprisoned in her own sunken place, not those of Rose's grandmother who inhabits and controls Georgina's body (but who is, in fact, powerless to stop those tears from falling). Tears fall from physical bodies that are otherwise *not* controlled by the same highly repressed internal forces which are causing the crying. So, to return now to Peele's own ideas about representation within the horror genre as a whole, tears thus become the only tool that Chris and Georgina can employ, the only physical *representation* (in Brinkema's terms) that they have left within this particular horror film text itself, while they are oppressed within their sunken places and so disconnected otherwise from their former bodies.

Monstrousness and Miscegenation Morals:

Rose, after the Andre/Logan incident, suggests that she and Chris take a walk; as they decompress, Chris tells Rose "I think your mom got in my head." But, what he does not realize at this point, is that both White women (Missy and Rose) have gotten in his head. Even her suggestion that they take a walk is meant to further affirm that she is on Chris' side—that she wants to be with him after the emotionally traumatic episode. But, in fact, Rose is also helping to distract and remove Chris from the site of Dean's game of Bingo, or rather, the auctioning off of Chris's body. During their time away from the party guests' "bingo" game, Chris works through his formerly repressed feelings, which Missy's hypnosis reawakened in him, regarding the loss

of his mother and the fact that he did nothing. This all leads him to express his feeling that Rose is all he has now, and that he is not going to abandon her (as if she, too, were a victim of her family's racism). Chris' assumption is still, at this point, that she is different than them despite being related to them, and that she thus belongs with Chris more than she belongs with them. In reality, however, Rose has been gaslighting Chris via an exploitation of her White womanhood and its assumed desirability throughout the film. For instance, Chris perceives Walter's behavior as odd and attributes his calling Rose "lovely," and "one-of-a-kind, top of the line, a real doggone keeper!" to jealousy. Rose responds, in a joking manner which is already familiar to the audience from her jokingly flirtatious phone conversation with Rod, "so you think I've got a shot?" This is followed by a more earnest-seeming promise to talk to her father about Walter, which serves to affirm that she is Chris's ally. It is the combination of responses, I argue, which cause Chris to recant the concern he's just voiced, claiming that "it's fine" or that "it's nothing." Rose employs the former tactic of gaslighting to make Chris confront his own jealousy and come to the realization that it is unwarranted and ridiculous. Then, she adds in that she will talk to her father about Chris' experience of Walter's odd behavior in order to force Chris into a position where he must choose between siding with his race (that is, whether to be a "tattle-tale" or not) versus his [interracial] relationship. The "tattle-tale" notion comes up in an exchange between Chris and Georgina. But, it is Chris' voicing paranoia to Rose about Georgina intentionally unplugging his cell phone which is important here; when Chris expresses his concern about Georgina's behavior, Rose similarly pushes Chris to second-guess his theory, which is that Georgina has unplugged his phone because she has a problem with their relationship. In both cases, Rose can be seen as taking control over Chris' mind just as Missy does. Rather than hypnosis, Rose invokes their interracial relationship and the idea that her family (including, for

these intents and purposes, Walter and Georgina) is post-racial and liberal. Rose does this to make Chris question the validity of his invoking ideas about interracial relationships, within the Black imagination, as being a betrayal or a form of racial disloyalty[7].

However, mixed-race relationships are, in fact, proven to be unsustainable in both films through their respective narratives (especially their endings) and certain horror generic elements, as well. At Helen's funeral, for instance, the procession of Cabrini-Green residents tosses Candyman's hook into her grave, as if to thank her for eradicating him from Cabrini-Green and to bury the symbol of his fearful control in with the person who ostensibly defeated him. Indeed, this may connect Candyman and Helen in the afterlife, just as Candyman had wanted. But, the congregation of believers now shifts from Blacks at Cabrini-Green, to Trevor—a White male in a White space. And, Candyman, in pursuing Helen and by consummating their relationship through exposing his bodily abjection to the fullest extent, is in a sense living out the cycle of his racial (and sexual, if we view his hook hand as a symbolic castration) victimization. First, he abjectly embodies the punishment he received for his initial interracial relationship, reaffirming yet again that his romantic, sexual desire for a White woman is what made him into a monstrous figure in the first place. Then, he uses his monstrous body to simultaneously scare and seduce Helen, especially in the consummation scene, thus restarting the cycle from the beginning, in a sense—both through his expulsion of bees, as well as when he suggestively runs his hook-hand beneath her skirt. As Candyman runs his hook up Helen's leg, he tells her their crimes will be told and retold and that they will be immortal together as myths. This speech suggests Candyman's assumption that their mythic quality as a monstrous pair might finally allow their

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[7] This is another theory established, via Catanese's work, in Chapter 1: "[I]n American culture, sexual access to white women remains a sign of success and masculinity, and for black men in particular, these relationships are often perceived as an emblem of their escape from (or disloyalty to) their race" (78).

interracial love to be realized and recognized, and thus their racial differences transcended via their monstrosity, through the horror of the crimes they would commit together. But, especially *because* it is rendered abject and monstrous, the film ultimately posits their interracial romance as fearful in and of itself—despite the fact that such abjection and monstrosity are necessitated or supported by the film's horror generic narrative and ensuing visual conventions.

Significantly, then, Harris reads *Get Out*'s violent, suspenseful closing sequence as ultimately triumphant—if only in the sense that Chris does not die, even if Rose is not adequately punished for her role in almost causing his death. But, Harris importantly reiterates that "Chris joins a long historical line of black people, both real and fictional, who have had their lives threatened or complicated by white women's lies and/or the cultural perception of white womanhood as unfailingly virtuous and true." Thus, in 1992's *Candyman*, the interracial romance itself is still deemed horrific in a number of ways, including via some of Helen's reactions toward her eventual, and notably abject, courtship with Candyman. But in 2017's *Get Out*, Rose herself embodies and evokes horror for Chris and thus the audience; as Harris puts it, "she is the villain, an exact incarnation of the horror of being a black person in America."

These final comparisons beg the question of whether it is an oversimplification to say the source of horror in *Candyman* is race, while the source of horror in *Get Out* is, in fact, *racism*. More specifically, this binary can be broken down in the following way: the horror of Black masculinity as constructed or construed in the White imagination (that is, predatory toward White women); versus the horror of White supposedly anti-racist liberalism (which at its most nefarious, includes White womanhood and, often, White feminism) as constructed or construed in the Black imagination. According to Means Coleman, however, in *Candyman,* "audiences were actually asked to side with the monster, rooting for the beast to enter the boudoir and

convince a White woman to be his victim" (196). *Candyman*'s monster/victim dichotomy is indeed complicated already by the very premises of this project which takes White womanhood as potentially, if not definitely, a source of Black exploitation and oppression. Thus, I am inclined to agree with Means Coleman's readings insofar as Candyman can be considered a monster who is, in fact, just as much of a victim, if not more of one, than Helen. In turn, Helen can, and should, be seen as a victim who is very much also a monster. And, in reference to Helen's victimhood, it is important to ask, as Briefel and Ngai do, whether "it [is] a privilege to be haunted, or afraid?...[And whether] fear or the control of fear [can] be used…as a means of justifying and confirming predetermined claims to cultural power?" (281). Thus, again, Helen's Whiteness deems her monstrous even despite, or through, her victimhood; she victimizes Cabrini-Green's residents partially through acts committed by Candyman, of which she is also a victim in the sense that he has framed her for them.

One can still argue then, even more so if one is to set aside many such nuances, that in *Candyman*, the White woman is the victim, the Black man the monster. Meanwhile, in *Get Out* that dynamic, and thus audience sympathy, is reversed. But, again, there is privilege inherent even in Helen's victimhood as a White woman. For as Briefel and Ngai also state, "in restricting the representation of fear or anxiety to figures we immediately recognize as privileged…horror and slasher films suggest that being frightened is paradoxically a sign of empowerment. Victims in these films are consistently white, suburban residents engaged in middle-class routines" (281). Further, among all these readings of Helen in terms of miscegenation and her White feminine power and privilege therein, it is significant also that, as Means Coleman puts it, "it did not seem to matter that Candyman suffered as a result of sleeping with a White woman in the first place"

(196). In *Get Out,* though, it matters very much—which is to say, it *is* interrogated and critiqued to a degree within the film itself. Ashlee Blackwell makes a similar argument, writing that:

> [Chris'] self-awareness of how his race might present a challenge suggests an honesty and subjective insight we're not often shown within the genre. This is something we didn't quite get in 1992's *Candyman*…[That] film delivers a powerful commentary [on] the brutal manifestation of racism and its lingering effect on a community, but it focuses its sympathetic eye on a contemporary white female protagonist...[whose] personal and professional turning points became focal and the film [thus] leaves little to no room for investigating the horrors of racism from the point of view of the black characters. Candyman is not the center, she is. The shift in focus shown in…*Get Out* and [its] exploration of racial identity suggests that the horror genre might finally be ready to push a new boundary.

Get Out thus continues to invert various audience expectations and generic norms concerning victimhood and, in turn, villainy. But, as per the many additional readings of Helen offered above, such norms were already being somewhat, though perhaps not sufficiently, complicated within *Candyman.* Therefore, in concluding this chapter, I must explore some of the films' sociopolitical contexts; these can help us begin to understand *why* horror, in the case of *Get Out* as Blackwell claims, was able to push a new boundary in 2017 that was more difficult if not impossible with *Candyman* in 1992. While I address in my introduction some general contexts in which these films emerge, I will now isolate White womanhood even more deliberately within those contexts; in what ways can we read Rose as the "exact incarnation of the horror of being a black person in America" in 2017, as Harris puts it—and how might we understand Helen in these same terms in 1992?

Jane Byrne and Hillary Clinton—Different White Female Politicians, Similar Hypocrisy:

  Candyman, as Briefel and Ngai point out, was released in "the year officially ending the Reagan-Bush regime" and acknowledges a "social fear that seems furthest removed from the concerns of the traditional horror film: the everyday reality of urban violence in low-income neighborhoods," particularly after recent legislation had "worked to further disempower people at low-income levels" (284). In terms of White womanhood specifically, though, Briefel and Ngai also provide background on a true historical event that helps further situate Helen's aforementioned privileged approach to Cabrini-Green: in 1981, Chicago mayor Jane Byrne (a White woman) moved into Cabrini-Green to "help restore order following a particularly violent period in the project's history" (291). Her conciliatory gesture highlighted the isolation and alienation of Cabrini-Green and its residents, allegedly even more than any murder of, or plea for help from, African-American community members there (291).

  This harkens back to the proactive police response to the gang leader Candyman coming only after he has attacked Helen, even though he is presumed to have brutally murdered Black women there before with no such justice sought. However, this is just one way in which Byrne's White female privilege was employed and/or displayed in her asserting herself into Cabrini-Green; despite it only being eight blocks from the mayor's Gold Coast apartment, Byrne had an entourage of police and advisors, in addition to reporters. This is all ironic, according to Briefel and Ngai, given that it was her administration under which the Housing Department's Home Acquisition Program was reduced by nearly $3 million in 1982; and, during her term, Byrne also destroyed over 16,000 residential units in Black and Latino neighborhoods while only building a little under 13,000 new ones (291). Byrne's actions thus prove that White womanhood served to prevent her from fully engaging, at least on a legislative level the very racial realities that she,

through those actions, had purported to be engaged with. That White womanhood functions

similarly in *Candyman* as it really had in Chicago ten years prior with Byrne is not merely proof

of, nor simply a reference to, Cabrini-Green's particular notoriety; White womanhood's political

inaction is also explained, in feminist discourse, by White womanhood's problematic role as the

assumed perfect form of womanhood. As bell hooks writes in her 1995 book, *Killing Rage:*

Ending Racism, for example, "since white women's bodies embody the sexist racist fantasy of

real womanness, they must not sully themselves by claiming a political voice within public

discourse about race" (2).

It is this notion of political inaction on the part of White women that I wish to emphasize

in reading these two films, despite *Candyman* emerging just three years prior to O.J. Simpson's

trial. Simpson was accused and, in October of 1995, acquitted of murdering his White wife,

Nicole Brown. This highly visible interracial relationship would thus seem to serve as another

important context within which to situate this chapter's readings of Helen and Candyman. This is

valid, especially in terms of the tension between racial and gendered violence and victimization;

as Linda Williams states, the Simpson trial "seemed to present its jury a stark choice between

two forms of victimization—the gendered…victimization of Nicole [and] the racial victimization

of Simpson" (*Playing the Race Card* 274-275). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the

Rodney King tape factored greatly into readings of, if not the making of, *Candyman*, but in

thinking about how the O.J. Simpson trial may also factor into readings of the film, connections

between these two events must also be acknowledged. As Williams explains:

> What critical race theorists call the intersectionality of race and gender is invisible to the
>
> either/or arguments of law…The Simpson jury did not accept the domestic violence
>
> (gender) evidence as relevant and, in that lack of acceptance, the jurors were seen by

many trial watchers to repeat the trauma of the Rodney King beating trial in reverse

fashion—to reenact, in other words, an inverse form of racial violence. (*Playing the Race*

Card 275)

To draw further from Williams' account of race and gender dynamics at play in the trial,

[I]n the Simpson trial, the 'race card' scenario of police violence toward the black man

trumped the 'gender card' scenario of gendered domestic violence. This is not to say,

however, that racial victimization trumped gender victimization altogether, since the

narrative frame of gender-based domestic violence…was already covertly intersected by

race…[T]here appeared to be no way for juries, prosecutors, and defense attorneys to

acknowledge the intersection of the history of raced and gendered injuries in the case. All

they could do was pit one raced or gendered form of injury against another as if a legal

win for blacks could only result in a loss for women and vice versa…As soon as Simpson

was charged with murder he could no longer be simply a husband with a history of

spousal abuse; he became a black husband with a white wife…Thus, gender and race

were already in play, already intersected, long before the supposed 'race card' was

introduced into the trial. However, in the adversarial format there was no way to

acknowledge this intersection. (276)

So, again, the racial and gendered violence represented in *Candyman* can and to at least

some degree should be read within the context of Simpson's trial. Particularly useful is that, even

in Williams' interpretations of the trial, White female victimhood becomes narrativized via

stereotypes of Black masculinity as brutish by dominant—in this case, legal or judicial—

systems. All of that being said, I rather wish to situate my readings of Helen in the context of

Jane Byrne who held an active role within those existing dominant systems and whose politics

often upheld these systems. The O.J. Simpson context, while illuminative in terms of

racial/gender dynamics of violence and victimhood, nevertheless centers White female

victim/Black male aggressor dynamics. Even though Williams' work helps us to understand the

explicit need for (and implicit presence of) intersectionality within these dynamics, the goals of

this project are rather to read the White female's participation and function in such dynamics as

being exploitative, oppressive, and problematic. Therefore, it is Byrne's political [in]action,

again, which I argue helps inform such nuanced readings of Helen; by reading *Candyman* in

terms of the Simpson trial, it is possible that her victimization rather than, or separate from, her

villainy would be erroneously prioritized and no new conclusions could be reached.

