

I SURVIVED:
BRUSH YOUR HAR 100 TIMES AND IT'LL TURN INTO AN ART EDUCATION

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This is just a study of how I survived.

Not all people arrive in institutions of higher education by taking the same path or get an art education the same way. For example, not everyone had an art studio at their grandparents' home or had art classes made available to them. Once I realized this, I began to think of how the practice of hair care can be translated in order to reframe the practice of learning. Learning about one's hair is a continuous process and happens alongside any other education that happens, so I think that using that with art education in this context, is a way of acknowledging the complex ways that one can arrive at a "solution." I'm specifically thinking about how we can use the metaphor of hair care as means of finding deeper meaning and understanding in what art education looks like for Black women.

If you've found yourself looking for heavy theory and methodology, you won't find it here. In chapter two is a review of my understanding of Black Feminist Theory (BFT), themes of care, MeTelling, and place/positionality, and how I used these theoretical and methodological perspectives to inform this work and writing. In chapter three are the methods that I'm loosely drawing from to apply to this writing. These include arts-based research, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology. In chapter four, are the methods of care, a light translation of hair care practice and moments that have impacted this "research." I'll conclude with some final reflections on this process.

Approaching this research, my first question was: what happens when I intentionally care for me in the way of re-presenting as my true, cared for, natural hair, protective style wearing-self in the academy? but has since turned into how can I make it through this program with my sanity and what can a theoretical framework look like when it begins with practicing care? How

can self-recognition of cultural and creative practices be translated in a way that prompts a meaningful art education?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to you who have come across, and decided to read this. I'm grateful for you and I hope that you find some inspiration or even just a good song to lift your spirit. Now moving on...

I would like to give a shout out to my family back home for inspiring this work. Lisa, Tess, Tea, Doris, thank you for the foundation. Big ups to my homies that provided encouragement, care and overall support throughout this ENTIRE process, Paulina C., Alicia D.L., and Tiffany H. Shout out to the dopest professors, Dr. Brown and Dr. Travis for your care. Shout out to all the hairstylists, your skills are unmatched! And lastly, shout out to the one and only Jesus. Thank you for the constant grace and strength that got me through it all.

For My Homegirls

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is*. (Christian, 1988, p.78).

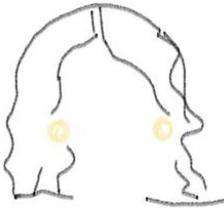
Hair becomes another character in the novel, matters attendant to the grade, style, and care of hair do seem to function as symbolic of a character's sense of identity, social status, health, and sense of purpose in African American culture (p. 7) ... As with such metaphoric references as "mother's gardens" or "grandma's quilt"... the description of rituals associated with hair and its care often foreshadows the development of the protagonist (Rooks, 1996, p. 8).

Coming from Georgia, arriving here in the Midwest, in Champaign, Illinois, was (and sometimes still is) a culture shock. Initially, I spent most days wondering where the people that look like me were and how I would deal with this. There were times that I was desperate to see Black people only for them to lack that friendliness and unspoken solidarity that I was missing. There was a point when I unintentionally tried to make myself invisible, not assimilate, but just not be seen. Being confronted with my identity as a Black woman, I no longer wanted the gazes or to be the person that speaks for all Black experiences, that gets attention for just being myself. Being myself meant doing my hair, dressing like where I want to go (as my mama says) and speaking up in classes when the conversation was centered around a westernized, midwestern,

white perspective. I wore my hair in twists, paired with a hat or headwrap for about 29 out of the 32 weeks of my first year of graduate school.

The few times that I did, almost every time I did, something always happened that made me feel out of it in a way I can't put into words. The following three flashpoints helped begin this research, though at the time were unsettling. The illustrations (see Figures 1-3) are of styles that I was wearing during these moments.

Figure 1. Bob



One of my students (an adult) asked a third grader with braids with cowrie shells asked could she touch her hair and why her mother put them in her hair.

I wear my hair out to a friend's birthday party. Of course, I'm the only Black person present amongst my Latinx friends. And in an attempt to talk to me, an Argentinian man makes the assumption that I listen to all music by artists that look Black, and then asks if I'm originally from Africa (after I've already told him I'm from Georgia). But it was his gaze that was the worst part.

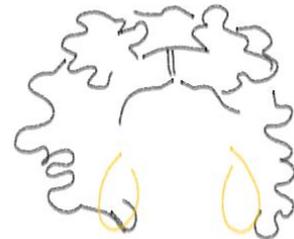


Figure 2. Buns and an afro

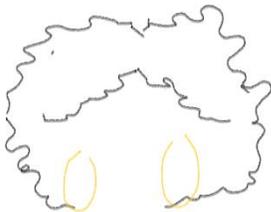


Figure 3. Twist-out

The day I chose to wear my hair out to class (in the end of Spring semester), I knew I was cute, I felt like me. A white classmate complimented my hair, but then said when she tries to get her hair

like mine, it doesn't work. In my mind I think "Girl! Of course, it doesn't!"

If I remember nothing else about my first year of graduate school, I remember these three moments like they happened minutes ago. I remember the way that I felt physically and mentally, I remember that these were the times that I left my apartment feeling like myself, but came back tired, upset and ready to go back to my placeholder of a home, a.k.a. my apartment. All the while, I was looking for a hairstylist to get me together only to find out there were none in the area. What I was really looking for was the intimacy and relationships that I have always know to come from the practice of caring for Black hair. In planning how to create a study of this, it made the most sense to collaborate with hairstylists to create work that would be the result of our exchange of artistic practices. My plan took a turn during the summer. The participants weren't coming in, but instead what I experienced were reminders of where I come from, reminders of who I am when I'm not here in Illinois, but also not there in Georgia. My research plan changed. Instead of working with hairstylists in Georgia, I decided that I would intentionally style my own hair weekly in ways that honored this cultural practice and see how that may or may not impact the people around me, embracing the attention that comes with it. Now if you know then you know that dealing with kinky, natural hair is no joke. So, the literal practice of styling became a metaphor for caring and learning. What I originally planned didn't work out. The project that was supposed to be about my relationship with others has turned into a project about the relationship that I have with myself. Honestly, this is just a study of how I survived this entire experience.

Not all people arrive in institutions of higher education by taking the same path or get an art education the same way. For example, not everyone had an art studio at their grandparents'

home or had art classes made available to them. Once I realized this, I began to think of how the practice of hair care can be translated in order to reframe the practice of learning. Learning about one's hair is a continuous process and happens alongside any other education that happens, so I think that using that with art education in this context, is a way of acknowledging the complex ways that one can arrive at a "solution." I'm specifically thinking about how we can use the metaphor of hair care as means of finding deeper meaning and understanding in what art education looks like for Black women.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I should begin this section by mentioning that there is a gap in art education research about Black women and their experiences in the field (see Acuff, 2018; Wilson, 2018). Neither is there much research about Black women's cultural practices in the field of art education. More specifically, there is little research into how we can use the metaphor of hair care as means of finding deeper meaning and understanding in what art education looks like for Black women. Though the themes and lenses have changed during the labor of reading and writing, intersecting themes that inform this study are Black Feminist Theory, care, Me Telling, and place/positionality. Each of these themes or lenses always informs how I go about learning and caring. Other questions that inform my research are around what an education is and where does this happen, who gets to call themselves an educator, who gets to *be* an educator, and so on. Thinking about these things began with reflecting on what my own art education has been and how it evolved. Through this reflection, I realized that before my time as an undergraduate, I had never had a "formal" art education, but, instead, what I call a traditional one. Most of my art education happened in the hair salon, from my mother, aunt, and grandmother doing my hair, adornment, development of personal aesthetics, and I could continue to go on. Their "art education" came from this tradition of survival, using what is available in order to survive, and not have to "look like what they were going through." They made their own clothes, did each other's hair because the salon wasn't an option, made these beautiful quilts; they taught themselves and passed it down. My mother actually made clothes for me when I was younger. She also made sure that I was surrounded by things whether a tv program or toy, that encouraged exploration, but I think most importantly had work that represented who we were. I learned from the aesthetics of our homes, scrapbooks, fashion, doing hair and the list goes on. I say all of this

to say that the richness of this tradition and education can't be expressed in exact terms and I do not think that it's fullness can be understood by anyone that has not had the experience. So again, the following themes help to inform this overall practice of hair care.

