

CIRCUMCISION

TRAUMA



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Circumcision Trauma

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Introduction

The practice of removing the foreskin from infant males varies widely in how broadly it is performed from country to country. The United States has one of the highest rates of circumcising male infants. It is also increasingly controversial. This paper is an attempt to bring more awareness to the practice of circumcision and its consequences. The information included below comes from a variety of sources that include medical research, psychological studies, and the reports of individual men. Detailed references are included at the end.

As you review this information try to create a space inside of you where you can let in the information and see if any of it resonates. As men, we have lost much of our connection to parts of ourselves through denial, forgetting, and normalization (it happens to everyone, no big deal). The first step into healing and wholeness is bringing what was hidden in the shadows of the unconsciousness into the light of consciousness.

It is possible that this material could bring up strong feelings and previously buried issues. If these arise and seem overwhelming, seek support from a trusted source.

Functions of the Foreskin

The foreskin represents at least a third of the penile skin and increases sexual pleasure by sliding up and down on the shaft.

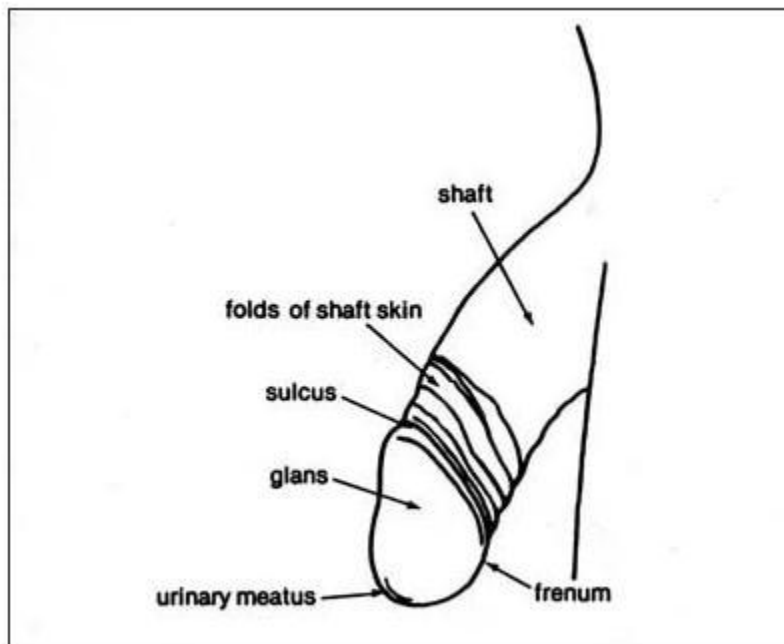


Fig. 1 Circumcised Penis in the Relaxed State

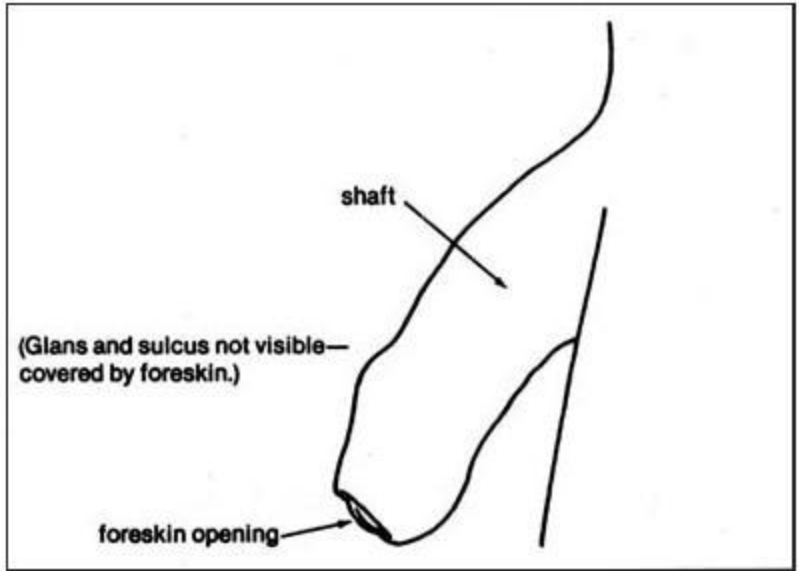


Fig. 2 Uncircumcised Penis in the Relaxed State

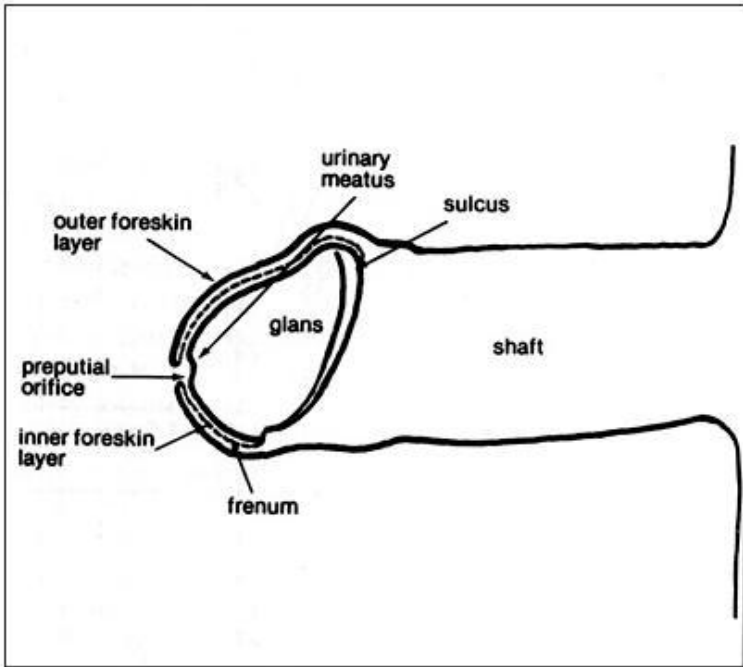


Fig. 3 Inner and Outer Foreskin Layers

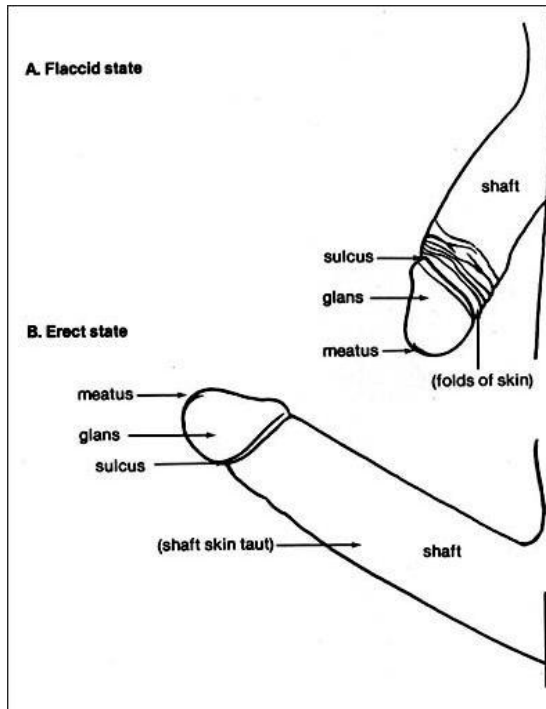


Fig. 4 Erectile Process in the Circumcised Penis

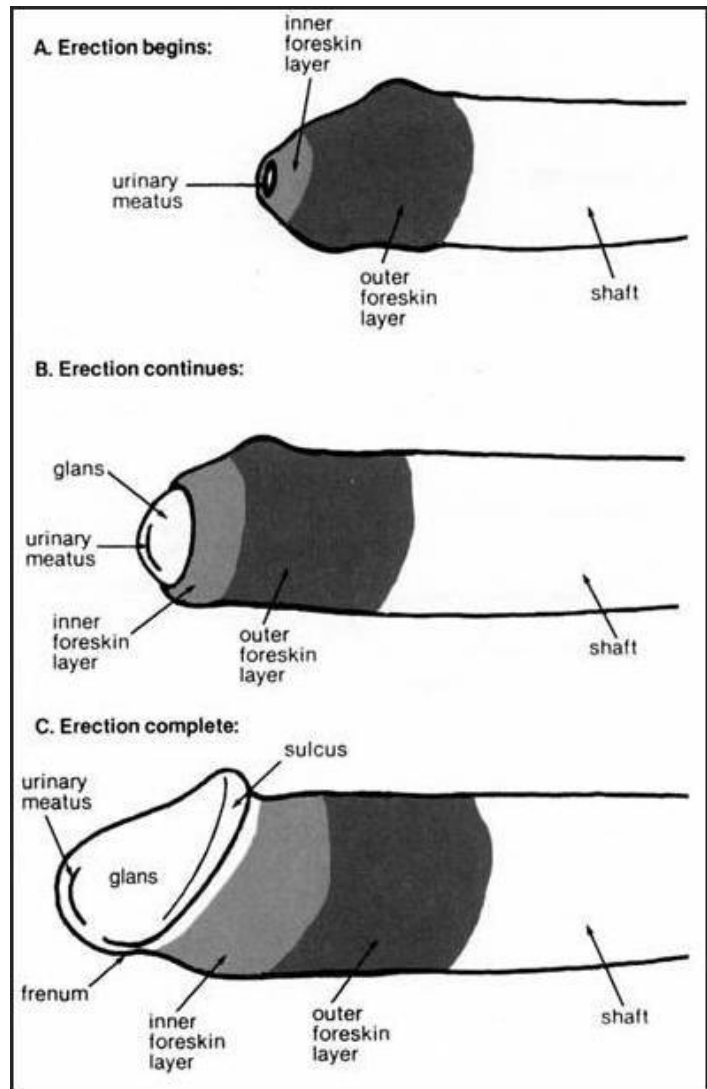


Fig. 5 Erectile Process in the Uncircumcised Penis

The foreskin represents at least a third of the penile skin. It protects the glans from abrasion and contact with clothes. The foreskin also increases sexual pleasure by sliding up and down on the shaft, stimulating the glans by alternately covering and exposing it. This can occur during masturbation or intercourse. Friction is minimized, and supplementary lubrication is not needed. Without the foreskin, the glans skin, which is normally moist mucous membrane, becomes dry and thickens considerably in response to continued exposure. This change reduces its sensitivity. In addition, the loss of a secretion called smegma of the inner foreskin layer removes natural lubrication.