Further, the relationship between White womanhood and political inaction with regards

to race (and class) progress and justice emerges again in *Get Out*'s context, specifically in the

form of Hillary Clinton and her 2016 presidential campaign. According to Liza Featherstone, in

an article called "Elite, White Feminism Gave Us Trump: It Needs to Die" written mere days

after Trump was elected in November of 2016, what cost Clinton the election was the "bourgeois

feminism Clinton represents [which] works against the interests of the vast majority of women."

In comparison with the hypocrisy and White privilege inherent in Byrne's move to Cabrini-

Green, Clinton, according to Featherstone,

> [ran a] tone-deaf campaign [that] didn't even pretend to transcend…class divisions. Once
>
> she had secured the nomination, Clinton offered few ideas about how to make ordinary
>
> women's lives better. That's probably because what helps the average woman most is
>
> redistribution, and Clinton's banker friends wouldn't have liked that very much.

Featherstone also claims that "#ImWithHer was a painfully uninspiring campaign slogan,

appropriately highlighting that the entire campaign's message centered on the individual

candidate and her gender, rather than on a vision for society, or even women, as a whole."

Ultimately, Featherstone best articulates the problematic racial implications of Clinton's "faux" feminism, particularly as it impacted her campaign, and thus the 2016 election itself, as follows:

> The elite feminism Clinton represents is also a white feminism. There was a lot of talk during the primary about black voters' loyalty to her, but that turned out to be a misleading narrative, applying mainly to those engaged enough to vote in a primary, which is never a representative sample of the electorate. Clinton had contributed significantly to policies that led to mass incarceration in the nineties, run a racist campaign against Obama in 2008, and treated women from #BlackLivesMatter with painful condescension in 2016. Yet she took black voters for granted. She was more interested in trying to attract white suburban, Republican women. In the end, African American turnout was lower than in 2012.

One can thus contextualize *Get Out* (specifically in terms of its White female characters) as having been created in the final leg of Obama's presidential term which may have been won partly through White guilt. And, it was then released directly in the wake of Trump's inauguration which was spurred in part by White rage. But in this dualistic contextualization, one cannot ignore Hillary Clinton. She is reflected in the character of Rose if only in the, albeit overly simplified, sense that Rose consistently claims to be Chris' ally, but only on a superficial, indeed wholly fabricated level—and only for her own self-serving reasons. Clinton's feminist rhetoric likewise engaged only rich, White women; any rhetoric which did attempt, however ineffectively, to galvanize support from the African-American community to earn votes were, in that sense alone, self-serving and/or were fairly superficial, at least. Michelle Alexander echoes these sentiments in her article, "Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote:"

Hillary…put forth a plan to ban racial profiling, eliminate the sentencing disparities between crack and cocaine, and abolish private prisons, among other measures. But what about a larger agenda that would not just reverse some of the policies adopted during the Clinton era, but would rebuild the communities decimated by them? If you listen closely here, you'll notice that Hillary Clinton is still singing the same old tune in a slightly different key.

Clinton singing the same old tune equates to sustaining the status quo which she and her "banker friends" and "celebrity one-percenters, especially women," as Featherstone refers to her core base, all benefited from. This is akin to Rose's White ally-ship serving only to reinforce and prolong the status quo of her family and her White, upper-middle class community. In other words, while "Obama inspired Americans by talking about change and hope[,] Clinton couldn't talk about change because that's not what she believes in, and she couldn't talk about hope because hope is dangerous." These sentiments about hope are echoed in Patrick Ruffini's article, "Black Voters Aren't Turning Out For The Post-Obama Democratic Party:"

> Lower black turnout in 2016 might be explained as a reversion to the mean after that group's historic turnout for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. It's possible that Clinton could never inspire black turnout the way the first African-American president could. But even if this shift is more of a return to the old status quo, Democrats will still have to grapple with these turnout levels going forward, and there are powerful lessons we can learn from the party's failure to raise or maintain previous black turnout levels in 2016. Painting Trump as a bigot did not motivate more African-Americans to vote, in 2016…Hope and shared identity seem to be much more effective turnout motivators than fear.

Therefore, in terms also of taking Black voters for granted, as Featherstone claims, Alexander likewise felt that Hillary believed she could win in 2016 "because this time she's got us, the black vote, in her back pocket—her lucky card," presumably because there was no competition from Obama and his rhetoric of hope. All of this being said, Black voters who did show up to vote still voted for Clinton. According to Ruffini's analyses, Clinton "won African-American voters 89 percent [compared] to [Trump's] 8 percent;" the number of Black voters who showed up, however, was indeed smaller than the turnout for Obama in 2008 and 2012. This notion of "shared identity" then speaks to the notion of shared oppression; Black women may be more likely to align themselves in solidarity with Black men, who share their racial oppression, than with White woman, because Black women may tend to experience oppression more as a result of their race than they do as a result of their gender. Thus, the notion of hope may work in a similar way; Black female voters may have been filled with hope at the prospect of an Obama presidency, because of his Blackness and regardless of his maleness, but were not similarly inspired by the prospect of a Clinton presidency, because of her Whiteness and regardless of her femaleness. Further, hope is "dangerous" according to Featherstone, insofar as it could eventually lead to progress and true equality for disenfranchised people of color and low-income Americans. Such progress is, again according to Anderson's work on White rage, often perceived as threatening to White dominance and therefore induces anger among White Americans. Additionally, in Welsing's view, "The difficulty whites have in according "non-whites" socio-political and economic equality within the white supremacy structure stems…not from a moral issue nor from a political or economic imperative but instead from the fundamental sense of their own unequal situation in regards to their numerical inadequacy and color deficiency state" (38). Either way, the idea that any such advancement or progress toward

equality could ever change the patriarchal, capitalist power structures that Clinton was so engrained in—and which she, as a wealthy, well-educated White woman, has benefitted from—is reflected in Rose, as well. Rose is, again, likewise engrained in and thus benefits from her family's relative wealth and Whiteness, both of which have been inherited. Rose *chooses* to play an integral role in her family's attempts at maintaining power via Black exploitation; truly being Chris' ally would have entailed supporting his, and other Black people's, progress and true racial equality even while it may entail that perceived loss of power and positioning for Whites.

Helen's Excuse and Rose's Lack Thereof:

By way of concluding this chapter, I would like to offer what may be the *main* underlying reason for the differences in representations of Helen and Rose: the increased, and still ever increasing, visibility of White feminism and White supremacy. As Anna March writes:

There is no way to truthfully consider racial injustice without a stark look at its long history, which is stitched into this country's very foundation…Neither the vast systems of institutional racism nor personal incidents of racist violence should be surprising in a country founded and built on slavery that has carried its deeply racist history into the present. *And in today's hyper-connected world, it is impossible to overlook, confronted as we are with images of unarmed people of color shot in the street by the police, of white supremacists carrying flaming torches and bearing Nazi symbols, and a president who praises these cops and these bigots*. Anyone shocked by the horror in Charlottesville is either not paying attention or is lying to themselves about the state of this country. If we are not bursting with passion on these issues and working to prevent them from happening again, we are either willfully ignoring reality or participating, ourselves, in the quiet racism of silence and inaction. [emphasis mine]

Such political and social upheaval and unrest as described here, and the feminist

discourses ensuing from these political and social issues, make clear that White women in 2017

no longer have any excuse to ignore, not understand, or not do something to change their White

feminism. To do so would be to willfully continue supporting White supremacy. Helen's lack of

awareness of her White feminism and White privilege speaks directly to the ways in which such

feminist discourses were not so ubiquitous and mainstream as the internet and social media have

made them today; while Helen as a character is a scholar, the film as a text and its White creators

are not clued into those discourses which had been happening in academia for years. Peele, on

the other hand, presents a White female character who is deft and deliberate in her exploitation

of her White womanhood for the purposes of exploiting Black men like Chris. This is due to

Peele's biracial identity, but also because his film emerges in the aforementioned sociopolitical

contexts (of Obama, Trump, and Hillary Clinton). The events of the 2016 election and the nature

of Clinton's campaign made especially transparent the dangers of White feminism and the

destruction and oppression of Black people that it can directly contribute to. Byrne's legislative

actions in Chicago were seemingly diametrically opposed to the motivations behind and reality

of moving into Cabrini-Green; such hypocrisy and arguable misguidedness, again, inform

readings of Helen and her White privilege. But, while intersectionality was a term that existed in

scholarly feminist discourse at the time of *Candyman*'s production and release, the notion of

White feminism was never so blatantly displayed on a national stage as they were in Clinton's

campaign. Nor were they written and read about with such frequency; now they are readily

available and widely accessible online. This does not *excuse* Helen's behavior, especially as she

is a construct that must be judged only in direct conjunction with those who have created her

character. But, it makes comprehensible and understandable why her White feminism and

enactment of White privilege—especially as they manifest in and inform her *ambiguous*

response toward Candyman and their interracial romantic/sexual encounter(s)—appear less

intentional and savvy than that which Rose exhibits in her interracial relationship with Chris.

Chapter 3: Solidarity & Exclusion—White Women/Black Women

White women play a central role in the exploitation and oppression of both Black men *and* Black women in American society and also, as a result, in the narratives, themes, and visual compositions of both *Candyman* and *Get Out*. Thus, in analyzing both films' representations of White women and their involvement in White supremacy, the very issue of intersectionality— and, specifically, intersectional feminism—must also be addressed and utilized. In so doing, again, we can transcend the traditionally myopic analyses that center solely on miscegenation and begin to unravel the films' complex dynamics between White and Black women. For, as Taylor Davis states, "it's understandable to walk out of [*Get Out*] and think it was about the relationship that Black men have with white people, but like with the rest of the film, there are small nuances of how Black women fit in this narrative and society." And therefore, also in terms of *Get Out*, it is worth considering whether, as Brittany Willis writes, "Peele's blind spot seems to be both black and white women. Specifically, this is in his inability to give nuance to black women characters, and his failure to condemn white women for their role in white supremacy." But by applying relevant feminist frameworks and sociopolitical factors, I will read nuances into these Black female characters, thus arguing against Willis' first point to a degree. Further Willis' second point, regarding Peele's failure to hold White women accountable, is referred to in the previous chapter in terms of Chris' lack of punishment for Rose in the final moments of the film, but will continue to be of importance throughout the remainder of this project; because this absence of accountability has, in fact, motivated this project, I will necessarily continue to grapple with the implications of this particular "blind spot," as Willis puts it. This chapter thus serves to further unpack what the films' differing representations of the dynamic between White women and Black women say about intersectional feminism and White

feminism, as not just a dichotomy but also as an evolution—of both discourse *and* practice in race/gender relations—from 1992 to 2017. Additionally, I will explore what these potential blind spots look like in *both* films—blind spots which Jordan Peele and Bernard Rose, as men, may not have been wholly aware of.

Demonstrating such an evolution of feminist discourses, and their rhetorical foci on inclusionary versus exclusionary practices, is made possible through the characters of Bernadette, Helen's friend and fellow graduate student in *Candyman*, as well as Anne-Marie, the young Black mother to an infant child living in Cabrini-Green, who Helen and Bernadette meet on their first visit to the housing project. *Get Out*, meanwhile, features Georgina, the only Black female victim of the Armitages' surgical procedure shown (or even alluded to); in the climactic final sequence of the film, it is revealed that her body houses the identity/mind of the Armitage matriarch (Dean's mother, Rose's grandmother). I will analyze her encounter with Chris (briefly discussed in the previous chapter), along with her albeit brief but no less loaded interactions with Missy and, to a lesser extent, Rose. The other Black female characters in *Get Out* should likewise be addressed, despite their relatively short (or even non-existent) time on screen, none of which is in fact shared with White women. This relative lack of screen-time, combined with their arguably stereotypical character types are illuminative; as Davis states, the "Black women in *Get Out* are a maid, [a]…cop and a single Black mother but behind these stereotypical depictions of Black women, are some messages acknowledging the Black female experience in America." These messages include the tensions between intersectionality (inclusion/solidarity) and White feminism (exclusion/exploitation) especially seen in these characters' interactions with White female characters. The main Black female character of *Candyman*, Bernadette, is presented as equal to Helen, and is thus coded as White, through shared education and class

level. Meanwhile, among *Get Out*'s many anachronisms, Georgina is presented in an antiquated racial/class power dynamic: Black female housekeepers, and their White female employers.

Helen and Bernadette—Solidarity at a Cost:

The dynamic between Helen and Bernadette especially requires intersectional feminist theory to unpack its many problematic elements and insufficiencies. For instance, the film may seem (superficially) progressive in its depiction of a White-and-Black-woman friendship. While their friendship may convey a sense of solidarity and, moreover, equality, that equality is post-racial and colorblind and thus insufficient, especially as Helen's White privilege and ensuing power within their dynamic becomes evident through the film. But that privilege and power is never explicitly nor deliberately confronted by Helen. The film text as a whole, via its representation of Helen, fails to interrogate the very racial differences that I argue underpin, or can be read into, her dynamic with Bernadette. The film explicitly touts their solidarity and equality, that is, while implicitly taking their imbalance of power as a given. In that sense, the film is idiosyncratic in its depiction of Helen and Bernadette; it automatically assumes and adheres to existing power dynamics. And, as a result, it reifies these dynamics, leaving no possibility for its own characters like Helen to question or critique them. For instance, Helen, in her increasing obsession with the Candyman story, puts Bernadette in uncomfortable (and eventually dangerous, fatal) situations. Yet Helen is saved time and time again in these situations by her Whiteness—especially because Candyman desires her, and thus would not actually harm her no matter how much he traumatizes her by framing her for violence. After all, she is also the White woman descended or reincarnated from his myth. As Means Coleman writes, "Candyman…is looking for love…but not from Black women. He only wants to kill them" (189). Further, Helen is blinded for the majority of the film by her White privilege, unable to see

Bernadette's lack thereof, and so she remains unaware of this cycle; Bernadette in turn, and to her demise, remains caught in this cycle, as she continues to trust Helen—and, again, align herself with her, via education and class.

Bernadette presents herself as in line with Helen, versus Cabrini-Green's residents, as early as when Helen speculates that her apartment building has the same layout as Cabrini-Green toward the beginning of the film. She lays newspaper clippings out on her dining room table for Bernadette to examine as they exchange comments about the violence at Cabrini-Green. Helen then explains to Bernadette that her building, Lincoln Village, was originally built as a housing project. They discuss the lack of structural, geographic barriers between Lincoln Village and the White middle/upper-class areas, versus the train tracks and highway near Cabrini-Green that "keep the ghetto cut off," as Bernadette herself puts it. Bernadette's statement, and others she makes throughout this scene, serve to align her with Helen's class and, in turn, I argue, her Whiteness. As another example, she tells Helen earlier in this sequence that she won't even drive past Cabrini-Green, and that she heard a kid got shot there recently, to which Helen replies, flippantly, that it happens "every day."

Bernadette is then also coded as White, as mentioned previously, by another Black woman, Anne-Marie, who says to Helen and Bernadette, by way of justifying her initial mistrust of them when they first traverse Cabrini-Green, that "White folks don't ever come here except to cause us a problem." As Means Coleman writes, "the two women are [both] Whitened through class positioning and education level by Anne-Marie, who views such status as the root of Black exploitation" (189). While Helen's gender places her on a hierarchy below her White male peers, then, her race and education level nevertheless place her in a more privileged position than, and are thus deemed potentially destructive if not, in that sense, monstrous by, Anne-Marie.

