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NOTICED

A Little Imperfection For That Smile?

By AUSTIN CONSIDINE Published: October 21, 2011

AMERICANS are expected to spend nearly \$110 billion on dental care in 2012, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, with much of it to straighten, whiten and repair less-than-perfect teeth.

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Dental Salon Plaisir In Toyko, straight teeth no more.

Meanwhile, in Japan, a new fashion has women paying to have their straight teeth purposefully disarranged.

A result of tooth-crowding commonly derided in the United States as "snaggletooth" or "fangs," the look is called "yaeba" in Japanese or "double tooth." Japanese men are said to find this attractive: blogs are devoted to yaeba, celebrities display it proudly, and now some women are paying dentists to create it artificially by affixing plastic fronts to their real teeth.

"It's not like here, where perfect, straight, picket-fence teeth are considered beautiful," said Michelle Phan, a Vietnamese-American based in Los Angeles, who wrote about the phenomenon on her popular beauty blog. "In Japan, in fact, crooked teeth are actually endearing, and it shows that a girl is not perfect. And, in a way, men find that more approachable than someone who is too overly perfect."

The imperfect teeth phenomenon has its Western equivalents. In an episode of the reality show "America's Top Model" last year, the host and model Tyra Banks encouraged one contestant to have the gap between her two front teeth widened.

"Make it as big as you want it," the contestant replied excitedly.

As the writers at the celebrity and fashion blog Jezebel noted at the time, Ms. Banks had instructed a model in a previous season to minimize her gap — presumably when gapped teeth weren't so in fashion.

The gap craze has come and gone several times over the years (Lauren Hutton popularized it in the 1970s), but has seen a comeback recently with popular models like Lara Stone and Georgia Jagger.

Dr. Emilie Zaslow, an assistant professor of communication studies at Pace University in Manhattan, who has studied gender identity and beauty in consumer culture, noted that such ever-shifting tastes often have one thing in common: a fixation with youth.

"The gapped tooth is sort of preorthodontic or early development, and the naturally occurring yaeba is because of delayed baby teeth, or a mouth that's too small," she said. "It's this kind of emphasis on youth and the sexualization of young girls."

Falsely imperfect teeth aren't easy for everyone to swallow, perhaps because for most

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people, imperfections come naturally but don't score multimillion-dollar contracts. (According to a Forbes report in May, Ms. Stone had earned \$4.5 million in the preceding 12 months.) Dr. Zaslow suggested that contrived imperfections like yaeba teeth have nothing to do with imperfection. "It's not based in self-acceptance," she said.

In other words, it's as phony as [Botox](#). "It's still women changing their appearance primarily for men," Dr. Zaslow said.

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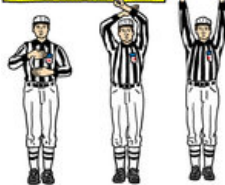
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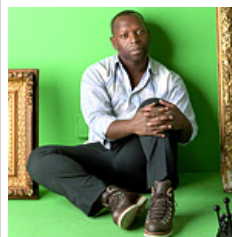
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