



COLORISM

in the beauty industry



TOPIC BRIEF

The beauty industry currently lacks the proper shade ranges that show the true variety of skin tones. As a majority of these shades are light and few dark shades exist, the disproportionate balance of light and dark colors reflects the colorism and racial inequity that is prevalent in the cosmetic world. Colorism is a form of racial discrimination that can occur within a specific ethnic group and across multiple ethnic groups, based on the shade of an individual's skin tone, typically favoring lighter skintones. By excluding people of darker skin tones from the beauty industry by creating products that they cannot realistically use, the industry enforces racist standards of beauty and fails to be inclusive. By showing preference towards lighter skinned clients, the cosmetic companies prevent celebration of diverse beauty and enforces the idea that they simply don't fit into society's idea of what "beautiful" is. Colorism in the beauty industry sends the message to dark-skinned young girls that they aren't as important or as worthy as their lighter-skinned peers.

ACTIVITY: Fact or Fiction

Assess the validity of these common statements about beauty products.

Statements:

Statement 1: In recent years, brands have refrained from changing their ways and continue to market to lighter skin tones.

Statement 2: It would not be financially beneficial to include darker skin tones in their beauty products because women with darker skin do not shop for makeup as often as women with lighter skin tones.

Statement 3: Creating beauty products for darker-skinned people is more expensive and time-consuming.

Answers:

Statement 1: False. In recent years, several brands have worked to be more inclusive of people of color, such as Too Faced's thirty-five shades of their Born This Way Foundation, Maybelline's forty shades of their Fit Me foundation, and Colourpop Cosmetics's forty-two shades of their foundation.

Statement 2: False. After the launch of Rihanna's Fenty Beauty line, the deeper shades of foundation sold out the fastest, effectively disproving this theory.

Statement 3: False. Al-Nisa Ward, owner and President of Cosmetic Science Innovations says, "Actually, it's not very difficult to make deeper shades. The only difference between a lighter shade and a darker shade is the ratio of pigment. All foundations contain the same 4 pigments; titanium dioxide, iron oxide red, iron oxide yellow, iron oxide black."

QUESTIONS

- Research the paper bag test, skin bleaching, and comb tests. In what ways has our society grown from these colorist traditions? In what ways are these ideologies still prevalent today?
- Are men subject to colorism and its effects?
- How can social media work as a proponent and as an opposer of colorism?