

Will we ever win? Devacurl

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Women with natural curly hair with textures ranging from 2c to 4c have struggled with ways to wear their hair. There are protective styles like cornrows or twists and weaves or lace front wigs, that way there is no hair being left out. But sometimes we just want to have our lush locs down and free from braided styles. But even when we leave our hair out we have to worry about shrinkage. With braids the hair is stretched so you are able to see the complete length but once the braids are removed hair that was armpit length can shrink up to ear length. There is no denying that sometimes our hair will look very awkward especially if there's no hair cut to manipulate the style and shape of the curls. Cutting straight hair is completely different than cutting curly hair. For example, with straight hair you have the option of cutting it either wet or dry and since there's no shrinkage the hair will not change during the process so the cut will remain precise. Whereas with curly hair it can be a lose-lose situation where if you blow dry the hair straight and cut it, the haircut might look uneven once shrunk back into its original form. Whereas when cutting hair that isn't shrunk it's difficult to make sure the cut isn't choppy once blow dried or straightened. For most women or men with textured hair, they would like to try and maintain the length but add volume and some hairdressers are not trained well enough to achieve that look. Hair is a major way to showcase a person's beauty and help them feel confident so if our hair is ruined we can sometimes no longer view ourselves as "pretty" or attractive leaving our self confidence at an all time low. Which now makes "us" our own hairdressers, to prevent ourselves from getting a disaster haircut. We usually take our hair into our own hands because we tend to trust ourselves rather than a hairdresser that might have no idea of what they're doing. Another difficulty of having textured hair is finding hair care products that actually work for us. Some lotions, puddings, hair masks etc are not strong enough to penetrate curly hair strands but work fine for people with straight hair. To define our curls

mousse or gel is needed but sometimes the gel/mousse can be too water based making the curls frizzy and undefined. Some shampoos might be too harsh containing sulfates that completely strips the hair from any healthy oils. Having curly hair will be much easier to work with if we had products or knowledgeable hairdressers to help guide us. In 1994 this all changed by the thanks of Denis Dasilva and Lorraine Massey with the launch of Devachan.

Devachan, now known as Devacurl started off as hair care products designed for curly textured hair that prided itself with not using harsh chemicals. With a launch so successful they decided to open a shop in New York City. “Since we opened the doors to our first salon in NYC in 1994, we've been dedicated to one thing — curls! Whether perfecting a new technique or developing a breakthrough product, we are obsessed with bringing out the best in every curl type” (Devacurl date n/a). Lorraine Massey created the “Curly Girl Method” which meant prioritizing the restoration and maintenance of curly hair. It includes rules such as not using shampoos or products that contain sulfates or alcohol, and trying to avoid applying heat to the hair with blow dryers and flatirons. Along with this is a three step rule to achieve healthy curls which is to cleanse, condition, dry and style, this hair method was heavily used in their salons. In 2002 they launched “No-Poo Original” which claimed to be a first of its kind shampoo cleanser that cleansed your girls but did not completely strip the hair from the natural oils. It was a no suds cleanser that excluded SLS/SLES sulfates, parabens, and silicones (also cruelty free and vegan). The process of going to a Devacurl salon was not only a place to pamper yourself but also can be a learning experience. To book an appointment online you must select the service you'd like to receive but also the hair stylist of your choosing. Every hairdresser has a mini profile on the website that shares their history with working with curly hair so you have a first hand pick on which person you feel comfortable enough with to work with from beginning to

end. Salon services included; color highlights or color correction, rejuvenation of curls, transformation, and their most popularized: DevaCut Once you place your appointment online you will be asked to come with your hair un stretched and detangled. This is so the stylist is able to see what your curly hair will look like in a dry state without manipulation so they are able to cut “curl by curl” to give the hair body and shape without removing too much hair (unless specified).

I personally have experienced getting a DevaCut, with my hairstylist named Tatyana who had 5 years working at Devachan throughout the entire process she talked about my curl patterns and ways to keep my hair moisturized with the use of Devacurl’s products and how to stretch my curls safely without causing added frizz. The entire process was quick and my curls lasted me 2 ½ weeks but the haircut lasted me 4 months. Devacurl only had a handful of hair salons but they figured a way to spread their haircare products and services around the world. Devacurl had “Deva Stylists” from all over the US these people would be hired properly trained/ certified by Devacurl to perform these services on the behalf of Devacurl at their own home or salon without needing to travel all the way to the New York salons. On the Devacurl website it has a “stylist finder” section that allows you to type in your location and it finds the nearest stylist in your location, at the time Devacurl had at least 2 salons in NYC but over 108 locations for off site stylists. They were categorized into three levels: Beginners of the brand were called “level 1 inspired” level two was given the title “Advanced” and three was “Master”. They also had sections for hairstylists specialized in product knowledge and hair texture for customers that

needed guidance to properly maintain their hair.

