

The manic rush for esthetics

The young lady sat in my chair crying. The reason: The glowing red tissue around the laminates on her front teeth. Closer examination found severe inflammation at the free gingival margins of the restorations on her maxillary lateral and central incisors. The problem was exacerbated by her high lip line. These restorations were placed to "improve her smile" and had been placed on normal, healthy teeth.

Her chief concern had been the yellowish cast in her maxillary anteriors. The dentist suggested laminates but said that the patient had "too much gum." The gingival tissue was removed (with a gingivectomy), and the provisional restorations were placed the same day. Final crowns followed about 6 weeks later. The patient said the inflammation followed the placement of the provisionals by 2 to 3 days. When she brought it to the dentist's attention, she was told that the problem would disappear when her final restorations were placed. Instead, it got worse.

She was told that she was not cleaning correctly and was given a prescription for chlorhexidine digluconate and advised to rinse twice daily. The redness improved slightly. A second gingivectomy was performed with the same results as the first.

Unfortunately her story is not atypical.

Her problem has two etiologies. The first is the dentist's lack of understanding of dentistry in general and his lack of attention to the concept of biologic width specifically. The second is the manic rush by members of the public to whiten their teeth.

The first error, especially the violation of the biologic width, is crucial but not the topic here. The current trend toward unnaturally white teeth is.

A significant portion of the public has been convinced that life is only complete when you have teeth the color of the whitest refrigerator. This sin has been perpetrated by many popular magazines and fueled by us baby boomers needing to appear young (translated, not die).

We in the dental profession have accommodated our patients. And I must say that if such procedures are done correctly and performed following informed consent (Can you tell that my oldest son is in law school?), I have no problems with improving one's appearance. In fact, it may help one's chance in the job market. But it must be part of an overall treatment plan and performed by individuals trained in all aspects of dentistry, not just cosmetics.

I know that white teeth are simply part of a trend and will go the way of the hula-hoop. But in the meantime, how many smiles must we damage to achieve this artificiality?



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