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**Black feminist discourse analysis of portrayals of gender violence against Black women:
A social work dissertation**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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My dissertation was produced and written in dedication to my beautiful son,
Langston Rise Ross-Lawrence.

To Langston: I hope this work serves as an inspiration for you to find joy, purpose and love in your future aspirations. Never settle for less and always see through the end of your projects without compromising your integrity, vision or spirit. Remember, to *rise* at all times. Mommy loves you, for always and always.

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Abstract

BLACK FEMINIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PORTRAYALS OF GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN: A SOCIAL WORK DISSERTATION

By Avina Ichele Ross, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016

Chair: Elizabeth Cramer, Professor, School of Social Work

This study explored media discourse of gender violence against Black women in Black contemporary films. Four Tyler Perry films were examined using a novel, qualitative and analytical framework: Black Feminist Discourse Analysis. Discourses that were studied include, but were not limited to: portrayals of gender violence and victims, character dispositions and interactions, stereotypes, relationship dynamics as well as portrayals of race, gender, sexuality and religion. The use of new and existing controlling images based on systems of race, gender, sexuality and religion were revealed in a transitional and systemic model. Common themes across the films are provided. This research closes with concluding assertions grounded by

existing literature and the current study's findings, as well as recommendations for future film writing and production and implications for social work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction/Dissertation Structure

This study explored media discourse of gender violence against Black women in Black contemporary film. Chapter one of this dissertation begins with a reflexive statement about my influences and motivations to pursue this dissertation topic. Next, I discuss the empirical rationale for the study of gender violence discourse of Black women in media. A review of the prevalence of gender violence within the U.S and worldwide, as well as a discussion of gender violence against Black women, including prevalence, help-seeking patterns, and a call for culturally competent interventions, are provided. Chapter one also highlights the substantive impacts of viewing violence against women in varied forms of media. Finally, the theoretical approaches for the study, Intersectionality, Black Feminist Thought and Discourse Theory, are summarized. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the multidisciplinary literature used to support the study. The literature on gender violence in media, controlling images and Black female representations in popular culture are discussed. Furthermore, a review of research on Tyler Perry films, the media studied in this study, is provided.

Chapter three addresses the interpretative methodology used for the dissertation, and includes the following content: research questions and design, sampling plan, data collection and analysis plans, as well as paradigmatically compatible rigor assurances. Chapter four provides rich data description as well as the findings that emerged from the analysis. Chapter five concludes the dissertation with a review of the study, discussion of study limitations, concluding assertions and recommendations for film production and social work.

Reflexive Statement

Reflexivity fosters reflection on the influences of personal experiences and beliefs on research, including the subject and interpretation of the data (Krefting, 1991). This process enhances rigor as well as transparency of personal biases and credibility between the research, consumers of my dissertation and the researcher (me). As such, it was imperative to engage in an ongoing reflexive process during this research project, where I openly reflected on the experiences, values and interests that shaped the pursuit of the dissertation subject.

I grew up in racially diverse military housing, but the county and school system were predominately White and affluent, over 75%. At an early age, probably 8 or 9 years old, I learned that my reality as a Black girl/woman was different from my other (White) girl peers. I began to evaluate my concerns and discuss them with my mother. We talked about the different challenges I had from my peers in order to conform to (White-normative) standards of beauty for hair (as mine was shorter and more curly) and body stature, as I was taller, thicker and physically developed breasts and hips sooner than my peers. As a young intellectual at heart, I also questioned both the omission of Black characters in novels, the lack of Black history in my history textbooks and public school lessons and even the recurring themes of dancing and/or “jiving” Black cartoon characters. My mother encouraged me to not only continue exploring these concerns, but she gave me Black history textbooks she purchased as a student of a historically Black university, many years prior. As a good natured student, when I went to class, I brought in the supplemental information I learned from these texts and more often than not, the information was not openly welcomed by my teachers.

As I got older, I continued to experience frustrations and grew upset due to the failure to include accurate and comprehensive Black history, narratives and voices, in the educational

system and also in media pre/representations, including books, television, film, advertisements and the like. During my undergraduate program, a close friend disclosed her survivorship story to me, sharing that she was a victim of childhood rape by schoolmates. Together, we pursued trainings and internships in the gender violence field and worked to enhance campus awareness of sex trafficking, sexual assault and domestic violence.

In my final semester, I had the privilege to participate in a qualitative research capstone course. There, I explored the meanings garnered by Black women of a blaxploitation film, *Foxy Brown*, which featured a group-rape of the Black female protagonist named Foxy Brown. Of particular interest, the group of women asserted that Foxy was not a victim, because she was strong, ‘got justice’ and failed to meet requirements of a typical victim archetype, such as crying, docility, and submissiveness. This surprised me; I assumed viewers, including Black female viewers, would easily acknowledge Foxy’s victimization and her identity as a victim. This astonishment “got my juices boiling” and from that point on, I became increasingly interested in the portrayals of Black female victims/survivors of gender violence as well as the meanings derived from viewers.

A bit later, after completing my master’s degree and working as a victims’ advocate, case manager and community response specialist in the field, I decided to pursue my Ph.D. in Social Work, hoping to explore media as an institution that affects people’s knowledge, attitudes and responses to gender violence. I was first able to investigate media content of gender violence in my directed research study, where I examined three of the four Tyler Perry films studied in this dissertation (Ross, 2015). Using juxtapositional analysis and focusing on the portrayal of Black matriarchy and Black victimhood, the controlling image model (See: Chapter 4) was first

revealed in the direct research. And now, during the dissertation study, the model is reinforced using another analytic framework and with the addition of another film in the sample.

Through all of these experiences, I've gained an interest in the use of media as an intervention to educate communities about gender violence against Black women. Presently a sexual violence prevention specialist employed at a Virginia university, I am eager to investigate the messages conveyed through gender violence media discourse. I am also motivated to develop educational media interventions that spark critical thought and conversation about the discourse in order to foster social change.

Rationale for the Study

Gender violence definition and response. Gender violence is an umbrella term used to describe various forms of violence, such as domestic and sexual violence, intimate partner violence, sex trafficking and other types of sexual exploitation (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; Heise, Ellsberg, & Gotmoeller, 2002; United Nations, 1993). Furthermore, gender violence can encompass violence against transpersons or those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer if the violence is based on the victims' non-cisgender or non-hetero identities or if the violence happens within the context of a current or former intimate relationship (Ristock, 2005; Perry & Dyck, 2014).

It is estimated that 35% of women around the world have experienced some form physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner (World Health Organization, 2013). As such, gender violence against women is recognized as a global public health concern (Krantz, 2002; World Health Organization, 2013). In their lifetime, more than one third of women in the U.S. have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner (Black et al., 2011). Furthermore, 14% of all homicides in the

U.S. are committed by intimate partners, with 70% of the homicide victims being women (Catalano & Snyder, 2009).

A host of formal help-seeking agents work with and collaborate to assist victims/survivors, such as advocates, social workers, criminal justice professionals as well as mental and physical health professionals. Trauma-informed response is a heavily recognized and promoted framework for working with victims/survivors (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2014; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). This framework acknowledges that the experience of gender violence is traumatic and that the role of the helping agent is to respond in ways that enhance the victim's/survivor's safety, trust, empowerment, choice, collaboration/support and cultural understandings. Trauma-informed response is also used to prevent or minimize re-traumatizing the victim/survivor during recovery.

Gender violence against Black women. This dissertation explored media portrayals of gender violence, specifically of Black female characters. This analysis is especially important when considering gender violence against Black women because media is a social institution and source of knowledge for human attitudes and behavior (McQuail, 2010). In other words, media impacts real-life and because of this, it is imperative to understand the real-life contexts of Black women's victimization.

To begin, gender violence is contextualized by racial disparities. Black women make up 6.7% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014); among these, 18% report being raped, while 52% report being physical assaulted and 6.5% report being stalked (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Additionally, Black women make up almost 1/3 of all intimate partner homicides in the U.S and experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than White counterparts and 2.5 more times than women of other racial groups (Women of Color Network, 2006).

Despite these rates, Black women are less likely to seek help through the criminal justice system (Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey, & Marghi, 2008; Weisz, 2005), which may be due to a mistrust developed from a shared (Black) cultural understanding of the system as a racist institution (Nash, 2005; Weisz, 2005). Some Black women report concerns disclosing relationship violence to helping agencies, such as concerns with disgracing their community and/or providing more opportunities for discrimination (Campbell et al., 2008). In fact, some scholars conclude that Black women are caught between sustaining their own safety in their relationship (i.e. reporting violence to authorities) and the safety of the Black community (i.e. community disgracing or racial discrimination) (Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacy & Marghi, 2008).

Black female victims/survivors of gender violence may also be less likely to seek help through other helping agencies, such as social services (Weisz, 2005). Some Black women state that the inaccessibility of services offered by domestic violence agencies, due to transportation issues, for example, deters their help-seeking behaviors (Bent-Goodley, 2004). Lack of cultural competence in service providers is another noted challenge affecting the lack of help-seeking for services by Black women and can include such things as denying shelter because of the perception of Black women as too strong (to be harmed or abused).

While faith-based leaders are a resource for victims/survivors, scholars note concerns (Campbell et al., 2008); Black women may seek guidance from faith-based leaders, but Black women may be inclined to take literal understandings from preachings, such as woman/wife submission to a husband. Additionally, domestic violence is not a common topic discussed by faith-based leaders during service, and often times when it is discussed the messages are not supportive for victims/survivors. Religious convictions are noted to contribute to a fear of victim

shaming, while racial stereotypes and myths also contribute to racially-centered complexities of gender violence against Black women (Women of Color Network, 2006).

Despite the challenges related to help-seeking, Black women do long for emotional and psychological support when coping as victims/survivors (Taylor, 2009). In an ethnographic study, Taylor interviewed 21 Black women and some reported feeling uncomfortable or unwelcomed in support groups because of differences in race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Some also reported wanting a space where racial stereotypes do not interfere with their experiences in support groups. Additionally, some spoke of wanting a chance to help other women of color through the support group. Taylor concluded that while some Black women may find more comfort in a racially homogenous support group, some are also concerned about the lack of cultural competence and critical perspectives of support group facilitators.

As a result of Black women's barriers to help-seeking, there has been a push for social workers to use culturally competent methods to enhance service accessibility for Black women. Such methods include, but are not limited to: cultural grief therapy (Bent-Goodley, 2004, 2009), restorative justice (Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey, & Marghi, 2008; Weisz, 2005), voluntary spirituality services (Gillum, Sullivan & Bybee, 2006), and interventions using Black popular culture (Oliver, 2000). Another recommendation to improve services for Black women is a two-phase support group system, whereby Black women first participate in racially homogenous support groups and then transition to a racially heterogeneous support group (Taylor, 2009).

Media impacts and social work. The media is noted as having a profound impact on viewers' understandings and responses to gender violence (Carlyle, Orr, Savage, & Babin, 2014; Collings, 2002; Collins & Carmody, 2011; Hust et al., 2013; Kohlman et al., 2014; Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1997; Mullin & Linz, 1995; Palazzolo & Roberto, 2011; Strega et al.,

2014). Some studies have reported that continued exposure of sexually explicit media (Krafka et al., 1997; Mullin & Linz, 1995) and media reports on domestic violence desensitize viewers to the violence (Kohlman et al., 2014). In fact, continued exposure to sexually explicit media contributes to viewers being more likely to rate the violence as less extreme (Mullin & Linz, 1995) and less degrading to women (Krafka et al., 1997). Research in this area also suggests that stereotypes contribute to the recall and interpretations of media reports about child sexual abuse (Collings, 2002). Additionally, when news stories report information on previous domestic violence offenses and perpetrator consumption of alcohol, participants of one study were more likely to prefer harsher punishments for offenders, such as incarceration (Palazzolo & Roberto, 2011). Furthermore, the consumption of sports media is also shown to affect attitudes and beliefs pertaining to gender based violence; specifically, consumption contributes to women believing rape myths and reduces the likelihood of intervening as a bystander. (Hust et al., 2013).

The Study

Given the impact of gender violence portrayals in media on viewers, it is imperative to examine media portrayals of gender violence through a social work lens. Social work scholars study gender violence in various ways that include, but are not limited to: social work practice and teaching (Agilias, 2012; Black, Weisz, & Bennett, 2010; Busch & Valentine, 2000; Hartman, 1987; Hooper, Koprowska, & McCluskey, 1997; Martin, 2008; van Wormer, 2009), social work and governmental policy (Cho & Wilke, 2005; Danis, 2003; Mills et al., 2000), religious influences/factors (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006; Fowler & Hill, 2004; Yick, 2008), and risk factors and impacts (Anderson, Saunders, Yoshihama, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; El-Bassel, Gilbert, Wu, Go, & Hill, 2005; Goodkind, Ng, & Sarri, 2006; Weisz, Tolman, &

Saunders, 2000). Despite the ethics, values and work driving the discipline, such as social justice, human wellbeing, service, empowerment and the end of human oppression (National Association of Social Workers, 2008), there is minimal (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Ross, 2015; Strega et al., 2014), yet needed social work voice in the assessment of gender violence portrayals in media. Moreover, social work literature on media depictions of gender violence against Black women is absent. As media continues to saturate our socio-cultural landscapes through ubiquitous access and advancing technologies, it is vital to interrogate the ways media portrays and influences experiences of gender violence. Therefore, this research fills a critical gap in social work scholarship by providing a social work lens to the depictions of gender violence against Black women.

The purpose of this study was to reveal the messaging of media discourse in portrayals of gender violence against Black women with a social work lens. A collection of films has recently emerged in the last 10 years, which feature gender violence against Black women as prominent discourse-- those produced, directed and/or written by Tyler Perry. Since the release of his first film, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Grant, 2005), many of Perry's films have gender violence plots, especially those featuring Madea, a recurring character in eight of his films. Perry films consistently gross millions of dollars. Furthermore, as contemporary films with Black casts that portray contemporary Black family life, these films were perfect sites for inquiry on media discourse of gender violence against Black women. While Perry films have been studied, an overwhelming majority of the studies focus on his perpetuation of racist and/or sexist stereotypes and fail to examine the intersection of those stereotypes with his portrayal of gender violence (Chen, Williams, Hendrickson, & Chen, 2012; Fontaine, 2011; Harris & Tassie, 2012; Patterson, 2011; Persley, 2012; Pimpare, 2010; Watkins-Hayes, Patterson, & Armour, 2011). Therefore, I

pursued a dissertation inquiry that explored the intersections of Perry's discourse of gender violence.

Theoretical Approaches

Black feminist thought and intersectionality. Current scholarship that reviews the portrayals of gender violence finds that the violence is normalized (Kohlman et al., 2014), minimized (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006) and underreported (Meloy & Miller, 2009) in media.

While the literature that examines media portrayals of gender violence against Black women is minimal (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Meyers, 2004; Sheppard, 2009), it suggests that the use of stereotypes based on systemic oppressions, such as racism, sexism and classism, minimize the seriousness of the violence. Intersectionality, a theoretical framework coined by Crenshaw (1989) and later developed by Collins (1999) as an analytic framework, does not make light of the media's use of stereotypes, specifically of Black women. As an analytic framework, Intersectionality requires recognition of how social systems such as constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and age, as well as institutional systems such as politics, government, education and media, simultaneously shape Black women's experiences.

Nearly seventeen years later, Collins and Blige (2016) provide a broader and encompassing definition of Intersectionality:

“...a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by

many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves” (p. 2). Additionally, Intersectionality refers to a synergy between critical inquiry and critical praxis (Collins & Blige, 2016). Collins & Blige assert that critical praxis and critical inquiry are organizing principles for Intersectionality. Critical inquiry refers to a way of challenging knowledge, theories and practices. While this can include conducting non-functionalist, non-traditional research, it can also include challenging everyday-taken-for-granted knowledge, such as racist stereotypes, gender roles or norms and religious convictions. On the other hand, critical praxis refers to the ways individuals and groups use intersectional frameworks to challenge, reject or fix social problems. For instance, the development of departments on diversity and inclusion in higher education allow colleges and universities to expand their appeal to prospective students who are members of minority groups. The development of diversity and inclusion sought to challenge or fix the inaccessibility of higher education to minority groups. Such departments recruit and try to appeal to minority students when they arrive by sponsoring student clubs and extracurricular programming that meet minority students’ interests. Therefore, not only can Intersectionality inform social theory (via critical inquiry), but it can also inform the everyday practices of individuals and groups in society (critical praxis). As such, Intersectionality has the potential to unite scholarship and activism within a single, analytic framework.

Intersectionality is ideologically compatible with Black Feminist Thought, a paradigm that acknowledges both interpretive and systemic forms of oppression against Black women. Collins (1999) provides six positions of Black Feminist Thought; however, a few are related to each other, so I present them here as three major positions. First, its purpose is to resist

oppressive practices and any ideas that seek to justify the oppression of Black women. As Black women are oppressed through the existence of intersecting oppressions, Black Feminist Thought aims to empower Black women for social justice. Full empowerment is only gained by eliminating all intersecting oppressions, even those that do not specifically impact Black women's experiences or needs. In other words, Black Feminist Thought acknowledges that full empowerment (or freedom or social justice) cannot exist for one group of women, while other women remain unfree, even if their forms/experiences of oppression are different (Lorde, 1984). Therefore, Black women's oppressions are part of an extensive fight for "human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Collins, 1999, p. 41). This orientation underscores values of emancipation and social change. The paradigm and its practices must be dynamic; thus, as social conditions transform, so must Black Feminist Thought in order to effectively address them.

The second position of Black Feminist Thought is that Black women face common challenges, despite a heterogeneity of experiences and responses to the common challenges (Collins, 1999). For instance, while difference can exist between Black women based on age, social class and religion, Black women experience injustices and inequalities that leave the group subject to an inferior status, through experiences like substandard living conditions, education and treatment. Additionally, the heterogeneity of the group can create a diversity of responses to experiences. For example, Black lesbians may underscore the oppressive experiences they have based on sexual orientation, while Black straight women may not recognize or underscore their experiences based on sexual orientation.

The third position of Black Feminist Thought is based upon the second premise (provided above). Specifically, there is a connection between the heterogeneity of the group's experiences and responses that create a collective of alternative knowledge or standpoint and practice.

Through a process of rearticulation, Black women can provide society a different view of ourselves using the “everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge” (Collins, 1999, p. 32) of Black women. As a practice, rearticulation offers a self-expressive view of Black women by fusing core themes of Black women’s standpoint (through everyday taken-for-granted knowledge) with new meanings, which are articulated by Black women. As such, Collins posits that Black women intellectuals are in a centralized position to facilitate rearticulation, based upon their oppressed status within an oppressive society and an oppressive academy, which of course is purposed for enlightenment. Collins insists that this process is not exactly “consciousness raising,” as the consciousness of Black women already exists; instead, Black Feminist Thought affirms and publicizes the taken-for-granted knowledge of Black women.

Inferior perceptions through controlling images. As mentioned in the second position of Black Feminist Thought, Black women are treated inferiorly. One way this takes place is through the perpetual presentation of Black women as different (and inferior) human beings, otherwise referred to as “othering,” which is commonplace in media (Collins, 1999). Othering is the process of categorizing people through oppositional and binary thinking, such as male/female, Black/White, subject/object. Through othering, one categorization only exists in relation to its counterpart. Since difference is defined through opposition, one group is objectified as the “other,” or determined to be the inherently different group. Furthermore, ideas of group difference are used to justify oppression, thereby creating a subordinate group. One way that Black women are “othered” and their oppressive experiences perpetuated, is through the use of racist, sexist and classist stereotypes in media, called *controlling images* (Collins, 1999). Controlling images are designed to make Black women’s oppression appear natural and

inevitable, thereby having oppression exist unchallenged and justified, sometimes by Black women ourselves (See: controlling images in Chapter 2).

Using Intersectionality as her analytic framework, Collins posits the media regularly use several controlling images of Black women: mammy, Black matriarch, welfare mother, welfare queen, the Black lady and jezebel/whore (discussed at length in Chapter 2). She argues that oppositional binary messaging is a method used with controlling images. Many of the ways Black women are stereotyped in media are juxtaposed with accepted gendered behavior associated for (White) women. For instance, the Black matriarch stereotype fails to appropriate socially acceptable behavior for women in her assertiveness and un-femininity, which are characteristics in sharp contrast with a (White) stereotypical woman who complies with gendered norms through passivity and femininity.

Oppositional gazing. An important Black feminist, theoretical concept for this dissertation involves the nature of engaged and critical spectatorship. bell hooks' (1992) coined concept, *oppositional gaze*, is a way of looking as an act of resistance. (hooks' legal name is Gloria Jean Watkins. She goes by the pen pal name "bell hooks" to honor her mother and grandmother. The use of the lowercase letters denotes that her work is more important than who she is, as a person [Williams, 2006]). She asserts, "Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination...opens up the possibility of agency" (hooks, 1992, p. 198).

In her study, hooks interviewed Black women, inquiring about the nature of their cinematic spectatorship. She found that most of the women did not expect to see compelling representations of Black women. They described having to shut down critique in order to enjoy the movies. Additionally, they reported having to forget about racism in order to receive

entertainment value from movies. She notes that most of the women she interviewed did not consider sexism. hooks' analysis also discussed the likelihood a Black woman would develop an oppositional gaze. She found that the extent to which a Black woman felt, "devalued, objectified, or dehumanized" (hooks, 1992, p. 198) determined the degree of her critical spectatorship; she then concluded that the women whose identities were constructed in resistance were more likely to develop an oppositional gaze.

Discourse theory. Discourse theory provides a theoretical approach to understanding how social problems are recognized, defined and addressed (Mahmoodogly, Harsij, Emamjomehzadeh, Forooghi, & Masoudnia, 2013), making it highly compatible with social work research and Black Feminist Thought. It recognizes collective knowledge and how that knowledge shapes and organizes individuals' experiences. Furthermore, one of discourse theory's major propositions is that all social phenomena obtain meanings through discourses, or structures where meanings are regularly negotiated and formed (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). Discourses are also understood as varied representations of social life, including social practices, representations and identities, in addition to verbal and nonverbal language, visual images, social institutions and other semiotics (Fairclough, 2001).

