

# Examining eye color and how it plays into clothing aesthetics

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Left: images of light (top) and darker (bottom) complexion faces. Right: the same images with eyes swapped. From a spectrum of colors, light blue clothing was chosen most frequently for the faces with light eyes and brick red clothing was chosen most when the eyes were dark. Credit: *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* (2023). DOI: 10.1037/aca0000626

"You are what you wear" is actually true, according to new research led by the University of St Andrews. Led by researchers from the School of Psychology and Neuroscience, the new study reveals, for the first time, scientifically, that a person's eye color determines the color of clothing that suits them.

Published in the journal *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* the study reveals strong preferences that favored 'cool' blue hues in fabric match gray or [blue eyes](#) and 'warm' orange/red fabric hues to match dark brown eyes.

Lead researcher Professor David Perrett, from the School of Psychology and Neuroscience, said, "We invited 200 participants to provide their opinions on what [clothing](#) colors suited different faces. We were very surprised at how much agreement there was; participants chose similar clothing colors favoring reds and blues, however the colors chosen depended on who was wearing the garment.

"Everyone wants to look their best, but what should guide the choice and color of our clothing? Previously, our work indicated the importance of a person's complexion for clothing color choice, but we did not define the critical aspect of complexion. Those with a darker complexion tend to have darker pigmentation in their hair, their eyes, and their skin."

"Any one of these features could be the basis of clothing color choice. We thought that skin tone would be the critical feature as this is stressed in virtually all stylist advice. Surprisingly skin color turned out to be unimportant."

The team of researchers asked participants to undertake two experiments to test the relative importance of skin, eye, and [hair color](#) for clothing color choice. One experiment used images of White women photographed under standard lighting: half had light-colored skin, hair

and eyes, and half had darker skin, hair, and eyes. These images were also transformed so that the skin tone of the naturally fair faces was altered to give them a tan and the skin color of the naturally darker faces was lightened.

One hundred participants adjusted the color of clothing for the face images with and without transformed skin color. The participants chose from a whole spectrum of colors that could be adjusted in brightness or in saturation (vividness). Despite the marked changes in skin tone, color preferences for clothing stayed the same.

Reds were chosen for the originally dark faces even when their skin was lightened. Blues were chosen for the originally light faces even when their skin was darkened. The results pointing to the critical role of eye color or hair color which had not been altered.

The second study confirmed the importance of eyes in selecting clothing colors. This study compared a set of natural face images with light eyes and a set with dark eyes. Further images were constructed with the eyes transplanted between the two sets. One hundred new participants chose blues more frequently for those images with light eyes (natural or transplanted) and orange/reds for images with dark eyes (natural or transplanted).

Overall, the results revealed a dominant role of eye color with warmer, more saturated, and darker clothing colors being chosen for faces with darker eyes. Reciprocally cooler, less saturated, lighter clothing colors were chosen for faces with lighter eyes. Hair and skin color had little influence.

Clothing is important to [self-esteem](#) and as such helping people look their best is important. The global fashion industry is worth trillions of dollars each year, with color a major factor in most people's choice of

garments. There is extensive stylist advice on what colors to wear. The advice is based according to personal categories that depend on skin, hair, and eye color but categories are not defined scientifically, advice is not based on evidence and is inconsistent across different stylists.

Furthermore, the allocation of people to categories is based mainly on skin tone.

Professor Perrett added, "Our findings indicate that the emphasis on [skin color](#) for personal clothing color choice is misplaced. Skin tone may be important at a distance, such as for modeling on a catwalk, but for intimate encounters, such as lunch or an in-person interview, it's the eyes that matter."

There has been very little scientific evaluation of the aesthetics of clothing color. The research team measured [skin tone](#) and eye color objectively and showed that for White women, light-colored eyes were consistently matched to different colors compared to dark eyes.

Future studies will attempt to introduce more realism in the garment depiction and will explore color choice for men and women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

**More information:** David I. Perrett, Eye color is more important than skin color for clothing color aesthetics., *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/aca0000626](https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000626)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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