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POSTER FROM INTACT AMERICA I DID NOT CONSENT CAMPAIGN

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Dr John Warren,

Guest Editor

When I started what was to become NORM-UK 20 years ago I had little idea what it would become. I was myself facing up to the harmful effects of my own childhood circumcision, and had realised that there might be other men

who might also be affected similarly. As a doctor, I had read the medical literature as it existed in 1993 to search for long term harmful effects of circumcision, and effectively found no record that such problems existed. I also tried to find out more about the function of the foreskin, and again, this information was simply not there in medical texts. It was only when I discovered a book by a US psychologist, Jim Bigelow, that I realised there were indeed other men adversely affected. When I read his book, *The Joy of Uncircumcising!*, I found the problems I had encountered described. It also contained an explanation of the function of the foreskin, and, to my amazement, accounts of non-surgical foreskin restoration, using tissue expansion techniques. I went to California to meet the author, and also met Marilyn Milos, who had been battling to stop the

American custom of routine infant circumcision for many years. Jim and Marilyn forwarded my contact details to enquiring men, and so, gradually, over the next few months, I started getting calls from men, which usually started like this: *I've never mentioned this to anyone before, but I was circumcised when I was a boy, and now I'm 30/40/50 and it's dreadful. I have no feeling in my penis when I have sex. I'm ashamed to let other men see it in the changing room. It rubs on my underwear and feels horrible.* Some of them had talked to a doctor about it, and I was sorry to hear that they were often rebuffed with ridicule and total lack of sympathy or understanding. Some of them obviously had other complications resulting from circumcision such as stitch tunnels, skin bridges, meatal stenosis (narrowed pee hole), and one had even had his

urethra damaged resulting in a fistula, so that urine leaked from the shaft of his penis when he passed urine.

After a few months of hearing these stories, which seemed to have a common thread, I called up some of the men and asked if they would like to come to a meeting. Quite a few agreed, and one lent his flat in London for the occasion, and so the organisation began.

It was quite an emotional meeting as, one by one, these men who had never dared to speak about circumcision before, told their stories, and of course, they could all immediately empathise with one another. The main purpose, I thought, at the start was to let men know about foreskin restoration techniques, but one of the messages that emerged was that everyone wanted to stop this happening to future generations.

At the end I asked them if they wanted to meet again, and most said they did. The rest is history. NORM-UK was started so that others would not be in the position of being unable to find out any information about the harm of circumcision and of what they could do to help themselves when they were in this position.

When the organisation became a charity it was registered as an educational charity. Who are we aiming to educate? The public, but, in particular, health professionals, parents and parents-to-be, and victims or survivors of circumcision, lawyers and law

makers, and people from cultural and religious backgrounds where circumcision is considered normal.

In this issue of NORM NEWS we have contributions from 6 authors. All the different angles deal with how they are delivering education about this topic in their different environments.

Raquel Lazar-Paley tells two stories about how she delivered the message to Jewish mothers in Israel.

Nihal Nour is starting to tackle the problem in Egypt, where, she says, 99.9% of men are circumcised.

H.E. Mead, from the USA, looks at the psychological issues that a man, who has been harmed by circumcision, faces, if he is to become a successful educator or intactivist. Mead explains that getting angry is not effective, and that the intactivist has to move on from victimhood, shedding his anger, to become a survivor, who can put his point calmly and reasonably.

Nicholas is from France, where, although circumcision is unusual except for immigrants, he finds doctors unaware of the harmful effects of circumcision, ignorant of the function of the foreskin, unaware of its normal development in childhood. Basically, France is like the rest of Europe and UK with regard to circumcision.

Clara Franco Yanez is from Mexico. She writes about the vital role of women in

educating the public about male circumcision. Vanessa Hammond, from USA, recounts an interview with a parent who opted for routine infant circumcision of her son. We need to read this to understand why this cultural practice is so persistent.



Two Stories of Jewish Intactivism

Raquel Lazar-Paley

Haifa, Israel

The Secular Mom

Four years ago, I was on the beach in Haifa with a friend of mine, changing my son's nappy, when my friend noticed that my son is intact. She has a son who is circumcised, and as I expected, her reaction was negative. I, however, was not bothered by it in the least, and decided to take a very strong, but calm and rational approach.

"We're not religious, you know", was my only comment. I confess that I might have taken my time closing my son's diaper, to give my friend a chance to get a good look at what a penis is supposed to look like. My son didn't mind in the slightest.

Since very few Israelis are deluded by the pro-

circumcision health claims, I felt no need to get on the proverbial soapbox. I just let her stew.

