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## Reproductive Technology, or Reproductive Justice?: An Ecofeminist, Environmental Justice Perspective on the Rhetoric of Choice

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# REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY, OR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE?

*AN ECOFEMINIST, ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE ON THE RHETORIC  
OF CHOICE*

GRETA GAARD

This essay develops an ecofeminist, environmental justice perspective on the shortcomings of “choice” rhetoric in the politics of women’s reproductive self-determination, specifically around fertility-enhancing technologies. These new reproductive technologies (NRTs) medicalize and thus depoliticize the contemporary phenomenon of decreased fertility in first-world industrialized societies, personalizing and privatizing both the problem and the solution when the root of this phenomenon may be more usefully addressed as a problem of PCBs, POPs, and other toxic by-products of industrialized culture that are degrading our personal and environmental health. The NRTs’ rhetoric of choice is implicitly antifeminist: it blames the victim by attributing rising infertility rates to middle-class women who delay childbearing while struggling to launch careers; it conceals information about adverse health effects and solicits egg donation and gestation services from women disadvantaged by economic status, nation, and age; and it offers no choice at all for the mil-

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lions of female animals—chicks, cows, turkeys, pigs, and others—whose fertility is regularly manipulated and whose offspring are commodified as products for industrialized animal food production. An intersectional analysis shifts the discourse away from reproductive choice to a framework of ecological, feminist, and reproductive justice.

When I opened the *Minneapolis StarTribune* one Sunday morning, hoping for thirty (or even ten) minutes of quiet reading before my toddler woke up, the headline “Miracles for Sale” caught my eye (2007). Introduced by a photo of a mother and baby, and followed by the story of that same happy “older” (age 36) mother who now has two children by egg donation, the article profiled a 24-year-old artist and antique dealer who feels “one of her eggs goes to waste each month,” so she may as well sell them for \$8,000. According to the article, “one in ten couples are unable to conceive on their own,” and an “infertility expert” claims the “increasing demand for eggs is fueled by the growing numbers of older women who want children but who find, too late, that their ovaries have quietly failed them.” As an ecofeminist and a new mother (albeit via the “old-school” method) at age 45, I was not surprised by the ageism and woman-blaming being presented as fact by these medical experts; more to the point, I was concerned about the untheorized manipulations of women’s biological “nature” by medical culture. I read more. The young egg donor feels none of these concerns, saying “Men have always been able to spread their genes. Now I can spread my genes.” Another anonymous donor is photographed shooting up with a fertility injection. And the rest of the article profiles brokers like Egg Donation, Inc., International Assisted Reproduction Center, and Infertility Associates, who are part of a growing industry that charges \$16,000 and up for their services.

This happy snapshot of reproductive choice is created through the rhetorical scheme of omission. What exists outside the narrative frame that encloses these images of attractive (white) college-age women who make extra money as egg donors, midlife (white) women who get babies, and a medical industry that is creating families for profit? From the beginning, feminist perspectives on science have been characterized by the practice of “asking different questions” in the words of Ruth Hubbard. With my hope for a restful Sunday morning completely disrupted by the *StarTribune* article, I began the project of developing an ecofeminist, environmental justice perspective that would unmask the shortcomings of

“choice” rhetoric in the politics of women’s reproductive self-determination, specifically around fertility-enhancing technologies.

In this essay, I will argue that feminists have lost discursive control over the word “choice”: instead, the term has been commodified and sold back to women as consumers of the new fertility-enhancing technologies. Building on historic and cultural divisions between humans and nature, these technologies separate women from their body’s fertility, treating the uterus as a natural “resource” open to commodification as well as a site for scientific and economic intervention; they separate women from their biological offspring, manipulating and commodifying those offspring as directed through women’s “choice”; and these technologies have significant harmful “side” effects on the physical and mental health of the women who “choose” them, as well as on the infant “products” they create. Most significantly, these new reproductive technologies (NRTs) medicalize and thus depoliticize the contemporary phenomenon of decreased fertility in first-world industrialized societies, personalizing and privatizing both the problem and the solution when the root of this phenomenon may be more usefully addressed as a problem of PCBs, POPs, and other toxic by-products of industrialized culture that are degrading our personal and environmental health. The NRTs’ rhetoric of choice is implicitly antifeminist when it invokes a form of victim-blaming by attributing rising infertility rates to middle-class women who delay childbearing while struggling to launch careers in a working environment constructed to suit the lives of married heterosexual males with stay-at-home wives. And the rhetoric of choice is anthropocentric, offering no choice at all for the millions of female animals—chicks, cows, turkeys, pigs, and others—whose fertility is regularly manipulated and whose offspring are commodified as products for industrialized animal food production. Bringing together the insights offered from a variety of liberatory perspectives—feminism, ecofeminism, environmental justice, reproductive and environmental health—an intersectional analysis can more helpfully shift the discourse away from reproductive choice to a framework of ecological, feminist, and reproductive justice.

### HISTORY OF WOMEN’S CHOICE RHETORIC

The advent and appeal of fertility-promoting technologies relies on the resolution of two preceding debates over women’s choice of reproductive control through reproductive technologies—preventing pregnancy through contraception, and terminating pregnancy through abortion.

Women's choices and capacities to prevent or terminate pregnancy have a history predating both the "official" feminist movement and the fee-for-service high-technologies of western medicine. Through the use of herbs, reeds, spermicides, diaphragms, and other "low-tech" devices, midwives, herbalists, and other women have helped women control their own fertility for centuries (Ehrenreich and English 1978). Although well-known, these methods were largely private, a matter of personal or spiritual networks and family connections, and it took three centuries of witch-burning to eradicate female lay healers and replace them with male, university-trained physicians. In contrast to the contraceptives and abortifacents provided by midwives and herbalists, contraceptive technologies of western medicine have been socially-produced and publicly-administered, and have therefore become the subject of social and legal debate.