Meanwhile, Bernadette is placed in a more liminal position by the film. She is positioned by herself (and, so, the film more broadly) on par with Helen, above Cabrini-Green's residents. But through Helen's (largely unintentional) exercising of White privilege, Bernadette is at least implicitly shown to lack the same level of privilege as Helen, due to their racial differences.

Returning to the apartment complex comparison sequence, then, Helen shows Bernadette the lack of a wall separating Helen's bathroom mirror from the next apartment's. She demonstrates how the killer at Cabrini-Green who had murdered Ruthie Jean was able to get in to her apartment through the mirror, from the adjacent apartment. This sequence as a whole thus does not only prove Bernadette's alignment with Helen, but also indicates Helen's own misguided attempt to align herself with Cabrini-Green. This is a futile and unsuccessful attempt indeed, given the coded Whiteness of her apartment (including the price she paid for it, and the location) in contrast to the coded Blackness of Cabrini-Green. No preponderance of superficial commonalities across these two differently racialized spaces could lessen Helen's White privilege which she carries with her into the Black space of Cabrini-Green. Race is embedded in more than just the architecture. Or, rather, it is built into the architecture of the apartments by White systems of power that, as demonstrated in the aforementioned sequence, have purposefully segregated and codified the apartments by race and socioeconomic status. Yet, again, Helen ultimately proves unable to truly interrogate, nor even fully recognize her privilege, nor her place, within this form of oppression; the film's jokes about her pricey rent aside, she has benefitted from this segregation, but neither she nor the film at large ever acknowledges this. In other words, Helen fails to understand that while the walls may be built similarly, no violence the likes of which characterize Cabrini-Green would ever occur between them. And, she likewise

fails to see that as a renter in the would-be project of Lincoln Village, she is benefitting from a

White supremacist, racist system that simultaneously oppresses Cabrini-Green's Black residents.

Helen's ignorance about the systemic causes for Cabrini-Green's racialized status, versus

her own apartment's status as a would-be project as determined by an architectural similarity,

can be attributed to her White, middle-class privilege and her academic standpoint; and so, these

also inform then how she approaches the myth of Candyman and the real racialized space of

Cabrini-Green. When discussing Cabrini-Green early in the aforementioned sequence,

Bernadette is, notably, the one who must remind Helen that this isn't one of her fairy tales, that a

woman got killed there—a Black woman, Ruthie Jean, to be more specific. Bernadette's

perspective on the situation, which Helen lacks, once more proves the difference in racial

privilege between them. Bernadette may exhibit White fears of Cabrini-Green due to her

class/education positioning alongside Helen, in other words, but her race still negates any

potential arrogance about Cabrini-Green, the likes of which Helen exhibits because she truly is

White. Despite this reminder that Candyman is not one of her fairy tales, Helen still tells a young

boy from Cabrini-Green named Jake that Candyman isn't real—that he's made up, just like

Dracula or Frankenstein. This relegates Candyman to the academic milieu of European/literary

monsters within which Helen has the privilege to operate, glossing over the racial parable of his

origin story. This proves again Helen's initial distance from, ignorance to, and disregard for the

ways in which "an entire community starts attributing the daily horrors of their lives to a

mythical figure," as she herself states earlier in the film when she and Bernadette are on their

way to Cabrini-Green for the first time; the community, of African-Americans living at Cabrini-

Green, do indeed experience horrors that Helen, as a well-educated upper-middle class White

woman living at Lincoln Village, will never have to experience, even throughout her

victimization by the mythic Candyman. Such horrors include the gang leader who has adopted the Candyman name and iconography (the coat and, more ominously, the hook). In fact, whether he is aware of it or not, the only Candyman Jake seems to actually know or be concerned about is the gang leader. It is possible that Jake views this figure mythically rather than as a reality, but this is left ambiguous in the film. This ambiguity speaks, at least in part, to the horror genre's built-in aims at suspense—since this reinforces the idea that the mythic Candyman may in fact be real. And, more importantly, this is not something that Helen considers either way, as she "constructs herself as a missionary of social truth, as if in expiation of white liberal guilt" (Briefel and Ngai 290). Further, it is only her succumbing to the gang leader Candyman's violence that successfully expels this particular horror; her being assaulted by him leads to his arrest, while no murder of Black women at Cabrini-Green incited such justice.

In terms of Helen's White privilege and its relation to both space and Bernadette, Bernadette is even more fearful than Helen is of going to Cabrini-Green. Firstly, on their car ride to the housing project, Helen attempts to quell Bernadette's fears by arguing that they should press on because their male counterparts at the university would have been too afraid to do so. This is one way in which Helen exhibits White feminism; she believes that these male professors are the main source of domination oppressing both her and Bernadette, and that they must therefore work together to eliminate that oppression via their thesis (which, to Helen, necessitates their trip to Cabrini-Green). This assumes Bernadette's Whiteness or rather, that they are both oppressed equally by these male professors and thus both seek to benefit from their thesis. Helen (and the film as a text) fails to consider Bernadette's actual race and thus the idea that it is Whiteness, rather than maleness, which may be Bernadette's true source of domination and oppression. As a result, there is a failure also to consider that their trip to Cabrini-Green and

their thesis more generally will serve only to benefit Helen in her quest for equality with her White male counterparts, while only exploiting and harming Bernadette in the process.

Secondly, Bernadette carries pepper-spray, and appears physically tense as they cross the premises of Cabrini-Green, even while Helen communicates with relative ease with the Black teenagers they find there—all because, as she says to Bernadette, they think they are cops. This mistaken identity is posited as a privileged position by Helen, to Bernadette. Further, the very idea that Helen feels she can explain to Bernadette, a Black woman, what the Black residents of Cabrini-Green think about their presence is another mark of her privilege and the ignorance therein. And, that Bernadette assents to Helen's theory here endorses Helen's authority on the subject despite her Whiteness. The film thus can be seen, to a certain degree anyway, as endorsing Helen's White privilege by neglecting to question it through the means of other characters—and by likewise failing to dismantle it by the film's ending, which recasts Helen as a monster who arguably erases the Blackness of the film's previous monster. Bernadette continues to stay back while Helen enters Candyman's lair to take pictures. Helen inserts herself, via her privilege and with camera in tow, into spaces at Cabrini-Green where she does not belong. Bernadette, being Black but coded as White, is unable or unwilling to do the same. She is forced into literal, physical liminal spaces, such as the bathroom where Ruthie Jean was killed, as Helen crawls through its mirror to photograph Candyman's lair. Helen can insert herself into even Candyman's seemingly off-limits space while Bernadette relegates herself to the very same space where a Black woman had been killed recently.

The third instance of Bernadette exhibiting fear and vulnerability within her relationship to Helen specifically (and in relation also to White, versus Black, spaces) is when Helen calls Candyman in her apartment bathroom. Bernadette gets fearful and does not say the last iteration

of "Candyman." Helen, though, does say it, seemingly fearless. After all, Helen believes the urban legend to be just that—a legend incapable of harming her, which in certain respects, is true; Candyman does not want to harm her. Helen is, however, not at this point, if ever, consciously aware that it is her White feminine beauty that is protecting her from his violence, not his folkloric/fictional state. It is, perhaps, ironic that while Bernadette is afraid of the Candyman monster, she should be afraid rather of Helen's brazen ignorance in calling him, both with her incantation in that moment, and her disbelief in him overall. As Briefel and Ngai point out, "Helen fails to consider…the possibility that in order to position herself as an educator, she may actually *need* to believe that [Cabrini-Green's residents] believe in the legend" (290). And so, it is Helen's privilege, as a White woman, which allows her to operate with such brazenness and ignorance that ultimately kills Bernadette: via Candyman's hook, and notably, within Helen's apartment, turning her White space into an unlikely site for violence after all.

Bernadette's close friendship with Helen, then, becomes literally deadly to Bernadette. More specifically, Bernadette's downfall is crossing into Helen's White space seemingly without a full understanding of the toxicity involved not just in Helen's Whiteness, but more specifically, in Helen's incomprehension of her own White privilege. One could argue that Bernadette's elevated education and class status supports the distance she tries to create between herself and the Black Cabrini-Green residents and thus supports her friendship with Helen despite its costs. But the friendship between Helen and Bernadette is not inherently dangerous on the grounds of race but is rather based on Helen's inability to understand her White privilege versus Bernadette's lack thereof. As bell hooks articulates, "the feminist movement may have placed the call for sisterhood on the political agenda, but the vast majority of white women were not prepared in their psyches to fully investigate and understand the class differences coupled with

race that would and did make bonding between the two groups difficult, if not all but

impossible" (*Writing Beyond Race* 41). It may be easy, in hooks' terms, to justify Helen's

inability to fully investigate and comprehend the class differences coupled with race which

would make her bond with Bernadette unstable or unsustainable at best—impossible (indeed,

deadly) at worst. But, that justification does not negate the villainy inherent in Helen's

ignorance. Whether or not the film itself unintentionally represents Helen as ignorant in this way,

this ignorance leads to Bernadette's downfall.

Georgina as Matriarch and Housekeeper:

In turning now to Georgina, the most prominent black female character in *Get Out*, we

can take up a subsequent insight in hooks' piece: "historically the relationship between white

women and black women had been characterized by domination, by white females exerting

power over black females. And it was in the domestic household that this unequal relationship

was most apparent" (*Writing Beyond Race* 41). It is this specific unequal relationship, set in the

domestic household, which is recalled in Georgina and Missy's power dynamic in *Get Out.*

While not necessarily utilizing explicit feminist frameworks such as those I have put

forth here from hooks on Black/White female dynamics, Georgina has been helpfully examined

in various think-pieces since the film's release. For instance, Davis has argued the following

regarding *Get Out*'s motif of mirrors and reflections (a motif which it has in common with

Candyman, if only in terms of Georgina's use of them to examine her hair and lobotomy scar):

> This geriatric white woman [Rose's grandmother, inhabiting this Black female body]
>
> now has ownership of a particular type of beauty she's never had before and just can't
>
> deal. Adjusting her wig in the mirror is partially Grandma trying to cover the unsightly
>
> scar that comes along with forcibly putting your brain in an unwilling Black woman's

body, but also speaks to the undeniable fascination white women have with Black hair. Every Black woman can identify a time her head has been poked and prodded without permission, but Grandma now gets to satisfy her curiosities with her very own black hair to play with. Instead of keeping the real Georgina's luscious natural hair (as seen in her boo-love picture with Rose in the photo trophy collection) Grandma keeps it braided under a wig. While she might have Black hair of her very own, she doesn't actually know what to do with it because appropriating Blackness doesn't come with an understanding of the nuances or realities of being Black.

With Georgina being, on the inside, an older White woman, this appropriation of Black physical qualities can be read similarly to Walter's situation. When Chris is taken on a tour of the Armitage house upon arriving, Dean brings up the fact that Jesse Owens beat his father (who now inhabits Walter's body) in the Olympics, and that he "almost got over it." This phrase foreshadows Walter's running in the middle of the night; this moment unnerves Chris shortly before he is hypnotized by Missy, and proves that Dean's father never truly did get over it—and that he now has the means (that is, the Black male body) to reclaim that level of glory which he had been otherwise unable to when in a White male body. Likewise, Georgina now has the body which had come to symbolize a more effective homemaker figure, for according to hooks, "White women may have been accorded higher status based on race but black females saw themselves as the true and better homemakers" (*Writing Beyond Race* 41). Chris saves Georgina after hitting her in his attempts to escape, and when Georgina awakens in the car, the words that accompany her violent outburst toward Chris are, "You ruined my house!" In this moment, her wig has fallen off, revealing the aforementioned braids and lobotomy scar. Also, this scene again exposes the White grandmother's concern for the upkeep of her home, which through Georgina's

Black female body, she arguably thought she would have even more control over than she did before. And, in addition, this sequence also reveals a grandmother-granddaughter solidarity between Rose and Georgina which transcends, or rather ignores, the Blackness of the body which "Grandma" now inhabits; when Rose comes to the front door with a shotgun, and sees that Georgina has been hit but saved by Chris, she lowers her gun and utters "grandma," in an almost warm, or at least self-assured tone of voice, seemingly confident that grandma will successfully thwart Chris' escape.

Meanwhile, Rose's "solidarity" with Georgina—as a Black woman—is an empty gesture at best, such as when Rose is replaying the many microaggressions of their first day at the Armitage home. Rose, though merely feigning disbelief in order to maintain the impression for Chris that she is different than her unexpectedly racist family, complains about her mother being rude to Georgina. The encounter to which she is referring features Georgina pouring iced tea from a pitcher for Chris, Rose, Dean, and Missy, as they sit outside discussing the upcoming annual "party" (where unbeknownst to him, Chris will be auctioned off in the game of bingo). Chris is shot in close-up as he looks up at Georgina and thanks her. The scene then cuts to a medium close-up of Georgina, whose facial expression changes from a knowing grin, to a strained, tense look of unease and terror. The former look, I argue, is initiated by the White grandmother smiling about the party; she even is happily looking down at the glasses as she pours the iced tea while smirking. The latter, then, is initiated by the Black woman attempting to reemerge from her sunken place—for the first, but not only time in the film—at least partially in response to the trauma of her procedure which the discussion of the party has reawakened in her. In contrast to the look of mischievous joy she projects downward as she pours the drinks, she continues to pour while staring off-screen with this look of discomfort. She blinks and purses her

lips as she overfills Chris' glass of iced tea, to which Missy condescendingly says, "Georgina!"

followed by her polite, but still admonishing, suggestion that she go lay down and get some rest.

As Georgina leaves the frame after flashing an over-the-top smile at Missy in response to her

recommendation, the camera momentarily lingers on Missy's face as she glares after her. Despite

Georgina's assumed status as better homemaker, due in part to her being the original Armitage

matriarch (internally) and her new racial identity (externally/superficially), the latter nevertheless

places her beneath and at the command of Missy. After all, Missy is the White woman who

serves as Georgina's employer and as the new Armitage matriarch. And, she also has power over

Georgina (specifically, the Black woman residing within) due to her ability to hypnotize her.

