



# Got You Under My Skin

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, TO NIP AND TO TUCK...SARAH BERNAD INVESTIGATES THE EMOTIONAL LABYRINTH PLASTIC SURGEONS ENTER WHEN THEY WORK THEIR MAGIC ON THEIR OWN SPOUSES.

There's a saying in plastic surgery that if you want to judge a doctor's work, look at his wife. Doctors of all kinds confront the issue of treating family members: Should something go wrong, how could one be sure emotions wouldn't get in the way of taking life-saving action? But a plastic surgeon's decision to cut into the person he or she loves most can be particularly charged, even creepy, especially when it comes to shaping her face. "The face is the most anxiety provoking," says David P.

Rapaport, MD, a New York City plastic surgeon who has operated on his mother-in-law, his sister, and his wife. "But I love my wife's face even more now, because I know

billboard for every item on your service menu. "Doctors will have their trophy wives number four, five, and six with the large breasts and the large lips," says Kevin L. Smith, MD, of Charlotte Plastic Surgery in North Carolina. "And you have to ask, Who are they doing that for?" Their wives or themselves?

Steven Fayer, MD, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in NYC, has even been asked to see the wives of plastic surgeons by the plastic surgeons themselves, to discuss the psychological ramifications. "One doctor was just a very sensitive guy," Fayer says. "He wanted to get the go-ahead for the right reasons. After examining his wife, I didn't feel she had any significant emotional difficulties. Also, she was 51. If she were 25, then I would have been suspicious."

Rapaport's wife, Charmaine, was initially surgery-averse.

Botox an hour before the ceremony while I was sitting on the kitchen counter. My daughter held the instruments." A few months prior, he

But after having four children, she decided she wanted to talk to her husband about liposuction. "I remember thinking, Maybe I'll just ask him what the risks are. I thought he'd say, 'I have to refer you to a friend because I can't bear to see you in pain or bleeding,'" she recalls. "But he said, 'There's a cancellation next Friday.' He seemed so fine with it that I thought, Wait, are you that detached?" She adds, "I think he accepted me as a patient in a protective way."

It's a truism that surgeons are not generally egoless beings, and when a doctor is doing a procedure because his wife wants it done, he likely feels he is the best person for the job, says Sheenah Hankin, a New York City psychotherapist who has counseled patients presurgery. "It depends how secure [the wife] is. If you're saying, By improving my face, you give me approval, it's probably not a good idea. But if she wants to look younger and fresher, and it's not a purely emotional decision, why not?" Part of the motivation to get work done is the pressure to represent. "As soon as people know what he does for a living, their eyes are riveted on me," says Leigh Brown, whose husband, Elliot Jacobs, MD, a Manhattan plastic surgeon, has operated on her twice. "They practically take out microscopes! So I like to look as good as I can."

"You start to think, Am I agreeing I need to do this because it might make his business look better?" asks the wife of one New York City-based surgeon whose husband gave her a breast augmentation and a neck-lift. "I often think I should go to one of their national meetings and lead group therapy sessions for the wives."

But the most obvious reason a wife might be tempted to go under her husband's knife may simply be because it's convenient... and cheap. Not to mention discreet. Most plastic surgeons operate in their own fully accredited operating rooms, which means privacy above all. Injectables can be brought home and stored in the fridge or even taken on vacation. "We went to a wedding in Boston," says a 33-year-old mother of two who is married to a Miami surgeon, "and my husband was giving me