Take Your Place: Rhetorical Healing and Black Womanhood in Tyler Perry's Films

Author(s): Tamika L. Carey

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Summer 2014), pp. 999-1021

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/675546

Tamika L. Carey

Take Your Place: Rhetorical Healing and Black Womanhood in Tyler Perry's Films

With the success of such films as *Why Did I Get Married?* and *I Can Do Bad All by Myself*, Tyler Perry has achieved two seemingly unrelated feats. First, the gospel playwright turned screenwriter and film and television producer has made films and sitcoms catering to working- and middle-class black Christian audiences into mainstream commodities. Second, he has given black women unprecedented opportunities to have leading roles in his films. Both achievements are noteworthy given that the majority of Perry's box-office-topping films are adaptations of his gospel stage plays, works he wrote and released during the late 1990s to share the insights on overcoming crises that he developed by journaling about his abusive upbringing.[1] For Perry, the motive driving his release of over ten films in the last seven years is simple: "So many people are in need of healing" that he eventually developed "an unbelievable pull to have people see [his] movies and be healed" (in Thrash 2004). According to Samantha Redmond, Perry's plays and films offer black Christian women rare opportunities to see family and community-oriented narratives that remind them of "home" (in Thrash 2004).

Despite these achievements, Perry's films garner considerable criticism.[2] Courtney Young (2009) argues that the consistent messages to "be strong, but not too strong," to "let a man be a man," and that "true fulfillment is found in the role of wife and/or mother" embedded in his modern-day morality tales uphold a conservative gender politics that "reinforces rather than revolutionizes" representations of black womanhood. Kimberly Springer (2007) echoes this sentiment, noting that Perry's frequent choice to have his female protagonists return home enacts a retreatist narrative that makes the postfeminist argument that a woman's independence comes at a high

[1] In a 2009 blog entry titled "We're all PRECIOUS in His Sight," Perry explained that the focus on forgiveness in his work is a result of his own abusive upbringing. He urges his fans to practice forgiveness in their own lives, saying, "If you're having a hard time getting over something in your life, maybe you can try forgiveness too. It's not easy, but it does bring forth healing" (Perry 2009).

[2] For additional critical discussions of Perry's films, see Svetky, Watson, and Wheat (2009) and Patterson (2011).

[*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2014, vol. 39, no. 4]

cost. Finally, in his examination of Madea, Perry's drag alter ego, Timothy Lyle (2011) debunks any notion that Perry's choice to depict black women dealing with such issues as domestic violence and molestation reveals a feminist politics in his work. Because Madea reinforces transphobic and conservative gender ideologies while acting as a guide for wayward female protagonists, Lyle asserts that the films fail to destabilize hegemonic ideas about gender construction or to capitalize upon the transformative potential of drag as a subversive practice. Such critiques are valid. Yet, as numerous black Christian women like Redmond continually support his films and as Perry defends his representations of black womanhood with the claim that "as long as people walk away from my shows feeling better . . . whichever way I lure them to hear that message, so be it" (in La Ferla 2007, 1), key questions remain. What, for example, are the themes, images, and arguments Perry uses to appeal to black women viewers? Further, how can we make sense of Perry's insistence that his message—one we can assume is influenced by his goal of healing—justifies his characterization of certain black female characters as incomplete without a man? And, finally, what are the implications when individuals like Perry make depictions of black womanhood the site for such messages and projects?

This essay addresses these questions through an analysis of the rhetoric of healing in Perry's early films, a rhetoric that constructs black Christian women as students who must learn prescribed attitudes and behaviors to achieve, or remain in, states of wellness that reinforce conservative gender ideologies and reify patriarchal constructions of the family and home. Rhetorics of healing are a series of persuasive messages, performances, and literacy acts that writers deploy to convince readers that redressing or preventing crises requires them to follow curricula for ideological, communicative, and behavioral transformation that the writer considers essential to wellness. As arguments that posit instruction as the vehicle for individual transformation and community progress, these rhetorics reveal which images, actions, and themes writers find most salient to inspire healing and which culturally situated forms of being and knowing, or literacies, the writer considers indicative of healing and wellness. Conversely, these arguments and curricula also reveal the behaviors, events, or attitudes the writer regards as a threat to the community or institution that he or she wants to preserve.

The analytical framework I use to identify Perry's rhetoric of healing incorporates theories drawn from African American literacy practice and rhetoric as well as black feminism. Although Jacqueline Jones Royster's (2000) theory of literacy as sociopolitical action stems from her examina-

tion of the persuasive strategies black women essayists use to intervene into crises affecting their communities, it provides a useful way to analyze the rhetorical decisions Perry makes to represent an image of healing in his narratives about black women. Royster argues that when writers feel compelled to intervene in sociopolitical crises affecting individuals within their communities, their threefold task is to attract an audience that has the means to act, to draw attention to the issue, and to direct their audience on how to carry out the actions that will resolve the matter. To do so, writers must make problems visible, identify with their audiences, and present viable solutions. Given Perry's privilege as a male writer, I rely on black feminist thought as a critical framework to assess his representation of healing. Film remains a potent vehicle in the subjugation of black women because of its potential to perpetuate controlling images like the jezebel, the gold digger, the matriarch, and the mammy that function to define black womanhood within the social imaginary.[3] When such images are transmitted through discourse, or replicated in film, these constructions of black womanhood become tropes that uphold binary ways of seeing black women, their families, and their communities—and that justify exploitation, oppression, and domination. Although Perry's films aim to give readers an illustration of a transformative process where protagonists arrive at a place of healing and wellness, he has yet to explicitly state that black women's healing is the goal or motive of his work. As such, his choice to invoke discourses about black women's roles within the home and his choice to use Madea and other characters as teachers in his curriculum make his films susceptible to perpetuating these controlling images (Collins 1998).

