

## WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND WOMANISM IN SELF MADE: INSPIRED BY THE LIFE OF MADAM C.J WALKER 2020 SERIES

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### Abstract

Oppression of Black women is a significant issue to examine within various social and cultural contexts. One prominent figure who fought for the rights of Black women is Sarah Breedlove, known as Madam C.J. Walker. This study aims to analyze the oppression experienced by Sarah Breedlove in the series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* (2020) using the oppression theory from Iris Marion Young in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), which includes exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Additionally, this study examines the concept of womanism as articulated by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1982), which emphasizes the strength, solidarity, and resilience of Black women. Aspects of womanism analyzed in this study include communal orientation, resistance, commitment to survival and wholeness, spirituality, and the love for women and women's culture. The data collected includes 67 entries related to oppression and womanism, with marginalization as the most dominant form of oppression (17 entries), followed by powerlessness (11 entries), exploitation (5 entries), cultural imperialism (6 entries), and violence (3 entries). In the aspect of womanism, resistance (14 entries) is the most prominent, followed by commitment to survival and wholeness (12 entries), communal orientation (6 entries), spirituality and connection to nature (3 entries), and loving women and appreciating women's culture (6 entries). The findings of this study show how Sarah Breedlove, despite facing various forms of oppression, successfully resisted these forces and celebrated the strength and identity of Black women through the values of womanism represented in her life.

**Keywords:** Oppression, Womanism, Madam C.J. Walker, Series, Black Women, Iris Marion Young .

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a reflection of human life, cultural values, and social realities. Through forms like novels, poems, and plays, it conveys aesthetic value while expressing political, moral, and philosophical messages. In academic settings, literature is studied to analyze structure, meaning, and cultural context. This research specifically focuses on the oppression of Black women an issue often overlooked despite its complexity. Black women face double oppression due to both race and gender and are often portrayed as inferior and submissive under white dominance. Historically, they have endured ongoing discrimination in areas such as labor, education, and social status. Against this backdrop, **Madam C.J. Walker** stands out as a key figure. As the first self-made Black woman millionaire in the United States, her life story portrayed in the series *Self Made* highlights her struggles against racial and gender-based oppression. The series presents Walker as a strong, visionary woman who defied societal norms and empowered other Black women through her beauty business and training programs. Thus, this study analyzes how Walker's character in *Self Made* reflects both the oppression faced by Black women and the principles of womanism, offering deeper insight into their historical struggle and contribution to the fight for equality.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist literary criticism analyzes literature through a feminist lens, focusing on how women are portrayed and how literature reflects or challenges patriarchal norms (Guo, 2018). It examines works by both male and female authors to uncover gender-based oppression and stereotypes, aiming to highlight women's voices and promote justice (Madsen, 2000; Ruthven, 1985). This criticism not only interprets texts but also seeks to expand the literary canon by including marginalized women writers. Feminism, at its core, demands equal rights and autonomy for women (Suwardi, 2010), encouraging them to resist domination and reclaim their identities through literature. Black feminism arose in the 1960s-70s to address the unique struggles of Black women, who were often excluded from both white feminist and Black civil rights movements. Crenshaw (1989) introduced *intersectionality*—the idea that race, gender, and class intersect to create unique forms of oppression. Collins (2006) emphasizes that Black women's experiences offer critical insight into systemic injustice. The movement challenges both racial and gender hierarchies and fights for inclusive activism that reflects the realities of Black women, who are frequently misrepresented or overlooked in mainstream feminism.

Women's oppression refers to systemic injustice rooted in patriarchy, where women are treated unequally based on their gender. Frye (1998) compares this oppression to a birdcage—individual barriers may seem minor, but together they severely restrict freedom. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that social and cultural structures often reduce women to passive roles serving male interests. This oppression is not always visible but deeply embedded in everyday experiences, limiting women's opportunities, perspectives, and autonomy.

**Iris Marion Young's (1990) theory of oppression** highlights how structural and systemic forces perpetuate inequality beyond individual bias. This study focuses on five of Young's central concepts—**exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence**—and explores how these intersect with race and gender to compound the struggles of marginalized groups.

### a. Exploitation

Young (1990, p. 48) explains exploitation as when one group benefits from another's labor without fair return. Drawing from Marxism, she connects this to class hierarchies and unpaid or underpaid labor. Women are often seen as naturally subordinate, leading to lower wages and limited political participation (Wili et al., 2019). At work, women face sexual exploitation, where they are viewed as objects to satisfy male desires (Young, 1990,

p. 34). Historically, Black women were exploited as domestic workers under white control, losing economic and familial stability.

**b. Marginalization**

Young (1990, p. 40) defines marginalization as the exclusion of certain groups from full societal participation due to identity-based barriers. This often impacts access to education, employment, and politics, reinforcing inequality (Young, 1990, p. 23). Marginalized individuals struggle to meet basic needs and are systematically denied social mobility.

