The Feasibility of Beauty Shop Health Initiatives to Impact Marriage and Depression

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Many women revere beauty shops for beautifying and improving their outer appearance. However, they are also change agents that can uplift inner well-being.

Although beauty shops are associated with the superficial transformation of appearance, some researchers have also equated the services received as ‘beauty therapy’ which connotes a more profound and restorative kind of transformation that involves both the body and the mind, but always implying some notion of health or wholeness.

In the black community, similar to churches, beauty shops are unique and important institutional community assets where women can receive emotional support for the stressors of marriage.
The Assets-based Approach

Utilizing beauty shops is an assets-based approach upon which to build interventions that focus on community strengths or give balanced attention to strengths and needs.

Focuses on capabilities, skills and social resources

- Inventory Local Business Institutions
- Inventory Individual Capacity
- Inventory Local Business Associations
Accessibility of Beauty Shops

Figure 1. Services Establishments; Raleigh-Cary, NC (N=2,442)

- Religious Orgs: 23%
- Automotive R & M: 23%
- Beauty Salons: 10%
- Grant, Civic, Prof Orgs: 10%
- Business, Prof, Labor, Pol Orgs: 6%
- Dry Cleaning, Laundry Services: 6%
- Other Pers Services: 6%
- Personal Care Services: 4%
- Personal Household Goods R & M: 3%
- Electrical Prec Equip R & M: 3%
- Communications Equip: 2%
- Death Care Srvcs: 2%

US Census Bureau-County Business Patterns, 2005
Accessibility of Beauty Shops

Figure 2. Services Establishments; Richmond, VA (N=3,488)*

- Automotive R & M: 27%
- Religious Orgs: 20%
- Beauty Salons: 11%
- Other Personal Services: 6%
- Personal/Household Goods Repair and Maintenance: 3%
- Commercial/Industrial Machinery and Equipment: 3%
- Death Care Services: 2%
- Electric/Precision Equipment Repair and Maintenance: 2%
- Grant, Civic, Profession, and Related Organizations: 2%
- Pers Care Services: 2%

Figure 3. Services Establishments; Baltimore, MD (N=6,636)*

- Automotive R & M: 23%
- Religious Orgs: 20%
- Beauty Salons: 12%
- Other Personal Services: 9%
- Personal/Household Goods Repair and Maintenance: 7%
- Commercial/Industrial Machinery and Equipment: 5%
- Death Care Services: 2%
- Electric/Precision Equipment Repair and Maintenance: 2%
- Pers Care Services: 2%
- Grant, Civic, Profession, and Related Organizations: 2%
- Pers Care Services: 2%

US Census Bureau-County Business Patterns, 2005
Beauty Shop Culture

The beauty shop is the black women’s golf course; where relationships are formed and women have conversations in a relaxing, unassuming environment, thus allowing for a cathartic experience.

While networking, many women seek advice from others and discuss topics that have to do with personal relationships and health.
# Frequently Discussed Health Topics in Beauty Shops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>(%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Personal Relationships</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Motherhood/Weight (tie)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Diabetes</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Sexual Health</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>STDs/Heart Disease</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Violence (tie)</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Smoking/Asthma (tie)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
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Trusted Professionals

✦ Cosmetologists are perceived by customers as competent, trust-worthy and likeable.

✦ Dating back nearly 30 years, community psychologists characterized cosmetologists as informal caregivers, who with no mental health training, could play a vital role in the lives of interpersonally distressed individuals.

✦ Cosmetologists have been called “esteem builders” and many say that they handle more than just hair.
The Ubiquity of Local Business Association Supports

Utilizing local business associations can bring increased exposure and resources to health initiatives.

Identify marriage and family therapists & mental health counselors who can provide their expertise.

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- American Mental Health Counselors Association
- American Counseling Association
Community Assets Need to be Translated into Action

- Merely identifying community assets would be insignificant if it is not translated into action.

- Some beauty shop owners/cosmetologists are health advocates by allowing their shop to be a storefront for health education programs, health care services and for the distribution of health products.

- Community psychologist have even mobilized cosmetologists as “natural helpers” to help provide mental health support for clients.
Practical Internal Strategies Depend on Stylists

Particularly because cosmetologists become confidants to many of their clients, many respond to their clients’ needs in ways that are attentive but not overly-involved or invasive.

Cowen et al. (1979) reported frequent strategies that stylists use to respond to clients’ personal problems of marriage and depression.

- Offering Personal Advice
- Being Lighthearted
- Reflecting Feelings
- Presenting Alternatives
Practical External Strategies

Depend on Experts

Although many stylists enjoy (or tolerate) fielding clients’ personal problems, it can be perplexing whereby trained professionals are more appropriate for addressing client needs.

Create a pipeline to health service professionals who are able to provide their expertise in beauty shop group settings.

- **Concise** (30 min. max)
- **Approach** conversation through anecdote
- **Position** stylists to engage clients in conversation
- **Pose** questions that are culturally familiar
- **Stress** advocating for self and community needs
Implement Interventions that Utilize Adaptations of Motivational Interviewing (MI) Techniques

- Motivational Interviewing is a specific talk-based therapy originally developed to help people with addictions. More recently, it has been applied to address a wide range of health problems characterized by poor motivation (or negative/depressive mood).

- Thus, the length of time spent during beauty shop visits and repeat visits, allow for the venue to offer quick teachable moments where adapted MI techniques can be used.

- Moreover, women expect to be transformed when they leave beauty shops; therefore, the setting may (by default) help to bolster MI effects.
Components of Successful Beauty Shop Health Initiatives

- Incorporate Community Based Participatory Research as a common research practice; involving services from academic, beauty shop and health organizations.

- For Program Planner & Researcher Partners it means:
  - Including beauty shop partners in program planning and evaluation aspects
  - Creating advisory boards that include all partners who share equal input
  - Sustaining a rapport with beauty salon stylists and intervention/prevention by routine visits/calls to businesses
  - Adapting programming to the flexibility of beauty shop schedules

- For Beauty Shop Partners it means:
  - Accepting the role of community leader
  - Championing project activities to clients

- For Health Organizations it means:
  - Serving as a referral resource
  - Championing project activities to patients and staff
Practical Advice

“Depending how to tackle him or her, a client can walk out of your salon feeling wonderful or feeling like crap. When you style someone, you have to keep their personality, lifestyle and even social life in mind. It’s never just about the hair.”

-Kevin, stylist