

**Black feminism: A critique of the stereotypical representations of Black women in African-American Comedy Films: A case study of selected Tyler Perry films.**

By

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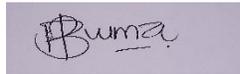
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## DECLARATION

I, Ms. Mercy Bvuma declare as follows:

That, **Black Feminism: A critique of the Stereotypical Representations of Black Women in African-American Comedy Films: A case study of selected Tyler Perry films** is my own work, that all sources used have been acknowledged through accurate referencing. Furthermore, I declare that the work described in this thesis has not been submitted to UKZN or other tertiary institution for purposes of obtaining an academic qualification, whether by myself or any other party.

Signed

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'Bvuma' with a stylized initial 'B'.

Date 09 May 2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

The media has a potential to raise consciousness, and to educate audiences. It also has a responsibility to shape public opinions and attitudes, but film critics have found that the media, specifically television and films are often doing the exact opposite.

Culture, gender, media and film scholars such as Young (1996) argue that the production of arts and culture still raises critical issues of sexism, racism, discrimination, domination and subordination. Black women have often been depicted negatively particularly in films. From the 1960s, particularly in the USA, Black women formed civil and human rights groups to challenge their White counterparts because of the racism, sexism and economic oppression they suffered in the hands of White men, Black men and White women. It was only then that Black feminists and film critics such as hooks, Hill-Collins and Gordon critically emphasized the issues surrounding the representation of Black women in films.

The study reveals that Tyler Perry, a top Black American filmmaker, portrays Black women in a negative stereotypical manner in all three of his films selected for analysis. These films convey a message that Black women are weak, dishonored and uneducated, thus perpetuating the already existing stereotypes about Black people and Black women.

### **Key words**

Black women, Stereotypes, racism, sexism, economic oppression, Comedy, representation, intersectionality, Feminism, Jezebel, Tragic Mullata, Mammy.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and aims of study

Tyler Perry (born 1969) is an enormously successful African-American contemporary artist and cultural entrepreneur whose prodigious creativity is measured by scores of films, plays, and television series he has mostly produced, directed, written and even acted in himself, including a TV series partnership with the Oprah Winfrey Network. He is even an accomplished songwriter. Unsurprisingly, in 2011 he was the highest paid man in the entertainment industry.

My interest was drawn to his films because, despite being such a powerful role model for other young African-Americans, he had a traumatic childhood over which he triumphed. Moreover, with a huge and devoted following amongst the African-American community, there has ironically been increasing criticism of the allegedly stereotypically sexist (and even racist) manner in which his female Black characters (including Madea, a character often played by himself) are portrayed in his films. I therefore wished to critically analyse three of his 'dramedy' - *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), *Madeas Family Reunion* (2006), and *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009) - from a Black feminist theoretical perspective, which also includes a specific Black feminist contribution to film theory, most notably found in the work of bell hooks. I was drawn to this particular variant of feminist theory because it placed on the agenda the particular experiences of Black women, which were argued to be distinct from White feminists; because Tyler Perry works within the African-American community; and because I am a Black woman interested in gender issues, especially in relation to the media traditions.

This is a cross-sectional study done over a year. The researcher collected data (Film DVD's) through buying them at the local music store, while journal articles, books, the internet and conference articles were acquired from local as well as international libraries via interlibrary loans to make the study feasible.

## **1.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **1.2.1 Feminism and film**

Feminist film theory 'aims to expose the ideological operations of patriarchy at work within textual and institutional practices' (McCabe 2004: 12), and began in 1975 when Laura Mulvey published her essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema', in the avant-garde *Screen journal*. This article was not only a major encouragement to using psychoanalysis (of both Freud and Lacan) in critical film analysis, but was also the first major example of feminist film theory, which would continue to make a major impact to this day (despite the waning of psychoanalytic film criticism). For Mulvey, the dominant Hollywood cinema worked within a complex and connected series of 'looks' (of the camera, of the audience, of characters looking at one another) to generate the cinematic subject-position of what she famously described as the 'male gaze' with which male audiences identified, and whose voyeuristic phallographic power reduced women in films to mere objects of desire. Men were the (active/dominant) 'bearers of the look', while women were coded as (passive/subordinated) 'to-be-looked-at-ness', an erotic spectacle outside the narrative momentum of the film (which men 'make happen'): "The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed" (Mulvey 1975: 23).

De Lauretis, following Althusser, categorizes gender as an 'ideologico-technological production' whose function is to constitute 'concrete individuals as men and women' (de Lauretis 1987: 6), an important technology of gender being cinema. This process has most commonly been described within (Feminist) Film theory, as involving identification and suture, (Heath 1981; Silverman 1983): viewers are 'stitched' into the subject-positions films construct for them through an

imaginary identification with a fictional character which, in the case of gender, typically involves women identifying with a limiting, stereotyped and patriarchal notion of what it is to be female, such as the glamour goddess, the femme fatale, and the self-sacrificing mother (Cook 1975/1988; Haskell 1987; Rosen 1973). Indeed, for Claire Johnston (1973/2000), women in films have been semiotically transformed into ideological ‘myths’ serving the dominant patriarchal culture.

## **1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.3.1 Feminism**

Feminism, specifically ‘second-wave’ feminism, inaugurated by Simone du Bouvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), but fully taking off in the radical 1960s (Germaine Greer 1971; Kate Millet 1970), rapidly broke up into a host of tendencies (radical/separatist, marxist/socialist, liberal, womanism, etc.). It is perhaps best understood as the struggle to expand what Laclau and Mouffe (1985a; 1985b; 1990) call the ‘radical democratic imaginary’: the discourse of equality, freedom and human rights launched by the American and French revolutions, and which in subsequent centuries becomes a liberatory discourse claimed by a succession of social groups, including women, suffering the oppressions of being entangled in an unequal relation of power (here specifically patriarchal power). As Annette Kuhn put it, second wave feminism is broadly “a set of political practices founded in analyses of the social/historical position of women as subordinated, oppressed or exploited either within dominant modes of production [such as capitalism] and/or by the social relations of patriarchy or male domination” (1985: 4). Although there is now – a generation later – a ‘third wave’ feminism (Krolokke and Sorensen 2006: 12), feminist film theory was developed during the above ‘second wave’, which is what this thesis will draw upon.

### **1.3.2 Black Feminism**

Black feminist thought can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes black women’s every day, taken-for-granted knowledge ...it affirms, rearticulates, and

provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists...[ and] aims to empower African American women and stimulate resistance ( Collins 2000: 32).

Black feminism became prominent in the United States from the 1980s, in the wake of militant anti-racist struggles developing from the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, emerging from what was perceived to be an ideological blindness within mainstream (now seen as 'White') feminism to the specificity of Black women's issues. As bell hooks argued, "When Black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on Black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on White women. Nowhere is this more evident than in the vast body of feminist literature" (hooks 1981/2015: 21). For Brewer it is the over-determined articulations of Black women's multiple oppressions that require a 'polyvocal' Black feminist theory: "gender as a category of analysis cannot be understood decontextualized from race and class in Black feminist theorizing. Social constructions of Black womanhood and manhood are inextricably linked to racial hierarchy, meaning systems and institutionalization" (Brewer in James and Busia 1993: 17).

Of course, the category of social class was sadly not always to the front of Black feminist writings. This is not the case for bell hooks. Not all Black women are members of the working class, but many black women form part of the working class in the USA, although as can be seen in this passage by Doane, the subaltern class position of many Black women is often ignored:

Black woman. Her position becomes quite peculiar and oppressively unique: in terms of oppression, she is both Black and a woman; in terms of theory, she is neither (1991: 231).

This racialized feminism 'way of seeing' had a range of important intellectual and political consequences. Firstly, it created a fissure within the women's movement, identifying the concerns of White and Black women to be seriously different from each other. Moreover, it similarly tore a hole in the Black solidarity movement fighting against American racism, because now Black women are not only oppressed as blacks by White America, but also by Black (and White)

patriarchy. Black men were seen to be oppressing Black women, alongside White males and even White feminists. Black feminism has gone through many trials, including challenging proponents of White feminism, and “radical liberation” proponents, in order for them to follow the “intersectional nature of racism, sexism and class oppression” (Valk 2008:3).

Simien (2004:324) affirmed this statement:

Black feminist consciousness is the recognition that African American women are status deprived because they face discrimination based on both race and gender.

In this thesis, it is important to include Black feminism as a theory because it gives the study analytical tools to explore the possibility of a Black American male filmmaker depicting Black women in stereotypically sexist ways.

## **1.4 MAIN RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The main research problem is to identify and critique the various negative stereotypes about African-American women appearing in a selection of Tyler Perry’s contemporary dramedy films.

### **1.4.1 Related Research questions:**

- Why is the theory of black feminism important when analyzing black films?
- What is the purpose of stereotypes in media, particularly cinema?
- How do the films selected represent negative patriarchal stereotypes about black women?
- Is Mulvey’s “male gaze”, or hooks’ oppositional gaze demonstrated in the films; if so how?

## **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Research Methods**

The research employs qualitative narrative and thematic analysis as methods of analysing data. According to Hepper, Wamphold and Kivlighan Jr. (2007:258), qualitative researchers are dedicated to understanding details of a particular case and embedding their research findings in an ever-changing world, therefore the use of methodological triangulation is vital. This is when a researcher uses multiple methods to study a single research problem (Barker and Angelopulo 2006: 349).

Qualitative research understands things such as human behaviour, experiences and even opinions that are rather indefinable and unquantifiable methods of collecting data. According to Stake (2010:15), qualitative research is interpretive, meaning that it is based on the meanings constructed to articulate human affairs as observed from a range of different positions that therefore defy any claim to ‘objectivity’. It is situational where its contexts are fully described (in-depth), and it is finally subjective (as is always the case with ‘interpretation’), where issues are often “emic (emerging from the people) than etic (brought by researcher)”, and most of the times the researcher would be the main research instrument (Stake 2010:15). These methods will be discussed further in Chapter four.

The application of these methods and the broader theories enabled a richer understanding of the ways Tayler Perry uses in his ‘dramedy’ films historical stereotypes of African-American women that emerged in slavery. These denigrating and limiting representations of African-American women perpetuate a virulently patriarchal ideology of this community.

## **1.6 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION**

The dissertation comprises six Chapters. Subsequent to this chapter, is chapter two, which discusses the literature that the researcher analysed in order to come to the main theory, which is discussed in chapter three. Chapter four discusses the various methodologies employed in the study, while chapter five argues the findings of the study. The final chapter (six) concludes the entire study by confirming and/or rejecting the hypothesis, then suggesting recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEWING THEORIES ADDRESSING BLACK CONCERNS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The study analyses the following key aspects: the history of African- American comedy, film studies, feminist film theory/ as well as the theory of stereotypes and popular culture. These aspects will be discussed to gain an enhanced understanding of their link to the theoretical framework from which the study draws.

Black comedy as well as a brief discussion of Perry's films will also be discussed. The films under discussion are *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), *Madeas Family Reunion* (2006), and *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009). The films were produced over a number of years, which makes it even more significant for us to understand the patterns of behaviour and equate them in order to understand the stereotypical representations of which the study argues.

##### 2.1.1 African –American Comedy: The History

Comedy is a genre of film that uses humour as a dynamic. The aim of a comedy film is to illicit laughter from the audience through humorous stories and characters. According to Whedbee (2002:9), this laughter is “often complex and ambivalent, ranging from sardonic and subversive to joyous and celebrative”. Though comedy film may take on some sympathetic and rather serious

material, most have a pleasant ending. Comedy has the tendency of becoming a fusion sub-genre because humour can be integrated into many other genres, such as drama.

Comedy film is generally understudied around the world. This is according to Bao (2008: ii) who expressed how this particular genre has “suffered from relative critical and theoretical neglect in film studies.” From the Silent period (1895-1929), to the present, comedy has always been prevalent in films. The first comedy film was produced in the United States of America arguably in 1889 or 1892 and was called *Fred Otts’ Sneeze* (Horton 1991:25). The silent era was predominated by physical actions, slapstick or clown performances (Kuhn & Westwell 2012:378). This era was not entirely silent because orchestral music would mostly play in the background. Around the 1930s, the sound era evolved and brought about another genre in comedy, the dialogue-based genre that was often referred to as the era of the “talkies”. This genre “foregrounded both the art of spoken language and the nuances of class- based relationships” (Beach 2002: 1-2). The transition from the silent to the sound era took place because critics saw how primitive the silent era was, and that it demanded greater attention to the screen by an audience. An audience had to watch visuals attentively without words and explanations while films with sound brought about change in terms of the concentration on the visuals by the audience. One could look the other way but because of the sound and spoken words, still be able to comprehend (Farwell 2008:55).

There are many different types of comedy genres, which one can find in films: Anarchic comedy,<sup>1</sup> Black comedy,<sup>2</sup> action comedy,<sup>3</sup> and slapstick comedy,<sup>4</sup> are some of the more popular genres. African-American humour or “Black humour”<sup>5</sup> has its roots in the early 1900s and has always

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<sup>1</sup> Anarchic comedy refers to humour which is somewhat exaggerated and absurd. According to Haut (2007:33), this type of comedy is the “rejection of social order”.

<sup>2</sup> “Black comedy” is comedy which has openly or overtly “explored the trials and tribulations of African-American communities”( Haggins 2007:2).