**c. Powerlessness**

Powerlessness occurs when people lack control over decisions affecting their lives (Young, 1990, p. 56). Rooted in class domination, it denies marginalized groups access to authority, information, and expression. As Young (1990, p. 31) argues, this often leads to unawareness of one's own oppression, emphasizing the need for critical reflection and education.

**d. Cultural Imperialism**

Young (1990, p. 67) defines cultural imperialism as when dominant groups universalize their experiences and dismiss others'. In the U.S., Anglo-Christian values dominate, marginalizing other cultures. Heterosexual norms also dominate, labeling other sexualities as deviant and reinforcing patriarchy. Stereotypes imposed by dominant cultures restrict identity and uphold white supremacy.

**e. Violence**

Young (1990, p. 58) sees violence as a tool of oppression—sudden, often random acts aimed to control, harm, or intimidate. This includes economic violence (e.g., financial control, denial of inheritance), sexual violence (e.g., coercion, abuse), mental violence (e.g., verbal degradation, identity attacks), and physical violence (e.g., beating, confinement), all of which target marginalized groups, especially women and children.

Alice Walker's (1982) concept of womanism emphasizes the unique experiences of Black women, centering community, resistance, and cultural identity. Unlike mainstream feminism, womanism includes spiritual, cultural, and collective values.

**a. Communal Orientation**

Black women lead community building, prioritizing shared well-being over individual gain (Walker, 1982, p. 22).

**b. Resistance**

Womanism recognizes Black women's everyday resistance—whether through activism, art, or spirituality—as vital to their survival and identity (Walker, 1982, p. 22).

**c. Commitment to Survival & Wholeness**

This aspect emphasizes physical, mental, and emotional resilience in facing systemic challenges (Walker, 1982, p. 34).

**d. Spirituality & Connection to Nature**

Spiritual belief and ties to nature strengthen Black women's resilience and preserve cultural continuity (Walker, 1982, p. 72).

**e. Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture**

Womanism values mutual support among women and uplifts Black women's cultural contributions (Walker, 1982, p. 88), offering a holistic, inclusive response to both racism and patriarchy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to explore the oppression of Black women in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning behind social and human experiences. This approach is used to analyze linguistic and discursive elements such as words, sentences, and speech, aiming to reveal forms of oppression and the representation of womanism in the series.

This study examines the TV series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* (2020). Fossard (2005, p. 28) defines serial drama as a long-form narrative unfolding over weeks or months, similar to a novel, with episodes aired weekly or even daily. This research focuses on themes of oppression and the portrayal of womanism among Black women in the series. The data collection method in this study involves several steps as follows:

1. Intensively watching the series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* to grasp the overall storyline and the deeper purpose of Sarah Breedlove's story.
2. Analyzing the definitions, characteristics, conflicts, and the portrayal of oppression experienced by Sarah Breedlove in the series, with a focus on applying Iris Marion Young's theory of oppression.
3. Focusing on specific scenes to understand dialogues and situations, and relating them to the theoretical framework of oppression used in the study.
4. Gathering data such as dialogues, scripts, monologues, and screenshots from selected scenes, emphasizing relevant keywords, phrases, and sentences.
5. Organizing the collected data into chronological parts to facilitate the analysis of the forms of oppression experienced by Sarah Breedlove in the series.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the forms of oppression experienced by Sarah Breedlove, applying Iris Marion Young's theory of the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. The objective of this section is to examine the various forms of oppression faced by Madam C.J. Walker, the central character in the series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, using Young's framework. Based on the analysis of 30 data points from all four episodes, it was found that Madam C.J. Walker and other female characters encounter a range of oppressive situations.

#### A. Form of Oppression Experienced by Madam C. J. Walker in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*

##### 1. Exploitation

According to Iris Marion Young in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), exploitation is one of the five faces of oppression, referring to the ways in which the labor and efforts of one group are extracted for the benefit of another without providing equivalent compensation to the exploited group. In the context of women, exploitation is often rooted in the gendered division of labor and power imbalances, where women are economically, emotionally, and socially exploited to sustain the patriarchal system. In this miniseries, the main character, Sarah, experiences oppression in the form of exploitation. The following section presents an analysis of the exploitative acts endured by the protagonist.

Addie Monroe : “Now, we've got a good arrangement here—laundry for hair treatments. Let's not complicate things. You saw the laundry in the back.”

Sarah Breedlove : “I'll have it for you on Friday.”



