# COSMETIC

# The Public Face of Rhinoplasty: Impact on Perceived Attractiveness and Personality

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**Background:** The authors assess the impact of rhinoplasty on public perception of a patient's appearance and personality.

**Methods:** A survey was created using standardized before-and-after photographs of 10 Caucasian women who had undergone primary rhinoplasty. Photographs of two additional women who had not undergone facial surgery were randomly included as controls, for a total of 12 survey items. Preoperative and postoperative photographs were placed side by side. The survey was administered by means of crowd-sourcing. Respondents were asked to evaluate which photograph better represented 11 traits of appearance or personality, according to a seven-point Likert scale. A score of 1 meant the preoperative photograph was much better, 7 meant the postoperative photograph was much better, and 4 meant no difference. *T* tests and analyses of variance were used to evaluate rating changes for each trait and differences between demographic groups.

**Results:** There were 264 responses received. Averaged scores across the 10 survey patients produced a value for each appearance or personality trait. In 10 of 11 categories (i.e., symmetry, youthfulness, facial harmony, likeability, trustworthiness, confidence, femininity, attractiveness, approachability, and intelligence), the postoperative photograph was significantly favorable compared with the preoperative photograph (p < 0.0001). The preoperative photograph was rated higher only in aggressiveness (p < 0.001). The same scores were calculated for the controls; no significant difference in any category was seen except confidence, where the right image was viewed as more confident (mean, 4.19; p < 0.005).

**Conclusion:** Aesthetic rhinoplasty improves the public perception of a person's appearance and personality in multiple aspects. (*Plast. Reconstr. Surg.* 142: 881, 2018.)

Physical beauty and attractiveness have been the subject of philosophical debate and study for millennia, with both evolutionary and cultural reasons for the "beauty advantage."<sup>1-3</sup> Moreover, both ancient and modern cultures have assumed a connection between perceived facial appearance and personality,<sup>4</sup> and this belief has been borne out in the arts and literature, where physical appearance (or its description) has implied or augmented personality traits (e.g., Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*).<sup>5</sup>

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Physiognomy, the "art" of determining character traits based on physical features and measurements, reached its peak in the nineteenth century, when everything from ideal character to criminality was proposed to be associated with facial features.<sup>4,6</sup> Over the past 100 years, physiognomy has largely been discounted, yet recent scientific studies have demonstrated the impact of facial appearance in social interactions, and that "first impressions" do matter.<sup>7–11</sup> Amazingly, an opinion of a person's attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness, based on facial appearance can be formed within a tenth of a second, and this opinion does not

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A "Hot Topic Video" by Editor-in-Chief Rod J. Rohrich, M.D., accompanies this article. Go to PRSJournal.com and click on "Plastic Surgery Hot Topics" in the "Digital Media" tab to watch. change with unrestricted time.<sup>9,12</sup> Other studies suggest that characteristics such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and dominance can be accurately determined from first impressions.<sup>4,10,13,14</sup>

However, the data have not universally supported the accuracy of first impressions<sup>15,16</sup>; thus, social psychology has sought to determine the specific relationship between facial features and perceived personality traits. For example, an adult characterized as "baby-faced" is perceived as physically weak, naive, submissive, honest, kind, and warm<sup>4,17-20</sup>; attractive people are perceived as competent and intelligent<sup>21</sup>; and "wider" faces, based on the facial height-to-width ratio, correlate to unethical and threatening behavior, dominance, and aggression.<sup>22,23</sup> Other studies have found a correlation among intelligence, perceived intelligence, and facial shape, but only for men.24 Perceived trustworthiness has been tied to skin smoothness<sup>25</sup> and, possibly related, real-world trustworthiness can be accurately perceived based on children's faces.<sup>26</sup>

Although these studies provide intriguing conclusions, the face is an incredibly complex entitywhat constitutes a facial "feature" and its variations leads to an exponential number of possibilities. Even a reductionistic view of just the nose includes nine subunits.27 Todorov et al.4 and Oosterhof and Todorov<sup>6</sup> have recognized this difficulty and developed a "data-driven approach" using computational models based on real images to resolve faces into principal component points and vectors, which can be parametrically controlled to generate an infinite number of face images, thus allowing judgment of faces along a complete spectrum for a given characteristic. This ability to computergenerate, manipulate, and evaluate faces, along with other data-driven techniques, has led to a proliferation of studies in the past decade,<sup>28,29</sup> and has progressed to allowing surgeons to simulate the results of surgery with images and software (e.g., Crisalix, Lausanne, Switzerland).