Two years later my friend was pregnant again with another boy. She is an intelligent, well-read woman and I trusted her to make the right decision given all the information. She and her new partner were (and still are) fairly anti-religious in all other aspects of their daily lives, and would later become active in a secular-humanist Israeli political party. Knowing her general inclination, and also knowing that many Israelis tend to fight back ferociously if they feel attacked and berated, I decided to simply provide her with resources—a link to a series of webinars I produced about the function of the foreskin and the circumcision process, and references to some online resources set up by other Israelis who are against the practice.

She kept her second son intact, and was so pleased with her decision that I had to stop her after one of her lengthy tirades on how barbaric circumcision is. She was, after all, preaching to the choir and I had other things to do.

The Ultra-Orthodox Celebrant

I was on a bus headed for Jerusalem when the bus stopped to let on a rather large group of ultra-Orthodox Jews and their children, all impeccably dressed. I'm generally not in favour of little girls wearing heavy stockings and full length dresses in the

heat of summer, but a few of these girls were wearing really exquisite dresses and I decided to complement their mother on their attire. Although the ultra-Orthodox community is quite insular—with little or no connection with anyone outside their circle, no television and no internet—the compliment pleased the mother and she decided to share with me their plans for the day.

They were on their way to attend the *bris* (ritual circumcision) of their Rabbi's first grandson. This woman was brimming with excitement at the opportunity to celebrate such a joyous occasion. While she went on and on about the rabbi she so admired and the event that was bringing a large number of her family members and friends together, I sat quietly and tried to formulate a response.

This isn't easy with Orthodox Jews. They are—on the surface, at least—not hypocritical about their faith and religious practice. They do what the Bible says, and they do it to the letter. Unlike many Jews, who marry outside the faith, eat non-kosher food and don't observe the Sabbath or holidays, circumcision isn't the only way that Orthodox Jews express their Jewish identity. You can't say that the only sacrifice they are making is the cutting off of part of their son's penis. For the Orthodox, Jewish practice permeates their daily lives—it is the be-all and end-all to their existence here on earth.

This was the little boy's day for getting a name, for becoming a full-fledged member of his community. His spirit was going to be released today—if he died before his *bris*, his dead body would still be circumcised in order to prevent him from being buried "in shame". (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch at 163:7)

While the woman went on and on about the exciting day ahead, I thought about the obvious—that there was absolutely nothing I could say or do that would prevent this little boy from being cut. Despite my belief that circumcision is outdated and the harm irreparable, picking a fight on a bus full of Orthodox Jews would have been almost as irrational as the practice itself.

I decided to do something not so nice and simply spoil her pleasure.

"So", I said, "it sounds like everyone will be celebrating today except for the baby".

She looked at me dumbfounded. This was obviously the first time she had thought twice about the ritual. I maintained eye contact and waited for her response. After a minute (or more, it seemed), she nodded. For the rest of the ride, she sat silently gazing out the window. I said nothing more and neither did she.



Raquel Lazar-Paley, Esq., LLM., is a lawyer and writer living in Haifa, Israel. From 2006-2008, Ms. Lazar-Paley produced more than 50 live webinars on legal and consumer issues concerning women's and children's health and the environment, including a series entitled "The Intact Boy" with renowned Intactivists Marilyn Milos, Gillian Longley, Ronald Goldman, and Miriam Pollack. Raquel was a world pioneer in the use of webinars to educate the general public, and received accolades from WebEx for her innovative use of their technology. Archived recordings of The Intact Boy and other programs on the topics of childbirth, lactation, childhood vaccinations and activism are available for public viewing on Raquel's website at <http://consciouswoman.org>.



Egypt and the Intactivism Cause: Small Steps towards Change

Nihal Nour
Giiza, Egypt

Though the Middle East and Egypt in particular may seem worlds apart from North America and Europe, it may be surprising that the arguments used to justify male infant circumcision do not differ that much from those considered by most American parents when they are trying to make life--and body-altering decisions for their infant sons.

Truth be told: it is not the same all over the country. It is thought of as a tradition in many places and "traditions" are, by definition, mindless. People do not even think about why they do what they do and they get carried away with the circumcision "ceremony". Going up the social ladder, one could see the stereotypical Egyptian doctor who does not even need to advise the parents to circumcise the child.

Mostly parents worry about the pain the child may endure, but doctors are always reassuring.

Parents mostly do not witness the procedure. I have often heard of mothers crying while taking their babies to circumcision clinics. I even heard of that mother who was on the edge of breaking down and kept delaying taking her son to the clinic because she was scared for him.

The child's "aunt" then decided to take the initiative and actually took the child to the clinic herself without the mother knowing. One could think the mother would be angry, but she was actually thankful the baby's aunt relieved her of the pain.

That has the word "ironic" written all over it, but yes, parents are always concerned about the baby, but they wouldn't mind it if you have him circumcised as long as they do not watch.

