

Tan is 'In': Study Finds Light Brown More Attractive than Pale or Dark Skin

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Some African-American stars have been ridiculed for trying to lighten their skin color, but many Caucasians go to tanning salons to darken their skin. A new study by University of Missouri-Columbia researcher Cynthia Frisby found that people perceive a light brown skin tone to be more physically attractive than a pale or dark skin tone.

"Does a person's skin color alone impact whether others perceive her as physically attractive? Advertisers want their models to be perceived as attractive so that consumers will buy their product, and previous studies have found that black models used in advertisements frequently are fair-skinned and have more European features. I wanted to test skin color separately to find out whether it's important to perceptions of beauty. I found that without regard to physical features, people prefer light brown skin over dark brown skin or pale skin," said Frisby, associate professor of advertising at MU's School of Journalism.

For the study, photographs of four female models were adjusted using computer software. Each model was imaged in three different skin tones - light, medium and dark - but all other features remained the same. Frisby asked 79 female participants to evaluate a selection of the photographs, which they believed were for an upcoming advertising campaign. Frisby analyzed the responses and discovered that participants, of whom 45 were Caucasian and 34 were African American, found the light brown skin tone most attractive.

These findings might impact how advertisers use African-American

models. Some advertisers have worried that using African-American models for mainstream products might alienate potential Caucasian buyers, Frisby said, but this study shows Caucasians and African Americans react in similar ways to light, medium and dark shades of skin tone.

"Since the mid-1960s, many advertisers have been in a dilemma regarding the use of blacks in advertisements," Frisby said. "Many considered using blacks in advertisements to appeal to a growing black target audience but were concerned that use of blacks might alienate white consumers. Fortunately for advertisers and advertising agencies, research shows that white consumers react to black models in advertisements in almost exactly the same way as black consumers react. It seems that both groups prefer the light brown skin tone, whether it's a tan Caucasian or a light-skinned African American."

The study, "'Shades of Beauty': Examining the Relationship of Skin Color to Perceptions of Physical Attractiveness," was published in the August issue of the journal *Facial Plastic Surgery*.

Source: University of Missouri

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