CIRCUMCISION REMOVES THE MOST SENSITIVE PARTS OF THE PENIS

A sensitivity study of the adult penis in circumcised and genitally intact men shows that the natural penis is significantly more sensitive. The most sensitive location on the circumcised penis is the circumcision scar on the ventral surface. Five locations on the natural penis that are

routinely removed at circumcision are significantly more sensitive than the most sensitive location on the circumcised penis.

Personal Accounts

After a man discovers that he is partially color blind, he connected to the denial of his feelings around being circumcised:

“ . . . This discovery [of being partially color blind] and my experience with overcoming denial enabled me to finally confront something else. I was able to confront another area where my perception of the world is significantly diminished. This area is diminished in a way that I never imagined possible. It is another place where my perception of the world is not nearly as vivid or as complete as ‘normal people.’

The area I’m talking about is my sexual perception – my physical appreciation of normal sexual contact. My sexual perception is radically muted, too. But this time, it is not a blameless, unlucky genetic defect. This was done to me by other people. My sexual perception was taken from me.

It was taken intentionally. It was taken by doctors. It was taken without my knowledge or consent. It was taken when I was a defenseless baby. And, perhaps most shockingly, it was taken with my parents’ approval.

This time the denial was harder to overcome. This time the denial didn’t just protect my self-image of being fully ‘normal.’ This time the denial protected me from knowing that the people who I have trusted the most, who I loved the most – had betrayed me. The denial guarded me from fully knowing and feeling the painful discovery that I had been hurt badly, and forever, in the most intimate and personal part of my life. I was permanently sexually maimed. Intentionally, by the people who claim to love me the most – my parents.

This has been a very hard path of self-discovery to follow.

But, in confronting all of the feelings that were waiting for me behind my curtain of denial, I found more than just pain and anger and depression. They were there, certainly, in large amounts. But, I also found understanding and personal growth and some hope.

I understand now why I sometimes have difficulty maintaining an erection or achieving orgasm. This isn’t a shameful failure of my masculinity. This isn’t evidence of my physical and emotional disinterest in a sexual partner. This isn’t proof of my shortcomings as a man. I’ve learned that this is proof of the operation’s success. Erectile dysfunction and diminished sexual pleasure are THE desired surgical outcomes of circumcision. My operation was a success!

Many people believe that sex is wrong. They believe masturbation and recreational sex are immoral. Sometimes these beliefs are religiously motivated, sometimes not. Genital cutting is the intervention that directly addresses the evil of human sexuality. Medical textbooks used to be very specific about the effectiveness of male and female circumcision in preventing masturbation. That is what genital cutting is designed to achieve – undermining human sexuality by dramatically reducing sexual pleasure. I understand that now. I also understand that this intention was never explained to my parents.

I understand now that my radically muted sexual sensations aren’t the result of a botched, or extraordinarily aggressive, circumcision. They are greatly dulled because my circumcision went the way it was supposed to. I am more numb than a normal man, an intact man. The most sensitive parts of my

penis are gone. The "lips" of my prepuce were taken. My Ridged Band was taken. My Frenulum was taken. My Outer Foreskin was taken. And lastly, my Glans and Inner Foreskin are desensitized from constant chaffing from contact with the outside world. I also understand that these exquisitely sensitive parts of my anatomy and their functions were never explained to my parents.

Effectively, the "eyes and ears" of my system of sexual perception are gone. I can still have sex and I can still conceive a child, but most of the fun and much of the frequency are gone. I know about the reduced frequency from my experience with failed efforts – and fear of failed efforts. The loss of pleasure, the fun, is something I can only try to understand about by reading.

But, I know about numbness and loss. The memories of being unable to maintain an erection with women who I loved, who I was deeply attracted to both physically and emotionally, are still very sharp. So too, are the memories of my feelings of inadequacy and their feelings of being undesirable to me. As are the memories of those relationships drifting apart and inexplicably ending. Now, I understand why. I also understand that these predictable results of my circumcision were never explained to my parents.

I know about numbness and disease. I was taught about safe sex and I understand how important it is. But I also know that when I've tried to use condoms, I become totally numb. For me, condoms equal abstinence. With a condom, I am rarely able to maintain an erection and I'm never able to achieve orgasm. I understand why that is now. But faced with the choice of unsafe intercourse or no intercourse, I chose to be unsafe. And I paid the price. Circumcision isn't the only thing that lasts forever. Some diseases last forever. So too, do the memories and anguish of an unwanted pregnancy. I'll carry both of these for the rest of my life. Now I understand why. I also understand that my parents never knew that circumcision would put me in a situation where I'd need to take those risks in order to share intimacy with a loved one.

