Introduction: A Global Approach to Reproductive Justice—Psychosocial and Legal Aspects and Implications

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INTRODUCTION: A GLOBAL APPROACH TO
REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE—PSYCHOSOCIAL AND
LEGAL ASPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS

JOAN C. CHRISLER, PH.D.*

INTRODUCTION

I. TOPICS COVERED BY THE REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT
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The term reproductive justice was introduced in the 1990s by a
group of American Women of Color,¹ who had attended the 1994 Inter-
national Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which
was sponsored by the United Nations and is known as “the Cairo
conference.”² After listening to debates by representatives of the gov-
ernments of UN nation states about how to slow population growth
and encourage the use of contraceptives and the extent to which
women’s reproductive rights could/should be guaranteed, the group
realized, as Loretta Ross later wrote, that “[o]ur ability to control what
happens to our bodies is constantly challenged by poverty, racism, en-
vironmental degradation, sexism, homophobia, and injustice . . . .”³
This is no less true in the United States than it is in less-developed
countries. The term caught on first with women’s health activists,
especially those working in US communities of Color,⁴ then among
women’s studies faculty and students. It remains relatively unknown
to the general public, who continue to use the term reproductive rights.

The Cairo conference was a milestone event in the interna-
tional women’s movement because it marked the first formal accep-
tance of women’s reproductive rights as basic human rights.⁵ There,

¹ JAELE SILLIMAN ET AL., UNDIVIDED RIGHTS: WOMEN OF COLOR ORGANIZE FOR
REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE 1 (South End Press 2004).
² Repro Rights Are Human Rights, CTR. FOR REPROD. RIGHTS, http://reproductive
³ SILLIMAN ET AL., supra note 1, at 4.
⁴ See SISTERSONG, http://www.sistersong.net; Reproductive Justice Briefing Book,
⁵ Joan C. Chrisler & Cynthia Garrett, Women’s Reproductive Rights: An International
Perspective, in FEMINISM & WOMEN’S RIGHTS WORLDWIDE 129, 129 (Praeger 2010).
representatives of over 180 nations agreed on basic protections for women’s ability to control their reproductive lives, and, since then, the UN and other international assemblies have urged governments to safeguard women’s reproductive rights. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined reproductive rights as

the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.7

The WHO definition is an ambitious one, more aspirational than achievable in many parts of the world, including the United States, which does not have universal health care and where state and federal funding of women’s health clinics and sex education programs ebbs and flows with the political tides. It is important to keep in mind that, even in countries where reproductive rights are legal and the government has signed a compact to protect them, many women are unable to access the services they need to exercise their rights (e.g., there may be no clinics near where they live, they may lack the ability to read or understand information about their options, the services they need may be too expensive/not covered by health insurance or government health programs). “If women are not able to exercise their rights, it does them little good to know that the government guarantees their right to make their own ‘choices.’ Rights + resources + accessibility = justice.”

Reproductive justice activists have criticized the rhetoric of the reproductive rights movement as culture bound and noted that framing family planning as choice best fits the experience of relatively privileged women in Western industrialized countries with individualistic cultures. According to one scholar, the rhetoric of choice assumes that all women can, and do, decide for themselves whether and when to have children. It also assumes that all women have the resources to obtain and pay for any medical or

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6. Repro Rights are Human Rights, supra note 2.
9. Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 130.
10. Id.
11. SISTERSONG, supra note 4; Chrisler, supra note 8, at 1.
counseling services they need in order to follow through with their family planning. Even more basic . . . is the assumption that a woman’s body is her own—that she owns it, controls it, and makes her own decisions about her body, her health, and her relationships.

Choice also suggests a “marketplace of options,” like an array of products displayed in a shop, where various options may be appealing, and some scholars have complained that the appropriation of the language of feminism by advertisers (e.g., “it’s your choice,” “consumer empowerment”) has cheapened the rhetoric and robbed it of its power. In fact, reproductive decision-making is often difficult and painful, and is not always experienced as a choice. For example, consider women who use contraception or abortion because of ill health, because they cannot afford to raise a child, or because of insecurity due to war, natural disaster, or a severe economic recession; women who want to be parents but cannot get pregnant, are prevented by law or custom from utilizing adoption or assistive reproductive technologies (ARTs), or lose their children to early death (infant mortality) or revocation of custody; and women who have been coerced or misled into sterilization, abortion, or contraceptive use (by partners, kin, courts, or medical authorities).

