



Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex

Meghan's claims about Archie highlight colourism problem in UK

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The Duchess of Sussex's allegation that concerns were raised with [Prince Harry](#) about the skin colour of their baby when she was pregnant will probably have been the most shocking for a US audience to hear, where discussion of colourism is widespread.

But experts in the UK argue the comments would also resonate deeply across the Atlantic. Though it is not recognised as such, colourism is a significant issue in the UK too, they said.

In the interview with Oprah Winfrey, which [first aired in the US on Sunday](#), Meghan said conversations were had about how dark Archie's skin might be when he was born. Meghan and Harry declined to say who expressed those concerns.

Aisha Phoenix, a researcher on colourism, Islam, and belonging at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, said: “Colourism in general is a taboo topic and until recently people haven’t wanted to talk about it in the UK. Beyond those who have experienced it, there wasn’t the recognition that it actually existed and there was no body of research to draw on. Because it hadn’t been researched, some people assumed that it wasn’t an issue.”



▲ Meghan: there were 'concerns and conversations about how dark Archie's skin might be' - video

She said colourism had different histories in different parts of the world. “For the descendants of transatlantic slaves, it dates back to the preferential treatment given to the children of slaves and slave masters who had lighter skin and were afforded privileges, for example being allowed to work in the house, rather than in the fields.”

Phoenix added: “The legacy of European colonialism in different parts of the world, and the preferential treatment given to the children of colonialists and local people, has also contributed to present-day colourism. Some scholars argue that light skin was also associated with being of a higher status, while dark skin was associated with outdoor labour. In the UK, colourism is a problem for people of colour, irrespective of backgrounds.”

In the research she has carried out on colourism in the UK, participants told Phoenix of their struggles with colourism in the job market, with darker-skinned people less likely to get good jobs than those with lighter skin, and the lack of representation of dark-

skinned people of colour in the media. Others spoke of colourist teasing at school and being told they were ugly because they had dark skin. They also described being teased and mocked for their skin shade by their relatives.

Dr Deborah Gabriel, founder and director of Black British Academics, and author of the book *Layers of Blackness*, said colourism was sometimes wrongfully perceived “as being idiosyncrasies of black and brown communities. In other words, it’s got nothing to do with white people, it’s just within black and brown communities that they prefer to have lighter skin.”

She added: “The allegation there was a preoccupation in the royal household about what colour the baby was going to be reaffirms my argument that colourism is not just about a preference for a certain skin tone. It’s part and parcel of systemic racism and inequality. And it’s linked to power and imperialism.”

Phoenix thinks the colourism issues raised by Meghan will lead to more people reflecting on what this says about attitudes towards people of colour in the UK.

“We’ve been having more conversations about colourism over the last three to four years, and particularly in light of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and I think now there’s going to be even more of a focus on it, with more people coming out to talk about their own experiences,” she said.

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