The Changing Face Of Beauty: 2004 to 2024
Dove is passionate that beauty should be a source of confidence for women - not anxiety.

In 2004, our Campaign for Real Beauty turned the industry on its head and challenged the status quo by celebrating real women. We ignited a global conversation about beauty by revealing that only 2% of women worldwide were comfortable describing themselves as ‘beautiful’.

Today, we remain just as committed to making a difference in how young girls and women feel about their bodies, which is why we continue to campaign for a broader representation of beauty in society.

In 2013, research showed that while there was a slight improvement in the number of women who would call themselves beautiful globally (4% from 2%), in the UK this figure was only 1%. For us, this underlines the importance of championing real beauty and helping women to realise their own personal beauty and unlock their full potential.

This report examines how women’s relationship with their beauty has changed since 2004, what beauty means to us today, and our predictions of how our perceptions of beauty may evolve in 10 years’ time. It also looks at the wider cultural and social context for how beauty is defined, while drawing on the views and expertise of a variety of inspiring women from many different backgrounds – from psychology, to modelling, to journalism, to one of the women from the first Dove ‘real women’ campaign.

It is a fascinating read that shows just how complex our relationship with our bodies is, as well as highlighting the factors that play a role in our own relationship with the mirror.

We’re proud to have been a pioneer in helping to forge the path for the future of beauty by creating a broader, more inclusive definition of beauty. We hope that the next 10 years will see a more positive and expressive society that is less judgemental and more accepting of others and our unique differences that make us beautiful as individuals. It is only then that we will start to realise our ambition of ensuring that beauty is a source of confidence rather than anxiety.

Lucy Attley, Dove UK Brand Director

Key summary

The evolution of beauty: 2004 to 2014

- The majority of British women are now more accepting of diverse representations of beauty across different body shapes, ages, ethnicities and sexuality
- While celebrities, television stars and models still have a significant impact on our definition of beauty, everyday women have become more influential
- A beauty paradox has arisen. While we are now more accepting of the diverse beauty around us, we have become less accepting of our own beauty

Four trends which have shaped the evolution of beauty

- Born This Way: A more diverse range of beauty role models is taking centre stage as we celebrate what makes us unique
- ‘Pick and Mix’ Creativity: Access to an eclectic range of beauty influences and creative tools has made style and beauty more experimental
- Beyond Skin Deep: There is a movement away from superficial glamour to a multi-dimensional idea of beauty
- Life On Display: Social media is making us more critical of our own beauty

The future of beauty in 2024: our predictions

- Beauty Tribes: New beauty tribes will emerge and beauty ideals will be more diverse and democratic
- Expressive Beauty: New technologies inspire a wave of consumer-driven creativity and our definition of beauty becomes more expressive
- Visible Values: Substance and values will increase in importance, creating a movement to visualise ‘inner beauty’
- Unedited Me: As people agonise over their ‘virtual’ beauty, a social media backlash will trigger a return to unedited images
Data highlights

We don't think we're beautiful

69%

of UK women wouldn't describe themselves as beautiful

41%

of UK women are unhappy with their body weight and shape, compared to 36% in 2004

... and we want to change our appearance

- 1 in 5 UK women (23%) have considered cosmetic surgery, and 28% may consider it in the future
- 60% of 18 to 29-year-old UK women have considered or may consider cosmetic surgery in the future
- 42% of UK women would consider cosmetic surgery to improve self-esteem, against only 20% to look younger or more attractive

The pressure to be beautiful comes from...

- within (38%)
- media & society (21%)
- friends, family and partners (6%)
- don't feel any pressure (33%)
- workplace (2%)

We've become more accepting of diversity

The percentage of UK women who feel that we are more accepting of:

- Women of different shapes: 49%
- Women with disabilities: 53%
- Women of different ages: 56%
- Women of different ethnicities: 62%

... but there is still work to be done

- 2 in 5 UK women feel that media and advertising set unrealistic standards of beauty that most women can’t achieve
- More than two-thirds of UK women would prefer to see more women of different weights and shapes (77%), different ages (69%) and without digital enhancement (63%) in the media

Everyday women have more influence on beauty than models and celebrities:

- Friends (47%), everyday women (48%) and mothers (40%) have more influence on the definition of beauty than celebrities (37%), models (36%) and advertising (36%)
- 1 in 5 UK women (21%) feel that ‘everyday women’ are the most influential role models when defining their idea of beauty
- 1 in 3 (35%) UK women believe everyday women have more influence on beauty today than in 2004

Social media is making us more self-conscious

- say social media has made them more self-conscious about their appearance
- feel pressured to present the best possible version of themselves online
- say receiving comments and likes on pictures they post online boosts their confidence

Half of British women under 40

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Beauty in 2004 was determined by the few

While broadband and social media were on the horizon, our media landscape was dominated by TV, newspapers and magazines.

