

ARTICLE

‘Depending on where I am...’ Hair, travelling and the performance of identity among Black and mixed-race women

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Abstract

A growing interdisciplinary literature examines the role of hair textures and styles in Black and mixed-race women's identity performances. Through an analysis of travel narratives, this paper extends and complements research on the context-dependency of racialized identity performances. This paper presents an analysis of 24 qualitative interviews with Black and mixed-race women in England and Germany. The question it seeks to answer is: ‘How do changes in context alter Black and mixed-race women's hair-styling practices as a performance of identity?’ Navigating a novel context could lead the women to (1) conform to local standards of beauty and femininity, (2) resist external expectations, (3) try out novel performances and (4) negotiate the complex performance of belonging. All in all, this paper shows that Black and mixed-race women dialogically re/negotiated and performatively re/created how they identify and how they are identified by others as they moved from one context to another.

KEYWORDS

Black women, context, hairstyling, identity performance, mixed-race, travelling

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INTRODUCTION

'I had traveled freely all over the world'; Audre Lorde (2009) writes in her essay *Is your hair still political?* and continues: 'now, in a Caribbean country, a Black woman was telling me I could not enter her land because of how I wore my hair' (p. 225). Lorde's reflections on her trip to Virgin Gorda and the implications of her hair, styled as locs, which delayed her boarding an airplane and entering the country show that the performance of racialized identities and the reception of such performances is a highly contextualized matter. Consequently, a social and cultural psychological perspective on racial identity performances should focus on how encountering and navigating a novel context shifts and shapes how individuals see themselves and how they are seen by others and what this means for their everyday performances of self. It should also focus on how such performances are influenced by historically formed and culturally specific contextual features (Reicher, 2004) and how norm-conforming or deviant performances are managed, re/negotiated and re/constructed. Research into this spatial dimension of contextual changes, rather than changes over time, is limited in the current discourse, and this paper seeks to add to this literature.

This paper will begin with an outline of key concepts and research trends on racialized identity performances in context. Next, we will provide an overview of the importance placed upon Black hair and hairstyling at every stage of Black and mixed-race women's life course to provide a backdrop for understanding the role of hair styling in Black and mixed-race women's identity performances. This paper draws from a larger study exploring Black hair aesthetics and representations of Black hair among Black and mixed-race women in England and Germany, and analyses specifically participants' travel narratives and narratives of temporarily moving abroad. Contributing to the literature on identity performances, this paper posits that Black and mixed-race women used hair textures and styles to dialogically re/negotiate and performatively re/create their identities as they moved from one context to another.

To be clear, the combined use of 'Black' and 'mixed-race' adds complexity. This complexity is necessary to acknowledge that some women rejected or expressed discomfort at identifying and being identified as Black or mixed-race. Hence, we use 'Black' and 'mixed-race' to situate this project within the literature, while simultaneously advocating for a bottom-up approach that promotes an analysis of the women's own understandings and identity-relevant frameworks of meaning. Indeed, our approach to data and analysis allowed the women to describe themselves in their own terms (Smith, 2012) and makes visible the dialogical, performative and argumentative aspects of racialized identities (Howarth, 2009).

IDENTITIES IN CONTEXT

This paper takes as its point of departure an understanding that identities are relational and contextual. Mead's (1934) lectures on self and society, Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of the presentation of self and Tajfel's (1974) early research on social identity all posit that identity is a dynamic and contextualized process that arises and is constructed in the meeting of self and other(s). Furthermore, DuBois' (1996) theory of Double Consciousness and Fanon's (1952/2008) work on the bodily and historio-racial schema conceive of the process of self-formation within the context of the modern racialized world as taking place in the encounter between the racializing and the racialized. In being mindful of the centrality of the self-other relationship for identity, we follow Duveen (2001) who notes that identity is 'as much about the process of being identified as it is about the process of identification' (p. 259). It is in the presence of others and through the eyes of others (Howarth, 2002) that individuals form an understanding of how they see themselves and how they are seen by others. Meta-perceptions—how one thinks one is seen by others—are also important here because they can, within a particular context, motivate strategic performances of identity (Amer, 2020; Blackwood et al., 2015; Vorauer et al., 2000). Identity is then also a matter of negotiation, communication and resistance within and against the constraints of a given interaction's power dynamics (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). While the material and ideological nature of social categories implies that these categories, and in particular the categories of race and gender may be (to a certain extent) imposed upon individuals

and ascribe a particular identity (Duveen, 2001; Howarth, 2010), research shows how even when faced with negative stereotypes of themselves or their communities, individuals assert, challenge, construct and creatively re/imagine more positive versions of self and of their communities (Howarth, 2002, 2011). Indeed, some complex identities are strategically performed as is the case with biracial individuals' code-switching language depending on whether they are in a predominately Black or White context (Gaither et al., 2015) and British Muslim women's decision to wear hijab as an expression of a Muslim female agency that counteracts and resists simplistic cultural constructions of Muslim womanhood (Mirza, 2013).

