



The “Ethnic Nose Job” Is On The Rise — 3 Black Women Defend Theirs

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF NIKKI MCQUEEN.

Kemi says that getting a nose job was one of the best decisions she has made. "I would definitely say I'm more confident now," she says to Unbothered over Zoom. After years of contemplation, Kemi underwent what is known as an “ethnic rhinoplasty” in Turkey at the age of 29, five months ago.

What is an "ethnic nose job"?

An ethnic rhinoplasty, also known as an “ethnic nose job”, is the term given to rhinoplasty surgery when performed on people of colour. The procedure, costing anywhere between £5000 and £15,000, combines tested rhinoplasty techniques with specialist surgical methods meant to help retain a natural look and shape. For some Black women who choose to undergo the procedure, the decision can be highly polarising.

According to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS), Rhinoplasties are still the sixth most popular cosmetic surgery for women (even though the number of nose augmentation surgeries performed is steadily dropping), and are becoming increasingly more common amongst Black women in the UK and US, despite long-held stigma and fears concerning the surgery.

“Historically, certain ethnicities have been associated with certain nasal shapes and types,” explains **Dr. Steven Williams**, president-elect of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). “Only in recent years has rhinoplasty evolved to effectively cater to the specific needs and desired outcomes of individuals from different racial backgrounds, embracing the unique features instead of trying to create one standard nose — and since then, the procedure has become more of an option for Black women.”

Kemi is very open about her procedure and posts regular vlogs on her TikTok account @KissesKemi, where she documents her recovery journey, and she’s far from the only one. There are currently 157.9 million views across videos using the #ethnicrohinoplasty hashtag and Kemi's TikTok videos have gained significant popularity online, as there are relatively few Black women who openly discuss their experiences with undergoing rhinoplasty due to fear of being judged and, in some cases, labelled “anti-Black.”

"I've always wanted a nose job because, to be honest, I closely resembled my dad, and I've always admired my mom's appearance, like most young girls who idolise their mothers," Kemi shares. "I've wanted to change my nose since my high school days, not due to any bullying or external pressure, but simply because it was something I wanted to do for myself."

Like Kemi, Amanda's original nose was similar in shape to her father's. "I have always been aware of my nose from a young age. Occasionally, people would mention it to me, but it never triggered me that much. I knew getting surgery would allow me to get a more symmetrical face shape that I wanted."

Amanda, 23, from London, travelled to Turkey to get her surgery for her 23rd birthday. "The whole process was very straightforward; my doctor explained the whole process to me," she explains. "I travelled to Turkey with my friend, who helped me throughout my recovery process. I had quite a bit of swelling and couldn't breathe through my nose for a while, which was probably the thing I struggled with the most, but overall I'm loving the results so far."

"I started making YouTube videos about my journey because I noticed there wasn't that much information available online from women who look like me who have actually gone through with the surgery," says Nikki who also underwent ethnic rhinoplasty at 29 years old.

She adds: "I do have to say I do love my nose [following the surgery]. I just feel like it fits into my face a bit more. I was always aware that my nose didn't really have a bridge. I actually really loved my nose from the side profile. I just didn't like it from the front on, so I would always take pictures from the side. Now I take my pictures from the front. When I first woke up from surgery, I was immediately in love. I love the way it is now. But I know that I'm still not done healing."

Why is the "ethnic nose job" so polarising?

The ethnic rhinoplasty often provokes intense discussions among the general public online, especially on Twitter and TikTok. Content creators are divided between those who stress that surgery is simply a personal choice and those who want to embrace wider, flatter nose bridges and shapes and encourage others to do the same. Black creators such as Brettina and Kissy Duerré are part of the latter and use their platform to try to disrupt trends that only glorify slim, smaller noses.

In the age of the 'Instagram Face', some fear that surgery is encouraging people of colour to assimilate to a white beauty ideal, and specifically, fear Black women who choose this procedure are attempting to erase their Black features in an effort to conform to European beauty standards. It is, of course, not only a conversation amongst Black people. Many will remember when Dutch-Palestinian supermodel Bella Hadid confessed that she regretted getting a nose job at 14, telling *Vogue*, "I wish I had kept the nose of my ancestors. I think I would have grown into it."

"It's important to emphasise that the goal for most patients is not to erase features associated with their ethnic background. As surgeons, our primary objective is to help clients achieve the results they desire," says Dr. Williams.

The increased accessibility of plastic surgery for Black women is generally seen as a positive development for those seeking out invasive treatments (it's usually a good sign when an industry moves to become more inclusive and addresses the needs of marginalised communities). However, for those who argue that such surgeries may promote conformity to Eurocentric beauty ideals, this isn't a victory.

Historically, broad and wider noses are considered a distinctive feature of Black people and these features have often been stigmatised in Western society. Writer Carly Lewis-Oduntan, looked deeper into broad noses and the politics of Black beauty for Refinery29 last year. In the article she wrote, "Broad noses, particularly Black women's noses, have long been considered unattractive – even masculine" referring to a deplorable and widely-condemned 2011 study published in *Psychology Today* that attempted to explain why Black women were less attractive than other races. Between the curse of internalised white supremacy to the toxic legacy of colourism, it's not an overstatement to suggest Black people were taught to hate our features (and aspire for features far removed from our own). And it's certainly not beyond the scope to suggest that a closer proximity to whiteness (albeit lighter skin or a smaller nose, or looser textured hair) can afford privileges in a world that values and upholds whiteness as an ideal. Over time there has been significant progress in celebrating the beauty of Black features in mainstream culture (when Beyoncé sang the lyrics "I love my negro nose with Jackson 5 nostrils" in the song *Formation*, it was considered a rallying cry for Black self-love), however, some argue that undergoing a nose job to make the nose appear smaller potentially undermine the hard-fought acceptance of Black features as beautiful in their own right.