99.9% of Egyptian men are circumcised. People sometimes refer to the religious argument, quoting a "hadith" (a saying of the Prophet), which says that circumcision is a *sunnah* (preferable, but no obligation). More progressive Muslim commentators doubt the origin of this saying, but argue that even if it were a true saying, circumcision is only a *sunnah*, so if you do not do it to your child, you will not be punished by God, according to Islam.

When one says this to those who defend the practice, they immediately go back to the "health" argument, claiming that the foreskin is unclean and that leaving it as it is definitely leads to health problems. The medical institution in Egypt is almost totally *pro* infant circumcision and unfortunately "You can't argue with doctors. They know better"

It may be quite surprising that most Christian boys are also circumcised in Egypt. This is

evidence that circumcision is basically a medical issue, not exactly a religious one. With an unsupportive medical institution that does not encourage people to make their own decision, no wonder the circumcision cause is not gaining much ground in Egypt.

Most of our activism as Egyptian intactivists is done online. We have an Arabic Facebook group where an incredible amount of effort is exerted to promote more accurate information on circumcision through translation.

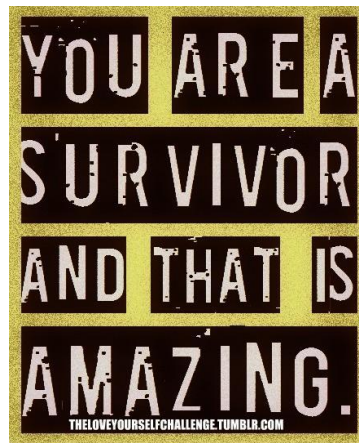
Accurate information on circumcision is rare to find in Arabic so it is important to try and bring this information close to people who may not exactly understand it in English.

Our activism in real life is done on a small personal scale. We attempt to talk to our friends/relatives about circumcision without making it look like we are “preaching” or “patronizing” them. We know that the decision to go against the grain when it comes to one’s children is extremely difficult and there is no support whatsoever from the medical institution.

It is absolutely not surprising that people choose circumcision and it is understandable a friend would believe a doctor, not another “friend” when it comes to their baby’s health. That is why we believe it is important not to show ourselves as “preaching” because that does more harm than good to the cause.

We may not be doing much if compared to the impressive intactivism movement in Europe and North America. We still haven’t been able to go out in demonstrations or marches. We haven’t been able to hold conferences on the subject or campaign for the cause in the media. We hope that those would be our next steps, but until then, we are still trying in all our capacities to make a difference in the life of our children.

Nihal Nour is an Egyptian translator who has been an intactivist for 4 years. She is currently an MA candidate at Cairo University and is active in research on the media and visual culture.



From Victim to Survivor: Distancing Emotional Victimology from Activism

H.E. Mead
Camden, South Carolina

Some of the strongest and most active voices in the “intactivist” movement are males who have experienced the effects of circumcision

personally. In adulthood, men may feel anger and depression, may feel violated, and may experience the residual effects of Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) (Boyle & Bensley, 2001). Simply put, they feel victimised. But how can one transition from the status of victim to survivor? And why is this important for effective activism?

To understand the need for the transition from victim to survivor, one must first understand the effects of loss.

In 1969, Swiss psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross designed her five stages of death and grieving. While these “stages” have met with skepticism over the years, not the least of which is the denial that stages of grieving even exist (Koenigsburg, 2011), these stages, when applied to the losses suffered in infant circumcision, can still effectively show how one does or does not transition through the process to survivor status.

All of Kubler-Ross’s stages - denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance - can certainly be applied to the circumcision loss experience (Kubler-Ross, 1973). However, for the purpose of the victim-to-survivor transition, I will look at two stages (anger and acceptance) and see how they affect performance as an activist.

We all understand anger so it is really not necessary to define it. It is perfectly normal

under these circumstances.

The problem arises when one never leaves the anger stage. This person remains a victim always. It is important to understand the anger, but it is also important to use it constructively to move to the acceptance stage. Acceptance does not imply a “get over it” or denial of the trauma that was suffered. It does mean that one is using the experience toward a positive end.

Why is it important to distance oneself from emotional victimology? Aren't the feelings important in getting the point across? Well, yes and no. The emotional discovery of the trauma committed on one's body certainly is something that should not be forgotten, and can certainly fuel the fires of activism. But in fueling that fire, one must remember not to blow smoke in the faces of those you are attempting to educate.

If a mother of a circumcised boy is called a child abuser or baby mutilator, she will likely defend herself without giving thought to what you, the activist, is trying to say.

If you tell a parent that you will never, ever forgive your parents, they will likely consider you crazy.