Importantly, identities are intersectionally constructed, experienced and embodied as well as performatively enacted. Both embodied intersectionality and performativity point towards the visual aspects of identity (Howarth, 2011). In going beyond how race and gender are 'written on and experienced within the body' (Mirza, 2013, p. 5), performativity brings to the fore the creative aspects of identity and the processes of challenging, resisting, negotiating and re/creating how others see us. Performativity suggests that identity—including gender (Butler, 2007) and racial (Sims et al., 2020; Tate, 2013) identity—is a matter of *doing*. Identity performances as the continual presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) thus constitute a social choreography, which Cox (2015) defines as 'shapeshifting made visible' and as 'embodied meaning making, physical story telling, [and] affective physicality' (p. 28). What we take this to mean in this study is the importance of a methodology that allows us to capture how Black and mixed-race women see themselves, how they are seen by others and how they think they are seen by others and how the intersectional politics that govern these processes are experienced within and lived out on the body.

However, identities are also highly fluid and contextual, bound up within the historical, cultural and social fabric of the context of their production. As Reicher (2004) writes: 'The world is not homogeneous. Different contexts are differentially structured, and this means that our categories of understanding are similarly malleable'. (p. 935). This implies that in changing contexts, individuals need to re/learn the meanings, expectations and rights associated with particular categories and figure out the dynamics of who fits into certain categories and the relationship between different categories. Twine (1996), for instance, offers a case study of girls of African descent, who co-constructed identities as White girls during adolescence and who re-constructed a Black or mixed-race identity after moving to a university campus. Simmons (Simmons, 2008), in turn, discusses the racial dilemma of African American exchange students in the Dominican Republic and Dominican exchange students visiting the U.S.. Each group faced the historically formed racial systems inherent to the national context they were visiting and struggled to re/negotiate their ideas of Blackness and mixedness as well as who they are within this new national context. While research has examined the construction and performance of identities within a variety of contexts—institutional (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013), national (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Lukate, 2019a; Wagner et al., 2012), socio-political (Reddy & Gleibs, 2019)—and studied how changes *within* social contexts, such as the emergence of the term 'African American' (Philogène, 2001) or the introduction of mixed census categories (Aspinall, 2003; Song & Aspinall, 2012), affect individual's identities, it is the aspect of individual's moving from one socio-political context to another that we are interested in. This interest in the importance of spatial context changes for identity is less explored in the psychological literature, compared with sociology (Bagnoli, 2007, 2009; Sims, 2016) and tourism studies (Desforges, 2000; Noy, 2004). This paper thus centres Black and mixed-race women's travel narratives, looking at how changes in contexts (defined as spatial movements from one socio-geographic context to another) correspond to and bring about changes in the ways in which the women style their hair as part of their performance of identity.

HAIRSTYLING AND THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

Located at the border between self and other, hair is a deeply private and personal matter while simultaneously hypervisible and public (Callier & Pérez, 2014). What makes hair—textures, styling, presences and absences—so potent for the study of racial identity performances is that hair, more so than skin colour (but see Glenn, 2008; Hunter, 2011), is malleable. As Mercer (2000) notes, hair is part of 'our modes of appearance in the everyday world' (p. 112). Hair can be groomed, cut, weaved and styled.

These acts invest hair with symbolic meaning (Synnott, 1987) and are part of its 'communicative doing, its performativity, and its signification of race, gender, sexuality, and class' (Callier & Pérez, 2014, p. 391). Hence, hair is involved in the performance of identity because it is through and with hair that individuals make statements about self and society.

Black and mixed-race women's relationship with hair is complex, rooted in the interplay of race, gender, class, sexuality, power and beauty. Feminist writers (Caldwell, 1991; Dabiri, 2019; Davis, 1994; Hill & Callier, 2014; Hooks, 2001; Johnson & Harris, 2001; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987; Pérez, 2014; Spry, 2014) have often used their own experiences to explicate how hair influenced their everyday experiences from childhood to adulthood, noting its relation to issues such as motherhood, professional status, the law and identity. Taking the form of personal anecdotes and coming-of-age stories, this line of work demonstrates the centrality of hair for Black and mixed-race women's everyday experiences. It also draws attention to experience and everyday narratives as methods through which Black and mixed-race women produce specialized knowledge about self and the world (Collins, 2000). Scholarship has also documented the re/production of historically formed notions of afro-textured hair and dark skin as other to Whiteness, beauty, femininity, acceptability and professionalism (Craig, 2006; Edmonds, 2007; Nichols, 2013; Patton, 2006; Tate, 2007; Thompson, 2009), which nurture lingering preferences for lighter skin and straighter hair textures throughout Black communities in Africa and the diaspora (Candelario, 2000; Hunter, 2005; Oyedemi, 2016; Tate, 2013) as well as the wider society. Indeed, experimental social psychological studies consistently show that Black women with natural, afro-textured and curly hair or locs are seen as less professional and less attractive compared with Black women with straight(end) hair (Koval & Rosette, 2021; Opie & Phillips, 2015). As a performative practice, hairstyling thus allows Black and mixed-race women to engage with, strive for and challenge how they are positioned by hegemonic, racialized and gendered beauty norms.