In collectivist cultures, especially countries where the average family has a very low income, women often have little self-efficacy and few opportunities to control their bodies or much else about their lives. In some cultural groups, such as the Ngwa-Igbo people of Nigeria, one does not own one’s body; it belongs to the community. This means that individual women have limited control over their bodies, and implies that the body should be used to benefit the community, such as by accepting as many pregnancies as may occur. Likewise, offenses against one’s body (e.g., rape) are not offenses against the woman herself, but against the whole community. The Ubang people, also of Nigeria, split the ownership rights to a woman’s body when she marries. Her “underneath” (which symbolizes her ability to produce new life) becomes the property of her in-laws, whereas ownership

12. Chrisler, supra note 8, at 1.
13. Silliman et al., supra note 1, at 5.
15. Chrisler, supra note 8, at 2–3.
of her “head” (which symbolizes her own life) is retained by her birth family.\textsuperscript{17}

Use of the term \textit{reproductive justice} situates action on behalf of women’s reproductive rights within the broader movement for social justice. Social justice activists are concerned with issues such as peace, poverty, human rights, prejudice and discrimination, labor practices and conditions, educational equity, and health and health care disparities;\textsuperscript{18} all of these issues are fundamental to the achievement of reproductive justice.\textsuperscript{19} Unlike \textit{reproductive rights}, which can be seen as based on the principle of negative rights (i.e., the right to resist being told by authorities what one can and cannot do with one’s own body), \textit{reproductive justice} is based on the principle of positive rights (i.e., the role of authorities is to support one’s pursuit of a good quality of life).\textsuperscript{20} The reproductive justice movement has also been influenced by both the global\textsuperscript{21} and the transnational\textsuperscript{22} feminism movements. Global feminism emphasizes the need for the world’s women to work together to solve systemic problems that result from the effects of patriarchal structures and customs on women’s health and well-being and their social, economic, and political rights.\textsuperscript{23} Transnational feminism emphasizes the fact that global media, multinational corporations, and constant migration across borders make it impossible, as well as undesirable, to divide people into ingroups and outgroups (i.e., \textit{us} and \textit{them}).\textsuperscript{24} Transnational feminism also focuses on the intersectionality of oppression, that is, the ways in which aspects of social status and social identity (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ability) combine to impact women’s experiences.\textsuperscript{25} Transnational feminists encourage women from developed nations to support indigenous movements of women, who are best able to develop solutions that fit their culture and situation, rather than to attempt to devise solutions for others.\textsuperscript{26}

\section*{I. Topics Covered by the Reproductive Justice Movement}

There is no agreed upon list of issues for reproductive justice activists to address. Reproductive rights activists typically focus on

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\bibitem{17} Id. at 163.
\bibitem{18} Chrisler, \textit{supra} note 8, at 3.
\bibitem{19} Id.
\bibitem{20} Jennie Bristow, \textit{Closing the Book on Choice?}, 33 CONSCIENCE 40, 40 (2012).
\bibitem{21} ROBIN MORGAN, \textit{SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL} 3 (The Feminist Press 1996).
\bibitem{22} CHANDRA T. MOHANTY, \textit{FEMINISM WITHOUT BORDERS: DECOLONIZING THEORY, PRACTICING SOLIDARITY} 144 (Duke Univ. Press 2003).
\bibitem{23} MORGAN, \textit{supra} note 21, at 1.
\bibitem{24} MOHANTY, \textit{supra} note 22, at 162.
\bibitem{25} Id. at 146.
\bibitem{26} Id. at 155.
\end{thebibliography}
women’s ability to access contraception and abortion services, and they generally support access to adoption (including for lesbian and gay couples), sex education, and affordable and accessible reproductive health services (e.g., routine gynecological care, screening for sexually transmitted diseases [STIs], prenatal and antenatal care). All of those are necessary for reproductive justice, of course, but this Article will argue for the broadest possible approach to issues that are interrelated with those foci.

A broad approach to reproductive justice addresses aspects of women’s social status that promote or interfere with her power in relationships, bodily integrity, and ability to engage in family planning and reproductive decision-making.

A good place to begin is with “the [c]hoice before the [c]hoice” women’s ability to choose their own sexual partners. There are a number of practices around the world that interfere with this most basic decision. Arranged marriages remain traditional in many countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, but are rare in the West unless they involve immigrants from cultures where such practices are common. Arranged marriages are viewed as contracts between families or communities, rather than between individuals, and thus are similar to the cultural question raised above regarding who “owns” a woman’s body. There is considerable variation in how much (if any) input the woman has in the decision. In traditional forms of arranged marriage, the parents or community elders make the decision; in cooperative forms, the individuals and the parents make a joint decision; in contemporary forms, the individuals make their choice and then seek parental approval. Although Hindu tradition has historically given parents the sole authority to decide on their children’s marital partners, in many places in India today young people are increasingly involved in choosing their partners, or at least are able to refuse options suggested to them. However, forced arranged marriages remain common in some parts of the world (e.g., Afghanistan), and these marriages are often conducted when the girls (but not necessarily their husbands) are in early adolescence. Marriages between young girls