In Episode 1, *The Fight of the Century*, Sarah Breedlove experiences exploitation when she expresses her desire to become a reseller of Addie Munroe's hair care products. This scene illustrates the exploitation experienced by Sarah Breedlove in her relationship with Addie Monroe. In the dialogue, Addie explicitly establishes an unequal working relationship by stating, "*Now we've got a good arrangement here. Laundry for hair treatments. Let's not complicate things.*" This statement demonstrates how Addie exerts control over Sarah, ensuring that she remains confined to domestic labor without access to greater economic opportunities. Instead of offering financial compensation or a chance to advance in the beauty industry, Addie merely provides hair treatments as a form of remuneration. This dynamic reflects labor exploitation as defined by Iris Marion Young, in which individuals from marginalized groups are systematically utilized by those in positions of power without pathways for social or economic advancement.

Furthermore, the phrase "*Let's not complicate things*" indicates Addie's deliberate attempt to maintain the status quo, keeping Sarah in a subordinate position. This power imbalance is further emphasized in Sarah's brief and compliant response, "*I'll have it for you on Friday.*" Her answer underscores the systemic limitations faced by Black women at the time, who were frequently trapped in exploitative labor conditions that denied them opportunities for social mobility. By accepting this arrangement, Sarah inadvertently reflects how the exploitation of Black women's labor had long been legitimized as a social norm.

## 2. Marginalization

According to Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), marginalization is a form of oppression that occurs when certain groups are excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life. Marginalization often leads to dependency, isolation, and devaluation of individuals or groups, including women. In the context of women, marginalization arises due to social structures that limit their access to employment, education, and other opportunities, particularly for women from racial, class, or other minority identities. In this miniseries, the protagonist, Sarah, experiences marginalization. The following is an analysis of the marginalization she faces.

- Sarah Breedlove : “Maybe I could sell your product. I’d be honored, in fact.”  
Addie Munroe : “Oh, I don’t think sales is for you.” (*laughs*)  
Sarah Breedlove : “I’ve been singing your praises for almost two years. I got you what—eight new customers?”



The datum above is taken from Episode 1, titled *The Fight of the Century*. In this scene, Sarah Breedlove explicitly requests the opportunity to sell Addie Munroe’s product, demonstrating her ambition to advance within the beauty industry. However, Addie dismisses her request with a condescending remark, even laughing as she says, “*Oh, I don’t think sales is for you.*” This statement carries discriminatory undertones, not based on Sarah’s capabilities but rather on her social status as a washerwoman and a dark-skinned Black woman from a lower economic background.

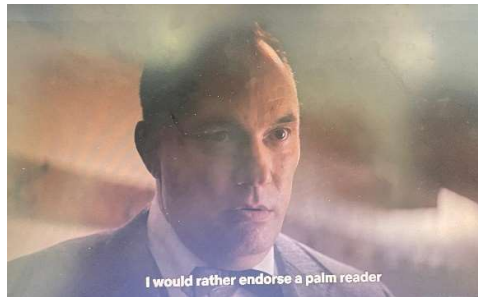
This rejection exemplifies **marginalization**, as conceptualized by Iris Marion Young (1990), which refers to the systemic exclusion of certain groups from full participation in economic and social life. Sarah experiences marginalization because she is denied access to economic opportunities despite having demonstrated her competence by bringing in eight new customers for Addie’s product. Her rejection is not based on a lack of ability but rather on entrenched social hierarchies that deem her unfit for such a role.

Furthermore, this marginalization reinforces social dominance and systemic exclusion, as Addie a lighter-skinned Black woman enjoys greater access to the beauty industry and actively prevents Sarah from seizing an opportunity that could improve her socioeconomic standing. The psychological consequences of marginalization are also significant, as it perpetuates the notion that women like Sarah have no place in the beauty business, potentially diminishing the self-confidence of marginalized individuals. This scene effectively illustrates how marginalization is not only imposed by the dominant (white) group but can also manifest within the Black community itself through differences in social status and skin color, revealing the complex dynamics of oppression that affect Black women on multiple levels.

### 3. Powerlessness

According to Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), powerlessness is a form of oppression that occurs when individuals or groups, such as women, lack control over their life circumstances, are not provided the opportunity to make important decisions, or do not have access to the resources necessary to empower themselves. Powerlessness encompasses a lack of agency in directing one’s life, dependence on others, and the absence of recognition as a valuable or competent individual.

- Sarah Breedlove : “We all need to be lifted, sir.”  
Mr. Washington Booker : “The Negro man needs to be lifted first.”  
Sarah Breedlove : “I know our men have it hard, but so do our women.”  
Mr. Washington Booker : “I would rather endorse a palm reader than a hair culturalist, Mrs. Walker. And that little outburst in there is precisely the reason why you ladies need to be kept in your place. Good day.”



In **Episode 2 Bootstraps**, In the conversation between Sarah Breedlove and Booker T. Washington, the concept of *powerlessness*, as defined by Iris Marion Young (1990), is clearly evident. Young describes *powerlessness* as the inability of a group to control significant aspects of their lives, whether economically, socially, or politically. This is reflected in Washington’s statement, “***The Negro man needs to be lifted first,***” which implies that women, including Sarah, are secondary in the struggle for racial advancement. His remark highlights a hierarchical structure within the Black community, where men are prioritized while women’s struggles remain overlooked. This aligns with Young’s argument that *powerlessness* is not merely about lacking authority but also about structural subordination, which denies certain groups access to recognition and opportunities for empowerment.