I've also chosen to use artists as sources not only because of this being based in arts-based research, but more so because they're the ones actually doing the work in the community. They successfully show the ways in which exploration of BFT, care, process, narratives, etc. are used by those outside of the capital A, Artworld. More specifically, I chose some of the artists that connect intimacy, community, and popular culture with the practices of hair care/representation in their work.

Black Feminist Theory

I consider Black Feminist Theory (BFT) to be the most important framework for my study. My understanding of BFT is informed mostly by my genes and from literature. Patricia Hill Collins (1986) says Black Feminist Thought contains observations and interpretations about African American womanhood that describe and explain different expressions of common themes (p. S16). Themes and characteristics of this include affirmation of the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation (p. S16), attention to the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression (S19) and effort to redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture (p. S21).

In addition to thought, the way that Black women theorize is essential to my study. Barbara Christian (1988) says that people of color have always theorized in ways different from western forms of abstract logic. Our theorizing is often in narrative form, in the stories we create, in the language, "because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (Christian, p.

68). And continues in saying “certainly, our literature is an indication of the ways in which our theorizing, of necessity is based on our multiplicity of experiences” (Christian, 1988, p. 76).

Theory is significant to this study. Black Feminist Theory (BFT) removes the mystery and exclusivity of the way that theory has been presented in institutions. BFT challenges the traditional notions of research, “including the language of validity, rigor and reliability that contribute to preserving the status quo and safeguarding social order” (Acuff, 2018, p. 204). BFT challenged the way that theory was used and even understood for me. Theory is connected to the theorizer and the everydayness of theorizing. Theory in its basic form is reserved for those in the institution and is presented as something that is static and in isolation of other theories. With this understanding of theories, it was somewhat of a challenge to identify with a specific theory that connected with the tradition of care and survival that was passed down to me. This made me feel that the people that have educated me, their voices weren’t valid or admissible in this context, and in my mind created so much conflict. BFT not only validates my experiences, but also too, honors the women that taught me to think and theorize outside of the institution. “Rather than having to view our world as subordinate to others, or rather than having to work as if we were hybrids, we can pursue ourselves as subjects” (Acuff, 2018, p. 206).

Components of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) include but are not limited to a) centering the everyday lives of Black women and privileging their ways of knowing, b) being rooted in everyday praxis and stimulating new practices (p. 207), c) using narrative and original voice (p. 208). For many reasons, this study is based in BFT. BFT is essential to this research because I will be using my own language and including terms used in hair care but also in where I come from regionally, which is the Southern United States. Using my original voice is essential to allowing this study to be as authentic and true to myself as possible. In response to a question

about needing more variety of Black women represented in literature, Toni Cade Bambara responds that she doesn't think that it is necessary unless the things that are written are usable truths. Will people care about what I'm writing about and will they be able to use it in their lives? Maybe or maybe not, but this isn't the main point.

This work is a collective endeavor, so we should share our practices as much as possible. My early thinking about what this project could do was somewhat revolved around this thinking. I was trying to exchange and share my practice with the practices of hairstylists and to see how these practices aligned or didn't, to create something out of this combination of practices, and also in this exchange see what else besides the surface level practices would be exchanged, like relationship and theory. Though collaboration is no longer the direct plan of action for this study or a part of my hair story, I understand that BFT gives me the permission to pursue myself as the subject and my methods of care as a framework.

Artists + Significance of Hair Practices

One theme of BFT is the role of creative expression in shaping and sustaining Black women's self-definition/valuation and how creative expression plays a role in Black women's culture. Pursuing myself as a subject also meant pursuing cultural identifiers, in connection with hair, care and process. The rabbit hole led me to watching the ingenious work of Kwame Braithwaite and the Grandassa models, pioneers of the Black is Beautiful movement to the late 1960s with the Afro Sheen and Ultra Sheen commercials. This also allowed me the freedom to go a little deeper into what process looks like specifically for African American artists like, Shani Crowe, Kevin Beasley, Nick Cave, Lorna Simpson, Abigail Deville, and so...many...more. But here I'd like to start with Kwame Braithwaite's foundation of artist activism and Shani Crowe's work and re-purposing of hair. I am considering my study, this

work, as a story that I am sharing, and thinking of artists, non/academics are my references throughout this to further emphasize the gap not only in art education of Black voices, but to also emphasize that my personal art education and approach to such is founded on my history of cultural practices of hair and caring and resilience.

Kwame Brathwaite is a hidden figure in the artworld. His photography usually captured figures like James Brown and Nina Simone, as well as everyday people, but his work was never about the physical work, it was about the activism and political action of the people. He and his brother, Elombe Brath founded the African Jazz Arts Society and Studios in the late 1950s. They built upon the artists of the Harlem Renaissance. They coined the term “Black is beautiful,” and started the Grandassa models group at the beginning of the Black Arts Movement. Brathwaite’s work demonstrates the power of photography as an essential cultural tool in the dissemination of new political ideas, its power to stage visual rhetoric and its ability make language visible. Brathwaite and his brother were already building and empowering the community, but the combination of fashion and activism draws me into his work even further. I consider models to be storytellers, artists. The first fashion show that they held was Naturally ’62:

The models wore designs by other Black designers and worked with Black stylists, hairdressers and makeup artists, which led to Black-run businesses and boutiques. It also created demand for magazines like Essence, which was founded in 1970, as a space to celebrate Black beauty. (Sayej, 2019, para. 16)

The images depicted models that looked drastically different from the icons of the time like Twiggy and wore afros and African clothing. And interestingly enough, his work had not been recognized in the “artworld” until recently, April 2019 was the first exhibition highlighting his work.

It was important for me to see what artists were thinking and doing around hair. Further, it was important that I could see how artists in their practices were actually acknowledging the practice of care in their use of hair. There are many artists whose work deals with cultural identity, and there is a body of work that uses hair extensions, usually kanekelon which is used for braids or wigs. But to me, there is more importance in a work that is in conversation with the community, that speaks directly to Black women who consider the material of hair and accessories to be a part of their cultural practice, not just another material used for its materiality. I explored artists whose work connects the original purpose of the material to women of color's cultural practices.