The cult following of Devacurl was

launched thanks to social media, specifically hair



influencers. One notable influencer was Ayesha Malik who had 138k followers on Instagram and 285k subscribers on YouTube. She was a heavy user of Devacurl products “Her YouTube and Instagram were filled with DevaCurl tips, tricks and how to’s. Women of all ethnicities with curly hair flocked to Malik for her expertise on keeping up with curly hair “One day in 2017, I posted a selfie and it went viral. Thousands of women were accusing me of wearing a wig or that I used a curling iron. I hated having my integrity questioned like that so I made a YouTube video to prove my innocence. I show my hair from wet to dry, styling it with DevaCurl products.”” (Robert 2020). Influencers would promote Devacurl even explaining their daily hair routines and how well the product works into their hair with some not even being sponsored but just wanted to show love for the haircare brand and its efforts to make curly hair feel beautiful instead of the traditional long and straight hair that only a portion of the population actually has. The success of Devacurl especially in 2017 has also contributed to people embracing their natural hair and understanding how to maintain their natural hair. Women who have used relaxers in the past or use their hair straighteners daily would argue that a major benefit of having straight hair was its simple to maintain but now with natural haircare products such as Devacurl it allowed people to realize that you can properly take care of your hair without manipulating the curl pattern you just need a steady regime and hair care products with proper ingredients. “Millennials are one of the prominent consumer segments for natural hair care products. According to the Asia Cosmetics report, in 2017, globally, close to 56% of millennials and Gen X actively bought natural beauty and grooming products owing to growing consciousness regarding chemical-free products” (Grand View Research 2020). Devacurl turned into a 300 million dollar company, it seemed like everything was going just smooth for Devacurl until January 31st 2020.

Ayesha Malik released a video titled “ Why I stopped using Devacurl” with the thumb nail showing Malik with beautiful healthy curls in the before photo and damaged dull curls in the after image.

She starts off the video by immediately stating,“ If you bought Devacurl products because of me i'm sorry and if your currently using these products stop immediately I do not recommend them, not on your hair, not your friends hair do not give these to them, to a women's shelter I do not recommend these products on anyone's hair” (Malik 2020). The fifteen minute video explained that she used Devacurl for about 6 years and she never changed her hair routine throughout that time. All of the products she used for her hair was from Devacurl and it wasn't until she had a photo taken that she realized her hair looked different, at first she blamed it on a bad hair day but “bad hair days” quickly turned into “bad hair weeks”. She debated if maybe something was wrong with her diet, hormones, lack of exercising everything pointed back to Devacurl. Ayesha dealt with dandruff, stretched out curls almost looking wavy, frizziness of curls etc. She claimed that back in 2019 she received messages from women complaining about Devacurl ruining their hair giving them bald spot patches, stretching out of their curls giving them a 2c curl pattern instead of their original 3c hair. Ayesha decided to stay quiet about this situation and join a Facebook Group Page for people who have experienced hair damage with Devacurl; it had over 4,000 members. When she was certain that it was the products that caused her hair/scalp damage she spoke immediately and the video went viral almost overnight with 1.7 million views. It is important to note that when you are a popular hair influencer it is your duty to keep your hair as healthy as possible. Hair influencers do not work with just one company; they usually have multiple partnerships/collaborations and if their hair shows signs of damages companies will back out. Companies would like someone with healthy hair to represent their brand if if the



influencer has bald spots, dandruff, along with an unhealthy curl pattern it will make the company look bad as well. Influencers can be losing money while waiting for their hair to repair themselves and even if they cut it off they'll need to wait for it to be an

appropriate length to restore how it was originally. This video was the start of the snowball effect in which other youtubers now felt brave enough to talk about the damages that were caused by Devacurl or used their platform to speak up for those affected by hair loss and damages to get Devacurl's attention.

From a personal standpoint I only used Devacurl products once, which was when I went to the salon to get the “Devacut Transformation” . I remember Tatyana using the “No-poo” cleanser along with a conditioner and other styling products. The style of my hair lasted for about two weeks but I felt a change in my scalp, I do not suffer from a dry scalp in fact it was almost always moisturized but I felt like my scalp was as dry as the desert and was so shocked to see I had formed dandruff. Like Ayesha I was also in denial about what could be causing my scalp issue. At first I blamed it on the weather, I thought maybe since it was wintertime my hair wasn't so moisturized and dried out quickly from the weather but I had never suffered with this issue before. The dandruff stayed with me for a month but the itchiness did stay for two. Reflecting back during this time, I really have sympathy for those customers who've been using these products for years when I only used it once and noticed a slight change. I cannot imagine how insecure they might feel now that their hair is ruined. Most customers who suffered to the fullest extent were not capable of restoring their hair back to a healthy state. They opted to do a “big chop” meaning you cut or shave all of your hair so you can start fresh. This can be a person's

worst nightmare when we think of beauty or at least femininity, hair is a key component and without hair it can make us feel insecure, ugly, and less of a woman. Of course the victims of Devacurl weren't going to remain silent over this situation and with media outlets such as Forbes, TeenVouge, and Vice all covering the ongoing issue everyone waited for a response from the 300 million dollar company.

