

# COSMOPOLITAN

## 24 SEXY MOVES

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ALBA**  
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Secrets

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P. 100

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# I HAVE A VERY 'ETHNIC' NOSE.



Writer Robyn has had a complicated relationship with her nose

It's hard to say to which ethnicity it belongs – I'm a mixture of Mediterranean, south Asian and northern European – but it doesn't conform to the buttony Caucasian 'ideal'. It's long and hooked, and ends in

a bulbous tip that points sullenly at my mouth like a fleshy arrow.

I've always hated it, and as a teenager at an all-girls school, surrounded by willowy types with cute-as-a-button noses, it didn't occur to me that my knobbly version was part of my heritage; that generations of proud Italian/French/Nepali relatives had nobly borne my wonky nose through history. To me it was just ugly, and I began saving up for a nose job when I was 14: a prime candidate for what's known today as 'ethnic plastic surgery'.

It's an odd term. While it is a phrase often used by surgeons to describe any cosmetic surgery for non-white people, it also – more controversially – refers to cosmetic surgery to make non-white people look more Caucasian.

A woman's choice to have cosmetic surgery always provokes debate; add race into the equation and it sparks

uneasy conversations about perceptions of beauty and ethnic identity. There's often an assumption that when people from ethnic minorities have surgery, they're doing it to look more Western, whether it's through Asian blepharoplasty – a procedure that adds an 'extra' eyelid to East Asian eyes to make them look larger or rounder – or the ethnic rhinoplasty (nose job) I dreamt of as a teen. The most infamous example is Michael Jackson, who thinned his nose and whitened his skin.

The rise of ethnic plastic surgery – in the US it's up 243% in the past 15 years – makes some uncomfortable. Many worry that in trying to conform to a supposed universal beauty standard commonly associated with white people – large eyes, small mouths, thin noses,

'cute' chins – surgeons are literally chiselling the race off people's faces. But is it simplistic – not to say patronising – to assume that the reason people are changing their appearance is to be more Western?

For Sharan Dhaliwal, 31, a video producer from London, it was something that happened subconsciously. "I inherited my mother's hooked nose and hated it," she explains. "I was bullied at school, outside of school; boys would make jokes about it. It got to the point where my anxiety intensified if I spotted anyone looking at my profile." The constant jibes led to depression and crippling anxiety, and Sharan opted for a nose job when she was



Before



After

Sharan admits she now struggles with her choice to have surgery to reshape her nose

22. "I instantly felt more confident as a result," she says.

As she got older, however, Sharan became aware of how she'd

succumbed to Western ideals of beauty. "I'd told myself that I needed to be accepted; that it was important for me to 'fit in'. When I removed a cultural characteristic from my face, I essentially became more 'appealing'. A small nose is something we've been told is the most desirable feature because white people tend to have smaller noses – they were essentially seen as the ideal. But having a nose of any other shape is an important part of your identity."

I'd told myself that I needed to be accepted for me to "fit in"

Sharan admits that she now has mixed feelings about her decision. "I wouldn't have had my nose job if I'd realised I was conforming to 'white' standards of beauty – but I was a vulnerable young Indian woman struggling to exist in a predominantly

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white culture. I don't *feel* less ethnic now, but I'm aware that my ethnicity was maybe more noticeable before."

Most of the surgeons who carry out these procedures insist that people's main motive for going under the knife is to look like a better version of themselves. And while Harley Street plastic surgeon Dr Julian de Silva has seen an increase in requests for ethnic rhinoplasty and blepharoplasty in the past year – now 30% of his patients request these niche procedures – he argues that they do it to enhance, not blunt their existing ethnic features. "There's no 'one-surgery-fits-all' approach with ethnic rhinoplasty," he says. "What looks natural for one ethnicity may look wrong on another. Generally, each patient wants a nose to fit their ethnic characteristics. The best results look as though the patient was born with the perfect nose for *their* face."