Linda Gordon (1990) describes four major movements in the development of modern U.S. reproductive-control politics: first, the voluntary motherhood movement of the 1870s, that claimed control over sexuality and reproduction as a woman's right; second, the birth control movement (1910–1920, roughly) that originally sought social change and women's empowerment, but devolved into the eugenics movement; and third, the family planning movement that began in the 1940s and shed any prior feminist commitments, becoming part of the population control movement. Of these three, only the birth control movement expressed the interests of working-class women. The fourth stage of reproductive politics, sparked by a revived feminist movement in the 1970s, emphasized reproductive rights as a tool for individual self-determination and sexual freedom. But with the 1980s, reproductive control controversies shifted: from debating legalities and methods for preventing reproduction, reproductive control controversy now focused on strategies for *promoting* reproduction.

The 1980s marked the beginning of an antifeminist and conservative backlash that has shaped public discourse and restricted women's legal choices around reproductive freedom. As Susan Faludi (1991) unequivocally states, "All of women's aspirations—whether for education, work, or any form of self-determination—ultimately rest on their ability to decide whether and when to bear children" (414). Acts of violence—including bombings, death threats, and harassment—against abortion clinics, their clients and their employees, formed part of the backlash against women in the 1980s and 1990s. Beginning after *Roe v. Wade* (1973), and gain-

ing force through Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority (1980), the movement to eliminate women's public and private reproductive control quickly re-named itself not as the "anti-choice" movement but rather as the "pro-life" movement. Its focus was on the life of the 12-week embryo (retroactively named a fetus) and not on the life of the woman gestating the embryo. Now put on the defensive, the movement for women's reproductive freedoms renamed itself as "pro-choice," and movement rhetoric focused on the woman herself, included an awareness of her social and economic contexts, and steered the discourse away from the specific choices of terminating or keeping an unplanned pregnancy to advocate for women's reproductive choice itself as the basis for any authentic and gender-neutral human rights.

Strategically, the emphasis on choice and privacy served to split social conservatives, but ultimately backfired against larger feminist goals. As Catharine MacKinnon (1987) explains, "privacy doctrine reaffirms and reinforces what the feminist critique of sexuality criticizes: the public/private split" (93). Rosalind Petchesky (1990) concurs: "What is lost in the language of liberal privacy is the concept of *social rights*...that the society has a responsibility to ameliorate the conditions that make either abortion or childbearing a hard, painful choice for some women; and that the bearers of this right are not so much isolated individuals as they are members of social groups with distinct needs" (xxv). In sum, there are several shortcomings to the framework of privacy and choice, as Marilyn Fried (2005) observes: first, privacy rights undercut demands for public funding of abortion; second, the rhetoric of "choice" appeals only to those who have options, but is meaningless to those who do not, and thus it politically divides women by race and economic class, since these factors circumscribe women's choices. No wonder that middle-class white women have tended to be the champions of abortion rights, while low income women and women of color have faced numerous restrictions on their fertility under the rhetoric of population/poverty control. As radical feminists (Corea 1985) and ecofeminists (Diamond 1994) have observed, choice rhetoric and the privacy framework together fit into a larger constellation of male-centered liberal perspectives that rely on separation rather than interconnectedness for definitions of selfhood, science (Merchant 1980), and social relations. These views treat nature as a "resource" for human needs rather than a living ecosystem where humans flourish through interdependence;

they divide personhood into various bodily parts (i.e., the uterus, ovaries, breasts) which can then be commodified by “choice” and manipulated in concert with Western culture’s control of “nature” as a path to human liberation. Together, these shortcomings made the framework of reproductive choice both marginally effective and vulnerable to appropriation.

By 2000, the rhetoric of choice had been co-opted by the conservative pro-life movement, and a woman’s “choice” to keep an unplanned pregnancy gained equal if not greater legitimacy than a woman’s choice to terminate an unplanned pregnancy. The 2007 film, “Juno,” articulates this shift, concealing conservative values (i.e., the belief that embryos have fingernails and thus should not be aborted, even by teenaged mothers who are ill prepared to support either themselves or their children; a preference for closed adoption, provided free of compensation by the birth mother; openly-expressed racism as a form of humor; hostility toward divorce and absent mothers; homophobia expressed in the criticism of gender-neutral names like “Madison” as “so gay”) wrapped in a hipster package that invokes frequent profanity, pop music, and working class white lifestyles. Juno is a white, working-class, and mouthy sixteen-year-old with a shy boyfriend and an unplanned pregnancy, the product of their first and sole sexual encounter. She visits an abortion clinic and quickly leaves because it is “too depressing”: the receptionist crudely insists on handing Juno free boysenberry-flavored condoms that make her boyfriend’s “junk smell like pie,” and the rapid clips of the women in the waiting room show them as alone and isolated, biting or drumming their fingers. Swayed by the words of a lone female protester outside the clinic, who tells her “your baby has fingernails,” Juno chooses to carry the pregnancy to term. After some lip-service to the possibility of giving her child to otherwise disadvantaged parents—a biracial or “lesbo couple”—Juno chooses a wealthy, white infertile heterosexual married couple as the recipients of her child. They offer to pay her, and to agree to an open adoption so that Juno will receive yearly updates on her baby’s health and activities, but Juno refuses all of this, insisting that she won’t back out of the decision; the film implies she allows them to pay only for the medical costs of the pregnancy and delivery.

To achieve this rhetorical narrative of reproductive choice, the film omits any serious consideration of less “depressing” Planned Parenthood centers, as well as a study of how “depressing” it might be to undergo

full-term pregnancy, childbirth, and a lifetime of wondering about the well-being of the child given up for adoption. The context of facts omitted by Juno is provided in an article Katha Pollitt wrote for *The Nation* (1/21/08). First, Juno goes alone to the abortion clinic, a step that would be illegal for minors in Minnesota (where the movie is set) and most other Midwestern states, due to parental notification laws that have been in force since 1981. Second, Juno's choice is presented as the norm, when in fact it falls in a statistical outfield that has clearly been affected by the conservative backlash against reproductive freedoms: in 2007, twenty-nine percent of pregnant teens were having abortions; fourteen percent miscarry; and of the fifty-seven percent who carry to term, less than one percent give up their babies. Even among pregnant women who plan to give up their babies for adoption, at least thirty-five percent change their minds once the baby is born. As described in Ann Fessler's (2006) poignant chronicle of over a hundred mothers who were forced to "surrender" their babies for adoption in the years between World War II and the legalization of abortion in 1973, many factors affect whether birth mothers are able to "put their mistakes behind them and move on"; in fact, some birth mothers feel a sense of loss, a yearning that is reciprocated by the many adoptive children who actively seek out their birth parents on reaching adulthood.

Along with omitting facts, the rhetoric of "Juno" also relies on distortion, providing antifeminist caricatures of women—the receptionist at the abortion clinic, the ultrasound technician who expresses anti-maternalist relief on learning that Juno will be giving up her baby for adoption—and using these exaggerated portraits as an opportunity to attack the "straw woman" of feminism. Juno's stepmother's attack on the ultrasound technician is also a battle of racist white working-class resistance against ageist and classist bourgeois values: the stepmother is a nail beautician using profanity to defend her stepdaughter's unplanned teenage pregnancy against the ageist and classist concerns for the baby's well-being expressed by the Asian-American middle-class medic. (There's few more effective rhetorical strategies for reinforcing dominant stereotypes than having fabricated representatives of disenfranchised groups sling biased insults at one another.) By opening the film's narrative with Juno taking repeated pregnancy tests at "two months and three days" of pregnancy, the film also backgrounds consideration of the more private

abortifacient drug Mifepristone (RU-486), a simple pill that is safe and effective through the first nine weeks of pregnancy. Through the rhetorical strategies of omission and distortion, along with an invocation of white prejudices, conservative values, and working class heroes, the film “Juno” is able to gain discursive control over “choice,” sidestepping the issue of safe and affordable birth control for teenagers, and elevating a teenager’s choice to bear an unplanned pregnancy over the choice to terminate that pregnancy.

In 2007, at least two additional examples from the popular media showed the inadequacy of choice rhetoric. In the same month as the *Star-Tribune*’s “Miracles for Sale,” the Oprah Winfrey show aired a special on “Wombs for Rent” (2007), a program on hiring surrogate mothers in India as an alternative for infertile US couples. Because fertility treatment and surrogacy costs can soar up to \$70,000 in the US, one economically fertile white couple turned to India for the same services, more affordably priced at \$12,000. At Akansha Fertility Clinic in India, surrogates are confined in a dormitory attached to the clinic for the duration of their pregnancy. There, one surrogate, Sangita, covers her face and head with a scarf when Oprah’s film crew enter the clinic so her family won’t know what she’s doing, another surrogate weeps for her son back home, and a third says she will remember the child she is carrying for the rest of her life. In response to these women’s experiences, the adoptive white mother claims the \$6000 Sangita and other surrogates earn buys them better housing and “bigger kitchens” (the American dream), providing a sum of money they “couldn’t have earned in a lifetime,” and Oprah calls it an example of “women helping women” (Brooks 2007). On this Oprah show, race and class differences between first-world women and a medical industry that benefit from reproductive technologies, as opposed to the women who provide the benefits, couldn’t be much clearer.

Due to these different histories and present economic realities, women of color have tended to organize for reproductive rights outside of the “choice” framework. Population control policies have often targeted women of color as “breeders,” attempting to control their fertility through forced sterilization and unsafe reproductive technologies such as Depo-Provera, Implanon and Norplant, and Quinacrine (Silliman et al. 2004; Galpern, Mingus, and Page 2007; SisterSong 2008). Because communities of color within the US have disproportionate rates of poverty, lack of access to health care, higher incidences of violence, and poorer health

outcomes, their definitions of reproductive justice focus on a broader spectrum of conditions necessary for reproductive health and sexual freedom, contextualized within a framework of human rights and economic justice. Due to the histories of population control, the right to have children is at the heart of their activism (Fried 2005; SisterSong 2008). Women of color coined the term “reproductive justice” in 1994, after the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (SisterSong 2008), and this framework offers a potential for collaboration between white women and women of color activists working for reproductive freedoms. Unlike the “choice” framework, reproductive justice offers a more inclusive lens for analyzing the risks and benefits of the new reproductive technologies in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and nationality.

### **FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES (NRTS)**

Reproductive technologies include both contraceptive technologies and fertility-promoting technologies. From the beginning, feminists have been critical of contraceptive technologies in terms of their safety, affordability, the amount of research conducted prior to FDA approval, and the excessive burdens (as well as blame) placed on women for preventing conception. Feminists have long noted the ways these contraceptive technologies echo the eugenics movement from the 1920s and play out along lines of race and class, providing technologies with least harm and most freedom of control (i.e., condoms, the diaphragm, the sponge, the cervical cap, the pill) to first-world, economically-privileged white women, while the technologies for reproductive control with the least safety and freedoms (i.e., sterilization, hysterectomy, Depo-Provera, Norplant) are offered to or enforced upon third-world, economically disadvantaged women of color. These harmful technologies produce a range of “side” effects, including excessive bleeding, weight gain, hair loss, heart attacks, loss of bone density, depression, and even infertility (Our Bodies, Ourselves 2008).

