

Cosmesis of the Mouth, Face and Jaws

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Chapter 1 What Is Beauty?

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Perhaps the British novelist, essayist, and poet D. H. Lawrence had it right when he proffered that “Beauty is an experience, nothing else. It is not a fixed pattern or an arrangement of features. It is something felt, a glow or a communicated sense of fineness.”

For beauty, as we have come to understand it, is merely a perception of appearance by ones self or by another. It is subjective and differs among individuals and between cultures. Certainly, that which is considered beautiful among Aborigines may not be interpreted similarly by others around. Although the phrase is frequently ascribed to others, the author Margaret Wolfe Hungerford in 1878 was the first to write in her novel, *Molly Bawn*, the famous idiom that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Certainly her proffer seems on point.

One’s perception of beauty varies from generation to generation. For example, the proportions and shape of the “sought after” nose in America today is far different than the cute, little upturned (bobbed) nose popular in the early and mid-1900s. If one peruses old books and magazines, clearly the same is true of body morphology and even hairstyles.

However accurate they may be, we as doctors do not depend on romantic notions or assertions to define concepts, even one as nebulous as beauty. We look to norms, ratios, mathematical formulae, and science as did Leonardo da Vinci in his famous drawing, the *Vitruvian Man* (Figure 1.1).

Regardless of cultural or temporal differences, the face is ordinarily the first thing that we see when we come upon another person and form our initial impressions. That appearance is the focal point of an individual since it is usually the most exposed

body part for one to quickly formulate and extrapolate a subjective interpretation of that person’s substance. For example, good-looking people are assumed to be more intelligent, have better personalities, and to be sexually warmer than those who are not. This phenomenon, although not universally accepted, is frequently referred to as the halo effect. The opposite can also be experienced. The negative halo effect refers to an unfavorable impression that is attached to those less attractive. It is no wonder that Americans spend billions of dollars annually to attempt to improve their looks.

Cultural differences aside, there are certain components of what is considered an attractive face that seem to be universal.

Symmetry is one. Studies have shown that even infants, who clearly have no training or cultural input into what is considered attractive, routinely focus on those with symmetrical faces rather than those with asymmetries even if they are not looking at a parent. Whereas minor asymmetries are often overlooked, more significant ones can detract significantly from a person’s appearance. Think of an individual with a crooked smile or nose or a marked difference in orbital size.

Another component in judging an individual’s looks is a matter of proportion. For example, if someone has a large facial skeleton, you will not be surprised or put off if they have a large nose. But if that same nose is attached to a patient with a small face, it attracts negative attention. Sometimes the nose is appropriately proportioned for the face, but looks outsized because the maxilla is retrusive. Observers similarly evaluate the eyes, ears, and jaws as they size up one another.

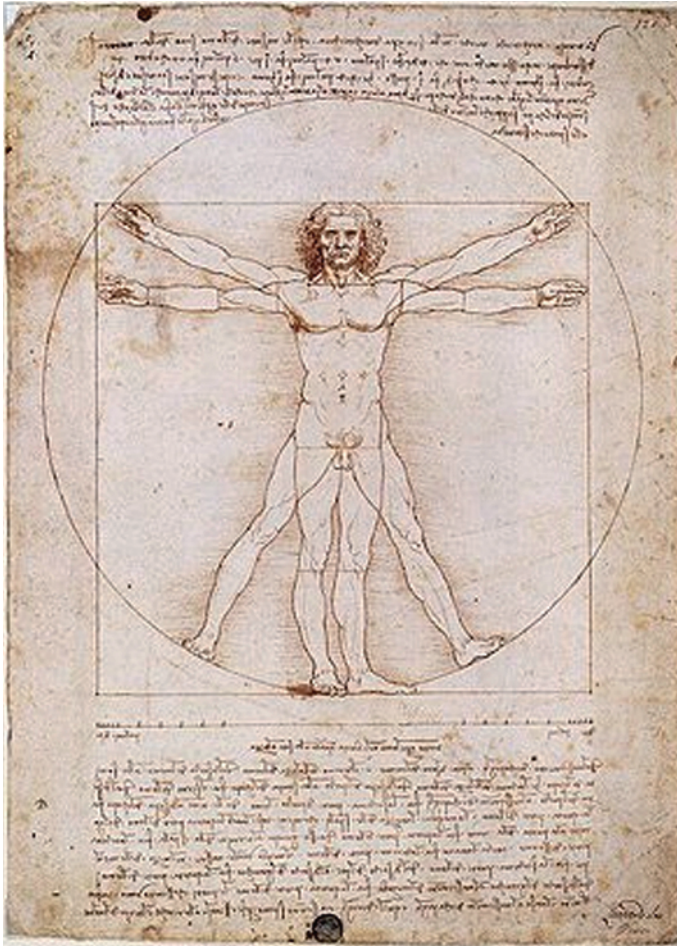


Figure 1.1 Vitruvian Man. (Pen and ink with wash over metalpoint drawing on paper by Leonardo da Vinci created c. 1487.)

In addition to assessing the symmetry of facial features, one also subliminally and quickly appraises the placement of those components to see if they are where they should be. Individuals with hypo- or hypertelorism are easily noted, even by the casual observer. Perhaps subtler placement aberrations can be appreciated in patients who have abnormalities of the horizontal facial thirds or vertical facial fifths. These alterations can also diminish one's subjective beauty rating.

While symmetry, placement, and proportion are important signposts of beauty, all of the facial components contribute to the overall look. We virtually instantaneously assess a person's appearance, looking at the features mentioned above in addition to the individual components of their eyes, nose, smile, teeth, lips, hair, and of course, the quality of their skin. When it comes to correcting shortcomings in this area there are numerous overlapping dental and medical specialists who would lay claim to all or part of the face.

All in all, facial beauty is not just about an ear or an eye or a nose and so on. It is the sum of everything between the clavicles and the top of head including the enveloping skin and hair, which is why this text is so unique and important. Experienced practitioners from seven different specialties, all focused on the appearance of the mouth, face, and jaws have contributed to this volume: cosmetic dentistry, prosthetic dentistry, oral and maxillofacial surgery, dermatology, facial plastic surgery, plastic surgery, hair restoration, and oculoplastic surgery.

What lies here before you is a primer for students of dentistry and medicine, residents and fellows, as well as seasoned practitioners seeking to enhance their skills. It is hoped that no matter what your background, you will find pearls in these pages to apply to your practice.