

Agency-Inhibitive FGM

Female genital mutilation (FGM) affects more than two million girls annually, the majority of which reside in twenty-eight developing countries on the African continent (Murray 47). In reality, the culturally embedded practice of performing clitoridectomies on young women holds no health value and, in contrast, originates lifelong side effects as well as notable sexual impairment. The practice perpetuates patriarchal domination in society by objectifying females through violent intrusions upon women's corporeal selves and, as a result, silencing women's voices. To this point, developing countries suppress sexual deviance and academic progress through female genital mutilation to ultimately inhibit women's agency, as illustrated by Anne Firth Murray's From Outrage to Courage.

To begin, patriarchal societies in developing regions implement female genital mutilation practices to suppress sexual deviance and preserve reproductive purity. For example, "80% to 90% of all circumcisions in Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan...involve a clitoridectomy [in which] a small opening is left to allow urine and menstrual blood to pass. This type is intended to...curtail premarital sex [and] reduce women's sexual desire, thus promoting...virginity and protecting marital fidelity, in the interest of" ensuring the perpetuation a particular male's specific genealogy (Murray 50). In other words, cultural practices in developing countries, especially on the African continent, manipulate physical female bodies in order to tangibly suppress both sexual desire and sexual capacity. Centrally, patriarchal communities perpetuate oppressive institutions violating women's physical health to maintain male-centric lineage purity interests through the physical repression of sexual deviance.

Continuing, culturally imbedded female genital mutilation practices preserving male genealogy interests fundamentally oppress women's agency within the community. Essentially "female genital mutilation not only disfigures a woman but also inhibits her full participation in society" by asserting objectifying patriarchal control over her bodily existence "to cater to men's sexual [and reproductive] desires" (Murray 48). That is to say, hindering a woman's capacity to choose when and with whom to have sexual relations restricts female autonomy. At the crux, patriarchal communities enforcing FGM ceremonies inherently characterize women as incapable of making educated, independent decisions regarding their sexual selves and, as a result, objectify women as unconscious, voiceless beings. In particular, social understandings of women stemming from the culturally embedded practice of female genital mutilation allow patriarchy to depict females as impotent members of society exhibiting limited agency and reduced autonomy in comparison with their male counterparts.

Similarly, the characterization of female genital mutilation as a coming-of-age ceremony prioritizes fertile womanhood over academic achievement. Notably, "once the procedure has been carried out, parents and the larger community and often the girls themselves begin to see school as an unnecessary part of life that belongs more to the realm of childhood than to womanhood, which by virtue of the traditional practice, a girl may be said to have entered" (Murray 47). Consequently, society's understanding of a young woman's shifts from valuing her physical and mental capacities to valuing her biological and reproductive capabilities. In other words, female genital mutilation represents the completion of patriarchal objectification of the female body, recharacterizing young women through a unifaceted view of their fertility and capacity to perpetuate male genealogy. After undergoing an FGM ceremony, a young woman is discouraged from pursuing academic interests and coerced into furthering male reproductive

interests through her own biological potential. Resultantly, very few women attain significant education after experiencing female genital mutilation, hindering academic achievement among women in developing countries.

Moreover, the deprioritization of female education as a result of FGM rites of passage customs inhibits women's agency and autonomy within patriarchal society. Notably, traditional "rites of passage to womanhood [including FGM] have limited girls' human rights in the sense of both violating their bodily integrity and limiting access to education and other choices" by restricting access to resources essential to socio-economic autonomy (Murray 46). Centrally, low education levels among women in developing countries hamper female participation in the workforce. Without sufficient education and experience in comparison with their male counterparts, women fail to attain adequate employment, forcing women into male-dependent living situations. Fundamentally, the elimination of choice and economic freedom prevents women from achieving societal autonomy necessary for expressing meaningful agency. That is to say, the deprioritization of education through cultural coming-of-age ceremonies including female genital mutilation disrupt women's agency and participation in the community by obstructing access to the tools necessary for attaining socio-economic independence. Moreover, FGM practices emphasize reproductive capacity over academic achievement to ultimately suppress both female autonomy and agency within developing patriarchal societies.

In conclusion, female genital mutilation, a practice affecting millions of girls in developing countries annually, affects both sexual and academic spheres of existence. Most notably, patriarchal societies employ the practice, often adopting it as a coming-of-age ceremony, to suppress sexual deviance and educational progress among women in order to maintain male dominance both in genealogy and within the community. At the crux, dominantly

patriarchal communities practice female genital mutilation to secure sexual purity and hinder socio-economic autonomy to impede female agency within society, as depicted by Anne Firth Murray's From Outrage to Courage.