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REMEMBERING CHRISNY: ENGENDERING KNOWLEDGE, DIFFERENCE, AND POWER IN WOMEN’S HAIR-CARE NARRATIVES

This paper analyzes the affiliative and disaffiliative stances adopted by European American and African American women in a discussion about “doing Black hair.” In this highly charged discussion, African American women invoke a narrative about the Chrissy doll, one of the first Black dolls on which they, as children, could practice hair care. It is likewise co-narrated by them as a testament to the cultural significance of hair care practice among African American females. The Chrissy narrative is also a means through which Black women discursively co-familiarize with one another, at the exclusion of the European American woman present, by virtue of their shared, lived experiences and knowledge. Narrative and discourse analysis shed light on how speakers may align and/or disassociate with others who may share or lack access to cultural narratives and race- and gender-based experiences.

KEYWORDS: Narrative analysis, race, identity, hair, Black

INTRODUCTION

Personal narratives are mediums through which speakers constitute their cultural selves, histories, and values (Briggs 1996, Bruner 1991). As speakers, we tell narratives for their potency to explain, rationalize, and delineate past, present and possible experience (Bauman 1986, Duranti and Brenna 1986, Ochs 1994, Baquedano-López 1997). In doing so, we do not merely depict events temporally, but we often display stances and dispositions towards those events through verbal and nonverbal forms of talk (Labov and Waletzky 1967). In these ways, narratives emerge from experience, yet, at the same time, shape experience (Ochs and Capps 1996).

Partha Chatterjee (1993) reminds us that narratives may also constitute forms of resistance to “master” or hegemonic storylines. Such stories or counternarratives derive political force as oppositional responses to grand historical narratives. Counternarratives also debunk “official” narratives of everyday life, or what Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear (1996:2) describe as “legitimizing stories ... which herald a national set of common cultural ideals.” Patricia Baquedano-López’s (1998) ethnographic study of a Los Angeles parish likewise demonstrates how Latina instructors teach cultural narratives in Spanish, despite administrative pressures to adopt a mainstream Eurocentric curriculum and standard language in classroom instruction. These counternarratives celebrate Latino students’ culture and language in the face of encroaching English-only legislation at both the local and state-wide level. Marcylinea Morgan (1995) uses a similar concept, “camouflaged” narratives, to describe the means through which older, southern African Americans opposed implicit rules governing language which dictated that they veil public and private descriptions of racial oppression. Through the use of indirectness and other forms of linguistic “camouflage,” these narratives serve to deconstruct life under hegemony. As with counternarratives, these “camouflaged” narratives act as veiled contestations of past and present experiences. Finally, Susan Gal (1995) suggests that aspects of women’s everyday talk and women’s voice or consciousness can be understood as strategic responses, often resistance, to dominant hegemonic cultural forms. In this sense, women’s talk can reflect the political essence of counternarratives.

PAPER FOCUS

This paper is centrally concerned with women’s hair-care testimonies at a Black hair-care seminar. In particular, I examine how an European American woman’s professed desire to style Black hair provokes four African American women to collaborate in a series counternarratives that ultimately position her as a peripheral participant in the discussion. What transpires in their conversation about doing Black hair exemplifies how women co-construct unity, as well as underscore individual or collective differences, in everyday talk and interaction. At a larger level, their narrative exchange illuminates different forms of knowing and speaking that may emerge from African American and European American women’s cultural practices. Lest we falsely assume that race and gender create
homogeneous storylines for African American women, this analysis also highlights diversity within and across African American women's hair experiences and narratives about lay and professional hair-care. Significantly, however, the manifestation of "difference" and relative privilege among Black female participants is ultimately reconciled within a narrative frame of race- and gender-based unity and struggle. Narrative and discourse analyses afford a window into past and present contexts that afford such possibilities.

**NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

Discourse analytic perspectives on narrative contribute greatly to our understanding of how identities, ideologies, and epistemic stances are conveyed and through talk (Ochs and Capps 1996). In making stipulations about the pragmatics of narrative, or what narratives "do," such perspectives attend to the referential nature of narratives (e.g., what narratives convey), verbal and nonverbal linguistic details (e.g., the precise form of questions, turn-taking patterns), and the narrative context (e.g., the situated nature of narrative) (Bauman 1986). Marjorie Goodwin's (1990) ethnographic study of talk among urban boys and girls unpacks the interplay between the referential content, linguistic form, and situated nature of their narratives. Moreover, her analysis illuminates how girls and boys introduce participant frameworks that organize talk (and affiliative relationships) by expanding and at times constraining who can and cannot speak. Similarly, Adam Kendon (1992) shows how individual speakers use body posture and spatial orientation to organize participation in conversation.

