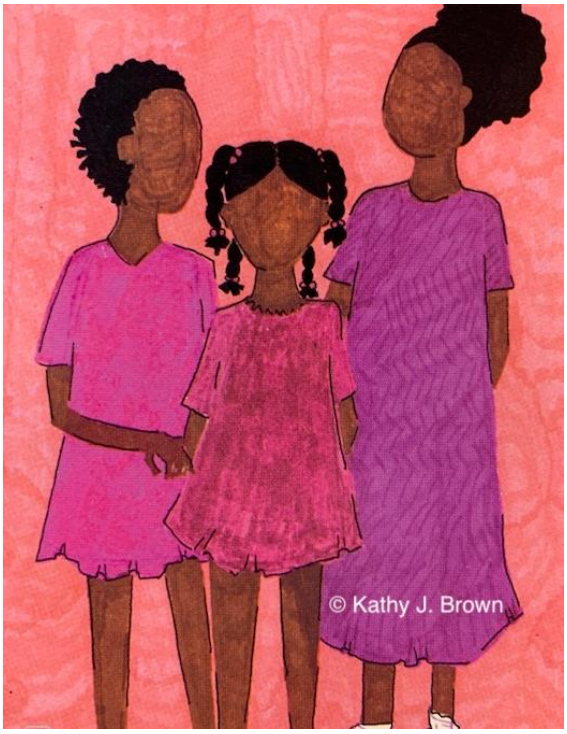


Black Hair as Metaphor Explored through Duoethnography and Arts-Based Research

by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

Introduction

We present a duoethnographic (Hood and Travis 2021, Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019, Sawyer and Norris 2015), critical arts-based research project (Travis 2020, Wilson 2018, Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019), which began as a pre-recorded, on-demand presentation for the 2021 [Virtual] National Art Education Association Annual Convention (Brown and Gilbert 2021). This is an edited, expanded print version of our conference session examining hair as text and sites of identity/respectability politics, positionality, rites of passage, liminality, and selfhood. Seen through the lens of African American women professors of art education, we unpack the complexities of Black women's hair stories as positional metaphors and share a culminating antiracist, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) lesson overview adaptable for grades 7-12.

About the images: *Bold.* Acrylic and shredded paper on wood panel. c. 2016 © Lynnette M. Gilbert (L); *Little Sister.* Marker on paper c. 2001 © Kathy J. Brown (R).

Furthermore, we both situate ourselves within the "artist-as-scholar model" (Wilson and Harris Lawton 2019, 83). We share similar hair narratives but enter this work from different research frameworks and speak in individual voices. The creators of duoethnography, Sawyer and Norris, (2015) posited, "To keep the voices separate, we began to write in script format in a way to promote the quest of inquiry as a phenomenological process of reconceptualization, not the identification of portable research findings and answers" (2). I (Kathy) am a critical qualitative researcher, emerging AfroFuturist, pedagogue, and cultural historian. I employ methods such as autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and arts-based research. I (Lynnette) am an artist-art educator who examines diverse lesson planning through implementing multicultural art education, more specifically African American artists, while challenging artistic approaches to storytelling through culturally relevant teaching methods. Additionally, our disclaimer, as we do not want to misrepresent ourselves, we are not folklorists nor are the artist exemplars we suggest folk artists. We are educational researchers using duoethnography and arts-based research methodologies as employed in educational research and teacher education. We present our emerging qualitative work in four parts: 1) brief historic literature review, 2) hair narratives, 3) artist statements, and 4) lesson overview.

Duoethnography, theorized by Sawyer and Norris (2015), foregrounds multiple-voice dialogue, the fluidity of lived experiences and an acknowledgment of difference, "... we sought to turn the inquiry lens on ourselves, not as the topic, but as the site of an archeological examination of the formation of our beliefs, values, and ways of knowing... the exploration of how life histories of different individuals impact the meanings they give to those experiences…" (1-2). Moreover, in this inquiry, we also use Sawyer and Norris's four pillars of duoethnography as a methodology that is:

1. Polyvocal/dialogic in nature,
2. An examination of life history as curriculum,
3. Intends not to profess but rather to learn and change as the result of the conversation, and
4. About the importance of learning.

(2015, 3)

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is most often attributed to art education theorists Eisner and Barone (2012), who sought to fill the gaps in contemporary qualitative methods by expanding and validating the visual as viable sites of inquiry and findings. Wilson, in her 2018 autoethnographic article, builds upon the work of previous researchers, expounding upon the idea of *critical* arts-based research by noting:

> In this sense, arts-based research acts as a heuristic through which I deepen and make more nuanced an understanding of an aspect of a lived experience emphasizing the generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding the self. (214)

Moreover, we situate this article as a specific type of (critical) arts-based research called *art-informing inquiry*, in which the artmaking or the art pieces signify viewer understanding and interaction with the images, "...arts-informing inquiry is research where art is used to evoke responses from an audience to a situation" (Qingchun, Coemans, Siegesmund, and Hannes 2017, 9).

The impetus of this inquiry began during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic quarantine, global civil unrest, and racialized uprisings following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. We were a group of three friends—former doctoral classmates—in daily communication via group text. Immersed in chatter about the events of the day, two of us (Lynnette and Kathy) were also reflecting and making art. Additionally, like many others, increased time indoors resulted in additional time to lament on the state of our hair. These events catalyzed this duoethnography, a co-examination of two friends and colleagues' dysfunctional relationship with our crowns of naps, kinks, and coils. We situate our parallel experiences and evolving naming process of transformations and epiphanies as a catalyst for embodied artmaking and racialized discourse. As stated above, we approach this article through an overview of the literature, telling our own stories, and sharing artwork as hair ethnographies and conclude with an instructional resource for a 7-12 lesson overview that includes five contemporary BIPOC artist exemplars examining Black hair in their work.

