

DOES SHE or DOESN'T SHE?

WENDY SCHMID looks at why some women keep their enhancements on the DL—and the lengths they'll go to in order to keep it that way.

On

a late-night talk show last February, Jennifer Aniston was being her usual disarmingly charming self when she did something unexpected. Looking glowy and years younger than 43, the woman *Men's Health* magazine named Hottest Woman of All Time admitted to lasering away her sun spots and resurfacing her skin with a chemical peel. No, she wasn't copping to surgery, but she did acknowledge getting a little work done—a rarity among celebs who tend to hide their cosmetic improvements in an effort to appear preternaturally perfect.

Cosmetic surgery has long been a hot topic, and admitting to it—or not—is a polarizing one. “Patients fall into two camps: those who hide it and those who talk about it,” says Beverly Hills cosmetic

surgeon Dr. Nathan Newman. Recent episodes of Bravo's *The Real Housewives* franchise illuminated the line in the sand with alternating footage of some women getting work done on air and others uncomfortably denying questions of whether they'd secretly enhanced their lips (Gretchen Rossi, Orange County) or rear end (Lisa Vanderpump, Beverly Hills). Of course, the best work doesn't beg the question. Done right, it can be undetectable, which makes it harder to know who is indulging and who is staying mum.

According to docs, the “hidiers” far outnumber the “talkers.” “I'd say a good 70 per cent of my patients hide their work,” says Toronto-based plastic surgeon Dr. Richard Rival, “though talking about less invasive things is becoming a bit more

common.” Manhattan dermatologist Dr. Francesca Fusco agrees. “There's more openness about smaller tweaks than there was five years ago, but the majority of people—women and men, famous or not—still hide *ehhverything*,” she says, drawing out the syllables for effect. And they go to great lengths to do so. “I have a beautiful brunette actress who comes for Dysport, Restylane and chemical peels, and not only does she hide it, I need to speak in code. I refer to the injections as vitamin D and vitamin R!” Another patient of Fusco's, a well-known news anchor, wears a wig to her appointments, and many women will book treatments only when their husbands are away, ensuring they can hide during any downtime. “They pay with their own money too.”

Rival says he secretly treats some of the wives of his fellow surgeons. “It's true,” he says, laughing. “A lot of cash deals go on.”

Others go even further to remain undetected. “I have a patient who lives in Yorkville near my clinic there, but she insisted I do her facelift at St. Joe's Hospital [in Toronto's West End] because she said there wasn't a chance in hell she'd see anyone she knew in that part of town,” says plastic surgeon Dr. Andres Gantous. “Apparently she thinks it's the wrong side of the tracks.” Some “hidiers” resort to an alias. “One of my patients, a Caucasian actor, booked his surgery under a Hispanic name,” says Newman. “If you knew who he was, you'd laugh at his name choice.” It might sound outlandish, but the stakes are higher than ever for recognizable faces, as one well-known actress patient of Rival's recently learned. “She was in my office lobby for a rhinoplasty follow-up when someone tweeted about it,” he says. “She was pissed.”

For their part, doctors take the Hippocratic oath to protect patient identity and most do whatever it takes to avoid information leaks. They accommodate skittish celebs by seeing them extra early or late, when their offices are closed. Toronto and Mississauga plastic surgeon Dr. Michael Weinberg offers a VIP treatment of sorts, keeping “famous files” in a separate location and agreeing not to take before and after photos.

Special architectural features help too. Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Dr. Marc Mani's tony office is between Brighton Way and Bedford Drive—plastic surgery central of Los Angeles. “TMZ and the paparazzi hang out here, but I picked the building because it's so private,” says Mani. “It's got remote locks and a back »

entrance with a drive-up bridge. You never have to use an elevator.” During visits from high-profile film and music stars or members of Dubai’s royal family, Mani is not above employing decoy tactics such as having an office assistant don a patient’s hat and drive her car to divert photographers. He’ll also make the occasional post-op house call. One fortysomething A-lister hiding out after a mini-lift asked him to come to her country house. “Once I parked, I had to walk a trail to get there,” he says, laughing. “I thought, ‘I am literally going the extra mile.’”

Fusco, meanwhile, has raised stealth to an art form. “The pressure is really on when patients don’t want any ‘evidence’ of a visit,” she says. To that end, she’s created an elaborate anti-bruising regimen: For a week pre-treatment, patients pop supplements of Traumeel, arnica forte and vitamin C (to strengthen blood vessel walls) and avoid blood thinners like fish and flax oil, Aspirin, multivitamins and vitamin E. Fusco applies cold gel patches after filler injections and uses tiny 32-gauge needles for Botox and Dysport, using multiple needles per session to prevent dulling. Patients finish an appointment in front of an LED light to curb inflammation, and if Fusco sees a hint of a bruise, she zaps the area with a V-beam laser.

It seems to work. Samantha,* a 48-year-old Manhattan school teacher, says she has been going to Fusco for a rotation of Botox, fillers, Fraxel, chemical peels and tightening treatments (Ulthera for her face; Exilis for her body) for 10 years without raising the suspicions of family or friends. “I time it for when my husband has a business trip, and he’s never noticed a thing. Dr. Fusco is such an artist that I look better but not done,” she says, speaking from a friend’s phone so she can’t be traced. Getting “hiders” like Samantha to talk is like conducting special-ops. Doctors provide fake names and warn, “You can’t call her; she’ll call you.”

