

## RECLAIMING HERSELF: A BLACK FEMINIST READING OF ALICIA KEYS' *MORE MYSELF*

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### Abstract

*The research, Reclaiming Herself: A Black Feminist Reading of Alicia Keys' More Myself is an analytical study of an autobiographical book by Alicia Keys More Myself: A Journey through the lens of Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hills. The text showcases how black women shape their identity, gain knowledge through experience, selfhood and resistance within celebrity contexts. The sample for the study consists of excerpts from Keys' book that foreground experiences of identity formation, emotional struggle, creativity, motherhood and social activism throughout her life. The study is of qualitative paradigm as it employs textual analysis to analyze the text. The findings reveal that More Myself: A Journey functions as a Black feminist autobiographical text in which Alicia Keys challenges racialized beauty norms, resists the "Strong Black Woman" stereotype and renames vulnerability as a source of strength and knowledge. The book exposes the nature of oppression supported by intersectionality within the music industry, demonstrating how race, gender and class operate within Collins' matrix of domination. Furthermore, the text highlights the role of motherhood, inter generational knowledge and artistic expression in shaping political consciousness and activism. The study concludes that Alicia Keys' More Myself embodies Patricia Hill Collins' claim that Black women identity is not just shaped by oppression but also by actively gaining knowledge through their lived experiences.*

**Keywords: Black Feminist Thought, Identity Formation, Intersectionality, Racialized Beauty Norms, Social Activism**

### 1.1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

Autobiography is one of the most universal forms of writing in which the authors from around the world produce work in. Not only authors, but people like literary critics, philosophers, historians and psychologists have also worked on it finding out that autobiographies are not only the means of understanding of the ways in which lives have been lived, but also what it is to have a self identity in the world. Autobiographies are also known as life-writing and are seen to act as a vehicle on which essential ideas like identity, self and subjectivity are contained.

Alicia Keys was born on January 25, 1981 . She is an award-winning American singer, songwriter, pianist, actress, activist and philanthropist who is famously known for her heartfelt voice, piano skills and deeply emotional lyrics. She debuted in early 2000s as one of the most ground holding voices in contemporary R&B and soul music. Furthermore, she won multiple Grammy Awards, had multiple bestselling albums and most importantly, a strong voice for women's empowerment, identity and social justice. Alicia Keys has become a prominent figure not just in music but also in global activism.

Alicia Keys immediate surrounding were Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan which was one of New York City's busiest neighborhoods at that time. She was initially raised by her mother, who worked multiple jobs at a time due to which Alicia learned valuable sense of responsibility

and independence at a very young age. Her father was largely unavailable. This deeply affected her emotional perspective and later her music as well. Her childhood was a both disciplined and unique due to exposure to the harsh realities she experienced. All this contributed in making her an expressive and famous artist.

Alicia was biracial due to which he faced questions regarding her belonging and identity. She famously stated that she often felt “between worlds”. This also shaped what was people’s perception about her. However, even in the racist surroundings, her mother became a role model for her as she had strength, determination and showed resistance. Alicia often talked about her emotional struggles, how lonely she felt, fear of abandonment and all the insecurities. However, what shaped her identity was how she didn’t let this vulnerability weaken her, but she gained strength from it. Moreover, she became a role model for women empowerment especially by being a social activist and leading movements like No Makeup. In *More Myself: A Journey*, Alicia Keys narrates an honest events of her life, starting from her childhood, her struggles and her tough journey towards success in music. She was trained by Beethoven, Chopin and others and started playing piano from a young age with the knowledge of the classics as well. She was highly expressive at a very young age and wrote lyrics that were beyond her age proficiency.

Throughout *More Myself: A Journey*, Keys narrated details of how she composed and promoted her albums, from *Songs in A Minor* up through her 2016 album, *HERE*. Other than her music journey, she also narrates her own personal journey that hoe she found her voice. It might sound ironic that a singer, who’s famous for her voice and her songs, has had to search so long for her inner voice, but it’s a journey so many of us will find familiar.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

Following the objectives for the research,

- To analyze how Alicia Keys shapes her identity in through the lens of Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hills Collins.
- To examine how the autobiographical book *More Myself: A Journey* by Alicia Keys challenges controlling images and stereotypes associated with black womanhood.

## 1.3 Research Questions

Following the research questions,

- How does Alicia Keys shapes her identity in through the lens of Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hills Collins?
- How did the autobiographical book *More Myself: A Journey* by Alicia Keys challenges controlling images and stereotypes associated with black womanhood?

## 1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is significant as it points out the idea of Black Feminist Thought within contemporary celebrity autobiographies. Hence, by analyzing Alicia Keys’ *More Myself*, the study shows how it a a continuous struggle for modern Black women to stand for their identity, power and show resistance in the realm of celebrity context. Furthermore, the research highlights the unique struggles of a biracial Black woman and ideas like racial ambiguity, belonging and identity. Lastly, the study showcases that how Alicia Keys used her emotion, vulnerability and personal memory as weapon that gave her strength and valuable knowledge.