As this research examined media portrayals as *discourse*, instead of mere *content*, it becomes important to draw the distinction between *discourse* and *content*. Lacking inherent meaning by themselves, scholars must study discourses with respect to their historical and social contexts (Hardy, Harley, & Phillips, 2004). The meanings ascribed to discourses are provided through the creation, dissemination and consumption of texts/semiotics as well as social interactions. With a constructionist orientation, meaning attributed from discourse is socially constructed and fluid. Similarly, while discourse analysis is commonly used as an analytic

framework or methodology to understand discourses, it is also understood to be a perspective that incorporates various ways to think about discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000). All of these features are in stark contrast to examining the media portrayals as mere *content*, as *content* has a more objective reality and fixed meaning, both of which are disconnected from social contexts (Hardy et al., 2004).

Judith Butler's concept of *gender performativity* (Butler, 1999) is a solid example of the contextual nature of discourse. Butler argues that gender lacks identity or meaning before discourse, as the gender identity is created through the performance of gendered expressions based on social norms/expectations for men, women and heterosexuality (Butler, 1999; Carline, 2011). As such, the social and historical contexts of heterosexuality, and quite arguably, heteronormativity, patriarchy and the operation of a sex/gender binary, create expectations for gendered behavior and therefore gender (identity) itself. In this way, gender and gender performativity are socially constructed and can change over time and place. However, an understanding of gender without these contexts, or interpreting gender through content-only, would assume an objective or single reality of gender.

Discourse theory is found to be applicable for media studies research in three ways: 1) to study discourses about media and their societal functions; 2) to study discourses of mass media, focusing on discourses of form and content and; 3) to describe media as discourse (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). Of particular interest for this study is discourses of mass media, specifically gender violence portrayals of Black female victims/survivors (in Black contemporary media). Through discourse theory, media are understood not only as passive distributors or dispensers of discourses, but also engaged actors that (re)produce and transform social phenomena.

Conclusion

Altogether, this study used Intersectionality, Black Feminist Thought and Discourse Theory as theoretical orientations to explore media discourse of gender violence against Black women in Tyler Perry films within the context of controlling images. Controlling images and oppositional gazing served as concepts to consider throughout the research. Next, Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature on gender violence in media, controlling images, Black female representations in popular culture, and research on Tyler Perry films.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Gender Violence Portrayals in Media

The scholarship on media portrayals of gender violence is minimal. However, scholars have addressed the ways in which gender violence is presented on prime time television, press coverage, advertisements, talk shows, textbooks and pornography (Berns, 2004; Cowan & Campbell, 1994; Cuklanz, 2000; Gossett & Byrne, 2002; Kohlman et al., 2014; Meloy & Miller, 2009; Meyers, 2004; Snyder, 2009). In general, with the exception of internet rape pornography, the consensus is that gender violence in the media is minimized, underrepresented, and misdirected. Furthermore, the literature on media portrayals of gender violence against Black women, or other women of color, is scarce.

Cuklanz (2000) conducted a study on prime time television shows portraying rape during the late 1970s-1990 time period. She found that in the late 70's and early 80's victims were presented as helpless, passive, and in need of support from (male) detectives. Victims were only minor characters to the story line and their roles were minimized. Additionally, victims were rarely portrayed as strong and articulate about their experiences. In prime time television during the 80's, Cuklanz (2000) found stories where victims were more proactive about their healing and willing to testify against their rapist. Also, story plots were less centralized on male detectives and victims were more present. Cuklanz did not elaborate much on racial differences in the portrayal of rape in her study, but did note that during the late 1970s nearly all rape-centered episodes comprised of White victims. By the 80's, victimized racial minority characters emerged in prime time television shows. Important to note, most of the offenders

were White males and minority victims did not discuss race and rarely had allies to assist them in healing. By 1990, justice-seeking victims were commonly found in prime time television.

In addition to prime time television analysis of victim imagery, news reports were also used as a site for analysis. Miller and Meloy (2009) point out that while domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women, it is underreported in the news. These authors conducted an exploratory study on gendered themes in news articles on violent crimes; findings reported in this study suggested that reports on violence against women typically highlighted only extreme cases and that reporters ignored the systemic or structural context present in violence against women. Miller and Meloy conclude, “ [by] ignoring the structural context of criminal behavior, the media let fundamental institutions of society off the hook” (2009, p. 52). While the authors noted the intersection of class, ethnicity and race as constructs that shaped the profile of an El Salvadoran victim, examination or discussion of Black female victims were not provided.

The potential harms of using humor in media portrayals of violence is also explored. In a content analysis study on 153 sexist internet jokes, Bemiller and Schneider (2010) found that the jokes promoted dangerous outcomes against women, including sexual objectification, devaluation of abilities and violence. (While sexist jokes are not physically violent, they have been regarded as “hostile,” and often used within violent discourse about women [Drimonis, 2014].) They assert that sexist jokes are harmful, as the humor component associates the content as trivial and not serious. Similarly, in a study of night-time television programming on four commercial networks, Potter and Warren (1998) also found humorous context trivializes violent content in the programming. In fact, they found that the rate of all forms of violence, inclusive of minor and major forms of violence, was higher on comedy programs when compared to non-

comedy programs. Moreover, they found that the violence in comedic programs were less likely to portray punishment because the violence was more likely to be committed by heroes. As such, viewers may be more likely to consider the violence as less serious than if it were enacted by villains.

Kohlman et al. (2014) asserted that domestic violence is normalized, condoned and desensitized by viewers due to devaluing and comical depictions in news, magazines, advertisements and television. They contended that even though social acceptance of domestic violence is shaped mostly by our gender roles and institution of marriage, the media's use of sexist, offensive and prejudiced humor, jokes about victims, and language, frame the violence as acceptable. For example, the use of sexist jokes against women, objectify and devalue women in addition to "support[ing] and normaliz[ing] aggression and violence against women" (2014, p. 3). They concluded with a call to action for behavioral scientists to expose the irresponsibility of media's role in shaping viewers perceptions of domestic violence. Unfortunately, while they provided examples such as Chris Brown/Rihanna and OJ Simpson coverage, the authors failed to discuss how the intersection of gender, race and sexuality may impact the coverage/portrayal of domestic violence in media as well as comedic, normalizing and desensitizing outcomes.

In a study that examined the way media present violence against women of color, Meyers (2004) explored the press coverage of Freaknik, an annual pre-finals spring event of the 1990's that was frequented by Black students around the country. Freaknik consisted of street parties and other events in Atlanta, Georgia. Meyers noted that 1994-1996 coverage of Freaknik in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* ignored sexual violence issues and focused on blaming locals, not students, for violent acts. Another focus of media coverage was the traffic jams and gridlock. Only when camera crews were present during an instance of gender violence was there

specific coverage on the violence occurring at Freaknik against women. In the typical coverage violence was minimized, victims were blamed for assaults, and offenders were not held accountable for crimes. For example, a voice over provided by a reporter placed blame on the victim for her assault (the woman is unconsentingly grabbed as she walks past a group of men), “Short skirts draw a crowd tonight at Underground Atlanta. Freaknik ’96 is underway” (Meyers, 2004, p. 105). Here, a (Black) woman and her clothing are blamed for the assault.

Pornography also seems to be an area where researchers study gender violence in media. In an explicit study of 31 internet pornographic rape sites, Gossett and Byrne (2002) found that 8 sites had a “jukebox” of options for the viewers to choose based on text description or images of the type of scenes available. Graphics were commonly found to establish a theme for the site, such as dripping blood, burning flames or gothic images. Restrictive and fatal weapons, such as ropes, handcuffs, guns and chains, were regularly used to assist the perpetrator in raping the victim. Innocence was a common theme for victim construction and derogatory slurs, like “bitch,” “whore,” and “slave,” were used in 14 sites. Interestingly, while much went into the construction of the victim, little to no information was provided about the perpetrator.

An unexpected finding of Gossett and Byrne’s (2002) study involves the intersection of gender, race, sexuality and the profound image construction of the victim. While an overwhelming majority (34/56) of images showcase Asian women as victims and 24 images of White women as victims, no images of Black female victims were identified. Given the real life and historical prevalence of sexual violence against Black women, Gossett and Byrne argued that the omission of Black female rape victims was striking. In fact, their finding counters other research that found Black women represented as frequent victims of sexual aggression in pornography (Cowan & Campbell, 1994). Gossett and Byrne (2002) concluded that while

pornography is a method that men use to oppress women, race (or the intersection of gender, race and sexuality) markedly complicates and shapes pornography.

With the exception of pornography, gender violence in media is minimized, underrepresented, trivialized and misdirected in media. In online rape pornography, however, gender violence is front and center, while the intersection and social construction of race, gender and sexuality shape victim portrayals or the lack thereof. This literature points to a need to comprehensively address portrayals of gender violence against women of color, specifically Black women. In this way, this dissertation, which examines such discourse produced by Black contemporary media, adds to the literature base and helps round out perceptions of Black women as victims of gender violence.

The Victim Stereotype and Archetype

In discussing the literature of representations of gender violence, it becomes important to address paradigmatic portrayals of victims through the use of stereotypes and archetypes. Stereotypes are over-simplistic or generalized, but shared cultural understandings of social groups that are based on certain beliefs about the group's characteristics (Macrae, Stangor & Hewstone, 1996). Additionally, stereotypes are assigned to all members of a social group and are not always based on direct experiences with those members (Babad, Birnbaum & Benne, 1983). Stereotypes are often considered pejorative (Cawalti, 1976); regularly noted as tools to maintain the status quo (Fenton, 1998; Macrae, Stangor & Hewstone, 1996), the objects of the stereotypes are trapped by prescribed roles (Fenton, 1998). Indeed, stereotypes are often based on overly simplistic understandings of race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural orientation and other categorical systems. As a result of all this, stereotypes sustain misconceptions of and inappropriate responses to social groups and their members.

A related paradigmatic representation, the *archetype*, does not evoke such a derogatory status as stereotype. Archetypes are also based on social understandings, but they can also be attributed to more than social groups. Archetypes are traditional and universal symbols that provide “meanings, implications, and overtones” into a story and to the audience (Lane, 1954, p.232). Many aspects of a story can be archetypal, including real people (Lupton, 1999), characters, settings and themes. Furthermore, archetypes can exist in a variety of discourses. A major distinction between stereotypes and archetypes is that archetypes are reproduced across long periods of time and cultures; therefore, stereotypes can become archetypes (Seiter, 2006).

Americanized ideas about victims of gender violence have been developed into both a stereotype and archetype. This victim stereotype entails being a female that espouses expected gender roles and norms, including passivity, femininity, delicacy, chastity, motherhood domesticity and, more often than not, Whiteness (Fenton, 1998). These characteristics portray a stereotypic concept of being a *good-girl*; good-girls need and deserve protection and thus can be harmed or victimized, while bad girls do not (or cannot) conform to expected gender roles and norms and, as a result, are deemed unworthy of protection. This juxtaposition between good and bad girls creates a cultural understating that legitimacy exists in victimhood, such as the legitimate victim or the victim whose victim identity and victimization are considered valid.

The victim archetype is predicated by race and gender and dictates who and how groups are understood to be victims of varied experiences. But, what of the intersectional understandings specific to Black women as victims of gender violence? While the literature is scarce in that regard, Collins’ concept of controlling images of Black women (1999) is a strong theoretical lead into potential answers to this question.

Controlling images. Some scholars believe the mass media is a repository for stereotypes of social groups (Macrae, Stangor & Hewstone, 1996); however, it is best to understand mass media as a clearinghouse of stereotypes and archetypes as it collects and distributes stereotype-knowledge (McQuail, 2010). Stereotypical portrayals are powerful, dangerous and often used in media depicting Black women (Collins, 1999). Collins finds that such images are a matter of control, a way in which to justify Black women's oppression, or in this case gender violence against Black women. Collins contends stereotypical images, or *controlling images*, of Black women are designed to make racism, sexism, and other types of oppression appear natural. The controlling images of Black women include: mammy, Black matriarch, welfare mother, welfare queen, the Black lady and jezebel/whore.

Mammy. Noted as one of the strongest stereotypical depictions of Black women (Chen et al., 2012), mammy was created as a contrast to White lady archetypes and used to justify the economic exploitation of Black women during slavery as well as the economic inequalities faced by contemporary Black women in the workforce (Collins, 1999). Mammy characteristics include that of an asexual, content, docile and faithful slave/servant who cares for White children and families, often better than her own family. Mammies are typically physically obese and dark-skinned Black women (West, 1995). Mammy's dark skin is not typically understood as a positive attribute. Indeed, skin complexion has historically been a factor in the mis/treatment of Black people. For instance, during slavery Blackness was associated with ugliness and sin (Hill, 2002). Skin complexion has grown to denote attractiveness or beauty in the Black community (Bond & Cash, 1992; Hill, 2002), with lighter skin tones preferred. In fact, Eurocentric standards of beauty, including skin complexion or tone, have been identified as pervasive in the Black community (Hill, 2002).

Examples of mammy include Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*, Aunt Jemima in advertising and Florida Evans on *Good Times* (Chen et al., 2012). These controlling images of Black women serve to represent social expectations of Black motherhood. Furthermore, while traditional Mammy images may be less contemporary, they still hold current significance as Black women make less money compared to their counterparts for the same work or have to work twice as hard to make the equal income (Collins, 1999).

Newer and revised versions of mammy have also been examined (Chen et al., 2012; Nelson, 2007). The characters Madea in Tyler Perry films, Rasputia in Eddie Murphy's film, *Norbit*, and Big Momma in Martin Lawrence's film, *Big Momma's House*, have been described as contemporary, male mammies. These characters feature Black men in drag and fatsuits presented as "desexualized or sexual predators who are domineering, full of attitude and weighed down with massive breasts and buttocks" (Chen et al., 2012, p. 118). The obesity and desexualization of these characters point to a "modern-day mammy" stereotype (Chen et al., 2012), while the attitudinal traits may be more in line with that of the Black matriarch (discussed below).

Mammy imagery has been noted as harmful to viewers, specifically Black women (Collins, 1999). Traditional mammy portrayals are recognized as perpetuating expectations of removing Black women's labor from their families, thereby denying income and emotional work in the Black family. Male mammy depictions are also found to be damaging; beyond perpetuating mockery of Black women, after viewing male mammy images, Black women reported body dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Chen et al., 2012). Chen et al. (2012) found that the mockery of Black women's bodies by the male actors in drag and fat suits, robs Black women of positive associations with their bodies.

Black matriarch. The Black matriarch is presented as unfeminine, too strong, independent, aggressive/angry, and disrupts traditional gender roles by emasculating her (male) partner (Collins, 1999). With southern roots dating post-slavery (West, 1995), this controlling image represents an aggressive, unfeminine and emasculating woman—too strong for her own good (Collins, 1999). She is normally presented as an older and physically large Black woman with a dark skin complexion (Fontaine, 2011). The Black matriarch does not follow socially-proper gender norms; thus, she serves as an example of what happens should a woman challenge White patriarchy. Negative consequences include being labeled and treated as dangerous, deviant, unfeminine or un-beautiful, or as a bad mother (Collins, 1999). Matriarch examples include Sapphire from the *Amos 'n Andy Show* (Cummings, 1988), Dr. Karen Jensen in the film *Blade* (Gayles, 2012) and Madea in *Tyler Perry's Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Ross, 2015).

Angela Davis (1981) provides more historical context to the images of the Black matriarch and notes the image as contributing to the “deformed equality of equal oppression” (1981, p. 8) of Black women, as Black female slaves were not provided any more compassion nor less cruelty than her male counterpart. A major danger in the perpetuation of the Black matriarch image is that it presents Black women with a double-edged sword in terms of complying with social and gendered norms (Collins, 1999). Specifically, while Black women are expected to be mammies in some environments, like the workplace, they are stigmatized in their own homes for being strong characters. Also, the matriarch image is particularly harmful to Black women with regard to gender violence. The stereotype implies that due to the matriarch's strength, Black women can deal with anything or are superwomen (Wallace, 1999); this prevents society from seeing Black women as susceptible to harm via gender violence and increases the

risk of gender violence against Black women (Taft, Bryant-Davis, Woodward, Tillman, & Torres, 2009).

Welfare mother/queen. Another controlling image common of Black women is the welfare mother. Like the matriarch, she is labeled as a bad mother. In contrast to the matriarch and mammy, she is not aggressive enough to raise her children and is presented as a woman who does not work, but instead is lazy and receives welfare (Collins, 1999). Additionally, violating another gender norm for women, she is single (or alone) and passes on her poor work ethic onto her children. A slight variation to the welfare mother is the welfare queen who is a “highly materialistic, domineering and manless working-class Black woman” (Collins, 1999, p. 80) and is also content with collecting welfare. A strident example of welfare mothers/queens is found in media depictions of women of color serving as the “public face of the poor and public assistance recipients” (Kelly, 2010, p. 79).

Like the other controlling images, the welfare mother/queen depiction is dangerous; it ignores systemic barriers of poverty in Black families and encourages victim-blaming (Collins, 1999). While little is reported on popular culture images of the welfare mother/queen portrayal, this image has historically, during the Reagan administration, been used to portray Black women as lazy women who procreate to receive and waste government assistance (Hing, 2011). The media-produced image has been used to scapegoat Black women, blaming them for wasting government funds, in order to hide the true reality: that money was not fraudulently taken by Black women, but that there were government cuts to welfare programs and public services. Furthermore, while women on welfare tend to blame social structures, the welfare system or fate for their own welfare use, they also tend to accept stereotypes about welfare mothers/queens for other welfare recipients, mainly that they are lazy and unmotivated (Secombe, James, &

Walters, 1998). The scapegoating of Black women to mask government cuts to welfare and public services and the labeling of Black women as lazy and unmotivated individuals who take advantage of government assistance leaves no room for compassion or understanding of Black women as victims/survivors.

Black lady. Another controlling image of Black women is the Black lady, a character representing Black professional women who work hard, are educated and accomplished (Collins, 1999). In this way, the Black lady represents a modern mammy, as she is hardworking, yet having to work harder than her counterparts. However, she also evokes matriarchal traits, in that her work ethic leaves no room for male companionship. Black ladies may mistreat men with their assertiveness and competitiveness and are unable to get men to marry them. Clair Huxtable (even though married) from *The Cosby Show* and the portrayals of Condoleezza Rice have been argued to be representations of the Black lady (Springer, 2008).

This image perpetuates a stereotype that Black women, through affirmative action, are given jobs that should go to *worthy* candidates, White men in particular (Collins, 1999). Additionally, as this controlling image is intrinsically linked to patriarchal values, it may lead to Black men believing that Black women are taking jobs that should be given to them. Like the Black matriarch, Black lady stereotypes paint Black women as too strong to be victimized.

Jezebel/whore. The final controlling image of Black women is that of jezebel, also referred to as a whore or hoochie (Collins, 1999). Like mammy, jezebel was created during slavery, when slave owners had control over Black women's sexuality and reproduction (West, 1995). Jezebels are typically seductive, hypersexual (West, 1995) and sexually aggressive characters (Collins, 1999) and therefore violate gender norms for female sexuality, which is limited to submissiveness and sexual resistance. In the past, jezebels were images used to justify

the sexual exploitation against Black women in the forced reproduction of slaves and in Black female slaves serving as wet nurses for White women. Contemporary jezebels, or hoochies, are commonplace in popular culture, especially Black popular culture. Hoochies are masculinized since they openly desire and pursue sex as much as a man. Examples include video vixens in hip-hop music videos, 2 Live Crew's song "Hoochie Mama" (Collins, 1999) and even twerking, a new popular dance where women squat and thrust their hips provocatively (Baskerville, 2014).

The danger with jezebel is in her deviant, sexual characteristics (Collins, 1999). The deviancy helps to define, through oppositional and binary thinking, normal sexuality. Jezebel is also dangerous in its relegation of Black women as sexually aggressive, which can justify sexual assaults against Black women. Additionally, because jezebels are hypersexual with heightened fertility, suppressed nurturing of Black children becomes a social expectation for Black women.

Altogether, the literature on victim stereotypes, victim archetypes and controlling images reveals how there are socially prescribed scripts that shape our understanding and definitions about victims/survivors of gender violence (or other forms of oppression); these scripts are harmful in several ways, such as oversimplification of groups, typically marginalized groups, as well a failure to recognize victims as victims if they do not (or cannot) meet the prescribed scripts. Clearly, Black women are set up as illegitimate victims or non-victims, due to the stark contrast between controlling images of Black women and the victim stereo- and archetypes.

Black Female Representations in Black Popular Culture

Many scholars from various disciplines discuss how Black women are portrayed on television and in film and many contend that Black female portrayals are consistently based on stereotypes (Collins, 1999; Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Gillum, 2008; hooks, 1996; Larson, 2006; Lubiano, 1997; Taft et al., 2009). In particular, some forms of Black popular culture

represent Black women and gender violence against Black women. Analysis of Steven Spielberg's cinematic presentation of *The Color Purple* (Bobo, 1995; Collins, 1999; Early, 1986), hip-hop culture (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Richardson, 2007) and Tyler Perry film productions (Chen et al., 2012; Fontaine, 2011; Harris & Tassie, 2012; McKoy, 2012; Manigault-Bryant, Lomax & Duncan, 2014; Patterson, 2011; Persley, 2012; Pimpare, 2010; Watkins-Hayes et al., 2011) are major focal points of discussion between scholars on Black popular culture's representation of Black women.

