

FAST COMPANY

WHY WOMEN ARE TURNING TO "BLOWTOX" INJECTIONS TO PRESERVE THEIR HAIRDOS

UNDERGOING A MEDICAL PROCEDURE TO PREVENT SWEATING DURING EXERCISE MIGHT SOUND RIDICULOUS—BUT IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT THE HAIR.

BY SARAH KESSLER

Jeannel Astarita has long, thick hair that gets frizzy when she sweats. It takes her 40 minutes to blow dry it and another 20 minutes to curl it, and she'll go to great lengths to avoid this routine. That used to mean skipping workouts after work and weekend bike rides with her husband.

More recently, it has meant getting several dozen Botox shots in her scalp in order to stop her head from sweating when she exercises—thus preserving her hairstyle for another day or two. She and other women who swear by the method call it "Blowtox."

"It's common for SoulCycle people," says Dr. Patricia Wexler, a New York City dermatologist who administers the treatment. "SoulCycle is infamous for killing the hair."

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Botox, best known as a wrinkle smoother, is also approved by the FDA for excessive underarm sweating. The drug blocks the impulses between nerves that tell a sweat gland to activate and the gland itself. If

strategically shot into the scalp—a treatment that lasts anywhere from three to nine months and can cost up to \$1,500—a woman can emerge from even the sweatiest of workouts with her hairdo still dry and intact.

Dr. Wexler says that she's been getting the odd request for Blowtox, though not by that name, for the past two years. Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, who also has a practice in Manhattan, says that he got his first request for Blowtox five years ago, but "this summer the treatment has been more popular than ever." Dr. Dendy Engelman, who practices at Manhattan Dermatology and Cosmetic Surgery, says she administers Blowtox to about two clients per month, and, after being featured on a television segment about the treatment this summer, has received calls from doctors in Brazil, Ireland, Australia, and "everywhere in the states," inquiring about the technique for their own practices.



Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank

Women in the United States already spend an estimated \$42 billion in hair salons and another \$11.6 billion on hair care products. Now, it seems, dermatologists, plastic surgeons, and Botox-maker Allergan all have an opportunity to, er, inject themselves into the giant hair care market.

Wait, you might be thinking. Isn't this market restricted to the pampered owners of dogs that fit inside purses? I mean, isn't getting a medical procedure to protect your hairstyle ridiculous?

“WOMEN REPORTED SPENDING ON AVERAGE 55 MINUTES EVERY DAY WORKING ON THEIR APPEARANCE.”

For some (fabulously wealthy) women, a \$1,500 Blowtox treatment may actually save money. A blowout at a trendy hair dry salon costs \$40 (for the uninitiated, a “blowout” is when a salon shampoos and styles your hair without cutting it). Let’s say that a dose of Blowtox saves two blowouts per week. That’s \$2,880 over nine months.

On the other hand, you really don’t *need* a professional beautician to blow dry your hair.

The more convincing justification for Blowtox is that, for many women, their hair is a sort of handcuff.

In a poll by Today and AOL last year, women reported spending on average 55 minutes every day working on their appearance. Another poll, commissioned by British beauty brand Nephria, found women spend 23 minutes a day blow-drying and styling their hair (men spent 12 minutes getting ready total, two minutes shy of how much time women spent putting on makeup). Some women, like Astarita, who have particularly difficult hair, can spend more time than that.

Fair or not, skipping a beauty routine can have professional and personal consequences. Study after study shows that attractive people have easier lives. They are more likely to get called back for an interview, make more sales, have better starting salaries, and receive favorable treatment in the legal system.

And conforming to “attractive” and “presentable” standards has a lot to do with doing your hair. In 2012, the Center for Talent Innovation, in partnership with *Marie Claire*, conducted a study of more than 4,000 college-educated professionals in which they asked what portraying an “executive presence” involved. Unsurprisingly, “polished appearance” was one of the top three results (behind “gravitas” and “communication skills”). The study reported that 54% of male and 67% of female survey respondents cited “unkempt hair” as one of the biggest mistakes women make at work, and *the magazine* quoted a vice president at a global consulting firm: “I was mentoring a woman who was 30 but looked 22. She couldn’t get to the next level, so I told her, ‘Get a haircut. You look like a kid, and people don’t trust a kid to do a grown-up’s job.’ The next time I saw her, she looked amazing [with a new hairstyle]. And guess what? She got that promotion.”

“Why are so few women running Fortune 500 companies?” *Marie Claire* asked while presenting these findings. “Because too many of us don’t look and act the part.”

Oh yes. That’s the problem.

Of course, there are exceptions. (Looking to raise venture capital? Scruff up! Attractive women fare worse). But in many cases, not conforming to societal standards for beauty and grooming results in a penalty. Which sucks, and often sucks more for women of color. One survey found that two out of five black women avoid exercising to maintain their hairstyles.

In other words, before you judge Blowtox, remember that it’s you, society, that created conditions under which it could thrive. While Blowtox is not *not* ridiculous, it *is* about more than hair.

“It was a real emotional phenomenon,” says Dr. Engelman of her clients who received Blowtox. “It’s not, ‘Oh, yay, I’m prettier and life is easier’; it’s, ‘Now I don’t worry about what I look like or how I’m going to schedule my life around my hair. I make people pretty all the time, but they don’t come in and say, ‘You’ve changed my life by doing my lips.’”

That’s certainly been the case for Astarita, who works as an aesthetician. “Especially in New York, we all have these incredibly busy work lives, social lives, and trying to carve out some time when I can make time for myself to go to the gym, to exercise, is really challenging,” she says. “The last thing I want to deter me is because I just got my hair blown out. [Blowtox] basically gives me a lot more free time.”



Dr. Dendy Engelman

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Dr. Nia Terezakis, a clinical professor at Tulane University Medical School who has a [practice near New Orleans](#), has never administered Blowtox, but she says she would, even sans FDA approval. "The safety of the drug is established, and when they approve it for one indication, it's not forbidden for use elsewhere," she says. "It's the most common cosmetic procedure in the world. In the hands of someone who uses Botox a lot, it's very safe."

Even so, getting Botox injections is a real medical procedure with real risks. There are no studies about Blowtox, its prevalence, or how far it's spread beyond New York, but none of the doctors I contacted for this article, even those who had never performed a single Blowtox procedure, or a spokesperson for the American Academy of Dermatology, seemed particularly surprised by the idea. "People usually prioritize face first," Dr. Wexler told me. "Then they prioritize with their budget. "

"But if they have unlimited budgets, they do everything."