

(Hair)itage: Using Type 4 Hair to Reconcile Struggles of Race and Identity Through Research-  
Creation

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## Abstract

### (Hair)itage: Using Type 4 Hair to Reconcile Struggles of Race and Identity Through Research-Creation

Shanice Bernicky

Black hair is a vast term describing a myriad of textures, lengths, and colours. Mixed-race identity is just as vast with no set definition. This research-creation piece couples the two, harnessing the method of autoethnography to discuss how the author uses her coily hair to connect with her Trinidadian roots. The creation portion is a documentary comprised of six interviews with family members, hair care specialists, and a friends, discussing the importance of black hair care, the industry, and mixed-race identity. This piece is presented online, in a non-linear format which allows viewers to watch at their own pace. The research component delves into the complexities of race, identity, heritage and pursuing research-creation.

Keywords: black hair, autoethnography, mixed-race, Canadianess, documentary film, interactive documentary platforms, research-creation, task-based interview, Trinidadian, type 4 hair

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## Introduction

When I was born, my mother was in her teens. Growing up, I was close to my maternal grandparents who provided my mother and I with stability even though they lived miles away in Campbellton, New Brunswick. Every summer throughout primary school, I'd leave the busy city of Montréal and spend time with my grandparents in their bungalow miles outside of town. I have fond memories of my sister and I running through fields, swimming in streams, spying on deer and eating bowls of fiddleheads with a thick layer of pepper and butter on top. We'd harbour chipmunks in my grandfather's garage, help my grandmother make a traditional Irish stew and every now and then we'd sing Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn songs before bed. These were my summers. I never noticed how much I stuck out in the rural environment because my family never spoke a word about it; my caramel skin contrasting to that of my family's, who all have ivory skin and auburn hair. But in this town I felt no different.

As I got older, it became more uncomfortable, not in New Brunswick but in Montréal, where I began to get questions from strangers when walking with my mother and sisters, "are you adopted?" they'd ask, "is that girl your friend?" they'd say as they pointed at my sister. The older I got, the more I began to feel separate from my own family. The event that most solidified my sense of alienation from my family was when my mother took my sister and I to get haircuts. We were both under nine years old. The hairdresser leaned against her chair and looked at my sister and I for a while, she then pointed at my sister and said "her, yes" and then to me saying "her, no". My hair. My hair was the reason I was not like my sister I began to think. If I straightened it, I'd be more like her. I knew this wasn't true but I still spent years chemically relaxing my hair straight in order to feel more accepted.

In CEGEP, my hair was straight, but I'd still get questions from strangers regarding my relation to my mother and other siblings. I began to realize that I had little to no knowledge about my father's Trinidadian culture. I grew up believing that he had abandoned his duties as a father to me because of being so young when I was born. But he gave me my features, I'd tell myself. If I stopped straightening my hair and learned more about being Trinidadian, I'd have an answer for curious people. It seemed that my mixed race identity confused people, but if I could simply say I was Trinidadian, there would be a space for me. Beginning to learn about the other half of my

cultural background would be a journey of forgiveness and acceptance. This thesis project comes from a personal place. Notwithstanding a background in video production, I have never made a video about myself.

This research-creation project is composed of a video-based piece and this written component, which contextualizes the mediawork. *(Hair)itage* is a non-linear video created with the online software, Klynt, which showcases six interviews with friends and relatives as I search for and explore the links between hair, race and culture. In this written portion, Chapter One provides a brief historical overview of the slave trade and a literature review mapping the importance of black hair to the black female consciousness. Chapter Two details the mixed-methods approach utilized in order to undertake this research. Chapter Three provides a short description of the production and post-production stages of making the film itself, and the final chapter analyzes some of the topics discussed by my interviewees and myself.

\*Please contact me via my email: [Shanice.m.bernicky@gmail.com](mailto:Shanice.m.bernicky@gmail.com) in order to arrange a way to view the final piece or request excerpts of the film.

## Chapter 1

### Nappy Negress Turned Ambiguous Mulatta: A Literature Review

Before we begin to grapple with mixed race identity, we must first understand how the black body has been represented throughout history and how type 4 hair<sup>1</sup> has been used as a conduit for oppression and resistance. There has been a robust history of theorists and artists alike examining the collective black female consciousness in relation to physical appearance. My research-creation piece harnesses such works, exploring how hegemonic standards of beauty complicate mixed race identity. This chapter will explore the writings of black feminists, historians, psychologists and academics, delving into the slave trade, black hair and mixed race identity.

#### “Negress”

In the opening chapter of her book entitled *African American Women’s Rhetoric*, Deborah F. Atwater discusses how a black woman’s body was a historical spectacle turned into scientific exhibit. Atwater’s chapter presents the life of Sara Baartman, more widely known as the Hottentot Venus (born 1789 - died 1815). Baartman was considered a specimen of science during her life in Europe where she was continually studied and put on display. She danced and sang in a flesh-toned, form-fitting leotard for a white European audience until her death (Atwater 11). Called a “curiosity” by scientists, after her death Atwater provides an analysis of how Baartman was treated:

Her body was sold to be dissected at the museum, which had no legal right to do so but she was dissected anyway. No rites were performed. They made body casts, removed her organs, and placed her brain and genitals in jars. Her flesh was boiled to remove the skin from the bones. Sara was treated like an animal, like some glorified lab experiment. (12)

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Type 4” is commonly used to describe a coily, dense hair pattern, a physical attribute which is typically associated with those from within the Black diaspora. It has become a social term used on media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube as a quick way to describe one’s hair pattern. The scale ranges from 1A to 4C (some say 4D) with type 1 being straight hair and type 4 being the curliest pattern.



Baartman's body was only returned to South Africa in 2002 to have her properly buried. Sara Baartman's life is just one cruel example of the longevity of racial oppressions, her personhood remained the property of a colonial power until the twenty-first century.

The story of the Hottentot Venus is one of many horror stories that academics, filmmakers and social advocates against racial inequality have recited in the West as a reminder of the injustices enacted on the black body before the end of segregation and before the new founded neo-liberal term "diversity." Dr. Saidiya V. Hartman not so much rejects the use of these graphic tales in her book *Scenes of Subjection*, but gives weight to the routine and mundane ways black slaves were dominated and robbed of their dignity by slave owners by using their own humanity against them. Hartman recounts the tales of black slaves having to market themselves during slave sales or receive lashes, and once sold, having to march happily while singing, showing no pain. As she states, "the affiliation of performance and blackness can be attributed to the spectacularization of black pain and racist conceptions of Negro nature as carefree, infantile, hedonistic, and indifferent to suffering and to an interested misreading of the interdependence of labor and song common among the enslaved" (Hartman 22, 36, 38). A black person was considered as unable to feel pain. Slave owners harnessed the humanity of the Other only to devalue their ability to experience basic human responses. For Hartman, the injustices performed that were harmful where the subtle and hard to pin down events. I present Baartman's story in this chapter which details explicitly the ways in which her body was dishonored because black women's bodies have historically been more subjected to multiple forms of violence and continue to be today.