Nena Soulfly is an interdisciplinary artist that focuses on hair, makeup, and adornment. She talks about decolonizing beauty as a form of self-acceptance and the relationship between her and clients. The work is intimate and personal. She breaks down decolonizing beauty by using the points of becoming, undoing and being. I see them as steps and want them to be in conversation with what I talk about throughout my writing. Becoming is a ritual of self-acceptance, self-recognition; it is allowing ourselves to be seen in our true essence. She says, "through becoming we find our true purpose" (Bese, 2018). Undoing is the process of unraveling, breaking down, allowing yourself to sit in solitude, releasing doubt, letting go false narratives, allowing yourself to see who you truly are and find your strength in it. Being is not caring what people think of you; to *be* is to know who you are and move forward completely and wholly in strength.

Shani Crowe is an interdisciplinary artist out of Chicago. I believe that she informs this study a great deal. She is recognized as an artist, but most of the information that can be found on her work is more about recognizing her as a hairstylist/hair artist, which I think is interesting.

Her practice of caring and the practices of hair are connected to her repurposing the use of hair in creating her work. I especially appreciate that her work doesn't just exist in the artworld but is constantly in conversation with the real world, like cultural appropriation, policing of and recognition of Black women's hair in the workplace and hair styling, i.e. braids, as an art form and taking it a step further. The part that I mostly appreciate is that she emphasizes the importance of representation of Black women. She shows this in the way that she presents her own personal aesthetic but more importantly lets that inform her work. "I wanted to create images that portray Black women in a way that would inspire them not to be necessarily pretty, which is what most beauty stuff is about, but to kind of embody that and more within themselves," Ms. Crowe said. "Everything starts within you and how you feel about yourself. It's just trying to glorify Black women and make them imagine themselves beyond their wildest dreams" (Best 2012).

Care + MeTelling

Care can be defined as 1) the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something or 2) feeling concern or interest; attach importance to something. Care in higher education, specifically in art education is lacking. In any institution, possibly. For Black women especially, the burdens are heavy. Self-care is critical for our sustainability, and Black women must insist upon having the time to engage in self-care. Also, "those who call and draw upon our resources and abilities to mediate, facilitate, and educate should also be respectful of and foster opportunities for self-care" (Scott, 2016, p. 131).

It is especially important for me to focus on myself and be deliberate in how I choose to re-present myself in life but also in this project. I have been unconsciously afraid to present myself as too Black or too whatever as an effort to hide in a way, to become semi-visible, to

avoid the comments that come with them from some of my colleagues. Collins (1986) says, “Oppressed peoples may maintain hidden consciousness and may not reveal their true selves for reasons of self-protection” (p. S23).

June Jordan (1979) writes “the fact that I am Black: it means that I must undertake to love myself and to respect myself as though my very life depends upon self-love and self-respect” (p. 269). This means that we have to cleanse ourselves of “the hatred and the contempt that surrounds and permeates my identity, as a woman and as a Black human being in this particular world of ours” (p. 269). Adding to learning to love ourselves, Scott (2016) argues that embodying the particular controlling image of being the strong Black woman negatively impacts Black women’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health (p. 129). This of course leads me to ask how to do these things. What does it look like to undertake loving myself as if my life depends on it? And what does hair have to do with it? What can my practice of care impart on my environment? I don’t believe that I can fully answer these questions, but I think that telling my own story is a way of beginning to answer these. Jackson’s (2013) call to action is a proposal for Black women to continue these “MeTelling Narratives” as a “pedagogical activity worth using for the (de)marginalization of other misrepresented and underrepresented groups in visual culture as well as visual art” (p.70).

More specifically, I’m looking at care as tradition and method, especially in relation to the metaphor of hair. Care is learned and passed down. “Caring in the Black family has had to be, in part, about the surrounding society, because it has had to provide children with the understanding and the strategies, they need to survive racism” (Thompson, 1998, p. 532). I’m looking at hair care practice as a way of observing, looking at learning. Caring is a part of the learning process just like reading is. The traditions of care and survival that my family has

passed down to me directly relates to my personal tradition of art education. Self-definition and self-valuation are not luxuries, they're necessary for Black female survival (Collins, 1986).

Place/Positionality

Place and positionality are important to my study. Tamara Butler (2018) says, "Black Girl Cartography," is the study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education. This requires a self-reflection and navigation requires "a very special kind of listening" (Butler, 2018, p. 29). Through this work, we can begin to see how our own educational experiences have guided us back into classroom spaces so that we may be more intentional about our practices. The lenses that we see through inform our research methods, citational practices, and structure associated with this (mapping) and other projects. The lens which I see through comes from a place of a Georgia gal. This means that where I'm from is a place of resilience, reciprocity, self-efficiency, soul and all things natural and caring. I come from a family of growers and caretakers of all things from a home garden to the hair on both mine and other's heads.

Not only am I away from everything that I know physically like my family, friends and traditions (not to mention comfort), but on a campus where African Americans make up less than 4% of the population, I constantly find myself to be the *only one* in the room. And as Gloria J. Wilson (2018) states, the extra mental work of it all is exacerbating. I spend an equal amount of time on and off campus, but no matter where I go, I am constantly aware of who I am and what my body is doing and feeling. There's a "need" to seem as non-threatening as possible, not exactly a need to assimilate, a constant battle of whether or not to explain my culture to someone else, and the list goes on. Ngo (2018) says:

we might say that the racialized body is not-at-home in its own body. This we have already seen when considering how the racialized body does not experience itself as the habitual body, but rather as a body that stands in front of and before (or behind) itself. (p. 96)

And more than that, depending on where I am, there is a different mental response and level of work that goes into it. One place I know that I can go and not have to worry about these things is the hair salon. It was my goal to find one, but there was only one actual Black hair salon in Champaign when I first moved here, and now it is closed. After much searching on Instagram, I found that the closest salons are in Chicago and St. Louis. I was looking for salons that cater to Black women's needs, an actual building not someone's home (as an extended form of care). This furthered my awareness of physical displacement. I should also mention here that in addition to these things, the number of Black women going missing is constantly increasing in the United States, specifically in Georgia. Being in a place where I have been exoticized and Othered constantly, care has been and still is a response to my environment. The ways in which I orient myself are a part of all of this. I am not willing to put myself in positions that jeopardize my safety, sanity, or even time. These things have even made me more aware of how my friends orient themselves in the spaces that we find ourselves in.

I try to refrain from speaking for other people's experiences and making assumptions, but I'm finding that the relationship of space/place in relation to identity is something that some have more awareness of than others, possibly out of necessity. Navigation is something that some of us have been raised to do as a way of caring for oneself and others; it's become somewhat of an unspoken tradition that continues to be passed down and around for survival. Navigation of a place is not the same for everyone and I've seen this appropriated in a sense. For example, in the

last few months, sex trafficking and missing Black women in the U.S. but more specifically in Atlanta has become a hot topic. The rising numbers of Black women, girls, boys and men that have been kidnapped has sparked social media to become a way of spreading useful information like the tactics traffickers are using and victims stories to aid in what to look for in our surroundings and make sure that we are safe. Mainstream media doesn't cover this. Weeks later, this information has made its way into the conversations of those in Champaign. A white friend passed this information by sharing it in a group message with no context other than that her sister's husband told her that people were being put kidnapped in vans from the Walmart parking lot. And I couldn't help but wonder how this information had made its way without its context and also if they actually cared to see who this was really affecting or just spread the information because it's close to them. How did this crucial information for all people become removed from who it's for? And who is now in danger because of it losing its context?

