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FROM MAMMY TO MADEA, AND EXAMINATION OF THE BEHAVIORS OF TYLER PERRY'S MADEA CHARACTER IN RELATION TO THE MAMMY, JEZEBEL, AND SAPPHIRE STEREOTYPES

by

NARGIS IHSAN FONTAINE

Under the Direction of Dr. Jonathan Gayles

ABSTRACT

African-Americans have been portrayed in stereotypical entertainment roles since their arrival into American society. Before film and television were developed, minstrel and side-shows were the source of entertainment at African-American's expense. Minstrel shows were performed by White individuals dressed to impersonate Blacks and behaved in a White interpretation of Black behavior (Pieterse, 1992, pg. 134). African American women in particular were portrayed in three primary stereotypical ways: the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire. This research examines the relationship between the stereotypes and these historical

typecasts of African-American women are relevant to Black director Tyler Perry's popular character Mabel Simmons, better known as 'Madea'.

INDEX WORDS: African-American, Women, Madea, Sapphire, Jezebel, Mammy, Stereotypes, Films, Representation

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by

NARGIS IHSAN FONTAINE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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2011

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by

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Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2011

DEDICATION

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
Createth man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen,
Teacheth man that which he knew not.
Nay, but verily man is rebellious
That he thinketh himself independent!
Lo! unto thy Lord is the return.
Hast thou seen him who dissuadeth
A slave when he prayeth?
Hast thou seen if he relieth on the guidance (of Allah)
Or enjoineth piety?
Hast thou seen if he denieth (Allah's guidance) and is froward?
Is he then unaware that Allah seeth?
Nay, but if he cease not We will seize him by the fore-lock -
The lying, sinful forelock -
Then let him call upon his henchmen!
We will call the guards of hell.
Nay, Obey not thou him. But prostrate thyself, and draw near (unto Allah).

I want to dedicate this to my entire family, both blood and adopted, who have supported and loved me throughout this entire process and pushed me beyond my own comfort level. Especially to my father, Ihsan Fontaine, thank you for all of the literal blood, sweat, and tears, that have gone into you going to the peak of your means to ensure that not simply myself but all of your children, Muneera, Hajure, and Ebraheem had the ability to pursue their dreams and aspirations. To my mother, Raheemah Fontaine, for all of the late night and early morning calls, the supportive conversations, and the overall belief in my own ability when I doubted myself. And for my grandmother Gynetha Shackelford for being a constant figure of encouragement and strength while growing up and continued in my adulthood.

To the AfriKan ancestors that have come before me that fought hard and struggled to enable me the access for better opportunities and higher learning I say ‘Medase’.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bismillah

In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful Lord of the Worlds and Master of the Day of Judgment, you alone do I worship and you alone do I seek for help. Guide me on the right path, the path of those who receive your blessings not the path of those who you have brought your wrath upon nor those who have gone astray.

To the Department of African American Studies for serving as a valuable resource through this process, and especially to Dr. Jonathan Gayles, who had faith in my research vision and supported me through it all. I addition I want to acknowledge the two supporting members of my committee Dr. Sarita Davis and Denise Donnelly for believing in this study and believing that I could do it.

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1 INTRODUCTION

African-Americans have been portrayed in stereotypical entertainment roles since their arrival into American society. Before film and television were developed, minstrel and side-shows were the source of African American based entertainment. Minstrel shows were performed by White individuals dressed to impersonate Blacks and behaved in a White interpretation of African- American behavior (Pieterse, 1992, pg. 134). The representations of African-American behavior in these Minstrel shows were stereotypical and offensive. Both African American men and women have had to suffer through oversimplification of their behaviors and appearance while being placed on display for entertainment purposes (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1995). As entertainment media have developed and films have grown in popularity, opportunities for African-American actors and actresses were limited to stereotypical roles (Pieterse, 1992, pg. 146). African American women in particular were portrayed in three primary stereotypical ways: the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire. This research examines the relationship between the stereotypes and these historical typecasts of African-American women and African-American director Tyler Perry's popular character Mabel Simmons, better known as 'Madea'.

1.1 Background

Tyler Perry is a successful play and film director. He writes, produces, and acts in his stage plays, films and television shows. I will examine the manner in which Perry's most notable character Mable 'Madea' Simmons, played by Perry himself, represents historically stereotypi-

cal traits of African American women. This proposed study will seek to discover if Madea is an extension of previous stereotypical forms of Black entertainment.

In the context of African-American culture a woman with the title of 'Madea' is viewed as a female elder in the community. Originating in the African-American community, "her name is a southern term for 'mother dear'" (Perry, 2006, pg. vii). This term has other origins as well. In Greek mythology Medea was a witch and enchantress that helped Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece (Tyminski, R.F., 2009, pg. 55). Medea is skilled with the effects of drugs and herbs and she gives Jason the necessary potion to give the dragon that is guarding the Golden Fleece (Tyminski, R.F., 2009, pg. 55). Another interpretation of the term is 'Murdear'. Author, Tina McElroy Ansa (2005) describes her Murdear character as "…a complicated, self-focused woman, ruled her house and raised her daughters with an iron hand, wise sayings and a distant interest after her 'change'". However this study is going to concentrate on the definition asserted by Tyler Perry. Madea was chosen as the subject of study because she is a current popular figure in the media

Madea is an elderly African American woman who supports and cares for her family while ruling with an iron fist and sharp tongue. Madea is portrayed as the matriarch of a large extended family located in Atlanta, Georgia. Perry describes Madea as "A God-fearing, gun-toting, pot-smoking, loud-mouthed grandmother" ("About Tyler", 2011, para 4). She is large in stature, brown-skinned, and prone to extreme violence that cause frequent encounters with law enforcement. Perry presents her character as a form of comedic relief for audiences.

Perry asserts that, “back around the 1970’s, the Madeas in our neighborhoods began to disappear and they left an unmistakable void” (Perry, 2006, pg. vii). It has been Perry’s consistent assertion that he created Madea in order to assist in rebuilding the Black community by filling this particular void. It is possible that Perry instead has recycled previous stereotypes of African-American women, and whether intentionally or not has designed Madea based on the stereotypical behavior.

A stereotype develops when there is an imbalance of power. Stereotypes,”…get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development” (Hall, 1997,pg. 257). The stereotype that closely resembles the Madea character physically is the Mammy. Mammy is a desexualized character who is old, overweight, and formidable in stature (Pieterse, 1990, pg. 228). The origins of this caricature developed out of slavery to justify sexual abuse by masters onto the slave women (Pilgrim, D., 2000, para 6). Mammy represents a void of sexual and sensuality and was constructed deliberately to represent ugliness (Pilgrim, D., 2000, para 6). Another trait that Mammy has is her loyalty to her white slave masters (Hall, 1997, pg. 251). However, Madea’s loyalty is to her family, and despite her sharp tongue, and frequent violent outbursts, Madea is still viewed as the leader and looked to by her other family members for advice and help. Her behaviors are never challenged or contested by those surrounding her. Instead she instills fear using threats of physical violence to obtain power within her family structure. Her severe angry reactions reinforce the Sapphire stereotype because characteristics associated with Sapphire are primarily angry.

Originating as an adaptation of the Mammy, in the 1800's the Sapphire began as the 'Sassy Mammy' ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.). This woman ran her household and her sassiness was accepted by the White people surrounding causing her to be immune to violent retaliation ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.). It was not until the *Amos n Andy* show debuted that the term 'Sapphire' was associated with sassy behavior. One character George 'Kingfish' Stevens is married to Sapphire Stevens who constantly berates and insults her husband ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.). Sapphire stereotype is described as, "…a shrill nagger with irrational states of anger and indignation -- prone to being mean-spirited and abusive. Although African American men are her primary targets, she has venom for anyone who insults or disrespects her." ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.) The Sapphire is another description of 'The Angry Black Woman'. She embodies the attitude and sass that is associated with African American women (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, pg. 638). Generally it is the incompetence of African American men that fuels her rage and provides her with the opportunities to verbally emasculate African American men around her (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, pg. 654).

In addition to embodying the Sapphire stereotype, Madea also exhibits traits of the Jezebel stereotype. The Jezebel originates from Biblical stories. According to Columbia University Press (2010) she defied Elijah and his prophecy and persecuted a number of prophets in her day because she promoted the worship of other God. In common usage Jezebel is thought of as a wicked woman. In African-American history this term was used to objectify Black women and justify the rape of them. Enslaved African women were stripped down nude at the auction blocks and their nudity during that time period implied a lack of civility and sexual restraint (Pilgrim, D., 2002, para 9). An understanding of the stereotype is that, "the Jezebel was depicted as

a Black woman with an insatiable appetite for sex" (Dunn, 2008, pg. 114). She functioned primarily in the role of a seductive, hypersexual, exploiter of men's weaknesses (Dunn, 2008, pg. 115). Though this is not a dominant trait of Madea's, her dialogue includes discussion of her adolescent sexuality which includes being promiscuous and a stripper.

1.2 Problem Statement

Madea has been a success for Tyler Perry. Of the four Tyler Perry films that have debuted at number one in the box office, three of those films featured Madea ('About Tyler, 2011, para, 3). Perry has indicated that he wants to depict the real Black family lifestyle, and Madea's are part of that lifestyle: "In the black community, Madea was the head of that village"…"No matter what race you are, everybody wants to have a Madea in their family"(Perry,2006,pg vii).

The purpose of this study is to examine what the relationship between Madea and the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. Madea is featured in four films; '*Diary of a Mad Black Woman*', '*Madea's Family Reunion*', '*Madea Goes To Jail*', and '*I Can Do Bad All By Myself*'. These four films were viewed by the researcher who documented both the appearance and the behaviors of Madea while interacting with other characters to discover how much, if at all, Madea embodies previous stereotypical behaviors.

1.3 Purpose Statement

The research method that was utilized for this study was ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1996, pg. 14). The researcher observed four of Tyler Perry's movies that featured Madea. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman (2005), Madea's Family Reunion (2006), Madea Goes to Jail (2009), and I Can Do Bad All By Myself (2009*). Madea was analyzed as a sign utilizing the

framework of semiotics. A semiotic framework treats anything that can convey meaning as a sign (Chandler 2002, pg. 13). Through observing the dialogue and actions of the Madea character I documented Madeas' stereotypical representation and dialogue while interacting with other characters. Madea's behavior was coded to identify any traits of stereotypical images of Black women. The three stereotypes that were considered are the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. Previous research containing these stereotypes of African-American women was used to define each stereotype and to draw any parallels. Also potential independent behaviors and characteristics that have not been associated with the three stereotypes that could be perceived as behavior unique to Madea were documented. The four Tyler Perry films being analyzed were chosen because they are the only films featuring Madea.

1.4 Significance of Study

This study is important because it contributes to the body of knowledge concerning media, stereotypes, and popular culture. Because Tyler Perry and Madea are recognized figures in the media as well as within Black culture, it is necessary to explore any influence that they have on their audience. Madea, as a popular culture figure, has the potential of being an influential representation of Black cultural behaviors. This research contributes to the body of knowledge that has explored stereotypical depictions of African-American women (Gilman, 1985; Givens & Monahan, 2005; Hall, 1997; Woodard & Mastin, 2005) and shown that media can cause negative influences on African-Americans and their self-esteem (Ward, 2004)

1.5 Nature of the Study

I used an ethnographic content analysis research method for the purpose of this study. The examination of film and media content utilized a qualitative analytical research method (Al-

theide, 1987, pg. 66). Qualitative research analysis involves interpretations and assumptions about the world (Cresswell, 2007, pg. 37). "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Cresswell, 2007, pg. 37). Further, "…qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Cresswell, 2007, pg. 37). Qualitative methodology was chosen instead of quantitative or a mixed method because the nature of the study is to observe and interpret the behaviors and appearance of Madea to determine if she possesses stereotypical characteristics.

With ethnographic content analysis the verbal dialogue in a film can be interpreted as data, "in a sense therefore when we do research on dialogue in a film or other mass-mediated text, we are dealing with a writer's perception of the world but because writers create texts for large numbers of people, who presumably share perceptions, we can assure that analyzing dialogue in mediated text is not different from analyzing dialogue in everyday situations" (Berger, 2000, pg. 151). Utilizing this method enabled me to interpret the statements made by Madea in her films and find relevance with the three stereotypes.