Perry routinely recycles conflicts and characters in his films; however, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) and *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006) contain most of the messages and strategies for healing within his oeuvre. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* is the story of Helen McCarter's journey to healing after heartbreak. The Atlanta socialite's life changes when her husband of eighteen years, Charles, announces his intent to divorce on their anniversary night. With no alternative but to return home to her grandmother, Madea, Helen begins a circuitous journey through grief, hope, and rage that is punctuated by her burgeoning romantic relationship with Orlando, the moving-truck driver she meets on her anniversary night, and a freak accident that leaves Charles in her medical care. In *Madea's Family Reunion* the focus is on two protagonists: Vanessa, who is a single mother living with her grandmother, Madea, and whose long-standing

[3] See Bobo (1995), hooks (1996), Collins (2000, 2004), and Pough (2004).

distrust of men is challenged when she meets Frankie, a local bus driver, and Lisa, Vanessa's younger, pampered sister who is hiding her fiancé Carlos's physical and emotional abuse. Against the backdrop of an overdue family reunion and Lisa's wedding, both protagonists must learn how to remove negative people and elements from their lives and move on toward better relationships and forms of wellness.

The broader argument across Perry's films is that African Americans can resolve a myriad of personal crises by restoring the prominence of Christianity, family, and the home in their lives. However, his representation of black women's rhetorical healing in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* and *Madea's Family Reunion* serves a pedagogical function. By portraying his protagonists as learning to revise their concept of self, faith, and the future, Perry's films teach viewers a gender politics that emphasizes the home and family as the locus of women's safety and self-actualization and narrows black women's roles within these sites. Despite the positive messages in his films, Perry's representation of healing does not contribute to black women's liberation but rather points to a moment where black women's pain is a commodity and where cultural productions about their instructive journeys to wellness are exploited sites where writers can carry out their own agendas.

Politics, possibilities, and placebos: Contextualizing Perry's approach to healing

Perry's confession that healing motivates his work places his films in a complex set of discourses about black women's pain and empowerment. When nineteenth-century black women intellectuals articulated their plights within intersecting systems of oppression as platforms to call for systemic reform, they helped cement two major themes within discourses on their healing. First, by arguing that it's only "when and where" the black woman "enters" that the "whole race" progresses, protofeminists like Anna Julia Cooper (1892) made a synecdochical argument about the measure of a black woman's wellness being the measure of her family or community's wellness, and this argument still informs some discourses on black womanhood. Second, by championing a politics of respectability that emphasized individual behavior and attitude modification as a means for self-improvement, rewriting negative discourses, and challenging structures of oppression, nineteenth-century club women helped to formalize the assumption that women's self-empowerment efforts were steps to broader forms of collective uplift and racial resistance (Higginbotham 1994). Although Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1994) argues that the politics of

respectability were inward- and outward-directed arguments that enabled black women to affect some social change, the standards for understanding and assessing black womanhood that these politics promoted were at times as repressive as those that black women faced from the dominant society.

African American women's fiction published during the black women's literary renaissance shows the influence of these themes.[4] For example, in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), female protagonists struggle with their communities to fight oppression and within their communities to resist the expectations for their behavior, labor, affection, or bodies that contribute to their mental, emotional, and physical duress. Walker and other writers of this period were vilified for what some male critics regarded as their demonization of black men and families.[5] Yet some feminist theorists credit them with giving black women valuable pathways to healing and advancing epistemologies essential to black feminism's function as a critical social theory. By showing black female protagonists discovering the forms of spirituality, means of self-acceptance, and sources of love necessary for their own personal healing, these writers, according to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), illustrate the types of self-knowledge and changed consciousness black women need if they are to effectively identify and challenge patriarchy. In *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (1993), bell hooks corroborates Collins's claim. She argues that writers like Walker, Bambara, and Ntozake Shange ([1975] 2000), who give voice to the "deep" and "often unnamed" sources of black women's psychic pain, provide readers with strategies to "imaginatively" construct maps for their own empowerment and new possibilities to conceive of their own healing (hooks 1993, 41).

That Perry has sidestepped the anti–black male and anti–black family criticisms launched against Walker and others years earlier does not point to the innovation of his films or mainstream audiences' embrace of narratives featuring black women confronting the sources of their symbolic and personal pain. Instead, his success speaks to his appropriation of the instructional strategies and discourses on healing in African American women's self-help books as a means to enter a thriving market for black

[4] The term "black women's literary renaissance" draws on the work of Deborah McDowell (1995), who discusses the period of heightened African American women's writing during the 1970s and 1980s.

[5] Among the most vehement critics of the work of such writers as Walker and Ntozake Shange were black male journalists like Robert Staples (1979), Mel Watkins (1986), and Darryl Pinckney (1987).

women's films galvanized by cinematic adaptations of *The Color Purple* (1985) and Terry McMillian's *Waiting to Exhale* (1995). Since the end of the black women's literary renaissance, there has been a proliferation of self-help guides and inspirational books published for black women. In them, authors address the "taboo" topics of domestic violence, depression, and rape, which Walker and others were vilified for discussing, to offer readers prescribed strategies for recovery and healing. Rich in personal testimonies, cultural messages of inspiration, and practices for overcoming or resisting life difficulties, books like Bishop T. D. Jakes's *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* (1996) and Iyanla Vanzant's *Interiors* (1995) have been popular among some black women readers. For most authors, writing self-help and inspirational literature is a gesture of activism. Through their rhetorics of healing, these teachers and preachers illustrate the problems that trigger black women's personal traumas, low self-esteem, or discontent with their current lives and offer promises and prescriptions for how a reader can pursue and live his or her healthiest life.

The focus on explicit strategies that characterizes the self-help genre further complicates Perry's use of film as a medium for healing. According to hooks, writers who focus on teaching readers how to develop and strengthen their resilience and self-will frequently fail to stress how "patriarchy is institutionalized" or to encourage "women to organize politically to change society in conjunction with our efforts to transform ourselves" (1993, 4). Since the oppositional knowledges embedded in the forms of critical consciousness black women use to achieve self-growth and enact social change only become oppositional in relation to other forms of power, the failures of the genre hooks identifies suggest that self-help approaches to healing can function as placebos, or efforts that stall black women's recovery (Collins 1998, 89). The remainder of this essay examines how Perry's representation of rhetorical healing fits in this context. Although Perry's use of culturally resonant messages and tropes enables him to call for healing as a way to promote collective uplift and survival, the assumptions in his representation reflect a narrow conceptualization of black women's spheres of influence while teaching viewers how to assess behaviors that signify the need for healing.