I say all of this to say that no matter how it's phrased, place, positionality, orientation, it's something that cannot be escaped or separated from the present. All of these things affect how I think of my positioning and navigation of my present and future environments. Black Feminist Theory is how I choose to approach this entire thing because of its approval of self-reflection, it allows me to research self and all the things on the "outside" that inform my education. It also welcomes the use of voices that aren't recognized by universities and other institutions. In this work, I intentionally cite artists that I've had to search for hours to find information on because of a failure of "the institution" to recognize. And at the same time, I see the strength in existing outside of that world. This I think is the most important because coming into the field of art education, there's an assumption that graduate students have all arrived the same way and had the same experiences; it makes the arrival to this point monolithic, which is a part of why I

couldn't understand the surface level learning that I was experiencing until I was under the *care* of Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown and Dr. Sarah Travis. I have chosen to observe and write about what it is to be "in a with" with others through methods of care and self. Self, in a with with care, reflection, awareness and so on.

Care, MeTelling, place/positionality all come back to BFT. They all work together in the way that starting with self is a method of caring for community. It brings the community, my community into the conversations of those with the privilege of "furthering" education inside schools. BFT proves that the experiences that I've had are valid ways of knowing and learning, specifically in relation to place of the salon where all my needs are taken care of. I think that Collins (2016) says it best in writing:

if Black women simultaneously use all resources available to them-their roles as mothers, their participation in churches, their support of one another in Black female networks, their creative expression-to be self-defined and self-valuating and to encourage others to reject objectification, then Black women's everyday behavior itself is a form of activism.
(p. S24)

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Originally for the project I wanted to collaborate with hairstylists in Georgia to focus on the relationship aspect but also to create something wearable using hair as the medium. Inspiration that could come nowhere but from God led me to re-purpose the waist-length braids I had just taken out to turn them into a skirt. I literally took them out and put them on a hanger and there the idea came. The excitement of being able to create once again and something so “unusual” was the preface to this project and its original intents. This skirt got me thinking about the many ways that extensions could be presented other than being on someone’s head. I wanted to explore the other ways of repurposing hair along with the women who specialize in it. This however didn’t work out how I planned. The methodological approaches that I originally intended to use remained in the same categories of ethnography and exploration of people and self. But the evolution of this original project has changed, as stated earlier to a MeTelling story. As stated earlier, one theme of BFT is the role of creative expression in shaping and sustaining Black women’s self-definition/valuation. Based on this, I’ve chosen to draw from methods of arts-based research, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology.

Arts-Based Research

Blackness as embodied experience is art in itself. The art making in this is the writing, it is the art of caring. The art in this Arts-Based Research (ABR) is a focus on the process and not the end product. The methodology is one that is based in the researcher’s interpretation. Lorna Simpson said in an interview something about being interdisciplinary and how that means asking yourself what material will get the point across (Tate, 2014). This study began as a project of repurposing hair through collaboration. The second intent was to do my hair every week and observe what happens when I decide “perform” my true self. But moving into the overall concept

of care, looking at it as a practice and how the care of my own natural hair can be a metaphor or framework that can be applied to methods of art education and learning, the most important part of this ABR study is the process. Specifically allowing lived experience, both past and present to inform the data. In other words, being open to change.

Gloria J. Wilson (2018) strongly informs my understanding of arts-based research, specifically her work, *#tumblingbodies*, *#academiccartographies*. She combines methods of critical arts-based research along with autoethnography, she constructed a doctoral gown as a means of processing how she experienced and made sense of her “racialized academic identity” (Wilson, 2018, p.213). She describes this process using concepts of garment construction (marking, pinning, measuring, pressing and stitching) as aesthetic interludes to illuminate and organize moments of intersubjective dialogue, which ultimately lead to an ascribed racialized academic identification (p. 213). She sees “the act of garment making as a way to introduce a point of view of the embodied human experience of a scholar of color (SOC). This offering is not intended to general experiences of all SOCs, but to express the nuances of a racialized academic identity (Wilson, 2018). Like her I am drawn to artfully document my personal experiences within these structures. Wilson’s (2018) work serves as a part of the foundation for my study, mainly the part of sharing experiences, as they are, and continue to be, anxiety-inducing, and yet simultaneously thrust me into acts of art-making as a means to work through these anxieties.

To continue on ABR as process, artists Kevin Beasley and Nick Cave’s processes are also informing my work. I mentioned the freedom of going down the rabbit hole earlier. As a part of my own process, attention to sound has always been a big part of my practices. Without going into all the artists’ practices, I found that sound is a common factor in the ways that we

process the world. What does the world around me sound like? These are all a part of ABR and the artmaking process.

Kevin Beasley talks about a flash (see phenomenology section) when he comes across a cotton field close to home. This flash leads him to unpacking the context and exploration of cotton. He asked questions of where it leads. He talks about materials and their contexts and histories, but I believe that his spirit and willingness to explore the something so heavy is what I find intriguing. Specifically, his use of the cotton gin is what I'd like to focus more on. He talks about originally wanting something small, but immediately seeing a cotton gin and something about the gin telling him what to do. And the way he installs the gin is that the viewer can see it, but not hear it which was inspired by the previous owner telling him that the sound of a cotton gin is hard to articulate and something that must be experienced for oneself. He asks the question "Are we taking the time to process?" I see his process of this specific work as him taking the time to process and explore as a method of narrative inquiry as a means to do ABR.

Nick Cave asks the question, "how do we be one on one with something that is unfamiliar?" (Thick Skin, 2016). From observation, most of the pre-service students I have are white women from middle to upper class. Most are from the Midwest and of course haven't taught before. In the class that I work with them in, their first teaching experience, they're expected to teach based on a concept rather than skills. They're assigned contemporary artists of different backgrounds, which is where everyone gets uncomfortable because they don't know how to talk about race. So instead, the research and presentation get stuck on a surface level because they don't want to be wrong. So, in working with these pre-service teachers that are asked to teach about artists they don't know how to talk about, Nick Cave has been one of the artists that I've found myself researching again and again to prove that his work isn't just these

beautiful, noisy, costumes. In an Art21 video, he brings up the concept of building a thick skin that will help him navigate the world that opposes him based on the complexity of identity as a Black person in America. He says:

Psychologically I have to really get it together. And I just have to get quiet, to put it in perspective and not sort of lash out into rage. And if I do, lashing out for me is creating this. All of that becomes the impulse to create. I don't ever see the 'Soundsuits' as fun. They really are coming from a very dark place. (Art 21, 2016)

The statement speaks to the process. Regardless of the material, regardless of its ability to conceal one's gender, race and class, they're origin is what I identify with in relation to this story I'm trying to tell.

Like narrative processes, "the artmaking process is iterative—in the production of any series of works, the artist can post-navigate what was learned in the prior iteration in order to further inscribe and enrich meaning" (Rolling & Bey, 2016, p. 309). As I've been exploring my art education, I've recognized that sound has had an equal impact on informing practices. Sound has a way of entering the body and invoking memories. I connect sound with oral traditions of storytelling, which is equally important to this entire project. Sound is a way of making meaning but also an art in itself. Sound has some familiarity to it, some comfort that cannot be described because of an attachment to individual experience. Sound is a part of the narrative and has been the initiator of the phenomenological response that I tell about in my story.