In the Canadian context, Activist Robyn Maynard takes Hartman and other African-American Studies scholars' work and applies it to a Canadian context where black slaves were stripped of their humanity and labeled as chattel (this is common throughout all other such as throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, but the historical erasure of Canada as one of these territories is the reason for emphasis). Her book *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to The Present* is one of few books of its kind to track the racial inequalities black Canadians faced from settlement until the twenty-first century (with many chapters addressing specifically the devaluation of black women). Maynard summons individual anecdotes, historical evidence and government reports to demonstrate the residual effects of slavery. She presents several examples where black women, in the eyes of the Canadian government and police force,

were more likely to be perceived as sex workers, “welfare cheats”, and the bearers of “crack-babies” compared to white Canadian women (Maynard 132, 138, 200).

Much of the literature directly related to type 4 hair addresses its importance to black African-American women and men, the significance of curl pattern as symbolic of oppressive practices during the slave trade, and its use as an emblem of resistance in the United States. For instance, according to historians Shane White and Graham White, in the United States during slavery before the civil war, hair was one of the only parts of their bodies African American slaves had any agency over. In their paper, “Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” they detail the ways in which Caucasian slave owners used hair styles as an identifier in runaway slave advertisements published in newspaper classifieds by slaveowners in the United States offering rewards for runaways’ recapture. Their article highlights the importance of being able to manipulate one’s hair for African slaves, continuing one of the only African (more notably West African) cultural practices that they could retain under slavery (White and White 51). Author Tracey Owens Patton takes White and White’s research further, establishing the connection between slavery and the internalization of Eurocentric standards of beauty amongst African-American slave women. As she remarks:

During slavery, black women who were lighter skinned and had features that were associated with mixed progeny (e.g., wavy or straight hair, White/European facial features) tended to be house slaves and those Black women with darker-skin hues, kinky hair, and broader facial features tended to be field slaves. (Patton 26)

Thus, shades of black become another factor. Not only were black women considered chattel to be bought and sold, but they were also divided by physical appearance. The closer their skin and features were to a white woman’s, the more privileges (and I say this very loosely) they were permitted. This social phenomena continues in society today amongst all non-white races and is known as ‘colorism.’ “Colorism,” coined by Alice Walker in 1982, refers to the act of discrimination and/or prejudice of an individual solely on the basis of their dark skin tone.

There have been several journal articles, book chapters, and whole novels devoted to the dehumanizing portrayals of African American women in popular media and the internalization of Eurocentric standards of beauty (Brooks 2015, Capodilupo 2014, Dash 2006, Hopson 2009,

Kimbell 2008, Walker 2009, Thompson 2000). Ingrid Banks's book *Hair Matters* continues to be influential as it explores the collective feelings African American women possess about their natural hair in a contemporary American society. Moreover, through several interviews, Banks compiles experiences rather than facts, generating a qualitative novel which shifts the importance away from empirical data and rests it into the hands of black women, giving value to their lived experiences. This format is key as it moves away from how Baartman was treated – as a scientific specimen – and gives black women and girls back the agency they have been stripped of for centuries. In her interviews with sixty-one black girls and women, it is clear that, in 1996, to be “nappy” was to be pushed further to the margins of society. The word “nappy” is a derogatory term which has traversed history only to be reclaimed by the black community now (Banks 1). Nappy hair is considered to be tightly coiled natural hair which, in the black community, some would consider “bad hair.” This notion of “bad hair” is derived from centuries of colorism where silky, loose curls, or better yet, as close as possible to straight hair is considered “good hair”. On the subject of permanently straightening one's hair, Banks's elaborates on her interviewee, Aria's observations, stating: “Aria points to the white women on television, in magazines, and in romance novels with long, flowing hair as representative of femininity in U.S society. Therefore, femininity is not merely associated with long hair as described by Pearl [another interviewee], but with white women” (Banks 89). Considering Canada's proximity to the United States and our high consumption of American popular culture, this defining image of femininity applied to black Canadian women as well.

The pressure to conform to impossible standards of beauty caused “The Lily Complex,” a term coined by journalist Charisse Jones and author Kumea Shorter-Gooden in their book *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America*. The complex is associated with black women (but can be associated with other women of colour) who change their appearance to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty.

In her Ph.D. dissertation *Race and Beauty in Canada: Print Culture, Retail, and The Transnational Flow of Products, Images and Ideologies, 1700s to Present* Dr. Cheryl Thompson maps Canada's role in the larger global scene as it pertains to black beauty. What became evident by reading Thompson's thesis was that many of the social norms governing physical appearance in the United States had residual effects in Canada. She details the story of Viola Desmond, a black beauty culturist from Nova Scotia born in 1914. Desmond opened a beauty salon and school,

teaching black students to apply African-American haircare practices to their hair (straightening being popular). As Thompson notes:

In Canada, as in the United States, segregation had created an imperative among blacks to appear well-groomed in public, especially with respect to one's hair, so as to avoid negative attention from whites. Even though Viola Desmond symbolized the essence of middle-class black femininity – she was a celebrated Halifax beautician, described as both “elegantly coiffed and fashionably dressed,” well-mannered, refined and a “demonstrably feminine woman” – this did not preclude her from racism. (Thompson 160).

Desmond had paid to see a movie in a segregated town in Nova Scotia. She was imprisoned for one night and charged a fine for sitting in an area reserved for white paying customers. This form of segregation is quite similar to the Jim Crow laws in the United States (160). Though Desmond was as close as she could be to white femininity, she was still black. Hence, changing one's appearance did not lift black women out of their unfair circumstances. 54 years after her death, Desmond is only now being celebrated as a Canadian civil rights icon, as her face is now on the new Canadian ten dollar bill circulating across the country.

The above literature provides a glimpse of the malpractices performed onto the black body during colonialism and thereafter, as well as how black women related to their physical appearance in a world that celebrates Caucasian physical traits. How then, were the children born of interracial relations treated during colonialism?

#### “Mulatta” – “Half-Caste” – “Mixed race”

Before beginning this section, it is important to note that race is simply a social construct. For cultural theorist Stuart Hall the scientific definition of race bares no weight, but instead Hall offers the following:

...the argument that I want to make to you is that *race works like a language*. And signifiers refer to they systems and concepts of the classification of a culture to its *making meaning practices*. And those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying

field. (Hall 1997)

Race, a concept once rooted in biology is now a term that continues to govern lives in today's societies.

Mixed race identity is nothing new. Literary scholar Dr. Michelle Elam in her book *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* asks us to move beyond the question: "...“why are there more mixed race people now?” to inquire instead, “why do we see more people *as* mixed race now?” ...” (Elam 6). If we go back to the colonial slave trade, we can see why mixed race identity is nothing new.

In much of the literature discussing mixed race identity, terminology is important. Psychologists, Dr. Barbara Tizard and Dr. Ann Phoenix in their book *Black, White or Mixed Race: Race and Racism in The Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage* present a number of terms that children of mixed race have been called.<sup>2</sup> “Mulatto”, “Métis”, “Half-caste”, “Mixed Race”, “Biracial” have been used throughout history to define a child that has one white parent and one racialized parent (through lived experience, I can attest to this). For the authors, the shifts in terminology is key because it maps how society continues to view interracial relationships (Tizard and Phoenix 9-10).