Furthermore, Washington explicitly dismisses Sarah’s profession by stating, “***I would rather endorse a palm reader than a hair culturalist.***” This remark not only rejects Sarah personally but also devalues the work predominantly carried out by Black women, reinforcing the idea that their economic contributions are insignificant. Young’s theory of *powerlessness* emphasizes how oppressed groups are often perceived as incompetent and excluded from decision-making processes. Sarah, as a Black woman striving to build a business and create employment opportunities, faces a double burden: she must overcome racial discrimination in the business world while also resisting patriarchal norms within her own community that refuse to acknowledge female leadership.

Washington’s final statement, “***And the little outburst in there is precisely the reason why you ladies need to be kept in your place,***” further underscores the marginalization of Black women. By suggesting that women should remain in a subordinate position, he reinforces the systemic barriers that prevent them from asserting their agency.

This directly reflects Young’s concept of *powerlessness*, where marginalized groups are not only denied authority but also discouraged from expressing their views or demanding their rights. Sarah’s attempt to establish herself as a leader and entrepreneur is met with resistance, not only from the dominant white business sector but also from Black male leaders who believe that women should not hold positions of influence.



This datum strongly illustrates how *powerlessness* operates within the Black community during that era. Sarah is not only denied support from mainstream society but also actively undermined by her own peers, who uphold traditional gender roles that limit women's mobility. This case highlights the dual oppression Black women face navigating both racial and gender discrimination which systematically restricts their access to power, recognition, and professional advancement. Young's framework of *powerlessness* helps to contextualize this struggle, demonstrating how it extends beyond individual experiences to encompass broader social structures that continuously exclude and silence marginalized group

#### 4. Cultural Imperialism

According to Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), According to Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), **cultural imperialism** is a form of oppression that occurs when the dominant culture in society deems its values, norms, and perspectives as universal, thereby marginalizing, diminishing, or erasing the cultures, experiences, and contributions of other groups. In the context of women, cultural imperialism manifests when women's experiences, perspectives, and roles are reduced or controlled by patriarchal norms that are considered the standard.

##### Datum 6

**Sarah Breedlove** : "All I'm saying is... when a customer looks at my hair, they'll know they're seeing what your product can do."

**Addie Munroe** : "Colored women will do anything to look like me—even if deep down, they know they can't."



The datum above is taken from **Episode 1 *The Fight of Century***, The conversation between Sarah Breedlove and Addie Munroe illustrates the concept of *cultural imperialism* as outlined by Iris Marion Young (1990). Addie Munroe, whose lighter complexion aligns more closely with Euro-American beauty standards, implicitly asserts the superiority of mixed-race aesthetics over those of darker-skinned Black women. Her remark, "*Colored women will do anything to look like me. Even if deep down they know they can't,*" highlights the internalization of white beauty standards within the Black community, creating a hierarchy based on proximity to whiteness. This reflects *cultural imperialism*, in which the dominant culture establishes social and aesthetic norms that are then imposed upon marginalized groups.

Sarah Breedlove tries to challenge the narrative by using her own hair as proof of her product's effectiveness. However, Addie's response reinforces the idea that no matter how much Black women try to meet beauty standards, they will always fall short. This highlights how cultural imperialism shapes both societal views of marginalized groups and their self-perception, often leading to internalized inferiority.



## 5. Violence

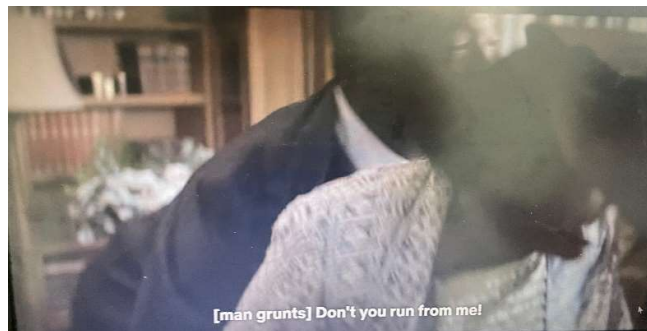
According to Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), **violence** is a form of oppression that refers to physical, psychological, or symbolic threats or acts of violence directed at individuals or groups based on their identity. In the context of women, this violence is often systemic and gender-based, driven by social norms, patriarchal culture, and power structures that sustain male dominance. Below are several data points from the mini-series that demonstrate how the main Black female character, Sarah, experiences oppression through violence from other characters.

