

SHAPE

shifting

From Mad Men curvy to waif thin, body shape trends come and go. But unlike your haircut or wardrobe, it's not quite so easy to change your natural silhouette when Brazilian butts are on trend.

Words: Angela Tufvesson

Whether you're an apple, pear or something in between, chances are your body shape has been both on trend and decidedly out of vogue at some time over the last 50 years. From Marilyn's curves to Kate Moss' skinny chic and Beyonce's bootyliciousness, the female silhouette has reinvented itself almost as many times as the clothes we choose to adorn it with. Think minis, leggings and shoulder pads.

Over the years, we've waxed and waned from fleshy to waisted to emaciated to uber fit and gaunt. Trouble is, chicken fillets and Spanx notwithstanding, changing your curves – or lack thereof – to cater to the whim of the latest fashion paradigm is near impossible.

So why, when we know too well that we are wonderfully unique and mostly set in shape, do we seem to strive to – and indeed believe that we can – override our body shape? Yes, women have been dieting for decades (which definitely doesn't mean you should) and a new wave of less invasive cosmetic surgery has apparently turned body parts into anatomical Play-Doh, but neither can downsize a thick frame or reprogram a body born to store more fat than muscle. So what's a girl to do to weather the storm of ever-changing body shape trends?

Back in the day

Once upon a time, women wore corsets and long undies and took a lot longer than your shower 'n' dash morning routine to get

ready for the day. In the 1900s, women swapped corsets for a high-waisted silhouette in the interests of greater movement – and for the first time, ladies could dress without the aid of a family member or maid.

During World War I, the lack of men around the home further drove the push for free-flowing clothing, and by the time the 1920s roared in, hemlines rose in line with the freedom of the times.

"I don't think it's any surprise that 1920s fashions were all about freedom of movement," says image consultant Donna Cameron from Body Map. "Most famously, hemlines rose somewhat and a really androgynous shape was in. It was all about being able to move. Anyone with hips and

a curvy butt was out and that really slim, flat, androgynous shape was in."

Fast forward to the post-war 1950s and a curvy female body shape was fashionable. Known as the 'new look', it epitomised femininity and signalled the return of women to the home. "It was a return to stereotypical gender roles and I don't think that's much



BACK THEN

YEARS LATER



of a coincidence either as men were returning or had returned from the Second World War and, again, women had taken on men's roles," says Cameron. "There was a big push to get women out of the workforce and back into the homes and to look feminine, entertain in the home and be glamorous."

In the 1960s, social upheaval spurred change like never before,

and again, fashion obliged with an egalitarian, androgynous shape. Hippies were in and the '50s housewife was out.

The 1970s too were casual and flowy, albeit with the sparkle of flares and platform shoes. By the time the 1980s rolled in, the fitness movement was taking off for the first time. Denim, shoulder pads and muscles were de rigueur.



NOW

"The 1980s supermodels were a lot bigger than models today," says Cameron. "A lot of women were trying to get into boardrooms, so boxy suits and masculine fashions were popular."

The skinny jean speaks

Rubber-neck around your local Westfield and there's no doubt skinny jeans are the duds du jour – for women and men alike – in a distinct nod to androgyny. (Please leave curves at the door, or tuck them beneath a top as

figure-hugging as a kimono.) So what's driving this shapeless moment?

According to Cameron, there's more to this desire to be skinny and wear skinny than the sex appeal of stretch denim.

"We're in an era where we like women to be skinny, but having said that, I think it's women that like women to be skinny. I think men prefer women to be more curvy. Women are very critical of other women.

"Perhaps skinny jeans signal that we can employ self-control

and not overeat or that we have enough money to go to gyms and buy healthy foods," she says.

Professor Marika Tiggemann, a body image expert from the School of Psychology at Flinders University, agrees that access to food and a perceived ability to employ self-control help to drive body shape trends. "In a very general global way, when food is scarce, people tend to value a plumper body. So a thinner frame tends to be valued when food is plentiful."

Given all the talk about an obesity epidemic and rising instances of chronic illness, it's no surprise skinny jeans fill your wardrobe and the only place you can find a pair of bootlegs is Vinnie's.

And there's no denying the influence of celebrity culture. "From Marilyn Monroe and her coveted hourglass figure to Kate Moss and the rise of gaunt, heroin chic, the celebrity of the moment plays a huge part in shaping the current trend in body shapes," says Darianne Donnelly, director of plus size modelling agency BGM Models.

"The direction fashion takes is inextricably linked with the current celebrity and the immediate environment – they all feed off each other to create an overarching body shape trend that young people aspire to."

