



Colorism and Skin Lightening: Addressing an Epidemic of Mercury Poisoning in MN

Friday, December 3rd

10:00am-2:00pm CST | Zoom Webinar

AGENDA

10:00am-10:10am	Welcome & land acknowledgement, Susi Keefe
10:10am-10:25am	Plenary: Introduction to Skin Lightening, Jessica Nelson
10:25am-10:30am	Introduction of Keynote
10:30am-11:10am	Keynote: Kavitha Emanuel, including 5 min for Q&A
11:10am-11:15am	Introduction Panel 1
11:15am-12:15pm	Panel 1: Community Conversation on Colorism Yasmin Hirsi Nadia Mohammed Micheal Xiong Abdullahi Abdulle
12:15pm-12:20pm	Introduction Keynote:
12:20 pm-12:45pm	Keynote: Dr. Amina Mire
12:45pm-12:50pm	Introduction to Panel 2
12:55pm-1:55pm	Panel 2: <i>The Future of Skin Lightening</i> : Perspectives from Advocates & Experts Dr. Amina Mire (Moderator) Ngunan Adamu Asha Mohamed Minnesota Senator Sandra L. Pappas Priya Rao
1:55am-2:00pm	Closing Remarks

PLENARY

Jessica Nelson

Dr. Jessica Nelson is Program Director and an epidemiologist with the Minnesota Biomonitoring Program at the Minnesota Department of Health. She works on design, coordination, analysis, and communication about biomonitoring projects. She has served as the Principal Investigator for different biomonitoring projects, including the Minnesota Family Environmental Exposure Tracking (MN FEET) study that measured heavy metals in Twin Cities women and babies. MN FEET found links between using skin lightening creams and higher levels of urine mercury. Jessica received her PhD and MPH in Environmental Health from Boston University School of Public Health.



KEYNOTE

Kavitha Emmanuel

Founder and director of [Dark Is Beautiful](#) Campaign, founder of the Women of Worth movement (www.womenofworth.in).

Kavitha Emmanuel is a trainer, executive coach, and founder of the Women of Worth movement (www.womenofworth.in) specializing in Transformational Leadership. She launched the Dark is Beautiful campaign in March 2009 to address the toxic belief that a person's worth is measured by the colour of their skin. The campaign went viral on social media in 2013. Though the campaign was originally meant to address the problem of Colourism in India, it garnered support and attention across the globe since its launch and continues to gather momentum every year. Ms. Emmanuel has appeared in multiple media interviews in over 30 countries since the launch of the campaign. The campaign motivated the initiation of several research papers on Colourism in leading universities like Harvard. The cascading impact of the campaign continues to grow across the globe with channels like HBO Vice, NPR, Al Jazeera, Netflix, and CNN continuing to highlight the work of the Dark is Beautiful campaign.



KEYNOTE

Dr. Amina Mire

Dr. Amina Mire is an Associate Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, of Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada).

Research:

Anti-racism, women and health, STEM and Gender, bioethics, medical humanities, and the biomedicalization of ageing. Her book, *Wellness in Whiteness: Biomedicalization and the Promotion of Whiteness and Youth among Women*, was published to great acclaim by Routledge in 2020. She is currently working on a new book entitled “The Changing Meaning of Skin Whitening (Lexington Books, Imprint of Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group). *Changing Meaning of Skin Whitening* (Forthcoming 2022) takes historically grounded sociological approach and seeks to delineate rebranding of the skin whitening industry in response to the demands of the BLM movement and seeks to critically interrogate broader implications of rebranding racist marketing in the skin whitening industry in wake of global response to the decolonizing demands of the BLM movement.

EDUCATION

- 2009 Doctor of Philosophy, Sociology, minor in Women’s Studies and Gender Studies Collaborative Program (OISE). Dissertation: “Soaping the Cells”: Science, Beauty, and The Practice of Skin-Whitening Biotechnology. University of Toronto.
- 1998 Master of Philosophy University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario
- 1994 Bachelor of Science, Chemistry, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1994 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1980 Diploma, Assistant Pharmacy Somali Health Personnel Training Institute, Mogadishu, Somalia.