I've undergone a lot of personal growth throughout this process of dealing with my circumcision. I've researched about my body – what I was born with and how it functions. I've researched about how the medical community has deceived generations of parents about the practice of circumcision. I've researched about the difficulty of overcoming denial and breaking the cycle of ritual abuse that can exist within families. And I've researched the changing trends in choices that families are making for their sons – and this gives me hope.

Hope isn't a word that easily comes into my heart and mind when I think about genital cutting. I am a survivor of an abusive sexual assault that I don't remember...but can never forget. I will never know what sex is supposed to be like for a man. I will never look in the mirror and see a complete male form. But, I have learned that I can forgive my parents for letting strangers hurt me so badly. I have learned that I can love them still, in spite of my pain and anger. And that gives me hope. I have hope because I know that I can love and forgive. I can love and forgive because my parents were misled and they didn't know any better. They had no easy access to research through the internet. They heard no voices of child advocacy pleading on my behalf. They had no reassurance from a large and growing group of parents who were challenging and rejecting the horrifying violation of routine infant genital mutilation.

My parents weren't unwilling to learn – unwilling to protect me. They were deceived. And I forgive them.

I have hope because I can channel my negative feelings of betrayal, anger, pain and depression into something positive. I can advocate protecting the newborns of today who will become a generation of men tomorrow.”

A Circumcision Poem

A warm and tight embrace,
keeps me sheltered in this room.
My safe and secure nest,
I know this is your womb.

I feel the surges pushing me,
and I meet a cold harsh light.
Then suddenly I'm in your arms,
and everything's all right.

Warm and sweet milky life,
given to me with love.
Then something firm snatches me,
a hand covered by glove.

Laid on a cot, I'm wheeled away.
Where could I be going?
Am I going to be okay?
I'm pushed through the doors not knowing.

There's the same harsh light again,
blinding my sensitive new eyes.
The door is shut, just me and them,
will anyone hear my cries?

My arms and legs strapped to a board,
I'm struggling just to move.
My clothing from the waist down,
is all that they remove.

My eyes bulge with fear,
I gasp, scream, and cry.
Why won't you help me, mommy?
I'm afraid that I may die!

I wonder where in the world you are,
while my confused head spins.
It's YOUR job to keep me safe.
But, too late. It begins.

A cold liquid poured upon
my most sensitive spot.
Then a sharp needle enters me,
burning icy hot.

Then I go numb,
body and mind.
I ignore them while

they cut and grind.

Finally they finish
but I don't care.

I have no clue
how long I was there.

Returned to you now,
you smile at me so kind.
"Did it hurt him at all?"
"No! He didn't mind."

I can't help but feel
that I lost a part of me.
How can I go on
when I'm not who I used to be?

So I eat and I sleep,
resting long to recover.
But I no longer feel safe
in the arms of my own mother.

What if they come back
and decide to hurt me again?
Every burning urination
is a reminder of what happened then.

Time goes by,
I've healed from my trauma.
I'm growing everyday,
I can even say "mama!"

I live a normal life,
though I am NOT the same,
but what can I do?
And who can I blame?

I can only keep on living
and seek no retaliation.
I accept my life as normal,
and forget my mutilation.

I live a joyful life,
grow up happily,
and in the process I forget,
all that was stolen from me.

How Painful?

HOW PAINFUL IS CIRCUMCISION?

A variety of studies confirm that newborn infant responses to pain are similar to and greater than those in adult subjects. Robert Van Howe, M.D., a Michigan pediatrician who has authored numerous studies about circumcision, describes the infant's response: "Circumcision results in not only severe pain but also an increased risk of choking and difficulty breathing. Medical studies show significant increases in heart rate and level of blood stress hormone. Some infants do not cry because they go into shock from the overwhelming pain of the surgery." According to clinical definitions and researchers' reports, circumcision is traumatic. Even when pain medication is used (local injection, the best option tested), it relieves only some of the pain, the effect is inconsistent, and it wanes before the post-operative pain does.

CIRCUMCISION PERMANENTLY ALTERS THE BRAIN

The surgery subjected the infant to significant trauma.

by Paul D. Tinari, Ph.D., Director, Pacific Institute for Advanced Study

As a graduate student working in the Dept. of Epidemiology, I was approached by a group of nurses who were attempting to organize a protest against male infant circumcision in Kingston General Hospital. They said that their observations indicated that babies undergoing the procedure were subjected to significant and inhumane levels of pain that subsequently adversely affected their behaviors. They said that they needed some scientific support for their position. It was my idea to use fMRI and/or PET scanning to directly observe the effects of circumcision on the infant brain.

