

Surgery needs pause for thought

May 19, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

A fairly detailed article in a local English newspaper this week on the subject of teenagers seeking cosmetic surgery lies behind my words today. The article had to have caught the attention of many, and for more than one reason.

The title was enough for me: "Doctors talk about plastic surgery, youth" (TT 5-15-13 p. 5). An adjoining photo of Department of Health Minister Chiu Wen-ta answering questions at a Social Welfare and Environmental Hygiene Committee meeting in the legislature didn't hurt any, either. Surely the topic of teens and plastic surgery appeals to all of us who care about social welfare.

I of course know next to nothing about cosmetic surgery. Any writing about it is bound to include terms that stir emotions of wonder, fear, and maybe mystery. Terms like "liposuction," "rhinoplasty," and "blepharoplasty."

Gott sei Dank for the marvels of the Internet, which offers numbskulls like me a background sketch on a complicated and sensitive topic such as medicine and physical appearance.

If I am ever loony enough to write and publish a text entitled "The Bauer Philosophy in a Nutshell," by the way, it is a given the tome will include ideas about medicine and appearance. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, this is an area of life we all sometimes contemplate.

I assume readers know that liposuction is a medical procedure that calls for doctors to make incisions and then suck out chunks of fat from various parts of the human body. Promotional material on line lauds liposuction for its potential to help people "reshape and contour" their body. I am quite convinced my body was never, and I mean never, spectacularly "shaped" or "contoured." There is really nothing about my physical self to go back to, I fear, or to "redo," XDXD.

I had a hunch, which proved to be accurate, that "rhinoplasty" links with the human nose. As a naive graduate student I once observed a classmate come to class with a badly beaten up face. She looked like a couple of mobsters had worked her over in a dark

alley with baseball bats. "Gosh," I said, "are you okay? You look like you were in a motorcycle crash."

"Oh, I'm okay. I had a nose job three days ago." My friend meant she was recovering from a rhinoplasty.

The report that spawned this column spoke of the form of plastic surgery that is most popular among our student population. That surgery is blepharoplasty, "surgical modification of eyelids."

The Department of Health is pushing legislators to consider setting a minimal age for some procedures that have now become common in the burgeoning industry of beauty medicine, or medicine and physical appearance. Some practitioners of these arts, not surprisingly, are opposed to such laws. Let the doctors decide, they urge, and don't deny medical treatment to teenagers who are keenly suffering because of their feelings about their nose, eyes or body shape.

Who knows? Perhaps a panel of professionals, including psychiatrists, could play Solomon and make exceptions to rules that generally apply to persons under the age of 18.

Still, laws can only do so much. We should also work pro-actively with parents, teachers and teenagers themselves to develop healthy attitudes about this whole thing we call "physical appearance." We adults who may be "hung up" about the way we personally look could be part of the reason our young friends obsess on the question of how they look. If we parents and teachers constantly praise celebrities in front of our youth, or express admiration for them because of their appearance, our young friends are sure to compare their own faces and figures with role models who are simply impossible to equal. At the very least, we should encourage our teens to develop the abilities to be self-confident and to love themselves as they are.

My advice is to hold off spending oodles of money (which probably comes from Mom and Dad) on a blepharoplasty or whatever, for as long as possible. Most decisions about medicine and appearance can wait for a time in life when we are more experienced, more mature, and more ready.

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Talking points:

1. Do you happen to know any young person who has been through cosmetic surgery? What is their story and was this the right time in life for them to do this?
2. How much influence do teachers and parents maybe unconsciously have on young people by talking too often about famous people and their physical appearance?
3. How can we appreciate ourselves more AS WE ARE in life, and to accept our eyes, our mouths, our shape and so on, without unreasonably pushing ourselves to "look different"?
4. Do we love ourselves enough?

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