Through reading Lawrence Hill (2001), Tina G. Patel (2009), and Christine B. Hickman (1997) I was able to answer Elam's question. The history regarding black slaves in America also applied to mixed race children because of strict laws regarding hypodescent, more commonly known as the “one drop rule.” This rule stipulated anyone with African ancestry was deemed black. Therefore, children of mixed race were considered black in the eyes of the law, regardless of their appearance. For my research, this is key because no matter the appearance of a child of mixed race with a black parent, this individual cannot benefit from the privileges of being half white. This experience described by Canadian author Lawrence Hill in his book *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*:

What's the benefit of my claiming my mother's white because I'm black in the eye of the beholder? I get no white privilege. I get zero. Calling me mulatto is insulting. My dad wanted

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that Tizard and Phoenix use the term “Mixed Parentage” in their book borrowing from J.W. Small (1986) because Mixed Race reproduces the binary and also solidifies the ideology that race is more than a construct (Tizard and Phoenix 10).

us to be different. My dad didn't want us to be black. My dad probably thought he was doing us a favour. I think my father hoped that we would have an easier life. Parents never know the complexities of that experience. (Hill 32)

Up until the end of segregation, to be mixed race was to be black. The above literature mixes both American and Canadian history. Canada has been influenced by American politics and segregation was also practiced in here. Borrowing from American sources, this section asserts that, until recently, my ability to give my genetic make-up a term was not permitted.

### Hair as a Signifier of Resistance: A Brief Media Review

Hair (and the manipulation of it) has historically been used as a marker of subculture. Media theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, has several examples of how Subaltern Counterpublics used hair as a catalyst to display their socio-political beliefs (see Nancy Fraser 1992). He also includes a subcultural analysis of how a black youth subculture rose in the 1970s as a result of the popularization of reggae music in Britain. Moreover, Hebdige posits that the reggae music at the time, separated from its original Rastafarian roots, provided second generation British black youth with the idea of the “African ‘natural’ image,” where their style of dress changed and young girls abandoned the routine of straightening their hair, to display their natural type 4 coils (Hebdige 43).

In the last five years, there has been a proliferation of media texts commenting on black women’s rejection of Eurocentric standards of beauty, the frustration of being a “curiosity” to white people when wearing our natural hair and the importance of embracing traditions revolving around black hair.

American R & B singer Solange released an anthem addressing the struggles of being black in the contemporary world, emphasizing the importance of our hair to us in the black community, whether natural or styled. Her song, “Don’t Touch My Hair” (2016) expresses the pride associated with having black hair. Video game designer Momo Pixel utilizes Solange’s words and adds an interactive spin, by creating an internet game in 2017. In the game, users can select their skin tone and a protective or natural hairstyle. To win the game, players must swat white hands away as they attempt to touch black hair. This game displays the exhausting nature of having to defend one’s self – constantly being treated like a specimen that can be handled.

Photographer Nakeya Brown displayed a collection of works exploring race and identity in 2015 that focused on traditional hair care rituals black women undertake. In the photo essay “Hair Stories Untold,” she presents techniques mainly known to those within the black community. This piece resonates with my film, as I discuss hair care practices with a black hair salon owner. The reason the techniques Brown photographs are so rarely seen is because salons with mainly white hair dressers typically do not perform these practices. These same techniques are normal to those with black hair.

Through the strong theoretical and historical foundation surrounding the treatment and representation of black people and their bodies provided by black feminists, African-American theorists, and post-colonial scholars, I will explore the intricacies of the use of black hair as both a method of retaliation but also as a method to reconnect or disassociate from one’s black roots.

## Chapter 2

### Adopting a Mixed-Methods Approach

The topic of black hair and mixed race identity has been analyzed through many lenses in academic literature. Producing a mediawork based on the topic benefited most from a mixed-methods approach that included interviews, autoethnography and videomaking through research-creation. This chapter provides an overview of the methods implemented to capture moments with six individuals.

#### Interviewee Profiles

Savannah Depeiza is my youngest sister and is eleven years old. Her father is Trinidadian and her mother is Syrian. She herself is Canadian, born in Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Michael “Brian” Depeiza is my father. He is from Trinidad and Tobago, immigrating to Canada in his teens. His background, like most Trinidadians and Tobagonians, is a mixed ethnic background consisting of Indian, African, and Spanish ancestry.

Carmelita “Carmen” Joseph is my grandmother. She is Trinidadian with African, Carib and Spanish roots. She immigrated to Canada in the late 1980s to escape an abusive relationship and build a better life for her and her children.

Janelle Lunman is a Curl Consultation Specialist from the curl spa *Inhairitance*. She is Canadian and is mixed race. The vignette in which she appears is a hair care consultation.

Anthony “Tony” Newton is my long-time hair dresser. He was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, but has lived in Canada for decades. He is the owner of Dazzl hair salon located on the corner of Décarie and Queen-Mary in Montréal.

Nicole “Nikki” Taylor is a friend, peer, and colleague whom I met at Concordia University. She is from Toronto, Ontario, Canada and identifies as black. Both of her parents immigrated from Trinidad and Tobago.



## Methodology

While preparing to undertake this research-creation project, the following are the methods I adopted:

### *Creation-as-Research*

Much of the literature that I've read that focuses on the topic of type 4 hair transcribes personal anecdotes. I believe that, by adding faces, voices, textures, and light, I am contributing to the growing body of audio-visual materials discussing black hair. Drawing from communications scholars Dr. Kim Sawchuk and Dr. Owen Chapman's text entitled "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances," I embraced the *creation-as-research* approach whereby "it is a form of directed exploration through creative processes that includes experimentation, but also analysis, critique, and a profound engagement with theory and questions of method" (Chapman and Sawchuk 19). Before each interview, I thought of the methods required to undertake the task. Each interviewee is set in a different space, with a unique set of questions. In order to yield the best results, mixing qualitative methods was the most effective approach. During the post-production phase, I gave myself the liberty of playing with editing styles because I wanted each segment to follow their own pace. As a result, this research-creation has been an exploration of montage styles where long-form interviews become the central aesthetic as a consequence of directorial decisions. As a whole, research-creation as an overarching method allowed me to create portraits documenting my current relationship with those who know me in different capacities.

Aligning with Gladstone L. Yearwood, my project will add to the long tradition amongst black filmmakers in presenting alternative perspectives within societies which draw from the European aesthetic to justify the historical suppression of black art (Yearwood 70). Yearwood's book *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African American Aesthetic Tradition* presents the ways in which black critics and academics should theorize black art, placing heavy importance on the context in which this art is made. As the creator of *(Hair)itage*, this film goes against most things that I learned while specializing in video production during my undergraduate degree; there are "talking head" interviews with virtually no b-roll shots for cutaway transitions, the sound is imperfect, very little general context such as who the interviewees are to me and there are many instances where film equipment appears on camera. However, these rules

that I was taught were established by Caucasian male filmmakers, and the so-called imperfections that resulted from breaking these aesthetic rules brought a smile to my face as I edited my footage. Negotiating documentary filmmaking techniques during this project led me to relinquish some of the methods I had seen in practice and do what felt organic in the moment.