Beauty revolved around a ‘be this way’ attitude. We strived to emulate celebrities like Kate Moss and Sienna Miller, who wielded enormous influence over our beauty ideals.

From Boho-chic to early noughties bling, we enthusiastically followed the latest celebrity-set trends while starlets like Paris Hilton popularised ‘surface gloss’.

“It was a time when we were ready to be honest. The Dove campaign was absolutely what women needed to boost that movement.”

Stella Page, model from Dove’s 2004 Campaign for Real Beauty

But things were changing

While the desire for more diversity and healthier beauty ideals was growing amongst everyday women, beauty ideals were often restrictive and conformist. Brazilian waxes and Spanx set a new, super high-maintenance standard for personal grooming and fashion, while size zero models drew attention to a lack of healthy role models.

Reality TV, talent shows, and the rise of blogging pushed real women further into the limelight and the first signs of the expressive, playful and bold attitude that would dictate the beauty trends of the coming decade were starting to emerge.

“Celebrity gossip mags were largely to blame for the bullying culture around women’s bodies.”

Josy Spooner, Special Bookings agent, Models 1

BEAUTY SNAPSHOT 2004

Beauty icon: Kate Moss

Most wanted: A washboard stomach to show off in low-slung jeans

Trends set by celebrities

Beauty must-haves:
• Blonde, ‘beachy’ highlights
• Sienna Miller’s ‘Boho glow’
• Lipgloss

The average UK woman is a size 14

Most wanted: A washboard stomach to show off in low-slung jeans

CULTURAL SNAPSHOT 2004

Elle Woman Of The Year:
Nicole Kidman

X Factor launches

Word of the year: ‘blog’

Last episode of Friends watched by 8.6 million in UK

Facebook launches

Bling culture

Heat magazine sells half a million copies a week
Beauty in 2014

Multidimensional beauty is on the rise

2014 has seen a move towards a more inclusive and multi-dimensional idea of beauty. Oscar-winning Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong’o gave a moving speech on the importance of claiming your own beauty even when the world refuses to recognise it. “I realised that beauty was not a thing that I could acquire or consume,” she said. “It was something that I just had to be.”

Visible virtue is key

Today, we look for beauty that represents the full spectrum of our unique identities, and captures our inner qualities. The trend for ‘no make-up selfies’ taps into our desire to marry appearance with values.

We are experimenting more

When it comes to our appearance, niche is the new normal. Looks that once appeared radical - brightly coloured hair, visible tattoos and facial piercings - now are viewed as mainstream. A new experimental spirit runs through beauty.

Social media is making us more self-conscious

While our beauty ideals might be broadening, our relationship with our own appearance is more intense than ever. ‘Selfie’ was the OED’s word of the year, and our digital self-portraits range from the digitally manipulated to the intentionally ridiculous as we consider the best way to present ourselves online.

“Beauty has become democratised - it’s no longer just the remit of celebrities.”

Susie Orbach, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic

“Beauty is broader now. People are influenced by a wider set of images and ideals, and are less frightened to admire something different.”

Lucy Mangan, columnist and features writer

BEAUTY SNAPSHOT 2014

Beauty icon: Cara Delevigne

Social media sets trends

#NoMakeUpSelfies fill our newsfeeds

Beauty must-have:
• Bold hair colours
• Nail art

Most wanted:
• A curvaceous bottom like Kim Kardashian
• Photo-perfect, ‘pore-free’ skin

The average UK woman is a size 16

CULTURAL SNAPSHOT 2014

Elle Woman of the Year: Katy Perry

Word of the year: ‘selfie’

24m Britons log on to Facebook each day

UK beauty blogger Zoe “Zeolla” Sugg has 4.6 million YouTube subscribers

Heat magazine sales have halved since 2004

Lena Dunham in Girls ignites natural beauty debates

Ellen’s Oscars selfie most retweeted tweet of all time
How is our definition of beauty changing?

