

Remember What Matters and Don't Count the Earrings

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I looked across the high school gym during a school event and saw this student with a big mohawk, tall, stiff, green and black. "Oh," I commented in the ear of the mom next to me, "Aren't you glad you're not **his** mother!" She retorted, "And aren't you glad he's not dating your daughter!"

Not long after, I heard a girl's tongue clattering against her front teeth, and when she spoke, I could see the piercing on her tongue. Yuck, I thought.

The woman in the coffee shop leaned over to hand me my change and I noticed a beautiful diamond stud in her nostril. Hmmm, what happens when she has a cold? That can't be comfortable. Why would she do that? Ugh.

My daughter brought a boy home -- just a friend, mom -- and his eyebrow had a ring in it. "Don't worry," she whispered, "it's just a hoop in his eyebrow. He's a good kid."

And then I began to notice earlobes stretched into hoops, reminding me of an issue of *National Geographic* my brother and I pored over when we were kids.

Then I saw backs of necks pierced too. At Thanksgiving, my younger cousin showed me his chest -- and it too was pierced. It doesn't stop there, I realize. No place on the body seemed to be spared.

And you can hear me, I'm sure, talking to my high schooler:

"I don't like that hairstyle!"

"That earring/nose ring/eyebrow ring/tongue ring (substitute appropriate ring) is gross."

"Why do they *do* that?"

And better yet, I bet you can hear me respond to my own daughter's requests for such changes: "No, you can't do that until you're 18." And then this one (you know it, I know you do!): "When you no longer live under my roof, you can do whatever you want." (This one works for, "Can I have a snake?" too.)

Even worse, I admit to using reasons such as "No one will ever hire you with that piercing" and "People judge you by how you appear. Do you want to look like that?"

Hey, when did I get to be so judgmental?"

I could tell you all the things I did in high school that proved my individuality. I could tell you about the grungy torn jeans, more patches than denim. I could tell you about the peasant blouses, gauzy and see-through. I could tell you about the crazy things we wore, the boundaries we crossed, the challenges we made to our parents' way of doing things. But that was then. Now is now. And I'm getting older...I'm on the fifty side of forty.

Why do I judge these kids? I am not above judgment myself, if that's the game -- in my clogs, my t-shirts, my favorite worn-out denim shirt, my long hair, and my lack of make-up. Perhaps it's natural to look at what's different in our society and react. I know better though. I know better.

Beyond the hair and beyond the numerous piercings is the kid, the adult, the person who gazes at me across the coffee house counter. And I remind myself that what makes all of us individual is so much deeper than the outer layer we sometimes get hung up on. How you live and how you love do not seem to me to be related to the number of piercings or the shade of green in one's hair.

But I will stick to my clogs.

And I'm thinking of piercing my nose.