Likewise, I employ several strategies of narrative analysis to chart the different "footings" (Goffman 1981) or stances that are discursively enacted by women as they discuss a range of hair-related topics. My aim is to describe the verbal and nonverbal mechanisms through which speakers affiliate and disaffiliate with one another, thereby engendering unity and difference. By further locating this analysis socio-culturally and historically, I suggest that Black women's collaborative narratives serve the pragmatic function of counternarratives. That is, African American women's hair narratives underscore their shared marginalization as children and cosmetology students for whom there were few Black dolls and mannequins on which to practice hair-care. At the same time, however, these counternarratives celebrate African American women's success despite the paucity of like models during their lay and professional hair-care experiences. In these ways, these counternarratives are oppositional responses to master ideologies and practices in the wider hair-care profession. Through their (counter) narratives, both the European American woman and African American women implicate and critique practices that situate European hair and hair styles as mainstream. Interestingly enough, though the European American woman collaborates in this counternarrative through an expressed desire to do Black hair and other commentary, it is against her initial commentary that African American women's counternarratives appear to emerge. I will hypothesize later on how and why this happens.

**CONTEXTUALIZING THE INTERACTION**

I recorded the interaction depicted in Transcripts 1 through 5 (below) at the first annual Natural Hair Braiding and Weaving Expo in Los Angeles, California. Approximately 100 people attended the expo, including stylists, cosmetology students, natural health promoters, and lay persons. The majority of the attendees were African American, although several were European American and Latino. In my capacity as an amateur videographer, I taped several "staged" events, such as hair-styling competitions. I also videotaped more "emergent" interactions among exhibitors and people who frequented their booths. The interaction I will discuss here took place during an early-morning hair weaving demonstration and involved four African American women and one European American woman. The small number of participants, combined with the relative vacancy of the conference hall at the time (things were just getting started), provided a context for more intimate one-on-one dialogue between the women convened.

Each of the four African American women (fictitiously named Linda, May, Kesha, and Joyce) and the European American woman (fictitiously named Carla) are affiliated with the beauty industry. May is a licensed stylist who specializes in braiding and weaving. In the interaction [see Figure 1], she is actually using a loom to demonstrate how to create a weft for hair weaving. Kesha, who is standing next to Carla, markets Black hair-care seminars and publications. Both Linda and Joyce are young, licensed stylists, and Carla is a cosmetology student at a local community college.

The focal interaction begins when May greets the women and attempts to compel them to join a statewide network of licensed braiders. She first asks Joyce how long she's been braiding. May then directs her at-

![Figure 1: Spatial Arrangement of Participants](image-url)
tention to Carla and asks her what is her particular niche. Carla responds by expressing a desire to learn how to “work with Black hair,” which May reframes as a desire to become a Black-hair specialist. Carla also laments the fact that many White stylists lack the desire to learn how to “mess with Black folks’ hair.” When May asks her to speculate on why this is so and offers a hypothesis (i.e., doing Black hair may be a challenge for White students), Carla responds, “I don’t know if it’s much of a challenge. I have a lot of Black friends Okay.” Carla’s latter response offends many of the African American women, who I observed exchange puzzled looks and orient physically away from Carla. I later learned that many of them perceived that her comment reflected the naiveté of a generic White liberal defense of the “Black cause,” or one who claims to understand the plight of Black people by referencing the fact that “some of my best friends are Black.” Though Carla does not engage in such grand presumptions here, her response is deemed defensive without merit and thus worthy of an indirect reproof.

This interaction, depicted in Transcript 1, sets the stage for a series of oppositional storylines that are, in many ways, collectively narrated by the African American women. Significantly, Carla’s initial comments, perceived as naïve by many of her conversants, casts her as an unwittingly protagonist against whom Black women chart their rise from children with few or no Black dolls on which to practice hair to African American hair-care professionals skilled in styling a broad range of hair textures. Carla, thus, becomes the foil for a critique of Eurocentric ideologies around hair and beauty that situate European features and hair textures as mainstream within the cosmetology profession and broader society.

Black women’s interweaving of counternarratives, in response to Carla’s expressed privilege (e.g., she doesn’t yet know how to style Black hair and may not have to in order to become licensed), also serves to illuminate professed differences between the African American conversants. We learn, for example, that one of the African American women (Joyce) learned to style a broad range of hair textures, including those of African American patrons, while in cosmetology school. This marks her relative privilege among the other African American women present since the majority of them attended schools that prioritized European hair textures, styles, and treatments in their professional training. How African American women deal with this revelation and reconcile it with their larger collective critique is detailed in the paragraphs that follow.