Although studies of facial appearance and perceived personality have progressed into the virtual realm, the conclusions people draw have real-world effects, influencing voting,<sup>30,31</sup> sentencing decisions,<sup>32,33</sup> dating preferences,<sup>34</sup> and even chief executive officer success,<sup>35,36</sup> with stereotypes playing a large role. However, although some stereotypes may contain a kernel of truth, by no means are they universally accurate or true, and perceivers ought to be aware of the shortcomings of their judgments. The review by Todorov et al. of these secondary and meta-effects of social attributions based on faces points to the need for additional rigorous studies in this realm.<sup>4</sup>

Research has thus shown the importance of first impressions, the primacy of facial appearance, and the diversity of social attributions based on perceptions of the face. As possessors of the skill, knowledge, and ability to manipulate real faces on real people, plastic surgeons have naturally sought to define and create an aesthetic ideal.<sup>37,38</sup> Determining the "ideal," however, has typically been based on surgical outcomes evaluated from the surgeon's or patient's perspective.<sup>39–46</sup> These views are critical for improving results and patient satisfaction but do not address an important endpoint-how laypeople in the general public perceive a patient. Aesthetic surgeons have long recognized the significance of this question, but previous research has typically used small focus groups or lacked statistical validity.47-50

Studies have begun to examine the outcomes of facial aesthetic surgery from third-party perspectives,<sup>51</sup> and with the explosion of social media over the past decade, larger scale studies using crowdsourcing methods have become important and effective tools for evaluating the impact of facial rejuvenation,<sup>52,53</sup> hair transplant,<sup>54</sup> cleft surgery,<sup>55</sup> and other areas.<sup>56,57</sup> The study authors here sought to assess the impact of rhinoplasty on public perception of a patient's appearance and personality.

# **PATIENTS AND METHODS**

A survey was created using standardized beforeand-after photographs of 10 Caucasian women who had undergone primary rhinoplasty, linked from the before-and-after photograph galleries of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons and American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery public websites.<sup>58,59</sup> Photographs of two additional women who had not undergone facial surgery were randomly included as controls, for a total of 12 survey items. The photographs used in the survey were standardized within a given before-and-after item for background, hair style, facial expression, and makeup, but some of these factors varied between items because patients came from multiple surgeons. Control items consisted of two separate photographs taken in quick succession with minimal variations. Preoperative and postoperative frontal and lateral photographs were placed side by side. To eliminate left/right bias, half of the items had preoperative photographs on the left and half had postoperative photographs on the left (Fig. 1).

Respondents were naive to the study purpose and were asked to evaluate which photograph better represented 11 traits of appearance or personality (i.e., symmetry, youthfulness, facial harmony,



Carefully examine Figure A and Figure B. Choose which Figure represents the given characteristic MORE, and by how MUCH:

	(Figure A) Much more	Figure A) (Figure A) uch more More		No difference	(Figure B) A little more	(Figure B) Somewhat more	(Figure B) Much more
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youthfulr	ness *						
	(Figure A) Much more	(Figure A) Somewhat more	(Figure A) A little more	No difference	(Figure B) A little more	(Figure B) Somewhat more	(Figure B) Much more
	0	0	$\bigcirc$	0	0	0	0
Facial Ha	irmony *						
	(Figure A) Much more	(Figure A) Somewhat more	(Figure A) A little more	No difference	(Figure B) A little more	(Figure B) Somewhat more	(Figure B) Much more
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

#### Aggressiveness\*

7 Symmetry\*

Fig. 1. Survey sample item.

aggressiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, confidence, femininity, attractiveness, approachability, and intelligence), according to a seven-point Likert scale. The selected traits were based on prior studies of other procedures<sup>24,51,54</sup> and relevant outcomes.<sup>60,61</sup> A score of 1 meant the preoperative photograph was much better, 7 meant the postoperative photograph was much better, and 4 meant no difference.

Using a distributed online survey platform, unique anonymous respondents were recruited, excluding those younger than 18 years or

Characteristic	No. (%)		
Age, yr			
18-24	31 (11.7)		
25-34	149 (56.4)		
35-44	55 (20.8)		
45-54	19 (7.2)		
55-64	6(2.3)		
≥65	4 (1.5)		
Sex			
Male	167 (63.3)		
Female	97 (36.7)		

 Table 1. Demographics of Evaluators

diagnosed with schizophrenia or autism. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 22.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y.). For each trait, two-tailed one-sample *t* tests were performed to determine whether the sample mean was significantly different from the midpoint score ( $H_0$ , mean = 4.0;  $H_1$ , mean  $\neq$  4.0). In an exploratory analysis, two-tailed independent-samples *t* tests were performed to determine gender differences in ratings for each trait ( $H_0$ , mean<sub>mates</sub> = mean<sub>femates</sub>;  $H_1$ , mean<sub>mates</sub> = mean<sub>femates</sub>). An analysis of variance was also used to test differences in mean scores across the six age groups (Table 1). For all tests, differences were considered statistically significant at p < 0.01.