Real beauty: the rise of everyday women

Everyday women are becoming more influential:

- One in three (35%) believe everyday women have a greater influence on beauty today than 10 years ago
- Friends (29%) have more influence on beauty than models (24%)

Media and advertising still set an unrealistic standard, but it’s improving:

- Two thirds of UK women believe that media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that women can’t ever achieve - down from 74% 10 years ago
- Half of UK women (53%) believe the attributes of female beauty are very narrowly defined, down from 59% in 2004

Personality attributes still play a greater role in defining beauty:

- Four in five women say inner beauty attributes such as self-confidence (86%), happiness (82%), kindness (81%) and humour (77%), are the most important factors in making a woman beautiful
- Two thirds of women (66%) believe intelligence and wisdom make a woman beautiful, up from 59% in 2004

Top attributes women value include:

- Healthy skin (83%, up from 56% in 2004)
- Body weight and shape (71%, up from 47% in 2004)
- Great hair and make-up (60%, up from 41% in 2004)
- Facial appearance (66%, up from 50% in 2004)

“We beauty is more than what's on the surface. It's more than a face and a body. Beauty radiates from confidence or a sense of individuality. It's how we embrace every element of our lives and communicate that to others.”

Gemma Cairney, BBC Radio 1 DJ, TV presenter and former fashion stylist

The beauty paradox: accepting others, but not ourselves

We have become more accepting of diversity over the past 10 years

Percentage of women who believe our society is more or less accepting of these diversity traits:

- Women of different shapes (49% versus 31% less accepting)
- Women of different ages (56% versus 22% less accepting)
- Women with disabilities (53% versus 17% less accepting)
- Women of different ethnicities (62% versus 14% less accepting)

But we are unhappier with our own beauty:

- A quarter of women (26%) are unsatisfied with their beauty, up from 21% in 2004
- One in five women (23%) have considered cosmetic surgery
- One in three women (38%) are unsatisfied with their body weight and shape
- We are our own worst critics: 38% of women say the pressure to be beautiful comes from within, rather than from celebrities or society

Social media is intensifying our relationship with beauty:

- Half of 18 to 29-year-old UK women (55%) say social media has made them more self-conscious about their appearance
- Over half of women aged under 40 say receiving likes on the pictures they post online improves their confidence (57% for 18-29, 58% for 30-39)

“Today’s ideal includes more ethnic diversity - people such as Lupita Nyong’o and Kim Kardashian are now who women aspire to look like.”

Natasha Devon, writer and body image educator, running the Body Gossip Education Programme
Four trends are evolving our definition of beauty

**Trend 1. Born This Way**
A more diverse range of beauty role models is taking centre stage as we celebrate what makes us unique.

**Calls for diversity have grown louder**
Against a narrow, celebrity-driven idea of beauty in 2004, criticism of the media’s lack of diverse and positive role models began to intensify. Dove’s campaign and commentators like Caitlin Moran drove a renewed interest in body politics.

**Beauty icons who sit outside of the old ideal of white, thin and conventional sprang up throughout the decade, from Gossip frontwoman Beth Ditto to androgynous model Andrej Pejic.**

**We claimed the right to be ourselves**
In 2014, Lena Dunham went naked on Girls and sparked a global conversation about what a woman’s body ‘should’ look like and whether it even matters.

Lady Gaga’s pop anthem (Born This Way) soundtracked the right to being yourself, without apology. And while being proud of who you are may be a reality for only a few, in 2014 it’s the aspiration of most, and over the coming decade we expect to see it take centre stage.

“Someone who is comfortable in their own skin is beautiful - you can’t fake that.”

Natasha Devon, writer and body image educator, running the Body Gossip Education Programme.

**Trend 2. ‘Pick and Mix’ Creativity**
Access to an eclectic range of influences and creative tools has made beauty more experimental.

**We’re more creative than ever**
Technology has revolutionised our beauty inspiration and put creative tools in the hands of everyday women.

Beauty video bloggers offer a world of tutorials and tips directly to our bedrooms. Scrapbooking sites like Pinterest and photo-sharing apps like Snapchat have made eclecticism and experimentation second nature, and seen mainstream beauty shift from conformist to creative.

**Beauty experimentation is fun and social**
DIY beauty has enjoyed a renaissance. From dip-dyes to nail art to contouring, transformative tricks once left to professionals can now be tried out by everyone.

Social media opened up the opportunity to share our creativity with our peers – a new hair colour becomes a way of communicating with our network, and receiving a positive, supportive response.

“The media promote youthfulness and perfection as the ideal, when in reality, beauty comes from uniqueness.”

Josy Spooner, Special Bookings agent, Models 1

**Trend 3. Beyond Skin Deep**
From a background of superficial glamour, a more multidimensional idea of beauty has emerged.

**We’re over bling culture**
Celebrity in 2004 was focussed on a glitzy, paparazzi-driven idea of surface glamour. As economic uncertainty encouraged a reassessment of values, a multi-dimensional ideal of beauty has emerged - with icons to match.