With the advent of fertility-promoting technologies, health concerns are magnified on a number of levels. In terms of ovarian cancer, the major drugs of concern are those that induce ovulation, like Clomid, the typical first step for most infertile women, and Pergonal, which increases the number of eggs produced, and is often the second step (Our Bodies Ourselves 2008). Both were discovered in the 1950s. Pergonal (human

menopausal gonadotropin) is extracted from the urine of postmenopausal women and must be given by daily injection into the muscles of the buttocks or thighs. Clomid (clomiphene citrate, also sold as Serophene) can be taken orally. It is derived from DES (diethylstilbestrol), the infamous synthetic estrogen given to pregnant women for 30 years before it was found, in the 1970s, to cause a rare form of cancer in their daughters, as well as birth defects like T-shaped uteruses and other anatomical distortions that make it difficult, if not impossible, to carry a baby (Seaman 2004). In 2000, an independent organization that reviews medical studies, the Cochrane Collaboration, concluded that the adverse effects of Clomid include the risk of ovarian cancer. Women who use the drug experience stomach pain, bloating, breast tenderness, occasional vomiting, hot flashes, severe dizziness, and blurred vision. Only one in four women who use either of these fertility drugs will bear a child as a result, but all will pay up to \$20,000 in fertility treatments. Despite these adverse effects, Clomid is one of the most frequently prescribed fertility drugs in the U.S. (Seaman 2004).

Women who use Clomid and Pergonal without results for one year are declared infertile and move on to the next step of reproductive technology, egg donations. Instead of extracting one egg per cycle, fertility specialists promote superovulation to speed up the process of fertilization and implantation. College-age women are regularly solicited as donors: their youth, their financial need, and their alleged health and intelligence make them desirable donors. These young women can earn from \$6000–\$8000 per donation, but they undergo considerable discomfort, inconvenience, and health risks they may not be informed of. The drug most often used to shut down a woman's ovaries (before stimulating them with other drugs to produce multiple follicles) is Lupron (leuprolide acetate), which has caused a range of problems reported to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), including rash, vasodilation (dilation of blood vessels causing a "hot flash"), burning sensations, tingling, itching, headache and migraine, dizziness, hives, hair loss, severe joint pain, difficulty breathing, chest pain, nausea, depression, emotional instability, loss of libido, dimness of vision, fainting, weakness, amnesia, hypertension, tachycardia (rapid beating of the heart), muscular pain, bone pain, nausea/vomiting, asthma, abdominal pain, insomnia, swelling of hands, general edema, chronic enlargement of the thyroid, liver function abnormality, vision abnormality, anxiety, muscle weakness, and vertigo (Norsigian 2005). Commonly used to treat

endometriosis, Lupron has not been approved for use in procedures for multiple egg extraction.

After the ovaries are shut down, other drugs are used to hyperstimulate the ovaries, with additional negative “side” effects, most notably a condition called Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome (OHSS). Serious cases of this syndrome involve the development of many cysts and enlargement of the ovaries, along with massive fluid build-up in the body. These conditions are potentially fatal, carrying an additional risk of clotting disorders, kidney damage, and ovarian twisting. According to a former Chief Medical Officer at the FDA, “ovarian stimulation in general has been associated with serious life threatening pulmonary conditions in FDA trials including thromboembolic events, pulmonary embolism, pulmonary infarction, cerebral vascular accident (stroke) and arterial occlusion with loss of a limb and death” (Norsigian 2005). Whether women are always informed of the severity and likelihood of these risks prior to the uses of these drugs is unclear.

Instead of “women helping women,” as Oprah proclaimed, these new reproductive technologies threaten women on many levels. The woman who “chooses” to delay childbearing for the sake of career finds she is haunted by the myth that true womanhood requires biological childbearing. The woman who sells her eggs for profit finds her “choice” masks potential health and fertility risks. But the women in India who undergo nine months of surrogacy before releasing their “product” at a rate of \$6000 in order to support their families—these women have few “choices” at all.

In sum, when used to legitimate both the older contraceptive technologies as well as the new reproductive technologies, the rhetoric of choice excludes a multitude of women in order to focus on elite women for whom choice is possible. Choice rhetoric privatizes and depoliticizes the decisions surrounding childbearing, leading to conflicts between the individual and society, and real or perceived conflicts between the woman and the embryo she carries. Moreover, the rhetoric of choice provides no foundation for critiques of such practices as pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), techniques now producing “designer” babies (Galpern, Mingus, & Page 2007). Most significantly, by focusing on the individual woman, the rhetoric of choice excludes consideration of the context of social, economic, and environmental conditions that influence and limit women’s choices for both contraception and fertility.

In contrast, the rhetoric of reproductive justice includes these excluded factors, and more. It focuses on reproductive maternal and infant health and health equity across race, class, sexuality, and nationality (Silliman et al. 2004). The leading organization of the reproductive justice movement, SisterSong, has produced a *Reproductive Justice Briefing Book* (2008) defining the issues and providing a series of activist statements from various coalition members. SisterSong was formed in 1997 through a coalition meeting of 16 organizations dedicated to women's reproductive rights and health, and representing the five primary ethnic populations in the United States: African American, Arab American/Middle Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latina, Native American/Indigenous (SisterSong 2008). SisterSong's *Reproductive Justice Briefing Book* demonstrates the rhetorical effectiveness of reproductive justice in addressing issues of birth control, abortion, transnational and transracial adoption, foster care, law and medicine, pharmacists' refusals to supply birth control, assisted reproductive technologies, the United Nations, and even spirituality. The book's many essays show the widespread relevance of reproductive justice for youth, women of diverse races and cultures, LGBTQ persons, immigrants, incarcerated women, disabled women, and pregnant women alike. But while the book's introduction mentions a concern for the environment, of the twenty-eight chapter/statements in the book, only one chapter directly addresses the intersection between reproductive and environmental justice.