<sup>3</sup> Action comedy is a somewhat uneasy infusion of conflict and humour. Action plays a more important role in this genre (Sarno 2005:3).

<sup>4</sup> According to Rischel (2002:112), this type of genre comedy (slapstick comedy) is exaggerated “physical humour”. It includes a lot of “boisterous” kicks, punches, slaps, shoving and it extremely visual.

<sup>5</sup> “Blackhumour” also called “grotesque” constitutes sarcasm with mostly disturbing images or topics (Rischel 2002:172).

been a mystery for “mainstream” Americans. This can be related to “Blaxploitation/black<sup>6</sup> cinema” which just about completely refers to African-American cinema. Black humour has its roots in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when blacks arrived in the USA as slaves. Watkins (1999:4), who states that during those times, Black humour was nothing but confusing and often mysterious to Whites, argues this. They (White people) could not understand what blacks found amusing to a point that if they found a group of Black people laughing, they would literally be in trouble. This is how paranoid White people were with the “Black laughter”. In the Southern towns of America, White people were so determined to regulate Black expressiveness that they installed large drums or what they called “barrels” marked “for coloured only” (meaning for blacks only) in the city square. These barrels were used by “Negroes” as Black people were referred to, who felt the need to laugh, and were required to shove their heads into the barrels. It was not until the 1980s when Black laughter lost most of the hostile implications it once had. Like Black music such as rap music, Black humour too became part of the “ordinary” American culture that could be seen on prime television (Watkins 1999: 4). What constitutes Black humour is questionable, though scholars such as Breton (1997: vi) argue that Black humour is the opposite of wit or sarcasm and joviality. He argues that it is “always green around the edges”, meaning that it is partly chilling and partly sarcastic or ironical (Breton 1997: vi). Also called “Grotesque”<sup>7</sup> humour, Black humour in its long history, to the current stand-up comedies has always made people laugh but at the same time has “repulsive and shocking” elements (Rishel 2002:172). Black humour combines peculiar imagery with unsettling topics such as death, diseases and even war, and mainly has two purposes: to make fun of emotional preconceptions and “conformist thought, as well as to voice a moral hopelessness for our meaningless, irrational life” (Rischel 2002:172). Black comedy and Black humour work interchangeably. One cannot refer to one without the other, because Black comedy deals with the trials and hardships that Black people have endured, while Black humour deals with the fun and irony these people conformed to, to ease their pain brought about by these harsh living conditions. According to O’Neill (1983:145), there is no general agreement as to what “Black humour” is, but different writers use the term to mean, “humour which is variously grotesque,

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<sup>6</sup> “Blaxploitation/Blackcinema is a traditional conceptualisation of cinema emanating from Black “diasporic” communities in the USA (Hayward 2000:35).

<sup>7</sup> The word “grotesque” is another, early name, for Black humour. It comes from the bizarre underground paintings (grotte) found in ancient Roman ruins (Rishel 2002:172).

macabre, sick, pornographic, scatological, cosmic, ironic, satirical, absurd, or any combination of these”. Thus in the context of this study, both terms will be used interchangeably.

### **2.1.2 Feminism: The History**

According to Offen (1988:123), feminism began in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, with the focus being on votes for women, “with an end to the improvement and granting of equal rights similar to those of men”. Feminists also believe in discontinuing the stereotypical representations of women. According to Nelmes (2012:269) feminists believe that the media is an influential factor in perpetuating a narrow range of stereotyped images of women. These representations contribute to the narrow-mindedness of how women should behave or even encourage particular expectations of women which are conceivably restrictive, such as that women are always based in the home and that they are always inferior to men.

According to Krolokke and Scott Sorensen (2006: 1), there are three waves of feminism. The First wave feminism, which arose in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States as well as Europe, was mainly concerned with women accessing equal opportunities. Then came the second wave feminism, which emerged initially in the 1960s and 1970s in “postwar Western societies”. During the 1980s and 1990s, this particular wave of feminism took a huge turn whereby women of colour and “third-world women” took initiative to empower themselves and fight for their rights. From the 1990s onward came forth the third wave feminism which manifested itself in “yuru” rhetoric challenging the notion of “universal womanhood” and accepting diversity, ambiguity and “transversal theory and politics” (Krolokke and Scott Sorensen 2006: 2) . This means problematizing women’s homogeneity and strengthening the solidarity of feminists beyond borders and boundaries.

### **2.1.3 The Feminist film theory**

The feminist film theory originates from second wave feminism, and plays an integral part in this study. According to Kaplan (200:1), feminist perspectives enrich film study. This is because the

word 'feminist' "implies a particular stance vis- à-vis women: it implies concern with gender difference in general, by taking up the perspectives of woman specifically". Although feminism is concerned with the liberation of women, it also concerns itself with issues concerning men. Feminist film theory also includes the study of masculinity in cinema, an area that initially began in Britain in the 1980s is being followed in America to this day (Kaplan 2009:1). To date, there is no clear-cut definition of feminist criticism, but since its inception its theorists and practitioners have all agreed that it is a "corrective, unmasking the omissions and distortions of the past, the errors of a literary critical tradition that arise from and reflect a culture created, perpetuated and dominated by men" (McDowell 1980: 153). As in the case of films, produced and perpetuated by men.

Feminist film theory was developed around the 1970s and has contributed vastly to the understanding of gender identity as well as sexual difference (McCabe 2004:2) with the aim of transforming the entirety of women's condition and not just an aspect unlike many "suffragette" movements (Chaudhuri 2006:4). This is also supported by Kaplan (2000: 1), who asserts that during this period, women from different countries resisted ostracism of any form and stood for what they believed in. These women resisted their "social, political, and intellectual marginalizing, their silencing in patriarchal cultures and set about producing new knowledge", including cinema.

Today, many believe that the work of feminism is over, especially within film studies where there has been mixed reactions against feminist film theory due to its abstract concepts and complex language. However, Chaudhuri (2006:1) states that there is so much to be attained from feminist film theory because it can add great value to people's experiences of films, by giving "valuable tools for analysis". It is for this reason that since its inception, its concepts has been changing and been deeply involved in "critical" debates as well as getting involved in the development of film production.

There are seven key feminist film concepts that I have identified (not all concepts will be explained) : the male gaze, the female voice, technologies of gender, queering desire, the monstrous feminine, masculinity in crisis, and the "oppositional gaze" (Chaudhuri 2006:11). The seminal works of Mulvey focus on the "male gaze" and demonstrates how the use of

psychoanalysis can be a “political weapon” to reveal how the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form (Mulvey 1989c:14). This is of particular importance in analysing Perry’s directorial “male gaze”. This political use of psychoanalysis enables Mulvey to “turn her focus from the mere description of woman as spectacle to the male psyche whose needs the spectacle serves” (Chaundhuri 2006:33). A woman stands in a masculine culture as a signifier for the ‘male other’. A man can live out his fantasies and obsessions, by imposing them on the silent image of a woman, “who is at that time still tied to her place only as a bearer of meaning, not as maker of meaning” (Mulvey 1989c:58). This complements Mulvey’s concept of the “paradox of phallocentrism” (a belief that male sex is superior) which is dependent on the “castration of women” to give meaning and order to the world.

Mulvey draws from Freud’s theory of sexuality, the notion of ‘scopophilia’ or ‘pleasure in looking’ (Freud 1991b:70). In its active aspect, scopophilia is associated with taking other people as sexual objects, “subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” as with voyeurism (Mulvey 1989c:16). de Lauretis (1987:129,131) argues that through proposing the destruction of narrative and visual pleasure and through avoiding a “politics of emotions”, by problematising the “female spectator’s identification with the on-screen image of women”, Mulvey did no justice to the “redefinition of aesthetic and formal knowledge”, especially considering how woman’s cinema has been involved in the adjustment of vision.

Feminist film critiques have come up with new approaches within the field and these have impacted greatly beyond Western film theory (Chaundhuri 2006:2). According to de Lauretis (1987: 132 -133), films can be critical spaces for analysis, a “horizon of possible meanings”. This includes ‘active’ spectators who are able to extend their thoughts beyond the fiction in film. This can be done by either following the two “logics” or modes of feminine, (that of the camera, and that of the woman filmed), and perceiving them to be “equally and concurrently true”, or perhaps making decisions on whether or not to believe the message implied through the film.

In explaining the other concepts such as the female voice, critics such as Silverman (1990:309) argue that cinema is obsessed with the sounds produced by the female voice rather than just ways in which a woman is constructed for the “male gaze”. According to Silverman (1988:141), the female voice coexists with the female body though at its price of “entrapment” and being disadvantaged. The female voice is also important in terms of “cinematic authorship”. This is

where the female voice is hampered due to reasons such as having unequal opportunities in the film industry, and depriving women filmmakers within production deprives them of their voices as well as authority and recognition where “female subjectivity is inscribed in cinema” (Silverman 1988:202). According to de Beauvoir, (1984:174) women have no stable meaning. “She is a false infinite, an ideal without truth” (de Beauvoir 1984:218). This patriarchal ideology then ceaselessly creates an idea of a woman as a projection of male fantasies with anxieties of “phallogentric otherness and masculine lack” (Mc Cabe 2004:4), which translates into masculine myths where a woman “may be all that a man desires and all that he cannot attain” (de Beauvoir 1984:229). In films, the fantasies and subconscious needs of their mostly male creators are expressed (Smith in Thornham 1999:15). Millet (2000:55) describes women as beings that are always “denigrated” through any contact be it personal or through media images, and that they suffer “minority status and a marginal existence”. According to Nelmes, (2012:263) film represents images, and these images are highly intense, they are symbolic and they are stimulating. These images “have super- powered meanings” and in most films “perception takes precedence over truth” (Manchel 1990: 209). This means audiences believe what they see, and if women are portrayed in films as nonentities, this perception is then ultimately validated by society.

Since the study is based on African-American women it is only proper to include Black feminist film critic, bell hooks, who identifies a resistant “oppositional gaze” associated with Black and female viewers. This gaze is mainly associated with Black female spectators and their desire to look; the willingness not only to look, but for the look to change “reality”. This “look” or gaze can however also be associated with Black people in general, since slaves had a desire to look and they did, even though it was just a sneak peek. The attempts to repress Black people’s right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze” (hooks 1992:116). Influenced by the work of Foucault, who insists on describing domination in terms of “power relations”, hooks states that one should have the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination, opening up the “possibility of agency”. Unlike Mulvey, who refers to the ‘male gaze’ as an entirely dominant way of seeing that allows no active resistance, hooks refers to the ‘Black gaze’, which allows for the concept of resistance and ‘looking back’ at the oppressor. According to hooks (1992:118), Black looks have always been interrogating looks

and in racist America, the Black male gaze was subject to punishment by the “White other”. Black women were aware of the “cinematic racism” as well as the violent erasure of Black womanhood:

Even when representations of Black women were present in film, our bodies and being were there to serve – to enhance and maintain White womanhood as object of the phallogentric gaze. (hooks 1992: 119)

In her book, *Feminism for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000), hooks criticizes feminism and perhaps its White association. She asserts that privileged – class White women in the United States of America are of the impression that feminism is White and belongs to White women or they are “owners of the movement”, while the rest of the world, more especially “third world” feminists are / should become followers. hooks asserts that these White women are colonizing in their thinking in terms of racism, class elitism and sexism toward the less powerful groups of women in their society or women worldwide. These women want to lead the feminist movement and set agendas for “all the women in the world” especially third world countries. (hooks 2000: 44-45). With that said, it clearly shows that feminism has many levels or spheres.

This controversial representation of Black women has always been an issue. According to hooks (1981:52) every day, “twenty-four hours a day” one has to learn and deal with the sad reality of how Black women are perceived in American television. According to Anderson (1997:11, 61, 85), African-American women were classified according to three characters: the ‘Mammy’; the Tragic Mulatta; and the ‘Jezebel’ / Topsy Figure. These stereotypical depictions of African-American women have continued since the 19th century, and are sustained to this very day. The study will be based on these key stereotypes, which will be central to the analysis of Perry’s films and characterizations.

#### **2.1.4 Stereotypes**

According to Raïrez Berg (2002: 13), no single “unified” concept of the term stereotype can be found. Thus exploring the many perspectives from various researchers can assist in gaining a deeper understanding of the concept. American journalist Walter Lippmann in his 1922 book titled *Public Opinion* was the first to coin the concept. Lippmann’s interest was on how individuals

reacted to people of different races and countries, and he thought of stereotypes as “pictures in our heads” or mental constructs of the people in the social groups around us (Stanger 2000: 6). This is also affirmed by Ramirez Berg (2002:14) who stated that Lippmann termed these generalizations made by an in-group (Us) about an out-group (Them) ‘mental constructs’, “They/Them” being inferior “incomplete and “imperfect” while “Us” being superior. He also distinguished between the two elements, which make out “bad” stereotyping. The first one is “*ethnocentrism*” where one’s own group is the centre of everything while others are more or less related with reference to it. The second element is “*prejudice*” which means judging others as inferior based on the ethnocentrically defined differences. Prejudice holds that “They” are naturally not as clean, civilized, trustworthy, honorable, religious, or decent as “Us” because of their skin color, food, culture etc. (Ramirez Berg 2002:15).

