Why do women of color use these products?

Chemical straighteners can contain phthalates, parabens, and formaldehyde. Use of these products has been associated with increased risk of uterine fibroids and breast cancer.

Skin lighteners can contain hydroquinone, corticosteroids, and mercury. Mercury exposure can cause kidney and nervous system damage and corticosteroids can cause metabolic effects.

Why do women of color use these products?

Racialized beauty norms are prevalent in our society and give material advantages to women with certain Eurocentric features, such as light skin and straight hair.
OUR RESULTS IN CONTEXT

Black and Hispanic/Latinx women reported using more hair products and cosmetics, respectively, than White women.* Understanding the potential drivers of product use could help reduce exposure and risk of disease.

Our data show that racialized beauty norms can impact personal decisions to use chemical straighteners and skin lighteners.

Our findings have the potential to inform prevention and intervention strategies in New York City. It also points to the need for legislation that ensures safer products, like the Safer Beauty Bill.

ABOUT OUR STUDY

Our study goal was to characterize chemical straightener and skin lightener use among diverse respondents in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx. We asked respondents how, where, and why they choose to use and buy these products in order to better understand both use of and sentiments toward these products.

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Femme-identifying individuals and women were surveyed in nine NYC neighborhoods:

- Morningside Heights
- Hamilton Heights
- Manhattanville
- Inwood
- West Harlem
- Central Harlem
- East Harlem
- Washington Heights
- South Bronx

ABOUT THE BEAUTY INSIDE OUT CAMPAIGN

Launched in 2019 by WE ACT, the campaign seeks to educate WE ACT’s community members about environmental racism in the beauty industry and to reduce the demand for and sale of harmful products, including skin lighteners and chemical straighteners.

Visit Our Website for More Info

Citations:

The Safer Beauty Bill
Zota and Shamasunder, 2017
Dodson et al., 2021*