MIRROR/MIRROR: AARP SURVEY OF BLACK WOMEN'S REFLECTIONS ON BEAUTY, AGE, AND MEDIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary

While the COVID19 pandemic has impacted everyone in the United States, it has had a particularly profound effect on women and Black women even more so. Disproportionate hospitalizations, fatalities, and job loss on top of heightened racial injustice have had compound effects on the physical and mental health of Black women.^{1,2,3} Amidst the context of pandemic stress, Black women are focusing more on self-care and their own well-being.

- Pandemic stress has manifested in many **physical effects** for Black women, including weight gain, sleep disruption, skin problems and hair loss.
- A majority are increasingly focusing on **health and inner peace** rather than outward appearance during the pandemic and they often connect their emotional and spiritual well-being to their beauty and personal grooming routines.
- During the pandemic, Black women have increasingly embraced more **relaxed looks and natural hairstyles**, incorporating head wraps and scarves, while turning to straightening tools less often.
- Traditional beauty companies have an opportunity to offer more diverse products. Black women see these companies' offerings as too limited and feel there should be **more products tailored to their hair and skin types** as well as for perimenopause.
- **Media and advertising still miss the mark** in accurately representing Black women and how they see themselves as they age. Boomers in particular feel underrepresented in images and advertising for beauty and grooming products.

Black women's increased emphasis on their own wellness presents an opportunity to provide them with resources to help them cope throughout the pandemic and its aftermath. These resources could include tips and tools to help them stay mentally and physically fit, as well as ways to help them gain or maintain employment and manage increased caregiving responsibilities. As the backbone of many households, Black women deserve to have the time and resources they need for self-care.

¹ Anu Madgavkar, Olivia White, Mekala Krishnan, Deepa Mahajan, "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects," McKinsey Global Institute, July 15, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>.

² National Center for Health Statistics, "Health Disparities: Provisional Death Counts for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/health_disparities.htm

³ Erica Larose, producer, "Why COVID-19 Has Impacted Black Women so Badly," HuffPost Video, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-covid-19-has-impacted-black-women-so-badly_n_602afa11e4b06d64049f1826

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

A majority of Black women have experienced weight and sleep problems due to worry or stress from the pandemic.

About 45% of Black women have experienced weight gain and overeating. More than one-third had trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. Some also report skin, hair, and teeth problems due to the pandemic.

Percent experiencing the following problems
Due to worry or stress from the pandemic

Q22. Think about the impact from the coronavirus pandemic on various aspects of your life, including the physical and mental health of you and your family, and the effect on your and your family's finances. Has worry or stress resulting from the pandemic caused you to experience any of the following, or not? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Black women are split on the impact of the pandemic on the importance of their beauty and grooming routines.

Ninety-one (91%) of Black women indicate that their beauty and personal grooming routines were extremely or very important before the pandemic. About equal shares of Black women (about 3 in 10) feel their routines are *more* important or *less* important since the pandemic began. This divide is similar across generations.

Q2. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, would you say your beauty and personal grooming routine has become more important to you, less important, or has there been no difference?
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Black women had more positive experiences than negative ones around beauty and personal grooming during the pandemic overall.

Routines for hair care, nails, and skin were disrupted primarily due to limited access to salon services and lack of motivation, but this disruption also gave Black women a low-stress opportunity to experiment with natural hair and makeup-free skin. Several reported a sense of freedom and improved self-confidence as a result. Despite fewer overall mentions of negative experiences, those who did mention such experiences cited struggles with mental health.

Percent who have had **positive** and **negative** experiences
Around beauty and personal grooming due to the pandemic

- Millennials (29%) tended to report negative experiences more often than Gen X (22%) and Boomers (21%).
- Common positive experience: Self-confidence has improved.
- Common negative experience: Have been or felt depressed.

Q20. Think about your own beauty and personal grooming routine. Have you experienced anything positive because of the pandemic? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)
Q21. And thinking about your own beauty and personal grooming routine, have you experienced anything negative because of the pandemic? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

When asked about the pandemic's impact on their beauty and personal grooming routines, many Black women connect those routines to their emotional and spiritual well-being.

In addition to impacts on hair care, nails, and skin care routines, Black women commonly cited a renewed focus on the health of their mind, body, and spirit, while some were also feeling an increase in stress and depression.