Around February Devacurl put out a statement, ““We’ve heard you and recognize that any changes to your hair — for whatever reason — demand a special type of attention that safety tests alone can’t address,” the statement on the DevaCurl website reads. "That’s why we’re partnering with medical professionals, dermatologists, industry experts, professional stylists, and members of our curl community to better address your needs and concerns”” (Diaz 2020).

Devacurl has claimed their products had no safety issues initially but they soon announced that they will invite industry professionals and customers to create a “Curl Hair Council”. There is two reasons as to why Devacurl products caused hair loss and hair damage “If you are styling your hair daily with DevaCurl products and solely using the brand’s non-lather or lathering version of the No-Poo cleanser, you may need a clarifying shampoo to properly remove dead skin, sebum, and sweat from your scalp, Mell rationalizes. The residue of product and debris can accumulate and work concurrently to clog the hair follicles turning the scalp’s environment into a breeding ground for fungus like malassezia. This scenario can cause hydrophobic hair that is dry, brittle, and prone to hair loss and scalp irritation. Mell’s video also postulates that DevaCurl products may have a pH that is more alkaline or basic (i.e., higher than 7) which may be behind the straightening effect the lawsuits allege the plaintiff’s hair underwent. To put this into context, a chemical relaxer which includes sodium hydroxide, a chemical found in lye, has a pH between 12.5 and 13.5, causing the texture of your hair to change (Louis 2020). As more outlets covered

the situation, Devacurl began to lose a lot of followers starting from 706k followers in instagram on February 2nd and then decreasing to 701k on February 16th following their response to the issue. The facebook group dedicated to hair damage continued to have new members join and speak up about their experiences jumping from 4,000 facebook members to 58,000. Besides having damaged hair women have complained about Devacurl causing alopecia and even migraines. In September 2021 one year after the downfall of Devacurl there was a site published that stated, "If you purchased or used a DevaCurl cleanser, conditioner, styling or treatment product between February 8, 2008 and August 29, 2021, you now have the opportunity to file a claim for your piece of the deal by following the instructions on this page" (ClassAction.org 2022). There was now a class action lawsuit against Devacurl for people who've previously used the products and on January 5th 2022 a settlement was reached for 5.2 million. Today Devacurl had lost the cult following they once had, they even closed their salon on Broome Street and the upper east side of manhattan. Devacurl claims they have updated the ingredients of their products but of course customers are weary of testing out the new formula scared of the effects it might have on their hair. Once again we curly hair women were stuck once more at square one.

The beauty Devacurl held was that it catered to almost every issue women had with curly hair and now that it's gone it was and still is difficult to find a hair care brand that will cater to our needs. Devacurl was not only able to give us products but also properly trained their workers so you are in great hands with any hair stylist that you chose. But I've also noticed that there has been a rise on Tiktok of black women creating their own products, particularly whipped shea butter. A notable influencer is Brittany Rose having 1.6 million views on youtube and 123k likes on a youtube short showing the progress of her using a 55lb of raw shea butter that she cuts by hand to use it for her hair care products to promote hair growth. She claims shea butter is in

almost every hair care product because it is highly moisturizing and promotes hair growth, her best selling product on her website is the “The Original Shea Butter” and it's even a black owned company. What is cool about this is that these young women post short clips talking about the reason they created their own hair care product and how they fulfill orders while actually making the product right in front of you so you can see what ingredients directly go into the product. This makes the viewer feel more relaxed knowing how the product is actually made and it is created by someone who has the same hair texture. As far as haircuts people still use the Deva Cut method by cutting the curl one-by-one in a dry state but now that there's no salons and the off site hairstylists still use Devacurl products people try to achieve the haircut on their own. Youtube and social media has still continued to educate people on how to cut their hair without having to go to a salon. Like I said in the beginning of my paper, you do not want to trust just anyone with your hair. Sometimes the hairdresser might look like she's aware of what she's doing but honestly doesn't even know how to work with curly hair. My question is simply “when will we ever win” meaning everytime there is a product for curly/natural hair there is always an issue with harmful ingredients being added or false advertising. Recently there has been a study that links chemical relaxers to cancer in black women and in 2018 a man named Benny Harlem who was in the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest hightop sold “veggie hair care products” that sold out in 59 seconds. But once customers received the hair care kits they realized that the products in the kit were items from the local grocery store like olive oil and he would print his label over it and his kits were selling from \$200-\$400. I find the same problem in the “Black Is Profitable” reading to be that some hair care brands will still only create hair care products only to make a profit but do not actually care about if it benefits our hair or not which is why we have so many products that do not cater to the issues we face. It is almost like every year

their claims to be a new product that is supposed to “help” and “treat” our hair but it always ends up doing the exact opposite. I predict that with social media platforms rising it will give us exposure to up and coming brands who have true advertising and safe ingredients. This current generation (Generation Z) and the younger generation is all about embracing your natural self whether its your body,skin,and hair so a lot of entrepreneurs will create a products that will fix our problems being they’ve probably went through the same issues with their own hand so they don't come in with the mentality of only making a profit. Hopefully in 2023 we will continue to see the rise of haircare products and treatments by people who have the same hair texture as us and use ingredients that are safe for our hair. As far as Devacurl, thank you for at least making the curly hair community be heard for once.

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