### Datum 29

**Sarah Breedlove** : “Stop”

**Theodore** : “Don’t you run from me!”

**Sarah Breedlove** : “Take one more step, and I will blow the Black off you”



The datum above is taken from **Episode 2 "Bootstraps"** In the scene where Sarah Breedlove engages in a conversation with Theodore regarding an investment in her business, she confidently inquires about what it would take to bring him on board. However, the interaction takes a troubling turn when Theodore’s response diminishes Sarah’s agency. Rather than addressing her on equal terms, Theodore’s patronizing remarks undermine her authority, a tactic used to assert control over her in a situation where she is seeking support. This dynamic escalates further as Theodore crosses a line into physical violence, demonstrating an overt manifestation of oppression. In this context, the form of *violence* described by Iris Marion Young becomes evident.

Young’s (1990) concept of violence is not limited to physical harm but extends to any action or behavior that diminishes the autonomy, dignity, and security of an individual. In this case, Theodore’s actions toward Sarah involve emotional and psychological violence that aims to silence her, undermine her confidence, and assert dominance over her. His behavior exemplifies how violence can function as a tool of oppression, reinforcing societal hierarchies that seek to control and marginalize individuals based on race and gender. This form of violence is particularly significant in systems of oppression, where individuals, especially women of color, are subjected to constant threats to their power, self-worth, and agency.

Sarah’s vulnerability in this negotiation highlights the insidious nature of such violence, as it operates beyond physical aggression and manifests in coercion, intimidation, and belittlement. By attempting to exert control over Sarah, Theodore not only reinforces existing power imbalances but also contributes to a broader system that systematically disenfranchises Black women and limits their ability to navigate spaces of power and influence. His actions serve as a reminder that violence within oppressive structures is not always overt but often manifests in more subtle, yet equally harmful, ways.

Through this encounter, Theodore seeks to reaffirm the oppressive power structures that aim to keep Sarah in a state of subjugation, restricting her ability to act freely and assert her agency. However, rather than succumbing to this violence, Sarah's resilience and determination to challenge these barriers demonstrate a crucial act of resistance. Ultimately, this moment of emotional and psychological violence underscores the broader systemic forces at play—ones that continually attempt to restrict the autonomy, ambition, and potential of marginalized individuals, particularly Black women, in their pursuit of self-determination and success.

## B. Womanism Idea Related through Black Women in *Self Made: Inspired By The Life Of Madam CJ Walker*.

### 1. Communal Orientation

In Alice Walker's (1982) womanist theory, **Communal Orientation** refers to the emphasis on solidarity, togetherness, and collective relationships among Black women in facing social, economic, and political challenges. This concept highlights the idea that individual well-being is inseparable from the well-being of the community as a whole. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often prioritizes individualism, womanism places significant value on mutual support, cooperation, and strong social bonds within Black women's communities.

Within the womanist framework, Communal Orientation illustrates how Black women build social networks to uplift one another, share knowledge, and reinforce their cultural and personal identities. This extends beyond economic aspects such as collective efforts in business and trade to emotional and spiritual dimensions, where women provide each other with strength in times of adversity.

Walker asserts that Black women do not merely strive for personal survival but also work to uplift their communities. By forming strong relationships, they create safe spaces for growth and development while ensuring the preservation of cultural values and traditions passed down through generations.

This concept is particularly evident in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, where Sarah Breedlove (Madam C.J. Walker) fights not only for her success but also for the empowerment of other Black women. She establishes job opportunities, builds a business community, and creates pathways for economic independence. Sarah's actions reflect the principles of Communal Orientation in womanism, demonstrating that individual struggle is deeply connected to collective well-being.

#### Datum 25

**Sarah Breedlove** : "I endorse them, myself. I put everything I got into this factory. Now I could've rebuilt my basement after the fire, but instead, I took all my money and I made a down payment on this building. Now I'm giving u all the chance to be first in, part of history."

**Man** : "That's a lot of money your wife is asking for. It's risky."



The concept of **Communal Orientation** in Alice Walker's (1982) womanism is evident in Sarah Breedlove's approach to business and leadership. Rather than solely focusing on personal financial gain, Sarah prioritizes the collective advancement of her community. This is reflected in her statement, *"Now I'm giving you all the chance to be first in, part of history,"* which demonstrates her commitment to uplifting others through economic opportunities. Her decision to invest all of her resources into building a factory instead of rebuilding her basement after the fire signifies her dedication to creating a sustainable future for Black women and their economic independence. However, despite her vision, she faces skepticism from male investors, as seen in the response, *"That's a lot of money your wife is asking for. It's risky."* This reaction highlights the structural barriers imposed by patriarchy and capitalism, which often undermine the credibility of Black women entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, Sarah's persistence embodies the essence of **Communal Orientation**, where success is not measured by individual achievements but by the collective empowerment of the community. Through her business, she seeks to provide economic mobility and stability for Black women, reinforcing the core principle of womanism that emphasizes solidarity, shared progress, and communal upliftment.