Black (versus White) Motherhood:

The role of Black motherhood itself, as it interacts with and is, more specifically,

exploited by White womanhood/White motherhood in each film, commands further attention. In

Candyman, when Anne-Marie and her infant son, Anthony, meet Helen, Anne-Marie asks Helen

if she has children, and she replies that she does not, but that she wants to one day. Anne-Marie

may play other roles on her own terms. She is a single, working mother raising her amidst the

difficult conditions of Cabrini-Green that she articulates to Helen and Bernadette earlier in this

scene. But in terms of her dynamic with Helen, specifically, this conversation about having

children rather recasts and redirects Anne-Marie's Black motherhood, loading it with and

reducing it to problematic symbolism; Anne-Marie eventually comes to serve as a surrogate for

Candyman and Helen to potentially create their mixed-race family. As Schneider proposes, that

is, Candyman's kidnapping of Anthony is effective at "providing the final member of an

(admittedly dysfunctional) interracial family, and sending a message—to viewers, as well as to

those within the diegesis—that nothing, not even the most horrible acts of racial violence, will

prevent such families from coming into being" (86). However, this reading is overly reductive and short-sighted at best. It does not acknowledge the infant's race, first of all; Anthony is not presented to us as a mixed-race child, although we are not introduced to a father figure which would confirm or deny his race. And perhaps more importantly, in *Candyman,* this pseudo-family is produced not by a sexual relationship between a White woman and Candyman, as it would have been in the original Candyman myth. Even though Helen and Candyman do, in a sense, consummate their relationship, this is only after, or as a direct result of, his kidnapping of Anthony. Helen only agrees to give herself over to Candyman to save the child, reminding him that they "had a deal" in which he would let Anthony go safely if she surrendered to him. The film does not present this family merely as "dysfunctional" as Schneider suggests, therefore, but as unethical and unsustainable; Helen returns Anthony to his rightful—Black—mother. Through this chain of events, then, Anne-Marie's role as Anthony's mother also becomes the primary factor in Helen's eventual transformation into White martyr/savior. Chris' mother, meanwhile, also factors into *Get Out* even in her absence. As Willis writes:

> Her death, as a matter of fact, is the gateway to Chris' "sunken place."… It's fitting in this movie, which is a giant metaphor for how white supremacy harms black people, that Chris' enslavement is indirectly caused by the sustained mental trauma of a broken familial bond. It's then easy to argue…that had Chris' mother been alive, he would've been mentally fortified enough for hypnosis to not have worked; Jeremy would've had to step in and break him down physically.

Willis also goes on to argue that Rod, though suspicious throughout the film nevertheless "clearly lacked the intuition that seems to be hardwired in every black mama. Rose's evil spirit would have been exposed from the onset, or she would've been interrogated enough that she'd

move on to her next black victim." So, it is the very absence or loss or lack of a Black woman—

in particular, a Black maternal figure—which allows for a White woman—in particular, a White

maternal figure—to continue Rose's work in mentally exploiting Chris. This is rather than

having that task fall on a White male (Jeremy) who would resort to physical violence from the

outset (as he does with Andre-turned-Logan, in the opening scene of the film). White women

thus are able to succeed where there is an absence, exploitation, or indeed enslavement (via the

sunken place), of Black women.

While this may be true in the case of both *Candyman* and *Get Out,* it is important to

acknowledge that this very power dynamic is dangerous to intersectional feminist thought and

progress for both White women and women of color in American society. As hooks states,

> Critical thinking about the historical relationship between white women and black
>
> women reveals the extent to which these two groups are pitted against one another by
>
> dominator culture in ways that serve to maintain the status quo. Basically, the message
>
> these two groups have historically received from dominator culture is that one group
>
> cannot be liberated unless the other group remains enslaved. It is the understanding of
>
> this message that has made and continues to make most black women fearful of alliances
>
> with white women, fearful that any gains white women make in the existing social
>
> structure will mean setbacks for black women/women of color. Retrospectively, it is
>
> evident that as long as women have sought solely to gain power within the existing social
>
> structure this has been the correct assumption. (*Writing Beyond Race* 40)

In other words, both films present—whether automatically and idiosyncratically (as *Candyman*

does) or somewhat more critically (as *Get Out* does)—versions of this existing social structure.

Both films present dominator culture (White, capitalist/patriarchal systems and institutions of

power) as sustained in part by keeping White and Black women at odds via the idea (projected

by dominator culture to both groups) that they cannot excel without the other remaining behind.

Black (versus White) Women as Saviors:

Get Out does, however, also depict (arguably without adequately deconstructing) the

ways in which dominator culture also creates an unnecessarily tenuous sense of solidarity

between Black women and Black men; as hooks puts it, "solidarity between black women and

men continues to be undermined by sexism and misogyny" (107). The film, for instance, features

a Black female character who departs from the tradition inherent in Chris' mother—that is, of

saving Black men from or warning them against White women: Detective Latoya (Erika

Alexander). Her scene in the film, according to Willis, "represents a deviation from the ancient

tradition of black women saving black men. Here, we have a black woman not only positioned to

be the hero, but to be the barrier between life and death for a black man. Yet, she puts her cape

down and steps out of the way." Willis goes on to claim that "Black women will always have

black men's backs but Detective Latoya is a symbol (maybe accidentally on Peele's part) of the

weariness and reluctance of black women showing up for black men who don't always show up

for them." Or, put another way by Davis, "Even if Latoya assumed the responsibility of being the

Black woman saving a Black man from a white woman, who would be left to save her? Black

women are continuously supporting everyone around them, but then there's no one left to help

them or support them."

However, to complicate Davis' arguments somewhat, these readings beg the question of

how, methodologically, one must grapple also with genre conventions and motivations, even in

otherwise ideological analyses. Given this project's interest in thinking critically about how

horror as a genre uniquely and effectively serves as a vehicle for and manifestation of

representational concerns, one must also consider Latoya's rejection of the Black-woman-savior

role within the film's specific generic and narrative necessities. For instance, Latoya also fits into a longstanding tradition in horror movies, from Hitchcock's films to slasher films, in which authority figures such as police officers and detectives are useless in helping everyday individuals who are in extreme danger—whether due to disbelief and skepticism as in the case of Latoya, or sheer incompetence, or both. Many of these think-pieces, due to the nature of *Get Out*'s powerful social commentary, ignore the genre through which that commentary is effectively conveyed, in a sense implicitly arguing that those genre conventions distract from or lessen the ideological and theoretical concerns over representation. Ideology, however, is not separate from genre. It is inherently bound up in it. If we are to justify certain character motivations in terms of what the film's horror narrative calls for, then its ideological readings become even more potent and possible; we can read Latoya in Davis' terms not in spite of but rather because her character must act a certain way as necessitated by the genre. Even if Davis does not herself explicitly factor the genre into those readings of Latoya, we must keep them in mind to better understand horror's role in ideological (that is, racial and gendered) representations. Genre conventions also come into play in terms of reading Latoya's scene as being "relegated to comic relief;" nevertheless, through this relegation, "one could [still] argue that Peele has yet to understand the lens through which black women view the world" (Davis)

One could also argue that this overall notion of Black-woman-as-savior is conspicuously inverted in *Candyman*, wherein Helen is the one to save Anne-Marie's child. Again, in addition to depicting Bernadette as existing outside of any of these, albeit stereotypical, narratives, *Candyman* also depicts Anne-Marie as needing to be helped, and her baby saved, by the very White woman whose privileged meddling in Cabrini-Green has caused her strife in the first place. In Helen's funeral scene, it is Anne-Marie, holding Anthony in her arms, alongside Jake,

the little boy Helen speaks with earlier, that we see leading the procession of African-American Cabrini-Green residents to Helen's grave. Shot from a low-height, low-angle, as if the camera is viewing them from Helen's point of view in her grave, Jake throws Candyman's hook into the grave while Anne-Marie looks on. In addition to the miscegenation-based readings of this gesture offered in the previous chapter, it also potentially bestows upon her Candyman's mythic power (if it resides within his weapon) and, again, rewards her with a trophy symbolizing her heroism in saving Cabrini-Green from Candyman. And so, through this gesture, the film overlooks or undermines Helen's previous arrogance and exploitation, thereby endorsing a White savior narrative via these Black characters. Thus, one could argue that Bernard Rose did not understand "the lens through which black women view the world," either (Davis).

Hypnosis and Paralysis in Terms of Saviors and Solidarity:

These problematic occurrences in the films—of White saviors of Black women, and Black women saving (or neglecting to save) Black men—are hyperbolized and complicated through both films' depictions of hypnosis and ensuing paralysis. Georgina, however, does not need any external stimuli to awaken from her sunken place (such as the camera flash which awakens Andre out of Logan). Georgina in fact acts as a site for the struggle between oppressed Black woman (in her sunken place) and in-control White woman (Rose's grandmother). This is seen to a degree in the aforementioned iced tea pouring scene, but even more so in the scene addressed in the previous chapter when she speaks to Chris about why she has unplugged his phone. In this scene, she begins to break down after Chris says he gets nervous when there are too many White people around. At this, her lips begin to quiver and then purse. She gasps as if trying to speak (presumably, to warn Chris to get out of the Armitage home before it is too late) but stops herself (as the grandmother regains control). Her brows furrow and eventually she

begins to laugh while her eyes fill with tears and a single tear drop falls on her cheek—all shot in a very tight, uncomfortable close-up. She then says "no" over and over again, before seeming to fully regain her composure (or, more aptly, her power, pushing the Black woman back into her sunken place). She then claims that the Armitages are very good to her and Walter—that they treat them like family, because they are. The scene ends with Chris muttering that "this bitch is crazy," thus breaking down any possible solidarity between Black man and Black woman. In this case, such a breakdown comes as a direct result of villainous White womanhood, as Georgina's message to him was interrupted by the White woman who controls her body. This scene has lead Willis to read Georgina as

> The embodiment of the two-edged sword that is the "strong black woman" stereotype. It's this idea that Black women can't be broken…While this stereotype is founded in some truth…it also builds up a myth about black women…Georgina is every black woman that has lived up to this stereotype while simultaneously being cut down by it…She is every black woman trying to save black men from their own demise only to be met with suspicion and distrust.

Chris ultimately flashes back to the image of Georgina's crying when he is debating whether or not to save her after hitting her with the car as he is escaping; he conflates this flashback with the paralysis he felt as a child in not saving his own mother. His regret over his inaction during his own mother's hit and run is also shown to us here explicitly through flashbacks to his sitting in front of the TV set as a child. This suggests that he finally does recognize Georgina's powerlessness, and his power to now help her, even though her original, albeit tragic, message may have been that Chris needs to save himself. Helen's own paralysis meanwhile prevents her from saving Bernadette from Candyman. Helen's hypnotized state does not allow her to even

call her name and warn Bernadette, though she does clearly struggle in her attempts to do so. This can be read as a symbolic representation of White women's paralysis in confronting their own White privilege and the harm it can do to Black women. It can be read this way given Helen's bringing Candyman into her home via her brazen disbelief in him and her intentional invocation of him earlier in the film. Helen remains generally safe, if not psychologically then at least physically, due to her privileged White femininity. So, again, her actions only endanger Bernadette, and ultimately for the sake of Helen's ambitions and achievements. Thus, by attempting to call Bernadette's name but proving unable to use her voice, she is acting out a kind of ineffectual, indeed powerless attempt to protect a Black woman from that which her privilege has wrought. But, through the very enactments of her privilege (calling Candyman, who has now induced Helen's paralysis) and the benefits she arguably stands to reap from it (academically/professionally but also her immortality and monstrosity) she remains silent when her Black female companion needs her voice most. Further, Helen's paralysis here is reminiscent of Chris' inability to save his own mother, and the hypnosis (and ensuing paralysis) this later leads to or allows for at the hands of Missy Armitage. Bernadette exemplifies a Black woman who has "shown up" but is not saved. Thus, *Candyman* presents a dangerous White feminism on Helen's part; Bernadette helps Helen get as far as she does with their thesis on Candyman, and consistently puts herself into dangerous or at the very least uncomfortable situations. While the thesis they are working on is presented as something that should be a joint effort between both women, Helen ultimately gains from it, while Bernadette dies for it. Similarly, Anne-Marie lets her guard down slightly around Helen and ends up being a victim to Helen's exploitative Whiteness, and more specifically, one of the crimes Candyman frames Helen for.

Solidarity within Sociopolitical Contexts—Anita Hill and The Women's March:

As the conclusion to my previous chapter suggests, White women in 2017 (as constructed in *Get Out*) are represented differently than White women in 1992 (as constructed in *Candyman*). They are represented as being more aware of and duplicitous in their enactments and embodiments of White privilege and White feminism. Again, this is in large part because of where feminism is theoretically and rhetorically, as well as culturally and in practice, during each of the film's sociopolitical contexts—particularly in relation to issues of race and therefore intersectionality. Thus, in order to continue to add nuances to this overarching conclusion, a discussion of these very sociopolitical contexts and their ensuing feminist discourses necessarily takes shape around two events: Anita Hill's sexual assault testimony against Clarence Thomas before he was confirmed to the supreme court in 1991, and the organization and execution of the Women's March in January of 2017. I have chosen to situate my readings of *Candyman* and *Get Out* within these two events for the following reasons. First, both events served as sites for issues of intersectionality to play themselves out in a practical, rather than merely theoretical, sense; they each to different degrees and in different ways demonstrate the need for intersectional feminism. Both did so in highly visible ways, given their mainstream coverage in traditional news media outlets and, later, on the internet. Lastly, due to the feminist issues at the core of each event, combined with their cultural prominence, these events are especially indicative of the aforementioned correlation between sociopolitical context and feminist theoretical discourse.

For instance, the Anita Hill hearing can be read today as a catalyst for reflection on the very nature of feminism, intersectional or otherwise, when up against the dominant patriarchal system. bell hooks, in her piece "A Feminist Challenge: Must We Call Every Woman Sister?" writes:

Though many women viewers felt we understood Hill's actions, for any woman to make

such charges within the context of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, especially a

black woman, if indeed she expected to be taken seriously, there should have been full

recognition that she would need to do more than simply state her case…While I have

talked with many women of various races and ethnicities who admired Hill's

calmness…such admiration need not obscure the reality that Hill's performance suggests

that she brought to the hearings misguided faith in a system that has rarely worked for

women seeking justice in cases of sexual harassment…Had Anita Hill been an advocate

of feminism, mild or militant, she would have brought to the hearings the kind of feminist

thinking and awareness that would have enabled her to face the reality that white

supremacist patriarchy had already chosen Thomas. It would have given her the wisdom

to understand that to challenge that choice, either by creating powerful opposition or by

exposing his true character, she would need to subvert the system. Subversion requires

strategy. Simply stating the case was not enough. (*Black Looks* 79-80)

Further, in addition to critiquing Hill's lack of feminist strategy, hooks also highlights the

ineffectual feminism of those [White] women who projected onto Hill feminist ideas and stances

that Hill, in reality, never truly embodied or, at least, never explicitly touted:

Contrary to those who wish to claim that the hearings were in some way a feminist

victory, [because Hill was u]nable to step outside the boundaries of patriarchal discourse,

Hill was never disloyal to patriarchy or, for that matter, to the institution of white

supremacy. Instead she expressed her loyalty consistently by the manner in which she

appealed to the system for justice. By appropriating her as feminist hero, women, and

white women in particular, show that they are more interested in positioning Hill in support of a feminism that she never espoused (*Black Looks* 82-83).

