



# Real Beauty in a Superficial World

What new research reveals about women's perceptions of beauty. If real beauty lies within, why can't women see it?

By BRUNO GRALPOIS

The world has been tormented by the darkest sides of humanity in the past few months, all the way to the streets of Paris where "Je Suis Charlie" signs proclaim support for freedom of speech. But can we really be free when generations of women are still victims of record-low levels of self-esteem and confidence? Continuously solicited by a multi-billion-dollar beauty industry that profits from women's insecurities, some simple yet powerful questions emerge: What is beauty, anyway? Have we lost track of what "real beauty" means? And how did we get here?

## Wondering why you don't always feel good about how you look?

It's Monday morning; the alarm clock buzzes. You jump out of bed, grab a cup of coffee, and search for the right outfit before going through the usual makeup ritual. You look in the mirror. You don't quite feel good about yourself, and you wonder why. How can you improve your appearance: Lose weight? Buy a new outfit? New makeup or hair color? Whiten your teeth?

It's no coincidence that, perhaps for as long as you can remember, you've been exposed to countless images of supermodels with air-brushed skin and Photoshopped curves. You see them everywhere: on billboards during your work commute, in magazines at the doctor's office, and on TV.

According to a 2015 survey by CivicScience, the leading intelligent polling and real-time insights platform, an overwhelming number of respondents—67%—think that digitally enhanced photos of celebrities cause an unrealistic self-image and low self-esteem among individuals. This number's even higher among women 24 and under, with 86% linking images with insecurities. Consciously or not, you compare yourself to unattainable standards of physical beauty, and that affects the way you feel today.

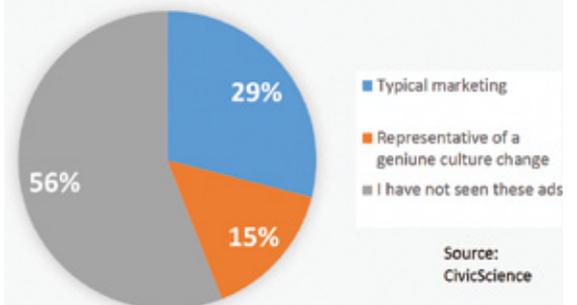
## Have we reached the tipping point on real cultural change?

In recent commercials by world-class brands like Dove and Under Armour, images of girls and women feature powerful role models, emphasizing internal qualities that make them beautiful. These messages place less emphasis on physical appearance, reminding us that real beauty is achieved by combining a healthy body, strong mind, confident heart and authentic image. In Dove's 2015 "Curly Hair" campaign, a group of young girls (5-11 years old) who dislike their naturally curly hair learn to accept and love their looks—curly hair and all—and embrace true beauty. In this tear-jerking commercial, the girls' families and friends all make their hair curly and sing "we all love our hair," inviting the girls to love the hair they were born with.

In the equally touching "I will what I want" ad, Under Armour introduces Misty Copeland, a ballerina who overcame repeated warnings that she lacked the "right" body for ballet—and

went on to become a soloist for the prestigious American Ballet Theater. The brand declares, "It's a reminder that you don't need permission, advice or affirmation when you have WILL. It's a celebration of who you are. As an athlete. As a woman. As everything in between and beyond."

Do you think that recent ads by Dove depicting girls and women as powerful figures are:

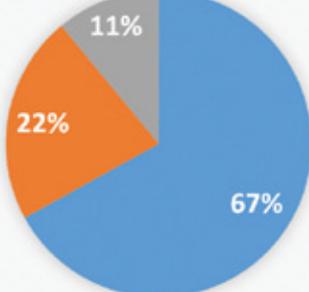


The extensive social media buzz around these commercials demonstrates their resonance among women of all ages. Online posts share how heartbreaking and emotional these messages feel, and how women relate to them in very personal ways. But for too many women, the Dove and Under Armour ads don't truly reflect how society behaves. In other words, we don't walk the talk yet. We may promote other forms of beauty, but the reality of everyday life seems to drag us back to older, narrower beauty standards. Twice as many women saw merely "typical marketing" in the recent Dove ads as women who perceived the ads to represent a genuine cultural change.