To sum up negative stereotypes, Ramirez Berg (2002:15) identifies them as categorizing of people in an undesirable and derogatory manner:

*Category making + ethnocentricity + prejudice = Stereotypes.*

According to Lippmann (1922:3), humans simplify reality all the time, as reality is very complex. “Stereotypes are simplified pictures in our heads. These pictures could be about people or even events in the world”. Lippmann argues that our actions are not really well informed of the ‘real’ world because the ‘real’ world is too complex, too big and too short-lived for direct acquaintance. Hence, people typically develop generalised concepts that enable them to engage with the world: “so in order for us to cope, we construct these ‘pictures’ or ‘Images’ of the environment” (Lippmann 1922:16). The problem begins when certain groups of people are negatively stereotyped.

Perkins (in O’Sullivan and Jewkes 1997:76) however differs with many social scientists including Lippmann in defining the term stereotypes. She asserts that stereotypes are like “symbols”. She then gives an example of a “dumb blonde”. Does this only refer to the woman’s hair colour? According to Perkins (1997), this immediately refers to the woman’s sex, her status in society, and even to her relationship with men or perhaps her incapability to think and behave rationally. Therefore they are not simple as assumed but actually complex (Perkins 1997:77). According to Perkins, these stereotypes are examples of “shared cultural meanings”. This means that they have

everything to do with socialization (norms, values of culture) as this is where they draw their strength (1997:78). Dyer (1993: 13) who supports Lippmann's notion that stereotypes are defined fundamentally by their social function also maintains this. They refer to the world and the way we express our values and beliefs. Perkins (1997: 80) sums up her argument with the following characteristics of a stereotype:

- a. *A group concept*: It describes a group. Personality traits (broadly defined) predominate.
- b. *It is held by a group*: There is a very considerable uniformity about its content. Cannot have a 'private' stereotype.
- c. *Reflects an 'inferior judgemental process'*: (But not therefore leading necessarily to an inaccurate conclusion.)
- d. (b) and (c) give rise to a simple *structure* which frequently conceals complexity.
- e. High probability that social stereotypes will be predominantly *evaluative* (this means that stereotypes can refer to role and status at the same time.).
- f. A concept like other concepts, it is a *selective, cognitive organizing system*, and a feature of human thought.

According to Perkins (1997: 80), these stereotypes vary, and can all be explained in terms of a group's structural position. They do not all perform the same ideological functions nor are they related to 'objective reality' in the same way. Perkins then categorizes stereotypes in the following variations:

1. *Major Structural Groups*: These include colour (black/White); gender (male/female); class (upper/ middle/ working); age (child, young/ adult/ old).
2. *Structurally Significant and Salient Groups*: ethnic groups, scientists and artists, adolescents in the 1950s and mothers –in-law.
3. *Isolated Groups*: These include social and geographic isolation. American Indians, Gays and Lesbians.
4. *Pariah Groups*: Blacks, Gays, Junkies. Groups here may also belong to another group, perhaps between groups 1-3.
5. *Opponent Groups*: These differ to others in so far they are often developed by protesting, deviant or oppressed groups about their opponents. They can be divided into

other subgroups like *counter stereotypes*, for example, male chauvinist pig; and *blanket stereotypes*: all White people are right-wingers.

6. *Socially/ Ideologically Insignificant Groups*: herdsman, milkmen or maybe even a domestic worker.

In her argument, Perkins clearly makes distinctions between the different types of stereotypes and this helps us better understand and associate these stereotypes in terms of the groups in which she categorizes people. With that said, we can conclude by stating that stereotypes are ideologies that groups of people hold about other groups. Dyer in Marris and Thornham (1999: iv) argues that stereotypes express a ‘general’ agreement about a social group, and it is from the stereotype that we get “our ideas about these social groups”. These social groups range from gender to race.

In this study, feminist and black feminist theories have enabled a more precise critical understanding of stereotypes in the representations of women and African-American women. As we saw with Mulvey, the ‘male gaze’ identifies the patriarchal power to define women, and this is done to portray women as sexualized and passive, existing solely for the pleasures of the dominating (voyeuristic) male viewer. This phallogocentric projection of male fantasies limit the possibilities of women in all their potential diversities and need to act upon the world to transform themselves. Stereotypes are therefore powerfully ideological, containing the more liberatory potentialities of women. hooks extends this phallogocentric stereotyping gaze to include Black women, to enable a deeper understanding of race and gender (and often social class) in Black women’s oppression. hooks also, and importantly, introduces the ‘oppositional gaze’ into her analysis, which is the agentic and challenging gaze of the oppressed.

The study discusses the three main stereotypes under which Perry portrays Black women in his films. The ‘Mammy’ personifies the obedient Black mother Figure in White homes. The ‘Jezebel’ is the whore and “sexually aggressive Black woman” (Hill-Collins 1990:73), and the ‘Tragic Mullata/o’ who is neither Black nor White, is an “ill-fated in-between figure who is supposedly “better” than Blacks because she is of a lighter skin complexion and apparently “closer to Whites” (Fabi 2001:2). These figures will be discussed at great length in Chapter 5.

### 2.1.5 Ethnic (Cultural) and Gender Stereotypes

The study also asserts that stereotypes are mostly ethnic and gender based. According to Fujioka (1999: 53), ethnic stereotypes are usually developed and learned culturally, although they can change through personal experience through contact with stereotyped group members. This contact then leads to the 'contact hypothesis' which assumes that "positive personal contact produces a favorable change in racial attitudes and promotes interracial respect and liking" (Fujioka 1999: 53).

When interracial contact helps develop a mutual relationship between members of the two ethnic groups (e.g. Whites and African-Americans), as Berg has argued, we may expect one's other's racial attitude to be improved (Fujioka 1999:53).

This means that stereotypes such as racism are not innate, but learned reactions that are passed from generation to generation.

Undesirable television portrayals of a certain nationality and/ gender (African- Americans and Black women in this case), can have adverse effects on the manner in which these individuals are treated in reality. The social cognitive theory assumes that indirect learning via television takes place through a sequence of perceptive or cognitive processes including "attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation" (Fujioka 1999: 56). The social cognitive theory also suggests that peoples' evaluations and interpretations, (whether positive or negative) of television, messages "affect consequences of television viewing". These television messages must therefore be "cognitively processed, evaluated and interpreted by viewers before any influence occurs" (Fujioka 1999: 56). What audiences see about a particular group of people on television, and how they interpret the messages (pleasant and unpleasant), holds a great significance for the formation of stereotypes.

In terms of gender stereotypes, binary categories of femininity or womanliness are frequently shown where women are represented as weak, unable to defend themselves, and incapable to take control of their lives, and reliant on men (masculinity). This is where Mulvey (1989) argues about the objectification of women (the gaze). The female remains a passive image for the active male to look at her. Mulvey (1989:19) quotes:

The presence of a woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.

## **2.2 SUMMARY**

The chapter was built on the Literature Review on which the study is based. The history of African–American comedy that illustrated the importance of comedy film was discussed. From the silent era to what we know as comedy today, the study examined black humour and black comedy and their relevance to this study.

The origins of feminism, and the feminist film theory was outlined to give a sense of the major theory on which the study is based (Black Feminism). Perkins' (1997) theory of stereotypes and her analyses of them was summed up and categories with which she classifies them were also outlined. The following chapter discusses the main theories of the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORIZING BLACK FEMINISM AND CULTURE

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The theory chosen for this study is Black feminism as Black feminism is associated with the struggle of Black woman in the United States of America. This statement is confirmed by Anderson (2008: 7), who asserted that after World War II and the emergence of the civil rights activity and protests, Black women tried to maintain their struggles through their continued activism. This chapter will discuss theories, which are pertinent to the theory of Black feminism.

##### 3.1.1 Black feminist theory

The African – American community has been labelled a ‘matriarchal society’ and this is evident in the three films, which are under discussion. According to Gordon (1987: viii) the issue of single Black parent families especially those headed by women is still a challenge in society. These Black women are then expected again to perform effectively in being a nurturer, a provider and a teacher to children without taking into cognizance the “constant battle against multiphase oppression” they have to go through. These women are under a “three - fold attack” or are “triple victims”. They suffer from racism, sexism and often economic deprivation (Gordon 1987: viii).

The issue of Black feminism has and still is facing challenges. Euro- American women persuaded Black women to participate in the Women’s Liberation movement, only to oppress them. The coalitions of Black and White women movements would then end up having a Eurocentric focus. The rewards as initially promised in the coalition were neglected, by not only isolating Black women, but also alienating them from their historical identity, and their efforts of liberating the African- American community. Seemingly, many Black people are still linking the feminist movement solely to the activism of bourgeois or middle - class White women and not to the

struggles which African- Americans prompted for justice, for freedom and particularly for equality (Taylor 1998:18). This misconception needs to be rectified. The history of feminism in the United States is marked by two very diverse periods or waves that are connected to two key movements in African-American history. These are the abolitionist movement which terminated with the “suffragists’ securing passage” of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 as well as the modern civil rights movement which ended with the implementation of the Title VII and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 during the 1970s.

By the 1980s, many White American women were legally made to benefit from affirmative action. For that reason, it is not surprising that many Black feminist theorists in the 1990s operated in the legal realm in order to protect the collective rights of all women and not just White women (Taylor 1998: 21). During both these massive historical periods (the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement) and the third wave that followed them, immeasurable numbers of Black women activists came together and “developed a distinctly feminist consciousness that gave them an agency to strive for empowerment on their own terms” (Taylor 1998:18). The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s also gave Black college students power to demand representation and relevance in higher education, through classes and then programs of Afro-American studies (Gordon 1987: 13). Incidentally, this renewed focus on Black American history revealed that during the period of slavery, Black women enacted an early form of feminism when they fought against nonconsensual sexual relations when they could. They resisted rape, forced pregnancies and being separated from their children on plantations. They even resorted to natural abortion methods if they had to (Springer 2002:1062).

According to Thompson (2002: 340), Black, Asian, Latina and Native American women formed the autonomous feminist movements/organisations during the early 1970s. One early Black organisation was the “Third *World Women’s’ Alliance*” which emerged in 1968 out of the *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)* chapters on the East Coast in the United States of America and focused on racism, sexism and imperialism. The prominent autonomous feminist organisation of the time, during the early 1970s was the National Black Feminist Organisation (NBFO) that was founded in 1973 by Florynce Kennedy, Doris Wright, Alice Walker and Barbara Smith amongst many other women. These and many other groups which followed in the 1970s

provided the basis for the “most far-reaching and expansive organizing by women of color in U.S history” (Thompson 200:340).

Black women have always been denied opportunities, and even ignored as writers more especially lesbian writers. White male critics, Black male critics and White women critics who “think of themselves as feminists” have ignored them. The analyses of feminist literature these people used to judge Black women writers were inconsistent. They preferred Black women to write as a group as opposed to a single Black women or Black lesbian writing. They acted as if “they did not know that Black women writers and Black lesbian writers existed” (Smith 1979: 183).

Even at this moment, I am not convinced that one can write explicitly as a Black lesbian and live to tell about it” ( Smith 1979:193).

Numerous Black feminist works have gone unpublished and unrecognized due to race, gender and class politics, and one Black feminist, Michele Wallace, confirms this:

We exist as women who are black who are feminist, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle- [our thoughts]’ ( Wallace 1975:7).

Black feminist writings between the 1970s and 1990s are similar in the sense that writings in the 1990s continue to disprove the idea that working against gender oppression is somewhat a substitute to antiracist efforts. It is a struggle to theorise a balance between both race and gender as they intersect in the United States (Springer 2002: 1059). One other noticeable aspect about Black feminist writings of then and now is that they struggle with “advocating a love for Black men while passionately hating Black sexism”. While older Black feminists are fighting against gender and racial discriminations, younger Black feminists are also joining in, through their activism, writings and contemporary music (Springer 2002:1059).

### **3.1.2 Intersectionality**

Comparable with Black feminism, the theory of intersectionality involves an intersection of race, class and gender. Although there are varied and contradicting definitions of the theory of

intersectionality, according to Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) many scholars provide the following description of the term;

Intersectionality is 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.

According to Smith (1979:185), a Black feminist approach to literature represents the realization that the politics of sex, class and race are critically intertwining factors in the works of Black women writers, and a necessity. When Black women's books are looked at or dealt with, it is usually in the context of Black literature and not within the implications of sexual politics. Even when White women look at a Black women's work, they would be biased due to subtle racial politics (Smith 1979: 185). This concurs with Gordon's (1987: 15) argument that indeed racism, sexism as well as economic oppression are prevalently entangled in America, that all three oppressive forces affect many Black women, which leaves them "drained of both creativity and vision". Hence, it has been observed that Black women at any given moment "will first report themselves to be tired and exhausted" (Gordon 1987: 15). Earlier, hooks in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), explained how these forces could have a negative impact on the image and confidence of a Black woman:

Widespread efforts to continue devaluation of black womanhood make it extremely difficult and oftentimes impossible for the black female to develop a positive self-concept. For we are daily bombarded by negative images. Indeed, one strong oppressive force has been this negative stereotype and our acceptance of it as a viable role mode upon which we can pattern our lives (hooks 1993:1).