Like my previous chapter's framing of Helen in reference to Jane Byrne and Rose in reference to Hilary Clinton, framing Bernadette similarly in reference to Anita Hill helps position the film as being in conversation to some degree with (or at least better understood in lieu of) race and gender relations at the time. With these two passages then, we may better interpret Bernadette's characterization and, perhaps more specifically, her relationship with Helen and their mutual, though differing, relationship to White capitalist patriarchy. For instance, Bernadette was, like Hill, well-educated and worked in academia, and was arguably never disloyal to the systems which she was bound up in and brought down by. Bernadette's loyalty to White supremacist patriarchy is likewise exemplified by her academic career pursuits and class positioning alongside Helen. Bernadette's loyalty to White supremacist patriarchy is also more problematic or more complicated than Helen's. This is due to the inescapable reality and seemingly inevitable oppression of Bernadette's race. Despite her attempts to align herself with Helen professionally as a potential way of escaping that aspect of her identity, she is still oppressed by that aspect of her identity. Thus, while Bernadette's actions, similar to Hill's, are understandable, they cannot be fit into a feminist narrative. Or, rather, a similarly heroic feminist status cannot easily be attributed to Bernadette. Her actions appeal to the existing system (in her case, the system can be said to be academia, and she seeks professional, educational equality rather than justice). And, that system, especially via Helen's role within that system, predictably, fails her. As far as Helen's role, one might read her as the same type of White woman who positions her friend Bernadette in idealistic feminist terms—that is, as an equal, without understanding the racial differences which cause there to be discrepancies in their experiences.

While Helen may be the type to project solidarity onto her friendship with Bernadette, by neglecting to interrogate her own Whiteness and Bernadette's lack thereof, she likewise neglects to question or adequately strategize against the powerful White supremacist patriarchy that she and Bernadette are both ultimately operating within. Thus, again, Anita Hill also serves as a crucial example of how political, cultural events and upheavals help shape feminist thought and theory. And, Hill also demonstrates how political, cultural events and ensuing theoretical discourses in turn both help further support my readings of the films. This is especially true given other aspects of the Hill trial which are necessary to at least acknowledge here in terms of intersectional feminism and solidarity: namely, that Hill was supported, however inconsequentially, by five female lawmakers, one of whom was Black, but the rest of whom were White. As articulated by Annys Shin and Libby Casey:

> On Nov. 16, Anita Hill sat down at The Washington Post offices with five current and former Democratic lawmakers: Nita M. Lowey (N.Y.), Barbara A. Mikulski (Md.), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D.C.), Pat Schroeder (Colo.) and Louise M. Slaughter (N.Y.) — all allies of Hill during her historic appearance at the confirmation hearings for U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991. Hill…alleged at the time that Thomas had sexually harassed her when she was in her mid-20s and worked for him at the Department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The five female lawmakers were part of a larger group of members of Congress who prevailed on their colleagues…to allow Hill to testify. Millions of Americans watched on television as the all-white, all-male panel questioned Hill with prosecutorial zeal.

This echoes what hooks points out, that "[t]here was no racial or sexual diversity on the committee, none of that "inclusion" that would indicate shared positions of equality within the

existing social structure," and that "bonds of white supremacy and maleness transcended differences…among the white male Senate committee members. Those bonds could extend to and include Clarence Thomas because he so fundamentally allied himself with the interests of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (*Black Looks* 84). And, hooks even argues that "the hearings became a public occasion for an assault on feminism…That Anita Hill's personal political reality was obscured by those who positioned her as feminist symbol cannot be denied. And it is this positioning that allowed many people to see the hearings as the death of feminism" (*Black Looks* 84). But while hooks claims therefore that "the hearings were an attack on feminism (defined here as a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression) and an attack on feminist principles," what then might we make of these supposed White female allies and their absence from hooks theorizations (*Black Looks* 84)? In terms of situating *Candyman* within the context of these hearings, having been released just the following year, I choose not to read Hill's allies as ineffectual in and of themselves due to their White womanhood or even unintentional White feminism. Rather, I return to the idea of Bernadette attempting to have solidarity with Helen while both operating within an institutional, systemic structure that is patriarchal and White supremacist in nature, and that deems her agency and moreover her ability to stand equally with Helen as upper middle-class, well-educated academic professionals impossible. Helen's assumptions that she and Bernadette are equal already can thus also be read similarly to Hill's White female allies. Their helping Hill to testify could be deemed feminist in nature, but like Helen, and in line with hooks' readings of the trial, there was a lack of understanding as to the obstacles inherent for Hill as a Black woman seeking justice in a White supremacist system. And, also, there was a lack of understanding as to the fact that in the decision to confirm Thomas, the strategy-lacking feminism was not enough to dismantle that

dominant system. Thus, this feminism can be seen as a moot point, to some degree, open to critique and ridicule by the very system they failed to dismantle. And so, with that in mind, Anita Hill's example ultimately serves to demonstrate the deeply embedded and seemingly insurmountable nature of systemic racism. Hill's example allows for potential critiques of Hill, and her White allies. But perhaps more prominently, Hill's example allows for a critique of the system itself in which they operate—and which they were unable to dismantle. Systemic racism embeds itself within patriarchy and undermines solidarity between White and Black women. In both Hill's hearing and *Candyman*, systemic racism recuperates the dominant Whiteness lost through Hill and Bernadette, respectively, acting White (and/or being seen as White by their White allies). Systemic racism, in other words, reinstates White patriarchal status quo by reminding Hill—and Bernadette—that within that system, they are not simply women, assumed White and aligned with their White friends and colleagues. They are, in fact, *Black* women.

Therefore, the women's attempts at solidarity in Hill's example, while ineffectual for the reasons described here, cannot be entirely discredited, either; at least, its failures should be attributed to that dominant—racist and patriarchal—system. Likewise, Helen's similarly idealistic, ignorant approach to solidarity with Bernadette should be attributed to that same dominant system as it is, again, idiosyncratically or automatically reified by the film text as a whole and, more specifically then, by its White male creators including director Bernard Rose. This does not negate the necessity to retroactively read Helen's White feminism, nor should it counteract or undermine this project's aims at holding her accountable for it. Rather, the difficult theoretical conundrum posed by hooks as to *how*, strategically speaking, Hill's White female allies should have dismantled patriarchy within the context of helping Hill to get an opportunity to testify, cannot be answered here simply or in any practical terms. For if they were to not

support Hill in this way, and/or if Hill were to not testify at all, this may have further suppressed her voice and agency. So ultimately, Hill and her allies do exhibit an imperfect and thus ineffective feminism that is similarly reflected in *Candyman*; in both the hearing and the film, systemic racism undermines solidarity. But, neither the hearing nor the film necessarily argues against solidarity, either. Rather, we can and indeed should read the Hill hearing and the film as lacking an awareness and interrogation of Whiteness, and of its role within and relationship to feminism, which are required to dismantle White supremacist patriarchy. But instead of holding Hill's allies and Helen accountable by offering retroactive solutions to their ineffectual feminism, their ineffectuality within that existing dominant system can be applied to critiques and readings of future feminist movements—and to *Get Out*, in relation to those movements.

In particular, their solidarity and intersectionality, and their failures and flaws therein, can be thought of in conjunction with the Women's March. As noted in the literature review chapter of this project, the March was criticized in its planning phases for not including any women of color as organizers. But there were also other dominant narratives surrounding the March and feminist critiques that resulted from and pushed against some of those narratives. Like the positioning of Anita Hill as feminist symbol, an unhelpful and largely unwarranted (according to hooks) discursive move on the part of American [arguably White female] viewers, the Women's March too can be read as a way of White women taking action in a way that makes themselves feel better but does not dismantle existing systems of [White supremacist] patriarchy. That is, by marching one day out of the whole year, these women may have made themselves feel better about the other 364 days when they did nothing for their sisters of color and women who are not cis-gendered, able-bodied, or heterosexual. This is encapsulated by Lonnae O'Neal:

Even though a majority of white women voted for Trump, white feminists are now urging

resistance to his presidency. They've called for solidarity across racial lines and for a

massive Women's March on Washington the day after the inauguration. But a vocal

segment of women of color, especially black feminists, are saying, hold up, pump the

brakes. While white feminists are issuing all-hands-on-deck calls to stand against a

Trump presidency, these women say, they haven't worked hard enough to even win over

a majority of their own ranks. And where were most white feminists when women of

color, lesbians and transgender women were marching in the streets to protest police

shootings, and other issues important to nonwhite, or non-middle-class women? Women

of color stand ready to protest — some of them are key organizers in the Women's March

on Washington, others have voiced support, others will be protesting in their local areas.

But this whole ally thing feels a little one-sided.

In addition to this form of ineffectual ally-ship though, other central threads emerged

from the Women's March in terms of race, sisterhood, and solidarity. There is the notion, again,

that many White women who saw themselves as allies, and who did not vote for Trump, were

marching less for the interests of non-White women, and more for their own interests as White

women, which are so often assumed to be all women's interests. As Melissa Gira Grant writes,

> For all the rights white women have gained in the last century (…suffrage, divorce,
>
> contraception, employment) perhaps, for some of those women, once they got theirs, that
>
> was enough? If you, a white woman voter, can afford to travel wherever you need to for
>
> an abortion, does a prohibition on Medicaid covering abortion matter to you? If you, a
>
> white woman voter, are without a criminal record, does the disenfranchisement of women
>
> with felony convictions matter? These are the calculations white women, including white

feminists, make across the political spectrum. These restrictions, they can see, largely fall on women of color and women in poverty. What is absent from the lives of too many white women, then, isn't feminism. It is a sense of justice that still fights as if it really believes that, until all women are free, no women will be.

Secondly, there was the White privilege exhibited by the marchers themselves in their interactions with police officers and in their recounting of the event afterwards as being successful given its lack of violence; on this, Lavanya Ramanathan writes:

> [P]rivilege in the march…allowed hundreds of thousands of women — the overwhelming majority of them white — to march freely, beyond the borders of their permitted route in Washington, filling the streets in Los Angeles, effectively shutting down downtown Chicago, yet never encountering police in riot gear, never having to wipe away pepper spray, never fearing arrest. They saw privilege in the women posing for photos with grinning officers wearing pink "pussy hats" alongside them.[8]

While these negative aspects of the March may be more hopefully seen as crash course lesson in intersectional feminism for the future, they were nevertheless still failures in intersectional feminist practice. However, the Women's March was extremely important and effective if for no other reason than its widespread visibility online and over news media outlets, as well as support from activists and celebrities. But, given the relative accessibility of the March—its presence even in small cities across the country and the world—it may have served, again, as an easy way to perform ally-ship not similarly nor effectively enacted by these

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[8] The ubiquitous pink pussy hats worn that day, it should be noted, were largely criticized for assuming biological femaleness on the part of all women (thereby symbolically leaving out transgender women who, despite their lack of ovaries and female genitalia, are women—and who are thus affected by women's rights issues and who are often far more vulnerable to other additional forms of oppression and violence.

supposed allies throughout the year. Therefore, the failures of the March and the backlash that it subsequently faced, further inflect my reading of Peele's construction of Rose; her representation can be read in lieu of, or in direct conversation with, the ideological and practical flaws of the March. Of particular importance to my readings of Rose, in addition to these notions of ineffectual or part-time ally-ship, is the idea that the March focused on "reproductive health care, LGBT issues and equal pay" in defiance of the new administration's antithetical values—and yet there was a lack of visible accountability at the March itself in terms of White women's role in getting Trump elected (Bates). Even with all the opportunities alluded to in the previous chapter's conclusion to learn about and live by intersectional rather than White feminism, that is, "A majority of white women—53 percent—voted for Trump. This oft-repeated data point tends to disappear from coverage of the Women's March... Instead, feel-good accounts of the resistance repeat a cheery narrative about women in pink hats as a fixed, biological category of people who all experience the world in the same way and uniformly hold center-left political views" (Daniels). As Jessie Daniels further explains,

> The majority of white women have voted Republican for decades, and that pattern is rooted in systems of white supremacy and patriarchy: When white women marry white men (and around 90 percent do), their economic interests are yoked to those of their husbands. Most people writing and talking about Trump don't put "white" and "women" together as a demographic category. Instead, the white women who voted for Trump are lumped together as "Republican" or "rural" or "white evangelicals," but whiteness and the way it changes woman-ness slips away in these configurations. It's hard for us to grasp the idea that white women are culpable, because it doesn't fit the widespread culture image of us as benevolent, peaceful and nurturing. These assumptions allow white

women to behave in ways that materially harm non-white people, without being held accountable.

Thus, I argue that Rose represents both types of White woman articulated here, given how she is presented in *Get Out*. That is, she presents herself as an albeit ineffectual liberal feminist ally. But beneath that, and beneath her seeming benevolence and nurturing nature, she is also the culpable, even politically conservative, White woman articulated by Daniels above. Helen's White feminism results from ignorance and unawareness, with even her solidarity with Bernadette proven unsustainable due to that ignorance and unawareness, partially given their mutually operating within and against a patriarchal White supremacist system that requires a far more strategic and substantial feminism, according to hooks. Helen's version of White feminism supports Bernadette but leaves out formulations of her own Whiteness that come to harm Bernadette; it makes sense when situated within the same duality exhibited in Anita Hill's trial— between White women politicians who supported her and those White women viewers who viewed her as feminist hero, mistakenly or at least inconsequentially, again according to hooks. Rose, however, presents herself via a different form of duality, or duplicity, that makes sense likewise in terms of the Women's March and the criticisms it yielded that serve to expose White feminism and strengthen intersectionality. Throughout the film, Rose presents herself as the occasional ally, despite the emptiness and strategic employment of such ally-ship as a supremacist ruse. And then, when she isn't playing that part—much like some of the White women present at the March were playing that part—she is the White woman who can materially harm non-White people without being held accountable. Her lack of accountability stems partly from her Whiteness in and of itself. But it is also because she can, and chooses to, so deftly oscillate between the role of the peaceful and "woke" White ally (who does not act in ways that

actually interrogate White privilege or use it to dismantle White supremacy) and the role of the "real" Rose—if there is such a thing. This presumably "real" Rose, as the next chapter will continue to analyze in the following terms, uses ally-ship as a disguise to hide the White woman within who is aligned with, or whose interests are yoked to, socioeconomic interests inherent in sustaining White patriarchy via family ties (including but not necessarily limited to marriage). This particular idea leads us to and will be taken up further in the following, conclusion chapter.

<u>Conclusion: Culpability & Complicity—White Women/White Men</u>

In order to fully and effectively interrogate Whiteness, and White womanhood more specifically, in both *Candyman* and *Get Out,* dynamics between White women and White men must also be considered. As mentioned in my introduction chapter, the particular characters within those dynamics that I will mainly be examining are: Helen with her husband Trevor and a professor named Philip Purcell; and Rose and Missy with Dean and Jeremy. My readings of these dynamics utilize theoretical conceptions and constructions of Whiteness put forth by Dyer, Sullivan, and others. Thus, my readings of these dynamics also serve to expand upon notions of White privilege, White feminism, White guilt, and White liberal anti-racism and, even more particularly, ineffectual/uninformed (or even entirely false, in the case of Rose) White ally-ship. And, in offering these readings within this conclusion chapter, I will also discuss the importance, and the implications, of this project.