1.6 Hypothesis and Research Question

The research question for this study was, 'What is the relationship between Madea and the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes?' Previous studies examining stereotypical representations of African American women have engaged the sexual objectification of African American women and her body (Hill-Collins, 2004) the influence that media and films have on

minority women's perception of beauty (Botta, 2000; Thompson & Keith, 2001) and the manner in which they are represented in the media in relation to their professional aspirations (Hobson, 2003, Reynolds-Dobbs, 2008, Thompson & Neville, 1999). However no research could be found that considered the Madea character and her relation to historical stereotypical representations of African American women. The absence of said research may be because Madea is a reasonably recent phenomenon in major motion films. The first film '*Diary of a Mad Black Woman*' debuted in 2005, therefore Madea is still fairly young cinematically speaking. For this qualitative study, ethnographic content analysis was used to observe Madea and discover if she continued historically stereotypical trends.

1.7 Framework, Theory, or Concept Relevant to Africana People

Meaning is conveyed through dialogue and imagery in media and popular culture. Images have the potential to convey messages and stereotypes (Hall, 1997, pg. 228). Instead of interpreting a right or wrong meaning, Hall states that there is instead a "preferred meaning" (Hall, 1997, pg. 228) conveyed by images. Preferred meaning is how the individual intends for the representation to be seen by fixing a text to the image (Hall,1997, pg. 228).Society consumes media, whether actively or passively, traces of media outlets are accessible everywhere. The media is a vehicle that is used to pervade society and influence the audience (Punyant-Carter, 2008; Rada,2000). Using the theoretical framework of semiotics I observed Madea within the context of four films and coded her behaviors and image.

This research was conducted under the theoretical framework of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of meaning in signs and symbols (Cruse, 2000; Lidov, 1999; Martin & Ringham, 2006).

Semiological studies originated with Swiss theorist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure was the first to apply scientific theory to the study of language and then took this science and applied it to social psychology (Martin & Ringham, 2000, pg. 2). A sign is both a concept and a sound image that cannot be distinguished from one another (Berger, 1998, pg. 7). The concept being the idea and the sound image represents the association of a word, sound, or noise with that idea. This concept and sound image was redefined by Saussure as the signified and signifier respectively. The signified and the signifier share an arbitrary relationship that suggests meaning must somehow be learned which implies that there are certain structures and associations which influence the interpretation of signs (Berger, 1998, pg. 8).

In this research, Madea was treated as a sign. Semiotics explores the human thought and ideology that those sign systems address (Kim, 1996, pg. 1). Film is a medium that has gained a large amount of attention from semiological research (Berger, 1998, pg. 4; Chandler, 2002, pg. 68; Kim, 1996, pg. 53). Films are now seen as a new form of language that have contributed to numerous fields of human symbolism for example; culture, entertainment, and education (Kim, 1996, pg. 181). Within a semiological framework, meaning is delivered through signs and images. As a sign, the meaning behind Madea's behavior and appearance was analyzed and compared to her performance and representation of the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel stereotypes.

Previous research has shown that stereotypical media portrayals of African Americans and other minorities are often perceived or constructed to seem real to audiences (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008; Rada, 2000; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). From these studies researchers have demonstrated that exposure to stereotypical imagery influences audiences self esteem

and body satisfaction (Botta, 2000; Frisby, 2004), sex and sexual expression (Miller-Young, 2008; Ward, Hansborough, & Walker, 2005) and how they view African-American women (Bogle, 1994; Givens & Monahan, 2005; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004; Woodard & Mastin, 2005).

My research expands upon previous studies and contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring the characteristics of Madea and building upon the foundation of literature about African-Americans in media.

1.8 Definitions

Three specific stereotypes were examined in the course of this research. Typically the Mammy role depicts older, obese, and very dark skinned women, physical features that are in opposition to the Eurocentric ideal of feminine beauty (Yarbrough & Bennett,2000, pg. 2). In addition, "Mammy is distinguished, however, by her sex and her fierce independence, she is usually big, fat, and cantankerous" (Bogle, 1994, pg. 9). An example of a Mammy in television is Florida Evans from the show *Good Times.* The 'Jezebel' is characterized by her over sexualized behavior. An example of an actress best known for performing this role would be Dorothy Dandridge in the 1954 movie *Carmen* in which she is the aggressor in sexual situations (Bogle,1994, pg. 169).Dandridge portrays jezebel traits because, "in this movie, she is a physically attractive opportunist who desires the constant attention of men and often takes pride in her sexual conquests" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg. 91). Author Patricia Hill Collins describes the Jezebel character as portraying Black women who have uncontrollable sexual appetites (Hill Collins, 2004, pg. 127). The Sapphire stereotype has received the least scholarly attention between the three, "She is tart-tongued and emasculating, one hand on a hip the other pointing and jabbing

(or arms akimbo), violently and rhythmically rocking her head, mocking African American men for offenses ranging from being unemployed to sexually pursuing White women" ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.). The origin of the Sapphire term developed from the *Amos n Andy* radio and television show. The wife, 'Sapphire Stevens' to one character of the show 'George Kingfish Stevens' was constantly berating and verbally attacking her husband ("Sapphire Caricature", n.d.). Additional classic African-American television shows have featured 'Sapphire' characters such as, Aunt Esther, from *Sanford and Son*, Florence from *The Jeffersons*, and Wilona from *Good Times*.

1.9 Chapter Summary:

Using ethnographic content analysis, I observed the behaviors of the Madea Character. Madea created by African American director Tyler Perry. My research observed four of Tyler Perry's films featuring Madea, and compared the behaviors and appearance of Madea to past historic stereotypical depictions of African American women in films. The relevance of the study was exploring the stereotypical characteristics of Madea and her relationship to historical portrayals.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a coherent outline that displays a broad range of literature that contributes a strong foundation to the proposed research. This chapter contains scholarship that examines the experience of African-Americans, specifically African-American women. Examples of African-Americans in society throughout history, the role that

entertainment outlets played in shaping the stereotypical ideals and representations of African-Americans, and the influence that these media representations have on audiences and societal beliefs are discussed in detail.

2.2 The Development of African American Stereotypes

The objectification and abuse of African decent people throughout history is well documented and researched (Bennett, 2007; Hine, Hine & Harold, 2010; Parks, 2010; Washington, 2006). Newly received slaves were forced to act and live based on the discretion of their white slave owners (Hine, Hine, & Harold, 2010, pg. 124). Enslaved men and women were conditioned into a lifestyle and culture that endorsed Black inferiority (Davis, 1972, pg. 89; Hine, Hine & Harold, 2010, pg. 133). When slavery ended, the treatment of the newly freed African Americans hardly improved. Laws and regulations were enforced that caused newly 'freed' slaves to continue with the labor and trades they had acquired while enslaved. Because of these specified skills and trades, Black men were conditioned to physical labor, and Black women continued with domestic work (Davis, 1972, pg. 85: Sharp, 1993, pg. 56). This resulted in fixed ideals of black behavior created by white society developed into stereotypical representations of African Americans. Primarily these stereotypes were distinguished between male and female African Americans. For men the three primary stereotypes were the "Tom", the "Coon", and the "Buck". The Tom stereotype developed out of slavery to illustrate a Black man who was loyal and devoted to their white slave owner and oppressor (Bogle, 1994, pg. 6). The Coon depicted a Black man acting like buffoon who had little to no intelligence (Bogle, 1994, pg. 7). The Buck was a strong, large, and sexually-charged man who lusted after white women and was often portrayed as being brutal and violent (Pieterse, 1990, pg.152). For women these stereo-

types included the “Mammy”, “Sapphire”, and “Jezebel”. The Mammy is a large, asexual, and dark-skinned woman who has more loyalty to the white family that she serves rather than her own family (Bogle, 1994, pg. 9; Sharp, 1993, pg. 56). The Sapphire is the sassy, angry black woman who stands with her hands on her hips while verbally emasculating to the men that are around her (Dunn, 2008, pg. 115; Sharp, 1993, pg. 41). The Jezebel is a woman motivated by her sexual abilities to use men to get what she wants (Dunn, 2008, pg. 114). Within the system of slavery and the Jim Crow period that followed, these six primary stereotypes developed as the result of fixed, limited, and racist perceptions of the dominant white ideology (Pieterse, 1990, pg.151). During slavery, captured Africans were utilized as forms of entertainment for the slave owners in addition to serving the role of slave and servant (Pierterse, 1992, pg. 136).Within the plantation structure entertainment served as a means to reduce friction and rebelliousness (Pieterse, 1992, pg. 132). This outlet served as a means to express anger and rage, which was part of the slave experience (Gordon, 1998, pg. 259). This ritual of dancing and entertaining white people continued on after the system of slavery ended.

2.3 Entertainment Outlets: From Minstrelsy to Films

During the Jim Crow period the development of entertainment for White audiences by Blacks or Whites in black face was exhibited in the minstrel circuit shows. The minstrel show tradition was a white imitation of black culture that had its origin in an imitation of slavery to demonstrate a contented naïve, gullible Black slave (Pieterse, 1992, pg. 132). The stereotypes of African Americans pervaded societal beliefs more once film was developed. Author Stanford Lyman asserts that in the beginning of the American film industry Blacks had no control over how they were portrayed (Lyman, 1990, pg. 49). Lyman continued by explaining, “…white Euro-

pean and American movie-makers were not constrained by either their own condition, color, culture, or character or by their meager knowledge of the realities of African or black American life from seeking to characterize on film the manners and customs of the Africans and their African descendants" (Lyman, 1990, pg. 49). An example of the portrayal of the African-American in films is "The Birth of A Nation".

'The Birth of A Nation' was, directed by David Wark Griffith and debuted on February 20, 1915 (Carter, 1960, pg. 347). This film was an adaptation of author Thomas Dixons' novel 'The Clansman' which is a southern romance that discusses the effects of the Reconstruction period in the Carolina states (Merritt, 1972, pg. 35). 'The Birth of A Nation' consisted of white men dressed up in blackface for the purpose of portraying Blacks in a stereotypical manner, including being lazy, eating fried chicken, and preying on white women. The film's content was controversial and angered the Black community (Merritt, 1972, pg. 26).Being displayed as loyal, brutal, or comical, the Black actor/actress' representations were pigeon-holed into categories that Blacks in entertainment were seen as. In relation to comedy, Cooper suggests that, "…one may surmise that the significant presence of Blacks in American popular comic forms, starting from minstrel shows and continuing with their representation in comedic films, television situation comedies, and as stand-up performers, have significantly affected Whites' perceptions of Blacks" (Cooper, 2007, pg. 223). This perception has stemmed primarily from White portrayals of African-Americans.

2.4 Humor and The African-American Experience

As a tool for survival, enslaved Africans used humor as a form of entertainment that potentially spared them from their oppressor's violence and punishment, "American slavery pro-

vides the backdrop of tragedy against which African-Americans developed their distinct form of humor, in which the material of tragedy was converted into comedy…" (Gordon, 1998, pg. 256). Though other outlets were used in an attempt to make their enslaved situation bearable, "black slaves faced with the demand of White masters for rigid discipline, unconditional surrender, acceptance of Black inferiority, and white superiority survived these emotionally crippling conditions through their sense of humor" (Gordon, 1998, pg. 256). As African-American comedy has evolved, the remnants of the pain and treatment experienced by African-Americans during slavery have manifested itself. As a result contemporary Black humor has fallen under severe criticism for representing negative aspects of African American culture and community (Cooper, 2007, pg. 225). Post slavery humor became an aspect of minstrel shows which entertained the White people by displaying blacks telling jokes, generally at their own expense. This form of comedy has contributed the concept of humor that exists in modern Black comedy today.

