

Light Work

Learning in the digital era by Jay Kirby

Studio Portrait Lighting

An introduction to black and white photography in A studio environment

- Black and white photography is heavily considered the most tried and tested method of capturing contrast, in this instance this ability in a studio setting on a subject can highlight interesting shapes and definition on a person with effective lighting. Perhaps stereotypically the subject are often in a low key lighting setting but this is not always the case, to create a portrait without distraction a larger aperture is deemed the most effective so using f/1.4 should be adequate, this in a outdoor scenario would keep the model in focus and the background out of focus keeping a separation between the two. In a studio setting if the lighting is set up well, aperture shouldn't be too important for the background in a low key lighting setting. An important element of black and white photography is being creative with lighting due to the importance of contrast in the technique. A single light source can have hard dramatic values if face on, if you start adding carefully placed light sources on the model with different brightness settings you can capture the model with a different tone and narrative while enhancing or subtracting shadows, and changing the values of highlights.
- Black and white photography on a subject seems to be at its most effective when the eyes are popping therefore the subject should look towards the lens for the most effective portrait based off the works of platon. Like colour photography black and white is not bound by aesthetic and emotion can be effectively captured in this format. The emotion of a subject juxtaposed with emotion helps capture an image bound by intimacy between viewer and subject that a colour image cannot.
- References

https://www.imageconverterplus.com/news/power_of_emotions_in_black_and_white_photography_989/

<https://www.institute-of-photography.com/impact-black-white/>

Robert Mapplethorpe

Mapplethorpe throughout his career seemed to use symmetry and contrast to capture beauty, this in hand with his conceptual portraits, gave each subject in his portraiture a interplay between, deep emotion and calm. Mapplethorpe also took inspiration from ancient Greece sculpture, using light and contrast to embody the fight against decay. Mapplethorpe would also noticeably project a black background in contrast with a very bright subject or visa versa. Projecting body as sculpture with the lighting. Mapplethorpe also used black and white as political undertones holding values of the two both working in harmony with each over.

In conclusion, the subject used is as important as the lighting set up and in turn is a light in its self when used in black and white form, changing the exposure of a form can change the realism of the subject into a god like sculpture giving the subject a different identity or message.



Mapplethorpe noticeably used black skin tones to get greater definition under studio lighting its, implied in his biography.



<https://www.thecollector.com/nietzsche-philosophy-apollonian-dionysian/>

Platon

Platon is a story teller first, photographer second, Platon captures a model on a personal bases, capturing a graphic, exaggerated look that elevates the soul into a visual form. The human condition is very important to platon, before a shoot, Platon would evoke what our own human condition means, “how important is passion, moral compass and how important is compassion?” are all questions that evoke his narratives for connecting with people as a exploration of ones self. Platon puts entthesis on connection quoting “99.9% is spent on connection” referring to the feeling being the most important essence of portraiture. This could be studio or outdoor photography. In practice before a shoot, upon the beginning of a shoot Platon would start a conversation based off his own homework of the subject this would be the beginning of his way of putting the subject at ease.

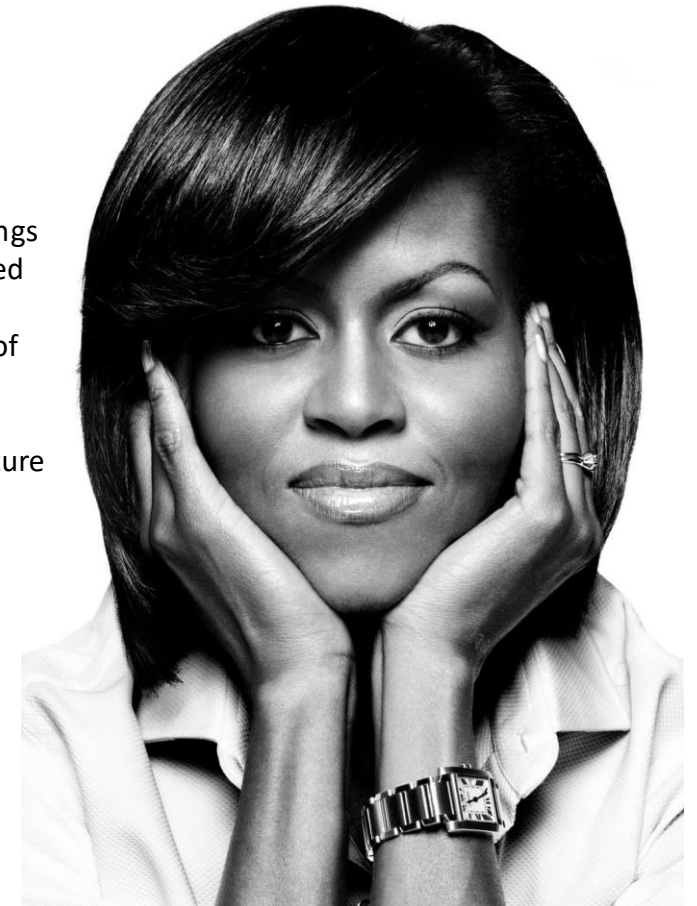
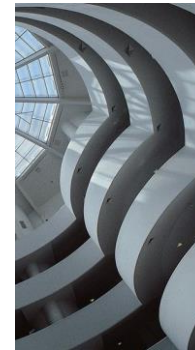
Influence

