

**Black Women – Hair, Identity, and Bodily Autonomy** Mena Fombo

**Link:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLQzz75yE5A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLQzz75yE5A) [2017 (16 mins)]

“My seven year old self learnt to tell people what I thought they wanted to hear. By the age of eight I’d convinced the other kids that my hair was made of sponge... because being Black, it couldn’t be made of ‘hair’.” Ms. Fombo, a British Nigerian Bristolian, created a survey to find out if others shared her life experiences having her hair touched and her body objectified. Half of respondents affirmed that they also had their hair touched without their permission; 18% said that it happened weekly. Of those who responded that they too had experienced unwanted hair touching—described as “intrusive, invasive and unwelcome”—all were females and most were of African descent. Many of the respondents were angry and collectively they named three remedies: 1.) others needed to stop touching them, 2) more education and awareness was needed, 3) we all need to call this racist behavior out. Fombo’s personal story describes how as a Black child she was objectified, violated and humiliated as white adults in her school felt that they had the right to touch and stare at her private body—as if she were an animal in the zoo. Fombo tells how her experience mirrored the historical experiences of others with Black bodies and hair who were placed on public display by and for whites and asks “is the motivation different-- because the actions are still the same.” She argues with language that names her experiences as resulting from cultural “bias” or “ignorance” or “microaggressions” when the problem is racism. Fombo calls hair touching “hair attacks” and is the inspiration and force behind the international campaign “No. You Cannot Touch My Hair.”

*We celebrate Youth Voice through listening to two teen girls:*

[\(370\) Don't Touch My Crown | McKenna Hensley | TEDxColumbus - YouTube](#)

[Dec 14, 2016 (6 mins)]

Ms Hensley, a is a junior at Fort Hayes Arts and Academic High School in the Columbus, OH, City Schools and spoken word artist. She tells the story of the history and power of hair, and the power of her own hair—her “crown”— a part of her culture and identity.

[\(370\) African Hair | LUCILLE ROIMEN | TEDxYouth@BrookhouseSchool - YouTube](#)

[Jan 14, 2020 (9 mins)]

From the description in YouTube: “Lucille narrates how she often struggled to embrace her natural hair but later on she came to love it. Lucille is a student at Brookhouse School, Her Ted talk is about ‘The beauty of African Hair’.”