Though these minstrel shows contained primarily male performers, African American women used their humor as an outlet for their suffering as well. Author Daryl Cumber Dance asserts that,"

> If there is one thing that has brought African American women whole through the horrors of the middle passage, slavery, Jim Crow, Aunt Jemima, the welfare system, integration… it is our humor. If there is any one thing that has helped us to survive broken promises, lies, betrayals, contempt, humiliations, and dehumanization that have been our lot in this nation and often in our families, it is our humor" (Dance, 1998, pg. xxi).

She continues by stating, “We laugh to hide our pain, to gently walk around the wound too painful to touch” (Dance, 1998, pg. xxi). A large source of this pain for black women has come from the sexual abuse and objectification they have faced since being enslaved by Whites.

2.5 The African-American Woman’s Body

The tragedy of the Hottentot Venus is a well known story that provides an example of how African-descended people were used for entertainment purposes (Clifton & Scully, 2009). Sarah Baartman was a Khoisan woman from the East Cape of South Africa. She had oversized buttocks as well as large breasts. She was a labor worker for a Boer farmer, Peter Cezar (Washington, 2006, pg. 83). On the farm Baartman caught the attention of Cezar’s brother, Hendrik, he offered her wealth if she traveled to Europe to be part of an exhibition that would be held there (Netto, 2005, pg. 150). There is no record to show the circumstances of the contract that Baartman entered with the second Cezar brother. However, she was brought to London in 1810 and placed on display as an entertainment attraction for European audiences. Author Harriet Washington describes the reactions to Baartman standing naked under the gaze of the European audience’s, “They began by staring at her in disgust, progressed to laughing at her, and ended by being aroused by her” (Washington, 2006, pg. 85). She was then taken by Henry Taylor to Paris, where she was sold to an animal trainer and forced into a cage where she was to behave in an animalistic manner (Washington, 2006, pg. 83). Shortly after her arrival in Paris, she died in 1815 at the approximate age of 28 (Netto, 2005, pg. 150).

Unfortunately, even in death, Baartman could not rest in peace. Her body was further violated by what was claimed to be in the interest of science (Washington, 2006, pg. 85). Her

vagina was dissected and placed in a jar of formaldehyde, a plaster cast was made out of her buttocks, and her brain and skeleton was placed on display in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris (Netto, 2005, pg. 150). There her remains stayed on display until the early 1980's and was not returned to South Africa until August of 2002. This example of Baartman implies the early existence of the use of African women for entertainment purposes and sexual attention before the development of cinema and films nearly one century later.

Years later African-Americans were consistently portrayed stereotypically in films. As films advanced from silent movies to 'talkies' which, contain sound and verbal dialogue, the roles for African American actors opened up, however these roles still maintained limited, racist, and stereotypical behaviors (Lyman, 1990, pg. 51).In early films reminiscent of their treatment in slavery, Black women were immediately designated to two primary roles, the slave/servant, or the sexual conquest(Bell, 2004, pg. 156) The role that Dorothy Dandridge plays in the film Carmen Jones, is often used by scholars to exhibit the Jezebel seductress role of the African-American woman. In some of her notable films; 'Tarzan's Peril' (1951), 'Carmen Jones' (1954), and 'The Decks Ran Red' (1958)Dandridge was positioned in a manner that sexualized her image as a Black woman (Bogle, 1994, pg. 166; Lyman, 1990, pg. 58). In Carmen Jones, Dandridge plays a southern Black factory worker who lures a Black man named Joe into deserting the army, but then Jones abandons Joe for a prizefighter instead (Bogle, 1994, pg. 169).

The Jezebel stereotype originated, "…from the sexual exploitation and victimization of African American women (by their white slave owners), often a way to justify sexual relations with enslaved women" (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004, pg. 429).The Jezebel exploits

men's weaknesses through the use of her own sexuality (West, 1995, pg462). She asserts sexual power and dominance over men in order to obtain what she wants. Author Patricia Hill-Collins believes that there is now a modern execution of this stereotype, "whether she 'fucks men' for pleasure, drugs, revenge, or money, the sexualized bitch constitutes a modern version of the jezebel, repackaged for contemporary mass media" (Hill-Collins, 2004, pg. 127).This adopted role by African American women influence their interactions and treatment by African American men (Hill-Collins, 2009, pg. 169; hooks, 1992, pg. 90). The sexualization of African-American women traces throughout history with various levels of abuse and misrepresentation.

Referencing the previous discussion of the Hottentot Venus, the fascination and objectification of the African American woman's body is an ongoing example of the exploitation of African American women (Washington, 2007, pg. 84). Deriving from Venus, the image of the African American woman's rear end has been brought into a contemporary commodity, primarily seen through hip-hop, pornography and music videos (Hill-Collins, 2004; Miller-Young, 2008). According to Miller-Young, "Long a symbol of deviant, repulsive, and grotesque black sexuality and black womanhood, black women's rear ends became newly fetishized through hip-hop music in ways that sought to recognize, reclaim, and reify their bodies as desirable, natural, and attractive" (Miller-Young, 2008, pg. 270). Some hip-hop music videos are featured as 'un-cut' versions that can be considered as soft versions of pornography. Featuring themselves in hip-hop videos expose African-American video girls to the world of pornographic films as well.

Within the context of pornographic films, Miller-Young explores the dynamic of hip-hop culture and how the 'eye candy' or 'video girls' are viewed as soft core pornographic models and therefore the incorporation of more pornographic or uncut hip hop videos was a natural

progression (Miller-Young, 2008, pg. 262). When it comes to the marketing of the porn industry, “The desire to maintain and legitimize the [supposed] hyperaccesibility of black women’s bodies to the sexual needs of men, while simultaneously iconographically devaluing those bodies, is illustrated in the cooptation of hip hop as a space for the articulation and visualization of black sexualities” (Miller-Young, 2008, pg. 271). Pornographic films and hip-hop videos are examples of the entertainment exploitation of the African-American female body.

Another instance of African-American female objectification is the Blaxploitation films featuring curvaceous and sexually-dominant African American actresses. Blaxploitation films were accepted widely by black audiences because they presented realistic facets of urban ghetto life (Dunn, 2008, pg. 24). Developing out of the 1970’s, “Blaxploitation shares the typical aspects of exploitation cinema that hinges on the exploitation of sex and violence”(Dunn, 2008, pg. 46). The problem with Blaxploitation films however is that they still contained the dominant sexual tendencies and ideologies of American society (Dunn, 2008, pg. 24). A prominent actress that emerged from the Blaxploitation films was Pam Grier. Grier was the first African American woman to rise to stardom through B movies (Bogle, 1994, pg. 252). Some of her best known films are ‘Foxy Brown’ and ‘Coffy’, each of these films displays African American women gaining agency through sexual acts. The problematic facets of these films were that the African-American woman never retains the control over her sexualized body (Dunn, 2008, pg. 120). This has been a continuing theme of Black women’s image and representation in media.

2.6 Consequences of Black Representation in Films

Researchers and scholars have produced a wealth of scholarship on how the representation of African-Americans in the media’s eye has influenced the perceptions of African Ameri-

cans in this society (Bell, 2004; Bristor, Lee & Hunt, 1995; Elasmar et.al., 1999; Owens; 2006; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison; 2008; Richeson& Pollydore,2002; Snooks& Hall, 2002). These studies include the negative image of the African Americans in television (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008; Rada, 2000; Ramasubramanian& Oliver, 2007), the affect that the Eurocentric standard of beauty has on the self- esteem of minority women (Botta, 2000; Cachelin, et. Al. 2002; Debraganza & Hausenblas, 2008; Frisby, 2004; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Thompson & Keith, 2001; Webb, Looby, & Fults-McMurtery, 2004), as well as the consequent sexual expectations of the male and female dynamic within the African American community itself (Miller-Young, 2008; Hill-Collins, 2004; Ward, Hansbrough & Walker, 2005).

Perceived Realism of African-American Images In the Media

In a qualititative study conducted by James A. Rada,"*A New Piece to the Puzzle: Examining Effects of Television Portrayals of African Americans,"* the researcher sought to discover if the negative and positive portrayals of African Americans in television news coverage influence viewers to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards African Americans. The results of this research demonstrated that in fact audiences were more willing to help an African American individual if they were portrayed in a negative light. However the author does assert that the definitions of what positive and negative are should be more clearly defined for future research. In addition Rada admits that the entire context of the news story needs to be taken into account in order to produce a more complete study result. Rada explains that, "While the overt, traditional stereotypes of African Americans that were found in the early days of the medium are not present

today, research has found that African Americans are still misrepresented in television portrayals" (Rada, 2000, pg. 713).

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter explains in her article "*The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television,"* (2008) that media portrayals of African Americans are in fact interpreted by audience members to be true. She asserts that the negative portrayals often lead to a continuation of stereotypes of African-Americans in general (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008, pg. 251). In addition the author also concludes that while research into the television portrayals of African Americans is beneficial, more research should look at the presence of African Americans in motion pictures as well (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008, pg. 253).

In their article, authors Srividya Ramasubramanian and Mary Oliver (2007), illustrate the emotional responses to media stereotypes.Their research demonstrated that hostile prejudice is more likely to be expressed toward African-Americans and benevolent prejudice is more likely to be expressed towards Asian-Indians (Ramasubramanian& Oliver, 2007, pg. 623). Results also suggested that perceived failure among African Americans was interpreted as individual incompetence rather than the result of social injustice (Ramasubramanian& Oliver, 2007, pg. 641).

Influence of Media Images on African-American Self-Esteem

Media outlets have been shown to influence the self perceptions of its consumers (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Elasmar et al, 1999; Reese, Gandy, & Gordon, 2001; Richeson & Pollydore, 2002; Ward, 2002, 2004, & 2005). Previous research has demonstrated that images are more influential when the consumer can identify with the race of the actor or actress on the

screen (Abrams & Giles, 2007; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Mastro & Stern, 2003). This means that a White audience member will identify more with the white actor, actress, model, or athlete, and the same holds true for an African American viewer as well (Botta, 2000, pg. 155). In a study conducted by author Monique Ward (2004) she discusses the affect that media images have on black youth as consumers. Ward explains that black youth and adults have been shown to consume the most media of all racial groups (Ward, 2004, pg. 285). Author Patricia Hill Collins asserts that in the case of African American youth,

> "…popular culture has increased in importance as a source of information and ideas. African American youth, in particular, can no longer depend on a deeply textured web of families, churchs, fraternal organizations, school clubs, sports teams, and other community organizations to help them negotiate the challenges of social inequality. Mass media fills this void, especially movies, television, and music that market Black popular culture aimed at African American consumers" (Hill-Collins, 2004, pg. 121).

Because of this Ward states, "..frequent exposure to stereotypical images of Blacks as lazy, unintelligent, and criminal will lead viewers of all races to believe that these attributes characterize Blacks in the real world. In this way, it is believed that frequent media use may lead Black viewers to believe that Blacks are inferior and that being Black is bad, thereby leading to lower self-esteem and lower racial self-esteem" (Ward, 2004, pg. 285). The issue of self-esteem is a direct result of the perceived realism of African Americans in the media. If audiences are interpreting images presented to them in the media to be true, then the African-

Americans who are consuming these images begin to believe the stereotypical representations of African-Americans are true too. According to Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2004) African-American women specifically have to contend with stereotypical images of African American women in media influencing their day-to-day functions in society. Two stereotypes, Mammy and Sapphire, were shown to influence levels of self-esteem in African American women. Internalization of the Mammy stereotype can lead to the need to serve and care for others (Reynolds-Dobbs, 2008, pg. 137). Patricia Hill Collins explains that, "Black women who internalize the Mammy image potentially becomes effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg. 80). Women may end up defining themselves only in relationship to others and may base their happiness on others' well-being and satisfaction (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004, pg. 437). The Sapphire stereotype, influence self-esteem as well because, "women who internalize this stereotypic role may have low self-esteem if they struggle with expressing their feelings of anger, disappointment, or hurt" (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004, pg. 437). Authors Givens and Monahan explain that, "African American female schemas contain gender and racial cues that may interact significantly to influence the way in which African American women are perceived in social situations" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg. 101).

