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### **A Beautiful Smile**

Often when I am asked to restore patients' smiles, the patients ask for qualities that they think will make their smile perfect – smooth on the incisal (chewing) edge and white. These qualities SOUND good, but in the mouth, they may not be so pleasing to the eye. So what makes a smile beautiful? Typically, the most esthetic qualities involve symmetry, a natural light color, and the appearance of health.

Teeth that are symmetrical do not have to be perfectly even on the edges, and in fact, appear more youthful when they are not. Flattened, even edges are typical of wear which is associated with aging. A beautiful smile has symmetry between the 2 central incisors, the 2 lateral incisors (on either side of the centrals,) and the 2 canines as well as among the posterior (back) teeth that are visible. The lateral incisors are preferably shorter than the centrals, and even adding some unique features, such as a small space between the front two teeth, can be attractive.

Tooth whitening is very popular today, and I generally recommend it as one of the first procedures to try in creating a more youthful appearance. Also, discolored fillings and crowns should be replaced with more esthetic restorations that match the color of the surrounding teeth (but these restorations should be done AFTER bleaching since they do not bleach.) Teeth that are too white, however, can detract from an otherwise pleasing smile. So what is too white? Generally, the teeth should be no whiter than the whites of the eyes. When these colors match, the result is a natural appearance. Teeth that are much whiter appear fake.

Studies have shown that when a man or a woman chooses a mate, one of the attributes that subconsciously makes a person desire another is the appearance of health. Healthy teeth, besides being symmetrical and light in color, have firm, light pink gums surrounding them and are not chipped, worn, or cracked. When the gums are swollen and red from gingivitis, which is caused by bacteria, it is a sign of an unhealthy mouth. Also, have you ever heard the old expression, “he is long in the tooth,” which meant that someone was of advanced age? Gums that have receded away from the teeth, often because of periodontal disease or teeth grinding, expose the roots and create spaces near the gumline, making the teeth look longer and less youthful.

Individuality is what makes us all interesting and unique. The goal in a smile makeover should be to achieve a better version of YOU! Orthodontics to straighten teeth, tooth

recontouring, cosmetic bonding, veneers and all-ceramic restorations, teeth whitening, and replacement of discolored fillings are just a few of the options available to enhance a smile. If you are dissatisfied with your smile, the next time you visit your dentist, ask him or her about a smile analysis to see if you are the best you can be.