Platon took early inspiration from his home growing up, the Greek isles. Seeing great ancient Greek structures cause him to see things with such power. Religious structures also inspired Platon. Quoting, “ a religious icon structure mixed with modernist design” created “simple, bold and clear design” “ a Platon picture”

Platon studied graphic design, giving Platon a “deep respect for negative space, that comes from studying frank loyed wrights idea of compression and expansion” this gave Platon the effective ability to open up a person. In essence becoming a cultural provocateur. Platon also took inspiration from white houses, taken on a 35mm camera it lacked detail. Platon would then focus on emotion and connection, saying “and that is what photography feels like” going on to juxtaposing simplicity with emotional complexity in his future works.

Practice

Platon uses the same equipment for all images, he starts with a “long lens head shot in colour.” this is allows platon to begin breaking down walls with his subjects, shouting at them to change the subjects presence in shot. Platons most important part of the shoot is the intimacy. Which arguably is lost in a digital form. Platon only uses film that plays into the intimacy between subject and photographer.



[Abstract: The Art of Design | Platon: Photography | FULL EPISODE | Netflix](#)

- The responsibility of studio photography is extremely important to get right platon has stated that studio photography “ is an amazing terrifying experience, because if I get it wrong, I can do great harm, it is really important to do homework” (platon)

Everything in the images in the editing stage, is hand drawn, no use of photoshop is done at all in platons work, keeping to his ethics regarding tools over technology.

The Uses Of Hard Lighting

- What is hard lighting?
- Hard lighting is a technique used to abruptly separate the subject from its background, this also can have an effect on shadows, casting strong shadows and highlighting certain areas of the face to make it appear sharper. This type of light is also seen often in times of the day the sun is at its peak, directly shining on the models face.
- To create this technique, place a single light source a fair distance from the model, the further away from the model the light source is the harder the light becomes similar to how the sun works for natural lighting outdoor portraiture.

Fill lighting and Low Key Lighting

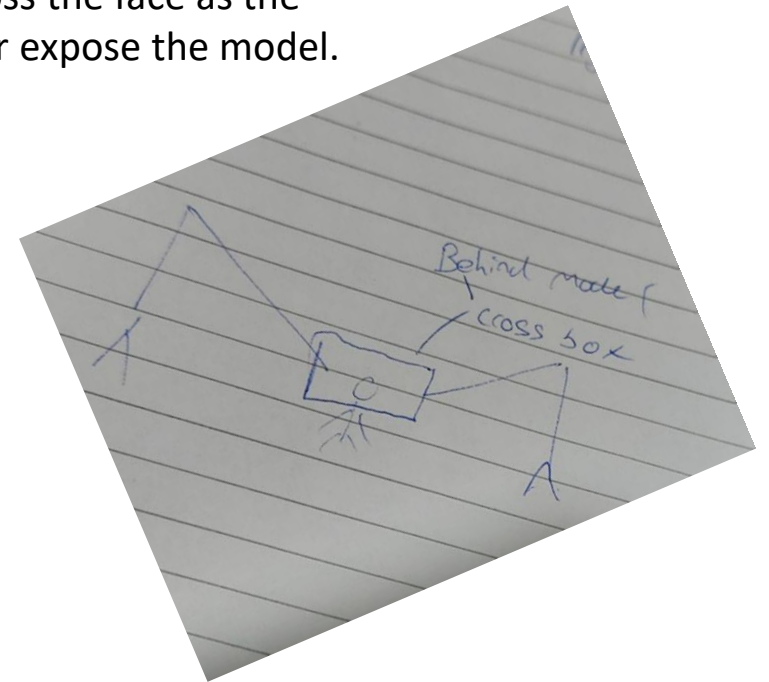
- Hard lighting in studio form can be effectively utilised with low key lighting due to how low key lighting imagery only needing a single light source in practice, this isn't always the case though and the lighting can also be further tuned with a reflector and adjusting a fill light accordingly to emphasise contours of the subject even more.
- A fill light is very important in creating depth and dimension to the subject avoiding a flat image and instead creating more shadows and dark tones. Therefore I will try to utilize the fill light to create a portrait with dynamic use of lighting on the subjects face.

