

Review Article

Oral Ornaments: A Sparkling and Blinging Smile

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ABSTRACT:

The fashion industry plays a significant role on a global scale, increasingly emphasizing the importance of one's appearance. This shift in dynamics has also extended its influence to the field of dentistry. In the past, each tooth in a person's mouth was considered more valuable than a diamond. However, times have changed, and now there is a growing desire for a flawless, sparkling smile that embodies perfect aesthetics. Dentistry has evolved to include cosmetic dental treatments aligned with fashion trends. These treatments encompass various options such as tooth jewelry, porcelain veneers, composite veneers, and teeth whitening. These innovations have boosted the self-confidence of patients, making them more visually appealing and turning them into their own style icons.

Tooth jewellery, in particular, has a rich history, once being a part of religious rituals and traditions. The array of options in tooth jewelry includes tooth gems, twinkles, tooth rings, dental tattoos, dental grills, and more. Thus, this review aims to assess the recent advancements in cosmetic dental procedures that contribute to fashionable appearances.

Keywords: Cosmetic Dentistry, Tooth Jewellery, Tooth Gems, Dental Tattoo, Oral Soft Tissue Piercing.

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INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic dentistry, which is essentially a branch of philosophy focused on beauty, presents a unique challenge when applied in dental practice. In the past, dentistry was primarily associated with pain, fear, and discomfort^{1,2}. However, in recent times, dentistry has undergone a transformation and embraced the evolving fashion trends. Nowadays, people are increasingly conscious of their appearance and smile, aiming to stand out in the crowd and garner attention. To achieve their desired aesthetic look and capture attention³, individuals are turning to various treatments, including body art and cosmetic dental procedures. Cosmetic and aesthetic dentistry is no longer limited to the rich and powerful; people of all ages are now passionate about fashion.

Tooth jewellery placement is considered a cosmetic dental procedure that involves attaching diamonds and various other stones to the tooth's surface. It not only enhances one's smile but also contributes to boosting self-esteem. It is often used as a symbol of affluence and status among friends, relatives, and society⁴. Celebrities such as Drake, Hailey Bieber, Katy Perry,

A kay, and Jazzy B have also shown a strong affinity for incorporating tooth jewellery into their smiles. Its procedures are non-invasive and relatively safe, with few side effects. There are various types of tooth jewellery, including tooth grills, tooth gems, tooth rings, twinkles, and dental tattoos. Typically, such types of jewellery are placed on visible anterior teeth, adding an extra sparkle to one's smile⁵. Smiles are always in vogue, and tooth jewellery has become a popular trend⁶.

Oral soft tissue piercing encompasses the practice of piercing various parts of the mouth, including the tongue, cheeks, lips, and uvula. Of these, lip piercing is the most commonly chosen site for this practice, although tongue piercing has gained popularity, partly due to peer pressure and the influence of celebrities who are regarded as style icons⁵. The American Dental Association (ADA) recognized this trend, adopting guidelines in October 1998 and later amending them in October 2004. Piercing has evolved into a more widespread form of self-expression and body art in contemporary society. This review is

focused on both tooth jewelry and oral soft tissue piercing, examining their impact and implications.

1. TOOTH JEWELLERY: THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

Today, Ornamental dentistry is a commonly practiced field. Tooth jewellery is a specific type of cosmetic dental procedure that adds a touch of glamour and sparkle to a person's life using diamonds, rubies, crystal glass designs, and twinkles. The interest in tooth jewellery is not a recent phenomenon; it dates back several decades. In the period of 800 BC to 200 BC, the Etruscan civilization, one of the most powerful and affluent civilizations in ancient Italy, wore tooth jewellery. Tooth grills, which have become popular in recent times, were worn by Etruscan women⁷. Many affluent women even had their front teeth extracted to make way for gold band appliances or tooth grills. Various decorative gold teeth were also used. Even the present day tooth gems, share similarities with grills that were made famous by African American hip-hop artists in the 1980s and 1990s. Grills were seen as a fresh and unique fashion statement, surpassing the popularity of regular costume jewellery⁸.

In the battlefield of Kurukshetra around 2500 BC, Lord Krishna tested the kindness and goodwill of the dying warrior Karna. Krishna asked him to donate gold, and Karna proved his fortune by giving away his gold-filled tooth⁵. In the 9th century, the Mayan culture introduced teeth embellished with jade, turquoise, gold, or hematite gems, marking the inception of tooth jewellery. The Mayans, skilled in the smelting and forging of gold, silver, and bronze, excelled in the fabrication and placement of intricately carved stone inlays, especially in the front teeth⁷.

Various types are popular tooth jewellery includes:

Tooth Gems: These are colored, differently shaped crystal glass pieces mounted on thin aluminum foil. In terms of colors, tooth gems are available in nine distinct options, including diamonds, rainbows, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, aquamarines, pinks, light sapphires, and emerald greens. These are high-quality ornamental tooth jewellery⁹.