The regressing family and home: A call to healing

A preliminary task that self-help writers undertake in rhetorical healing is to illustrate a culture of lack that contributes to the crises their readers may be experiencing or need to avoid. Once the writer shows how broader

social issues like poverty or racism affect the reader, he or she calls for the reader to invest in the prescribed approach to healing as a way to redress the larger issue. A speech by Myrtle in *Madea's Family Reunion* is an indicator of the broader crisis facing black families and homes that inspires Perry's films. As older relatives get reacquainted at the reunion, younger relatives gamble and dance provocatively. The generational disconnect is so distressing to the ninety-six-year-old matriarch, Aunt Ruby, that she calls the family together at their ancestors' slave cabin yards to ask, "Is this what we paid for?" The question confuses the younger relatives, prompting Myrtle, Helen McCarter's mother from *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, to deliver a speech about regression and family responsibility that ends with a call for the younger relatives to "take [their] place" in preserving the family's legacy. She begins by discussing the occasion, explaining:

> Family reunions are about uniting the family. Bringing together the young and the old . . . and thanking God . . . for getting us over. . . . Do you see this shack? The men and woman who were born here gave birth to this generation. They were slaves. They worked this ground, but they bought it from the widow of the slave owner! The blood we have running through our veins. That's the stock we're made of! What happened to us? . . . Do you know who you are? What happened to the pride, and the dignity, and the love and respect we had for one another? Where'd it go? And how, how do we get it back? (*Madea's Family Reunion* 2006).

Myrtle's speech incorporates two of the principal features of African American jeremiad appeals: a citation of the group's promise and a criticism of their retrogression from it (Howard-Pitney 2005). An internally directed version of this rhetoric of indignation, Myrtle's questions about lost values and commitments create an opportunity for her to make a broader call for younger relatives to take their place in preserving the traditions and legacy of the home and family institution.

Perry's choice to use Myrtle as the messenger and the ancestral home as the site is particularly strategic given how some black women have been taught to conceptualize their roles as mothers within the home. According to hooks, one of the ways black mothers have contributed to liberation efforts is by creating homes where African Americans learn how to resist dehumanization and "strive to be subjects, not objects" (hooks 1990, 42). By constructing safe and affirming spaces where blacks could nurse and heal the wounds of racism, black women's keeping of the home enables them to participate in liberation struggles by offering individuals

the "opportunity to grow and develop, and nurture [their] spirits" away from contexts of white supremacy (44). For hooks, watching her mother create a "homeplace" that fostered her sense of individual wholeness and her resolve to strive for the wholeness of her community modeled "degrees of critical consciousness" that hooks used to navigate the outside world (44). Perry's staging of Myrtle on the steps of their ancestor's homeplace and her question about self-knowledge suggests his awareness of this tradition.

This discussion of homeplaces and critical consciousness illuminates a historical context for the crisis of poor parenting that appears to motivate Perry's work. As Perry explains in *Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life* (2006), Madea—an abbreviation of the phrase "mother dear"—is a version of the rapidly vanishing Southern black matriarch of yesteryear. A fixture within black neighborhoods, "she used to be everywhere," he explains, "but today she is missed. Back around the 1970s, the Madeas in our neighborhoods began to disappear and they have left an unmistakable void" (Perry 2006, vii). This void has created a decline in traditional family values because, in the past, "if somebody's child was doing something wrong, Madea got to them and straightened them out or she would go directly to the parents, and the parents straightened the kids out. . . . Because there are so few Madeas, children are pretty much raising themselves" (Perry 2006, x). The suggestion is that children who are left to raise themselves not only miss the lessons about critical consciousness that help them navigate the world but also fail to acquire the values that make them future contributors to their homeplace. When faced with crises in their relationships or other issues, these lost children can become the mad, bitter, fragile, and distrustful female protagonists of Perry's films, women whom figures like Madea and Myrtle must teach the steps necessary to move toward healing if they are to take their places as wives and mothers.

Given the impact of such historical documents as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (1965) report "The Negro Family," which essentially blames black mothers for the perceived dysfunctions of black families, the reasoning Perry uses to validate Madea's value to African American communities and his films is problematic. Citing the issue of children raising themselves as evidence of disintegrating black families and proof of Madea's continued relevance without acknowledging men's roles as husbands, fathers, or parental figures is a move that absolves men of their responsibilities in the preservation of the black family and places sole responsibility on women. Moreover, by situating the origins of the disintegrating black family in the 1970s, when black women first began to claim feminist

identities en masse and to assume roles as chief breadwinners, Perry's lament is a veiled critique that chastises women who, figuratively, exchange their family obligations for career aspirations and other individual pursuits. This critique appears throughout such Perry films as *Daddy's Little Girls* (2007) and *The Family That Preys* (2008) in the form of the ambitious, upwardly mobile female who must be taken down a notch or taught to reprioritize her values. In consistently showing women returning home and revising their notions of appropriate relationships with their families, faith, and suitable partners, Perry's films teach viewers what amounts to a confining message: black women may aspire to forms of success beyond the home, but they must honor and prioritize the needs of their families and communities.

Bitter black women: An impetus for healing

Another task self-help writers deploy to persuade readers to follow their approach to healing is to identify with the individual(s) who need to take action. Perry does this in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* through his characterization of Helen. Promotional trailers for the film contain a montage of images illustrating Helen's opulent home, her husband Charles's adultery, her return to her grandmother's house, her descent into revenge, and the choice she must make between staying with her husband after he is paralyzed in a random act of violence or moving forward with Orlando, her new romantic interest. The pivot point is a shot where Helen throws a drink in Orlando's face and defiantly states, "I'm not bitter! I'm mad as hell!" Following scenes in the trailer show Helen beginning her rocky journey to emotional and spiritual wellness.

