



LITTLE WHITE LIE

A FILM BY
LACEY SCHWARTZ



STORY BY AND SCREENPLAY BY JESSICA KAPLAN. DIRECTED BY LACEY SCHWARTZ.
CASTING BY JESSICA KAPLAN. COSTUME DESIGNER: JESSICA KAPLAN. HAIR: JESSICA KAPLAN. MAKEUP: JESSICA KAPLAN.

LITTLEWHITELIETHEFILM.COM

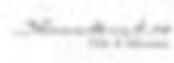


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ABOUT THE FILM



Filmmaker Lacey Schwartz grew up in a typical upper middle class Jewish household in Woodstock, NY, with loving parents and a strong sense of her identity, despite occasional remarks from those around her who wondered how a white girl could have such dark skin. As a child she believed her family’s explanation—that her appearance was inherited from her dark-skinned Sicilian great-grandfather. But when she reaches adolescence, and her parents abruptly separate, her gut begins to tell her something else.



Lacey’s suspicions intensify when she attends a more diverse high school, where she suddenly doesn’t quite fit any racial profile, and her classmates are vocal about noting it. At the urging of her boyfriend, who is of mixed race, she begins to question her true identity and the validity of her parents’ explanation. After being accepted to Georgetown University as a Black student on the basis of her photo, Lacey finally confronts her mother and learns the truth about her biological father.



As *Little White Lie* shows, both the bonds and the lies told between family members can run deep. Lacey strives to reconcile her newfound African American heritage with her Jewish upbringing, and discovers that in order to define herself, she must first come to terms with her parents’ choices and how much she is willing to let their past affect her future.

Piecing together her family history and the story of her dual identity using home videos, archival footage, interviews, and episodes from her own life, Lacey discovers that answering those questions means understanding her parents’ stories as well as her own.

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/little-white-lie/film.html>

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER



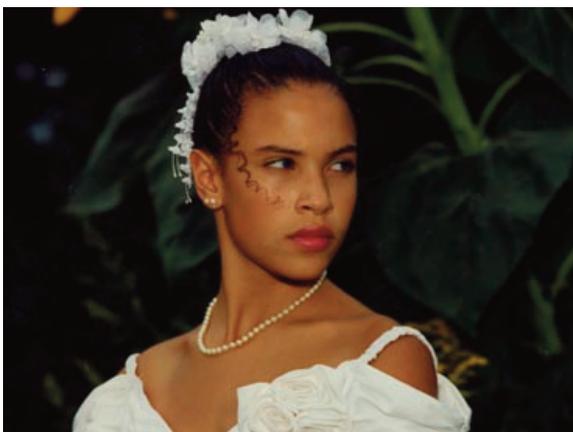
Lacey Schwartz is the CEO of the production and outreach organization Truth Aid. She is also the National Outreach Director for Be'chol Lashon (GlobalJews.org). She has over a decade of experience in the nonprofit and media sector working with a variety of production companies, networks, and organizations including MTV, BET, @radical.media, and NASCAR.

Little White Lie is her first film as a director. She also executive produced the narrative film Difret, which won audience awards at the 2014 Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals.



Prior to her media career, Schwartz was a professional DJ and public high school math and theater teacher. She has a BA from Georgetown University, a JD from Harvard Law School, and is a member of the New York State Bar.

She speaks widely on issues of diversity and the use of media to spark dialogue around important social issues, giving people tools that lead to personal evolution and social change.



ISSUES IN THE FILM

Little White Lie is a tour de force coming-of-age story that portrays the emergence from childhood, when identity is defined largely by others, and the transition into adulthood, when people claim the right to declare their own identities. The challenges of soul-searching and growth are magnified when one's personal story includes multiple heritages.

Daring to ask questions about her true identity, around which her parents had been silent throughout her childhood, filmmaker Lacey Schwartz confronts matters of race and family secrets in her deeply personal documentary. Little White Lie presents an opportunity to talk about what factors—race, religion, family—make us who we are? And what happens when we are forced to redefine ourselves?

Little White Lie manages to be both a particular family's story, but also raises larger questions for us all. It is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people interested in the following:

- African-American culture
- Biography
- Code-switching
- Coming of age
- Cultural competence
- Diversity
- Double consciousness
- Family Secrets
- Identity formation
- Inter-racial relations
- Jewish identity
- Standards of beauty
- Passing
- Race

USING THIS GUIDE

Little White Lie is an important tool to talk about differences in an age where intersectional identities are becoming the norm. Although many of the issues are controversial, it is not the subjects in and of themselves that are problematic but rather the inability to talk about them.

This guide, created by Be'chol Lashon in collaboration with the filmmaker, is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use Little White Lie to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues.