The operator of the MRI machine in the hospital was a friend of mine, and he agreed to allow us to use the machine for research after normal operational hours. We also found a nurse who was under intense pressure by her husband to have her newborn son circumcised, and she was willing to have her son to be the subject of the study. Her goal was to provide scientific information that would eventually be used to ban male infant circumcision.

The baby was kept in the MRI machine for several minutes to generate baseline data of the normal metabolic activity in the brain. This was used to compare to the data gathered during and after the surgery. Analysis of the MRI data indicated that the surgery subjected the infant to significant trauma. The greatest changes occurred in the limbic system concentrating in the amygdala and in the frontal and temporal lobes.

A neurologist who saw the results postulated that the data indicated that circumcision affected most intensely the portions of the victim's brain associated with reasoning, perception and emotions. Follow up tests on the infant one day, one week and one month after the surgery indicated that the child's brain never returned to its baseline configuration. In other words, the evidence generated by this research indicated that the brain of the circumcised infant was permanently changed by the surgery.

Our problems began when we attempted to publish our findings in the open medical literature. All of the participants in the research including myself were called before the hospital discipline

committee and were severely reprimanded. We were told that while male circumcision was legal under all circumstances in Canada, any attempt to study the adverse effects of circumcision was strictly prohibited by the ethical regulations. Not only could we not publish the results of our research, but we also had to destroy all of our results. If we refused to comply, we were all threatened with immediate dismissal and legal action.

MALE NEONATAL CIRCUMCISION TRAUMA AND BRAIN DAMAGE

Modern scientific research indicates that early childhood trauma, especially during the first two years of life when the brain is still rapidly developing, produces permanent adverse physical changes in brain development.

Although we know of no research specific to circumcision trauma causing brain damage, we include some of the related research that is applicable. Genital trauma cannot be different from trauma to other parts of the body in its potential to cause brain damage.

On the Reference page at the end of this paper there is a listing of articles that relate in some way to the risk of possible brain damage due to traumatic non-therapeutic circumcision.

Psychological Impact

FEELINGS OF DISSATISFACTION AND HAVING BEEN HARMED

Following are some statements about circumcision excerpted from letters written by dissatisfied circumcised men and received at the Circumcision Resource Center:

- I have felt a deep rage for a long time about this.
- My penis feels incomplete, deformed, maimed.
- Circumcision has given my life a much diminished and shameful flavor.
- The single most traumatic event of my life with the greatest psychological damage was my circumcision as an infant.
- Circumcision: it's taught me how to hate.
- Being circumcised has ruined my sex life.
- I feel violated and abused.
- I have felt unhappy about it all my life.
- I am very angry and resentful about this. I've had many physical, psychological, and emotional problems all my life.
- No one had the right to cut my foreskin off!
- I feel cheated at having been robbed of what is my natural birthright.
- I never mentioned it to my parents.
- I've always felt I'm missing normal male experience, and I'm embarrassed when in public dressing rooms.
- I feel like the best part of me was severed from my body, and I have ugly scars to remind me. I am so ANGRY!!

The responses of men dissatisfied with their circumcision tend to include at least one of the following feelings:

- anger, resentment, revenge, rage, hate
- sense of loss, deficiency, diminished body image
- disbelief, lack of understanding, confusion
- embarrassment, shame
- sense of having been victimized, cheated, robbed, raped,
- violated, abused, mutilated, deformed
- fear, distrust, withdrawal
- grief, sadness, pain
- envy, jealousy of intact men

Similar feelings were reported in a preliminary survey in which over 300 self-selected circumcised men responded to a request to document the harmful effects of their circumcision. Over 80 percent of respondents cited emotional harm.

A THERAPISTS PERSPECTIVE

by Tom Golden is an international expert on men and grief. From [Voices of Men e-mail list](#).

A part of my work as a psychotherapist involves helping people move into old painful memories. Using techniques like breathwork or EMDR people are moved into the old pain and thereby have the opportunity to re-experience the painful memories and events and be relieved of the old trauma. (Many men prefer this sort of therapy over traditional talk therapy because they don't have to "sit and talk about it" to get to the raw emotion. Actually, painful events that occur prior to the acquisition of language can't be retrieved through "words" in therapy...you can talk till you are blue in the face and you will never get there....)

When I started doing this type of work a number of years ago I noticed that the painful memories were often clustered...as someone re-experienced one old trauma they would often spontaneously experience others that were related in some way. I began to see that one of the experiences that was not uncommon for men to "re-experience" within a cluster of old trauma was the pain and trauma related to being circumcised. When I first noticed this I was amazed and shocked...I hadn't thought of the experience of circumcision as being anything but a routine medical procedure. The men who re-lived things were usually just as startled. They were usually expecting other issues to surface and were surprised to see circumcision as one of them. We were both shocked at the intensity of the related pain. I started looking into the medical aspects and was completely blown away to find that doctors didn't use any anesthetic...the assumption being that babies don't feel pain. Now there is a mind blower!

