

TZR

The Nose Job That Defies Western Ideals Of Beauty

Parizaad Khan Sethi | January 19, 2024



TZR/Stocksy

Twenty years ago, rhinoplasties looked very different from how they do today. For starters, most patients quite literally got a cookie-cutter nose job, no matter what they looked like. Dr. Steven Williams, M.D., a California-based board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon and president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, says every surgeon had a sterilizable plastic or rubber mold that showed the internal anatomy of a typical Caucasian nose. “As a surgeon, you were looking at this model as you were operating, and the goal was to make all the structures look exactly like it. That’s when you know you’ve done this perfect rhinoplasty,” he says.

If the patient happened to be Caucasian, that may have worked out for them. But that wasn’t the case for people of other races. “There was a period of time when a lot of ethnic patients underwent rhinoplasties and came out looking less natural, or with results that didn’t necessarily enhance the rest of their features,” says [Dr. Kimberly Lee, M.D.](#), a board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon based in California.

The nose also holds significant cultural and ethnic importance for many people. “It’s often seen as a key feature that connects them to their ancestry. Undergoing rhinoplasty in the past may have felt like you had to conform to mainstream beauty standards at the cost of losing these unique characteristics that tie them to their cultural roots,” Lee says. Model Bella Hadid famously confessed to regretting the rhinoplasty she got at 14, saying in an interview, “I wish I had kept the nose of my ancestors. I think I would have grown into it,” referring to her Palestinian father’s features.

In 2022, 37% more rhinoplasties were performed compared with 2019, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. These days, we even have a term dedicated to nose jobs for people of color: ethnic rhinoplasty. “Twenty years ago, an ethnic rhinoplasty meant you had an ethnic person in your office, and you had to figure out how to make their nose look non-ethnic. It’s such an antithesis to what we think of now,” says Williams. Today, an ethnic rhinoplasty is the shorthand, albeit reductive, used to suggest a nose job that’s tailored to fit the specific features of people of nonhomogeneous ethnic groups that are not Caucasian. “Techniques that are specific to ethnic rhinoplasty have been developed to address the unique anatomical characteristics of various ethnicities, allowing for more personalized and culturally sensitive approaches to rhinoplasty for individuals of all backgrounds,” says Lee.

While that is currently the surgical gold standard and the skill that patients of color are most looking for in their surgeons, it may be a contentious point of view. “The idea of recognizing multiple beauty ideals rather than one single beauty ideal based on a white norm represents a break from the past and does broaden what is considered beautiful for noses,” says Alka Menon, assistant professor of sociology at Yale University and the author of *Refashioning Race: How Global Cosmetic Surgery Crafts New Beauty Standards*. “However, by introducing multiple ideals based on racial categories, surgeons are breathing new life into the idea that race, which is a social and cultural idea, can and should be visible on the body,” she says.

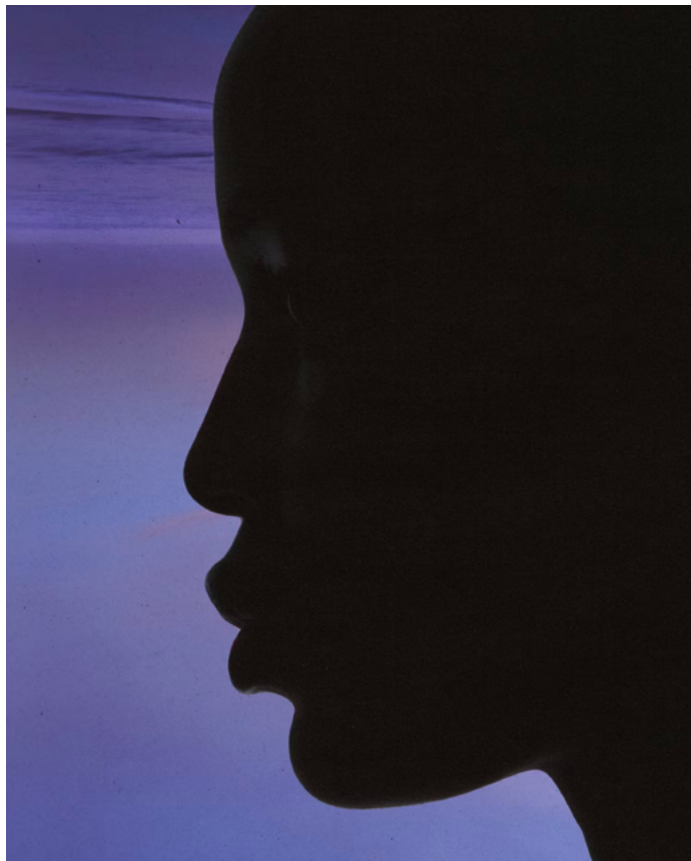
What’s In A Name?