Beauty and make-up means nothing when you're dead or on a ventilator. Natural beauty is who we are.
(Black woman, age 58)

I cut off all my hair...I'm now A BEAUTIFUL BALD HEADED BLACK QUEEN
(Black woman, age 61)

Self-reflection is more important than outward appearance.
(Black woman, age 40)

I don't care like I used to and am not taking as good care of myself.
(Black woman, age 58)

I stopped worrying about my hair and how I was going to take care of it
(Black woman, age 26)

Learned how to be with myself and become more spiritual
(Black woman, age 64)

My inner peace reflects in my face and actions.
(Black woman, age 74)

Nothing like this seems important right now. Constant fear of being able to survive.
(Black woman, age 51)

The positive thing I have experienced during this pandemic has been implementing self-care and wellness with results.
(Black woman, age 65)

I can be me and not worry about what others say about my hair and facial appearance. I am free to live as God has created me to be.
(Black woman, age 33)

I have begun to embrace my natural hair and feel less pressure to look a certain way in terms of hairdos.
(Black woman, age 34)

I lost my job due to the pandemic and have felt less on multiple levels and caring about my personal appearance has suffered. (Black woman, age 54)

Q21. And thinking about your own beauty and personal grooming routine, have you experienced anything negative because of the pandemic? Base: Total respondents (n=1,890)

Q21A. What is the most negative thing you have experienced? Base: Respondents who have experienced something negative because of the pandemic

Many Black women are using video conferencing, but it makes many feel more self-conscious about their appearance.

Black women are using video conferencing to keep in touch with friends and family, attend religious meetings, and other support, social, and community groups. Though video-conferencing enables them to be stay in touch, 40% indicate that it makes them more self-conscious about their appearance.

Use of video conferencing applications
Since the pandemic began

Video conferencing effect on self-consciousness
Compared to when they meet people in person

Q17. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, have you used a video conferencing application like Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime for any of the following? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)
Q18. Compared to when you meet with people in-person, does using video conferencing applications make you more self-conscious about your appearance, less self-conscious, or is there no difference? Base: If used a video conferencing application in Q 17 (n=1,426)

Despite self-consciousness on screen, however, most Black women have not become more self-conscious about their physical appearance in general.

Half have not experienced any change in their self-consciousness about their physical appearance. Younger Black women are more likely to feel more self-conscious since the pandemic began.

Change in self-consciousness about physical appearance
Since the coronavirus pandemic began

Q9. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, would you say you have become more self-conscious about your physical appearance, less self-conscious, or there is no difference?
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

FOCUS ON HEALTH AND A POSITIVE MINDSET

Since the pandemic began, Black women have increasingly focused inward on health and inner peace.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, about one-third of Black women (31%) say they care less often about what people think of their appearance. A majority (58%) have focused more often on their inner peace than outer beauty, and a similar share (60%) of Black women have focused on their health more often than their appearance.

Since the pandemic began, 31% of Black women are more likely to focus on media that emphasizes health over beauty.

Q3. Since the coronavirus pandemic began, have you done each of the following more often, less often, or about as often as before? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)
Q27: Since the coronavirus pandemic began, are you more likely to focus on media that emphasizes health over beauty, less likely, or has there been no change? By media, we mean print, online, social media, TV, etc. Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

One-fifth of all Black women want to see lowered standards of beauty persist postpandemic.

About one-third (30%) of Black women say standards of beauty have been lowered since the start of the pandemic, and of that group, 63% — or 19% of all Black women — say they should stay that way.

Change in beauty standards for women
Due to the pandemic

Q5. *Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, do you think the standards of beauty for women in the U.S. have been raised, lowered, or remained the same?*
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Q6. *Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion? These new standards of beauty for women established during the pandemic should go back to the way they were before the pandemic began or These new standards of beauty for women established during the pandemic should continue after the pandemic ends.*
Base: Respondents who say standards of beauty have been lowered somewhat or lowered a lot in Q5. (n=566)

CHANGING BEAUTY ROUTINES

A majority of Black women have changed their beauty routine since the pandemic and one-third say they will make at least some changes permanent.

About a third of all Black women (34%) plan to keep at least some of the changes after the outbreak is over. Millennial women are more confident (45%) than Gen X or Boomers about keeping changes they have made.

Percent who have changed their beauty routine, and whether they will keep changes
Since the coronavirus pandemic began

- Q4. Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion? Base: Total respondents
- During the pandemic, you changed your personal grooming of beauty routine but will go back to the way it was when the outbreak is over
 - During the pandemic, you changed your personal grooming of beauty routine and will keep at least some of the changes even after the outbreak is over
 - You haven't changed your personal grooming or beauty routine during the pandemic.

In fact, most Black women say the pandemic has not changed societal pressures regarding looks and appearance.

Even as they are changing their own care routines, most still feel social pressure to look a certain way. Millennial women are more likely than Gen X or Boomer women to report *increased* pressure to look a certain way and to post good photos of themselves.

Change in pressure to do the following
Since the coronavirus pandemic began

Q11. *Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, have you felt more pressure, less pressure, or experienced no change in pressure to do each of the following?*
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Since the pandemic began, Black women feel slightly more comfortable wearing natural hair and using hair covers and hair products.

