

Similarities in Attitudes and Misconceptions toward Infant Male Circumcision in North America and Ritual Female Genital Mutilation in Africa

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[Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa](#)

Clitoridectomy and Infibulation in Africa	Infant Male Circumcision in North America
"She loses only a little piece of the clitoris, just the part that protrudes. The girl does not miss it. She can still feel, after all. There is hardly any pain. Women's pain thresholds are so much higher than men's."	"It's only a little piece of skin. The baby does not feel any pain because his nervous system is not developed yet."
"The parts that are cut away are disgusting and hideous to look at. It is done for the beauty of the suture."	"An uncircumcised penis is a real turn-off. Its disgusting. It looks like the penis of an animal."
"Female circumcision protects the health of a woman. Infibulation prevents the uterus from falling out [uterine prolapse]. It keeps her smelling so sweet that her husband will be pleased. If it is not done, she will stink and get worms in her vagina. "	"An uncircumcised penis causes urinary infections and penile cancer. It generates smegma and smegma stinks. A circumcised penis is more hygienic and oral sex with an uncircumcised penis is disgusting to women."
"An uncircumcised vulva is unclean and only the lowest prostitute would leave her daughter uncircumcised. No man would dream of marrying an unclean woman. He would be laughed at by everyone."	"An uncircumcised penis is dirty and only the lowest class of people with no concept of hygiene leave their boys uncircumcised."
"Leaving a girl uncircumcised endangers both her husband and her baby. If the baby's head touches the uncut clitoris during birth, the baby will be born hydrocephalic [excess cranial fluid]. The milk of the mother will become poisonous. If a man's penis touches a woman's clitoris he will become impotent."	"Men have an obligation to their wives to give up their foreskin. An uncircumcised penis will cause cervical cancer in women. It also spreads disease."
"A circumcised woman is sexually more pleasing to her husband. The tighter she is sewn, the more pleasure he has."	"Circumcised men make better lovers because they have more staying power than uncircumcised men."

<p>"All the women in the world are circumcised. It is something that must be done. If there is pain, then that is part of a woman's lot in life."</p>	<p>"Men in all of the `civilized' world are circumcised."</p>
<p>"Doctors do it, so it must be a good thing."</p>	<p>"Doctors do it, so it must be a good thing."</p>
<p>Sudanese grandmother: "In some countries they only cut out the clitoris, but here we do it properly. We scrape our girls clean. If it is properly done, nothing is left, other than a scar. Everything has to be cut away."</p>	<p>My own father, a physician, speaking of ritual circumcision inflicted upon my son: "It is a good thing that I was here to preside. He had quite a long foreskin. I made sure that we gave him a good, tight circumcision."</p>
<p>35-year-old Sudanese woman: "Yes, I have suffered from chronic pelvic infections and terrible pain for years now. You say that all of this is the result of my circumcision? But I was circumcised over 30 years ago! How can something that was done for me when I was four years old have anything to do with my health now?"</p>	<p>35-years-old American male: "I have lost nearly all interest in sex. You might say that I'm becoming impotent. I don't seem to have much sensation in my penis anymore, and it is becoming more and more difficult for me to reach orgasm. You say that this is the result of my circumcision? That doesn't make any sense. I was circumcised 35 years ago, when I was a little baby. How can that affect me in any way now?"</p>

Clitoridectomy: surgical removal of clitoris. Infibulation: surgical removal of labia, then suturing. Circumcision: surgical removal of foreskin.