It is doubtful that Perry created the promotional materials for the film, but the emphasis on the shot where Helen asserts that she's "mad as hell" does suggest an attempt to appeal to female viewers by invoking discourses about black women's bitterness regarding romantic relationships. Numerous writers, filmmakers, and recording artists have offered critical perspectives on black women's relationships, but the black female cinema and literature (*Waiting to Exhale* [1995], *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* [1998]) produced during the nineties helped cement the trope of the bitter black woman. Best exemplified in the shot of Bernadine setting her adulterous husband's possessions afire in the film adaptation of *Waiting to Exhale* (1995), the image of the mistreated woman who refuses to silence her resentment and acts out makes the label of the bitter black woman time sensitive. Women are only labeled as bitter when they stay in the mode of critique, lament, or retaliation for too long.

Although Perry's use of Helen's diary entries complicates the stereotype of the bitter black woman, his use of her bitterness and misplaced agency as catalysts for family interventions shows one of the hegemonic undertones in his representation of black women. Through her diary entries, viewers learn of Charles's neglect, Helen's despair, the reasons she stays, and her hopes to salvage their marriage. The effect is endearing but short lived because of the interactions Perry stages between Helen and Orlando, the moving-truck driver Charles hires to escort Helen off their estate. During their initial meeting, Helen lashes out at Orlando when he asks her for a destination, yelling, "All you men are just alike. You don't think about anybody else but yourself! Just stop the truck!" When she attempts to grab the steering wheel, Orlando finally relents, pulls the truck over, and departs the vehicle, saying, "Now I see why you're going through what you're going through." The scene ends with Orlando watching her drive away and a following shot showing Helen arriving Madea's house in the middle of the night.

While Springer (2007, 266) asserts that Helen's retreat to Madea's house is a postfeminst "coming back to blackness" argument about the "true" source of middle-class black women's identities, this scene also shows how Perry's representation of healing casts women's acts of misplaced agency as threats to the innocent, or to the collective wellness of their families. Helen's stereotyping of Orlando as being just like Charles is a plot feature that works to validate the stage of Perry's curriculum where protagonists learn to recognize good opportunities and seize them. The flaw in this technique is that it casts Helen as the aggressor and Orlando as the victim. Because Helen is too bitter to recognize Orlando's sympathy, her symbolic gesture of grabbing the steering wheel to reclaim a measure of control makes her a literal threat to others. She is lost, blind, and irrational. And Orlando, by proximity, becomes the undeserving target of her misdirected rage. Helen's act of agency is misplaced.

Karla Holloway's (1995) discussion of the unrecognized effects of the hegemonic gaze on black women explains how these misplaced acts reflect expectations of black women's appropriate behaviors. Constructions of ethnicity in literary, social, or cultural narratives have historically created and perpetuated the idea of ethical behaviors. As a result, codes such as "act your age, not your color" have become community-based epistemologies aimed at helping marginalized groups to navigate the gaze of dominant groups. For black women, the centrality of these themes poses a dilemma whereby they must choose how to navigate encounters where their bodies, and therefore their personhood, are read through disparaging notions of race and gender. In these situations, they must decide between

inflicting damage upon themselves by ignoring stereotypes and behaving "as if race and sex are peripheral" or defying such codes of conduct and engaging in a practice that Holloway defines as "turning it out" (1995, 31). When black women decide to turn it out, they "give up trying to respond to a situation as if both we and they (white people and/or men) are operating within the same codes of conduct. It can mean handing over to our adversary our version of the stereotype that motivates their disrespect to us—just to prove to them that they could no better handle the stereotype than they can determine and control our character" (31). Holloway goes on to argue that while "no one wins" in a situation where a black woman resorts to turning it out, these acts of disruption are sometimes necessary for black women challenging forms of objectification and control (32).

Because Helen's second instance of turning it out at a family cookout is the impetus for the messages about restoration that characters express through the remainder of the film, the suggestion is that her behavior, not necessarily her feelings, is a crisis that requires healing. The second meeting between Helen and Orlando carries over the tensions of the first, erupting when Helen refuses to apologize for throwing Orlando out of the truck and Orlando calls her "just another bitter black woman" who makes every man she meets "pay for what he did." When Helen informs Orlando that he doesn't know her and he responds by reminding her that he "watched a man drag [her] out of a house and treat [her] like dirt," she retaliates by throwing her drink at him and asserting that she's "not bitter" but "mad as hell."

Helen's choice to throw her drink in retaliation for being called a bitter black woman could be read as an assertion of her agency against Orlando's taunt. Yet Perry's decision to place their exchange within the scene of the family cookout makes her choice to act out a signifier of how emotionally lost she is and how disconnected she is from her family. While Orlando's antagonism is obscured, Helen's despair and irrationality are amplified against the backdrop of the cookout: a symbol some audiences may interpret as an indicator of the family's unity. Helen's retaliation becomes a willful breach of the proper code of decorum for family events and an indicator that the family needs to intervene. It is a confirmation that women in the film and audience need to initiate and invest in the approach to family rehabilitation that Perry regards as pivotal to healing.

What makes this attempt to identify with black female viewers through the Helen character problematic is that it teaches viewers to see women's assertive behavior as a potential justification for intervention and to measure women's behavior according to a code that privileges heterosexual Christian men. For example, when Orlando tells Helen that he chose

to reject the bitterness of his own heartbreak, his confession works to enforce the code that women must rise above mistreatment and get over it. Helen has no excuse for mistreating Orlando; thus, in her rejection of his marriage proposal in favor of honoring her commitment to Charles, viewers see a threat to the continuation of the black family that Perry's rhetoric of healing resolves. When women like Helen are unable to see, love, honor, or choose the good Christian men in front of them, families suffer and communities regress. This attempt to identify with black women undercuts the positive potential of Perry's narrative for healing because Helen, at this stage, symbolizes the bitterness, blindness, and sense of loss black women experience after traumatic relationships and signifies the attitudes and behaviors women must sacrifice so the nuclear black Christian family can be preserved.