I checked with other therapists doing this sort of work and folks who had written about this and found that it was not an uncommon experience. I am convinced that the practice of circumcision can create trauma in boys. I can't imagine anyone allowing little girls to be cut in their genital area shortly after birth. You would see an avalanche of protest! These boys get through the gauntlet of the birth canal only to find one of their very first experiences with other humans is being cut in one of their most sensitive parts. Not a good

start. To me routine circumcision seems senseless. If someone has religious reasons that's their call....but routine procedures...hell no. Why create more pain??

Someone asked:

None of us who have been circumcised can remember that on a conscious level, so why attempt to dredge it up? Of what use is that?

Tom replied:

Good question. I am certainly not recommending you dredge it up. What I was trying to say is that it was one of the memories that surfaced for some men when they were re-experiencing other very powerful trauma.

Why bring it up?

Short answer...only if you have to.

Long answer...Well, old trauma tends to reside in our unconscious memory. Usually it lays dormant and has little impact on our daily consciousness. Most people have adequate defenses to contain it easily or don't have enough old traumas to become bothersome. Trauma seems to accumulate...the more old painful memories we have that are not dealt with the bigger our cesspool of unfinished trauma...and the more defenses we need to contain it.... So with good defenses and only a bit of unfinished trauma most of us will never have to deal with the kinds of dreadful symptoms of the men we mentioned. However a number of variables can wake the dragon....things like the occurrence of a similar trauma, the additive effect of multiple traumas, or the crumbling of our usual psychological defenses. If any of these (or many other possibilities) happens then the trauma can be brought into consciousness and completely disrupt ones daily functioning. An easy rule to gauge this disruption is related to a person's ability to live in the "here and now." Can the person experience life in the present moment? Can they work and love? If they can then all is fine...but with the eruptions we are talking about here there is so much chaos that the person can't function....disabling anxiety, panic, continual and unrelenting images of a trauma, sleeplessness, suicidal urges and other unwelcome crap.

Often these symptoms are related to the original trauma. An example might be a man who saw his wife murdered and has repetitive memories of the event. In some ways it seems the psyche is making an attempt to re-experience things...the images keep coming to his mind...but he fights it for all he is worth and runs! Most of us would run like hell! The simplest way to describe this is that the therapy is geared to not run from this stuff but to sit in it for a while. By facing it squarely and allowing ourselves to not run but experience it at its fullest we begin to de-sensitize ourselves to the troubling material. This is the hard part. It takes a great deal of courage to stand next to this sort of powerful material. Therapists have found that by standing in the tension the symptoms begin to recede. I don't think anyone is absolutely certain about the mechanisms that are at work here...but it is apparent that it helps to relieve the symptoms by re-experiencing things.

STUDIES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CIRCUMCISION

An article titled "The Psychological Impact of Circumcision" reports that circumcision results in behavioral changes in infants and long-term unrecognized psychological effects on men. The piece reviews the medical literature on infants' responses to circumcision and concludes, "there is strong evidence that circumcision is overwhelmingly painful and traumatic." The article notes that infants exhibit behavioral changes after circumcision, and some men have strong feelings of anger, shame, distrust, and grief about having been circumcised. In addition, circumcision has been shown to disrupt the mother-infant bond, and some mothers report significant distress after allowing their son to be circumcised. Psychological factors perpetuate circumcision. According to the author, "defending circumcision requires minimizing or dismissing the harm and producing overstated medical claims about protection from future harm. The ongoing denial requires the acceptance of false beliefs and misunderstanding of facts. These psychological factors affect professionals, members of religious groups, and parents involved in the practice."

Expressions from circumcised men are generally lacking because most circumcised men do not understand what circumcision is, emotional repression keeps feelings from awareness, or men may be aware of these feelings but afraid of disclosure.

SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF CIRCUMCISION TRAUMA IN ADULT MEN CLINICALLY OBSERVED

Using four case examples that are typical among his clients, a John W. Rhinehart, M.D. practicing psychiatrist and psychotherapist and director of Deep Brook Center, Newtown, CT presents clinical findings regarding the serious and sometimes disabling long-term somatic, emotional, and psychological consequences of infant circumcision in adult men. These consequences resemble complex post-traumatic stress disorder and emerge during psychotherapy focused on the resolution of perinatal and developmental trauma. Adult symptoms associated with circumcision trauma include shyness, anger, fear, powerlessness, distrust, low self-esteem, relationship difficulties, and sexual shame. Long-term psychotherapy dealing with early trauma resolution appears to be effective in healing these consequences.

Circumcision of the newborn male child consists of removal of the penile foreskin, a normal, functional part of the child's body. The United States is now the only industrialized country in the world that continues to circumcise the majority of its newborn male children for non-religious reasons. In my client population of adult men, serious and sometimes disabling lifelong consequences appear to have resulted from this procedure, and long-term psychotherapy focusing on early trauma resolution appears to be effective in dealing with these consequences. Early prevention by eliminating the practice of routine circumcision is seen as desirable.

