**(K)notting Strands of Change: Radical Deconstruction Through Afrofuturist-Feminist Design**

by

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Abstract

Black women have combatted hegemonic forces that forced them into chattel slavery and other forms oppression by using needle, thread, patterns, and design for centuries (Tobin & Dobard, 1999). Working through needle, thread, and textile has allowed Black women to gain a sense of community and a sense of self to cope with and trouble daily discriminations encountered in everyday life (Leon, 2006). This act of resistance has privileged the materials and textiles that marginalized Black women fiber/textile artists use as the fiber/textile artists select and interact with materials they can intentionally encode with messages for resistance and deliverance. However, Black women still face erasure and omission of their sociopolitical efforts in crafting their liberation through design (Hewett, 2021). While these erasures exist, Black women scholars and designers show their valiant efforts to make safe spaces and epistemologies to acknowledge and legitimize their voices in the midst of Eurocentric traditions in systems of knowledges. In this study, I investigate ways of negotiating everyday life and giving agency to materials and design through my Afrofuturist-feminist culturalism. I use Cynthia B. Dillard's methodology of surrender and Venus Evans-Winters' mosaic approach to guide this critical autoethnography of closely reading my written and creative scholarship in apparel design. Paradigms that center Black women's voices are interlaced with oppositional knowledges that validate Black women's experiences and offer visibility to them while challenging hegemonic practices of denying Black women safety and legitimacy in disciplines and public spaces (Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Toliver, 2022). I use (k)notting (AmberBeckyCreative, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022) as an analysis to thematize my findings into meta- and sub-themes of Afrofuturist and Black feminist concepts, braiding narratives of liberation across time, symbology in design, hybridity and liminality as it pertains to Black women's life in design. I argue that Black women construct liberations in their own Black woman-led epistemologies of pasts, presents, and futures to define themselves and their existence, resisting anti-Black discursive practices in design and research.

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| ABC | AmberBeckyCreative |
| BFT | Black feminist theory/Black feminist thought |
| EFE | Endarkened feminist epistemology |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background

Black women have suffered many losses upon their forced arrival and continued stay in the Americas, emanating from chattel slavery and the erasure of knowledges and cultural markers. In her process tracing, Strings (2019) chronicles the history of slavery and how this newly found power that the European elite had uncovered led not only to the disparity between wealthy white Europeans and Black people but the outright abuse that had befallen these transplanted Africans. Dutch, French, and British intellectuals had long since recorded the "facts" of African bodies and temperaments, surmising that Black Americans and Black Africans "have no moral sensations, no taste but for women, gormandizing and drinking to excess, but wish to be idle" (Edward Long quoted in Strings, 2019, p. 83). Disparaging comments such as the one provided by British scholar Edward Long were reinforced by other white male scholars and medical professionals who intended to gain notoriety for their intelligence and scholarly debates. Many of these 18th century thinkers built upon the scholarship of either preceding or competing contemporary scholars (Strings, 2019). The concoction of racial difference (and, thus, stereotyping) has risen out of the need for European whites to categorize and, in extreme cases, pathologize Blackness as it pertains to, relates to, and reifies whiteness. "Part of [the appeal of contemporarily theorized racial differences'] appeal was that they provided a convenient explanation for both black skin and corpulence" (Strings, 2019, p. 85), owing to a creation of antiblack stereotypes that have permeated throughout every aspect of Black life and created hardships for Black women and their bodies.

Damage outside of the creation of overt, deleterious stereotypes has presently corrupted the public opinion and progress of Black women. Centuries of erasure have prohibited widespread knowledge formation about Black communities and has resulted in a slippery slope of a lack of resources and unfair treatments across many facets of life, including "poverty, racism, imperialism, lynching, welfare, economic exploitation, sterilization abuse, decent housing[, etc.]" post-civil war (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 2; see also Berry et al., 2022). The "tendency to ignore long years of political struggle aimed at eradicating the multiple oppressions that black women experience resulted in erroneous notions about the relevance of feminism to the black community during the second wave of the women's movement" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, pp. 1-2). The proclivity for inconsideration of Black women's battles in sociopolitical issues creates a platform for Black women to construct and establish themselves in the realm of possibility in many disciplines and sectors.

## Problem statement

The political erasure of Blackness (re)defined has shown up in philosophical paradigms, the American educational system, medicine, and design (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Design has been celebrated as one of the most liberating practices and disciplines in the world (Berry et al., 2022; Walters, 2021). However, it has also served as one of the most exclusive professions. For decades, marginalized peoples, those belonging to fat communities; disabled communities; black and indigenous communities; etc., have been left out with little consideration in design. "[W]e have to learn the other side in order to produce design work for people consumers, or whomever we're trying to communicate to and with" (Walters, 2021, p. 18). Black designers and design scholars across multiple disciplines have noted this problem (Berry et al., 2022; Hewett, 2021;

Walters, 2021; Wilkins, 2007). Hewett (2021) notes that the lack of attention paid to Black women designers and Black design as a paradigm is a "systemic issue, not an individual one, and it extends beyond knitting to the larger fiber arts and crafts world" (p. 1). But this problem affects Black design in its entirety. Berry et al. (2022) argue that the erasure of Black creativity and Black American history is actively playing out "in real time" (p. 9).

Amid the blatant exclusionary practice of nullifying Black history and creations in the Americas, specifically the U.S., Black women still strive to work endlessly to provide a hallmark for Black achievements and justices. Through cunning trickery, education and communication, and community and connection, Black women have fought hard to abolish social hierarchies, rally resources for underprivileged communities, and protect those within their care. Benjamin (2015) postulates that the Akan-fabled spider god Ananse could not have been slain if it were not for the cleverness of a Black woman; in the folklore, the wife of one of the brothers advised the pair of siblings to "learn and integrate" the ways of the monster (p. 28). She also chronicles how prior to Emancipation, seamstress to the family of Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Keckley, bartered, traded, purchased, and stitched her and her son's way to freedom (Benjamin, 2015). Other scholars have noted similar liberatory constructions that have transcended time and space. Sylvanus (2016) documents how Dutch wax cloth has been distributed across Togo and globally by the efforts and ingenuity of fierce Black women who made billions even under the rule of a merciless dictator. Similar to the wife in the Ananse fable, these clever women learned how to craft freedom amid dire, and possibly fatal, situations.

Re-identification in how Black women create a corpus of knowledge through materiality is seen in how Dutch wax cloth has been distributed across Togo and other West African

countries. Sylvanus (2016) explains how West African women negotiated their power even while given colonized positions as traders. These women became the tastemakers for what African fashion evolved into, even though rooms full of foreign European white men who had never visited Africa were the ones who designed fabrics for West Africans. These Dutch men could not fathom what African colors, iconography, or symbology could mean to the "natives" they were designing for, having not done the ethnographic work it would take to capture the essence endemic to the West African populous.

Sylvanus (2016) does a wonderful job of examining how white Dutch designers went about scouting examples for prints for Africans. What is more interesting is how Sabrina Strings (2019) delves into how it came to be that the Dutch began doing business with Africans. Strings (2019) records how the 17th century saw an upsurge of European nations embarking on the slave trade, one of which was the Netherlands. Because of the success in the slave trade in the Netherlands, the Dutch, along with the British, had actively worked to denigrate and produce negative stereotypes of Black peoples, specifically Black women. With control of how the public viewed and accessed Black women, it was a matter of time for antiblack systems to dictate and take control over the commodities produced for and by enslaved African and Black populations.

Further these two texts (Sylvanus, 2016; Strings, 2019) coupled with Tate (2005) chronicle the intent of Black women's *capture-and-release* by the Dutch, hunting down Black women for personal leisure and convenience. Sylvanus (2016) solidifies Tate's (2005) conceptualization of hybridity, "an interactional process in which Black identities are constantly created and recreated" (Tate, 2005, p. 4), as it pertains to cloth, fashion, and materiality. Ankara (or Dutch wax) cloth and African women as tastemakers allow Black women to hybridize their

social location, their position in the wax cloth trade, and their experiences in a form of agency and power.

## Research Inquiry

To address this problem, I pose the research inquiry: How do I, as a Black designer and scholar, negotiate the everyday, past and present, with communicative devices in design through critical lenses of Afrofuturism and Black feminist theory and give agency to design and materials based on my culturalism?

Because there are gaps in the literature investigating Black women design scholars in apparel design, I look to literature in other design fields. McCoy (2003) speaks from a graphic design perspective and many of the issues she discusses in her research make their appearance in the field of apparel design. She discusses the limitations and dangers of using a monolithic and objective perspective in how designers conceptualize the world for others. The intent of objectivity originally served Europeans, as they worked towards streamlining functionality and ameliorating life for elite and wealthy Europeans and attaching deficiencies to Black communities (Tillman, 2002; Strings, 2019). Doing so did not hold consideration for any other communities of people living in Europe upon the discovery of various design disciplines. As new critical schools of thought have entered the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, critical epistemologies have situated themselves innovatively in unforeseen ways across design and praxis. New paradigms have been and should be considered to assist in promulgating solutions for social issues in design sectors. McCoy (2003) makes a compelling argument when she states that how we think about and do design "most often trains students to think of themselves as passive arbitrators of the message between the client/sender and audience/receiver, rather than as

advocates for the message content or the audience" (p. 4). Unfortunately, this framing of design pedagogy privileges racist, ableist, and all-around exclusive practices, as it encourages antiblack ideologies when designers do not learn to scrutinize and counteract heteropatriarchy within design.

Literature heavy in embroidery, quilting, and other needlework rely heavily on and expose the world to beautiful works created by Europeans and/or white women (see Parker, 1984 and Amos & Binkley, 2020). The fiber works covered by these authors do little to embrace the changes and liberatory excursions enacted by pre-, post-, and colonial Black women. With the exception of a sentence in the introduction about world-famous Black fiber artist Faith Ringgold (Amos & Binkley, 2020), neither of these anthologies story the Black woman's redemptive fiber work. Scholars such as Parker (1984) and Amos and Binkley (2020) actively participate in the omission and erasure of Black female fiber workers in the past and present and how these practices play an incremental role in the signification of freedom for women. More recently, Black women textile artists and designers have investigated and interviewed Black women creators and other women of color who worked with textiles and fibers and the impact of hearing their individualized stories and reasons for making (Hewett 2021; Shealey, 2021).

## Research Purpose

In light of Afro-pessimism, a set of theories that investigates antiblackness, slavery and neo-slavery institutions; reconceptualizes the black/white binary; denies the conceptualization of people of color; and claims that antiblackness is the root of setbacks for the African diaspora (Ray et al., 2017), I explore ways in which Black women, through various aspects of design and in the midst of continuous and dynamic antiblackness, shift and redefine their power and joy in

the third space and the crosshairs of oppression, or what I define as Afro-optimism. Tillman (2002) illuminates many Black women scholars' use of culturally sensitive research approaches, contending that these approaches seek to "reveal, understand, and respond to unequal power relations that may minimize, marginalize, subjugate, or exclude the multiple realities and knowledge bases of African Americans" (p. 6). She informs that conducting research from Black women's sociocultural standpoints offers an emic perspective from Black women's distinct experiences and social positioning. Using epistemologies intrinsic to Black women's knowledges [i.e., Collins' (1990) Black feminist thought; Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology; Kershaw's (1989) Afrocentric emancipatory methodology] promulgate transformation in dominant research rhetoric, positioning Black women as knowledge producers, change agents, and experts in academia and in the field. The purpose of this research inquiry is to explore and demonstrate ways in which Black women design scholars may weave their onto-epistemologies into their research.

Black women position and re-position themselves as Black women through dominant and marginalized discourse. Tate (2005) has analyzed how Black women's performativity construct their identities, through "third space of talk through translation" (p. 79). By negotiating and talking back to dominant discourses, Black women have found power in creating self-images that combat racialized and gendered ideologies of what Black women are (or are not) (Collins, 2000). This re-creation is seen in how Black women have disseminated text, textiles, and other discourse since slavery (Benjamin, 2015; Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Sylvanus, 2019).

Tate (2005) expresses the need for uplifting and empowering research within and for Black communities, due to the burnout and fatigue they feel from being experimented on, or, as

Tillman (2002) situates it, being the subjected to deficit and/or deficient research. Both Tillman (2002) and Tate (2005) call to action the need for culturally sensitive research approaches, given the state of Black communities and the history of research within them.

