

# Ideal Female Brow Aesthetics

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## KEYWORDS

• Brow lift • Forehead lift • Aesthetic surgery • Browplasty • Photography • Beauty • Fashion

## KEY POINTS

- The ideal modern female brow aesthetic is becoming lower, flatter, and with a more lateral peak.
- There is likely an interaction between a woman's age and the perceived ideal brow position.
- Volumizing the brow upper lid complex will likely supplant many of the traditional open brow lifting techniques.

*The computer can't tell you the emotional story. It can give you the exact mathematical design, but what's missing is the eyebrows.*

—Frank Zappa

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/eyebrows.html>

## INTRODUCTION

Few facial features are as powerful as the eyebrows. Sclafani<sup>1</sup> recently called them “the superior aesthetic frame of the eyes.” This statement is significant because vision-tracking studies have shown that when viewing a face, people spend the most time looking at the periorcular region.<sup>2</sup> The eyebrow can express wide-ranging and subtle emotions, even when the rest of the face is neutral. Elevated brows suggest surprise and, when lowered, they express fatigue and aging. Medially angled brows indicate anger, whereas laterally angled brows connote sadness.<sup>3</sup>

Given their importance in facial aesthetics and emotional expression, it is not surprising that women have sought ways to change the appearance of their eyebrows to better project youth, beauty, and energy. Plucking and dyeing can achieve modest

changes, but more permanent and impressive alterations require surgical intervention. Browplasty was initially described nearly a century ago and became significantly more popular recently because of more effective and less invasive techniques. There are several potential indications for aesthetic forehead surgery, including the reduction of forehead rhytids and the repositioning of skin and soft tissue in the upper lid–brow complex<sup>4</sup>; however, it is difficult to perform significant forehead surgery without changing the location of the eyebrows. Most women undergoing aesthetic forehead surgery simply want to look younger and more alert. It will be difficult for them to more specifically articulate a goalresting brow position. Hence, it is important for the surgeon to possess an understanding of the ideal youthful female eyebrow.

## THE IDEAL FEMALE BROW

Beauty is an evolving concept specific to a particular time and population. Contemporary ideas about the ideal female brow (in North America) originated with makeup artists like Westmore in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> His formulation placed the medial and lateral brow at the orbital rim, with the peak located above the lateral limbus (LL) approximately 1 cm

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above the bony rim. Over the past 40 years, investigators have proposed several changes to Westmore's model.

Ellenbogen<sup>3</sup> stated that the inferior aspect of the medial eyebrow margin should start 1 cm above the supraorbital rim. Whitaker and colleagues<sup>6</sup> thought the brow peak should be at the junction of the middle and lateral thirds. This idea was supported by Byrd, who added that this point corresponded to the intersection of the brow with a line connecting the nasal ala and LL. Byrd also recommended that the peak should be 8 to 10 mm superior to the medial brow.<sup>7</sup> As far back as 1989, Cook and colleagues<sup>8</sup> stated that the peak of the eyebrow should be above the lateral *canthus* (LC) not the LL because a more medial peak yielded a surprised look. Several investigators have proposed even more strict numerical guidelines for the brow position. Connell and colleagues<sup>9</sup> recommended 1.5 cm between the eyebrow and the upper-lid skin crease. McKinney and colleagues<sup>10</sup> evaluated 50 young women and found an average of 2.5 cm from the midpupil to the superior brow. They concluded that a brow *less* than 2.5 cm from the midpupil was ptotic and sought to raise the brow to 2.5 to 2.8 cm above the pupil with a forehead lift. Matarasso and Terino<sup>4</sup> essentially reiterated the values proposed by Ellenbogen, Connell, and McKinney. These values were all based on extensive personal experience but remained largely subjective.

## OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

Objectively defining an ideal female eyebrow position is challenging, even beyond the fact that aesthetic trends are constantly changing. Who determines what is ideal when there is no gold standard? In such instances, it is helpful to analyze a problem from many different perspectives.

### **Observer Scored**

Several investigators have used a group of observers to evaluate the brow position of women in photographs. Schreiber and colleagues<sup>11</sup> asked 100 individuals to rank 21 female and 6 male photographs for attractiveness on a 10-point scale (10 = most attractive). The photographs that were given a score greater than 7 were then analyzed for various eyebrow dimensions. Their measurements were all in relation to eye width to allow comparison between photographs. They measured medial canthus to medial brow, LC to lateral brow, and the location of the eyebrow peak in relation to the eye width. Observers preferred the brow peak at 71% of the distance across the eye width, which is roughly at the LL. A strength of this study

was its large number of raters. One weakness is that only a few photographs (fewer than 10) were analyzed for the ideal female eyebrow characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Freund and Nolan<sup>12</sup> used Adobe Photoshop (Adobe Systems, Inc, San Jose, California) to alter the eyebrow characteristics in photographs of young Hispanic, Anglo-Saxon, and Slavic women. Two sets of images were generated. In the first set of images, the eyebrow shape was kept constant, but the medial brow was placed at, below, or above the supraorbital rim. In the second set, the eyebrow peak was placed medial or lateral to the LL, or the eyebrow was made completely flat without a clear peak. The altered photographs were then scored for attractiveness by 11 plastic surgeons and 9 established cosmetologists. Surgeons and aestheticians preferred a medial brow at or below the supraorbital rim; medial brows above the rim were considered unattractive. In the second set of images, both groups of raters preferred laterally peaked brows, then flat brows, then eyebrows with a medial apex.<sup>12</sup>

Baker and colleagues<sup>13</sup> used Adobe Photoshop to create 4 facial shapes (round, square, oval, and long) for 5 different models. They erased the eyebrows and asked a modern makeup artist to draw new appropriate eyebrows on each face. In a second set of images, they used eyebrows using Westmore's original criteria. They then asked 78 individuals to compare the makeup artist's and Westmore's eyebrow position for each of the 20 face/shape combinations. In the oval and round faces, the two eyebrow locations were each preferred by essentially 50% of the participants. However, 58% and 62% of participants preferred the makeup artist's brow in the long and square faces, respectively. The makeup artist altered the height, severity, and location of the peak to better complement the long and square faces.

Billier and Kim<sup>14</sup> photographed 4 women (a 30-year-old Caucasian, a 30-year-old Asian, a 60-year-old Caucasian, and a 60-year-old Asian) and used the Mirror Suite (Canfield Scientific, Fairfield, New Jersey) to alter brow position, nasal tip width, and nasolabial angle. Five unique eyebrow shapes were created for each model, with the eyebrow apex at a different location: midpupillary line, LL, halfway between limbus and canthus (HF), LC, and the lateral brow margin (LM). The images were rated by 171 observers. Each brow position, except LM, was ranked very similarly, with a nonstatistically significant trend toward preferring more lateral brow positions in the two younger models (highest ranking for HF) compared with the two older models (highest ranking for LL).<sup>14</sup>

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