Brief Historiography of Black Hair

We investigate the origin of our hair in this literature review in the vein of Black women as artist-academics engaging in art-based research identity work (Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019, Wilson 2018). With this historical information we do not seek to police Black hair, nor suggest that chemically or heat-altered hairstyles denote a denial of self, because a Black woman has the right to wear her hair however she chooses. Instead, we simultaneously highlight celebratory moments in our history, while apologetically naming and tracing systemic, generative dysfunction. Ellis-Harvey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, and Araiza (2016) wrote, "Black women face a double 'othering'" (91) as both gendered and racialized beings. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) posited that the antithetical, lifelong tensions of many Black women and their manes are rooted in historical trauma and perpetuated by current-day *isms*; our hair is "…part of African cultural identity, as hair and identity are inseparable…intricately connected to cultural identity, spirituality, character makeup, and notions of beauty" (87). We contextualize our research within the concepts of historical trauma, oppositional triumphs, and current movements.

"Transatlantic Children of the Mother Continent"*

In the 15th century on the African continent, Thompson (2009) states, "Hairstyles were used to indicate a person's marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth and rank within the community" (79). White and White (1995) wrote, "In 1602 the Dutch explorer Pieter de Marees published a plate showing sixteen different hairstyles of various classes and genders in Benin alone" (51). Our phenotypical differences from those of the European colonizer, including our hair, were used to justify, dehumanize, and commodify (Paulino 2019). It is reported that upon arrival at some colonial entry points, shaving the heads of newly arrived, kidnapped African people was instituted "to symbolize their removal from their cultures" (Ellis Hervey et al. 2016, 871). Additionally, among many documented brutalities such as floggings, brandings, mental and sexual abuse, shackles, malnourishment, and amputation, head shaving and hair cutting were also a form of punishment (White and White 1995) in antebellum America. White and White (1995) recounted 17th-century Virginia runaway slave advertisements describing an enslaved young woman whose hair was cut into a disfigured style and a young man who not only had his head shaved but was also branded on both facial cheeks with hot iron.

* (Newkirk II 2018)

Moreover, in Louisiana in 1786, the Spanish governor imposed Tignon Laws upon free Black and Creole women requiring them to cover their heads with scarves called tignons (Figure 1) to appear less attractive to white men and mark or metaphorically brand who was Black and who was not among lighter-skinned Mulatto women (Pitts 2021, Young 2020). Although the tignon was meant to be a symbol of positional reminder, humiliation, and shame for women of color, it instead became an act of rebellion. Women embellished them as fashionable headpieces and proudly donned them as small acts of revolution (Pitts 2021, Young 2020, Sherman 2020). In homage, Chesley Antoinette, a Dallas-based fiber artist has extensively researched the Tignon Laws to create a series of sculptural head coverings, exhibited throughout the region (Sherman 2020). I was first introduced to the tignon when I (Kathy) saw Antoinette's work exhibited at the Texas Woman's University in 2019.

Figure 1. *Portrait of Betsey* c. 1837, François Fleischbein. Public Domain image.

The regulation of our hair continued during forced enslavement: "Once enslaved, hair became more a matter of the labor one was forced to do. For instance, field slaves often hid their hair, whereas house slaves had to wear wigs similar to their slave owners, who also adorned wigs during this period" (Thompson 2009, 79). Furthermore, Black hair was designated as wool and slaves had to cover their hair to be deemed more acceptable to white people (Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016, Randle 2015). Moreover, the term "Nappy" was first weaponized to describe the appearance of African captives on the slave auction block (Kenneth 2021). The source of the word "nappy" is considered to have derived from "...the word *nap,* which was used to describe the frizzled threads rising from a piece of fabric. There is a lot of speculation that nap was redefined as a disparaging phrase for the coils and kinks in the hair of the African enslaved, in connection with the fields of cotton that drove the Colonial economy" (Paulino 2019, para.6). Still considered by some to be a racialized insult, in recent years African Americans have reclaimed "nappy," for example, in publication of actively antiracist, decolonizing children's books such as *Nappy Hair* (Herron 1997), *I Love My Hair* (Tarley 2001), *Hair Love* (Cherry 2019), and *Happy to Be Nappy* (hooks 1999).

20th Century

Through it all, African American people have remained intelligent, resourceful, innovative, and resilient. Sharing toiletries and assisting one another with hair grooming during our extended period of forced enslavement is only one example. Well after Emancipation and into the dawn of the 20th century the quest to appear "presentable" to the dominant society persisted for many reasons: survival, upward mobility, work acquisition and retention, necessary respectability politics of the day, and prior centuries of mental and physical abuse and indoctrination. In the early 1900s, as the Industrial Age boomed, Madam C.J. Walker seized the moment and patented a revolutionary hot comb/pressing comb and "hair softener" product (Randle 2015, 118) readily allowing Black women to straighten their hair at home or in the salon (Pitts 2021, Thompson 2009) and by 1925, straightened hair became a marker of the Black bourgeoisie (Randle 2015). Moving forward to the late 1950s, the civil rights era in the United States and a fight toward integration had begun, and it was important for Black people to have an acceptable aesthetic (Pitts 2021). At this juncture, the relaxer, colloquially known as the "perm," was invented by an African American

