

Coloring the Narrative:

How to Use Storytelling to Create Social Change in Skin Tone Ideals

**A Teaching Case From the Strategic Training Initiative
for the Prevention of Eating Disorders**

**Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Boston Children's Hospital**

Written by Eric Weinberger

**Contact: S. Bryn Austin, ScD
Email: Bryn.austin@childrens.harvard.edu
Phone: (001-)(617)355-8194**

STRIPED

**A PUBLIC HEALTH
INCUBATOR**

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The provided case study narrative document includes:

- 1) Cover page, table of contents, synopsis, acknowledgments, and funding (2 pages)
- 2) Cast of characters (1 page)
- 3) Case narrative “Coloring the Narrative: How to Use Storytelling to Create Social Change in Societal Skin Tone Ideals” (13 pages)
- 4) Appendix containing images of real-world cosmetic skin-lightening campaigns and messaging that runs counter to that imagery (3 pages)

SYNOPSIS

In the teaching case “Coloring the Narrative: How to Use Storytelling to Create Social Change in Skin Tone Ideals,” two immigrants from different continents are arriving in Hamilton, capital of the fictitious U.S. state of Columbia, and one issue on their minds is the shade of their skin color. For as long as they can remember—like millions of others in their home countries of Nigeria and Thailand, and true for many other countries besides—the message for all genders, but particularly felt by women, is that the lighter their skin, the better their prospects: More likely they will be taken to be affluent, powerful, educated, socially elevated, and just plain “beautiful,” or desirable, with the “help” of creams and soaps that lighten their dark skin. This is the message of the relentless and aggressive advertising they have grown up with and that goes back still farther to an unresolved racist legacy of colonialism, where lighter-skinned locals were cast as closer to those at the top of the pile: namely, white Europeans.

In the U.S. and other Western countries, the phenomenon of “colorism” is now fairly well understood but far less so is the problem of skin lightening (really, it’s “skin bleaching”), and the health risks that consumers assume with these products and their dangerous chemical contents. For immigrants like our teaching case protagonists Rebecca Obafemi (from Nigeria) and Piti Bunyasarn (from Thailand), who have used these products most of their lives, the confusion and stress are significant. In Rebecca’s case, the African-born pastor of her church is outspoken against skin lightening, drawing more and more support within his congregation; while her husband and two Americanized sons have long made their opposition known.

Rebecca’s sons are members of the pastor’s youth group that is busy with a “healthy living” project that will soon come to encompass skin lightening. Visited by two health communications professionals from outside the community, the children will learn, partly by accident and partly by practice, storytelling methods in service of a larger public health strategy

that they hope will start to make a difference in many lives among their families and within their community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND FUNDING

This teaching case was written by Eric Weinberger and the teaching note was written by Ayesha McAdams-Mahmoud for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders (STRIPED; www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped) under the direction of STRIPED director S. Bryn Austin. We would like to thank contributors and reviewers for this case: Avanti Adhia, Claire Berman, Nadia Craddock, Ncoza Dlova, Debra Franko, Jess Haines, Sabra Katz-Wise, Sotonye Imadojemu, Susan Madden, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Cassandra Okechukwu, Flora Or, Susan Paxton, and Kimberly Yu. We also thank Allegra Gordon and Avanti Adhia, who led the pilot evaluation of this teaching case in their course at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and the students who participated in the pilot evaluation. This work was supported by the Ellen Feldberg Gordon Challenge Fund for Eating Disorders Research and grants T71MC00009 and T76MC00001 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

In order of appearance:

Rebecca Obafemi – *Nigerian immigrant to the U.S. with husband and sons already living in Hamilton.*

Piti Bunyasarn – *au pair from Thailand for an American family in Hamilton.*

Kwame Michael Boateng – *Ghanaian-born pastor of a mainly African immigrant congregation in the Hamilton neighborhood of Nevis.*

Antony Munoz – *bodega owner in Nevis close to Pastor Boateng’s church.*

Sukhon Pradtana – *Thai-born graduate student in health communications studying in Hamilton.*

Isaac Obafemi – *Rebecca’s teenage eldest son and member of church youth group.*

Dr. Sally Kreisberg – *physician, researcher and health communications specialist; Pradtana’s mentor.*

And assorted relatives, members of the youth group, and general congregation.

