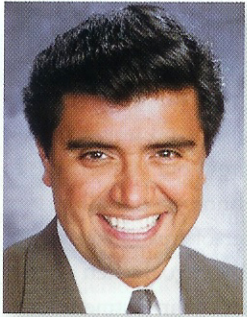


The Psychology of a Smile



by Jose-Luis Ruiz, D.D.S., F.A.G.D.

Dr. Ruiz, a general dentist, has practiced in the studio district of Burbank for more than 11 years, and his clients include many in the entertainment industry. He also is an instructor of restorative dentistry at the University of Southern California School of Dentistry. A Fellow of the Academy of General Dentistry, his focus is on treating complex cosmetic and rehabilitation cases, occlusion, and orthodontics.

Dr. Ruiz has appeared on various television shows, including NBC Channel 4 News and ABC's Vista LA, discussing the latest breakthroughs in the dental industry. He is an avid lecturer on high-tech equipment, cosmetic dentistry, and team leadership because he has used these techniques himself and understands what it takes to build a "dream practice."

ARE SMILES REALLY THAT IMPORTANT?

As cosmetic dentists, we are constantly finding new techniques to make the science and art of creating beautiful smiles more predictable. We have come a long way as a result of better porcelains, and more translucent and resistant composites and bonds. With the help of lasers, cosmetic and periodontal surgeries, and even implants, we can give virtually anybody a beautiful "movie star" smile. The question that some patients, the public, and even some of our colleagues might ask, however, is, "There is so much research, effort, and money spent on elective cosmetic dentistry—is a patient's smile really that important, or could we spend this money on a more worthwhile cause?"

We can deliver a beautiful, youthful smile to almost anyone, under almost any circumstances.

The science and art of cosmetic dentistry has become so advanced and refined that we can deliver a beautiful, youthful smile to almost anyone, under almost any circumstances. But with all of this emphasis on achieving the perfect smile, it is logical to ask, "How important is a smile?" A review of psychology and other non-dental literature allows us to assess the social-emotional effects that the smile has in our lives.

Humans are first and foremost social creatures. Much of what makes us tick has to do with our relations with other people; everything else is subjugated to our emotions about ourselves and what we think others feel

about us. Because of this most basic need to be appreciated and understood, much research has been done on the subject of human relations and how to enhance them.

SMILES CAN INFLUENCE

Dale Carnegie wrote more than 70 years ago in his landmark book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, about humans' all-important need to have meaningful relationships with others and how good social relationships can lead to much success in life and in business. Interestingly, Carnegie devoted the book's first chapter to the importance of a smile, stating that it is the "big secret of dealing with people."¹ In this chapter, he discusses the importance of smiling to create good first impressions. Is there a scientific basis for this? In a study conducted by Oxford University and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute to assess the method humans most use to identify cooperative partners, they researched the effects of a smile; the results indicated that smiles can elicit cooperation among strangers in a short interaction.² In other words, a smile can indeed "win friends and influence people."

One of the first things that we notice in a person's face is their mouth and smile... or lack thereof.

SMILES GIVE PLEASURE

"The smile is the most basic facial expression"³ and when we deprive ourselves of it we are denying ourselves

pleasure. The public spends billions of dollars every year just for cosmetic (makeup) products alone, far more than they spend in all fields of dentistry combined. The reason? Humans have a never-ending urge to be liked and appreciated and we have learned that a pleasant appearance makes us more popular. Yet one of the first things that we notice in a person's face is their mouth and smile... or lack thereof. A smile makes us appear to be more cooperative and research shows that a smile elicits a similar response,⁴ bringing pleasure to both parties; no amount of makeup can do that.

With so much evidence as to the great value of a smile, how can we not help people to enjoy their smiles?

The smile's ultimate value is its ability to give us pleasure, but is a smile the cause, or the result of a happy occasion? Hietanen and Surakka⁴ indicate that a genuine smile can actually

induce "feelings of pleasure" even if the smile is that of a stranger in a photograph. Their research attempts to explain the neural mechanism that can allow the "receiver" (the person being smiled at) and the "signaler" (the person smiling) to share a feeling of true pleasure with just a smile. It is no wonder that most magazine and television advertisements include people with gorgeous teeth, laughing and smiling—marketing experts are well-aware of the pleasure-inducing power of smiles.

YES, SMILES ARE IMPORTANT

With so much evidence as to the great value of a smile, how can we not help people to enjoy their smiles? Throughout my career as a cosmetic dentist, many hundreds of people have told me that they avoid smiling because they aren't happy with the appearance of their teeth. How sad for them, and for those around them. Conversely, we all have had the pleas-

ure of seeing firsthand those whose lives have changed as a result of being able to smile freely for the first time. Our profession improves our patients' quality of life and brings pleasure to others. Smiles can help people to be more influential and can make it easier for them to have friends. Can anyone find a better way to spend their resources and their lives than in giving the gift of a smile to their patients? *AD*

References

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3. Dumas G. *The Smile: Psychology and Physiology*. Paris, France: Presse Universitaire de France; 1948.
4. Hietanen JK, Surakka V. Facial expressions are contagious. *Int J Psychophysiology* 25(1):62, 1997.



The following pages display a collage that the *Journal* would like you to participate in. *The Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry* knows that smiles are created in your office every day and we would like to publish them. We are collecting photographs that include various poses of individuals and groups to create a collage of beautiful smiles inside the *Journal*. Your submission should include photos that are "full of life and gesture." This issue is our inaugural display and we would like to thank the following people who submitted their creations to us: Dr. Elizabeth Bakeman, Dr. Sunil Bhoolabhai, Camille Halaby, C.D.T., Dr. Bruce Hartley, Dr. Gary Radz, Dr. Tony Soileau, Dr. Rhys Spoor, and Dr. Tom Trinkner. As this section grows, we anticipate that we will see increasing artistic work to display. Have fun!

Please send us the original format of the photos taken of your patients, after you helped them create the smile they always dreamed of. Please send your submission to:

Tracy Skenandore
American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry
5401 World Dairy Drive
Madison, WI 53718

If you have any questions, please contact Tracy at tracys@aacd.com.

Please Note: Your photos will be subject to review by the Editor and the Editorial Review Board of *The Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry*. Please include a photo release form signed by you and your patient along with your submission. *AD*