businessman and lab-trained chemist, George E. Johnson (Mack 2018, Thompson 2009). The perm/relaxer originated in 1954 as the Ultra Wave for Black men to achieve popular chemically altered hairstyles (Mack 2018). Previously, to achieve this hairstyle for men called the "conk," one had to undergo treatments at home, "with the extremely painful application of a homemade mixture of potatoes, eggs, and lye" (White and White 1995, 48). Three years later in 1957, the relaxer for women as we know it was born under the label of Ultra Sheen (Mack 2018). He later created the Johnson Products company, and his success story is chronicled in a 2019 documentary *No Lye: An American Beauty Story* (Mack 2019). The relaxer transformed the beauty industry much like the pressing comb had decades earlier, because the relaxer could be done at home too and the results were "permanent," only needing to be "touched up" every six weeks or so. These results far outlasted "press and curl" results from Madame C.J. Walker's earlier pressing comb (Pitt 2021).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a cultural awakening took place during and following the Civil Rights Movement and the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Pitt 2021). The Afro was lauded as "a symbolic representation of political change" (Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016, 873). A few years into the 1980s, the Afro began to fall out of favor, and chemically altered hairstyles such as the Jheri Curl returned (Kenneth 2021), later satirized in the film *Coming to America* (1989). Also in the 1980s, Thompson (2009) posits that hair weaves further revolutionized the hair care industry because a Black woman could have hair that was "not just straight, but also very long" (79-80). A particular type of braided style became popular with films such as *Poetic Justice* (1996) and usually involved hair extensions. The ultra-straight hair trend flourished into the 1990s. I (Kathy) remember the "wrap" hairstyle in the 1990s that required a perm to achieve and maintain that "look," and media perpetuated a style that may have possibly been harming us:

> … the juxtaposition of the dangers of relaxers and the rampant popularity of straightened styles were present within the black community. The National Institutes of Health had just released a study that revealed a link between relaxers and fibroids. But at the same time, bone straight hairstyles made famous by wildly popular celebrities such as Nia Long and Aaliyah lead to thousands of black women following suit. (McLeod 2018, para. 2)

New Millennium

Depending on the source, a resurgence and reclamation of hair in its natural state emerged from social media, advancing the neo-natural hair movement that began in the early to late 2000s (McCleod 2018, Pitt 2021). The rise of popular hair influencers, YouTube hair tutorials, and "natural hair bloggers" renewed sociocultural understanding of our hair in its natural state and inspired a new generation of girls and women (McCleod 2018). Additionally, in 2019, the CROWN Act was introduced, after several national news stories of Black children being disciplined in school for their hair (Mbilishaka and Apugo 2020) or adults being chided, losing their jobs, or denied employment because of their hairstyles. Pitt reported,

> The CROWN Act, which stands for "Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair" would end discrimination based on hair styles and hair textures in workplaces and schools…. Though many states have introduced protective legislation regarding hair,…. To date, the CROWN Act has been introduced in sixteen states where it did not pass. (2021, 5)

Spearheaded by a Black woman, California Senator Holly J. Mitchell, the CROWN Act was introduced and passed in California in 2019 to prevent further school and workplace discrimination (Acuff and Kraehe 2020, Pitt 2021). At the time of this writing, ten states have enacted CROWN laws and three more have passed similar legislation (www.thecrownact.com).

Illuminating the concept of hair as a metaphor, Thompson (2009) describes what she calls *hair stories* (here we call them hair ethnographies and hair narratives interchangeably), noting that "'straightening' serves as a rite of passage for most young black girls from childhood into adolescence and womanhood… and [study participant Ruth stated]… it would be unfair to say that you can compare another race's hair issues with ours" (82). Phenotypically we are the group of people whose hair grows up and out like a crown, as opposed to straight or wavy and downward (Brown and Gilbert 2021). Furthermore, the 2016 Ellis-Hervey et al. quantitative study surveyed 282 Black women from various social, economic, and environmental backgrounds, yielding interesting statistical findings from their regression analysis, demonstrating a small difference between the hair choice of natural or altered hair styles, "... a slight but significant positive correlation between a higher internal locus of control and those who choose to wear their hair in a natural state" (869). In the same study, Ellis-Hervey et al. described hair as a universal symbol of beauty; however, the measure on which the standard of beauty was based has not changed to match our contemporary diverse society. "Hair alteration is not necessarily a result of self-hatred, nor a desire to be White, but about working within internalized beauty paradigms to attain one small piece of what society defines as beautiful" (2016, 874). This is an important distinction, as we highlight Black hair as racialized texts.

Theorizing Black Hair

Art education researchers Kraehe and Acuff (2021) suggest that hair is a significant racially identifiable marker. In 2015 researchers Opie and Phillips (2015) conducted an extensive three-part, mixed-methods study applying Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) to Black women wearing their natural hair in corporate work environments. Theoretically, "ODT asserts that people actively manage the balance between the need for belongingness and the need for uniqueness" (2). One of Opie and Phillips' (2015) findings resulted in what they call the "agency-penalty" (2) when Black women were perceived as more dominant or angry based on the aesthetic of Afrocentric hairstyles in the workplace. Opie and Phillips (2015) posited that because Black women can decide whether to wear their hair natural, hair as a readily identifiable racial marker that can be intentionally changed for invisibility or hypervisibility.

As the natural hair movement regained momentum, researchers illuminated Black hair as a sociopolitical site. For example, Tameka Ellington and Joseph Underwood edited *Textures: The Art and History of Black Hair* (2020), while Doherty (2020) advances the possible issues that arise from Black women constructing racialized research, such as the risk of the angry Black woman trope and one's work being dismissed. Doherty (2020) suggests what she calls "strategic emotionality" (554) while doing the kind of work we are attempting in this article. As we (the authors) understand the root of Dubois' (1903) double consciousness to which Doherty refers, we simultaneously unbind ourselves from the psychology and aesthetics of white patriarchy—foregrounding our stories and hair journeys as inspiration, celebration, and normalization.