COLORING THE NARRATIVE:

How to Use Storytelling to Create Social Change in Skin Tone Ideals

Hours before boarding the flight from Lagos to her new home in Hamilton, state of Columbia, USA, Rebecca Obafemi turned to her sister and said, “I don’t want you to be sending me bars of Fairbrite like I asked you to.” She meant the brightening soap that, for one thing, always made her skin itch.

“But what if they don’t have it in America?”

“I want to go without. Michelle Obama is a dark black woman, and she was just first of all American ladies. It won’t be the same as it is here.”

The way it was, “here,” the women could see from the window of the car that took them past at least four billboards on the way to the airport. They advertised creams and soaps for skin-brightening, as they called it, and showed models in swimsuits or lingerie whose skin color was lighter than anything normally seen in Nigeria. It was estimated that over 70 percent of Nigeria’s women used these cosmetics.¹ Rebecca was the lightest in her family—lighter than her sister Charity alongside her, who used the same products. Both women always wore hats with a wide brim when outdoors, and seldom ventured out during the searing Lagos days where the sun risked undoing the products’ effects and added to their known risk of skin cancer. “I cannot be in the sun,” Rebecca told her husband and two teenage sons whenever they tried to nudge her outdoors for some activity they had planned. They would go without her. Now the three of them were in Hamilton, waiting for her to join them in their new American home, and their main wish for her was a healthier life, and way of living.

Meanwhile, at Hamilton International Airport where Rebecca would arrive the next day after transfers in London and New York, Flight 362 from Bangkok had landed, bearing a young woman, Piti Bunyasarn, who had packed a dozen tubes of Fair and Lovely in her luggage, the most popular skin-lightening cream in many Southeast Asian countries. She would be working

¹ Craddock N (2016). Colour me beautiful: Examining the shades related to global skin tone ideals. *Journal of Aesthetic Nursing*. 5(6): 287-289. Access here: <http://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/abs/10.12968/joan.2016.5.6.287?af=R&>

as an au pair and studying intensive English for the next year and didn't expect to go home in that time, nor have her family send her care packages in the mail. Like the Nigerian woman Rebecca Obafemi, whose resolve would weaken as time passed, Bunyasarn would discover that her precautions were unnecessary—these products were to be readily found in the United States. She could have packed more clothing instead. Still, it was one less thing she had to worry about spending money on during her year in Hamilton.

*

In the Anglophone countries of Africa they tended to call it “skin-brightening.” It could also be called “skin-lightening” or “skin-whitening,” but really it was skin-bleaching. That’s what chemicals like hydroquinone, or benzene-1, did to human skin when used in a face cream or soap. Outside of rich countries mostly in the West—but also some African countries including Ghana, which banned hydroquinone in August 2016—there were few restrictions elsewhere in the world on the sale or handling of what was basically a dangerous carcinogen. In India, young women would see daily TV ads that claimed they could become radiant flight attendants or confident broadcasters with the right product producing the right shade. In the ads, skin-lightening products were sold as cures for women who previously wept with frustration at their stalled career prospects.²

In the southeastern neighborhood of Hamilton called Nevis, where Rebecca Obafemi’s family was waiting for her, there was a bodega owner, Muñoz, who refused to stock these products, while across the street and over the next corner, another immigrant bodega owner, Rodriguez, did. Muñoz noticed that the local Africans, and some Asians he didn’t quite place, went there instead, just as the construction workers and taxi drivers who bought lottery tickets came to his place. One vice or another; Muñoz didn’t play the lottery himself, but had seen at least one customer each year clear ten grand on scratch tickets, which made it OK with him; the thing with the lightening soaps was just weird. You were the color you were born with. Or, as he’d heard the pastor who sometimes came to his store express it, saying the words came from the prophet Jeremiah, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?”

² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4OudWoggRo> and <http://www.criticalmediaproject.org/cml/media/fair-and-lovely-ad/>

That pastor's church, the Biblical Good News Home of God, not far away, was the spiritual home of Hamilton's Anglophone Africans, most of whom lived in Nevis. At "the Biblical," as it was called, the pastor himself was from Ghana. Two of his sermons in the past six months had talked about God's love for the person "that you are," which he took to exclude such things as tattooing, circumcision of all sexes and skin-brightening. Conversely God would be angry if you did it anyway. "Woe is to him that strives with his Maker," said pastor Kwame Michael Boateng, invoking Isaiah 45, verse 9: "Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, what makest thou?" These had not been his most popular sermons but they had, he felt, been reasonably effective. More and more men in his congregation came to him now and talked of their worry for their wives or mothers or sisters. They were spending lots of money, the men told him. They were making themselves sick. By their compulsion they courted disease and death, they withdrew from family activities outdoors, they just couldn't stop themselves. Thank you, Pastor Boateng, the men said, for allowing us to talk about this at home.

"Let's not blame only the women," Pastor Boateng sometimes said on these occasions. "We know men use these products, too. And if no man ever thought that lighter skin was more beautiful skin, maybe women would not use them at all."³

The pastor's recourse was invariably his Bible, with its many passages about vanity, dignity, abasement, and wisdom. But there were other, possibly greater forces at work. One was the onslaught of advertisers on TV and bus shelters and billboards in so many countries that made it seem normal, easy, and natural for dark-skinned women and men to pursue a lighter color than the one they were born with. Who taught them this? Many of these countries had been subject to the degradations of Western colonialism, leaving behind the message, over decades or even centuries, that the bearers of lighter skin were better educated or richer or more attractive or socially elevated than darker human beings. Pastor Boateng didn't speak of "colorism," colonialism, racism, or sexism, but the effects were there, all the same. (Colonialism didn't so easily explain the tanning salons so common in other parts of the city, especially near universities and neighborhoods where young people lived. The social and commercial pressures that sent white people, especially women, to these salons was the other side of the coin the pastor held up to his congregation for inspection: the one he didn't say too much about.)

³ See Appendix for example of Unilever "Vaseline for Men" social media campaign.

One of the most important things the pastor had done was to create a youth group at the Biblical. His church was growing, having moved from its humble shop front, where everything and everyone was visible behind the big plate glass window of the former pastry shop, to a small brick two-story house with room to expand. Young people in his church—“the Americans,” he called them—felt differently in many ways from their immigrant parents. Their speech was American, and so, increasingly, were their attitudes. They gravitated to different music, sports and fashions, they were hostile to cigarette smoking, and—this was a most sensitive subject, even for the pastor who felt himself enlightened but not going that far—they weren’t bothered by gay people. With their father’s blessing, Rebecca Obafemi’s two boys were active in Pastor Boateng’s youth group.

The young Thai woman, Piti Bunyasarn, was met at the airport by her host family, the Barkers, and taken to their impressively large home in the Hamilton suburbs. Alan Barker had met and married Indira Ajarwal while the two studied together in business school: first in a small ceremony at City Hall in Hamilton and then during a much larger, multi-day event in her home city of Mumbai. Their daughters were six and three years old. Everywhere the girls needed to go could be done on foot—school and playground, dance lessons and playdates—this was by design, since the family knew the au pair arriving from Thailand didn’t drive. Bunyasarn worked all five weekdays until both parents came home for dinner, helped out Saturday morning as needed and then was free for the rest of the weekend. The commuter rail took her into downtown Hamilton whenever she wanted; she had her own room, with bath, on the third floor of the house, with cable TV and wifi. Really, she considered herself to have landed quite fortunately in America.

One thing confounded her, though. She couldn’t tell anybody, of course, but she couldn’t understand how one of the daughters was so much lighter than her sister. The elder girl, Serena, had the dark skin of her Indian mother; the younger girl, Sonia, appeared white like her dad. It confused her—and confused others, too. At the playground, not everyone—the parents or kids, grandparents or other au pairs from Europe, Colombia, and other countries—realized the two girls were related. “So you look after two families,” one of the granddads asked her in a friendly way.

Bunyasarn's English was not good enough yet for sustained conversation. She could say, "No, no, sisters," and say she was an au pair from Thailand and other expressions relevant to child-minding work. Sukhon Pradtana, a Thai woman she'd met by chance at the nearby Café Angelica, was a graduate student in public health and the person whom Bunyasarn could speak with most fully and candidly.