Narrative Inquiry

Patricia Leavy (2009) uses narrative inquiry as an umbrella category for a variety of arts-based methodological practices involving storytelling and writing (p. 26). Narratives are about *something*. Ones of those somethings can be in the form of autoethnographic narratives. "In this

design researchers share their experiences as a part of their ethnographic work—as a means of developing their own ideas, questioning their assumptions and positionality, building rapport, and creating reciprocity” (Leavy, 2009, p. 39). Leavy (2009) also says that this type of research can be used to address a number of research questions, including those linked to exploring personal or shared traumas, spirituality, life cycles or topics such as oppression, stigmas, subjugation, and many other issues (p. 41).

Rolling and Bey (2016) also provide an example of how personal narratives are used within art education research. They say:

Narrative inquiry practices provide a platform from which to express our personal challenges, struggles, and dilemmas as African-Americans reconciling our cultural identities. These narratives open unique spaces for dialogue and reflexivity regarding the complexities of race, culture, class, and the management of stigma. (Rolling & Bey, 2016, p. 310)

A friend said that writing is an act of resistance. In this study, I will be using narrative inquiry. The writings and stories that are shared are about my relationship and care of myself and my relationship with my environment (current culture). The *something* that I want to tell about is my experience, past and present; caring for myself partially through a metaphor of a Black woman caring for her hair. There are some journal entry-like writings that represent the present as they occur and vignettes for the things that have already happened. Although narrative inquiry attempts and *can be* used to answer some of the questions around certain issues, I think that it is important to state that I do not have all the answers to questions around my experiences. I also will not attempt to answer some questions that may come as a labor of love and care for whoever reads this. It’s important that some things are left to be answered by the viewer. A part of my

experience has been being looked to to explain the experiences of African Americans and a part of my resistance is to no longer simplify the complexity of experiences by prescribing meaning in my writing.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the description of lived human existence, located at the between point of world and consciousness. In this space what exists is a developing synthesis which is forever unfinished precisely because it is instantiated in our concrete, fleshy embodiment, rather than an abstraction or transcendental perspective (Fisher & Embree, 2000, p. 48). According to Vagle (2016), it is the study of one's world:

as it is *lived*, not the world as it *measured*, categorized, compared, and broken down.

Phenomenology is the study of how things are *being* and *becoming*. This also means that phenomenologists do not assume that any one individual's experiences of some "thing" wholly belongs to that individual in any sort of final or idealized way. (p. 22)

I mentioned earlier, writing as an act of resistance. There is something powerful and historical about narrative and its place in African Americans lives. Connecting this to phenomenology, Fisher and Embree (2000) say, "lived experience is open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting not because of the limitations of language, but because of the nature of embodied, temporal existence" (p. 49). Therefore, experience can never be understood outside of its full material context and cannot be reduced to the sphere of language, and to miss the ways in which meanings, and thus the historical motion of cultures, can be imparted and transformed through non-discursive modes of practice (Fisher & Embree, 2000, p. 50).

Phenomenological Flashpoints. Another aspect of phenomenological methods that is important to this study are flashpoints and fleshpoints. Kraehe and Lewis (2018) write extensively about this:

Flashpoints are lived phenomena. To experience a flash is to experience a moment of interruption or suspension in normal behavior, perception, and everyday experiential flow. It might be experienced in terms of uncanny weirdness, shock, cold sweat, a lump in the throat, existential disorientation, perceptual blurriness, and so on. (p. 3)

Flash experiences disorient and re-orient, indicates breakdown, leads to breakthrough, and so on.

“Because flashpoints are embodied surges that disorient us and reorient us toward that which would otherwise be unthematized in our everyday experience, they are always already *fleshpoints*” (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 5). The flesh itself is a phenomenon, which I think is important to briefly talk about. Flesh as a point of departure is written about by Fanon, Spillers, Weheliye and Santner, but the one that I want to mention here is Hortense J. Spillers, who builds upon Fanon’s “historico-racial schema” and is built upon by Weheliye and so many others. For Spillers, the flesh is the fulcrum of a distinctly “American grammar” (p. 68) through which White and non-White bodies speak, scream, spit, yell, and cry out to one another...bodies are never whole, never pure, never innocent of the scars and/or privileges of the flesh that bind us together through the ambivalent violence of loss, love, pain, and desire.

Flashpoints are more deeply ambivalent than microaggressions and therefore more difficult to share and describe. I am thinking of the flesh as an “American grammar” (I’d actually extend this to a global grammar), there are flashes that were and still hard to share because of the difficulty of even putting them into language. Even in the original context of the fleshpoints that I have chosen to share, is the absence of things as simple as my thoughts in the moment. This

difficulty of description isn't just about the pain and violence, but extends to love and desire. I can still clearly remember what these things felt like, but in my story, I'm trying to use these flashpoints as points of departure and breakthrough, thus looking at how they can inform my care practices without trying to analyze or break them down.

Phenomenological case studies emphasize rich descriptions of lived, first-person experiences wherein familiar narratives are ruptured and easy political, educational, or cultural lessons fall short. I understand narrative inquiry and phenomenology to be cousins. There are some things, feelings, that words on a paper absolutely cannot describe unless one has experienced it firsthand. Experientially, despite my love of words, there are things that I have experienced during my time here in the Midwest and at home, that I cannot really describe to myself let alone someone else. I share some flash/fleshpoints to provide context. I choose to share them to emphasize the point that they are temporal interruptions of everyday lived experiences, they don't just stop. I want to juxtapose them with the positive stories that far outlive and out-inform the "Other" moments, as a hair salon exists *with* the struggles outside of it. But I also want to emphasize the point of how these lived experiences can better inform how I choose to care for myself but also try to impart something to others. I think that sharing these moments and stories validate them, allow them to exist outside of my mind and the temporal moment itself.

Arts-based research, narrative inquiry and phenomenology all come together as methods that I will be using in my study. I share stories that draw from all three methods, and there are some images included with a few. The flashpoints I share are only that. I choose not to extensively reflect on them 1) because I can't and 2) because a part of practicing care is forgiveness and not giving those moments the power or control to my narrative. They are

included only to show how all these things come together to inform a practice of care that allows me to understand how I can impart something onto others in the field. I see these methods as ways of *beginning* how to understand and impart (not teach) the ways in which we can co-exist and being to *actually* do the work of equality and social justice in our communities. The “data” that is included in the next chapter won’t be analyzed because it cannot be. Subjectivity cannot be theorized apart from its lived, embodied experience. My purpose is to simply record my narrative. I see this as the beginning of my future practices, future projects, books or whatever I need to use to translate and continue doing the work in my community.

CHAPTER 4: THE ARCHIVE

As a part of this, I created a playlist on Spotify to go along with this section. You can play it along with or preface the reading of the section with listening. These songs and sounds are ones that remind me of where I come from, how artists have gotten messages across in the past, and overall are sounds that help me survive the present. You should be able to click the cover or scan the QR code in Figure 4.