Using two point lighting



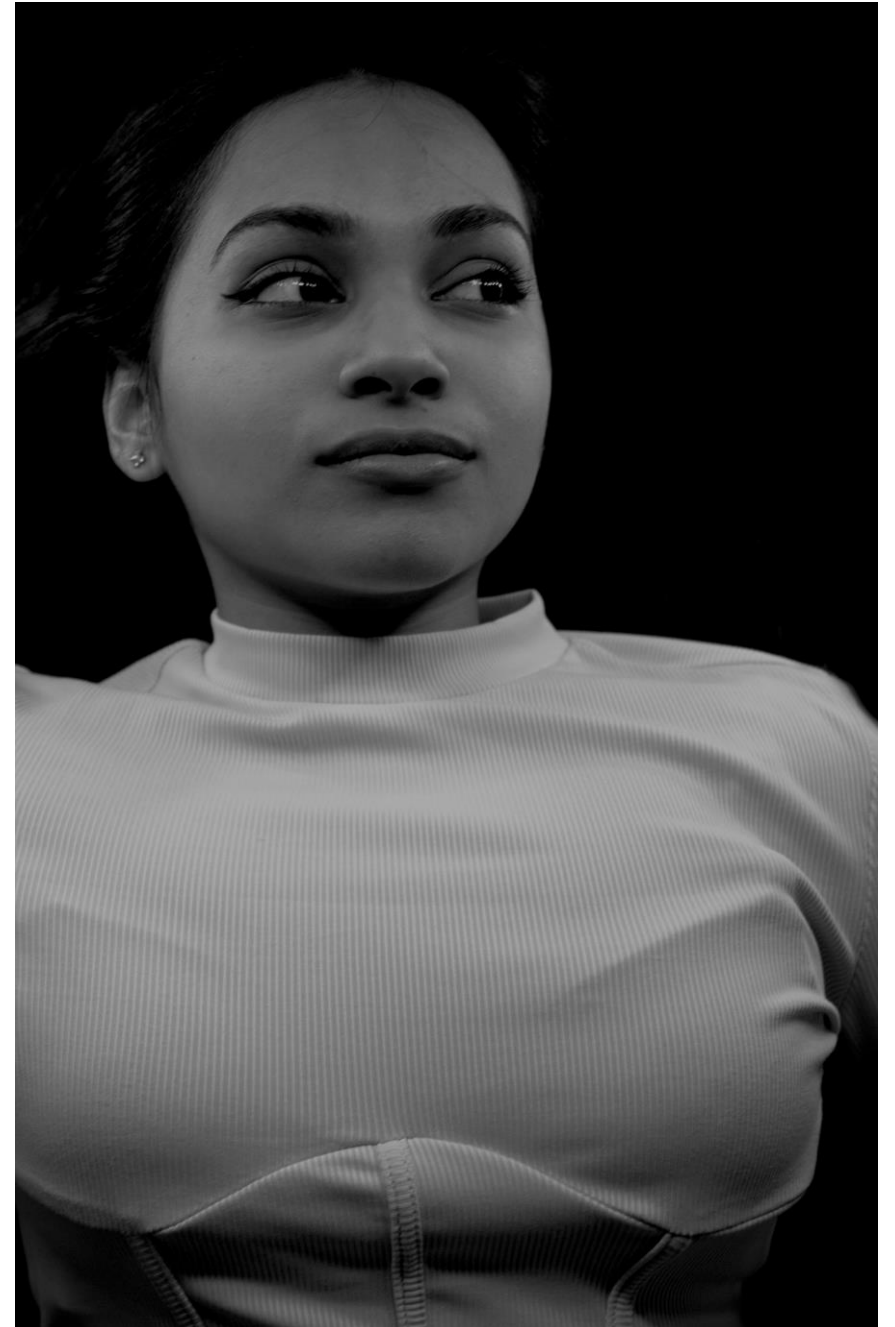
Here I used two point lighting, this method was introduced to me from Paul, in hand with a cross light the cross light helped me bring light across the face while the two point lighting I used to highlight the cheek bones for more definition on the subjects face, I tried to set up the softbox in a position that would redirect the light back onto the models face from the two supporting lights so the softbox was very close to the model above and just behind them, the model laying down. This softbox was instrumental to wrapping the light evenly across the face as the two point lights were lit dimly so I didn't over expose the model.

