

Grace Nunekpeku

BUF 4700

Tooth Gems: A Modern Dental Accessory with Historical Roots

In recent years, a unique trend has emerged in the world of fashion. Combining dental aesthetics with jewelry, tooth gems has gained popularity as a trendy fashion statement. Gaining popularity among those that seek to make a statement and showcase their individuality, these small sparkling adornments are placed on one's teeth. While tooth gems may seem like a new idea or innovation, its origin can be traced back to ancient civilization. In those times, this trend was used for dental adornment such as symbols of rank, status and spirituality.

Tooth gems hold historical significance in various cultures around the world. In India, tooth jewelry was popular among the women of the Mughal dynasty. They adorned their teeth with pearls and gemstones as a symbol of beauty and status. In Japan, tooth blackening, known as Ohaguro, was practiced for centuries as a sign of maturity and marriage readiness. For some South Africans, it is a spiritual belief that gold "represents the light and has the ability to scare away evil spirits like the Tokoloshe" (Owodina, 2020). Due to this belief, some South Africans as young as twelve years old are fitted for gold embellishment for their teeth.

In some indigenous American cultures, dental modification involved filing teeth to create decorative patterns or inserting materials like jade or turquoise into tooth cavities. "Sophisticated dentistry allowed Native Americans to add bling to their teeth as far back as 2,500 years ago" (Tlapoyawa, 2012). In that time, it was mostly men that opted for the look and did it for decoration rather than to represent a mark of social class. Proving this fact is the Maya mummy Red Queen, a royal of that time did not have teeth decorations. These practices highlight the

diverse ways in which dental adornments have been used throughout history to signify cultural identity, rites of passage, and social status.

Presently, a form of dentist bonding gel is used to bond gems to the enamel. In order for these small ornaments to stay, dental adhesive is put and set with a UV lamp (Macau 2023). The jewels used for tooth gems range in different quality material and are available in many different shapes, sizes, allowing the wearer the ability to customize their dental embellishment to suit their individuality and preference.

Skyce and Sapphire are a high quality range of crystals used for jewelry that is easily applied to the tooth's surface with an adhesive. Skyce has extra sparkle whereas Sapphire possesses white or blue crystals. With its patented backside like an orthodontic bracket, dazzlers are also tooth jewels specifically designed to bond to one's teeth, making them last longer.

Another kind of tooth gem is twinkies and is known for its pure gold and precious stones like diamonds, sapphires and rubies. Last but not least are dental crystals. Though its bonding is not as durable as the others, dental crystals are mounted on a thin foil of aluminum and when taken care of can last for six months. Also with dental crystal, a variety of shapes are available in the market like diamond, star, triangle, droplet, heart and round shape (Bhatia, Arora, Gupta, N., Gupta, P., Bansal, and Thakar 2016)

Several factors can be credited to the popularity of tooth gems. In today's world, tooth gems are primarily used as a form of body modification and self-expression. With social media on the rise, it is now easier than ever to find the hottest trends. People all over the world show off their tooth gems, inspiring others ranging from ages eighteen to thirty-five to try the trend also (Embleton, 2022). In comparison to other body modifications, tooth gems are non-invasive,

making them a safer option for someone who wants to experiment with their appearance without having to commit to any permanent changes.

Whether it be for a special occasion or everyday wear, they are often chosen to complement an individual's style. Celebrities and influencers such as Kendal Jenner and Charli D'Amelio have played a significant role in popularizing this trend (Leslau, 2023). Rappers such as Drake have also been seen rocking this trend in music videos, red carpet events and on their social media platforms. Some celebrities and influencers get real gemstones, such as diamonds or sapphires, while others choose less expensive alternatives made from crystals or rhinestones (Embleton, 2022).

Although tooth gems are still safer than other body modifications, they are not without controversy as there are a few dental risks one might want to consider. Improper application or removal of them can damage tooth enamel or lead to oral health issues. Long term effects of wearing tooth gems are also a concern, especially when the jewels are made from materials that are not biocompatible. Dr. Kantor, who is a cosmetic dentist in New York, states that they can trap plaque and can also “create places for food particles and harmful bacteria to hide” (Embleton, 2022).

There are many ways to avoid these kinds of complications which include keeping the gems clean and practicing good oral hygiene. It is highly recommended to brush twice a day with non-abrasive toothpaste and soft bristles sonic toothbrushes as they offer a deeper clean and dislodge food stuck to the gemstone due to the vibration it creates. Furthermore, one must floss regularly in order to avoid inflammation, tooth decay and other dental issues (Embleton, 2022).

Currently, tooth gems are regarded as a modern fashion trend rooted in historical practices of dental adornment. The ever-evolving nature of fashion and personal style is shown

in this popular trend as a form of self expression and beauty enhancement. However, when deciding on whether to have tooth gems or not, it is essential to consider the potential risks and consult with dental professionals to ensure that both oral health and aesthetics are maintained. Not only do tooth gems serve as a testament to the enduring human fascination with embellishing the body and expressing cultural identity, this practice has evolved across time and continues to shape modern trends in the beauty and fashion world.

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