For the purposes of this analysis, I have excerpted the aforementioned exchange in five transcripts. The first transcript [Transcript 1] recounts Carla’s remark about “having a lot of Black friends” as an initial catalyst for a series of co-constructed counternarratives in subsequent exchanges between the women. In these collaboratively constructed counternarratives, African American women rebuke professional hair-care pedagogies and policies that often privilege European hair texture, intermittently addressing their comments to Carla in particular [see Transcripts 2–4]. Several Black women also reconcile the relative privilege of one African American woman who reveals her exposure to a broad range of hair textures and styles in cosmetology school [see Transcript 5]. The beginning of the broader exchange is recounted in Transcript 1:

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**TRANSCRIPT 1** (See Note 1, page 41 for a description of symbols used throughout the transcripts)

1. May: 
   (((to Carla))) Uhm what is your niche?

2. Carla: No, I have half way to go yet

3. May: You got half way?

4. Carla: Yeah

5. May: So what do you feel you want to do uh

6. Carla: I want to learn how to braid

7. and I want to learn how to weave

9. I want I want to learn how to work with Black hair

10. May: Okay, so you would like to be a Black hair specialist on that (market)/(model)

11. Carla: ‘Cause so many White um people are scared
to to mess with Black people’s hair

13. May: Go ahead now talk to us

14. (talk to us)

15. Carla: (((voice)))) I don’t understand it because

16. (((shakes her head horizontally))))
May: Yeah and so what do you feel is behind it?
Is it challenge?
What do you feel about it?
Is it a challenge?
Carla: I don’t know if it’s much of a challenge ha ha ha
May: Yeah
Carla: <I have a lot of Black friends Okay
((Kesha, Joyce, and Linda exchange puzzled looks, orient away from conversation))
May: <How about a child? You have a bi-racial child?
Carla: No, but uh I’ve always just felt really comfortable around Black people
so I mean <and I’m in cosmetology (.)
There’s no reason for me to be scared to work with Black people’s hair
May: >You’re absolutely right<
Now at x college are they, are the students (.) the White students or whatever
still shying away from working on Black hair like they used to?
Carla: <Oh yeah
Oh yeah
May: It’s always been that way in cosmetology school
[([looks at Lanita])]
[See you don’t know this ...
Carla: <There’s only a handful of us that are really interested
May: ... So what she’s saying
Yeah (.) that she’d like to learn more
and so I guess it’s a challenge you know
wants to learn more about it

DISCUSSION
As evident above, Carla’s controversial proclamation at line 24 does not deter May’s line of inquiry, or her conversational fervor. While the other African American women temporarily orient their attention to passerby’s, magazines, or one another, Carla and May problematize the phenomena of White students who shy away from instruction and practice on Black patrons. Perhaps conscious of the other women’s momentary disregard for the conversation, May re-voices Carla’s preceding responses in lines 39-42 to the entire group. In doing so, May favorably characterizes Carla’s desire to learn more about Black hair-care. She also reinserts her implicit candidate explanation at line 19 that learning to do Black hair may in fact be considered a challenge by Carla and other White cosmetology students.

When we examine African American women’s ensuing narratives, particularly how they invoke participant frameworks that engender unity and difference among the women, I believe we see evidence of counternarratives at work. African American women share a series of narratives which 1) generally broaden the critique of White stylists who are accused of being afraid to develop skills in Black hair-care and 2) celebrate the versatility of Black hair. As indicated in Transcript 1, Carla has already corroborated (with May) in the critique against White stylists who are allegedly “scared” and “shying away” from working on Black hair. However, Carla’s positionality as a collaborator in this stance is marginalized, and at times even ignored, since the African American women’s counternarratives are co-constructed around experiences and physical attributes (i.e., Black hair) to which Carla has little or no access. This, along with the invocation of cultural speaking styles, serve to limit the extent to which Carla can speak on these topics, thus relegating her to the margins of the discussion. We see this happening in Transcript 2 when, after several uncomfortable moments, Joyce decides to speak.1