By closely considering the interactions between White women and White men, White women are proven to be aligned with White men. And, in turn, these women are proven to be aligned with patriarchal systems and institutions that, in their White supremacist form, benefit and protect them. To that end, I will also be examining White male death in each film. In *Candyman*, White male death is wrought by Helen in an act of revenge upon her cheating husband. In *Get Out*, it is wrought by Chris out of self-defense. In terms of the latter, this chapter will address aforementioned concerns that suggest the on-screen deaths of Dean and Jeremy, and even Georgina, are more violent and visible than the deaths of Rose and Missy. Likewise, in *Candyman*, much of the violence against the Black community, particularly Black women (Bernadette and Ruthie Jean, specifically) occurs off-screen. In contrast, Helen's psychiatrist is another professional White male to endure on-screen violence; while Candyman does in fact kill

this particular White male victim, he is beckoned by Helen who wishes to prove her innocence by proving Candyman's existence. I will more closely analyze these differences in order to argue that White women can, and should, not be read merely as being *potentially* monstrous. Rather, both Helen and Rose are proven to be endlessly privileged and protected by a system which has meanwhile victimized Candyman and Chris, each to the point of "no return" in the sense that they must both resort to violent means in response to the White violence against them. Because they are privileged and protected by White supremacist patriarchy, whether they know it or not, they continue to uphold that system and thereby participate in the oppression and exploitation of Black people. Therefore, they are not simply *potentially* monstrous; they, in fact, *are* monstrous.

Different Operations of Whiteness:

However, these final analyses and ultimate conclusions must be prefaced with the following claim: Helen and Rose do not utilize their White feminine privilege in the same way. Something significant and unique is gained by tracing an *evolution* of representations between *Candyman* and *Get Out*. What is achieved by studying these two films together is a more holistic, nuanced understanding of the multifarious and ever-changing ways that White womanhood can and does operate in relation to racism and White supremacist patriarchy, and of the ways Whiteness more broadly can be and has been defined in relation to racism. George Lipsitz states that "Racism changes over time, taking on different forms and serving different social purposes in different eras" (371). These two films emerge amidst different political and cultural struggles that help shape the contours and dimensions of both racism *and* feminism in ways that are reflected in the films or can, at least, *inflect* our readings of the films. So, White feminism, and White womanhood's operations within the White supremacist/patriarchal status quo, are different in *Candyman*'s time of production and release than in *Get Out*'s time of

production and release; this is, again, due to the ways in which sociopolitical events taking place

in America during different eras (re)shape White supremacist/patriarchal status quo under or

within which White women operate. In addition, though, there is also a relative lack of

understanding or awareness at least in a mainstream sense as to how Whiteness operates in

general, and how multivalent and malleable it can be. The sociopolitical events of the early

1990s, while often highly televised—and while they often did result in feminist discourses and

critical race theory—did not spur the same kind of widespread rhetoric, easily accessible on the

internet, as did the events of the mid-2010s. There are considerably more media sources now,

particularly online, ranging from *Huffington Post* to *Teen Vogue,* in which thoughtful analyses of

White feminism and White supremacy are playing out in response to current political events.

Therefore, Rose, as represented by Peele, has no excuse to not embrace intersectionality,

or interrogate her white feminine privilege—except that White supremacist patriarchy still

presents itself as more beneficial to her. Helen may have had an excuse, but her representation

still reads as culpable, even if in a less intentional way. Her actions still come from an ignorance

or lack of interrogation of her own privilege. *Candyman*'s sociopolitical context might allow us

to read such an interrogation as less likely to be undertaken by Helen—in the sense that the tools

and vocabulary for such an interrogation might not have been as accessible or visible to her.

Ultimately, the differences between Helen's White feminism and Rose's are illuminated and, in

many ways, even incited by their respective times, but also by the notion that Whiteness and

White womanhood can in fact *always* manifest and mobilize in a multitude of ways.

White womanhood, for instance, can at any time still operate similarly to Helen's

representation—unaware and unintentional in her White feminism, but no less culpable or

problematic. It can also operate similarly to Rose's representation—wholly attuned to the ways

in which she continues to support the dominant system because of the benefits it affords her. Although this awareness arguably also extends to and includes an understanding of what intersectionality is and how that, too, would benefit her. But because Whiteness and White womanhood can manifest and mobilize in this multitude of ways, all with exploitative and oppressive outcomes for non-Whites, it becomes increasingly important to take this holistic, nuanced approach. To essentialize or ignore the complexities inherent in Whiteness and White womanhood would be to only view racism in a similarly unproductive and monolithic way. As Kennedy et al., writes,

> If the…racial and political/economic operations of whiteness were interpreted as binary oppositions, they would simply trap people…within fixed options…If the…operations of whiteness are interpreted as oxymorons, however, then the contradictions within and among the operations of Whiteness would be laid alongside one another to determine what myriad meanings might be generated and what possible actions might be taken in particular situations. (10)

This supports the concluding arguments I have put forth here thus far as to the myriad meanings that might be generated by different operations of Whiteness; I read Helen and Rose as two such examples of how operations of White womanhood can vary and be multifaceted, and that those variations do not necessarily oppose or negate each other. But, this also speaks to a central premise underlying this project that I likewise seek to emphasize in this conclusion: that there is a utility, beyond academia, of reading representations of White womanhood within these (and even other) horror films via these methods—in terms of racial exploitation and oppression, but specifically through feminist frameworks that allow for and theoretically supplement such readings. In so doing, horror films and horror film scholarship become important tools in the

ongoing, increasingly mainstream or ubiquitous, cultural conversation about not just racism, nor even Whiteness and intersectionality, but also about the great need for accountability.

In order to continue thinking about Whiteness less as a fixed binary but rather as something more complicated and fluid, it is useful to unpack a statement made by Richard Dyer in the conclusion chapter to his book, *White*, entitled "White Death;" he describes two supposedly opposing forms of Whiteness as follows:

> Extreme whiteness coexists with ordinary whiteness: it is exceptional, excessive, marked. It is what whiteness aspires to and also…fears. It exists alongside non-extreme, unspectacular, plain whiteness…Whites are the one particular group that can take up the non-particular position of ordinariness, the position that claims to speak for and embody the commonality of humanity…An image of what whites are like…can also be held at a distance…If in certain periods of derangement – the empires at their height, the Fascist eras – white people have seen themselves in these images, they can take comfort from the fact that for most of the time, they haven't. Whites can thus believe that they are nothing in particular, because the white particularities on offer are so obviously not them…The combination of extreme whiteness with plain, unwhite whiteness means that white people can both lay claim to the spirit that aspires to the heights of humanity and yet supposedly speak and act disinterestedly as humanity's most average and unremarkable representatives. (223)

Get Out's Armitage family especially embodies the shifting nature of ordinary versus extraordinary Whiteness, proving that they *both* serve to actively uphold, and not just passively reflect, the White supremacist status quo. At first glance, the staunchly liberal and anti-racist family seems to reflect ordinary Whiteness, which can be read as akin to covert racism; it

encompasses ineffectual and empty White ally-ship. Once the family's more sinister, exploitative plans are revealed, however, they rather reflect extraordinary Whiteness, which can be read as akin to overt racism. It may seem unwieldy to approach *Get Out* in terms of these binaries because there is no way to know for sure, interpretationally, whether the Armitage family truly believes that they are not racist. But given Rose's particularly stark duplicitousness, she is presented as entirely aware of these binary ends and is therefore the most manipulative of the gray area that lies between them. In fact, she oscillates between them in such a way as to actually collapse the binary and change the nature of the question at hand: that is, the question of whether the Armitages see themselves as racist. Because Rose collapses the binary and, in so doing, undermines the question of the Armitages' self-perception, Rose warrants readings of the film which feature a decentering of the White oppressor and, in turn, a re-centering of the oppressed. To clarify this point: the Armitages must be understood as racist whether or not they believe themselves to be. Both their ordinary/covert and extraordinary/overt enactments of Whiteness and racism force this reading. It must be stressed therefore that both modes of Whiteness, both versions of racism, are dangerous. The covert/ordinary can easily lead to, change into, or even alternate with the overt/extraordinary. And, again, they both serve to sustain white supremacy. Further, the covert/ordinary can even be deemed more dangerous to begin with, for as we see via the character of Rose, it is often hidden and omnipresent. It is, in other words, often deeply and imperceptibly embedded within American institutions and systems; some examples include housing, education, and civic engagement, all of which made difficult for non-Whites through economic and political policies of segregation and suppression that, in turn, benefit Whites. As such, and as per Dyer's ideas, ordinary Whiteness seemingly speaks for and embodies "the commonality of humanity" even though in reality, it is more likely to still operate in ways that

support and thus sustain Whiteness and White supremacy. Therefore, ordinary Whiteness and especially its systemic and institutional manifestations should, again, be considered racist; George Lipsitz describes this phenomenon in the following terms:

> As long as we define social life as the sum total of conscious and deliberate individual activities, then only *individual* manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility will be seen as racist. Systemic, collective, and coordinated behavior disappears from sight. Collective exercises of group power relentlessly channeling rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another will not appear to be "racist" from this perspective because they rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals. But they work to construct racial identities by giving people of different races vastly different life chances. (381)

Therefore, *Get Out* makes evident the potential horror, oppression and exploitation inherent in covert racism and ordinary Whiteness given its hidden, omnipresent, and malleable nature. Rose in particular functions to demonstrate that the binary between the covert/ordinary and overt racism/extraordinary whiteness is increasingly becoming muddled, but also that this binary was always, in fact, muddled, returning to the ideas put forth by Kennedy et al., about oxymoronic Whiteness. And, this should all be understood in conjunction with the fact that also, by virtue of their Whiteness, the Armitages are societally and systemically positioned as racist, whether or not they believe or present themselves to be. In fact, on that note, the oppression and exploitation that Black men and Black women experience due to the Armitages' whiteness supersede or, at least, make irrelevant whatever self-perception the Armitages may have of their own Whiteness. This project advocates for self-interrogation and self-accountability where Whiteness (and White womanhood especially) is concerned, but never for the sake of saving

White people from their own racism. I shall return to this idea but wish to re-emphasize here the need to center the experiences of those who have been marginalized and exploited, rather than reifying the existing power structure by placing too much emphasis on the Armitages' self-perception of their Whiteness, as their Whiteness operates in ways that do oppress, exploit, and marginalize. Additionally, as the Armitages do not interrogate their Whiteness in the film, interpretations that map onto the Armitages such understandings of their Whiteness, and how it operates, are erroneous and only silence Chris and those victims who have come before him.

Furthermore, the Armitage family's self-perception of their own Whiteness and, in turn, racism (or lack thereof) are seemingly tied to their perception of their victims' Blackness. For, as touched upon earlier in this project, the Armitages and their community—as evidenced by their many microaggressions at the party—think of Black people in a way that, while still problematic and stereotypical and, therefore, racist, positions them as superior than White people. This, again, is very much still linked with stereotypes and myths of Black masculinity. These myths include athleticism, sexual prowess, and cultural "cool" factor (as represented by one particular White male party guest who tells Chris matter-of-factly that "Black is in fashion"). But, it is not racist in the ways one might expect (i.e., it does not view them as inferior). That said, the other ways in which this does still constitute racism, is that the White people still view themselves as the rightful owners of, or entitled to, those qualities supposedly inherent to Blackness; they do not view these qualities as belonging to a Black identity, nor do they view that Black identity as deserving of those positive attributes, as if their White identities would make better use of or are indeed more deserving of them. This is, broadly, akin to imperialism and colonialism, with their physical attributes and perceived talents therein existing solely to be claimed and used for White gain. This is as opposed to those attributes or talents existing for the Black people who truly

possess them naturally (to the degree that the stereotypes are grounded in truth) to use on their own terms or for their own benefit and purposes. Thus, even the admiration and jealousy that White people in *Get Out* is a form of racism; it leads to the exploitation of Black people for the purpose of regaining superiority over them. Walter is, again, a prime example of this form of racism; because Rose's grandfather was deemed inferior to Jesse Owens, who beat him in the 1936 Olympics, when able to take over a Black man's body he exercises that entitlement he feels is his right as a White man. Specifically, he spends his nights running as if to beat Owens' time and thus regain superiority via an exploitation of the Black body and its assumed athleticism.

The Armitages, therefore, exhibit and exert their White privilege to reclaim supremacy which they feel has been threatened by the superiority they see exhibited by Black people in certain ways. Their appreciation for Black people is still based therefore in what they can offer or do for them as White people, or what exploitable goods they can offer via their bodies for the betterment of the White race. Thus, even their backhanded compliments, besides being problematic and rooted in racial stereotypes that posit what a person is versus who the person is, are not directed toward Chris as a person. They are more about the things he possesses that the White people at the Armitage party feel entitled to and will thus exploit for themselves. By making Chris into a walking stereotype, the notion that Black people are not, in fact, human, is evoked. This notion is likewise evoked through a lack of concern for the actual identity inhabiting the Black body. This entails also the conception that the person is somehow not effectively making use of their desirable physical attributes. Not only do they have this resource which the White people want and feel entitled to, that is, but they *are* the resource. Their procedure is thus a colonization of both the lived bodies on the land, as well as the land itself and its alleged resources. Again, the bodies of the victims operate in both ways simultaneously.

Besides notions of colonialism, colonization, and imperialism that are evoked by this reading of the Armitages and their friends' admiration for and fascination with Black bodies, this reading also evokes notions of racism as resulting directly from desire and jealousy. In *Get Out*, the Armitages have found a tangible, pseudoscientific way to make their desire attainable: the procedure which allows them to live inside of the Black person's skin. This loophole allows them to attain the otherwise unattainable: Blackness itself. For Frances Cress Welsing, that is, in "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation," the disgust or hatred more commonly associated with racism emerges only as a response to desire—specifically, the White person's desire for Black skin; upon realizing they cannot have that which they desire, they typically transform that desire into disgust. Welsing's formulations speak to the inferiority complex embodied in Walter and in the Armitages' community at large; the neurosurgical procedure can be understood as a way of negating the disgust and hatred portion of Welsing's proposed process of racist, White supremacy. Or, rather, Welsing's ideas help explain the Armitages' racism, through the use of their procedure, as lacking those same negative emotions typically associated with racism. Also, footnoted earlier in terms of Chris' assumed social elevation via his mixed-race relationship with a White woman, Frantz Fanon's seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* must also be mentioned here again, in terms of how desire often translates into racism. But Fanon's formulations differ from Welsing's. For Fanon, because White people desire the racial Other—a desire which is forbidden—this desire then is cancelled out forcibly via an ensuing fear and a reactionary hatred; in order to quell that desire, racist myths of the racial other are then put forth.