**We’re looking for inner beauty**
Surface remains important, however, substance is quickly catching up and has taken on a co-starring role. Cara Delevingne and Jennifer Lawrence are cherished as much for their humour as they are admired for their model looks. Jessica Ennis’ Olympic success made her an icon of strength, achievement and beauty.

And with advances in technology making it easier than ever to make our values visible, our inner life and outer appearance are set to move ever closer together.

“Models today aren’t just clothes horses, they’re personalities. Women are seeing celebrity models as more approachable than traditional catwalk models.”

Josy Spooner, Special Bookings agent, Models 1

**Trend 4. Life On Display**
Social media has heightened our relationship with our own beauty

**We are the stars of our own media**
In 2014, we are more visible than ever. More than 65% of the UK public own smartphones, and 31 million are Facebook users. Where once we consumed media, now we are media. And while we may be looking afresh at the importance of substance, we are also feeling more self-conscious about our physical appearance.

**The pressure to be perfect is growing**
The mixing of celebrity content with our own on social media is shifting our perception of just how perfect ‘real’ can be, and driving an upsurge in self-editing.

With young women who’ve never known life offline coming of age, and smartphone ownership set to surpass 90% by 2017, ‘life on display’ will become even more constant, triggering a new search for creative ways to release the pressure.

“We’re in the era of the smartphone, where people feel the need to document their night out and show how attractive they are.”

Natasha Devon, writer and body image educator, running the Body Gossip Education Programme

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**Key Data**
More than two thirds of UK women would like to see more women of different weights and shapes (77%), and ages (69%) in the media.

**2004** | **2014**
---|---
What Not To Wear | How To Be a Woman
Kate Moss | Lena Dunham
Lads’ mags | No More Page 3

**Manicures**

**Make-up tips**

| 2004 | 2014 |
---|---|
Pink dip-dye | Beauty tutorials

**Key Data**
Half of 18 to 29-year-olds say ‘creativity’ is an important aspect in making a woman beautiful.

**2004** | **2014**
---|---
Paris Hilton | Cara Delevingne
Celebrity perfumes | No make-up selfies
Lipgloss | Healthy glow

**Key Data**
Nearly half (44%) of UK women say they feel pressured to present the best possible version of themselves online.

| 2004 | 2014 |
---|---|
Private by default | Public by default
1 megapixel camera | 50 megapixel camera
Beyoncé’s BeyHive |
How will beauty evolve in the future?

A focus on self-acceptance

As the world becomes more accepting of diversity, social media and mainstream media will collaborate on more inclusive beauty ideals, however, a paradox will remain where we struggle to accept our own beauty.

Beauty becomes something we ‘do’

Aesthetics will remain important, but personality and health will contribute to a more holistic vision of beauty. Beauty will become something you ‘do’ as much as it is the way you look, making it more accessible.

Meanwhile, new technologies and a faster flow of ideas and information will unleash personal creativity, allowing unique expressions in beauty to flourish.

Key data

UK women believe the future of beauty will be more about personality than looks

Characteristics defining the future of beauty:
- Confidence 57%
- Happiness 51%
- Personality 50%
- Attractiveness and aesthetics 41%

Social media and everyday women will have a bigger influence on beauty than models and magazines

What will have a bigger influence on the future of beauty:
- Social media 46%
- Everyday women 45%
- Fashion and style 39%
- Celebrities 33%
- Entertainment 32%
- Professional models 26%
- Newspapers and magazines 25%

“Social media has made everything more accessible. Beauty bloggers are especially powerful today, as people feel like they can trust them.”

Josy Spooner, Special Bookings agent, Models 1

“We’re moving away from achieving a set idea of perfection and towards bringing out the best in yourself. There will be more freedom to be you, instead of going nuts to achieve an impossible goal.”

Daphne Selfe, 84-year-old model

“People have so many references to choose from today, it is becoming more difficult to define beauty.”

Lucy Mangan, columnist and features writer
How might beauty look in 2024?

**Beauty Tribes**

New beauty tribes emerge, fragmenting the dominant single beauty ideal into more diverse, democratic representations.

Digital networks allow new tribes to form around different interpretations of beauty. Everyone can find a tribe that celebrates their beauty ideals. Tribes offer ‘on-demand’ support, advice and reassurance to members.

As these tribes grow in confidence, everyday people are empowered to reject dominant beauty ideals.

Beauty ideals are influenced by a collage of tribal definitions, and the dominant beauty aesthetic becomes one of fusion. Those able to transcend beauty boundaries (between race, body sizes, age, gender, cultures, and interests) become icons of a new, more inclusive beauty ideal.