The methods carried throughout the project's interview sessions were the following:

*Autoethnography/Autobiography*

For much of my academic life, I assumed that my own life could not be an object of study. However my life informs much of the research that I do. I came to this analysis because of the experiences that I live on a daily basis and this thesis reflects that. A key methodological approach to this research is *autoethnography*:

Autoethnography is part of a corrective movement against colonizing ethnographic practices that erased the subjectivity of the researcher while granting him or her absolute authority for representing “the other” of the research. In autoethnography, the subject and object of research collapse into the body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time (Gannon 475).

This project paints a portrait of my life and documents my Trinidadian side's family history as well as the significations that type 4 hair has for exploring one's family roots. One of the central questions asked throughout this film was “Do you believe your hair connects you to your ethnic identity?” Due to my background, my hypothesis was evident to my interviewees. Author Dr. Tami Spry's article, “Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis” was influential as I watched the interviews I had conducted with my relatives. She points to how “autoethnographic texts reveal the fractures, sutures, and seams of self-interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience” (Spry 712). Many of the questions I asked my grandmother and father about my upbringing demonstrated my inability to let go of the narrative constructed by my mother. As a researcher, I had preconceived notions of events (from my life) that were shattered on-camera as I interacted with members of my family with whom I do not usually share on such an intimate level. Autoethnography not only allows the marginalized to take

control of their own narratives, placing qualitative data as invaluable, it also makes room for subjectivity of the researcher in theory.

Three methods were used while undertaking the interviews: Interactive Interviewing, the “Task-Based” Interview and Child Interviewing. The first method required me to give as much of myself as I asked of my interviewees. The second created a unique and active interview setting. The final method was the most challenging as I interviewed a minor about her mixed-race Canadian identity.

### *Interactive Interviewing*

This method allowed me to be the one setting the parameters for each interview, but also to have to act within those parameters. Put in simpler words, I was both the interviewer and interviewee. Considered an extension of autoethnography, *interactive interviewing’s* goal “is for all those participating, usually two to four people, including the primary researcher, to act both as researchers and as research participants” (Ellis and Berger 10–11). My interviewees were people whom I already had bonds with. This allowed me to delve deeper in my interview questions, drawing from their own personal anecdotes that they once told me. It also made the interviews more like conversations where my interviewees were told that they could ask me anything they wanted in return and were free to control the overall pacing of the interview. For instance, during Anthony Newton’s interview, he was comfortable answering questions while working with clients, but also, partly because of his occupation, liberally asked me a series of personal questions regarding my family. Walking away from the interviews, I hope those involved learned as much about me as I learned about them.

### *The “Task-Based” Interview*

My interviewees are not asked to sit in front of the camera and answer a set list of questions, (though Tony Newton’s may appear so). My film is inspired by the ‘walking interview’ where interviews are conducted while walking through particular spaces or taking set routes: “It is argued that walking interviews generate richer data because interviewees are prompted by meanings and connections to the surrounding environment and are less likely to try and give the ‘right’ answer” (Evans and Jones 849). Before each interview, interviewees were told that we would be completing a task together on screen. Whether it be making bread, braiding hair or literally walking through a

beauty supply store, the purpose was to create individualized moments with each person, drawing from important links in our relationship. Moreover, though each interviewee did not choose the action we would be completing, they were asked beforehand if they felt comfortable with the arrangement. One of the challenges faced while using this method was that it proved difficult to be both the director and interviewer. When I was on camera during the interviews, my mind was sometimes momentarily elsewhere, thinking about the technical setup. The momentum also suffered in some of the sessions as I regularly checked in with my crew. However, what my interviews lacked in aesthetics (sound included), gained in content. I have never had in-depth conversations with my father before his interview and I never knew the detailed specifics of why my grandmother immigrated to Montréal. This method was utilized in part for my interviewees but it was also for myself. The thought of asking my father about parenting and race was terrifying without having a justifiable reason - “for school work” seemed to calm my anxiety, my mind flooded with “what ifs”.

### *The Child Interview*

A relatively new method which taught me to embrace unpredictability was the *Child Interview*. Melton et al. stress that “... much more attention should be given to the ways that elementary-school-age and even preschool children are or could be actors (not simply dependent subjects) in community life and to the meaning that such activities (or, conversely, instances of ‘protection’ from such involvement) have for children themselves” (Melton et al. 8). Most ethics forms provided by universities acknowledge the added protection minors require when participating in a study. Interviewing children requires adopting a fluid interview style where their feelings about the interview are in the foreground. Children have a unique perspective that should be represented when researching our current context. Interviewing my younger sister, Savannah, allowed me to assess whether the subtle discrimination and subsequent feelings I experienced during my childhood were still present. However, because of her age, I had to be highly aware of the wording I used, making sure that my questions were as open-ended as possible allowing her to interpret them in her own way. Some of the challenges of interviewing Savannah was that, being her oldest sister and interviewer, I believe my presence influenced some of her responses. She tended to repeat some of my own personal anecdotes when answering questions about her own experiences and was less focused than she would have been with a stranger. It is also important to

note that Savannah runs an Instagram fan page with over three thousand followers and enjoys performing for the camera. This made it hard to have genuine conversations with her at times as her performative self or “insta (Instagram) personality” presented itself many times during our interview sessions. Overall, I realized while interviewing Savannah that all interviewers should interview children as it allows you to reassess your interview style and strengthen your basic skills.

The above methods were critical during the making of my film but also in unpacking the information that was gathered. Autoethnography and the task-based interview were central components in the research-creation film as these methods were actively being tested on-screen.

Before jumping ahead to an analysis of some of the conversations captured during the interviews, the subsequent chapter delves into the production and post-production of the documentary.

### Chapter 3 *(Hair)itage in The Making*

Coming from an educational background in video production, I was never expected to produce an audio-visual piece work on my own, but always in a team environment. Even in these contexts, I was never the director of any of these projects. Creating a piece mapping the history of my family, *my* history, forced me to open myself up in many ways. I had to be ready to receive the accounts of relatives and friends about the complexities of their Caribbean-Canadian identities, personal narratives that, until creating this project, I felt I could not speak to.

#### Production



Interview with Nicole Taylor at Mama Africa Beauty Supply Store located in Montréal.

Each interview was unique. The questions asked to each interviewee changed regularly and the locations were also strategically picked to better focus our conversations and contribute additional information. Hearing Tony interact with his clients, the sound of the blow dryers signifying a busy day at Inhairitance, or sitting with my grandmother in a home where she's worked as a domestic worker for most of my life, provide additional layers to my film which would have been lost if all the interviews took place in a studio or simply at the interviewee's home. The location triggered the "Task-Based" interview method but also allowed for a certain level of

comfort in my interviewees and for myself. Interviewing Savannah after we've made our morning tea, talking about menstruation, composting and her friends at school are all things left out of the documentary but greatly enriched the encounters that were included on-screen.