TRANSCRIPT 2
Joyce: It’s a it’s a myth that um=
May: Go ahead
Joyce: = that there be hhh that people just get caught in sometimes you know
We know as as <now that I hear you say the word
I can say that I’m a Black (.) hair (.) specialist
because I don’t do naturally straight hair
but what I find
is that by going to other companies (.) hair color companies
because I learn how to do all that
so I can color that hair right for weaving
and I end up being the only Black stylist there
so I do understand that
but what I try to do is um is just let them know
that I have the same uh inhibitions sometimes
so we can get together
we can trade information
they can call me
I can talk to them
you know and go back and forth
and that'll help eliminate some of that fear
because the fear just come from not knowing
without the truth
I know the truth
<we know that our hair is very easy to work with
and uh [very nice to work with
May:  [It's so it's so versatile
Joyce:  Yes
May:  Black hair is so versatile
Joyce:  yes
May:  that's what it is
Joyce:  We can do so much with it
Joyce:  Yeah
May:  We can make it look like cotton in one week
Joyce:  That's right
May:  And the next week, turn around, it's silky!
Joyce:  Bone straight
that's right
Kesha:  mm hmm (.) mm hnm
May:  ha ha so our hair is interesting

Joyce's narrative is multilayered, invoking shifting participant frameworks throughout its course. Joyce initially debunks what she calls a "myth," itself a politically laden framing of the belief that Black hair is a difficult medium. May both anticipates and ratifies Joyce's description, offering the agreement expletive, "Go ahead," in line 44. Then, using the first-person narrative, Joyce affirms herself as a "Black-hair specialist," a term first introduced by May in Transcript 1 in response to Carla's professed interest in Black hair-care. Here, Joyce and May are in explicit dialogue. Joyce then sets up an affiliative frame with White stylists who are allegedly ambivalent about Black hair. She invokes her own experience as the only Black stylist in hair coloring seminars and expresses her understanding of the inhibitions facing White stylists. While Joyce understands these inhibitions, however, she does not excuse them. Rather, in lines 55-63, she proposes a strategy for sharing information to debunk the "myth," alleviate the "fear," and eventually uncover the "truth" about Black hair.

Disclosing the "truth" about Black hair is actually a collaborative undertaking by May and Joyce. Beginning in line 66, Joyce constructs a framework for participation that, by the referential nature of her commentary, restricts participation in the sequence to the African American women present. This restriction of participant frameworks is indexically realized through her use of the pronouns "we" and "our" to describe those present who have Black hair (i.e., African American women) and those who have skills in Black hair-care. Significantly, May not only corroborates Joyce's positive description of Black hair, she also assumes the role of primary narrator in line 68. In their reversal of roles, Joyce now collaborates in May's description of Black hair through agreement expletives and call-and-response ("that's right," "bone straight, that's right"). Kesha also participates in the co-construction of Black hair as versatile and interesting. At line 80, she endorses the narrative in progress with "mm hmm (.) mm hnm." Despite Carla's previous alignment with African American women's stance toward Black hair-care, she
has fewer ‘rights to speak’ in this sequence given that she is not a part of the “we” group who knows that “our hair” (i.e., Black hair) is an easy medium with which to work.

In setting up a contraspective frame between “truth” versus “myth,” Joyce disrupts official narratives that marginalize Black hair, problematizes White stylists who are fearful of Black hair-care, and ignites a narrative celebration of the versatility of Black hair. Joyce’s narrative thus conveys the illocutionary and pragmatic force of a counternarrative. While Carla is a marginal participant in Transcript 2, she resurfaces in the dialogue’s progression. In the next sequence of talk, depicted in Transcript 3, Carla re-enters the conversation and attempts to insert the belief that race is not so much a factor in White stylists’ inhibitions, as much as is their lack of familiarity with curly hair textures.

TRANSCRIPT 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Carla:</th>
<th>Kesha:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>There are some white people with overly kinky you know curly hair</td>
<td>Oh /Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>And the white students don’t want to work on them either</td>
<td>because they’re scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>I don’t know what they’re scared of</td>
<td>&lt;But see our culture is changing so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>you have all these interracial couples and all () things like that</td>
<td>You () Don’t () Know what is coming up you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>and so you have to be able to be versatile as a hair stylist</td>
<td>and so you have to be able to be versatile as a hair stylist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>to work with all kind of hair textures () you know</td>
<td>to work with all kind of hair textures () you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>[((looks pointedly at Carla))]</td>
<td>[((looks pointedly at Carla))]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>[&gt;(black white&lt; () that’s not even an issue</td>
<td>[&gt;(black white&lt; () that’s not even an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>[((points toward Carla))]</td>
<td>[((points toward Carla))]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>[It's ha::ir</td>
<td>[It's ha::ir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Carla: “Well I’ve heard about () uh () black people come into a salon”</td>
<td>you know like at Santa Monica on Wilshire or something and =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>you know like at Santa Monica on Wilshire or something and =</td>
<td>Kesha: [((looks at Carla))]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>[=(And they’re like ())</td>
<td>[=(And they’re like ())</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>&gt;‘What do you want?’&lt;</td>
<td>&gt;‘What do you want?’&lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>[Eh hmmph</td>
<td>[Eh hmmph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>[((turns gaze to African American women present))</td>
<td>[((turns gaze to African American women present))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Carla:</td>
<td>Kesha: [&gt;(You sneed the directions some”where?”&lt; =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td>[((Nods head vertically and emphatically))]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Ye::((hh)ah</td>
<td>Carla: Eh he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Kesha: [=‘Because certainly you’re not getting your hair done!’&lt;</td>
<td>Kesha: [=‘Because certainly you’re not getting your hair done!’&lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td>Because we don’t () know () how () to do that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carla’s second verbal contribution at line 82 broadens her initial description of the inhibitions of White cosmetology students. White students are not only hesitant to service Black patrons, but also White clients who have “overly kinky” or “curly” hair textures. While Carla is representative of the generic group of White cosmetology students she critiques, she distances herself from those who are “scared” to style naturally curly hair by stating, “I don’t know what they’re scared of” (my emphasis). Through this stance, Carla ideologically aligns with Kesha, May, and Joyce who have thus far critiqued cosmetology students who are “fearful” of doing Black hair and the “‘myths’ that ground their perspectives.