**Expressive Identities**

New technologies inspire a wave of consumer-driven creativity and our definition of beauty becomes more expressive.

Empowered by choice, a culture of experimentation emerges and we adopt a remix approach to aesthetics. Bedrooms become digital beauty hubs; playful spaces to learn and experiment with new styles and techniques.

Visualisation technologies enable people to try out new looks and get feedback, and 3D printers mean we can customise our own makeup. Our look is limited only by our imagination.

Creativity becomes central to our definition of beauty, as people seek to express their unique ‘beauty personality’. Digital beauty consultants analyse personal data - from skin tone to favourite colours - and create personalised beauty palettes for self-expression.

**Visible Values**

Substance and values increase in importance, causing a new aesthetic movement to visualise ‘inner beauty’.

Personality becomes a prerequisite to beauty, as models known only for their good looks become rarer.

Treatments designed to encourage self-development become popular, and wellness classes will incorporate confidence-building and treat our beauty from within.

Beauty becomes something internally validated and then radiated outwards, rather than externally validated and radiated inwards. Personality and health (emotional, physical and spiritual) become central to definitions of beauty, sparking an aesthetic revolution focused on visualising inner virtues - like confidence and kindness - on the outside. Beauty becomes as much about what we ‘do’ and how we ‘feel’ as what we look like.

**Unedited Me**

As people agonise over their ‘virtual’ beauty, a social media backlash triggers the return to unedited self image.

The intensifying demands of social media create a culture of self-editing. Airbrushing tools and beautifying apps promise perfect beauty online. Home videos start to look like Hollywood films, and beauty brands develop ‘on camera’ beauty ranges.

Our online lives begin to shape our offline lives. Everyday decisions are made according to how they make us look online.

As airbrushing becomes a tool for the masses, we enter an age of filtered reality. Images of ‘real beauty’ become rarer. A backlash begins. Trendsetters start showing their unfiltered lives and not de-tagging becomes a status symbol. #NoFilter becomes a dominant aesthetic, as people seek to reclaim reality, and loosen up the collective pressures of life on display.
How would you like to see beauty evolve?

The next decade will determine the future of beauty for the next generation of young women. While women’s sense of beauty in others expands and diversifies, the beauty paradox persists; women remain their own worst critics. Addressing the mounting pressures of beauty will be the difference between a future where beauty is a stressor and one where it is liberating, powerful and celebratory.

Hopes for the future of beauty

“I feel that we’re on the cusp of a revolution and it’s going to take strong leadership to provide an umbrella for women to come together and feel united.”

Stella Page, model from Dove’s 2004 Campaign for Real Beauty

“There is so much more to natural beauty than celebrating women who are size 14. We need to build on the foundations of where we’ve come to encourage even more diversity.”

Natasha Devon, writer and body image educator, running the Body Gossip Education Programme

“If we want a nation of sustainable bodies, we need a positive movement.”

Susie Orbach, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic

“We’ll need to learn to appreciate our own beauty.”

Josy Spooner, Special Bookings agent, Models 1

“I hope that as our population ages, we’ll see older women being better catered to, and that previously invisible groups will become visible.”

Lucy Mangan, columnist and features writer

“You don’t have to be physically beautiful; confidence is what makes someone beautiful – and good posture helps as well.”

Daphne Selfe, 84-year-old model

“Until women feel liberated to be ourselves, we need to continue having conversations that celebrate diversity.”

Gemma Cairney, BBC Radio 1 DJ, TV presenter and former fashion stylist

Methodology

This report was researched and written by Canvas8, a behavioural insights and trends consultancy based in London, in collaboration with GolinHarris:

• Canvas8 conducted a survey of a representative sample of 1,000 women in the UK aged 18-65
• Cultural analysis of the decade 2004-2014 was then undertaken, mapping shifts throughout media, beauty, identity, technology, research, current affairs and culture to identify the key trends influencing the relationship between women and beauty
• Canvas8 interviewed a panel of leading social commentators and social beauty experts
• The existing Canvas8 library of cultural and behavioural trends was used to inform background analysis within the report, and to extrapolate future trends

About Canvas8

Canvas8 is a leading UK behavioural trends and insights practice.

Being smart relies on knowledge. Whether anticipating, innovating, or communicating, Canvas8 helps its members apply a better understanding of people to their business challenges. Connecting innovators with those who live and breathe their specialism, Canvas8 overlays new thinking with analytical data and original case studies from around the world and bottle it in one place: www.canvas8.com.

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