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Do you really want a Media Smile?

CAN A SMILE BE TOO WHITE?

You cannot miss it! Look at any one of the hundreds of magazine covers on newsstands and you will see the dazzling super white smiles of movie stars and other celebrities. But are these smiles really showing the world just how white their teeth are? Or are they what I like to call “media smiles” – teeth that have been brightened by Photoshop or other computer-generated programs?

Over the years I have observed celebrities on magazine covers then later seen some of the same personalities up close and personal, and I can tell you they aren’t what they are portrayed to be! Even in stars where I had performed their smile transformation, the “magazine media smile” transformation was in full force!

According to research, close-up faces help to sell magazine covers. The brighter the teeth, the better the cover looks. But does that same premise hold true in real life? A good estimate of what my new patients ask for is as follows: 20% want whiter than white, 60% ask for “natural white,” and 20% are satisfied with matching their own tooth shade.

You may wonder why the 20% want a snow white radiance to their smiles, and the answers are usually multifaceted. Some want the “media smile” they constantly see in the weekly celebrity gossip publications, while others have existed with dark teeth all their life and are fed up with all the negative comments about their smile. I have had other patients tell me their friends had their smiles done and they want what they feel is an even brighter smile than their friends. However, the possible downside to super white teeth is how others may judge you. And if this is not a factor for you, then so be it.

The most interesting group is the 60%, because they want the color of their new teeth to look natural, but as light as possible. So we create illusions in porcelain to create realistic looking translucency in parts. We also put in artifacts that are naturally occurring in enamel and vary

the amounts of shaded porcelain to create a final result that provides a fresh new look, but one you would expect to see in natural teeth.

SHAPE VS. SHADE

Now I will tell you a few “secrets of the trade.” You may not believe it, but the shape and arrangement of the teeth are more important than the shade. Research has shown that the same shade of white looks different to individuals depending on the shapes of the teeth. And do the whites of the teeth have to match the whites of the eyes? Not really. Otherwise the color of so many people’s teeth would wind up being much darker. And is it necessary for the upper teeth to match the color of the bottom teeth? Nope! Because the only time you truly see the color of your lower teeth is if they are lined up touching each other and that is not a naturally occurring position. Instead, the upper lip tends to place a constant shadow hiding their true color – hence the famous song, “The Shadow of Your Smile.”

And, by the way, don’t blame the dentist when you see someone with teeth you feel are much too white for him or her. Remember, we dentists are in a service profession and need to please the patient. And, believe me, there are times when I have tried to talk patients out of choosing a shade I felt was much too light for them, but in the final analysis they are the decision maker! We all want to please our patients and really want them to have the final result that will make them look their best. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder – and the person holding the mirror has to make the final decision about shape, arrangement and color.

SMILE APPROPRIATE OR YOUNGER LOOKING?

And another thought: I understand people who say “you need to look your age,” and that is fine with me if that is the way they want to look. But 80% of the patients who

come to me really do not want to look their age. They want younger looking smiles. Just recently I treated an attractive woman in her 60s who wanted a bright new smile, and when looking at all the shade guides she selected the very lightest shade. Although I thought it might be too light for her, she insisted on it. And when I mentioned that the result might not be as natural as she might want, she answered, "If I had wanted natural, why would I come to you?" The fact is, I enjoy making artificial teeth look natural regardless of the shade. However, when I inserted her final restorations, she stood up and beamed into the mirror because she was so happy. And then she smiled at me and asked, "How do I look?" I had to agree that she had been right because she did look terrific – and at least 20 years younger!

So who am I to judge? I do give advice when asked to, but I seldom judge. Rather, I try to listen and look into the mind of my patients and then understand what and why they want the result I will deliver.

WHAT TREATMENT IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

My father was a great dentist who taught me to always think conservatively when it came to treatment. This means to choose the least aggressive therapy that will accomplish the patient's wants, needs and desires. So when it comes to having a brighter smile, bleaching is normally the first thought, but only if it will accomplish the necessary tooth whitening. However, X-rays are necessary to see the size of the pulp tissue, which can predict if sensitivity will occur. And also the clinical exam should be able to predict if bleaching will work for your individual tooth color. Teeth which have a great deal of translucency will usually not become lighter. In fact, they can become even more translucent. This means they will actually appear darker by allowing more light to go through the teeth which picks up the dark color in the back of the mouth.

If your dentist does not think bleaching will work, the next most conservative option is the porcelain veneer, which requires less tooth preparation than a full porcelain crown and is bonded to the teeth. However, you want to make sure there will be enough thickness of the porcelain to actually mask the dark color of your teeth. If not, in



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time you may see the underlying darker tooth color showing though. Also, your bite must be favorable since the veneer is bonded to the front of the tooth and can be more susceptible to chip or fracture than a full porcelain crown, which wraps all the way around the tooth. But that full crown requires the most tooth reduction. Therefore it comes down to being a judgment decision both you and your dentist must make.

In the final analysis, if you are happy with your smile but choosing to whiten your teeth mainly for photographs at an upcoming wedding, you can try bleaching, but it may be a lot easier and less costly to ask the photographer to use Photoshop to whiten your teeth.



WITH A LIFELONG INTEREST IN BEAUTY, DR. RONALD GOLDSTEIN CONDUCTS ONGOING RESEARCH ON THE PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS PHENOMENON AND ITS ROLE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PERSONAL SUCCESS. HIS DENTAL PRACTICE WAS THE FIRST TO MOVE BEYOND THE SMILE AND FOCUS ON OVERALL FACIAL HARMONY. HE WRITES EXTENSIVELY FOR BOTH CONSUMERS AND THE DENTAL PROFESSION ON BEAUTY, ESTHETIC DENTISTRY AND RELATED TOPICS. DR. GOLDSTEIN IS THE AUTHOR OF THE 2-VOLUME TEXTBOOK, *ESTHETICS IN DENTISTRY* AND *CHANGE YOUR SMILE* (12 FOREIGN TRANSLATIONS), WHICH NOW IN ITS 4TH EDITION IS THE TOP-SELLING CONSUMER GUIDE TO COSMETIC DENTISTRY FOUND IN THOUSANDS OF DENTISTS' RECEPTION ROOMS AROUND THE WORLD. HE IS ON THE ADVISORY BOARD OF *NEW BEAUTY* MAGAZINE AND WRITES FOR IT AS WELL. HE IS THE FOUNDER OF TOMORROW'S SMILES, A NATIONAL NON-PROFIT FUND THAT HELPS DESERVING ADOLESCENTS RECEIVE LIFE-CHANGING SMILES THROUGH COSMETIC DENTISTRY. HIS MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE GOLDSTEIN, GARBER & SALAMA IS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA.