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CULTURAL IDENTITY

By Evan MacDonald
STAFF WRITER

Jabari McPherson used to dread looking in the mirror. He felt his nose was too wide for his face, shaped more like a rectangle than a triangle.

He wanted his face to look more balanced. As a teenager, he started considering the possibility of a rhinoplasty, commonly referred to as a nose job.

McPherson, 35, delayed because he was apprehensive about changing his appearance. When he became a father, he wanted to make sure his facial features matched those of his

Ethnic rhinoplasty has become more popular in recent years as patients seek to preserve their unique features

children.

He did some research and found Dr. Anthony E. Brissett, a facial plastic surgeon at Houston Methodist Hospital. As he watched YouTube videos of Brissett discussing the importance of preserving cultural identity during a rhinoplasty, McPherson realized that was exactly what he wanted.

“I didn’t want someone to copy-and-paste someone else’s nose and features onto my face,” McPherson said. “I wanted something that was unique to me and offered balance.”

McPherson is among a growing number of patients of color
Nose continues on D5

Jabari McPherson recently underwent an “ethnic rhinoplasty” to reshape his nose, which he felt was too wide for his face.

Michael Wyke / Contributor

THE NEW BA.5 CORONAVIRUS VARIANT RAISES NEW CONCERNS. D6

Conroe man wanted to fix up a Ford Mustang, but when he couldn’t fit in the car, he started to work on himself. **D2**

NOSE

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who have undergone what surgeons refer to as an ethnic rhinoplasty. Historically, nose jobs have been heavily influenced by the appearance of a white person's nose, in part because more than 70 percent of the rhinoplasties performed in the U.S. involve white patients. But as patients have become more diverse, patients and their surgeons have increasingly sought to preserve the cultural features that make each person unique.

Preserving a patient's ethnic identity during a rhinoplasty is not a novel idea — Brissett is the co-author of a 2009 article in the journal *Seminars in Plastic Surgery* that delves into the topic. But ethnic rhinoplasties have become more common over the past 10 or 15 years as more patients began expressing concern about losing their unique features — something Brissett calls “cultural destruction.”

“We would lose kind of these racial features or unique features of one's face or nose,” he said. “I began about 15 years ago seeing patients coming to me upset — psychologically, physically, emotionally — because they had lost the uniqueness of their appearance.”

The appearance of someone's nose can differ by ethnicity. For example, a 1993 study in the journal *Annals of Plastic Surgery* identified differences in the appearances of African, Afro-Caucasian and Afro-Indian noses. And a 2011 article in the *Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* identified 14 different types of noses in white people living in Israel and Europe.

With ethnic rhinoplasty, it's critical for surgeons to understand those differences, said Kofi Boahene, a Johns Hopkins University professor who is an expert in the field. For every ethnic group, there are certain facial features that help guide how a nose should look.

“You have to be invested to really understand that culture, because you are not just taking

care of noses in isolation,” Boahene said. “You're not sculpting noses. You're sculpting lives. You're sculpting personalities. You're sculpting the features that people interact with.”

Changing demographics

The rise in interest in ethnic rhinoplasty has coincided with an overall increase in plastic surgery in the U.S. There were 2.3 million plastic surgeries performed in 2020; that is 22 percent more than the 1.9 million performed in 2000, according to the most recent annual report from the American Society for Plastic Surgeons.

White people still underwent 71 percent of 352,000 rhinoplasties performed in 2020, according to ASPS data. But patients from other ethnic groups have gradually begun to account for larger shares.

Asian American patients underwent 11 percent of the rhinoplasties performed in 2020 compared to just 4 percent in 2012. African American patients accounted for 6 percent of the procedures in 2020, a slight increase from 5.7 percent in 2012, according to ASPS data.

Rhinoplasty costs an average of nearly \$4,500, according to the ASPS, and it is generally not covered by insurance.

Brissett attributes the increasing popularity to a greater focus on celebrating diversity in America compared to 30 or 40 years ago. Western beauty standards have historically been centered around whiteness, but that has been shifting. He predicts it will continue to shift moving forward, as the U.S. population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse.

“We're seeing that people are becoming more aware of global influences. And as a result, they are celebrating that uniqueness,” he said.

Preserving cultural identity

Like McPherson, Houston resident Kisha Peters spent years considering rhinoplasty before undergoing surgery in 2019. She wanted to alter a nose that she felt was too wide and



Michael Wyke / Contributor

Jabari McPherson underwent an “ethnic rhinoplasty,” a nose job procedure that preserves the look of the patient's face.



Courtesy Houston Methodist Hospital
Kisha Peters is shown after undergoing an ethnic rhinoplasty to alter the appearance of her nose.

had a bulbous tip, as well as correct an issue that made it difficult to breathe through her nostrils.

Peters, 44, spoke with 22 plastic surgeons over nearly 10

years before she decided to have the surgery. She needed to find someone who understood that she didn't want to look like anyone else — she just didn't want her nose to be the defining feature of her face.

“I just wanted some symmetry with my nose, making it a little smaller,” she said. “But I still wanted my African American nose. I didn't want it to be skinny and narrow.”

An ethnic rhinoplasty also helps ensure a nose looks more natural on a person's face, Boahene said. In a successful rhinoplasty, you shouldn't be able to tell that someone has had a nose job. The new nose may look out of place if the surgery is not ethnic-sensitive, he said.

“That brings about some incongruence, and in some people, it leads to inner conflict,” he said. “I see quite a few people who want their surgeries reversed.”

When Peters spoke with

Brissett, she knew she'd found a surgeon who was aligned with her vision for her nose. She still waited to commit, though, because she wanted to be sure she was ready.

Now that she's had the surgery — as well as a revision in 2021 — she's glad she took the care to ensure she would still have her African American nose. She just wishes she would have made her decision sooner.

“I wanted to make sure that I wasn't trying to change me, per se,” she said. “My nose job is so perfect, to the point where most of my family ... my family didn't notice the nose job until I told them.”

Finding balance

Thanks to the interest in ethnic rhinoplasty, Brissett has seen a shift from what he used to call “cultural destruction” to “cultural preservation” — a greater focus on maintaining each person's ethnic identity during the procedure.

For Brissett, that means creating “harmony” in the way different parts of a patient's face relate to each other. He's not just considering a patient's nose during a rhinoplasty; he's thinking about their eyes and mouth.

If it's done correctly, an ethnic rhinoplasty should look natural and preserve the patient's cultural identity, Brissett said.

“We're looking more for balance. We're not trying to be influenced by Western features,” he said. “Once you achieve that, it just creates a more unique aspect of beauty.”

McPherson is happy with the balance his new nose has given him. His surgery in December 2021 made the top of his nose a bit narrower, so it has less of the box shape that he felt self-conscious about for decades. The change is subtle, but it's given him the appearance he has wanted since he was a teenager.

“When I look in the mirror, everything just seems more balanced,” he said. “I don't dread taking pictures anymore.”

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