

Afro centric Hairstyles: A Motif for Fabric Design and Construction

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ABSTRACT: Natural hairs amongst Ghanaian women have proven to be evolving as they continue to be used as a marker of cultural identification of Africans to denote age, religion, social ranks, marital status as well as other status symbols. This study casts light on the trending Afrocentric hairstyle among students of UEW. The study employed a qualitative study design. It used descriptive, field methods such as observation and interviews to collect data from students with trending Afrocentric hairstyles. It was concluded that braids, perm, natural, and weave-on were the types of hairstyles invoked at the university campus with braids and natural hairstyles being the most dominant. These two were used to design and construct fabrics in three different colors and styles. Again, hairstyles could be interpreted into varied symbols, proverbs, and so on to add up to the existing stocks. It was recommended that researchers in the field of textiles should look in African feminine beauty culture and used them to come up with real and abstract fabrics to create a global awareness of how they perceive aesthetics.

Keywords: Afrocentric, Hairstyles, Designing & Construction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Afrocentric and Africology were coined in the 1980s by African American scholars and activists (Kayange 2018). It focused on the history of the people of recent African descent. It is in some respect a response to global attitudes about African people and their historical contributions to cultural and political movements (Kayange 2018). Africans adhere to and believe that their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values (Kanneh 1998).

Hairstyling is a form of expression of identity, status, and wealth (Bobo 1995) different hairstyles have been passed from generation to generation even though some have been transformed over the periods. Hairstyling, as imagined, is a mutable part of humans' social and psychological lives which lends itself as a symbolic representation embedded in many social and cultural settings (Banks 2000). Within the visual culture, we find an innumerable array of hairstyles that have been explored to some extent by painters, sculptors, poets, and other artists all in the name of preserving and showcasing them. Unfortunately, they have always followed specific guidelines that allow these hairstyles to adorn and beautify their bodies and showcase cultures (Goldstein 1991).

Hair is a cultural trait (Banks 2000) and with a particular focus on Africa, natural hair plays a significant role in the cultural and spiritual lives of many groups of people. Bloomsbury Encarta (2004) explains hair as a type that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, which include inorganic hair relaxers. Hair may play an important role in the lives of African descent; this role is amplified due to the unique nature and texture of their black hairs. Since antiquity, African hairstyles have been known for their complex multifaceted nature (Bobo 1995). A notion that remains true today is that Africans treasure their hair irrespective of the condition under which they find themselves. For many women of African descent, hair is a motive symbolic and inseparable part of their beauty.

Hairstyles especially Afrocentric hairstyles are markers and signifiers of social class, age, marital status, racial identification, political beliefs, and attitudes about gender (Banks 2000). Every culture has various ways of portraying hairstyles. Again, hairstyling is an expression achieved by arranging hair into suitable balanced lines which complement the underlined hair and face structure (Banks 2000) they vary according to hair fashion, Sex, age, occupation coupled with apparel that goes with it. For ages, people have worn hairstyles

in a wide variety of styles and sculpted them into various forms. Because of the nature of this non-texturized nature of the African hair, it can be sculpted into various designs and these designs come out in different shapes and forms which is appealing to the eyes (Dramedo 2009). Africans their hairstyle has a link to their status in society and their spiritual affiliation. In most African communities' hairstyles are used to communicate visually more frequently than oral.

Thompson (2008) draws from a body of phenomenological description of young African Americans females who transitioned from chemically relaxed hair to natural hair. He thus sets the foundation for one of the ways by which they could view hairs as the original texture of one's hair before any chemical or mechanical manipulation. The lack of chemical treatment made their hairs look kinky and non-glossy as compared to hair that has been treated chemically to relax and loosen them into textures. He concluded that the kinky African hair texture is a natural cause of the growth of the type of hair due to where Africans find themselves.

In today's world, people have been designing unconsciously because they have been planning, assembling, arranging, and organizing their daily activities. Most of these actions are unconscious, yet they are not regarded as designing. According to Sackey (2002) design is an expression of the mind which has been interpreted through a process of planning which involves the organization of elements and principles of design to form an idea. So, every work of art is based on knowledge of design.

For a textile designer to survive in the competing markets, the designer should make his product very durable to distinguish them from other products. Contemporary textile designers in this lightly incorporate traditional symbols, totems proverbs, and metaphors as motifs into complex abstract designs for textiles printing and aesthetics. The question here is that have the textiles designers exhausted all the basic things we see at all times around us? Certainly not, there is the need to investigate how Afrocentric hairstyles could be used as motifs for textile designing. This research is aimed at identifying some Afrocentric hairstyles and developing them into motifs that can be used for making design patterns on fabrics to help bring variation in textile designing and construction. There is, therefore, a need in this context to research Afrocentric hairstyle designs and adapt them to textile designing and construction.