Practices, processes, and proofs: A curriculum for healing

In the final stage of rhetorical healing, writers teach specific practices that their readers can follow to change their perspectives, behavior, expectations, and actions. The changes individuals undergo by following the curriculum promote broader forms of ideological, behavioral, and spiritual transformation that the writer regards as necessary in order to arrive at or remain in a state of wellness. Readers consistently learn that healing is a process, a journey that requires them to acquire a new literacy or a new way of seeing their place in the world, reading their relationships, and knowing what decisions produce the best outcomes for themselves and their families. Although Perry's use of film would suggest that his healing curriculum is not explicit to his audiences, he actually makes a more compelling argument for the processes in his curriculum through his representation of women moving through the pain of heartbreak or trauma of abuse. By showing characters like Helen, Lisa, and Vanessa undergoing the stages of restoration, resolution, and recognition that define Perry's curriculum, his films teach viewers to see these behaviors as steps to healing that produce positive results. Coincidentally, the practices, processes, and proofs that mark the protagonist's journey to wellness also teach viewers narrow ways to assess women's behavior.

Restoring the centrality of faith

The first and most important action Perry's characters undertake in their journeys to healing is to restore the centrality of faith in their lives. Through testimonies, sermons, and songs about mercy, grace, and salvation, supporting characters encourage protagonists to make Christian faith their primary source of power and identity. And, consistently, Perry's protagonists

return to church, prayer, or a state of spiritual practice and later gain an improved sense of self-esteem and value. Because the protagonist eventually learns to forgive herself and move forward by forgiving those individuals who have abused or hurt her, the implied message is that restoring one's faith and spirituality is a crucial step toward healing and wellness.

The act of restoring one's faith is consistent within inspirational literature on healing, much of which suggests that cultivating a faith relationship affords an individual vision, wisdom, and discernment. What makes Perry's representation of this stage problematic is the critique implicit in the scenarios and dialogues he stages. The nursing home scene in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), where Myrtle reminds her daughter Helen about the necessity of keeping God and faith first in her life, is one example of how sacred messages can be used to preserve the interests of groups in power and to reinforce worldviews. When Helen confesses how hurt she is by Charles's abrupt decision to end to their marriage, saying, "I think I'm losing my mind, mama. He hurt me so bad. He was my everything," her mother responds with the statement, "God is your everything. Don't you know He is a jealous God? He don't want no man before him."

Myrtle's response appears to be an act sharing both spiritual wisdom about the dangers of worshipping idols and conventional wisdom about the dangers of losing one's identity and sense of self in relationships. However, because viewers learn earlier in the film that Helen willingly allowed Charles to put Myrtle into a nursing home because Myrtle "didn't fit his model" of wealth and upward mobility, Myrtle's rhetorical question about God's jealousy not only implies Helen's complicity but also critiques Helen's values. The suggestion is that if Helen's faith, self-image, and commitment to her extended family had been stronger she would have known that it was in her best interest to leave her fruitless marriage—symbolized by a lack of children—upon seeing Charles's shifting values and cold demeanor. As Helen waits for a divine change in a marriage that does not contribute to the preservation or extension of her family, her faith, prior to her crisis, is made to seem misplaced. Perry's message about the importance of women recognizing and preserving their own self-worth is valuable. But his attempts to represent women revising their sense of self-efficacy in adverse situations lay the groundwork for one of the more troubling aspects of healing curricula, the idea that women must accept responsibility for the traumas they endure.

Restoring the centrality of family

Perry's films advance the idea that the black family is an institution within the broader black community. Ideally, the family is supposed to be a refuge for individuals in crisis, a pillar of collective values, and a training site

where individuals learn, or relearn, strategies and epistemologies to navigate hostile worlds. While the black church has historically functioned as one of the civic arenas within African American communities, Perry's representation of the functional black family casts it as a more private yet equally essential component; it is a site for the development of collective and individual skills for self-reliance.

Perry's films do acknowledge how dysfunctional families can contribute to, or cause, women's crises, but family gatherings and relationships are the common places for the persuasive instruction women must undergo to arrive at healing. In these settings and scenarios, women are targeted with loving but didactic messages of wisdom that operate as forms of intervention aimed at redirecting or instructing the wayward protagonist. Delivered by such agents as the mother, the sister, or the grandmother, these messages remind the protagonist of her self-worth as an individual and her purpose as a daughter, a wife, or a mother while also explicitly or implicitly communicating to audiences that the woman needs the family to survive and the family needs the woman to survive. Within the scheme of the overall healing process, these moments work to shift the protagonist's focus away from her past trauma and present hurt to the future work she has to do as a functional member of the family and the community. This reprioritization is crucial because it helps the protagonist forgive or resist individuals who have abused her and to move out of destructive relationships.

Madea's gritball lesson in *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006) is one example of how Perry stages teaching moments to redirect women in crisis. In the scene, Madea shares important thoughts on selfhood and relationships, all the while indirectly teaching her granddaughter Lisa, the sheltered and bourgeois princess trapped in an abusive relationship, how to fight back against her abusive fiancé, Carlos. The scene occurs in Madea's kitchen, where Lisa confesses to her older sister Vanessa, a single mother of two, that Carlos is beating her. Although Vanessa immediately calls Madea into the kitchen to hear the news, she opts to keep her sister's secret after seeing Madea's initial look of skepticism. Instead, she tells Madea that a friend is in an abusive relationship. Seeing through the lie, Madea opts to play along and offers the following self-defense lesson about "gritball" instead of an admonishment: "I'ma tell you this. Can't nobody help your friend until she wants to help herself. You can want all your life to help somebody but if they don't wanna get help, it ain't goin' happen. You listen to me, when you get tired of a man hitting on you, ain't nothin' you can do but cook breakfast for him. . . . Bring him into the kitchen and get you a big ole' pot of hot grits, and when they start to boil like lava, after he done got good and comfortable, you say, 'Good Morn'ting,' throw it

right on him." As reinforcement, Madea teaches her granddaughters to hit their attackers with a frying pan. "I call it gritball," she says.