Call a doctor a mutilator or a rapist and s/he is unlikely to hear your arguments. In fact, s/he is likely to counter, and then spread the word about the “nut jobs” called intactivists. In all of these cases, your audience is not going to listen.

Since education about genital autonomy is the primary goal here, an opportunity is lost through the use of an ad hominem fallacy. In other words, name-calling and personal attacks really are ineffective. It brings about a collective mindset in those being attacked, where the main concern is what “an increasingly dehumanized enemy is trying to do and of what must be done in return” (Mann, 2002, p. 256).

The intactivist community is viewed as the “dehumanized” enemy and the person being accused is only interested in how the intactivist position can be invalidated.

The emotionality of the activist keeps him from seeing his argument from the point of view of the other person and sets up an “us against them” scenario (Mann, 2002, p. 252).

Why do some activists use incendiary ad hominem arguments? I believe it is because their anger has locked them into the victim mindset. I am not saying that they are not victims, nor am I saying that they have not been traumatized.

However, by working through the stages of loss and truly understanding what one experiences due to loss, one can “graduate” from victim to survivor.

What is the difference? Both victim and survivor have experienced trauma certainly.

However, while the victim operates through raw emotions generated by that trauma, the survivor stands up and uses the experience in positive ways.

The victim will accuse, while the survivor will educate. The victim will linger in an unhealthy emotional rage, while the survivor will channel that rage toward a positive outcome. The victim argues from a position of weakness, the survivor from a position of strength.

The personal experience of the circumcised male is important to the intactivist movement. The goal must be kept in mind however. The goal is to save future generations from the same harm you have experienced. And the only way to do that is to educate, not accuse. Accusations do nothing to further the cause and, in fact, may drive people away.

If we are to be successful intactivists, we must stand as powerful survivors and educate through knowledge and experience.

H.E. Mead has been an activist in the peace movement, the environmental movement and civil/human rights movements for over forty years, and an intactivist for over twenty years. Mead currently resides in South Carolina, USA.

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Situation of Circumcision in France: A Vision by a French Intactivist

Nicolas Maubert

Paris, France

Circumcision in France

Circumcision is not common in France, but unfortunately it exists. Here are some numbers: In a telephone survey of 2008, 14 % of participants said that they are circumcised (1).

In 2012, French MD Christian Castagnola said although 80 000 circumcisions have been reported in 2008, it is difficult to be sure of this statistic since some circumcisions are performed outside the hospital (2).
Maxime Guérin, member of Association against Child

Mutilation (Association contre la mutilation des enfants) (<http://enfant.ovh.org/infos.html>) said in a recent interview that this number could reach 100 000 or 120 000 per year. To give you a referential, there have been 822 000 babies born in France in 2012 (girls and boys).

Why does it Exist?

Two reasons why French people circumcise:

For religious reasons: France has big communities of Jews and Muslims, the majority of whom unfortunately circumcise their boys.

For “medical” reasons: many French MDs are not aware of the natural development of the foreskin in children and very often boys are circumcised for “phimosis”, which is in fact a normal condition. A survey in 2006 among French MDs revealed that 51 % said that the way to care of the foreskin of boys was not discussed during their studies (3).

What about Politics?

I will be clear: I have absolutely no trust in politics. If the debate explodes here like in Germany, I am almost certain that it would end in a law to legalize circumcision like Merkel did. Circumcision is of course not legal in France: there is simply a tolerance and no one want to speak about it.

What about the Doctors?

It is very rare for Doctors to address this topic, but recently there were two big discussions: In 2010, Michel Cymes (a famous French MD who has a tv show) and Daniel Annequin (specialist of pain in children) spoke about circumcision in a Medical Congress (my report here :

<http://www.drmomma.org/2010/12/medical-congress-on-childrens-pain.html>) but only about the pain and how to limit the pain !... Of course, as MDs, they should have condemned the practice but they refused to do it. People will say this is a good start to speak about the pain.

In 2012, a discussion occurred about the ethics of circumcision during the 106th edition of French urologists. As expected, they did not condemn the practice and instead, they just argued that it is such a big dilemma for the doctor, who is never forced to the surgery. I thought that an MD could not operate on a healthy patient who can't consent. *Primum non nocere*, you know?

What do People Say?

What do French people say about the practice of circumcision? Well, this is probably like in Germany where 70 % of people are against it.

But it is important to say, and I notice this very often, that people are almost completely ignorant on the topic.

When I tell a friend or someone I have recently met about what I do, the person does not really know what circumcision is or what is removed. For example a lot of my friends thought that only the tip of the foreskin was cut. When they learned that the entire foreskin is removed, they were horrified.

One month ago, a girl I know had to bring her (intact) boyfriend on wikipedia to prove to him that circumcision removed the entire foreskin: he could not believe her.