The researcher concurs with feminists such as hooks (1984), Collins (1990) and King (1988) who argued that gender as a category of analysis cannot be 'decontextualized' from race and class -

they go hand-in-hand. Brewer (1993:17) is of the view that class is a major category of analysis in the view of the “simultaneity of oppression”. She like any other Black feminist critic believes that gender is no single category of analysis but is instead “embedded institutionally in the context of the racial and class order”. She maintains that feminism should reflect in its theory and practice, the race and class ground upon which hierarchy and inequality are built both in the USA and globally, and how these social forces work concurrently (1993:27).

The theory of Intersectionality is used as an analytical tool to explain many problems oppressed people may face. This includes social divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, which are not only evident within societies, but also, even within higher education. Here, the theory of intersectionality can be used as an analytical tool to develop strategies to deal with issues of inequality within the higher education sector. In the context of this study, intersectionality will be useful in understanding the inequality in terms of the representation of black women (race, gender) in films produced and directed by Perry.

William E. B Du Bois, an African-American intellectual, over one hundred years ago predicted that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the problem would be the “presence of color line”. This meant that the policies of colonialism as well as racial segregation were designed to separate and to rank the various “races” of man (Hill Collins 2004: 32). Although, Du Bois acknowledges race and class as social issues affecting the Black society, he did not afford gender the same “analytical importance” as race and class in explaining them. For Du Bois, “race and class constituted important systems of power that explained Black political economy, yet gender remained a far too personal identity category that described Black women’s special circumstances in dealing with fundamental oppressions of race, class and nation” ( Hill Collins 2000:42). This means that Du Bois considered race and class to be of utmost importance and basically did little, if not anything at all to address the challenges of masculine authority which Black women had to endure ( Hill Collins 2000: 43).

Unlike Du Bois, some scholars saw the significance of contemporary U.S. Black feminism, that being the importance of intersectional paradigms in explaining not only Black women’s experiences, but the general organisation of social structure and culture itself ( Hill Collins 2000: 44). Anna Julia Cooper, a prominent Black feminist thinker in her book *A Voice from the South* (1892) cited a speech she once delivered. Here Cooper addressed issues regarding poor Black

women and her belief of fighting a heroic struggle for the necessities of life, knowledge, the struggle for dignity, for bread, and for the simplest right of possession of their bodies (Cooper 1988: i). Women like Ida R. Wells-Barnett were women of substance who repudiated oppression. Born to slave parents, Wells-Barnett who struggled throughout the United States of America, campaigned not only for equal rights of Black Americans but for women's rights as well. As a professional teacher herself, she is one of those women who organized movements. She and other female struggle stalwarts "worked amidst the tensions of city politics, the birth pangs of the women suffrage movement, and the internal class and gender dynamics of an emerging black elite to affirm a place in the city" (Schechter 2001: 45). Wells-Barnett and Cooper were among the early social scientists and social analysts who dealt with the complexity of 'Jim Crow segregation'. They made significant developments in U.S literature but mostly wrote significant books as well as articles, which provided the first meticulous analyses of the country's "White racism and making the first use of the analytical language of subordination, repression and despotism". These women were pioneers in early analyses of the circumstances of White and Black women, thereby helping in developing the early U.S feminist (womanist) discourse (Feagin 2015:98).

### **3.1.3 Popular Culture**

The study briefly discusses popular culture as a theory that is relevant in film studies, particularly when using Black feminism and intersectionality theories. This is because in popular culture, identity based on ethnicity, race or class are of significance, most notably, in popular music, body art, film and television (Fedorak 2009: xii). Even though its definition is debatable to many scholars, "popular culture is found in different societies, within different groups in societies, as well as among societies and groups in different historical periods" (Strinati 1995: xiv, xv). According to Fedorak (2009: xii), culture is the most powerful and vibrant force which constantly changes in response to internal and external forces. This is because of both globalisation and modernisation which have created "more opportunities for cultural flow", though there has recently been a fear of popular culture becoming "homogenized or hybrid" given the effortlessness of communication through the internet.

According to Street (1997: 9), "popular culture makes us feel things, allows us to experience sensations that are both familiar and novel", how to respond to films and our favourite songs or

television programme, and the way we laugh, dance, and perhaps dream is popular culture. Much as it can offer forms of identity, mainly with the “politics of citizenship”, the right to belong and to be acknowledged. Popular culture can also become some form of resistance, which provides a “form of defiance, a weapon with which to deny power” (Street 1997:12). Popular culture is not exclusively dominated by the west, every cultural group is surrounded and immersed in popular culture (Ortner 1998). Kidd (2007) who states that popular culture provides collective experiences and creates the social cohesion that is the basis for all societies affirms this. It creates harmony in cultures through these shared experiences. Artifacts or symbols, for example, graphic novels, movies, drums and whistles, and children’s’ games all hold meaning and in turn, offer messages about people and their way of life (Fedorak 2009: iv). To sum up what popular culture means, Fedorak (2009:3) states;

Popular culture – the culture of our everyday lives- is present in all human groups and is much more than entertainment. It is the sum of performance, expression, and symbolism that influences and reflects human culture.

Films are popular culture, and hence the need to include this aspect into the study. The way the films have an influence on our lives, the experiences and symbolism that the films may carry, is of great significance and hence popular culture was included in the study.

## **3.2 SUMMARY**

The chapter summarises the significance of Black feminism and its brief history. This theory demonstrates how feminism is not an exclusive “Eurocentric” concept, but that Black American women stood for themselves, mostly against their White counterparts. The third wave theory made way around the 1970s when Black women were up in arms trying to defend themselves against three forces: the racial force, the gender force and the classism force. This is where the theory of Intersectionality comes into play.

This theory examines the relevance of race, gender and class in all spheres of life and that Black women all over the world have had to deal with these forces and are currently still facing such challenges. This includes amongst others, economic and political challenges. As a final

point, the study ends with the concept of popular culture and how it relates to the study. The chapter which follows discusses the methodology employed in the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (theory) of this study focused on black feminism on which the study is based, as well as the theory of intersectionality, which discusses race, gender and class. These three aspects mentioned are of utmost importance when it comes to the critiquing of the films in question. The chapter continues to discuss black feminists, and how their works have barely been recognized, and or valued (Springer 2002). Additionally, how black women have suffered not only racism and sexism, but also economic oppression as stated by (Smith 1979).

This chapter will discuss the methodology of the study taking into account the following aspects; the research questions of the study, the research design that the study employed the population of the study and its characteristics. It will then continue to discuss the data collection as well as sampling techniques, the units of analysis, the data analysis methods, the authenticity and ethical issues of the study and finally, the strengths and limitations of the study.

##### 4.1.1 Research questions

The aim of the study was to answer the following research question:

In what ways did Tyler Perry portray African-American women in his dramedy films in a negative stereotypical manner?

Sub questions:

- Why is the theory of Black feminism important when analysing black films?
- What is the purpose of stereotypes in media, particularly cinema?

- How do the films selected represent negative patriarchal stereotypes about black women?
- Is Mulvey's "male gaze", or hooks' oppositional gaze, demonstrated in the films; if so how?

## **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.2.1 Qualitative narrative analysis**

A qualitative research approach using Interpretive textual analysis techniques drawn from thematic analysis, and guided by a range of theories outlined earlier, was employed in this study of a selected number of Tyler Perry films. Qualitative research is an "umbrella term" for an extensive variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life (Saldana 2011: 3-4). The information of data collected as well as analysed in qualitative research is primarily (although not exclusively) non-quantitative in nature comprising of textual and visual materials such as photographs, video recordings, transcripts, field notes and interview transcripts that "document human experiences about others' and /or ones' self in social action and reflective states" (Saldana 2011:3). The reason for the use of this research design is that the study analysed a literary style (comedy) which has both social and cultural significance in a community. This community could be an audience who can be influenced by "culturally and demographically based discursive practices" (Bazeley 2013:202).

Qualitative narrative analysis was employed as a method of analysing data. According to Kohler Riessman (2005:1), narrative analysis includes a number of approaches of varied kinds of texts, which have in common "a storied form". What makes these texts "narrative" is their categorization and value, or what Kohler Riessman (2005:1) terms "sequence and consequence". Here events are "selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (Kohler Riessman 2005:1). The study used narrative analysis since comedy films are texts, which can be interpreted. Storytellers like Perry are able to interpret the world and "create moral tales" of how the world should be, denoting that they can, to some extent, impose and influence an audience on

social issues. Unlike other qualitative methods of data analysis which open up and at times add to existing data, narrative analysis provides a summary of the various links between the sequences of events. Meaning, the fifth sequence mirrors the first, the other sequence confirms the hypothesis of the previous, and so forth, although systematization could become problematic and irrelevant for stories with few events (Herman and Vervaeck 2001 :50). Qualitative analysis is flexible, and reduces the amount of material, in the case of this study, through thematic analysis where themes were grouped to analyse data. This means that the researcher focused on particular aspects of meaning, specifically those features that relate to the research questions. Equally, the use of narrative analysis in this study made it very permissible for the researcher to provide a categorized summary of the acquired data.

### **4.3 DEFINING THE DATA-SET**

The research focus in this study is all the films and stage plays made by Tyler Perry since 1998. The accessible data-set is the selection of films from that whole cinematic and theatrical output, which are accessible and available to the researcher for participation in the research process (Burke Johnson & Christensen 2013:292). The accessible data-set was only three films from a particular genre (dramedy) because most of Perry's films are either drama, comedy, dramedy, African-American cinema<sup>8</sup> and special interest films<sup>9</sup>.

Tyler Perry has produced more than 18 films thus far, ranging from the year 2005 to the year 2016. The study could not accommodate all the films for analysis hence only three were chosen based on the genre (comedy). The study focuses on themes from the selected films through observation.

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<sup>8</sup> Genre films exclusive to African- American cinema include Blaxploitation, Urban Drama and Urban Romance films” ( 2009: 112)

4.1.1 <sup>9</sup> “Special interest” means ‘art’ or ‘quality’ cinema ( Faulkner 2006:17)

### **4.3.1 Characteristics of the population**

The three films were chosen from different years because the study aims to compare the string of similarities, which could be drawn from the themes chosen. According to Burke Johnson & Christensen (2013: 292), in order to generalize a study to a larger target population, the researcher needs to generalize from a sample of individuals or items participating in the study to the accessible population. With that said, on the generalization process we inferred from the accessible population to the target population, therefore concluding confidently that the accessible population is representative of the target population, albeit not the entire film population especially keeping in mind the various genres his films use. The films will thus reveal conclusions from a sample and not the entire population of films by Perry.

## **4.4 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

Due to the fact that it is not financially viable, nor practical and even feasible to investigate an entire target or even an accessible population, it only makes sense to draw a sample. In sampling, the researcher selects some parts of a population to observe, so that they estimate something about the whole population (Thompson 2012:1).

The researcher collected film DVDs from a music store and selected the DVDs based on the researchers' knowledge of the films chosen. This means that the films were intentionally chosen. The three films are a combination of drama and comedy, hence 'dramedy'. The reason why these three films were specifically chosen over the others was that the other films were strictly either drama, or comedy, or action, or perhaps even crime. Moreover, because comedy is supposed to be funny from beginning to end, it was quite surprising to discover that the three films were termed under comedy and drama as opposed to just drama. In view of that dramedy films incorporate both drama and comedy, the study strived to find humour in very dire situations and circumstances in which the women were portrayed in, and the manner in which these films promulgate negative images of Black women, on Black men and typically on Black communities. The study analysed

three films from 2005-2009 with the expectation of finding similar patterns which will be explained in the findings chapter.

Non-probability sampling was used because the study employed a qualitative research design, which is viable for this sampling procedure. According to Daniel (2011: 67), other advantages of using non-probability sampling include specifics such as that the purpose of the sampling would be to provide all illustrative examples (which will be existent in the findings). The research has an exploratory purpose, which is flexible and adaptable to change, and that an extremely small sample size is used, in such a case only three films are used. This made it easier to conclude results due to the small sample size.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. The reason for the use of this technique was that the researcher knew the films prior to doing the study, which made it natural for the researcher to determine the elements that facilitates an investigation. In purposive sampling, a researcher selects a sample based on his or her own judgement about the unit of analysis, which are most representative or useful (Rubin & Babbie 2009:148). The main advantage of using this method is that it is less costly and very easily available. Similar to quota sampling, but better, much care is paid in choosing the samples, which the researcher seeks for his objectives, (Rajamanickam 2001:83). This means that the researcher can use his or her capacity as well as prior knowledge to choose a selection of (film) texts. In the case of the study, the researcher knew the films under analysis. The disadvantage of this method is that it is biased. The results depend on the “subjectivity of the researchers’ decision making”. This means that the validity of the research conclusions may be threatened. However, this can be alleviated by ensuring that there is an “internal consistency between the aims and epistemological bias of the research, and the criteria used for selecting the purposive sample” (Jupp 2006:245).

#### **4.4.1 Units of Analysis**

The units of analysis were three dramedy films made by Tyler Perry between 2005- 2009.

#### 4.4.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed because the study looked at patterns within data.

#### 4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a method used for analysing, identifying, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. “It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun and Clarke 2006:6). Thematic analysis also encompasses encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit “code”, which may be a list of themes, a multifaceted model with themes as well as indicators (Boyatzis 1998: iv –vii).

