

Survey of Young Adult Women Regarding Men's Orofacial Features

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The importance of an individual's appearance to his or her self-esteem and outlook on life may be obvious.¹⁻³ At least one survey has found that the aspect of appearance with which people are most dissatisfied is their teeth.⁴ In a recent study of Japanese university students, however, although one-third of the males and half of the females had considered orthodontic treatment, only one-fourth of these students had ever visited an orthodontic office. The remainder cited reasons such as a general aversion to treatment, high cost, and embarrassment about the visibility of orthodontic appliances.⁵

We hypothesized that another reason for not seeking treatment might be a lesser awareness of tooth alignment and the oral region in general on the part of non-patients. We further hypothesized that the most objective assessment of this awareness could be gained by asking people their opinions about the orofacial region of the opposite sex.

Subjects and Methods

We randomly selected 141 female patients in their 20s who were undergoing treatment in a private orthodontic practice as the "orthodontic patient group". Another 122 females in their 20s who had never visited an orthodontic office were randomly sampled on city streets during holidays.

The orthodontic patients filled out the following questionnaire in the practice's waiting room; the other subjects filled it out on the street:

1. Which part of the face of members of the opposite sex do you find attractive? (please rank in descending order)

- Eyebrows
- Eyes
- Mouth
- Teeth
- Nose
- Cheeks
- Jaw

2. Which aspect of the oral region of members of the opposite sex do you find attractive? (please rank in descending order, and ignore aspects that are of no particular concern to you)

- Tooth alignment
- Tooth size
- Color of teeth
- Color of gums

- Part where the teeth meet the gums
- Jaw
- Lips

3. Which aspect of the oral region do you find unattractive? (please rank in descending order, and ignore aspects that are of no particular concern to you)

- Crooked teeth
- Protruding upper teeth
- Overlapping upper canines
- Bad breath
- Yellow teeth
- Fillings, crowns, etc.
- Gaps between teeth

The following question was asked only of the non-patient subjects:

4. Have you ever considered undergoing orthodontic treatment? If so, why haven't you visited an orthodontic clinic?

- Fear of treatment
- Troublesome process
- High costs
- Visibility of appliances
- Lengthy treatment period
- Other

Fifty of the non-patients said they had considered orthodontic treatment; they were classified as the "potential patient group", while the remaining 72 subjects were called the "unconcerned group".

Statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS software. The chi-square test or Fischer's exact probability test was used to analyze the differences in the rank distribution of answers between the patient and potential patient groups, and between the patient and unconcerned groups. The level of significance was established at .05.

Results

The facial characteristics thought most attractive by all the respondents were the eyes, mouth, and teeth, in that order (Fig. 1). The eyebrows, nose, cheeks, and jaw were all felt to be less important. The orthodontic patients showed a significantly higher awareness of the teeth than the unconcerned group did ($p < .001$). There were no other significant differences among the groups.

Tooth alignment and color were considered the most important aspects of the oral region by all three groups (Fig. 2). Subjects in the unconcerned group rated the lips as significantly more important than the orthodontic patient group did ($p < .01$). No other significant differences were found.

Bad breath was the least attractive feature to all the subjects, followed by crowded teeth in the orthodontic patient group and discolored teeth in the non-patient groups (Fig. 3). In fact, the orthodontic patients found crowding to be significantly less attractive than the other two groups did ($p < .05$). There were no other significant differences in the rankings.

About 30% of the non-patients indicated that the cost of treatment was the reason for not visiting an orthodontist, with an equal number citing the length of treatment (multiple answers to the question were possible). About 20% of the respondents mentioned the visibility of appliances (Fig. 4).

Discussion

These young adult Japanese women were fairly unanimous in finding the eyes, mouth, and teeth to be the most important parts of the face in determining the attractiveness of members of the opposite sex. The orthodontic patients were slightly more aware of the teeth than the subjects who had not considered orthodontic treatment were. This may indicate that raising the awareness of non-patients about their own tooth alignment would make them more likely to undergo treatment.

All the women surveyed found halitosis, crowded teeth, and discolored teeth to be the least attractive oral features of members of the opposite sex. It is understandable that orthodontic patients would have a greater degree of interest in tooth alignment. None of the subjects were particularly aware, however, of certain aspects of malocclusion—protruding maxillary teeth and high cuspids—that are commonly thought of as Japanese characteristics.

