

# Minimalism in esthetic dentistry



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It's a great time to be in the field of dentistry. Over the past few decades we have seen some spectacular, artistic work that provides life like esthetics to our patients. At times, in the quest to achieve these enthralling results, the science has taken a back seat, where too much tooth structure was taken away only to replace it with artificial substitutes, that, in spite of the best intentions of the dentists, failed, due to failure of the biological substrate. Today we seek a true amalgamation of science in the art of esthetic dentistry and the voices are louder than ever before, to provide good esthetic results without having to pay a steep biological price for it.

There are two primary reasons for the high demand in esthetic dentistry today. The first is the media created image of a beautiful human face, a well-endowed envelope of lips that houses a gorgeous, white, well-proportioned, aligned set of teeth. When the patients compare themselves to the glitzy images in magazines they fall short in their own estimation and shout out to the dental fraternity to make them look like the pictures they see in media. As per the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry survey conducted in 2015<sup>1</sup>, eighty-six percent of patients elected cosmetic treatments to improve physical attractiveness and self-esteem. Respondents were asked to rate how much of a concern various issues are to patients when they consider a cosmetic dentistry procedure. Defining ratings of 4 or 5 as a true concern, at the top of the list was, appearance, indicated by 99% of respondents. Only 39% of the

respondents were concerned about the amount of tooth structure that will be removed for achieving the result. This trend is a cause of worry as the patients' demand for looking good without biologic concerns can trap an unsuspecting clinician in a web of unethical treatments sacrificing ever so precious tooth structure to conform to media generated definitions of a good smile.

The second reason for the high demand of esthetic procedures is the technological advancement in the material science that has engulfed the entire fraternity with a plethora of options. These options offer different degrees of strength and translucency and can be a boon or a bane based on how their usage is interpreted. The industry has been in overdrive, investing millions of dollars in research for newer materials. This has led to increased industry budgets for marketing the benefits of these esthetic restorative options, leading to percolation of the information to patients and clinicians through social and print media.

The dentist's today find themselves at the crossroad where they feel the pull of the media as well as the dental industry. In this context, the clinician needs to take a multitude of factors into consideration. Many materials can provide superlative esthetic results but some may require a lot of tooth structure to be taken away while others may do the same job with hardly any damage to the tooth structure. Then, there are patients, who come in with very high expectations, demanding invasive procedures to



Minimal prep and final restorations of patient

make their smiles fit a prescribed image of perceived beauty. In both these instances, the dentist has to put his most conscientious foot forward and stand up for the most conservative treatment option.

Our understanding of tooth morphology and its histological nuances combined with our detailed knowledge of adhesive material science has led to some very conservative protocols in esthetic treatment rendition. However, these adhesive protocols are not easy to master and the clinicians must invest a large portion of time and money to train themselves in these procedures. The importance of unbiased, non-industry driven, continuing education from responsible organizations in this field cannot be overemphasized. The clinicians today, need to develop a thought process that asks, “How long will the teeth last after being prepared”? As compared to asking, “How long will the restoration last”? Choosing restorations that are the strongest may not necessarily be conservative of tooth structure and will be detrimental to biomechanical and esthetic aspects of the case in the long term. Multidisciplinary approach is an aspect the clinician has to learn to imbibe, in contemporary conservative esthetic dentistry. Using orthodontics for minor tooth movements

can make the tooth preparation much more conservative in several cases, in many others use of implants can lead to saving of tooth structure.

Minimalism has to be taken in the right sense and there is a tendency to do no-prep restorations where the final result leads to over-contouring that can be detrimental to periodontal health. A judicious approach to the subject is warranted and employing a cookbook recipe to convert all cases to ‘no prep’ protocols and using that as a marketing gimmick to attract patients, must be discouraged. Optimum preparation where absolutely necessary must be the dictum. Case selection is the key.

In this age of minimalism, dentistry has to shift gears and now be in an ‘Enamel Saving’ mode. It is in this mode that conscientious dentist and creative ceramist will find maximum job satisfaction, and the entire fraternity will benefit from the fruits of the positive image that this mode will create, while providing the patient with a beautiful smile they yearn for; at a negligible biological price!

## References

1. Cosmetic Dentistry: State of Industry Survey, 2015; American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry; [www.aacd.com](http://www.aacd.com).

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