



"I'm not the classic beauty, with features that measure up to the golden ratio, Phi equals 1.618. Far from it, to be honest. I'm slightly above average when I have the benefit of stylists, make-up artists and hair stylists working on me for productions. But really, in everyday life, I wouldn't turn heads. Ask my students!"

SHARON ISMAIL (left), 38, lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic and actress



"I'd say I'm quite decent looking. It's something I had to grow into. The older I get, the more I learn to embrace the imperfections. I think modern women are more confident in every way and they definitely embrace the way they look."

ASE WANG (left), 31, actress



"Yes, I do think I am beautiful. Being beautiful was a great blessing in my successful modelling career. In the modelling field, we had to be comfortable with our beauty as it was regarded as an asset to begin with."

HANIS HUSSEY (above), 48, expat shopping event organiser and former supermodel

# Bold and beautiful

While many Singaporean women would not call themselves beautiful, they are secure about their looks



Melissa Sim

A forensic artist draws women according to the description of themselves, then does another sketch based on descriptions given by a stranger. The result: The women seem to underestimate their own beauty, as the faces in the stranger-described sketches turn out more attractive.

This is the video by beauty brand Dove, which has gone viral, hitting more than 48 million views on YouTube since it was uploaded on April 14.

In Singapore, women seem to be reason-

ably comfortable with their looks, according to Dove's Internet survey of 300 women here.

Results show that 2 per cent of the women used the word beautiful to describe their looks, while another 21 per cent used positive words such as attractive, pretty and good-looking.

The survey did not include negative descriptive words for the women to pick.

Experts who spoke to SundayLife! weigh in on how concern over one's looks is in line with the different social expectations of each gender.

The general consensus is, women here may not consider themselves beautiful, but are still confident individuals. Associate professor of psychology Norman Li from the Singapore Management University School of Social Sciences, says: "It's not too alarming to me that only 2 per cent consider themselves beautiful."

He explains that "beautiful" is at the very top of the beauty spectrum, and that it's "hard to imagine a society of people where a significant number consider themselves beautiful."

Also "it's not like 50 per cent of the

people are considering themselves ugly", he says.

And even if a woman does not think she looks beautiful, she could "still feel very secure about herself", says Ms Pang Li Kin, president of the Association of Image Consultants International (Singapore Chapter).

In fact, the survey also found that 52 per cent of the 300 women surveyed said they were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their own beauty.

And a good 49 per cent also said they were "confident" or "somewhat confident" about their looks.

Ms Pang adds that even clients who seek professional help from image consultants "may not feel insecure about their looks as such, but rather, are ignorant about how to present themselves positively".

That said, there are women who are insecure about their looks and Assoc Prof Li says the insecurity is due to "social comparisons being made to countless attractive women, many of whom are viewed through print and electronic media".

Says Assistant professor of psychology Joyce Pang, from the Nanyang Technological University: "Exposure to media cultivates a kind of image of what is physically attractive."

She says models in advertisements and movie stars that are currently popular have features that become the "body ideal" for women. For example, they are slim, young and have big eyes.

Assoc Prof Li says people compete with one another in terms of physical attractiveness because "it is important for mating".

Research has shown that men value physical attractiveness in a mate and that does put some pressure on women, he says.

But with the TV and Internet, instead of competing against real people, Assoc Prof Li says women compete with "air-brushed people".

"Your mind thinks you are competing with these people and you will never quite look like that, no matter what you do," he says.

While women may be insecure about their looks, men are often less concerned about it. This is largely because women do not value looks as much as the ability to obtain resources in a mate.

"From an evolutionary perspective, a man's looks can be passed to the children, but without resources the children would not live," says Assoc Prof Li.

In terms of confidence about their looks, he says men are the opposite from women. "In fact, men think they are more attractive than others think they are."

So it is not surprising that at least two parody videos have surfaced, where men talk about their looks and the sketches come out looking like Brad Pitt and George Clooney. The videos have gained some traction on the Internet, with one reaching more than 2.4 million views since it was uploaded on April 17.

But Assoc Prof Li also points out that his gender too has insecurities.

"In the same way women are affected by comparisons of looks, men too are affected by comparisons to all the wealth and success they see in the big cities and in the media," he says.

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"I think beauty is very subjective and a yes or no answer may not suffice. A scale might be more appropriate, and if I were to use a perfect 10 as the ultimate standard of beauty, I think I'm a 6 - just above average. Simply because there may be areas of myself that I find lacking, which may not be visible to others. But I'm happy with what I've been blessed with, even if I'm not a perfect 10!"

DR JANICE LAM (above), 28, doctor



"Do I think I'm beautiful on the outside? Sometimes. When I dress up really nice and my hair happens to look decent, then I'd think I'm not too shabby. Another level I'd judge beauty on is through my character and personality. If I did something that brightened someone's day I think I'd feel beautiful on the inside. On the contrary, if I did something terrible, then I wouldn't feel like such a beautiful person."

SHELBY KOH (above), 18, teacher and national netballer



"I think I'm all right. I have pretty good make-up skills! I think we each have our own special kind of beauty and it comes from knowing, loving and celebrating who we are. I think that by and large, Singaporean women are a very confident bunch who understand that beauty is a holistic thing. Perhaps that's one of the perks of growing up in an academically driven society. You become very rational. Do women underestimate how pleasing they are aesthetically? Yes."

OON SHU AN (above), 27, Fly Entertainment artist



"I think I am above average and have my mixed parentage to thank for that. Having said that, like everyone else, I've my good days when I feel beautiful and then there are bad days when I feel like s\*\*t and that I should dig a hole and hibernate there."

MS DEBORAH DAYANI NANAYAKARA (above), 28, manager at Strategic Public Relations Group



"I think every woman is beautiful. To me, beauty is not only in appearance but also from within... I think I have a friendly approachable look and persona. People get along with me."

MRS JOSEPHINE NG (above), 44, a housewife

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