Within Givens and Monahan's study, the subjects were exposed to videos containing both the Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes and were then exposed to a mock job interview involving a female interviewee and the audiences were asked to identify which job fit best for the woman and the speed in which they did this was measured. The results demonstrated that participants were less familiar with the Mammy stereotype characteristics than they were terms

associated with the jezebel stereotype (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg. 102). These results suggests that, "…an African American woman who is perceived as jezebel-like should be seen as sexual and consequently more appropriate for a job as a cocktail waitress or exotic dancer" (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg.102). Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight found no predictive relationships between with the Jezebel and levels of self-esteem in African American women. Instead they theorize that African American women are more comfortable with their sexuality than most.

While the influence these controlling stereotypical beliefs and images have on the self-esteem of African American women is evident, there are also controlling images and beliefs which affect the interaction and understanding of African American women and men.

Gender Dynamics in the African-American Community Interactions

The internalization of stereotypes by the Black community has resulted in African American men and women believing in the controlling behaviors of the opposite sex. Author Patricia Hill-Collins has written on the subject of African American male and female relationships and interactions "*Black Sexual Politics,"* (2004) "*Black Feminist Thought,"* (2000). Hill-Collins asserts that it is the Eurocentric scripts that have been written since slavery that are being reinforced by the beliefs and interactions of African American women and men today (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg. 169). She explains that, "When African-American men see Black women as little more than mammies, matriarchs, or hoochies…they objectify not only the black woman but themselves" (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg. 169). Hill-Collins continues by stating, "Conversely, when Black women demand of their partners, "show me the money," they not only reduce Black men to a measure of their financial worth, but rein-scribe controlling images of themselves as mate-

rialistic “bitches” (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg. 169). Author bell hooks argues that these beliefs practiced by African American men and women against one another has resulted from the adoption of Eurocentric patriarchal ideals (hooks, 2004, pg. 18).

hooks defines patriarchy as, “…a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (hooks, 2004, pg. 18). Patriarchy is a belief system that can be accepted by both men and women, and is adopted in order to achieve the position of power that has been determined by the White standards (hooks, 2004, pg. 24). When adopting the ideology of patriarchy men are considered to be in power and therefore are expected to rule their households, Daniel Moynihan reinforced this belief in his controversial report on the Black family in 1965. Moynihan asserted that the Black family stood at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Black society (Moynihan, 1965, pg. 5). It is his belief that the lack of male-headed households in the Black family was the contributing factor to the decline of the productivity of the Black community (Moynihan, 1965, pg. 16). hooks would argue that the assumption of this by Moynihan feeds into the dominant patriarchal ideology that requires men to be the providers for their families. Patriarchal practices then parallel stereotypical beliefs of African-American men and women by fixing historically oppressive ideologies. The development of controlling behaviors and images of African Americans have been adopted by men and women within the African American community and ultimately support the controlling patriarchal system of society. Therefore, stereotypical images have reinforced

stereotypical beliefs within the African American community and influenced the interactions and expectations of African American men and women.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter was meant to weave together broad aspects of the African and African American experience and the oversimplification of this experience in the eyes of society and the media. The outlet of entertainment as a tool used to reinforce and justify the treatment of the African American image, in this case primarily limited to the Black woman, for the purpose of profit, entertainment, scientific interest and brutality. Through the stereotypical representation of Black women, certain assumptions have become fixed into societal understanding of Black woman's behaviors and mannerisms that are still represented in contemporary media.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

The media plays an intricate and important role in the beliefs of society (Berger, 1998, pg. 103). Media and mass communication outlets consist of not just films, but radio, television, internet, magazines and newspapers as well. Tyler Perry is an African American film director who, within the past five years since his first film debuted in 2005, has received a magnitude of not simply recognition, but support for his movies and vision. The main character in Perry's most popular films is an old woman named Mabel 'Madea' Simmons played by Perry himself dressed as a woman. Madea is an appropriate subject for study because of the scale of her popularity. The purpose in this study is to examine the relationship between Madea and the historical African American female stereotypes. The Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire are three

predominant 'types' of African American women that have appeared historically in the media. Madea's characteristics reflect historically stereotypical depictions of African American women, specifically in films.

Within this chapter, the researcher will discuss in detail the proposed research method for this study. An elaboration of previous research methods, methodological frameworks, data collection, and interpretation will be discussed in length throughout this chapter.

3.2 Research Methods and Design Appropriateness

This study used qualitative methodology, ethnographic content analysis. The reasoning for choosing this form of methodology instead of quantitative was the centrality of the researcher to the interpretation of the data (Altheide, 1987, pg. 68). Author David Altheide is recognized as the authority on Ethnographic content analysis (ECA). He explains that ECA, "… is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships" (Altheide, 1987,pg. 68). This study was meant to discover the relationship between the behaviors of the Madea character and the historical representations of African American women in films. Utilizing ECA was key in this study because "This method is particularly well suited to textual and visual data" (Jernigan & Dorfman, 1996, pg. 175). Utilizing this form of research methodology is appropriate because according to Altheide, the protocol is used as the instrument and the categories precede the analysis of the data (Altheide, 1987, pg. 68).

The nature of a, "content analysis provides a consistent and transparent examination of categories which can then be expressed in terms of frequencies" (Dixon-Woods et al., 2007, pg. 794). However, this study began with a set of pre-determined categories of the Mammy, Jeze-

bel, and Sapphire stereotypes and examined the frequencies of behavior that Madea exhibited which fell into the categories of Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire. However this research did not limit her behavior to these three categories, and was conscious of other behaviors that were coded separately from the three primary categories. Several studies have utilized ECA as their form of methodology because of the detail analysis that ECA enables the researcher to identify emergent themes and commonalities within the data (Costello, 2002; Dixon-Woods et al., 2007; Exner & Thurston, 2009; Jernigan & Dorfman, 1996; Laird, Marrais, & Barnes, 2007). Altheide explains that, "ECA consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation" (Altheide, 1987, pg. 68). He continues by stating, "the aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid" (Altheide, 1987, pg. 68). Because this study is based on analyzing the content of films containing Madea, this form of research is the most appropriate to best answer the research question.

The theoretical framework within which this research was conducted was semiotics. "Semiotics is the study of signs, and in the semiotic sense 'signs' can take the form of anything; including words, gestures, sounds, objects and images" (Chandler 2002, pg. 2). In this study Madea was treated as a sign. Her image, speech, and gestures were observed. Author Daniel Chandler states that, "anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something, referring to or standing in for something other than itself" (Chandler 2002, pg. 13). Applying a semiological framework to this content analysis study was deemed by the researcher to be the most useful to this study because ECA and semiotics are mutually reinforcing. Because ECA is central to the researcher's interpretation, semiotics was deemed the most appropriate framework because the investigator must first recognize that the sign conveying meaning

in fact extends beyond itself (Chandler 2002, pg. 13). It is the researcher's belief that Madea as a sign is conveying meaning beyond simply a movie character, but instead a potentially negative meaning that has historical relevance in the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes.

3.3 Population, Sample, and Data Collection Procedures and Rationale

In order to properly engage this research, Tyler Perry's four films featuring Madea were analyzed. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), *Madea Goes To Jail* (2009), and *I Can Do Bad All By Myse*lf (2009) are the only films that have featured Madea. In '*Diary of a Mad Black Woman*' Madea is called upon by a relative for assistance after her husband left her and kicked her out of their home. '*Madea's Family Reunion*' shows a young woman who is being abused by her husband and she and her sister seek out Madea for refuge and advice. '*Madea Goes To Jail*' is about Madea's criminal past and behaviors catching up to her and being incarcerated as a result. And lastly in '*I Can Do Bad All By Myself*' Madea's promiscuous granddaughter appears after a long absence needing help with straightening out her life. Madea is a prominent figure within Tyler Perry's films and plays, and she represents the leader of her family.

Each film, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman, Madea's Family Reunion, Madea Goes To Jail*, and *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* includes Madea and she functions in the films in a leadership role for friends and family. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea acts as a caregiver to her granddaughter Helen who has been put out of the house by her abusive husband Charles. Madea gives Helen encouragement to get back on her feet while giving her a place to stay. In the film *Madea's Family Reunion* Lisa, the main character, is in an abusive relationship and she runs to her sister Vanessa who is staying with Madea with her two young children. Madea gives both

sisters advice and simultaneously takes care of a foster child that has been placed in her custody by the courts as a punishment for breaking her probation. *Madea Goes To Jail* depicts a young prostitute named Candice who is jailed on false charges and meets Madea who has finally been locked up for her long list of criminal offenses. Madea serves as a form of protection and a source of advice to both Candice and other inmates. *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* is about three orphaned children who seek out their troubled aunt for support. Madea brings the young children to their aunt's house after she caught them breaking into her house and attempting to steal her belongings. As a form of payment the aunt agrees to bring the children to Madea's house in order to work off the money that is owed.

The data collected for this study consisted of both the visual representation and the behaviors of Madea. Utilizing ECA enabled me to discover consistent themes among the codes appearing from Madea. Ethnographic content analysis defines and describes the emergent patterns of the research data (Laird, Marrais, & Barnes, 2007,pg 2426). As an example, in a study conducted by authors Jernigan and Dorfman (1996), "*Visualizing America's drug problems: an ethnographic content analysis of illegal drug stories on the nightly news"* researchers sought out to discover the frequencies of nightly news reports of illegal drug stories in response to the 'War on Drugs' that was declared by Ronald Regan and George Bush. In this study the researchers utilized ECA when analyzing their data. The authors explained, "Each story was watched at least four times by the authors. With transcript in hand, each story was viewed first in real time to see the story; again to mark each new shot (cut); a third time in slow motion to record every image in every shot; and finally the total sample again twice to verify the numbers of shots in each story" (Jernigan & Dorfman, 1996, pg. 175). Thus I mimicked this studies procedure of ana-

lyzing television stories and applied them to the Madea films. Another researcher was recruited in order to ensure reliability and to reduce bias of the primary researcher.

Based on previous literary definitions (Bogle, 1994;Pieterse, 1995; West, 1995) Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes utilized four specific codes or themes which were applied to the behavior and appearance of Madea when observing her in these films. Mammy is defined as a large, cranky, old woman who is looked upon by her family to care for them (Bogle, 1994, pg. 9;Parks, 2010, pg. 39;West, 1995, pg. 459). Any behaviors or actions that Madea displayed in the form of irritability, chastisement, or nurturing were assigned as a Mammy code. Sapphire is defined as being a sharp tongued, humiliating, and emasculating, especially when addressing men and children ("Sapphire Charicature", 2009, np). She is sassy and commonly labeled as a 'bitch' and her behavior can become violent quickly. The Sapphire is rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, pg. 243). Any violent and insulting behavior that Madea exhibited was assigned as Sapphire code. A jezebel is characterized by her ability to utilize her own sexuality to get what she wants (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg. 91). References to Madea's sexuality or behavior in appearance and dialogue were placed with the Jezebel code. Lastly, all behaviors that could not be identified by any of the three stereotypical codes were interpreted to possibly form their own categories independent of Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire. This category functioned to display any behaviors or actions that Madea possesses which are not representative of the three stereotypes, but could contribute to future possible research involving Madea, or African-American film representation.

The recruited researcher was given a set of definitions to observe Madea's behavior and appearance. Given the nature of the methodology the process of interpreting the data required

a series of filtering through the transcriptions of the films to ensure consistency in the themes. The researchers compared data analysis and discrepancies were settled by coding a behavior into more than one theme. For example when Madea makes a statement to her nephew about his wife who is strung out on drugs, the primary researcher interpreted the statement as a nurturing statement related to the Mammy theme. The recruited researcher however coded this statement as advice/wisdom that was related to the Other theme. In order to reach a consensus about the variation in the interpretation of the statement the statement remained coded under both themes, and the difference was discussed in the results.