## Research approach

In this study, I use Evans-Winters' (2019) *mosaic*, qualitative epistemology that centers Black feminist multidimensional perspectives in research, as an approach to theoretically framing this work around Black feminist thought, Afrofuturism, and materiality. In this work, mosaic provides a backdrop to align the ostensibly disparate works in my scholarship. It binds together my ontology, epistemology, and axiology in the performance of my thinking, designing, and researching. Mosaic facilitates the achievement of piecing and stitching together theoretical and conceptual frameworks that resonate with my social location as a Black woman in the process of always becoming and piecing myself together in the American educational system and as a multi-hyphenated creator. Mosaic also plays a large role in identifying and selecting my data sources within my scholarship, as I weave intricate tales through the data I selected. Mosaic approach provides me with access to research in authentic means to research that resonates with my experiences.

As the study progresses, I evoke Dillard's (2006a) methodology of surrender, an epistemology that pairs well with mosaic, as it envelops intimacy in meditative and faith filled research spaces for Black women researchers, allowing intrinsic qualities and knowledges to be explored, to aggregate my written and creative scholarships; reflect on their purposes; and analyze their content, and expounded upon. To this, I add conceptual frameworks of Afrofuturism and Black feminist theory to center my voice and experiences as a Black woman

designer-scholar.  I, then, educe (k)notting (AmberBeckyCreative, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022) as analysis, a generative entanglement of epistemologies, theories, methodologies, art, and making with the self. (K)notting seeks to find patterns similar to a mosaic and help develop the picture of incorporating authenticity, spirituality, cultural, material, and nuance to my approach to designing for Black women who have been left in the margins.

## Definition of terms

**Afro-optimism:** ways in which Black women, in the midst of continuous and dynamic antiblackness, shift and redefine their power and joy in the third space and the crosshairs of oppression

**Afro-pessimism:** "a body of theory that is unrelentingly focused on the historical specificity of antiblackness" as it critiques racial progression and the people of color construct, "insists up the distinctness of antiblackness from other forms of racism", re-establishes the black/white binary as black/nonblack antagonism, and investigates slavery and neo-slavery abolition (Ray et al., 2017, p. 148-149)

**Afrofuturism:** "a mechanism for understanding the real world situations of oppression in the contemporary world in the context of the ever-present past, while charting the future situation through the arts" (Hamilton, 2017, p. 19)

**Autoethnography:** "reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect" (Denizen quoted in Lapadat, 2017, p. 592)

**Black feminist thought [or theory] (BFT):** a theoretical perspective that 'capture[s] the emancipatory vision and acts of resistance among a diverse group of African American women who attempt in their writings to articulate their understanding of the complex nature of black womanhood, the interlocking nature of the oppressions black women suffer, and the necessity of sustained struggle in their quest for self-definition, the liberation of black people, and gender equality (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. xiv)

**Bricolage approach:** an approach to methods and theory that allows the researcher to "draw upon multiple theoretical and methodological frameworks" (McCloud, 2015, p. 263)

**Critical autoethnography:** an autoethnographic approach that converges traditional methods (e.g., interviews, document reviews, etc.) with a critical aim or a narrative lens intended to indicate the field towards dismantling patterns of power and domination (Durdella, 2019)

**Endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE):** standpoint that articulates "how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought…[and distinguishes] difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African-American women" (Dillard, 2000, p. 662)

**Hybridity:** "an interactional process in which Black identities are constantly created and recreated" (Tate, 2005, p. 4)

**(K)notting (or knotting or knot mattering):** a reconsideration of methodology, pedagogy, and material as they intertwine with humans and materials (ABC, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022)

**Liminality:** "inbetween spaces" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 40; see also Raheem, 2022)

**Materiality:** theory of things (Amos & Binkley, 2020; Miller, 2010); Miller (2010) posits that "materiality is obviously important to the study of media, the definition of art, the creation of new financial instruments, environmental politics and the respect we have for persons" (p. 70).

**Methodology of surrender:** a methodology that envelops intimacy in meditative and faith filled research spaces for Black women researchers, allowing intrinsic qualities and knowledges to be explored (Dillard, 2006a)

**Mosaic approach:** "the process of creating images with an assortment of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other objects put together to create a pattern or picture" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 15); a cultural and spiritual approach to qualitative research inquiry that is similar to the

bricolage approach established by Evans-Winters (2019) and combines Black women scholars "wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, and experiences [in] the research process" (p. 15).

**Sankofa:** Akan iconography; Adinkra glyph signifying "It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget," or "learn from or build on the past" (Temple, 2010, p. 127)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Epistemology informs the research process, method, and analysis. Therefore, it is important to lay that groundwork here to explain my knowledge formation and thought process for gathering literature to investigate my research inquiry, the conceptual framework, and, later, the research plan. This chapter synthesizes how Evans-Winters' (2019) mosaic approach to qualitative inquiry, a unique property of Black feminism, encourages Black feminist scholars to use segments of Black women's multiple identities to stitch multifaceted worldviews that best represent their intersectionalities through theoretical and conceptual scaffolding found below. The amalgamation supports the multiple theories that inform this work, past work, and future work that I have and will produce. I also introduce Dillard's (2006a) methodology of surrender, which stems from her endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE; Dillard, 2000) that arises from Black feminist theory/thought (BFT). As part of this mosaic, I borrow a methodology of surrender from EFE to carefully craft this review of literature that is nourishing to and is representative of Black women's liberatory efforts and transformation through research in and out of academia. Dillard (2006a) posits that "our methodological choices are spiritual choices, interrelated and whole" (p. 86) because of how researchers should engage surrender in their research. Moving in the spirit ensures that scholars research responsibly, consider others when selecting research processes, and find frameworks that inspire marginalized communities.

I discuss in this chapter the epistemological underpinnings of this study that justify the choice of conceptual and theoretical network. I also review and synthesize the literature for Black feminist theory, a brief history of Afrofuturism and its relationship with feminism, materiality, methodology of surrender, Black women's performativity, and knotting. Lastly, I

conclude with my conceptual framework for this study and address gaps in the literature and how this study will add to the body of knowledge.

## Epistemological Underpinnings

Akin to the bricolage approach initiated by Kincheloe (2001; see also McCloud, 2015 and Morton, 2023), Evans-Winters (2019) introduces qualitative research imbued with Black feminist epistemologies as a mosaic. She describes qualitative research historically and metaphorically existing as "a bricolage, a montage, quilt-making, and musical improvisation" (p. 15). The process of creating mosaics, according to Evans-Winters (2019), is a "process of creating images with an assortment of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other objects put together to create a pattern or picture" (p. 15). She goes on to reveal that the mosaic approach is significant spiritually and culturally in context, often bridging together Black women scholars' experiences to the research process. Black women's experience in construction of knowledge, expertise, and technique provides excellent fodder for the mosaic approach to qualitative inquiry, as it creatively highlights the multi-facets of Black women's identities.

Because of the interrelatedness of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are at the intersections of this study, it heavily relies on mosaic approach to qualitative inquiry of research, supplying epistemological grounding for the context in which I present the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, methodology, and analysis of this research study. This concept is an epistemological approach to methods and theories that allow the researcher to combine "diverse elements, patterns, and forms" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 15) as it critiques heteronormative and antiblack Eurocentric proclamations of performing research. In so doing, I can marry the tenets of Black feminist theory (or thought) with the core tenets of Afrofuturism, as I explore how these theoretical framings relate to and guide me through the problem of this study. The mosaic

approach also translates throughout the methodology of surrender that is used later in this study. Similar to this methodology, performing a mosaic "expose[s] and trouble[s] marginalization and exclusionary practices in qualitative inquiry" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 15). This approach aptly applies as it connotes a denouncement of white domination, allowing the imaginative and speculative nature of Afrofuturism, Black feminist thought, and the power of materiality within the dialectical context of this chapter to come to the forefront.

I also invoke Dillard's (2006a) methodology of surrender as an epistemological foundation that undergirds this research inquiry. A practice that aligns with Evans-Winters' (2019) mosaic approach, surrender perpetuates the salience of developing naturalistic and spirit-filled research methodologies indigenous to Black women's ways of meaning-making and knowledge production. Dillard (2006a) argues that the need to serve our communities, spiritual guidance, and the desire to "do something we never imagined" (p. 81) inspire Black women researchers to authentically engage with scholarship and the research realm, often leading Black women to embed intimacy in their research with others or as the sole "subject" of their research. Thus, engaging with methods that come natural to Black women's experiential knowledges, they embark on the "spiritual nature of our human relationships within our research" (Dillard, 2006a, p. 82). Surrender addresses two prominent questions: 1) who is the researcher growing into as they create nothing and 2) who is the researcher growing into as they reject nothing? Applying these questions, surrender provides the foundation for uncovering methodological practices that embrace and engage Black women's mind, body, and spirit (more on this methodology below).

## Black feminist theory

Because of Black feminist theory's voracity for Black women's liberation from oppressive and marginalizing sociopolitical systems, it will be used in dialogue with other frameworks for this study. BFT, according to Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995),

> capture[s] the emancipatory vision and acts of resistance among a diverse group of African American women who attempt in their writings to articulate their understanding of the complex nature of black womanhood, the interlocking nature of the oppressions black women suffer, and the necessity of sustained struggle in their quest for self-definition, the liberation of black people, and gender equality (p. xiv).

BFT centers the existence and experiences of the breadth of its purveyors and their multiplicity. Akin to the diverse range of authors who promulgate BFT or other critical frameworks, this paradigm is not monolithic in goals or topics (Turpin, 2021).

BFT began to circulate amongst Black women abolitionists' circles in the 1830s, when Black women were politicizing antislavery tactics and scholarship. Some of the foremothers of Black feminism were Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, and Frances E. W. Harper (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). These freed Black women began to speak out against crimes against humanity when they were caught up in the matrix of domination and had their race and gender intersections held against them by the rest of society (Collins, 2000). When white women would not assist them and Black men could not assist them, Black women came to their own aid. BFT constitutes a power for the othered Black woman that "is used to deconstruct the structures of oppression" (Turpin, 2021, p. 26).

Black feminist theory, a critical paradigm that has been in existence for nearly two centuries but gained recognition outside of African American women in the 1960s (Guy-Sheftall,

1995), has preluded many conceptual frameworks, including Afrofuturism (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Turpin, 2021). Guy-Sheftall (1995) highlights how Black women fiction authors, their feminist enterprises, and their discourses have been the foci of imaginative or speculative literature, or what has also been known as Afrofuturism, growing out of the 1960s. "Afrofuturism as a movement itself may be the first in which black women creators are credited for the power of their imaginations and are equally represented as the face of the future and the shapers of the future" (Womack, 2012, para. 16).

## Afrofuturism

### History

Though Afrofuturism is touted as being practiced for over a century, it has gained notoriety as an art form since the 1960s (Anderson & Jones, 2016; Toliver, 2022). In true marginalized form, early producers of Afrofuturist speculative fiction in the late 19th century and early 20th century received pushback (Toliver, 2022). Their work was deemed inferior to more prestigious authors and published in disproportionate numbers (a tactic still being displayed in the twenty-first century; see Jemisin, 2018). Originally seen as an aesthetic, its movement coincided with the Black Arts Movement (Turpin, 2021) and countered the heavy emphasis on male perspectives that the Black Arts Movement seemed to maintain (Anderson & Jones, 2016; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Turpin, 2021; see also Neal, 1968). This mechanism, Afrofuturism, emerged as "a move away and an answer to the Eurocentric perspective of the twentieth century's…history of African peoples [and its erasure]" (Anderson, 2016, p. 228). Scholars highlight pioneers of Afrofuturism as George Clinton, Herbie Hancock, Octavia E. Butler, Sun Ra, Jimi Hendrix, and John and Alice Coltrane (Anderson, 2016; Leong, 2016; Morris, 2012, Toliver, 2022). Afrofuturism's presence has appeared in literary studies, art methods, and

Africana studies (Anderson & Jones, 2016; Toliver, 2022). Scholar Kodwo Eshun produced one of the most infamous book-length manifestos in honor of Afrofuturism in 1998 (Anderson & Jones, 2016).

> Given its appellation in the early 1990s by Mark Dery, Afrofuturism has been defined as [s]peculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future (Dery quoted in Turpin, 2021, p. 30).

Other scholars have described it thus: "a cultural aesthetic in which Black authors create speculative texts that center Black characters in an effort to reclaim and recover the past, counter negative and elevate positive realities that exist in the present, and create new possibilities for the future" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxi). Akpem describes Afrofuturism as "an exploration and methodology of liberation, simultaneously both a location and a journey" (quoted in Turpin, 2021, p. 30). Over the decades the definitions and descriptions of Afrofuturism has been broadened to encapsulate much more than reactionary "Black production, but Black life as a whole (Toliver, 2022, p. xxi). Afrofuturist scholars Alondra Nelson, Ytasha Womack, and others have chimed in on definitions that have been just as dynamic as the people and the temporal and spatial map points that these definitions are intended to represent. These descriptions address the marginalization of Black folks and decentering and transcending above said marginalization in an imagined future. This praxis is a call to Afrodiasporic cultures to embrace their versions of art, music, speculative science fiction and fantasy, and cybernetics along with other technology.