The two lights either side where Bowens 500DXs and I adjusted them to be higher, acting as spotlights, I then adjusted the lighting till I was happy with the highlights after testing.



Without fill light

This shot was with a single light pointing at the model it was a fair distance from the model as I wanted to see the effect of a hard lighting. I used the lighting at brightness level forty two, I found the effects of this technique to be very flat, no contours, no definition and highlights are present, the lighting could have been improved for this task with a higher brightness setting but my model was uncomfortable with the light, so this is something I could have edited afterwards to create a higher exposure or using flash. I could have also used a umbrella and improved the ISO to fix this issue.



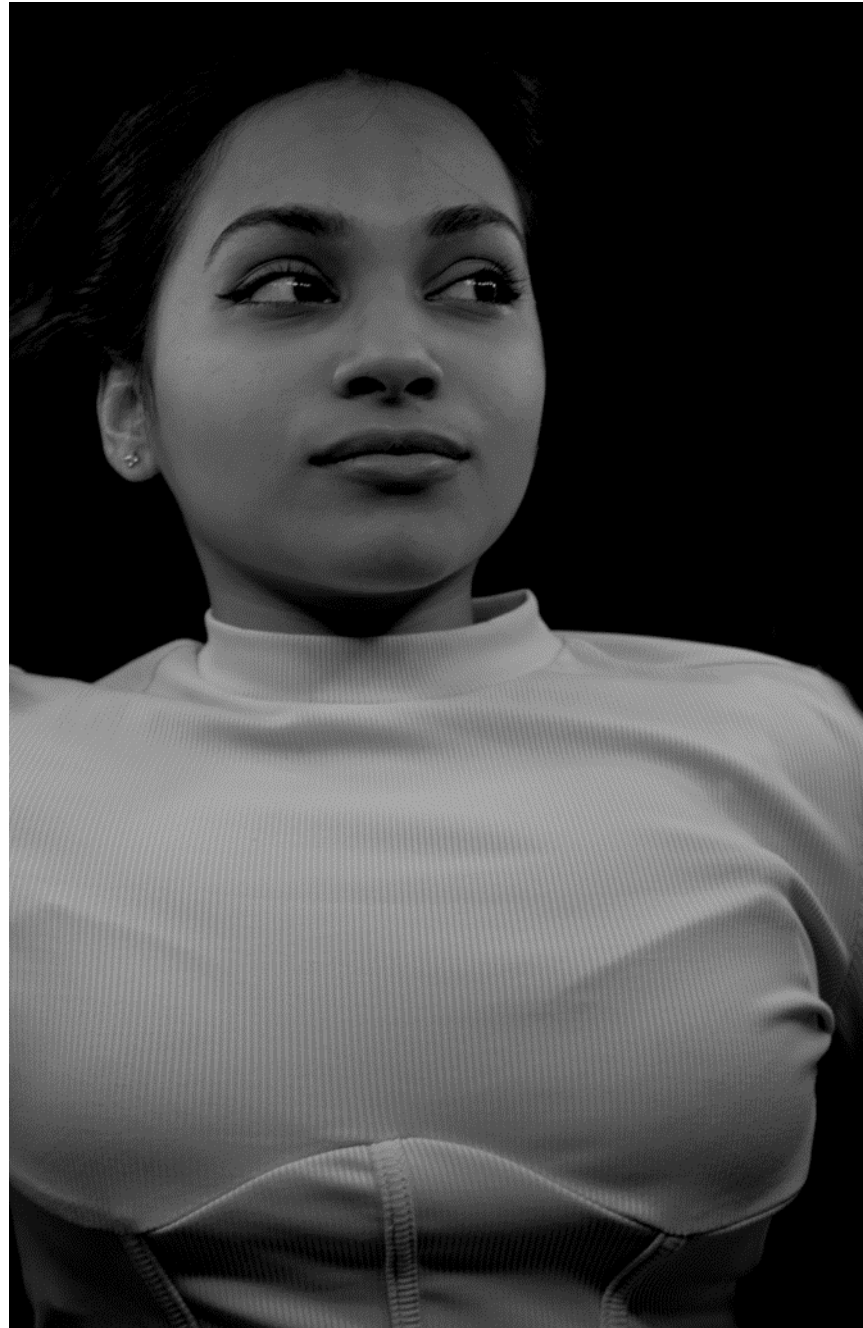
Emphasising shadows

- Low key lighting has the ability to communicate story in its medium, this dramatic effect on the figure, this can be seen in horror films, this lighting gives the viewer a sense of discomfort due to the tone of mystery of what's in the shadows, and what can and can't be seen, therefore making this light less appropriate for commercial use. This can be emphasised even more with high contrast to create dramatic spectacle that can impact anxiety and tension.
- Anxiety and tension doesn't always have to be the result of low key lighting, with a beauty dish and some low lit supporting lights, shadows can impact the model in a way that tells a story, you can see all their face, highlights, eyes and shadows in great detail. The same lighting technique resulting in a different outcome.





Two light
sources



Single light
source

- Platon inspired me to use the model as a human being, expressing an emotion through my imagery was a important task I wanted to try and I engaged in conversation during the shoot, taking images almost became a afterthought, I would then politely during conversation ask the model to stay in position and as she was in conversation it wasn't enough time to break the mood between shots, I also tried unconventional methods of posing, platons imagery sometimes uses low angles to the subject so that's what I tried here, however unlike platon I used a softer lighting approach, with lights from behind the model and two the side opposed to the umbrella diffuser that platon uses so well.

High Key Lighting

- High Key lighting is the opposite of low key lighting, high key lighting acts as a lighting style that is brightly composed for minimal shadows that also coincides with soft lighting and a bright frame. This in turn creates a happier tone for portraiture, stereotypically this style can be found in comedic television and commercial use.

Platon