Our Hair Narratives

Lynnette


Figure 2.


Figure 3.


Figure 4.


Figure 5.

As a little girl, I can remember my dad saying to my mom, "What are we going to do with her hair?" Even now, my dad's comments on my hair range from, "What are we doing with our hair today, Daughter?" which usually means he's not too sure about my style of choice, to "Wow, Pooh, your hair looks nice. We've come a long way," as he nods his head in approval.

My hair is an ongoing journey of self. Early on, I remember the time spent with the kitchen beautician, my mom, and the hot comb to straighten my hair. As a young girl, my hair was natural (Figure 2). I believe by the time I was seven, the family went to the Jheri Curl (Figure 3). I didn't mind the curl so much, because it gave my hair freedom and removed me from the hot comb. After the curl, I advanced to more chemical assistance, a relaxer (perm). I admit I fell into the "good hair, bad hair" camp, and straight, long hair meant good hair. The only way to achieve straight hair was through a relaxer (perm), but long and luxurious never happened for me, so I embraced my short hairstyles. I kept my hair in a permed short cut, and this would remain my style through college and well into my professional career (Figure 4). In 1998 I actually cut my hair. I went to the barbershop and asked the barber to cut all the perm out to reveal my natural texture. I had just graduated college and moved to a new state and started in my master's program. I remember going home to visit my parents and my younger brother opened the door and with the biggest smile on his face said, "Hey, you look like me!" I instantly thought he meant I looked like a boy, and the next day I bought a box perm and permed my hair. Looking back, I realize I had a fear of acceptance of my hair, and my self-confidence was at an all-time low. I didn't understand the beauty of my natural hair and how I felt about my hair was a direct reflection of my identity.

It would be 2010 before I would truly begin my natural hair journey. I recall sitting in my stylist's chair and saying, "Just cut it off." Financially, I was exhausted, and my hair has always been where I release my stress, so it was also a feeling of freedom. Even though I felt free, I was still uneasy about my decision, so I asked for color (Figure 5). Color always brings me joy, so adding color to my newly natural cut hair was a way for me to find joy instantly in my decision. I kept a Teeny-Weeny Afro, or TWA, for about two years before I decided to grow my hair out. My hair started to loc naturally (Figure 6) because of my curl pattern, but I was unsure, so after a few weeks I had my stylist cut my hair. My hair never really became dynamic like I saw on various natural hair posts on Pinterest, television, or some of my closest friends. I had always loved natural hair and its versatility, not fully understanding why my hair

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

literally did what she wanted to do no matter what products, twist, or wash method I used. I felt like the line out of "Cleva," a song by Erykah Badu, "My hair ain't never hung down to my shoulders, and it might not grow, Ya' never know…" (Badu 2000).

My twist-outs are usually a twist don't, they just make my hair curlier. The one time I had a great twist-out was when I had color. It was violet, blue-violet, and a little red-violet. I was a living analogous color scheme and loved it. The dyes changed the texture of my hair slightly, and that was why my twist-out was successful because my texture had changed (Figure 7).

My revelation—to love my hair for what it is and where it is—finally clicked when I was at a convention in Washington, DC. I asked this beautiful, young Black woman about her hair. It was gorgeous! I took the opportunity to compliment her hair and start a conversation about her hair regimen. Her response was first to thank me, and then she told me where I could get the same wig! I was blown away. I realized then that we all have natural hair struggles, successes, and solutions.

Nowadays you will find me with natural hair color with my favorite headband or headwrap, hair fluffed or in a high puff (Figure 8). The summer usually calls for protective styles because the humidity is not kind to my hair. I usually go with faux locs (Figure 9), because now, 11 years after beginning my natural hair journey, I am ready to loc my hair. I often think back to when my hair began to loc naturally and think about how maybe I should have started then, but that's the beauty of the journey, I had to learn to love my hair before locing my hair.

Figure 10. *Seek and Ye Shall Find.* Acrylic and acrylic sand medium on canvas. c. 2015
© Lynnette M. Gilbert

Hair-Informed Artmaking

Lynnette

My artwork reflects the faith, essence, beauty, presence, and value of being a Black woman. I have always been fascinated with colors, textures, and patterns. Art is my creative place of exploration and just being. Through my work I use the boldness of colors and the play of pattern and textures to capture what radiates from within. I use shredded paper and acrylic mediums to capture the complex beauty of our natural crown (Figures 10-12, and title page image).

Figure 12. *Hopes and Dreams* (This painting is a work in progress. I photographed my niece to be the model for the painting. Paper, textures and text will be added.) c. 2021

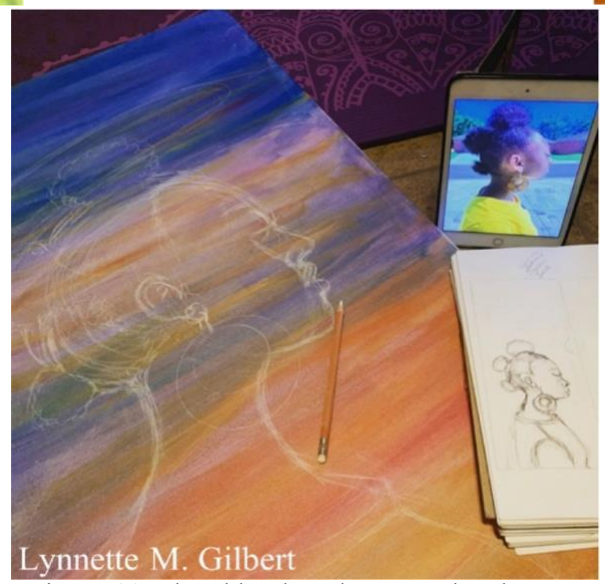


Figure 11. Sketchbook and canvas sketch.

