

Brown is Beautiful

ZAKKIETHUNNISA unearths the struggles faced by brown girls searching for affordable, yet suitable makeup

All that Nurul Nishaat Bte Mohamed Salleh, 17, wanted was to find a foundation which suited her, and get it at an affordable price. However, with it comes the struggle in finding one with a suitable undertone for her skin shade. If she does find one, her hopes are dashed because it's expensive; she'll have to fork out more to get it.

This is the predicament faced by many girls with medium to dark skin tones in Singapore from time to time when they decide to buy makeup products.

Padmini Arutselvam, 19, recounts how once, she decided to try going with a brighter foundation colour to see if it would suit her, after failing to find her own skin tone shade. However, she felt disappointed when it caused people to ask her if she had overdone her makeup instead.

"I felt rather embarrassed as I'm not the type that wears too much makeup... I prefer a simpler look," she concludes, cringing from the memory of her unfortunate experience.

Nurul, on the other hand, acknowledges that matching foundations are available sometimes, but are usually very expensive. "I have only managed to find 2 brands that carry my exact shade and both cost more than \$50," says the Hospitality Higher NITEC student, talking about how, in addition to being expensive, deeper foundation shades do not always accommodate the various undertones.

Skin undertones can be determined by the colours your skin leans towards. If your skin leans peachy, yellow or golden, you have warm undertones. If your skin leans pink, red or blue, you have cool undertones.

Determining undertones can be done using a few methods. First, look at the veins on the underside of your wrists. Warm undertones make your veins seem greenish, while cool undertones make your veins seem purplish. Another way is to wrap a towel around your face in natural lighting and looking in the mirror. Skin with warm undertones would appear yellowish, while skin with cool undertones would appear bluish. A final and straightforward method would be to look at what kind of jewelry flatters you. Gold flatters warm undertones while silver flatters cool undertones.

If you get mixed results for these tests, you are likely to have neutral undertones, meaning that makeup catering to both warm and cool undertones are suitable for you. Nurul herself has cool undertones, hence she needs foundations with pink or red undertones for her skin. Other foundations would look too yellow or orange on her.

It is not only the everyday brown girl who feels that Singapore's makeup industry has room for improvement. Professional makeup artist Vanetha Nair, 23, who has been doing makeup professionally via her Instagram account @mehndi_inc, also expresses her concern regarding the gap between Singapore's makeup industry as compared to overseas.

Overseas, there are many brands with a wide range of foundations in differing shades. For example, Huda Beauty offers 30 shades, Cover FX and Fenty Beauty offer 40 shades. However, this level of variety is often unavailable in Singapore. With limited suitable shades, it's a challenge for brown girls, even with the current available varieties from overseas.

“In Singapore, the variety is very little... and only for lighter skins. (Makeup stores in Singapore) don't really have shades for darker skins, and that makes it a very big problem for (brown girls) to get (foundation) for their skin shades,” says Vanetha, regarding the local makeup industry.

She encourages brown girls to head to Sephora to buy makeup, noting that there are several brands there which offer a wide, although expensive array of foundation shades, such as Marc Jacobs and Fenty Beauty.

She also has a word of advice for brown girls searching for foundations which match their skin tones. “You have to swatch (the foundation) on your jaw area, so that you can see the contrast between your neck and your face, because your neck is always lighter than your face,” she says. According to her, once armed with the proper products and techniques, dark skin beauty can be enhanced beautifully..

“Dark skin is very beautiful. It is easy to go for a natural look. You can do a lot of (makeup styles) on dark skin,” she says, further explaining that bronze and rose gold looks are very suitable for brown girls since it enhances their skin and face as a whole.

To cater to the current problem, effort is being made locally to bridge the gap in variety. Mr T R Teivian Raj, 26, director of Dark Diva Dolls, started his makeup line following inspiration from his mother.

“She wanted to launch a label that catered specifically for women of colour. Once I started working, I decided to pick up this idea and bring it to life. With that Dark Diva Dolls was born,” says Mr Teivian in an email interview.

Mr Teivian went on to explain that Dark Diva Dolls began with the intention of bringing affordable, quality makeup to women of colour. “Since our inception, we have had over 300 customers from a variety of races,” says Mr Teivian, about the reception to Dark Diva Dolls.

The local makeup industry and its treatment of brown girls, however, still has plenty of room to grow.

“Maybe there could be more makeup tutorials done at beauty shops and the concept of darker skin beauty should be more appreciated in the beauty industry,” says Padmini, when asked to share her hopes for the local makeup industry.

“Makeup companies need to realise that just as they make foundations with varying undertones for fairer skin, they need to do the same for deeper skin tones,” says Nurul, who looks forward to the day where she can finally buy suitable foundations easily in Singapore.