

'Intactivists' snip at circumcision attitudes in Dickinson

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Brother K, 70, founder of the Bloodstained Men & Their Friends, and Anastasia Von Buskirk of Chicago, 25, protest in Dickinson on Thursday. (Grady McGregor / The Dickinson Press)1 / 4

A Dickinson police officer approached Brother K, protester and founder of the Bloodstained Men & Their Friends group, and told him that someone had called in a complaint that his protest was holding up traffic. Brother K, wearing an all-white costume with a red, blood-like stain in the crotch area of his pants, responded, "officer we get false reports filed against us all the time, this movement makes people angry."

After a few minutes of friendly conversation, the DPD officer left and Brother K said, "I would say that in least half the cities where we protest, we have some sort of interaction like that."

On Thursday, Brother K and members of the group protested at the intersection of 15th Street and Third Avenue West in Dickinson.

'Intactivists'

Amid honks, shouts, middle fingers, and some cheers, Brother K and three other activists wearing the same 'bloodstained jumpsuit' stood at the intersection for the majority of the day carrying signs saying things like, "CIRCUMCISION CRUELTY TO BOYS," "END GENITAL MUTILATION," and "STOP CUTTING BABY PENIS."

If this felt like a startling scene to Dickinson residents, that was the point.

"I call this shock treatment for the American people," Brother K said.

Brother K and the other protesters are currently on a 17-day "Northern Heartlands" road trip across Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa and the Dakotas to advocate against the practice of circumcising baby boys in the United States, or as the protesters call it, "male

genital mutilation."

Combining the words activist and intact, the protesters call themselves 'intactivists.' CEO and co-director of the Bloodstained Men group, David Atkinson, 29, said this is because they are, "activists for children's genitals to stay intact."

For Atkinson, the central issue with male circumcision is that kids are robbed of a choice that will impact them for the rest of their lives.

"It should be your own choice how much of your genitals get removed. If an adult wants to have his foreskin amputated, I wouldn't recommend that, but that's fine go for it," Atkinson said. "The more you learn about the functions of the foreskin, and how destructive it is to amputate that part of the penis, the more disturbing it is. It's very harmful and a very terrible thing to do with children."

One of the other 'intactivists', Anastasia Von Buskirk, 25, had come from Chicago for the protest and wanted people to know that the group was not just for ending male circumcision, but also female mutilation and genital mutilation in general.

Von Buskirk was born intersex, meaning that when she was born she presented with both male and female genitalia. She now objects to the fact that when she was "three months old they took our (her) testes."

AAP report

Brother K and the other protesters pointed towards a report released by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in 2012 as inspiring their 'intactivism.'

AAP's 2012 report concluded that, "evaluation of current evidence indicates that the health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks and that the procedure's benefits justify access to this procedure for families who choose it."

For Brother K, this was a "weasel-worded statement that circumcision was good for boys." Brother K, and many others, believed that this statement would reverse decades of declining circumcision rates in the United States so activism, or intactivism, was needed to inform citizens of the dangers of circumcision.

Shortly after the AAP released the statement, Brother K joined the first circumcision protest outside an AAP conference in New Orleans and started the Facebook group Bloodstained Men And Their Friends. The group has now grown to over 15,000 members and is the central communication and organizing platform for the movement.

Medical view of circumcision

The United States medical community has tended to agree with the AAP. The Mayo Clinic released a study in 2014 outlining the benefits of circumcision, and even compared the benefits of circumcision to that of a "childhood vaccination."

According to an article in Quartz by Emily Bobrow, benefits of circumcision may also include lowered risk for AIDS, penile cancer and urinary tract infections, though the impact may be small to negligible in those cases.

These benefits, combined with strong cultural attitudes and traditions, help explain why there is such a high rate of circumcision amongst boys in the United States. A CDC report from 2013 put the number at around 60 percent and it showed that the Midwest region (North Dakota included) has some of the highest rates of circumcision in the United States.

But in comparison to other countries around the world, and especially more industrialized ones, the United States has a uniquely high rate of circumcising young males. Countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Britain have almost completely phased out the practice.

According to Bobrow's article, these countries have concluded that any potential benefits of circumcision do not outweigh the right of an individual to decide whether or not to be circumcised.

Dickinson resident joins protest

Though dressed in plainclothes, Dickinson-native Amber Robidoux joined the Bloodstained Men in holding signs and protesting with her four kids, 8, 6, 2, and 1. Robidoux has been following the group for years on Facebook and was excited that they had decided to make a stop in Dickinson.

"I think the movement is great," she said.

Robidoux became passionate about the issue after a "horrifying" experience of having to look after a baby male relative who had the surgery under her care. Now, even though she "has lost a few friends over it," she is still trying to advocate against male circumcision in the Dickinson community.

"Out here today, we've got a few boos but a lot of people are receptive and honking at us and waving at us," she said.

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