Figure 13. *Locitude--Crown and Glory Series (2018-).* Collagraph print on butcher paper. c. 2018

Figure 14. *Bantuiful--Crown and Glory Series (2018-).* Collagraph print on paper. c. 2019

Crown and Glory (Figures 13-14) is an ongoing collagraph printmaking series I began in 2018. The series is a direct response to the negative backlash that Black children, as well as professionals, were receiving based on their hair. I saw society once again stripping our identity and making our crowns seem unworthy, ugly, devalued. I wanted to celebrate and honor the beauty of the natural crown by exploring different textures through recycled materials such as cardboard to create textures for the hair.

The #SayHerName movement, Breonna Taylor, and the sheer essence of being a Black woman served as a catalyst for my piece *#BlackQueensRising* (Figure 15), a call to rise up for justice, rise up to uplift, protect, and honor Black women. The mask is symbolic. It not only speaks to the current pandemic but also to the power of the protests while in the pandemic, and the pandemic that has been happening for centuries, the pandemic of the unprotected, dismissed Black Woman. Her hair is a symbol of youth and power created through shredded newspaper and acrylic sands. The mask (Figure 16) is not to be seen as a symbol of silence but as a symbol of voice and protection of the Black Woman and to speak SAY HER NAME boldly, demanding to be heard and demanding justice! As I continue in this body of work, it is my desire to explore meanings through space, time, experience, and identity—exploring hair as power, strength, position, and voice.

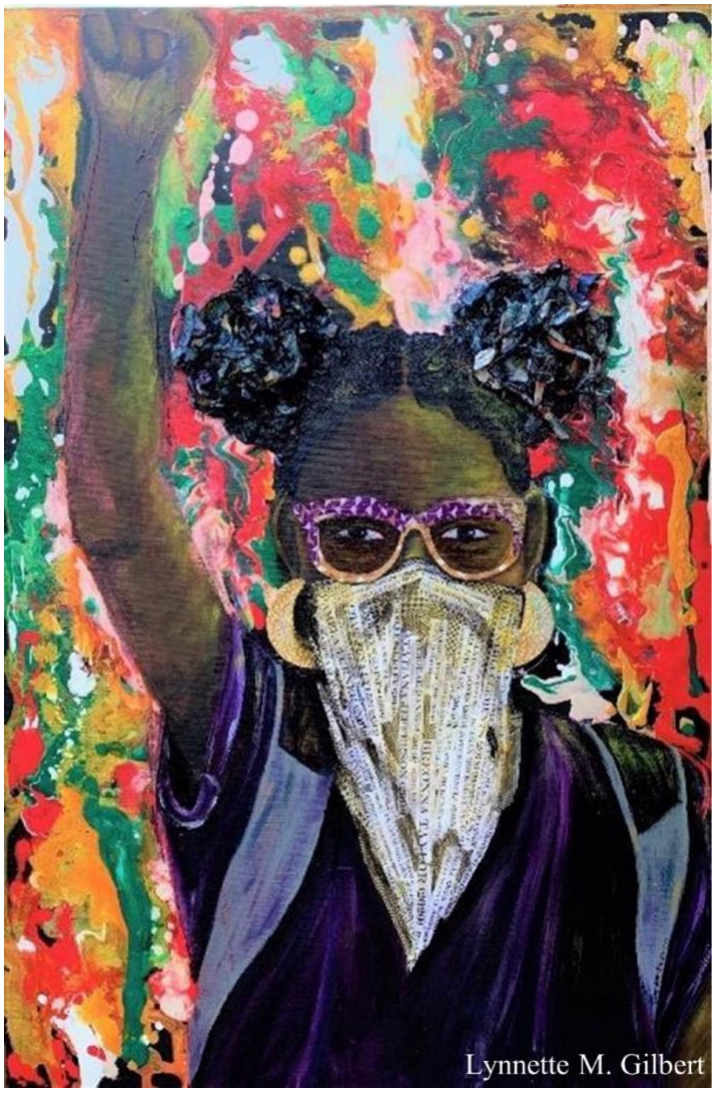


Figure 15. *#BlackQueensRising.* Acrylic paint, newspaper, textured and untextured paper on canvas. c. 2020

Figure 16. Close-up view of mask. All the names on the mask are Black women who were killed by police.

Kathy

Figures 17 and 18. Watercolor on canvas board.
Top image, Age 24 Self-portrait, c. 1998
Bottom image, touched-up version, c. 2021

Figure 19.

I first went natural with the "big chop" in 1996 or 97, when my college boyfriend volunteered to cut off my permed hair for me. I had the quintessential TWA. It grew out and I kept it natural for my first year as a teacher; however, after my first year, I left the profession. After a few unemployed months back living at home with my mom, I interviewed for a corporate job. I was excited to experience a new work venture. However, to get the job there was the contingency that I straighten my hair, "do something with my hair," an overt application of Opie and Phillips' "agency penalty" based on my coif choice (2). The watercolor self-portraits (Figures 17 and 18) reflect what my hair looked like during this specific liminal period.