There is no direct endorsement of the centrality of family in this scene, but it does show some of the culturally situated literacy practices Perry appropriates to reinforce messages about the family as an institution. As Elaine Richardson explains, black women employ language and literacy practices such as storytelling to "advance and protect themselves and their loved ones," and these practices are characteristically shaped by "a heightened consciousness of the 'rhetorical situation,'" or a sense of appropriate timing (2002, 86). Because Madea is never directly told of the abuse her granddaughter suffers, her ability to read the situation, respond with narrative instruction, and deliver the persuasive appeals about self-value Lisa eventually uses to get out of her relationship is intended to signal a rhetorical intervention. Madea is intended to represent the many mothers who stay attuned to their loved ones and the challenges they face and are prepared to respond accordingly.

Perry's choice to have Madea deliver his message about women leaving violent situations and retaliating against their abusers contributes to the patriarchal logic his representation of healing advances. The parody of black womanhood Perry enacts through Madea frequently involves aggressive and violent acts that work to reinforce his masculinity while in drag. Madea is far from respectable, yet, ironically, her lessons to wayward women in crisis reinforce a gender politics that centralizes women's respectability. Madea's message that women must remember their self-worth and activate their agency against violence, for example, is valuable and necessary, but the suggestion that women wield a frying pan as an act of resistance does little to help characters like Lisa (or viewers, for that matter) understand how patriarchy works. Because the scene ends on a comedic note, Lisa does not come to understand how Carlos's male insecurity makes him possessive over her body and life. Instead, Perry's use of Madea as a tool to foster, in hooks's terms, the development of Lisa's self-will, rather than her critical consciousness, makes the victory Lisa achieves by fighting back a narrow one. As viewers watch Lisa fight the inordinately villainous Carlos, this stage of healing is reduced to acts of retaliation rather than inquiry.

This facet of Perry's healing curriculum also reveals a troubling politics of proximity and a critique of black mothers. Lisa's estrangement from her family makes Madea's message about self-worth more poignant. As a symbolically strange text who must be brought home so Madea can read and teach her, Lisa is a character whose detachment implies that women are safer when they stay physically, and ideologically, closer to

home and date family-approved partners. The politics of proximity embedded in Lisa's estrangement from the family and the crisis of domestic violence works to reify the idea that the family is an institutional safe haven for women. Conversely, Perry's representation of Victoria, Lisa and Vanessa's mother, in opposition to Madea works to reinforce narrow conceptualizations of black motherhood. Cast against Madea, who is made to seem like an appropriate, albeit nontraditional matriarch, Victoria, who inexplicably berates the older daughter and manipulates the younger into staying in an abusive relationship for the sake of marrying a richer man, is a villain. This binary upholds the forms of "black mother worship" that occur when black women's choice to be self-sacrificing is extolled and praised without complication (hooks 1990, 45). Exaggerated, one-dimensional portrayals of characters like Victoria work to reinforce the assumption that women who actively choose to be giving and self-sacrificing for the sake of their families are the "perfect embodiment of a woman's natural role" (hooks 1990, 45). Not only do these notions naturalize the idea that the "black woman who works hard to be a responsible caretaker is only doing what she should be doing" (45), but they also suggest that women like Victoria pose threats to their families. As a result, Perry's use of Victoria as an antagonizing figure makes his representation of black motherhood a validation of the pathologizing rhetoric in documents like the Moynihan report.

Resolving to exercise resilience

A praxis component of Perry's curriculum is the trend of characters who resolve to exercise resilience. Motivated by the testimonies their relatives share and the skills they teach, Perry's protagonists press forward with their lives in the face of mistreatment and hurt. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, Myrtle encourages her heartbroken daughter, Helen, to rely on divine assistance and courage to get a job and become economically self-sufficient after her divorce. When Helen explains how the pain of her broken marriage makes her feel too weak to carry on, Myrtle says, "You've got the strength God gave us women to survive. You just ain't tapped into it yet. . . . Just let it go. There's nothing wrong with shedding a few tears. It cleanses the soul. You know, you need to stop thinking about what you think you lost and look forward to what there is to gain. It's a new life baby. It's right in front of you. All you got to do is reach out and grab it." When Helen asks how she is supposed to carry this out, her mother responds with the following charge: "By waking up every morning and thanking God, and then ask him to help you. Just ask the savior to help you."

Interestingly, the message of independence, survival, and faith Myrtle articulates to Helen in the film version of *Diary* is different in the stageplay version. In that version of the text, Perry has Myrtle remind Helen of the legacy from which she came, saying, "You come from a long legacy of black women who were raped, beaten, and separated from their families. But they sought strength in the Lord and they survived. You have to do the same. He will see you through this" (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman: The Play* 2002). Both versions show a concept of healing premised on individual action and the belief that we are divinely endowed with resources that enable us to survive difficult encounters. When viewers see protagonists like Helen deciding to get their own jobs, returning to church regularly, or becoming financially self-sufficient, the argument is validated. As proof that these processes work, Perry's films show protagonists enjoying their independence or talking about the difficult yet positive transformations they are undergoing, essentially rewriting their sense of purpose. Their progress reinforces the idea that exercising resiliency is a pivotal step in the journey to healing.