Though the term ethnic rhinoplasty is popularly used (#ethnicrhinoplasty has 177 million TikTok views), and is commonly thought of as the politically correct way to refer to this surgery, many plastic surgeons themselves think it’s a throwback to a less enlightened time. “This idea of every non-European textbook nose being lumped into one thing called an ethnic rhinoplasty is actually quite narrow-minded,” says Dr. Dara Liotta, M.D., double board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon in New York City.

Even within one ethnic background noses can have wildly differing characteristics, and clumping noses into categories like Asian or Arabic make no sense for surgeons practicing the techniques. “Most people are mutts. You can have two related people with soft cartilage and thick skin, or stiff cartilage and soft, thin skin, and different surgical techniques are required for different cartilage and skin combinations,” says Liotta. And since everyone’s beauty ideals are not the same, what doctors try to achieve with each surgery is not homogenous either. “I’m not sure we’re doing anybody justice by calling that an ethnic rhinoplasty,” she says. “I think a better way to approach it is a rhinoplasty that maintains someone’s sense of self and ethnicity and encompasses their personal beauty ideals.”

Despite feeling this way, many surgeons freely use the term when writing for medical journals or in communicating with patients. In the interviews with surgeons that Menon conducted while researching her book, she found they were more ambivalent about ethnic rhinoplasties than they seemed in articles — even some of the same surgeons who had written articles that described, for instance, the “African-American nose.” “Some surgeons called ethnic rhinoplasties a marketing tool to signal that they were not going to give the same nose job to every patient who walked in the door,” says Menon. “They described the term as a way to set themselves apart in a competitive market and cater to new audiences.” After all, she says, cosmetic surgeons are businesspeople who have to drum up their own markets. This means that ideals for ethnic rhinoplasties, like other forms of cosmetic surgery, can be a moving target. “The goal is to offer people new aspirations of how to appear to entice further consumption.”

It’s worth examining if many of these rhinoplasties — though we all want to believe to the contrary — are succumbing to white beauty standards. “Most surgeons refuse to operate on ethnic patients to make them look white, but they do not necessarily object to making ethnic patients look ‘whiter’ than the average member of their ethnic group,” Menon writes. While it might not be a conscious thought in the minds of any of these players, “the task for the ‘ethnic’ cosmetic surgeon, then ... is to retain ethnic distinctiveness and enhance individual beauty without appearing to capitulate to the demands of normative whiteness,” writes philosopher Cressida J Heyes.



TZR/ Getty

Not Your Mother's Rhinoplasty

Apart from the fact that nose jobs for people of color now have a catchy, if debatable, moniker, the whole landscape of plastic surgery, and rhinoplasty in particular, has changed. Formerly, patients deferred to the surgeon, a godlike figure who doled out new noses, faces, and breasts formed by his hands and in his aesthetic judgment, without much consideration for the patient's wishes, needs, or preferences.

In 2024, the patient is in the driver's seat. They're more comfortable advocating for themselves, they've honed their eye and aesthetic judgment by consuming hours of content of people with similar features getting the surgical results they want, and as a result, they are able to parse what outcomes they will and won't be happy with and are able to communicate that to surgeons they've carefully chosen for their aesthetic that matches their own.