## 2.0 Literature Review

The research article, *Black Feminist Thought and Qualitative Research in Education* was written by Kristal Moore Clemons in the year 2019. This research article analyses that how Black Feminist Thought portrays qualitative research in education by foregrounding learning practices that were prominent in the lived experiences of Black women through which gained knowledge. It argued that the struggles regarding race, gender and class of that Black women in the history, created unique ways of gaining knowledge, which can be more inclusive

and just educational approaches. This research article associates with the present one as it uses the lens of *The Black Feminist Thought* to analyse the autobiography *More Myself* by Alicia Keys.

The research article *Black Feminist Thought as Methodology: Examining Intergenerational Lived Experiences of Black Women* was written by Ashley Patterson, Valerie Kinloch, Tanja Burkhard, Ryann Randall and Arianna Howard in the year 2016. This essay uses Black feminist lens to question and broaden traditional ideas of what can be considered as rigorous research methodology. By drawing inspiration the Black Women's Gathering Place, an intergenerational community of Black women, the authors use Black Feminist Thought also as a methodological framework instead of using it just as a critical social theory. It analyzing Black women shared experiences and demonstrates how BFT can be used as a powerful means for understanding and representing Black women's lives. "Additionally, daily encounters with other people, media and societal structures remind us that, as black women, we are constantly engaged in a struggle to combat those features of everyday life that may otherwise break us down, suppress our capacities for self-knowing and self-love and prevent us from deepening our interactions with others." (pg. 70). This research article associates with the present one as it uses the lens of *The Black Feminist Thought* to analyse the autobiography *More Myself* by Alicia Keys.

The article *Black Feminist Thought and Why it Matters* was written by Lindsay Hein in the year 2017. The paper illustrates that how Black Women experience racism, sexism and classism continuously in several interconnected ways. It argues that Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Thought can be considered to be highly relevant in contemporary times because it demonstrates how Black women face intersecting oppression in different ways and offers a framework for understanding their experiences, activism and how they resistance against oppression. "Collins describes this concept as "interlocking oppression" and examines just how problematic this is for women of color in the U.S. For example, throughout her work Collins brings up the constant pressure black women face to choose between their identity as women and their identity as African-Americans." (pg. 1). This research article associates with the present one as it uses the lens of *The Black Feminist Thought* to analyse the autobiography *More Myself* by Alicia Keys.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The research is of qualitative paradigm as it analyzes how the autobiographical book *More Myself: More Myself* by Alicia Keys showcases the ideas introduced in *The Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hills Collins.

#### **3.2 Population**

This research uses autobiographical books for its analysis through the lens of *The Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hills Collins.

#### **3.3 Sample**

The sample comprises of the excerpts from the analysis of autobiographical book *More Myself* by Alicia Keys.

#### **3.4 Delimitation**

The research is delimited to just one autobiographical book, *More Myself: A Journey* by Alicia Keys. Furthermore, only the lens of *The Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Collins is used to analyse the respective text.

#### **3.5 Data Collection Technique**

The data is collected through close and analytical reading of several excerpts from the autobiographical book *More Myself: A Journey* by Alicia Keys.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Technique

The data is analyzed by using the technique of textual analysis.

### 3.7 Theoretical Framework

#### 3.7.1 Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins

The research applies Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins to examine an autobiographical book *More Myself: A Journey* by Alicia Keys. Collins also named Black Feminist Thought as social critical theory. This theory argues that Black women experience oppression in intersecting forms regarding race, gender and class. An essential element of this theory is self definition which foregrounds that black women have rights to define their own identity instead of forcefully accepting stereotypes or social labels.

In *More Myself: A Journey*, Alicia Keys narrates her journey showcasing how she resisted beauty norms and public pressures that a celebrity faces. Her experiences reflect key concerns of Black Feminist Thought, especially the struggle against controlling images and the pursuit of personal agency.

Using this framework, the memoir is viewed not just as a personal story but as a narrative of empowerment and resistance. Black Feminist Thought, thus provides an effective lens to understand how these reconstruct her identity, challenges cultural expectations and asserts her voice within a broader social context.

#### Data Interpretation

Alicia Keys' autobiographical book *More Myself: A Journey* is not just a personal story that also a narrative that shows how a Black woman deals problems related to race, gender and class in the music industry. This book narrates how she grew up in a single-parent, working-class family and how her past shaped the idea of her true self. Furthermore, she also describes the pressure she faced from the record companies to look a certain way, to lose weight and to act like a pop princess. All this concealed how she actually feels about herself and what she wants her identity to be. Keys writes that she spent many years trying to please others. She was worried and feared that she would be judged and will feel excluded. However, she finally decided to stop hiding and resurface her true self.

In Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins states that Black women must go against the "matrix of domination", that is the oppression they face by overlapping forces of racism, sexism, classism, so they can understand themselves and find their true identity. The book does exactly that. Keys pointed out what the music industry expected from her in terms of beauty and behavior which was actually deeply rooted in what is called racist and sexist. Additionally, how her working-class background further added to her struggles.

The book also showcases intersectionality, the idea that race, gender and class work together to make ones identity. Keys also talked about racism from the industry, sexism from the media and the fear of being labeled as "too Black", affected her career choices as well as her personal life. Her famously declared to "know yourself" and to used her voice for other Black women. This corresponds with Collins's claim that Black feminist knowledge helps Black women be aware of their power and define themselves on their own terms.