In "Environmental Justice: Woman is the First Environment," Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook argues that "reproductive justice and environmental justice intersect at the nexus of woman's blood and voice" but they are not the same framework or the same movement (SisterSong 2008). Cook's article emphasizes the value of breastfeeding, and places the nursing infant at the top of the food chain, receiving nutrition and bioaccumulated toxins alike from the mother. Cook's own Akwesasne Mohawk community has fought PCB-contamination on the St. Lawrence River, and its struggle for environmental justice and reproductive justice have co-evolved through Cook's efforts to revive the practice of using traditional midwives and doulas, and to make the connections between women's health and the many industrial toxins in their environment. Cook's short chapter brings awareness of the connections between environmental contaminants and reproductive failure. It references well-known schol-

ars, activists, and resources in the environmental justice movement—Theo Colborne, Winona LaDuke, Sandra Steingraber, the Center for Health and Environment—yet these resources do not appear in the other chapters of SisterSong’s *Reproductive Justice Briefing Book*, suggesting that the rhetoric of reproductive justice, while more inclusive and more powerful than the rhetoric of choice, nonetheless backgrounds or excludes consideration of environmental contexts in its emphasis on social justice.

As feminists have argued, ethical dilemmas involve both the ethical content (the problem itself) and the ethical contexts in which the problem and its solution(s) exist (Gaard 2001). The ethical content of social justice protections must inevitably be experienced within the context of specific social and ecological environments, and in particular, the health, economic practices, and agricultural fertility of those environmental contexts will influence the extent to which women can experience social justice provisions. For example, a woman’s right to bear children may be defended by refuting the sexist, racist, and classist claims that underlie much of the rhetoric of overpopulation (Hartmann 1987), and SisterSong has done this. Yet that right to bear children may be compromised in the context of unsustainable environmental practices such as warfare, colonization, or industrialized resource extraction (i.e., oil production in Nigeria, mining and hydropower dams on indigenous North American lands, deforestation for cattle grazing in Brazil), and its “by-products” of toxic waste, ecological degradation, species loss, hunger and poverty. A woman’s right to bear and nourish healthy children must also be contextualized locally and globally in terms of maternal and infant health care, industrialized animal food production, and dietary patterns of food production for export to overconsuming nations.

Activists using the rhetoric of reproductive justice want this framework to provide an intersectional analysis capable of exploring oppression and justice from a variety of perspectives, and to build a movement that is “multiracial, multigenerational, and multiclass” (SisterSong 2008). To complete this goal of building a more inclusive rhetorical framework, one capable of describing all the factors influencing women’s reproductive health and freedoms, I propose a rhetoric that considers both ethical contents and ethical contexts—that is, an intersectional analysis that acknowledges and builds on the perspectives of reproductive *and* environmental justice, ecofeminism, and environmental health.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, ECOFEMINISM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The 1990s was a decade of renewed environmental activism growing out of the separate but linked fields of civil rights and feminism, a time during which the environmental justice and ecofeminist movements, respectively, became fully developed. The environmental justice movement traces its roots to a 1982 action in Warren County, NC, where Dollie Burwell helped form Warren County Concerned Citizens, a group of predominantly black and poor residents who successfully opposed a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) disposal landfill in their community. In 1987, the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice produced the study, *Toxic Waste and Race*, showing that race was the most powerful variable predicting the location of toxic waste facilities—more powerful than other variables such as poverty, land values, and home ownership. By 1991, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit met for four days in Washington, DC. At the conference, Hazel Johnson was named the “mother of the environmental justice movement” for her work organizing on Chicago’s south side: in 1982 she had founded People for Community Recovery when she learned that her community, a “toxic doughnut,” was surrounded by polluting industries that caused an incidence of cancer higher than any other area in Chicago (EJRC 2008). In 2002, the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was again held in Washington, DC, offering another four-day event that attracted over 1400 participants. This second summit expanded and extended the environmental and economic justice paradigm to address globalization and international issues (EJRC 2008). Although the prominent spokespersons for the environmental justice movement are predominantly male, academic, and/or ministerial, the movement itself was formed largely through the work of grassroots women activists who are working class and/or women of color.

Like the environmental justice movement, ecofeminism’s roots come from earlier movements—second-wave feminism, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s, the women’s spirituality movement, the animal rights movement, the environmental movement—and its first manifestations also occurred in the 1980s. WomanEarth Feminist Peace Institute, founded by Ynestra King and Starhawk, grew out of a feminist engagement with the peace movement. During the three years of its existence (1986–89), this

educational institution was committed to addressing the conflicts of race among women, and chose the concept of racial parity as its foundation for addressing the connections linking feminist peace politics, ecology, and spirituality. In 1982, Marti Kheel and Tina Frisco formed Feminists for Animal Rights (FAR), a group committed to exploring the connections between the exploitation of women and that of animals. Activists from FAR and from WomanEarth, along with ecofeminists active in the women's spirituality movement, participated as founders of the US Green Movement during the 1980s, and many remained active through the mid-1990s (Gaard 1998). Feminist interest in environmental issues took on a global focus through the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), formed in 1991 by former US Congresswoman Bella Abzug (1920–98) and feminist activist and journalist Mim Kelber (1922–2004). Bringing together women from all around the world to take action in the United Nations and other international policymaking forums, WEDO's primary events in the 1990s included the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet (a planning meeting for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development), followed by highly successful Women's Caucuses at key UN conferences throughout the 1990s (WEDO 2008). Although ecofeminism is a movement launched primarily by European, Australian, and Euro-American women, significant organizations within the movement have been formed with a commitment to racial and global justice in administration, vision, and action—WomanEarth Feminist Peace Institute and WEDO, respectively—and notable ecofeminists such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) have written and organized in a way that bridges first-world/third-world and racial barriers.