MALE CIRCUMCISION AND PSYCHOSEXUAL EFFECTS INVESTIGATED

Infant male circumcision continues despite growing questions about its medical justification. As usually performed without analgesia or anesthetic, circumcision is observably painful. It is likely that genital cutting has physical, sexual, and psychological consequences, too. Some studies link involuntary male circumcision with a range of negative emotions and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some circumcised men have described their current feelings in the language of violation, torture, mutilation, and sexual assault. In view of the acute as well as long-term risks

from circumcision and the legal liabilities that might arise, it is timely for health professionals and scientists to re-examine the evidence on this issue and participate in the debate about the advisability of this surgical procedure on unconsenting minors.

Why Most Circumcised Men Seem Satisfied

CIRCUMCISED MEN DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE MISSING.

1. Circumcised men do not know what they are missing. They believe that the sexual sensitivity they have without a foreskin is "normal." (Similarly, a woman born in Somalia who had been subjected to a severe form of female circumcision insisted that it had no impact. "It's the same thing. There is nothing different about my sexuality.") According to one man who was circumcised as an adult, sex without a foreskin is like sight without color. Those who have not seen in color cannot appreciate what is lost.
2. Young circumcised men may not notice the negative sexual effects of circumcision until they are older, because of the progressive desensitization of the exposed glans (head of the penis) from exposure and rubbing against clothes. See Functions of the Foreskin. It is possible that circumcision is an unrecognized factor in the high rates of impotence in older American men.
3. Accepting circumcision beliefs and cultural assumptions prevents men from recognizing and feeling their dissatisfaction. A typical response is "When I was young I was told it was necessary for health reasons. I guess I just didn't question that. I assumed that was so."
4. The emotions connected with circumcision that may surface are very painful. Repressing them protects men from this pain. A circumcised man recalled, "It was something I just didn't examine. I put it away in the back of my mind like a lot of guys do." If the feelings do become conscious, they can still be suppressed. After learning about circumcision, another man said, "I don't want to be angry about this."
5. Those who have feelings about their circumcision are generally afraid to express them because their feelings may be dismissed or ridiculed. When asked why he had not revealed his circumcision feelings before, one man said, "I would be looked upon as strange or else people would toss it off lightly." Another said, "It's not something that anyone talks about. If it is talked about, it's in a snickering, comical way which I find disturbing. People laugh about it as if there is something funny going on."
6. Verbal expression of feelings requires conscious awareness. Because early traumas are generally unconscious, associated feelings are expressed nonverbally through behavioral, emotional, and physiological forms. Attitudes about people, life, and the future may also be affected. An example of an attitude resulting from childhood trauma is "You can't count on anything or anyone to protect you."

Male - Female Effects

EFFECTS ON MOTHER-INFANT RELATIONSHIPS

The trauma of circumcision raises questions about effects on mother-infant relationships. Based on more than twenty years of clinical observations using leading-edge techniques, psychiatrist Rima Laibow, M.D., reports:

When a child is subjected to intolerable, overwhelming pain, he conceptualizes mother as both participatory and responsible regardless of mother's intent. . . . The consequences for impaired bonding are significant. . . . Circumcision is an enormous obstacle to the development of basic trust between mother and child.

Even though the physician does the circumcising, and the father may have made the final decision to circumcise, the newborn infant connects the experience to the mother. Because the experience is repressed, the connection between the event and the mother is also repressed. (How this repressed connection affects men's feelings toward women is not known.)

Studies have shown that circumcision can adversely affect mother-infant bonding. Circumcised infants can be more irritable. Since infant irritability at two days has been connected with insecure bonding at fourteen months, the impact of circumcision on bonding may be more than temporary. The effect of circumcision on mother-infant bonding and interaction is evident in this account by Mary Milvich about her experience around the birth of her first child:

I shared a hospital room with a mother whose son was born within hours of my daughter. My roommate and I marveled at the identical personality traits exhibited by our newborn babies. Both were perfectly calm, never cried and gazed unwaveringly at our faces when we held them. We experienced that maternal closeness the mother feels when she realizes her baby knows her and accepts her as caretaker. . . . Delight in our new-found joys of motherhood was shattered the following morning. My roommate's baby had changed. He refused to nurse; he cried; he wouldn't be held. "He doesn't want me," my roommate pitifully told the nurse. "It's just the circumcision," the nurse told her comfortingly.

Investigators have confirmed that the trauma of circumcision may contribute to the failure of an infant to breast-feed. In addition, extended crying connected with circumcision may exceed the mother's tolerance level. She could become more interested in relieving her own distress (from hearing the crying) than that of her infant. If a mother believes she is not able to relieve her infant's distress, she may feel a lack of competence and respond less or not at all. She may also think her infant has a "difficult" temperament and use that belief as a reason not to respond. Conversely, if an infant withdraws because of the trauma of circumcision, he may not communicate his needs, the mother could assume he is content, and his needs may not be met. Interaction between mother and child could be frustrating and less rewarding for the mother if she receives only a limited response from her child. Like all relationships, the mother-infant relationship is a two-way social relationship that depends on the responsiveness of both. If either the mother or the infant is unresponsive, the relationship may suffer, and emotional disturbances could occur. More research is needed.

