

CREATING ACCESSIBLE CAMPUSES THROUGH FRAGRANCE-FREE POLICIES

BY GRACEN BRILMYER AND ALEXANDRA APOLLONI

SHARE THE AIR!



AVOID THE USE OF SCENTED PRODUCTS IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AND THAT OF OTHERS

The Center for the Study of Women's Share the Air Campaign aims to raise awareness of the health effects of fragrances.

Access to fragrance-free spaces is a disability justice issue. While University campuses endeavor to provide accessible spaces for their students, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), few have policies in place that ensure accessibility for persons who experience sensitivity or adverse reactions to the synthetic fragrances and other hazardous substances found in widely used products. Cleaning products, personal care products, and other commonly-used products can trigger debilitating symptoms in those who experience conditions such as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), Toxicant-Induced Loss of Tolerance (TILT), allergy to fragrance, etc. Reactions can include migraines, respiratory issues, memory loss, seizures, etc. Such reactions can inhibit the ability to learn and participate in the intellectual life of the university. Such conditions are increasingly common, and universities' inaction in accommodating those who experience them is limiting access to educational opportunity. Moreover, because the majority of the individuals who report such conditions are women, this is also a gender equity issue.

FROM HAIRSPRAYS, AFTERSHAVES, and deodorants, to laundry detergents and all-purpose cleaners, many of the products that people use on a daily

basis have a common ingredient listed on their labels: fragrance. Less well-known is the fact that “fragrance” can include any number of undisclosed ingredients, which manufacturers in the US are not required to disclose due to laws protecting trade secrets, which permit companies to protect “proprietary” formulas by not revealing ingredients (Gervin, 2008). As a result, the makeup of “fragrance” can vary from product to product, and often includes chemicals like phthalates, which are known to cause reproductive harm (Jurewicz and Hanke, 2011). In addition to chemicals included in fragrance, phthalates and plasticizers such as BPA and BPS are present in building materials (flooring, varnishes, adhesives, etc.), packing materials, medical devices (equipment, bags, tubing, etc.), and other items that individuals come into contact with on a daily basis on university campuses and elsewhere. BPA, BPS, and phthalates are known to be endocrine disruptors, and can not only produce the short-term effects listed above, but also long-term effects to the reproductive system. While individuals with MCS and TILT may experience immediate reactions to chemicals and fragrance, those sub-

stances present a health risk to all.

Recent court cases have found in favor of plaintiffs arguing that fragrance made their workplaces inaccessible. In 2008, a federal court ruled in favor of Susan McBride, whose employer, the city of Detroit, had failed to recognize her Multiple Chemical Sensitivity as a disability (McBride vs. City of Detroit). In addition to awarding McBride financial compensation, a US District Court found that allergy to fragrance could be a potentially disabling condition under then-recent amendments to the (ADA). The city was required to provide fragrance-free workspaces (Belkin, 2008). This case supports our argument that providing fragrance-free spaces is necessary for accessibility and demonstrates that this accessibility issues falls under the purview of the ADA.

Some universities and colleges have fragrance-free policies in place. Portland State University encourages voluntary compliance with a “Fragrance-Free Value” (n.d.). At the Evergreen State College, fragrance-free language is included alongside language about smoking as part of the campus’ Air Quality policy, and the

campus requires that products used on campus be “the least toxic alternative” (2008). McMaster University in Canada has one of the more comprehensive policies on fragrance, and promotes a Scent-Aware policy that offers recommendations on minimizing exposure (2004). At some institutions, individual departments or units have their own policies on fragrance: the Stanford University Symphonic Chorus, for instance, asks its members to be fragrance-free at rehearsals and performances (n.d.). At UC Santa Cruz, the Career Center is a fragrance-free space, as are campus vanpools (Career Coaching; Employee Vanpool Passenger Agreement). The UCLA Center for the Study of Women has designated our offices and events as fragrance-free. Comprehensive campus-wide fragrance-free policies remain rare. At time of writing, none of the campuses in the University of California system have a campus-wide policy on the use of fragrance.

