

'The day I discovered I was beautiful'

After a childhood spent feeling like the ugly duckling, comedian Shazia Mirza, 31, went on a search for the definition of beauty. She never suspected she would find the answer in her own reflection

Photos: Thomas Skovsende

'AS I TOTTERED THROUGH THE VELVET ROPE AT A TOP LIVERPOOL CLUB, I suddenly knew how it felt to be a WAG. There was Alex Curran, dressed in a Miu Miu mini shift, and Bianca Gascoigne in a frock that left little to the imagination. Dressed to the nines and plastered in make-up, I looked like a glamorous meringue. Now I know how great it feels to have a whole room of people gawp and admire you as you swan in.

'Until recently, this would have been unthinkable. As a stand-up comedian, I've always performed in black trousers, black shirt and no make-up. I was convinced that no one would find me funny if I dressed up. Besides, years of discomfort with my appearance had taught me that beauty was something that happened to other people. 'At school, I looked like King Kong: facial hair, hairy arms, dark skin, bandy legs and crooked teeth. My best friends, Ruth and Ann, were the opposite – straight blonde hair (only on their head!), porcelain skin, blue eyes, perfect teeth. Anything at odds with that was second class. I became obsessed with comparing my face to Cindy Crawford's, of all people. I'd make lists of all the things I needed to look like her: big hair, pouty lips, mole. Clearly, it wasn't going to happen, so I found myself working harder to be the best at netball and singing instead. As for boys, they never even glanced at me, and that hurt.

'Then, when I was 21, I met Boy George at a party. He said, "You're beautiful, you have wonderful features; you look like Rossy de Palma." I'd never heard of her. At home I looked her up and saw pictures of a Spanish actress with a long face and nose and huge eyes. I felt it was the antithesis of conventional beauty and ▶