Surgeons, too, have gotten the memo, and are no longer force-fitting tiny button noses with a ski slope and an upturned tip on everyone. "Those days of following the mold instead of listening to the patient are really going away," says Williams. Liotta, in fact, doesn't operate on patients who can't articulate what they want or who aren't convinced by the digitized 3D photos and renderings that she generates for them. "It's not my nose; I'm not wearing it. I could think it's amazing, but if it's not what you want, I'd consider it a disaster," she says.

There's also been a significant improvement in surgical techniques, which have played a big role in how surgeons approach individual cases. Dr. Edward Kwak, M.D., a New York-based dual board-certified facial plastic surgeon and clinical assistant professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, says a significant shift has been in utilizing a patient's own cartilage. "In an Asian patient who's looking to build up their bridge, for example, in the past we used synthetic implants, which had severe limitations in terms of what can be done, and they were associated with complications in the long term. Utilizing [one's own] rib or ear cartilage has allowed surgeons to really customize the outcomes," he says.

A Revolution Led By Social Media

Social media is in large part to thank for patients coming into their own. "There can be some horrible things about social media in terms of people's self-image and unattainable physical characteristics, but one of the things it has done is it's allowed people to come together in community and reinforce each other; that's part of why people are saying 'I don't need this stereotypical nose; these are the things that I want,'" says Williams.

Social media was the factor that most affected the choices of three women we spoke to who had rhinoplasties. It affected why they wanted the surgery in the first place, as they often didn't like how they saw themselves on camera. It formed the very basis of their aesthetic judgment, as by viewing hundreds of nose jobs, they were able to zero in on what they wanted for themselves. It was how two of them found their surgeons. And it was the route with which they announced to the world that they had had their surgery, sharing their experiences like others before them. Their stories are below.

Alexis Yam, 24, Content Creator

I didn't have a problem with my nose growing up. But more recently, I realized I just didn't like my nose. I really wanted a nose bridge, because like most East Asian noses, it's rare to have a high nose bridge, and I also had a little hump, which I didn't like. I started thinking about a nose job in 2020 and sat on it for two years to make sure I really wanted it. In 2022, I made the decision to go to [South] Korea. I set up several consultations with plastic surgeons and decided that I would do it if I felt comfortable around the doctors and if their advice made sense.

I decided on [South] Korea because they're the best at doing East Asian noses. They know what will complement our eyes and face shape. I did want a higher nose bridge but I didn't want to do anything else to my nose because I wanted to keep my Asian features. I have really round nostrils, and I didn't want to change that because I know that the roundness of my nose is an Asian feature. I also didn't want to look like I changed my genetics and for my parents to feel offended. I had no insecurities about the Asian-ness of my nose; it was just the bridge that I wanted to fix. I liked that the doctors really didn't push anything onto me. They stuck to what I wanted. But they did advise me that to get a higher bridge, they would have to raise the tip of my nose, and I was fine with that.

I did a lot of research by watching YouTube videos and vlogs of people going to Korea for nose jobs. But my research on clinics was through online forums specifically for people to post their Asian plastic surgery experiences. It's more specific than, say, Reddit or other forums. These are mostly foreigners sharing about going to countries like Korea, Vietnam, or Thailand for plastic surgery. Doing research on surgeries in these countries and planning to travel there is a completely different experience from just researching a procedure in general that you're getting from a local surgeon in your city. America doesn't have the competitiveness of the plastic surgery clinics in [South] Korea — it's rare that you see people here choosing from 10 or 20 different plastic surgery clinics in one city, which are all so different with different experiences and results. So, you do have to do your research. You're dealing with doctors, clinics, and translators, and managing logistics like getting your hotel near the clinic, coordinating transportation after your surgery, etc.