A primary emphasis of ecofeminism has been the connection between reproductive cancers and environmental health, and by the mid-1990s a raft of research was published to document this connection. Liane Clorfene-Castan's *Breast Cancer: Poisons, Profits and Prevention* (1996), Theo Colborn's *Our Stolen Future* (1996), Lois Gibbs' *Dying from Dioxin* (1996), and Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment* (1997) all pointed to the role of pesticides, endocrine-disruptors, phthalates, PCBs, dioxins, and other toxic chemicals in affecting cancers and reproductive health for humans and animals alike. Women's reproductive capacities were the central but not the sole topic of study; these texts also documented reduced sperm counts and

feminization among human and animal males. Opening with examples of reduced fertility in bald eagles in Florida (1952), river otters in England (late '50s), mink in Michigan (mid-60's), herring gulls in Michigan (1970), western gulls in California (early '80s), alligators in Florida ('80s), seals in northern Europe (1988), dolphins in the Mediterranean (early '90s), and sperm counts of men worldwide (1992), Colburn's *Our Stolen Future* contains a chapter titled "Fifty Ways to Lose Your Fertility" and a conclusion that hormone-disruptors produced by synthetic chemicals are damaging human and animal reproductive health in females and males alike. Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment* (1997) offers the first study to bring together data on toxic releases with newly released data from U.S. cancer registries, presenting these environmental links to cancer as a human rights issue—though not an animal rights issue. (Steingraber's feminism omits a critique of her own medical training: she is persistently untroubled by using the results of data derived from animal experimentation, and omits advocacy for these animal species from all of her conclusions regarding human and environmental health.)

The field of environmental health has been growing in dialogue with these diverse feminist scientific researchers, using both epidemiological and animal studies to provide its data. In April 2002, a research team of scientists at the University of California-Berkeley, lead by Tyrone Hayes, revealed that the most abundantly used herbicide in the world, atrazine, disrupts the development of frogs at extraordinarily low levels of exposure, producing demasculinization of secondary sexual characteristics and alterations in serum hormone levels. Despite repeated attacks from the chemical industry, Hayes has spoken widely about his research, invoking the Precautionary Principle in advocating for an immediate ban on agricultural chemicals until further research proves their safety. Similar findings are reported in the Vallombrosa Report, *Challenged Conceptions: Environmental Chemicals and Fertility* (Luoma 2005), a document produced from the national Collaborative on Health and the Environment, Stanford University School of Medicine's Women's Health Program, and forty experts in infertility and reproductive health, who met together at the Vallombrosa Retreat Center to discuss the relationship between environmental chemicals and fertility. Their findings show that twelve percent of the reproductive age population in the United States is experiencing

infertility, a trend increasing most dramatically in women under the age of twenty-five. Their research produced a list of environmental contaminants affecting human and animal fertility prior to conception, during development, as well as through exposures during adulthood: bisphenol A (BPA), chlorinated hydrocarbons (dioxins, PCBs), organochlorine pesticides, phthalates (plasticizers found in plastics, cosmetics, toys, pharmaceuticals, medical devices), solvents (benzene, toluene, xylene, styrene, perchloroethylene), heavy metals (lead, mercury, manganese, cadmium), perfluorinated compounds, polybrominated diphenyl ethers (flame retardants), and cigarette smoke (Luoma 2005). Many of these chemicals are bioaccumulative, and their effects when encountered in combination are largely unstudied.

A specific aspect of environmental health that has been a focus of ecofeminist activism is the correlation between breast cancer and environmental toxins. In 1994, activists from the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition who had noted elevated breast cancer rates throughout Cape Cod called for an investigation of their causes, and, inspired by Rachel Carson's work, founded the Silent Spring Institute (SSI). Today, this Institute is comprised of not only activists but also scientists, physicians, public health advocates, and elected officials, united around the common goal of identifying and changing the links between the environment and women's health, especially breast cancer. In collaboration with Communities for a Better Environment and Brown University, SSI is assessing household pollutant exposure for endocrine disrupting compounds (EDCs) and developing communications tools to report results to affected individuals and communities. One of this project's specific aims is to link breast cancer advocacy and environmental justice in two communities that differ in racial/ethnic and economic character (Silent Spring Institute 2008).

Breast cancer activists studying the correlation between breast cancer and the environment have uncovered a list of environmental toxins linked with breast cancer, using campaigns such as "think before you pink" (2008) to challenge the privatization of breast cancer as a problem caused primarily by a woman's genetics, reproductive history, and lifestyle, along with the mistaken notion that we can shop our way back to health. Instead, breast cancer researchers and activists like Devra Lee Davis and Ana Soto point to the complexity of breast cancer causation as an intersectional phenomenon of genetic, lifestyle, and environmental fac-

tors that include exposure to xenoestrogens and other endocrine disrupting compounds, estrogens and progestins, radiation, and other chemicals of concern (ethylene oxide, organic solvents, aromatic amines, benzene, PVCs, 1,3-Butadiene) (Gray 2008). Numerous epidemiological studies and animal studies (the latter performed on involuntary participants who do not benefit from the research) document these environmental chemicals' impacts on reproductive health and link environmental exposures to breast cancers, yet their findings are interpreted as having relevance primarily for humans.

One branch of ecofeminism, vegetarian ecofeminism, argues for interspecies justice as integral to a feminist and environmental vision of ecological democracy. Beginning with recognitions of the similarities between sexism and speciesism (Adams 1990; Donovan 1990), sexism and racism (Spiegel 1989), or sexism and the oppression of nature (Griffin 1978), this branch of ecofeminism coalesced with a recognition of the similarities among sexism, racism, and speciesism (Collard and Contrucci 1989; Gaard 1993) and developed to an understanding of the "logic of domination" (Warren 1990) and the "master model" (Plumwood 1993) that shifted analysis from the objects of oppression to the conceptual system of oppression in western cultures. This system relies on a process of alienation of self from other, and the associated identity formations that emphasize a valued feature possessed only by the self. Alienation is followed by hierarchy, valuing self above other, and then by justifying the subordination of an inferior other. This system of alienation, hierarchy, and domination is at work in all major structures of oppression in the west—sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, speciesism, anthropocentrism—and the features of the valued self in each system are associated, just as the features of the devalued self are associated: thus, "real" men are young able-bodied rational productive heterosexual meat-eaters, while women are simultaneously irrational, sexual, animalistic, and reproductive (Gaard 1997). The policing of GLBTQ sexual behaviors, and the practice of compulsory gender reassignment for intersexed infants, are additional aspects of domination in the form of reproductive control. A queer, vegetarian ecofeminist analysis suggests that an inclusive vision of reproductive justice would address interspecies, intersexual, and GLBTQ reproductive justice together with environmental justice. It would particularly address the ways that the sexual and reproductive capacities of females of all species are affected by social and environmental toxins.

