

How Men and Women Make Buying Decisions Differently

In your practice, you've probably already observed that patients make buying decisions based on differences in age, social class, and gender. Retail anthropology has broadly classified the four most influential factors: cultural, social, psychological and personal. Once you understand the basics of consumer buying behavior, you can customize your marketing materials to address different buying groups and the factors that motivate them.

Women still have the greatest number of cosmetic procedures (both surgical and nonsurgical), but the market for men is expanding twice as fast. A bit of research on gender-based differences in consumer buying behavior reveals some broad but clear patterns:

Time is one major component which intersects with all four anthropological factors behind the buying process. The time between the initial desire for the cosmetic treatment and its fulfillment is crucial. "Men tend to make their purchasing decisions based on immediate needs...how well the product or service will satisfy needs now and into the immediate future," explains Swarna Bashti. "Long-term considerations seem to play little part for men."

Women, perhaps not surprisingly, generally exhibit the opposite buying behavior: long-term considerations such as longevity and maintenance are the biggest factors driving the buying decision. There are of course variations on this pattern, but women tend to take more time to consider major decisions such as cosmetic procedures. Subtle and/or long-term results are preferable to instant gratification.

Surprisingly, men are more likely than women to worry that having a cosmetic procedure will make them seem "vain." This is probably closely tied to widespread cultural assumptions that women are *supposed* to be concerned with their appearance, while in men this trait may be viewed as "unmasculine." Clearly, with the number and rate of male plastic surgeries increasing, this presumption is groundless. As one patient put it, "I've never seen why women should want to look their best, but not men."

In 2010, Australian researchers reported in the Annals of Plastic Surgery that men and women both exhibited comparable levels of "preoperative psychosocial dysfunction" prior to surgery. Men however, were more likely than women to express dissatisfaction after the procedure, even when the results were as promised. Closer pre-operative screening helps to identify such potential "problem patients."

The following year, however, [Statistics Norway](#) reported that men and women exhibit opposite patterns in self-reporting overall physical and mental health prior to undergoing a procedure: “Men who have had cosmetic surgery reported feeling less depressed, in better health, and felt less discriminated against than men in general. The data show clear gender differences: while men who have a cosmetic surgery appear to be a healthy, resourceful group, cosmetic surgery among women is associated with high income, but poorer physical and mental health.”

Conclusions

Allowing for variation between cultures and other influencing factors, as a rule marketing to male patients should emphasize:

- the immediacy of the procedure’s results;
- the positive effects of the procedure on their physical and mental health;
- the patient’s sense of masculinity.

Marketing to female patients should focus on:

- empowerment and sense of self-worth
- long-term benefits and maintenance regimens
- positive effects on physical and mental health.