

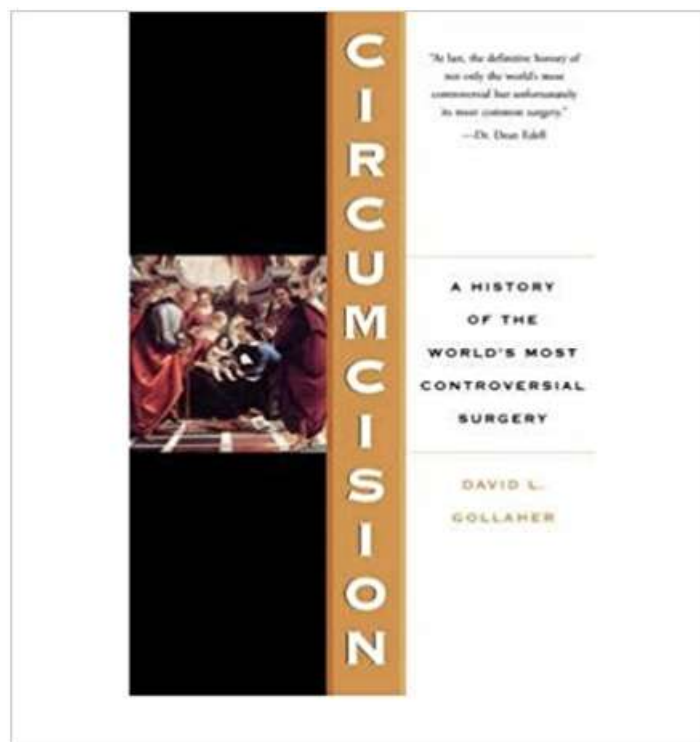
# Book Review: Circumcision: A History of the World's Most Controversial Surgery

(ISBN10:0465026532/ISBN13:9780465026531, Published by Basic books, New York, USA; 2001, cost: \$14.00)

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This ten chaptered, fully referenced book was written by a celebrated American medical historian "David Gollaher". The strength of this book lies in its ability to explore the various cultural, religious, mythical and anthropological concepts of circumcision. Gollaher discusses the pre-historic origins of the procedure as a religious sacrifice, cultural rite of passage from adolescence to manhood, ritual for virility or fertility, protection from evil, emblem of higher social status or a sexual punishment. During history several cultures and religions have embraced circumcision, such as ancient Egypt, the Jewish faith and Islam.



Gollaher also discusses the current ethical dilemmas surrounding the act of circumcision by exploring the views of opponents and advocates of circumcision in modern medicine.

Gollaher is unable to keep his stand as an opponent of male circumcision for long. He argues his point from the social and cultural values placed on genital markings for both male and female in chapter six. He sees the unequal criticism placed on both markings as elements of paradigm shift which is socially unacceptable. He, however, is unable to equate both markings from the context of scientific benefits.

As a specialist in family medicine, I have performed well over a thousand medical male circumcisions in South Africa. Many of my patients often ask the question: When should I bring my child for the operation? This question is often asked with mixed feelings ranging from guilt of coming too late to the joy of being circumcised after all. This book provides no answer to why the uptake of male circumcision is still unimpressive even in this twenty first century medicine, when the health benefits of the procedure are so obvious and voluntary medical circumcision is hugely promoted in southern Africa.

This volume deserves a wide readership by the medical community and people who are interested in HIV as well as the history of medical procedures.

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