Building on earlier feminist research into the exploitation of female reproduction (Corea 1985), and the development of reproductive technologies via experimentation on non-human females first, vegetarian ecofeminists emphasize how western systems of industrial animal production (“factory farming”) rely specifically on the exploitation of the female (Adams and Donovan 1995; Donovan and Adams 2007), harming the health of both nonhuman females and the human females who consume their bodies and their reproductive “products.” As Carol Adams (2003) points out, “to control fertility one must have absolute access to the female of the species” (147). The control of female fertility for food production and human reproduction alike uses invasive technologies to manipulate female bodies across the species (Adams 2003; Corea 1985; Diamond 1994). Battery chickens are crowded into tiny cages, de-beaked, and inoculated with numerous antibiotics to maximize control of their reproductive output, eggs (Davis 1995). Male chicks are routinely discarded because they are of no use to the battery hen industry, while female chicks are bred to deformity with excessively large breasts and tiny feet, growing up to live a radically shortened lifetime of captivity, unable to perform any of their natural functions (i.e., dustbathing, nesting, flying). Pregnant sows are confined to gestation crates and after they give birth they are allowed to suckle their offspring only through metal bars. Dairy cows are forcibly inseminated, and their male calves are taken from them 24–48 hours after birth and confined in crates, where they will be fed an iron-deprived diet until they are slaughtered for veal. Cows separated from their calves bellow and appear to grieve for days afterwards, sometimes ramming themselves against their stalls in attempt to reunite with their calves—news articles report the “amazing” feats of cows returning across miles of countryside in order to nurse calves from whom they were forcibly separated (Dawn 2008). We understand the frenzy of a human mother separated from her new infant, yet our understanding and empathy seems to halt at the species boundary, since this involuntary weaning and the attendant suffering for cow and calf continues to be the norm for dairy production: the milk that would have fed the cows’ offspring is taken for human consumption, and manipulated into overproduction through the use of growth hormones (Dawn 2008; Gaard 1994; Gruen 1993).

In all of these cases, reproductive injustice exploiting nonhuman females is practiced for the economic profit of an elite group—first-world humans. Meanwhile, human females who consume the milk and eggs of

other animals face higher risks in their own reproductive organ health: studies published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2004), *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention* (2004), and the *American Journal of Epidemiology* (1999) all confirm positive associations between ovarian cancer risks for women with a higher consumption of eggs or dairy products (primarily cow's milk). An ecofeminist perspective on milk- and egg-production makes visible the ill health and suffering of females from all species—from those who are used for their reproductive capacities while their infants are taken from them for slaughter or continued reproductive confinement until slaughter, to those who work in unsafe and illegal conditions in order to slaughter these animals, to those pregnant or lactating mothers who drink the water or breathe the air permeated with the waste of these industrial animal farms as pass on these contaminants to their infants, and finally, to those who consume these products of female reproduction, ingesting their antibiotics and growth hormones along with their suffering, their eggs and their milk. Ecofeminism's contribution to a theory of reproductive justice offers an emphasis on the environmental causes of infertility and compromised reproductive health as well as a vision of reproductive justice for all—women, men, and others of all species.

Ecofeminism's attentiveness to motherhood across species fits well with third-wave feminism's renewed awareness of motherhood, an awareness that builds on and extends analyses from second-wave feminists. In those earlier critiques, Adrienne Rich (1976) explored the social construction of motherhood, distinguishing the "institution" from the experience of individual mothers. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1978) examined the history of childbirth, and the transition from female midwifery to the institutionalization of male medicine. The sustained interest in Suzanne Arms' *Immaculate Deception: Myth, Magic & Birth* (1975; 1994) continues a feminist critique of the male medical model that has produced unnecessarily elevated numbers of caesarean births among US women with health care coverage—one out of every three births in 2005 (Goer 2006). *Mothering* magazine, founded in 1976 by Peggy O'Mara, continues to bridge feminism and environmentalism by addressing issues of natural family living, particularly natural pregnancy and childbirth, breastfeeding, vaccines, whole foods, and environmental toxins affecting children. Gena Corea's *The Mother Machine* (1985) introduced terms

such as “the breeder woman” and the “reproductive brothel,” and challenged the “discontinuous reproductive experience” being created for women through the new reproductive technologies. Sara Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking* (1989) put forth the claim that specific intelligence and ethical care can develop through the maternal relationship, and that this type of knowledge is valuable to society. Bridging second- and third-wave feminisms, Sandra Steingraber’s *Having Faith: An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood* (2001), provides both a memoir of pregnancy and an investigation of fetal toxicology, revealing the alarming extent to which environmental hazards threaten each crucial stage of human infant development.