Statements and behaviors were first labeled as being consistent with either Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, or Other. Once that was complete the researchers returned to the data to determine which specific characteristic that statement or behavior reflected. For example a statement assigned to Mammy was later labeled as 'nurturing' based on the nature of the statement. After the data was coded, each code was placed in the appropriate theme that corresponded with the characteristics of each theme. Some of the data was assigned to more than one category, therefore some statements were interpreted to contain more than one meaning. However the researchers were able to reach a consensus on each code and theme.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research methods and design appropriate for my research. Ethnographic content analysis was conducted within the framework of semiotics. This method has been shown to be beneficial in previous studies examining the reoccurring themes or trends that appear in media outlets (Altheide, 1987; Exner & Thurston, 2009; Jernigan & Dorfman, 1996). A semiological approach was appropriate for this research because it is the study of

meaning within signs, interpreting everything as a sign with meaning attached (Berger, 1998, pg13). Utilizing this method and framework as a major component of the study enabled me to treat Madea as a sign and code her behaviors and appearance to examine character traits of Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire.

4.0 Results

This study consists of four themes, see appendix A. The first was the Mammy theme that represented any behaviors or appearances that related to Madea being either large, cranky, nurturing, a caregiver, domestic, independent, loyal, or dimwitted (Bogle, 1994, pg 9; Pieterse, 1990, pg 228; Parks, 2010, pg 39; West, 1995, pg 459). The Sapphire stereotype was characterized as being a sharp-tongued, humiliating, and emasculating, especially when addressing men and children (Ferris State University, 2009, np). She was sassy and commonly labeled as a 'bitch' and her behavior could become violent quickly. The Sapphire was rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, pg. 243). Any violent, emasculating and insulting behavior that Madea exhibited throughout these films was assigned to the Sapphire stereotype. A jezebel was characterized by her ability to utilize her own sexuality to get what she wants (Givens & Monahan, 2005, pg. 91). References to Madea's sexuality, either in appearance or dialogue were placed in the Jezebel category. Lastly all behaviors that could not be identified by any of the three stereotypical categories were interpreted to possibly form their own theme independent of Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire. This category functions to display any behaviors or actions that Madea possesses which are not representative of the three stereotypes.

To determine the relationship of Madea with Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes, I analyzed films in which Madea appeared and compared her behaviors to predetermined stereotypes. The films were viewed in chronological order of theatrical release. This was done in order to determine whether behaviors were consistent in the films over time.

Applying ethnographic content analysis, which relies on the researcher to interpret the data (Altheide, 1987,pg. 68), the four films that contain Madea were viewed four times per film and Madea's behavior, appearance, and interaction with other characters were documented. After the films were analyzed, each statement, behavior, or appearance by Madea was coded and assigned to; Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, or Other. In order to ensure reliability and reduce bias a second researcher was recruited for this study. The recruited researcher earned a M.A. degree from Georgia State University and was determined to be capable of assisting the study.

4.1 <u>Madea's Sapphire Characteristics</u>

736 coded behaviors developed through the research. Out of the 736 behaviors 382 Madea's behaviors most commonly fell into the stereotype of the Sapphire. The Sapphire stereotype has the characteristics of being sassy, insulting, and violent. She directs a large amount of her anger towards men. Madea exhibits these behaviors in all of the films in several ways.

<u>Threatening Behavior</u>

In the movie *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* when talking to her brother Joe, Madea states,"

> I know you're my brother and the only reason I'm letting you stay in my house is to get your check, but I can still get your check if you come up

> missing, keep trying me [and] you gon end up in the Chattahoochee River" (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman,* 2005*).*

In this statement Madea is conveying a threat of violence and is directing that threat towards a black male, behavior reflective of Sapphire.

In the film *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* Madea has brought three children who attempted to rob her house back to their aunt. While attempting to reconcile the repayment of property damage with the children's aunt the young girl speaks out in a dismissive and disrespectful manner, Madea responds by grabbing the back of the young girls jacket and growling, "Say something else, I want you to say something else, say something, snatch away from me and I'm gonna punch you, I'm gonna punch you like a dude, say something". Madea is displaying violent behavior that she uses as a tool to maintain dominance over those who attempt to challenge her. Later on in the film while addressing the same young girl again, who threatens to call 911 if Madea touches her again. Madea retorts by stating, "

> What you mean 'touch you again?' I ain't touched you yet, you gotta get to the phone if your gonna dial 911 honey you got to get to the phone and I will hit you so hard that your cranium and your skull and urethra tube will be all tied up together inside of each other you won't be about to do nothing but pee and run" (*I Can Do Bad All By Myself,* 2009*)*.

This also illustrates violent and threatening behavior by Madea that is reflective of Sapphire. Several instances occur when Madea physically strikes other characters in the movies as well.

<u>Examples of Physical Violence</u>

In the film *Madea's Family Reunion* Madea is riding in the car with her new foster daughter Nicki and nephew Brian. When Nicki challenges her by saying, "You don't know me, I'll whoop an old lady" while removing her earrings. Madea in response takes off her seatbelt and turns around jumping over the seat and begins to beat the young girl. In between the strikes Madea exclaims, "I don't know who….sit there and act like you don't got no sense….shut the hell up! Shut up! Shut up! Not sit in that seat and put the seatbelt on you better put that seat-belt on right now!" Later in the film Madea escorts Nicki onto the school bus to talk to the children about teasing the girl. There is a young boy on the bus who shouts out, "Shut up old lady!" and when the children begin to laugh Madea jumps over the seat and begins to smack the child over and over again until she finally releases him, straightens herself up and leaves the bus.

In, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* after assisting her granddaughter Helen with destroying her husband's mistresses closet, Madea is confronted by the mistress. However, before they physically fight Madea hears Helen's raised voice downstairs and as she runs past the mistress to assist Helen, she strikes the woman in the back of the head. In, *Madea Goes To Jail,* Madea and the young girl Candice are approaches by Big Sal, another inmate, when Madea tells Big Sal to leave the girl alone Big Sal challenges her by stating, "What you gon do?" In response Madea smiles and throws powder in Big Sal's face and begins to beat her up in the laundry room dragging her around the room and placing her head under the hot iron press before finally throwing her in a clothes hamper. While the attack was occurring Madea states, "Come on, come on you big heifer" allowing Candice to strike Big Sal as well once she in stuffed in the hamper. The opening scene of movie *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* depicts Madea waking up in the middle of

the night to sounds coming from downstairs and after waking up her brother to go investigate she intercepts the intruders saying, “Is this worth getting a cap bust in your ass for?” When one of the intruders drops the VCR Madea and her brother Joe begin to beat and strike the intruders before Madea realizes they are children.

Insulting Towards Black Men

A large amount of Madea’s insults are directed at men, primarily her brother Joe and Nephew Brian. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* while talking to her brother Joe Madea states, “You are always messing with somebody what the hell wrong with you? You just grouchy as hell you been grouchy that’s why momma and daddy didn’t like you.” Joe replies, “

> …Mabel you know, you just huge you big as a Buick you just fat as hell, I watched you walk down the hall the other day I thought somebody had put a refrigerator on your butt you’re huge, you’re big (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman, 2005).*

Madea replies by stating, “And that’s something you’ll never in your life hear a woman say…” causing Joe to stop talking. Other instances of emasculation are seen in the movie *Madea’s Family Reunion* for example*:* in the film *Madea Goes To Jail* where Madea is in a courtroom and the judge is attempting to send her to jail Madea chastises her lawyer and nephew Brian by stating, “Your weak ass your suppose to get me off, your weak ass I need to get me a real lawyer, Matt Johnson or somebody your weak ass lawyer, Ugh Lord!” Another film, *Madea’s Family Reunion* shows Madea in the courtroom again with her lawyer Brian and she turns to insult him after the judge dismisses his statement. Madea says, “I told you, you don’t know how to lie. What kind of lawyer don’t know how to lie? Lie and lawyer go together lie-awyer,

lie-awyer that's all you is." Madea here is challenging Brian's ability as a lawyer which is his means of supporting his family and simultaneously insulting his manhood as well by calling him 'weak'.

When Madea arrives home from court Joe states, "I was sure hoping they would have locked you up". Madea retorts by saying, "The only thing locked up is your bowels now shut the hell up". When Joe finds out that Madea has become a foster mother in lieu of going to jail, Joe protests. Madea in turn states, "I remember I sent you somewhere too and you came back with something, you still itching?" Later in the film when Madea is speaking to the foster child Nicki about going to college she states,"

> Smart as you is you better go, it ain't where you come from honey it's where you're going, no matter what your momma was or who your dad-dy was you can be anything you wanna be. I mean look at, look at Brian he turned out to be a lawyer and look at his daddy, a big ole lump of nothing" (*Madea's Family Reunion, 2006).*

Once Nicki goes upstairs Joe says to Madea, "You know how much college gon cost for her to be a lawyer? Who gon pay for that?" Madea responds, "Well I figure if you do us a favor and DIE, we can use your insurance money". In *Madea Goes To Jail,* after Joe implies that Ma-dea can get a job as a whale at the local aquarium Madea snaps back, "You rusty old bastard, you fart and dust come out. Go to hell".

Madea and Joe are sitting at the kitchen table in *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* and Joe is arguing about the fact that Madea is feeding the children who just broke into their house. Joe says, "You got one roach in your house you're gonna have thousands, I'm telling you these kids,

you're never going to be able to get rid of these children". Madea responds by stating, "Just like you ain't been able to get rid of what you got, scratch n sniff, hahaha".

These are all instances of Madea being emasculating, specifically to men who are her relatives. Madea reflects the behaviors of the Sapphire by acting out in an insulting and angry manner towards Black males in order to demean them. Though her targets are directed at specific people primarily, it is a consistent behavior that is seen throughout all four films.

4.2 MAMMY

Looking at behaviors that were coded with the Mammy theme, the researcher determined that Madea possessed traits of the Mammy that included being a nurturer, a caregiver, and a protector, while also maintaining the general appearance of a Mammy. In all four films Madea is depicted as an elderly, brown skinned, large-statured woman. In the film, *Madea Goes To Jail,* there is a photo montage in the opening credits that show old pictures of Madea that still make her look old. Historically Mammy was shown to have extreme loyalty to the white family that she cared for and showed devotion towards them while neglecting her own family if they existed at all. Madea channels this same impassioned loyalty and dedication but directs it towards her own family instead.

Madea Behaving as a Nurturer and Protective

In a scene from the film *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea's granddaughter Helen comes down the steps into the kitchen to find a woman standing in Madea's kitchen while Madea is making her a plate of food. Madea says, "You didn't come by yesterday, you got to eat something out there on them streets you got to be careful". Helen realizes this is her childhood friend Debra, and after exchanging a few words Debra leaves with the plate of food Madea

hands her. Madea shouts after Debra, “you take care of yourself out there”! Another scene later in the movie Madea steps forward when Helen is being threatened by her husband. Madea walks in the room and witnesses Charles placing his hands on Helen, and Madea, while holding up a handgun exclaims, “Oh please, do it please hit her I want to see you do it! The hell is wrong with you? Hit her ya bastard put ya hands on her!” though this statement was coded in an additional category with a different meaning, the researchers interpreted this as a nurturing and protective as well. These are two varying examples of nurturing. The earlier depicts Madea giving comfort through food, though she does not have control over the woman’s life choices, Madea does have control over what she eats. This is an act of nurturing that Madea uses often to utilize food as an act of comfort and security. The second example of Madea threatening Helen’s husband is Madea inserting herself in the situation to show Helen that she is in her corner and will defend her in spite of the situation.

In the film *Madea’s Family Reunion,* while Madea is in court explaining that she removed her court ordered ankle bracelet to take care of her brother. Madea says, “

> Oh yes I have to though I have to because you know nobody else gon take care of him, that’s my only brother you know and I take care of his kids when he’s in court, and I take care of my great niece and her children they at my house too cause I open my house up to anybody in need, anybody in need they can come to my house and get a good meal and everything. That’s why I can’t be tied down I have to go to the store and stuff for people. I feed the homeless and help the hungry I’m going on the highways and

> byways of doing what the Lord told me to do, praise him thank you Jesus" (*Madea's Family Reunion, 2006).*

Regardless of what she says about her family Madea makes sure that her family is taken care of and provides them with a roof over their heads and three square meals per day. This is another instance of Madea utilizing domestic qualities as a tool to help provide for those who are in need. In another instance in the film Madea is speaking to some of her family members about her foster daughter and she states,"

> Nah, you know I look at these foster parents taking these children in you know just trying to get money, but you know what I found out ain't nothing wrong with these children all they need is some love and support and somebody to be a little patient with them and they'll be alright you know that's what I found out about these kids" (*Madea's Family Reunion,* 2006).