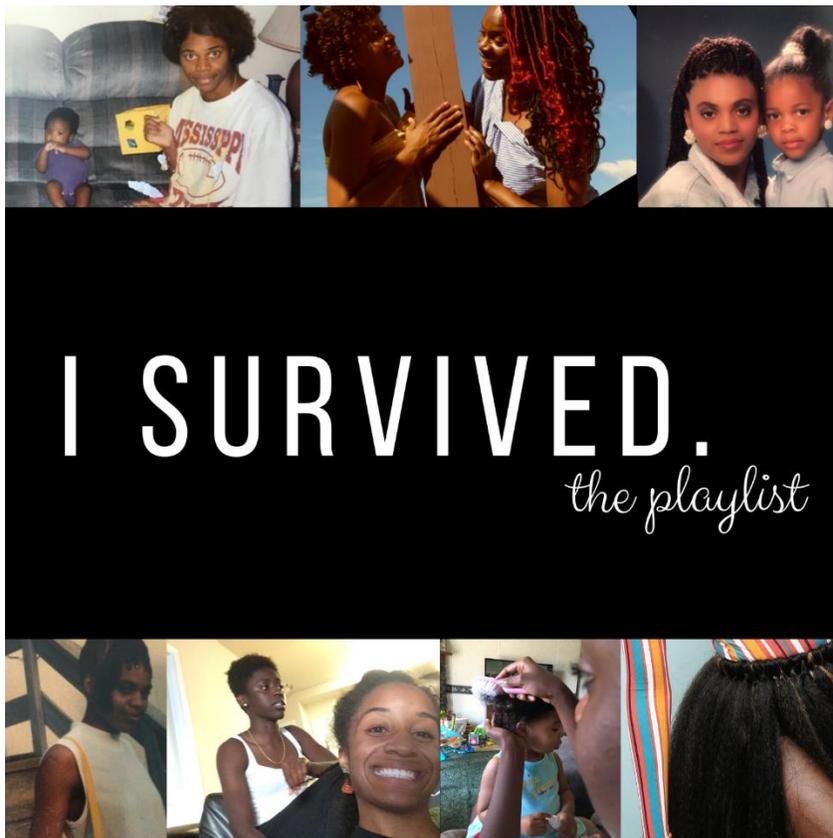


Figure 4. *I Survived.*

Back to the regularly scheduled writing...Here you'll find something like an archive if anything else. It's more than data, I believe. I've shared some flashpoints, moments that have informed my practice of care, and then I conclude with some methods of care, and a translation of hair to education. I initially wanted to get the flashpoints out of the way, and share those at the beginning of this chapter, but I believe that putting them in the place that they happened emphasizes the fact that flashpoints are interruptions. Moving forward, I've chosen to share a few of the highlights of this time that far outlive flashpoints. One has to do with the skirt that started it all, my mother and time at home, and a hair moment I was fortunate to experience with a student.

The Skirt

I had braided my hair before returning to Illinois for the second semester. With box braids is scalp exposure, so while home and it being 70 degrees with humidity, upon landing in Illinois, I knew once my scalp was drier than ever that it was time to take them down. Because I was raised to be resourceful and use things until they can't be used again, as I took out my braids, I placed them on a hanger until I could figure out what was next for the protection of my head. Once I finished, I realized that the way the hair was on the hanger resembled a tulle skirt. I allowed it to sit for a few days, but out of the blue the idea came to actually use this to make a skirt. I knew that *this* was important to share with the women in my family (my mom, my aunt and a sister/cousin) because of the history we have with our hair being a tradition in our family. This skirt was something that came so easily that I knew this idea didn't just come on my own. It was a test. So anyway, it took me about two weeks to construct it, first thinking through how to assemble it which ended up being by way of elastic band and hot glue. And during this process, I knew that I had to document this, but in a traditional way I'd been trained to do.

The importance of documenting for this goes back to my childhood. My mother and aunt used to dress us for church or whatever and make us take pictures. Back then of course it was something we (me and my cousins) hated and were just ready to take off those annoying gigi's. Gigi's is the word my mother or me came up with when I was little that means tights or stockings. Keeping that tradition in mind as I thought of how I would document this skirt was not just how I could do it but how it would honor this tradition. I consulted with my them on the styling of the skirt, which gave me plenty to work with. I ended up drawing from the different combinations and using my experience as a dancer to come up with a final look. This was also a way that I was able to honor the women that provided me with that dance foundation, mostly Black women. It was especially important to me that I worked with a Black photographer for this also, so after a search on Instagram, I was able to find and book an appointment in Chicago with a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (see Figures 5 and 7).

The excitement that I felt for this project and even the inspiration that followed it was almost indescribable. I hadn't felt that excited about making anything for a while, and to be honest not making was eating away at my livelihood. Even as I write this, I can't help but think of how I remember the excitement but right now, I can't even begin to explain it in a way that makes sense. I've always journaled as a part of care and as a way of looking back or revisiting the origin of thoughts, ideas, revelations, questions...all things. Because I want to emphasize the process, I've decided to include the entries related to this skirt (see Figures 6.1-6.4). I don't believe that the context outside of what's on the page has to be shared, as it may not be very relevant. But I see now, that something on each page reflects the care, relationship, faith that I speak of and will speak a little more on later.



Figure 5. In progress of skirt documentation.

75

- maybe on what an art educator looks like, how ~~there~~ as a black Christian woman, I am already an "art" educator. How my presence + being in the room is enough. How my art, teaching of takes many forms, from the perfecting of my twist out, to the paint on a canvas and highlights in my Bible

17 2019 AM.
 faith - muscle memory
 James 1:1-10 ask for wisdom w/
~~best~~ faith that God will do it
 let God set your pace
 Joshua 6:

THOUGHTS REFLECTION
 - still trying to love my neighbor while he works out in his room

Figure 6a

83

Jan. 20 19
 psalm 23, 91, Isaiah 11:2-3
 - rad comforts because it corrects us
 - difference between what God is using & God (ex: God-artist, people-paintbrush)
 - correction to know we've cared for
 - who God chooses, not perfect, just available

isolating "the things" ...
 my presence in the room
 perfecting of a twist out
 paint on a canvas
 highlights in my Bible
 ... and make them, create something

1-27
 Kanekalon skirt in progress
 what does the rest of this look include?

Figure 6b

February 3
 1 Kings 18
 let God use you!
 share what He has given you. A word, finance, blessings, grace

Mama asked if my skirt has a deadline b/c I'm moving so quickly. I'm just excited to be cheating something that I know is ~~from~~ a part of my larger purpose but the questions did arise.

What IS the purpose/meaning of (making) this skirt?
 what happens if I can't shoot it?
 why do I want to shoot this?
 why is this piece + its presentation so (seemingly) important?

Figure 6c

- we revisited the skirt + options again (it went from 2 looks to 4, but I only in favor of 3?)
 ↳ there's a situation: both shoots are scheduled for a Sunday, one is an hour but starts at 5 or 6 which means a late return, but its \$80 w/ downtime, the other is \$225 which I don't think that I can do, its for 30 w/ a MUA (as opposed to me doing my own, which is possible)
 ↳ So I need some discernment because I want to bring out the potential of the skirt
 I also want I need to be led by ~~my~~ God as He is really the creator of this thing + I just want it to be greater than what I can do than what I imagine
 - only God knows me, truly knows me

Figure 6d

Once the photos were taken, I was so inspired to continue this collaboration, but now with actual hairstylists. I was hoping for about three. The plan was to get my hair done as a way of getting to know the stylist and an entry point of asking them if they were willing to participate or just collaborate with me. I would also be recording the learning that happened in the appointment. If the stylist was down to collaborate, we would come together about once or twice a month to plan and then construct. As a part of the restrictions of the academy and also to keep the documentation in the same format, the next step would be for me to be photographed in the garment that we came up with. And for the final presentation, I was somewhat wanting to make a coffee table book or exhibition or the work. However, as we know, none of that happened.