The Color Purple. In an eye-opening analysis of Spielberg's movie construction of Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, Bobo (1995) criticized Spielberg's presentation of the three Black female protagonists. She claimed Spielberg ignored the historical context with which Walker constructed the themes in her novel. Specifically, she found that he ignored the history of Black women in America as "breeders, chattel, and sexual repositories" and the "transitional moment" in the story when Black women's role shifts to a "place of importance" (1995, p. 278). Instead, Bobo found Spielberg perpetuates Black female stereotypes by simplifying Shug as a "licentious cabaret singer" (a jezebel), Sofia to the "castrating Amazon" (a Black matriarch), and Celie to an "orphan Annie" (a mammy).

Hip-hop. Another trend in examining Black female representations in popular culture has been in analyzing hip-hop music and culture (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Rebollo-gil & Moras, 2012). Cole and Guy-Schettall (2003) assert that hip-hop is harmful to Black girls in its lyrics, images, and attitudes, and most especially in the reference to gender violence and other forms of violence. They fear the misogynistic messages perpetuated in the music may harm Black female self-perceptions and also the way others perceive and treat Black women.

Hip-hop is also known for perpetuating misogynistic images of Black women as “domineering freaks, bitches, mummies, and baby’s mamas,” in addition to single mothers and gold-diggers (Rebollo-gil & Moras, 2012, p. 122). In terms of hip-hop female artists, the content of their songs are often viewed with less credibility than their male counterparts (Rebollo-gil & Moras, 2012). Additionally, female artists have to balance their image with hard and soft characteristics. They have to be hard enough to be taken seriously and soft enough to be considered sexy. While a small number of (Black) female hip-hop artists (i.e., Missy Elliot) have been able to successfully operate outside such heteronormative rules, most are silenced and/or have their contributions go unacknowledged (Lane, 2011). One scholar examined oppositional gazing in hip-hop (Richardson, 2007). Specifically, Richardson found that agency and alternative readings of hip-hop discourse (such as Black and street consciousness) by Black females exists; however, these alternatives are only noted to challenge systems of oppression, like racism and sexism, as opposed to changing the systems in which they operate (Richardson, 2007).

Tyler Perry films. Tyler Perry is described as “one of the most popular and successful African American playwrights and filmmakers of all time” (Persley, 2012, p. 217). Many Perry films, those he has produced, directed, wrote and/or starred in, such as *Tyler Perry’s Madea Goes To Jail* (2009b), feature Black female protagonists that experience gender violence; this feature alone makes them key sites for research, but also speaks to the influences of Perry’s childhood in his art-form. Across their lifetime, Perry’s films have grossed anywhere from \$15.9-\$90.5 million dollars (Box Office Mojo, 2016). His films are readily available in theaters, cable television, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video and Redbox and are noted as undeniably popular with Black audiences, in particular Black working class women (Persley, 2012). Furthermore,

not only have his films received awards, but also Perry has received nominations and awards for his acting, screenwriting, public image, producer and directorships (IMDb, 2016a). Perry represents a powerhouse of Black contemporary media for his work as a writer, director and producer of films and plays, and as such his films have been studied by a variety of researchers (Chen et al., 2012; Fontaine, 2011; Harris & Tassie, 2012; McKoy, 2012; Manigault-Bryant, Lomax & Duncan, 2014; Patterson, 2011; Persley, 2012; Pimpare, 2010; Watkins-Hayes et al., 2011).

Pimpare (2010) offers a pointed review of Perry's film *Precious*, contending it endorsed a Black female controlling image, the welfare queen. He questioned the responsibilities of profiting celebrities, like Perry, in their approval and justification of poor Black stereotypes. Similarly, in their content analysis of four Perry films, Harris and Tassie (2012) discussed race and class stereotypes in Perry films. They find he portrays middle-class Blacks as materialistic, fixated on status, dysfunctional, abusive, disparaging of working class and poor Blacks, and that Perry created a new controlling image, the *emasculated black man*. These Black male characters are successful and caring, but persecuted by their Black female (stereotypical) counterparts.

Focused scholarship examining portrayals of Black female victimness in Tyler Perry films is minimal (Manigault-Bryant, Lomax & Duncan, 2014; Sheppard, 2009). In a rare study examining gender violence against Black women portrayals, Sheppard found that in *Tyler Perry's Madea's Family Reunion*, Black male desires were expressed through a "visual façade" of Black women (2009, p. 2). The author noted that not only do Black female characters sacrifice themselves to patriarchy and intimate partner violence, but the depictions of the strong and victimized Black woman, as well as a theme of intimate partner violence, marginalize Black women as a group. Black women are presented as "victims or victors," based upon the weakness

or strength of their surrounding Black male characters. Furthermore, visual juxtaposition is used as a tool to highlight differences between the healthy and unhealthy intimate partner relationships of two sisters. Sheppard (2009) found the juxtaposition problematic, as the healthy and unhealthy relationship discourse is linked to Black masculinity and economic class. Finally, Sheppard argued that the ultimate fail of the film was Perry's missing critique of racism, sexism and patriarchy in the Black community, as it presents domestic violence as an individualized problem.

In a new book (Manigault-Bryant, Lomax & Duncan, 2014), several scholars present womanist and Black feminist responses to Perry's work. One author (Kirk-Duggan, 2014) sought to explore the intersections of domestic violence, religion and Black womanhood from a womanist perspective in Perry's first two films, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* and *Madea's Family Reunion*. Kirk-Duggan recognized: Perry's Christian themes, such as love and forgiveness; his portrayal of violence from the perpetrator onto the victim/survivor and the responsive violence of the victim/survivor onto their abuser; and the pointed and Christian messaging behind the lyrics of Perry's musical score, which often directs his characters (and the audience) to action. However, Kirk-Duggan's intersectional and womanist analysis is insufficient, as she fails to critically challenge his portrayals and does not address how Perry's portrayal of Black womanhood and Christian values bear on his portrayal of domestic violence against Black women. Furthermore, Kirk-Duggan does not question how social constructions of race and gender play into Perry's victimized characters and their experiences. Meanwhile, some others in the volume challenge Perry's portrayal of violence, such as his use of stereotypes that conceals Black women's true violent experiences (Tomlinson, 2014) and the portrayal of a

victim who becomes violent against her abuser as an inappropriate way to settle issues in relationships (Duncan, 2014).

Other studies of Perry films emphasize the use of racist and/or gendered stereotypes, including the perpetuation of mammy, jezebel and Black matriarch/sapphire (Fontaine, 2011; McKoy, 2012); portrayals of submissive gender roles and Black patriarchy (Patterson, 2011), depiction of Black crime as entertainment (Harrison III, 2012); and the use of *male mummies* that mock and intensify Black female stereotypes (Chen et al., 2012). In contrast, other researchers learned possible opportunities for agency and change (Persley, 2012; Watkins-Hayes et al., 2011). For example, Persley (2012) finds that Perry captures the intersectional nature of oppression and makes it accessible for Black working class women. Additionally, Watkins-Hayes et al. (2011) identify ways Perry's film, *Precious*, highlights intervention opportunities related to healing from sexual abuse and HIV risk, HIV health messages and services, as well as the promotion of physical wellness.

About Tyler Perry. Perry's online, brief biography describes him as the "mastermind" behind numerous films, plays, television shows, and a New York Times bestselling book ("Tyler Perry's story, n.d.). His legacy is described as "the modern epitome of the American dream," surviving poverty and family abuse as a child. Perry's initial play, one he saved for and personally financed, *I Know I've Been Changed* (1992), was initially unsuccessful at recruiting an audience, but six years later, the same play sold out.

Perry was born in 1969 (Biography.com Editors, 2014) and was named Emmit Perry Jr., after his father, but he changed his name to distance himself from his abusive father ("Tyler Perry recounts," 2009). He has shared that his father beat him with an extension cord until "...the skin was coming off [his] back" and that his father was also abusive to his mother, who

tried to escape unsuccessfully with Perry and his siblings. Perry also reports that his grandmother tried to rid him of his allergies by bathing him in ammonia and the mother of a childhood friend sexually assaulted him. Furthermore, even though his mother was a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband (Perry's father), she, too, was violent with her children (Gross, 2012).

Now, Perry reports being on the other side of his victimization as he celebrates his journey, however troubling, of getting to where he is today (Epic Victories, 2011). He says he survived with the help of God, faith and prayer. In an interview for Epic Visionaries, Perry states, "When I say I'm celebrating the abuse, what I mean is I've found out in life that everything that happens to you can work for your good, if you let it, no matter how bad, no matter how traumatic" (Epic Victories, 2011, 1:40). Perry reports that after he forgave his father for the abuse, he realized that his experiences gave him what he needed to write stories and develop characters (Epic Victories, 2011). He says he knows a lot of people cannot afford therapy, as he never went to therapy, but that his characters give advice and that he aims for his films to provoke thought, change and hope. In fact, Perry created the image of the famous and reoccurring protagonist, Madea, as a cross between his mother, his aunt and Eddie Murphy's play of the Klumps family in the 1996 film, the Nutty Professor (Gross, 2012). (Murphy's influence is clear as Perry plays Madea in drag and wearing a fatsuit, similar to Murphy's play of Sherman Klump.) Perry states that Madea is like his mother in that she is "...strong, witty, loving...[and] would beat the hell out of you but make sure the ambulance got there in time to make sure they could set your arm back...Because the love was there inside all of it" (Gross, 2012, 7:25). This background on Perry is very important to consider with regard to: 1) his positionality as Madea, or his relative identity-shaping of Madea shaped by his experiences

(Alcoff, 1988) and 2) his performativity, or contextualized performative acts (Butler, 1988) based on race and gender, as Madea.

Conclusion

In sum, most scholarship on media portrayals of gender violence suggests that the violence is minimized, underrepresented and misdirected. Additionally, the use of victim stereotypes, victim archetypes and controlling images of Black women are dangerous, in that Black women do not meet social expectations to be deemed legitimate victims, thereby justifying and/or ignoring Black women's experience with violence and other forms of oppression. Further, while there is a wealth of literature on Tyler Perry films as sites for analysis of gender and race in media, to my knowledge, aside from my own previous work (Ross, 2015), there is no social work scholarship and a lack of other disciplinary scholarship that sufficiently addresses gender violence portrayals of Black women in Perry films.

Considering all the presented literature, the overarching research question of this dissertation comes to light: What is the intersecting, oppressive discourse produced in Perry films around gender violence against Black women? Secondary research questions that will help reveal answers for the primary question are:

1. How are intersections of race, gender, sexuality and religion constructed in the films?
How do the intersections operate as contexts, shaping the discourse of gender violence against Black women?
2. What systems of oppression are present in the films and how do they shape discourse of gender violence against Black women?
3. What existing and/or new controlling images are present in the films and how do they shape discourse of gender violence against Black women?

4. What meanings are derived from the discourse of gender violence against Black women?
5. What are common themes across the films in terms of intersecting oppressions, controlling images and discourse of gender violence against Black women?

The findings of these questions can be used to develop culturally relevant social work educational interventions, such as a critical, media viewing instrument for Tyler Perry films with gender violence plots. Such an instrument can encourage, at minimum, consciousness raising (National Women's Liberation, 2016) or awareness, but also oppositional gazing (hooks, 1992) and rearticulation (Collins, 1999). Next, in Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology used to address these research questions, including the sampling plan, data collection, analysis and rigor assurances.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Methods for Media Research

This study used a qualitative and highly emergent research design (Creswell, 2013) based on a novel discourse approach, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis, in examining four Tyler Perry films. Black Feminist Discourse Analysis is a novel approach designed especially for this study; it combines the subjective, social and historical contexts of Black Feminist Thought to critical examination of power in texts and other semiotics through their historical, political and social contexts, found in critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis and critical feminist discourse analysis. Discourse theory (as discussed in Chapter 1), while used as a theoretical approach (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Mahmoodoghli et al., 2013), spawned a research methodology called discourse analysis, which examines how stories are told as well as meanings provided by identities, activities and relationships (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As a variation of discourse analysis, *critical discourse analysis* is a form of discourse study that examines the interplay, reproduction and resistance of social power, dominance and inequalities in text/semiotics and social interaction through historical, political and other social contexts (Van Dijk, 2001). Not surprisingly, critical discourse analysis is used to assess how discourses “enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge” social power and dominance (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353). As such, it uses interpretive and structural modes to address social problems, power relationships (including those between discourse, text and society) and cultural ideologies (Van Dijk, 2001).

It is noted that a specialized form of critical discourse analysis, feminist critical discourse analysis, is required to advance “rich and nuanced analysis” of power, ideology within the context of gendered hierarchies (Lazar, 2007, p. 141). In particular, several justifications are provided to underscore the need for a feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007). First, while critical discourse analysis is derived from a critical perspective seeking emancipation through social justice and equality, there is not always a critical lens attributed to gender, and even in cases that critically assess gender in discourse, the focus is not necessarily guided by feminist principles or knowledge. Furthermore, the founding of critical discourse analysis by heterosexual White men is seen as related to the failure to acknowledge the contributions of feminist literature. Finally, the absence of “feminist” from the term has led to a lack of an organized feminist forum for analysts who are guided by feminist principles in critical discourse study.

Why Black Feminist Discourse Analysis. Similar to the need for a recognized feminist critical discourse analysis, there is a need to label and differentiate critical discourse analysis that is guided by Black feminism or Black Feminist Thought. Some scholars have conducted discourse analysis through a Black feminist lens (Hammad, 2011; Reviere & Byerly, 2013), but to my knowledge, there has not been a thorough explication of it as a specialized methodology.

Black Feminist Discourse Analysis, coined within this project, is used explicitly to address the historical and social contexts of Black women in discourse. As such, this methodology necessitates the use of Intersectionality to study various forms of discourse (Collins, 1999). For example, intersections of patriarchy, racism, classism and sexual oppression can be examined in media discourse on or about Black women. While critical discourse analysis may fail to consistently address gender and power in discourse (as well as race, power and/or

gender in discourse), feminist critical discourse analyses may not necessarily address the intersecting ways Black women, or other women of color, experience oppression, including the ways we experience and are represented in discourse. As such, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis gives voice to the specific standpoints of Black women as a group with unique intersecting oppressions. Furthermore, its roots in Black Feminist Thought, which is known as a type of subjugated knowledge (Collins, 1999), acknowledges the standpoints of Black women by Black women on discourse about Black women. Having Black Feminist Thought as an underlying theory to Black Feminist Discourse Analysis debunks the methodology as inferior and instead values it because of the subjugated knowledge that emerges. Therefore, the design, distinction and use of Black Feminist Discourse Analysis for this dissertation are not only justified, but vital.

Sample selection. Four films were selected for this project based on their date of release, gross earnings and viewer accessibility. All films feature Perry's noted character, Mable "Madea" Simmons, and gender violence against Black female characters as a dominant theme. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Grant, 2005), Perry's first film was released in 2005 and grossed over \$50 million dollars (IMDb, 2016b). *Madea's Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006) released a year later in 2006, has grossed over \$60 million dollars (IMDb, 2016e) and *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009b) released in 2009, grossed over \$90 million (IMDb, 2016d). Also released in 2009, *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* (Perry, 2009a) grossed over \$51 million dollars (IMDb, 2016c). All four films receive cable-television airplay and are available on Netflix, Amazon Instant Video and Redbox. Given Perry films' popularity, accessibility and gender violence themes, they serve as strong sites for analysis of contemporary Black media that features discourse on gender violence against Black female characters.

Data collection. Each film was watched one time through for familiarity. Main characters were identified and other data recorded in observational notes. Next, subsequent viewings of each film were conducted, in which observed dynamics of race, gender, sexuality and religion were recorded. Based upon Collins' (1999) typology, controlling images of Black female characters were identified and the portrayals of gender violence against Black women were recorded. Discourses, such as character demographic descriptions, personality, character background, noted language/dialogue (verbal and nonverbal), and interactions, in addition to the scene and other character traits, were also noted. Data collection continued until saturation, or the continuous collection of data until the occurrence of data redundancy, was achieved (Drake & Johnson-Reid, 2008; Walker, 2012)

Data analysis: memoing, thematic analysis and open coding. After data collection, Collins' controlling images (1999) typology was used as pre-existing codes to identify controlling images in the films. Additionally, the memoing (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008) of all the data was started. Memoing is a technique useful in a variety of qualitative approaches whereby the researcher extracts meaning from the data and makes connections between the data, social theories and previous research. Memos were used to inductively develop codes from the data. The codes underwent thematic analysis, to identify and organize common and unique themes.

Thematic analysis procedures were conducted to organize the data for patterns and comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a method to identify, analyze and describe patterns, known as themes, of the data. In particular, after code development, codes were collapsed into themes by linking the data relevant for each theme. Next, a data (Esterberg, 2002) or thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was created to illustrate the relationships and/or chronology

between codes and themes. Further analysis helped to generate labels and definitions for each theme. Important to note, while thematic analysis procedures were used to organize the data, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis was used to contextualize and interpret the data. For all analysis procedures, manifest and latent discourse were assessed. All data analysis was conducted manually, without the use of qualitative research software.

Rigor assurances. A model for rigor was identified for this project. Krefting (1991) recommends the use of Guba's 1981 model for establishing rigor in qualitative research. The model includes four overarching components: 1) trust value; 2) applicability; 3) consistency; and 4) neutrality. Trust value describes the confidence of the researcher about the research findings based on the design, content and research participants. A list of codes and themes is provided in Appendix B to enhance trust value. As this part of the research project does not include human subjects as research participants, peer review was conducted during the data collection, analysis and interpretation processes. During a peer review, also referred to as peer debriefing, external reviewers provide additional critical lenses to the research as well as support to the researcher, challenges to the researcher's assumptions and questions about methodologies and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An academic, who is familiar with the qualitative research design and relevant literature, participated as the peer reviewer. I met regularly with the peer reviewer during the analysis and review of findings stages of the study. She asked critical questions and provided feedback on the codes and themes as well as my reflexive journal entries (discussed below), study findings and implications for social work. Peer review was a continual process during analysis and the development of study findings.

Applicability involves fittingness or transferability and is determined when findings fit contexts from outside the study. To meet this criterion, highly descriptive data were recorded to

allow follow-up comparison. The researcher does not need to necessarily do the comparison, but provide enough detail for another researcher. For this project, in addition to providing descriptive data, determinations were made on whether the data and findings fit the knowledge from existing, relevant literature.

Consistency requires variability in qualitative research. Specifically, consistency refers to the dependability or trackable variability of the data ascribed to identified sources (Krefting, 1991). Because it is important to consider variations in the data, atypical findings were reported. Sources of variability can include researcher insight, participant fatigue or changes in the participant's life. Indeed, qualitative research necessitates observation of a range of experiences, rather than the average experience reported in quantitative research. And finally, neutrality refers to the neutrality of the data, not the researcher. To enhance neutrality, I participated in a reflexive process (outlined below) to enhance transparency of my processes, influences and conclusions. Academic, practitioner, and layperson consumers of my research will have agency in assessing the trustworthiness of the research.

Subjectivity. An area of concern regarding rigor may be that this project relies heavily on researcher subjectivity. Qualitative researchers acknowledge that subjectivity exists throughout the research process, including the topic of study, selection of methodology and the interpretation of the data (Ratner, 2002). In fact, researcher subjectivity is not only compatible with qualitative research (Birks et al., 2008), but also with the main theoretical approach guiding this study, Black Feminist Thought. Collins (1999) notes that Black Feminist Thought is a subjugated knowledge, consistently suppressed by institutions, such as the academy, which are mainly controlled by White men. She further insists that Black women's lived experience is a criterion for credibility when "making knowledge claims" (1999, p. 257) about Black women.

Furthermore, Black women's "outsider within status" in academia, which is described as being a part of something that considers or treats you as an outsider, positions Black women (academics) especially well to analyze race, class and gender (Collins, 1986). By using this subjective approach, she asserts the literature and the knowledge base will benefit by revealing realities that remain hidden when using more traditional research approaches. By acknowledging my own subjectivity and working through it, my dissertation serves as a space for me, as a Black woman, to re/articulate meanings derived from discourse of gender violence against Black women.

Reflexive process. While researcher subjectivity is valued in this study, in order to enhance rigor, reflexive processes took place during data collection, analysis and interpretation. Noted for enhancing research rigor, reflexivity is also recognized as a tool to achieve emancipatory goals (McCabe & Holmes, 2009), such as through rearticulation and enhancing oppositional gazing. Several methods for researcher reflexivity are reported in the literature, including the use of recording memos (Birks et al., 2008), notes, incident reports and even more informal reporting through diary entries (Probst & Berenson, 2014). Typical reflexive content include thoughts, emotions, reactions as well as insights and emerging themes. For this project, not only was the reflexive content reported in journal entries to supplement the data, but they are also described as themes in an appendix of this dissertation. The themes provide readers opportunities to assess the entire research process for aspects of trust value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the guiding research question for this study was: What is the intersecting oppressive discourse produced in Perry films around gender violence against Black women? This study explored the media discourse specific to gender violence portrayals of Black women

using a novel methodology, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis. Memoing, thematic analysis and open coding took place during data collection and analysis. Furthermore, several methods were used to ensure rigor of the study. Results from this research have direct implications for social work education and practice, which will be discussed, in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Study Data and Findings

Chapter 4 will begin with a brief synopsis of each film. While the synoptic data can be found in other literature, I will present the synopses from my standpoint, as this is consistent with the components of the chosen approach to data analysis, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis (BFDA). (Note: A detailed listing of codes and themes is provided in Appendix B. Some themes that emerged from BFDA later revealed themselves as interrelated, transitional, consistent and modernized components of a model.) Next, a thorough discussion of the major themes is provided, which includes a comprehensive account of a model that was uncovered in this study: Perry's Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence.

During the analysis, I wrote about my personal experiences in a journal to establish reflexivity and rigor in my work. While themes from my reflexive journal are provided in an organized way as an appendix to this study, it is important to note that my thinking and experiences occurred in a nonlinear (Vance, Groves, Paik & Kindler, 2007) fashion.

