

Laypeople's perceptions of smile esthetics: Why is it important and what do we need to know?.

Percepciones de la gente común sobre la estética de la sonrisa:
¿Por qué es importante y qué necesitamos saber?.

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The new definition of oral health has placed special emphasis on the functional and social components, ascribing a fundamental role to physical and psychological well-being in it, which is influenced by the individual's changing experiences, perceptions, expectations and the ability to adapt to new circumstances.¹ Non-verbal communication embroils the face, head, eyes, hands, body and the ability to express emotions; being the smile one of the main components of this type of communication.²

In recent years, the concern for cosmetic dentistry has increased. This is due to exposure to the media, and to the contrasting information people can absorb as references when seeing models smiling while simultaneously receiving information about trendy dental treatments. In addition, the attractiveness of the smile plays a key role in social interactions, as it influences the success of relationships, professional image, employment opportunities; and in the development of personality.³ Pithon et al. evaluated whether dental aesthetics influences the search for a new job, finding that people with ideal smiles are considered more intelligent and have a higher probability of finding a job compared to people with non-ideal smiles.⁴ Furthermore, other research has shown that individuals satisfied with their physical appearance tend to be more outgoing and successful in social interactions, based on the impact a beautiful smile has on an individual's self-image.⁵ In this sense, smiling has a great impact on physical appearance. When the smile is compromised, it is often associated with low self-esteem, and impairment of both personal image and mental health.⁶

The conceptualization of a 'beautiful smile' differs by populations, regions, countries and continents; and also by ethnic and sociocultural variations.⁷ In our society, people judge themselves and others by their smile, which could be affected by oral diseases that lead to a loss of health, function and aesthetics, extending its impact on self-esteem and quality of life. Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the perception of the smile by altering the aesthetic parameters (such as shape and color of the anterior teeth, gingival exposure, smile arch, buccal corridors, smile line, etc.) evaluated by general dentists, specialists and lay people, in order to assess the coherence of the expectations of these groups, showing that all groups had different perceptions of aesthetics.⁴ Dissatisfaction with dental appearance is largely influenced by tooth color, which is the

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main reason for seeking aesthetic treatments. A low level of satisfaction with teeth appearance was shown to be the main motivating factor for patients seeking teeth whitening. When analyzing the motivations for carrying out an aesthetic treatment, the evidence shows that those are numerous and varied, with the main motivating factors in adult patients being improvements in appearance, self-confidence, aesthetics and functional status.⁸

The social impact stems from possible problems in an individual's social interactions caused by a negative self-perception of orofacial appearance. The research around the smile associated with quality of life has gained interest in recent years. Measuring quality of life represents an important aspect because it allows to measure psychosocial perception in a quantitative way. Therefore, it is of vital importance to relate the need for objective treatment evaluated by the dentist with the subjective needs perceived by the patient.^{3,9} The way in which the professional evaluates a certain oral condition, such as for example, malocclusion, is not related to the new dimensions of quality of life and dental aesthetics if the patient identifies a clinical change as relevant, no matter how small it may be. This would represent an important point of improvement in social contacts, self-confidence and self-awareness.⁹ For this reason, it is essential to have instruments that allow us to measure these conditions in patients. Although, there are general psychometric instruments, it is known that instruments for specific conditions have more advantages since the degree of sensitivity is better, and more precise measurements can be made.⁹ In recent years, few instruments related to the aesthetics of the smile have been developed, since, their construction implies a complex process that includes psychological, methodological and statistical aspects, which are not daily competencies of the dentist.^{9,10} Saltovic et al. created and validated a new instrument to measure the psychosocial impacts of

altered smile confirming its good stability and internal consistency, and concluding that it can have practical validity when applied in aesthetic clinical procedures.⁹

However, this instrument was applied and validated in Croatia, results that could not be extrapolated or applied to other regions such as Latin America.

The degree of acceptance of smile aesthetics for a population is difficult to know, since each society has multiethnic components and, in addition, it is also influenced by foreign beauty standards.¹⁻⁶ Therefore, it is necessary to understand patients in order to effectively satisfy their needs and expectations.

The limited knowledge of psychosocial aspects makes it difficult to correctly interpret the reasons that lead people to choose or reject aesthetic treatments, such as teeth whitening. The satisfaction of patients with their oral health is influenced by the psychological profile, therefore, this should be considered in the formulation of a treatment plan.^{3,5} Since, this can compromise the success of the treatment, if there is not adequate communication between the patient and the dentist regarding their expectations, the treatment plan and process, and the outcome. Saltovic *et al.*,⁹ and Lajnert *et al.*,¹⁰ found that the most significant clinical predictors of satisfaction with the aesthetics of the smile were the absence of dental crowding and the light color of the anterior teeth, followed by gingival health and adequate aspect of previous restorations.

It is a fundamental step to evaluate the perception of patients regarding smile aesthetics, since the dentists must identify the wishes of the patient in a specific way, detecting those aesthetic elements that are the most relevant and disturbing for the patient, increasing the likelihood of success of a proposed treatment. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to use a valid and reliable instrument that can accurately measure problems related to the aesthetics of the smile and that can be adapted to each sociocultural context.

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