



# MIND OVER MATTER: PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED TO AESTHETICS



BY KIM NICHOLS, MD, FAAD; EMILY ANNE SCALISE, MA; AND MADISON BRADLEY, MBA

**P** sychology is the study of people, and aesthetics is centered on consumer behavior. Using psychological principles to better understand human behavior, or the behavior of your aesthetic customers or staff, can lead to intentional marketing strategies, strong long-term customer relationships, and increases in sales and profitability. In this article, we aim to highlight the way we utilize principles of psychology in our aesthetic business, in order to bring awareness to a client about what we do and the value it brings to them.

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive psychology is a subfield of psychology dedicated to cultivating satisfaction. Thriving brands depend

on crafting experiences that generate positive emotions in customers, thereby instilling a sense of gratitude and loyalty. Studies have found that strong and positive brand experiences act as an underlying source of information that affects customer purchase intentions.<sup>1</sup> We encourage our staff to frame everything as positive for our clients. Some ways to incorporate positive language into the practice can be seen in Table 1.

The power of yes in business, and aesthetics, is another form of applied positive psychology. By saying “yes” as much as possible, we make clients feel that their needs are being met. Even when saying no, it is important to include a positive. For example, staff are encouraged to say, “While we don’t offer X, we do offer Y.”

## SOCIAL PROOF

Social proof is the idea that people will follow the actions of others and can be encouraged in that way to buy certain services. We are more likely to do something if someone else has done it. Within our aesthetic practice, social proof showcases the satisfied customers to potential customers. For instance, using client testimonials when reviewing a treatment and sharing real customer reviews strengthens the company’s relationship with the client. Similarly, influencer marketing is essential in this industry because people often copy the actions of others to help inform their own actions. In a recent study, results show that social proof is crucial during the pre-purchase phase, where testimonials and reviews

significantly improve the number of micro-conversions.<sup>2</sup> A Google review is an example of social proof because the company is not explaining how great you are; it's in the honest words of another client. In the form of content creation, social proof strengthens a company's reputation by having an influencer rave about you and your practice to their audience.

**MEMORY: SCENT AN OLFACTORY**

The sense of smell is closely linked with memory. Knowing this, we use the same scent at all locations to trigger familiarity and to ensure our clients feel a sense of comfort. Studies have found that there are several factors, such as the use of ambient scent, that help shape the emotional and behavioral responses that are stimulated in customer interaction.<sup>3</sup> For example, when you walk into an Apple store, you immediately recognize the distinct scent of their signature fragrance, which creates an atmosphere of familiarity. The scent is a form of branding. It communicates a "sense of place" within a business and our clients have that moment of familiarity as soon as they walk into the elevator or when they visit any of the locations.

**LINGUISTICS**

Linguistics is the study of human language, and how we produce and interpret that language can have an impact on the success of business. Applying this principle of linguistics to aesthetics, it is important to tell an existing client or potential customer what you can do for them, rather than what you can't. For example, we always tell our clients that they came to the right place, to ensure them that they are receiving the best care. By saying who you are to your customers and reassuring them with phrases such as, "you came to the right place," or "best in town", they will be attracted to that as long as you

**TABLE 1.**

COMMON PHRASE	MORE POSITIVE LANGUAGE
What are your skincare concerns?	What are your skincare goals?
What do you wish you could change?	What are your favorite facial features about yourself?
Downtime	Rejuvenation Time
Price	Investment
Painless	Comfortable

carry through on it in operations. You need to name out loud your aesthetic difference, so people describe to you the way you position yourself, and then it's your job to carry through on that. In the end, this is a huge component of branding.

**SCARCITY PRINCIPLE**

The scarcity principle dictates that when a good is in short supply but in high demand, its price will increase to match the anticipated demand. This principle can be thought of as a "while supplies last" promotion, which is very common across many industries. At our practice, we offer several promotions such as a discounted treatment package in which a \$50 credit is given at each visit to apply toward an additional treatment that same day. In this case, a sense of urgency is created in which the client must use or lose the credit. Similarly, we have an anniversary sale that takes place on one day only with once-a-year savings. When people are faced with a limited opportunity to get the best deal, they are more likely to buy.

**CONCEPT OF RECIPROCITY**

The concept of reciprocity is an inherent aspect of human nature, anticipating that relationships should

involve both giving and receiving. Moreso, this concept describes the tendency of human nature to want to offer something when something is received. At our practice, it is our goal to continually show appreciation for our clients. We ensure to express gratitude by saying "thank you" consistently, whether it's before ending a phone call, in the conclusion of a confirmation email, on every blog post, prior to a client's check-out, during surveys, at the conclusion of parties, in quarterly expressions of appreciation to our VIP clients, and beyond. Most times, we mean it, but when was the last time you actually said, "Thank You for Your Business?"

**WORKPLACE CULTURE AND DIVERSITY REPRESENTATION**

Psychology in business can help organizations create inclusive workplace cultures that respect and empower their employees and will yield high-performance, overall productivity, and tenure. At our company we ensure there is diverse representation, from our staff to our client base. At our practice, we have providers of all skin types who are knowledgeable of treating a diverse range of skin colors, because, as we know, different skin types can react differ-

ently to the same treatment. Within our “before and after” photo gallery, we feature photos that are diverse in terms of their skin type, skin condition, skin texture, gender, and more. Like the law of attraction, showcasing our diverse clients also allows our new clients to be diverse.

### UNDERSTAND PEOPLE

In conclusion, these principles of psychology can be used to help improve virtually every aspect of business, especially consumer behavior and experience. Psychology is essentially the science of understanding

the way people think and behave, and business thrives on the understanding of people, whether it be customers or employees. Although further research is needed to better understand the direct effects of these principles applied to business, we have found within our case study that these are the techniques that work in our aesthetic practice. ■

1. Brakus JJ, Schmitt BH, Zarantonello L. Brand experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*. 2009;73(3):52-68. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.3.52>.
2. Wolters M. The effect of social proof on customer purchases : an experiment with client testimonials and online reviews on website conversions. Thesis. University of Twente; 2022.
3. Roschk H, Hosseinpour M. Pleasant Ambient Scents: A Meta-Analysis of

Customer Responses and Situational Contingencies. *Journal of Marketing*. 2020;84(1):125-145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919881137>

---

### KIM NICHOLS, MD, FAAD

- Board-certified dermatologist and owner of Nichols MD of Greenwich (CT), SkinLab by NicholsMD (Stamford, CT), and NicholsMD of Fairfield (CT)

### EMILY ANNE SCALISE, MA

- Executive Director of the tri-location NicholsMD practices. Master's degree in clinical and counseling psychology.

### MADISON BRADLEY, MBA

- Office Manager at NicholsMD of Fairfield, Stamford, CT