It was important that my interviewees felt comfortable throughout the process which is why only three crew members were present at any given time (including myself). This made for many technical errors as I frequently had to focus on the recording device registering my own lapel mic, the wide-angle camera, and conducting the interview all at the same time. In order to achieve the feeling of intimacy, I had to make sacrifices of technical and aesthetic nature.



Me setting up a camera during my interview with my grandmother, Carmelita.

With the help of a peer and friend, Jaëlle Dutremble-Rivet (camera operator), and my partner, Maxime Fillion, a composer/pianist/music theorist (who also contributed as the boom operator) and the occasional help of long-time friend and graphic designer, Meghan Myers-Colet (camera operator for my father's interview), I achieved my goal of capturing extreme close-ups of my interviewees and myself. I wanted to smother the screen with the smiles of the people I love. Each interviewee is familiar and showcases a different side of me. During the production process, I kept a journal, detailing my feelings either before or after an interview and during the post-production stage. In an entry after watching my interview with my sister, Savannah, I noted;

I realized that one of the things I couldn't do was obsess about the aesthetics of the film. It will never be perfect, and having my body in front of the camera was uncomfortable. I also felt as though my questions/conversation with my little sister was flat but that's representative of my relationship with her. But also, as her big sister, I felt I was possibly (possibly was then scratched out and replaced with definitely) corrupting her responses. Journal Entry - 01.03.2019.

The hardest interviews were not with Tony or Janelle from Inhairtance, but with my father, grandmother and sister. I realized that I had barely had lengthy conversations with them before, especially with my father. For me, these interviews are introspective, as viewers are watching my relationships with my family members evolve before their eyes.



Making Bake with my father during his interview.

I never knew my grandmother fled Trinidad to escape an abusive relationship or that she wanted to become my legal guardian before our interview. I also never knew that my father never intended to be so removed from my life. It was emotionally draining to be on-screen hearing so much about my life, having my own memories be rearranged and even torn apart. That being said it did bring me much closer to my relatives. Yes, the project was set out to investigate the importance of black hair to me, a mixed race woman. However, the interviews themselves became less and less about

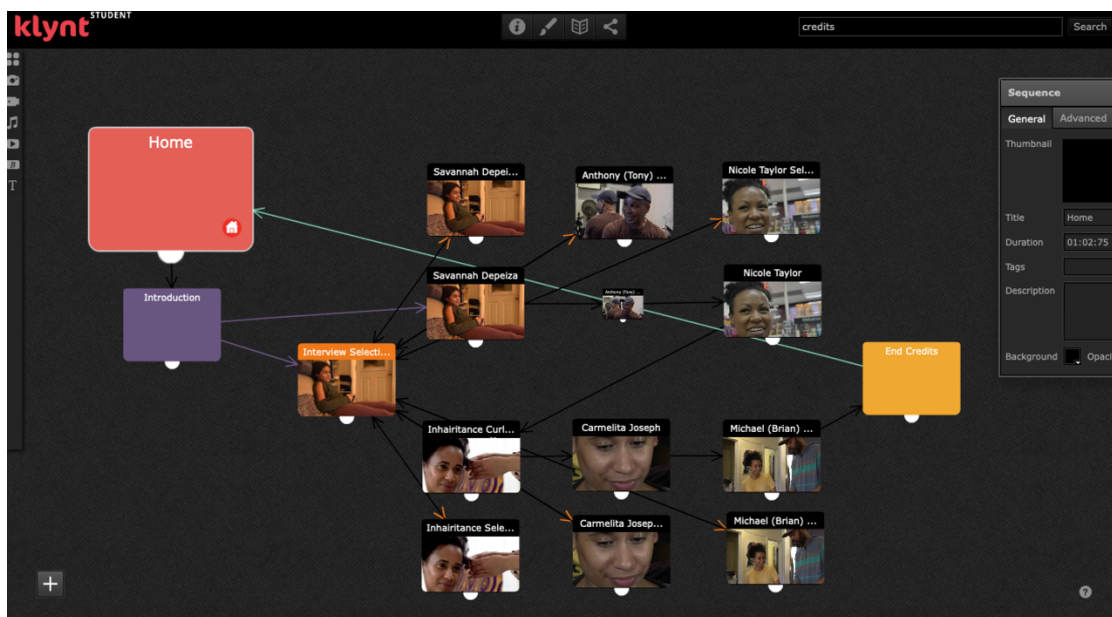


hair the closer I became to interviewing my grandmother and father. Instead, hair functioned as a springboard to a sea of questions surrounding race and its relationship to culture.

### Post-Production

*(Hair)itage* is comprised of six vignettes ranging from six to eighteen minutes organized using an online non-linear editing software called Klynt. During the post-production process, I edited each interview as its own short film. This format highlights the key moments during each conversation. An important technique used during the editing process was to not include anything regarding the lives of those not directly involved in my documentary. What I mean by this is that I never included the hardships faced by my aunt or uncle as told by my grandmother because that is not my story to tell. This technique was useful as it allowed me to retain the focus of each interview. The editing process was also quite draining. My interview with Nicole was enlightening but also left me quite envious of her relationship with her mother. In my journal I noted that I “felt so disassociated from her experiences.” Reworking Nicole’s interview over and over, I heard the story of her mother doing her hair every morning. Editing the interviews on my own allowed for constant reflection about my feelings towards each interview, but also allowed me to reevaluate my responses on-camera. The editing process was quite self-reflexive by nature.

I never envisioned my piece as linear documentary film in the traditional sense because each interview has its own ecosystem with its own story to tell. The ideal way to view my piece is through the Klynt software as it allows the interviews to stand alone, together. However, this does not mean that no order exists. As I edited each interview I began to see a narrative thread which concludes with my father’s interview.



Screenshot of (Hair)itage Klynt Storyboard

The film is more episodic by nature and can be viewed two ways: by taking my suggested route (how I envision the narrative thread), or by viewing each interview individually at one's desired pace.

Though I have a rough edit of each vignette and have created a Klynt structure, the documentary remains unfinished. I still would like to add to the Klynt project, providing succinct sections allowing viewers the ability to watch short segments where interviewees discuss similar topics. This would allow for easily accessible content providing short summaries on black hair, mixed race identity, culture and ethnicity and more. While I work to finish the project, one question still remains: where can this project be viewed? I had initially thought that having it readily available online was the most effective method, but perhaps an installation piece would be suited to this project as well. What a non-linear structure allows for that a linear piece does not, is the ability to add or subtract content as the project continues to evolve.

The audio-visual footage gathered during each interview is heavy with emotion and provides rich content for analysis. The coming chapter excavates some of the main topics unearthed during each interview.