Patriarchy—Family and Professionalism:

In that sense, then, returning to White female characters and how their representations fit into these various theoretical conceptions and constructions, Rose may also be read as gaining

pleasure from her ruse. I read Rose's pleasure as deriving mainly from the power she wields over Chris, and that which she wields more generally as a significant and respected player within her patriarchal family structure. For instance, when complaining about her family's microaggressions, Rose ultimately asks Chris "how are they different than that cop? That's the fucking bummer of it all." This, coupled with Rose saying "I'm sorry, this sucks, I'm related to all of them" brings up pertinent questions about Whiteness and family, and how White supremacy is a shared, indeed even taught, mode of thought and behavior within the home. Further, this fictitious, performative disavowal serves as a direct antithesis to Rose's behavior later, in which she consistently aligns herself with her family—in both covert and then overt ways. She believes her family that it was a seizure, for instance, which afflicts Logan and turns him violent toward Chris after his camera's flash awakens Andre from his sunken place. In yet another gaslighting tactic, when Chris says that his cousin was epileptic and that what just happened was not a seizure, she replies that since her father is a neurosurgeon, she's inclined to believe what he said. This is already in contrast with the albeit fake disavowal of her family mentioned previously and sets the stage for her most duplicitous moment of the film—in which she is fishing frantically for the car keys, as if still on Chris' side despite her inability, seemingly unintentional, to find their means of escape. In this moment, her facial expression changes suddenly and decisively, as if removing the mask of the Rose character—the woke ally—that she had been wearing, revealing instead a cold and calculating look, as she tells Chris "you know I can't give you those keys, right babe?" Rather than aligned with Chris, then, she is physically positioned as an oppressor alongside her parents and brother—especially after Missy hypnotizes him again and sends him to his sunken place. Through the screen-like frame, Chris watches from afar, paralyzed again and powerless, falling silently as the family members begin to lift his body.

Rose, leaning in so she is centered in that frame, tells Chris that he was one of her favorites. But, Rose is not merely positioned physically alongside her family as she is revealed to be aligned ideologically with them; rather, she is also visually positioned here in such a way as to emphasize the significance of her role as the most central, prominent figure in Chris' oppression.

It should be noted that Rose is given the power, albeit in a stereotypical or indeed patriarchal set up, to romantically bring in victims, even female ones; when Chris is going through the photographs of Rose with her many previous Black romantic partners, he finds one of Rose with her arm around Georgina. This leads one to assume they had a lesbian relationship, rather than it being proof of a close friendship between women that crosses the color line, like that between Helen and Bernadette (any problematic potential inherent in their bond notwithstanding). Therefore, more can be said here, even just briefly, about Georgina as a queer Black woman. As Willis writes:

> Georgina being the only woman in a sea of men made me think two things: 1) Black women know better. We know better than black men and we don't trust white women as easily. I was not surprised that Rose was only able to capture one black woman for every twenty black men because…black women be knowing. 2) Despite us knowing better, we are STILL vulnerable. We're still out here trying to survive. We have the same foot on our necks that's on that of our brothers. And the *most* vulnerable of us are queer black women.

It is worth noting, however, in terms of Willis' first point, that as far as what we're shown in the film, it is only older White males in the Armitages' inner-circle—not their wives—who have been undergoing the procedure. During the auction scene, there is only one woman who raises her bingo card to bid on Chris. It is the same woman whose husband we see in a

wheelchair and using a portable oxygen tank earlier in the film when she says that Chris is so handsome and asks Rose if "it" (sexual relations with a Black man) is really better. Put another way, it is also possible that in addition to Willis' point that many Black women may not have trusted Rose as readily as Black males, the gender inequity amongst her victims is also a matter of supply and demand. It would seem, in other words, that Georgina is the first and (so far) the only woman who has wanted or needed the procedure done, prompting Rose to pursue a Black female romantic partner to host her grandmother's identity. It is also possible that there is a desire among White men specifically to embody the Black male body, and for the White woman rather to reap the presumed sexual benefits therein. Georgina still emerges as an exception to this; but where desire for the Black body is concerned, specifically, Georgina can be read in terms of White women's fascination with Black women's hair, as discussed in the previous chapter. This does not negate Willis' readings of Georgina's identity as a Black woman and her vulnerability as a *queer* Black woman, but it does add nuances to her argument.

Either way though, any readings of Georgina as a queer Black woman still hinge upon Rose's assigned role as the romantic seducer being seemingly fixed and permanent no matter the sex of her target. Meanwhile, Jeremy is instead given the task of resorting to brutal violence as we see in the beginning of the film with Andre. The film opens with Andre walking alone in a quiet suburb, being followed by a white car. This opening scene ends with Andre being kidnapped by the car's driver, who is wearing a helmet that hides his entire face and evokes medieval torture in its metallic, heavy, armor-like appearance; when Chris attempts to escape the Armitage property late in the film, he ends up getting into that same car, which we come to understand is Jeremy's car, and sees this same helmet on the passenger seat. This is one way in which we come to learn of Jeremy's unique role in the family business—he does not merely

learn from and assist Dean in the operating room, presumably to take over his father's role in the future, but he also "wrangles" Black individuals. As Jim Hudson expresses to Chris via their video/intercom exchange shortly before they are to undergo the procedure: Chris is one of the lucky ones for having been brought in fully by Rose's romantic method—for "Jeremy's wrangling method sounds way less pleasant." It is not shown nor stated explicitly within the film exactly why or when Jeremy's method must be employed. But, what we do come to understand, despite the fact that it too is not shown nor stated explicitly within the film, is that Rose is given the responsibility of employing these more romantic "pleasant" methods because of those myths of desired, desirable White woman. Further, she is also presented as trustworthy—both to her victims and to her family—given her uncanny ability to keep up the ruse of being the only true anti-racist ally in the family, thereby ensuring the success of her family's plan. Whether intentionally part of the Armitages' multi-stage, multifarious attacks on Black victims or not, it is notable that every odd behavior or "unusual" microaggression that her brother and parents exhibit only serve to cement Rose's role as Chris' one true ally. She is able to set herself apart from her family by pretending to criticize their behavior. Her criticism then only serves to further their collective goals of oppressing and exploiting Chris successfully—at least in theory. Because of this, Chris continues to trust Rose until the moment when she is rummaging for the keys, even though he has already seen the photographs proving her involvement.

Jeremy on the other hand is presented almost as a decoy; he is a loose cannon, erratic and off-putting in his behavior toward Chris which centers solely upon and seeks to exploit myths of Black brute athleticism. Rose shows her awareness of similar tropes, as mentioned in my second chapter, but through more subtle, insidious ways that rather emphasize, once again, her desirability as a White woman. On the topic of family as a source for learned and normalized

patriarchal roles, bell hooks writes: "in dominator culture the family is one of the primary pedagogical locations for the teaching of dominator thought and practice via the acceptance and perpetuation of patriarchy" (*Writing Beyond Race* 33). She goes on to claim that "patriarchy begins at home. It is the one aspect of dominator culture that we tend to learn from family, from folks who purport to care about us" (*Writing Beyond Race* 34). Thus, Rose may only seek to benefit from solidarity and intersectionality but is taught a form of patriarchy that appears to benefit her while actually oppressing her as well; as hooks also explains, "since dominator culture relies on interlocking systems (imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy) to sustain itself, it seeks to cover up the connections between these systems. Or it allows for only one aspect of the system to be challenged at a time" (*Writing Beyond Race* 34). Rose, through the natural trust built into a family structure, and with the Armitages being run as a particularly patriarchal one at that, is led in other words to believe that the patriarchy of her own family (if not, in turn, patriarchy more broadly) is in her best interest. This is perhaps because she refuses to see—or is denied to some degree the full ability to see—the connections between those interlocking systems which in reality seek to oppress her as well, at least in theoretical terms. While Missy and Rose are each integral to the process of neurosurgical replacement of Black minds with White ones, whether by psychological conditioning disguised as romance or by actual hypnosis, they are still doing so in support of, and thus are at the mercy of, a patriarchal order now run by Dean and Jeremy. This is not to discount or discredit the arguably more-subtle and less hands-on dirty work being done by Missy and Rose, especially as this project seeks to hold their characters accountable for their involvement. But it does support the notion that they, too, are held back by dominator culture, especially patriarchy, as women—despite the benefits that patriarchy's White supremacist form affords them as *White* women. It is their Whiteness, in

other words, which they ultimately prioritize over even their gender, and which functions to therefore sustain dominator culture more broadly by obscuring those connections between other interlocking systems. For Rose, this prioritization makes sense given the aforementioned power afforded her by her family; her powerful role in that structure would not exist in a world of true solidarity, racial equality, or intersectionality, because the importance or emphasis placed on that structure would be decreased within culture.

To further situate notions of family as one form of patriarchal insulation, if not indoctrination, for White women in today's sociopolitical context, one need look no further than to the example of Hope Hicks, the former White House director of communications. Jessie Daniels, in her piece written for *Huffington Post* entitled "White Women Who Enable Trump Do Not Deserve The Benefit Of Your Doubt" refers to news stories that broke in both the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* which claimed that "Hicks co-wrote a July 2017 press release misrepresenting the purpose of a suspicious meeting a year earlier between Donald Trump Jr. and Russian government official," thereby taking part in an effort to obstruct justice. She goes on to discuss that in the wake of these news stories, there were "many expressions [over social media] of concern for Hicks, that wayward child of Democrats who finds herself tangled up in this mess of an administration. Surely she didn't truly choose this path; surely she's been led astray; surely we are obligated to help her. This assumes that Hicks is collateral damage of Trump's administration, not one of its chief architects." Hicks exemplifies the excuses that are made for White women on the grounds of their Whiteness and privilege, and the ways in which family can serve to block accountability or deemphasize the necessity of accountability for actions White women are truly guilty of.

Additionally, Hicks is an example of the infantilization that so often comes with conceptions of White womanhood and which seeks to further insulate them from having to take responsibility as it excuses them, too; by consistently positioning White women like Hicks and Rose alongside their families in these various ways, their agency and thus culpability are often discounted. White women in interracial relationships, as discussed previously, exhibit ambiguity, but not inaction; their desire is often deemphasized, and their role as damsel in need of White male protection furthers the myth that they are helpless, like children, who are strictly being taken advantage of. Family should be seen, as it does in bell hooks' work, as a theoretical and practical site wherein White women first learn about and take part in patriarchy. Family does tend to excuse individual choices made even within larger systems of dominator culture. But there is a difference between understanding one possible source for White women's indoctrination into White supremacist patriarchy and allowing that source to also continue to shield White women from accountability for their own culpability. Because of this latter tendency, family is another White supremacist patriarchal institution that White women benefit from. And thus, they continue to participate in and sustain it.

One may be able to read the Armitage family as a pseudo-corporation then, considering that it seems to function as an impossibly well-oiled machine with each person playing their assigned role. But patriarchy plays itself out less on a familial level and more in the actual form or realm of professionalism (more specifically, an academic/educational sphere) in *Candyman*. Helen and Bernadette, for instance, act competitive toward Helen's husband Trevor's colleague Phillip Purcell. While Helen says that they are going to "bury" him with their work on Candyman, it is Helen's involvement with and ultimate transformation into (a version of) Candyman that does not so much elevate her to any kind of workplace equality with [White,

professional] men, but rather leads to a violent elimination of them. As noted, the only deaths *Candyman* actually shows are those of White, professional men. First, Helen calls Candyman in order to prove her sanity to her psychiatrist and, in doing so, Candyman comes and kills the psychiatrist. Second, as Trevor mourns Helen's death while [in]conveniently standing in front of his bathroom mirror, he calls her name multiple times, which summons her in the same way that Candyman was formerly summoned. She appears behind him then and murders him in the same way that Candyman used to murder his victims—slicing them, from groin to gullet, with a hook. This could suggest that for White women to be set free of patriarchy, there needs to be White male death, at least metaphorically. But this reading is insufficient and problematic in terms of intersectionality, for in the first scenario, Helen is set free by Candyman, a Black male, and in return, in the second scenario, Candyman and the history of racism he represents through his horrific origin story (in which he is punished by a White lynch mob for miscegenation) is erased and replaced by Helen. While she may have conquered her own oppression from White males, it comes at cost, resulting in Black oppression. As Means Coleman even reads into the film's ending, *Candyman* becomes a celebration of White womanhood, arguing that, again, "in the end, Candyman disappears along with the history of racism he brings. It is all about Helen as she becomes monstrous. As a White woman she can do what Candyman would not: terrorize those on the other side of the tracks. She is a woman scorned, exacting her revenge on Trevor" (190).

Erasure and Codeswitching:

The topic of racial erasure, heretofore not explicitly addressed, comes up in *Get Out* as well. Logan, formerly Andre, exhibits this erasure prominently, especially as Rod looks him up online and finds his entire appearance to be totally different between the two versions of himself. Rod and Chris had even known Andre once, and upon seeing his picture that Chris sends (that

which awakens Andre from his sunken place) asks why he is dressed "like that." It can be said that he is dressed like an elderly White man, which is what he is on the inside now, thus making the unnatural clothing choices match the Whiteness of his new identity, if not perhaps the Blackness of his actual outer-self. And along those same lines, at its core, the Armitages' procedure erases—in the sense that it sublimates and so essentially eliminates—one's Black identity, replacing it with a White one, just as Helen erases Candyman as she replaces his myth with her own violent version. The fact that her version seems to vengefully target White males would seem to serve as a critique or combatting of patriarchy. But if so, it is still problematic White feminism: White women versus White men at the expense of Black women (like Bernadette, who helps to advance Helen's academic goals while in the end dying for it) and Black men (like Candyman himself and his racially charged mythos which she erases).

A related notion that is necessary to acknowledge with regard to erasure in the case of *Get Out* especially is the notion of codeswitching: a performative, behavioral move to fit in with a given racial or social group, and the ability to oscillate between one's usual, natural expression of racial/social identity, and any other expressions that are falsified for that given purpose. While usually thought of in the context of Blackness operating in White spaces, *Get Out* can be read as displaying this as both a forced process—in the sense that the Armitages semi-permanently codeswitch their Black bodied victims to be, thus to act, White—as well as something Rose does in order to be seen as a woke, innocent ally by Chris, Rod and even the White cop. This would not be the first time Jordan Peele has explored the issue of codeswitching. By way of anecdotally acknowledging Peele's preoccupation as a biracial man in America with issues of race identity and social expectations, it is worth mentioning that certain sketches from his Comedy Central sketch show, *Key & Peele* (2012-2015), played with these very preoccupations. And likewise, in

the film *Keanu* (2016), which Peele co-wrote, he and his comedy partner from *Key & Peele*,

Keegan-Michael Key, play Black male characters whose natural behaviors and demeanors are

presented as being in contrast with their eventual performances of Black masculinity and

stereotypical toughness; they slip in and out of these performances as needed throughout the

film, mainly in order to not seem out of place when surrounded by gangs and drug dealers. While

this all does seem to suggest Peele's artistic or thematic preoccupation with performed racial

identity, this project seeks to interpret and analyze rather than rely upon or relay Peele's authorial

intent; that said, it is worth questioning, in order to hold White female characters (or more

specifically, characterizations) accountable, "Why…the film depict[s] a black man so unwilling

to pull this trigger? Why [in other words] does this film still find it problematic for its own

protagonist to enact thorough, graphic revenge, and even righteous revenge on white

womanhood for its steady betrayal?" (Brooks). As Brooks also goes on to state:

> Yes, [Chris] he kills the mother…; but we can only presume how she died (letter opener
>
> through the eye) because the camera quickly cuts away before it happens. Now compare
>
> this to the (partial) death of Jeremy Armitage…who is brutally beaten about the head
>
> with a croquet ball. Or even Dean Armitage's…graphic piercing through the throat by the
>
> horns of a mounted stag… The camera lingers on details like blood spurting through the
>
> father's mouth or slowly pooling around the brother's head. Not to mention how the
>
> frame stays with the Georgina…as we view her head crashed against the car window in a
>
> repose of death. Peele's editorial choices reveals his hand: graphic white male death is
>
> okay, and even the fetishizing of the dead body of the one (of two total) black women
>
> characters is just fine. But the intentional framing and editing choices Peele makes to
>
> conceal and work around the explicit deaths of Missy and Rose show that white women

are still valued as fragile and occupy a unique cultural privilege…even in the blackest horror film of this decade.