## 2. Resistance

In Alice Walker's (1982) womanist theory, **Resistance** serves as a critical component in the struggle for Black women's liberation and empowerment. It is an active defiance against the intersecting systems of oppression racism, sexism, and classism that marginalize and control Black women. Rather than simply reacting to these forces, resistance in womanism is about **reclaiming autonomy, power, and identity** through both individual and collective acts of defiance. For Walker, this resistance takes on multiple forms, from personal acts of self-affirmation to communal efforts aimed at dismantling oppressive societal structures.

Central to womanist resistance is the preservation of Black culture and spirituality, as well as the creation of spaces where Black women can thrive on their own terms, unencumbered by external forces. This resistance is not just a rejection of the status quo but an active pursuit of self-determination, communal solidarity, and the power to define one's own life. Through this lens, resistance becomes not only a means of survival but also a tool for creating alternative systems that honor the experiences and contributions of Black women. Sarah's persistence in challenging these oppressive forces highlights how womanism does not only confront one form of injustice but seeks to dismantle all intersecting systems of power that work against Black women's autonomy.

### Datum 11

Lelia : "Mom, what you doin' up?"

Sarah Breedlove : "Just working on a little something. Sit, there's something I wanna try."

Leli : "What is it?"

Sarah Breedlove : "Hair grower... maybe. Just something I'm fiddling around with."

Lelia : "Mmm. Smells better than Addie's already."

Sarah Breedlove : "Just trying to figure out the right mix."



In this scene, Sarah demonstrates a form of resistance against the dominant beauty industry norms that often overlook the needs of Black women. As Sarah attempts to develop her own hair growth formula, she challenges the commercial products long produced by and for the white-dominated beauty industry. In doing so, Sarah is not only striving to create a product more suited to Black women's needs but also asserting her **autonomy** and **self-determination**. This aligns with the concept of resistance in Alice Walker's womanism, where resistance is not just reactive but proactive in building alternatives that allow Black women to achieve freedom and control over their lives. In this way, Sarah symbolically resists a system that disregards Black women, while simultaneously empowering herself and her community to take control over their identities and needs.

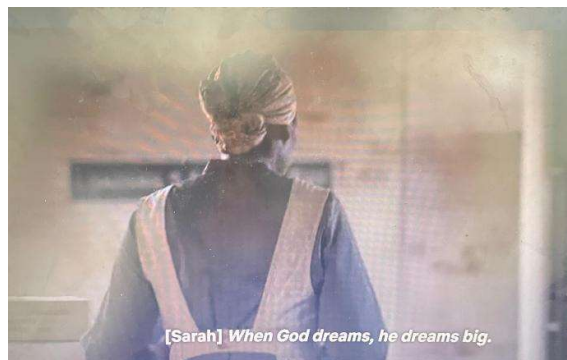
### 3. Commitment to Survival and Wholeness

In Alice Walker's (1982) womanist theory, one of the key components is **Commitment to Survival and Wholeness**. This concept emphasizes the profound and inherent dedication to the survival, well-being, and holistic growth of Black women. It is a resilience that transcends individual struggles and extends to the community, as it acknowledges the interconnection between personal survival and collective empowerment. **Commitment to Survival & Wholeness** is not just about enduring hardships, but actively seeking balance, healing, and fulfillment in the face of adversity. For Black women, this commitment involves nurturing one's own strength while also uplifting and supporting others in the community. It reflects an understanding that true survival is not only about overcoming external oppressions but also about reclaiming and nurturing the self in its full complexity.

This theme is particularly evident in the life and actions of Sarah Breedlove in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, where her personal journey toward success is deeply intertwined with her efforts to empower and uplift other Black women. In examining her character through the lens of **Commitment to Survival & Wholeness**, we can explore how Sarah's struggles and achievements reflect a larger, collective vision for survival and growth within the Black community.

#### Datum 55

**Sarah** : "One thing I've learned about dreams... they do come true. When God dreams, He dreams big—and I decided to follow His example. I opened this factory only six months ago, and today, I have hundreds of factory workers and sales agents. I've also sold thousands of tins of my *Wonderful Hair Grower*. And I have one of the largest factories in Indianapolis. But my aspirations don't stop at these doors—or with me. I have a dream of helping to better all colored women. I'm gonna open salons with the *Walker* name all over the country. You see, I want you all to be just like me."





Sarah Breedlove's dialogue in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* is highly relevant to Alice Walker's concept of *Commitment to Survival & Wholeness* because it illustrates how Sarah integrates the struggle for personal survival with her commitment to empowering the Black female community collectively. *Commitment to Survival & Wholeness* in womanism emphasizes not only surviving in oppressive conditions but also achieving a full and wholesome life. In this case, Sarah's focus is not solely on her personal success but also on ensuring that other Black women have opportunities to become independent and improve their own lives.