However, hair—both in terms of textures and styles—works differently for Black and mixed-race women. Looking at racialized identity performances in England, Tate (2013) describes the relational shame attached to bodies that bear the mark of Whiteness and shows how Jamaican-heritage mixed-race women's recognition as Black could be contingent upon an obligation 'to perform Black beauty by wig, weave and bleach' (p. 230). Depending on the context (Albuja et al., 2018) and in anticipation of mis- or nonrecognition (Albuja, Gaither, et al., 2019; Albuja, Sanchez, & Gaither, 2019; Amer, 2020; Cheryan & Monin, 2005), mixed-race individuals may thus be motivated to manipulate or 'accent' the texture and colour of their hair to be seen as more Black, White or mixed-race (Khanna, 2011; Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Sims et al., 2020). Importantly, because 'race' operates differently in different socio-political contexts (Simmons, 2008), racialized perceptions (including meta-perceptions) and performances, including the processes of identifying and making identifications, are always highly context specific. Scholars focusing on the Latin Americas and the Caribbean have called attention to how Black and mixed-race women's relationship to hair and beauty is differentially shaped by the *mestizaje* logic (Edmonds, 2007; Simmons, 2008; Moreno Figueroa, 2010, 2013) and how these ideas travel through the diaspora (Candelario, 2000). Moreover, Sims (2016) reports variations in how mixed-race people in the United Kingdom and the U.S. were *racially* perceived by others while travelling internationally due to their skin colour and hair textures, and Lukate (2019a) explores how Black and mixed-race women in Germany assessed their hair against historically formed notions of Germanness, which translated into a concern with long, straight and *blonde* hair. Therefore, the assumption is that Black and mixed-race women travelling or temporarily moving abroad would re/construct their identity performances because the perception and recognition of their performance is mediated by the immediate socio-cultural context they are in.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to explore how changes in socio-geographic context—because of travelling or temporarily moving abroad—corresponded to and encouraged changes in Black and mixed-race

women's hairstyling as a performance of identity. While experimental studies are beneficial to studying *other*-perceptions of visible identity expressions (Sims et al., 2020), qualitative methods have been shown to hold distinct advantages in studying participants' own understandings of their performances, including the motivations and reasons behind particular identity performances (Bowleg, 2008; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). The 24 interviews with 25 Black and mixed-race women¹ that inform the analysis are a subset of a sample of 35 single, semi-structured interviews ($n_{\text{England}} = 15$, $n_{\text{Germany}} = 20$) from a larger mixed method study on social representations of Black hair and Black hair aesthetics in England and Germany (Lukate, 2019b). Women who self-identified as having afro-textured hair and spanning a wide age range (20–56) were interviewed. Twelve women listed one parent as being White Austrian, British or German and one woman identified one parent as being of White British Nigerian heritage. Women were recruited via social media platforms, at sites the first author visited as part of the ethnography, the first author's networks, and snowballing.

The majority of interviews ($n = 31$) were conducted between spring 2015 and winter 2016 by the first author, who is fluent in English and German and identified as mixed-race. In Germany, an additional four interviews were conducted in the spring of 2016 by a second interviewer because some women with chemically straightened hair had voiced concerns about being interviewed by a researcher with 'good hair'. In the present study, texturism,² along with colourism, was thus a complicating consideration, which shaped the relationships and bonds between researcher and researched (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Merriam et al., 2001). All interview participants gave written informed consent, and the study was approved by the Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 min and contained questions on the meaning of the term *natural hair*; the role of hair in dating and employment, and the relevance of media representations of Black hair. Additionally, the women were asked to narrate their life story as a 'hair story' (Lukate, 2019b). Interviewees were not explicitly asked about identity or travelling. Participants were invited to bring along personal photographs and about half of the participants had brought selected photographs to the interview or spontaneously opted to show the interviewer photographs on their mobile phone or tablet. Photographs acted as a guide through the women's hair story during the interview. However, in acknowledging seeing and looking as cultural practices (Moreno Figueroa, 2008), photographs remained with the women and were not analysed. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in the original language upon completion, and individual quotes were then translated into English by the first author.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allows for the identification and interpretation of patterns across datasets. The analysis of data had an explicit focus on how Black and mixed-race women's hairstyles as a performance of identity changed as a result of changes in context. Following transcription, all interviews were read to search for travel narratives or narratives of temporarily moving abroad. The subsequent 24 interview transcripts were then analysed to identify patterns in the women's stories of changing their hairstyles as a result of travelling or temporarily moving abroad. The analysis was situated within a framework that brings together critical realism (Sims Schouten et al., 2007) and (Black) feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Dotson, 2015; Sweet, 2018) to acknowledge that knowledge is produced in and through the complex relationship between embodiment, intersubjectivity and power.

The analysis was conducted by the first author. Initial codes were generated at the semantic level of what participants had said (e.g. 'being called white girl') and at a more latent level (e.g. 'negotiating mixedness'). As coding progressed, codes were revised, producing more complex codes (e.g. 'performance of respectability politics') grounded in and informed by existing research and theories, as well as the literature on return travel (see Angelou, 2008; Bruner, 1996; Gyasi, 2016; Hartman, 2007;

¹At one interview, two women were present and participated in the interview.