## Chapter 4

### Searching for Trinidadian Roots Where Fiddleheads Grow: An Analysis of Identity Through the Topic of Black Hair

One night, when I was seventeen years old, my mother and I prepared for our semi-annual routine of perming (relaxing) my hair. The product of choice this time around was “Organic Root Stimulator” by Olive Oil. My mother picked it up because it advertised “Built-In Protection” on the front of the box. I had been permanently straightening my hair since I was twelve, always wanting to achieve the same look, a shiny, slick bob that the fair-skinned women are sporting on the box. Chemically straightening one’s hair should never be done at home, but because this box cost no more than twenty dollars, we took the economical route (which many do) and applied the compound ourselves. Once the cream sat in my hair for the allocated amount of time, it was time to wash it out with tepid water. My mother began to run the water over my head with a detached shower head as I kneeled over the bathtub. I screamed the moment the stream of water touched my scalp. The product had welted my scalp so badly that even fresh water on my head was agonizing. But we could not stop rinsing the product out. I cried while my mother continued to pour water on my scalp, and once it was over my hair began to dry. My hair was straight, but because of the welts, some of the hair stuck to my scalp. That night I cried myself to sleep, my mother watching me in darkness from the threshold of my room. She said she wanted me to be as happy as possible and I suggested we purchase the latest Chi flat iron which promised silky-straight hair. My mother couldn’t afford it, but she said she would help me attain a top-of-the line tool to never feel this pain and sadness again.

I did not stop relaxing my hair until the age of twenty and purchased an array of flat irons that never made me truly happy. Internalizing Eurocentric standards of beauty is emotionally harmful and sometimes physically as well. For women of colour, hair is the most malleable trait that they possess to achieve an unattainable image of beauty which translates to acceptance regardless of the pain and suffering caused. This chapter reflects on how black hair can be used as a gateway to discuss questions surrounding identity. Though the interview sessions provided insightful responses regarding a myriad of topics, given the constraints of this research, the

analysis below focuses on three areas of interest: black Hair as Self-Care, Mixed Race Identity in Canada, and finally the relationship between race and culture.

### Black Hair as Self-Care and The Commercial Industry That Profits Off of It

Learning to accept my hair has been a process and I am still struggling both literally and metaphorically with. Hair has a long history of being used as both a method of control and as a symbol of resistance, resilience and pride, as described in Chapter One. During each interview session, I asked interviewees to discuss what having black hair meant to them. Most spoke to the importance of accepting one's natural features (especially hair) as it affects one's emotional wellbeing.

While walking through a black-owned beauty supply store called Mama Africa Beauty Supply and Unisex Salon Inc. in the Parc-X region of Montréal (owned by Mercy Kwateng), Nicole Taylor and I discussed culture, identity, and hair care. The interview took place on a Sunday morning to avoid high foot traffic in the store, but the salon/barbershop in the back was booming.

*Taylor:* ...I was talking to this girl that said “learning how to care for your hair is also a part of self-care.” And for me, that’s always stayed with me because it’s so true. It’s really a part of getting to know yourself and healing and learning to love yourself through learning to love your hair and all the kinks and curls and that was a process for me...

In high school, Taylor started to find ways of wearing her hair down to allow it to blow in the wind because she went to a predominately white school and saw moving hair as desirable. Taylor has had many “Big Chops,” a practice where black women cut off their damaged hair and let it grow out naturally.

This sentiment was echoed by my sister, Savannah Depeiza, less than half of Taylor's age, in her interview:

*Bernicky:* Let's kind of think about why you might feel ugly with your hair curly.

*S. Depeiza:* I don't know. Because I have friends that have straight hair. Their natural hair is straight and I've just been looking at their hair and thinking like "Oh I really want straight hair" and everything like that and so that's when I started straightening it a lot and it's become kind of a habit for me.

*Bernicky:* So when you have straight hair, how do you feel?

*S. Depeiza:* Perfect. Beautiful – all positive words.

My younger sister Savannah goes to a public primary school in the Notre-Dame-De-Grace borough of Montréal. Though her classmates come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, not many of them are mixed race. She feels underrepresented daily. Savannah also mentioned that she prefers her hair straight for its manageability in that state, but her self-esteem is noticeably higher with straight hair, indicating that her ability to coif her own hair is only a surface reason for routinely flat-ironing it. She mentioned moments earlier in the interview that having her curly hair made her feel beautiful and ugly at the same time.

Taylor's response was also echoed by Janelle Lunman of Inhairitance Curl Spa:

*Lunman:* I would say for me it was a lot because I grew up not really understanding my hair and my mom being white not knowing how to do my hair so you know, going through that pain of detangling and wanting straight hair all the time...It was somewhat of a spiritual journey but more just learning to love what I was born with.

Lunman also thinned her hair regularly for a low cost because she believed her hair was too voluminous. Lunman now teaches women with curly hair to embrace their natural textures in a free consultation session provided by Inhairitance Curl Spa. Attending one of these sessions, I mainly learned what products would work best for my hair to achieve the most curl definition possible.

Speaking with Taylor and Lunman, it seemed like accepting one's natural hair comes with adulthood. Taylor and Lunman made the conscious decision to embrace their natural state,

regardless of the status quo. Savannah Depeiza on the other hand is still finding her own vocabulary for the topic and developing physically, causing her responses to my questions surrounding black hair to be much more unique.

However, while speaking to my long-time hairdresser and one of the most straightforward people I know, he saw black hair as coil in the grander scheme of things:

*Newton:* I think first you have to be proud of yourself. I mean, black hair, you know, is just one part of you. You really have to be proud as a person – accept yourself as a person. When you're black, you're black. What can you do?

The aforementioned quote from Anthony “Tony” Newton suggests that black hair is one mode of acceptance of self. To him, it is important to accept your ethnic background and your personality. The physical traits which we possess are difficult and expensive to change to adhere to standards. Taylor mentions that learning to do her hair was also a process of healing. Many young women with type 4 hair internalize Eurocentric standards of beauty which dominate the mediascape. Unlearning these standards and healing those wounds takes time.

While the link between black hair care, self-esteem and standards of beauty are strong in academia and media, the research covering the industry that caters to the type 4 curl pattern is still a niche topic. Caring for, and even covering up black hair (through weaves and wigs) is expensive. According to Thompson: “Historically, the idea that straight hair means higher social and economic opportunities was spearheaded by C.J. Walker; however, by the mid-1940s White-owned companies recognized that black women were a multiple product-dependent market, desperate to move up the social and economic ladder” (Thompson, “Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being” 843). According to Mintel, the black hair care industry is valued at over \$2.5 billion (Turner 2018). When speaking to all female participants about their hair, the products they used always came up. Taylor and Lunman both expressed that finding the products that worked for their hair was a complex process and an expensive one at that. At my curl consultation, Lunman recommended a six-step process that should be done bi-weekly with some products requiring daily application (a total of approximately \$200 worth of products to start). As a student, I only purchased half of the products because I felt uncomfortable leaving without having purchased anything. However, I was pleasantly surprised that the curl spa carried many local and

Canadian brands such as Blended Beauty, their house brand and Earthtones Naturals. Otherwise, many of the black hair care products for natural hair are imported from the United States. Newton had much to say on this topic:

*Bernicky:* I know that you go to the States a lot, and I know that every year you go to the hair show in Atlanta. Do you see a difference in the Canadian black hair industry and the United States industry?