Does the "ethnic nose job" promote a white beauty ideal?

"I think this argument that Black women who get nose jobs want to look more white is silly," says Amanda. "When I had my consultations with my doctor, I never sent him pictures of white women; I sent him images of Black women who had my desired nose shape. Furthermore, Africa is a whole continent full of people who have all different types of noses, so the concept of having a 'Black nose' doesn't even make sense to me."

The assumption that if you decide to get a nose job as a Black person, you *must* hate your Black features, and by getting surgery — any surgery — you're trying to fit into Eurocentric beauty standards, is a pervasive one. As Jackie Adedeji shared about her decision to get fillers to Unbothered, "Being lectured about my decision to get filler like it is abhorrent, anti-Black, and not what Black women are "supposed" to do can feel like I deserve to sit on the naughty step reserved for Black women who go against the grain."

"Our society upholds Eurocentric beauty features, so I'm sure this plays some part in some Black women's decisions subconsciously," says Nikki. "But overall, I think if getting surgery is what it takes for you to love yourself a little bit more, then why not, as long as you've done your research."

"Beauty standards have an impact on all women in society whether you acknowledge it or not, so I'm not going to say it has absolutely no impact on my decisions regarding my appearance." Amanda also agrees with this point, "...but I know that for me I did this surgery because I wanted to and not because I felt like I had to."

Kemi adds: "You can't win, if we take this idea that women must not love themselves if they get surgery, then you can also argue that if you wear hair extensions it means you don't love your natural hair, or if you use makeup, it means you don't love your natural appearance."



PHOTO: VIA @KISSEKEMI
Kemi Fakunle

"I think it's particularly easy to make such comments about women," she continues. "If plastic surgery or cosmetic enhancements were as popular among men, which is gradually happening, I don't think people would react the same way. It often seems like a quick and easy judgement to claim that when a woman alters something about herself, it's because she doesn't love herself. I honestly think that this perception often stems from others projecting their own insecurities onto someone else or perhaps envy because they may not have the courage to make similar changes themselves. I have always been a confident girl, but I have to say I have noticed that I use Facetune less after having surgery."

Nikki had never really told anyone about her insecurities about her nose, so it initially came as a shock to her mum. "My family and friends were shocked but they were all really cool with it. My mum is my biggest fan, so even though she was shocked initially, she got over it. One of my aunts even told me she had considered getting it done."

Like Nikki, Kemi didn't receive any backlash from her friends or family. "When my friends saw me after the surgery, they were honestly so nonchalant about the whole thing," she shares. "My mum is very much a proud traditional Nigerian woman, but even she was fine with it."

Why are people travelling abroad for the "ethnic nose job"?

Undergoing any form of surgery can be anxiety-inducing, particularly when it involves such a prominent facial feature as the nose. While the trend of seeking lower-cost cosmetic procedures overseas, especially in Turkey, has gained popularity in recent times, it's crucial to acknowledge the inherent risks associated with this decision. As the *Independent* reported, in 2022 the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) found that the number of Brits being treated for "serious complications following cosmetic surgery abroad rose by 44 percent."

"When considering surgery abroad or in any location, the foremost priority is to identify a qualified surgeon who provides comprehensive post-op care," says Dr. Williams. "Different countries have varying standards for qualifications, so you need to make sure you're doing thorough research to understand the specific requirements in the country where you intend to undergo the procedure. Full recovery can span up to a year. Part of your post-op care may involve procedures such as steroid injections or moulding, which is why having easy access to your surgeon is necessary."

Kemi, Amanda and Nikki all suggest that while surgical procedures can bring about physical transformations, they are not a standalone solution for your insecurities. "During my consultation, my doctor often had conversations with me where he reminded me that this procedure doesn't fix any internal problems or insecurities. I knew this already, but I was glad that he took it upon himself to have these conversations with me," says Amanda.

Like Amanda, Nikki, and Kemi spoke about the importance of inner work — understanding where you're at mentally — before going under the knife. "I was always a confident girl even before the nose job, so you just need to remember that one surgery isn't going to fix all your problems. If you deal with confidence issues before, there is no guarantee that they're just going to disappear if you get surgery," says Kemi.

Nikki adds, "For me, doing the inner work is about understanding why you are getting the surgery in the first place and making sure that external factors aren't the main thing causing you to get it done. People are always going to have something to say about the decisions you make in your life; that's a fact. So I just think if you can do something that helps you feel more confident, as long as it's done safely."

It's unfair to suggest that anyone who wants to undergo surgery to change these features is doing so solely based on the pressures of society's Eurocentric beauty standards — as Kemi, Amanda and Nikki suggested, there is way more to it than that. What's clear, there is a chasm between advocating for Black women to have autonomy over their bodies and celebrating the distinctive features that are markers of our heritage and define our individuality. Self-acceptance looks different for everyone. I personally do not believe that a few Black women opting for rhinoplasty surgery diminish the importance of celebrating our unique attributes. Ultimately, the choice to undergo surgery is deeply personal.

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/ethnic-nose-job-black-women>