Collins stated that instead of gaining knowledge through conventional means of

education, Black women gain valuable knowledge through their lived experiences. In *More Myself: A Journey*, Keys renamed her emotional, physical and psychological experiences as legitimate source of gaining valuable knowledge. She stated that, “*I was exhausted—physically, emotionally, spiritually. I felt trapped inside a version of myself that everyone else seemed to love.*” Alicia’s exhaustion is not just personal but also highly reflects that systemic oppression and burden that Black women face to be included in the circle of what is called perfection, especially in a white patriarchal surroundings. Her breakdown in the dressing room marks a moment where her silenced emotions remolded into knowing.

Collins stated the concept of the matrix of domination which illustrates that how the intersection of race, gender, class and institutional power shape Black women’s lives. Alicia said, “*I learned early how to shrink myself, how to be agreeable, how to smile even when I felt invisible.*”

As a Black woman in the music industry, Alicia was hyper active in visibility in media. Not only her body was scrutinized but her voice was also commodified. Fame did not provide her the freedom from the oppression. Instead, it was reshaped through surveillance, beauty standards and stereotypical idea of what actually a celebrity should look and sound like. This buttresses Collins’ argument being successful or being a celebrity doesn’t mean that oppression is eliminated. Instead, it is reshaped.

### **Resisting Controlling Images and Beauty Norms**

Collins talks about controlling images and stereotypes such as the idea of the *Superwoman* on the basis of which Black women exploitation is normalized. Alicia explicitly interrogates on this topic stating that “*I was tired of being strong. Tired of holding it all together. I didn’t want to be Superwoman anymore.*” Her song “*Superwoman*” resist the expectation from Black women that they must endure endlessly without being vulnerable. Alicia redefines strength saying that it is actually in honesty, softness and self-care. Moreover, her bold decision to appear without makeup challenges racialized beauty norms. She stated, “*I don’t want to cover up anymore. Not my face. Not my truth.*” This moment explicitly confronts the controlling image that think of Black women as objects to be perfected and controlled.

### **Motherhood, Intergenerational Knowledge and Ethics of Care**

Collins portrays Black motherhood as not merely private life but also means of political consciousness Alicia’s relationship with her mother and grandmother, Nana, supports this idea of intergenerational wisdom. She recalls Nana’s teachings: “*Death is a gift meant to wake up the living—to nudge us toward a life of purpose.*” Alicia’s political awareness intensifies further when she became a mother herself and she stated, “*Watching the world as the mother of two Black boys changes everything.*” This shows that Alicia’s activism is not abstract, instead it is supported by survival, love and responsibility.

### **Activism, Music and Black Feminist Consciousness**

Collins argues that Black feminist thought often emerges through **cultural expression**, not formal theory. Alicia makes use of counter-hegemonic discourse in her music, particularly in response to racial violence. Her album *HERE* and initiatives like *We Are Here* sets a ground as a shift from personal grief into collective action. Music becomes a mean of resistance that voices that were once marginalized loudly challenge and resist. Alicia herself affirms that “*Music is one of the most potent forms of protest—the gateway to connection.*”

## Conclusion

Through the lens of Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins', *More Myself* can be read as a Black feminist autobiographical text that foregrounds lived experience as a legitimate source of knowledge. Alicia Keys narrated her life story through personal reflection, emotional struggle and experience, that reflects Collins' claim that Black women gain valuable knowledge from their everyday life experiences. The moments in her life where she was feeling exhausted, vulnerable and questioning herself, are not showcased as weaknesses but actually revealing how survival in oppression led to deeper insights such as consciousness and understanding.

The book also brings fore intersectional oppression, illustrating that how race, gender and class intersect within the matrix of domination. Alicia's experiences as being a Black woman in the music industry reveals that how being a celebrity does not eliminate oppression but reshapes it through surveillance, commodification and rigid expectations of femininity and professionalism. Her narrative demonstrates Collins' claim that the oppression that Black women face is multidimensional and cannot be understood easily.

Furthermore, *More Myself: A Journey* also resists controlling images that are forced upon Black women, particularly the trope of who is considered to be a *Superwoman*. Alicia challenges this and states that what a real superwoman is like illustrating her endless resilience by openly expressing vulnerability, emotional fatigue and expressing the desire to rest. She rejected the imposed beauty standards and took a bold decision to appear in public without any makeup, expresses as acts of resistance to stereotypes that try to discipline and control Black women's bodies and emotions.

In addition, *More Myself: A Journey* links motherhood with political consciousness and activism. Alicia's reflections on her mother, grandmother and her own role as a mother showcases how care, survival and resistance are passed down in generations. Her activism further intensifies as she becomes more aware of social injustice and racial violence.

In a nutshell, Alicia Keys' journey reflects Patricia Hill Collins ideas that Black women are not merely shaped by oppression, they theorize through it. *More Myself: A Journey* stands as a contemporary work of Black feminism that highlights how Black women struggle and survive in racial and white patriarchal surroundings.

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