*Newton:* ...They [the Canadian salon industry] are behind. In everything they are behind. You go there you see all the new products they have for hair, the new styling, the new equipment that they use and here you don't have it. People they aren't interested, hairdressers, they don't go anywhere.

Newton and I discussed his educational background where he stated that he did not even learn to do type 4 hair in Canada, and had to go to the United States for further training. The lack of products and services by large Canadian personal care locations and merchant enterprises demonstrates their disinterest in catering to a black clientele.

In my film, my choice to interview Taylor at a beauty supply store was not only for easy access to products but also to convey to viewers how large the black hair care industry is with majority of the profit being made outside of Canada.

*Taylor:* I think it's excellent to know that it's here. I have a beauty store-hair store that is right across from me in Cote-des-Neiges and although a lot of black women work there, it's not black-owned. So it's nice to know that these exist within Montréal.

What Taylor is alluding to is the trend of Asians owning and operating brands and stores that cater to the black female population. In Emma Sapong's article "Roots of Tension: race, hair, competition and black beauty stores" she details that "Korean-Americans own more than 70 percent of 10,000 beauty supply stores nationwide where a lot of that spending is done" (Sapong 2017). In Canada, it is hard to tell how many stores are not black-owned, but truth-be-told, the stores that Taylor and I myself frequent are in fact Asian-owned. Furthermore, the largest

manufacturer of wigs and weaves is China. Anthropologist Dr. Emma Tarlo researched the global hair trade industry for her book *Entanglement: The Secret Lives of Hair*, and in an interview with the BBC it is mentioned that Tarlo discovered that “China is the biggest exporter and importer of human hair and harvests huge amounts from its own population” (Brewer 2016). Thompson also mentions this trend, detailing that the experiences in the U.S are similar in Canada (Thompson, *Race and Beauty in Canada* 202). This ever-growing industry is generating considerable profits for those outside of the black community and for non-Canadians as well.

What this brief analysis has demonstrated is the strength of the black hair care market. Black women spend a considerable amount to care for their hair. Caring for their hair is not just a matter of physical appearance but also a matter of elevating their self-esteem. The chemical relaxer and multiple straighteners I purchased to achieve Caucasian standards of beauty turned into purchasing twisting butters, curl enhancing jellies, rollers, a hair steamer, and much more. In truth, my hair is never really in its natural state: in five years of being “natural,” I have never let my hair air dry with no product and left the house. Perhaps we need to leave the term “natural” behind. As Newton says: “natural hair should be natural natural natural you know? Nothing in it.”

Perhaps we women of colour need to stop comparing ourselves to Caucasian standards of beauty. Celebrity hair stylist specializing in black hair Nikki Nelms in an interview with *Glamour* magazine stated: “It’s not a movement when someone decides to be themselves. When you go on a red carpet as a celebrity and choose to be your natural self and people consider that a movement or a protest, I think that says more about the interpreter than the interpreted. What is the big deal with me wearing what I was born with?” (*Glamour Magazine* 2018). Though there are real implications of wearing one’s hair in a natural way, the fact that we continue to discuss the topic is due to the constant comparison to Eurocentric standards.

### I’m Black With One White Parent: Mixed Race Identity in Canada

My film not only explores black women’s relationship to their hair, but also attempts to address how my journey of learning to do my hair connected me to my Trinidadian roots, the source of my blackness. Spending time with my sister demonstrated that she struggled with the same issues of classification as I have. The opening section of her interview is a four-minute clip of her creating her avatar on a Nintendo console. It took her a considerable amount of time to find



the hair style that suited her, and at the end of the segment, her avatar had no resemblance to her. Though the laws that governed black slaves' lives are behind us, the drop of black blood rule still continues to apply in different ways. Regardless of our mixed racial heritage, in the eyes of others, I am black, Savannah is black. In this light, W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of 'Double-Consciousness' resonates with me. As Du Bois states, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois and Edwards 8). As a mixed race person, Savannah Depeiza constantly self-polices herself, always providing a hyphen to divulge how she is racialized.<sup>3</sup> When I asked her to undertake an introduction to herself she responded in this way:

*Bernicky:* How do you tell your friends what you are when they ask you?

*S. Depeiza:* Oh, I don't know how to say that, let me think about it. [Long pause] Like can I say like I'm half Trinidadian, Canadian, and Arabic [Syrian]?

She then mentions that she sometimes feels embarrassed when revealing her ethnic background to others. Savannah asking me if she could say that she had multiple hyphens is telling. Dr. Minelle Mahtani has written multiple times on the subject of mixed race, being mixed race herself. In her article entitled "Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and 'Mixed Race' Identities," she posits: "These hyphens of multiculturalism in effect operate to produce spaces of distance, in which ethnicity is positioned outside *Canadianess* – as an addition to it, but also as an exclusion from it" (Mahtani 78). At a young age, Savannah has already internalized her difference. Though she herself was not born in Syria, nor Trinidad & Tobago, she understands that being in Canada means expressing your ethnic identity. She also thinks that stating that she is simply Canadian is not truthful. Thus, her racialized identity becomes the factor that separates her from "true" Canadians. If we aren't considered true Canadians, how then do we describe our identities? I am constantly asked what I am but whenever I respond with: "my mother is from Campbellton, New Brunswick," people are not satisfied with my answer. I grew up spending my summers in her home town eating bowls of fiddleheads and smoked herring, singing Johnny Cash, and poking beached jellyfish. As I got older, I quickly learned that saying I was a proud Maritimer

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<sup>3</sup> In the end, race is simply a social construct. Those who are not Caucasian are *racialized*.

was not the response people wanted. Once I stopped chemically relaxing my hair I began to shift my response, saying that I was a Trinidadian-Canadian, and people seemed content with my answer. As a mixed race individual, my hair became my method of representing one-side more than another. Once my hair was natural, I was never perceived as mixed race but entirely Trinidadian.

As my grandmother Carmelita corn-rowed my hair she spoke to the importance of keeping my hair natural:

*Joseph:* I think, you know like, you being natural and keeping it natural is a part of your heritage. Part of you. Just being simply like this-you braid back and you see the natural beauty.

A trend that emerged through talking with Taylor, Lunman, and Savannah Depeiza was the relationship between a mother and her daughter's hair. Speaking to Taylor, I was slightly jealous of her family's routine:

*Taylor:* As black women, our mothers get really invested in our hair as well...Every morning, she'd wake us up and she'd do my hair first because I'd leave for school first then she'd do my younger sister's. And she used to do my older sister's too before my older sister got relaxed.

Taylor's relationship to her hair began with her mother caring for it naturally first. For Lunman, Savannah, and I, our white mothers struggled with our hair. Newton sees this as a common issue, stating:

*Newton:* I could say something, maybe you wouldn't like it but I'm going to tell you. I find that a lot of white parents that have black kids, they don't know how to comb the hair, they don't know how to treat the hair at all and they should really take them to salons or get some education on how to comb or treat the child's hair.