Pradtana was enrolled in a master's program in health communications. She had lived in the U.S. for five years and earned her bachelor's degree at a college in North Carolina, and she spoke fluent English. A lot of what Bunyasarn was confused about, or needed help with, Pradtana could explain to her. The two women met for coffee at Café Angelica two mornings a week at 8.30 a.m., after Bunyasarn had brought the older girl to school. She had the younger one still with her, usually in a stroller; the cafe was Bunyasarn's stop before heading to the playground, and Pradtana's before traveling on to campus.

"What is health communications?" Bunyasarn asked in one of their first conversations. "It can be many things," Pradtana replied. "For me, it's a role in-between. Between the research done by the doctors and scientists, I make it accessible for patients and families. I am like a translator."

"Like what you do for me," Bunyasarn said. "You are my translator."

"Before we can change behavior, we have to change thinking. Change people's motivation."

"What is an example?"

Pradtana described an episode from a longitudinal study of children with or exposed to HIV, where parents were asked to bring in children for blood draws and were given 25 dollars. But enrollment lagged, despite the fact that most patients lived in a low-income city neighborhood where 25 bucks made a difference. "The team did some interviews," Pradtana said, "and found the parents did not like the idea of being paid money for their children's blood. 'I am not a vampire,' one father said. The team made a video explaining why they took the children's blood and why they paid families. Then they tested their understanding. The parents understood the study better, and their results improved."

"What do you work on, Sukhon?" Bunyasarn asked.

“My mentor does work on the things we do to our body. Piercings, tattoos, breast implants, straightening hair, and the products or procedures we use for them. The tanning salons where so many white women our age like to go. After all none of these things is medically necessary. They all have some risk. But why do we do them? You and I are from Thailand. Why do so many Thai women use skin-lightening cream? I did until I moved here.”

“Oh my goodness,” Bunyasarn said.

*

Back in Nevis, Pastor Boateng’s youth group had adopted as their year-long project the goal of “healthy living” for the church community. Each member of the group was meant to identify a person in the health professions who could come and speak to the group on a particular issue that the boy or girl would introduce. For most of the group, this would be an adult from their school: the nurse, for instance, or one of the counselors. But now, a car was pulling up to the garage started by Isaac Obafemi’s dad, and Rebecca’s husband, soon after he immigrated from Nigeria. Inside was a boy Isaac knew from his community basketball team.

“Hey, Isaac!” the boy yelled from the car window.

One day in practice, this boy had said his mother was a doctor. Remembering this as he walked to the pumps, Isaac wasted no time. Quickly he introduced himself, explained his project, and finished with a request.

“Will you speak to my church youth group about what you do?”

The woman, Sally Kreisberg, was expecting to get just gas and new windshield wipers when she pulled up to the Obafemi garage. All of which she got, plus a date on her calendar for a Sunday afternoon later that month on a subject of her choice that she would think about and share with Isaac in the coming week by email.

But now, three days before her presentation with the youth group, she still didn’t have a subject. A plastic surgeon by training, Kreisberg spent more time now on patient education and mentoring graduate students like Pradtana. Working with accident victims and breast cancer patients had made her think deeply about humans’ perceptions of and attachment to their

bodies, or what was called “body image,” and when her teenage daughter struggled with an eating disorder (she was in college now, and seemed to be doing well), she realized that was all part of the same world and made that her focus. She didn’t think she would talk about that, however. She had never addressed a group so young; what would sustain and excite them for 30 or 40 minutes? On Thursday, she grabbed her research assistant, Sukhon Pradtana, who was telling her something quite interesting, and together they went off to lunch. Pradtana was telling her about a young Thai woman in Hamilton she’d befriended whose name was Piti Bunyasarn, a nanny who’d arrived in America with a suitcase crammed with skin-lightening creams.

“This is also an issue in African countries,” Kreisberg said. “And I would presume the immigrant communities where Africans come live, like here in Hamilton. The church group I’m going to see on Sunday is in Nevis.”

“This is the boy who invited you to speak when he learned you were a physician?”

“Yes, his name is Isaac. A topic of my choice, and I’m still looking for one. But maybe now I have one.”

“The skin-lightening industry?”

“Yes. Sukhon, what are you doing Sunday afternoon at two?”