Since the study used a qualitative method of analysis, thematic analysis was relevant in that themes were chosen based on the pattern of occurrence in the films. Braun and Clarke offered a six-phase guide to doing a thematic analysis (2006:16- 23):

- **Familiarizing yourself with your data:** In this phase, it is imperative to be familiar with all aspects of you data. One needs to come to the analysis with some prior knowledge of data, and perhaps some critical interests or thoughts. (Braun and Clarke 2006: 16).
- **Generating initial codes:** this phase involves the production of initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006:18).
- **Searching for themes:** this phase involves sorting the various codes into potential themes, and organizing all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun and Clarke 2006:19).
- **Reviewing themes:** this phase involves reviewing and refining your themes (re-working a theme and creating a new theme etc.) (Braun and Clarke 2006: 20).
- **Defining and naming themes:** in this phase, you define and further refine the themes, and by the end of this phase, you can clearly define what your themes are. If this cannot be

done, then a further refinement may be needed in order to give the reader a ‘concise’, ‘punchy’ name which will instantly give the reader a sense of what the theme is about (Braun and Clarke 2006: 23).

- **Producing a report:** this last phase involves writing a report of the final thematic analysis, which will convince the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis. The themes should tell a coherent, concise, non-repetitive, logical and interesting story without unnecessary complexities (Braun and Clarke 2006: 23).

When relating the phases above with the study, themes were chosen on the extent or the number of times they occurred in the chosen films. For example, if women were sexually violated in all three films, coding through identifying a particular feature of the data would then follow, and then a theme manifested.

The advantages of using a thematic analysis is that is flexible, it is a fairly easy and quick method to learn and use, and it can produce unanticipated insights, amongst other reasons (Braun and Clarke 2006:37). A major disadvantage of using a thematic analysis is that the concept of a ‘theme’ can come across confusing to some, as it is similar to that of ‘contents’ within contents analysis. Therefore, many researchers tend to be confused between the use of thematic analysis as well as content analysis (Athanasidou and Darzi 2011: 16).

#### **4.5.1 Conformability**

Here the researcher should be able to confirm that the procedures pronounced in the research certainly took place (Stringer 2013: 94) more especially in a neutral and objective manner. Confirmability simply refers to the “degree to which others agree with the conclusions of a research project” (Walle 2015:141). Though qualitative research is exclusive, and replication is often difficult if not impossible, other researchers may or may not have had similar experiences, considering that confirmability is also “the degree to which the findings of the investigation reflect, at least in a general and intuitive way, what others have observed” (Walle 2015:141 ).

The study shows how it applied Gubas' Four Criteria for Trustworthiness (Shenton 2004:73) below:

Quality criterion	Probable provision made by researcher
<p><b>Credibility:</b> <i>Adoption of appropriate well recognized research methods.</i></p> <p><b>Transferability:</b> <i>Provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made.</i></p> <p><b>Dependability :</b> <i>Employment of “overlapping methods”</i></p> <p><i>In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated</i></p>	<p>In the case of this study, qualitative content and thematic analysis were employed.</p> <p><b><i>Examination of previous research to frame findings:</i></b></p> <p>The researcher went through a number of articles relating to the study, which will contribute vastly to the findings.</p> <p>This acknowledges the uniqueness of the initial conditions of a study. It poses questions on whether the study can be generalized. In the case of this study, the results cannot be generalised because another research technique or methodology could be used, which could yield different results.</p> <p>If similar techniques were used in the same context with the same methods for this study, will similar results be obtained? In the case of this study, similar results could</p>

<p><b>Confirmability:</b> <i>Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias</i></p>	<p>be yielded if the same techniques and methods are employed.</p> <p>This process is associated with objectivity of the researcher when doing research although the researchers' bias is inevitable most times. Here the role of triangulation is emphasised to reduce the role of investigator bias (Shenton 2004:72), hence more than one method was used to analyse data in the study.</p>
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**4.5.2 Ethical issues**

Research ethics entails moral behaviour in research contexts. Ethics can be divided into the following areas; *descriptive ethics*, which studies the behaviour of people and the ethical values they hold; *Normative ethics*, concerns itself with how an individual should behave; *Meta-ethics* asks questions about the meaning of ethical words, the justification of moral decisions and so forth. Finally, *Applied ethics* uses principle and understanding from normative ethics to solve particular moral issues in and around specific situations, (Mertens and Ginsberg (2009:6). According to Mertens and Ginsberg (2009:6) in social sciences, there are two fundamental ethical questions to ask when conducting research. The manner in which data was collected (the procedure), as well as the behaviour of scientists with respect to the research subjects. Films were being observed in this study, therefore the ethical procedure to follow was to purchase the DVDs instead of pirating them. The DVDs were then later copied to an external-harddrive where the supervisor could access them at his convenience.

## **4.6 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

### **4.6.1 Limitations of the study**

The study employed a qualitative design and could have used a quantitative research design as a supplementary method, in order to get a broader picture of how an audience of Tyler Perry films rates his work. Questionnaires or a focus group could have been used as methods of obtaining data from the audience to acquire clarity on their opinions about the films concerned.

The researcher analysed only one genre of the films, whereas they could have also analysed and compared two or three film genres of Perry's films. The results would then be generalized because a comparative analysis of three genres would have provided comprehensive conclusions about the representation of women in Perry's broader spectrum of films.

### **4.6.2 Strength of the study**

Using thematic analysis was beneficial for the study in that when themes were selected, a link based on the themes chosen from all three films was evident and made it quite easy to reach conclusions. It was evident that through the selected themes, a pattern of representation from the films manifested.

Using only Tyler Perry films was fruitful because during data analysis, it was discovered that all three films exposed similar traits in which Black women are represented in his films, a clear pattern that could be analysed. Another strength of the study was discovered in the findings chapter, where the study argues the importance of re-categorizing genres, especially focusing on producers of films, to refrain from misleading audiences with superfluous, unclear genre identities.

## **4.7 SUMMARY**

The chapter focused on explaining the research design, and defined the population that encompassed the three films, which the research focused on. The sampling methods and techniques were also described, as well as the unit of analysis. Data analysis methods including thematic analysis and their relevance to the studied was outlined. Finally, Shenton's (2004) use of Gubas' four criteria of trustworthiness was described.

The chapter that follows will clarify and interpret the findings of the research. Research questions as indicated on 4.2 will also be addressed.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETATION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings represented in the films. The three films have similarities, which only dwell on negative stereotypical representations of Black women, and the aim of the study is to reveal the stereotypes. Perry's films are pleasant to watch and very amusing. The films have positive elements such as the spiritual content, and most of the time demonstrate a happy ending. The women would enter into a form of spiritual journey and somewhat "repent" from their wicked conduct. Then there is an element of togetherness and unity where Black women will come together to resolve a pertinent and perhaps even painful issue affecting them. For example, in *Madea Goes to Jail* while Madea is in prison, she and the other inmates protect Candace (Candace) from being bullied by the giant Big Sal. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea assists Hellen to destroy Charles' house after a big fight ensued.

The study questions a genre being termed 'comedy' when genuine social issues on domestic violence are oftentimes exaggerated and considered humorous. According to Russworm (2016:2), there has been many "public rewards about the merits of his work" (Perry), but few opportunities have existed to examine productions in scholarly contexts. Many scholars argue as to whether Perry produces the 'correct' Black popular culture through his films, because "culture branders" such as film directors have a major influence in the construction of social reality. This means that these films "helps to shape the way society thinks" (McKoy 2012:127). According to McKoy (2012: 128), Tyler Perry films have an ability to create a belief system about "typical African-American behaviour", although this can be argued.

The stereotypes with which Perry portrays Black women were identified according to recurring themes, which were predominantly selected in all three films, hence the use of thematic analysis.

## 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FILMS

The three films under analysis were all written, produced and directed by Perry himself, except for *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. Darren Grant directed this film. Perry himself also starred in all three films as Madea, Uncle Joe and Brian (imdb, 2017).

### 5.2.1 *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005)

After 18 long years of marriage, things deteriorated for a rich, Black family. Charles, who had just won an award for the most extraordinary lawyer in Atlanta, wanted to divorce his wife Hellen for a younger, sexier and fairer woman. An oblivious and very happy Hellen discovered a U- Haul truck (rental van) in the driveway the same night they should have celebrated their anniversary. Her clothes were packed in the van and her wardrobe filled with new and beautiful clothes. Charles broke the news that he wanted a divorce in front of Brenda (the mistress) so that she witnessed the separation. Charles drags Hellen, who is still reluctant and in disbelief of what had just happened, out the door of their mansion where Orlando (the truck driver) awaits. Disgraced and humiliated, Hellen is then driven to her aunt Madea in the projects (similar to South African townships where poor Blacks live). After some days, Hellen opens up to her aunt about the domestic violence she had endured over the years with her husband. Hellen had remained in the marriage because she was a homemaker, and accustomed to the finer things in life. An angry gun-toting Madea and Hellen go to the couples' home and destroy everything from the mistresses' clothes, to furniture and the like. Charles eventually gets them arrested but the worst was yet to come. Madea became the 'mother-like' figure to Hellen and encouraged her to be independent. Hellen finally acquired a waitressing job. Later that year just before the divorce was finalised, a vengeful client in court leaves Charles paralysed and wheel chair bound. Even after all that she had suffered, Hellen became a 'Proverbs 31' woman (a principled woman who takes care of her husband no matter the circumstances). Charles discovered that Brenda was nothing but a gold-digger, who only wanted him for the money, but it was already too late to fix anything with Hellen as she had found new love with Orlando (Perry, 2005).

### **5.2.2 Madea's Family Reunion (2006)**

An extremely rich but yet very abusive husband Carlos and his wife Lisa are planning their top of the art wedding. Lisa like many other abused women conceals the fact that her husband to - be is an abusive monster who would preferably alienate her from her family. Lisa ultimately confronts her mother (Victoria) about this unhealthy relationship but the mother refused to listen because she was a woman of 'class', and according to her, one could not 'abandon' a wealthy partner no matter the consequences. Lisa was her mothers' favourite daughter unlike her sister Vanessa who became a victim of abuse from childhood. Vanessa's stepfather (Lisa's father) constantly raped her in her mother's presence, and according to Victoria, Vanessa, who became a single parent of two, was just a failure. Vanessa finally met the handsome Frankie who changed her life completely. Days before the wedding, Lisa runs to Madea for protection against her fiancé, and when the day of the wedding finally comes, Lisa defends herself against this man and calls off the wedding. Instead of things falling apart, things work out well for Vanessa and Frankie who wed on that particular day.

### **5.2.3 Madea Goes to Jail (2009)**

Madea, a key character in all discussed films is arrested for a high-speed freeway chase and gets a five-year sentence. Before that, she was arrested for causing trouble at the grocery store, where she flipped over a woman's car. She got reprieve there, but this reprieve was short lived when she sped off on the freeway and got re-arrested. She and seven other prisoners who were collectively called the 'Georgia seven' were wrongfully sentenced. This group included Candace, a prostitute and drug addict who grew up in the same neighborhood as Joshua the attorney. Candace's life changed for the worse when a football team known to Joshua gang-raped her many years ago. She then became a sex slave to a man she 'trusted' who later led her to drugs and prostitution. Candace was arrested for prostitution. During her court appearance, she meets Joshua who decided to hand over her case to Linda his fiancée, and supposedly 'reputable' and 'best' district attorney. It was later discovered that Linda's bright legal career was built on lies, deceit and manipulating the

system in order to win cases. She was the one who got the ‘Georgia seven’ unjustly sentenced on their respective cases. In prison, Madea befriended, and protected Candace, Dona and TT by becoming a “motherly” figure to them. Eventually, they were all acquitted.

### **5.3 LANGUAGE AND ITS USE**

Most characters in Perry’s films speak African-American or Black English, which is oftentimes not accepted in mainstream America due to being perceived as belonging to a lower social class (Rickford and Rickford 2000:93) . This distinctive lexicon or vocabulary (perhaps even another dialect of English usually spoken by Black African-Americans) is so powerful that it can bring groups of people together, and serve as a categorizing device between groups.

“One of the many fascinating features of Black vocabulary is how sharply it can divide Blacks and Whites, and how solidly it can connect Blacks from different social classes” (Rickford and Rickford 2000:93). The “N” word for example is acceptable when used by Black people towards each other, but completely unacceptable and racist when used by other races addressing Black people. Many US-citizens of African descent speak this distinctive variety of English, which has been referred to as Non-Standard Negro English, Negro Dialect, Black English, African- American English, African- American Vernacular English (AAVE), and Ebonics to name a few. According to Durgut (2009:3), the term vernacular refers to “the everyday language spoken by a community, often a non-standard variety”. This English is usually for the uneducated. Dillard (2014) outlines the roots of Black English Vernacular (BEV) as that which originates from slavery. According to Dillard (2014: 60-85 ) slaves from different parts of West Africa who spoke different languages were brought together so that it would be difficult for them to communicate and therefore not challenge their owners. These slaves eventually developed a pidgin language to communicate with each other as well as their White owners. Progressively, this pidgin or creolized language became a norm and eventually expanded from one generation to the next as a mother tongue. This creole was then modified over time in a process called decreolization to become more like other diversities of English, and hence many African-Americans still speak that way today (Durgut 2009:7).