Through her efforts to establish a factory and open salons to be owned by her top-selling agents, Sarah provides tangible economic opportunities for other women to transform their lives. In doing so, she instills the value of *wholeness* creating a space where women can thrive socially, emotionally, and economically. She is not just helping women survive; she is empowering them to create and manage their own businesses. By opening these opportunities, Sarah Breedlove invites the Black female community to build a better future together.

*Commitment to Survival* in this context is also reflected in how Sarah urges Black women not just to survive social injustice but to attain financial and social independence. Sarah makes herself an example of how to succeed through hard work and determination, thereby advocating not only for her own life but also for the survival of her community. Therefore, Sarah's efforts to open salons and provide opportunities for other women to succeed exemplify *Commitment to Survival & Wholeness* in Alice Walker's womanism, where attention is given not just to the individual but also to the community as a whole, achieving well-being and collective survival.

#### 4. Spirituality & Connection to Nature

In Alice Walker's (1982) womanism theory, spirituality and a deep connection to nature are pivotal aspects that empower Black women to transcend the hardships imposed by societal oppression. Walker emphasizes that spirituality is not merely a religious practice, but a vital force that sustains the emotional and psychological well-being of Black women. For many, this spiritual bond is not only a means of survival, but also a way to reclaim their identity and cultivate a sense of wholeness. Similarly, the connection to nature provides a space of healing and renewal, grounding them in a world that often seeks to marginalize their existence. In the context of *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, Sarah Breedlove's journey of entrepreneurship and self-discovery reflects these themes, as her resilience is intertwined with both her spiritual beliefs and the natural world. This chapter will explore how spirituality and nature play a crucial role in the empowerment and resilience of Black women, focusing on the ways in which Sarah's character embodies these principles through her actions and personal growth.

##### Datum 8

**Sarah Breedlove :** "I was hesitant at first, but then I realized... this is my calling. That I could help others the way Addie helped me—and that's why I'm here."



In Alice Walker's (1982) womanism theory, the concept of *Spirituality & Connection to Nature* emphasizes the importance of a connection to higher powers and nature as sources of strength and empowerment for Black women. In this context, Sarah Breedlove in *Self Made* illustrates how spirituality plays a crucial role in her decision-making and her struggles. When Sarah states that she realized it is "her calling" and that she wants to help others in the same way Addie helped her, this reflects a deeper understanding of her purpose not merely for personal success, but for the betterment of other Black women. In womanism, spirituality often means an awareness of a greater self, a connection to community, and a sense of responsibility for broader social change.

Sarah feels that her work in producing and marketing hair care products is not only for her personal advancement but also to empower other Black women to become independent and feel valued, a manifestation of *Commitment to Survival & Wholeness* in womanism. By providing opportunities for Black women to own businesses and build their own lives, Sarah not only established a factory but also created a spiritual space where they could feel whole and empowered. In this way, Sarah links spirituality with empowerment, showing that spiritual influence in womanism serves as a catalyst for collective strength that goes beyond individual power and focuses more on the well-being of the entire community.

## 5. Loving Women and Appreciating Women's Culture

In the concept of womanism proposed by Alice Walker (1982), *Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture* emphasizes the appreciation of women, relationships among women, and the recognition of women's culture that thrives within their communities. This aspect reflects female solidarity in facing social, economic, and political challenges that often place them in marginalized positions.

In *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, the appreciation of women and their culture can be seen through Sarah Breedlove's relationships with other Black women. This is not only evident in how she builds her business but also in how she empowers and supports other women in achieving economic independence. This narrative illustrates that Sarah's struggle is not solely for herself but also for her community, particularly Black women who experience various forms of oppression.

This section will analyze how the values of *Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture* are reflected in the series by highlighting Sarah's interactions with other women and how she fights for space for them in a business and social world dominated by men and white communities.

### Datum 16

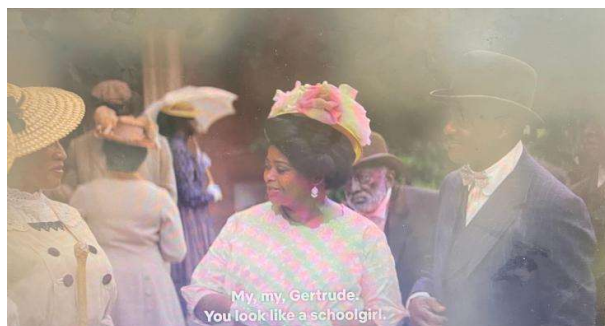
**Sarah Breedlove** : "Oh wow, Gertrude. You look like a schoolgirl. That hair sure is growing."