For the purpose of this study, I align this work with the operational definition provided by Hamilton (2017). She expresses Afrofuturism as "a mechanism for understanding the real-world

situations of oppression in the contemporary world in the context of the ever-present past, while charting the future situation through the arts" (p. 19). She posits that Afrofuturism has interdependency with Black liberation, transformation, temporality, and materiality, lending the epistemology to mesh with Black communities' conceptualizations of freedom, change, time/space, and objects.

**Afrofuturism and feminism**

Scholars have synthesized that Afrofuturism and BFT serve similar purposes for the same communities. Morris (2012) tells us that "Afrofuturism's transgressive politics align with the fundamental tenets of black feminist thought" (p. 153). She further goes to say that these two schools of thought are in talks with one another, describing their relationship as "symbiotic" (p. 153). In her manifesto *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) introduces her theorizing with ideas of lexical and theoretical accessibility for Black women within and without the academe, giving power to Black women's experiences and rhetoric. She acknowledges the interplay of "Afrocentric philosophy, feminist theory, Marxist social thought, the sociology of knowledge, critical theory, and postmodernism" (p. vii) in ways that are not reductive in context but use discourse that is approachable for marginalized folks. Afrofuturism cites similar interplays:

> Afrofuturism may be characterized as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken. (Eshun, 2003, p. 301)

Morris (2019) posits

> Afrofuturist feminism is a way of knowing and moving through the world that is a strategy for naming and navigating complicated and often vexed histories and visions of the future, one that places people of color at the center and is fundamentally interested in transgressing conventional systems of power and dominance, especially as it relates to the intersection of race and gender. [It] engages the issues around race, power, and heritage at the center of Africana studies but with an attention to gender often missing from Africana studies more generally. (p. 78)

She notes how Black women are often martyrs, pariahs, or victims in past and future texts, and, within Afrofuturist feminism, Black women can be revered as having agential power through their protagonist positioning.

Several Black women activists have built scholarship at the intersection of Afrofuturism and [Black] feminism. Morris (2012) centers her study around Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* and how, if read through an Afrofuturist-feminist lens, exemplifies how the vampires in the novel "are vulnerable to constraints similar to those faced by people in communities that are marginalized because of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability" (p. 147). She goes on to claim that struggles present in this text written by the mother of speculative fiction highlights how all science fiction does not create utopic remedies but provides epistemologies that may be tangible in Black people's quotidian lives. Morris (2012) even theorizes Afrofuturist feminism as "a reflection of the shared central tenets of Afrofuturism and black feminist thought and reflects a literary tradition in which people of African descent and transgressive, feminist practices born of or from across the Afrodiaspora are key to a progressive future" (p.154). Leong (2016) also reads work by Octavia Butler, the *Parable* duology, through Black feminism and the othering and omission of the Black body throughout new materialisms theorization of the Anthropocene

epoch. In line with the omission of the Black female body, Professor Elizabeth Hamilton (2017) researches the relationship that Afrofuturism and feminism has with art and art history. She questions the "technologies of survival" (p.18) for Black people in the US and globally in response to disproportionate murders of Black bodies and a revival of blatant racism that rivals violence chronicled during the Civil Rights Movement and other apartheids. Hamilton's (2017) convergence of Afrofuturism and Black feminism identifies how male artists have made manifest their ideals of the Black body in the future and the obvious omission of Black women as *Afronauts*. This omission clearly defines that "the black female body is also in danger in a white supremacist society" (Hamilton, 2017, *p. 20*), as the artists outfitted human simulacra art subjects with survival technologies for the future.

Toliver (2022) seamlessly marries Black feminist thought, Afrofuturism, and indigenous storywork in her qualitative research method of Endarkened storywork.

> Endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE) allows space for alternative ways of knowing, and it also investigates and challenges what is deemed justifiable in research. ISW [Indigenous story work] is a methodology that hinges upon Indigenous storytelling and argues for an expansion of research practices that allows for alternative sites of research and method. Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that honors the speculative thinking of Black people and challenges traditional conceptions of time, place, and being. Although they may seem to begin in different disciplines, they're connected through their commitment to stories and storytelling to alternative sites of knowledge and being, and to honoring the spiritual within the everyday lives of people whose stories have been discounted in traditional settings. (p. xvi)

## Materiality

Tauke et al. (2015) pose pertinent questions in consideration of materiality and a duty to cultural history and understanding: “If design is a material form of social praxis, then what role might cultural history play in its creation? When do material form and cultural history intersect with one another during the design process, and what is affected when technique and meaning converge” (p. 18). These questions assist in framing that material *and technique* do not exist simply as vehicles for transporting activist-creators’ ideas, especially where there is cultural context involved.

Elizabeth C. Hamilton (2017) contextualizes materiality within Afrofuturism’s pragmatic approaches by artists and other dreamer-activists. Here she urges us to see the interdependence of materiality (among other considerations) with Afrofuturism (See Figure 1). She claims that material is inherent to the nature of works (of art) created by Afrofuturists and ultimately are part of the semantics of each creation, not meant as objet d’art reserved to undermine the subject matter: “The material does not by any means subordinate the subject, but it is significant to the understanding of each work of art” (Hamilton, 2017, p. 20). This is widely evinced in Hamilton’s selected and unselected art by Yinka Shonibare and his pervasive use of Dutch wax prints/Ankara cloth. In an artist statement, Shonibare (1997) expounds upon his artistic approaches with his use of Ankara cloth materiality. He suggests that his material selection and the form of his depiction is molded by and melds together the hybridity of his upbringing as a British-born Nigerian and the duality of living in Eurocentric and Afrocentric worlds throughout his life. His use of cloth is his attempt at displaying his authentic self as he forayed into art during a time when artists were grandstanding authenticity.

The Afrodiaspora has a tightly woven relationship with material whether it be new material (Sylvanus, 2016), new clothing (Miller, 2010; Sylvanus, 2016), or even old "waste" material retired for quilting (Tobin & Dobard, 1999; Benjamin, 2015; Priest, 2015; Toliver, 2022). In fact, Priest (2014) helps us make the connection of Black women's bodies, oppression, and material through Alice Walker's extensive scholarship on Black women by stating, "Walker has famously proclaimed the quilt as a metaphor for cultural creation and a mode of redress for oppressions enacted on the Black female body; counterbalancing 'bodily death' is the 'living creativity' that the quilt represents, the growth of wholeness out of waste" (Alice Walker quoted in Priest, 2014, pp. 463-464).

Researchers show that African and descendants of African women use clothing not as mere protection from the elements, but as conspicuous means to display their culture and their richness, oftentimes in spite of their socioeconomic status (Miller, 2010; Sylvanus, 2016; Strings, 2019). Miller (2010) recounts his ethnographic work with impoverished Trinidadian squatters who barely had proper utilities for their homes, yet they were sure to outfit themselves in many opulent costumes and shoes for any occasion: "A common leisure activity was to hold a fashion display, on a temporary catwalk, along one of the open spaces within the squatters' encampment" (p. 14).

## Methodology of surrender

Methodology of surrender "seeks to embrace an intimate research space that is both meditative (that is, that listens and heeds the wisdom of the ancestors and the Creator) and faith filled (that is, prayerfully attentive and grateful to the spirits and the Creator)" (Dillard, 2006a, pp. 82-83). This methodology, as per Dillard (2006a), allows the researcher to explore their roots, being embedded in Eurocentric conceptualizations of Africa and African life and also

"historical and contemporary manifestations of shared spiritual and indigenous cultural traditions and life" (p. 83). Dillard also shares that her methodological practices in research are intended to be imbued with unconditional love and to achieve this unbounded love, researchers have to renounce tenets of Eurocentric schools of research practices: "objectivity, domination, patriarchy, and inequity" (p. 83).

While Dillard's (2006a) methodological work on *re-search* highlights four major tenets (love, compassion, reciprocity, and ritual), she allows for dynamic changes within these principles, according to the researcher who takes up this methodology. Researchers may take or leave these precepts as they chose, provided they surrender to mind, body, spirit, and community in their work. She defines love as "the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness […] the missing element is the need to engage love as the *experience* that creates more reciprocal (and thus more just) sites of inquiry" (emphasis in original; Dillard, 2006a, p. 84). The processes of observing and heeding grow researchers spiritually so that we may serve our participants the same way we serve ourselves. When researchers foster love within their research projects, we invite co-creation and more accurate depictions and surrender divisive discourses and techniques in research.

Compassion is defined as "the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering through our research work" (Dillard, 2006a, p. 84). Compassion assists researchers with accepting the responsibility to meliorate marginalized communities of their suffering by having a swelling concern for community matters. With compassion, researchers have a predilection for restoring and serving ebullience to communities treated with disparity. Researchers do not have to face the same suffering as the communities they serve, but we must surrender prestige and esteem to a grassroots approach.

Dillard goes on to explain reciprocity as the "intention and capacity to see human beings as equal" (p. 85). Researchers need to surrender inequity and prejudice that creates barriers between those who conduct research and those who are researched. Researchers must surrender haughty agendas for research to serve communities to the utmost. She warns that researchers "cannot be in loving, reciprocal relationships with" (p. 85) participants if we exalt our research agendas over marginalized communities' needs and desires.

Finally, ritual "is the process and desire to recognize, in the everyday work of research, the 'eternal moment' (Richards, 1980) that is also present" (Dillard, 2006a, p. 85). Ritual surpasses the limitations of time, space, and the "practice of unifying the human and the divine" (p. 85) to magnify the Afrocentric perspective of how Black women researchers engage with it. Researchers surrender to acknowledging that we are never separated from reality and surrender to ushering in the restoration of energy and wisdom to employ our intellectual and spiritual craft.

Dillard's exhibition exemplifies how to humanize our subject matter and our research as it pertains to people who have been othered, people who are oppressed within a cis-heteropatriarchal system. Bearing this in mind, it is extremely pertinent for my investigation in how I as a Black woman, who has been and continually is othered, negotiate my existence every day and reify my power in my marginality through design in an Afrofuturist context. To this end, Tate (2005) insists that "Black womanhood as a discourse" (p. 36) creates a "system of formation" (p. 36) stemming from Black women's everyday life and the construction of statements and translations as reflexivity that, in turn, can provide agency for Black women communities: "The introduction of difference is the agentic moment that asserts the possibility for other ontologies" (p. 36).

Owens, Edwards, and McArthur (2018) provide an example of the methodology of surrender at work in Black women's scholarship. These researchers sought the importance of a) edifying personal stories as legitimate fodder for research, b) contend perpetual oblivion, and c) situate the importance of Black women's expertise on their experiences. Their work is embedded in community work, work that eschews and/or counters Eurocentric and hegemonic conceptualizations of Black womanhood as it journeys into love for community-building. As Dillard (2006a) remarks on her methodology embodying transcendence of time and space as we focus on our future selves and those yet to be born, so do this team of Black women scholars in their pursuit of positive and reaffirming research for Black women and girls: "the purpose of this piece is two-fold: 1) to document our experiences doing Black girls research; and 2) to illuminate a path for future Black girls researchers interested in non-racist, non-sexist, counter air oppositional work (counter-hegemonic cultural practice)" (Owens, et al., 2018, p. 127).

In Toliver's (2022) engagement with surrender by focusing on the collaboration between the sisterhood of young Black girl participants and herself. Toliver began her scholarship by inviting six Black girls to write their lives and truths in an Afrofuturist writing workshop in Savannah, Georgia. She rejected ideals of enlightenment (i.e., "objectivity, disconnectedness, and inequity"; p. xxv) to promote care in her writing cohort. She served these young women by putting their thinking as the focus of the research, denying her own interpretation of their terms. She fostered and nourished a community of hope as a result of denying objectivity admission into her methodology. She epitomizes Dillard's (2006a) fluidity between the researcher and the researched, formulating a reciprocal environment that established the young girls as co-creators of truth. Through evoking a spirit-filled methodology, researchers gain the possibility of learning more about self as well as participants and the research process.

Morton (2020) argues her use of surrender in her research where she investigates how spirituality plays into Black women's engineering doctoral pursuits through semistructured interviews, journaling, photo elicitation, and her own reflections and memos. Morton's display of a methodology of surrender embodies "a meditative and faith-filled research space" (p. 765) that engages with and advances the four principles of love, compassion, reciprocity, and ritual. She goes on to describe how her spirituality is a metric for interpretation, credibility, and believability. She also incorporates an ethic of care and self-accountability to accompany her surrendering. Morton surrendered to being what Toliver (2022) calls a "story listener" (p. xxiv), incorporating many of the senses and spirit into listening to participants' stories. Similar to Toliver's (2022) surrender, Morton (2020) began to understand herself and her participants more in the context of her work. She ultimately came to see how healing a methodology of surrender is when incorporated into a culturally sensitive study.