Implicit in Carla’s comments, though, are several potentially offensive characterizations that may compel Kesha to reprove Carla. Carla initially describes curly hair as “overly kinky” which carries with it the controversial insinuation that hair can actually be too kinky. Within African American communities, the term “kinky” is also an in-group characterization of a particular type of Black hair (Smitherman 1994). Since this term often carries a negative connotation, its use by Carla could be deemed offensive. Carla’s commentary thus far presumes that some Whites, but all Blacks have “overly kinky hair.”
takes issue with this implicit assumption in lines 87-95. Because there are biracial couples who presumably bear children with an even broader range of hair textures, Kesha suggests that all hair stylists must be versatile enough to service whomever enters into their salon. It is striking to observe the way Kesha ends her commentary. She looks pointedly at Carla and states, ">Black White< (.) that's not even an issue." Then, while pointing toward Carla, she adds, "It's hair!" This epistemic stance problematizes semantic distinctions between hair textures, particularly those which are value-laden (e.g., "overly kinky") and race-specific. As a modestly veiled reproof of Carla's narrative, Kesha's rebuttal acts in the pragmatic sense of counter-narrative. Her counter-narrative also continues the work of co-constructing an ideology that is celebratory of Black hair and critical of Eurocentric practices in the hair-care field.

Carla re-enters the conversation again at line 96 with what may be considered a new strategy for aligning with Kesha and others; she reports cases wherein Black patrons have been excluded from (presumably) White salons. Interestingly, Kesha co-constructs Carla's narrative through a mock response that functions, in sentiment and tone, as an anticipatory completion (see lines 99-111). Though Carla ratifies Kesha's voicing of White stylists who exclude Black patrons because they are unfamiliar with their hair textures, Kesha has now turned her gaze to the African American women present. Thus, even in the brief moment when Carla is allowed to be part of the in-group via her collaboration in generic narration, Kesha's nonverbal cues invoke participant frameworks that are designed to elicit involvement from women other than Carla.

Another narrative shift occurs when Linda, who has thus far been largely silent, begins a personal narrative about dolls. Her narrative is nostalgic, recalling a time during her childhood when the Barbie (read as "White") doll was all she had. Her narrative, depicted in Transcript 4, also celebrates the advent of the Black Chrissy doll [see Figure 1].

**Figure 1:** Beautiful Chrissy Doll, ©1969 Ideal Toy Corporation

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**TRANSCRIPT 4**

112 Linda: "It's not that they don't know how to do that."°
113 <It's just that they're not familiar
114 Kesha: ['They don't know how
115 May: Okay
116 Linda: = I would say that
117 (1.0)
118 ever since I um grew up
119 I've always had to work with Barbie
120 ((looks toward Carla and Kesha))
121 (1.0)
122 So I kind of like had a wider range [because working with her =
123 Kesha: ["Go ahead"
124 Linda: = <that was basically the texture of a Caucasian person's hair
125 May: <"Yes [Yes].°
126 Linda: [However

Linda constructs a personal narrative of overcoming a problematic event. As a child for whom there were few Black dolls, she learned how to style her Barbie (read as "white") doll's hair.
I learned how to work with that hair
and style it with water and grease
And make it pretty he
which I wanted my doll TO BE
Because that's all I had
(1.0)
However, once my mom (. ) <got me a Chrissy doll>
I was able to get [Basically=

Kesha: [All right Chrissy!
[Claps hands, looks at Linda]

Remember the Chrissy? heh
Carla: [heh heh heh [heh heh
Kesha: [GIRL WE'RE [GOING BA: CK! heh
Joyce: [=>Right down to Chrissy< Okay hh heh!