A fine line

The line between idealisation and obsession is fine for many women. While we're all guilty of wishing our bodies away at one

"For example, for people who are overweight, there's a lot of stereotyping that goes with that, such as they're lazy and lacking in self-control," she says. "Conversely, we associate being thin with being in control, disciplined and morally superior. So it is something more fundamental in the way people make judgements than doing your hair and putting on make-up."

around you, encouraging you to focus on acceptance and health over trends."

Donnelly says lack of support from friends and family, an acrimonious experience related to appearance and poor role models can all make a person more susceptible to outside pressures and cause them to equate their value with a particular shape. "Unless you have the strength and determination to accept the skin you're in, you'll always be vulnerable to the ideal weight or look or shape," she says.

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time or another, some of us will happily laugh off unfashionable hips while others will pursue a new shape through diets, surgery or, at the very least, visual clothing tricks.

According to Tiggemann, many of us read significant meaning into body size and shape, which can trigger extreme behaviour.

For some of us, the pressure to fit in is simply too strong. "Sometimes the external or personal pressure to conform is too strong to be swayed by common sense," says Donnelly. "When you are continually faced with a particular ideal of beauty, it's very hard not to succumb unless you have a strong community

Zero comparison

Body shape trends may come and go faster than *American Idol* winners, but there's no escaping the fact that unless you resort to extreme measures like cosmetic surgery (see below), there's very little you can do to change what Mother Nature gave you. It sounds like something your mum would say, but the secret really is to love the skin you're in – or disguise it if you must.

In fact, research has found that the less we compare



CHANGING SHAPE

COSMETIC SURGEONS ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF CHANGING BODY SHAPES, SO WE CHATTED WITH **DR SARA MULLEN** AND **DR GAVIN CHAN** FROM THE VICTORIAN COSMETIC INSTITUTE ABOUT TRENDS, TUSHES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

What are the major drivers of body shape trends?

Dr Mullen: What's going on in Hollywood certainly influences what's on trend when it comes to desired body types. A good example is Kim Kardashian bringing the booty back. Ever since the media applauded her curves, Brazilian butt lifts have been very popular. With that said, we advocate proportion, not what's on trend per se. Universally, the hourglass is the most aesthetically

pleasing female shape, so we recommend balancing all enhancements so when unified, an hourglass form is achieved. For example, if you are pear shaped, larger breasts may be a better enhancement option as opposed to a larger rear.

Dr Chan: Today, we celebrate the hourglass figure like we did back in the 1950s and 1960s more than we did a decade ago. Shapely breasts

ourselves to media images and other women, the better our psychological health and body image. "If we could look at other people without doing that comparison of ourselves, we'd be better off psychologically," says Tiggemann. "You can do this by consciously not doing it. Another thing is to shift your dimensions in which you compare, so only compare yourself to others on things that you're good at rather than appearance."

Cameron says clever use of colour and shape can create the illusion of a slightly different shape. Think belts to create a defined waist, less skinny jeans for less skinny legs and necklines to suit your bust size.

Donnelly agrees: "Dress for your shape, find what flatters your figure and shift your focus to light exercise, a healthy diet and pursuing your passions. You are not defined by your shape, your look or what you wear, but by what you create for yourself in this life. So just get out there and start living!"

and buttocks have been made very popular with celebrities like Beyonce and television shows like *Mad Men*.

What are the most popular body shape procedures?

Dr Chan: Increased awareness around liposuction as a safe and effective method of reducing fat deposits from areas of the body that cannot be corrected with diet and exercise has made it increasingly popular over the years. A woman's breasts form some of the most important and attractive aesthetic lines of her body, which is why breast augmentation is still one of the most frequently

performed cosmetic procedures of all time. Fat transfers – using your own body fat to enhance other areas of the body – are becoming more and more common as a means of body and facial sculpting.

What are some of the ethical considerations of changing your body shape?

Dr Mullen: If the patient's aim in having the procedure is to feel better about themselves and increase their self-esteem, then I believe there are no ethical implications to having the procedure. When a patient's expectations are healthy and realistic, they gain more confidence and self-esteem from having their

procedure. This can only be a positive thing.

How do you counsel patients prior to a procedure?

Dr Mullen: First we have to ascertain whether the procedure the patient wants is right for them and whether their expectations are realistic. Once it is decided that the patient is a good candidate and that their expectations are reasonable, we take them through the procedure each step of the way and counsel them on what results to expect and the recovery process. Beauty is very individual; however, we always try to educate our patients on the benefits of natural-looking treatments.



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