### Negotiations of self within everyday life: Black women's performativity

In her take on Frantz Fanon's (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Tate (2005) identifies ways in which Black women perform and reify their Blackness in the context of maneuvering through quotidian social interactions. She maintains that "Black identities are texts of social practice which have to be given meaning in interaction" (p. 35). People interpret and make sense of the world(s) as they are constructed by them. This is done so by aligning themselves with culturally accepted identity patterns that are expressed on individual bases. These cultural exchanges and contexts are highly complex and require "cultural insiders" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 70) to authenticate, or verify the appropriate response in an occurrence, and consists of the "interplay between forms, meanings and actions of discourse" (Tate, 2005, p. 35).

Scholars conclude that Black women are not monolithic; there are not prescriptive behaviors born to any Black women as research provided by non-Black scholars may suggest (Tate, 2005; Cooper, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2019). In fact, Black women scholars have suggested that Black women embark on hybridity (Tate, 2005) and liminality (Evans-Winters, 2019) as means to constitute their onto-epistemologies. Tate's (2005) focuses on hybridity by investigating Bhabha's work within hybridity and the third space as it pertains to Black women's navigation on jobs, in schools, and other public arenas. She suggests that Black women perform their Blackness through "conversations in which women both speak from within discourses and construct counter-discourses" (Tate, 2005, p. 35). Doing this work from within discourses while simultaneously creating discursive counters allows Black women to dwell on a continuum that may affirm or reject normativity. Through daily discourse, Black women construct their identifications that may be "different from, but the same as" (Tate, 2005, p. 35) other forms of Black womanhood. Acknowledging a difference within "the same" provides agency and other ways of knowing and being. Through storying, Black women can compare and contrast their experiences within the Diaspora and among each other to craft their authenticity within Black communities and cultures: "This hybridity of the everyday involves interactants using gendered readings of discourses of a Black authentic same" (Tate, 2005, p. 76). However, scholars have indicated that there is a gap in Black communities' existence in the everyday for the future; Afrofuturism seeks to better negotiate Black folks' everyday lives in the future (Toliver, 2022).

Similarly, liminality evokes this in-between dimensionality for Black women. Evans-Winters (2019) states that Black girls and women "exist… in the liminality between softness and strength and vulnerability and resistance" (p. 65), arising from varying backgrounds, economic statuses, educational interests, etc. It is in the crux of liminality that Black women (and girls)

learn to navigate their individual lives. Black women investigate each aspect of their social lives and experiment with balances of softness and strength, vulnerability, and resilience.

> In actuality, most Black girls' and women's existence fall in the liminal space between vulnerability and resistance. The liminal space of our existence is a state of resilience. Most of us simply maintain and try to survive, sort of speak, until we are encouraged, introduced to and learn to continually and purposefully engage in acts of resistance. Researching, theorizing, and writing, are acts of resistance. Deciding to live is an act of resilience and resistance. (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 70)

Here, the author invites the reader into the insight she has gained as a Black woman scholar and as a researcher for Black women and girls. She supplants formerly conceived notions by Eurocentric researchers of pathology of Black women or supernatural strength of Black women (Strings, 2019) with ideologies of a continuum of vulnerability/strength that Black women utilize based on their surroundings and social setting (Evans-Winters, 2019). Per the scholarship of Toliver (2022), this usage perfectly describes technologies of freedom, as it "showcase[s] the numerous ways Black [women] employ their knowledge for the practical purpose of freedom" (p. xxii) as they try to survive from day to day.

## (K)notting

Guyotte et al. (2022) and AmberBeckyCreative (2022) utilize knotting, or the stylization "(k)notting" interchangeably (Guyotte et al., 2022, p. 1), as a methodological analysis within qualitative pedagogy to analyze theory, methodology, pedagogy, and art, owing to no specific method. They intend for this analysis to bring together, entangle, and disrupt how researchers think about humans' entwinement with material and creativity. Guyotte et al. (2022) center two pertinent questions of (k)notting: 1) "*what do these (k)nots produce in pedagogy as well as in*

*methodology?"* (emphasis in original, p. 1) and 2) "*[w]hat sort of living-thinking-being are we worlding together?"* (emphasis in original, p. 1). At its core, knotting allows researchers to extract "energy from the creation of visual art as part of [the] inquiry process" (Guyotte et al., 2022, p. 2). As a designer and a scholar, drawing from the energy of visual art and design while simultaneously stitching together my experiential knowledge, my creative process, and materials strengthens how I use design to world-build, communicate, and affect change.

Guyotte et al. (2022) brings (k)notting into existence by weaving in the work of Donna Haraway, Sara Ahmed, Katherine McKittrick, Wendy Kawabata, and Lisa Kokin. Its foundation is similar to the foundations of mosaic and surrender — these devices exist to situate the experiences of the researcher as legitimate knowledge and acknowledge the disruption of binaries and the researchers' intersectionality and kinship with their communities. Knotting, as a methodological practice, cultivates relationships between researchers and the way we fashion those relationships. Knotting supports speculative futures, community creation, and world-building, holds to the structure of piecing and blending together tangential concepts to represent othered knowledges. The initiative to manifest (k)notting is sparked by Sara Ahmed's (2014) *Willful Subjects*, where she focuses her attention on the work of scholars who are *not* philosophers whether by admittance or by classification from outside auditors. Not philosophers could be categorized as novel authors and BIPOC scholars. This "*not philosophy*" (emphasis in original, Sara Ahmed quoted In Guyotte et al., 2022, p. 5) opens a portal for Black women writers to escape the structure and hindrances conventional methods imposed on philosophy. Doing so makes way for lived experiences to cultivate new trajectories for old methods and methodologies. What is crafted is a disruption or a destabilization of how researchers formally think about and submit to philosophy.

AmberBeckyCreative's (2022) take on knotting, (k)not mattering, privileges the relationship between researcher and material, giving voice and substanance to material and challenging traditional ways of thinking. Knotting may be metaphoric or literal, rendering some research projects tie, twist, braid, or manipulate fibers together or string together paradigms or philosophies to craft the world with which we engage. "[K]nots are assemblages of more-than-human and humans" (AmberBeckyCreative, 2022, p. 267). The clustering of people and things is particularly symbolic to this research project, considering how Black women have been devalued and dehumanized and have fought for the establishment of scholarship paradigms and liberation over centuries (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2000). In (k)notting, researchers analyze their relationships and interactions with the (im)material and hold space for the information and knowledge gained from other-than-human agency. Similar to Black feminism; Afrofuturism; mosaic; and surrender, knotting supports alternate approaches to truth production in academia to permit more researchers to decolonize traditional routes of scholarship. To reify Black women's predisposition for weaving stories and meaning while rejecting the academy's refusal to hold researchers in the space of telling stories as well as gathering stories, (k)notting sets the platform for Black women researchers to "tell research stories in different ways" (Toliver, 2022, p. xv).

## Conceptual framework

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the mosaic approach allows me to meld together or draw from my experiences within my spiritual, cultural, and epistemological guidance to open up the possibility of new worlds within qualitative research. A mosaic also provides an opportunity to critique gender- and race-based violences and offenses that happen at the crux of antiblack exploitation, while harnessing Black women's emic propensity for their

"connection between culture and theory formation" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 15). Evans-Winters (2019) posits:

> In the past, qualitative research has been metaphorically described as a bricolage, a montage, quilt-making, and musical improvisation. In this fieldnote, I would like to describe Black feminism, and specifically its possibilities to qualitative research, as a mosaic. Mosaic as an artform is the process of creating images with an assortment of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other objects put together to create a pattern or picture. In most Instances, the mosaic has cultural and spiritual significance. Black feminist scholars bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, and experiences mold together to construct our multiple Identities, yields a creative, distinctly mosaic worldview (p. 15).

Though writing a mosaic is more nuanced than constructing a bricolage, both approaches share a common perspective posited by Kincheloe (2001):

> bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, [and] they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process. (p. 681)

As researchers recognize these occurrences, especially within interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary projects, researchers “seek a rigor that alerts them to new ontological insights” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Because of the cultural reconsiderations and upheaval called upon in this work, I have stepped outside of traditional ways of looking and doing researcher and pushed beyond the boundaries into piecing together a broader picture where I saw designers like me

included. For this reason, I inlay this framework with guidance from Afrofuturism and BFT to create present and future justices for Black women who can and will be served with apparel design.

Though Afrofuturism has not been widely accepted as a theory presently, some Black scholars have already identified Afrofuturism as a well-theorized epistemology. Morris (2012) contends that "Afrofuturism is an epistemology that both examines the current problems faced by blacks and people of color more generally and critiques interpretations of the past and the future" (p. 153). S. R. Toliver (2022) uses Afrofuturism alongside endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE; Dillard, 2000) to stake a claim in how qualitative research can be performed by and for Black women and girls. Scholarship amassed by Afrofuturist researchers Anderson and Jones (2016) has sought to expand Afrofuturism "to other fields of academic inquiry" (p. vii). Their expansion includes a framework they have dubbed Astro-Blackness, a term that

> represents the emergence of a black identity framework within the emerging global technocultural assemblages, migration, human reproduction, algorithms, digital networks, software platforms, bio-technical augmentation and are constitutive of racialized identities that are increasingly materialized vis-à-vis contemporary technological advances or "technogenesis, the idea that humans and technics have co-evolved together (Hayles 2012)." (Anderson & Jones, 2016, pp. vii-viii)

Based on Beth Coleman's "Race as Technology," Jennings and Fluker (2019) situate Afrofuturism as a theory, stating that it "can be likened to a lens that renders reality via a *pantechnological* perspective. It views *everything* as a type of technology" (emphasis in original, p. 65). They go on to claim that in the context of Afrofuturism, Black people have been afforded many types of technologies even while oppressed. They highlight these technologies as "literacy,

civil rights, social justice, or simply access to an internet connection" (p. 65). Toliver (2022) names other liberating technologies: "literacy, spirituality, language, trickery, coding, communal connection, intergenerational links, dance, hope, imagination, and joy" (p. xxii). All of these technologies allow Black people to exploit the "benevolence" of their oppressors and blindside them with the release of the oppressive control that has rendered Black communities immobile.

Anderson and Fluker (2019) also assert that Afrofuturism is a paradigm that need not be reified by other worldviews and does not aspire to be equated with Eurocentric foci of "neoliberal projects, multiculturalism, or traditionally Western epistemologies" (p. 1). Because Afrofuturism does not owe to any Western rites of passage, it is a theoretical framework innate to the emancipatory practices that are imbued with the lives of Black people. It is indeed a cultural knowledge and discourse that has rendered itself useful and lifesaving for centuries of navigating heteronormativity and patriarchal marginalization. It privileges Black people's truths, ways of knowing, and multiplicity in the process of knowledge and meaning making, in ways that may reject or decenter the formality of institutional learning.

This work is also steered by BFT's consciousness of Black women's resilience in combat for liberation in their absence of mainstream industries and disciplines. In solidarity with the Black feminist scholars who are the foremothers of this paradigm, I acknowledge the trifecta of oppression, racism; sexism; and classism, that Black women continually battle and resist (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Black women scholars contend that society's freedom is predicated on Black women's liberation from systemic pressures of social, economic, and political oppressions (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Collins, 2000; Cooper, 2018; Kendall, 2020). BFT provides unique perspectives and arguments that cater to the plight of Black women in the United States' structure of discrimination and oppression towards them, providing critique and "rigorous examination"

(hooks, 1995, p. 276). Through critique, exploration, and examination, Black feminists deny hegemony in feminist thought. I see the possibility of spreading this resistance into design academia. BFT's enactment of refusal empowers scholars to continually push through the trap of Eurocentric methods and objectivity in research and design to provide more authentic and humanistic means of co-validating Black women and their meaning-making.

## Gaps in Literature

There are gaps in the literature that investigate Black feminist theory and Afrofuturism's role in fashion design. Afrofuturism has been tied to art, music, and literature and more recently has been considered for only certain disciplines of design (i.e., user experience, product development, graphic design, branding, systems design, architecture, and service design; Anderson & Fluker, 2019; Berry et al., 2022). Much of what is seen is at the intersection of art and design, blurring the line of what constitutes either discipline. BFT has been produced as a lens by which art, needlework, crocheting/knitting, quilting, and embroidery is crafted (Morris, 2012; Priest, 201`4; Hewett, 2021; Plummer, 2023). There have been few special-issue journal editions that have critiqued the intersections of Black issues and design (i.e., *Fashion, Style, & Popular Culture; Clothing and Textiles Research Journal; Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*. These issues, however, do not seem to be mainstays within the regular proceedings published by these journals.