In all three films under analysis, Madea used coarse language and blasphemy in her vocabulary. Words such as “What the hell” and “damn well” were used so recurrently, and she even used words like “Lord have Mercy”, “help me Jesus” and “Praise the Lord” often irreverently, and in situations that are otherwise considered unfitting and unwarranted. In this scene from *Madea Goes to Jail*, Madea argued with one of the bullies in prison and exclaims, “Get the hell up the table and go on now”; “ I guess nobody told ya that I’m Madea, MA to the damn DEA you understand that” (Perry, 2009). In another scene from *Madea Goes to Jail*, Uncle Joe was seen talking to his niece Cora that her mother Madea has been running away from the police because “she a popo ho. When the Police come, she run like a ho” (Perry, 2009). In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Madea opened the door for Hellen while waving her gun in the air and said, “I always open the door with the gun at this time of night. Aint’ nothing but a crackhead out of police knockin’ on your door this time of night. What ya doing here this late? You live in a mansion on the other side of town, wat the hell ya doing in the ghetto?” (Perry, 2005). These are just a few examples of her ‘uncouth’ vocabulary.

Madea was noted to be a “dim-witted” and illiterate throughout Perry’s films. She seemed to be doing and saying the most inappropriate things for a woman her age (McKoy 2012:141). In *Diary of Mad Black Woman*, while talking to Hellen she said things like, “who the hell told ya to sign a renap?” Instead of saying pre-nap. The number she called out after calculating how much Charles owed Hellen, as well how she spelled out clothing names at Hellens’ house, displayed lack of schooling. This number could have amounted to millions of dollars, but the manner in which she said it was confusing In *Madea’s Family Reunion*, a young lady who was leaning inside a big drum to get more cold beer for uncle Joe said, “ they ain’t got no more” ( Perry, 2006). This indicates that this creolized language, which passed from one African-American generation to the next as indicated by Dillard (2014), has in fact reinforced a certain belief about the history of African-Americans. To date, it is considered a “cultural barrier” in schools when White teachers “attempt to correct the English of Black parents” who had come for conferences or meetings to support their children (White 2007: 85). This is the only English many African –Americans know.

## 5.4 THE PROMINENCE OF MUSIC

Music has several functions in film. In persuasive, dramatic as well as experimental films, music can be tremendously effective. “Music can do much, through its emotional appeal, to add to the mood, pacing and action of film” (Mercer 1967:177). Music also has a re-integrative psychological effect, where a musical theme or song can cause an audience to remember previous events or even feelings in a film. Therefore, the appropriateness of the music in the film is extremely important (Mercer 1967:177).

In all these films, music played a significant role. The study discovered that Perry’s films do not only carry sexual elements, drug and alcohol content, but these films also carried spiritual content through music, using songs of repentance such as “*Ask the Savior*” in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, where people were seen repenting from their previous lifestyles. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, songs such as “*Turn your life around*” and “*Aint nobody’s fault but mine*” also reflected on time passing by when the women were imprisoned, and had to do some self- introspection. “*Pray on*”, a spiritual song on *Madeas Family Reunion*, also evoked spiritual gratification on audiences, especially because of the historical context associated with the environment in which slavery took place.

## 5.5 BLACK FEMINISM IN BLACK FILMS, THE “GAZE”, AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES OF BLACK WOMEN

Mulvey (1989:19) argued that the “male gaze” focused on looking at a woman as an “erotic object”, for characters within the screen story as well as “erotic object” for the spectator within the auditorium or the movie theatre, “with shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 1989:19). Furthermore, hooks (1992:317) argued for an “oppositional gaze” (the rebellious act of looking), which advocated for the rights of Black women to critique stereotypical representations of Black women in film. hooks (1992:319) stated:

This gaze is one which cultivates a power to look, enabling black female spectators to document what they see and construct their own dialogue with their own voice. By representing black women in film, not as a reaction to existing White-dominated narratives, but simply as a recognition of critical black female spectatorship, it creates a space for new transgressive possibilities for the formulation of identity.

Both gazes (the “male gaze” as well as the “oppositional gaze”) were confirmed in Perry’s films. The woman objectified erotically is the Black woman. Having said that, the study condemns the negative stereotypes associated with Black women in his films. The character of Madea is seen as peculiar and foolish; while this particular character defines the fundamental stereotype (The ‘Mammy’). She is neither a man nor a woman, but a super-human possessing super-powers. This is where patriarchy comes into play. Madea’s character has negative connotations of African-American men. When incarcerated, these men display strong presence of masculinity towards other inmates (especially passive ones), often considered weak. Ideally, no African-American person would behave so radically towards police, and disregarding the justice system the way Madea does, The # *Black Lives Matter* awareness campaign has been making waves for the past few years in order to disprove the myth that Black people are dangerous and should be killed indefensibly. Such misconceptions and stereotypes therefore need to be recognized and interrogated especially in cinema where these stereotypes are mostly developed and disseminated. Because stereotypes function like “symbolic mechanisms”, where an element is recognized as the core attribute, this information is then quickly assigned to certain preexisting and prejudiced complexes of ideas (Schweinitz 2011:6). This is what happened in Perry’s films, where an element of mortifying Black women was capitalized on.

In addressing the significance of the theory of Black feminism when analysing Black films, the study recognizes the abuse Black women experience often produces different articulations and assumptions about the histories of women and men in the Black communities (Reid 1993: 119). Black and White women do not share similar histories and experiences. Feminism should address these issues, “otherwise its ahistorical approach towards Black women can and does maintain institutional racism” (Reid 1993:119).

## 5.6 THE THREE STEREOTYPICAL FIGURES PERSONIFIED IN PERRY'S FILMS

African- American women were and still are classified according to many types, including but not limited to; the 'Mammy', the 'Jezebel', the 'Tragic Mullata', the 'Sapphire' and 'Aunt Jemima'. The first three images are discussed in detail below, as they formed part of the study. Aunt Jemima developed from the image of the 'Mammy' in that they have a similar appearance, although Aunt Jemima's tasks were only limited to those of a cook as opposed to running the entire home like the 'Mammy'. The Sapphire is known to be a very vocal Black woman who is not afraid to go as far as pointing a finger at her husband with "one hand on her hip" (Sims 2006:42). These images were and still are popular on American screens that they played an important role in defining African femininity. According to Sims (2006:41), the fearlessness of African-American women as social activists was absent from the screen. Depicting them in any other role required disassembling cultural myths associated with African- American women as sexual or promiscuous. The films analysed form part of the argument that Black women are always portrayed as uninhibited and unprincipled and nothing more.

This study challenges McKoy (2012) who asserts that there is a 'Mammy', a 'Jezebel' as well as 'Sapphire' in Perry's films. According to this study, there is a thin line between the "Sapphire" and the 'Jezebel'", because they both possess similar traits. For example, in her article titled *Tyler Perry and the weight of misrepresentation*, McKoy (2012:137) defines both "Sapphire" and 'Jezebel' women who are angry. To the researchers' understanding, these personalities are somewhat intertwined. Therefore, the study only addressed the following images: the 'Mammy', the 'Jezebel' and then the 'Tragic Mullata', due to their frequent appearance in all three films.

### 5.6.1 The 'Mammy'

The image of the 'Mammy' figure has a profound history in American culture. It is the longest perpetuated image of African- American women in American society and still remains replicated and mimicked over and over again on stage and on screen (Anderson 1997: 9), hence the image of Madea. According to Ripley in (Wallace- Sanders 2008:4), 'Mammy', auntie, Negro nurse and

coloured figures were used in the eighteenth-century to describe a Black woman within the homestead or 'plantation home' who served as a cook, a baby nurse, and an all-rounder in the house. The earliest use of the word or name 'Mammy', was used in 1810 in reference to slave women (African) caring for White children in the South of America (Wallace- Sanders 2008:4). She was obedient, and faithful to serving her White master, and ran the master's home very "sternly" (McKoy 2012: 131). In Blackface and reality, the 'Mammy' would be a surrogate mother, usually of tough physical appearance, who was dedicated to the growth of a White family, and no matter how much she was loved by the White family, she remained poor due to economic exploitation by them (Collins 1990: 72).

The character of Madea in Perry's films signifies the 'Mammy' in so many ways. Madea shortened from '*Mother Dear*', (Heartley 2011: 14) has a historical reference in Black culture. The study has discovered that Madea can be categorized according to three types of 'Mammies' (McKoy 2012: 140-141). The first type was the "*Masculine Mammy*", because she possesses many masculine characteristics, consistent with hooks' (2015) definition of "masculinized sub-human creatures". According to hooks (2015:71), the myth that Black female slaves were referred to as "masculinized sub-human" was that they showed capabilities of performing "manly" labor, and that they could "endure hardship, pain, and privation" and on the other hand perform "womanly" duties such as cooking, child nurturing and housekeeping. This description is warranted because Perry himself in drag plays Madea. Looking at Fig.1 in *Madea Goes to Jail*, Madea is portrayed to be this "masculine' almost manly woman who can handle anything just like the 'Mammy'. She is particularly tough and she can even drive a construction vehicle and flip a car over as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Madea “The Masculine ‘Mammy’” flipping a car at the parking lot in *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009)**

The second character was the “*Nurturing ‘Mammy’*”, because besides the masculine character, she was also seen to possess a nurturing side. She is “motherly” and takes care of a family, like the historical ‘Mammy’. In Fig 2. Madea is seen as a nurturing mother in *Madeas Family Reunion* when she accommodated a young foster teenage girl at her house, and changed her life for the better. She taught her manners, and respect. She went as far as beating the teenager to discipline her, and encouraged her to focus on school. When the young girl returned home with good grades (marks) Madea said, “That is good, you just proved that you can be anything you want to be” (Perry, 2006). Those were sincere, kind and nurturing words from a mother figure.



**Figure 2. The “Nurturing ‘Mammy’” punishing the adoptive girl and then encouraging her to focus on her education in *Madea's Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

Finally, Madea was seen as a “*Dim-witted Mammy*” showing her disregard for the law, and her inappropriate behaviour. Her vocabulary was perceived to be that of an uneducated person, and she seemed unbothered by that. In *Madea's Family reunion*, Madea could not say algebra, but said “Algero” when the teenage girl showed off her good marks to her. In the same film ( see Fig 3), Madea was portrayed in a rather precarious position with a saw blade in her hand destroying Charles’ s furniture because she felt that her niece Hellen deserved half of everything in that house. This behaviour then landed her in jail. She would go as far as fighting physically with police, since they did not terrify her. This behaviour then questioned her intelligence.



**Figure 3. The “Dim-witted Mammy” Madea with a saw blade trying to cut everything in half so that her niece Hellen can walk out of the marriage with her fair share the asserts in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Perry, 2005).**

In these films, Black women like Madea or “Jemima” as the White woman in *Madea Goes to Jail* referred to her, were portrayed as very dangerous, dominant and almost manly or beast-like. They are objectified as the “Other” not only by White people but also by Black men. Black women as compared to their White counterparts constantly fight this objectification by living two lives, one for “them” (Whites) and one for “ourselves” (Black women), (Collins 1990:94).

### **5.6.2 The ‘Tragic Mullata’**

Blacks and Whites denoted the “Tragic Mullata” in two distinct ways. For both races, she remained the daughter of Aunt Jemima, but for Whites she looks white and almost passes for White (Heartley 2011:16). She is light-skinned, beautiful and enjoys some of the benefits of Whiteness. Although her “invisible Blackness plagues her life”, she ultimately destroys her life by her own doing (because she is bitter, angry and extremely mean (Anderson 2008:41)). For Black writers and the Black community, she gets sympathy as long as she “maintains her identity as Black” and possibly even works for the community because the reality of her existence or part of her ‘tragedy’

is that she “represents the rape of her mother by a White man”. Literally, she “does not fit anywhere” (Anderson 2008: 41). The bad ‘Tragic Mullata’ despises her own Black race as well as her family and would do anything including using her skin colour to “escape what could have otherwise been her destiny” (Heartley 2011: 16).

The ‘Tragic Mullata’ was evident in all three films. In *Madea’s Family Reunion*, Victoria is seen as the ‘Tragic Mullata’, although she might not necessarily be born of a White father. She felt that life owed her everything because she worked “hard” to be where she was. She looked beautiful and even spoke ‘proper’ English compared to the other women in her family. She dined at “posh” or luxurious restaurants with White people, and seemed to be well known amongst the White community. She articulated, reflected and validated Eurocentric behaviour. Her sense of mannerisms was so intense that she literally wanted to be White. This was confirmed when she told her daughter to “sit up straight” while they are about to have lunch at a “fancy” restaurant with affluent White people around.