²Texturism and colourism are forms of intra-racial discrimination and hierarchization whereby preferential treatment is given to those who have looser or straighter hair textures and lighter skin, respectively (for a discussion of colourism see Glenn, 2008; Hunter, 2005).

Mabanckou, 2013). Next, potential themes were generated and upon further revision, four themes were created which each capture how changes in context instigated or made possible a particular identity performance: blending in, anti-racist, trying on and belonging. The final step of the analysis consisted in the writing of this article and the creation of a coherent analytic narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Blending in

One of the most prominent themes was the adoption of local hairstyles and hair styling practices to blend in, rather than to visibly stand out from the host context. Blending in was evident at both the semantic and the latent levels, and related to concerns over recognition and acceptance. Strategic changes to the performance of identity through hair (styles) were directed towards people within the new context, and stories captured the negotiations of context-specific respectability politics and standards of acceptability and beauty.

Extract 1

And then I went to the U.S. I was 16. [...] I lived with a Black family and it was the other way around, so they wanted me to use the hot iron every day [...]. Every morning they used the flattening iron (sic English) and the curling iron (sic English), like they were really straightening it a lot and [...] their idea of what constitutes straight, that is to say, acceptable (sic English) hair was a lot stronger compared to what I was used to from Germany. I had the feeling that in Germany it was mainly length [...] and in the U.S. [...] the hair had to be as straight as possible.
Kimberly (31, Germany)³

Kimberly's view emphasized the active role of the host parents in introducing her to the Black hair culture and practices in the U.S. The use of English terminology in Kimberly's narratives underscores the indirect citation of the host parents and the dialogical construction of racialized identity performances (Reddy & Gleibs, 2019). Hence, in travelling or temporarily relocating to the U.S., the women were assessed within the U.S. American standards of acceptability as a parameter of beauty (Patton, 2006). Physical transformations—hair straightening and wearing weaves—enabled the women to performatively partake in and embody a certain standard of respectability that complied with normative expectations of Black femininity and beauty in the U.S. at that time.

Importantly, respectability and acceptability are not just about the women themselves but about racialized politics of re/presentation (i.e. maintaining the norm and policing deviance) and the ways in which the women's families, friends, hosts and communities saw themselves and were seen by the wider society. Accordingly, three women described how attending weddings or funerals abroad provided a pretext for relatives and friends to encourage the women to alter their appearance and engage in hairstyling practices that aligned their looks with the dominant yet local beauty norms and practices.

Extract 2

When I was about eight, yeah, I went on holiday to [the United States of] America with several other members of my family. I also had family from Trinidad who came over there as well because one of my cousins was getting married [...]. For that occasion, my aunty

³The quotes identify participants by their pseudonyms and age.

decided to relax my hair. I didn't really know what was happening at the time and I didn't really have any say in the situation, so it just kind of happened.

Delia (20, England)

While Delia noted that she had no say in her aunt's decision to chemically straighten her hair for her cousin's wedding, which she described as a 'big family occasion', the following excerpt demonstrated the dialogical negotiations that led to Bisette's decision to wear a wig for her father's funeral. She recounted,

Extract 3

Bisette: We learned that our father had died, and I didn't have time to do my hair. My hair was natural back then. I think I borrowed a wig from my cousin [...]

Interviewer: You couldn't wear natural hair in the Congo?

Bisette: No, I didn't feel comfortable. When I had it like this [i.e. natural], I was approached like "hey, why don't you fix your hair? You could just go to the hairdresser here..." All the time people would comment; I was like "okay, I have to wear a wig"

(25, Germany)

The two abstracts call attention to Black female beauty as an example of what Butler (2007) describes as the performative reiteration of hegemonic norms. Black female beauty is a matter of *doing* and, as Tate (2007) notes, about "racing" bodies and being raced by embodied subjects' (p. 307). Importantly, Blackness and Black female beauty can be performed differently in different contexts. Accordingly, the extracts show how hairstyles deemed acceptable in one national and cultural context are elsewhere deemed unacceptable and unfit for the occasion. Participation in the practices of a normalizing racialized Black beauty is thus experienced as a matter of acceptance and recognition by significant family members and inclusion in Black/African communities while being abroad.

In navigating new contexts, the women adapted their hairstyling practices and changed their hairstyles to blend in and conform to local and culturally specific standards of beauty. An example of what Elizabeth Bucar (2017) describes as 'creative conformity' (p. 18), these changes affirmed the women's agency while simultaneously making explicit the constraints imposed upon the women's identity performances by the specific socio-cultural context of their travel destination. Hairstyling decisions were shaped in dialogues with multiple and relevant others about what it means to be and embody an acceptable and respectable Black or mixed-race girl and woman. This is important because social rejection from close others may be more relevant than social threats from strangers (Uskul & Over, 2014). In this section, then, identity performances through hair textures and styles were directed towards and negotiated with audiences in the new context.