Choose one or two issues that best meet your interests. Leave time to consider planning next steps that can help people leave the room feeling energized and hopeful, even in instances when conversations have been difficult. See resources at LittleWhiteLiethefilm.com and GlobalJews.org

INDEPENDENT LENS | LITTLE WHITE LIE | PBS | CLIPS

This discussion guide is organized around the following clips from the film:

FAMILY ORIGINS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAk0FYXP-VAs> 1:35min

GROWING UP

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTKv-5K2744> 4:23

FINDING HERSELF AT GEORGETOWN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk-MAWvzhEuo> 3:39

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



FAMILY ORIGINS / JEWISH IDENTITY

JEWISH HERITAGE

The film opens with Schwartz narrating, “I come from a long line of New York Jews. I am the great granddaughter of Eastern European immigrants who brought their culture and traditions to Brooklyn.” She explains, “I grew up in a world of synagogue, Hebrew school, bar mitzvahs. My family knew who they were...and they defined who I was.”

What is Lacey’s relationship to Judaism at the start of the film? As Lacey explores her identity, do you feel that she is also questioning her relationship to Judaism?



BLACK AND JEWISH

In a later interview, Lacey is asked if she felt more or less Jewish after her journey of self-discovery, her answer was, “Neither. My Jewish identity was never in question. What was in question was how to be Jewish and...meaning Jewish and Black. For me, the question is how can I walk into any space and not leave a piece of myself behind.”

What does Lacey mean by “not leaving a piece of myself behind”? Are Lacey’s Jewish and African-American identities in conflict? If so, how?



Since Jews have lived on every continent in the world for millenia, why are multiracial Jews surprising? Why are Jews primarily thought of as “white?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



GROWING UP / LITTLE WHITE LIE(S)

LOOKING DIFFERENT

From the time Lacey was born, her family recognized she looked different. Even though Lacey knew she was different too, she “didn’t want to admit it.”

How did Lacey’s parents explain her difference? What tools did Lacey use to convince herself she was “just like” her parents? Why do you think Lacey’s relatives and friends accepted the story of the Sicilian ancestor, even though they suspected otherwise? Do you agree with these reasons? What might have happened if they had rejected the story?



PASSING

Lacey explains, “It never occurred to me that I was passing, I wasn’t pretending to be something I wasn’t. I actually grew up believing I was white. I wasn’t trying to be white, I was white. Everyone in my life had always let me think so.”

Growing up, how does Lacey feel when others assume she is white? Black? How did Lacey’s Jewish family and community, her high school peers, and Georgetown University define who she was?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



INTERNAL VS EXTERNAL IDENTITY

Even Lacey's childhood best friend says, "I always looked at you like you *looked* Black. To me you were just like a Jewish kid who ... I don't know."

How does being able to express herself freely to her family and friends help her make peace with her identity?

To form robust, fully-realized identities and relationships, personally and professionally, how much must we negotiate between what is true to our own inner landscape and the social lens through which we're seen by others?



RACE CONSCIOUSNESS

Lacey describes Woodstock, NY, the town where she grew up, as a "white liberal space" where she never encountered overt racism but where race was never discussed, and children grew up without race consciousness.

Are white people less likely to talk about race? Is it possible to "not see race"? How might Lacey's story have played out differently in a more diverse community? In a community with overt racism? In your own community? How might her identity have developed differently?



SECRETS AND LIES

When Lacey finally came to define herself as Black, she realized her parents had been keeping something secret.

Lacey defines a Little White Lie as "something everybody knows but no one talks about." What motivates Lacey to finally confront her family and refuse to perpetuate the lie? What lessons might someone struggling with a Little White Lie in his or her own family take from the film? Can you think of other Little White Lies in your family, community, or culture?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



FINDING HERSELF AT GEORGETOWN / MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

BELONGING

When Lacey applied to Georgetown University, she was admitted to college as a Black student on the basis of a photograph. “That moment when Georgetown said ‘you’re black’, it was like they gave me permission to start entertaining the idea myself.”

Why wasn’t Lacey able to embrace a black identity before she left for college? Why was Lacey ready to try on a new identity at Georgetown?



FINDING COMMUNITY

When Lacey was admitted to Georgetown as a Black student, she felt, “There were moments in the beginning when I would walk into all these Black spaces and I would think, how am I going to fit in, or what’s it going to be like? Would I dance in the right way? Would I say the right thing?”

How do you think Lacey defined her identity at this point? What do you think her peers thought? Why was being part of a Black community at Georgetown so important and freeing for her? How do you think she felt being Black at school, while still being considered white at home?



STANDARDS OF BEAUTY

In her childhood diary, Lacey divulges she wanted “lighter skin.” Meanwhile, at school, “all the girls in my class had long straight hair. I didn’t and I hated it. I couldn’t do anything about my skin but my hair was a different story.”