**Figure 4. Victoria the “Tragic Mullata” arriving at the family reunion driven by a chauffeur in *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

Furthermore, she was arrogant because she lived in the suburbs comfortably, with a chauffeur to drive her around as seen in Fig. 4. Her arrogance and condescending behaviour was also confirmed in the women’s conversation during the family reunion, which she hardly attended. When she started talking about the heat in that place, one of the women responded by saying, “It would be cool if you had some regular clothes”. Victoria then responded by saying that her dress was from Paris, which was quite an unwarranted response. It showed the level of condescension which she had for those who were not in her league. The other women start laughing at her, and telling her that in Georgia, people did not dress in that fashion. This illustrated that she was no ‘ordinary’ Black person. She afforded clothes from overseas, and is therefore associated with wealth and perhaps even Whiteness. Madea uttered words such as, “Well this hot Georgia, it’s not Pariiii (Paris), so we don’t wear dresee ( dress) like dat, it looks silly, tryin’ to look bougee, wee wee,

pee, pee” ( Perry, 2006) to mock her so that she could remember that she was still Black. The study refers to Victoria as the “Bad ‘Tragic Mullata’ because she was self-absorbed, and for the manner in which she treated Black people whom she disregarded, including her own daughter Vanessa and her grandchildren. She spoke to Lisa and said things like, “You know I don’t fraternize darling” when asked to join the reunion which Madea organised. Meaning, she did not associate with people of a certain caliber. When they were at the dress fitting venue where her other daughter worked, she said to Lisa, “Is this how you want to live, pathetic like your sister? Look how she lives”. When asked whether she would want to see her grandchildren, she said; “I don’t want to see those bastards” (Perry, 2006). The children were too destitute to fit her well-maintained standards.

In *Madea Goes to Jail*, Linda (Fig.5), the district attorney, whose utterances mostly displayed egotism and condescension illustrated the stereotype of the ‘Tragic Mullata’. This was also confirmed by how Candace described her to Joshua, the fiancé. “She is not you’re type Josh, she entirely too much of a princess, it ain’t gonna work”. This clarifies the two incompatible personalities of Joshua and his fiancé Linda. Linda was born of a rich family, she was light skinned, beautiful, had a decent childhood upbringing, and only associated with the likes of Joshua because he was an attorney like her. Had it not been for that, she would have probably dated a White man.



**Figure 5. Linda the ‘Tragic Mullata’ in court in *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).**



**Figure 6. Linda and her attorney friend talking down on Black people, *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).**

Some Black people in these films endorsed Whiteness so much that the manner in which they spoke about fellow Blacks is nothing but demeaning. This was confirmed (see Fig.6) by Linda and her friend who spoke to Joshua and Chuck at a restaurant during the lunch break. The friend said, “The fact that you feel guilty Josh. I know, I made it out of the ghetto too, but I don’t apologise for it. But these people will never let you forget, and as long as you let them do that, you will always feel a sense of obligation to them”. Linda added, “The point is, they were afforded the same opportunities as you were, you did something, they didn’t” (Perry, 2009). By “these people”, both characters actually referred to uneducated Black people. This is some form of classism, to which the study outlined when discussing intersectionality in the early chapters of this study. The study concludes that, just as White people have an “Us” and a “them” (Black people), these films perpetuate the culture of “classism” amongst Black people. Meaning, they always portray these ‘Tragic Mullata’s’ as a means to ridicule the Black society and to glorify Whiteness. hooks (2014: 4) supports this statement:

For some time now the critical challenge for Black folks has been to expand the discussion of race and representation beyond debates about good and bad imagery. Often what is thought to be good is merely a reaction against representations created by White people that were blatantly stereotypical. Currently, however, we are bombarded by Black folks creating and marketing similar stereotypical images. It is not an issue of "us" and "them."

It is all about a person's viewpoint. These images can be transformed, alternatives can be created only if we dream, look, create and take action against limiting and demeaning representations.

### **5.6.3 The 'Jezebel' or 'Topsy Figure'**

The final stereotype that will be discussed in this study is the 'Jezebel'. Like Madea, this character was most distinct in these films. This image like all the images discussed above, also revealed the manner in which slavery unjustly defined the image of Black women. This image of the 'Jezebel' originated under slavery when Black women were portrayed as being "sexually aggressive wet nurses" (Clarke 1989). This image had a function to "relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women" (Davis 1981; hooks 2015, White 1985). This means that even if a Black woman was to be successful and become a doctor, lawyer, teacher or anything in her professional capacity, she was likely to be labelled a prostitute or a whore by Whites, because all Black women were automatically categorized and objectified as "sexually available objects" (hooks 2015:58). This is evident in films and generally in culture, where the 'Jezebel' is portrayed as a woman who uses sex to entice men into giving her money for pleasure and for other "destructive reasons" like drugs (McKoy 2012:142). She is sexually enticing, fair skinned (at times) and very attractive. She is also manipulative and seeks attention from men. Comparable to the Sapphire to a certain extent, she is angry because above everything, she is unmarried and often accepts abusive behaviour from men (McKoy 2012:137). In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, this stereotype was showcased in the character of Brenda (Fig. 7), who was a mistress to a married man for almost eighteen years. The film indicates this because Brenda had

two children by this man, and has been sleeping with an affluent attorney for the sole purpose of acquiring access to his money. She used her beauty, and slender body shape to lure and manipulate this man. The image below displays how this ‘Jezebel’ in her tight fitting dress watched with pleasure when Charles dragged his wife out of their house.



**Figure 7. The ‘Jezebel’:** fair skinned, attractive Brenda in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. (Perry, 2005).

The film *Madea Goes to Jail*, focused on prostitution as portrayed by Candace (Fig. 8) who due to internal conflicts, sold her body because of her painful past. Candace spoke of the manner in which she was raped as a teenager, leading her to a wrong man who then sold her to his friends until she eventually became a prostitute. She automatically falls under the “Jezebel” category because she uses her body to please men and gain monetary value from it.



**Figure 8.** The “Jezebel” (prostitute) Candace in *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).

Similarly in *Madeas Family Reunion*, a group of young women (see Fig. 9) dressed in provocative clothing, and dancing to loud music while “engaging in public displays of affection”, McKoy (2012:142), while the men cheer and dance along with them, denoted and stereotyped the Black family specifically the Black woman as “loose and wild” (McKoy 2012:142).



**Figure 9. Young Black women dancing in “provocative” clothing in *Madea’s Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

In the same film, a group of older men (see Fig. 10) found a young woman, old enough to be their grandchild, sexually appealing and enticing, when they kept asking her to lean inside the drum to get cold beers for them, in order or them to drool over her. They asked her to “dig deeper and deeper” and even filmed her while she was “digging deeper”. Scenes like these portray Black society as uncivilized. Sexism just like racism are both tools of oppression. According to an American organisation called *Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance)* which

works towards eliminating sexual violence and assisting sexual assault victims, the attitude of sexism makes women of “color more susceptible to sexual violence”. Furthermore, this prejudice makes it difficult for these Black women not only to receive fair treatment within the criminal justice system, but makes it even more difficult for them to receive and access support services. The organisation also confirms that women of color or Black women are, and have always been habitually portrayed as “promiscuous or hypersexual”. These “Jezebel” stereotypes therefore endorse the notion that Black women cannot be raped because “they are willing participants in all sexual activity” (Connecticut, 2017). The depictions on these films regarding Black women are inappropriate, as they portray Black women to be promiscuous, even when matured as depicted in Fig 11.



**Figure 10. Old men (grandfathers) drooling over a young woman in *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**



**Figure 11. A matured prostitute ‘Jezebel’ dancing and asking for sex in *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).**

## **5.7 COMPARABLE STEREOTYPICAL THEMES IN THE FILMS**

Since the study has employed narrative analysis as a method of analysing data, it was only fitting that the study grouped themes according to the frequency of occurrences in the films (constructing texts in particular contexts). Having examined the ‘classic’ stereotypes used in Perry’s films, a number of related themes, which enrich our understanding of the role of cinematic stereotypes used by Perry, emerged in the study which are outlined below.

### **5.7.1 Anger and defensiveness**

The study stresses the manner in which Black people in film have always been degraded in terms of representation. In Perry’s films, the study exposes the fact that the majority of Black women are symbolized as unapologetic and very hostile. This is one of the major concerns of Black women as outlined by hooks (1987: 52), where Black women feel like there are no positive views about

them, often fueled by sexism. This was evident in the three films analysed. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, Madea is heard saying to Titi, one of the prisoners she shared a cell with, “what do you mean brownie, are you trying to call me Black?” (Perry, 2009). Similarly, in the same film, Madea is seen causing an accident to punish the man who cut in front of her daughter (as seen on Fig. 12).



**Figure. 12** Depicts Madea trying to hit another car by pushing the accelerator with her bare hands, because this man disrespected her daughter Cora through cutting in front of her, *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).

Subsequently in *Diary of a Mad Woman*, Madea is exposed with a saw blade in her hands (as portrayed in Fig 3), destroying furniture of a nieces’ house, just because the husband wants to divorce her niece. Another depiction of an angry woman was seen in the film *Madeas Family Reunion*, where even a small Black teenage girl’s mannerisms (as seen on Fig 13) were interrogated. She answers Madea by saying, “You don’t tell me what to do” (Perry, 2006), insinuating that perhaps all Black children behave this way.



**Figure 13. An adopted teenage girl talking back to adults symbolizing disrespect in *Madea's Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006)**

The study argues that representations like these indicate that Black women however young they may be are aggressive and ready for a fight. The study also maintains that Perry's representations of Black women in these films perpetuate stereotypes held by those outside of Black communities..

### **5.7.2 Issues of morality and hopelessness**

In these films, Black women were found to represent all sorts of negatives. Hopelessness is depicted in *Madea Goes to Jail*, when Candace told a story of how she was raped by her own partner, who then sold her to other men resulting in her becoming a prostitute. She became dependent on this lifestyle and even gave up on life. In the film, she was arrested and found herself

with other jailbirds, who shared similar stories of how they ended up in jail. Both *Madeas Family Reunion* and *Diary of Mad Black Woman*, exhibited old Black women (as seen in Fig11), who were evidently still prostituting themselves, which questions and demeans the morality of American Black culture. This mentality promulgates the ideology that Black women are loose and depraved, resulting in the stereotypical views of other races about Black women.



**Figure 14. Depicts a woman (Victoria) and her two daughters (Lisa and Vanessa). An argument ensued when Vanessa told her sister that Victoria sold her for sex to her stepfather, *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

Issues such as these question the morality of Black women. Why would a woman sell her daughter to her stepfather? Does money play such a pivotal role in one's life to the point where children suffer?

### **5.7.3 Classism “amongst” and “to” Black women**

According to these films Black women are jealous of each other, and do not build each other. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, Linda, the district attorney was heard saying to Josh, “Honey, youre’ a district attorney, you shouldn’t be hanging around the likes of these people” (Perry, 2009). This film

claims that Black people use “class” to treat other Black people of lower stature to them “as a means to an end”. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Orlando referred to Hellen as just “another bitter Black woman”, (Perry, 2005). This clearly indicated that even Black men themselves categorize Black women according to the constant stereotypical images mentioned above, in this context, the Sapphire. According to this study, these films perpetuate the ill- behaviour of an already broken society, which has had a long history of women being exposed to racism, sexism and economic exploitation, the “trilogy of oppression” as labelled by Gordon (1987:17). Now such depictions mean that Black men are somewhat conditioned by White people who have always had their own perceptions of Black women, and distorted their image. hooks (1993:38) spoke of Black women and the process of self-recovery, and the manner in which harsh criticism was used to “check” and examine their behaviors. Therefore, the point is that Black women are still criticized, not only by White people, but also by Black men, such a Perry through his films. In *Madeas Family Reunion*, and the two other films analysed, the manner in which Uncle Joe spoke to women was farfetched. The disregard he has for his sister Madea was always undeserved, particularly when he called her “dumb”. These films subtly and unconsciously depict the demeaning labels representing Black women as all these stereotypes (stupid, bad looking, domineering, non-threatening because of financial co-optation etc.). The images of Black women are “represented and reinforced through every means for education and communication within the society; from all –powerful television, to movies, to radio, to award-winning books praised by culturally selective White critics” just as these three films are doing (hooks 1993:38). These films suggest that Black people may have emerged from slavery, but they are so psychologically wounded, that they cannot “fully practice the art of loving”. They are using similar “harsh” and “brutal” methods against one another as has been done to them by slave masters when they were enslaved (hooks 1993:132). To confirm this, in *Madea Family Reunion*, Victoria considers herself a better ‘Black’ person than her entire family hence she hardly attends the family reunions. See figure 15 below.



**Figure 15. Victoria and her daughter Lisa during a conversation about the family reunion *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

When invited to Madeas' family reunion, Victoria states, "she doesn't fraternize" (Perry, 2006). This means that she does not associate with a 'certain caliber of people' (Black people) but associates with White people, at the luxurious restaurants. That is where she "fraternizes". She is much content there with people of a certain class. (See figure 16 below).



**Figure 16. Depicts a glamorous Victoria entering a fancy restaurant where mostly White people dine, *Madea's Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

#### **5.7.4 Unruliness and Corruption**

The study asserts that these films continuously depict Black women as delinquents and as dishonest. In *Madea Goes to Jail*, the stunning award winning and reputable district attorney Linda was exposed to be engaged in some unlawful activities in order to win her cases. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea and Hellen were portrayed as bitter and aggressive when they destroyed and broke down Charles' house. They were eventually arrested for their misconduct. Finally, in *Madea's Family Reunion*, Black women were seen dancing half-naked with men. During her address, one of the grandmothers spoke of her concern of the young women's conduct of "having no clothes on and jive written all over on this land" (Perry, 2006), which still questions the morality of Black women, and Black families. The study interrogates the manner in which the films barely represent Black successful women, and if they did, the women were found to be deceitful.