Kreisberg and Pradtana arrived together at the church in Kreisberg’s car, and soon found the meeting room where eleven boys and girls, aged between 10 and 14 years and maybe two who seemed younger, were sitting in a circle of metal folding chairs. “I am happy to talk about my work with you. First, I want to play a game,” Kreisberg told the children. “It’s called Opera. What do you know about opera?”

“It is theater and it is all singing,” one boy said. “All at the same time.”

He seemed to be the only one who knew the art form, as Kreisberg pressed on with her questions, until one girl finally said, “It is crazy!” and the others laughed.

“What do you mean by that?” Kreisberg asked.

“They are always saying—they are singing—I love you, or I will kill you, or I will kill myself, I will take revenge. They are crying, they are beating their chests—they are crazy!”

“Yes!” Kreisberg said. “It’s big, exaggerated emotions, and the music makes them look bigger. We don’t really go on like that in everyday life, do we? But in opera, they all do.”

“So what is the game?” asked another girl.

Kreisberg held up a tube of Fair and Lovely cosmetics that Pradtana had slipped her before they entered the church, and after handing it to the girl, told her to pass it along the circle. The humming and murmurs suggested that she had struck something, like a shovel that went smoothly through dirt and then clanged when it hit a rock.

“My mother uses something like this,” one of the children said.

“My sister,” said another.

“My grandfather says this is very bad for you.”

Each child who spoke was apprehensive, except for the girl who declared opera was crazy and now said that she didn’t see what the big deal was.

“It’s a tube,” she said. “Like toothpaste.”

“Like toothpaste,” Kreisberg repeated after her. “A daily activity, like brushing your teeth.”

“Yes,” the girl said.

“Show me how you see it used each day,” Kreisberg said.

The girl went to the center of the circle formed by the chairs, taking the tube from the last child who had it, next to where Pradtana was sitting.

“I cannot read all of it,” the girl said. Apart from English words like “Fair and Lovely,” most of the script was in Thai, since it was one of Bunyasarn’s tubes borrowed for the day by Pradtana.

“It is from Thailand,” Pradtana told the girl, “where I was born. But tell us why it matters, why you want to be able to read more of the words.”

“Is it for mornings or evenings?”

The girl’s question meant something. There were, after all, so many products for so many occasions—a cleanser for bedtime; for the morning before going out; or combined with sun protection and an SPF factor; or more; and clearly the girl wanted to know what *toilette* she was meant to perform. There were liquids or creams for freckles or for near the eyes, and even sleeping masks. An older person was more likely to have more products.

“It is for mornings.”

Hearing that, the girl pretended to step out of the bath, stroll to a sink, admire herself in a mirror, dry her face and apply three creams on her cheeks, nose, neck and chin, the first of which was the Fair and Lovely. It seemed clear she was mimicking what she must have seen her mother, or an older sister, do each morning for years.

“Opera,” Kreisberg said. “Tell us what you’re feeling, as you do it.”

“I feel pretty,” the girl said.

“Opera!” Kreisberg shouted. “Big emotions, big demonstration. What are you *feeling*?”

The girl started to exaggerate her motions, as if she were a vain or bedazzled princess quite pleased with herself, and she shouted, in a kind of singing voice, “I feel pretty!” Many of the children laughed.

“And what do you feel, Isaac?” Kreisberg turned to her host, Rebecca Obafemi’s son, the boy who had invited her to speak to the group.

“I feel nervous.”

“Stand up and tell us.”

“I have seen my mother do this in the bathroom. But I think she is pretty already and my father says, ‘We are all one color in the family and for you that’s not enough?’”

“Opera!” Kreisberg said. “Big feelings!”

But the big feelings didn't come from Isaac but from another boy, a younger one, perhaps 8 or 9, who softly cried.

"Let's stop," Kreisberg said gently. "You've all been very brave. Thank you for inviting me today. Thank you for telling me what you see and what worries you and for demonstrating it as you did."

Of course she had to say something to the boy who cried. Playing "Opera" with the kids, she hadn't actually reached the point of talking about her work, or why she, announced to them as a physician, had come to a "healthy living" meeting and the first activity was a game. Kreisberg realized she should have been as prepared for this event as for any meeting at her clinic or among her university colleagues, but Opera seemed like a good ice-breaker and there was more she wanted to do after it.