PANEL 1

Yasmine Hirsi

Yasmin Hirsi currently works at the Legal Rights Center with the Youth: Education, Advocacy & Restorative Services team (Y:EARs). She was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya after her parents fled the Civil War in Somalia. Yasmin is passionate about grassroots organizing that centers holistic community empowerment and clearing the way for radical imagination of a world and future where everyone has the chance to thrive. She is driven by the intersectionality of present struggles here in the so-called United States and the struggles of the Global South. Yasmin believes critical resistance to American imperialism and colonialism starts with coalition-building and centering the work of BIPOC communities that have historically and intentionally been silenced. Her aspirations are to continue working alongside her community and further the collective efforts of liberation for all people.



Nadia Mohammed

Nadia graduated from Hamline University with a degree in Public Health and a minor in Social Justice in 2018. She currently works at Family Tree clinic as a Community Engagement Liaison where she holds listening sessions within the Black community on health and healing. Focusing on racial justice and community organizing, Nadia believes in eliminating health disparities as an attainable goal for the future.



Micheal Xiong

Michael Xiong is an Environmental Specialist with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. He works on education and outreach on reducing use of mercury in consumer products. While pursuing his B.A in Public Health Science from Hamline University, his senior seminar class laid the foundation of MDH and MPCA's mercury in skin lightening campaign, "Love Your Skin." Prior to joining the MPCA he worked as a consultant for MDH's MN FEET mercury in fish program that helps pregnant women and young children on how much fish they should consume.



Abdullahi Abdulle

Abdullahi Abdulle graduated from Hamline university with a BA in Public Health in 2018. His senior year at Hamline he participated in community engaged research on skin lightening in the Hmong community conducting focus groups and literature reviews and then later applied for and received a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation mini grant to conduct research in his own community on generational and gendered experiences with colorism and skin lightening in his own Somali community in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. After graduation, he moved to Tanzania with Peace Corps working as a Health Extension Volunteer where he helped promote healthy behaviors on a community level. He is currently enrolled in a MPH at The George Washington University in Global Epidemiology and Disease Control in Washington DC and also works as a Behavioral Health Case Lead at Cigna.



PANEL 2

Asha Mohamed

A community health advocate and liaison with experience in chronic diseases self management, childhood development, chronic disease prevention, epidemiology, mental health practitioner, skin lightening prevention and awareness.





Minnesota Senator Sandra L. Pappas (Information forthcoming)

Priya Rao

Priya Rao is the Executive Editor at [Glossy](#) and host of [Unfair](#), a podcast which explores colorism and skin lightening, and the [Glossy Beauty Podcast](#). Priya got her start in journalism at Condé Nast at W Magazine and Women's Wear Daily. In her 15-year career, she has held senior editorial positions at [Harper's Bazaar](#), [Vanity Fair](#), and [Town & Country](#), and has written for [New York Magazine](#), [Vogue](#), and [Elle](#). As a first generation immigrant that grew up in the border town of Laredo, Texas, Priya cares deeply about representation, inclusivity, belonging, and equity. She is passionate about women's issues and believes good journalism and entertainment reflect the lives we lead.



Ngunan Adamu

Ngunan is an experienced journalist, broadcaster and project manager with expertise gained across a wide range of BBC platforms, her work as an international multimedia trainer has taken her across Africa and Asia training journalists from Ethiopia to Bangladesh.

Ngunan currently produces and presents BBC Radio Merseyside's popular 'Upfront' show, an African Caribbean magazine show which celebrates 40 years in 2022. As an entrepreneur and community leader, Ngunan has developed and led initiatives aimed at promoting diversity in the media.

Ngunan's podcast "[Colonialism and the origins of skin bleaching](#)" explores why skin bleaching is still a widespread practice and how it affects the mental and physical health of many people today.

She is also the founder and CEO of iWoman Media ltd and iWoman Academy CIC (www.iwoman.co.uk) – a peer to peer organisation set up by women to empower, entertain, explore and inspire women around the world.

Ngunan currently sits on several boards across various sectors (Arts, Religion and Technology) and is currently working on local, national, and international innovative projects that address diversity, equity and inclusion.

And when she's not busy planning world domination, she is a single mum to a beautiful Black young boy, who reminds her why she does what she does.