Ignorance is also here in another sad way: fallacious arguments / myths that people repeat and believe. When I speak about this topic, I often hear someone saying that circumcision is cleaner and healthier, and that it helps prevent HIV or infections. I even hear people say, who are not familiar with circumcision, that even though they will not circumcise their son, they do not oppose the practice based on the arguments they hear.

Conclusion

Circumcision exists in France, and neither political nor doctors do their job to protect children.

The majority of French people are probably against the practice, but since this is taboo and there is so much ignorance about circumcision, it is difficult to find activists like in the US for example : either people don't know, don't care, or they are afraid to speak against it.

Anti-FGM organizations in France don't want to speak about male circumcision (for strategic and political reasons), but are generally against too. I hope that my www.droitaucorps.com website will bring awareness in France and help save foreskin of babies. I already received good support from some MDs, several mothers and people in the community, and I have been interviewed by a journalist.

I would like to thank every activist in the world for their amazing work : I never could have made the website without seeing organizations like The Whole Network, Intact America, Doctors Opposing Circumcision, NORM and so many others... I had the chance to meet Lloyd Schofield (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k36575QbaVY>) and Jonathan Friedman (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DRsJXJop5I>) in Paris, it was really nice and interesting. I would also please do a special thanks to James Loewen for his fantastic youtube channel (www.youtube.com/user/Bonobo3D), this is truly amazing.

Those people and organizations gave me the energy to start my activism. I will continue and I hope I will inspire others to protect children.



Droit au Corps

Nicolas Maubert is a 26-year-old French activist who lives in Paris, France. He is responsible for the website Droit au Corps (Body Rights), which is about the movement against infant circumcision: www.droitaucorps.com

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Why Male Circumcision is a Female Issue: Female Perspective of Defending Men's Rights

Clara Eugenia Franco Yanez

Geneva, Switzerland

I represent NOCIRC in Mexico.

Our job at NOCIRC is to share adequate medical information, to help prevent the practice of male circumcision. This is not the appropriate time for medical details; suffice it to say that circumcision is absolutely unnecessary, it has endured through the years because of pseudo-medical myths that hide what it really is: the amputation of healthy genital tissue, in the absence of true medical need.

The foreskin does not cause any health problems just by existing. This amputation is hugely painful for anyone – baby, child or man. In addition, studies have shown that it can have negative effects on sexual satisfaction for both the man and his partner (such as the study carried out by Kirsten and Jeffrey O'Hara in the book "Sex As Nature Intended It").

70% of men in the world live their whole lives with intact genitals, and do not present any problems that require cutting.

In Europe, circumcision is almost unknown, except to Jews and Muslims; and no one would think of suggesting that men need surgery in cases of

infection, or for good hygiene, or to prevent HPV.

Beyond all science and studies, the cornerstone of the medical ethics that we promote is a very simple idea: *his* body, *his* rights. Conversely: not my body, not my right.

Being the parent of a baby boy should not warrant me the right to "decide" on an amputation (whether we like the word or not), of healthy genital tissue. This tissue has well-defined functions that remain hitherto ignored by many, starting with the very medical community that continues to define the foreskin as "extra skin". No one but the owner of the body himself should be able to decide which parts of it he wants to keep.

This will not be the time to delve, as mentioned, in medical details; but rather in the social, cultural, historical and feminist perspective. The type of activism that I undertake is quite peculiar, because I am dedicated to defending the rights of men, seemingly going against conventional gender rights discourse, which tends to revolve around women.

The more one reads about the history of male circumcision, the more convinced one can be that this is, for many reasons, an issue which profoundly touches women in the societies where it is practiced. Mothers, wives, sexual partners, doctors, nurses... Among the reasons why male circumcision

is also a topic of interest to women, are the following:

The sexual reasons: Besides O'Hara, also Frisch and Lindholm at the Danish Institute of Public Health showed that circumcised men and their partners reported problems of sexual dissatisfaction much more frequently. This leads us to consider that the practice of male circumcision probably began precisely due to a puritan idea of limiting sexual pleasure.

It is quite telling that even Rabbi Moses Maimonides, in his "Guide to the Perplexed", accepted that male circumcision is done to reduce sexual pleasure – published almost a thousand years ago.

There are still people who tell me that I, being a woman, "cannot talk about the penis" because it is an organ that I don't have, and never will. But if my sexuality can be affected, why would I not be able to have an opinion about it?

Another medically related reason: there is an inherent risk for babies undergoing circumcision, and many have died from it. Despite the denial that surrounds this fact, we know of babies and children who have died from circumcision complications.

Contrary to what some doctors say, the neonatal period is actually the most dangerous for any surgery. The body of a newborn has so little blood that losing a few ounces is enough

to put him in hypovolemic shock, and losing a little bit more can kill him.