The performance of anti-racist aesthetics

Contrastingly, four women discussed how they deliberately embraced hairstyles that made them stand out from the host context. Here, the women thus use hairstyling to actively and performatively work against the boundaries of how 'race', gender, class and beauty work to limit who they can be within a given context.

Extract 4

Interviewer: And back then in the Dominican Republic, did you consider straightening your hair again?

Tanja: No, not at all, it was a very, very extreme political statement for me. [...] I thought "yeah, cool, everyone here has hair like me" and then I arrived, and nobody had this kind of hair, and I thought "ey, what's going on here?" Like nobody is wearing this kind of hair. And I was working in an orphanage and it was always a huge issue because we always had to wash and comb the children's hair, and it was always very time-consuming, and they're not allowed to go to school with curly hair, it's

prohibited. [...] And my boss often said to me: “Oh, Tanja, don't you want to be pretty for once? Don't you want to straighten your hair for once? And wear different clothes? For once, don't you want to be a beautiful woman?” And I was like, “I consider myself beautiful the way I am, and I don't want to straighten my hair and dress differently.”

Tanja⁴ (Germany)

By the time Tanja arrived in the Dominican Republic to do volunteering work, she had transitioned back from chemically straightened hair to natural hair. Previously viewed as a necessary step to deal with hair damage and scalp issues, the confrontation with the racialized and gendered logic of the Dominican beauty culture (Candelario, 2000; Simmons, 2008), led to a reframing of her natural hair as a ‘political statement’. In her discussion, Tanja displayed an awareness for how being recognized as ‘the crazy German who doesn't know any better’ allowed her to deliberately play into people's assumptions about her ignorance of Dominican hair aesthetics. Amer (2020) finds a similar strategic use of one's status and position in a study of White Muslim identity performances in the United Kingdom. This highlights how being a foreigner and a visitor afforded Tanja the power not to compromise her own aesthetics, and to resist and challenge dominant beauty standards, which favour straight(ened) hair. However, for Tanja, resistance was not only about her own personal aesthetics and translated into broader attempts to influence the recognition and acceptance of natural hair by the wider society. Tanja noted that she used her role at the orphanage to influence the children's views and ‘give them positive associations’ of their natural hair. She also spoke about the importance of surrounding herself with like-minded people at a women's rights organization, who also resisted dominant beauty norms and social pressure for conformity by wearing natural hair. It highlights how natural hair as an embodied performance of identity and a political statement has the potential to unite, leading to joint performances of anti-racist aesthetics and attempts to challenge and transform societal beauty norms (Duveen, 2001; Weitz, 2001).

The fact that participants' expectations of arriving in a country where everyone looks like them and has similar hair textures to them was met with the reality of societies steeped in racist beauty aesthetics could be an important reason why the women changed their hairstyles.

Extract 5

After I finished the Abitur,⁵ I flew to Ghana. And there I was pretty shocked about the fact that I saw almost no one who wore an Afro and like advertisements for bleaching creams were somehow everywhere, and that, well, it confused me tremendously. And it also somehow made me sad and from that point onwards I never ever straightened my hair again. [...] It was simply so deeply disappointing that I... I had to realise I actually see more people walking around with an Afro in Germany.

Rihana (25, Germany)

Rihana framed her aesthetic act of resistance as challenging the racist (beauty) ideologies which she encountered during her time in Ghana. She noted her refusal to accept Ghanaian hairdressers' urging to straighten her hair or to yield to her family's insistence that she use bleaching creams, and the shock and confusion she experienced vis-à-vis the overall pervasiveness of racialized beauty ideals and practices that valorized ‘good hair’ and ‘light skin’. Crucially, refusal, shock, disappointment and sadness re-aligned the women's sense of self and their bodies with communities and societies back home rather than the people and communities they encountered during their travels. Rihana's performative decision to never straighten her hair again is thus part of situated and ongoing processes of identification and

⁴Age anonymised at the request of the participant.

⁵The Abitur is a set of final examinations taken by students in Germany at the end of their secondary education to qualify for university.

disidentification (Ahmed, 2001). Disidentification happens through natural hair as a performance of a sense of apartness and unlikeness experienced towards the bodies of others in Ghana. In turn, natural afro-textured hair marks a performative emotional, spatial and embodied movement towards a new logic of attachment and belonging rooted in a sense of identification and likeness experienced with regard to others in England or Germany.

The excerpts discussed in this section show how the refusal of the dominant script can be an emancipatory or radical act, which led to changes in the presentation of self. It is here then that we can see how identity becomes the basis for resistance, for, as Duveen notes (2001), ‘resistance [...] is the point where an identity [...] refuses to accept an attempt at influence’ (p. 269). The women’s refusal of social pressure for conformity with dominant beauty standards is contextually driven and speaks to the conscious and reflexive agency through which the women employed hairstyling to express their identity. Yet, their status and position as foreign travelers may have facilitated such explicit acts of transgression, allowing them to strategically exploit the power of being ‘not from here’. Ultimately, this section highlights how the body, and in particular hair textures and styles, as the site of disciplinary power relations and struggles, are also sites which bear the potential for embodied, performative strategies of resistance (Bordo, 1992). That is, if beauty norms influence how Black and mixed-race women are seen and influence their hair styling practices, the extracts in this section demonstrate how hairstyling can be used to critique and challenge these norms. In refusing the norm, it is through hairstyling that the women expressed and exercised a reflexive Black female agency.

