

Overview

[The Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University](#) (GHELI) supports interdisciplinary education about world health through the production, curation, and dissemination of educational public goods. This exemplar work was a final project for “World Health: Challenges and Opportunities,” a General Education course at Harvard College taught by GHELI Faculty Director Sue J. Goldie. For this creative assessment designed with support from GHELI, students systematically analyze a societal health challenge they care about and create a “real world” product intended to influence policy or motivate change.

Abstract

A microsite to educate about the negative health impacts of skin bleaching and encourage Jamaican women to stop bleaching.

Artist


Chloe McKain (2024)

Caption

For my final project, I knew that I wanted to focus on a health problem in Jamaica, the country where my parents and family came from, initially choosing to research acral lentiginous melanoma. However, while researching acral lentiginous melanoma, I kept stumbling across sources focused on another skin related issue in Jamaica, skin bleaching. While the exact number of skin bleachers is difficult to find due to the number of over the counter and homemade skin lightening products used in Jamaica, it is estimated that somewhere between 10-15% of Jamaican dermatologist patients bleach their skin. This is a problem since skin bleaching products often contain steroids and higher levels of mercury which yield side effects ranging from steroid acne to mercury poisoning. Users of skin bleach are at higher risk of mercury exposure which leads to several other health problems like brain and liver damage. This fact becomes even more alarming when it is considered that skin bleach users are more likely to be darker skinned individuals who already face several social inequities in Jamaica. This microsite aims to educate about the dangers of skin bleaching and encourage Jamaican women to stop bleaching.

Artist Lens

I decided to create a microsite called “Black is Beautiful” to encourage younger Jamaican women (most Jamaican skin bleacher users are women in their 20s and 30s) to stop bleaching. I chose to make a microsite since it would be able to easily reach a large portion of the population, and it does a good job of engaging viewers and directing them to more information via links. I knew when creating my microsite, however, that I couldn’t simply highlight the negative effects of skin bleaching. Instead, I had to focus on raising awareness of colorism in Jamaica to address the root, psychological cause behind the dangerous practice. In my microsite, I include historical explanations of colorism in the Jamaican context, a link to a New York Times article about Jamaican singer Spice’s anti-skin bleaching song, and illustrations I made to help connect to my audience of Jamaican women. In particular, my illustration of a dark-skinned woman smiling which I show at the top and



end of the microsite serves to show the beauty and joy in embracing natural skin. My illustration of the three little girls wearing the typical style of Jamaican school uniforms serves as a reminder that skin bleaching perpetuates cycles of colorism which are passed down to younger generations. I also include two infographics. One demonstrates the negative effects of skin bleaching, and the other, which I borrowed from the World Health Organization, shows the effects of mercury exposure to show the “ugly” side of skin bleaching, as most Jamaican women bleach their skin for aesthetic reasons.

Media

Digital

[View Black is Beautiful: Learning To Embrace Our Natural Skin Colors and Fighting Skin Bleaching in Jamaica Microsite](#)