For specific references, we know of Ryleigh McWillis (Canada), Jamaal Coleson (USA) and Amitai Moshe (England). How could it not to be a topic of female interest, when a mother loses her son on the altar of tradition or medical deceit?

It is sad to realize how fiercely protected this practice is among certain groups, who are willing to close eyes and shut mouths and dismiss the loss of life, so that the tradition survives.

Let's just compare the reactions that occur in the USA when a baby dies from circumcision and when a child dies in a ritual of, say, a New Age cult. In the latter case the authorities are mobilized to punish, to ban, they speak of the right to life as superior to any tradition or religion.

However, if a child dies from circumcision, people fight to protect "religious freedom" – to make sure no one takes away my right to carve my ideology on somebody else's body.

How could it not be a topic of female interest, the feeling that forever will haunt that mother: of guilt, failure, anguish, pain.

Every surgery carries risks, but we must remember that this is an unnecessary surgery, and many describe it as cosmetic. One death here, is one too many - a totally avoidable one.

A mother is left childless, but the truth is hidden and her loss is dismissed, so that she and all mothers will continue to believe that "circumcision is harmless".

Because this is comparable to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This idea tends to provoke, for several reasons.

The first is that for our Western culture, FGM is alien, culturally distant. And it is very easy to criticize what some Muslims do to their daughters on the other side of the Earth; but very hard to ask ourselves if we we're doing the same to our boys.

The idea persists that "these are two very different things." No, they're not. It is said that FGM is cruel because "it is done for the sole purpose of preventing pleasure." On the one hand, this is false: in the Middle East, "respectable studies" that show that female cutting "improves hygiene and prevents disease" have also been published.

On the other hand, it was mentioned already that male circumcision also began as a means of limiting sexuality, and it spread in the U.S. during the Victorian era to make masturbation difficult.

There are different degrees of FGM, and we tend to only hear about the most serious, where the labia are cut off, but this type is also the least practiced. The vast majority of Muslims who practice *some* form of "female circumcision" cut only

the clitoral hood, and sometimes only partially.

Male circumcision, comparatively, is much more severe. Mutilation is mutilation and we cannot promote one while speaking against the other. Everyone's body must be respected and protected. The logic of amputating first, and *then* challenging others to demonstrate that those body parts actually serve functions (the cure in search of a disease), is a twisted logic, regardless if the individual is male or female.

It should be the other way around: if we find that this problem can *only* be corrected by amputating, then and only then is surgery a valid option. The cries sound the same, the pain is the same. Perpetuating violence against men is not an ethical way of doing feminism.

Our medical ethics are very easy to understand: *his* body, *his* rights. No Pediatric Association in the world recommends routine neonatal circumcision. It has absolutely no benefit, demonstrated nor potential, for its imposition on a minor to be ethically justified.

Obviously a child cannot give informed consent. It seems obvious, but some parents seem to forget that their baby will one day become a man, one that might not be happy with having been circumcised by force.

"Family decision"?... The only one who will be using those genitals will be the man

himself, not his family. Parents who choose a circumcision for their baby (and worse, if they are already informed about the possible damage), are making the risky bet that their child will share their exact opinion, and that does not always happen.

There is a legal disparity that favours women in Western countries; because it is illegal to cut even the smallest piece of genital skin from a girl (in the U.S., all types of female circumcision were outlawed in 1997), while males do not have the same protection.

Circumcising "for aesthetics" is not only a violation of the child's rights, it is also absurd. If the vagina should not be an object of sculpture to please a society's beauty standards, then neither should the penis.

They are reproductive and sensory organs whose purpose is not aesthetic; they deserve to be left alone as the private property that they are.

Hundreds of dissatisfied men, choosing to remain anonymous for fear of ridicule, are currently seeking ways to restore their foreskins. Do men not complain?... Dozens of them write us e-mails. And we're no one to mock or belittle their feeling of being victims of a harmful and unethical medical practice.

Among the justifications used for this practice is the simplistic argument that the baby "won't remember" the pain, and that circumcision has no psychological consequence. There is no logic in first

accepting the idea (as many mothers do today) that even before birth, babies accumulate sensorial experiences; and then suddenly defending that they "don't feel anything" during circumcision, and that no subconscious traces are left when one is subjected to a brutal genital operation (often done without anesthesia, by the way).

In 2002, a study in the *Journal of Health Psychology* concluded that many newly circumcised babies showed symptoms of PTSD, and it is believed that these symptoms can leave lifelong effects. The subconscious footprint is there, and no one is asking themselves what effects it may have. We can speculate about its possible influence on a more untrusting or violent personality by some men; especially more distrustful of women, of that first woman who did not respond to the cries of the infant who felt an intense pain he could not rationalize.