31. Id. at 24.
32. Id.
33. Ghimire et al., supra note 29, at 1184.
and older men further exaggerate the power imbalance between the couple, and can have serious consequences for women’s physical and mental health and well-being.\textsuperscript{35} For example, young brides are at higher risk for disease, pregnancy at a very young age, maternal mortality, and childbirth-related health risks (e.g., obstetric fistulas).\textsuperscript{36} Honor killings occur in some cultures as a way to punish women for pre- or extra-marital sex, or even unauthorized romances that are deemed to embarrass the family or damage her marriage prospects.\textsuperscript{37} Other traditional practices that violate women’s right to choose their own partners include widow cleansing, in which a widow is forced to have sexual intercourse with a designated “cleanser” before she can remarry; levirate, in which a male relative “inherits” a widow and takes her on as his wife; and sati, the ritual burning of a widow on her husband’s funeral pyre, a Hindu tradition that is now against the law in India.\textsuperscript{38} Although these practices may be frowned upon (or outlawed) by local governments, they are still reported in parts of Africa and Asia.\textsuperscript{39} Violence against women (including sexual assault and trafficking of women and girls for forced prostitution) also deprive women of the ability to choose or refuse sexual “partners,” and women who find themselves pregnant as a result of these circumstances often end up giving birth to, and raising, their rapists’ children. Girls and women have been forced by kin or courts to marry their rapists, and some countries in South America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have laws that allow rapists to escape punishment if they marry their victims.\textsuperscript{40}

Recent positive changes in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in North America, liberalization of same-sex partner benefits and protections in the United States (e.g., the Supreme Court ruling against the Defense of Marriage Act [DOMA]),\textsuperscript{41} and the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada and over a dozen U.S. jurisdictions may cause some of us to forget that many lesbians lack the ability to choose their own sexual partners and co-parents.\textsuperscript{42} In some countries (e.g., Cameroon, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Belize) same-sex relationships

\begin{footnotes}
\item[36] Hampton, supra note 34, at 509.
\item[37] Chrisler, supra note 8, at 4.
\item[38] Padmini Murthy, Violence Against Women and Girls: A Silent Global Pandemic, in WOMEN'S GLOBAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS 11, 15–16 (Padmini Murthy & Clyde Lanford Smith eds., 2010).
\item[39] Id. at 15–17.
\item[41] United States v. Windsor, 133 S.Ct. 2675, 2675 (2013).
\end{footnotes}
are illegal. Some religions and cultures hold such negative views of same-sex relationships (e.g., that they are “unnatural” or against “God’s law”) that it is impossible or nearly so, and certainly unsafe, to declare a partnership openly and act as a couple. Even the suggestion of lesbian “inclinations” could result in honor killing or forced (heterosexual) marriage in some places. Hate crimes against lesbians and gay men still occur with some frequency in the United States, even in places with generally liberal attitudes (e.g., New York City). Many U.S. states have laws on their books against same-sex marriage and do not recognize legal marriages performed in other states. Adoptions by same-sex couples are not allowed everywhere (e.g., Mississippi, Utah) and some courts make it difficult for same-sex couples to adopt each other’s children.

The empowerment of women in relationships and in society is necessary to achieve reproductive justice. Social scientists typically define power as influence and often consider three types of power: power over—the ability to influence others to do what one wants, power from—the ability to resist unwanted influence by others, and power to—the ability to control one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to achieve one’s own goals. Empowerment obviously includes increases in all three types of power, although feminist activists tend to focus on the power to make change in the service of social justice. In that sense, empowerment includes greater self-confidence, a sense of self-efficacy, and considerable relationality (i.e., the ability to work with others to get things done).

others; it is not a characteristic of individuals. People become empowered through personal, group, and institutional efforts, and they exercise their power in relation to other individuals, groups, intimates and kin, policy makers, politicians, and legislators. Power is a dynamic and contextual process; successful influence (or resistance to influence) may occur in one situation, but not another.