[="the same (. ) the same thing"
but then a little more on the [line of our hair
[(Looks toward Carla and Kesha)]
But [Not
[horizontal nod, signals "no" with hands])
(1.0)
it (. ) at (. ) a:ll
(0.5)
but then I had to learn what <learn on my own
so I did get a range to deal in (. ) kind of like (. ) @different styles@
[(Looks at Carla)]
[<but I don't think that:tt (. ) for one reason that our hair is any different =
Kesha: [Right
Linda: =other than the fact that it is of [just a different texture
[(accompanying vertical nod)]
and that is all
Kesha: But look at some Blacks
You have some Blacks that have straight hair like [hers
[points at Carla while looking at May)]
Joyce: That's right
Straight hair
That's right
Kesha: So What's Up?
It's about knowing how to deal with [hair
[hair period
Kesha: Bottom line you know
May: heh heh heh
Kesha: You have to be you know very analytical when you're looking at hair
and just determine what can be done to it and how
May: mm hmm mm hmm
Kesha: And so you know

Linda's Chrissy narrative is an occasion for co-remembering among the African American women; This narrative event underscores their shared childhood experiences of marginalization and overcoming

Counternarrative subtext; appears to be directed at Carla

Kesha expands her counter-narrative in Transcript 3 (Lines 87-95) that dealing with hair necessitates understanding a wide range of hair textures versus making race-based distinctions or similarities between them
Linda initially frames her narrative to refute Kesha’s prior claim that White stylists simply do not know how to do Black hair. She suggests that White stylists’ alleged ignorance is instead a result of their limited exposure to Black hair, both as children and, as we will later see, professionals. To contextualize this argument, Linda discloses her early impressionable experiences with Chrissy, one of the first Black dolls on which she practiced hair grooming. While her narrative is launched as a personal narrative (i.e., “I would say that ever since I grew up...”), it eventually becomes a narrative event, indeed a co-remembering, between Linda and her African American peers. May, Joyce, and Kesha employ the cultural discourse style of call and response (Smitherman 1977, Morgan 1998), in-group terminology (e.g., Girl, we’re going back!), various continuers (e.g., mm hmmm, Go ahead), as well as more lengthy emphatic turns, to co-construct Linda’s narrative-in-progress. Reciprocally, Linda uses eye gaze to organize their orientation and participation in her narrative. The Chrissy narrative thus emerges as a collective and nostalgic account of their initial hair grooming practice. It is also a means through which Black women discursively co-facilitate with one another by virtue of their shared childhood grooming experiences and discourse practices.

As a thinly veiled description of African American women’s marginalization, the Chrissy narrative is imbued with the subversive force of “camouflaged narratives” (Morgan 1995). These African Americans’ testimonies critique and explain their past as children for whom there were very few Black dolls on which to practice hair care. Note, for example, the pragmatic force of several narrative tropes of marginalization and triumph that are sprinkled throughout Linda’s narrative:

- (Lines 116-119) “I would say that (1.0) ever since I um grew up, I’ve always had to work with Barbie” — denotes Linda’s marginalization as a child for whom there were few Black dolls.
- (Lines 126-130) “However I learned how to work with that hair and style it with water and grease and make it pretty hhh which I wanted my doll TO BE” — inscribes a tale of overcoming despite limitations posed by the lack of Black dolls.
- (Line 131) “Because that’s all I had” — reinvokes Linda’s marginalized status while, at the same time, rationalizes her need to “make do” with Barbie.

The Chrissy narrative also functions as a counternarrative by exposing the privilege of White stylists who, like Carla, often have had the option to choose whether or not they even wish to develop proficiency in Black hair-care. For the African American women, the decision to become proficient in styling European American hair textures was never much of an option, as much as a prerequisite. (Thus, while Joyce does not “do naturally straight hair,” she is nevertheless trained to do it.) Moreover, this counternarrative appears to be explicitly directed at Carla, in particular, when in lines 152-157, Linda tells Carla, “but I don’t think that” for one reason that our hair is any different than the fact that it is of just a different texture and that is all.” While Carla lacks direct culpability for the stance of which she is reproved, she nevertheless appears to be the central target of this counternarrative. After Linda concludes, Kesha expands her initial counternarrative in Transcript 3. She again underscores the diversity of Black hair textures and the importance of stylists knowing how to deal with a range of textures. In doing so, she references Carla with a detached third-person pronoun (i.e., “You have some Blacks that have straight hair like hers”) and a wave of the hand, though her gaze remains intentedly fixed on May and Linda. Carla’s status as a peripheral participant, even a potential recipient, of these counternarratives is all the more pronounced here.