Trying on performances—distance as liberation

Next, several women discussed ways in which travelling or temporarily moving abroad allowed them to experiment with hairstyles and identities, giving them the space to try something new or different.

Extract 6

I ended up [...] going asymmetrical like cutting like this side of my hair off and, you know, [...], I remember people were like “Black can’t shave their hair off” [...]. I waited until I was in [the United States of] America where my mom couldn’t get at me, cause my mom wouldn’t have let me cut my hair [both laughing].

Rue (26, England)

For Rue, who wore a straight hair wig at the time of the interview, travelling to the U.S. provided the necessary distance to shave one side of her hair off. Her narrative shows how engaging in a performance that unsettled others’ ideas of what Black women can or ought to do with their hair required at times what Goffman (1959) describes as ‘audience separation’ (p. 57). That is, breaking loose from a familiar context allowed the women to break out of character and try something new while maintaining and protecting established impressions back home. As one woman explained,

Extract 7

I went to a concert in [City in England] and I remember seeing this girl at a concert, completely shaved head, like no... really very short. She was also Black and I think she wore big thick dark glasses and bright red lipstick and just looked stunning. [...] Ever since then, that was like three years ago, I’ve thought, “Oh, I really would love to cut my hair, but I need to wait till my cheek bones come out.” Then in New York I just thought, “No one knows me, and I can kind of start again and cut my hair, and if it looks bad, I don’t

have to show my friends and family cause I'm in a different country." So I just went to a hairdressers and got it done.

Alicia (21, England)

After finishing her undergraduate studies in England, Alicia went to the United States of America for an internship. While Alicia portrayed the short hairstyle as something that she aspired to for 'three years', she recognized the radical change from long hair to short hair constituted 'a risk' because, in her own words, 'you never know what you're going to look like cutting off all your hair, whether it will make you less feminine'. This comment illustrates how hairstyles are differentially gendered, raced and sexualized and emphasizes how the women used hairstyling to performatively experiment with and try on gender (Cox, 2015; Williams, 2002).

The significance afforded to physical distance points towards the ways in which cutting one's hair off meant to step outside of and resist situated and ongoing respectability politics and normative expectations around Black femininity and beauty. For Alicia, much like Rue, travelling constituted an escape from the influence and normative expectations of friends and family. In turn, the women 'start again' to construct and *do* their performance of a Black female body that engages, challenges, re/negotiates and transgresses intersectionally construed understandings of respectable and normative bodies (Butler, 2007; Tate, 2013). This is an important difference to the dialogical re/negotiation and performative re/construction of intersectional identities that we have seen so far. Anonymity ('No one knows me', Alicia) reduced social pressure to conform to local, U.S. American beauty standards. The women discussed cutting or shaving their hair as a radical disruption of their everyday performances of self *back home*; they were falling out of character (Goffman, 1959). Thus, although these bodily transformations took place while the women were abroad, as an identity-transforming alteration of how the women presented themselves and were perceived by others, these embodied changes were less about the need to engage in a dialogue or manage one's impression with regards to the host audience but the possibility to hide, try on, practice and establish a novel performance away from known and familiar audiences back home.

Homegoing and the performance of belonging

The final theme relates to identity performances grounded in experiences of 'homegoing'. As a particular form of travel, homegoing commonly centres around a return to Africa as the—imaginary, mythical or real—motherland from which people in the African diaspora have been disconnected by way of slavery, colonialism and migration (Bruner, 1996; Hartman, 2007). While multiple women discussed their journeys to the African continent, others described travelling to the Caribbean to learn more about their heritage, connect with family and experience a place where there are other people of African descent.

Extract 8

I went to Haiti 20... 2014, came back in... I had braids because I didn't want to do it, have to deal with my hair, you know, in another country; different climate and stuff, we were in an orphanage, and I just said... [...] So I just braided it up and went... Biggest mistake ever, because it was hot, and the hair was down. [Laughter] Oh God... [...] But I braided my hair, and when I took it out, that was when I decided I don't want extensions.

Nneka (22, England)

Nneka offered this travel story as part of her hair story to explain her motivation to break 'this cycle' that meant she 'never had [her hair] out longer than three months without getting braids'. In elaborating her reliance on braids, Nneka, too, referenced acceptability as a parameter of Black female beauty and professionalism that makes certain performances more acceptable than others. Against this backdrop,

Nneka's decision to wear her natural hair out after her return from Haiti marked a profound change in her aesthetic identity performance. Nneka explained,

Extract 9

It was the first country I've been to, where I... I didn't feel like a minority. [...] And... You underestimate it, until you actually go to a predominantly Black country, and everybody just looks like you. I mean, they can tell you're a foreigner [...] but, even then, people just assumed, because [...] people don't really visit Haiti, it's not a tourist hotspot; people just assumed I was a Haitian that was coming home to visit.