Regretfully, I complied because I needed the job, and based on current statistics, I was definitely not alone in that experience and decision from over 20 years ago. According to a recent Dove Crown Act 2019 Research Study, where 1,000 Caucasian and 1,000 Black women of varied ages were surveyed (www.thecrownact.com), the numbers are staggering. The website reported Black women were 80 percent more likely than Caucasian women to agree with the following comment: "I have to change my hair from its natural state to fit into the office." Such stark percentages speak directly to the pervasiveness and longevity of Black hair bias in the workplace as well as the permanence of imbalanced American beauty standards. During that particular period in my young professional life, I had to accept the position to provide myself stability, and I didn't have long to make the decision and lament the indignity. In that moment I had to suppress my feelings for temporal financial security. I was navigating a system that was not designed for me and had to redirect my literal appearance and expectations to assimilate into "office" culture.

The next year I quit and returned to the K-12 classroom, which I enjoyed. I kept my hair permed, then later flat ironed/pressed again for another few years as a young teacher. Then I was on and off natural and flat ironed/pressed. Wearing it flat ironed/straight required weekly salon visits and a restricted lifestyle to deter my fear of it "turning back" or reverting to coils (Figure 19).

My late, elder cousin Everett was a licensed cosmetologist with her own beauty shop, and she would press my hair with copious amounts of Blue Magic hair grease in the old-school press-and-curl style. I remember getting it straightened for special occasions like school pictures or church on Mother's Day

Figure 20. 2nd grade school picture.

Figure 21. Sketchbook drawing of 2nd grade school picture. © Kathy J. Brown.

Figure 22.

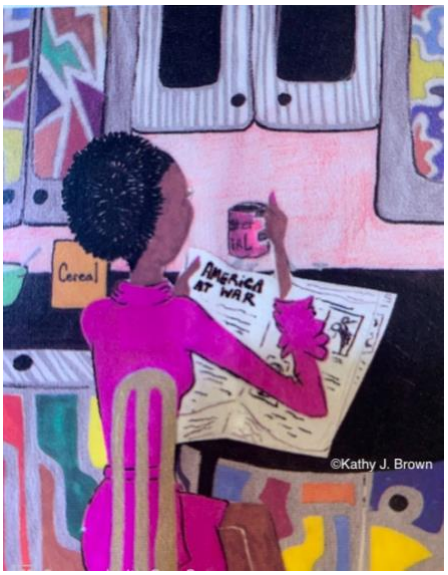
(Figure 20 and 21). In between, on ordinary days, I think I wore it plaited or pulled to the top of my head in a neat little Afro puff in the style of Janet Jackson on the television show (airing in reruns) *Good Times*. (This is probably the idealized version from my memoryscape). In retrospect, subconsciously I think I equated hair straightening with being presentable, with dressing up. Kraehe and Acuff (2021) had similar memories in their recollections of Black hair and memory. For me, most notably in 7th grade, my parents were in the midst of a contentious divorce. My cousin and mom had been doing my hair; I've never been talented in that area myself. At that point, there was so much going on there wasn't time to take me to Everett's, and I believe I received a home perm that caused some hair breakage, etc. My hair was not at its best, and I remember my classmates teasing me for my nappy hair. It wasn't something my parents would have done on purpose. I think that I was equating presentability with straight hair, like many others. It was certainly NOT a concept my beloved mom would have intentionally harmed me with, but an unspoken message that was probably passed down, transferred from generation to generation.

It's been a long road of natural, permed, flat ironed, hot combed, braids, weaves, and everything in between to accept my hair as it grows out of my head. I may change it tomorrow, as that is any woman's prerogative, but understanding why we do these things is imperative. I am thinking of locing my hair as the next phase of my story, but I want to understand the history and the power of locing fully it before I decide to do it. As I became more familiar with visual culture theories such as the concept of the "gaze," which Acuff and Kraehe (2020) define as when "... the relationship between social location and perception is not predictive, the context of seeing—when and why we look—is as significant as the object of the gaze—what we look at—in determining that which is visible and its possible meanings" (10). Upon further reflection, I wonder, was I doing these things to my hair for the male gaze, the "white colonial gaze," or both? At this writing, I lovingly wear it as it grows from my head, sometimes with product and manipulation, sometimes without (Figure 22).

Hair-Informed Artmaking: Alter Ego and Protest Art

Kathy

I've been a maker since childhood, studied art in college, and started making art professionally once I returned to teaching in 1999-2000. Even the themes of some of the abstract work I was doing then foregrounded Black experiences and self-work. My earlier stylized figurative artwork evoked the power of hair before I began studying its history and racialized meanings. I created a series of ten or so mixed-media drawings and paintings that I mass-produced onto bags, notecards, mouse pads, and journals called *The Adventures of SisterGirl Jones Series* (c.1999-2021) (Figures 22-24, and title page image) inspired by fashion magazines and illustrations and meant to foreground the daily lives of Black women and girls as adventures and triumphs. The protagonist was my alter ego, and as I look back, when drawing her I always took time to render her Afro or Afro puff. I re-examine them now, her coif was a central figure in each piece.