In the final sequence, depicted in Transcript 5, Joyce suggests additional factors that might color the current state of affairs within the beauty profession. Her personal narrative exposes her position of relative privilege among her African American peers. Linda, for example, responds to Joyce with a counternarrative that is a literal and symbolic extension of the Chrissy narrative. May follows by soliciting each of the women’s support for African American braidiers who find state board requirements to be irrelevant to their professional interests. Carla’s verbal contribution remains notably absent during this latter part of the exchange.

TRANSCRIPT 5
173 Joyce: I came from
174 I went to a community college cosmetology school
175 and so my instructors were versed in all of it
176 and so I was the one who got to pick
177 I mean I couldn’t get everything within that short amount of time
178 so I was the one who made the decision
on what I wanted to excel in
while I was there
but um and a lot of the White students that got a chance to choo
if they wanted to excel in Black hair
if they wanted to excel in naturally straight hair (.) whatever
because we had clients
our clients were the college students on campus and other clients
so we got a chance to choose what we want(ed)
but the teachers tried to expose us to everything
And we went from there

Linda: See you were blessed
because most instructors
and usually when you go
I know for a long time
it was hard to find a doll with even kinked hair
<the ones that you worked with
so if it wasn't out there for you to work
and learn
and be educated on
then how were you supposed to learn in these schools?
So now if they would put =

May: Yes!
Linda: = different textures
<ALL different textures
and make every student learn from all different textures
Joyce: That's (right)
Linda: then they those students as well can learn on all different textures
they won't be intimidated by it
because if you just only get one side (.) type of model
then that's all they're gonna work want to work on

May: mm hmm Now like I said
all of you girls need to join up with the braiders' association
We would like to send state board a letter letting them know that
hey, why, especially for home-based braiders
why should we (.)
<home based braiders are saying
'Why should I go and get my license?'
They're not teaching me anything about braiding
and all of that
what I really want to learn
so why should I go?'
So they're gonna have to put all of this on on uh
put it in the curriculum
in schools now...
So uh we hope you'll contact them about this

May: That's why we have the braiders' association
Joyce: All right!
May: Okay so that's why we're getting together
and you need numbers like this
so we can talk
we can do it very nicely
Narratives not only serve to engender unity among participants, but as Ochs and Capps (1996) note, they also organize diversity within a collective. This point is underscored in the last excerpt, where Joyce’s personal narrative serves to differentiate her experiences from that of her African American peers. Following Linda’s account of her belated exposure to Black dolls as a child, Joyce describes her own experiences as a cosmetology student. Her narrative implicates the curriculum and instructors in cosmetology schools in fostering an apprehensive or welcoming disposition toward Black hair-care. Joyce’s narrative also exposes her relative privilege as a student who was able to decide which hair textures she was exposed to in cosmetology school.

Not surprisingly, Joyce’s experience captures the attention of Linda, who characterizes Joyce’s experience as a blessing (line 189). Joyce’s story is a catalyst for a second tale that, strikingly enough, invokes the referential and pragmatic detail of the Barbie/Chrissey narrative. Like Black girls who struggled to find dolls with features similar to their own, Linda asserts that many African American students face the challenge of “finding a doll with kinky hair” in cosmetology school (lines 192-198). To remedy this problem, Linda suggests that both curly- and straight-hair models be introduced in cosmetology schools to promote more equitable exposure to Black hair within the wider beauty profession. May’s ensuing narrative enlists the women’s support in a campaign to make cosmetology board requirements for African American braiders more relevant to their craft. May’s commentary extends the political subtext of Linda’s narrative; she indicts the larger beauty industry that marginalizes Afrocentric hair-care practices and hair styles.

Linda and May’s respective narratives are similarly charged with the oppositional undercurrent of the counternarratives previously discussed in Transcripts 1-4. It is thus telling to examine how the other women, particularly Carla and Joyce, participate in this exchange. As noted earlier, Carla remains a silent peripheral participant. However, whereas during prior sequences, her gaze was directed at the women speaking in prior sequences, Carla’s gaze is directed toward the floor throughout most of this exchange. And Joyce, whose recently exposed privilege might seem to align her more closely with Carla (and a generalized category of “White stylists”), nevertheless maintains an affinity with May and Linda by conveying a supportive stance for the strategies they propose. Joyce’s affiliative stance is conveyed through such comments as (i.e., “that’s (right)” line 204, “all right!” line 225) and an attentive gaze. (Kasha, though silent, also signals her participation in ongoing discourse through eye contact.) The differences between the African American women thus appear to be minimized as they coalesce around strategies to debunk “myths” and allay stylists’ “fears” toward Black hair-care within the wider hair-care profession.