II. METHODOLOGY

The epistemological stand to arrive at the ontology of this research was coined under the qualitative methodology which employed descriptive and experimentation to conclude on the findings. This research employed an open-ended inductive interview, personal observations coupled with still-life images of hairstyles from the sampled population which comprised of all female students of Art Education, University of Education, Winneba. Some constructivist theorist interprets population as a group of interest to the researcher where findings of a subject area can be solicited (Leedy & Ormrod 2005; Owusu-Afriyie 2008).

In all, a total of twenty (20) females were selected and observed, and out of that, three (3) three dominant and trending hairstyles were picked from the sample size. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were exploited. This is because the researcher's sole interest was on the females since they tend to change hairstyles on daily basis due to their personal preferences. Again, a random sampling approach was used to extract the sample size from the large populist.

Secondary data was also sorted from books and the internet to draw vivid insights into the work under study. Hox and Boeije (2005) posit that secondary data is of the essence since it enhances in-depth understanding and prior discoveries of that subject area. Finally, the data collected were coded into themes, described, and experimented with in printing onto cotton fabrics.

III. FINDINGS

Based on the interpretive line of reasoning adopted under the qualitative approach, the researcher obtained both primary and secondary data with the aim of the objective set to buttress his line of reasoning. A thematic codified analysis was used on the primary data collected to reflect the interview presentation which was backed by prior discoveries emanated from the secondary sources of data collected.

Likewise, emic observational field notes were expanded coupled with still-life photographs of the various hairstyles of the sample respondents for the researcher to appreciate the interpretive theory of expression and impressionism under hair cosmetology. Below are the outcomes from the data in descriptive and experimental analysis.

a. INFLUENCE OF HAIRSTYLES ON PERSONALITY

An oral question was asked by the researcher to the sampled respondents as to whether the styling of the hair has any influence on their personalities. The interview data revealed that all the respondents totaling a hundred percent were conscientious that indeed styling of the hair plays an essential role in their bodies and the society. They view hairstyling as prestigious which showcases one's status or class in society. Again, the

respondents posited that individual likeness of a particular style boosts their confidence when they walk around campus or in the lecture rooms.

Interview data showed several of the respondents expressing their views on how dazzling beautiful they look in hairstyles such as weave on, braids, and perm hairstyles which makes them super attractive to the opposite sex.

A follow-up question was posed as to what accounts for the selection of their hairstyles. An interviewee opined that what is in vogue is what she looks out for just to make her fit into that society and upgrade her into a particular assumptive class created in their minds. A respondent postulated that women lookout for hairstyles that would define them and enhance their appearances. She added that though there are diverse hairstyles around, she normally goes for the natural hairstyle that has been partitioned and sawn in a bulb-like form because it conforms to her facial contours. An interviewee retreated that she would go in for anything expensive in hairstyling since she sees herself as expensive and of a higher class.

It became clear in the mind of the researcher from the data those dominant hairstyles such as braids, perm, weave on and natural were the trending hairstyles prevailing at the premises of Art Education in the University of Education, Winneba depending on how complex, stylized, and expensive one wears it boosts her confidence and put that person into a particular category of class.

Data showed that depending on how wealthy one is, would warrant some types of hair makeup. It was therefore concluded that hairstyling makes them beautiful, boosts their confidence in the society in which they find themselves, and again, makes them look expensive and of a high class.

b. OBSERVATIONS ON HAIRSTYLES

Emic look into hairstyles showed that it brings attraction, the feeling of belonging', confidence, and all wellbeing of a woman. Dominant hairstyles considered to be trending are; braids, perm, natural, and weave on.

Braids: it is a kind of hairstyle that looks like it was plaited in threes and raised in a form of ridges in long strands from the skull of the head and joined with other artificial hairs, hanging down way to the base of the bottom.

Perm: This type of hairstyle is observed as being treated with chemicals and heat set with rollers to bring out curly hairs in fine strands on the head.

Natural: Are seen as hairs that have not received any chemical treatments that will refine or distort the original makeup of the hairs.

Weave on: These are observed as artificial hair extensions in long or short strands that have permanently been treated with chemicals to form spirals or curls, attached to the normal hairs, or worn like a cap on the head.

After gathering all the hairstyles for this research, Photoshop software was used to manipulate the selected hairstyles of which other designs were combined in each stage of the designing process.

Below are the steps that were used in design processes.

- Selecting the hairstyle
- Cropping the hairstyle from the face of the wearer
- Developing the vector into a motif
- Resizing, arranging, and defining the motif into the pattern
- Addition of colors and background effects

c. AFRO HAIRSTYLE

Figure one is a female student wearing afro hair which has been divided into two with the front hair laid and the back rose.



