

BEAUTY FOR SALE

ADMISSION SEASON FADS: Fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds are paying tens of thousands of rupees for cosmetic surgery, laser treatment and image makeovers so that they can make the perfect impression on their first day of college

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When Rashmi Mehta (16, name changed) scored an impressive 93 per cent in her Class 10 ICSE board exams, she didn't get a new cellphone or an all-expenses-paid trip abroad.

Instead her parents gifted her a brand new nose.

"I told my friends I was going on a vacation... I wanted it to be a surprise," says Mehta, giggling.

Mehta's mother says she has no regrets about paying for her daughter to remodel her "long, sharp nose".

"This is the age for them to enjoy themselves and I don't want her to have a complex because of something that can easily be fixed," she says.

Mehta is among a growing breed of youngsters willing to go under the knife, get expensive treatments or, at the very least, a designer makeover, all so that they can look their best on the first day of college.

This year, plastic surgeons across the city say they saw a 10- to 15-per cent rise in the number of teenaged patients coming in just before the admission season.

"Students start approaching me just after the SSC and HSC exams," says Dr Lakshyajit Dhumi, a plastic and cosmetic surgeon at Naravati hospital, Vile Parle. "They usually come with friends or an elder sister for the initial consultation and, once they are convinced, they bring their mothers along."

The reason, psychologists and surgeons agree, is an increasing stress on appearance, and peer pressure to make a flashy first impression.

"I had one teenager come in saying she wanted to be Miss Fresher on the

first day of college," says Meenakshi Agarwal, director of the Face & Figure cosmetic surgery centre based in Mahim. "She got a liposuction treatment done to get into better shape."

The images these teens borrow from are, predictably, from fashion magazines, films and TV. Some, says clinical psychologist Anuradha Sovani, are influenced by their parents, who have themselves had botox shots, liposuction or cosmetic surgery.

"Many of these youngsters come from image-conscious, affluent backgrounds in which parents themselves regularly get cosmetic surgeries done," says Sovani. "When they see their parents do it, they want it too. But this is teaching them, at a young age, to judge people — and themselves — by the way they look."

Across the city, the season also sees a significant rise in demand for skin treatments, with teens opting for

I try to make sure they are certain of what they want and aren't approaching me with emotional baggage, like a recent break-up.

DR MOHAN THOMAS, cosmetic surgeon and senior consultant at Breach Candy Hospital

These youngsters are walking into a completely different environment and believe that modifying their appearance will make them more acceptable.

DR ANIL TIBREWALA, plastic surgeon at Mahim's PD Hinduja Hospital

everything from skin polishing to acne scar removal.

"Students start flooding my clinic after the March board exams and keep coming till the end of July," says Dr Rohini Wadhawani, medical director of Parle-based clinic Skin Essentials. "Most ask for treatments that will give them flawless skin and flowing hair, clearly something they've picked up from television ads and movies. I get plenty of

girls asking me for skin like [actors] Bipasha Basu or Kareena Kapoor."

Wadhawani says she often conducts sessions to tell her younger clients that the pictures they see in magazines have been extensively airbrushed and edited.

"I don't want them to have unrealistic expectations," she adds.

For those who can't afford a nose job, or find it too extreme, there are fash-

ion designers and stylists to help them prepare for their 'debut'.

Some teens are going so far as having entire college wardrobes custom-made.

"Compared with the seven enquiries I received last year from first-time college-goers, this year more than 15 kids have approached me," says Varsha Bhawnani, who specialises in image makeovers and owns designer clothing store Vinegar in Bandra.

Bhawnani says she started out offering makeovers for working professionals and middle-aged women. But over the past few years, her clients have steadily grown younger.

"Last month, a 16-year-old came asking for a wardrobe makeover before junior college began," she says. "She spent Rs 20,000 just on advice about what to buy."

The teenager's brief was simple, but specific. "She said: I

don't want brands. I want to look different, but fit."

Bhawnani gave her 10 sets of clothes and the teenager left with a promise to return after the Diwali holidays.

Another client, 16-year-old Simran Rao, came to her a few weeks before her class 10 results were declared, "to get a sense of style".

The Commerce student spent Rs 50,000 getting a wardrobe designed that "suited her personality and reflected her style".

"I feel more confident because I like what I wear," says Rao, now an HR College student. "On my first day of college, I wore one of the custom-designed dresses. Others noticed. I got plenty of compliments."

(With inputs from Dhamini Ratnam)

IMAGING: SURAJIT

INTERVIEW GITA CHADHA, SOCIOLOGIST

'Image has begun to matter more than self'



Why is today's generation so image-conscious?

In a world driven by market forces that reduce people to non-reflexive consumers, everyone is becoming image- and brand-conscious. Parents often choose to buy brands for their children in order to indicate their social class and their purchasing power.

So is the media to blame?

Most definitely. Also, peer pressure. More importantly, in a world so focused on social

networking, 'image' has begun to matter more than 'self'.

Does Bollywood play a big role in making youngsters self-conscious about the way they look?

It is not just Bollywood. Bollywood must be seen as part of a global culture that foregrounds how you look, what you wear, where you eat, what car you possess... It's advertising, reality shows, soap operas, sitcoms. [Actor] Jennifer Aniston defines girls today as much as Kareena Kapoor does, so let's not blame Bollywood alone.



BEAUTY AT A PRICE

Rs 50,000 onwards Liposuction	Rs 30,000 onwards Rhinoplasty	Rs 35,000 onwards Male breast reduction	Rs 20,000 onwards Dimple creation	Rs 5,000-50,000 onwards Wardrobe makeover	Rs 1,000 onwards Laser hair removal	Rs 600 onwards Acne scar treatment
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