Films' Synopses

A brief synopsis of each film is presented below. An important distinction is required here. Each film has at least two female leads, a protagonist and deuteragonist, which are set up in juxtaposition of each other. While juxtapositional analysis of Perry films is discussed in an earlier study (Ross, 2015), the juxtapositions in the films have implications for Perry's discourse of gender violence against Black women. At times, the focus in the film alternates between the protagonist and deuteragonist, which allows for both their stories to emerge through the plot. Their stories often play off one another, or are contrasted by each other, and this dynamic

underscores various discourse and messaging about gender violence against Black women. As such, details about protagonists and deuteragonists are provided in the synopses that follow. However, while both the protagonist and deuteragonists have focus in the films, only the protagonist transitions all the way through the controlling image model. In most cases, the deuteragonist is stuck in the Black Matriarch image or her future appears tragic and bleak.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. Tyler Perry's *Diary of A Mad Black Woman* takes place in Georgia and tells the resilient story of Helen McCarter (protagonist), a Black woman who is physically dragged and abruptly thrown out of the home on her 18th wedding anniversary by her husband, Charles. Helen is the housewife to Charles, a successful attorney, and they live in a mansion on the wealthy side of town. We learn that Charles has ostracized Helen, both in keeping her isolated from her family and in withholding affections to her, as he began a new family with another woman who moves into the home after Helen is kicked out. Charles hires Orlando, a man who later becomes Helen's new love interest, to transport her belongings from the home and drive her away. Charles also keeps Helen from their money and upon kicking her out of their home, he leaves her destitute.

Helen arrives at her grandmother Madea's (deuteragonist) house with her U-Haul in tow and moves in with her. Mable "Madea" Simmons, who lives in the "ghetto," is a large and loud, boisterous, gun-toting, violent Black woman who defends and supports Helen through this stage in her life. Madea leads Helen through a series of processing or healing journeys, which often involve violence, to make her a stronger woman. Through Helen's interactions with Madea, we learn that Charles has hit Helen in the past and we see him physically manhandle her, in his dragging her out of their home and aggressively shaking her in anger later on. Madea has a

vested interest in Helen's safety, not only as her grandmother, but because she, too, was a victim/survivor of domestic violence by her late husband.

As fate would have it, Charles is shot by one of his clients, leaving him paralyzed, and Helen abandons the new relationship she is building with Orlando to help Charles. She attempts to help Charles, but their toxic and violent past surfaces for her and triggers fits of retributive abuse. Eventually, Helen forgives Charles for his violations against her, forgives herself for hurting him and accepts a marriage proposal from Orlando. The film leaves us with the promise of a happily-ever-after, romantic ending.

Madea's Family Reunion. Tyler Perry's *Madea's Family Reunion* also takes place in Georgia. We are introduced to Lisa, one of the main characters, as she wakes up in a bed of rose petals leading to the bathroom, where a 3-person orchestra is playing live and, Carlos, Lisa's fiancé undresses her for the bath he's drawn for her. This film tells the story a pair of sisters, Vanessa (protagonist) and Lisa (second protagonist), and their plights in intimate and familial relationships. Lisa struggles in a very violent relationship with Carlos, and Vanessa, a victim/survivor of childhood rape, toils with loving and trusting her new love interest, Frankie. Their mother, Victoria, encourages Lisa to stay in her relationship to Carlos, even after she tells her mother about the violence. Furthermore, Victoria expresses disdain towards Vanessa, which we later find out is rooted in the childhood victimization of both characters.

Madea returns in this film again as a supporter and guide, but this time for besieged Lisa and Victoria. While Madea is still loud and advocates violence, we are reminded that Madea has her own survivorship story; she survived physical abuse from a former husband. Madea teaches Lisa and Victoria "grit-ball" as a method of self-defense against a violent partner, which involves tossing a hot pot of grits on the perpetrator and swatting at him with a cast-iron pan. In the end,

Lisa leaves Carlos, but not before a round of “grit-ball” and Victoria obtains her happily-ever-after, romantic ending by marrying Frankie.

Madea Goes to Jail. In this film, Madea’s criminality takes front stage as we learn about her past criminal behavior, including juvenile delinquency in the form of petty theft at the age of nine. Madea (deuteragonist) is not only providing support to the protagonist, Candace or “Candy,” but she physically defends her from harm while they are both incarcerated. Candy, a victim/survivor of group rape in college, is a prostitute who receives trumped up charges from a prosecutor, Linda, who was motivated to place physical distance between Candy and her (Linda’s) fiancé, Josh. The romantic focus of the film is between Candy and Josh, who knew each other as children and while in college. Josh comes to Candy’s rescue multiple times, but feels guilty about being unable to protect her from being raped in college. Madea’s perspective on being a criminal and victim/survivor comes full circle in the film, as she insists the other inmates hold themselves accountable for their wrongdoing, regardless of any past victimization that may have led them to criminal lives. In the end, Josh outs Linda’s unethical prosecution and works successfully to free Candy, to whom he professes his love.

I Can Do Bad All By Myself. This film tells the story of April (protagonist), a loud, often times yelling nightclub singer, with a violent past and questionable future. She is selfish and seemingly lacks empathy for other people and their problems. April is in an intimate relationship with a married man with children, Randy, and is presented with the decision of choosing to care for her orphaned niece and nephews, or keeping Randy happy. Her niece, Jennifer (deuteragonist), is 16 years old, cares for her younger brothers and meets Madea after breaking into her house to find items to steal and turn for profit. The three kids are later tasked with cleaning Madea’s house to work off the price of the window they broke while breaking and

entering. It is then that Madea provides Jennifer with some life lessons, which end up being relevant for Jennifer while she stays at April's.

Meanwhile, a new love interest emerges for April with Sandino, a new immigrant who lives in April's basement while he works to get on his feet. He exposes many of April's flaws, including a lack of self-love and selfishness, and slowly helps her work on changing her attitude and uncaring approach to life and others. April's story has a happy ending, but not without first being confronted with troubles involving Jennifer.

About the Findings

This study reveals a dynamic conceptual model representing five inter-related controlling images portrayed in the film sample, which I am calling the Tyler Perry Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence. The controlling images in this model not only serve as representations of the protagonist, but they also serve as stages through which the protagonists transition throughout the film. Black Feminist Discourse Analysis of the model reveals several themes. First, the controlling images of the model minimize the victim/survivor status of the protagonists in several ways, including using a controlling image with bitter, angry and strong dispositions that deflect focus away from victimized experiences. Secondly, with the exception of religious practice, there is a lack of help-seeking to formal helping agents (i.e. social workers, advocates, counselors, law enforcement officers, etc.) for assistance by the victimized protagonists, deuteragonists, and other victimized characters in the films, including children who experience physical assault. Additionally, the Christian-based themes in the films promote forgiveness that becomes necessary for the protagonists to gain happily-ever-after, romantic endings. On the other hand, there is the development of a new controlling image, the tragic matriarch, which exposes consequences for characters who do not practice forgiveness. There is

discourse that promotes how real men are nonviolent heroes for women as well as a promotion of cisgenderism and heteronormativity. And finally, there are parallels between Perry's experiences with abuse and his stories in the films, which suggest Perry's positionality and performativity have a substantial role in shaping his gender violence discourse.

In each film, the protagonist(s) goes through a process where they are portrayed as a Black victim, Black bitter woman, Black matriarch, Black forgiver and Black woman with a romantic ending to her love story. While the protagonists' transition within the conceptual model varies slightly from each other, as some controlling image representations are more dominant than or appear before others, the overarching system and representation of controlling images remain relatively consistent throughout the films. A large portion of this chapter will be spent explicating the Tyler Perry Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence and operationalizing its five interrelated concepts, the controlling images of: Black Victim, Black Bitterfruit, Black Matriarch, Black Forgiver and Black Princess. Thorough examples from the films are provided to help describe the protagonists' processes as well as their shifts in personality, disposition and outcome. Altogether, the model and its derived themes, address how Black women are portrayed systematically as victims/survivors of gender violence in Perry films as well as how those portrayals are related within contexts of race, gender, sexuality, and religion.

Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence

Tyler Perry's Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence operates as an extensive system in the Perry films studied; it organizes the interplay between Perry's controlling images, which are based on race, gender, sexuality, and religion. Altogether, the model is a Perry-

specific formula that constructs consistent discourse of gender violence against Black women across all four films.

To begin, I identified 5 controlling images in the 4 films, which I term: *Black Victim*, *Black Bitterfruit*, *Black Matriarch*, *Black Forgiver* and *Black Princess*. These controlling images exist within contexts based on representation of race, gender, sexuality and religion. While some of these controlling images are based on classic or traditional controlling images of Black women (Collins, 1999), Perry establishes new controlling images of Black women by either revamping classic ones or creating brand new ones. Perry's use of controlling images is more sophisticated than presenting a series of racist and sexist stereotypes in film. Instead his controlling images are:

- Interrelated to each other.
- Transitional over the course of the film.
- Patterned through seriation.
- Contextualized by aspects of race, gender, sexuality, and religion.
- Modernized by revising existing controlling images of Black women or creating images.

With Perry's portrayals of gender violence against Black women, the characteristics of controlling images construct a model that promotes specific discourse of gender violence against Black women. In the sections that follow, I present detailed descriptions of each controlling image. Several examples from each of the films will also be provided to substantiate the claims of the model. A concept map, which briefly illustrates the overarching model can be found in Appendix C.

Black victim. All of the films begin with an introduction to the protagonist and present her in a negative or troubled light. These introductions are the catalyst to her entry into the

model. In most of the films, the scenes that soon follow present the protagonist in a compromised or victimized state and sets the stage for the Black Victim controlling image. Perry's portrayal of the Black Victim is determined by the nature of her victimization. If she is a victim/survivor of intimate partner or domestic violence (but not sexual assault), the Black Victim is based on classic victim stereotypes, such as having feminine qualities, complying with gender norms set for women like passivity or dependence, and delicacy or softness. This paints the picture of the victim/survivor as a good girl who experiences something bad. On the other hand, if the protagonist is a victim of sexual violence (sexual assault, rape, sexual exploitation, etc.), then as a Black Victim she is portrayed as a jezebel/whore, or sexually immoral and deviant. Examples of the sexual violence a Black Victim experiences include: being a prostitute, a woman sleeping with an already married man or a mother of two children by two different men. The Black Victim characters in all four films are presented as cisgender characters in current or former heterosexual relationships.

The Black Victim has one other characteristic. At some point in the film, Perry's Black Victim accepts Christian values or identity. The Christian values can include practicing various aspects of Christian faith, such as attending church services, reading the Bible, quoting scripture, accepting God/Jesus as a savior, and of particular importance given its impact on another Perry controlling image, the practice of forgiveness. In the two cases when the Black Victim does not accept Christian values or identity early on, they do so later in the film. To further accentuate the importance of Christian values or identity, gospel music is regularly playing in the background of many scenes, either through solo or choir-produced song with lyrics providing instruction to the protagonist on what to do. In the subsections that follow, I provide examples and rich description of how the protagonists in each film illustrate the Black Victim controlling image.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* begins with Helen reading her diary entries that describe the external appearance of her marriage as contrasting to its reality. Early on, we see that Helen is in an unhealthy marriage. Her husband Charles thanks Helen for her support over the course of their marriage while accepting an attorney of the year award. Soon after, we see the real Charles: he has a life outside of his marriage and is a patriarch that refuses to answer Helen's questions about his mistress until she "gets a job and pays one of these bills." Helen responds in silence and walks away. He leaves her to wake up alone on their anniversary. This scene sets up Helen to be viewed as a victim/survivor at the beginning of the film. She adheres to one of the social expectations of the victim stereotype: passivity, through her silence and compliance, and just as it is prevalent in real life experiences, Helen lives in isolation from her family.

Clearly, Charles uses Helen as a symbol to the world that he is normal, or married, happy, grateful to have his supportive wife and all-in-all conforms to the roles society has laid out for him as an adult man in pursuit of the American dream: be a successful, breadwinning professional and husband. Later we find out Charles has started a new life with a mistress, Brenda, and has two children with her. Helen and Charles have no children together, but Helen did have miscarriages, which she attributes to the stress and unhealthy dynamics of their relationship.

In an early and climatic scene, Helen puts on a dress she believes Charles purchased for her for their anniversary, and awaits his arrival home to celebrate. Several glasses of wine later, he arrives with Brenda. He tells her that Brenda and their sons are moving into the home and then, after Helen refuses to leave, he drags her by her arms and torso, kicking and screaming, out of the house. He slams and locks the door in her face. Orlando, a man Charles hires to pack up a

U-Haul with Helen's things, is tasked with driving Helen away from the home. They have conflict because Helen is in shock and doesn't know where to go and Orlando is in a rush. She kicks him out of the truck and drives herself to Madea's, her grandmother's home that is located on the other side of town, in the working class side of Atlanta.

The next morning, Madea sits Helen down to talk about her relationship with Charles. Madea finds out Helen was kicked out of her home, that their sex life was not good and that Charles had become violent with her in the past. Madea insists that Charles owes Helen money for her domestic work of 18 years and pulls Helen out of her seat by her arm to drag her back home to get the money. There, Helen meets Charles who physically shakes her as she tries to take cash from the home. Madea barges in to protect Helen with her pistol in the air.

Here, Helen is portrayed in ways that further implicates her victimized status. Her compliance to gender roles through her unpaid domestic work and her passivity helps her evoke a "good-girl" image. Additionally, Helen meets social expectations of femininity; she had long hair, is a healthy size/weight, and despite the drama before her, always dresses impeccably. Furthermore, her grandmother has a common response to learning about Helen's victimization—she disempowers her by telling her what to do. Madea even physically commands Helen to doing it— to return to home and demand Charles give Helen her portion of their money, the money she earned as a beautiful, loyal and domestically conforming wife. And to solidify her victim/survivor status, we see Charles physically manhandle Helen and we also see her cry in the film.

Up to this point, Helen is presented as an example of a traditional victim/survivor, but Perry's Black Victim has one other distinguishing characteristic: the acceptance of Christian values or identity. Helen actually identifies as a Christian from the beginning to the end of the

film. She attends church regularly, questions God's will for her marriage, abstains from pre-marital and adulterous sex with Orlando, has been sexually faithful to Charles, takes in the Christian guidance of her mother and even cares for Charles when he falls victim to a shooting. However, despite Helen's attempt at Christian practice, she soon becomes embittered towards Charles.

Madea's Family Reunion. *Madea's Family Reunion* has an awkward beginning. The first of two protagonists, Lisa, wakes up to a trail of rose petals leading into a bathroom, where a trio musical ensemble is playing music and her fiancé, Carlos, is standing there with a drawn bubble bath. He walks over to her and undresses her, she gets into the bathtub in silence and then Carlos leaves for work. The sad expression on Lisa's face does not construct the mood as romantic, loving or seductive; instead the tone feels contrived and manipulative. This is how the first of two victimized protagonists are introduced in the film.

Soon after, Vanessa (the second protagonist and Lisa's sister) and their friend surprise Lisa with a spa trip, but Lisa forgets her cell phone at home. When they return back to Lisa's home after the spa day, they surprise her again with a male stripper, to celebrate her engagement to Carlos, only Carlos returns home to find the half-naked man dancing with Lisa. Carlos tells the group to carry on, but Lisa appears to know better and asks everyone to leave. Just after they exit and Lisa shuts the front door, she is slapped by Carlos as she turns around. He is upset that he's been calling Lisa all day and has been unable to reach her. He says, "You really like making me mad don't you?" When Lisa attempts to reach out for guidance from her mother, Victoria, her response was shocking: "You must stop doing what you're doing to make him angry. Women have to sometimes deal with things to be comfortable." Here, Victoria speaks of

Carlos's financial success as an investment banker and Lisa's engagement to Carlos to secure her and (Victoria's) future.

Lisa is presented clearly as a Black Victim in this film. She is gentle, dependent on a man for financial support and passive or non-resistant. Lisa adheres to Eurocentric standards of beauty for women, as she is thin, pretty and well put together and has a light skin complexion. Lisa is never seen working during the course of the film or in a position to make her own money, and in her introduction, she does not physically defend herself against Carlos's violence against her. In fact, Lisa's experience in trying to leave Carlos, by sneaking out in the middle of night while he is sleeping, rings realistic and so does his response. As many abusive partners do, Carlos increases his level of violence in order to seize control of the victim; he opens the balcony door to their home and says, "that's the only way you're going to leave me" and then grabs and pulls her to the balcony until she agrees to stay with him. Lisa is silent a lot during the film and others, like her sister and mother, speak for her. While she does not necessarily educe Christian values or identity, Lisa's sister, Vanessa, does identify as a Christian and as a consequence, Vanessa's story ends better because of it.

Vanessa is Lisa's older sister who was raped as a child by her stepfather, Lisa's biological father who was Victoria's late husband. Her mother, Victoria, not only knew about the abuse at the time, but also was complicit in it by allowing it to happen in order to keep from losing her husband who was her resource for financial security. Her traumatic experience naturally impacts her relationships with men later on in her life. Vanessa's personality is presented as strong as well as direct or sometimes combative due to unresolved anger and pain issues she harps over her mother's role in her victimization. She has two children by two different men, one who is incarcerated and the other is married. As such, Vanessa is framed as a

former jezebel/whore. For example, while her date was waiting for her in a living room, a family member warns him about how many kids she has and that she's fertile. While Vanessa meets some standards for beauty, one part of the film points to her being less beautiful than her sister; her mother accuses Vanessa of being jealous of Lisa because she is "so beautiful." Furthermore, Vanessa is a Christian and is practicing abstinence at the time she's introduced in the film. It appears that Vanessa may be well into her stages of healing, although not completely, as she writes and recites poetry about wanting to love again. Vanessa rejects a request for a date with Frankie, a city bus driver, but eventually agrees. Frankie becomes Vanessa's love interest and their healthy, blossoming relationship is fraught by her fears and insecurities in trusting men around her children and is also juxtaposed with Lisa's unhealthy and dangerous relationship with Carlos.

This film is unique compared to the other films in the sample in that Lisa, Vanessa, Victoria and Madea are all victims/survivors, but represent different stages in Perry's controlling image model of gender violence. Lisa represents the domestic violence Black Victim image, as feminine, passive, delicate and an overall good-girl and victim/survivor of extreme physical violence by her partner. When we learn of Vanessa's abuse, her portrayal appears to be consistent with the Black Bitterfruit image (to be discussed below)—she is not often physically violent, but has episodes of unresolved rage that begin to seethe. We are also reminded about Madea's past abuse and introduced to Victoria as another former victim/survivor who was sold by her drug addicted and prostituting mother for "ten dollars and a fix." Madea and Victoria's characters are addressed in more detail later, during the discussion of the *tragic* Black Matriarch.

Madea Goes to Jail. The victimized protagonist in *Madea Goes to Jail* is Candace "Candy" Washington. Candy is introduced to us in a courtroom, as a defendant being arraigned

for prostitution. She has a hard and choleric attitude, is dressed inappropriately for court and wearing a cheap-looking copper-red wig. Candy is not introduced as a legitimate victim/survivor, but a hypersexual criminal. The assistant district attorney assigned to the case, Joshua, recuses himself because he knew Candy personally when they were kids and college students. His colleague and fiancé, Linda, represents the state on his behalf.

After her arraignment, Josh bails Candy out and takes her out for a meal. But, she keeps her guard up with Josh, trying to maintain her hardness and asks what he wants from her. She even says that she can settle her debt to him outside the restaurant, but Josh was only interested in helping her. She becomes loud and belligerent, telling him that he must be pretending that “that night” never happened. Here, Josh’s attempt to help or save Candy and her contentious response, subtly reveal that she may need to be saved from something in her past as well as her present. But, Candy’s victim/survivor story is not fully shared just yet, and as such there is a focus on her sexual deviancy as a prostitute with a hardened exterior for a personality.

One night, Candy and another prostitute, Donna, were working and get muscled by a pimp on the street. He forces Donna into his truck and strangles Candy. In the next scene, Candy wakes up nude and in bed with the pimp. She sneaks out of the bathroom window in a towel and calls for Josh’s help; he comes to her rescue for a second time, this time carrying Candy in his arms and placing her into his vehicle. He takes her back to his place. It is then and through a series of other interactions between Candy and Josh that we begin to learn about Candy’s past. Her stepfather sexually assaulted her as a child and Josh was there for her. Then, while they were in college, Josh invited her to a party and while he was not there, some male students raped Candy. After that experience, Candy dropped out and ended up with a man who

sexually exploited her, or pimped her, for money. Several years later, she is where she is now—a hardened street prostitute and junkie who is trying to survive on what she knows.

As mentioned before, Perry presents victims/survivors of sexual violence differently than victims/survivors of intimate partner or domestic violence. While intimate partner or domestic violence victims/survivors are presented in ways consistent with the victim stereotype (i.e. the passive, good girl), victims/survivors of sexual violence are presented as sexually immoral, such as living as a junkie prostitute. Candy's past and current feelings for Josh as her friend to care/rescue her, creates a bitter and angry disposition when Josh failed to protect her in college.

I Can Do Bad All By Myself. The protagonist in this film is April who is indecisively torn between taking in her parent- and guardian-less niece and nephews or maintaining her relationship with her married boyfriend. Similar to Candy in *Madea Goes to Jail*, we learn about April's victimization later in the film. Until then, she is presented as a selfish, heartless jezebel or adulteress woman that sleeps with a married man and father. April seems uncaring and unapologetic that the children's grandmother, April's mother, has disappeared and that they resorted to stealing from people, like Madea, to survive. When it turns out that April's mother passed away, she was still unwilling to take in the children to keep them out of the foster care system.

Additionally, April is presented as a bad person. She and her boyfriend smoke in front of the children, despite that one of her nephews has asthma and she temporarily has them sleep downstairs in her living room, even though there is a spare bedroom upstairs. April refuses to donate spare cash to a homeless person on the street and she drinks excessively. Furthermore, when a pastor and church member from her mother's church try to steer April to a more selfless

path, she rejects their guidance, does not attend church and does not express any commitment to Christian identity or values.

In a climactic scene, April's boyfriend, Randy, sexually attacks April's niece, Jennifer. April's live-in tenant, Sandino, physically stops him, and at this point, April has to make her choice: her family or Randy. But, it is also the time where April comes to terms with her past trauma. Her mother's boyfriend sexually assaulted April and when she told her mother, she was not believed. Again, Perry's Black Victim of sexual assault is presented as sexually immoral (sleeping with a married man) and in general, a negative or troubled person. But, April's negativity, or negative disposition, is a product of her resentment towards her mother and her not processing her childhood victimization at the hands of her mother's boyfriend.

Black bitterfruit. The second controlling image in Perry's model is Black Bitterfruit. Essentially, Black Bitterfruit is a product of victimization and broken trust. The Black Victim's traits, such as passivity and "good-girl" qualities, begin to dissipate, while hardened personalities and resentment grow. In this stage, the protagonist expresses negative attitudes and is seen as confrontational. This controlling image sets the stage for the angry Black woman or matriarch to emerge. This stage is short-lived as it quickly spirals into full blown angry Black matriarchy. In the sub-sections that follow, I provide discussion of how each film features Black Bitterfruit.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. As mentioned previously, the introduction and influence of Madea and her personality, philosophies and actions serve as a catalyst to Helen transitioning from the Black Victim to Black Bitterfruit. Madea begins to influence Helen the morning after Helen arrives at Madea's home. When Madea insists that Charles owes Helen money she says, "Girl, that man owe you 64 billion, 283 million, 974 trillion, 5 thousand and 20 dollars and 82 cents. Now you need to get your money...it can happen one or two ways honey, from his

checking account voluntarily or (as she pulls her pistol out from her purse) from his insurance policy, involuntary manslaughter. Which one it gonna be?”

Once Madea and Helen arrive to Helen and Charles’ house, they go upstairs to grab some of Helen’s belongings and end up in the bedroom closet. There, Brenda has her clothing hung up in Helen’s old closet space. In a powerful and comedic scene, Madea pushes Helen to rip up Brenda’s designer clothing as an act of revenge. Madea asserts that while it will not solve anything, ripping Brenda’s clothes will make Helen feel better. Shortly after, when Madea and her pistol step in to defend Helen from Charles and his manhandling, as Helen attempts to take some cash from the home, Madea proclaims that she and Helen are not leaving until Helen gets half of everything in the home. When Charles refuses, Madea responds by taking a chainsaw to the living room furniture, sawing everything in half, including the couch and piano.

These experiences, along with the trauma of being forced from her home and victimized by Charles, harden Helen’s character for a bit in the film. For example, during Madea’s house party, Helen throws a drink on Orlando and while she tells him she isn’t bitter, but “mad as hell,” Helen is misdirecting the emotions she has for Charles onto Orlando. In her narration of a diary entry, Helen talks about not wanting to get out of bed, living moment to moment and that she’s reached depletion so low in her life, that she sees nowhere else to go, but up. She also states, “...when I think of all the blood, sweat and tears I put into my marriage, it makes me want to hate him.” Not only does Helen begin to make emotional transformations, but she also makes a physical transformation too— she darkens and shortens her hair. The change was significant enough that Orlando notices and compliments her on it. Helen’s Black Bitterfruit image quickly shifts, as her emotional tensions begin to manifest themselves into volatile behaviors against her husband, Charles.

Madea's Family Reunion. Vanessa begins as a Black Bitterfruit character. She and her two children are living with Madea until she can get back on her feet. While we do not see Madea directly involve herself in Vanessa's affairs, as she did with Helen in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Vanessa still shares some similar qualities with Madea, such as her direct and almost explosive confrontations with Victoria. Vanessa harbors pain and anger for Victoria for failing to mother and protect her from the childhood rapes of her stepfather. She tells Victoria that she is wicked and going to hell.

Additionally, Vanessa presents a rough exterior in her first interactions with Frankie. For example, Vanessa maintains a stern facial expression when greeted by Frankie on the bus. She fails to reciprocate his smile when he sees her and ignores his "how you doin'" as she walks past him to her seat. When Frankie inquires about a notepad she pulls out on his bus, she sharply tells him to just drive the bus, but when he recites a roses are *red*, violets are *blue* poem, her hardened exterior softens with a large smile and laughter. That sweet and vulnerable moment ends abruptly—immediately after, her face re-stiffens and she declines his request for a date, saying she had a rough day, her feet hurt and that she has two kids waiting for her to get home. After he re-asks and suggests a family outing with her two kids and his son, she says that she will consider it. Vanessa's next transition bypasses the Black Matriarch, but not without conflict. She reacts and panics, by loudly and emotionally confronting Frankie, when he takes her kids out for ice-cream without her knowledge, but Frankie helps Vanessa work through her emotions to settle and reassure her.

Madea Goes to Jail. Candy has an angry-at-the-world temperament that she directs to folks who engage with her, even those who seek to help her. For example, Ellen, a down-to-earth preacher and former drug addict and prostitute, takes her practice to the streets to offer

prostitutes clean needles, condoms and a way out of the street life. During Ellen's interaction with Donna and Candy, Candy maintains her rough temperament, but holds her hand out for condoms. Ellen responds to Candy's attitude by telling her to (verbally) ask for the condoms. Donna has to tell Candy that Ellen is "good people" to simmer her down.

Candy is emotional when it comes to Josh and his failure to protect or rescue her from being raped in college. Her abrasive response to Josh in the restaurant after her arraignment showcases her resentment towards him. That resentment towards Josh takes center stage in Candy's role in the film, even more so than her experiences with being sexually violated, as she scorns Josh for his letdown. Even more, Josh blames himself for not protecting her. Because her extremely bitter (and pained) disposition comes across as anger, aggression and hostility towards other characters, Candy is presented as Black Bitterfruit and the Black Matriarch simultaneously. The traits of both controlling images are intrinsically linked in this character. In the film, it is not Candy's lesson to forgive her rapists, but instead to forgive Josh for not being her protector at the party that sent her life spiraling downward.

I Can Do Bad All By Myself. April's general negative disposition and selfishness are products of unprocessed trauma and resentment. Similar to Candy, April expresses an angry-at-the-world attitude and she is non empathetic to other people's troubles. Her resentment toward her mother is revealed when she finds out her mother is missing. While she was surprised, she expressed denial in the severity of her mother being missing and she does not go looking for her mother or report her missing to the authorities. Instead, she takes out her frustrations by yelling and screaming at her niece and nephews and presenting herself as uncaring about their welfare. For example, after the kids break into Madea's house, she takes them to April and tells April she

wants \$300 to replace her VCR and broken window. When April refuses, Madea threatens to call the cops if she does not get her money and April responds, “You can use my phone.”

Later, April’s bitterness is juxtaposed with Madea’s, when Madea begins advising Jennifer (April’s teenage niece) on life, telling her to smile more and that good things come to those who give good things. Madea also cautions Jennifer about being mad at the world—she says when young women stay mad they become bitter old women, to which Madea’s brother jumps in to tell Jennifer, “[yes bitter], just like the one you sitting there talking to.” Here, the warning heeds for Jennifer to not end up like Madea: eternally bitter, angry and alone. Furthermore, similar to Candy’s depiction, April’s portrayal as Black Bitterfruit is intertwined with her portrayal as a Black Matriarch. Her bitterness does not lead into her anger; instead bitterness and anger reinforce themselves in her character, until she is forced to choose between Jennifer and Randy. But, there is hope for April as there is love developing between her and her tenant, Sandino. Sure enough, they go paddle-boating, April lets Sandino fix up the spare bedroom for the kids and she begins attending church with Sandino and the kids.

Black matriarch. Black Bitterfruit transitions into the third controlling image in Perry’s model. As the character traits of Black Bitterfruit intensify, she evolves into a Black Matriarch, which is a more volatile controlling image. Based on the classic Black Matriarch controlling image that fails to model dominant gender roles and norms for women, Perry’s Black Matriarch is typically hypo-feminine, strong, dominating/aggressive, emasculating/castrating, loud, hostile, and angry. As mentioned before, the Black Matriarch is vengeful so she engages in acts of retribitional violence. At times, behavior and attitudes of the Black Matriarch contradict the Christian values she presumes to uphold.

Two other important factors transcend Perry's Black Matriarch from its classic predecessor. First, this controlling image is the heart of Perry's model. It is the image that has a consistent character, Madea. Second, the Black Matriarch has the potential of becoming a dead-end for characters that do not transition away from its character traits. For Madea and Victoria (*Madea's Family Reunion*), the Black Matriarch is really the *Tragic* Black Matriarch, which will be discussed later. In the sub-sections that follow, I provide rich description of Madea as the consistent Black Matriarch in each film in addition to how each film portrays the Black Matriarch in the protagonists.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman.

About Madea. Madea influences each Black Victim's transition, so it is important to discuss Madea as a Black Matriarch as well as what we learn about her journey to Black matriarchy. Therefore, in this section, I will summarize my observations of Madea in all four films.

As mentioned before, Madea is played by Perry in drag, wearing a fatsuit, and is physically tall, large, loud talking, carries and shoots a pistol, and clearly advocates the use of violence. Madea meets the classic mold of a Black Matriarch. She is hypo-feminine—she does not have a love interest in any of the films, is not sexualized, does not meet social standards for beauty with her large physique and low hanging breasts underneath her collection of muumuus. Madea is aggressive, even emasculating and shows many bouts of anger throughout the films. She constantly exchanges verbal assaults with her brother and threatens men with violence and her pistol. Several other examples of Madea's aggression and violence include:

- attacking and injuring law enforcement officers
- physically defending women from physical harm

- engaging in a car chase with several cops
- shooting her pistol into the ceiling of her own home
- destroying furniture with a chainsaw
- ripping designer clothing by hand
- practicing corporal punishment against children and threatening children with violence
- lifting and dropping a stranger's car with a forklift after she stole Madea's intended parking space at a department store.

Not only is Madea violent, but she also advocates for others to be violent as well, such as her encouraging the destruction of property as an act of vengeance and her teaching violent techniques or maneuvers, like grit-ball. Despite being interrogated during a court-mandated anger management session by Dr. Phil, who keeps asking Madea why she is so angry and what is wrong with her, Madea justifies her acts of aggression, violence and revenge. Not surprisingly, Madea is a criminal and has frequented courtrooms since childhood.

In terms of Madea's religiosity, she cherry-picks the Christian values to adhere to and preach and she does not engage in Christian practice like other characters in Perry's films, such as reading scripture or attending church. While she is not entirely removed from Christian themes, her violent behavior and objectionable responses overshadow her link to Christian values. Nonetheless, Madea is considered a wise authority in her family and community and is the go-to person for help. In fact, her wisdom comes from personal experience as she shares with a few characters that she was physically abused by her late husband. Nonetheless, Madea helps all the victimized protagonists through their healing journey (even if her help is questionable, inappropriate or unsafe), such as her niece-in-law with her drug addiction, and

offers her home as a place to stay for those in need, such as a foster child on her way to juvenile delinquency and her granddaughter Helen, who is forced from her home.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. The stimulus that directly leads to Helen's shift into the Black Matriarch occurs when Helen receives a verbal bashing from Charles. After Charles is shot, Helen abandons the relationship she has brewing with Orlando to come to Charles's aid, as he is experiencing temporary paralysis and uses a wheelchair. (In fact, she abandons Orlando right after his romantic marriage proposal to help Charles, without giving Orlando an answer.) Instead of receiving sentiments of gratitude, Charles uses Helen as a verbal punching bag, lashing out at her, telling her she isn't good for anything and then yelling for her to get out of the house.

It looks like passive, victim/survivor Helen was going to walk away in silence, but instead, Helen snaps. She backhands Charles in the back of his head, stoops down into his face and calmly, but assertively says, "Let me explain something to you. Old Helen is gone and you will not talk to me like that. Now I came here to help you, but now, I'm going to get even." Helen then begins to yell at Charles, releasing built up anger she kept inside for him, about his cheating and the stress he caused her that led to an eating disorder, hair loss and miscarriages. Then she states she is going to let him sit where he is (in his office in a wheelchair) for a few days to think about what she said.

After a few days, Helen returns to Charles in the same spot. Quickly, she pushes Charles into the bathroom and uses the wheelchair to catapult Charles out of the chair, head first into a large bathtub, full of water and bubbles. She then continues her verbal release of emotions and smokes a cigarette, while Charles struggles to breathe and keep his head above the water. In a follow up scene, we see Helen refuse to feed Charles; the retributive abuse enacted by Helen is

beginning to wear down on him, as he sits at the kitchen table crying and watching Helen eat while he starves. Helen uses that time to inform Charles that his girlfriend abandoned him and took all his money.

As mentioned before, Madea is characterized as a traditional Black Matriarch and her characteristics rubbed off on Helen, hence the sweet, calm and passive disposition was transformed into an angry and violent one. In fact, Madea tells Helen and her mother that if Helen's situation was her own situation, she would "be beating the hell out of Charles." Furthermore, after Helen's mother asks Helen about the status of her relationship with Charles, Madea asserts, "She's beating the hell out of him... [looking at Helen] Child, you've been around me, I know something done rubbed off on you." Then Helen's mother tells her to forgive Charles and to forgive herself. She explains that when someone hurts you, they take power from you and that forgiving them allows you to reclaim your power. This is the start to Helen's work on herself and on forgiveness.

Madea's Family Reunion. There are two Black Matriarchs in the film: Madea and Victoria. Madea's disposition is similar to her character in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. She is still loud, expresses anger in a volatile way, is violent and advocates for violence. In fact, Madea is violent against children multiple times in this film. For example, Madea is forced to take in a foster care kid, Nicki, who is on her way to juvenile delinquency. Madea physically assaults Nicki twice in the film. The first time Madea hits her several times with her hands while they are in a car because Nicki refused to acquiesce to Madea's demand to stop popping bubble gum.

The second time, Madea spans Nicki with a leather belt for coming home late, while Madea's television is showing Penny, a character from the 1970s show *Goodtimes*, being abused by her mother (burned with a clothing iron) for returning home late from school. In another

scene, Madea physically attacks a boy on Nicki's school bus after back-talking Madea when she was defending Nicki against her bullies. Madea uses violence against children as a learning tool; in Nicki's case, she believes that beating Nicki is for Nicki's benefit, to correct and redirect her behavior.

Victoria is also presented as a Black Matriarch image in this film. She is controlling over Lisa, by trying to force her to marry Carlos and even emasculates Carlos in trying to get him to correct his violent behavior with her daughter. We learn that her controlling, dominating and hostile attitudes towards her children, as well as her bad-mothering ways are outcomes from her own trauma. Her exceptionally vile temperament towards Vanessa stems from Vanessa being a product of Victoria's childhood rape, by the man she was sold to by her own mother. In a way, she is *complicitly* violent towards her children, using them as objects of violent men for her own personal gain or survival. Due to the villainization of Victoria's character, her only religious reference in the film was a ghastly response to Vanessa condemning her to hell, to which she responds, "I vacation there."

In this film, the *Tragic* Black Matriarch is emphasized. Both Victoria and Madea are icons for failing to transition from matriarchy to a person who makes amends and forgives those who hurt them. As such, both women are not afforded fairytale endings for themselves. They still hold onto painful emotions and memories from their past, have not processed or healed from trauma, are violent and emasculating and therefore tragedy stricken. There is one major distinguishing factor between Victoria and Madea, however. Madea is valued in her family and community and operates as a caregiver for those in need—she houses them, feeds them and despite the appropriateness of her guidance, she also advises and counsels them. This is evidenced by the help-seeking of other characters for Madea's assistance. Madea is sought after

for advice, shelter, physical protection and other supports. Victoria, on the other hand, is villainized. Her abhorrent decisions and actions overshadow her victimization; therefore, empathy is not a response often afforded to her by her family.

I Can Do Bad All By Myself. April fully shifts into the Black Matriarch stage when she is forced to confront her victimized past as well as Randy's attempted assault on her niece, Jennifer. After the attempt, she tells Randy to go upstairs and get into the bathtub. She follows him upstairs and then, while he is in the tub, she asks him about what happened downstairs. She brings in a radio and plugs it into the wall, turns it on and says, "Tell me what happened. Tell me what you did." She brings the radio closer to the bathtub and repeats herself. Then, she gets visibly angry and yells that he's just like Lee, her mother's old boyfriend, and that her mother did not do anything to help her. Just as April drops the radio into the bathtub to purposely electrocute Randy, Sandino tries to stop her and Randy hops out of the tub, but not before being slightly electrocuted. Not only is April aggressive, loud, hostile and angry, but she becomes retributionally violent towards Randy, lashing out at him for his assault on Jennifer and also her past victimization as a child.

April and Sandino go to the club where she performs and due to her rawness about Randy, her past trauma and drinking alcohol, she begins to question the motivation behind Sandino's interest in the children. She lashes out and calls him a child molester and he says that he was just showing the kids some love. But, not long after this scene, April begins to solidify her change of heart, coming to terms with her care for the children and her love for Sandino.

Black forgiver and black princess. The fourth and fifth controlling images, Black Forgiver and Black Princess, are deeply connected to each other; therefore, they will be presented together in this section and the sub-sections that follow. While the Black Matriarch is

central to Perry's model, the Black Forgiver is the most pivotal to the protagonists' future. The Black Forgiver eventually comes to make amends and forgive the person who has wronged them the most, which in 3 of the 4 films is not the perpetrator of the physical or sexual violence. The Black Forgiver reinforces the Christian value and power of forgiveness. In the first of Perry's films, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Helen's mother points to the value and power of forgiveness when she asserts to Helen that forgiveness is not for the person who wronged her, but for Helen herself. As discussed previously, Helen's mother explains to Helen that when someone hurts her, it gives them power over her, but through forgiveness, she can reclaim her power. As such, in Perry's model, forgiveness fosters empowerment for the victimized protagonists.

The outcome for forgiving the wrong-doer and reclaiming one's own power is paramount for Perry's victimized protagonists. Only those that forgive are presented in an empowering light and obtain a happily-ever-after, romantic fairytale in their future. For the Black Matriarchs that do not forgive and attain empowerment (Madea and Victoria), they are thwarted from a life with a happy fairytale and, instead, stay in Black matriarchal limbo. Essentially, they become *tragic* Black Matriarchs.

The final controlling image, the Black Princess, quickly follows the Black Forgiver. Perry's Black Princess is a former victim turned *survivor* of gender violence—she has gone through a journey where she has processed bitterness, anger and maybe even enacted retributational violence. More importantly, the Black Princess has forgiven her abuser (or someone else who has devastatingly harmed her) and herself. Now she is free to love and be loved again. The Black Princess receives her prince charming, either through marital engagement, marriage or the high likelihood of both in the near future. This image evokes that

victims/survivors can have happily-ever-after, romantic fairytales. In the follow sub-sections, I provide discussion of the presence of both final controlling images in each film.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. Helen immediately begins to follow her mother's Christianly wisdom and her abuse against Charles ceases. She continues to care for him and his temporary paralysis improves. Charles sincerely apologizes to Helen for all the wrong he did to her and tells her to not be like him. Charles begins to accept Christian values— those that Helen imparted to him during their marriage and the two begin to attend church together. However, Helen misses Orlando. Over a family dinner, she asks Charles if he can forgive her and he says he always has forgiven her. She replies that she is also seeking forgiveness for solidifying the end of their marriage, as she pulls out their divorce papers. She says she is in love and leaves to find Orlando. Helen finds Orlando at work and asks him to propose to her again. He proposes, she says yes, and Orlando carries Helen away through a steamy fog.

In Helen and Orlando's final moment, when they re-accept each other, Helen transitions into the Black Princess. Here, Helen is rewarded with a happy love story, fairytale type of ending because she embodied the Christian task of forgiving Charles for the damage he caused her. She also forgave and loved herself enough to know when to walk away from their broken relationship and into the arms of the person she deserves.

Madea's Family Reunion. In a climactic scene, Vanessa confronts her mother in front of Lisa about her childhood abuse. She tells Lisa about her father raping her and that their mother not only knew about it, but allowed it, to keep him from leaving. After Victoria tries to explain her decisions, telling them that she was sold and raped as a child and that she enabled Vanessa's rape to keep their family financially secure, Vanessa tells Victoria that she forgives her and prays that God is merciful on her soul. Vanessa explains that she forgives her mother in order to let

Frankie love her and to be a better mother to her children. In this moment, Vanessa transitions from a Black Bitterfruit to the Black Forgiver image. This essential shift later secures Vanessa's romantic, fairytale ending.

Lisa, on the other hand, goes back to Carlos at her mother's request. The abuse does not stop. On the day of their wedding, Lisa escapes to Madea's house and Carlos finds her there. He slaps Lisa and she lands across a hot pot of grits and Lisa begins playing grit-ball, the violent technique Madea taught her that entails throwing a hot pot of grits on Carlos and then hitting him several times with a cast-iron pan. Lisa then leaves Carlos to call off the wedding. She announces that she will start making decisions and living for herself. Here, Lisa transitions away from the Black Victim controlling image. She has asserted herself and physically defended herself from Carlos. It is unclear where her image transitions to exactly, as this is where her story ends in the film, but as Perry patterns go, Lisa is likely to process her trauma through bitterness, anger and/or retributational violence, each characteristics of the Black Bitterfruit and Matriarch.

After Lisa announces calling off the wedding to the wedding party, Frankie proposes to Vanessa and they get married in place of Carlos and Lisa. Vanessa now meets the end of the controlling image model. She shifts into the Black Princess image, receiving her happy ending and romantic fairytale with Frankie, even with a Paris in springtime wedding theme.

Madea Goes to Jail. Candy's transition into the Black Forgiver controlling image happens when she is sent to prison for 17 years because Linda, Josh's fiancé, trumped up her charges in an attempt to distance Candy from Josh. It is in prison when Candy and Madea meet, as Madea is also a victim of Linda's unethical prosecution. Madea actually jumps in to defend

Candy when a large and masculine inmate, Big Sal, sets her interest on Candy. Madea fights Big Sal twice to protect her. Additionally, Josh keeps in contact with Candy.