Objections to seeking treatment that orthodontists may need to overcome include high costs, length of treatment,6 and visibility of appliances.7-10 Better education of both patients and non-patients could thus make orthodontic treatment more attractive to young adults.

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FIGURES

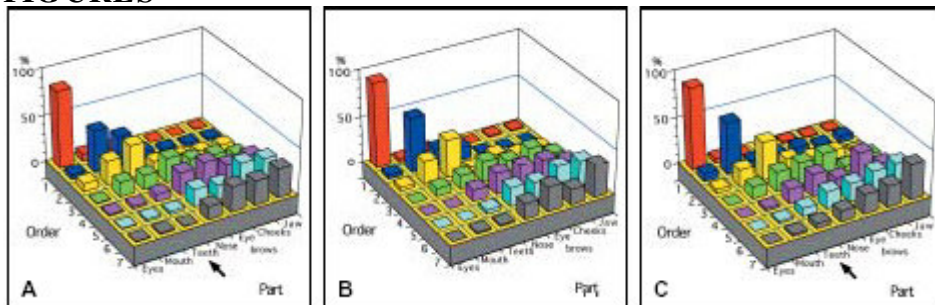


Fig. 1 Order of importance of various parts of face in determining attractiveness of males to females in their 20s (arrows indicate significant differences). A. Orthodontic patient group. B. Potential patient group. C. Unconcerned group.

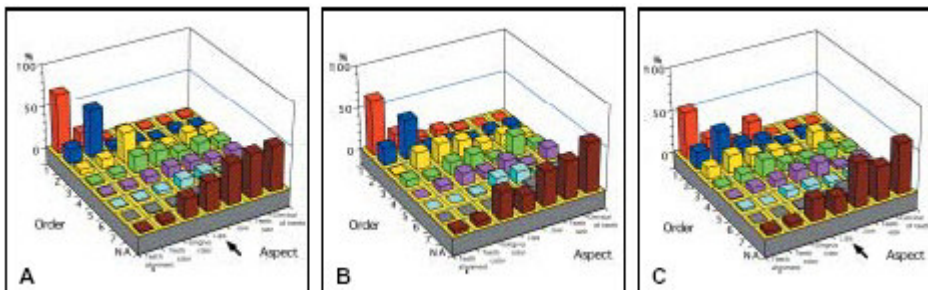


Fig. 2 Order of importance of various aspects of oral region in determining attractiveness of males to

females in their 20s (arrows indicate significant differences). A. Orthodontic patient group. B. Potential patient group. C. Unconcerned group.

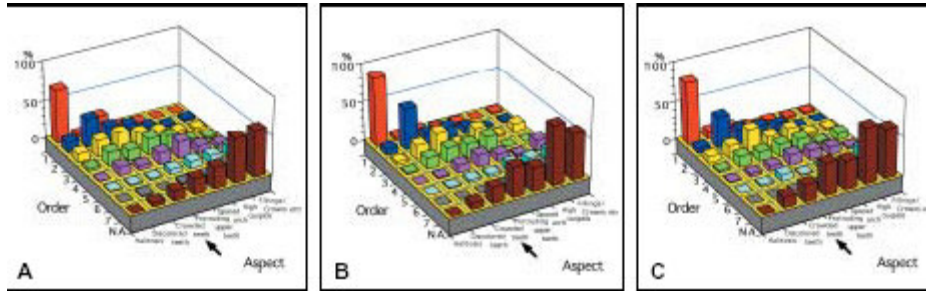


Fig. 3 Order of importance of various aspects of oral region that females in their 20s found unattractive (arrows indicate significant differences). A. Orthodontic patient group. B. Potential patient group. C. Unconcerned group.

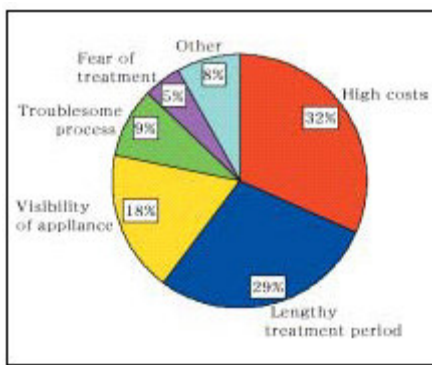


Fig. 4 Reasons why potential patients chose not to undergo orthodontic treatment.

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FOOTNOTES

1 SPSS Japan, Inc., Tokyo.