Platon is a heavy utilizer of high key lighting in his work his style is famous for a white background, its believed that high percentage of his work is taken with two boards funnelling the light onto the subject distributing a even amount of light onto all areas of the face, Platon has often used an umbrella, this would be a diffuser spreading light to defuse contrasts and shadows due to the translucent material. Due to what they are, an umbrella they can be very useful for portability.



For my attempt at low key lighting I initially encountered several issues, I could only get two Bowens 500 DXs to work so already I was limited in the way I could use the lights, however I got around this by placing one of the lights near the background and putting the brightness up to 100% this gave me a full white background, and the other Bowens, I placed just off centre of the models face at 72% brightness, as you can see by the result the image worked out surprisingly well, especially on the left side on the face where there are minimal shadows, on the other side you can see that I didn't evenly spread the light from left to right resulting in shadows on the right side of the face. Next time I could avoid this issue with a reflector or by using boards either side of the model This image was taken without flash. I shot this with 100 ISO due to the bright light and a shutter speed of 1/100 an aperture of 1/16 as I have been told this setting in hard light scenarios work effectively.

This form of photography is of a positive nature and is often portrayed in weddings and family portiture, the style has a asccosiation with attractiveness and celebration. This is also a type of photography in a domestic sense that a consumer of portraiture would be looking to buy for the reasons mentioned above. Creatively, high key lighting has been used in modern cinema, high key lighting has been a visual narration of context to holy characters in a cinematic setting with the lighting acting as a aura of heaven.



Available light & On Location

Capturing A Mood

- For a indoor capture, capturing the ambience of the room is important, this gives the image a tone and the audience a feel for what the environment feels like. This can be looking for key points of interest that give the place character and therefore can help a narrative between subject and background. For example utilizing a character in painting in shot and projecting that painting into the models clothes or pose.

Things to be mindful of outdoors when shooting:

Theft

Health and safety

Weather

Time Of Day

Adapting to the environment

Ambient Shooting

- Ambient shooting can utilise a reflector, we can use this in harmony with the sun, reflecting the light from the sun into the models face giving light to the eyes and filling in shadows. This works well in practice however adding more lights to the shot will give you more control and more options over tone of lighting.

