



How much is too much? —*By Kim Hughes*

enhancement **OVERLOAD**

L-R: Donatella Versace,
Mickey Rourke and
Heidi Montag

Even by the standards of Hollywood, where everything is bigger, weirder and wonkier than in real life, the current approach to plastic surgery has reached stupefying levels. You don't have to look very far to see scalpel casualties. Think of Joan Rivers, Kenny Rogers, Donatella Versace, Mickey Rourke, Nicole Kidman or Priscilla Presley—people who haven't so much refreshed their looks as recast them completely, ending up, to paraphrase *The New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, looking like astonished pansexual versions of their previous selves. ▶

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Then there's fame-seeking MTV reality star Heidi Montag who upped the ante in late 2009 by having 10 distinct cosmetic procedures done in a single day. That she was just 23 and already gorgeous seemed to have negligible bearing on her decision. And, indeed, Montag's adventures in complete body alteration scored her the cover of *People* magazine.

Clearly, a paradigm shift is afoot. But where exactly do you draw the line between vigorous enthusiasm for change and outright addiction? Is there a difference between simple vanity and a relentless pursuit of perfection?

Montag's multiple treatments also beg another set of questions: Is that kind of bundling, albeit on a much smaller and saner scale, a wise move for the average person? Do certain procedures lend themselves to a combination approach? Finally, and most critically, do the benefits of having multiple procedures done at once outweigh the associated risks?

For some perspective on Hollywood's fixation with cosmetic enhancement, *Elevate* surveyed several Canadian doctors on

the addiction-versus-enthusiasm debate and the efficacy of bundling procedures.

Repeat After Her

"I dislike the word perfection. Anybody who is seeking 'perfection' likely has unrealistic expectations and will never be happy," offers Dr. Michael J. Weinberg of the Mississauga Cosmetic Surgery and Laser Clinic. "Repeat surgeries cross the line when they compromise safety. They always cross the line when the treatments requested are too invasive for minimal deformities," he continues, stressing that natural-looking results and safety should always take priority.

"A 60-year-old woman who wants a facelift, some injectables and breast reduction over the next year is reasonable," adds Dr. Weinberg. "A 35-year-old who insists on a facelift, breast augmentation (to DD) and liposuction at the same time and who has good facial structure and a C-cup is addiction."

Though he equivocates on the term "addiction," Dr. Wayne R. Perron of Calgary's Plastic Surgery allows that it is possible to abuse cosmetic procedures. "The whole purpose of plastic surgery is to make you look better. The so-called plastic surgery addicts look weird—they look funny. They've had weird and funny things done to them by probably weird and funny surgeons. Obviously there are hundreds of more people who look good after plastic surgery than the one weirdo in California who gets on TV after having had 10 procedures done in six hours."

So just how many nose jobs can an average face handle, for example? "One revision should be a rough guide for every patient," says Dr. Weinberg. "Michael Jackson is a sad example to us all."

While most would agree that Hollywood does not represent a realistic point of reference for lay people considering plastic surgery, there is a trickle-down effect in terms of what's considered stylish and acceptable.

Indeed, as Dr. Perron notes, in the not-too-distant past, plastic surgery was something people downplayed and even tried to conceal. As recently as the 1980s and '90s, tabloids reported on celebrities who allegedly and covertly nipped and tucked in an effort to stall the advance of time.

Today that notion seems quaint. Celebrity surgery itself isn't the story — it's celebrity surgery run amok that's commanding columns. Google "plastic surgery gone wrong" and you'll get countless hits of sites picturing globe-like breasts, grossly exaggerated lips (cheekily dubbed "trout pout" by awfulplasticsurgery.com), too-tight faces and people who look more like cats than humans.

According to Dr. Andres Gantous of Facial Plastic Surgery Toronto, Montag is only the most current example of somebody overdoing it. "It makes you wonder if she is suffering from Body Dysmorphic Syndrome," he says, referring to the psychological anxiety disorder in which a person is excessively preoccupied by a perceived defect in his or her physical features.

The concept of gently refreshing one's look, however, is accepted as a mainstream and practical response to aging. But it nevertheless seems sensible to stop and consider whether the decision to have multiple surgeries is motivated by a realistic desire



L-R: Kenny Rogers, Priscilla Presley and Nicole Kidman



Joan Rivers

to improve on what's there or, rather, is prompted by the current accessibility and affordability of cosmetic procedures. And, yes, by what the stars are doing.

Both Dr. Perron and Dr. Weinberg stress that managing patient expectations is a crucial component of their overall treatment. And both agree that surgeons are obliged to confront patients they think have lost perspective or may be suffering from Body Dysmorphic Syndrome.

"We are not technicians," says Dr. Weinberg. "Bodies and people are one and the same. We have to take both into account." Adds Dr. Perron, "It's not difficult for me to address patients on the reality of what they are doing."

One-Shot Tactic

Montag's very public pursuit of perfection also brings another topic to the forefront: the safety of bundling procedures. Certainly, the idea of achieving widespread corrections in one shot while reducing downtime, maybe even saving money, makes the notion worth considering. But where should a surgeon draw the line?

"Longer operations carry the risk of possible blood clots in the leg veins that may end up travelling to the lungs (thrombosis and pulmonary embolism). The long procedure times also increase the risk of retained lung secretions and collapse of parts of the lungs (atelectasis)," explains Dr. Gantous.

"Surgical risks include bleeding, infection and wound-healing problems. The benefits are that the recovery time is bundled together and is not necessarily longer than usual. This translates into less overall time off from work or study and not having to go through pain and discomfort on multiple occasions."

Dr. Weinberg also cites "one recovery period and less cost," as a key benefit, adding, "We bundle procedures and reduce the costs.

We pass our cost savings off onto the patients. Some clinics don't. [But] the general surgical risks are likely additive; for example, infection risk for one surgery is twice as high with two surgeries."

There is also a general consensus on which types of procedures logically fit together — as a general rule, pairing an invasive procedure with a non-invasive one and focusing on one specific region of the face or body.

"You can have, say, your upper eyelids done surgically and then have some Restylene put in your lips or some Botox put in your nasal labial crease or something smaller like that," says Dr. Perron. "You could have a forehead lift, do a brow lift and then maybe do something to your lower eyelids. So you are correcting the eyelid area at once."

Other examples of smart bundling? Dr. Weinberg suggests breast augmentation and breast lift ("with some caveats"), as well as a face and brow lift. Dr. Gantous, meanwhile, offers rhinoplasty paired with chin implant surgery or a face lift along with eyelid surgery.

But Dr. Perron — who performs an astonishing 600 to 700 surgeries annually — sounds the cautionary bell when it comes to coupling up invasive procedures. "Doing something like liposuction and a tummy tuck and a breast reduction — that's big stuff. You are under anesthesia for four-to-six hours. The risks increase. People die every year from having plastic surgery in excess. And it's usually not the plastic surgery itself but from complications associated with it. This is purely elective surgery — it is not required in order to function so you don't risk your life or your health."

"I would suggest that people considering multiple procedures have a frank discussion with their surgeon regarding the benefits and potential risks of bundling them together," Dr. Gantous continues. "It is of utmost importance that the financial benefit does not outweigh the medical and psychological considerations." 