Figure one; Image of Afro hairstyle. Source: (Studio work 2022)

Figure two is the vector image of figure one in black and white to bring out both the positive and the negative sides of the afro hairstyle.



Figure two; vector image of figure one. Source: (Studio work 2022)

III. CONSTRUCTION

The hairstyle was first selected and cropped to obtain the vector image. This was arranged in columns using the copied and pasted tool of Adobe Photoshop to get the motifs repeated into half drops. The second image was duplicated and skewed below to get the up and down motif arrangements. An Undulating line was used to fill the background of the design.

Colours

A thick black colour was first applied to the borders of the motifs and then a coffee brown and light brown were applied to the original motifs and the skewed motifs. Again, blue colour was applied to the background design to shoot the motifs up coupled with the black undulating lines to give texture to the background to make the whole design very solid for textile printing.

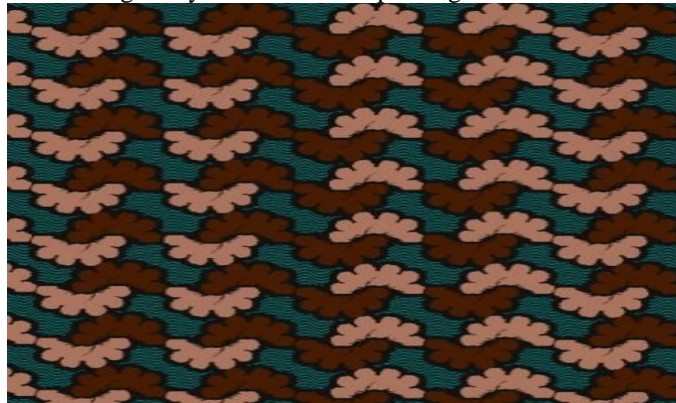


Figure three: Finished designed work of Afro hairstyle. Source: (Studio work 2022)

d. BRAID HAIRSTYLE

Construction

Figure four is the image of a female student wearing long braids that have been woven in a V-shaped form raised in a form of ridges from the base of the skull in long strands to the tip of the bottom.



Figure four; image of Braids hairstyle. Source: (Studio work 2022)

Figure five is the vector image of figure one in black and white to bring out both the positive and the negative sides of the braided hairstyle that has been skewed to the right.



Figure six; vector image of figure five skewed to the right. Source: (Studio work 2022)

IV. CONSTRUCTION

The braid hairstyle was first selected and cropped as shown above and then a vector image was obtained and arranged in columns. It was then copied and pasted to get the subsequent motif beneath. The second image was then vertically flipped to get the motif for the arrangement. The motif was then arranged horizontally, and as a unit repeated and was copied and pasted to fill the whole page. Crinkled lines were used to fill the background of the motifs.

Colour

Multiple colours such as turquoise green, gray and black were used in the application of the design. Black was used for the outside designs of the motifs, turquoise green for the background colour, and gray to fill some portions of the motif to create some abstract effect of the motifs to make the work look somewhat complex with unique features to make the design work complete for fabric printing.

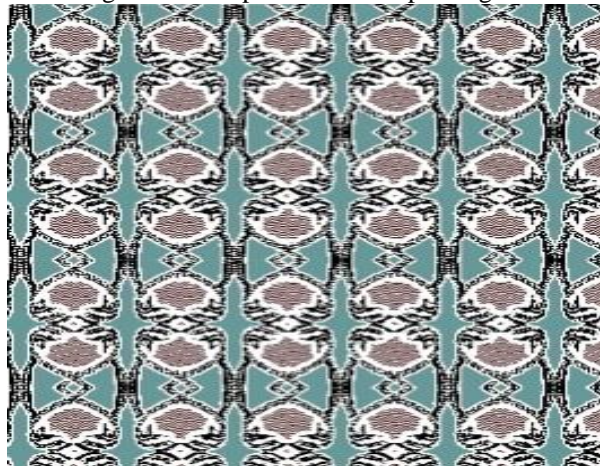


Figure seven; final design work from braided hairstyle. Source: (Studio work 2022)

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Textile designing and construction play a very important role in the textile industry. These significant roles and their importance cannot be overlooked. Interestingly most of the motifs or symbols are always being modified to suit various purposes while new ones are also designed to add to the existing stock to prove that although they are just hairstyles, they can be well interpreted to form motifs in designing clothes. It is therefore recommended that researchers keep looking into natural hair which healthier and defines the African feminine beauty styles as well as using these body styles in constructing fabrics augment true African beauty cosmetology and global awareness of what they perceive as aesthetics. Finally, textiles companies should have a correspondence with all the art designing schools to come up with design themes for industrial textiles construction to beautify and also sell their culture locally and globally.

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