



## Colourism

### *What is Colourism?*

Colourism is a complex form of discrimination, thus the depths of its nature and impact are undermined. Racism is one predominant race (perpetrators), establishing circumstances /behaviours to negatively impact upon those outside of that race. Colourism is a result of colonialism where colonised territories were indoctrinated into the prejudicial ideology of “white superiority”.

### *Internal or External?*

Colourism is internal and external. External colourism, is prejudice where individuals favour those with lighter skins over those with darker outside of their racial/ethnic group – thus discrimination. Its impact is relatively larger than internal colourism in diverse communities.

Internal colourism specifically occurs within “coloured” communities. For example, Hortense in Andrea Levy’s book “Small Island”, despite being Jamaican felt honoured to have “honey-like skin” rather than “bitter chocolate” like her mother, despite being black.

Despite the existence of a prevalent gender disparity within the effects of colourism favouring women (evidence supports the presence of sexism and the influence of “physical attraction” in this instance), colourism is entrenched with colonial and imperial mindsets (Aryan Race), ensuring its detrimental effects upon all those who experience it.

### *A Grey Area*

Researching colourism in the UK workspace uncovered a lack of documented cases and a considerable grey area in the perception of what colourism is. The Equality Act 2010 is unhelpful as it states, “*you must not be discriminated against because of your race*”, Section 9 further “clarifies” that race includes “(a) colour [...]”.[1]

However this broad legal definition conflates racism and colourism without defining the variances between the two. Specifically defining these variances would limit opportunities for discrimination to occur. The lack of clarity arguably places colourism in racism’s shadow, subsequently undermining its importance. Nevertheless, this emphasises the need to increase awareness of colourism’s origins and impacts.

### *Colourism at Work*

Media is the most visible form of employment, and thus difficult to be covert about colourism. The viral Candice Brathwaite and Rochelle Humes incident in 2021 is an example. Brathwaite, a best-selling author who campaigned about the high death rate of black women during

pregnancy and childbirth in the UK, was told that she was ‘never in the running’ to host a documentary despite her lived experience of the topic. Rochelle Humes was subsequently recruited. The key difference between the two successful women is their skin tone: Humes being lighter skinned and Braithwaite darker. The issue sparked a debate that evolved into hostility because colourism creates division within racial societies; as Marie Curie explains: it is a “*double-edged sword – it is racism reproduced by White Supremacy to further prejudice Blacks against Blacks. It is the Stockholm Syndrome of racism*”.[2]

It is the lingering effects of a difficult history still manipulated by the media and public. The need to further divide minorities is central to the theory that dark skinned achievers should exist in isolation – for example, Naomi Campbell “versus” Tyra Banks to maintain the visual of one black “supermodel”.

This anachronistic colonial mindset which limits space for “non-ideal shades” is colourism. It has always existed, yet it remains largely unacknowledged. A 2022 study on colourism’s impact on dark skinned men concerning the idea that “The Whiter You Are, the Better You Are” reinforces this.[3] The evidence demonstrated that they experienced additional disadvantages in their education, employment and salaries than their lighter skinned peers. Furthermore, consistent with negative stereotypes, dark skin is often associated with criminality. Another example is the situation played out on the reality TV show *Real Housewives of Potomac* and discussed in the finale: *Real Housewives of Potomac*. Watch clip [here](#)

*Progress?*

Lupita Nyong’o stated: colourism is “*the daughter of racism [...] which rewards lighter skin over darker skin*”. [4] Colourism is emotional and physical manipulation which for many leads to the deterioration of self-esteem and other mental health issues. It is oppression and exploitation of power to further divide the suppressed. Improving knowledge of colourism and the ability to recognise it can improve the coherence of a discrimination that has existed as long as racism.

*Want to learn more about colourism?*

**Join us at the Grey Area as we discuss colourism at our upcoming webinar. Register using this [link](#)**

*References*

[1] Equality Act 2010, Section 9, available at [Equality Act 2010](#)

[2] Marie Curie, *Dr Shola Mos-Shogabamimu: “We can’t talk about the dehumanisation of Black women without talking about colourism”*, available at: [‘The blame lies with TV, not Candice Braithwaite or Rochelle Humes’ | Marie Claire UK](#)

[3] Aisha Phoenix and Nadia Craddock, *Black Men’s Experiences of Colourism in the UK*, 56 (5), available at: [phoenix-craddock-2022-black-men-s-experiences-of-colourism-in-the-uk.pdf](#)

[4] Marie Curie, *Dr Shola Mos-Shogabamimu: “We can’t talk about the dehumanisation of Black women without talking about colourism”*, available at: [‘The blame lies with TV, not Candice Braithwaite or Rochelle Humes’ | Marie Claire UK](#)

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**About the writer** - LJ is a university student with an interest in history, and communications.