EFFECTS ON MALE-FEMALE INTIMACY

Because research is limited, we can only speculate about how the potential psychological effects of circumcision on men could inhibit their relationships with women. For example, low male self-esteem, shame, fear, distrust, and sexual anxiety can adversely affect communication and limit the degree of intimacy. In addition, sexual intimacy is a major component of male-female bonding, and research has shown that male sexual activity increases when self-esteem is higher. If circumcision lowers both male self-esteem and sexual sensitivity (to be discussed later), it would tend to reduce male sexual activity and consequently weaken the pair bond.

Male-female relationships could also be restricted because some circumcised men may feel a nagging sense that passion, excitement, or sexual fulfillment is missing. If a man believes he

cannot experience what he is missing with a woman, he may withhold commitment and continually seek new women to give him hope. In addition, the reduced emotional expression of circumcised men may dampen women's feelings. As a result, both men and women may feel something is missing from their relationships.

From a larger perspective, it would not be surprising if circumcision were found to have a negative effect on interpersonal relationships, since circumcision is a trauma, and trauma commonly impairs a person's relations with others. Harvard psychiatrist, professor, and author Judith Herman writes that after a traumatic event "a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship."

Research has also shown that men have a lower physiological tolerance to emotional stress than women do. Emotional numbing, a response to trauma, would tend to reduce a person's tolerance to emotional stress. This would account for the male tendency to avoid certain situations, such as marital conflict. One method men use to control their exposure to this emotional stress is to respond rationally rather than emotionally. Another tactic is to withdraw or stonewall during a conflict. Both behaviors can weaken the marital relationship by restricting communication and leaving conflicts unresolved. Does circumcision increase America's uniquely high divorce rate?

Emotional numbing also affects our sensitivity to others' pain because it is related to our sensitivity to our own pain. When an infant is subjected to the trauma of circumcision with nobody responding to his cries, he experiences our insensitivity to his pain. If we do not have empathy for infants, they may not have empathy for others. A male acquaintance, after reading about circumcision, remarked, "It hurts, and the baby screams. So what?" Circumcision may be an early experience that reduces male empathy.

It appears that there are a few reasons why circumcision could be a contributing factor to relationship difficulties between men and women. More research is needed.

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- Male neonatal circumcision trauma and brain damage

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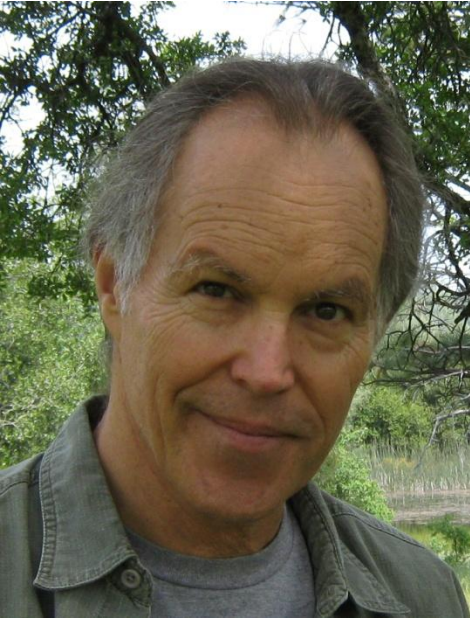
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A website for "conscientious-objectors" nurses who are refusing to participate in circumcisions... "Our medical position was that neonatal circumcision was unjustifiable. Our ethical position was that it violated a newborn's right to a whole, intact body. As patient advocates and nurse-educators working in maternal-child health, we believed that we had a professional duty to dispel myths and offer parents factual information about circumcision, and that we had a duty not to participate in a procedure that surgically altered the normal genitalia of unconsenting minors."

- www.webhealing.com

Therapist Tom Golden's website.

About Lyn:



Lyn has a deep love and passion for supporting the growth process in others. He brings a spiritual presence and perspective to his work based on his lifelong daily bhakti meditation and yoga practice. He's a Certified Tantra Educator through the Source School of Tantra, a graduate of the year long SkyDancing Tantra Facilitators Training, and a Certified Breema Practitioner. He's studied with and assisted most of the major tantra teachers. Lyn also incorporates Hakomi, somatic, humanistic & transpersonal psychology, Breema, urban shamanism, astrology, and the Bach flower remedies in his work. He offers private sessions, workshops, and guided shamanic journey work. For more information he can be contacted at: lyn_hunstad@yahoo.com or 707-245-3974.

*May all beings live free, and be healthy.
May all beings know peace, and rest in their wholeness.
May all beings feel the Oneness, feel the love.
May all beings celebrate the Love that is
EVERYWHERE!*