But when Lacey was at Georgetown, “hanging out with Black people put a lot of my insecurities to rest. The dark skin I always worried about was light skin to them, and my bad hair became good hair. For the first time in my life I felt like I belonged.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Lacey says that at Georgetown her “bad hair” was “good hair.” What made Lacey think her hair was “bad” before? What makes it “good” now? Why is Lacey’s skin tone more highly valued in the Black community? Where do these standards of beauty come from?

TALKING ABOUT RACE

For Lacey, “University was like Race 101, a crash course for a white person in what it means to be Black.” She observes, “White people don’t spend a whole lot of time thinking about their whiteness. But for Black people, Blackness is everywhere.”

Define yourself in a sentence or two. Did you include your race? Why or why not? What does Lacey mean when she says that “Blackness is everywhere”? Are people of color more likely to think about and discuss race? Why?

How do the more personal day-to-day fears, frictions, misunderstandings and biases, conscious and unconscious, contribute to the state of heightened racial anxiety, polarization and violence we’re seeing come to a head nationwide?



VICTIMHOOD

At the end of the film, Lacey concludes, “I put a lot of thought into the issue of changing my last name,” she says, as the screen shows images of her wedding. “As a kid I never really liked ‘Schwartz.’ But now, after everything, it seemed perfect for me. A clearly Jewish name, that literally means black.”

Are children sometimes the victims of their parents choices? How does Lacey successfully distinguish between her story and her parents’ stories? How does Lacey take control of her own story?

In a state of optimistic forward-looking, is there a way to consider a process of reconciliation, healing and promoting greater understanding?



DEFINING THE ISSUES



The keywords and definitions below are relevant concepts or ideas when thinking and talking about race.

2042

The demographics in America are changing. As America moves toward 2042, whites will drop below 50% of the population and all ethnic, racial and cultural groups will share the distinction of being minority groups.

CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching refers to navigating the spaces we each inhabit by changing the way we express ourselves between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities.

COLORBLINDNESS

It is common for those seeking racial equality to claim not to see race—to be “colorblind.” To some, it speaks to a vision of a world where the color of one’s skin does not matter. Although well meaning, colorblindness achieves the opposite of what is intended and can be perceived as racist in effect if not intent.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence is the “ability to work effectively across cultures.” It is not a static achievable goal but rather an ongoing state of being that allows for continual learning, self-reflection and growth.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Coined by WEB Dubois, double consciousness refers to the “sense of always looking at one-self through the eyes of others,” in which the internalization of anti-black sentiment damages self-esteem and identity formation.

PASSING

Passing is the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of social groups other than his or her own, generally with the goal of gaining social acceptance or to cope with anxiety caused by difference.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a concept to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another.

RACIAL IDENTITY

People of color tend to build their identities around their racial backgrounds because they view themselves as differing from the dominant images in American society.

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT RACE

In families where the issue of race is not addressed, children get the message that it is inappropriate to express their feelings and that the topic is taboo and perhaps even shameful or embarrassing.

PRAISE FOR LITTLE WHITE LIE

LITTLE WHITE LIE

**"SCHWARTZ' TRANSFORMATION INTO
A CONFIDENT AND AWARE WOMAN
IS A SIGHT TO BEHOLD AND MAKES
LITTLE WHITE LIE ONE OF THE BEST
DOCUMENTARIES OF THE YEAR."
— BOLD AS LOVE**

"The film's twisting tale is part of 'a larger story about race in America... It's a way for people to talk about their history.'"—Felicia R. Lee / NYT

"Exceptional, an amazing story. It's one of the most profound mediations on race I've ever experienced."—Chris Hayes / MSNBC

"Little White Lie has been chosen for the 2015 Film Forward series because of it's universal themes on identity, family secrets and coming of age."—Meredith Lavitt / Sundance Institute

"Holmes' criterion for festival submissions is great black films, against the grain. Certainly that describes Brooklyn filmmaker Lacey Schwartz's Little White Lie."—A.D Amorosi / The Philadelphia Inquirer

"The world premiere of Little White Lie, closes the SFJFF with an utterly unique angle on Jewish identity."—Michael Fox / KQED

"Remarkable story... A new documentary explores one biracial woman's quest on racial identity."—Charing Bell / The Grio, MSNBC

"The aptly-titled Little White Lie clocks in at just over an hour, but it packs in a miniseries' worth of emotional complexity and honesty." —Cheryl Eddy / San Francisco Bay Guardian

"Filmmaker Lacey Schwartz explores how race, culture and family shape a person's sense of identity in this documentary and personal detective story."—Anita Katz / The San Francisco Examiner

"...A candid look at race, family secrets and a Jewish woman's determined journey to discover who she really is. I was hooked throughout. "
—Randy Myers / San Jose Mercury NewsCredits