



## Circumcision Counseling in a Time of Cultural Change

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NOTE: This handout version is only HALF the slides.



### This session is about

- Figuring out your values and ethics
- How to do foreskin and circumcision counseling in a way that is in alignment with your integrity
- It is about helping you to figure out what is right for you – we all need to be authentic with our selves and our clients



### Why A Climate of Change?

Human beings are meaning makers.

Behavior → Meaning → Feeling



### Why A Climate of Change?

Most controversial topic invented (Collier, 2011)

- Religion
- Politics
- Penises
- Sexual pleasure
- Human rights issues
- Valid health concerns
- Spurious health concerns
- Babies

### Why A Climate of Change?

Shifts in the past two generations where men are embracing their status as circumcised and are choosing something different for their sons.

This is NOT an easy process.

### Why A Climate of Change?

- Who is intact?
- Who is circumcised?
  
- What do we know?
- What do we think we know?

### Health Merits

- Using *the same medical evidence*
- National medical associations differ in their circumcision recommendations.
  - USA – strongest proactive stance
  - Netherlands – only allows the procedure so children's health is not endangered by it being done illegally. (Collier, 2011)

### Social Merits

- Fitting into a peer group
  - Unless in a strict cultural group lifelong, almost all social and regional groups have all kinds of penises
  - With today's sexual abuse prevention measures boys do not have access to gaze at one another's genitals

## Sexual Merits

- Influence of pornography on penis preference
  - Pornography is our country's sex education
- "The foreskin is not Mother Nature's doily," - Sheri Winston
  - News: The foreskin has a sexual purpose.
- Don't often see a lot of genitals and are not aware of the variety. ([www.dodsonandross.com](http://www.dodsonandross.com))
- We don't often choose our sexual partners based on their genitals; we choose the person first.
- Parent's fear of future social rejection by sexual partners
- Son can have foreskin removed as an adult – his choice (extremely rare)

## Sexual Merits

- Partner sex and the foreskin
- Masturbation and the foreskin
  - Studies show that pleasure decreases with adult circumcision but not for all participants. (Yang, 2014; Kim, 2006)
- Erectile Dysfunction in Later Life and Circumcision
  - ED has so multiple causes, many psychological
  - Decreased sensation on the head of the penis is valid (Bronsealer, 2013; Taylor, 1996)

## So...

When health merits are up to the person interpreting the statistics  
and  
Sexual merits of the foreskin may or may not be valued by parents  
that leads us directly into the territory  
of *ethical decision making*

Ethics: mixture of feelings, religion, law, accepted social practice, science, personal values

## Ethical Approaches

- Utilitarian
- Rights
- Fairness or Justice
- Common Good
- Virtue
- Challenge 1: We may not agree on what is a human right or civil right.
- Challenge 2: We may not agree on what constitutes the common good or even what is a "good" and what is a "harm".

### Influences on Parents

- Rejection of grandparent's choices if different
- Rejection or acceptance - religious belief
- Health care provider's recommendations
- Fears about socialization of son
- Male parent's feelings about his own penis
  - "The Vulnerability Of Men" –Vincent Bach
  - Requires deep compassion on our part
  - Crux of cultural change including gender role shifts
  - Willingness of man to examine his own emotional response is often necessary to participate in active decision making

### The Perinatal Professional's Dilemma

How do we assist clients in the decision making process especially when we have feelings about what we think they should do?

### Be Clear With Yourself

As a perinatal professional and a person, do you feel that parents have *the right* to make the decision to remove their son's foreskin?

*no, yes, conditions?*

<http://scu.edu/ethics/ethical-decision/#getTheFacts>

 Markkula Center for Applied Ethics

#### Get the Facts

What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known? Do I know enough to make a decision?

Which individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome?

\* Input in this box will be deleted when the app is closed.

Baby, mother, father, ??doulas?

**With the facts and the stakeholders in mind, choose an option that you think might be the best thing to do in this circumstance. Now, evaluate that option from five different ethics perspectives. For each, drag the slider on the scale to indicate how ethical you think your choice would be from that perspective.**

**Continue**

### How Do I Want to Handle The Circumcision Discussion?

- Depends on your role
- Make a decision and test it
  - If I told someone I respect – or told a TV audience what option I have chosen, what would they say?
- **Act** and then **Reflect** on the Outcome

### Gender Communication Differences

- Women talk to collaborate.
- Men talk to challenge one another and to gain status or to ascertain their status.
- So your goal is to create a conversation where people have room to change their stance, where the person raised in a male gender role feels that his status is intact and that women are not colluding against him.

### Conversational Approaches When Engaging With Parents

- When you go on the offensive, it automatically puts the other person on the defensive. There is no space for them to move or change.
- No one ever convinced anyone of changing a belief when they were being challenged for having that belief.
- Leave space for *all possibilities* to be the right choice for this family
  - Potential for you to be surprised

### When Parents Struggle...

Do you feel that you have the right to make this decision about your son's sexual expression, identity, and physical integrity?

Is it ethical?

Is it your decision to make?

Is it your son's to make?

Do you as parents *want to make* this medical decision?

What decision do you want to take responsibility for? Keeping the foreskin or removing it?

Do you feel that the potential *medical* benefits outweigh the potential medical harm?

## When Professionals Struggle...

1. Do you feel comfortable with parents making a decision when they carefully considered relevant information?
  - What if its not the choice you agree with?
  - Does that get in the way of you being able to serve them? Or can you let it go?
2. Do you feel comfortable with parents making a decision when they *don't* have all the information you *feel they should?*
  - Especially when its not the choice you agree with?
  - Does that get in the way of you being able to serve them? Or can you let it go?



## Options

- State your bias from the beginning.
  - Does it work or not?
- Flip your bias around
- Change your values (hmmm...)
- Take care of yourself!
- State your feelings on your materials clearly and respectfully before parents contact you

## Only Take Clients Planning To Keep Their Son's Foreskin Intact

- Simply and respectfully in one sentence
  - *"Due to my concerns about infant circumcision, I am choosing not to work with parents who are planning on this surgery for their baby boy."*
  - *"If you want to know more about why people are concerned, here are some resources."*
  - Keep it simple. See my web site for faves.
  - This may be the first time they've ever heard about this issue.
  - You want to hook them into being curious and safely exploring.

## Your Ethics and Values

- *Won't this affect my business?*
  - Maybe. You'll need to decide what values are more important to you.
  - Flip side: you'll be attracting people to your authenticity
- *But Amy, I lose the opportunity to save those foreskins!*
  - "Questioning parents are welcome" leaves the door open – both ways.
  - I am **not** saying you have to do this. I am offering a respectful option if you do not want to work with parents who feel comfortable with circumcision.