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"I was my momma baby. I was my daddy gal": Strategic stories of success

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This paper is inspired by recent trends in narrative research that orient to the meaning-making actions of those in their life course. Applying concepts of narrative, discourse, and contrast, the complex meaning of growing up is presented through Lakeesha's story, one of the 20 women interviewed for a project on African American gender socialization. Rather than presenting the participant in question as having been subject to the ostensible forces and parameters of socialization, she was allowed to represent her growing-up experiences in her own terms. She talked herself into being, situating herself as a particular participant throughout her growing-up story — strategically employing and manipulating particular cultural discourses to do so. The ways that she situates herself with particular identities linked to local conceptions of successful womanhood are presented in this paper to illustrate a strategic model of narrative activity. In particular, I trace her use of the American dream and the ways that she situates herself with particular identities linked to local conceptions of successful womanhood. The implications of this approach are considered in the conclusion.

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