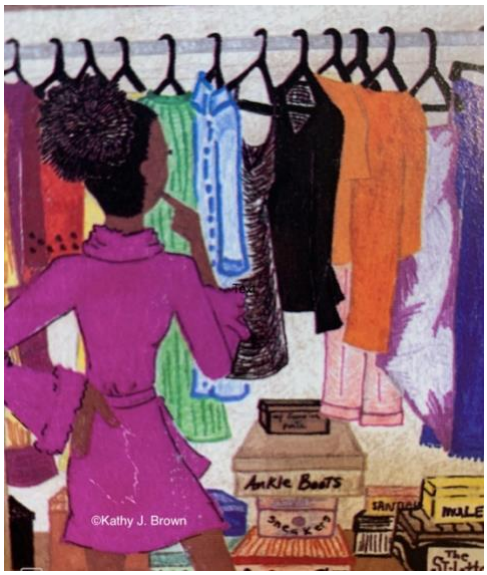


Image 23 (top): *Ladies Night*. Marker, Watercolor and India Ink on paper. c. 2001

Image 24 (L): *Morning Routine*. Marker on paper. c. 2002

Image 25 (R): *Decisions, Decisions*. Marker and colored pencil on paper. c. 2002

In Bennett Capers' (2010) speculative legal article "Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044," he posits three central tenets of Afrofuturism: representation, disruption of hierarchies, and alienation/redemption. I now realize these themes show up in my previous and contemporary work, both subconsciously and with intentionality. Hair has been a feature of my work because it is an integral part of my phenotype. More recently I have been creating fabric collages/assemblages draped and tailored over plastic mannequin busts. The first two of a series are reactions to police brutality killings and the long overdue uprisings of 2020. In *Clothes You Can't Remove: Pre and Post Breonna Taylor* (Figures 26 and 27) the figure's hair is not shown; instead she adorns a headdress commonly worn by contemporary Black women and girls—reclaiming the headwrap once used to hide or diminish us. As the fabric collage began to form, I wanted her to don a scarf as a symbol for the everyday Black girl/woman. The technique I used—unintentionally at the time—evoked ancestral tacit knowledge and turned out to have similarities to South Carolina Gullah Geechee traditions (my paternal grandad's lineage), explored further in a separate article, currently under review.

Figures 26 and 27. *Pre and Post Breonna Taylor: Clothes You Can't Remove (Post Mourning in the Morning)*. Hand-sewn fabric and wire collage/assemblage on readymade mannequin bust. c. 2020
© Kathy J. Brown

The second piece, produced in 2021 and entitled *Variations on a Theme* (Figures 28 and 29), was created in the same style, an ode to the many Black men who have been victims and survivors. Most notably, it is a homage to Sgt. Issac Woodard. His horrific blinding by South Carolina police in 1946 draws comparison to the 2020 murder of George Floyd because Sgt. Woodard's case also ignited global attention, followed by legislative and social change in the U.S.

In the art piece, the materiality of hair is emphasized because I employed a version of Gullah Geechee rag quilting—a technique I read about when researching for my first piece (Figures 26 and 27). I chose for his hair to resemble a version of rag quilting to denote the beauty of his "nappy" hair and proudly reclaim the disparaging origins of the word nappy as quoted in the literature review, "...the word *nap,* which was used to describe the frizzled threads rising from a piece of fabric" (Paulino 2019). The piece is incomplete as shown. I am in the process of creating a custom fabric and wire crown for his head. At the time of this writing, both are on display at the Greater Denton Arts Council's Meadows Gallery.

Figures 28 and 29. *Variations on a Theme.* Hand-sewn fabric and wire collage/assemblage on readymade mannequin bust. c. 2021
© Kathy J. Brown

Lynnette M. Gilbert, EdD *is an art educator from Ridgeland, MS. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Art Education from the University of Houston. She has 16 years of experience in secondary art education teaching in Memphis and Houston. She is Assistant Professor of Art Education at Arkansas Tech University and Director of the Windgate Summer Art Launch for Arkansas Educators hosted by the Arkansas Tech University Art Department. Her current research focuses on African American Women Artists-Art Educators from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Her artwork reflects faith, thoughts, and personal experiences that capture the beauty, presence, and value of Black women. Her work was most recently featured in the 2021 National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (NAAHBCU) Roots for Change Exhibition in Fayetteville, North Carolina.* *ORCID 0000-0002-9922-7453*

Kathy J. Brown, PhD, *is Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of North Texas. Prior to pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Houston, she was an elementary and middle school art teacher for many years. Her critical, art-based, ethnographic research interests include social justice art education, anti-Blackness in education, art teacher narratives, cultural histories, and Afrofuturism as antiracist pedagogy. Current projects include a collaborative, three-part, rhizomatic self-study exploring the use of the 5E lesson-planning model in art teacher education, duoethographic research about Black hair as CRP, an Afrofuturist/Gullah Geechee inspired fibers project, and co-leading an ongoing panel series, the 2044 Series: Anti-racist Praxis as Futurist Art and Design Pedagogy.*

Works Cited

Acuff, Joni Boyd and Amelia Kraehe, 2020.Visuality of Race in Popular Culture: Teaching Racial Histories and Iconography in Media. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*.7.3:1-14.

Ashe, Bertram D. 1995. "Why don't he like my hair?" Constructing African American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *African American Review*. 29.4:579-92.

Barone, Tom and Eisner, Elliot W. 2012. Arts Based Research, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Badu, Erykah.*Cleva*. 2000. Universal Motown Records, a division of UMG Recordings, Inc. Accessed June 23, 2021, https://genius.com/Erykah-badu-cleva-lyrics.

Brewer, Marilyn. 1991. The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.* 17, 475–482.

Brown, Kathy and Gilbert, Lynnette. 2021. Hair as Metaphor for Power, Identity and Agency/ HairEthnographies as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. On-Demand Presentation/Lecture at [Virtual] National Art Education Association National Convention, March 4-7, https://naeanationalconvention.us3.pathable.com/people/JXgKihzJtpBzmq8Bo.

Capers, I. Bennett. 2019. Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044. *New York University Law Review*.94:102-57.

Cherry, Matthew, A. 2019. *Hair Love.* NewYork: Penguin Random House.