This study aims to add to the growing body of knowledge of design, BFT, and Afrofuturism and expand the possibilities of doing design research within the cultural context where Afrofuturism, BFT, and materiality conjoin. It also aims to provide a space where other Black women designer-scholar-activists see themselves present in design academia.

# Chapter 3: Methods

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the study design and the rationale behind these decisions. Here I outline my epistemological underpinnings and the reason why this is a mosaic- and surrender-based critical autoethnography. I explain how I perform a close reading of theoretical and conceptual literature in conjunction with journaling about my past scholarship to come to a purposive selection of the data I used in this study. I describe the written and creative scholarships that I investigated and the process I underwent to thematize each scholarly work. Finally, I explain knotting as a data analysis and how it is relevant to this study.

## Methodology

Exploring a methodology of surrender (Dillard, 2006a) has allowed me to, as Dillard (2006b) states, immerse myself "in cultural and spiritual spaces that are congruent with what we know (in body, mind and spirit) [and…establish] more informed and authentic paradigms for ourselves" (p. 63). Considering this work as a mosaic (see previous chapter), this approach has lent itself heavily to the methodology of surrender, in which I was able to sit with my data, reflect on my identities as a Black woman design scholar, and be authentic with my growth and development all while rejecting the formalities of "traditional" qualitative research inquiries, traditions that originally considered Eurocentric instruments as dogma and discounted Afro-diasporic means of relaying narratives and truths. Surrender also became a tool to evaluate how I considered its precepts of compassion, reciprocity, love, and ritual in the various areas of the collected work that constituted my collected data. As a mosaic framing a methodology of surrender, I am able to welcome my spiritual, cultural, social, and intellectual experiences as well as my cultural memory into my knowledge formation as it pertains to design. To this end,

Toliver (2022) suggests that Black women scholars enmesh methodologies that best represent more holistic epistemologies for their research:

> That is, Black people have historically used numerous methods to express meaning even if academia tries to restrict us from accessing or using methods. Thus, it is vital that researchers not only consider new epistemological stances but also new ways of representing research, those that honor the storied traditions of Black people. (Toliver, 2022, p. xv)

Evans-Winters (2019) notes that Black women are rarely "given the space to *play with* or theorize methodological moves in qualitative inquiry" (p. 1, emphasis in original). Similarly, Nobles (2018) explains the effects of the oppression and social inequalities that Black people face when they are not in control of their individual narratives and how this deficit rhetoric plays into furthering the oppression in various aspects of sociopolitical decisions. I have noticed in design that there is a great disparity of qualitative research and an even greater disparity of Black women in design research living out their authenticity. As Evans-Winters (2018) puts it: "research faculty and theoreticians must acknowledge the marginalization of Black women scholars' voices in contemporary qualitative scholarship and debates" (p. 1). Dillard (2006a) theorizes that this methodology "will allow knowings to arise in ways that engage the body, mind, and spirit, bringing all to bear in service to communities in the world (p. 82), by relinquishing "knowledge, beliefs, and practices that dishonor the spiritual research life" (p. 82).

As a critical autoethnography, this approach will "merge conventional methods […] with a critical focus […] or with a narrative or a self-in-focus narrative lens […] and reflect the evolving direction of the field toward challenging historical patterns of power and domination (Durdella, 2019, p. 118). Because this interpretation relies heavily on my social location and my

scholarly acumen, mosaic and surrender as guiding epistemologies are the bedrock on which I place this critical autoethnography. Viewing this autoethnography through epistemologies formulated by spiritual Black women researchers aligns this study with my purpose of viewing apparel design in a way that is disruptive, liberatory, and personal.

## Procedure

To investigate the research purpose: ways in which I, as a Black designer and scholar, negotiate the everyday, my past and present, with communicative devices in design through the critical lenses of Afrofuturism Black feminist theory and give agency to design and materials based on my culturalism, I used critical autoethnography with a focus on the mosaic approach (Evans-Winters, 2019) and guided by surrender (Dillard, 2006a) to humanize the view by which I looked at my data. Durdella (2019) describes critical autoethnography as an approach in which "the researcher is a central instrument in the emancipatory goals of the investigation" (p. 118). Autoethnography is instrumental in writing the personal and evaluating it within "the larger cultural meaning for the individual's story" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 70).

I performed a close reading (Guillory, 2010) on Black feminist, Afrofuturism, needlework, and bricolage literature that I have collected since 2018. The key supporting texts have been *Stitching the Self: Identity and the Needle Arts* (Amos & Binkley, 2020), *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (Anderson & Jones, 2016), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd edition* (Collins, 2000), *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (Guy-Sheftall, 1995), *Patterns in Circulation: Cloth, Gender, and Materiality in West Africa* (Sylvanus, 2016), *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (Tobin & Dobard, 1999), and "Strategic Disruptions: Black Feminism, Intersectionality, and Afrofuturism" (Turpin, 2021).

I organized this group of literature according to the four categories: Black feminist thought, Afrofuturism, needlework, and bricolage (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Key Literature and Their Representative Themes*

| Literature Title | Themes from literature |
|---|---|
| *Stitching the Self: Identity and the Needle Art* (Amos & Binkley, 2020) | Needlework<br>Bricolage |
| *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (Anderson & Jones, 2016) | Afrofuturism |
| *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd edition* (Collins, 2000) | Black feminism |
| *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (Guy-Sheftall, 1995) | Black feminism |
| *Patterns in Circulation: Cloth, Gender, and Materiality in West Africa* (Sylvanus, 2016) | Black feminism<br>Needlework<br>Bricolage |
| *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (Tobin & Dobard, 1999) | Needlework<br>Black feminism |
| ”Strategic Disruptions: Black Feminism, Intersectionality, and Afrofuturism" (Turpin, 2021) | Afrofuturism<br>Black feminism |

## Data Collection

Alongside reading these texts, I maintained a research journal recording my thoughts on what diversity and inclusion meant in the context of design for Black and for plus-sized women. I later turned my journaling towards envisioning the potential of radical design should Black women be the gatekeepers or arbiters of taste. As I periodically revisited my notes, I noticed there were themes occurring, and I decided to pull out terms that I could better categorize into a schematic from my theoretical and conceptual framing. These initial terms were liminality, hybridity, biomimetics and sustainability, culture clashing [by way of assimilation, appropriation, and borrowing], Sankofa, and Afrofuturism.

I listed out my published and unpublished creative and written scholarship that I have either produced alone or co-produced since 2015. Included are these creative scholarships:

- *Heart* (2015; Shealey, 2016a)
    - Art exhibit showcasing gown using combination of textile choice and machined lace inspired by artwork
- *Arachnophilia* (Shealey, 2016b)
    - Art exhibit showcasing two-piece set made from machine embroidered lace and iridescent beads inspired by spider webs
- *Warding off the Evil Eye* (2017; Shealey, 2018)
    - Suit jacket combining Japanese pattern-making techniques and oversized blue eye-printed Ankara cloth inspired by the occult of evil eye traditions
- *African-Americana* (Albert & Shealey, 2022)
    - Art exhibit showcasing the process of redesigning classic American film costumes/sets to reappropriate and reflect Black designer influence; a part of a broader grant submission

The creative scholarship ranged in needlework from garment construction to embroidery and quilting/collaging, covering topics of collaborative autoethnography, Black feminism, and liberation. I also include the written scholarships:

- "#BlackRepresentationsMatter: Viewing Digital Activism Through Symbology" (Shealey, 2021)
    - Published article
- "We Had Nice Things, Too" (forthcoming; Albert & Shealey, in progress)
    - Collaborative autoethnographic visual essay
- "Patching a Better World for Black Women: How I Design for Better Self-Definitions" (forthcoming; Shealey, under review)
    - *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogy* (2nd edition) book chapter under review

- “Quilting Our Selves: Conceptualizing a Critical Feminist Pandemic Pedagogy Through Collaborative Autoethnography and Art” (forthcoming; Weise et al., 2022)
    - Collaborative autoethnographic manuscript under review
- “If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own” (conceptual; Shealey, in progress)
    - Content analysis conceptual manuscript

Using the concepts of Afrofuturism, Black feminism, needlework, and bricolage, I purposively selected scholarship that aligned my works with these themes as they fit in the literature (see Table 2). Purposive selection involved choosing artifacts and text that I “can substantially learn about the experience” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). If a scholarship did not align, I marked it as no alignment. If a scholarship covered multiple themes, then I included all qualifying themes. To qualify a scholarship, I selected works that fell into two or more themes and were authored by at least 50% Black women. This ruled out three scholarly works.

After this process, I was able to highlight six research projects that had been published, sent out for review, or are currently being written and awaiting submission. I reviewed the purpose and concepts of each work and paired them to any of the four appropriate themes listed above (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Written and Creative Scholarship*

| Self- & co-authored works | Themes from literature |
|---|---|
| *Heart* (2015) | Bricolage |
| *Arachnophilia* (2016) | Needlework |
| *Warding off the Evil Eye* (2017-2018) | Afrofuturism<br>Needlework<br>Bricolage |
| #BlackRepresentationsMatter (2021) | Black feminism<br>Needlework |
| *African-Americana* (2022) | Needlework<br>Bricolage<br>Black feminism |
| We had nice things, too (forthcoming) | Black feminism<br>Needlework<br>Bricolage |
| Patching a better world for Black women: How I design for better self-definitions (forthcoming) | Needlework<br>Black feminism |
| Quilting our selves: Conceptualizing a critical feminist pandemic pedagogy through collaborative autoethnography and art (forthcoming) | Needlework<br>Bricolage |
| *If you don't like my story, write your own* (conceptual) | Afrofuturism<br>Bricolage |

After this selection, I curated an annotated outline, providing a prologue, the scholarship's purpose, and an epilogue for each work. The purpose of the additional writeups was to provide additional explanation, historiography, and resources for each research project and how it relates to the themes and my research purpose. The epilogue for each section reintroduced the conceptual theme and draws parallels from the literature. Because of the evaluative manner of the annotated outline, the literature that was referenced in the epilogue was not referenced in the research projects. Doing so allowed me to restory my research projects and

make them cohesive through the work of the annotated outline. To create the annotation, I organized the six scholarships by reintroducing them to their initial theme (see Table 2) and aligning them to the concepts found within literature (see "Concepts within literature" in Figure 2):

1. *Warding off the Evil Eye* → text-as-textile
2. "#BlackRepresentationsMatter" → Black body politics (by way of fat phobia)
3. *African-Americana* → Sankofa
4. "We Had Nice Things, Too" → community (by way of collaborative autoethnography)
5. "Patching a Better World for Black Women" → hybrid-plurality
6. If You Don't Like my Story, Write Your Own → self-definitions (by way of Afro-optimism)

Figure 2 provides a visualization of my creation of themes from literature based on concepts found in the literature and the process of organizing these concepts into overarching or meta-themes. After I aggregated the themes that I found appropriate for my scholarly works, I organized my outline into three sections: a) liberation across time, b) hybridity & liminality, and c) symbology in design. Table 3 represents the finalized list of scholarship selected to analyze and craft into a narrative.