I can't tell you exactly why it didn't work out. I could say that it's because I couldn't offer them real incentive like money or the time commitment was undo-able or whatever other reasons, but I am thankful that it didn't go as I had planned. I think that my intentions were good, but I also now realize that I wanted to do that to make myself feel better. I would pay for the style service, but besides that I wasn't able to really provide them with anything. In addition to that, I realize that I was in a way, supporting the hierarchy of the artist/researcher. When I realized nothing was working and the problems, I tried to find the *thing* that I was really trying to get at, the thing that I was really trying to say. This required me to go back to draw out the themes and things that were important during the process of conceiving the idea, making the skirt and documenting it. This required me to look and reflect deeper inwardly, to do some more research around what meaning I was trying to make. Because otherwise maybe I wouldn't have realized what it was really about. Working on the skirt was an art practice, more deeply rooted in re-thinking caring for hair, but also a way for me to care for my sanity and be excited about something regardless of my physical environment.



Figure 7. Edited shot of the skirt.

Like Old Times

The first thing I wanted to do once I got home after my full first year of graduate school was for someone to wash my hair. I got so tired of doing my hair, it don't make no sense. I had never realized how much work it was to do my *own* hair. I had heard stories about how thick my hair was when I was younger and how thick it still is, but I did not understand what it meant until it became a burden to do it. By the way I have been doing my own hair for a while, it just never felt like such a chore before. So as soon as my feet touched the ground of Warner Robins, Georgia I could finally breathe and relax. I was able to convince my mama to wash my hair. She amazingly agreed (she usually has to be in a great mood to return to the task she had done so long). She scratched my scalp, ridding it of the remnants of a tough first year in Illinois. The dead skin, the water, and debris fought but couldn't win against such seasoned hands and a Black



Figure 8. Mom washing hair before returning, taken by Justin Luke.

rat tail comb. She washed, rinsed, and washed again, rinsed and moisturized. I was all set. There is nothing like a “Welcome home” wash day.

The last thing I did before returning for one final semester in the Midwest was get my hair washed. Having your hair done for symbolic things such as a first day of school has always had its place in my life. A clean head means a clean slate. A clean head is ready for anything that is about to touch it.

9/25/ 2019

I made the decision to braid my hair in a way that reflects traditional braids from the tribes of Africa. I tried to honor the process, and the pattern without appropriating them in any way, especially since I acknowledge the fact that I don't know where my family comes from on the continent. It took about two days. It felt like a protective helmet for sure.

10/3/2019

I decided to practice silence today. Firstly, because I had no opinion on the topic, but also because I just wanted to see where the conversation would go. Finding peace in this class for me was a huge part of caring. Interestingly enough, one classmate brought up the design and structure of museums as not supporting their so-called constructivist/free choice approaches. This somehow turned into a conversation about how the security in museums, specifically the one at this university, follow and hover over its patrons. Some said things like “obviously I'm not going to touch it” or “I'm in this field and are they really qualified?” and so on. In one of the tales told, I actually happened to be present and immediately it occurred to me that yes they [security] hover, but when we noticed them hovering, I instantly felt myself stop breathing for a moment. Also, this sense of entitlement and hierarchy that my classmates spoke about was just ... weird. It took me to the thoughts of how many times I myself have been hovered or followed in

some settings, not just the art museum, as place that some levels of privilege qualify us for. I was taken back to a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, where being in certain rooms there was an eeriness, where the seriousness of this place and the works were reflected in whispers among pairs, where I felt that if I talked, I might get tackled. Why so serious? And also how at the Art Institute, where the works of Black and brown artists was pretty much non-existent, where majority of the guards were Black women, how they didn't hover, but how their glances alone reminded me of the glance the women back home give you that says "didn't I tell you not to touch anything when we got in here."

10/10/19

In class last night during an interactive presentation, a classmate apparently made the "ok" hand sign and then apologized because of its apparent offensiveness. And then she turns directly around to me, looks me in my face and asks if I knew that the sign is considered to be an indicator of white supremacy/terrorism or whatever.

There are at least three more flashpoints that I could share from class, and for some reason it was always the same people having to do with my flashpoints, so I'm choosing not to. I'm just tired of giving them attention and in a way giving them life through my making and writing. I'm tired of retelling these stories. I realize that phenomenology gives me the freedom to let the experience stay where it is. And combining that with the fact that love keeps no records of wrong, I'm done. Saying nothing is saying something.

The Bonnet

As a part of my position as a teaching assistant, I had to work at a local elementary school for an afterschool program. In this program, specifically my group of girls are non-white, most of them being African American. There is a sense of responsibility that I feel to watch out for them and even teach my university students what that looks like. As a part of my practice of care, I've found myself extending it to them. Not only in how I treat them and talk to them, but also how I present myself to them as well as anyone connected to the school. Most times I look put together, as I was taught to. In addition to that, I have found myself being the same person, but aesthetically representing the multiple ways that we as Black women look. So, one day one of the girls comes up to me saying that she'll get in trouble when she gets home if her hair isn't how it was when she left for school. I remembered how growing up, our mothers told us "don't let those girls play in your head." I always remember that, now more so as a metaphor. I asked what I could do, but she figured it out. Another day, another one of the students tells me she's going to wear a hood for the time we were together. I didn't question her. Later, she says it again and then I see that she has on a bonnet. Seeing that, I asked did if she'd worn it all day of if she had just put it on. "Just now," she said. "Okay," I responded.

Practicing Care

"Be multidimensional"

(J. Acuff, personal communication, October 9, 2019).

Care is something that is practiced. It takes practice, training, consistency. Pedagogy is a practice. Learning is a practice. People are a practice. I say this to say that being intentional and becoming aware of the practice and conditioning of (insert word here) are essential. Care has required another level of openness and letting go most of my control. It has been practicing love

and patience and vulnerability among so many other things. And at the same time, even right now writing this, one of the challenges of care is awareness of how much I'm willing to share, and realizing that I may be contradicting myself, but being okay with it. Practicing care is teaching me what becoming multidimensional looks like.

Methods. Some of the methods of care that are essential to my practicing of care are separation/silence, prayer/devotion, and connecting aesthetic tradition to the present. The most important element for me was time. We can spend our time or waste our time. Where we spend our time, our life follows (Wilkerson, 2019). This meant spending more time communicating with God and reflecting, working out, dancing, praying, reading for leisure, binge watching shows, practicing progress instead of trying to immediately have it together in perfection... it was all a practice in listening, listening to know what my needs and the needs of others are.

Another method of care is separation and silence. I believe that we are supposed to have people around us and actually live life in community. However, at the same time I believe that knowing when to say "no" is equally important. So, from the get-go, peace and no stress, fear, anxiety, etc. were things I prayed against coming into this thing, actually daily. I learned about protecting my space last year, but it wasn't until recently that I've realized space isn't static. Protecting my heart, mind, and spirit requires me to identify triggers, whether people or actions, and then be able to remove myself from that environment, excuse myself from the conversation or doing whatever needs to happen. A part of that protection is being aware of my bodily response to places and people; and surrounding myself with those who consider my safety as a Black woman, without me even having to express my concerns. The method of separation as care has also been separating from academia as much as I can. Another view of what separation looks like is getting away from the corn fields every now and then. You know, actually doing

things that I love like going to see my favorite artist in concert or going to Chicago to dwell in actual communities like Pilsen or Bronzeville, learning more about the people that I have become family with. Most times this meant saying no and taking time away from what seems so urgent, like writing or reading.