Twinkles: Twinkles have become a recent trend in cosmetic dentistry. Dazzlers, designed to be bonded to the tooth, have a patented backside resembling that of an orthodontic bracket. They are made of pure gold and feature precious stones such as rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and diamonds, with an extra-thin multi-carat gold coating. Twinkles are most commonly bonded to maxillary incisors and canines, but their bonding is not very durable, lasting around six months. They come in a variety of collections in 24-carat gold and white gold, offering 50 different designs. The leading company for dazzlers is Twin dent AB in Sweden¹⁰.

Removable Tooth Jewellery: Another fashionable choice similar to tooth jewellery is removable tooth

jewellery. It consists of an invisible clear micro-skin that fits precisely on the teeth, with stones permanently attached. The micro glass skin is created in a lab using an impression taken in the clinic, and precious stones are affixed to it. These removable ornaments are safe to wear, do not harm the teeth or soft tissues, and do not require etching. The main advantage is that patients can remove and reattach them as needed^{2,3}.

Tooth Rings: Tooth rings represent another choice for young individuals seeking a unique lifestyle statement. This procedure differs from other tooth jewellery, requiring tooth preparation, including drilling a small hole in the maxillary incisors' disto-incisal corner and hanging a ring through it. Usually, maxillary central incisors are the preferred teeth for this. The size of the perforation depends on the thickness of the ring, which should be carefully selected to avoid interfering with the bite. Occasionally, rings are made to connect two central incisors or central incisors to lateral incisors^{2,3}.

Dental Tattoos: The term "tattoo" in the context of cosmetic dentistry is somewhat misleading, as it doesn't involve piercing the skin to create a pigment mark. Instead, dental tattoos are a form of custom-designed ornamentation added to dental crowns. The procedure entails applying various porcelain shades in diverse designs (such as hearts, symbols, or pets) onto ceramic crowns and bridges by a laboratory technician. Dental tattooing is a painless procedure but does come with some associated complications^{2,3,11}.

Dental Grills: Dental grills, distinct from dental gems that have gained popularity among American hip-hop stars and rappers, are a fashionable accessory. They are a type of visible jewellery that typically comes in metal, including gold, with encrusted diamonds and imprinted alphabets. This form of dental jewellery was originally done on the maxillary anterior teeth for both religious and aesthetic reasons. Dental grills have their own advantages and disadvantages. They can lead to the accumulation of plaque and reduce the ability to articulate teeth, resulting in speech difficulties^{8,12}.

2. ORAL SOFT TISSUE PIERCING

Ornamental piercing most commonly occurs in the tongue, followed by the lips, cheeks, and uvula. The Mayans first practiced oral piercing, particularly tongue piercing, around 700 BC. The Aztec civilization later adopted it as a spiritual act, limited to royals and priests. However, in 1521, Spanish conquistadors suppressed Aztec practices, including tooth piercing. In modern times, oral piercing often carries sexual connotations. In the African Makololo tribe, men insert wooden plugs into women's lips as a symbol of their own status. Piercing has become a prevalent form of self-expression in contemporary society. Oral soft tissue piercing is done to achieve a cool, attractive, and fashionable look³.

Typical tongue piercing is performed without anesthesia. A barbell-shaped piece of jewellery is placed to transverse the thickness of the tongue at its midline in the anterior one-third, using a thick needle. Without complications, complete healing takes about 4-6 weeks.

Tongue splitting is another way to achieve a unique and fashionable appearance. It literally splits the tongue into two pieces, creating a "forked" appearance. Various primitive techniques are used for this procedure. A scalpel or cauterizing pen may be used without anesthesia, or a finishing line may be threaded and pulled forward through the anterior aspect. Two tongue pieces are kept apart to prevent them from rejoining, and additional surgery may be needed to repair the split after healing.

In lip and cheek piercing, studs or rings are placed by piercing through the entire thickness of the lips. These can be placed unilaterally or bilaterally, depending on the patient's preference. Cheek studs, similar to lip studs, are popular among youth and teenagers and are typically placed in the modiolus region of the cheek¹³.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF ORAL JEWELLERY AND SOFT TISSUE PIERCING

Tooth jewelry is highly recommended in patients maintaining good oral hygiene standards. Various complications associated with use of oral jewellery and piercing. These includes excessive bleeding from oral soft tissues, Post-operative edema and pain, Metal allergies (hypersensitivity to the metals used), Interference with other dental treatments and procedures, leading to galvanic currents between accessories and dental restorations, Etching of sound enamel, Aspiration of jewellery, causing airway and digestive tract obstruction and transmission of bloodborne diseases, such as Hepatitis B, C, and AIDS due to oral piercing^{3,5,8}.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary dentistry goes beyond merely addressing dental issues; it encompasses aesthetic purposes as well. Tooth jewellery has emerged as a recent trend, particularly among young individuals,

but it has gained relevance across various age groups. However, it is important to note that this trend is advisable only for patients who maintain good oral hygiene. It falls within the dentist's responsibility to inform patients about the advantages and disadvantages of each trend in dental ornamentation. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recognizes the significance of educating healthcare professionals and the public about the implications of oral jewellery and accessories on individual health.

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