**Figure 1**

*Theme Schematic*

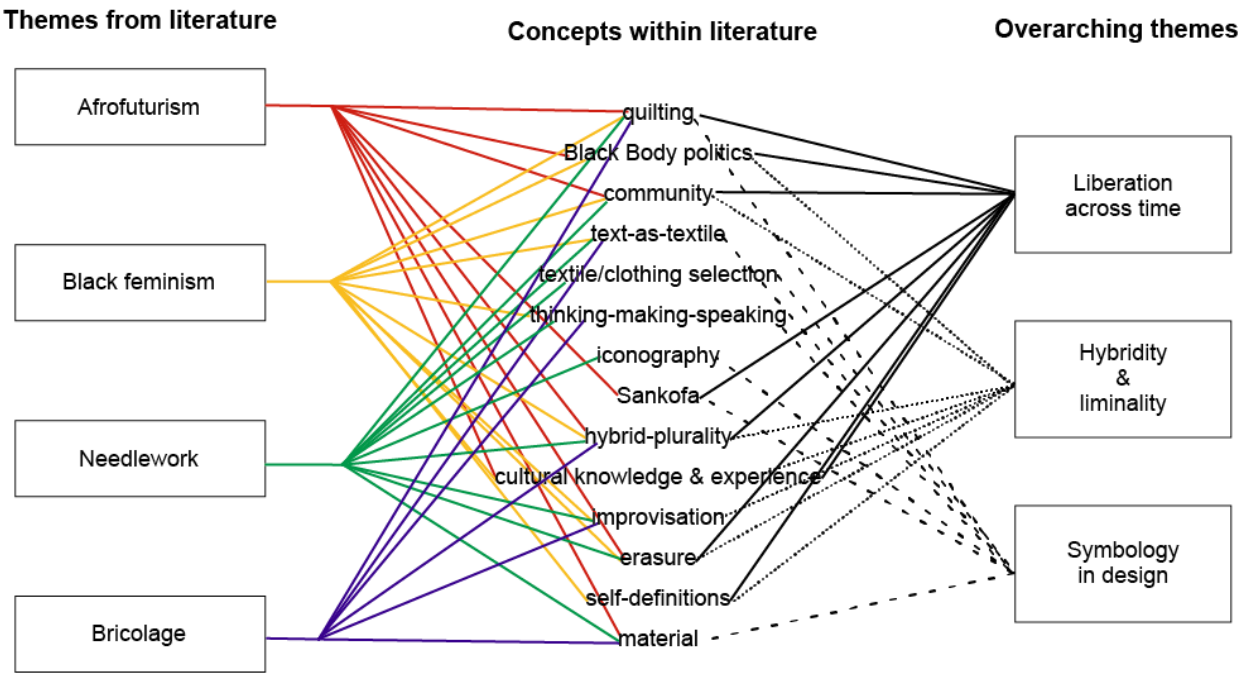

**Table 3**

*Aggregation of Scholarly Works into Meta-Themes*

| Self- & co-authored works | Themes from literature | Meta-themes |
|---|---|---|
| *Warding off the Evil Eye* (2017-2018) | Afrofuturism<br>Needlework<br>Bricolage | Symbology in Design |
| #BlackRepresentationsMatter (2021) | Black feminism<br>Needlework | Symbology in Design |
| *African-Americana* (2022) | Needlework<br>Bricolage<br>Black feminism | Liberation Across Time |
| "We had nice things, too" (forthcoming) | Black feminism<br>Needlework<br>Bricolage | Liberation Across Time |
| "Patching a better world for Black women: How I design for better self-definitions" (forthcoming) | Needlework<br>Black feminism | Hybridity & Liminality |
| "If you don't like my story, write your own" (conceptual) | Afrofuturism<br>Bricolage | Liberation Across Time |

## Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I used (*k)notting* (stylization created by scholars), a conceptualization of two artist-scholar collectives, AmberBeckyCreative (ABC) and Guyotte, Coogler, and Flint. (ABC, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022). Knotting, as explained by artist-scholar collective ABC (2022), guides analyzing and thinking towards the connectivity of people and *material*, "ways (k)not to be undone" (p. 249). This analysis, while relatively new in arts-based research, assists in explaining the interconnectivity of my role as critical autoethnographer and the arts and design background of my work.

The purpose of the mosaic approach while using knotting as the analysis for my scholarship is to situate my epistemological assumptions as a Black feminist and Afrofuturist at

the core of how I locate my scholarship and review literature. Evans-Winters (2019) highlights an elemental tenet of mosaic when illustrating how Afrocentric qualitative researched is performed — moving away from discourse of "victimization and powerlessness to piecing together the representations of our lives as a mosaic of intellectual creativity and a praxis of resistance" (p. 18). I position this work as a mosaic modeled after this definition to *work the hyphens*, as Fine (1994) conceptualizes it.

In a similar fashion, my relationship with surrender (Dillard, 2006a) impacts how I use knotting as an analysis. Dillard intends for a methodology of surrender to reconceptualize "research as a process of shared readings between human beings that honors contemporary, historical, and spiritual knowledge of multiple contents and contexts of African presence" (p. 83). To engage in a more authentic account of becoming scholarly while maintaining my spirit while analyzing my work, I tap into a methodology of surrender's four precepts: love, compassion, reciprocity, and ritual (Dillard, 2006a). These four principles acknowledge differences in onto-epistemologies and depose Eurocentric research traditions. These principles also champion the transformative process that occurs during the research story, allowing me to transfigure because of my work and new perceptions of it. To engage knotting with surrender, I shed my preconceived notions and learnings of conducting research and design in Eurocentric traditions, as the "Self and Other are knottily entangled" (Fine, 1994, p. 72), to put on the spirit of service for my community and myself as I reinvent new narratives from previously conceptualized ones.

# Chapter 4: Findings

## Introduction

I note in the previous chapter a restructuring or a recategorizing of the themes that my work took on under meta-themes to better frame my research inquiry: ways in which I negotiate the everyday in design with communicative devices employed in Afrofuturism and Black feminism and give agency to design and materials based on my culturalism. The intent of this chapter is to elucidate how knotting, or the stylized (k)notting, (ABC, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022) my data resulted in the entwinement of themes and meta-themes of this study. Here, I discuss what liberation across time consists of, how symbology in design shows up in my work and the literature, and what the interrelation between hybridity and liminality is. Within these meta-themes, I break down the smaller themes from which my work is categorized.

## (K)notting

AmberBeckyCreative (2022) describe the process of (k)notting or (k)not mattering as a reconsideration of methodology, pedagogy, and material as they intertwine with humans and "more-than-human[s]" (p. 249), an "intra-action between material bodies" (p. 249). Similarly, Guyotte et al.'s (2022) use of knotting invites readers to consider how we make meaning from "stories and other ways of relating" (p. 3) through confounding the self with other people and/or objects or artifacts, what ABC (2022) and Guyotte et al., (2022) both conceptualize as human and more-than-human. This interconnectedness produces (new) perspectives on how to view methodologies, paradigms, and data. These collectives of artists-scholars connote that (k)notting manifests as varied assemblages figuratively and/or literally, consisting of people, concepts,

epistemologies, pedagogies, artifacts, braided or tied materials, collages and other art forms (Guyotte et al., 2022; ABC, 2022).

Through the iterative and generative process of "thinking-making-speaking" (Dormor, 2014 p. 1), knotting enables me to generate the three meta-themes into three strands that can be woven into a braid (ABC, 2022; Guyotte et al., 2022; see also Fine, 1994). (K)notting also plays an intricate role in how I have played with and situated the data to read in multiple ways at different spatiotemporal locations: "(k)not mattering is/has become a never-ending process—changing and evolving, and (k)not mattering depends on the context in which it is made, seen, felt, and… It matters what matters and (k)not matters at any given time" (ABC, 2022, p. 255). Presently, this process leads me to align my scholarship and the revisiting of the literature (through prologues and epilogues) along three meta-themes: *Liberation Across Time*, *Hybridity/Liminality*, and *Symbology in Design*. These themes are woven into a braid, where each theme (or strand) has a standalone identity; however, when braided/stitched/knotted together, becomes but a part of a story that enlaces with the other tangents and lends its elements to the broader narrative. I use this analysis to open the dialogue for scholarship ingrained with technologies of joy for Black women (Toliver, 2022) and creative ways to shift design research to focus on constructing authentic displays of research for Black women designer-scholars.

**Liberation Across time**

Liberation across time assesses how black women have strategized fighting for their freedom through the centuries and into the future. In her anthology of Black women's liberation since the 19th century, Guy-Sheftall (1995) postulates,

> Discussions about the evolution of feminist consciousness among African American women usually begin with abolitionist Sojourner Truth (less often with abolitionist Maria Stewart), since the catalyst for the emergence of women's rights in the mid-nineteenth century was the movement to eradicate slavery. (p. 2)

While there may not be a direct focus on chattel slavery within Black women's present-day efforts, Black women are indeed still fighting to free themselves from the oppressive systems of today and beyond (Harris, 2015; Cooper, 2018; Kendall; 2020).

Of the six academic works I selected for this study, I elected three of them to be tied to this strand of the *knot*: *African-Americana* (West Albert & Shealey, 2022), "We Had Nice Things, Too" (West Albert & Shealey, forthcoming), and "If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own" (Shealey, forthcoming). Upon selection, I reintroduced these scholarships through literature (see previous chapter for list) to broaden the scope beyond the lenses that I initially used to scrutinize the written or creative scholarships. In this section, I chronicle, through my work, the historicity of liberation tied to Black women's movements and the impact it has on a read-through of my scholarship.

**Past**

"We Had Nice Things, Too" investigates how the co-authors use design to revision and re-version themselves in past efforts of exclusionary portrayals of the All-American sweetheart (read: petite white woman) archetype on the silver screen as film entered mainstream media consumption. Reading this manuscript through Temple's (2010) "The Emergence of *Sankofa* Practice in the United States" gives way to Sankofan traditions of rerouting the

present through lessons learned from the past. As a contribution to how the present is impacted by the past, I noted in my prologue for this article a reminder from Chang (2013):

> Physical evidence of the past, such as memorabilia, photo, multimedia materials, official records, and texts including blogs, personal journals and newspaper articles, can stimulate the researchers' multiple senses to connect the present to the past. (p. 114).

This passage links to the manuscript's research purpose as it centers how the "more-than-human" (ABC, 2022) artifacts play an integral role in the (re)formation of the past and the (k)notting relationship that it has with my co-researcher and me.

To further address the *past* aspect of the highlighted manuscript in this strand, I expound on Black American's tradition with Sankofa. While Sankofa, meaning "it is not taboo to go back and fetch it when you forget" (Temple, 2010, p. 127), has taken many forms throughout the Afro-diaspora, its ties with what *was* uncovers its true purpose in this explanation. Sankofa has garnered a *back to your (African) roots* attention throughout Black Americans and has often been communicated as a way to "return" to the past, a topic visited throughout Black cinema (Temple, 2010, p. 134). In a way to flesh out this idea within my collaborated work that knots with Sankofa, I revise and design dress as if Black women "returned" to classic American film to be captured on camera. In my prologue, I describe this as

> African diasporic liberation frameworks reconceptualize Sankofa in ways relevant to how we maintain […] the Black community still finds creative agency in coloring the lived experience with Sankofa.

Temple credits the African diaspora for its creative and inventive way of departing from a traditional way of "doing" Sankofa. While "We Had Nice Things, Too" is not a direct reflection of the Akan's use of Sankofa, it does "serve as an inaugural model of how we begin to deliberately and concisely cultivate and preserve African culture and philosophies" (Temple, 2010, p. 130). It perseveres as a liberatory tool to reclaim imagery and design for myself and other Black women during time periods when Black women may have not been afforded the opportunities to see themselves in film reels.

**Present**

In a similar vein to "We had nice things, too," *African-Americana* (West Albert & Shealey, 2022) is a museum exhibition that re-colored popular, contemporary television families. The guiding questions for this collaborative autoethnographic creative scholarship are: a) How do the authors negotiate their Blackness in the world of design that is heavily dominated by white mediocrity? and b) What does it mean to work together collectively on this project? This knot in the liberation strand concentrates on collaborative autoethnography as my co-researcher/designer and I craft vignettes to re-imagine scenes in *Full House*.

Calling attention to the second guiding question evoked my use of Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway's (2013) premise for collaborative autoethnography in this section's prologue. I write

> [They] posit that doing autoethnography offers a basis and a justification for cultural and social agents to critique 'political, historical, social, and cultural injustice' (p. 565) against their experiential knowledges.

By utilizing this rationale, I can pivot to the first guiding question of this creative scholarship. Knotting places a significant role in analyzing this inquiry; I am faced with revisiting how deep my relationship with *white mediocrity* may run beyond my realm of design and academia, even as I partner with other Black women designer-scholars. In the epilogue of this section, I scribe

> Black scholarship has been seen as monolithic and has often been prematurely pulled from audiences or considered as an afterthought in predominantly white spaces.

(K)notting this view with designed garments and spaces in television series causes me to push beyond the initial purpose of my collaboration to assess how a show like Full House, with its lack of diversity, symbolized in the 90s (and now with a reboot!) what an American family looks like.

> Reading *African-Americana* through Aikens (2018) and Wilkins (2007) serve as
>
> exemplars for the agency that can be found when one participates in autoethnography collaboratively, particularly for Black communities,

I highlight in the epilogue. I also conclude that the culture of racism increases the existence of Black art and design in silos or having a one-off existence. I propose that

> it is important to have collaborative autoethnography to reify the socio-cultural climate of people who can gather together accordingly.

Framing African-Americana in this light buttresses the negotiation of my Blackness in white-laden arenas of design, especially when I am able to converge with other Black women along our experiential knowledges.