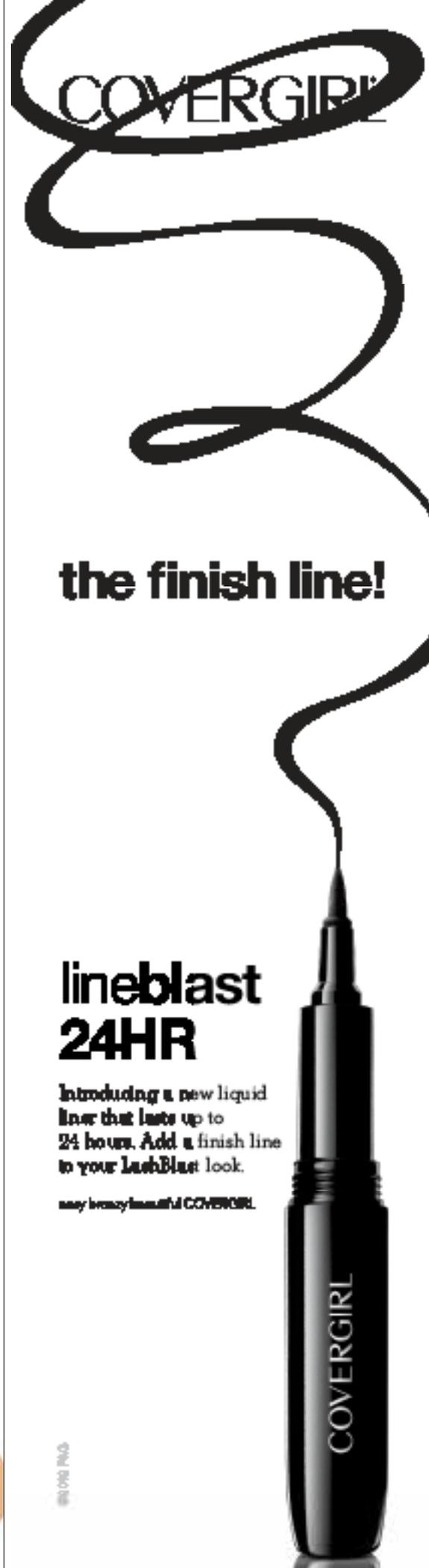
But why all the hiding, especially in these TMI times? “There’s still a stigma,” says Mani. “We live in a youth culture and plastic surgery is a form of deception, so people don’t want to admit to it.” Zoe,* 58, a director of communications for a government agency, feels compelled to look as youthful as she can among her young colleagues. When her cheek was bruised from filler injections, she said she’d fallen off the treadmill. “I don’t want them to know because I don’t think they’d get it,” she says. Rival believes many people feel

guilty, “like they’re too focused on vanity or will be judged that way.” Esther,* a real estate broker in her late 40s, fears the reaction of her Jewish community. “I’m a modern Orthodox woman but it’s just not considered acceptable to get work done to enhance how you look.” Samantha doesn’t want to send the wrong message to her husband or daughter. “He loves that I’m strong and confident, and I wouldn’t want him or my daughter to think otherwise,” she says. “But nowadays everyone looks like Demi Moore at my age.”

It’s true, fortysomething does suddenly look better than ever. Moore, Aniston and Jennifer Lopez (among others) have created a new benchmark for women to measure themselves against. But with the exception of Aniston’s candid remarks, the celeb crowd generally isn’t talking. This can create a “keep up with the Joneses” kind of pressure. According to Newport Beach, Calif., clinical psychologist and body image expert Dr. Lyndsay Elliott, “Many women are private about their ‘beauty secrets’ because they don’t want to deal with the embarrassment of feeling imperfect.”

These are some of the reasons why many “talkers” confide only in their inner circle. But there is a growing level of openness that may soon change this. “We all want to look and feel better as we get older, so why hide it?” says 64-year-old Mary Ling, mother of tv journalist Lisa Ling. Rather than get a facelift, she went to Newman for stem-cell fat injections (a.k.a the Stem Cell Lift) and talked about it on *Entertainment Tonight*. “I loved the result and wanted to let people know about these new options.” A younger generation used to living their lives online is also happy to educate the masses. They shout about their experiences from the rooftops of the digital age, i.e. Facebook and YouTube. “I was just fixing a surgical graft on a 25-year-old patient’s nose, and he was upset that he didn’t have his cellphone because he wanted to post it,” says Gantous. Thus far, six of Rival’s patients have video-blogged about their “work” on YouTube. One of them, a twentysomething hair-and-makeup video blogger named Leyla, takes fans on her nose-job journey in the spirit of honesty. She points out the bump she wants fixed, shows herself bruised and bandaged post-op, and excitedly offers a final reveal. “Only about 5 to 10 per cent will post pictures or videos,” says Rival. “They’re the minority, but they sure are good for business.” □

* NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED



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