This demonstrates a nurturing and understanding side to Madea that while she is not directing this nurturing nature towards a White family is still reflective of a Mammy behavior. Madea discusses her caring nature when talking to her daughter Cora in the film *Madea Goes To Jail.* Cora has just asked Madea for 'me time' when Madea calls to see where she is because Cora was supposed to take Madea to the store. Madea, hearing Cora's request for 'me time' responds by stating,"

> Did I ask you for some me time when I had to get up every four hours to cook for you up until the time you were 17 years old? Did I ask you for some me time when I had to hit that stripper pole every night trying to

> bring some money into this house, did I ask you for some me time? All those old men I met trying to make it drizzle cause they sure in the hell couldn't make it rain what in the hell is me time?" (*Madea Goes To Jail, 2009)*

Madea brings up her past employment to remind her child about the ends she went to in order to make sure that her daughter was taken care of. She does not glorify how she supported her family she simply uses it a reminder to her daughter an example of her nurturing behavior growing up. Another example of Madea's nurturing manner is in the film *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* when she feeds the children who just broke into her house. Madea encourages the children to eat as much as they want saying, "Yall eat like yall didn't eat nothing in days". When the oldest of the children attempts to discourage Madea from calling the police Madea replies,"

> You don't tell me not to call the cops. If I wanna call the cops, I'm gonna call the cops. I might not call if you done learned your lesson. The lesson is simple, you can ask people for stuff you ain't got to be breaking in they house and steal it. See I'm feeding you out the kindness of my heart, I'm doing the Christian thing, I'm doing what Jesus would have did right now I'm feeding you. My daughter would be so proud of me feeding the people that came up in here trying to steal from me. All this stuff going on in the world I can help yall if you ask me to help you ain't got to come breaking into the house. Hell people are struggling working hard for what the hell they got and you gonna break up in somebody's house *smacking

> the table* what the hell is wrong with yall" (*I Can Do Bad All By Myself, 2009)*.

Madea is demonstrating a nurturing behavior by providing food for these children despite the fact that they just broke into her house. While they eat she shows her irritation with them by explaining they could have simply asked for help. This reflects her nurturing nature because she implies that she would have assisted these children had they sought her out for help. In the same film later on Madea is speaking with the same young girl named Jennifer. The girl is working at Madea's to pay off the debt of breaking her window and Joe's VCR, when the girl tells Madea that she doesn't have much to smile about Madea responds, "

> hush that up, got a whole lot to smile about, you living. They got children your age in the hospital strung out on HIV, drugs and everything else you sitting talking about you ain't got nothing to smile, you pretty little girl. Honey get you a mirror and see how pretty you are and smile at yourself sometime" (*I Can Do Bad All by Myself,* 2009).

Jennifer says that she doesn't have nice clothes to make her pretty and Madea responds, "

> Clothes don't make you pretty they make you broke. You know what I want you to do, there ain't no mirror down here, when you get through cleaning that window look at yourself and see how pretty you are. Go on clean it real good until you see your smile" (*I Can Do Bad All by Myself)*.

These are statements and actions of a nurturing person who is concerned with those with whom she comes in contact with. Regardless that this girl is not related to her, Madea sees

the necessity of complimenting and encouraging the girl. Again this is reflective of the Mammy stereotype despite her care for her own family, rather than a White one, which is more historically accurate.

Dimwitted Behavior

In addition to being a caregiver Mammy has been described as a dimwitted character. In the film *Madea's Family Reunion,* when her foster daughter asks her for assistance with her algebra homework Madea replies first by looking at the homework paper with a confused expression, she flips the paper upside down then right side up again while shaking her head she states, "honey I don't know nothing about Al Jarreau honey when I was in school we had 3 R's read, write, rifatic I don't know nothing about that Al Jarreau". In the film '*Madea Goes To Jail*' Madea is shown in a courtroom listening as a lawyer explains to the judge that Madea was not read her Miranda rights. Madea exclaims, "I was waiting for Miranda to come in there and nobody came in there I was waiting for her that's right, ain't nobody Miranda me Miranda wasn't even in the room". This statement, though demonstrating a dismissive behavior suggests an ignorance of the legal system's terminology and a lack of academic intelligence.

4.3 JEZEBEL

Jezebel was a stereotype that was less prevalent in Madea's behaviors, however, she exhibited some traits of a Jezebel. Historically the Jezebel stereotype has been characterized as a sexualized figure who manipulates people, primarily men in order to achieve whatever she wants at the time.

Manipulative Actions

The opening scenes to the film *Madea Goes To Jail* depicts images of Madea dressed as a fan dancer and pictures of her business cards as a call girl and private dancer named 'Platinum' Simmons. In the same film Madea is talking to her daughter Cora who has requested to have some "me time" instead of coming to pick up Madea as she has requested. Madea replies by exclaiming, "

> Did I ask you for some me time when I had to hit that stripper pole every night trying to bring some money into this house, did I ask you for some me time? All those old men I met trying to make it drizzle cause they sure in hell couldn't make it rain, what the hell is me time?" (*Madea Goes To Jail, 2009)*

This statement demonstrates a past sexual life that Madea once led as a stripper to obtain money from men and illustrates a form of manipulation and sexuality that is reminiscent of the Jezebel traits. Later on in the same film Madea is talking to her new cellmate DD. DD tells her that she made her bunk for her and Madea explains, "Oh thank you honey I appreciate it, but I ain't into none of that freaky deeky stuff just cause you making a bunk don't mean I'm giving you nothing, you ain't getting none of this good stuff you understand?" Another scene from this film shows Madea at a meeting in jail and is talking to the group when an inmate challenges her. Big Sal, who has already been beaten up by Madea shouts for the inmate to allow Madea to talk. Madea smiles and says, "Thank you biggie smalls" Big Sal responds, "I love it when you call me big poppa" Madea giggles and states, "you're such a gentleman". These examples of Madea being both aware of her sexuality and defending it while flirting, and using it as a way to get what she wants in prison emulates Jezebel-like characteristics.

4.4 Other

The 'other' category functions as a means to code behaviors that Madea possesses which can be interpreted independently from the three initial stereotypes. In this category Madea was shown to possess characteristics of being sociable, giving advice, challenging authority and acting as a disciplinarian to others. In '*Diary of a Mad Black Woman*' and '*Madea's Family Reunion*' Madea is shown leading a large group of family and friends in the electric slide dance, and her house is the location for multiple cookouts and social gatherings. In addition when people around her are troubled she makes an effort to give them advice.

Madea Reflecting Qualities of Wisdom

Although Madea is not academically intelligent, she is smart as far as people are concerned. Madea is capable of sharing advice and wisdom with people around her who require it. While in a meeting in prison in the film, '*Madea Goes To Jail*', Madea is shown listening to other prisoners discussing the matter of forgiveness and not being able to forgive people who have done you wrong. Madea complains about listening to the people's stories and when the minister questions her about it she states,"

> I'm sorry reverend, doctor, bishop lady whatever your name is, I just don't agree with all this stuff, I hear what you say about forgiveness yes your suppose to forgive people, but this child over here talking about what her daddy did, honey your daddy is somewhere living life and you on lockdown. Honey you in jail cause of what you did, learn how to take some responsibility for yourself for your own stuff, I can't stand folk want to be the victim. This person did this that why I'm this way, everybody in

> this place got a story. Your momma and your daddy gave you life that's all they were suppose to do, no matter how good or how bad the life was it's up to you to make something out of it suck it up and shut the hell up" (*Madea Goes To Jail,2009)*.

In this instance, although she is somewhat sassy in her statements, Madea is giving advice to an individual that she doesn't know and still chose to give her guidance. These behaviors were determined to be separate from the Mammy theme because none of the literature revealed that Mammy gave advice. Though Mammy is nurturing that is not correlated with the capability to give advice.

In the film *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* while talking to her nephew Brian about his reluctance to allow his daughter to sing in the church choir out of fear that it will lead her to drugs in the same manner that his wife was Madea explains to him,"

> Brian you using them children like a crutch , you understand what I'm telling you? Any fool could see that you love that woman with all your might , you need to help her and at the same time it might help you. Listen you take your daughter on down there and let her sing in that church choir that is constructual what she's doing she needs to do something constructual. Love is stronger than any addiction baby, hell it is one" (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman, 2005)*.

Here Madea is expressing a sense of compassion and understanding while giving advice to her nephew about a serious issue influencing his family.

Behaviors of a Disciplinarian

Madea acts as a disciplinarian towards children. In '*Madea's Family Reunion*' while Madea is talking to her new foster daughter after she hits the child for being disrespectful Madea exclaims, "

> I don't know what's wrong with these children today but oh I'll set them straight, you don't know me I'm from the old school and I will beat the hell out of you first and ask questions later! If you don't know how to get in line I will get you in line!" (*Madea's Family Reunion, 2005)*

As a reaction to the young girls' disrespectful attitude towards Madea, she disciplined the child in order to let her know that she is unwilling to accept any disrespectful behavior or actions. Later in the film the young girl, Nicki, arrives home from school late. Madea questions her about where she has been, and after beating her with a belt for lying about her whereabouts Madea again steps in as a disciplinarian and talks to the girl. Madea states, "Why wasn't you in school today?" Nicki replies that she went to the park, Madea replies, "What were you doing in the park you suppose to be at the school house" Nicki doesn't respond and Madea says, "Lil Girl I'm not gon ask you no more" finally Nicki explains that she doesn't like being at school because she doesn't feel smart like the other kids and her last foster mother told her that she wasn't good for anything. Hearing this Madea explains while holding her hand on her hip, "

> The best revenge you can have on somebody that done told you something like that is to prove them wrong. Now I went down to that school and I got your homework, talked to your teacher and she said this what

> you need to work on now go upstairs and get it done" (*Madea's Family Reunion, 2006).*

After examining this scene, Madea acts again in the form of a disciplinarian to the young girl. Though she does strike her with a belt her intention is not to harm the girl but she showed genuine concern for the girl's education and helping her out. She acts as a disciplinarian by first scolding the young girl for lying and disobeying Madea, and then giving her support and encouragement that she has the ability to succeed in life.

From the data, it is the determination of the researchers that there is in fact a relationship between Madea and the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. However the fourth category of 'Other' provided a broader range of characteristics Madea possesses that contribute to her not being a clear cut manifestation of the stereotypes.

Madea appears and behaves as a Mammy, however she directs her nurturing and caregiving attributes towards her family and those who shows signs of needing support. She behaves very much as a Sapphire in her violent actions and insulting behaviors, but generally she reacts in this manner towards people that she feels have either disrespected her and her family or challenged her authority is some way. Madea least represented the Jezebel category primarily because many of the references to Jezebel came from a 'former life' of being a stripper. By appearance alone, Madea represents a Mammy-like figure and was more likely to contradict any Jezebel behavior. Data in the Jezebel category primarily consisted of manipulative or behavior that referenced sexuality which Madea exhibited in order to avoid any trouble with others. The 'other' category displayed other parts of Madea's characteristics that did not fit into a predetermined stereotype and she was shown to behave as a disciplinarian to others as well.

This chapter consisted of a description of the study and the methods utilized to produce data that could be interpreted to answer the proposed research question. The steps of analysis were discussed and the definitions of the predetermined categories were given. The results from that analysis was presented to demonstrate that Madea's character, while it does consist of stereotypical behavior, does not solely represent these historically negative traits. Madea behaves in a manner that is representative of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire characteristics, however this is not all she consists of. Behaviors that were coded independently from the stereotypes were interpreted into a fourth theme that shows Madea has more to her personality than stereotypical behavior. Chapter 5 will explore in greater detail the meaning of this information, the contribution this data can have towards future research studies.

5.0 <u>Discussion</u>

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Madea and three derogatory stereotypes of African-American women. Madea was shown to represent behaviors of all three stereotypes, however that is not all her character consisted of. The 'other' theme displayed behaviors of Madea that contradicted the confines of stereotypical definitions. Madea is more complex than the assigned stereotypes were able to capture. She is a blend of stereotypes but also represents more.

