

Female Circumcision: The Flight of Kasinga: Instructor Guide

Title

Female Circumcision: The Flight of Kasinga

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Discipline

Women's Studies, Psychology

Target Audience

Intermediate, all undergraduates

Keywords

Gender and culture, psychology of women, women's cultural issues

Length of Time/Staging

Two class periods; two to three hours total

Abstract

Female circumcision, or female genital mutilation, affects thousands of young girls and women in more than 30 countries worldwide (but primarily in Africa and portions of the Middle East).



Despite efforts to ban this procedure, it continues today due in part to deeply-embedded cultural traditions and perceptions of women. This problem explores the types of female circumcision, reasons why it is done, and if/how it should be stopped. Implications for US legal and medical professionals are also discussed.

Date Submitted

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Format of Delivery

1. To introduce this topic, I do a mini-lecture with accompanying powerpoint presentation (in the problem folder). This mini lecture describes three main types of female circumcision, (also called female genital mutilation), countries that practice it, and the implication for individuals in the US, especially those in medical and legal professions. Interspersed in the mini-lecture, I show a portion of the video, "Fire Eyes" that shows a female circumcision taking place. Students leave this class and complete outside readings on female circumcision. They read at least those that are linked on the web syllabus and are encouraged to read others as well.
2. At the beginning of the next class, students meet in small groups and read the problem Kasinga's Flight. Students, as a group, discuss questions 1-3. After approximately 20 minutes, groups report answers to questions 1-3.
3. Groups are presented with question #4 and asked to discuss. After approximately 10-15 minutes, groups report responses to question #4. Whole group discussion ensues (approximately 20-30 minutes). Group responses are submitted for part of their group participation grade.

Student Learning Objectives

Through completion of this exercise, students will:

1. acknowledge how female circumcision affects many facets of a society (*e.g.*, medical, legal, ethical, cultural).
2. become familiar with the primary countries that practice female circumcision.
3. be able to articulate the cultural values and views about women for individuals in countries that practice female circumcision.
4. reflect on personal beliefs about female circumcision.
5. debate the adequacy/inadequacy of current laws (in the US as well as other countries) to resolve this issue.

Student Resources

Class Notes:

Powerpoint Presentation: (in problem folder or at [website](#))

Shell-Duncan, B. & Hernlynd, Y. (Eds.). (2000). *Female circumcision in culture, controversy, and change*.



Gruenbaum, E. (2001). *The female circumcision controversy: An anthropological perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kassindja, F. & Bashir, L.M. (1998). *Do they hear you when you cry?* New York: Delacorte Press.

Saadawi, N.E. (1980). Circumcision of girls. In N.E. Saadawi, *The hidden face of Eve*. London: Zed Press. Included in Primis Reading: Circumcision of Girls.

Nahid, T. (1998). *Female genital mutilation: An overview*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Rahman, A., & Toubia, N. (2000). *Female genital mutilation: A guide to laws and policies worldwide*. New York: Zed Books and St. Martin's Press. (In association with the [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)).

[Female Genital Mutilation Education and Networking Project](#)

- Lightfoot-Klein, H. [Similarities in Attitudes and Misconceptions toward Infant Male Circumcision in North America and Ritual Female Genital Mutilation in Africa](#).
- Lightfoot-Klein, H. [The Sexual Experience and Marital Adjustment of Genitally Circumcised and Infibulated Females in The Sudan](#).

[Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

[Female Circumcision/Female Genital Mutilation](#)

Instructor Resources

In addition to the Student Resources, please refer to:

Gruenbaum, E. (2001). *The female circumcision controversy: An anthropological perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Babatunde, E.D. (1998). *Women's rites versus women's rights. A study of circumcision among the Kitu Yoruba of South Western Nigeria*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Abdalla, R.H.D. (1982). *Sisters in affliction: Circumcision and infibulation of women in Africa*. London: Zed Press, distributed in US by Lawrence Hill & Co.

[The Waris Dirie Story](#)

from [The Female Genital Mutilation Education and Networking Project](#)

Author's Teaching Notes

This can be a highly emotional issue and before beginning the introduction, I recommend that the instructor cautions students on the sensitive nature of the discussion. The circumcision on the video, "Fire Eyes," is quite graphic and may require additional cautions.

Reviewer: *I really don't like the movie Fire Eyes and think that it needs to be presented very carefully. Throughout the film the narrator says: "In Africa...they..." When, in fact, the film is about the practice among one group of Somalis. I find the film very inflammatory and potentially misleading.*

Author: *The reviewer writes that s/he does not like the video Fire Eyes. I realize that it may be slanted, and I would be happy to include a disclaimer that clarifies that the film is focused on a*



small sample of Somali women. However, can the reviewer tell me ... if the portion of the video in which the circumcision occurs is relatively accurate. If so, I would like to continue showing that portion of the video (about the first 20 minutes of the film). The visual presentation of the procedure, as well as the discussion of women just before and after this portion of the film presents women who have been circumcised, both in anesthetized and unanesthetized conditions, is powerful and gets students very involved in the topic

Reviewer: *I have no doubt that the depictions of female circumcision in the film are accurate. ... My concern is just that throughout the movie the narrator says 'in Africa they do this and that...' when what they are showing throughout this film is the practice among one group of Somalis. But one would come away from the video thinking that this happens everywhere in Africa though it doesn't. There are parts of Africa where people have barely heard of the practice. It is also one more instance of lumping 55 countries together into one when really the film is about one group of Somali people.*

In order to enable students to freely reflect and form their own opinions, it is important the the instructor not present the material in a biased way. (Although the instructor may feel strongly for or against this topic) it is best to remain neutral and let students decide for themselves. (Kasinga spelled Kasindja in some documents.)

A good way to strengthen this topic would be to include a presentation/co-instruction with a colleague who is familiar with the African cultures and/or someone familiar with legal justice systems. If this is not possible, it is important for the individual instructor to familiarize him/herself with these topics as they relate to the questions about female circumcision.

Assessment Strategies

Each small group will submit their group's responses to questions 1-3. Answers that show student effort and generation of three or more points for each question receive credit.

Because there are no 'right' answers, I do not grade for specific answers, but look to see that members of each group are able to generate some ideas for each question.

Solution Notes

Question 1.

How do you feel about female circumcision?

Question 2.

If you were the judge, would you grant Kasinga asylum in the US? State your reasons for or against. What are the implications for granting asylum?

Question 3.

Where do we draw the line between freedom of religion and/or cultural tradition and practices such as female circumcision?

- World Health Organization criteria
- overwhelming evidence of many bad side effects (infection, septicemia, infertility, death of many) seems to urge the complete ban of this practice.

Question 4.

Is female circumcision different from male circumcision? If so, how?

- responses modeled after list at website: www.fgmnetwork.org/intro/mgmfgm.html