Gruenbaum, Ellen. 2000. “Is “Female “Circumcision” a Maladaptive Cultural Pattern?” Pp. 41-

54 in *Female “Circumcision” in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change,* edited by

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Gruenbaum (2000) poses an interesting, complex question in her essay asking whether the practice of female circumcision (FC) is a “maladaptive” cultural pattern. Indeed, all cultures are dynamic; they do not remain constant and therefore people are adapting to behavioral, social, and environmental pressures. Humans possess the ability to problem-solve issue for the “survival” of the group (p. 42). However, as she states, “we should not assume that culturally institutionalized patterns have always developed for good reasons” (p. 44). Gruenbaum’s study of two groups who practiced different types of FC (sunna and pharaonic) was constructed to learn about how FC correlates with women’s reproductive abilities. The results revealed the practice did not have a significant impact on women’s fertility nor the live-birth rates. These results suggest, as Gruenbaum states, FC is not a “selective factor in adaptation” and therefore should not be argued as a maladaptive cultural behavior (p. 48).

Gruenbaum (2000) goes on to pose questions about why the practice continues and its purpose then examines causal factors for change and continuance of FC. The practice of FC is often retained due to strong cultural values such as status, gender identification for women, economy, and tradition and should not be minimized or simplified to be understood as solely as “a conspiracy of men to oppress women” as Grenbaum (2000, p. 50) asserts. In spite of the continuance of FC, there are communities changing their practice. The primary factors contributing to changing this cultural practice include increased and better health and public education as well as involving community members. To argue that FC is a “maladaptive” cultural pattern or practice infers its role within practicing communities is evolutionary in nature, therefore suggesting it is in some way related to their survival. Gruenbaum (2000) suggests a better approach to eradicating FC is through critical analysis of individual groups’ socio-cultural demographics and how cultural change might influence them in political and economic contexts.