Previous studies have shown that the internalization of images in the media influences the viewer. In addition images that convey stereotypical meaning have been shown to have negative influences on the individuals consuming the media (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008; Rada, 2000; Ramasubramanian& Oliver, 2007). Media images of African Americans have been shown to be stereotypical and often negative in nature which caused the actors portraying these im-

ages to be typecast into a fixed perception and ideal (Bell, 2004; Bristor, Lee & Hunt, 1995; Elasmar et.al., 1999; Owens; 2006; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison; 2008; Richeson& Pollydore,2002; Snooks& Hall, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine Madea and discover if she represented any historically stereotypical behavior and imagery. The research method employed for this study was an ethnographic content analysis that allows the interpretation of the data to rely solely on the researcher. A semiotic framework was utilized in this study in order to treat Madea as a sign that conveys meaning. In this chapter I discuss the results, the implications of these findings, and contributions that these findings can have towards future research.

The data shows that Madea does carry traits of Mammy, Jezebel, as well as Sapphire. However, the "Other" theme displays a large amount of behaviors that Madea possesses which are not associated with the three selected stereotypes. The Mammy theme was defined by any behavior or appearance that was associated with being large, stubborn, nurturing, a caregiver, loyal, and domestic. Authors have asserted that internalizing this image can be damaging to African American women (Hill-Collins, 2000; Parks, 2010; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). Patricia Hill-Collins asserts that, "By teaching Black children their assigned place in white power structures, Black women who internalize the Mammy image potentially become conduits for perpetuating racial oppression" (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg 80). Madea's behavior challenges this assertion however primarily because Madea does not advocate for subservience in the children with whom she interacts. Instead Madea encourages and nurtures children to be their best.

5.1 <u>Examples of Madea's Nurturing Behavior</u>

In the film *Madea's Family Reunion* upon returning home from school Madea's foster daughter Nicki shows her the 'B' that she earned on a math test. After Madea congratulates her Nicki states that a lot of the children in her class got help from their parents and Madea replies, "well that makes you smarter than them cuz you figured it out yourself." As the conversation continues Madea tells her that she can stay in the house until she goes away to college. When Nicki replies with skepticism about the possibility of college Madea states, "Smart as you is you better go, it ain't where you come from honey it's where you're going, no matter what yo momma was or who your daddy was you can be anything you wanna be….". This act of encouragement and nurturing for Nicki demonstrates that Madea does not encourage the young girl to accept mediocrity. To challenge this instead she encourages Nicki to excel in school and to think highly of herself. Madea is also often shows traits of challenging authority, and breaking the law.

In the film *Madea Goes to Jail* Madea is sent to jail for picking up a white woman's car with a forklift and damaging it. The woman's husband is a police officer and when officials are sent to her house she fights them stating, "Tell you what, I ain't going down without a fight, come on you bad, come on" before she is finally subdued. These behaviors do not suggest a submissive individual content with white authority or any authority in general.

Hill-Collins also asserts that the modern day Mammy has converted her historical devotion to the white family she served and now reinforces a myth that Black women should be devoted entirely to their jobs (Hill-Collins, 2000, pg 81). This is not true for Madea, though she is a modern character she is older which suggests that she is not required to work any longer in order to support herself. However when she does make reference to her previous work. Madea

makes it clear that her motivation was to support her daughter at the time showing more devotion to her family rather than her actual job. In the film 'Madea Goes to Jail' when Madea makes her 'me time' statement towards her daughter Cora this is an example that Madea did not have any misguided devotion, instead her priority was her family and raising her daughter.

In the article "*From Mammy to Superwoman: images that hinder Black women's career development*" by Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison the authors suggest that the internalization of the Mammy image has potentially negative influences. They argue that both the Mammy and Sapphire stereotypes makes it difficult for Black women to be seen in a leader role. In the article they state in reference to the Mammy character that, "Although nurturing and caretaking abilities are positive qualities, they are not viewed as characteristics of influential leaders…." (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008, pg. 139) However Madea is viewed as a matriarch of the family. In all four films, a collective of family and strangers all gravitate towards Madea in search for advice, support. They also give her the final say on matters. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea's granddaughter Helen arrives at her house in the middle of the night after being forced out of her own home by her soon to be ex-husband. When Madea attempts to leave her outside Helen pleads with Madea to let her inside.

In *Madea's Family Reunion* When Vanessa, Madea's great niece, who is staying at Madea's house with her two children discovers that her sister Lisa is being abused by her fiancée Vanessa immediately calls Madea into the kitchen for help. Later in the film when Lisa runs away from her fiancée she goes to Madea's house for refuge. The movie *Madea Goes to Jail* once she is locked up Madea is surrounded by a small group of young women to look to her for protection and advice after she defends a young girl name Candice from another prison inmate

Big Sal. After some time Madea ultimately earns the respect from Big Sal as well. In *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* a young girl names Jennifer who broke into Madea's house along with her two younger brothers seeks Madea out for help when she realizes that her aunt intends to place her in foster care. These actions by Madea and others demonstrate that she is viewed as a leader who can be used as a support system.

Research indicates that Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire are negatively correlated to self-esteem. They state that the internalizing the Mammy stereotype, "…may lead to the need to serve and to care for others, often setting aside one's own needs in the process" (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004, pg 437). They continue by saying, "Some women may end up defining themselves only in relationship to others and may base their happiness on others' well-being and satisfaction" (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004, pg 437). Though Madea does not explicitly come out and state how she actually views herself, she supports her family and those around her and generally offers up advice and assistance whenever she has the opportunity.

This is not viewed as a form of weakness because Madea still expects respect from people. In the film, *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* Madea is awakened by noises coming from downstairs. She says to herself, "I know ain't nobody breaking in my house. Must be somebody new to the neighborhood, they gon break in MY house. I'm Madea and they gonna break in this house? Oh hell naw"! And she gets out of bed to investigate downstairs. In another scene in *Madea Goes to Jail* after Madea has helped a young girl named Candice in the prison from another inmate Candice thanks Madea, she replies dismissively by stating, "I wasn't doing nothing for you honey I just don't like people messing over nobody that's all". This demonstrates

that while she is nurturing and chooses to take care of others Madea is not dependent on it to define who she is.

The data showed that Madea possesses Sapphire characteristics as well. The Sapphire theme included traits that were associated with being dismissive, angry, sassy, outspoken, emasculating, violent, and insulting. She is consistently at odd with men she encounters choosing to insult or belittle them in order to get her point across. Scholars assert that Black women who internalize the Sapphire stereotype may be fearful of being thought of angry black woman: "This stereotype also makes it difficult for Black women to show their vulnerability within the workplace because they are not looked at as being soft or vulnerable" (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008, pg 141). They continue by explaining, "…if a Black woman is too outspoken or aggressive she can become marginalized in an organization…Either way, Black women may be disadvantaged in regard to how people view them as leaders" (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008, pg 142). Madea challenges this assertion based on the role that she plays within her household structure and community. She was shown to represent Sapphire traits and she uses her temper in conjunction with firm discipline to command respect.

In the film *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* Madea is sitting at her kitchen table with three children who just attempted to rob her house before she and her brother Joe catches them. Madea has just finished feeding children when the eldest of the children speaks up stating that calling the police is unnecessary. Madea retorts to the girl exclaiming that she has the right to call the cops if she chooses to.

Her behavior demonstrates that she is able to employ her temper in a manner that commands respect while correcting disrespectful behavior. Another example of this behavior is

shown in the film *Madea Goes to Jail*. In response to an inmates' advances on a young girl Candice Madea intervenes and tells the inmate, Big Sal, to leave Candice alone. Big Sal responds by stating, "I see nobody told you I run this prison, I'm Big Sal and what Big Sal wants Big Sal gets, get it"! Madea retorts by standing up and explaining that she is to be respected otherwise she can get violent. This display of aggression and dominance is a behavior that is prominent in Madea's personality which demands respect, this is interpreted as a form of leadership.

Scholars also maintain that internalization of the Sapphire stereotype may lead Black women to believe they have to be loud to be heard, to receive attention or to make a point (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004, pg 437). They also assert that, "Women who internalize this stereotypic role may have low self-esteem if they struggle with expressing their feelings of anger, disappointment, or hurt (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004, pg 437). Though Madea does not appear to have a problem expressing her issues of anger or disappointment, she does reinforce their assertion about being loud to be heard and to get her point across, however she appears that way primarily with children. When addressing adults Madea chooses to insult to express her anger, however when talking to children she yells and threatens in order to get her point across. It is the researchers' belief that this occurs primarily to establish an authoritarian and disciplinarian role towards the children that Madea encounters and to earn both respect and fear from them.

Jezebel is a stereotype that is characterized by over sexualization and manipulation primarily of men (Bogle, 1994; Hill-Collins, 2000; West, 1995). She is described as being manipulative by nature and uses men to get what she wants. Madea does not exhibit any behavior that could be described necessarily as sexual in nature. However she does reflect manipulative cha-

racteristics which manifest themselves in some of the films. In *Madea Goes To Jail* when attempting to avoid jail time in court Madea consistently attempts to give the judge compliments and stretches the truth in order to appear like a sweet and gentle God fearing old lady. Madea addressed the judge and says, "

> Listen I'm gon change my life you don't have to say nothing I am living for da Lord. I am living for da Lordt Hallelujer I feel him down in my spirit, you know sometimes as I think about the goodness of Jesus and all that he has done for me my soul cries out Hallelujah thank God for saving me". (*Madea Goes To Jail, 2009)*

She says this in a tone that sounds both insincere and uncharacteristic. Generally Madea's attempted manipulations do not actually get what she wants because others can tell that she is being insincere but that hasn't stopped her from trying.

While sensitivity to stereotypes is important there are numerous other portrayals of African Americans in the media that need attention (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995, pg. 57). The 'Other' theme was meant to harness additional characteristics that Madea possesses which were not representative of the three stereotype characteristics. The prominent behaviors of Madea as shown by the Other category are behaviors associated with being destructive, giving advice, and she acts in the role of a disciplinarian as well.

<u>Madea's Threatening or Destructive Behavior</u>

In several of the movies Madea destroys or threatens to destroy other peoples' property. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* Madea returns to her granddaughter Helen's house to help her get her things from her husband Charles. Along with Helen, Madea goes into a large closet

to find Charles mistresses' clothes hanging in her closet where Helen's things once were. Madea grabs a piece of clothing and holds it out to Helen instructing her to rip it up. When Helen protests Madea continues to insist be stating, "Rip it" over and over again in a growling voice, Helen concedes to Madea and begins to tear apart the closet. Suddenly Helen stops and asks what doing this will solve and Madea replies with a huge smile, "Nothing, just gon make you feel better!" and they both turn back around joyfully continuing to tear apart the room. Later in the film after Helen confronts Charles, Helen asks that she and Madea leave. When Madea leaves the room after a few moments the sound of shouting comes from the next room when Helen, Charles, and the other woman rush towards the noises they see Madea standing in the living room holding a chainsaw. Madea exclaims, "Now I say half of everything in here belong to her, which half do you want, you want this half, you want this half?" She asks this question while gesturing to the right side then the left side of the couch. Madea then revs the chainsaw and begins to cut through the couch causing feathers and stuffing to fly throughout the air. The following scene pans across the living room showing a table, couch and piano that has been cut in half while feathers are flying through the wrecked room. This same film includes a scene where Madea pulls her handgun from her purse and shoots a bullet into her ceiling causing Helen to wake up and scaring her brother Joe.

In the movie *Madea Goes to Jail* Madea gets into a confrontation with a woman at the store, while the woman goes inside Madea uses a forklift to pick the womans' car up and drops it causing the car to fall on its roof damaging it. In another scene Madea riding in the car with her daughter Cora when she is cut off by a passing vehicle. The driver dismisses Cora when she attempts to speak to him at the light. Madea in response encourages Cora to go after the man

and when she refuses Madea places her own foot on the accelerator of Cora's vehicle causing her to crash into the man's car and forcing him off the road destroying a sign in the process. Madea exclaims while driving away, "Bust that fool in his face, we got that fool! Hahaha!" These were instances that Madea displayed and encouraged overt destructive behavior. The next characteristic that Madea exhibited was encouraging acts of wisdom.