Yet women are still told that male circumcision is "none of their business"; mothers are pressured by male doctors (or by misinformed female doctors) to accept an irreversible genital operation for their sons, urged not to question the doctor's omniscience. We must ask ourselves if this shows the remains of a patriarchal, phallocentric culture that demands a surgical sacrifice from males. The simple fact that I am still sometimes questioned in my ability to express an opinion about this;

ironically shows that male-centered culture. Dismissing me because of gender is precisely a sign that these rituals emerged and endured to secure a patriarchy that harmed us women, but men as well.



Clara Eugenia Franco Yanez currently studies a Master of Arts in International Affairs and works as an Intern at Human Rights Watch. She studied her undergraduate degree in International Business, and has been a NOCIRC representative for Mexico since early 2009. Clara has collaborated with Dr. Sami Aldeeb from the Swiss Institute of Compared Law in translating articles from French to English and English to Spanish, as well as in translating documentaries for NOCIRC.

When a Parent Gives Consent: An Interview

Vanessa Hammond
Los Angeles, California

In our efforts to educate, one blind spot that occurs for so many of us is why a parent

would choose routine infant circumcision even after receiving all of the necessary information. To push it further, consider a parent who receives information not only from activists, but from a medical professional, a pediatrician who refuses to perform the surgery. I conducted a Q&A with a mother who did just that.

I believe some parents perceive the repercussions of going against their cultural conditioning as more likely to occur than the risks associated with RIC. As a result, the potential consequences of not circumcising appear to outweigh the potential consequences of circumcising.

Of course, as times are changing, many of us know this to be a false assessment. The purpose of this interview is for educators and activists to have some insight into the process of choosing RIC even after having been informed. In order to consider how the issue of perceived risks can be addressed directly, we need to practice empathy for those who are still coming from within the cultural conditioning. Remembering that we are not immune to cultural conditioning can help facilitate this process.

Please keep in mind this mother does not speak on behalf of all parents who have chosen RIC. She has offered this information so that we might have more success in reaching out to parents who seem adamant to choose circumcision despite our best efforts to educate. I share this

interview with great appreciation to the mother for her willingness and veracity.

Do you feel that you received adequate information (informed consent) regarding the potential pros and cons of routine infant circumcision from a medical professional?

Yes, our pediatrician & midwife gave us lots of information.

Do you feel adequately informed about the sexual and non-sexual functions of the foreskin?

Yes, our pediatrician explained this to us.

How much of a role did your partner play in the decision?

A huge role. My husband & I actually argued about this for months prior and after my son's birth. He was unable to see the logic vs. the socialisms he had so embedded in his head over this subject. On this subject, there was no compromise with him.

Were they able to pinpoint a specific reason for wanting to have their child circumcised?

Yes. My husband was concerned about his son being made fun of for being different and also being different from my husband. My husband understood that getting the procedure done was unnecessary but couldn't let go of the possible social consequences of going against the "norm".

Would there have been tension in your family had

you chosen to leave your child intact?

Yes I'm sure at first it would have caused tension. Although, with most things, over time my husband probably would have adjusted to it. I think had an intact man talked to him about their own experiences in this, it might have changed his mind about it.

Did you anticipate the potential challenges between you and your partner over RIC to be greater than the potential risks of circumcision to your child?

No, I thought that had he heard about the facts of it not being necessary & strictly cosmetic, that he would be on board with not getting it done. I was unaware of how deeply rooted this social norm was for him & how deeply passionate he was in having it done on any of his sons. Because of this, having a conversation against doing it became a conversation more of social consequences vs. what was medically & morally the right thing to do.

Do you feel that your sexual experiences and preferences had an impact on your decision?

At first yes because I had never been with an intact man therefore i didn't know how being intact would affect my son sexually. But the more I read about the facts of being intact and actually speaking with some friends of mine who had been with intact men, the more I realized that it didn't harm men sexually. Also I realized that if my son was intact and sexually active and

his partner didn't like it that that just meant he was with the wrong person, not that he had an issue.

When weighing the pros and cons, how much influence did the cultural norm of circumcision impact your decision?

I was often given extremes to either side. The older generation were very pro RIC. Which would make sense due to the time in which they grew up in wars where it was considered necessary to be circumcised before being active in the military. They were also very pro due to being told over many years that to be intact mean't that you were probably unclean. The other side were often cruel in some cases. I was treated as if I were murdering my child if I even thought of doing it. The against side was rarely ever willing to take into account that I had been socially groomed to think that circumcision was normal & that there was nothing wrong with it. Also they often didn't take into account that I was a brand new parent & needed guidance in a compassionate manner. Both sides were guilty of this last part.

