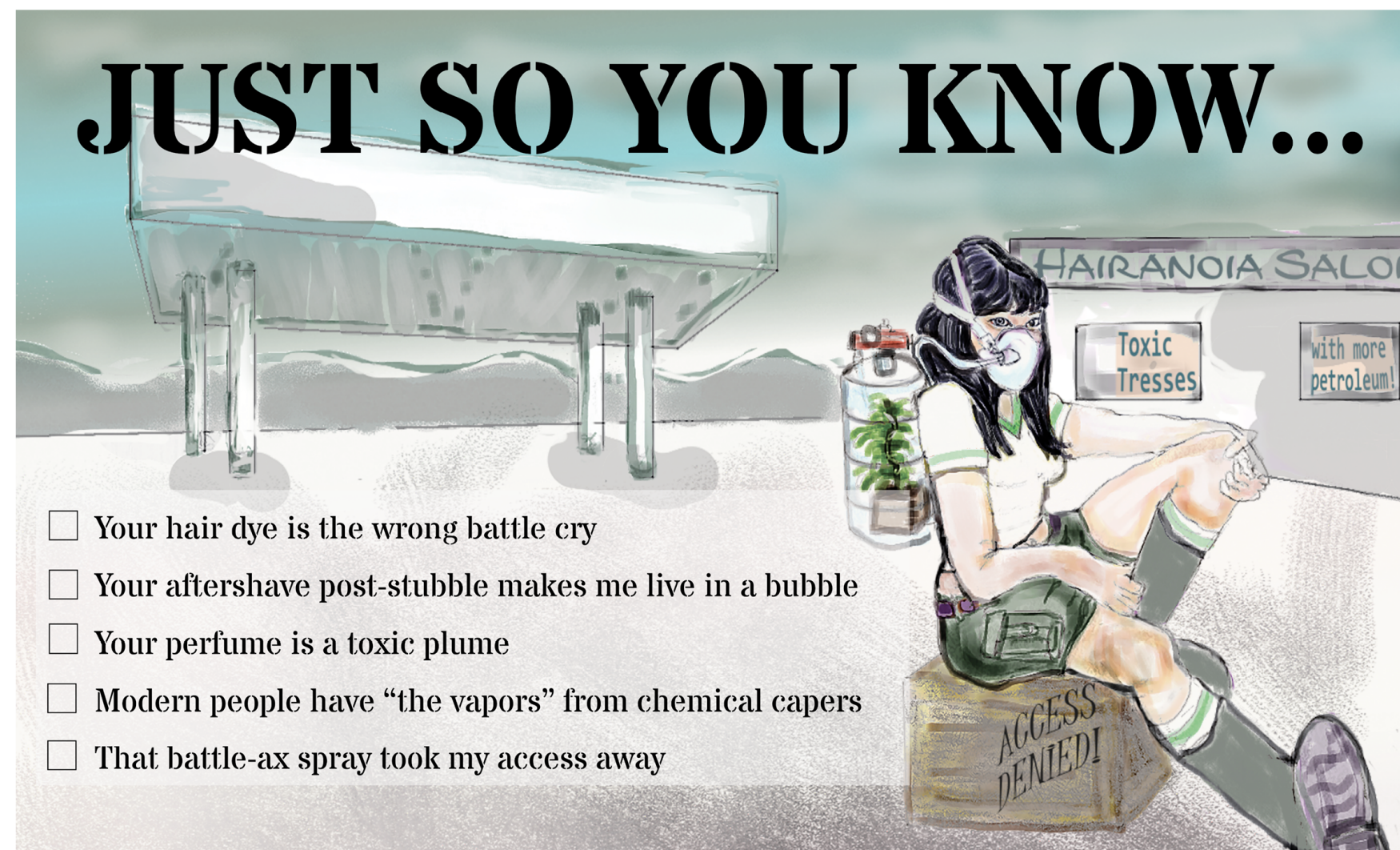


Incorporating POC into Canary Activism

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

- You're wearing a toxic dump from a pump
- Reduce your emissions: ask for permission
- Your aftershave post-stubble makes me live in a bubble
- You might re-think your de-stink
- That battle-ax spray took my access away



- Your hair dye is the wrong battle cry
- Your aftershave post-stubble makes me live in a bubble
- Your perfume is a toxic plume
- Modern people have "the vapors" from chemical capers
- That battle-ax spray took my access away

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Your perfume sent me to the waiting room

Chem industry skills are making us ill

What sounds aromatic may be diabolic

You might re-think your de-stink

My symptoms grow urgent around scented detergent



Caption

Diagnosis of MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) for individuals that have experienced TILT (Toxicant Induced Loss of Tolerance) is more common among white populations, suggesting a disparity in treatment among minorities. These three images, created by disability artist Peggy Munson (who herself has MCS), feature individuals with masks over their faces. One card features an Asian woman resting at an abandoned gas station repurposed as a beauty salon, pointing to the petroleum rootstocks and the toxic ingredients in many salon products. Another image shows an African American woman and her dog as they disembark from a camper with "SAFE" scrawled on its rear. This card points to the housing challenges people with MCS face since ordinary houses are constructed with material that continually off-gas chemicals. The third postcard presents a woman wearing a respirator, her arms around an African American gender non-binary individual—an image of mutual alliance and support. To our surprise, these images have not been well received... By commissioning this art, we hoped to make insider perspectives on MCS available to a wider public. We mistakenly assumed that the general population would only need to be made aware of the potential hazards in "fragranced" products. However, these images struck many as more offensive than informative. Thus, these also represent our naiveté around what constituted "low hanging fruit" in explaining the under-regulation of endocrine disrupting chemicals to a wider public.

UCLA Center for the Study of Women. 2019. "Incorporating POC into Canary Activism."

In "Canary Narratives: Visualizing Gender, Chronic Illness, and Exposure." In *Visualizing Toxic Subjects*, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y3almnga>

Design Statement

The Chemical Entanglements research group at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women (CSW) commissioned these images to help advance public understanding of toxic illnesses. These images show how a disability artist impacted by toxic exposures conveys her understanding of causes and impacts. But there is an important twist: the images were not well received and thus became an elicitation device, advancing our ethnographic understanding of public understanding of toxics through their surprising ineffectiveness. The images thus point to ways ethnographers can use creative forms of expression to communicate their research results. They also suggest how images (found or created by ethnographers) can be put into circulation to advance ethnographic understanding of particular discourse and cultural formations.

Project Statement

People with illnesses caused by toxic exposure are often referred to as canaries: like canaries in coal mines, they warn others of the mounting harm of everyday exposure to the toxic products of capitalism, from personal care products to industrial effluent. The Chemical Entanglements initiative at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women (CSW) is exploring how differently situated people understand toxic exposure. We are also exploring how visual representations of canary narratives can serve as activist tools and challenge gendered conceptions of chronic illness as imagined or hysterical.



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