Noticeable ambient photographers use ambience and flash together, to get to this point its important to take a picture with flash and without flash, once you find out what the ambient light is, you can adjust your shutter speed, slowing it down, allowing ambience to work into the image with flash together. This can also be achieved in the camera settings by lowering the flash exposure.

Ambient Lighting

Using golden hour for ambient lighting is very useful in creating professional imagery without expensive equipment, here I stumbled upon a golden hour scenario where the sunset peered through the clouds momentarily in a alleyway, the sun lit up the small entrance to the alleyway, creating a small crack of light , where my subject was standing was the light and the background behind him was shadow where no light was present, in hindsight I wish I got a more dynamic shot of my subject or a different angle showcasing the shadow on the wall more but this moment happened suddenly. This golden hour scenario creates a longer shadow that casted on the wall. With pre planning you can plan the position of your shoot depending on the direction of the light. When taking a conventional portrait in ambient lighting the softer shadows, can create depth and vibrancy, in turn projecting texture and warmer tones onto the subject. In a scenario of preparing a ambient shoot it is important to understand aperture, a wide aperture would help create depth between subject and background within the location. As the time frame is small it would help to have the photo settings set to raw so you can edit any imperfections later.

[What Time Is Golden Hour and How to Properly Use It - Pixobo - Profitable Photography](#)



Using under exposure with ambient illumination

Here I used 200 iso and 1/160 shutter speed this created a low exposed shot, the light bulbs, located in a garden shop where both lights were lit very bright, I considered this a good opportunity to test exposure settings, by testing the exposure settings I was able to change hard lighting into soft ambience. This effect wouldn't have been possible with a flash because the subject would light up cancelling out the effect of the bulbs. This is the same principle as using lighting in the studio but with the right settings, you can use available light to create a natural lit portrait just like being in a studio with cinematic qualities.



Silhouettes with Ambience

Here I used the same concept of low exposure in a underpass during midday. To create this effect I set the Iso to the lowest setting on my camera (100) this helped me present a sharp outline of the subject in my image, my F stop was set at f/8 to keep everything in my image in focus. Getting the right exposure was the hardest part of trying silhouette photography but I just kept changing the shutter speed till I was happy with exposure. If my model was moving I would need to go for a high shutter speed. This image was only possible due to the light behind the subject being brighter than the light in front of the model. Therefore for the best result I placed the model near the end of underpass so there was more light behind him. Had I done this in the middle of the underpass this image would not have been achievable.



On Location

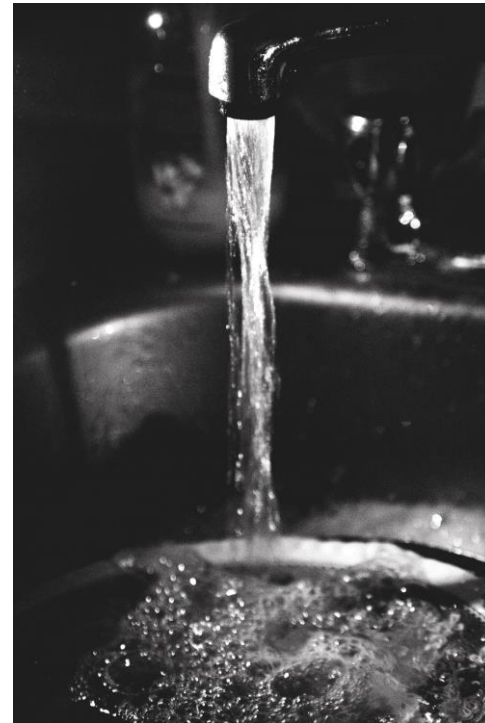
- On location lighting portraits are a challenging task that make a photographer think on their feet, the location of a shot can be what makes or breaks the image, therefore it is important to identify the purpose of the shoot before hand for example commercial based, nature of the model, aesthetic etc.
- A photographer also has to chose wherever to shoot indoors or outdoors and then the best place to shoot in said place, there is a strong element of health and safety involved depending on the location, one has to account for wires, people and environmental hazards that could all be at play during the set up process.

