

The Chronicle of Black Hair

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Introduction/Concept/Context: The pain experienced by a single mom who is left to handle everything independently, taking care of herself and her children, can often feel very isolating and misunderstood. The challenges of single motherhood are also linked with child outcomes. Berryhill and Durtschi (2016) stated that the average socioemotional, academic, and standardized test scores of children from single-parent families are lower than those of children from two-parent households. Households with single mothers are more likely to be poor than other types of households (Elliott et al., 2013).

Through all struggles, single parents still strive to dress, look good, and hide their pain behind their dressing and hairstyles, on many occasions. For Africans, the social impact of black hair was significant, and the cosmetic aspects of black hair were equally essential (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). West African cultures adore a woman's fine, dense, and curly hair. A woman with long, dense hair symbolizes the life force, the multiplicative power of profusion, prosperity, a "green thumb" for cultivating fertile farms, and many healthy children (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). According to Owusu (2006), hairstyles that avoid artifice and appear natural, such as the afro or dreadlocks, are the most authentic black hairstyles, and thus more ideologically appropriate. Hair salons for women, barbershops for men, and hair products are ubiquitous in numerous black communities. For the Boomers II generation, however, natural hair products such as unrefined cocoa butter and shea butter were used to maintain their hair's luster and delicate appearance. Researchers in textile and apparel design have discussed the history of black hair and culture (Ellington & Underwood, 2020; Ingram, 2022). Yet, limited studies have found on creating a narrative via the use of art, fashion, and recycling. The reuse of existing materials is an environmentally conscious approach to apparel design that allows designers to reevaluate the true significance and worth of discarded materials. Using techniques of upcycling and crocheting, the purpose of this design research was to tell the story of a black single mother.

Aesthetics: This project was inspired by my personal experience with my black single mom with many different hairstyles, based on numerous occasions and events. The making of the garment is mainly by crochet with secondhand t-shirts. Many colors were used to portray emotion, joy, hope, stress, achievement, and hairstyles. The black represents hair and the stress of my mom, the green represents joy and hope for a better future, the blue represents different emotions, the yellow represents the achievements, and the crocheting itself represents the ups and downs and difficulties in day-to-day life of a single mom. The face of the dress has many colors other than the other parts of the dress, and this is to express different feelings in the narrative. The appearance of the hair on both the top of the dress and the bottom is curled and braided, which conveys the appearance of black hair in various ways.

Process, Technique, and Execution: The process started by cutting the t-shirts into stripes to be used in all aspects of crocheting and hairstyling. The full body of the garment was crocheted with a green color t-shirt, finished with black stripes. The garment was made to reflect a woman's face and her style. Therefore, there is an abstract face in the form of the garment and the hairstyles above the face. The abstract face was made with green, black, blue, and yellow fabric scraps from the t-shirt after cutting (Figure 1). Above the invisible face, is the hair, which was made with two inches stripes cut from black t-shirts. Fishlines were added using a zigzag stitch to the edges of each stripe to create textures (Figure 2). Some of the stripes are falling/draping down from the shoulders, symbolizing the stress that the mothers are facing. On the back of the dress, a deep V-neck shape was used along with a laced closure made from t-shirt stripes. On the hem of the dress, the stripes were braided to represent a different black hairstyle (Figure 3). Golden jewels were added to the end of each braid to illustrate how black hair has been adorned in both ancient and modern times, as well as to illustrate the enjoyment of wearing jewelry.



Figure 1. Fabric scraps. *Figure 2.* Fabric stripes with fishlines. *Figure 3.* Braided fabric stripes.

Cohesion: Through transforming cotton t-shirts into a narrative of hairstyle and crocheting in storytelling, this design created a distinct look by integrating elements like hairstyling, fashion, and recycling into its execution. Additionally, crocheting was used in the process to offer a narrative dimension and personalization to the finished product.

Design Contribution: This design research explores how art and fashion can effectively tell a story in a visual and abstract way. The design communicates aspects such as African black hair, an abstract face incorporated into the dress, and the intricate crochet work, all of which collectively narrate a life story. The garment's creation process was done intuitively, and the design process was inspired and evolved by open-minded engagement with the materials and

techniques. The ability to maintain a mindset open to using any resources that come up along the route is essential to this strategy. The look represents the hairstyles in the narrative of a single parent. Future research could include various ways of exploring design research of 3D fashion design, laser cutting, and other techniques, in different narratives to examine how stories can be incorporated into designs to inform the audience.

References

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