Consequently, the choices Perry makes to stage these teaching moments reveal how his concept of healing upholds forms of patriarchy through silence. In their haste to help women in crisis reach states of wellness and resume their roles as mothers, wives, or workers, self-help writers frequently fail to make the interrogation or critique of systems of hegemony and oppression—an interrogation that is necessary for women's development of critical consciousness—a part of the curriculum. Myrtle's lament about "shielding" her daughter too much illustrates this oversight because, in that scene, neither character acknowledges Charles's role. Instead, both women focus on their own complicity with no attention to the complexities of race, class, and manhood that shaped both the marriage and Charles's agency. This focus reifies the problematic trend in rhetorical healing whereby women are taught to accept disproportionate levels of culpability for the traumas they or their loved ones encounter. In admonishing Helen to tap into the legacy of black women who have survived trauma or abuse and in critiquing herself, Myrtle's message perpetuates normalizing discourses about black women's resiliency that, when misappropriated, exacerbate the silent and internal oppression women in crisis and abused women sometimes endure. Songs, poems, e-mails, and other discourses lauding black women's survival of attacks on their bodies, psyches, and families are commonplace, often functioning as arguments that promote cultural pride and fortitude. Subsequently, the normalization of these messages preserves mythologies of black women's exorbitant strength, which black feminist critics have

examined and rejected (Wallace [1979] 1999; Collins 2000). Terrie M. Williams's discussion of how signs of her depression went unspoken and misdiagnosed in *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting* (2008) verifies the link between the normalization of these discourses and black women's internal oppression. Silenced by such familiar adages as "we don't air our dirty laundry" and her family's consistent messages about her success and black women's strength, Williams spent several unfruitful years in therapy, unable to explain, communicate, or conceptualize the severity of her depression. Thus, a consequence of Perry's appeal to resiliency is that his films perpetuate the myth that black women are inherently capable of enduring and bouncing back from trauma or oppression, if they so choose.

Recognizing and seizing positive opportunities

Enacting evolution is the last transformative step within the healing curricula African American writers have created to address and resolve individual crises. During this culminating stage, the healed individual applies her new insight and perspectives to her relationships. The assumption is that the healed individual not only behaves differently but also makes different decisions because she is better equipped with the resources or processes necessary to survive future crises. As proof, Perry's films show leading women taking actions and making decisions that his audiences are primed to interpret as evidence of the protagonists' healing. Through appeals aimed at persuading them that they are not only entitled to a happy future but must actively decide to pursue it, protagonists like Helen, Vanessa, and Lisa internalize messages of acceptance and praise that help them rewrite negative internal and external discourses that influence their self-perception after facing crisis. These messages are a critical element within rhetorics of healing because they foreground the importance of an individual recognizing and seizing good opportunities.

The burgeoning romantic relationship is the site where protagonists most frequently receive these messages of acceptance, and the "good" black Christian man is the character who most frequently delivers them. Frankie, the bus driver, fulfills this role in *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006). From the start of the film, he boldly expresses his interest in Vanessa, the single mother of two. However, she rebuffs his advances because of a deeply-seated distrust of men that viewers later learn is a result of her being raped as an adolescent by her mother's husband. Compared to Carlos, the physically abusive man engaged to Vanessa's sister Lisa, Frankie is the model man. Patient and compassionate, Frankie takes time to formally court Vanessa and respond to her accusatory question of "What do you

want? . . . All men come for something," with the answer "Some men come to restore." In this capacity, Frankie is strategically placed as the agent who enacts the crucial function of affirmation in the healing process. He delivers some of the messages the protagonist is supposed to use as a template of scripts to overwrite negative internal and external discourses that influence her self-esteem and shift her perception on relationships and her future.

Frankie's claim that some men can restore women to states of happiness reveals the narrow ways in which Perry's films teach viewers to conceptualize black women's wellness. The irony in his focus on black women's healing is that protagonists are encouraged to expand their notion of desirable romantic partners to include good, church-going, working-class men but are never encouraged to look beyond heterosexual relationships for sources of fulfillment, wholeness, or healing. The result of making the protagonist's burgeoning romantic relationship the site for her transformation is that Perry's films teach viewers to see a woman's healing as a reward for choosing to take her place as a wife to the good black Christian man. In *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), Helen and Orlando's romantic relationship illustrates how the notion that healing is a result of proper decision making creates a patriarchal system for evaluating women's behaviors. Despite his rocky start with Helen, Orlando, the moving-truck driver, is a strategically placed character who affirms her after her divorce. He does so on their first date by telling Helen that he sees her as a beautiful "woman that's been hurt" who has "taught herself to be tough." The intent of this message is to restore Helen's desirability, yet the focus on male affirmation and desire that makes the scene appealing later becomes a tool to measure Helen's progress toward emotional healing. As Orlando is proposing to her, Helen learns that Charles, her soon-to-be ex, has been shot, and she opts to resume her wifely duties as Charles's caregiver. The suspended proposal and the sadistic forms of revenge she enacts on Charles become signs that Helen is not yet well or ready to move toward a positive future. In his impassioned plea for Helen to choose him and choose hope, Orlando reveals whose interests are actually served by the rhetorical healing Perry's films teach when he says, "I . . . deserve to have good things and a good life and I deserve you. You're a good woman. You deserve me. The only reason you're going back . . . is because you're afraid. . . . I love you, but I need you to trust me. . . . I don't want just half of you."

Because vision, or ideological transformation, is one aim of rhetorical healing, the lesson about recognizing positive opportunities that Orlando is supposed to deliver is a critique of Helen's values. When placed

between an uncharacteristically (in the context of Perry's oeuvre) one-dimensional male villain and a good Christian man like Orlando, the protagonist is unable to choose the right option, symbolizing her lack of progress toward healing, her threat to the good black man, and, thereby, her threat to the traditional nuclear family. All that is good seems to be represented in the positive life that the affirming good man offers to the wounded yet recovering woman. An ulterior motive for healing, Perry's prioritization of the good Christian man's happiness is most evident when women like Helen beg the good men they have "wounded" to take them back. That the majority of his films end with a wedding is confirmation that healing is a restorative ritual that teaches women to take their places as whole, restored, and functional mates for black Christian men.

