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Study finds agreement on "ideal" nose

Last Updated: 2004-08-03 15:03:45 -0400 (Reuters Health)

By Amy Norton

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - People who opt for a nose job are no different from anyone else when it comes to their vision of the "ideal" nose, a study suggests.

Not too prominent, with a modest "scoop" at the bridge and a slightly upturned tip -- that's the nasal profile researchers found was preferred by plastic surgery candidates and non-candidates alike.

And while this nasal architecture may not be "average," it's not too far from it either, according to the study authors, led by Dr. David C. Pearson of the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida.

The findings support the notion that people who undergo nasal plastic surgery are not suffering from a distorted body image, but have "very normal perceptions of themselves and of beauty in general," Pearson told Reuters Health.

He and his colleagues report the results of their study in the Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery.

The study included 27 people seeking reduction rhinoplasty -- surgery to reduce the size of the nose -- and 15 people who were happy with their noses. Participants had to pick what they saw as the most attractive option in each of three series of pictures showing a white woman's face in profile.

The original profile used in the study was generated by electronically morphing the photos of 12 white women; then, three series of images featuring a range of nasal distortions were produced by image manipulation.

In one series, the degree to which the nose had a "scoop" or "bump" differed from image to image; in another, the tip of the nose turned up or down to varying degrees; and in the third, the prominence of the nose varied.

Pearson's team found that rhinoplasty patients and non-patients seemed to agree on the ideal proportions. A nose that was somewhat smaller than the "average" image in each series -- a little less prominent, a bit more of a scoop, a touch upturned -- won the most admiration.

That doesn't mean, however, that one nose fits all. The modest-sized, slightly scooped and upturned nose may have been the favorite on the white female face in this study, the authors note, but that doesn't make it the one-and-only ideal.

There may be universal "design principles" for surgeons to follow, according to Pearson, but not an ideal mold that outfits all rhinoplasty patients with "cookie-cutter" noses.

SOURCE: Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery, July/August 2004.

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