I mentioned briefly how sound is a way of processing. In practicing care, I've had to identify what the sound of silence is. There were times when I practiced being silent so that I could actually listen beyond the words that were being spoken into the room. By doing this I could also sense the differences in response to particular voices. Being silent to listen and reflect rather than *be* silenced, being silent as a shut down. Silence can be an action of not giving power or attention to ignorance. Paying attention to the different sounds of silence have become a method of caring. Silence has had a presence that I can't quite explain. There's also been silence as a way of being still. And then there's being silent because of fatigue of constant sounding and speaking and no one listening, and then bringing in sounds that speak for me.

Hair. The process of doing natural hair is a time intensive process, hence "wash day" is sometimes a whole weekend. This process involves detangling, washing, conditioning, moisturization, and styling. Getting to the end of a wash day is like getting a long-awaited degree, except you look a whole lot better. The fatigue is about the same. The only thing about hair is that you have to do it again.

Hair care is a practice that can easily be applied to learning. The routine and methods of taking care of one's hair is an individual experience that has to be learned and adjusted based on the caretakers wants, needs, time, and the list goes on. The methods and learning of caring for something, specifically hair, is traditional and cultural. I am so thankful that I have had the pleasure of working with professors that helped me to realize the ways that my cultural practices

are the foundation of what and how I put learning into practice. Acknowledging this can be prompted, but also has to be done by yourself. Allowing institutions to continue to dictate the way individual learning happens is possibly the reason for the current climate. To better describe what the practice looks like for me, I've chosen to define the steps of the process.

1. **Detangling:** Going through sections of hair to make sure strands are separate, free knots and kinks. This is done while hair is damp, sometimes with a product to give hair more slip. Detangling dry hair can damage hair, not to mention it is a little painful.
2. **Washing:** Usually done in sections to ensure that each part is clean and to keep hair detangled (this saves time). Removes dirt, product build-up, and other impurities from hair.
3. **Deep/conditioning:** Doesn't have to be done every time, masks can be left in hair for 5 minutes to 2 hours. Like creating a foundation for the hair to restore moisture back in.
4. **Moisturize:** Possibly the most methodical step. This step is also the most individualized based on evaluating needs, products used, time restriction, and the style that follows.
5. **Styling:** Answer to the question of whether you want to do your hair every day, or leave it alone for a few weeks.

One of the challenges of taking care of natural hair is its fragility. While natural hair is strong, it needs constant TLC to stay moisturized and leaving it alone at some point. I can feel the need to braid or twist my hair down as the semester is coming to a close, as this season comes to an end. As the air gets drier and the temperature gets colder, I feel the need, the pressure to lock down the thing that I've allowed to be so free for the last few months. As it relates to this learning process in art education, the steps of hair care can be related to 1) sorting out the facts/information, 2) unlearning, 3) relearning, 4) going deeper in process, and 5) deciding how

you choose to use it. It begins with being aware of the surrounding environment. Like caring for hair, the process of learning is repetitive. When not repeated, both create an unhealthiness not only of the hair or mind but eventually affects other parts of life depending on the individual. And I would even argue that it can affect our interactions with students, colleagues, children, the world.

There are things I grew up hearing like “don’t let those little girls play in your head” or superstitions about burning hair to keep from going crazy and even brushing your hair I think the number is 20 times a night for it to grow. In re-learning my hair needs, I’ve found that since the selection of available products has grown for Black women’s hair, I can still rely on the original products to take care of me (they’re also much cheaper). I carry all of this with me on a daily basis. As it relates to education, all these things were basically about protection of self and growing. There’s protecting your mind from the control of others or being cognizant of who we allow to mold our minds; and also aware of personal information, like hair and DNA to be left available to anyone for use. Then the last, though not true, emphasizes that in order to grow and progress, there has to be repetition or practice. Education and the methods we use don’t always have to be new. Yes, I think that we have to question and test other things, but there is some validity to previous methods. They can be built upon, repurposed and applied in other ways. We have to identify where we are, inquire how we got there, evaluate the traditions and practices that have shaped our identities, test and question them and then figure it out from there. This journey began by me asking the question of why I wasn’t understanding the things that were being taught to me about art education. With the guidance and activities of identifying what my educational experiences have looked like, where I’ve learned to theorize from, I was given the freedom to do inquire more about validity of the institution, the people it excludes along with using personal

experience. From there I was able to make the choice of applying my traditional practices to the new practices of learning.

CHAPTER 5: IT'S NOT A CONCLUSION

I still find it hard to summarize everything. I'm choosing not to. There is importance in stopping, pausing and being able to sit with information. Furthermore, if there's one thing that I want to be taken away from this, is that we have to be able to be with ourselves and learn for ourselves. We can't begin to change anything until we recognize our own experiences as valid. We can't go outside of ourselves, into communities, into schools effectively until we learn how to go inside of the self.

I would like to remind you that literature in the field of art education as it relates to the experiences of Black women and Black feminist theory/thought is lacking. This study has everything to do with art education in that I am one of the few in the field. I also would like to say that I am okay with this not having anything to do with the academic field of art education. I question every day if I want to continue working within this system that has failed to recognize other ways of knowing, and even what forms of art and meaning making are considered to be a part of it. I've also found that there is a separation of art education from self-actions and educators with the exception of a few. By self-actions, I mean the prefix of self, followed by verbs like recognition, reflection, observing, and so on. Teachers are taught to teach information without first acknowledging where they come from, how they got to where they are or how to embrace the unfamiliarity (of students, artists, concepts, etc.). And I get that looking within oneself, examining personal biases, and unlearning are things some people are just not ready or willing to do before or while they're in service as educators. This I think is essential, especially to educators working towards unbiased teaching in order to meet the goals of social justice education. This I believe is where the acknowledgement and description of phenomenological

response and experiences can be used as a beginning point for creating a framework for understanding raced, classed, and gendered experiences of education.

I am grateful that my original plan didn't work out. Initially trying to do projects with hair stylists, I was trying to do something that I wasn't fully clear on why I was doing it outside of selfishly wanting to make myself feel good. There is power in being uncomfortable, and that is what has made writing this entire thing so...peaceful. Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. This combination of Black Feminist Theory/Thought (BFT), care, MeTelling, arts-based research, phenomenology, narrative inquiry has afforded me freedom to pursue myself as a subject and be able to sit with all of this without trying to analyze the complexity of life or simplify what I've learned and experienced into words. I don't want to call this a conclusion because doing this research from a reframed lens has actually been more like a beginning. Phenomenology looks at how things are being and becoming and the last time I checked, we should never stop becoming.

Care, MeTelling, place/position all come back to BFT. They all work together in the way that starting with self-action is a method of caring for community. What started out as an exploration of hair styling practice turned into a translation of a practice of caring into a learning practice. Care to me is knowing that there is something bigger than me. Care is necessary for survival. Care is a call to action. I can't pretend that my methods of care aren't heavily based on my faith. I've only come this far and survived because of God's presence in my life. Although this may be the conclusion to *this* project, this feels like a beginning. I'm still becoming.

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