I looked through this forum on Purse Blog a lot, reading every experience and also keeping in mind that it's not all trustworthy because there are some false reviews. You just have to keep reading and based on what I read, I picked some of the clinics I visited. I went through their websites and made sure I liked their before-and-afters. I also joined group chats on a social media platform called KakaoTalk through the Purse Blog forum posts. They connect you to people who have done plastic surgery in the past or are planning to do it and can share resources and experiences. I was immersed in the realm of plastic surgery forums and group chats for a few months. I ended up paying roughly \$6,000 for my surgery.

I think watching all these vlogs [or] TikToks and consuming all this content definitely opens up everybody's mind about plastic surgery because when I was a kid there was a stigma around it, and we thought only celebrities got it. It's become more normalized; there's more people doing it and posting about it. There's pros and cons to everything, of course. But it's definitely made it more widespread and accessible, they can easily search YouTube or TikTok and access this content, which is essentially free knowledge. Also, watching these vlogs of people with noses

similar to mine definitely did influence me. I would take screenshots to show my doctor the noses I did and didn't like. These videos really helped me see what I wanted and made me realize what I didn't want.

So many people have shared their experience that I wanted to as well. I did film videos during my recovery every single day, but I didn't know if I would be comfortable posting it. I'm OK with sharing that I got a nose job, but the actual pictures with my nose in a cast with blood and swollen eyes was something I had to think about before posting.

When I first saw my nose, I was pleasantly surprised. I was happy I had the nose bridge I wanted, but I did hope it wasn't the final result because the bridge was very swollen and drastic-looking. But thanks to all the videos I had watched, I knew that was what most people think when they take the cast off, and it's not the final result. Now, I really do love my nose; it was one of the best decisions I've made. I definitely feel more confident on a day-to-day basis.



TZR/ Stocksy

Annie Oliveira, 27, Brow Artist

I started noticing around the age of 10 or 11 that my face would look prettier according to conventional beauty standards if I had a smaller nose, which was much bigger than my eyes and lips. It was especially obvious back home in Brazil, where I lived until I was 11. Plastic surgery is

so common there; I told my family when I was very young that I wanted to get a nose job when I was older, and they didn't have a problem with it.

I knew I didn't want to look like someone else; I just wanted a better version of my own nose. I'm a proud Black woman, and I wanted my nose to still look like a Black person's nose. A nose can really change your face and take you from looking like yourself to a completely different person with a different background and roots. Nobody really thinks I got a nose job because it is so natural and still blends with my family features.

I started by researching ethnic nose jobs on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook; TikTok wasn't around then. If it wasn't for social media, I wouldn't even have known how to get started. When I saw people looking like me getting the results I wanted, it made it seem possible. Without that, I wouldn't have had the vision in my head; it would have just been a wishful thought. I researched for a long time on Instagram and Facebook groups, and I noticed girls going to Turkey, and I had a doctor in the Dominican Republic that I was considering.

I finally decided to get one at 22, after my older sister Julie had hers. She got a liquid rhinoplasty (fillers) before getting married and loved the way it looked so she went to Brazil for a nose job. I decided that if hers turned out great, I'd go to the same doctor. She found him on a Facebook group of Brazilian doctors specializing in rhinoplasties. He only does nose jobs, nothing else, and has a lot of experience with ethnic rhinoplasties.

It was just the push I needed because I already had the money; I had saved up my entire life for a nose job. They asked for pictures from several angles, and I had a call with his team before I flew to Belo Horizonte, where he is based. I met with him for a half-hour consultation the day before the surgery where he showed me mocked up pictures of what I would look like. The next day I checked into the hospital for the surgery, which was under general anesthesia, and lasted around five hours. I paid around \$3,300 USD for the nose job, not including flights and hotel costs.

The recovery wasn't bad at all; I just felt like I had a really bad cold and a burning sensation on the bridge of my nose and forehead because they added cartilage to the nose bridge. They took a piece of my own cartilage from behind my ear, and that recovery was harder than the nose itself. My nose was constantly runny for months afterward, and that part is annoying because you get a lot of mucus, just massive amounts, which is gross.