While incarcerated, Madea, Candy and Donna begin to attend faith-based sessions led by Ellen. Ellen led a session on “forgiveness: acknowledging what was done and forgiving those who hurt you so you can be free” and she asserts that forgiveness is for the forgiver, not the person being forgiven. In that session, an inmate shares that she is unable to forgive her father and blames him for her incarceration. Next, Madea chimes in, “You are in jail because of what you did. Learn how to take some responsibility for yourself...I can’t stand folks always wanna be the victim. Suck it up and shut the hell up. Everybody’s got a life and it is up to you on what you do with that life. Stop being a victim. That’s all I have to say.” Here, Candy is internalizing two distinct messages: (1) to forgive Josh and (2) stop being a victim, which carry over into her relationship with Josh.

During a visit with Candy, Josh tells her that he keeps letting her down. (Once again, Candy is presented as in need of saving by Josh, but this is juxtaposed with a conflicting image of Candy being a criminal.) Candy asks him if he knew that her perpetrators were going to rape her that night at the college party. She cries and tells him that she needed him, but that he wasn’t there for her and didn’t protect her. He apologizes and asks Candy for her forgiveness. Candy admits that she has been angry with him for a long time, but that she is not going to be a victim anymore. She tells him to marry Linda and be happy because that is what she plans to do. In this moment, she forgives Josh and this sets her up for her happily-ever-after, romantic ending. From this point on, Candy is presented softer and more approachable .

Just before his wedding to Linda, Josh learns about her deceptive prosecuting and when he visits Candy, he professes his love to her and tells her that he is going to get her out of prison

and clean from drugs. Because Candy forgave Josh for his failed rescuing, her character has earned a Perry romantic happy ending. Josh campaigns for the release of all the inmates that fell victim to Linda's unethical prosecuting, including Candy and Madea. He is able to get their convictions overturned and meets Candy when she is released from prison. Josh walks out of the prison holding Candy's hand and they kiss. Candy's romantic and happy ending with Josh is her reward for putting a Christian value into practice, forgiving Josh.

I Can Do Bad All By Myself. April shifts into the Black Forgiver stage after her act of retributational violence against Randy and false accusation of Sandino. Sandino begins to move out and soon after April's change of heart begins. She tells the kids that she wants them to stay with her and that she wants Jennifer to show her how to care for her nephews. Jennifer tells her that Sandino is a good man and that she should hold onto him. Then, in her home, April hears the choir of the nearby church singing, "Lord I want you to help me" and she begins soulfully singing it too. This is April's first move to emotionally and psychologically heal.

When Sandino returns for his final belongings, April apologizes and tells him that she does not know how to love or care about anyone, but that she thinks she loves him. Sandino declares that April doesn't love herself, not the way he loves her, but says he will show her how and they kiss. At the end of the film, Sandino and April get married and host a block party for their wedding reception. As such, while we do not see April explicitly forgive her mother for failing to protect her as a child, April finally succumbed to Christian values: she accepts the kids into her home, she soulfully sang with the choir from her heart and she avails herself to Sandino. This earns April her happily-ever-after, romantic ending with Sandino.

Additional Findings

In addition to the controlling images, there are other noteworthy findings revealed from this study. Discussion is provided on Perry's positionality and performativity of Madea, as his play of Madea is influenced by his personal experiences of childhood abuse as well as the devices for his survivorship and his manhood. Supplemental findings based upon the controlling image model are also provided below.

Perry's positionality and performativity. Perry has spoken openly about the role his experiences play in the development of his films and reoccurring protagonist, Madea. Keep in mind, Perry admits that his experiences with childhood abuse helped him to develop the stories for his films, in particular those featuring violence or abuse as themes. Additionally, Perry has shared that he was able to overcome the trials and tribulations of being a victim through God, faith and prayer. Furthermore, Perry created Madea as a reflection of his mother, his aunt and Eddie Murphy's play of the Klumps family in the Nutty Professor film.

Perry's positionality greatly impacts the discourse in these films. Firstly, domestic violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, physical violence against children as corporal punishment, child rape, and child slavery are all forms of gender violence portrayed or discussed in the films. Not only are the protagonists victimized, but other characters also battle past abuses. It is the violence and abuse that multiple characters have to overcome, as even those characters that experienced abuse in the past, find themselves still affected by it, at least until they accept and engage in forgiveness.

Recall in an interview, Perry shared how he was able to find goodness in forgiving his abusive father, as he learned a lesson that all things, even abuse, can work to improve oneself. This lesson has been translated into Perry's films in a centralizing way. The Christian value of

forgiveness dominates Perry's films as a lesson for the protagonists to tackle. For Perry's protagonists, succumbing to forgiveness opens up the possibility for new loving relationships. Therein lies the reward, or positive reinforcement, for forgiving. Furthermore, the power of forgiveness is so great that the failure to forgive has detrimental consequences for Perry's characters, as exhibited through the Tragic Black Matriarch. As such, Perry requires victimized protagonists to forgive in order to have a happy ending.

Based upon Perry's creation and performativity of Madea (and his interview with Terry Gross of NPR), it is clear that Perry found strength and lovingness in his mother, despite that she was a victim of domestic violence and enacted violence against him. This is a key character trait of Madea—her aggressiveness and controlling ways with her family members and friends are presented as strength and sometimes her anger, violence and advice are presented as coming from a place of love. The unfortunate nature about these portrayals, especially as contextualized by Perry's view of his mother, is that they: 1) perpetuate a stereotype about Black women as angry and violent; 2) use anger, aggressiveness, control and violence to define strength and love from Black women; and, as a result, 3) delegitimize Black women as victims/survivors of gender violence, as violence is a justifiable measure to correct/fix/control a person with such traits.

Another important assessment about Perry's positionality and performativity is that he, a Black man and survivor of child abuse and sexual assault, plays Madea in drag, wearing a fatsuit with sagging breasts, a wig, makeup and muumuu. Madea is a character placed in a position with an immense influence over other characters as she is sought after for shelter, advice, protection and child guardianship—she represents the ultimate Black elder that demands and receives respect and compliance. But, a Black woman does not play Madea (nor did a Black woman conceptualize her)—she is played by Perry. As such, the same man who develops

Madea to reflect the qualities of his mother and aunt, and who writes, directs and produces films, also casts himself as the lead, reoccurring role. Certainly, Madea was not conceived by a Black woman for Black women and now it is clear that Madea's ideology and discourse does not belong to Black women (not even his mother or aunt) as it belongs to Perry. When Madea provides advice to Lisa and Vanessa, recommending grit-ball as a method of self-defense, the advice promoting violence is actually Perry's. When Madea tells her fellow inmate to take responsibility for her own life and stop being a victim, even though the inmate was victimized by her father, this is Perry blaming and shaming victims/survivors who end up in the prison pipeline. And when Madea beats Nicki with a belt for coming home late, while the television in the same room shows Penny, from the Goodtimes show, being burned by her mother with a clothing iron for coming home late, this is Perry justifying corporal punishment of children and distinguishing it from child abuse. In sum, Perry may use Madea as a cover or façade for his manhood or masculinity, as the messages he promotes through Madea might not be as well received coming from Perry.

Despite Perry's use of Madea as a cover of his gender and to facilitate his messages, Perry's purpose for those messages is well-intentioned. Recall, Perry aims to inspire hope, change and also to provoke thought with his films (*Epic Victories*, 2011). However, it appears Perry lacks even a basic understanding of trauma-informed response and the risk factors that reduce the safety or increase the lethality of a gender violence victim. This is not surprising as Perry openly admits to not receiving therapy—he reports God, faith and prayer as his saving graces. Unfortunately, several factors tied together create the formula of Perry's gender violence discourse. These factors include: 1) being a male victim of child abuse (by his father), corporal punishment (by his mother) and sexual assault (by his friend's mother); 2) being a man within a

culture that promotes aggression and violence in Black men and women; 3) being a survivor with the help of God and religious convictions; and 5) being a survivor who has not used a formal helping agent to help him understand the complexities of violence.

In summary, Perry's positionality and performativity as Madea influence Perry's discourse on gender violence, as parallels are found between Perry's experiences with violence and his violence discourse in film. Additionally, Madea appears to be a beacon through which Perry delivers well-intentioned, but ill serving messages about violence against women and children and victim blaming/shaming. One can only suggest that if Perry had received therapy, advocacy and/or education about the complexities of gender violence, that his messages would no longer promote violence (retributive violence or corporal punishment), but express advice around enhancing victim safety, offender accountability and victim/survivor empowerment.

Additional themes from the model. The overarching model presented earlier in the chapter posits that there are 5 intersectional controlling images based on race, gender, sexuality and religion in the study sample. The protagonists transition between each controlling image, before landing as Black women in a romantic, fairy tale ending. The model itself (the controlling images, their processes and the messaging) reveals relevant discourse about the portrayal of Black female victims/survivors in Perry films. Each discourse is presented as an additional finding below.

Minimization of victimization and victim/survivor status. The first major discourse that is uncovered by BFDA of the controlling image model of gender violence in these films is that the victimization of the protagonist is minimized as well as her victim/survivor status. While there is a victim controlling image representation and stage in the model, it is

overshadowed by some of the traits of the other controlling images, Madea's discourse about being a victim/survivor and the films' comedic nature.

To begin, all the films feature some form of gender violence as a root of their plots, but the portrayal of multiple controlling images can misdirect attention away from the seriousness of the victim/survivor and the violations to their bodies and spirit. The portrayal of the Black Victim image is in stark contrast to the Black Bitterfruit and Black Matriarch images. The sexual violence victim/survivor is sexually deviant; they are jezebels/whores who have multiple children by multiple (unavailable) men, sleep with a married man with children, as well as prostitute and do drugs. In this case, the focus is not on the victimization, but on the present deviancy. While the intimate partner or domestic violence victim/survivor is passive, feminine, docile and an overall "good girl" in need of saving and protection, the good girls turn into bitter, angry and violent Black women. The victims/survivors of sexual violence also turn into bitter, angry and violent Black women. This creates or reinforces a perception that Black women are too rough, tough or strong to be victims or harmed by gender violence. Furthermore, by the time the protagonist reaches the Black Princess stage, the focus is on her new love story, not necessarily her journey with processing trauma or working towards healing.

In addition to other controlling images minimizing or misdirecting the protagonists' victim/survivor status, Madea's interactions with the protagonists create a discourse that shames, blames and potentially increases the lethality of the victim. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, during the group session with Ellen, Madea undercuts the experience of the inmate who blames her father for her incarceration. Recall Madea's victim blaming/shaming in this scene. While Madea tries to help the women who come to her, in this case as in others, she evokes a common, inappropriate and hurtful response to a victim/survivor. Her statement minimizes the inmate's

experience with the violence as well as the long lasting trauma and its impact on her life. It challenges the relationship between victimization and criminality. Madea also shames the inmate for what she refers to as *wanting to be a victim*, when in actuality, the inmate was probably coming to terms with being a victim of abuse and its impact on her life. Moreover, Madea tries to silence the inmate as she shares her experience with the group, which is already a brave and hard thing to do. Madea's entire statement is counterproductive to inspiring empowerment and choice for the inmate, Candy and other victims/survivors who are also listening.

The final way the films' discourse minimizes victimization and victim/survivor status is through the use of comedy in the film. All four films are comedic dramas and feature several scenes where violence and/or the promotion of it is cheapened by points of comedic relief. For example, in *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, when April tries to electrocute Randy and he hops out the bathtub, he is slightly shocked in the process. He is on the ground squirming and his squirming is shaped as a humorous moment. Additionally, in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, when Helen catapults Charles headfirst into the bathtub, he is seen blowing bubbles in the water to keep from drowning. Other violent moments involve Madea, such as when she lifts and drops a car using a forklift because the owner stole her parking space or when she shoots her pistol in the home when her brother is having a party.

Lack of help-seeking to formal helping agents. The next revealing discourse of the model is a lack of protagonists seeking help from formal helping agents, such as social workers, law enforcement officers, advocates, counselors, and/or medical professionals. With the exception of seeking guidance and solace by communing in church, most protagonists do not seek formal services. In fact, the only time help is sought is when Candy, in *Madea Goes to Jail*,

attends a group session led by Pastor Ellen. Even then, group participants are presented as only attending the session to have jail time reduced. Additionally, the guidance by Ellen provided to practice forgiveness, does not directly address the gender violence experienced by Candy or other group members. Furthermore, Madea dominates the session and spouts victim blaming/shaming messages, which minimizes any helpful messaging Ellen tries to provide.

In the other films, protagonists are not pictured seeking assistance with recovery from a pastor, minister or other clergy member. The other characters who experience violence in the films also fail to seek out formal helping agents, including Nicki, the foster child Madea takes care of in *Madea's Family Reunion* as well as Jennifer who is attacked by April's boyfriend, Randy, in *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*. Instead, the assistance comes from informal helping agents, such as friends, senior family members and Madea.

For Helen in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, she gains insight from Madea, who advocates retributational violence and her mother, who advises her to forgive Charles and later forgive herself for the violence she enacted on him in revenge. Lisa and Vanessa in *Madea's Family Reunion* seek the advice of Madea on Lisa's domestic violence relationship with Carlos and Madea recommends violence—grit-ball. They also receive wisdom from family elders who assert that love is varied and can be many things, but it is not unsure. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, Candy has doubts about Pastor Ellen, but values Madea as a protector, which then enables her to value her perspectives. As such, Candy insists that she is going to stop being a victim, which is a direct outcome of Madea's victim blaming response to an inmate during Ellen's forgiveness group session. And finally, April receives unsolicited insight and wisdom from a colleague, her mother's pastor and friend as well as Sandino and Jennifer. Madea provides advice to April indirectly, as Jennifer shares what she has learned from Madea to April.

Lack of punishment for offenders. Given that the victimized characters do not report their victimization to formal helping agents, such as criminal justice professionals, none of the violent offenders are incarcerated and there are no implied formal punishments portrayed in the films. Additionally, none of the violent offenders are portrayed receiving treatment (i.e. counseling, anger management or batterer intervention classes or religious/spiritual advising) for their violence. Instead, the offenders become the recipients of retributive violence on the part of their victims. Recall, Helen becomes violent with Charles, Lisa attacks Carlos using grit-ball techniques and April almost electrocutes Randy. Candy is not seen being violent against her offenders, but when she was a victim of quid pro quo harassment during a job interview, she physically defended herself against a likely sexual assault. In addition to retributive violence (and physical defense), some of the offenders are subject to shame. Helen leaves Charles at the family dinner table to go be with Orlando and Randy is left shaking on the bathroom floor, in front of Jennifer and Sandino, after April drops the radio into the bathtub.

Promotion and necessity of forgiveness. As mentioned before, there is an overarching Christian theme, related to Christian identity and values that permeates through each film. Forgiveness is a practice that most of the protagonists do, even if not overtly: Helen forgives Charles and herself for their unhealthy and violent relationship; Vanessa openly and verbally forgives her mother for failing to protect her from her stepfather; Candy forgives Josh for failing to protect her in college; and while April does not explicitly forgive her mother because she passes away, seeing April come to terms with her inability to love, her desire to love Sandino and her letting go of an unhealthy relationship, we can deduce that she has made amends with her mother as well. For the characters that forgive those with whom they hold the most anger or

resentment, they are empowered and free to begin a new life with a new, healthy and supportive lover.

Tragic Black matriarch. On the other hand, romantic endings are juxtaposed with the characters who do not forgive and, as a result, lead less desirable lives. Madea and Victoria, from *Madea's Family Reunion*, represent a new controlling image called the *Tragic Black Matriarch*. Not only are both characters aggressive, controlling, hostile, emasculating and violent, they are both victims/survivors of abuse. Madea's late husband was physically violent with her. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Madea talks about stomping on his grave so much so that it pushed him deeper than 6 feet underground. Victoria, on the other hand, was sold by her mother to a man who raped and impregnated her with her first daughter, Vanessa. Her volatile and violent relationship with Vanessa and controlling relationship with Lisa demonstrates that she has not processed her trauma (or the trauma she has caused her children) nor has she found a place for forgiveness and healing. As a result, Madea and Victoria lead tragic lives within the context of Perry's films. Madea is portrayed and described as bitter, angry, ugly, and she lacks a true intimate relationship with a romantic partner. Victoria uses her daughters to secure her financial future and is portrayed and described as wicked and evil. She, too, lacks a romantic partnership and true love. These missing parts (forgiveness, healing, true and healthy love) make them tragic characters in a Perry film.

Real men are heroes and nonviolent. Another discourse that is raised in the model is that the new romantic love interests for the protagonists are heroes. Each new love interest for the protagonists rescue her in a nonviolent way. These men are juxtaposed with the men who hurt the protagonists, which helps to show how *real* men are supposed to act and treat women. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Orlando physically drives Helen away from her home with

Charles, even though he was paid to do so. Later, after falling in love with her, Orlando proposes to Helen, telling her he wants to be “her knight in shining armor” and in hard times, all he needs her to do is get up in the morning and he will take everything else from there. After Helen returns to her husband, Orlando asserts to her that she deserves him (Orlando) and the life she never had before. Additionally, Frankie evokes similar sentiments to Vanessa in *Madea’s Family Reunion* and when she panics because he took her kids without her knowledge, he reminds Vanessa that he loves her and would never hurt her or her children.

Josh’s rescuing of Candy in *Madea Goes to Jail* is explicit. We see Josh physically assist Candy to safety multiple times, such as after she was raped by a pimp and when he got her conviction overturned and held her hand as she walked out of prison. Furthermore, the conflict in their relationship centered around Candy’s resentment and Josh’s own disappointment in his failure to rescue her in college. In *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, Sandino is an unexpected hero. Even though he arrives at April’s with very little in hand, he teaches her about compassion, empathy and love for herself and other people. He rescues her from a life that would have been full of selfishness, bitterness, anger and unprocessed emotional pain.

Promotion of heteronormativity and cisgenderism. The final thematic finding of this research is that Perry promotes heteronormativity and cisgenderism in his films.

Heteronormativity refers to the cultural, systemic and symbolic expectation that everyone’s sexual orientation is heterosexual, which causes a hiding, silencing and distancing of persons who enjoy same sex or queer intimate relationships (Chambers, 2003). None of the films studied for this research depict LGBTQ+ relationships. Not only does this absence provide a narrow lens with regard to Perry’s discourse on Black, romantic relationships, but it also perpetuates the framing of gender violence only within heterosexual contexts. For example, how might Helen’s

experience with domestic violence, in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, be presented differently if she were abused by a female partner? Or, how would April's demeanor and relationships with men (or women), in *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, be different if she were sexually assaulted as a child by a woman, instead of her mother's boyfriend? Or pushing further, how might the discourse around April and Helen also change if they were not only victimized by someone of the same sex, but also still identified as Black, woman and Christian? What would be required by such characters, aside from forgiveness, to be afford a romanticized, happily-ever-after ending?

Considering Perry's use of drag to become Madea, it is surprising that his films feature cisgenderism and heteronormative notions of relationships and gender violence. Cisgenderism refers to "ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologizes self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth..." (Lennon & Mistler, 2014, p. 63), such as transgendered identities. While Perry does not deny, denigrate or pathologize transgender identities, he does omit transgendered characters from his discourse. This omission contextualizes Perry's discourse on gender violence. For instance, Perry's Black Victim and his other controlling images, are only understood as cisgendered and heterosexual characters. As such, Perry fails to provide space to discuss gender violence against LGBTQ+ persons who are also members of Black and Christian communities. This may be due in part to Perry's overarching Christian themes, as some denominations lean in support of cisgender and heteronormative identities (Levy & Lo, 2013). Another explanation is that Perry may be appealing to homophobic/cisgenderist attitudes in his Black audiences (Brown, 2008).

The perpetuation of cisgenderism and heteronormativity may also impact Perry's discourse of gender violence against Black women. When considering some of the media

discourse produced of Black women, specifically, the bitter Black Bitterfruit and the angry, aggressive and violent Black Matriarch, cisgenderism and heteronormativity showcase how Black women may not fit social expectations set for women. While Perry's Black Bitterfruit and Black Matriarchs are female characters, they evoke traits that are largely reserved for men (assertiveness, aggression, violence, etc.). Their failure to meet the gender roles ascribed to them disrupts cisgender and heteronormative expectations. As such, measures, like gender violence and patriarchy, can be used and deemed justified in order to control/fix/re-socialize the Black female characters into their proper gender roles and traits as women.

Indeed, Perry's films had such potential to more fully explore the intersectionality of race, gender/sex, sexuality and religion with gender violence. Perry's absence of LGBTQ+ representation not only promotes cisgenderism and heteronormativity, but he misses opportunities to explore the many complexities of gender violence against persons from multiple-intersecting and marginalized social groups. Perry spoke on his aim to provoke thought and change through his films—inclusion of persons representing diversity on sex, gender and sexual orientation spectra would have most surely inspired critical thought from his audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Black Feminist Discourse Analysis revealed a conceptual model in Tyler Perry films that features 5 intersectional controlling images that protagonist characters transition through during the films and they include the: Black Victim, Black Bitterfruit, Black Matriarch, Black Forgiver and the Black Princess. This model uses common victim stereotypes, but also controlling images of Black women, including the matriarch and jezebel/whore. Additionally, Perry further develops the controlling images by including components of Christian identity

and/or values and also by creating a distinction between the portrayals of Black women who are victims/survivors of intimate partner or domestic violence and sexual violence.