**Future**

"If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own" looks towards the speculative future of Black women and Black life. Ironically, this sub-theme also analyzes fictional media: speculative short stories. The purpose of this conceptual scholarship is to evaluate how Black women signify happiness in the presence of always-produced oppression. I thematize this knot-within-knot as *Afro-optimism*. In the introductory chapter to this project, I institute the concept of Afro-optimism as a liberatory device used to situate Black women's (and folks') contentment and joy at the center in an effort to decentralize the oppressive struggle that pervasively inundates many dimensions of everyday Black life. In this conceptualization, I performed a close reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's (1973) "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and N. K. Jemisin's (2018) short story "The Ones Who Stay and Fight." Jemisin's restories Le Guin's work through the lens of Afrofuturism and otherworldliness, in which she situates the Black actors of the future in a way that eradicates the oppressive tropes that disrupt the peace and tranquility of future Black folks. While both of these tales bear the heavy weight of death and ostracization, Jemisin's short speculative fiction portrays the "technologies of Afrofuturism to show the work of story, storyteller, and story listener" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxiv). Her tone in storytelling centers jubilation in Black communities in imagined futures and

> acknowledges the work of Afrofuturist freedom technologies and considers how Afrofuturism can serve as a medium through which Black scholars can delve into our

> histories, witness the stories of others, sing the praises of our people, and imagine new ways of building and sustaining our communities that shaped us and use these stories in a process of freedom from traditional research methods. (Toliver, 2022, p. xxiv)

To describe this process, I annotate in the prologue:

> Making lemonade out of the world's lemon waste

as a way to think about perseverance within oppressive systems and structures meant to only cause suffering to Black women (Collins, 1990; Lorde, 2017). My conceptual speculative essay investigates how I, as well as other women, are doing research for our contrived situatedness and joy in the future.

**Symbology in Design**

Another strand of my (k)not centers symbology within design. Symbology found in design presents space for how I seek out nonverbal discourse and visual language within textile design, garment construction, or digital embroidery design. It highlights how I read textiles to give myself and my work agency. I classified two works (one art exhibit and one published article) in this meta-theme: *Warding Off the Evil Eye* (Shealey, 2018) and "#BlackRepresentationsMatter: Viewing Digital Activism Through Symbology" (Shealey, 2021). I use these works to interrogate my relationship with the subthemes of fatphobia (Strings, 2019) and text-as-textile (Benjamin, 2015).

**Fatphobia**

In "#BlackRepresentationsMatter" (Shealey, 2021), I analyze how I think, make, and do agency through the design and manufacturing of embroidered patches. While the original intent of this article was to "show that customers can dictate the narrative that they want and appreciate about their identities [by seeking] out products that reflect the type of individual they believe they are" (p. 83), I have revisited this thinkpiece and inquire, through the scope of fatphobia, how thinking about corpulence plays a role in design for me. Designing around my fat body and other women's fat bodies feels like a bittersweetness upon reading Strings (2019) tracing of the othering of fat Black women. The bitter comes from historical ways that Black women have had to conform or be ostracized and pathologized for their anatomy. After closely reading Strings (2019), I synthesize in my prologue,

> There have been instances where African/Black bodies fit into the archetype initially reserved for European women but not in spite of white women. These occurrences usually only happened when handsome African women took features that were en vogue for European women, facially and bodily.

The sweetness prevails through Black women scholars and artists who renegotiate and apply agential power to the Black woman's othered body (e.g., Faith Ringgold, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Katherine McKittrick, etc.). By divesting from white normative beauty standards and digging deeper into the othering of Black women's bodies, Black women, intellectuals or otherwise, may see the redemptive and reparative power (Barber, 2016) in reclaiming fatness. I illustrate how liberating it can be showing off fat-centric patches (or symbols). "[Fat body] images have proven to instil [sic] and reinforce positive feelings towards the consumers' own

body types by giving consumers a basis of comparison that is in their frame of reference" (Shealey, 2021, p. 92). This point of reference constitutes what Farah Jasmine Griffin defines as "textual healing" (quoted in Barber, 2016, p. 7). Textual healing supports how Black women learn to nurture, care, and love the self and foster a reclamation of the body and the degenerative narratives that "seek to destroy it," despite imperfections (Griffin, as quoted in Barber, 2016, p. 8).

### Text-as-textile

Furthering the discussion on reading, I introduce Benjamin's (2015) conceptualization of text-as-textile. Benjamin posits the effective agency that materiality holds for Black women's freedom and reconciliation with the world. "The important part of [Elizabeth] Keckley's experience […] is not her sewing expertise, but in her skills in construction, in manipulating pieces of pre-woven fabric to tell a story and elicit a particular response from the viewer" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 32). Fabric can be contorted, stitched, cut, dyed, or otherwise altered into readability for the audience. Onlookers read these constructions as narratives, gleaning from them cultural stories that designer-scholars wove into the details.

I inscribe a narrative into the bright blue patterned Ankara fabric of *Warding Off the Evil Eye (Shealey, 2018)*, a tale of multiculturalism, multidimensionality, and cultural practices of occult. When analyzing how this suit jacket is text, I offer in the prologue,

> This garment may be read in many ways: the garment design choice — the shape and techniques of the garment and the material chosen to convey a specific message.

I specifically selected Ankara cloth (bedecked with large blue eye shapes as a repeated pattern) for its ability to convey stories across its pagnes (Sylvanus, 2016). Text-as-textile also factors in how materiality impacts the storyteller and the power in knotting together the fiber and the storyteller who sews and crafts the narratives into cloth (see Nemli, 2020). I compose,

> Benjamin reads fabric as text from the fiber level as it pertains to African-American women's production, meaning-making, and place-making. Benjamin's (2015) version seems to emanate from a similar process that the West African women that Sylvanus (2016) describes, as they both have encountered colonialism and rebuilding. Benjamin's (2015) operates from the added effect of enslavement and fashioning enslaved Blacks' freedom.

## Hybridity & Liminality

The final strand in this knot is comprised of hybridity and liminality. Because of the similar nature of these concepts, they coalesced to form this strand of my findings. One body of work was matched to this strand for this study: "Patching a Better World for Black Women: How I Design for Better Self-Definitions" (Shealey, book chapter submitted for publication 2021).

### Hybridity

Hybridity, according to Tate (2005), focuses on the "transformational processes" (p. 53) of Black womanhood and through these processes Black women are "seeing, thinking, and narrating themselves as Black women at different times and spaces of the life course" (p. 53). Because of hybridity, Black women may come into their own identities and definitions of self as they "go through the process of revealing their life through reminiscences and look at how they

were constrained by or acted against power" (Tate, 2005, p. 53). Back women's adaptability proves to be a survival technology (Toliver, 2022) that they can use to traverse in spaces that are predominantly non-Black. Dr. Annie Smith maintains that hybridity speaks to the plural nature of performance in the academe, that a person may be "an artist and an academic, a practitioner and a theorist, a student and a professional" (Jacobs, 2008, p. 156). She also highlights in her work that hybridity, when situated among other people of similar social location, elicits a sense of community and "may reveal an emergent culture of hope" (p. 157). The always-becoming site of transformation influences our performativity, our definitions of self, and our communal work.

### Liminality

Similarly, liminality speaks to the situated in-betweenness that Black women inhabit. Toliver (2022) writes that Black folks "exist between the spiritual and earthly realm" (p. xxii). Conversely, Priest (2014) that Black women are simultaneously "everywhere and nowhere" (p. 461), claiming "hypervisible invisibility" (p. 462). Liminality is an adaptive technology, one that allows Black women to "continuously transform […] to fit our needs" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxii). This dynamic fluctuation narrowly allows Black women to be rendered whole, always in a constant state of being and becoming simultaneously. Because Black women have been ill-defined by society and reside in this space of unrest, liminality grants Black women permission to travel to the edges of possibility. Working through a methodology of surrender where spirituality is evoked, the ability to synthesize knowledge through "recognizing different truths and applying that knowledge for the purpose of freedom" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxii) is at the disposal of Black women.

### Hybridity and Liminality

These conceptualizations depict the fluctuant nature of Black womanhood, particularly in attempts to survive and maintain life. Through both concepts, Black women are able to rely on cultural memory and historical ontologies that enable them to define their individual experiences, self-definitions, and impacts on community-building. Through years of being decentered, Black women have crafted ways to center themselves in the midst of marginalization (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2006b; Tate, 2005; Bowen, 2021; Toliver, 2022). In my prologue write-up to "Patching a Better World for Black Women: How I Design for Better Self-Definitions," I acknowledge this site of decentering and dynamic transformation:

> Having often been situated in the third space of being mocked/derided and being exemplars and having our style co-opted and curated for non-Black audiences, Black women occupy the site(s) of constantly being made, undone, and remade.

Recognizing how Black women have been fractionated in society, in politics, in design, in research, and in academia, I have made it a practice to use love, compassion, ritual, and reciprocity (Dillard, 2006a) in the creation of my embroidery designs exalting Black women where they are in their transformations and, in turn, writing about the uplifting community that is built when I cater to this intellectual and spiritual craft.

**Entwinement**

In the context of this study, I use knotting as "creative chaos" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxiii), a means to construct "humanizing violence" (Matias, 2016, p. 133; see also Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In this humanizing violence, a politic of peace as a site of disruption to the dominant colonized production of knowledge for racialized communities (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), I

contend that knowledge production is not linear. It is not always circular; it may be entwined with cultural memory, histories, intergenerational links, communal narratives, etc. (Toliver, 2022). Incorporating these sites of knowledge construction into my original work resulted in the segmentation of themes that I derived from (k)notting myself with literature, cultural memories, and materials. This process gives me insight into how I have crafted my existence in the everyday.

Liberatory practices that Black women have suffered across time instill in me the strength and spirit that Black women who came before me used to rescue themselves from slavery by stitching maps and messages into rough-hewn quilts (Tobin & Dobard, 1999; Priest, 2014), creating stitching bees and circles to escape the gaze of slave owners (Leon, 2006), or becoming seamstresses to purchase emancipation papers (Benjamin, 2015). I keep this cultural and historical memory in my spirit as *Sankofa*, to never forget what was taught to me, as I design garments and other artifacts for Black women. Designing "We Had Nice Things, Too," *African-Americana*, and "If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own"makes me (a Black woman) visible yesterday, today, and tomorrow and provides not only hope but a legacy of scholarship that furthers the liberatory efforts of Black women designer-scholars.

My participation in collaborative work on projects that speak to the spirit of the researchers presents counterstories that allow me to feel "supported, heard, and validated" (Matias, 2016, p. 129). In choosing humanizing collaborations, I continue the humanized violence (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) that counters "white diss-course," Eurocentric discourse that insults or *disses* BIPOC communities by invoking white innocence or normative speech (Matias, 2016, p. 21). When I create the worlds that I desire to be a part of and participate in, I foster a

space that I entrust with my existence. Costanza-Chock (2020) pens a relevant question about counterstories and humanizing world-building, particularly through design and BFT:

> Ultimately, if the master's tools can never be used to dismantle the master's house, as Black lesbian feminist writer, poet, and activist Audre Lorde stated so powerfully, can [designer spaces] be sites where we develop new kinds of tools? […] By following design justice principles, design sites might be transformed into feminist, antiracist spaces that are not only truly inclusive, but also organized to explicitly challenge, rather than tacitly reproduce, oppressive systems. (p. 172)

Designing this space (or for this space) permits my existence through the power of liberation as outlined in BFT and Afrofuturism, through the creation of my choosing and humanizing the existence of myself and Black women who have been intentionally made invisible and denied existence.

Symbology and materiality never hold impartiality; there is always power that is reproduced through design (Costanza-Chock, 2020), based on the social location of the designer. Because marginalized designers may succumb to the tools and traditions enacted by normative assumptions (Costanza-Chock, 2020), I intentionally search for and place cues of resistance and counterstories within material and design to reinforce my existence in a design world staunch with Eurocentric traditions and to give agency to that materiality within my work. My artwork and depictions in my digitized embroidery is one such way that I present a counter to the dominant presence of thinness that is not always at grasp for Black women (Strings, 2016; Cooper, 2018; Bowen, 2021). In "#BlackRepresentationsMatter" (Shealey, 2021), I counter fat phobia (and other disparaging symbology) by surrendering to ethics of love, compassion, and

reciprocity for Black women and their natural bodies. Fleitz (2015) describes, "[T]his focus on the material body is fitting, as it can help expose not only women's bodies and work but also the innovative ways women have used the available means of persuasion in order to construct meaning" (p. 35). As a designer-scholar, I get to privilege which users, as Costanza-Chock (2020) contends, get to benefit from my affirming symbology as I "write [my] body" (Hélène Cixous, quoted in Fleitz, 2015, p. 35) into design, into the world. This constitutes healing for not only the end-user but for me as a designer, a transformational healing that shows up as a result of surrendering (Dillard, 2006a; Restaino & Maute, 2015; Matias, 2016; Morton, 2020). Writing the Black woman's body also actively diminishes how Eurocentric traditions belie the legitimacy of their selfhood (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Exploring disparate themes and meta-themes through various presentations of my scholarship displays my escape from "monologic discourses [imposed on] Black womanhood" (Tate, 2005, p. 54). It fosters creative notions in how I have written myself into the everyday, the mundane (Toliver, 2022) and how, when few cues of Black women's existence in design exist, I fashion their manifestation by *writing her body* (Fleitz, 2015). The liminal space of being invisible yet offering visibility to fat Black women like me urges me to act with a spirit of surrender, to give love, compassion; ritual; and reciprocity in times that it may not exist on my behalf for the sake of community-building. In this way, I empathize with Matias (2016) when she laments, "I must submit to the difficult relationship in love despite the racialized resistance. These painful acts of resistance torment me because I simply want to be seen as a human being who deserves humanly love" (p. 15). I also empathize with her need to receive scholarly and humanly love and visibility while she *pays it forward* to other marginalized persons amid her stymied movements within her repressive discipline. However, scholars (often feminist and other

critical paradigms) orchestrate *their* existence in their work as a beacon to themselves and others of their communities, as I perform in this study.

