

TRENDS

WOULD YOU SNAPCHAT YOUR PLASTIC SURGERY?

Cosmetic surgery has reached peak voyeurism with new levels of social-media access. Its drive for ever-younger clients is not for the faint-hearted. By Josh Glancy



PABLO THECUADRO

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Monday morning on Dr Martin Jugenburg’s Snapchat is not a place for those with a weak constitution. The Toronto-based plastic surgeon walks you through his plush consulting rooms, checks in with his secretary, then it’s into the operating room, where he’s sucking out huge gobbets of fat from a woman’s stomach and implanting it into her bottom, live-streaming all the while.

It sounds like a scene from a scratchy horror movie, but Jugenburg ([@realdrsix](#)) is only one of many plastic surgeons now using social media, and particularly Snapchat, as a personal promotion channel, sharing real-time operations with millions.

There has long been an audience for plastic-surgery voyeurism. Think back to the US reality shows of the Noughties — Dr 90210 and Extreme Makeover — and, more recently, Botched. But now plastic surgeons are speaking directly to younger audiences. (According to a 2015 report from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, use of soft-tissue fillers alone among 20- to 29-year-olds increased by 33% in the five years from 2010.) The Florida-based surgeon Dr Michael Salzhauer ([@therealdrmiami](#)), is the pioneer in this field — a recent story received 1.9m views.



DR MIAMI IS OFTEN JOINED BY BLINGED-UP RAPPERS IN HIS SHOTS. HE CALLS HIS PATIENTS #BEAUTYWARRIORS

Instagram and Snapchat are natural bedfellows for the most image-obsessed branch of medicine, and the Snapchat feeds of surgeons such as Dr Miami allow prospective clients to see before they buy. The morbidly curious can watch stomach-churning live procedures, fat spraying out of the liposuction hose like it’s a Super Soaker, and giant chunks of flesh removed for all to see.

“Fifteen years ago, if you weren’t in the Yellow Pages, you didn’t exist,” says Dr Ryan Neinstein, a New York-based plastic surgeon. “Five years ago, if you didn’t have a website, you didn’t exist. Now, if you’re not all over social media, people think you’re hiding something.”

Neinstein works in one of the richest neighbourhoods in the world: Manhattan's Upper East Side. His job comes with many of the quirks and demands you might expect, particularly if you've ever watched an episode of Nip/Tuck. Club owners and agents across New York have him on speed dial, ready to demand his services at any time of the night if a celebrity customer cracks their head open while out on the razzle. He does some of these late-night quick fixes as "Godfather" treatments: no charge, just remember I did you this favour.

Neinstein also has to be his own social-media brand ambassador, however, and plastic-surgery Instagram is a pretty weird place. His feed, [@drneinstein](#), is at the classier end, but still there are pictures of women's bodies looking like an Etch A Sketch: flabby tummies marked out for the knife like the cuts of meat on a cow. There's a film of him doing "hi-def neck lipo", jabbing his tool under someone's skin to help reduce wattle.

At the more extreme end of the plastic-surgery social-media spectrum, things get a whole lot more emetic. This is where Dr Six and Dr Miami operate. The latter is often joined in his shots by blinged-up rappers. He calls his patients #BeautyWarriors and pictures himself alongside them after operations, smiling gleefully and pointing excitedly at their newly enlarged breasts.

Dr Six emphasises that this isn't just for kicks and self-promotion — Snapchat in particular has huge educational value. "It allows me to show clients what plastic surgery can and cannot do," he says. "I no longer have patients with unrealistic expectations."

What has surprised him most, since Dr Miami inspired him to start snapping, is how willing most clients are to get involved. Some even ask to be snapped. "They will watch it afterwards with their family and friends," he says. "They love to show it off." His Instagram feed is full of "before" and "after" pics of women who have had his "mommy makeover" — a tummy tuck and breast augmentation.

He believes showing plastic surgery on social media is just a "modern take" on a Discovery Channel documentary. But despite patients' consent and enthusiasm, some will feel uncomfortable about the ethics of live-broadcasting operations. You also hear stories of kickbacks: I'll give you some Botox on the cheap, you promote my work to your 2m followers. "People aren't appreciating what's happening to the human body, surgeons

aren't respecting the human body," says Neinstein, who does not promote his work on Snapchat. "They're acting as though they're slicing up an animal here. It drives viewers, but it doesn't glorify our profession. There's a voyeuristic angle to it. Many surgeons are choosing to build their practice through overanimation: glorifying bloody, gory things."

He strongly believes that attention-seeking live surgery should not be done on social media, with music and film crews and elaborate stunts, such as spraying the lipo fat around the room. "It's a car crash," he says. "It's only a matter of time until a patient dies on Snapchat during an elective operation because someone's not paying attention."

Neinstein emphasises that a well-curated Instagram feed can be hugely important to a prospective client, but he also believes it is driving some surgeons to an orgy of excess, pushing them to outdo each other in the quest for more likes and followers. Take the Brazilian butt lift (BBL), the surgery that takes fat from the body and implants it in the buttocks so you can get close to that "break the internet" Kardashian double-watermelon aesthetic. Dr Six recently live-streamed a procedure. As he cut into the patient on the table, one of his operating-room aides filmed the whole thing with captions: "Who wants a BBL? *Crying-face laughing emoji.*"

When some young women longing for a butt lift see it on social media, then find out the price tag for a fully qualified surgeon, they keep googling. "Eventually you find someone who has set up in a motel or shopping mall and will do it for \$300 cash," says Neinstein. "Most of these people are going to Home Depot, buying some cement and using a caulking gun and just... You might as well put a gun to the girl's head."

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the first modern plastic-surgery procedure — a skin graft on a sailor whose face was disfigured during the Battle of Jutland, performed by Harold Delf Gillies. It's fair to say the field has changed a bit since then. But perhaps the potential for competitive, even fatal vanity was always there, among the doctors as well as the patients. Gillies noted at the time: "With our artistic efforts constantly on exhibition about the wards, not only the patients judged our results, but we too, if only out of the corners of our eyes, jealously compared our work with that of our colleagues. Competition was keen, for the game was on." Dr Miami couldn't have put it better himself.



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