One-fourth of Black women have become more comfortable wearing their hair natural. There’s been an accompanying shift toward more use of head wraps and scarves and conditioning hair products. A similar share report using styling tools less often.

Change in comfort with the following
Since the pandemic began

Q12. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, have you become more or less comfortable with each of the following, or has your comfort level not changed? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Change in use of the following products
Since the pandemic began

Q16. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, would you say you have used each of the following more often, less often, or neither more or less often? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Increased use of facial and body skincare and decreased use of lip and eye makeup also indicate more attention on wellness and natural beauty.

Although majorities of Black women say they haven't changed product use across categories since the pandemic began, those who have changed behavior are more likely to report more frequent use of skincare products (face and body) and decreased use of lipstick and eye makeup.

Change in use of the following products
Since the pandemic began

Q16. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began*, would you say you have used each of the following more often, less often, or neither more or less often?
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

There is increasing comfort among Black women to adopt a casual appearance in public, even in the work environment.

Percent of women more comfortable doing the following since the pandemic began
Outside the house and *in work settings*

Q13. When doing errands outside your house since the coronavirus pandemic began, have you become more or less comfortable with each of the following, or has your comfort level not changed? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Q14. When going to work or joining video calls with work colleagues since the coronavirus pandemic began, have you become more or less comfortable with each of the following, or has your comfort level not changed? Not applicable responses are not included. Base: Employed respondents (n=897)

During the pandemic, many Black women are saving money and time on beauty and personal grooming products and routines.

Many Black women, especially Gen Xers and Boomers, are spending less money on beauty and personal grooming products and less time on their beauty and personal grooming routines.

Percent of women spending **less** or **more** money and time on beauty and personal grooming
Since the pandemic began

Q28/Q29. *Since the coronavirus pandemic began* how much money do you think you spend in a typical month on beauty/personal grooming products for yourself not for other people? Would you say this amount is more, less, or about the same as you spent in a typical month on beauty or personal grooming products for yourself before the pandemic began? Base: Black women who spent money (n=1,775), Millennials (n=492), Gen X (n=476), Boomers (n=616)

Q32. Overall, would you say the average amount of time you spend per day, that is morning and evening, on your beauty or personal grooming regimen is more, less, or the same as you spent in a typical day before the pandemic began? Base: Total respondents (n=1,884), Millennials (n=543), Gen X (n=501), Boomers (n=627)

MEDIA AND MARKETPLACE DESIRES

Traditional beauty companies still have limited product offerings for Black women.

Q23. Many big, traditional beauty companies are now making and marketing products and services to include people with different hair types and skin tones. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: Total respondents (n=1,884)

Black women find the beauty industry does not accurately represent them. They seek solutions tailored to their age, skin tone, and hair type.

Percent who agree there should be more beauty and personal grooming products and services tailored to...

Q25. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about beauty and personal grooming products and services? Base: Total respondents

Black women are not seeing women their own age portrayed in advertising, especially Gen Xers and Boomers.

Percent who agree with the following statements
About beauty and personal grooming ads, and ads in general

Q34. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about beauty and personal grooming ads? Base: Total respondents

Q35. Now, think about ads in general – not just for beauty and personal grooming – how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Total respondents

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

- The survey of 1,884 Black women ages 18 and older is part of a larger study of 4,851 women that was designed by AARP Research and conducted for AARP by NORC at the University of Chicago November 17 – December 15, 2020.
- Data were collected using the probability-based, nationally representative AmeriSpeak® Panel, supplemented with a nonprobability sample from Dynata. AmeriSpeak Panel members were scientifically selected to represent women ages 18 and over in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. There were 2,457 AmeriSpeak respondents completing the survey and 2,394 respondents from the Dynata panel. Data were collected online (4,572 interviews) and via telephone (279 interviews). Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.
- The data were weighted using the TrueNorth methodology to sociodemographic benchmarks derived from the March 2020 Current Population Survey to reflect U.S. women ages 18 and older, as well as predicted values of survey variables from small area estimation models. The sociodemographic characteristics include race/ethnicity by age, race/ethnicity by region, race/ethnicity by education, and age by education. For more information on TrueNorth visit <https://amerispeak.norc.org/our-capabilities/Pages/TrueNorth.aspx>.

Methodology (cont.)

- The margin of sampling error for Black women is +/- 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for a 50% survey statistic, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.
- For analysis purposes, age oversamples were also included in the sample design. Age cohorts are represented in the report using the generational definitions shown below:
 - 543 Millennial women (ages 23-39) with a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.9 percentage points
 - 501 Gen X women (ages 40–55) with a margin of sampling error of +/- 5.2 percentage points
 - 627 Boomer women (ages 56–74) with a margin of sampling error of +/- 5.1 percentage points

About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the nation's largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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