Furthermore, Perry's experiences with violence as well as his identity as a man shape his positionality and performativity as Madea, a character he uses to transmit his understandings and perspectives around gender violence against Black women and violence against children. Also, his controlling image model of gender violence conveys gender violence discourse as it relates to Black women. First, the use of Perry's controlling images minimizes the gender violence victimization as well as the protagonists' victim/survivor status. The protagonists limit their help-seeking behavior to informal helping agents, such as family and friends. None of the protagonists mention reaching out to or are portrayed as seeking help from formal helping agents, including social workers, advocates and law enforcement. Additionally, the model reveals discourse about the need for forgiveness for self-empowerment and a romantic happy ending. Victims/survivors who do not practice forgiveness are fated with tragic lives, lacking romantic partnership, harboring anger and resentment, and failing to reach internal resolve or healing. The new and healthy romantic relationships of the protagonist involve men that rescue the protagonists in one form or another without promoting violence. And lastly, Perry's promotion of cisgenderism and heteronormativity, via the absence of LGBTQ representation, inscribes a message that gender violence is only relevant for cisgendered and heterosexual persons and that violence is justified to force Black female conformity to gender roles.

In the final chapter, I will discuss potential implications of the controlling image model of gender violence and its discourse, including implications around messaging, for social work practice and social work education. The implications of these findings for future research are also discussed.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the current study, including the research questions, methodology and findings. Next, I offer concluding assertions grounded in the current study's findings as well as previous literature. This chapter closes with discussion of study limitations, recommendations for future film production featuring gender violence in the Black community as well as implications for social work education, practice and research.

Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to reveal the messaging of media discourse in portrayals of gender violence against Black women with a social work lens. Three theoretical approaches were used to guide this study: 1) Intersectionality, 2) Black Feminist Thought and 3) Discourse Theory. The scholarship on media portrayals of gender violence proposes that the violence is minimized, underrepresented and misdirected. The use of victim stereotypes, archetypes and controlling images of Black women in media is dangerous; these prototypes suggest that Black women cannot meet the social expectations to be considered "legitimate" victims/survivors and this justifies and ignores Black women's experiences with violence and other forms of oppression. While there is growing literature that addresses Tyler Perry films, most of the scholarship addresses issues of race. In the few works that discuss gender violence portrayals in Perry films, they fail to sufficiently address how his portrayal of Black women and Christian values impacts his portrayal of gender violence. They also fail to challenge Perry's constructions of race and gender and how they influence Perry's characters and their experiences. Therefore, the present study was needed to consider the intersectionality of the portrayal of gender violence

against Black women with regard to race, gender, sexuality and religion. Such a study has the potential to inform social work practice, research and education, with regard to perpetuated and consumed media-knowledge of gender violence against Black women.

The primary research question posed during this study was: What is the intersecting, oppressive discourse produced in Perry films around gender violence against Black women? Secondary research questions (provided in Chapter 3) inquired about the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and religion; existing and/or new controlling images in Perry films; derived meanings from gender violence discourse and common themes across the films. Data were collected from four Perry films, which were selected based on their release dates, gross earnings and accessibility. Data analysis consisted of memoing, thematic analysis and open coding, all of which are consistent with qualitative research methodology. Peer review, reflexive journaling and rich data descriptions were used to enhance the rigor of the research.

The major research finding from this study is a conceptual model, called: Tyler Perry's Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence (See: Appendix D). This model organizes and establishes relationships between 5 controlling images in Perry films: Black Victim, Black Bitterfruit, Black Matriarch, Black Forgiver and Black Princess. The controlling images are based on race, gender, sexuality and religion. The model provides a specific formula that constructs consistent discourse of gender violence against Black women in all four films.

In addition to providing an organized structure of controlling images, the model also provides themes of discourse. The first discourses theme is that the victimization of the protagonist and her victim/survivor status are minimized in Perry films. Secondly, the victimized protagonists do not seek help or support from formal helping agents, such as social workers, law enforcement officers or religious clergy. Additionally, there is a theme that

promotes and necessitates the act of forgiveness on the part of the victimized protagonist. Without forgiving, she risks living her life in tragedy as a Tragic Black Matriarch, who is eternally bitter, angry, violent and lacks a true healthy and romantic relationship. Another theme reveals that real men are heroes and nonviolent, which emphasizes healthy and nonviolent relationships for Black women. And finally, Perry promotes cisgenderism and heterosexism through his omission of LGBTQ+ characters and discourse.

In sum, this study expands the current literature through its exploration of gender violence against Black women in Black, contemporary media discourse. Through the use of Black Feminist Discourse Analysis, the study not only reveals discourse based on racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women, but also reveals themes such as: a minimization of victimization and victim status; sexual deviance as an outcome of sexual violence; an absence of punishment for offenders; the perpetuation of Christian values (such as forgiveness); the absence of help-seeking to formal agents; heteronormativity and cisgenderism; and victim-rescue with romanticized, happily-ever-after endings.

Study Limitations

This study explored the gender violence discourse of four Tyler Perry films, based on release date, gross earnings, accessibility, as well as the presence of Madea as a character. There is another film that features gender violence and Madea, *Madea's Big Happy Family* (2011). Unfortunately, the omission of this film from this study is limiting, as I am unable to say for certain that this study's findings has reach across the collection of Perry films featuring gender violence and Madea. Future research should interrogate the entire collection of Perry films that feature gender violence and Madea, as a complete collection, to determine if the controlling

images identified in this study are supported, expanded, explained away, or generally changed in another way.

There are also Perry plays that have gender violence themes and Madea as a character. While Perry films are successful in the Box Office, so are his plays that sell out across the country (“Tyler Perry’s story, n.d.). His film audiences may differ from his play audiences and as such, future research should explore both the discourse and composition of audience groups for his plays. This has the potential to not only expand on the controlling image model, but also explore the impact of Perry discourse regarding gender violence for play audiences. Additionally, Perry has produced gender violence films and television shows without the Madea character. This study might have benefited by including Perry films that feature gender violence films without Madea in the sample. Doing so may have made the research findings more exhaustive, but also would have provided a unique opportunity to fully assess the impact of Madea’s presence and absence on Perry’s discourse of gender violence. For example, research questions can explore whether the discourses change if Madea is not present in a film or, maybe does another Madea-like character take on her matriarch qualities and serve as an icon to reinscribe the discourse revealed in this study? Surely, the research on Perry discourse on gender violence is in its early stages and there are plenty of empirical paths in the future.

Black Feminist Discourse Analysis (BFDA) was used as the preferred methodology in this study. This framework values the standpoints of Black women by Black women on discourse reflecting knowledge about Black women. Discourse analysis with a Black feminist lens has been conducted in studies by other researchers; however, this was a new analysis framework, especially explicated in this study. At times during analysis, I felt as if I was working blindly without the help of previous research that used and spelled out steps of BFDA.

Therefore, the use of a novel methodological framework by the researcher is a potential limitation of the study. BFDA values the subjective knowledge of the researcher. As such, with the exception of peer review, I analyzed the data and developed the codes, themes and findings alone. However, I may have missed an opportunity to include and collaborate with other Black women during the analysis of this study. Collaboration might have produced the same or different codes, themes and findings. The inclusion of their standpoints would have enhanced the rigor of the study, such as components of trust value, consistency and data neutrality. Furthermore, the peer reviewer who was consulted during the study identifies as a White woman; perhaps the study would have benefited from the inclusion of a Black woman as a peer reviewer, in order to foster the components and theoretical values of BFDA in a more holistic way. Future research should consult findings with Black women via focus groups or individual interviews in an attempt to create more rigorous member checks.

Despite these limitations of the study, some important findings were revealed and contribute to the literature on gender violence discourse in media. Upon considering the findings of this study and existing literature, concluding assertions about Perry's discourse were brought to light. These assertions as well as recommendations for future film production and implications for social work are presented in the sections that follow.

Concluding Assertions from the Study

There are several concluding assertions to make about Perry's discourse of gender violence. The concluding assertions that follow were developed based on existing literature, as presented in Chapters 1 and 2, as well as the findings of this research, which were presented in Chapter 4. These assertions have implications for future film production and social work, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Concluding assertion #1. *The implementation and delivery of Perry's gender violence discourse contributes to the existing minimization of the seriousness and realities faced by all women who are victims/survivors of gender violence.* Existing literature suggests that media portrayals of gender violence are normalized, condoned and desensitized (Kohlman et al., 2014) by audiences because of devaluing and comical depictions. Similarly, this study finds that Perry's use of comedy throughout the film cheapens the violence discourse and any potential awareness messaging as audiences may be more inclined to laugh during the films than engage in serious or critical thought.

Other literature asserts that the roles of victimized characters are minimized (Cuklanz, 2000) and that gender violence is underreported in media (Miller & Meloy, 2009). In fact, while some media, such as internet pornography, completely omit Black women as victims/survivors of gender violence (Gossett & Byrne, 2002), others often find Black women as victims of sexual aggression in pornography (Cowan & Campbell, 1994). Even though Perry presents Black women as victims/survivors, his presentation of the violence still contributes to the minimization of the characters as victims. Perry's victimized characters have leading roles as protagonists in the films, but these characters are presented through a series of controlling images that overshadow their victim status or misdirect attention away from their victimization. For example, the use of the Black Matriarch controlling image portrays a strong, angry, aggressive and sometimes violent, Black female character. These characteristics work in opposition to victim stereotypes/archetype, as victims are commonly understood to be passive, dependent, feminine and White (female) characters (Fenton, 1998). Additionally, the Black Princess controlling image focuses on a character that receives her happily-ever-after, romantic love relationship. This image, just like the others in the Tyler Perry Controlling Image Model of

Gender Violence, does not present a character who processes their trauma and journeys through their healing in healthy ways or at all.

Concluding assertion #2. *Perry's portrayals of Black female victims/survivors do not include help-seeking to formal helping agents and Black women who actually experience violence are less likely to seek services from formal helping agents—this is not a coincidence.*

The literature contends that Black women are less likely to seek help through the criminal justice system, social services and other formal helping agents, such as domestic violence agencies (Bent-Goodley, 2004; Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacey, & Marghi, 2008; Weisz, 2005). Scholars assert the reasoning behind the lack of help-seeking is centered on social, historical and cultural contexts, such as a cultural understanding of the justice system as a racist institution or that service providers do not provide culturally relevant services. With the exception of Pastor Ellen in *Madea Goes to Jail*, the victimized characters in the studied films do not report their violence or seek help from to formal helping agents, such as advocates, social workers, and law enforcement officers. Instead, Perry presents discourse that operates within the current cultural context regarding help-seeking among Black female victims/survivors. In this way, he fails to offer alternative cultural scripts for Black female victims/survivors and perpetuates messaging that supports the status quo. A deviating, yet culturally relevant script could offer victims/survivors insight about the options and resources available to them that could increase their physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual safety as well as provide guidance throughout their healing.

Concluding assertion #3. *Perry's use of Madea as a resource for victims/survivors is dangerous and, in real life, Madea discourse could increase the danger and lethality of victims.*

Scholars note that often times, prior to intimate partner homicide, there is an increase in the

severity or frequency of the violence in the relationship (Watt, 2008). Perpetrators also commonly seek sole control over their partner and engage in harmful behaviors to maintain their control. These realities make Madea's promotion of retributive violence dangerous, as the severity or occurrence of violence can increase in times where a victim/survivor asserts herself or seeks to regain control over her life. The actuality of increased risk of lethality or more severe violence is not presented in Perry films; instead, the perpetrator ceases violence against the victim, which presents an inaccurate message that retributive violence is an effective way to teach the abuser a lesson. The promotion of retributive violence does not enhance the victim's safety or cultural understandings of gender violence, which are principles of trauma-informed response (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2014; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Similarly, Madea's victim shaming/blaming discourse is also dangerous for victims/survivors. Her responses fail to meet the principles of trauma-informed response (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2014; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). She tells victims/survivors to hold themselves accountable for the way their lives have turned out after being victimized and she also scolds victims/survivors who acknowledge their victim/survivor status, by telling them she can't stand people who want to be victims. Victim blaming/shaming contributes to secondary victimization (Campbell & Raja, 1999), which surely does not aid in the physical, emotional or spiritual safety of a victim/survivor. Additionally, when Madea tells the victimized characters what to do, which is quite often, this circumvents their sense of choice and empowerment. Furthermore, Madea does not refer the victimized characters to other formal or informal helping agents. And finally, while Madea does share a small part of her own experience with domestic violence, she does not

offer information to enhance victim's/survivor's understanding of gender violence, nor does she refer the victim/survivor to someone who can educate about prevalence, dynamics, risk factors or resources for help. Instead, what Madea offers is a pointed perspective that could set back a victim's/survivor's healing, as she perpetuates the social messages, myths and ideologies that prevent Black women from being recognized as victims/survivors of gender violence worthy of aid and support.

Concluding assertion #4. *Perry's use of Christian identity, values and musical messages as resources to foster healing are insufficient.* Bearing in mind some literature on faith-based convictions and responses to gender violence (Campbell et al., 2008; Women of Color Network, 2006), religious convictions are major factors to consider when addressing gender violence in the Black community. Unfortunately, while Perry illustrates Christian identity and values in his films, he fails to consistently showcase how Black churches and faith-based leaders can appropriately respond to gender violence in their communities. While Pastor Ellen, in *Madea Goes to Jail*, is engaged in front-line support for prostitutes, offering them clean needles, condoms and job opportunities to get off the streets, the victimized protagonist, Candy, is resistant in receiving her help. Ellen also facilitates group sessions in the jail, but the inmates participate to have their sentences reduced. The other films lack direction from the faith-based leaders, even in *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, which presents a pastor who tells April her mother has passed away. As such, faith-based leaders are not directly consulted for domestic or spiritual guidance, nor are they sought for advice on healing from gender violence.

On the other hand, Perry introduces Black elders within the victims'/survivors' families as religious or spiritual guides that have an immense amount of wisdom; however, their roles are minor in the films and the elders do not address the victimization directly. Instead, the elders

talk about real love, the need for a strong and supportive family, the history of Black people's oppression as well as the will of God. Without the presence of such leaders, the discourse of Christian identity, values and music falls flat. Viewers are left with messages that direct victims/survivors to forgive and leave personal troubles with Jesus without the spiritual wisdom on how to do these things.

Concluding assertion #5. *Perry offers an alternative script for Black heterosexual love in his portrayal of the new, nonviolent love interests of the protagonists. This discourse expresses that Black (heterosexual), true love can exist without violence.* The alternative script counters the realities of Black male socialization, which teaches that Black men “must be aggressive, dominant and sometimes, violent in order to be true men” (Wallace, 2007, p. 16). Additionally, “real” Black men focus on their sexuality without guidance on how to engage in family and other relationships. But, Perry disrupts this ideology in his portrayal of Orlando, Frankie, Josh and Sandino (even though Sandino is an immigrant from Mexico). All four characters are overwhelmingly supportive of the victimized protagonists. Orlando compliments Helen, cooks for her and tells her he wants to be her knight in shining armor. Frankie gets Vanessa to share some of her heartfelt poetry and helps her realize that he will not hurt her or her children. Josh physically saves Candy from harm on more than one occasion and works to free her from jail and Sandino teaches April about self-love and selflessness. Furthermore, these male characters are patient, do not pressure their companions for sex, and practice abstinence. These portrayals of nurturing masculinity and healthy relationships sit in stark contrast to typical hypersexual portrayals of Black masculinity in love relationships (Wallace, 2007).

Altogether, the concluding assertions provide overarching inferences based upon this study's findings and prior research. They speak to vital concerns about Perry's discourse of

gender violence against Black women, but also to the potential of Perry's discourse as he offers an alternative script to Black heterosexual love relationships. As such, prior research, this study's findings as well as the concluding assertions impart recommendations for future film production and social work scholarship, which will be presented in the sections that follow.

Recommendations for Future Film Production

Based on the existing literature and findings of the current study, there are some recommendations for the writing and production of films that present gender violence against Black women. These recommendations are to enhance consciousness-raising and oppositional gazing of gender violence and similar issues that affect Black victims/survivors and social responses. First, writers and producers should steer from presenting racist, sexist or victim stereotypes as well as controlling images of Black women. These depictions minimize the victim/survivor status of Black women and the seriousness of the violence they experience. Instead, producers should look for ways to center attention on the relevance, complexity and gravity of gender violence against Black women. For instance, production companies can portray the harsh realities that victims/survivors face, such firearm (Folkes, Hilton & Harris, 2013) and alcohol (World Health Organization, 2006) increases in the severity of violence as well as the risks of intimate partner homicide (Campbell, 2001). Additionally, gender violence encompasses a gamut of forms of violence. Future producers and writers should include aspects of non-physically violent forms of gender violence, such as forced isolation, emotional and/or financial abuse and the use of children or pets to control victims (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, n.d.).

The second recommendation for the production of films that feature gender violence against Black women is to present the availability and usefulness of formal helping agents.

While the socio-cultural and historical barriers between the justice system and Black communities are complex and rooted in violence and discrimination, it is still important to present agents of the justice system (i.e. law enforcement officers and attorneys) as available resources for Black victims/survivors. This would present opportunities to portray systems holding offenders accountable for their crimes and violations, such as portraying offender incarceration, court-mandated counseling and other sanctions. The portrayal of the justice system can also present the conundrum Black women face when deciding to report to law enforcement, in their decision to choose personal safety over community safety (Campbell et al., 2008; Hampton, LaTaillade, Dacy & Marghi, 2008). Additionally, realistic and helpful portrayals of advocates and social workers should be presented in the films. A potential option can include showing these agents as effective resources that help victims/survivors re-empower themselves as well as assist with healing or recovery. Another option could be to expose how helping agents/agencies are often operating from colorblind frameworks and fail to offer culturally relevant services and responses to Black victims/survivors (Bent-Goodley, 2009). This would bring attention to the barriers Black women have in seeking services in order to advise for improvements. Implementing these recommendations has the ability to enhance awareness of the needs of Black women who are victims/survivors of gender violence.

With respect for the use of informal helping agents, such as family and friends, future films should portray more helpful responses from informal helping agents, like Madea. Instead of promoting retributive violence or engaging in victim shaming/blaming, portrayals of informal helping agents can offer loving support, make referrals to formal helping agencies and/or offer advice that keeps the safety and welfare of the victim at the forefront. Educating producers and writers about trauma-informed response (National Resource Center on Justice

Involved Women, 2014; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014) may give them the tools needed to portray effective, safe and helpful responses from informal helping agents.

Future films on gender violence against Black women should also provide some focus on the services and outreach of Black churches and faith-based leaders, showing them as effective, open and relevant resources in the community that address gender violence. Perry's portrayal of pastor Ellen in *Madea Goes to Jail* is a great example of a faith-based leader engaged at the front lines. However, more "Ellens" are needed, especially those that address gender violence without victim blaming and shaming and can do so using the word of God. This may require portrayals of leaders who challenge traditional Christian ideology (or secular interpretations of the ideology) that is used to oppress women. Faith-based characters should also provide guidance on how to practice Christian principles, such as forgiving those that harm you and leaving problems with Jesus during hard times. Furthermore, when using Black elder characters, it would be beneficial to allow them to address gender violence directly and safely, considering the principles of trauma-informed response. These recommendations can provide awareness to real victims/survivors, faith-based leaders and familial elders on appropriate responses and outreach.

Victim blaming and shaming occurs in responses (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Zaleski, Gundersen, Baes, Estupinian & Vergara, 2016) to gender violence. Recall, Perry's prominent and reoccurring character, Madea, expresses sentiments in the films that are victim blaming and/or shaming. While it is advised to avoid portrayals of victim blaming or shaming, for those films that seek to capture that discourse as a reality faced by victims/survivors, it is worthwhile to do so in a critically thoughtful way. For example, depicting characters that challenge or stand

up against victim blaming and shaming would be consciousness-raising and create space for critical discussion.

It is also advised that future film production tread with extreme caution and strategy when framing gender violence discourse with comedy or humor. While the comedic value has been shown to normalize, condone and desensitize viewers to gender violence (Kohlman et al., 2014), humor is also reported as a useful tool for learning (Terrell, 2014; Ulloth, 2002) as well as a beneficial therapeutic application for trauma survivors (Garrick, 2006) and patients in clinical settings (Johnson, 1990). Garrick finds that a sense of humor can be harnessed to help survivors “mitigate the intensity of their traumatic stress reaction” (p. 169). Additionally, the use of gallows humor and black humor have been used by victims/survivors of immense oppression, including Jews during the Holocaust and Black slaves during U.S. slavery, to foster coping skills to alleviate mental or emotional distress. Therefore, the challenge for film writers and producers, like Perry, who use humor with gender violence discourse is to channel the learning and therapeutic benefits of humor-use into the discourse without trivializing the seriousness of gender violence. It might be enlightening for the films to explore how the humor about violence against women is problematic.

Lastly, films with gender violence themes should follow Perry’s example to feature healthy, safe Black masculinity in love relationships. However, Perry limits his portrayals of Black love relationships by only depicting heterosexual relationships. It is important to also present a diversity of love relationships, including Black LGBTQ+ love and the complexities of gender roles, violence and even Christian identity/values in such relationships. The portrayal of love relationships should be inclusive, relevant, realistic and complex.

By implementing some or all of these recommendations, future films that feature gender violence against Black women can be social justice orientated, foster consciousness-raising and critical reflection. There could be positive outcomes, such as an upturn in victims'/survivors' understanding of gender violence and resources as well as an improvement in the responses of formal and informal helping agents. Another way to foster effective, critical and relevant messaging in gender violence discourse through film is to consult social workers or advocates within the gender violence field; indeed, our expertise can be valuable in the development of the characters, script and overall production.

Social Work Implications

Not only can film production benefit from recommendations based on the current study's findings and existing research, but the research presented here espouses implications for social work education, research and practice. Indeed, the discipline can also benefit from recommendations grounded in research that was conducted using a novel analysis framework, which placed Black women's knowledge and consciousness at the center and forefront. The following will conclude this chapter and present recommendations for social work as a discipline.