Indeed, there is much to unpack in Brooks' observations and analyses. Firstly, Georgina's death is in direct visual contrast to the deaths of both Bernadette and Ruthie-Jean in Candyman, which is to say, those occur entirely off screen or, much like the death of Chris' mother, before the narrative events of the film begin. One might wish to read *Candyman*'s selective depictions of death in a positive light, as White males and so White patriarchy are seen being swiftly and violently punished on screen. However, that still does not account for Helen's role within that patriarchy, a role which is persistent and prevalent, so much so that her death can be seen as the opposite of a punishment. Hers is a martyr's death that entails a transformation into something powerful enough to live on and, indeed, combat oppression from the opposite sex.

But in White feminist terms, one must ask again: what is the cost of this combatting White male domination/oppression of White women (like Helen)? As Briefel and Ngai state,

> If the traditional horror film ultimately posits fear as a cachet for its white middle-class victims, *Candyman*'s protagonist seems to want to reverse this dynamic by reclaiming the originating fear of the killer, as if to offer proof of her distance from the victim control group. In the passage from victim to victimizer, Helen's self-mythologization as a female Candyman is perhaps an attempt to rectify the originating supplantation of the . . . [villain] figure's fear, by putting herself in his role. (297)

But, in partial agreement with Means Coleman's take on the film's ending as a kind of White-washing of the Candyman myth, Helen cannot truly be Candyman. Helen's physical monstrosity comes as a result not of White fear and victimization, nor even its racial inverse. And while Candyman's villainy does seem to be driven more by love and (re-)union than

revenge, Helen's villainy toward Trevor is indeed to be read as revenge for his infidelity and abandonment of her. Her seeing proof of Trevor's infidelity also marks Helen's return to Candyman, as well; she laments that Trevor was all she had left but she has her predetermined part to play within the Candyman mythos and her desire to save Anne-Marie's child. Both seem to drive her to her ultimate destiny as the new Candyman monster, as problematic as that is.

As a result, I rather wish to read Helen's role—that inevitable involvement in the Candyman mythos—as a kind of inevitable involvement in White supremacist, patriarchal systems which had created the Candyman monster in the name and honor of protecting White womanhood in the first place. Likewise, Helen's possession of Candyman's power and even of his exact way of killing people can be read in similar terms to the colonial racism of Armitages' procedure. She is afraid of Candyman but this fear, beyond miscegenation terms, is linked or likened with desire; not just a sexual desire, but again, a desire also to replace him with herself and occupy the power that comes from, or comes with, his monstrosity. However, his race is even erased in this reading—that it is not his race which is fearful to her, perhaps, but his penchant or potential for violence or retribution and her desire to possess it. This reading also ignores how that dynamic is still inexorably linked with racial, sexual desire. Briefly, the film links fear, desire, power, and racial myth in myriad visual motifs. These motifs include the bees which emerge from Candyman's mouth, or the way in which he runs his hook up Helen's leg beneath her skirt toward the end of the film during what is meant to be their consummation scene—thus linking his sexuality with fearful bestial imagery (the bees) and likewise the powerful, already symbolically phallic weapon (the hook) with sexuality. Lastly, similar to the Armitages' mentality, Helen too may indeed be seen as wanting Candyman's power for herself

because she feels she can wield it better than he can, or rather that she has a better use of that power in mind—to vengefully punish her White professional husband for cheating on her.

Power in Monstrousness:

Helen's newfound power in her monstrous afterlife can be read also as another form of privilege, or as the next logical, monstrous manifestation of the privilege she already formerly possessed. After all, despite her racialized claims that no part of her, "no matter how hidden, is capable of" those violent acts actually committed by Candyman, Helen is positioned in the film as always having a potential for monstrosity. She is positioned as such via those aforementioned motifs of bees and, later, the hook which visually and/or thematically connect her to Candyman, as well as mirrors which act as a site for Helen to actually confront and connect with her own inner-villainy. Mirrors also foreshadow her eventual external monstrosity exhibited when she appears behind Trevor in his bathroom mirror to kill him. However, as mentioned in a previous chapter, Helen does not ever truly confront her own Whiteness, and does not therefore understand how that Whiteness informs her villainy and monstrosity long before she is ever framed by Candyman, and well before she replaces Candyman. Thus, mirrors, in their superficial reflections or even confrontations of monstrosity, do not ever reach their full potential in the film as a symbolic site for, or visual representation of, the kind of in-depth self-reflection Helen would need to engage in to interrogate her White feminine privilege.

Thus, Helen's granting of power in her monstrous afterlife can be read as another form of privilege, the privilege of monstrosity, which she arguably always possessed and which Rose and Missy exhibit and embody as well even if not in such visceral manifestations. Although, this can be argued against in Rose's case, given her own stark transformation after the reveal of her villainy and duplicity. After her involvement in her family's plans for Chris is made clear by her

withholding the car keys from Chris, Missy sends him back to his sunken place and Rose immediately puts her hair up into a ponytail. Compared to her loose and relaxed look throughout the film, which itself can be seen then as the costume corresponding to the performed role of a liberal ally, Rose's look in the third act of the film can best be described as clinical and regimented. She wears white turtlenecks and button-down shirts in the scene when she acts scared over Chris' whereabouts and then seductive while talking on the phone with Rod, and in her death scene, respectively. Directly preceding the latter scene, right before she emerges from the Armitage home toting a shotgun upon realizing Chris has escaped, is a scene in which Rose sits alone in her bedroom. Arguably, this scene presents the audience with the "real" Rose— again, insofar as there is a "real" rose. There is no one there—neither Chris nor her family—to perform for. I mention this distinction partly because even when she is on the aforementioned call with Rod, the Armitages are revealed to be lingering at the other end of the room, listening to the call and ultimately sharing a glance with Rose after the call ends, as if to approve or otherwise judge her performance. When Rose is alone, however, she is listening to "(I've Had) The Time of My Life," while conducting internet research into Top NCAA Prospects, searching online for her next victim. While she does so, she eats Froot Loops cereal—one piece at a time— and drinks milk separately, through a straw. This can be read as a metaphor for her own displeasure at racial mixing. But, this juvenile choice of cereal and the camera movements here also further infantilize her; as the camera tracks backward with her perfectly centered in the frame, we not only see she has framed and hung up the photos Chris finds earlier of her previous victims, but we also see a plush lion toy on the nightstand beside her bed. Thus, her outward monstrosity differs from Helen's, but in certain ways connotes even more effectively the links between Whiteness (and White womanhood) and that monstrosity. This is achieved through the

evocation of infantilization and segregation, and by presenting us with an extreme, almost regimented vision of White femininity via her bright white clothing and tautly pulled back hair.

Therefore, I return now to the distinction Brooks points toward, and her conclusion that Missy and Rose are still valued or given privilege in a film which otherwise seems to seek a fair and just portrayal of the Black lived experience in a White-dominated culture. Such a conclusion allows us to reexamine *Get Out* as a potential platform to question and critique that very value and privilege. A few observations pertaining to Brooks' arguments must be acknowledged here before proceeding to review and expand upon this project's ultimate conclusions. Firstly, Missy's death, albeit off-screen as Brooks points out, ironically matches her particular role in Chris' oppression and exploitation; given her role as hypnotist, that is, it is ironic to kill her via a stab to her eye. Likewise, Dean dies by stag antler, recalling his awkward jokes early in the film after Rose and Chris tell him they hit a deer on the drive there about hating deer; the awkwardness of the jokes stem directly from his use of racialized language about them infiltrating neighborhoods. Jeremy is beaten with a billiards ball, evoking his emphasis on sports during previous conversations with Chris. Finally, with Rose's lack of on-screen death, one must keep in mind Peele's own personal relationships with his White mother and his White wife; such relationships could have impacted the value and privilege, and lack of punishment, given to these particular White figures in the film. Along those same lines, there is Chris' love for Rose, and the recent shock of learning her true identity prompting him to essentially fall out of love with her immediately. Chris in no way believes Rose's desperate exertions of "it's me" and "I love you." But his inability to kill her speaks again to her powerful hold over him and the trust she built in him. His inability to kill her though, even for these reasons, does not or should not negate the role of her White femininity therein, and in fact begs even more fervently for accountability.

Ultimate Conclusions:

So, what can be said, in summation, about White feminism and upholding White supremacy, as embodied and exhibited by Helen's character in *Candyman*, in comparison and contrasted with the White feminism and upholding of White supremacy embodied and exhibited by Rose and Missy in *Get Out*? This project has taken as a central premise that the two are observably not the same, and the goals of this project thus centered largely around examining what those differences are and, more specifically, how those differences can best be understood by situating them within the films' differing sociopolitical contexts. As I have also sought to demonstrate, these differing sociopolitical contexts also helped shape cultural discourses surrounding race and feminism. Thus, rather than only reading these characters' representations as allegories of or responses to those contexts, I have read these characters also through the lens of feminist and race theory, emphasizing the ways in which theory is spurred by those contexts.

One outcome of this project centers upon the notion that, as Veronica T. Watson and Becky Thompson write in their essay, "Theorizing White Racial Trauma and its Remedies," "At the heart of racism are attempts of the perpetrators to deny knowledge of themselves as violent aggressors, morally destitute, even barbaric;" they go on to claim that "In the United States, whiteness has rarely had to confront that image and knowledge of itself. Instead, it has worked hard to repress and discredit that history, which has continued the silence and deepened the trauma rather than opened avenues of accountability and healing" (247). Thus, even if just in the context of these two horror films, I have sought to re-emphasize Whiteness; I have sought to resurface such history, break that silence, and work through trauma in order to open those avenues of accountability. That said, this project contains gaps that can and should be taken up in future research endeavors. These include issues of space (that is, urban versus suburban spaces).

Get Out, conspicuously, flips the slasher film convention of suburban utopia infiltrated by dangerous outside by making Chris the benevolent outsider being brought into a suburban dystopia that seeks to victimize and terrorize him rather than it being the other way around. Meanwhile, much has been written and can thus be further explored as to *Candyman*'s use of Cabrini-Green, an urban housing project, as a site of horror for its own residents and for White infiltrators like Helen. Further, other aspects of intersectionality can be considered. This project, for the purposes of examining Whiteness in the ways I have addressed above, has mainly addressed race and gender, or "how whiteness changes woman-ness" as Daniels puts it in her piece. But again, there is much to be said about Georgina as a *queer* black woman. Further, more can potentially be explored with regard to viewership and trust. It is possible, for instance, based on personal accounts I have heard, that Black audience members were largely distrustful of Rose in the first place and were in that way aligned with Rod. After all, the film's title does not merely come from Andre's pleas to Chris but play on stereotypes of Black horror fans urging protagonists in horror movies to get out of whatever haunted or dangerous setting or situation they are in. This distrust can certainly change the viewing experience of the film as a whole; I write this as a White female viewer who, in confirmation of Peele's sentiments, relied upon or was informed by stereotypes about White women in horror as victims, as well as White women in Hollywood films more broadly—and even more generally, White women in American culture.

Thus, as American society and the feminist movement therein continue to recognize and grapple with White women's place within White supremacist patriarchy, both in individual actions as well as in how White women interact with, operate within, and benefit from larger systems and institutions, these issues and concerns may necessarily emerge within our film culture and more specifically within horror cinema. Psychoanalytic models of understanding

difference, monstrosity, violence, and power in the horror film are thus increasingly futile and insufficient. Intersectionality must form the bases of new frameworks, wherein horror film power dynamics can be understood with different sources of oppression and different definitions of identity in mind. Likewise, then, horror films may be used to understand those power dynamics, sources of oppression, and definitions of identity as they play out in our culture. In order to do this though, beyond simply taking intersectionality as an approach, White womanhood must no longer be considered as an ultimate good both in horror cinema and in society. And when she is depicted still as a victim, I believe scholars have a responsibility to unpack what the significance or function of her victimhood might be, as I have sought to do in terms of Helen and Rose in these films. Further, Whiteness must be examined more closely and deliberately as a racial construction unto itself. All of that said, this project has implications beyond the scope of academia. *Get Out*'s cultural impact might have awakened awareness in many White audience members, but the average filmgoer is responsible for turning that awareness into advocacy.

On the topic of advocacy among *Get Out*'s White liberal audiences, in a think-piece aptly entitled "White Liberals are taking the wrong lessons away from Get Out," Tari Ngangura writes that "The giddy reactions of white people excited by Get Out are just a microcosm of the larger narrative of bad whites and good whites." Ngangura goes on to explain that

> for white liberals, allyship is a role they act out to ease a conscience and fulfill a self-imposed quota of good deeds. No one is more capable of placing anti-black racism on a hierarchy of least to most than white people. Not for the betterment of those oppressed but for their own sake, so they are never seen as being on the same level as the REAL racists. But here's the gotcha moment—racism is racism.

Ngangura also emphasizes that "White liberals still find comfort in the very systems that oppress [people of color]." Ngangura's claims offered here are thus in direct conversation with those arguments I put forth at the beginning of this chapter: that Whiteness can be, and thus should be defined or thought of as, something that has different modes, operations, and also changes possible over time, as does (or along with) racism. Whiteness thus needs to be interrogated, and White womanhood in particular needs to be held accountable for its role in upholding White supremacy—but not for the sake of quelling White guilt, nor as a way of erroneously positioning certain White people as true racial allies in contrast with "racist" Whites. *Get Out*, unlike *Candyman*, centers the Black male experience, lifts Chris' voice, and prioritizes his exploitation and oppression. *Candyman*, from the beginning, is not about Candyman but about Helen's emotions and experiences as White savior, White martyr, then White monster. Thus, even within this project's own accounts and analyses of Helen and of Rose, there must be at least an acknowledgement, as I have attempted to offer in the beginning of this conclusion chapter, of the slippery slope of centering Whiteness and thus reifying White supremacy as dominant and default. We must examine and unpack what Whiteness is, how it changes, how it operates, but without marginalizing the already marginalized, and without positioning the White conceptions or definitions of itself over the tangible lived experiences of racial trauma that result from Whiteness. White guilt, White allyship, and White feminism are important to name, confront, and accept. But, this should be in service of listening to and learning about experiences of oppression and exploitation of non-White peoples, and White privilege should be used to dismantle those oppressive, exploitative systems and institutions. Once these conditions and requirements are understood, however, I believe that both horror films and horror film scholarship can serve as a tool for doing this kind of work. Horror continues to be a powerful

allegorical avenue for cultural reflection. This reflection, and scholarship which addresses it, can then, just maybe, have the power to turn into political advocacy and social progress, as *Get Out* in particular proves. After all, *Get Out*'s central White female character, and the way in which her villainy came as a surprise to many White viewers, gives us another kind of vocabulary in this ongoing discursive journey toward accountability—that is to say, White women are all Rose.

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