Pastor Boateng came into the hall where Kreisberg and Pradtana were talking. "The children are still in the room," he said. "I have talked to Jacob, who is the boy who was crying, and he is fine. He has an older sister who is having medical difficulties that his parents don't really understand, and that idea of a lady in a bathroom, and a father yelling, which is actually something Isaac said and not you, I think it was too much for Jacob. But he is OK now, although I don't think he'll go back."

"Go back?" Kreisberg asked.

"Well, I am hoping, though of course it is up to you, that you will go back and talk to the children about skin-lightening. The children are really quite interested and want to do something about it."

"Well, if you're sure," Kreisberg began. "I mean, I would like to, if you think it's a good idea."

"Very much so," said Pastor Boateng.

"Can I ask what you meant about Jacob's sister and 'medical difficulties'?"

"An eating disorder," Pastor Boateng replied. "I believe it is bulimia."

Pradtana and Kreisberg looked at each other, seeming to share a secret thought that the pastor couldn't have known. It was the ailment of Kreisberg's daughter early in her high school years. And it didn't have to be said between them that all of this that they studied and advocated against—skin-lightening or skin-darkening, eating disorders or fat-shaming—started, in many cases, in a bathroom, before a mirror.

Back in the meeting room, Pradtana did most of the talking. "I want to talk to Jacob," Kreisberg whispered to her after a few minutes, and then she stepped out.

One idea that Kreisberg and Pradtana had discussed in the car coming over to the Biblical was "colorism," which Kreisberg suggested and then promptly rejected as a possible subject of discussion with the kids. "They're going to learn about it the hard way, and they don't need an old white lady giving them a fancy word for it at their age," she said.

So now it was just Pradtana and ten children in the room. And Pradtana wasn't sure what to do.

She pulled out her smartphone, and pulling up one of her photos, held the device in the air. "This is my friend Piti," she said, and passed around the phone like she had the tube of Fair and Lovely about an hour before. "She is a dark girl, too." The children laughed. Obviously Bunyasarn was no such thing.

"No, no, I am serious," Pradtana protested.

The children laughed again.

"She is my friend from Thailand," Pradtana continued. "She lives here in Hamilton. That is her tube of Fair and Lovely I passed around earlier. Why would she use it if she wasn't dark?"

This admission created consternation among the children. Pradtana, seeing she had scored her point, said, "You see how crazy this gets. You can never be light enough. And then, as you know, many white people in this country think they are too pale and that by being tanned—becoming darker!—they look better. So they go in the sun and to salons and burn their skin and risk cancer. When you go all the way to one side, you start going right back to the other."

The children laughed and cheered. "It is a fool's game," Pradtana said. "The best skin color is the one we are born with. With that lesson, you will never go wrong."

It was the children's decision to devise their own "healthy living" project, and after several more Sunday meetings, they had an idea. Evidently the game Opera, introduced by Kreisberg and Pradtana, had made an impression. The children proposed a short play "about health," as Isaac put it, in which each boy or girl would perform a tiny skit that linked or ran into the next child's skit.

They called it "a cartoon," thinking of it in frames. A girl impersonating a cigarette smoker who hacked and coughed and choked would be followed by a problem drinker whose unsteady motions on foot, or behind the wheel, were alarming. "We are demonstrating bad habits," Isaac said.

The youth group performed the show for the first time on a Sunday afternoon before their parents and friends, maybe 40 people in the meeting hall not long after the service and the community lunch, a pot-luck. One of the performers, a twelve-year-old girl, did the bathroom skin-lightening skit from the Opera game to general applause and laughter.

One member of the audience, however, was unhappy. Rebecca Obafemi, Isaac's mother, felt that this particular sketch was about her. "Is that true, Isaac?" she asked. "Did you talk about me in front of the children and that is why we have that silly woman in the bathroom who is so vain and shallow?"

Isaac had to admit that yes, he had mentioned her. "But," he exclaimed, "the skit is not about you! It is anybody!"

The explanation did not satisfy his mother. She complained to Pastor Boateng; the pastor told the youth group, who had been asked to do the play again next week in school, that the "healthy living" project was over now, finished.

But perhaps it wasn't really finished after all.