CONCLUSION

Narratives, what they say, how they are conveyed, and situated in particular socio-historical and cultural contexts, are insightful texts. Through them, speakers constitute their identities, make subtle and overt distinctions among themselves, and organize themselves into a collective. In the episodes analyzed above, women use verbal and non-verbal speech, including gaze, body orientation, prosody, and other linguistic cues to convey stances that align or exclude other speakers. Narratives also speak to other (and often) preceding stories, sometimes functioning as political meta-commentaries, or counternarratives, which disrupt hegemonic ideologies conveyed in prior talk. Narratives act pragmatically in this sense, serving to co-construct and shape speakers’ identities, experiences, and positionalities. This paper has attempted to elucidate these discursive dynamics of narrative.

The preceding analysis specifically emphasizes how women co-construct unity, and underscore individual or collective differences, in everyday talk and interaction. To the extent that Black women invoke shared historical experiences that are largely predicated on their race and gender (e.g., they were all Black girls who yearned for a doll that looked like them with which they could practice hair styling), this paper highlights different forms of knowing and speaking that may emerge from African American and European American women’s cultural experience and practices. The preceding analysis also sheds light on how dilemmas of difference and privilege are manifested and resolved in exchanges between European American and African American women.

Notably, Carla’s expressed desire to learn how to style Black hair may potentially serve to align her with the African American women present at the hair-styling demonstration. However, her controversial reference to “having a lot of Black friends” and, presumably, her privilege as a cosmetology student who does not have to learn how to style Black hair in order to become officially licensed, hinder her subsequent attempts to align with the African American women present. Though different degrees of privilege also become manifest among the African American female conversants, the revelation of difference is discursively resolved in a manner that preserves Black women’s collective stance and affiliation. Namely, Joyce’s disclosure that she was exposed to “multicultural” hair styling and treatment in cosmetology school does not serve to reposition her as a peripheral participant in the narrative’s progression. Rather, she marks her alignment with May’s strategy for contesting Eurocentric dictates and practices at work in wider cosmetology profession. Additionally, Joyce’s prior engagement in Black
women’s collective Chrissy narrative revealed that she, too, experienced a dearth of Black dolls, likewise marking her privilege as indeed relative.

Discourse and narrative analysis affords a deeper understanding of how macro-level forms of privilege and power play out in everyday interactions – including an early morning discussion about “doing Black hair.” In particular, these modes of analyses illuminate the distancing and affiliative stances women adopt in and through talk and cultural practice, as well as the broader sociohistorical and political realities that situate women’s cross-cultural engagements in the present.

NOTES
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1. Transcript notations largely follow those noted by Ochs and Taylor (1995):
   [ a left-hand bracket indicates the onset of overlapping, simultaneous utterances.
   (0.1) indicates a length of pause within and between utterances, timed in tenths of a second.
   ( ( ) double parentheses enclose nonverbal and other descriptive information.
   ( ) single parenthesis enclose words that are not clearly audible (i.e., best guesses).
   _ underlining indicates stress on a syllable or word(s).
   Italicized words or phrases indicate talk that is in some way animated or performed (i.e. sarcasm).
   CAPS upper case indicates louder or shouted talk.
   : a colon indicates a lengthening of a sound, the more colons, the longer the sound
   © voice indicates smile-voice intonation; marks talk that is delivered as though speaker was smiling.
   ° this symbol is placed before and after words or phrases that are delivered in a soft pitch.
   / this arrow marks words or phrases delivered with a downward intonational contour.
   > < The combination of “greater than” and “less than” symbols enclose words and/or talk that is compressed or rushed.
   < > The combination of “less than” and “greater than” symbols enclose words and/or talk that is markedly slowed or drawn out.
   < The “less than” symbol by itself indicates that the immediately following talk is “jump-started,” i.e.,
   sounds like starts of with a rush.
   hh, (hh) The letter h marks hearable aspiration, the more h’s, the more aspiration. Aspiration may represent breathing, laughter, etc. If it occurs inside the boundaries of a word, it may be enclosed in parentheses in order to set it apart from the sounds of the word.
   Heh heh, Ha ha marks laughter
   (try 1) (try 2) this arrangement of words/phrases encircled by parentheses and separated by a single oblique or slash represent two alternate hearings.


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