Third-wave feminism has continued to explore motherhood through print and web-based publications such as *HipMama*, a zine started in 1993 by Ariel Gore as her senior project in college. Bee Lavender joined the magazine in 1997 and later created new websites like *Girl-Mom*, a site for teen parents, and *Mamaphonic*, an arts resource site. Together, Lavender and Gore culled from these publications a volume of essays on motherhood titled *Breeder: Real Life Stories from a New Generation of Mothers* (2001). Other feminist web-based zines dedicated to motherhood include *Brain, Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers*, founded in 1999 by Jennifer Niesslein and Stephanie Wilkinson, two friends who had babies under a year old; and *Literary Mama*, an online literary magazine of writing about motherhood, launched in November 2003. For eleven years bridging the mid-1990s into 2005, Minneapolis-based radio producer Nanci Olesen aired her show MOMbo first at KFAI (Minneapolis, MN) and then on the Pacifica Radio Network. Four hour-long MOMbo specials were compiled for Public Radio International (2002–04), featuring the show’s blend of mom attitude, music, commentaries, interviews, and sound collage; a four-part series, called “Now You MOMbo,” was released in April 2005.

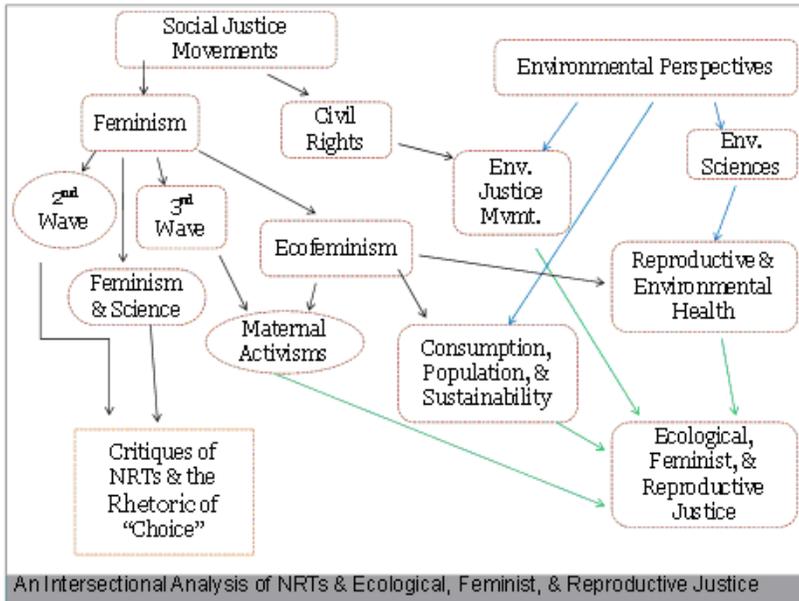
Third-wave feminism has actively used the internet as an organizing tool for mothers, creating such sites as MomsRising.org, founded on Mother’s Day 2006 by Joan Blades and Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, co-authors of *The Motherhood Manifesto: What America’s Moms Want—and What to Do About It* (2006). Their site explores the state of motherhood in the US in terms of real wages, health care coverage, maternity and paternity leave, flexible work schedules, and safe and healthy neighborhoods. Writing an editorial for the *New York Times* in December 2007, members of

MomsRising created the term “maternal profiling” to describe “employment discrimination against a woman who has, or will have, children” (MomsRising.org 2007). Both MomsRising and The Safe Milk Coalition websites provide activist mothers with opportunities for e-mail activism. Like MomsRising, the Safe Milk Coalition uses motherhood strategically as a platform for activism, specifically challenging the presence of environmental toxins in breastmilk. Their campaign to Make Our Milk Safe (MOMS 2008) focuses on childhood lead exposure, household contaminants, phthalates, bisphenol A, perchlorates, household cleaners, and other aspects of mothering that affect the health of children and mothers alike. This updated motherhood movement affirms Katsi Cook’s insight that the mother’s body is the first environment, an insight that links the concerns of feminism, environmental justice, environmental health, and interspecies justice. For real “choice” to be possible, a new rhetoric is needed, one that relies on a strategy of inclusion rather than exclusion.

#### SHIFTING RHETORICS: FROM “CHOICE” TO REPRODUCTIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Research on breast cancer and the environment shows that “we need to begin to think of breast cancer causation as a *complex* web of often interconnected factors” (Gray 2008, italics mine). Responding to this feature of complexity, intersectionality has emerged as a major paradigm of research in women’s studies, providing a methodology that explores relationships among multiple dimensions of social relations and subject formations (McCall 2005). In the graphic that follows, I offer a summary of the intersectional approach that can and, I argue, must emerge from the related perspectives of environmental justice, Ecofeminism, third-wave feminism’s maternal activisms, environmentalism, and environmental health.

Basic to feminist thought is the principle that the best analysis is the one that is most inclusive. Unlike the rhetoric of choice which relies on omission, an intersectional analysis of ecofeminist, environmental, and reproductive justice relies on inclusion by exploring the intersections among these various perspectives. From the intersections of feminist and reproductive justice frameworks, this analysis acknowledges the importance of safe and affordable contraception, including abortion; prenatal, infant, and maternal health care; economic support for family caregiving, allow-



ing individuals to define “family” rather than adhering to a single definition; rethinking gender, sexuality, and culture, so that women’s primary socioeconomic value is not confined to motherhood, compulsory heterosexuality is challenged, and the social construction of masculinity is interrogated. From the intersections of ecofeminism and environmental justice frameworks, this analysis calls for a ban on endocrine-disrupting chemicals, and workplace health regulations that include reproductive health. It invokes the Precautionary Principle for uses of environmental chemicals and the new reproductive technologies alike, requiring more stringent regulations on NRT’s to protect the physical and mental health of egg donors, birth mothers, gestational mothers, and children alike. It resists eugenics in national and international medical, pharmaceutical, and corporate interventions into reproductive rights. Finally, its inclusive analysis calls for interspecies justice, inviting us to imagine and strive for the social and economic transformations that must occur in order to include farm animals, as well as wild and domesticated animals, in this holistic, intersectional vision of reproductive and environmental justice.

Through the rhetoric of inclusion, this intersectional analysis provides

activists, researchers, scholars, and elected officials with a more comprehensive picture of the factors involved in creating a society and an environment where reproductive justice is truly available to all.

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