**Gertrude** : "I can't believe it. My hair ain't never reached my shoulders before."

**Sarah Breedlove** : "I see you, Annabelle. Lookin' good."

**Annabelle** : "Sarah Walker, you are royalty. We oughta call you *Madam*."

**Sarah Breedlove** : *[laughing]*.



In the context of *Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture* (LA) within womanism, the dialogue between Sarah Breedlove, Gertrude, and Annabelle exemplifies the ways in which Black women support and celebrate one another. When Sarah praises Gertrude's hair for its growth, she not only acknowledges Gertrude's physical appearance but also appreciates the cultural significance of hair for Black women, often seen as a symbol of identity and empowerment. Gertrude, astonished by her hair finally reaching a length she had never achieved before, expresses pride in her personal accomplishment.

Furthermore, when Annabelle refers to Sarah as "royalty" and suggests they call her "Madam," it reflects the respect and recognition for Sarah's achievements, positioning her as an inspirational figure within their community. Sarah's joyful laughter in response demonstrates the warmth and solidarity among them. This interaction highlights the solidarity and appreciation of each other's culture and accomplishments, creating a space in which Black women can celebrate their identities with pride and without fear, a core tenet of womanism

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on this analysis, the study concludes that all forms of oppression outlined by Young exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence are present in the conditions faced by the characters. This research aims to address the following questions: What forms of oppression does Madam C.J. Walker experience in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*? And how are the ideas of womanism expressed through Black women in the series? In relation to these issues, the study identified 5 instances of exploitation, 17 instances of marginalization, 11 instances of powerlessness, 6 instances of cultural imperialism, and 3 instances of violence.

Sarah Breedlove is exploited due to her gender and skin color. The second form of oppression she experiences is marginalization, which makes it difficult for her to access opportunities and services, as there is a clear separation between Black and white communities. The third aspect is Sarah's sense of powerlessness, stemming from her physical appearance not aligning with the beauty standards of the time, as well as the rejection of her business collaborations by white individuals. This situation is compounded by the dominance of white people over Black individuals, forcing Sarah, who began as a washerwoman, to comply with the prevailing norms set by the white majority. Furthermore, cultural imperialism in this series is also experienced by Sarah Breedlove, as she is subjected to stereotypes from white individuals. Additionally, both psychological and physical violence are inflicted upon her by those around her, including her own family. As discussed in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that Black women experience all five forms of oppression, as outlined by Iris Marion Young. Sarah faces oppression due to her social condition.

In the series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, the relationship between womanist ideas and Black women is clearly portrayed. Based on Alice Walker's womanist theory, the series highlights five key concepts. This study identifies six findings related to *Communal Orientation*, fourteen findings related to *Resistance*, twelve findings related to *Commitment to Survival & Wholeness*, three findings related to *Spirituality & Connection to Nature*, and six findings related to *Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture*. Despite facing various forms of oppression, Sarah Breedlove demonstrates resilience and actively challenges the barriers imposed on her. Through her struggle against oppression, as discussed earlier, this study concludes that the six womanist concepts encapsulate the experiences and resistance of the main character, Sarah Breedlove.



Through the concepts of womanism, the main character in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, Sarah Breedlove, expresses her struggle against various forms of oppression. Based on Alice Walker's womanist theory, Sarah demonstrates *Resistance* by rejecting beauty standards dominated by white culture and advocating for Black women's beauty through her hair care products. She also embodies *Communal Orientation* by empowering Black women through economic opportunities and the business network she established.

Furthermore, Sarah represents *Spirituality & Connection to Nature* by drawing strength from her spiritual beliefs to overcome life's challenges. She also exemplifies *Loving Women & Appreciating Women's Culture* by fostering a supportive community among women. Despite experiencing marginalization and both psychological and physical violence, Sarah perseveres and strives to transform not only her own life but also the lives of other Black women. Thus, this study concludes that the concepts of womanism not only illustrate Sarah's struggle but also serve as a form of resistance against the five types of oppression she experiences, as outlined by Iris Marion Young.

The struggles undertaken by Sarah Breedlove in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* ultimately bore fruit. Sarah successfully established a hair care business for Black women and built a distribution network managed by fellow Black women. Her success not only elevated her social and economic status but also provided opportunities for other Black women to achieve financial independence. Additionally, Sarah gained recognition for her efforts despite facing various forms of oppression throughout her journey.

Furthermore, based on the two research questions in this study, Sarah Breedlove experienced the five forms of oppression as outlined by Iris Marion Young: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Each form of oppression is reflected in different situations Sarah encounters in the series. Nevertheless, Sarah demonstrates resistance through several concepts of womanism proposed by Alice Walker, such as *Resistance* in challenging beauty standards dominated by white culture, *Communal Orientation* in establishing an economic network for Black women, and *Spirituality & Connection to Nature* in drawing spiritual strength to overcome challenges. Thus, this study concludes that the concepts of womanism not only illustrate Sarah's struggle but also serve as a means of resistance against the forms of oppression she experiences.

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