



Down’s Syndromeⁱ

I was appalled when I read Wednesday’s article on the increasing number of Down’s syndrome children undergoing facial cosmetic surgery to change the shape of their eyes or nose. What were the parents and doctors thinking? Young children with Down’s syndrome should not be subject to plastic surgery, because young children, let alone those with Down’s syndrome, are virtually incapable of providing reliable feedback regarding post-operations and plans. For a child with Down’s syndrome, expressing extreme discomfort or explaining what hurts where, would be an even more difficult task.

Furthermore, like all other surgical procedures, the operation itself is dangerous. As such, plastic surgery for cosmetic purposes is unacceptable and even more so, to perform aesthetic facial surgery on a young child with Down’s syndrome. The child is just too young to understand what he or she is going through, much less be a willing, informed, mature deciding partner.

If on the other hand, the person with Down’s syndrome was a full-grown adult, my judgment on the case would be vastly different. Unlike a child, an adult can fully comprehend the gravity of the surgery he or she is committing himself or herself to. Hence, one cannot say, as one would with regard to a child, that the Down’s syndrome individual has not understood and considered the dangers of the operation. The decision to have facial plastic surgery should be an educated one – not one made by a young child with Down’s syndrome by his or her parents.

Furthermore, parents of Down’s syndrome children should also realize that if surgical procedures are done on a child too young, follow up operations might become necessary later on in the child’s life. What kind of life will such parents be dooming their children to? One surgical procedure after another? What’s more, parents will be sending the wrong message to their Down’s syndrome children – that their appearances matter much more than what is inside. Parents should be educating their children to resist social prejudices; they should not be altering their child’s physical appearance just because society discriminates against them.

In conclusion I firmly believe that cosmetic surgery for Down’s syndrome children is morally reprehensible. I could understand if the surgery was necessary for medical reasons, for example, if there was a need to improve breathing, swallowing and drinking amongst others. I do not buy for one minute, the argument that facial plastic surgery can alter the quality of life for individuals with Down’s syndrome. Changing a child’s face will not remove the prejudice against him, changing his eyes will not cause the community to stop shunning him, and certainly, reconstructing a young child’s features will not eradicate the ignorance and lack of information people have about Down’s syndrome in society.

It will be truly a sad day when personal appearance or the ability to blend in physically would indicate, in any way, the quality of life of an individual, or whether or not he or she should be accepted.



Application Question

How convincing are the writer’s arguments? Discuss the relevance of the arguments presented to you and your society.

Refer to specific material from the passage as well as your own knowledge and opinions in your answer.

ⁱ *Note: Down’s syndrome (DS) is a chromosomal disorder caused by the presence of all or part of an extra 21st chromosome. Individuals with DS tend to have a lower than average cognitive ability, often ranging from mild to moderate developmental disabilities. A small number have severe to profound mental disability.*