This is an image I took with a Godox V150 light, I used the light in a cinema room at the back, an interior location. this was a completely dark room with a small area of luminescence coming from the st Davids light, I was using a model for this image to highlight a creative use of the lighting. I had a Godox V150 video light, I placed this light in a area just behind the model, directing the light upwards, you can see some of the lighting has lit up the top right side of the image more than the left however I was directing it to the ceiling so that wouldn't happen so it is a slight mistake. This lighting placement has worked effectively at illuminating the models face, I used the setting on 82% brightness on the godox because under camera light the models face was most vibrantly illuminated without looking overexposed. I used a tripod to set up this composition from about 4 to 5 meters away I would have liked another light to light the wall as it has a bold midnight blue tone to it, had I had more lighting I could create a more bolder graphic style of imagery with, just how Jessica Walsh uses bold colours in her own work. However regarding the importance of capturing a tone and mood, I find student accommodations oddly soulless, I found using a dark area with my tonal palate going into the shoot allowed me to capture a moody tone with a helping expression of my model who I asked to be "fed up" in the image, this also plays on the text as irony. I find the models face lit up in a dark place to have the same impact as low key lighting, Moody.



Backlighting

Backlighting is the action of lighting a subject from behind. Backlighting has many multipurposes, backlighting can be used dramatically, creating separation from the subject but can also enhance the qualities of the subject. When taking a backlighting shot, in this case I took a backlighting shot of water, but so the shot didn't become blinded by my light source I took the image of the water with the light source out of frame, this has lit the running water adding contrast and dynamic lighting to the image, which in turn has created a rich lighting image. Without backlighting the water you would not be able to see the water running, at least it would not be the focal point. Going forward backlighting can be paired with low aperture for bokeh and for creating depth in studio imagey.



Using flash

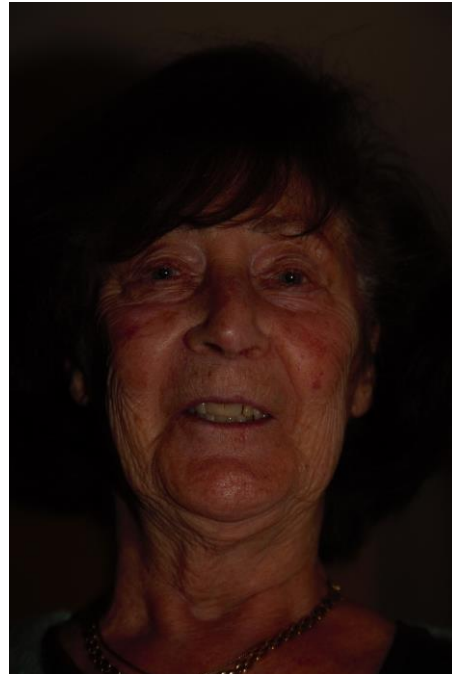
The first image is available light only the position of the available light has the subject underexposed, the models face is still lit up due to the position of the interior light but remains effected by poor visual perception.

Using a flash (EL 100) in image two has allowed me to separate background from subject, increasing the shutter speed under exposed the background making the flash the key aspect to this portrait in image two.

Image three is a continuation of perfecting the shutter speed to find the right contrast between subject and background.

In conclusion flash can be a instrumental part of separation, directing focal points of your image and controlling ambience vs flash, the difference can be seen by adjusting the f stops depending on the flatness of the ambience and the position of the subject.

To help blend my flash with my camera settings I set the flash to auto, I'm aware that in practice a diffuser with flash will give more desired results on the subject, but for understanding lighting I proceeded with the task. Using flash can have a increased effect on increasing contrast with highlights and shadows as it has here, but with a diffuser you can create softer lighting in portraiture once you have perfected the locations lighting on camera.



<https://www.adorama.com/alcl/flash-photography-tips-how-to-get-better-lighting-with-camera-flashes/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20first%20and%20most>

Using flash



Here I used the same principal as with the previous subject but in a outdoor setting, I decided to try turning the flash exposure setting in the flash function settings to control the amount of light reaching my models face, the first image was natural light only, I then increased the flash exposure compensation settings slightly each time to light my models face up gradually, went from -2 to 0 from image 2 to 3.

- In conclusion lighting is a key aspect in all aspects of photography, it's the difference between a bad and a good photo, the lighting is instrumental to tone, mood and a atmosphere, all of these can be enhanced with lighting in a outdoor space and indoor, lighting also controls the vibrancy and colour of your subject so setting up lighting correctly matters, this leads into the importance of setting up the light correctly, this results in the difference between flat imagery and drama in lighting. Once I have understood this aspect of lighting I then can enhance my light even more with diffusers and manipulation allowing me to bounce flash, creatively using soft boxes are all been things I've learned from this exercise.