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Will the less-than-perfect still be loved?

By LAURENCE THOMAS

When I look around me, I see some beautiful people and some not so beautiful ones. Some with physical features that one would "die" for; others with physical features that one is only too happy not to have. I fall more in the latter than the former category. But oh, did my parents love me. And when I think back upon my childhood days, the teasing that I received as a child pales mightily in comparison to the love that I experienced from my parents. What is ever so clear is that they loved me majestically -- and they did so in spite of those obviously imperfect parts of my body. And if I could do it all over again, there is nothing that I would trade for that love.

But with the extraordinary success of both the medical technology of gene mapping and the modern techniques of plastic surgery, we are fast approaching an era where we can have physical features upon demand. I want not just a child, but: "I want a child with green eyes, brown hair and full lips. Oh, and I almost forgot: the child should be a male."

Perhaps there is nothing wrong with wistful wants. But when it comes to having children, what happens when our wistful wants turn into inexorable demands? Do we send the child back? Ask for a remake? Or, and this gets to the very heart of my concern: Do we love that child a little less?

Disfigurations are one thing. Understandably, loving parents seek to eliminate these from their child's life. Clearly, the use of medical technology in this regard is one of the most admirable uses of science known to humanity. Something has gone wrong, though, when eliminating disfigurations turns into a demand for standards of beauty. Something has gone terribly wrong when parents are disaffected with their child merely because she or he falls short of some vision of beauty in their eyes. And things have become worse still, if society condones such an attitude on the part of parents.

Most significantly, parental love will be mightily cheapened if it comes to be associated with creating visions of beauty in a child, just as it is cheapened if it is associated with material goods. There is no material good on the face of this Earth that can take the place of the love of a parent.

Some of the best parents have been poor ones. For in a child's eyes, the measure of love is not what its parents can afford to buy, but their unfailing presence of support in its life. In our materialistic society, far too many parents have overlooked this truth, and then have wondered what went wrong.

When I was growing up, kids used to make so much fun of the size of my nose. But today, there is one question that will never haunt me. I will never wonder if my looks were more important to my parents than being their child. I will never wonder whether it mattered to them that I did not have the looks of the neighbor's child. I will never wonder if my parents would have loved me if my nose had not been perfect. For what I know more clearly than I know anything else on the face of this Earth is that I was their darling. And long after their deaths, it is that knowledge that continues to nourish my soul like no other truth.

This is the gift of parental love.

And if we allow the technology of gene mapping and plastic surgery to become an impediment to the majestic gift of parental love, then from the solid rock of humanity we will have launched ourselves into the abyss of inhumanity. We may all end up looking cute, but behind all of that cuteness there will be nothing much left either to love or be loved.

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