When Kreisberg and Pradtana heard what happened, because the pastor called to inform them, they were mortified. But then they decided to act. The group they led, as health

communicators, was known as the Storytelling Lab, a fluctuating assemblage of graduate students, undergrads, interns, postdocs and others as the issues were defined and the funding came in, or didn't. The Opera icebreaker was the contribution of a postdoc, trained in the Theater of the Oppressed methodology, but when properly followed it was the first of many steps in succession and no one had counted on a bunch of kids being so taken with the idea that they would just carry on with it, on their own. "TOO," as it was known, was conceived to draw in new participants, not alienate them; to promote dialogue, not summarily end it.

Kreisberg and Pradtana wanted to get back into it, with the kids they'd fired up and then, perhaps, left in the lurch—or maybe it was the fire.

"Let us come back," Pradtana said to the pastor, "as a team, and work with the children. Let us lead the activity as professionals."

"Maybe it is too late," Pastor Boateng said, "for skin-lightening as our subject, seeing as how Isaac's mother was so offended."

"We will do it differently," Kreisberg said. "Probably it will not be a play, if that's what you're saying. But there are many ways to tell a story."

Pastor Boateng thought for a moment. His shopkeeper friend, Muñoz, who declined to sell skin-lightening products at his corner bodega, had been quite interested when the pastor told him one day of the debacle of the youth group's performance. "You are doing interesting things in your church, Father!" Muñoz had said. "Maybe I should come have a look sometime!" Maybe more than one thing could be accomplished by bringing the health professionals back to the Biblical; so after his few moments thinking about it, the pastor said yes.

Her year as the Barker family's au pair nearing its end, Piti Bunyasarn was planning her return to Thailand. Packing for the trip home, she could see that, coming to America ten months before, she had over-packed; she still had two of her Fair and Lovely tubes left. She thought she would bring them to Sukhon at their last coffee at the Café Angelica, in case she wanted them.

After all, at one point, she remembered, Sukhon had asked to borrow one.

* * *

Appendix

IMAGES OF REAL-WORLD SKIN-LIGHTENING CAMPAIGNS

VIDEO CAMPAIGN/COMMERCIAL



Company:

Unilever (Fair and Lovely Multivitamin)

Tagline:

For Total Fairness (Indian Commercial)

<http://www.criticalmediaproject.org/cml/media/fair-and-lovely-ad/>

BILLBOARDS



Company:

L'Oréal Paris, 2016

Tagline:

Melanin-Vanish: Because we definitely deserve 50x More White Perfect

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN



Company:

Unilever (Vaseline for Men), 2010

Tagline:

Transform Your Face on Facebook with Vaseline for Men (Indian ad starring Bollywood star Shahid Kapur)

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/vaseline-issues-skin-whitening-app-for-facebook/>

MESSAGING COUNTER TO MARKETING OF SKIN-LIGHTENING PRODUCTS

Summary: This is a sample of counter-messaging campaigns that have sparked changes from cosmetic producers and consumers.

VIRAL VIDEO STORYTELLING



Title:

DEFIANT: The Story of Khoudia Diop:
The Melanin Goddess

Synopsis:

This is a 2-minute video about a dark-skinned woman from Senegal who was bullied for her skin color when she moved to Paris. She went on to become a model, embrace her skin color as beautiful, and challenge the cosmetic skin-lightening industry.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8T7y_tlubE

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS



Title:

Unfair and Lovely Campaign

Synopsis:

Started as a hashtag (#UnfairandLovely) by a University of Texas student as an alternative to India's Fair & Lovely skin-lightening product line.

<http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-08/unfair-and-lovely-south-asian-women-dare-be-dark>



Title:

Dark Is Beautiful movement

Synopsis:

This is an awareness campaign that aims to draw the attention to the unjust effects of skin color bias and celebrate the beauty of diverse skin tones.

<http://womenofworth.in/dark-is-beautiful/>

BLOGS



Title:

Mocha Girl Pit Stop

Synopsis:

Aims to empower women of color to make peace with their pasts and pursue their goals, all while becoming their best selves.

<http://mochagirlspitstop.com/proud-of-your-melanin/>

MUSIC VIDEOS



Title:

My Black Is Beautiful

Synopsis:

Explores stereotypes and idealized beauty standards while addressing identity, self-worth, and what it means to be a black woman in America.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbuoPmB2Amg>