CRITIQUE

While campus accessibility policies are prepared to accommodate multiple physical and cognitive disabilities on campus, they fail to address the carcinogenic and endocrine disrupting aspects of common cleaning and personal care products. Not only are students, faculty, and staff with multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) and Toxicant-Induced Loss of Tolerance (TILT) at risk for serious health concerns, but the entire campus community is put at risk through the known harm that is caused by such chemicals. A campus accessibility policy that neglects to include chemicals as both harmful to disabled individuals as well as capable of inducing debilitating symptoms in many people, not only puts community members at risk but also fails to create transparency around what products are used on campus (i.e. cleaning products, soaps, etc).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Job Accommodation network offers a series of recommendations for accommodating individual workers who experience chemical sensitivity. They suggest that employers of chemically-sensitive workers take steps such as maintaining good indoor air quality; discontinuing the use of fragranced products; modifying workstation locations, schedules, and communication methods; providing scent-free meeting rooms and restrooms; etc (Simpson, 2013). While we agree that these strategies are important and necessary starting points, they are, ultimately, reactive and presented as responses to individual requests for accommodation. To truly be accessible and to ensure access to education, universities should be proactive in creating accessible spaces by anticipating the health risks that chemical use poses to members of their communities.

We recommend that campuses implement fragrance-free policies and transparency policies around chemical use. Universities should clearly list chemicals used on campus as well as request that campus community members and visitors refrain from using fragranced personal care products and perfumes. These policies would be beneficial for a number of reasons:

- Policy that encouraged community members to come to campus fragrance-free would build on precedent set by smoke-free campus policy, which is for the safety of the entire campus community. This policy would not only support the health needs of those who identify as chemically-sensitive, but would create a safer environment for all.
- Likewise, switching campus cleaning products and hand-soaps to products that are paraben- and fragrance-free would prioritize the safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors with chemical sensitivities as well as the safety of the community overall.
- Transparency around chemicals in campus products would raise awareness around chemical sensitivities as an accessibility issue and encourage consent to those knowingly coming into contact with chemicals. Lists of

cleaning products used on campus, and their ingredients, should be made publically available so that individuals can make informed decisions about subjecting themselves to exposure risk in different campus environments.

- Implementing campus-wide fragrance-free policies would enable students, faculty, and staff to seamlessly participate in the intellectual activities of the university and would not require already-vulnerable members of campus communities to undertake the labor of self-advocacy.
- A fragrance-free policy would set a precedent for the UC system and for universities more broadly to consider chemicals and fragrances as an accessibility concern.

Gracen Brilmyer is a first-year graduate student pursuing a PhD with the Department of Library and Information Studies program at UCLA. With a background in digital scientific archives and using Disability Studies and Queer Theory as lenses to understand power and authority within archives, their research traces the conflation of disability, race, and animality within natural history and centers on how colonialism can be further understood by looking at biological archives.

Alexandra Apolloni is the Program Coordinator at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. She holds a PhD in Musicology from UCLA.

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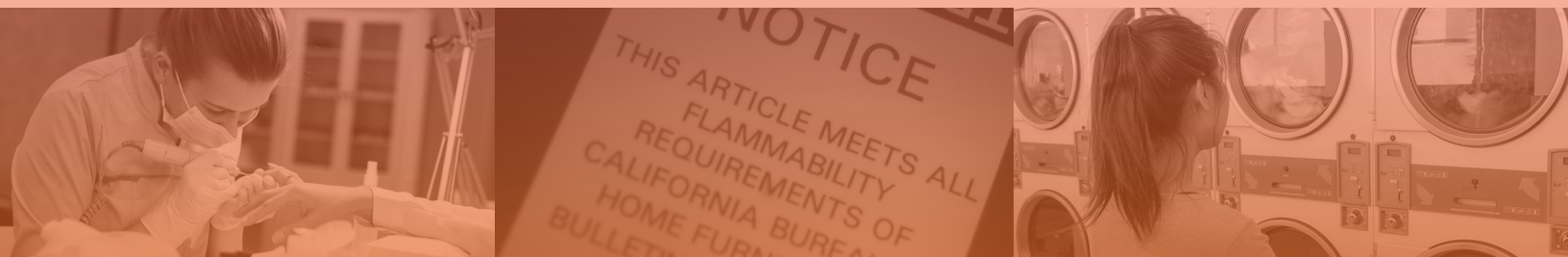
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CHEMICAL ENTANGLEMENTS GENDER AND EXPOSURE



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