

# **Bleach my skin white: is skin bleaching really as common as tanning?**

14 September 2005 Deborah Gabriel

## **A personal journey**

The promotional literature for Bleach My Skin White is every bit as sensational as one would expect for prime time television. It reads:

**"Skin...you can tattoo it, nip it, tuck it, pierce it...now you can bleach it. This authored documentary explores a trend that could become as popular as tanning."**

Therefore does this mean that Bleach My Skin White is just an over-simplification of a complex issue that merely scratches the surface?

Not so, according to its director Dami Akinnusi, who spoke exclusively to Black Britain about the making of the documentary. She said:

**"The film is definitely from the perspective of a black woman"**, but admitted that it is geared towards a mainstream audience:

**"It aims to inform people who don't know that black and Asian people bleach their skin. It's there for everybody to digest."**

Confiding in Black Britain of her own experience of skin bleaching when she was a teenager, Ms Akinnusi described making the documentary as **"my own personal journey"**, saying it had always been on her mind since then.

She told Black Britain that in the past: **"I was branded too dark by people that I met at the time [and] contemplated was I too dark to be successful? Too dark to be pretty? All of these different things."**

Ms Akinnusi said that she feels different about the colour of her skin now that she is in her twenties:

**"It took me a while to understand and realise that actually to be me is a great thing and to be dark-skinned is a beautiful thing. I'm really blessed."**

However, having been through the experience herself, Ms Akinnusi told Black Britain that she understands the pressures that individuals go through in trying to meet what they see as the perceived concept of beauty:

**"The ideal basically doesn't look like us, you know it doesn't look like black people."**

## **Why do Asian people bleach their skin?**

Taking as a subject matter a practice that is widespread within the African Caribbean community, some may be surprised at the decision to feature an Asian woman as the central character in the programme.

Ms Akinnusi explained that in making the documentary her objective was not only to make people aware that skin bleaching exists, but also to show that it doesn't just happen within the black community:

**"The reason for this is to say that it's not just happening to us, it's happening to Asian people as well. Why is that?"**

**Asian people are of a lighter complexion so what is the reason for bleaching their skin?"**

Another important factor was that although her research showed that skin bleaching is very prevalent within the African and Caribbean communities:

**"The subject is still taboo. It's not the sort of thing that someone would want to come on camera and admit to doing."**

As well as highlighting the damage caused by skin bleaching the programme also features a psychiatrist, sociologist and dermatologist who seek to answer the question **"why is there still a negative attitude towards darker skin in the 21st century."**

Counsellor and psychotherapist Vernon De Maynard told Black Britain that in predominantly white societies **"where Caucasian physical features and culture are valued more"** than physical features of other races:

**"Black and other ethnic minorities begin to dislike the very skin they were born in and choose to do whatever is necessary to reduce their effect."**

Referring to the theories of sociologists Dupont, Joshua and Rose, Mr De Maynard said that low self esteem and self-loathing in terms of one's skin colour can occur:

**"In black households where children are subjected to the devaluation of their own skin colour as expressed by family and friends and people the child meets during the course of their everyday life."**

Presenting the concept of skin bleaching to a mainstream audience was a challenge that had to be overcome.

Ms Akinnusi told Black Britain that she **"sat down for many hours and many nights"** contemplating how best to structure the documentary taking on board her responsibilities as a director producing a programme for primetime television:

**"It's essential for me as a woman of colour to maintain my integrity, so I fought for the things that I really felt should be in the documentary and hopefully I helped to break down some of the boundaries."**

Bleach My Skin White  
Thursday 15 September  
7.30pm ITV

Read the feature on Monday:

There will be an in-depth feature on skin bleaching, black identity and beauty on Black Britain next Monday 19 September:

Love the skin you're in? Is it possible to be black and beautiful in a white society?

It will feature interviews with Dr Lez Henry and Dr Dele Olajide, both of whom appear in the documentary: Bleach My Skin White along with other contributors.

PRINTED WITH KIND PERMISSION AT: [www.iamcolourful.com](http://www.iamcolourful.com)