Doharty, Nadena. 2020. The "Angry Black Woman" as Intellectual Bondage: Being Strategically Emotional on the Academic Plantation. *Race Ethnicity and Education.* 23.4:548-62.

Ellis-Hervey, Nina, Angela Doss, DeShea Davis, Robert Nicks, and Perla Araiza. 2016. African American Personal Presentation: Psychology of Hair and Self-Perception. *Journal of Black Studies*. 47.8 869–82.

Fleischbein, Francois.1837. *Portrait of Betsy*. Oil on canvas. The Historic New Orleans Collection, Public Domain.

Gay, Geneva. 2018. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Herron, Carolivia. 1998. *Nappy Hair.* New York: Dragonfly Books.

Horne, Madison. 2019. A Visual History of Iconic Black Hairstyles. *History.com*, February 1. Accessed February 21, 2021, https://www.history.com/news/black-hairstyles-visual-history-in-photos.

Hood, Emily Jean and Travis, S. 2021. Breakdowns and Breakthroughs: Duoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice in Art Education. On-Demand Presentation/Lecture at [Virtual] National Art Education Association National Convention, March 4-7, https://naeanationalconvention.us3.pathable.com/meetings/virtual/y7BCz5phkeiZDwmje.
hooks, bell. 1999. *Happy to Be Nappy.* New York: Hyperion Books.
Hopson, Mark. C. 2009. Language and Girlhood: Conceptualizing Black Feminist Thought in Happy to Be Nappy". *Women and Language.* 30.1:31-5.
Johnson, Tabora A. and Teiahsha Bankhead. 2014. Hair It Is: Examining the Experiences of Black Women with Natural Hair. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*. 2:86-100.
Kenneth. 2021. The Natural Hair Movement: A Historical Perspective. *CurlCentric.com*, June, 7. Accessed June 21, 2021, https://www.curlcentric.com/natural-hair-movement.
Kraehe, A.M. and Joni Boyd Acuff. 2021. It's Not Just About Hair: Visual Education and the Aesthetics of Racism. *Art Education.* 74.2:50-1.
Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1994. *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co.
Mack, Bayer. 2018. *The Man Behind Afro Sheen and Sponsor of Soul Train | George E. Johnson | Black History*. [Youtube video]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkxAZqFw4Qo.
Mack, Bayer. 2019. *No LYE: An American Beauty Story.* Block Starz Music Television.
Mbilishaka, A.M. and Danielle Apugo. 2020. Brushed Aside: African American Women's Narratives of Hair Bias in School, *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 23.5:634-53. DOI 10.1080/13613324.2020.1718075.
McLeod, Nia Simone. 2018. How the Internet Changed the Natural Hair Movement. *UrbanReviewsrva.com*. Accessed February 20, 2021, https://urbanviewsrva.com/2019/01/23/how-the-internet-changed-the-natural-hair-movement.
Newkirk II, Vann R. 2018. The Provocation and Power of Black Panther, *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/02/the-provocation-and-powerof-black-panther/553226
Opie, T.R. and Katherine W. Phillips. 2015. Hair Penalties: The Negative Influence of Afrocentric Hair on Ratings of Black Women's Dominance and Professionalism. *Frontiers in Psychology.*6:1-14.
Paulino, Michael. 2019. The Racial Roots Behind the Term "Nappy." *NPR Code Switch.* August 9. Accessed March 18, 2021, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/08/09/412886884/the-racial-roots-behind-the-term-nappy.
Pitts, Britney. 2021. "Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown": A Critical Race Analysis of the CROWN Act. *Journal of Black Studies.* DOI https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347211021096,
Randle, Brenda, A. 2015. I Am Not My Hair; African American Women and their Struggles with Embracing Natural Hair! *Race, Gender & Class.* 22.1-2:114-21
Rooks, Noliwe, M. 1996. *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Rousseau, Nicole. 2013. Historical Womanist Theory: Re-visioning Black Feminist Thought. *Race, Gender & Class.* 20.3:191-204.
Sawyer, Richard and Joe Norris. 2015. Duoethnography: A Retrospective 10 Years After. *International Review of Qualitative Research*. 8.1:1-4.
Sherman, Rebecca. 2020. Chesley Antoinette's Lush Depictions of Turbaned Creole Women Continue the Conversation About Race.*PaperCityMag.com*. November 17. Accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.papercitymag.com/arts/dallas-artist-chesley-antoinette-tignon
TheCrownAct. 2021. *13 Down, 37 to Go.* Retrieved from https://www.thecrownact.com/about.
Thompson, Cheryl. 2009. Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to Do with It? *Michigan Feminist Studies*. 22:78–90.
Tarpley, Natasha A. 2001. *I Love My Hair.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
Travis, Sarah. 2020. Portrait of a Methodology: Portraiture as Critical Arts-Based Research *Visual Arts Research.* 46. 2:100-14.
Wang, Qingchun, Sara Coemans, Richard Siegesmund, and Karin Hannes. 2017. Arts-Based Methods in Socially Engaged Research Practice: A Classification Framework. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*. 2.2:5-39.
White, Shane and Graham White. 1995. Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. *The Journal of Southern History*. 61.1 45-76. DOI 10.2307/2211360. Accessed February 19, 2021.
Wilson, Gloria J. (2018). Construction of the Blackademic: An Arts-Based Tale of Identity in and through Academia. Visual Inquiry: Learning & Teaching Art. 7.3:213-26.
Wilson, Gloria J. and Pamela Harris Lawton, 2019. Critical Portraiture: Black/Women/Artists/Educators/Research. *Visual Arts Research.* 45.1:83-9.