"Similarly, the majority seeking cosmetic Asian blepharoplasty don't want to look 'Westernised'. Some may find it difficult to see due to the extra soft tissue in their eyelid. Most want to keep their ethnicity, but have more open eyes, with a natural-looking eyelid crease." In fact, many east Asians *are* born with an eyelid crease. It's attractive in that culture – regardless of whether Western people have it.

Eyelid surgery specialist Dr Naresh Joshi adds, "The most common request I get is, 'I don't have a space between my eyelash and my fold to put my makeup on.'" When his patients bring a picture of who they'd like to look like, it's usually a celebrity from their own culture. Occasionally a patient will bring in a picture of a Caucasian face – but he'll refuse to do it. "The problem is that you'll look Chinese everywhere else but your eyelids, so the effect is a bit odd. It isn't something I'd advise."

The issue of ethnic plastic surgery involves more than just race, believes sociology and gender studies professor Laurie Essig. When she interviewed female plastic-surgery candidates for her book *American Plastic: Boob Jobs*,

*Credit Cards, And Our Quest For Perfection*, she found they all had something in common: "Non-white women I interviewed were mostly doing it for the same reason as white women: to get a job, keep a job; get a husband, keep a husband. They're convinced if they look better, this is more likely." Our desires for cosmetic surgery are never 'individual choices,' but influenced by structures such as gender, race and the economy. Women are investing in their future.

More than 20 million plastic-surgery procedures were performed worldwide

in 2014. "Globally, all ethnicities want cosmetic surgery," says Dr Joshi. "Everyone is scrutinising themselves more." The truth is perhaps that we all want to be 'perfect' versions of ourselves – more symmetrical features isn't just a Western ideal.

But notions of what 'looking better' means are changing. People have always turned to celebrities and models for their beauty ideals, but, as these figures become more diverse, so does our idea of what is beautiful. In 2015, model Soo Joo Park – of Korean heritage – became the first Asian-American spokesmodel for L'Oréal Paris, in the wake of Estée Lauder signing Chinese model Liu Wen and Maybelline hiring Shu Pei Qin. In a 2014 piece for *New York* magazine, writer Maureen O'Connor described "racially ambiguous" stars such as Jessica Alba and Kim Kardashian as "avatars for post-racial beauty".

The most popular plastic-surgery procedures today are a mix of beauty ideals. There might still be a demand for wider eyes and thinner noses, but features stereotypically associated with different races – such as fuller lips and bigger bums – are now some of the most requested. Transform, which has 25 UK clinics, has seen a 54% increase in enquiries about buttock implants over the past year – "inspired by Kim and Khloé," says its clinical director Mark Norfolk.

Ultimately, ethnic identity runs far deeper than your facial features. "I've started identifying with my culture a lot more," says Sharan. "I'm more interested in Indian fashion, I speak to my family in my mother tongue. My ethnicity isn't just defined by my facial features, but also by my social, political and cultural stance. Although I changed my nose, I still feel very Indian."

While Sharan had surgery, I decided to live with my nose. I'm happy I did – it's intrinsically me. But had I opted for surgery, I'd have felt pretty patronised if someone told me I was relinquishing my ethnicity by doing so. ♦

## THE CHANGING FACE OF BEAUTY

Today's hottest models owe their looks to their natural ethnic mix



### GIGI HADID

The model of the moment and face of Topshop was born in California, but is of Dutch and Palestinian descent. 'Half-Palestinian and proud of it,' she posted on Instagram last year.



### IMAAN HAMMAM

Raised in Amsterdam with a Moroccan mother and an Egyptian father, Imaan – who's shot for Givenchy – has praised the growing diversity in fashion, saying, "The future is bright, full of colour."



### HAILEY BALDWIN

Daughter of actor Stephen Baldwin, Hailey's mother Kenya is Brazilian – to which she attributes her model looks, tweeting, 'Being half-Brazilian does well for my skin tone thanks Ma.'