Social work programs educate their students about a host of social institutions, such as: family, religion, policy, healthcare and community. A hope for this research is to illustrate how relevant media is as an institution for social work as a discipline. Existing literature, presented in Chapters 1 and 2, already underscores that media discourses impact human perceptions and behaviors. In fact, the use of film in social work courses has been found to be beneficial as a supplement to teaching lectures and textbook materials (Downey, Jackson, Puid & Furman, 2003). Additionally, zine-making (Desyllas & Sinclair, 2014) and the use of documentaries

(Shdaimah, 2009) in social work courses are noted as useful pedagogical tools. However, while the prevalence of media courses in social work education is unknown at this time, social work is described as a discipline that has an insufficient development of “media consciousness” (Tower, 2000), or the awareness of the knowledge that derived from media discourse. As such, interdisciplinary courses are important to offer in social work so that future practitioners are prepared to address media influences in practice. Additionally, as the influence of media affects individuals and culture, the development and offering of courses on media are relevant for macro and micro program tracks. Potential courses can include: Social work and media; Using social media to enhance social work practice; Social work, justice and media; and Social work and media interventions. It may even be worthwhile for courses to explore the impacts media has on special or marginalized populations and discuss how that impacts social work practice. Future scholarship on social work education may seek to design a comprehensive guide to cinemeducation for social work education (Alexander, Lenahan & Pavlov, 2012).

In addition to expanding courses, social work researchers should study media more. The majority of research on the impacts of media on perception and behavior as well as the exploration of media depictions and discourses is conducted by scholars of other social science disciplines. Social work scholars have a specialized expertise as trained clinical professionals, community organizers and advocates that would be of tremendous value to media research. Sociologists and media scholars are contributory to the literature, but social workers come with first-hand experience working with the communities and individuals of concern. As such, social work lens and expertise are crucial to continuing the development of media studies and interventions.

Future research can explore whether consumption of Perry films (or other films that feature gender violence against Black women) increases the likelihood of accepting rape myths, victim stereotypes and/or the de-legitimization of Black female victimization. Also, how does the consumption of such films impact the practice of formal helping agents when working with Black clients or communities? Additionally, intervention research can be developed using Perry films. For example, how might critical discussions of Perry films (or other films with gender violence discourse) with victims/survivors improve upon their oppositional gazing (hooks, 1992) or foster consciousness-raising about gender violence? How can we use such interventions to also foster oppositional gazing of formal helping agents, to ensure we are critically evaluating our own responses in practice? It is also worthy to explore the degree to which Black women buy-in to Madea's guidance, wisdom and matriarch ideology. By social workers conducting this research, the expectation is that social justice, empowerment, service and other social work values will be grounded in the research. This grounding can keep the goals of improving services and enhancing individual and social wellbeing at the forefront of the research.

Social work practice can also advance through the incorporation of media. Media interventions can be used and developed by social workers in a variety of capacities when working with victims/survivors. As mentioned above, the development of interventions that can strengthen oppositional gazing (hooks, 1992) or critical reflection on gender violence is needed. Social work clients consume media on a daily basis and as part of our role in cultivating awareness, it becomes imperative that we tackle harmful and inaccurate messaging. Pushing social work practice in these and other similar ways can not only improve our response, but ensure our responses stay dynamic in order to remain relevant for our service communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, previous existing literature and the findings of this study offer several concluding assertions about the four Perry films studied for this dissertation:

- The implementation and delivery of Perry's gender violence discourse contributes to the existing minimization of the seriousness and realities faced by all women who are victims/survivors of gender violence.
- Perry's portrayals of Black female victims/survivors does not include help-seeking to formal helping agents and Black women who actually experience violence are less likely to seek services from formal helping agents—this is not a coincidence.
- Perry's use of Madea as a resource for victims/survivors is dangerous and, in real life, Madea discourse could increase the danger and lethality of victims.
- Perry's use of Christian identity, values and musical messages as resources to foster healing are insufficient.
- Perry offers an alternative script for Black heterosexual love in his portrayal of the new, nonviolent love interests of the protagonists.

The concluding assertions helped produce a variety of recommendations for the future writing and production of gender violence films that portray violence against Black women, such as avoiding the portrayals of stereotypes and controlling images as well as presenting formal helping agents as characters. By incorporating some or all of the recommendations, producers and writers help create a work of art that is also a socially conscious resource to enhance viewers' awareness and knowledge. And finally, this study helped uncover implications to advance social work education, research and practice. Hopefully, these advancement strategies will improve the response of social workers and advocates to help enhance the wellbeing of our

service communities and society at large.

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Appendix A:

Dissertation Concepts, Theories, Frameworks and Definitions

Concept/Theory/Framework	Definition	Citations
Archetype	A paradigmatic representation or symbol based on social understandings that provide “meanings, implications, and overtones”. Archetypes can be a variety of things, including real people, characters, settings and themes. Archetypes are reproduced across long periods of time and across cultures.	Lane, 1954 Lupton, 1999
Black Feminist Discourse Analysis	Methodological framework used to address the historical and social contexts of Black women in discourse. This framework is rooted in Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality.	Present study- Ross, 2016
Black Feminist Thought	Theoretical approach that is designed to resist oppressive practice and ideas that justify Black women’s office. It recognizes that Black women face common challenges, despite the diversity of experiences and responses to the challenges. BFT acknowledges the importance and relevance of Black women’s standpoint and rearticulation of taken-for-granted knowledge.	Collins, 1999
Controlling image	Racist, sexist and classist stereotypes designed to make Black women’s oppression appear natural and inevitable. This makes oppression exist unchallenged and justified.	Collins, 1999

Critical discourse analysis	Framework that examines the interplay, reproduction and resistance of social power, dominance and inequalities in text/semiotics and social interaction through historical, political and other social contexts. Used to examine how discourse impacts social power and dominance.	Van Dijk, 2001
Discourse	Any representation of social life, including social practice, language, identity, image, institutions and semiotics.	Fairclough, 2001
Discourse Theory	Theoretical approach used to understand how social problems are recognized, define and addressed. Acknowledges that all social phenomena obtain meaning through discourse and that collective knowledge shapes experiences.	Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007 Mahmoodoghli, Harsij, Emamjomehzadeh, Forooghi, & Masoudnia, 2013
Feminist discourse analysis	Framework that examines unchallenged assumptions and hegemonic power in explorations of feminist issues. It acknowledges that social issues have the personal consequences for groups in certain communities.	Lazar, 2007
Gender violence	Umbrella term used to describe various forms of violence, such as domestic and sexual violence, intimate partner violence, sex trafficking and other types of sexual exploitation, which are commonly experienced by women.	European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016 Heise, Ellsberg, & Gotmoeller, 2002 United Nations, 1993
Intersectionality	Analytic framework that asserts “mutually constructing features of social organization” are formed by systems of race, gender, sexuality (and other social systems) shape Black women’s experiences and are also shaped by Black women.	Collins, 1999
Oppositional gaze	A way of looking as an act of resistance that fosters critical spectatorship	hooks, 1992

Stereotype	Over-simplistic or generalized, but shared cultural understandings of social groups that are based on certain beliefs about the group's characteristics. Often considered pejoratively.	Cawalti, 1976 Macrae, Stangor & Hewstone, 1996
Victim stereotype/archetype	Representation of a female that espouses expected gender roles and norms, including passivity, femininity, delicacy, chastity, motherhood domesticity and, more often than not, Whiteness.	Fenton, 1998

Appendix B:
List of Themes and Codes

The following table provides a listing of the themes and codes used to develop this research. Many other codes were captured during the analysis process; however, only the codes that addressed the research questions of this project are provided below.

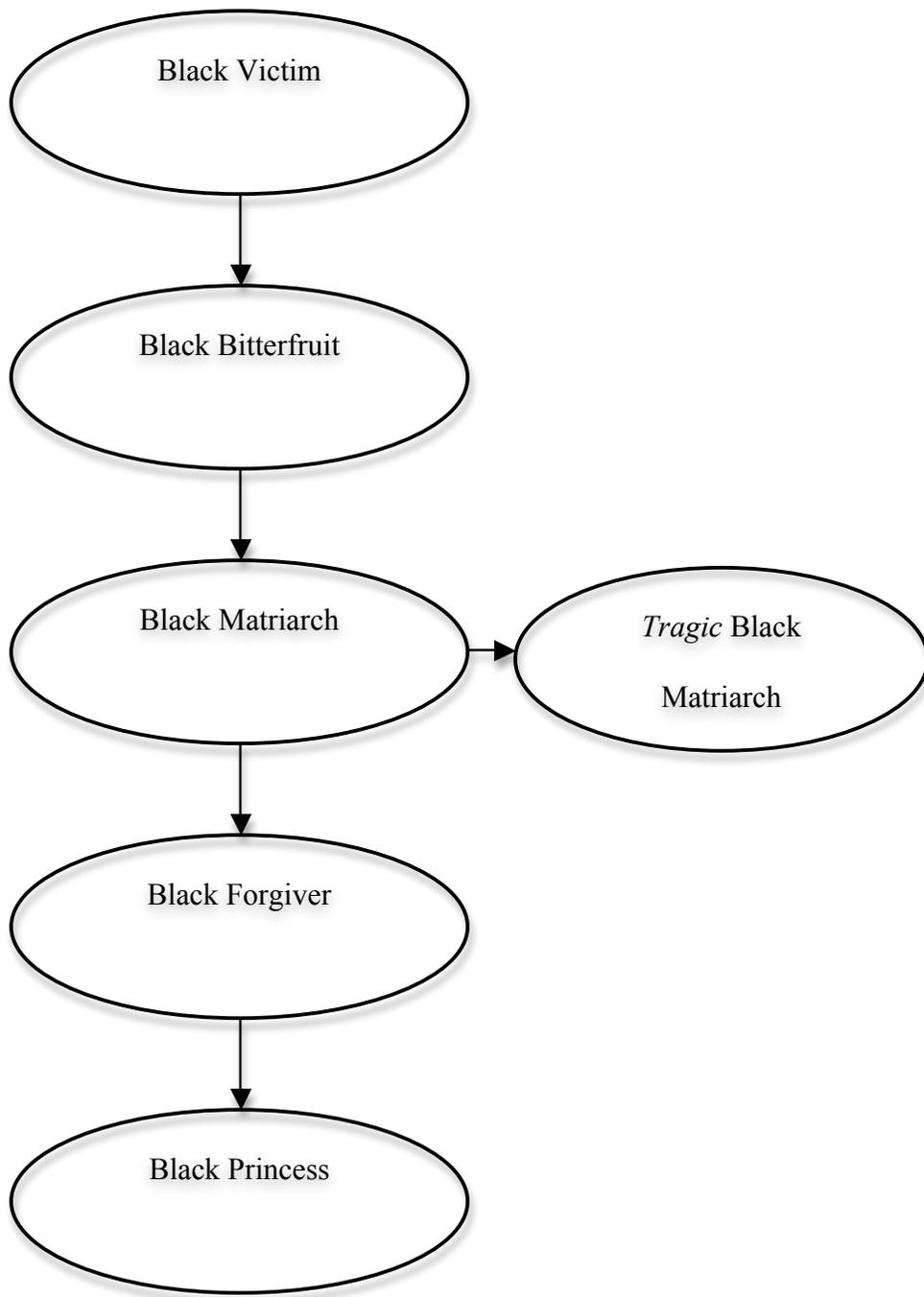
Themes	Brief Descriptions	Codes
Black Bitterfruit	Second controlling image in the Model. Character becomes bitter and harbors resentment among other negative traits.	Tough personality
		Resentment
		Negative attitude
		Confrontation
Black forgiver	Fourth controlling image in the Model. Character forgives the person who harmed her most.	Christian
		Practices forgiveness
Black matriarch	Third controlling image in the Model. Character takes on full matriarch traits.	Angry
		Aggressive
		Emasculating
		Violent
		Controlling
Black princess	Fifth and final controlling image in the Model. Character fully receives her love interest and obtains her romantic, happily-ever-after ending.	Strong
		Has new love interest
		Forgives the person who harmed them the most
		Gets engaged/married
Black victim	First controlling image in the Model. Character is victimized and the portrayal depends upon whether she is a victim of domestic or sexual violence.	Survivor
		<i>See: codes for domestic violence victim theme</i>
		<i>See: codes sexual violence victim theme</i>

Themes	Brief Descriptions	Codes
Christian identity/values	Discourse in the film that implies Christian identity or the acceptance of Christian values.	Abstinence
		Attends church
		Identifies as Christian
		Reads Bible
		Jesus is savior
		Values forgiveness
Criminality	Forms of criminal behavior or engagement shown as discourse in the films.	Prostitution
		Physical assault
		Property damage
		Incarceration
		Court hearings
Domestic violence perpetrator	Discourse that describes the violent and unhealthy characteristics of the abusive character.	Manipulative
		Controlling
		Arrogant
		Physically violent
Domestic violence victim	Discourse that describes the characteristics of characters that face domestic violence in the films. This is distinguished from the discourse sexual violence victims.	Passive
		Dependent
		Delicate
		Soft
		Isolated
		Controlled (disempowered)
		Good girl
		Experiences domestic violence
Returns to abuser		
Elder wisdom	Discourse describing the advice, guidance or lessons given by family elders.	True love discussion
		Discussion of oppressive Black history
		Promotion of forgiveness
Gender violence	Description of forms of violence, typically experienced by women, faced by the characters in the films.	Sexual assault
		Rape
		Incest
		Forced prostitution
		Domestic violence
Helping agents	Characters who offer advice, guidance, support or lessons to victimized characters.	Retributional violence
		Madea
		Family elders
		New love interests
		Faith-based leaders

Themes	Brief Descriptions	Codes
Promotion of forgiveness	Discourse in the films that promote the victims' forgiveness of the character(s) who harmed them.	Christian music messages Advice from elder Faith-based leader advice Forgiveness opens possibility for love
Real men are ()	Discourse that describes the examples of "real men" in the films.	New love interests save/help victim Fairytale presentation Nonviolent Heterosexual
Sexual violence victim	Discourse that describes the characteristics of characters that face sexual violence in the films. This is distinguished from the discourse domestic violence victims.	Whore/jezebel Nasty attitude Sexually immoral/deviant Experiences some form of sexual violence
Tragic Black Matriarch	Sub-type of Black matriarch controlling image. Tragic Black Matriarch fails to forgive and remains in the black matriarchy long-term.	<i>See: Black Matriarch codes</i> Victim of gender violence No healing Lacks love relationship Does not forgive Victim blaming/shaming Victimizes

Appendix C:

Mapping of Tyler Perry's Controlling Image Model of Gender Violence



Appendix D:

Reflexive Journal Themes

Transparency statement:

It is important to note that prior to this dissertation, during a directed research project, I studied three of the four films in this sample using a different analytic framework, juxtapositional analysis (Ross, 2015). The directed research project explored the juxtapositions between Black matriarchy and victimhood presented in the films and revealed the controlling image model. The controlling image model finding of the juxtapositional analysis were upheld through this dissertation research, using a different analytic framework.

Research for this dissertation took place from November 2015 to July 2016. The writing processes began in July 2016 with plans to defend in November of the same year. During the research and writing processes, I worked as the Sexual Assault and Prevention Specialist for a university in Virginia. I oversaw the development and implementation of prevention programming and advocacy supports for victims/survivors on campus. As such, I was very much immersed in gender violence work while working on the dissertation. Additionally, I was pregnant during all of the data collection and a portion of the analysis process. My son was born in April 2016, so I took on new responsibilities as a mother during the analysis phase. As with any life role, the aspects of my job as well as my entry into motherhood may have influenced my research.

It is important to note, that I watched the film sample prior to conducting this research. I watched the films multiple times for entertainment value, alone and with family and friends. I

also studied three of the films during a directed research project conducted before this study. As such, none of the discourse presented in the films were new to me during this study and this also could have influenced the research.

I was emotionally invested in this research study. Before beginning my doctoral program, I began questioning the impacts of Perry films on victims/survivors. In my work as an advocate, I found that many Black clients rejected their victim/survivor status, despite being victimized, but accepted the “survivor” label. I was motivated to explore this phenomenon in doctoral study. During my doctoral program, I spent two years working with faculty to develop a study on Tyler Perry films that was (considered to be) relevant for social work. Therefore, my attachment to the study may have impacted the research.

In the table that follows, I present a list of themes with their associated descriptions to outline my experience during the research processes. Themes were developed based on 51 journal entries I wrote during the research processes. The purpose of providing these notes is to be transparent about my positionality and subjectivity as the researcher.

(This space is intentionally left blank.)

<u>Process</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Data collection	Emotional upset	<p>The majority of my journal entries during data collection captured troubled feelings I had while watching the films. There were many times where I experienced upsetting feelings while watching the films and collecting data. Some of the scenes were a challenge to watch because, at some point (I am not sure when), I became emotionally vulnerable about how Black female characters were being portrayed and treated. Often times, I'd yell at the television in response to what was happening in the film. Three examples stand out:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nicki's belt beating by Madea in <i>Madea's Family Reunion</i> and its juxtaposition with the episode of <i>Goodtimes</i> when Penny is burned with a clothing iron by her mother. 2. During a support group session, Madea chastises other characters and participates in victim blaming/shaming in <i>Madea Goes to Jail</i> 3. Madea's is interrogated about being angry and vindictive by Dr. Phil during anger management in <i>Madea Goes to Jail</i>.
	Social debriefings	<p>Often times, after data collection I would call members of my family or friends to talk about what I saw as well as my reactions. At times, family and friends just provided a listening ear, but sometimes they would talk about the parts of the film(s) they were bothered by or ask me to further explore my feelings.</p>

<u>Process</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	Inundated by gender violence work	As a full-time advocate and prevention specialist on a college campus, I spent at least 40 hours a week supporting and advocating for students; training students, faculty and staff; planning awareness events; and participating in events and other projects. Therefore, when it came time to collect data for this dissertation, there were times were I was overwhelmed by “the work” and needed a break. I did practice self-care and took breaks from the dissertation until I felt emotionally prepared to do it.
	Overwhelmed by the amount of gender violence discourse	Watching four films several times and sometimes back-to-back, over the course of this project was challenging. Having worked with victims and survivors during the same time period, it was hard sometimes to watch these films as fiction.
Data analysis	Concerns Black Feminist Discourse Analysis process	Black Feminist Discourse Analysis is coined by me and for the first time, explicated in this research. As such, I had to rely on the theoretical underpinnings of the framework when making decisions about “how to do BFDA.” At times, I was uncomfortable about the direction I was going in analysis. I relied heavily on my peer reviewer for guidance and support.
	Concerns about where to start	As with typical qualitative research, there is a wealth of rich data to explore. It took some time for me to decide where to begin. So by hand, I started reviewing memos/notes and writing down possible codes that came to mind.

<u>Process</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	Birth of child	During this stage of the research, my son, Langston was born. I took about 3 weeks off from the analysis. I also began 12 weeks of maternity leave, so I had a break from gender violence work professionally. This may have created a break or change in consciousness during the analysis process.
	Fear about Madea's promotion of violence	There were times during the analysis process where Madea's promotion or use of violence was hard to study. For example, in <i>Madea's Family Reunion</i> , she teaches a victim of domestic violence grit-ball, the process of throwing a hot pot of grits on the perpetrator and hitting him with a cast iron skillet. Studying this scene scared me; having words with many victims of domestic violence, I know that many times when a victim responds to violence with violence, the severity of their victimization increases. My fear was that the film's message was encouraging victim's to use violence as a tool for defense, when in actuality, this can decrease their safety.
	Early connections	Early on in the data analysis process, similarities were revealed between the films. Some early revealed similarities include: Madea's promotion of violence, angry or aggressive traits of the victim, and nonviolent new love interests.

<u>Process</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	Concern on how to report reflexive entries	The reflexive journal had a total of 51 handwritten entries. Some of the entries were quite extensive, as I used the journaling process to speak candidly about experiences, feelings and other thoughts or questions that came up during the research processes. Upon consulting with my peer reviewer, we decided it was not necessary to share all 51 entries, but provide a list and description of the most relevant themes of the journal.
	Peer review process provided confidence	The peer review process was extremely helpful while interpreting the data. Because the peer review process began early in the research, during data collection, the reviewer was able to understand my findings within the context of the data and provide critical feedback. At the end of interpreting the data, the peer review helped to provide a confidence about my findings. Knowing that someone was reviewing my work along the way and concurs with my findings was comforting.

<u>Process</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	Bias	<p>While subjectivity was valued during this research, there was still a concern for bias. Did my feelings during the data collection and analysis processes bias the data? I thought the answer to this question was “yes.” But then, I re-grounded myself in the orientations of my research and I reminded myself, “My identity as a Black woman and consumer of media is relevant. They create an alternative knowledge that is often taken-for-granted (Collins, 1999). As a Black feminist researcher, am tasked with rearticulating what we think we know about the media discourse of gender violence against Black women through my own self-expressive views.” By providing transparency of my subjectivity, I allow readers the opportunity to assess my findings within the context they were developed. My paradigmatic approach does not seek to minimize bias of the researcher (Krefting, 1991), but to present neutral data through confirmability, which is achieved by establishing trust value and applicability. The provision of rich data description and reflexive themes extend opportunities for readers to confirm or trust my findings.</p>

Vita

Avina Ichele Ross is the Sexual Assault & Prevention Specialist for the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. In her position for only 14 months, she has earned the university a total of \$330,000 in federal grant funding for the expansion of prevention and support services. Avina has earned her Doctorate of Philosophy in November 2016 from Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Social Work. She also has a Master's degree in Sociology from Virginia Commonwealth University and Bachelors in Sociology and Women's Studies from the College of William and Mary.

Avina is an experienced educator in sociology and women's studies. She also has subject matter expertise in interpersonal violence prevention; program development; management and evaluation; and advocacy and training. She applies feminist, andragogic and peer-facilitated frameworks in her practice as an advocate and educator. Her substantive interests include intersectionality of gender violence; qualitative, feminist and community engaged research; social advocacy and activism; feminist practice; as well as andragogic and service-based learning.