**Figure 17. Depicts Madea and her niece Hellen in a jail cell after trespassing and ransacking Hellen's former house, *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2006).**

#### **5.7.5 Issues pertaining to Abusiveness and Vulnerability**

The final and perhaps critical theme in Perry's films covered issues relating to physical, emotional, sexual abuse and the like, to Black women. The study maintains that Perry has produced a scene/s in all three films, where a Black woman had been exposed to some form of abuse, which was quite peculiar. Many might argue and state that this is because it is comedy, and that such things should be laughed at and disregarded. The study has however gathered that because films as well as television have lasting effects on an audience, they strengthen societal attitudes on issues concerning gender, race and cultures. Films also reinforce stereotypes, which have always been accentuated by different races against others. Throughout history, Black women have always been portrayed derogatorily as the "whore", "the mistress" or "breeder", while the White woman was "hoisted on a pedestal so high that she was beyond the reach of her own husband" (Gordon 1987:25). Fig 18 depicted a Black woman (Candace), who was supposedly seeking employment, with a White employer, who then decided to make sexual advances to her, confirming the

statement above. The scene portrayed a Black woman being taken advantage of, simply because she is supposedly “uninhibited”.



**Figure 18. A White employer seeks sexual favors from a Black woman in order for her to gain employment, *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).**

A pimp raped the same woman (as shown on Fig 19) confirming the notion that these films depict women as being susceptible to abuse.



**Figure 19. Candace who was drugged, then raped by a pimp. *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2005).**

In *Madeas Family Reunion*, another depiction of an abused Black woman manifested. An intense incident started in the middle of the night when a conversation between Lisa and her emotionally and physically abusive fiancé, Carlos ensued. Lisa was so desperate to leave that her fiancé begged her, and even promised to go to counselling. When Lisa was still reluctant and insisted on leaving him, he said to her “the only way you’re leaving is through this door” (as seen on Fig.20), (Perry, 2006). This man had instilled so much fear in Lisa that she was left with having to stay with him for her own safety. Primarily, the film shows how Carlos hit his fiancé after seeing her with a male stripper in his home. Lisa’s sister and friend suggested the gesture, and she had no control over it. She even says to the stripper “You have to go”, Perry (2006), because she is terrified of what the fiancé would do to her should he see him. Nevertheless, the inevitable befell her. She unluckily ended up getting a beating just by participating in the act (See figure 21).



**Figure 20.** Carlos attempting to drag Lisa out the sliding door of a rooftop apartment, *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).



**Figure 21.** An emotional Lisa after being hit in the face by her fiancé in *Madeas' Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).

The very same Carlos proved to be a sociopath when he dances with Lisa (see figure 22) to prove to society that they have a happy marriage. He utters these words to her such as “You like to provoke me don’t you, and “I love you to death and I mean it”. The study affirms that there are such men in the world, pretentious, manipulative and psychotic, but this again should not be considered a laughable matter.



**Figure 22. Carlos dances with his fiancé to prove a point that they are happy albeit false. He is threatening her while busy dancing, *Madeas Family Reunion* (Perry, 2006).**

In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, even after constantly crushing her, Charles still wanted to make Hellen suffer by reclaiming his money from her, manhandling and humiliating her (See figure 23). This gives the false impression that Black women are helpless and defenseless, and that men are always in control regardless of the circumstance.



**Figure 23.** Charles manhandling his wife because she had taken money from his office, which she was evidently not supposed to have taken, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Perry, 2005).



**Figure 24.** Shows Candace and her friend running away from a pimp, *Madea Goes to Jail* (Perry, 2009).

All these films depict Black women in some form of abusive condition, and this study proves that Perry's films are mostly condescending towards the image of a Black woman. The study proves that Black women in all three films suffered some form of domestic violence/ abuse, which included either of the following; intimidation, violent behavior (physical violence) and sexual violence. The study then questions whether the manner, in which Perry represents Black women in his films, is reliant on his masculine beliefs about them. Otherwise, why would he continue representing them as vulnerable, illiterate, immoral, prone to abuse, uncouth and all sorts of negatives? The manner in which he depicts Black women being as abuse victims in his films strengthens the above statement and leaves no room for feminists to think otherwise.

## **5.8 SUMMARY**

The chapter discussed the findings of the study by also demonstrating images from the three films in order to substantiate the argument. The study gave a brief synopsis of the films analysed and addressed the research questions as outlined in the previous chapter. The following chapter outlines the findings of the research and concludes with a concise summary of the entire project. It also makes recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study by encapsulating how the researcher comprehends the notion of Black women's representation in African-American comedy films, and how Tyler Perry diminishes and disregards the powerful image of Black women through his films. Limitations of the study will be discussed as well as suggestions for further research.

##### 6.1.1 Black women and oppression

The results of the study confirms that Black women were so oppressed, that they had to resort to forming Black solidarity movements, where they would not feel overlooked by other social groups. Black feminist Movements or Black feminism manifested in response to Black Liberation Movements and the Women's' Movement, in an effort to foreground Black women, who were racially oppressed and isolated in the Women's' Movement by their White counterparts. In the Black liberation Movements, these women were sexually oppressed and patriarchy prevailed most times, hence their determination in establishing their own movements in the 1960s. The study has revealed that Black women suffer the most in terms of everything. Even Black men who rape Black women get lighter sentences (if at all sentenced) compared to sentences for the rape of White women (Gordon 1987:30). The study revealed that in all three films analysed, it was mostly Black women who were either raped, or sexually violated. These women were either gang- raped like what happened to Candace on *Madea Goes to Jail*, or raped by a family member, like what happened to Vanessa on *Madeas Family Reunion*.

The victim of the Black male rape is overwhelmingly the Black female. The rate of Black female rape by White males is almost three times higher than the rate of White female rape by Black males (Gordon 1987: 30).

This clearly indicates that Black females are more prone to rape than any other race yet these films find it comical to always include such dire social issues in their comedy films.

### **6.1.2 The Three Films Analysed**

This research proves that as Bobo (1995:33) asserted in her book titled, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, the representation of Black women in mainstream media constitute a “tradition of distorted and limited imagery”. This dates back to the 1900s during the times of Blackface when non-White people used to represent and play Black people in theatre.

Tyler Perry’s films have displayed a massive ambiguity towards feminist film theorists who criticize the manner in which he portrays Black women. The results of the study demonstrate that in the three films analysed, the negative and stereotypical characters of the “Mammy”, the “Jezebel” and the “Tragic Mullata” were exhibited. Madea as a ‘Mammy’ character in all three films exemplified the three ‘Mammy’ types as explained by McKoy (2012: 140). The ‘masculine’ ‘Mammy’, the ‘nurturing’ ‘Mammy’ as well as the ‘dim-witted’ ‘Mammy’ all resonated well with the character of Madea. Taking into cognisance where the ‘Mammy’ character hails from, the study found it unsettling that after the many decades of slavery and humiliation that Black people endured, people like Perry still use this character as comical. The ‘Tragic Mullata’ was also found to be a disturbing image, which Perry constantly used in his films. This image also links very well with the times of slavery.

Black women (the ‘Mammy’ or ‘Aunt Jemima’ or random Black women) were raped by their slave masters, leading to the birth of many mixed race women, who would oftentimes not want to be associated with Blackness. These women were then termed ‘Tragic’ because they were not White enough to be absorbed by Whiteness, due to the tragedy of how they were born, and they were not

Black enough because they at least had fairer skin than ordinary Black people. On *Madeas Goes to Jail*, the study witnessed Linda and her friend who otherwise denied their Blackness and thought they were “better” Black people just because they were educated and no longer living in the ‘hood’ (an urban ghetto or suburb) where people of lower social class live. This character is also revealed in *Madeas Family Reunion* where Victoria is seen as ‘tragic’ due to her constant denial of associating with Blackness. Furthermore, the image of the ‘Jezebel’ is exhibited many times in the films. This image objectifies Black women. When a person is objectified, they can easily be manipulated and controlled. hooks (1989:42) support this statement by asserting that:

As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, and name their history, whereas as objects, ones’ reality is defined by others, ones’ identity created by others, ones’ history named only in ways that define ones’ relationship to those who are subject.

The results of the study indicate that patriarchy, power relations and conditions (economic and political) are instrumental when symbolizing Black women, and continuing the image of the Black women as the ‘Other’ provides ideological justification for race, class and gender oppressions. These images are a constant reminder of race, class and gender oppression of Black women, and they are designed to make sexism, racism as well as poverty seem normal and natural and an “inevitable part of everyday life” (Collins 1990:68). It is for this reason that Perry and many other filmmakers continue to use these images. They make it seem “OK” to depict Black women as matriarchs, single mothers, Jezebels and so forth.

### **6.1.3 Limitations of the study**

The study focused on only three films from a particular genre whereas the researcher could have compared two or more genres from Tyler Perry’s films in order to get a broader analysis of the results or findings that the other genres could produce. Tyler Perry’s films were compared amongst

themselves instead of comparing his films with films of the same genre (dramedy), which represent African-American women in the same manner.

Another limitation is that the study could have selected a dramedy film, which predominantly featured White women, and compared how they were represented in contrast to their Black counterparts. Perhaps one South African or African comedy film could have been used to compare how Black women are generally portrayed in films. The challenge here was that it was difficult for the researcher to find one comedy film that was not ‘Slapstick’. The final limitation is that the study is not generalizable. If another researcher would use a different method for example, quantitative research, or triangulation, as well as techniques like the snowball effect to collect data of the same research, the same results would not yield.

#### **6.1.4 Suggestions for future research/study**

The researcher suggests that for future research, more Perry films of different genres are analysed to compare the themes that have been outlined in this particular study. Chances are there will be similarities even though different genres would be used.

Black South African films should also be compared to African-American films to analyse and compare the different cultures to acquire more understanding about the manner in which the culture of the Black diaspora is represented in film.

#### **6.1.5 Concluding statements**

White people have owned powerful media corporations for centuries. When Tyler Perry started with his stage films in the 90s’ no one believed that he would end up becoming the media mogul that he is today. Lionsgate films assisted him with his first stage or theatre film, which was then converted into a film, and the rest of his other films followed. Lionsgate is White owned and influences the content to be included and otherwise. These White owned corporations like Lionsgate play a major role in forming and shaping stereotypes.

Black people in the United States of America are the minority, and they are the most poor. They are the descendants of slaves, suffered and still suffer racism, economic oppression and inequality. They are the most vulnerable and prone to premature death based on the colour of their skin, and not all these are aided by the manner in which the media represents them. Black women are the most prone to rape because the media emphasizes that they are loose and immoral and therefore not able to feel any pain. When analysing these films the researcher thought of hooks' oppositional gaze: the gaze, which allows Black women to question the manner in which they are represented by the media and the responsibility to challenge it. The researcher also thought of the male gaze, of how men find pleasure in looking at women's bodies and objectifying them, how disregarded Black women are in all spheres especially in films, which are the stepping-stones of shaping perceptions.

The study again challenges Perry and many other filmmakers to refrain from categorizing such films such as the ones analysed as 'dramedy' and 'comedy'. It is an insult to feminists because real, pertinent social issues are conveyed as humorous when they are not. These films should be categorized under 'drama', or even 'action' and never comedy.

The 'Mammy', a matriarch, who was at times feared by White people during slavery, is still being depicted through Madea in Perry's films. The 'Tragic Mullata', a product of rape during the painful history of slavery in the United States, is still being exhibited in Perry's films. The 'Jezebel', the Black woman who is loose and uninhibited, is the order of the day in many of Perry's films. This image tarnishes and disempowers the character of Black women all over the world. She can be intelligent, educated and decent, but because she is Black, she will always remain a 'Jezebel' because that is how the media overwhelmingly represents her.

Films such as these perpetuate a culture that all Black women are promiscuous. Such images remind feminists of the harsh reality which Black women faced during slavery. They did not work by choice, it was enforced upon them otherwise they would be beaten or worse killed. The slave masters denied Black domestics work anywhere if they resisted sexual advances. This was some form of "social control" for African-American women (Collins 1990:176).

The study concludes by adding a quote, which emphasises the necessity for Black feminism and why it should be considered:

The voices of these African-American women are not those of victims but of survivors. Their ideas and actions suggest that not only does a self-defined, articulated Black women's standpoint exist, but its presence has been essential to Black women's survival (Collins 1990: 93).

If Black feminists ignore stereotypical representations of Black women in film and television, then the issue of pigeonholing Black people undesirably will always remain an obstacle for Black women.

If we take a moment and reflect on what audiences have seen about African-Americans then (during slavery) to now, we can clearly see that little alarmingly has changed. Figure 27 below depicts a picture of an African-American woman in the famous film of 1939, *Gone with the Wind*. The features of this woman can be compared to that of Madea. She is the Mammy. A matriarch in nature, but a servant to her master. Madea possesses similar traits, the only difference being that Madea is not a servant.



**Figure 25: The Mammy (Image obtained from nytimes.com)**

The manner in which the Black community in general is represented forms part of the bigger picture that leads to events such as the #Blacklivesmatter campaign as depicted in figure 28. The many Black lives lost during these recent years are in part the results of the misrepresentation of the Black community by the media. This has resulted in many Black men and women losing their lives and hence the study argues that the media plays an integral part in modeling perceptions and perpetuating stereotypes.



**Figure 26: Black lives matter image. (Image obtained from [trevorloudon.com](http://trevorloudon.com))**

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