(22, England)

Travelling provided the women with a set of identity-relevant experiences that contrasted with their experiences at home. Whereas their identity was previously informed from the perspective of me-as-minority, changes in context afforded them with experiences of me-as-majority. For Nneka, this shift manifested in the decision to give up on wearing hair extensions after her return to England. It is noteworthy that Nneka relished the fact that she was mistaken for 'a Haitian [...] coming home'. Other women, and in particular those travelling to their parental home countries on the African continent, struggled with the unexpected experience of being called *oboronyi* (Ghana) or *mzungu* (Swahili-speaking countries)—a foreigner, a White person (Bruner, 1996; Lukate, *under review*). These women had anticipated to be greeted as 'one of us'. An expectation, which had in part grown out of coming of age with the repeated experience of being located as from 'somewhere else', expressed in questions such as 'where are you from' or 'when are you going back home?' (Lukate, 2019a). Rejection from both their home (British or German) and host societies put these women's sense of belonging under double jeopardy.

Although travelling 'home' was often described as an ambivalent experience and as psychologically unsettling, homegoing could afford the women with a sense of connection with people in Africa and across the African diaspora, grounded in the familiarity of hair textures and shared practices of hairstyling. Moreover, encounters during their journeys offered the women ways to aesthetically and creatively re/imagine a sense of belonging and perform who they are through hairstyling upon their return to England or Germany.

Extract 10

There [in Ghana] a woman said to me, she was like "Hey, wear your hair out. Show people what beautiful hair you have. Don't hide your hair. Don't hide it under wigs, don't hide it under a weave. Don't hide it all the time, okay? Braids are beautiful." [...] That was the first time that I thought "okay, she's right" because [...] I don't wear them [i.e. braids] because it is a trend. I have been wearing them like this [i.e. braids] for a while now because I feel closer to Africa.

Nia (23, Germany)

Nia's story shows how encounters in the travel context could encourage the women to re-think their relationship to their hair and how they started to strategically use certain hairstyles, in Nia's case, braids, upon their return to England or Germany to make visible and communicate their felt sense of belonging and attachment to the African continent or the Caribbean. Shona recounted,

Extract 11

I took that picture because that day I was just like proud like "yeah, I did [it] all myself and it looks good!" [...] I remember [...] I was on holiday in the Caribbean and I saw a girl, but she [had] her hair braided, and she put beads at the end and I just thought like "oh that

looks cool, I wonder if I can do that” [...]. And then I kind of got home and I just thought: “Let me try it.” So I got a pack with beads and then I was like “oh, it stays on!” [laughs] So it was something I started to do more and [...] I felt like I could express who I am and how I am cos I think like I'm a very fashion-y person and I like creativity a lot...

Shona (25, England)

In this excerpt, Shona's reflection on the reasons for sharing a particular picture of herself with the interviewer became the springboard for her travel narrative. Shona, who was born in England, described herself as the ‘in-between-girl’, who neither shares ‘certain experiences that other girls my age’ in the Caribbean have nor did she have ‘a hundred percent British experience’. Her locs, which Shona had since childhood, were pivotal to this sense of in-betweenness. Albeit surrounded by ‘a lot of negative connotations’, locs also ‘signify my heritage and [...] ethnic background’. As Spry (2014) noted, ‘dreadlocks are consummate performers’, which ‘shapeshift me into roles that I do and do not want to embody’ (p. 402). Playing with her locs by styling them into Bantu Knots or adding beads was a way for Shona to be more creative with the hypervisibility of Blackness and to challenge the limiting sense of identity that stemmed from the feeling that ‘my race and ethnicity [...] define who I am’ vis-à-vis her desire to be recognized as ‘an intellectual, [...] a creative person’, who ‘love[s] travelling’. Through travelling to the Caribbean, Shona found creative ways of styling her locs to dialogically engage how she sees herself and how she is seen, read and constructed as ‘a Black Caribbean woman’ by others in England. Ultimately, her narrative points towards the importance of the structural context—the intersectional category of Black Caribbean woman—as a constraint on identity (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010) and the possibilities to performatively negotiate, challenge and resist such constraints through hairstyling.

It is here that we can begin to complicate the relationship between geography, place, body and identity. As a quest for connection, roots and belonging, homegoing was motivated by the experience that the simultaneous naturalization of place, body, and identity located the women within the geographies and histories of the African diaspora. However, the experience of being called White and a foreigner called into question the practice of naturalizing body, identity and place, and required the women to construct alternative practices of inhabiting places, of multiple, situated ways of belonging. Hence, these shifts in identity demonstrate how identity is both situated and relational and how, in following Ahmed (2001), ‘[d]ifference [...] is not what belongs to a particular body, but materialises as a relationship between bodies’ (p. 16). That is, the body constitutes the border between self and other, where similarity and difference, likeness and unlikeness are dialogically re/produced and performatively re/enacted as we move from one context to another, from one encounter to the next.

