

MY OBSERVATIONS OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND CONFIRMATION BIAS AS FACTORS DETERMINING A PARENT'S INSISTENCE ON CIRCUMCISION OF MALE CHILDREN

I have had an opportunity to observe the familial dynamics at play in my own immediate family regarding the cultural circumcision of male infants as newborns. I have two nephews, two great-nephews, two sons, and one grandson. As a retired family practitioner, I have expressed to my immediate family members and friends my ethical opposition to the cultural or theological genital cutting of minor children who cannot give a valid consent to irreversible elective cosmetic surgeries such as circumcision.

Both of my nephews and their father were circumcised as infants, and my nephews have told me that they are comfortable with their genital status. Both of my nephews insisted upon their own newborn sons being circumcised. Both of my nephews declined any new, novel, or negative information from me about the procedure that might influence them to allow their sons the opportunity to remain genitally intact as children. I consider their behavior to be an example of confirmation bias resulting from rationalizing their own circumcisions. Both of my nephews are highly educated, and both hold doctorates in their respective professions. Their

wives have master's degrees, professionals in their individual fields. I suspect that both them and their wives wish to avoid any cognitive dissonance about cosmetic genital cutting by declining any further investigation of rationales used to justify male circumcision practices in this culture.

My niece and my daughter-in-law both have fathers who are circumcised. My niece and daughter-in-law were willing to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of routine male circumcision. They both came to identical conclusions that such an elective permanent alteration in a male's penis should be made by that person as a teenager or adult, and insisted that their sons remain intact as infants and young children. Both my niece and my daughter-in-law were intensely criticized by their own relatives for breaking family tradition and allowing their sons to retain intact phalluses as children and future teenagers. Both women encountered verbal criticism from the obstetrical nursing staff about declining circumcision of their newborn sons. Both my niece and my daughter-in-law tell me that they will offer to their sons at puberty the option of a cosmetic circumcision, if the teenagers so request for the sake of genital appearance that conforms with their peers.

My two sons are genitally intact, and have a father (me) who restored his prepuce in his thirties, after being cosmetically circumcised at age nine for the sake of penile conformity with my peers. My own father was intact. Both of

my sons are presently satisfied with their genital status, but have also shared with me that they would have no objections if I had had them circumcised as infants, just as all their male friends were. Both of my sons have mentioned to me that they were the only genitally intact males they knew of among their high school peers. Circumcision is not a significant personal issue to them, a luxury I never had after age nine. Both appreciate me giving them a choice about their bodies, and have mentioned to me that they plan to remain genitally intact all their lives. Could they be saying that just to humor me?

My older son agreed completely with his wife's suggestion that their son (my grandson) remain uncircumcised as a child. My son tells me I did him a favor by leaving him uncircumcised as a child and teenager, but he also tells me that none of his male friends have ever registered with him any complaints with their circumcised phalluses. One of his adult friends noticed during a diaper change by my son of my grandson that he still retained his foreskin. He actually queried my son about the infant's 'penis deformity.' He asked with genuine concern my older son, "What's wrong with his prick?" That friend had apparently never seen intact male genitals before.

All of my high school peers who have remained my friends over the decades after graduation consider routine male circumcision a trivial issue, and unworthy of further

consideration. All of them who had sons had those sons genitally cut as infants, just as they themselves were genitally cut as infants. One friend said to me, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' Another friend even sympathetically told me that I was unfortunate not to have been circumcised as an infant, so that I never would have had the opportunity to worry about my loss of genital intactness at age nine. He was serious when he said that, if I was too young to know what had I supposedly lost, then I actually would never have lost anything. He told me that I would never question why I was cut, if a clipped cock was all I had ever known, just like that was all he had ever known. His rationale of tolerating cultural genital cutting was practical and functional for him. Incidentally, he fathered only daughters, and never had to face the cultural circumcision controversy.

A nagging contemplation that plagues me is how genuine is my concern about the genital integrity of minors if I had been 'sliced and diced' as an infant, and never experienced the drastic loss of sensation and genital sensitivity from my later circumcision at age nine? My relatives and friends who insisted on circumcising their sons are not fools, religious zealots, or perverts. They genuinely believe that routine male circumcision, like vaccination, is a distinct benefit to boys and men, and they have perpetuated the practice. Their consensus is that there is more than enough penile sensation left after circumcision to allow a man cut as an infant to have a completely satisfying sexual life. Am I overreacting, making 'a

mountain out of a molehill?’ My relatives and friends have suggested to me that I shouldn’t even care. My father once even said to me, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Are my critics correct? Should I even respond to them? What to do?

Then, I remembered the drastic increase in penile sensitivity and sexual satisfaction that occurred within a few years after my foreskin surgical reconstruction at age 33. My glans developed an exquisite ability to feel the vaginal folds of my partner during intercourse. I could feel her hymenal remnants once again, and could use them to pleasure myself during insertion. I no longer needed any artificial creams or lubricants during extended sessions of intercourse. I started to experience the exhilaration and joy of sexual interactions as they should have all along, had I not been circumcised as a nine-year-old child. My personal sexual experiences as a restored man have convinced me that my original intact genital birthright had been diminished by my disastrous childhood circumcision, and I am pleased that I insisted on correcting that artificially generated defect as much as I feasibly could do so.

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