

Should you 'fix' the family nose?

Patients benefit from support of family and friends, doctors say

June 05, 2010 | By Richard Asa, [Special to Tribune Newspapers](#)

Julie Zimerle has always thought her prominent family nose looked great — on her father and brother. Built-in character and all that. But the blue-eyed beauty with a big smile and a small face always felt a bit like a human toucan when seen from the side.

In high school, she endured the predictable teasing in her Ohio hometown. By college, she even wore a nose ring as a bold statement of acceptance. Still, she was never really comfortable. It just didn't match how she felt on the inside. So in December, she had rhinoplasty. Her Chicago surgeon, Dr. Peter D. Geldner, was careful to accentuate and preserve her natural good looks, showing her computerized before and after depictions she could share with her family while she considered the surgery and its impact.

"For the guys, that kind of nose works for them," Zimerle, 30, said. "I think it overpowered my face." She had a deviated septum as well, which had caused breathing problems for years, so she had that corrected at the same time. Her family, particularly her parents, Mary and David, were there for her throughout the process, attending consultations and caring for her after the procedure.

Zimerle says she wouldn't have it any other way. Having had breast surgery years before, at the behest of an overly enthusiastic young friend and without family input, Zimerle has had both physical and psychological regrets. One was that her dad was the first to notice. "I didn't talk it through with my family. That probably wasn't the best way to go about it," she said. "This time, I showed a little more maturity. Plus, it's scary; it's real surgery. What if something happened?"

Mary Zimerle said family dynamics helped the rhinoplasty go smoothly. "I was glad we were there for her," she said. "We just wanted to make sure she was happy and was doing the right thing for her. It looks very nice. She just looks like herself."

David Zimerle was more skeptical, said his daughter. "My dad said he didn't see a difference (in the pictures) and that there was nothing wrong with my nose," Julie said. "At one point he asked, 'Why don't you want to look like us?'"

"I think I still do look like the family," she said about six months after the surgery. "My dad finally came around and understood I was doing it for me. It is important to let your family know you're not trying to deny family traits or that you think your family is ugly. It wasn't about that at all."

Doctor involves the family

Geldner agreed that family dynamics play a part in plastic surgery, even when the patient is an adult. In fact, he has had patients who waited until their elderly parents died to have rhinoplasty.

"(Families) can add so many different facets to it that have to be considered," he said. "When having a given procedure, it's important to have a support structure. And if you have a family, ideally the family should be on the same page."

Acceptance and support, he added, "has to do with whether people respect one another, so if you want to change something that's a famous family trait, yeah, it's probably a good idea to talk about it at the kitchen table. What you might find is that your parents were afraid, and so (they) didn't do it but lived with it all their lives and actually did want to change it. When I see a family that can't be bothered or thinks a person will look too good and turns their back on her, it means the family has a weird set of dynamics" to begin with.

Psychological impact of surgery

Beverly Hills psychologist Lilli Fried-land, who focuses on relationship building deep in the land of "plastic junkies," agreed that individual family values will guide perspective on plastic surgery. "It sounds corny," she said, "but what is the importance of looks in the way (families) talk about other people or in the way they evaluate themselves? How does that compare to other values stressed in a family, such as character, competency and purpose in life? Is the family well balanced with a strong sense of values? If so, and they concentrate on the way the family functions, then looks are just one small piece.

"Clearly, having a warm support system is critical before you go in to get a sense of expectations, afterward in the recovery process and later in terms of acceptance," she said. "Siblings are a huge part of this, too, and if it can't be family, it would be nice to have close friends involved."

A southern Wisconsin woman, who asked to remain anonymous, thanks her family for unrelenting support when she had a botched rhinoplasty redone. Terrified to move forward because the first procedure in her teens was so "horrible," this woman was teased into extreme self-consciousness in her youth. Since then, two men in the family have had rhinoplasty. Her original procedure was done in a hospital atmosphere, where she was strapped down and told to stop crying when she became terrified.

She eventually accompanied her sister, who had a rhinoplasty done by Wisconsin plastic surgeon Andrew Campbell. Being present during that calm and informed experience, the woman overcame her stark fear and had the second surgery.

"If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have done this," she said. "Everyone in my family was very supportive, and they were excited for me. I needed their support and encouragement."

"I like it when a family member is with the patient," Campbell said. "Four ears are better than two. If the family is supportive, it makes it that much easier immediately after surgery." On the flip side, he added, "if they have antagonistic family members, they are not happy patients."