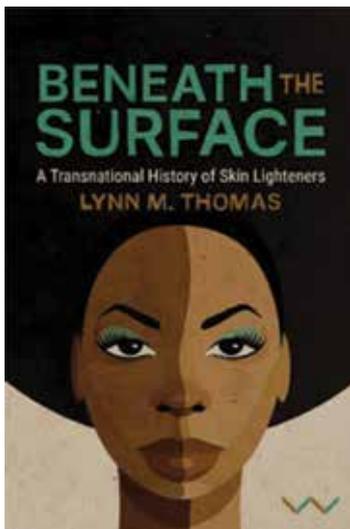


# Books

## Beneath the surface: A transnational history of skin lighteners

By Lynn M. Thomas, Wits University Press



Skin lightening (also called skin bleaching or brightening) is a cosmetic procedure that aims to lighten dark areas of skin or achieve a generally paler skin tone. In her book, *Beneath the surface: A transnational history of skin lighteners*, Lynn Thomas talks about how skin colour contributes to our image of ourselves.

The story takes you on a journey to learn about historical practices of skin lightening and how it occurred in different places.

It was used by many different cultures and diverse groups of people. For example, Black women's application of skin lightening products was for many different reasons, from beauty ideals to embracing consumer culture. Over time, commercial manufacturing and marketing of skin lighteners changed their products, packaging and adverts to make sure they appealed to the consumer of the day. Thomas's book has excellent stories and examples from South Africa. Take the 'Black is Beautiful' campaign that was embraced by activists who condemned skin lighteners to promote racial self-respect.

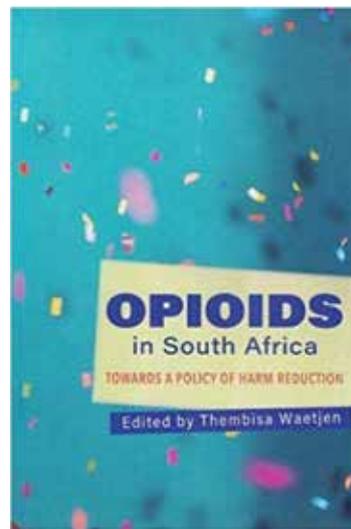
One of the main ingredients in skin lighteners is hydroquinone. When hydroquinone became a medical concern, skin lightening creams containing hydroquinone were banned in South Africa — being the first country globally to do so in 1990. Today, these products with hydroquinone are still used under medical supervision for treatment of some skin conditions in South Africa.

*Beneath the Surface* is a comprehensive book on skin lighteners and a good resource for anyone wanting to learn more about the history and issues around skin lightening. It has wonderful original advertisements, photographs, newspaper clippings and personal accounts that bring the narrative to life.

*The full review of this book was published in the South African Journal of Science. Wright C.Y. Unravelling historical and intertwined complexities of light and dark skin. S Afr J Sci. 2021;117(3/4). <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2021/9092>*

## Opioids in South Africa: Towards a policy of harm reduction

Edited by Thembisa Waetjen, by Health Sciences Research Council Press



Historically, the use of psychoactive and opioid substances in South Africa has been approached with prejudice and fear: there is stigma, stereotyping, and criminal association. The book *Opioids in South Africa: Towards a policy of harm reduction* suggests a mindset shift in considering how people who use opioids are treated — they should be approached with compassion and practicality rather than judgement.

Thembisa Waetjen presents this way of thinking by combining case studies, reflections, and archival graphics.

Harm reduction seeks to introduce practical, achievable, and sustainable options to provide drug users with support and treatment they deserve. By decriminalising substances and approaching drug users with compassion and humanity, the long-standing preconception and attitudes towards drug users can be changed.

Drug users are being uplifted by several organisations, empowering them to be researchers: skills and tools are provided for them to be a part of and conduct research within the communities of drug users. This reduces other participants' suspicions of the researchers' motives or opinions, and allows the participants to respond freely and honestly.

The voices of different groups of people are heard throughout this book, including those who use opioids, their family members, healthcare professionals, and the police. Waetjen and the other authors encourage the reader to re-think opioids and their users, and the ways in which to reduce harm that people using opioids face in South Africa.

*The full review of this book was published in the South African Journal of Science. Millar D.A., and Wright C.Y. 'Meet people where they are': An approach to opioids and harm reduction in South Africa. S Afr J Sci 2020; 116(5-6), 1. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2020/8141>*