Is Beauty Only Skin Deep

Nourbese Flint - Black Women for Wellness
AGENDA

• Quick overview of Black Women for Wellness
• Why this work
• The intersections of beauty and toxic chemicals
• BWWM community field research
• Committed to the empowerment, health and well-being of Black Women and Girls.
• Based in Los Angeles
• Reproductive Justice Organization
**WHY THIS TOPIC**

- Black stylist are a staple/economic backbone in many black communities
- Beauty Industry is only growing with Black women’s leading the charge
- The impact of toxins in hair and beauty products on health
Black Women spend an estimated 9 billion dollars in the beauty industry.

Black Women spend 80% more on beauty products than white women.

Over 2/3rd of Black women feel that maintaining a youthful appearance is important.

In the Nielsen report about Black women, about half of Black women surveyed has bought a skincare item, cosmetic or perfumes.
According to the latest Nielsen report, Black women are:

- 17% more likely to spend more on feminine hygiene products
- 61% more likely to spend more money on personal soaps
- 44% more likely on women’s fragrance
- 106% more on ethnic health and beauty aids
- 4% more on hair care per buyer compared to white women
WHO GETS TO BE BEAUTIFUL
As Annalise, Ms. Davis, 49, is sexual and even sexy, in a slightly menacing way, but the actress doesn’t look at all like the typical star of a network drama. Ignoring the narrow beauty standards some African-American women are held to, Ms. Rhimes chose a performer who is older, darker-skinned and less classically beautiful than Ms. Washington, or for that matter Halle Berry, who played an astronaut on the summer mini-series “Extant.”
• They very idea of femininity is steeped in beauty
• Current standards celebrate light/white skin, and facial features and body types seen throughout media
• Steeped in/reinforces structural racism
“Is capital is a resource drawn from the body that can be related to skin tone, facial features, hair and body shape that is attached to white bodies”

(Hunter 2011)
Why is this important when discussing chemical exposure of beauty products?

• We need to understand why before we create solutions

• It informs the work and particularly what questions to ask
BWW Field Research

- literature reviews
- surveys
- focus groups
- interviews
Formaldehyde (methylene glycol): exposure can cause irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat/increased cancer risk
• Hair products straightening products, nail polish, eye lash glue

Phthalates (dibutyl): Endocrine disruptor linked to reproductive health outcomes
• Found in nail polish, fragrance*, facial moisturizers, eye lash glue
DMDM Hydantoin and Diazolidinyl Urea: anti-microbial preservative that is a formaldehyde releaser
• Linked to cancer, immune system toxicity, skin irritation
• Found in hair products (relaxers/detanglers), facial/body wash, sunscreen, makeup...

Sodium/Calcium Hydroxide: Connected to skin irritation, skin burns, ulcers, dermatitis, baldness, eye damage.
• Found in relaxers, shampoo/conditioner, moisturizers, makeup, toothpaste...
# Most Common Form of Toxic Chemicals

## Most Common Forms of Toxic Chemicals in Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Chemical Ingredients</th>
<th>Health Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hormone containing conditioner</td>
<td>Various endocrine disruptors</td>
<td>Premature puberty, risk of breast cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair dyes</td>
<td>NH$_4$OH, H$_2$O$_2$</td>
<td>Skin burns &amp; scarring, eye irritation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phenylendiamine</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resorcinol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxers</td>
<td>NAOH and CaOH</td>
<td>Skin burns and irritation, eye damage, permanent hair loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“My friend [has] 20 years in the industry, my friends doesn’t have fingerprints anymore... my friends can’t go to the DMV and put their hand down.”

STYLIST

• Vast majority thought the products are safe
• Vast majority one to want to keep their clients safe and themselves
• Used products because they worked
**Top Health Issues**

![Bar Chart: Top Health Issues of Concern](chart-image-url)

- Headache
- Chemical Burn
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Eye irritation
- Tiredness
- Skin irritation
- Cancer
- Respiratory Problems
- Chronic Dermatitis
- Miscarriages
- Low Birth Weight
- Infant Death
- Aching Joints
- Back Pain
- None
- Other
Final Thoughts

• some of the toxic chemicals in products are what makes it work

• there is a new wave of embracing more “natural styles” that is driving products to be more green

• solutions need to intersectional
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