#### RESULTS

There were 264 responses received. The majority of evaluators were male and between the ages of 25 and 34 years (Table 1). Averaged scores across the 10 survey patients produced a value for each appearance or personality trait. In 10 of 11 categories (i.e., symmetry, youthfulness, facial harmony, likeability, trustworthiness, confidence, femininity, attractiveness, approachability, and intelligence), the postoperative photograph was considered significantly more favorable compared with the preoperative photograph (p < 0.00001) (Table 2). The greatest value

Table 2. Impact on Traits\*

Impact on Traits	Mean Score	þ	95% CI	t
Symmetry	4.30	< 0.00001	4.22-4.38	7.708
Youthfulness	4.33	< 0.00001	4.25 - 4.41	8.512
Facial harmony	4.33	< 0.00001	4.26-4.41	8.634
Aggressiveness	3.90	< 0.001	3.83-3.98	-2.624
Likeability	4.39	< 0.00001	4.31-4.46	9.924
Trustworthiness	4.28	< 0.00001	4.21-4.34	8.821
Confidence	4.37	< 0.00001	4.29 - 4.44	9.985
Femininity	4.37	< 0.00001	4.30 - 4.44	10.073
Attractiveness	4.40	< 0.00001	4.32 - 4.48	9.955
Approachability	4.34	< 0.00001	4.27 - 4.41	9.778
Intelligence	4.19	< 0.00001	4.13-4.25	6.035

\*df = 263.

changes in ratings were seen in attractiveness (mean, 4.40), likeability (mean, 4.39), femininity (mean, 4.37), and confidence (mean, 4.37).

The preoperative photograph was rated higher only in aggressiveness (p < 0.001). The same scores were calculated for the controls; no statistically significant difference in any category was seen except confidence, where the right image was viewed as more confident (mean, 4.19; p < 0.005). No significant differences were found between men and women or between age groups for any trait.

#### DISCUSSION

The face has been an object of fascination since ancient times and has played a significant role in social interactions. Physiognomists, psychologists, physicians, and the lay public have long sought to determine which and how facial features influence perception of personality and character, with some modern studies being performed with computergenerated models. For the plastic surgeon and his or her patient, however, virtually manipulated images are no substitute for real people and tangible results. This study furthers the pursuit of understanding the face and its role in social interactions with a specific focus on the nose.

The nose in particular has long been recognized as playing a central role in the face both physically and psychologically,<sup>62</sup> and therefore aesthetic rhinoplasty carries significant weight for affecting a patient's overall appearance and selfperception.<sup>62</sup> How others perceive a patient no doubt contributes to his or her psychosocial wellbeing, but this dimension to date has not been specifically and objectively studied. This study is the first of its kind examining public perception of rhinoplasty patients.

This study affirms that rhinoplasty achieves the desired effects for Caucasian women in terms of improving the physical traits of attractiveness, femininity, confidence, youthfulness, facial harmony, and symmetry. These results were expected, given the effort that plastic surgeons have invested in studying, defining, and sculpting the ideal nose for a given patient. However, rhinoplasty also improved personality traits such as perceived intelligence and aggressiveness, and even extended to include relational characteristics such as trustworthiness, approachability, and likeability. Although past research has suggested that cosmetic rhinoplasty patients are "more psychologically disturbed than other surgery cases"62-65 for multiple reasons,<sup>66–69</sup> these results regarding personality and

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relational characteristics imply that there may be legitimate reasons for a patient's broad concerns. This study provides additional data consistent with other studies reflecting the positive impact on perception of attractiveness and personality after facial rejuvenation surgery on other areas of the face, including rhytidectomy, upper and lower blepharoplasty, brow lift, neck lift, or chin implant.<sup>51</sup>

Because of the crowd-sourcing design, strengths of this study include the good sample sizes (of both photographs and judges) such that statistical significance was seen across a variety of subjects and evaluators. The distribution of age and sex was not equal across all groups, with a majority of young male subjects, but subgroup comparisons showed no difference in outcomes across age or sex. Moreover, the majority of rhinoplasty patients are female and young<sup>70,71</sup>; thus, the demographic drift of the evaluators might not be seen as unfavorable. This study could be improved with a greater number of controls, subjects, and evaluators, and the study methodology allows for expansion in these directions. A weakness of this method, however, is that the evaluators are anonymous, and demographic information is therefore limited. Including a component of known objective expert evaluators (e.g., senior aesthetic plastic surgeons) could add an additional degree of validity to the study. In addition, although this study showed a meaningful statistically significant improvement in each area, it is not clear to what degree these improvements affect or effect "real-life" changes. Therefore, these results should encourage prospective patients that rhinoplasty positively affects how she will be perceived, but at the same time she should be cautioned that the extent has not yet been quantified.

# CONCLUSIONS

Aesthetic rhinoplasty has the potential to significantly improve the public perception of a person's appearance and personality in multiple traits. Small but significant and clear differences were observed and held consistently across demographic groups. This study can thus be used to counsel, encourage, and set appropriate expectations for the rhinoplasty patient.

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### PATIENT CONSENT

Patient provided written consent for the use of patient's images.

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