Though the meta-themes of this study come across as disparate, they all play important roles in situating me (and the women I have designed for) into a space specially crafted to honor Black women's culture as daily practices and everyday life (Tate, 2005). My performativity as a fat Black woman designer-scholar is permeated with social practices of translating and reinterpreting hegemonic discourse through my subjectivity by refusing them, reclaiming them, or redefining them into discursive exercises that properly suit how I navigate life as a designer, as a scholar, and as a person in or out of the academe.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

## Introduction

This project is grounded in a theoretical and conceptual framework of Afrofuturism, BFT, and materiality. These schools of thought reimagine new possibilities for researchers, especially Black women scholars, to perform research that authentically investigates the sociopolitical issues that they want to trouble. Afrofuturism encourages possibilities of Black life in the future that do not highlight areas of Black deficiencies. BFT provides the discourse to decenter cis-heteropatriarchy in multiple areas of Black women's scholarship and lives. Materiality privileges the agential relationship that people have with artifacts. Materials can aid and coproduce with humans in reinforcing identities and discourse. This research project collected data through journaling and selecting written and creative scholarship that I have produced throughout my academic career. Through purposive selection, I culled the list of works by creating a schematic of themes from which I could draw conclusions. I conclude this mosaic- and surrender-based critical autoethnography study by summarizing the key findings as they relate to the research inquiry. It also reviews the contributions to the discipline of apparel design, discusses the limitations of this study, and offers recommendations for future trajectories.

## Overall Findings

This study purposed to investigate the research inquiry: how I, as a Black designer and scholar, negotiate the everyday, past and present, with communicative devices in design through the critical lens of Afrofuturist-feminist design and give agency to design and materials based on my culturalism. Knotting together (Guyotte et al., 2022; ABC, 2022) and analyzing my

aggregated creative and written scholarship uncovered three meta-themes (or knots) and their respective strands/subthemes: 1) liberation across time, 2) symbology in design, and 3) hybridity and liminality. Knotting's use concatenates these seemingly disparate concepts, showing how I negotiate my existence in the everyday. I weave each theme through narratives that establish what Fine (1994) calls "'uppity' voices, stances, and critiques to interrupt Master Narratives" (p. 75) that incorporates the intersections of my identities within the academic and practice-based portions of my life.

**Liberation Across Time**

Through an analysis of my creative and written scholarship in apparel design, the findings indicate that Black women use design and material for their liberation in ways that transcend time. Similar to enslaved Black women, I, alongside other Black women collaborators, have used design, quilting, and stitching to *write* our freedoms in many aspects of our lives (e.g., business, career, sociopolitical climates). We reach back to a cultural memory and use the tools that our ancestors created to carve paths for ourselves and our negotiations with life. There is not just a look to the past but, also, a look to what is to come and what can materialize from our restructuring and crafting a tangible future for Black women, one where we will do more than survive. Liberation across time looks into the past, the present, and the future and how I have designed or conducted research for these epochs that affirms Black women's existence. By writing our bodies into these temporal spaces, I work in the hyphens (Fine, 1994) to dispel white hegemonic ways of research and attachment of meaning and readability to the "othered" body.

## Symbology in Design

Symbology discussed the process of seeking discourse (nonverbal and visual) from designed accessories/clothing and textile/material choice. The intentionality of choice undergirded the agency that I designed into my art. I segmented this meta-theme into components of fatphobia and text-as-textile.

Highlighting my embroidered activism in written scholarship, I gave agency to fat Black bodies in "#BlackRepresentationsMatter" (Shealey, 2021). I centered the fat Black female body in my illustrated and designed depictions, creating safe imagery and spaces for people who identify with my art. This negotiation has allowed me and others to reclaim and redefine images that were initially intended to be harmful.

In *Warding Off the Evil Eye* (Shealey, 2018), I negotiated how textile plays an important role in garment construction and design, applying readability to the garment. By using Japanese patternmaking techniques and Ankara cloth, a fabric known throughout West Africa for its opulent colors and patterns and its use in storytelling and communication (Sylvanus, 2016), I wove into the suit jacket a multidimensionality and multiculturalism and a tale of occult practices.

## Hybridity & Liminality

The concluding strand in this three-strand knot consisted of hybridity and liminality. I consolidated these concepts into one of my upcoming written works - "Patching a Better World for Black Women: How I Design for Better Self-Definitions" (Shealey, book chapter submitted for publication 2021), research that discusses the importance of self-definitions within design.

Hybridity is concerned with "transformational processes" (Tate, 2005, p. 53) and how Black women negotiate their terms of Blackness and their performativity of these transactions. Black women's experiences play a major role in how they validate and verify their Blackness and existence and associate themselves within community. Many of these constraints are revealed through social and political locations in which they are situated. Likewise, liminality defined the situated in-betweenness that Black women navigate. Black feminist and Afrofuturist scholars identify liminality as a survival tactic that Black women evoke and master in order to exist in oppressive societies (Anderson & Fluker, 2019; Toliver, 2022). Hybridity and liminality characterized Black women's lives as always being in flux to combat negative self-definitions and portrayals.

**Entwinement**

Using (k)notting as a vehicle to be creative chaos (Toliver, 2022), to work the hyphen (Fine, 1994), and to humanize violence (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), I twist together tales of resistance and jubilation, community and solidarity through my individual scholarship and this study. I reach beyond myself to foster visibility and existence for Black women to find my voice as a fat Black woman existing in hybrid and liminal places of the academe and places of practice, as a student and as a professional. I name a place for others like me to exist; thus, ushering a place for me to occupy. Because I enmesh a humanizing violent spirit approach to research with my fervor for design, I not only disconcert the hegemonic practices of othering Black women and their bodies and relegate Black women's issues to special issues, but I bring to the fore an appreciation for Black women's imageries, issues, and voices in the everyday, mundane interactions of existence.

## Contributions to the Field

This research study offers ways in which I meld creative design scholarship and written design scholarship to be analyzed and crafted for a narrative of self-reflection. My inclusion of Black feminist thought and Afrofuturism as frameworks expands the scope of these critical theories and epistemologies in ways that influence design to be more sensitive to designers' cultural backgrounds and interests. How I use critical epistemologies encourages the privileging of personal narratives and the humanizing of Black women's marginalized perspectives. The humanizing tenets of these Black women-centered critical epistemologies challenges researchers to consider what narratives and definitions are being highlighted and privileged in conducting design research. My hope is for the crossover of service for marginalized communities in scholar-practitioners and educators, as designers advocate for communities that feel left out in traditional practices.

This research contributes to further grounding Afrofuturism as a theory as I embed it in the field of apparel design in my work. Afrofuturism, a Black speculative arts movement, has leaned heavily into literature, arts, film, music, dress, and technology (Anderson & Fluker, 2019) and lends itself to the practice of apparel design as it envelops "reexamining, reimagining, redefining, refocusing, and restructuring" (p. x) different perspectives. As a reframing, Afrofuturism centers the

> beauty and [the] resilience in [Black perspectives' on] art, a seriousness and a joy—church music, folklore, social customs, visual art, literary production, dance, cuisine, fashion—that go beyond what can be seen or heard, beyond aesthetics, and reflect the

> tenacity of a people sustained and kept whole by its ceremonies, rites, and rituals. (Anderson & Fluker, 2019, p. xi)

As a qualitative work, I illustrate types of artifacts and materials that researchers can aggregate to begin such a study. Because of the nature of the data selected to analyze, this study adds to the literature a possibility in studying practice-based work, moving into the realm of scholar-practitioners and metamorphosing into bricoleurs (Hebert, 2010). Here, I challenge myself to incorporate creative works and written works that are both read and analyzed as text and join other non-traditional, alternative research projects that do work to decenter dominant discourses in research (Jacobs, 2008; Milne, 2006).

## Limitations of the Study

As with all qualitative and autoethnographic projects, there are limitations unique to conducting and presenting research. Limitations arise in validity, reliability, and generalizability (Freeman, 2018). Autoethnographies, similar to the epistemology that will be explained here, privilege storytellers' narratives as truth according to how it is experienced. However, the *truth* is only as good as the memory of the storyteller when recounting (Freeman, 2018). This may cause a question of "accuracy" if the autoethnography or other participants retell stories in different ways every time.

This study used epistemologies and methods that are novel and newly introduced into the literature (i.e., Afrofuturism, mosaic approach, knotting) in ways that may not have been considered upon their inception and may focus on specific communities of people, making it difficult to generalize to or be relatable to other populations of people. My decision to ground

this study in such ways of knowing and producing knowledge came across as a mosaic, instilling that the study is a collaboration of schools of thought and projects along a common thread. To viewers outside of the scope of BFT, the question of validity and rigor may arise.

This study was limited to a singular perspective and interpretation on self and collaborative work, confined to nurturing and loving on Black women's bodies in the context of apparel design as outlined in the research inquiry. This framing centered the analysis in an interpretivistic lens that does not reinforce or reflect dominant discourse as it pertains to traditional or standard ways of problem-solving.

As I only focused on works that I have produced or co-produced, the range of designed texts were uniquely designed to fit design prompts or research calls at the time of production. Of the representative scholarship, the majority did not include garments designed for wearable application at the time of creation. Therefore, many of the created works had limited practicality when considering applicability in the people's lives.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may incorporate and analyze multiple apparel design scholars' works along commonalities in othering. This would give a multi-layered view of how a committee of researchers analyze their and others' works, enriching research with multiple facets of thought. This study could go beyond the scope of apparel design into other design disciplines to challenge how dominant discourse plays a role in the construction of ideologies and practices for marginalized practitioners.

Other critical lenses can be applied to investigate the existing scholarship. Meaning and knowledge can be attached differently based on which presiding lenses are viewed at the time of research construction, each carrying its own nuances and perceptions. Other scholars of marginalized communities have applied multi-layered critical lenses approaches to investigate issues in their fields (i.e., LGBTQIA+ in systems design in Costanza-Chock, 2020; teachers of color in urban schooling in Matias, 2016).

Expanding this study to focus on collaborative work in a singular modality in design (e.g., quilting, embroidery, textile design, etc.) would yield a network of conceptual frameworks when each collaborator applies their onto-epistemologies to how they individually view the modality or the material. This would work for communities of color akin to Jen Hewett's (2021) interviews of textile artists of color.

## Closing Summary

Fashion design scholars and activists have lamented the omission of Black women in fashion magazines, on runways, and in clothing stores (Kombo, 2017). While fashion design education and industry has been an intricately woven network of oppression, Black designers and scholars are cultivating more safe spaces for their communities to exist. Black women are embedding their cultures and knowledges into their creative and scholarly works and beyond. This is how they navigate and thrive in societies that shun them. They refuse to be indoctrinated with harmful tactics that dispossess them of themselves. This research project is my attempt to home in on that conversation and offer validation to multihyphenated Black women in the liminal and hybrid spaces of design education, practice, and activism to be themselves as they navigate practices that render them invisible.

> My choices of language (speakerly, aural, colloquial), my reliance for full comprehension on codes embedded in black culture, my effort to effect immediate coconspiracy and intimacy (without any distancing, explanatory fabric), as well as my attempt to shape a silence while breaking it are attempts to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black American culture into a language worthy of the culture. (Morrison, 1970, p. 2)

I stand in concert with Toni Morrison, her/my/our tactics to reach women like us/me/her. In this research project, I attempted to show a range of possibilities of interworking epistemologies and research methods to investigate different modalities of self-work and how I garnered visibility for myself. As a resistance to focusing on how Black women have been defined in standard traditions of research, I, instead, concentrate my efforts to turn this into a joy and liberation technology (Toliver, 2022) to celebrate how Black women have defined themselves.

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