

COLOURISM

Colourism, previously known as Shadism, is a prejudice in which Black and Brown people with darker skins experience disadvantages compared with those with a lighter complexion.

The aim of this exhibition is to explore Colourism/Shadism, which has had a more profound impact on life and culture than many presume. This issue impacts very differently in Black communities, White communities, and Mixed-Race communities.

For those who may not know, Colourism/Shadism is the value we attach to people of different complexions. This can be traced back to centuries of colonialism and some argue that this is a consequence of the Transatlantic Slave Trade which directly created and perpetuated Colourism; a system of preference for lighter skin tones within Black communities. Although different complexions could be found in some parts of the African continent prior to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, there is no evidence of a value attached to those complexions.

Colourism refers to the social marginalization and systemic oppression of people with darker skin tones and the privileging of people with lighter skin tones. Colourism can contribute to low or inflated self-esteem, mental health difficulties and a version of racism across different races and ethnicities; and some communities are embarrassed to even raise the issue within their own communities. We hope this exhibition will stimulate more conversation.

The exhibition "A Study in Colourism" in 2024 concentrated mainly on adults but in our research, we became aware that younger people saw the issue very differently and this new exhibition will give us the opportunity to examine further how Colourism impacts on younger people.

Social media seems to be having a greater influence on younger people and it is likely that the manner in which colourism manifests itself may conceivably impact on the mental health of young people, particularly where perceptions of beauty very often favour those of a lighter complexion and the media in the West seem to be more comfortable with our lighter skin brothers and sisters. The issue of identity for young Black people has presented many of them with more choices as to how they see themselves, where the old principle of "If you're not White you're Black" no longer applies. There is evidence to suggest that when Black people receive differential treatment based on skin tone, they begin to internalize society's views and treatment, leading to the divide we see today within Black communities.

Colourism is a by-product of Racism, and we all make judgements - either consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously - regarding this issue. The exhibition hopes to stimulate further discussion to create a greater understanding.

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