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On March 17, 2012, in Raleigh, N.C., at the 18th annual Radio One Women's Empowerment Expo, several thousand Black women sat enraptured with Tyra Bank's "booty" talk. Although not as well attended as the previous year, the Women's Empowerment Expo brings primarily Black women from the Triangle Area and across the country together. The event is part social, part educational, part marketing, part self-affirmation, and simply sisters hanging out to just having a good time among folk who look like their sister, cousin, best friend, or next door neighbor.

This year the main attraction was Banks, who took that piece of Black women's anatomy, "the booty," which has received too much negative attention, and transformed it into a tool of power and education. She waxed eloquently about the "Showing Booty," "Kissing Booty," and "Educating Booty." She also demonstrated the etiquette of presenting one's booty—and you had to be there to see it.

Tyra Banks, erstwhile supermodel and Harvard Business School graduate, enthralled the audience with life lessons she has learned about her body, her brains, and personal empowerment. She spoke with passion about how she took control of her own future by retiring as a supermodel while still on top of the game. According to her press bio, as the "first model to book twenty-five runway shows in Paris" at the tender age of eighteen, Tyra has seen it and virtually done it all. She spoke about her "ah ha" moment when she realized that her destiny was not as a singer. She had a friend/mentor who asked "Five years from now, what do you want people to think when you walk into this place?" She revealed that sitting in that exclusive restaurant peopled with celebrities and paparazzi, what she wanted most was "the power to make change" and "the power to influence women."

She encouraged the women in the audience to think about the ideas they held precious in their heads and hearts, and realize that it's just an idea, unless you do something with it. And, you

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can't do it alone. "Ideas are just ideas. ...Without the team to help you put them into action...that is where the real magic happens."

In her advice around "kissing booty," Tyra disclosed her own fears about showing vulnerability, and shared with the audience that when she was attacked in the tabloids because of her supposed weight gain, she used her talk show to respond. That moment was her standing on television in the same bathing suit in which the paparazzi had surreptitiously photographed her juxtaposed against the "fat" Tyra tabloid image and saying through tears "kiss my fat a..." The applause, as she encouraged the women present to love themselves regardless of their body shape, was thunderous, exhilarating and reaffirming to all those in attendance. Tyra revealed that in that moment, afraid because she had cried publicly on television, she learned from people who had watched the show that displaying her vulnerability was in fact a show of strength.

For Black women who struggle against stereotypes and expectations that we can hold everything together, don't need support, don't require love and comfort, and are miracle workers in our families and at work because we never seem to fall apart, Tyra handed us a gift—it's okay to just say no, and to let people know you also can be hurt and bleed. In her words, "I learned vulnerability can be strength."

In "Educating Booty," Tyra took us on a journey of her experiences as a Harvard student living in the dormitories and being treated like a regular person. The quick "takeaways" that she shared centered on having strategies, marketing your ideas, and displaying leadership.

Tyra Banks may not be the girl next door, but she is certainly a woman who has learned how to stay grounded. According to her, it was her mother who taught her not to get caught up in the razzle-dazzle of modeling, and to remember that the moments of fame as a super model would not last forever. Tyra listened to her mom and clearly has a back-up plan that consists of translating great ideas into action. She is an executive producer of her own TV show, is the founder of the Next Top Model franchise and has her own foundation TZone. The words of wisdom she shared with the several thousand (mostly Black) women in attendance were a powerful lesson of "booty" and beauty empowerment, if ever there was one to be learned.

Learn more:

<http://foxync.com/womens-empowerment/spruitt/radio-one-raleigh-presents-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-2012/>

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<https://twitter.com/#!/TYRABANKS>

<http://www.facebook.com/TyraBanks>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/celebritology/post/tyra-banks-graduates-from-harvards-executive-education-program/2012/02/24/gIQASv0vXR_blog.html

<http://www.tzonefoundation.org/>

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