To show yourself approved: Implications of black women's healing on film

For the large body of contemporary African American Christians who make up Perry's target demographic, the messages about family obligation and collective survival in his films are ones worth supporting. However, for the women who are cast as the students in his healing curricula, the binaries and narrow conceptions of gender roles his films advance are potentially dangerous. The final attack on Andrea in *The Family That Preys* (2008) is the most compelling evidence of these dangers. One of the story lines centers on the final road trip that Charlotte Cartwright, a wealthy white businesswoman fighting off her son's attempts to take over the family company, takes with her best friend Alice Evans, a working-class black diner owner struggling to keep peace in her family. The other plotline focuses on the exchange between the two matriarchs' families, particularly Andrea Evans's extramarital affair with her boss, William Cartwright, Charlotte's son. Throughout the film Andrea embodies the negative stereotype of the blindly ambitious, gold-digging, emasculating woman who shows little respect for her working-class husband, Chris. When Andrea learns that Chris has withdrawn money from the private account William has established for her, Andrea verbally berates Chris, saying that he could never be the man William is and braggingly informing Chris that he is not the father of their child. The fit of rage Chris flies into when he slaps Andrea so forcefully that she literally flies over the diner counter could ordinarily be identified as abusive, but the template for healing established throughout Perry's films works to justify the act. Since Andrea is represented as the villain, her lack of marital loyalty and disrespect for her husband make her a threat to Chris's wellness and happiness.

Although Jacqueline Bobo's (1995) theory of black women's cultural reading is an important reminder that the women who patronize Perry's films are not passive, uncritical consumers, some viewers are. As the primary source for contemporary cinematic representations of black womanhood, Perry's rhetoric of healing cannot go overlooked, especially as discourses on black women's declining marital prospects propel instructional relationship guides like Steve Harvey's *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (2009) to best-seller status. The feminist project of interrogating the images and discourses that shape how women perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others requires us to bring such complex instructional projects into our purview for critical assessment. By constructing women in crisis as students who must learn processes of healing to show themselves approved by their lovers and families, these films counter the spirit of the Combahee River Collective, who argued that black women should focus their energies on their own liberation, "not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of [their] need as human persons for autonomy" (1982, 13). Perry's version of healing is an antifeminist pedagogy that shifts the responsibility for African American communities' progress and wellness back on women.

Department of English
State University of New York, University at Albany

References

Bambara, Toni Cade. 1980. *The Salt Eaters*. New York: Random House.

Bobo, Jacqueline. 1995. *Black Women as Cultural Readers*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1998. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

———. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York; Routledge.

The Color Purple. 1985. Directed by Steven Spielberg. DVD. Burbank, CA: Warner.

Combahee River Collective. 1982. "A Black Feminist Statement." In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, 13–22. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press.

Cooper, Anna Julia. 1892. *A Voice from the South*. Electronic version, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina. http://docsouth.tunc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html.

Daddy's Little Girls. 2007. Directed by Tyler Perry. DVD. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman. 2005. Directed by Darren Grant. DVD. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman: The Play. 2002. Directed by Tyler Perry. DVD. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

The Family That Preys. 2008. Directed by Tyler Perry. DVD. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Harvey, Steve. 2009. *Act like a Lady, Think like a Man: What Men Really Think about Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*. New York: HarperCollins.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Holloway, Karla. 1995. *Codes of Conduct: Race, Ethics, and the Color of Our Character*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

hooks, bell. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End.

———. 1993. *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*. Boston: South End.

———. 1996. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End.

Howard-Pitney, David. 2005. *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

How Stella Got Her Groove Back. 1998. Directed by Kevin Rodney Sullivan. DVD. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Jakes, T. D. 1996. *Woman, Thou Art Loosed: Healing the Wounds of the Past*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

La Ferla, Ruth. 2007. "Sometimes Piety Isn't Squeaky Clean." *New York Times*, October 14. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/fashion/14tyler.html.

Lyle, Timothy. 2011. "'Check with Yo' Man First; Check with Yo' Man': Tyler Perry Appropriates Drag as a Tool to Recirculate Patriarchal Ideology." *Callaloo* 34(3):943–58.

Madea's Family Reunion. 2006. Directed by Tyler Perry. DVD. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

McDowell, Deborah. 1995. *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Moynian, Daniel Patrick. 1965. "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Report, Department of Labor, Office of Policy, Planning, and Research, Washington, DC.

Patterson, Robert. 2011. "'Woman, Thou Art Bound': Critical Spectatorship, Black Masculine Gazes, and Gender Problems in Tyler Perry's Movies." *Black Camera* 3(1):9–30.

Perry, Tyler. 2006. *Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life*. New York: Riverhead.

———. 2009. "We're All PRECIOUS in His Sight." Blog post, October 3. http://www.tylerperry.com/messages/were-all-precious-his-sight/.

Pinckney, Darryl. 1987. "Black Victims, Black Villains." *New York Review of Books*, January 29, 81–82.

Pough, Gwendolyn. 2004. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Black Public Sphere*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Richardson, Elaine. 2002. *African American Literacies*. New York: Routledge.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. 2000. *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Shange, Ntozake. (1975) 2000. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide, When the Rainbow Is Enuf: A Choreopoem*. New York: Scribner.

Springer, Kimberly. 2007. "Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women: African American Women in Postfeminist and Post-Civil-Rights Popular Culture." In *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. 249–75. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Staples, Robert. 1979. "The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists." *Black Scholar* 10(6–7):24–33.

Svetkey, Benjamin, Margeaux Watson, and Alynda Wheat. 2009. "Tyler Perry: The Controversy over His Hit Movies." *Entertainment Weekly*, March 17. http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,20266223,00.html.

Thrash, Rodney. 2004. "Playing to Their Crowd." *St. Petersburg Times*, November 16. http://www.sptimes.com/2004/11/16/Floridian/Playing_to_their_crowd.shtml.

Vanzant, Iyanla. 1995. *Interiors: A Black Woman's Healing in Progress*. New York: Harlem River.

Waiting to Exhale. 1995. Directed by Forest Whitaker. DVD. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Walker, Alice. 1982. *The Color Purple*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Wallace, Michelle. (1979) 1999. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso Classics.

Watkins, Mel. 1986. "Sexism, Racism, and Black Women Writers." *New York Times Book Review*, June 15. http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/15/books/sexism-racism-and-black-women-writers.html.

Williams, Terrie M. 2008. *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting: Real Talk for When There's Nowhere to Go but Up*. New York: Scribner.

Young, Courtney. 2009. "Tyler Perry's Gender Problem." *The Nation*, August 31. http://www.thenation.com/article/tyler-perrys-gender-problem.