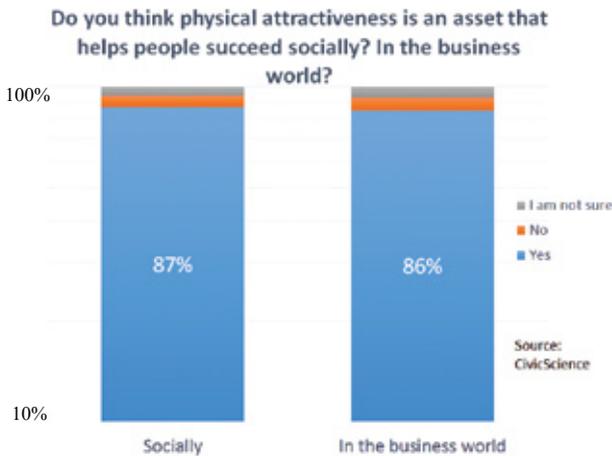
## Can we afford to ignore how we look to others?

Is physical attractiveness still seen as a major factor in achieving fame and fortune? Just pick up a copy of People magazine for a reminder

Do you think digitally enhanced photos of celebrities cause people to have an unrealistic self-image and low self-esteem?



that our culture is still obsessed with physical beauty. In another CivicScience study, women of all ages were asked whether physical beauty helps people succeed socially or in the business world.



The results are astounding: over 86% agreed that, no matter how we feel about it, physical attractiveness is a powerful asset in our social and business worlds. We must still leverage all our assets—including how we look—to accomplish our personal and professional goals.

There is a glimmer of hope, though: 15% of young women don't see attractiveness as a factor in business success. Although it's a small number, it's encouraging to see a new generation questioning the status quo.

**Beauty may not be in the eye of the beholder after all**

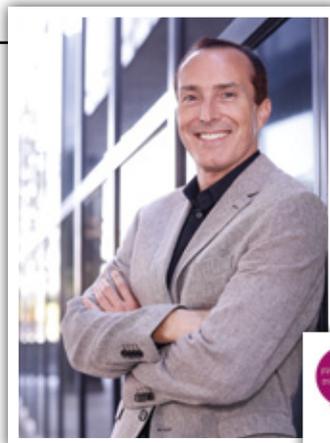
It's time to do something about "the beauty problem." Unlike other forms of social injustice, there's no march to join in order to cure this cultural disease. But there are ways to fight back. It's time to embrace a new definition of beauty, one that involves a more holistic form of self-expression: a careful balance of inner and outer beauty that satisfies our desire to feel good about how we present ourselves to the world but also valorizes non-physical characteristics—personality, values and abilities. You've heard the expression, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." American sociologist and therapist Martha Beck puts it differently: "the feeling of being beautiful exists solely in the mind of the beheld." This new definition of beauty focuses on that "mind of the beheld," and fosters self-fulfillment, self-esteem and confidence.

**Moving toward new standards of beauty**

It's time to challenge pre-conceived ideas and stereotypes of physical beauty. We're beautiful already: it's time to discover (or rediscover) that beauty. In doing so, we open up a new world of amazing opportunities. It's not only about finding true beauty in a world that appears to need it so badly—it's about finding a more satisfying means of self-expression. So that next time you look in the mirror, you can say to yourself, "Je suis magnifique," inside and out.

**BRUNO GRALPOIS**

A French native, Gralpois grew up near Paris, the world-renowned center of style, beauty and fashion. An adviser for two-time Academy Award® winning actress Emma Thompson, Gralpois' passion lies in protecting human rights and helping others realize their true potential. He's the author of the highly anticipated self-help book *Magnifique Inside & Out*. Gralpois spent over 20 years driving marketing and brand excellence for the world's most prestigious companies. A high-profile business executive, Gralpois held global leadership positions at Fortune 100 companies including Microsoft and Visa Inc. He received the prestigious Microsoft Marketing Excellence Award from former CEO Steve Ballmer for his exceptional leadership. His first book, *Agency Mania*, now available in multiple languages, is considered a reference book in the business community. Recognized as a leading authority by his industry peers, Gralpois is a French Foreign Trade Adviser for the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, a frequent speaker at industry events and is often quoted in the media.



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