

Nip/Tuck Secrets

Matt McCue



Illustration by Ryan Snook

Plastic surgery AMONG MALES is booming, but it's not one of those things guys want to discuss.

Brian has a secret so sensitive that he has never shared it with anyone except his wife. Brian is not his real name, but it's the alias I'm supposed to use when I call him for an interview. He has agreed to a confidential discussion on the condition that I describe him only in general terms: investment banker, mid-30s, lives in Connecticut.

Has he misled investors? Operated a pyramid scheme? Discovered the next great offshore tax haven? No, no and no. To him, however, this subject feels even more taboo.

The secret, he admits, is written across his face, although so subtly that it never has created a discussion among friends. And that's important to him because he is a man who has submitted himself to a procedure that is historically associated with women.

Brian has had plastic surgery.

“Vanity these days is not just for women,” he says. “I hate to say it, but I think a lot of people do judge you based on how you look. This is something for myself, not anybody else.”

Brian and his wife married after finishing college, and they quickly added children to their family. Brian spent long hours at the office, exercised less and developed a sunken chin that he wanted to strengthen. A little nip and tuck seemed like the answer. He went to see [Dr. Philip Miller](#) at Gotham Plastic Surgery in New York, received jaw implants and was home a few hours later. He didn’t even take pain-killers.

Since his surgery in 2010, none of Brian’s friends or colleagues have mentioned his reinforced mandible, which was exactly the intent.

“I wanted it to look natural and didn’t want people to comment on it,” Brian says in a phone conversation as his kids play in the background. “To me, good plastic surgery is noticeable but not to the point where people point it out.”

Among males, Brian isn’t alone in embracing cosmetic surgery. In November 2012, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported that men across the country are putting on a new face. In the past 15 years, the number of males undergoing plastic surgery has skyrocketed by 121 percent. In 2011 alone, 800,000 men — about 10 percent of the \$1 billion cosmetic-surgery market — eliminated muffin tops, removed turkey necks and smoothed out crow’s-feet.

The most common procedures are liposuction, rhinoplasty, eyelid surgeries, breast reduction and face-lifts. Prices are typically in four figures, with liposuction averaging \$2,700, breast reduction \$3,300 and nose reshaping \$4,000. Aesthetic plastic surgery is rarely covered by health insurance in the United States (although certain reconstructive procedures may be covered).

Hotbed markets include the image-conscious meccas of New York, Miami and Los Angeles, but the trend has spread to places like Baltimore and Nashville, Tenn. Along with CEOs and attorneys, plastic surgeons cite IT managers, accountants, teachers, chefs and train conductors as patients. “These are real guys,” says Dr. Darrick Antell of St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital in New York. “Guys who have to decide whether to go on a hunting trip with their buddies or get a neck lift. And they’re choosing the neck lift.”

The driving forces behind the uptick have been plastic surgery’s 51 percent cultural-acceptance rates across all income levels and races, the need to look sharp in a competitive post-recession workplace and a form of keeping up with the Joneses — assuming one of the Joneses is Channing Tatum.

“A lot of times, it’s men who can’t get rid of that last 10 percent that changes them from looking decent to getting that ‘Magic Mike’ look,” says Dr. Gabriel Chiu of Beverly Hills Plastic Surgery, Inc. At his practice, Dr. Chiu treats a range of ages, from guys in their 20s and 30s seeking high-definition

contouring of the torso and hips to men in their 50s and 60s requesting a chin lift. The body of Matthew McConaughey and the face of Brad Pitt seem to be in high demand.

Some of the pioneers of male cosmetic procedures were rugged American icons: astronaut Buzz Aldrin, Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz and a handful of aging Hollywood action heroes who look the part but won't cop to it. Discretion, not disclosure, is the norm among patients. Although men are opening up to the procedures, many stress the word subtle to their surgeons. "They don't want it to be something everyone else will notice," says Dr. Miller. Whereas he characterizes women as "shoppers" of the different treatments, men tend to be more definitive buyers. Men "come in, know they want it, get it and move on," says Dr. Miller.

Barry Maher, a professional speaker from Corona, Calif., recently had a hair transplant to appear more youthful to his Fortune 500 clients. Maher, in his mid-50s, initially told himself it was to maintain a professional edge, though he now concedes: "I did it because it turns out I'm a lot more vain than I thought. I simply never realized how vain I actually was until my hair disappeared."

While women dominate the plastic-surgery market, the numbers show men are freeing themselves from fitting into a neatly prescribed identity box. "If true equality between the sexes is a goal for our culture, it's a good thing that the practice of plastic surgery is becoming more common among men," says Dr. Seth Meyers, a clinical psychologist who runs a private practice in Los Angeles. "Men pursuing plastic surgery at higher rates than in the past shows that men aren't falling prey to age-old stigmas about masculinity and toughness."

Further highlighting the blurred gender line, men accounted for \$89 million in skin-care sales in 2012, according to the NPD Group. That is up 25 percent from 2008, and it's a sign that the domestic bathroom cabinet is changing. The guy's side of the shelf used to contain a bar of soap and a razor. Now, reports NPD, it is filled with toners, clarifiers and eye treatments.

The emerging market has spawned procedures tailored to the male demographic, such as brow lifts, abdominal contouring and hair transplants. And it's done wonders for men's post-surgery sartorial selections. "I used to have to tell guys to bring compression shorts," says Dr. Chiu. "Now companies make garments specifically for men." There are mesh vests for pectoral implants and high-waisted girdles for liposuction recovery that would not look out of place in an Under Armour ad.

Some doctors began offering men-only office hours after realizing that a waiting room full of women can affect one's sense of machismo. "They like to feel like they are part of a fraternity," says Dr. George Lefkovits of Park Plaza Plastic Surgery in New York. "If a man feels comfortable, then he feels it is OK to justify his vanity."

The hefty fees for the cosmetic operations elevate them from passing fads to serious investments, but that's a price men like Brian are willing to pay. He will likely touch up other parts of his body as they

meet the force of gravity. “If there is a way that I can keep myself looking fresher, I don’t think there is anything wrong with it,” he says. The hard part will be making sure nobody notices, or the secret is out.

Matt McCue is a writer living in New York. He is the author of *An Honorable Run* and has contributed to *ESPN The Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York* magazine.