Limitations and future directions

Before we summarize our findings, we would like to address potential for future research. Our analysis of how changes in socio-geographic context led to strategic changes in the women's hairstyles did not examine potential differences between women based in Germany and women based in England. Such analyses were beyond the scope of the present paper, but point towards the role of the national context and context-specific patterns of migration in exposure or likelihood to engage in certain forms of travel. For instance, only women in Germany spoke about participating in a high school exchange and only one woman from Germany mentioned travelling to a country in the Caribbean compared with several women from England. Future research could broaden the sample beyond self-identifying women and examine differences in individuals travelling ‘home’ to Africa versus the Caribbean. This could further our understanding of how belonging is experienced and performed differently in the Black African diasporas. Furthermore, the data showed divergent responses to travelling to the U.S. In *Blending In*, the U.S. were the dominant context where the women engaged in hair straightening practices as children or teenagers. In *Trying On Performances*, however, the U.S. featured as the country where the women broke out of familiar performances and tried on gendered and racialized identity performances. While we have

argued that this is the result of the presence or absence of social pressure from relevant and close others, a developmental analysis, which is beyond the scope of this paper, could help shed further light into these dynamics. Another limitation of this paper is that interviewing two women together potentially made a difference in terms of one woman influencing what or how the other woman talked about her experiences. Similarly, much could be gained from analysing how the women narrated transformations of self (Gillespie, 2005, 2010) and how this relates to transformations in individuals' understandings of how 'race', gender, class and beauty (among other social categories) work to constrain who they can be within a particular context. However, such analyses are for the future. Limitations notwithstanding, with this sample, we sought to explore an interesting and surprising aspect within the data (i.e. repeated travel narratives and narratives of temporarily moving abroad that corresponded to changes in the presentation of self) and to complement and extend current research and thinking on the relationship between socio-geographic context and the performance of racialized identities. In so doing, we followed Bauer and Gaskell (2014) who argue that 'the unexpected and the surprise' (p. 345) are key quality indicators for qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

'On a Black Caribbean island, one Black woman had looked into another Black woman's face and found her unacceptable. Not because of what she did, not because of who she was, not even because of what she believed. But because of how she LOOKED', Audre Lorde (2009, p. 227, sic) writes towards the end of her essay. For Lorde, travelling to Virgin Gorda turned a very personal styling decision into a highly political and public issue. Far from being a singular story, this paper has documented how travelling shifts and shapes how Black and mixed-race women see themselves, how they are seen by others, how they think they are seen by others and what this meant for their everyday performances of self. By analysing travel narratives and narratives of temporarily moving abroad, this paper thus makes the following contributions to the study of racialized identity performances.

Firstly, the travel narratives presented in this paper show that geographical movements alter the context in which identity is performed and how, in turn, contextual demands influence how the women style their hair. Black and mixed-race women's aesthetic choices are shaped by the hairstyles deemed acceptable, respectable, beautiful in a given context at a particular time, by relevant others within that context who tried to exert influence over the women's hairstyling practices and choices, and by the power dynamics, which structure the relations within that context. As shown in Extracts 1 through 5, in entering a novel socio-cultural context, the women were confronted with beauty practices such as weaving or relaxing and were encouraged to partake in such practices to conform to local yet dominant standards of beauty. Indeed, the recognition, acceptance and interpretation of aesthetic performances of identity are highly contextual. However, acceptance and recognition are sometimes deliberately refused to resist others' attempts to influence and control one's identity and body while actively challenging dominant beauty standards. As such, both creative conformity and deliberate acts of aesthetic resistance can be seen as an expression of a reflexive and agentic performance of identity.

Secondly, this paper contributes to our understanding of the role of the body in shaping identities. The women in this study used their intersectionally racialized and gendered bodies to shape, transform and craft their identities. Hence, this paper shows that hairstyling, like other forms of bodywork (Amer, 2020; Sims, 2018), are sites of agency through which gendered and racialized identities are re/produced, re/negotiated and performatively re/created. Importantly, embodied aesthetic changes were seen as a way to challenge the dominance of race and gender in determining the women's identities and a means through which the women could emphasize and articulate other aspects of identity. A focus on embodiment thus brings to the fore people's agency to influence and negotiate how their identities are read off their bodies and calls upon social psychologists to conceptualize and take into account the continuities between bodies, identities and contexts.

All in all, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on identity performances in the field of social and cultural psychology. Through a focus on changes in contexts and hair, rather than clothing (Bucar, 2017; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013), this paper shows that a concern with performances is particularly futile to debate and contest essentialist and essentializing notions of racialized identities (Howarth, 2009) and highlights some of the nuanced understandings of racialized identities which become evident when research centres on identity performances. Far from being ‘fixed on the body’, this article thus contributes to understanding the malleability and fluidity of Blackness and mixedness and demonstrates how hair textures and styles are used to strategically re/negotiate, perform and manage racialized and racializing identities. Hence, social psychological research into identity, and in particular racialized identities, needs to take into account the interconnectedness of context, body/hair and the work which humans do around their bodies and hair as performative strategies of identity negotiation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Johanna M. Lukate: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Juliet L. Foster:** Supervision.

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