I almost cried when the cast first came off. I couldn't believe how beautiful my nose looked and how everything completely changed. My eyes and lips looked bigger and my face looked just like I always wanted. It was a dream come true.

I wish I had done it sooner. It changed my life. It's a confidence thing. It was one of my biggest insecurities. After it I just feel unstoppable.

Jouman Kathem, 27, Medical Student & Actress

When I started out as an influencer, every time I held up my phone to record a video or take a photo, I felt insecure. I felt there was something wrong with my face, but it was just my nose. I didn't want to fix anything else on my face except my nose, even though my teeth really need braces.

I used to accompany an influencer friend of mine for all her injectable appointments with Dr. Dara Liotta, a plastic surgeon in New York, and we became close friends. The first time I met her, I told her about my nose. She told me that she would help when I was ready to get it done.

I was so scared of getting a medical procedure, but I met a lot of her patients over time who were so happy with their results and assured me that it wasn't too painful. Liotta had taken pictures of my nose and assured me that she wouldn't make it smaller, just help it fit my face better.

My rhinoplasty finally happened very spontaneously — Liotta practices in Dubai as well, and in 2019, she was there at the same time as I was. And we decided to do it. It was actually very easy, and right after the surgery, I left the hospital and went out to eat with my sister. The day that the cast came off, I looked in the mirror and cried. My nose looked amazing and fit my face. It's very natural, and no one guesses I've had it done.

I'm of Iraqi heritage, and we're famous for having big noses. I was raised in the United States, so I didn't really care about wanting to look Iraqi; I wanted my face to look better. Even in Iraq, a lot of people get nose jobs, men more so than women. So my nose does not define where I am from or connect me to my home country. That's inside of me, in my blood and my soul. It's nothing on my face; my nose has nothing to do with it.

If I didn't get my nose job, I wouldn't have become an actor. After the rhinoplasty, I was able to go to castings or freely send producers videos for castings without being conscious of my nose. They want unfiltered videos, and before my nose job, I used to put a soft filter that made my nose look smaller. They would find out, and I didn't want to be in that situation. Right after the rhinoplasty, I became an actor.

Before the surgery, a lot of my followers had been messaging Liotta to ask when she was doing my nose because they wanted to see the change on a person they knew and followed. So we made a plan that Liotta would not charge me for the surgery (I did pay for the hospital in Dubai), and I would share my journey and experience.

I had polled my followers several times before getting the surgery because, though I really wanted to get it done, I was scared and wanted people to make me more confident and help me say yes. At the time, I had 900,000 followers on my Snapchat and 500,000 on Instagram. Every single person didn't want me to do my nose, but after I got it done, everybody wanted to get their noses done.

I had recorded my surgery journey but hadn't shared it for more than a month after the recovery. My followers were curious after I posted a message from someone who saw me in person to say my nose looked amazing. My influencer friend, who had 3 million followers on Instagram at the time, had also posted photos of me before and after. Her followers were going crazy looking for my account to ask me about the procedure. So after a month and a half, I sat down and shared everything about the procedure. That's when many of my followers wanted to get a nose job and started contacting Liotta. Many of them made bookings, and those in the United States came from different states to get operated [on] by her.

Many followers had a misconception that once you start getting plastic surgery you will never stop. That's not true. If there's one thing you want to adjust, you just do that and you're good. After my nose, I've never wanted anything else done.

Experts:

Dr. Edward Kwak, M.D., a New York-based dual board-certified facial plastic surgeon and clinical assistant professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Dr. Kimberly Lee, M.D., a board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon based in California

Dr. Dara Liotta, M.D., double board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon in New York City

Alka Menon, assistant professor of sociology at Yale University and the author of Refashioning Race: How Global Cosmetic Surgery Crafts New Beauty Standards

Dr. Steven Williams, M.D., a California-based board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon and president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons

<https://www.thezoereport.com/beauty/ethnic-rhinoplasty>