Examples of Madea Sharing Wisdom

Scholars have said that when Black women display behaviors of strength and competence it is interpreted as controlling, manipulative, or aggressive behavior (Bell,2004, pg. 153). Instead Madea is viewed as a leader and her opinion is valued by other characters. While in a meeting in prison in the film, 'Madea Goes To Jail', Madea is shown listening to other prisoners discussing the matter of forgiveness and not being able to forgive people who have done you wrong. Madea complains about listening to the people's stories and when the minister questions her about it she states how the choices that people make in life cannot be blamed on others but instead responsibility must be accepted by the individual. In this instance although she is somewhat sassy in her statements Madea is giving advice to an individual that she doesn't know and still chose to give her guidance. In the film 'Diary of a Mad Black Woman' while talking to her nephew Brian about his reluctance to allow his daughter to sing in the church choir out of fear that it will lead her to drugs in the same manner that his wife was Madea explains to him, that it would be beneficial for his daughter to participate in the church choir and that he needs to come to terms with his wife's drug addiction. Here Madea is expressing a sense of compassion and understanding while giving advice to her nephew about a serious issue influencing his family.

Scholars have argued that in response to limited employment opportunities caused by racism, Black women assume the role of a provider and are the glue that holds the black family and community together (Bell, 2004, pg. 153). Madea reflects this role by acting as a disciplinarian towards children. In 'Madea's Family Reunion' while Madea is talking to her new foster daughter after she hits the child for being disrespectful Madea exclaims,

> "I don't know what's wrong with these children today but oh I'll set them straight, you don't know me I'm from the old school and I will beat the hell out of you first and ask questions later! If you don't know how to get in line I will get you in line!" (*Madea's Family Reunion,* 2007)

As a reaction to the young girls' disrespectful attitude towards Madea she disciplined the child in order to let her know that she is unwilling to accept any disrespectful behavior or actions. Later in the film the young girl, Nicki, arrives home from school late. Madea questions her about where she has been, and after beating her with a belt for lying about her whereabouts Madea again steps in as a disciplinarian and talks to the girl. Madea states, "Why wasn't you in school today?" Nicki replies that she went to the park, Madea replies, "What were you doing in the park you suppose to be at the school house" Nicki doesn't respond and Madea says, "Lil Girl I'm not gon ask you no more" finally Nicki explains that she doesn't like being at school because she doesn't feel smart like the other kids and her last foster mother told her that she wasn't good for anything. Hearing this Madea explains while holding her hand on her hip,

> "The best revenge you can have on somebody that done told you something like that is to prove them wrong. Now I went down to that school

> and I got your homework, talked to your teacher and she said this what you need to work on now go upstairs and get it done." (*Madea's Family Reunion,* 2007)

After examining this scene, Madea acts again in the form of a disciplinarian to the young girl. Though she does strike her with a belt her intention is not to harm the girl but she showed genuine concern for the girl's education and helping her out. She acts as a disciplinarian by first scolding the young girl for lying and disobeying Madea, and then giving her support and encouragement that she has the ability to succeed in life.

This chapter discusses the relationship between Madea and the existing literature on the influence of stereotypes. It was seen that Madea possesses characteristics of all three stereotypes as well as independent traits of her own. Though she has behaviors reflective of the Mammy these traits were not perceived as negative in spite of the literature. The Sapphire character was consistent in Madea's characteristics throughout all four of the films. She acts in a sassy and angry manner but it was determined that her behavior is present as the result of feeling disrespected. The Jezebel was not as prevalent in Madea as the other two stereotypes. Instead of utilizing her sexuality, Madea instead attempts to manipulate others in order to obtain what she wants. The other theme showed that Madea does display behaviors and characteristics independent of the stereotypical behavior that includes being a disciplinarian. These results show that though Madea does possess these behaviors she is not a character that consists of entirely negative behaviors that can influence audiences in a harmful manner.

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted in order to examine if there was a relationship between Madea and stereotypes of African American women. Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire are fixed stereotypes that have historically been presented in racist manners for entertainment purposes. Madea is a figure worthy of study primarily because of the level of popularity she has gained in the media. Tyler Perry stated that Madea was meant to fill a gap that is missing in the Black community. The researcher sought to discover if Madea did contain characteristics that were stereotypical, this would imply that Madea was potentially a negative figure. The method used to conduct this research was ethnographic content analysis which places the data interpretation solely on the researcher. By using a semiological framework that treats Madea as a sign her behavior and dialogue was documented and interpreted.

It was discovered that Madea possesses behaviors related to all three stereotypes analyzed. In relation to the Mammy, Madea behaves as a nurturer and caregiver in her actions towards both family members and friends. Regarding Sapphire, Madea directs a large amount of her insults to men in her family. She also behaves in violent and threatening ways when she feels disrespected. And lastly, Madea also manipulates when she attempts to avoid law enforcement, this was determined to be associated with the Jezebel stereotype.

There was a fourth theme labeled 'Other' that was meant to capture behaviors of Madea that were not associated with the three stereotypes. After the behaviors in this theme were interpreted Madea displayed a large amount of characteristics that were not stereotypical. These characteristics included Madea behaving as a disciplinarian, and providing sound advice to those who require it. Comparing these results to the literature demonstrate that Madea contradicts more than confirms the literature that condemns the stereotypical behavior as sole-

ly negative. Madea was shown to have appearances, and characteristics that are related to stereotypical behavior. Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire are apparent in the meaning behind Madea's actions. However these are not characteristics that negate her purpose of serving as a disciplinarian and authority figure within the Black community in the films. Her behavior extends beyond the confines of fixed stereotypical behavior and contributes instead to contemporary representations that are more complex than previous imagery. Further research for this study should include an analysis of audience interpretation of the films to observe how her behavior influences the audience. This research can contribute to future studies to analyze audience reactions to these films, and possibly other dynamic within the films, including male and female dynamics, as well as colorism in the characters. In addition Madea films can be viewed as a whole interpreting all characters featured.

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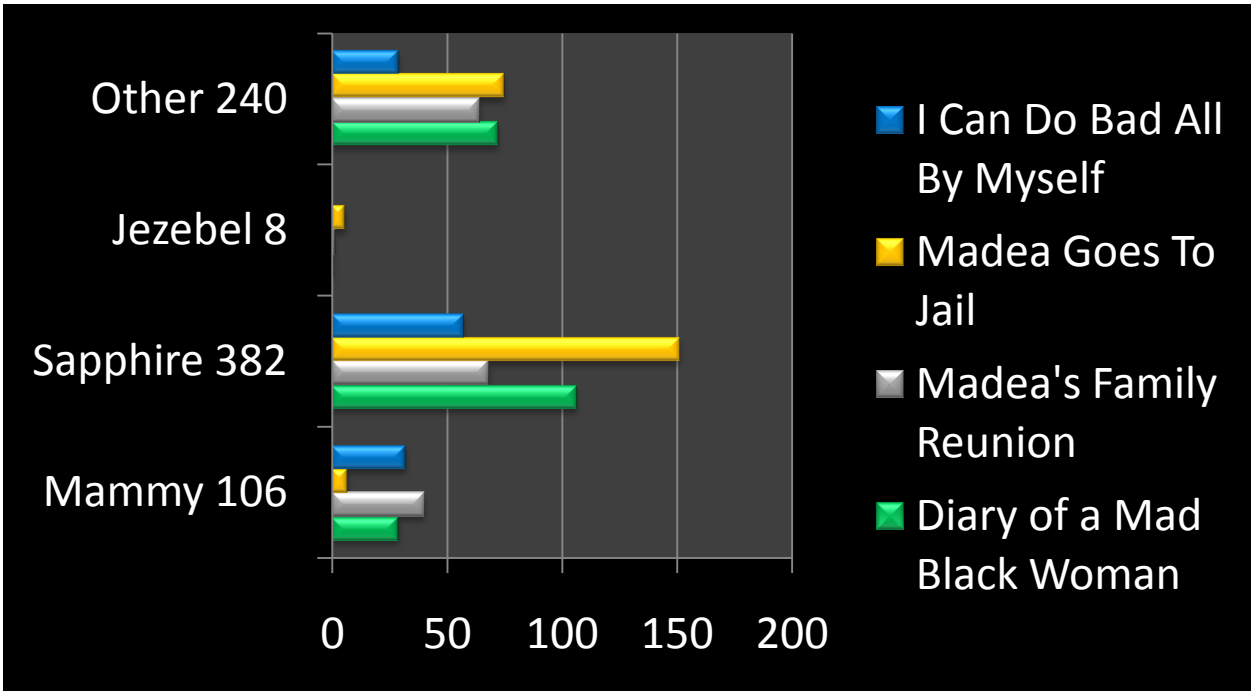
Appendix A.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Sapphire 382
Mammy 106
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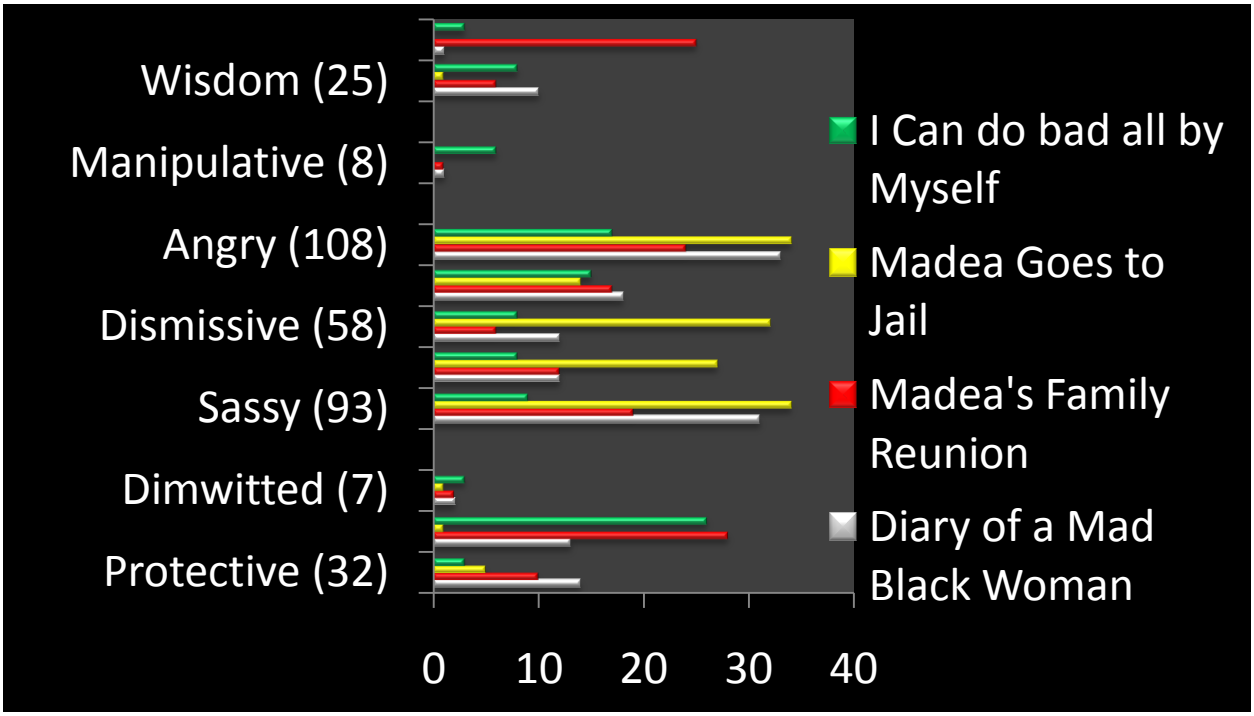
Madea Goes To Jail
Madea's Family Reunion
Diary of a Mad Black Woman

Appendix B.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I Can do bad all by Myself
Madea Goes to Jail
Madea's Family Reunion
Diary of a Mad Black Woman