

When is the Smile conceptualized as an Orthodontic Smile?



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INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, pioneer studies were carried out in the Egas Moniz University Clinic, surrounding the mental representation of the smile, centred on patients wearing orthodontic appliances, emerging with the results obtained as a new form of categorizing the perfect smile: **The Orthodontic Smile**. Understanding the importance, value and self-image that the smile represents in the daily life of individual, remains a subject of high scientific interest. The **present review** aims to understanding the importance of the self-perception of the mouth and smile on the mental representation of self-image and the well-being of children, younger and adult patients; the use of drawing as a qualitative projective technique is a graphic record of high empirical relevance [1-7].

METHODS

Studies on the mental representation of the Orthodontic Smile carried out in the Egas Moniz University Clinic in full-text, in English and published between 2018 and 2023, were included. Search was carried out in January 2024 on PubMed, Scopus and B-On and the references of previously selected articles. Patients of both genders aged 8-24 (children and adolescents) and 25-59 years (adults), who used orthodontic appliance were invited to produce two drawings of their mouth/smile based on the following questions: **“What was your mouth like before you had the orthodontic appliance?”** (Moment 1- M1); and **“How do you think your mouth will be when you remove the orthodontic appliance”** (Moment 2- M2). The content analysis of all the drawings was performed using a grid consisting of analytical categories and subcategories. In addition, all participants answered a socio-demographic inquiry and provided a written answer to the question: **“Why do you use an orthodontic appliance?”**, which content analysis was also done [1-7].

RESULTS

The results point to differences in the mental representation of mouth and the smile, before and after the use of the orthodontic appliance, as well as in the expressiveness and manifestation of emotions. After the use of the orthodontic appliance (M2), children and adolescents draw well-positioned and straight teeth, revealing the correction of crooked teeth, diastemas and fractures as main reasons for orthodontic treatment. Whereas, in adult subjects we can see more detailed drawings with more aligned teeth and no diastemas. According to the results obtained, the main reason that leads younger participants to orthodontic treatment is related to functional questions - conceptualizing the category of **Orthodontic Smile** [1-4], while aesthetic motives seem to be the true motivational leverages for the subjects in adulthood when they decide to seek orthodontic care [7]. These findings add to our understanding of the role that the mouth and smile play for the face, in a person's sense of **Self** and **Psychological Health**.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence suggests that the main reason that leads **younger participants** (children and adolescents) to the treatment is related to **functional issues**, while **adult patients** are motivated by **aesthetic reasons** [1-7]. When **children and adolescents** were submitted to orthodontic treatment, they seemed to associate the smile category to the social display of a look with perfect healthy teeth—the so-called **“orthodontic smile”**, which emerges as a **new conceptualization of the Perfect Smile**. The orthodontic smile (in the sense of a healthy, well-functioning smile) was thus more important than the perfect esthetic smile [1-4]. Orthodontic treatment contributes to a better smile and a more attractive profile, thus concluding, once again, that **adult subjects** prioritize aesthetic issues over functional ones [7].

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