In other words, was the fear of the risks equal to your fear of choosing something outside of the cultural norm?

The fear of doing something outside the cultural norm far outweighed the risks of the procedure at first. But while my son was getting the procedure done i realized in that moment that the cultural norm was

wrong & I didn't care what others thought. Unfortunately the procedure had been done & there was no going back.

Do you feel like you had a positive support system in place in the event of a circumcision complication?

Had there been a complication we would have had our families but I think some of the support would have been limited due to different opinions. For example, I'm not sure if some of my friends who are very anti RIC would have wanted to get involved. I think it would have been more of an "I told you so" type of moment.

Would you be willing to discuss your son's circumcision with him in the future if he approaches you about it?

Absolutely. He has a right to understand what was done to him and have feelings/opinions about it. At this point I would owe him an explanation whether he agrees with it or not.

Have you considered his possible reactions, positive or negative, to having this decision made for him?

Yes, I have prepared myself as much as I can for the possibility he may be angry with my husband & I for not leaving that decision for him to make when he gets older.

Have you considered what your response will be if your child has a negative reaction?

Yes. At this point all I can do is explain to him what our

reasoning was at the time & that I understand now that we made the wrong decision. It doesn't change what happened but at least he would know. It's his body therefore he is entitled to feel whatever he feels about it. I do wish that this hadn't have turned into a hindsight moment.

Do you feel adequately informed about foreskin restoration and would you be willing to bring that up in the even that your son was unhappy with being circumcised?

I do not feel adequately informed about this procedure but after doing more research on it I would bring it to him. I would do anything to help my son feel good about his body.

What would your response be if your child decided to address his circumciser either legally or personally?

It's his body therefore it is up to him to do whatever action he feels is just. I can't argue with him if he feels like he was wronged & wanted to do something about it. However I would explain to him that ultimately it was my husband & my decision to have the procedure done, therefore we are more to blame than anyone else.



Vanessa Hammond is a genital autonomy advocate from the Pacific Northwest living in Southern California. Becoming a parent led Vanessa to awareness of this issue. Support from her friends, family, and fellow activists gives Vanessa the strength necessary to continue speaking out.

Mother Apologises to Son for Circumcision

In this challenging video interview, watch as a mother reflects on circumcision, and apologises to her son for her decision.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUFwPD8yfNU&feature=c4-overview&list=UU_YdPMhQXYAJWva_34GAODQ

NORM-UK AGM AND CONFERENCE

The NORM-UK AGM and conference will be held on Saturday 14th September at Stone Station Conference Centre. Stone, Staffordshire.

Speakers are Marilyn Milos, Founder and Director, NOCIRC USA, who will be talking about her pioneering work in the USA, Harald Winterling, a member of a German Intactivist organisation will talk about the progress of the movement in Germany following the Cologne ruling, and Janne Raukola, from The Sexpo Foundation in Helsinki will be talking about the Finnish Intact Project, which is a new support organization for circumcised men in Finland.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR MEN AND BOYS

The Third National Conference for Men and Boys is the UK's biggest gathering of people committed to improving the lives of men and boys and will have sessions dedicated to the elimination of non-therapeutic circumcision. It takes place in Brighton & Hove from Wed 25th - Sun 29th September 2013.

Further details at the following link:

<https://mensconferenceuk.wordpress.com/day-by-day/>

Genital Autonomy Conference

Promoting children's rights in Europe: recent developments

**16th and 17th of September 2013.
Keele University.**

Speakers include: J Steven Svoboda, Attorneys for the Rights of the Child; Gert Van Dijk, medical ethicist from the Netherlands K.N.M.G; Michelle O'Brien, will be talking about intersex and the U.N. guidance.

There will be talks from the Children's Rights International Network (C.R.I.N.) and the Metropolitan Police will be presenting the latest from their enlightened Project Azure initiative on Female Genital Mutilation.

James Chegwiddden, barrister, will give a talk entitled "The Assault We Ignore – the unlawfulness of non-consensual genital cutting of boys in the UK; and why (almost) nothing is done about it and Dr Antony Lempert from The Secular Medical Forum will be talking about U.N. developments and will expand on the new General Medical Council policy on Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice, British Medical Association inaction and medical developments."

Booking details at www.genitalautonomy.org

Dates for your diary.

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What Is NORM-UK?

NORM-UK became a registered charity in England and Wales in 1998. It believes that our genitals are our own, and surgically altering them against our will is a crime - regardless of gender, race or culture. It must always be a personal choice.

“Unnecessary genital surgery on babies is said to be cheaper and easier than on adults. All abuse of babies is easier. They are powerless and history will judge us by how we protect the powerless. I say let the children decide for themselves - all in good time.” - Paul Mason, Commissioner for Children, Tasmania .

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