What I appreciate about Newton's comment is that he does not suggest that only black families can rear children with type 4 hair. Much of the literature I have read demystifies this same assumption (Katz; Tizard and Phoenix; Patel; Kilson and Ladd). For Newton, education is key. My mother never discussed my physical attributes as being different from my sisters and never acknowledged that I was mixed race. Though it was obvious, it seemed that I wanted her to talk to me about race. For my father, having discussions around racialization was important:

*Bernicky:* I love mom, and I love the way she raised me because she was like “you’re a person,” she never really thought about that I was black or anything like that.

*M. Depeiza:* – many racists [my father interjects]

*Bernicky:* But when you go off into the world though, I feel like it would have been nice to know. But for her it was like “you’re my kid and there’s no difference.”

*M. Depeiza:* Normal Kid.

*Bernicky:* Do you think it’s important for your kid to know that this is something?

*M. Depeiza:* Yes, they have to know. Because no matter where you go, there will always be bullying.

I did not grow up with my father nor my little sister Savannah (she is technically my half-sister). I grew up with a step-father with Caucasian traits (he was also mixed race but passed for white) and two sisters and two step brothers all of whom appeared Caucasian. We never discussed race or racism. American authors and mothers of mixed race children Dr. Marion Kilson and Dr. Florence Ladd in their book *Is that Your Child? Mothers Talk About Rearing Biracial Children*, spoke with fifteen other mothers raising mixed race children. They came to positive strategies for raising their children, some of which are:

- Create a climate for open discussion of race and race-related matters;
- Talk about your own history and experiences with respect to race;
- Elicit conversations that involve mutual self-examination;
- Promote children's appreciation of their racial heritages (Kilson and Ladd 109)

Moving from the larger topic of racialization to hair, I believe that fostering pride in a female mixed race child's type 4 hair is a start.

Savannah's mother's hair is also curly but of type 3. Savannah, as an eleven-year old, also copies her mother's habits:

*S. Depeiza:* It started off when I saw my mom straightening her hair a lot because she also has curly hair. It might not seem like it but she does and she straightens it a lot so I kinda got something from her.

When Savannah comes to my house for the day or for sleepovers, I always do her hair. This routine in our relationship is the only time she is not glued to her phone. I learn about her more every time and we talk about her life at school and home. For me, it has been essential to present myself as confident with my natural hair in front of her because of the constant stream of images she consumes on Instagram. Her idol is currently a nineteen-year-old French influencer who is thin, Caucasian and has straight hair. One of Savannah's favourite pastimes is making short clips of her and posting them to her fan account which has over three thousand followers.

Overall, talking to these six individuals about heritage and hair provided me with a sense of enlightenment. Using my hair to accept my heritage happened organically for me. However, mothers do seem to be a key factor in black women's acceptance of self.

### Heritage: There Was Never Anything to Reconcile

This topic in my film was one that I did not expect. While setting out to make this film, I thought I was trying to understand how black hair relates to the identity of mixed race people but found that I was really trying to reconcile my complex ethnic background. Speaking with four people who identify as Trinidadian, I constantly asked if they considered me in line with them, ethnically

speaking. When I asked my grandmother if she thought I would be more Trinidadian if I had lived and grown up with her, she said yes. That was the response, I must admit, I was looking for. However, my father had a different response:

*Bernicky:* If you compare me to Savannah, do you think that I'm less Trinidadian in my culture and the way that I think of stuff compared to her?

*M. Depeiza:* No, you're more Trinidadian because you've been back, you've seen how it is. You've visited your family so you have more of an idea of how it is in Trinidad.

For my father, simply seeing where my family was from was enough to consider myself Trinidadian. Though I cannot cornrow my hair or make coconut bake, I can make a plethora of curries, understand Trini slang and have fond memories of playing in the southern part of the Atlantic Ocean. His response troubled me and made me question my own perception of my Trinidadian identity (or lack thereof). Somehow I believed I had to be more of one ethnic background than the other when in fact I was everything all at once. In my film, my grandmother pinpoints my ancestry, mentioning Indian, Spanish, and Trinidadian Indigenous descent simply on my father's side. On my mother's side I am French, Irish, and Polish (that I know of). In the end, everything that I was searching for was already there. I just could not see it because I believed the colour of my skin and physical features were meant to dictate where I truly belonged.

Though my documentary covers a wide range of topics, it allowed me to strengthen my relationship with my Trinidadian family, with whom I had limited contact for many years. Type 4 hair is simply one aspect of my identity as a mixed-race individual. In the end, I need to accept myself for all that I am. As viewers follow the recommended order of my film online, they uncover more and more about me, the director.

## Conclusion

### Let Your Interviewees Guide You

My proposed research focused on the importance of creating a dialogue about the segregation of the Montréal hair salon industry. The further I researched the topic, the more I realized that for me, the project was about more than just hair (though hair has complexities of its own). I then began to research mixed race identity, hoping to correlate the use of my own hair as a way to swing between my two racial backgrounds. While reading and writing, the body of literature about mixed race identity and about hair provided a strong foundation for my research, but undertaking the interviews troubled my initial hypothesis. My own views regarding race were constructed using a Western ideology. For my grandmother, father, and Tony, race was seen entirely as a construct because they came from the Caribbean where racial lines are blurred. I found out that my ancestors came from all over the world. As it turns out, race is not the defining factor of who I am, but rather the blending of cultures which makes me *me*. Yes, being racialized has caused me hardships in my life, and yes, knowing that I am Trinidadian became a sort of armour, providing me with answers for why I looked the way I did in the simplest terms when someone asked. But in the end, my interviewees have taught me that a mixed race person's existence is only complicated when made much more complex than it needs to be. My mother's French, Acadian, Irish and Polish heritage is as much a part of me as my Father's Indo-Trinidadian, Spanish, Carib and African makeup. This project is just the tip of the iceberg, more research focusing on mixed race identity should explore the cultural upbringing of these particular children rather than simply focus on the colour of their skin or the texture of their hair.

I'd like to end this Master's thesis by thanking my interviewees without whom this project would not be possible:

I am thankful for my Grandmother Carmen for not only providing me with a rich interview but for her strength to come to Canada all alone, her story of resilience providing a glimpse of the lives of many Caribbean women after the multiculturalism policy of 1971.

I am thankful to Savannah for being as much of herself as possible during her interview. By being genuine to herself, and with a little influence from me, Savannah's clip that I've just shown perfectly encapsulates two main topics in my research – the complexities of a mixed-race identity and the importance of discussing having black hair, as well as the overall aesthetics of the film.

I am thankful for Nicole's very articulate nature, expressing so much that I did not have the words for myself. Her interview sent me down a rabbit hole, investigating where majority of black hair care products come from and who profits off such a lucrative business.

I am thankful to Janelle for her comfort in front of a camera during my consultation.

Finally, I am thankful to my father, Brian, for his illuminating interview which caused a *détournement* in a sense.

Much of this research has caused a *détournement* which Jennifer A. Sandlin describes as a moment where people “are no longer who they used to be but are caught off guard with the possibility of becoming someone different” (Sandlin 79).

One thing I am sure of is that this research does not mark the end of this project, but does mark a celebration of my internal detournement. There was never really anything to reconcile, only very many things to embrace.

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