Given that individuals are routinely influenced by others (e.g., friends, kin, authority figures) and by internalized cultural messages (e.g., religious beliefs, cultural values and traditions, laws and regulations), it is impossible to think about reproductive decision-making as purely an individual matter or choice. Family planning is usually negotiated between partners, but how much influence a woman has over the decision varies as a result of her cultural context and how traditional her relationship is. The more egalitarian the relationship between the partners, the more likely the woman is to achieve her preferred plan. In very traditional societies, such as the Ubang people mentioned earlier, the woman’s in-laws have more power than she does in terms of family planning. Women whose religious authorities ban the use of certain forms of contraception, or abortion, or ARTs are less likely to use them, indeed they may be unavailable except to those who can afford to travel to places where they can be accessed. Wealthy women, for example, can hire surrogate mothers if they themselves are unable to conceive or carry a fetus to term. Some countries (e.g., India), with high poverty rates and loose regulations, are active in the international surrogacy business. The low-income women who “volunteer” for this work may lose social status because of it, but they gain economic status from the payments, which are higher than they could otherwise earn. Family planning strategies not only include decisions about pregnancy prevention (e.g., condom use, abortion, voluntary sterilization), but also about whether and when to engage in sexual intercourse. In many places in the world, wives do not have the

52. Id. at 184.
55. See Izugbara & Undie, supra note 16, at 163; Kinoshita, supra note 54, at 1, 8.
right to refuse sex when their husbands demand it. Sharia Law, for example, recognizes only a few reasons for refusal of sex as legitimate (e.g., advanced pregnancy, serious illness).\textsuperscript{58} Nebraska was the first U.S. state to criminalize marital rape, which was a very controversial step in 1976.\textsuperscript{59} Today all 50 states criminalize it, but many define spousal rape as a lesser offense than other forms of sexual assault, and cases do not often come to trial.\textsuperscript{60}

The importance of the power to resist others’ unwanted influence is obvious in cases of sexual assault, forced marriage, female genital cutting, female infanticide and sex-selective abortions, and interference with contraceptive decision-making. STIs are a major cause of infertility,\textsuperscript{61} yet many women lack the power to insist on condom use. Women who have undergone genital cutting are more likely than those who have not had it to experience adverse obstetric outcomes, including an increased risk of maternal mortality, caesarian section, postpartum hemorrhage, and infant mortality.\textsuperscript{62} Technology, advertising, and both medical and popular discourse can constitute forms of powerful cultural messaging that is difficult for women, even in Western nations, to resist. For example, “modern” beliefs that infant formula is better for babies than breastfeeding have led to an increase in infant mortality, failure to thrive, and illness, and this is especially true in places where the water needed to mix the formula is not clean and storage at the proper temperature is impossible or not consistently available.\textsuperscript{63} Technology once used only during at-risk births has become almost commonplace in some countries, including the United States, where caesarian section (many of them medically unnecessary) is among the most common surgeries performed each year.\textsuperscript{64} Electronic fetal monitoring requires women to restrict their movements and bodily position during labor, interferes with tactile comforting from their partner, and attracts medical personnel’s attention toward the

\textsuperscript{58} Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 133.  
\textsuperscript{59} Jennifer McMahon-Howard et al., Criminalizing Spousal Rape, 52 SOC. PERSP. 4, 505, 507 (2009).  
\textsuperscript{60} Caroline Johnston Polisi, Spousal Rape Laws Continue to Evolve, WOMEN’S NEWS (July 1, 2009), http://womensenews.org/story/rape/090701/spousal-rape-laws-continue-evolve#.UmGUR3f8KKI.  
\textsuperscript{62} WORLD HEALTH ORG., Female Genital Mutilation and Obstetric Outcome: WHO Collaborative Prospective Study in Six African Countries, 367 LANCET 1835, 1839 (2006).  
\textsuperscript{63} Ingrid Johnston-Robledo & Allison Murray, Reproductive Justice for Women and Infants: Restoring Women’s Postpartum Health and Infant-Feeding Options, in REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: A GLOBAL CONCERN 269, 278 (Joan Chrisler ed., 2012).  
monitor and away from the woman. Information about contractions is gathered from the monitor rather than by physical examination or by asking the woman about her experience. Some feminist scholars worry that the increased popularity of continuous oral contraceptives to suppress menstruation and elective cosmetic genital surgery means that these could soon become cultural mandates with unpredictable effects on women’s health. One of the ironies of the reproductive justice movement is that activists are simultaneously concerned about the undertreatment of women in poor countries and the overtreatment of women in wealthy countries. Another is that many Western women who deplore female genital cutting in other cultures are coming to share those cultures’ view that female genitalia are unacceptable in their natural state and require reshaping (and shaving of the mons pubis) in order to render women attractive to potential partners. Of course, Western women must sign consent forms for surgeries and other treatments, but are they freely choosing these “treatments” given the cultural discourses and the difficulty in resisting them?

Reproductive justice includes the right to utilize medication and technology to avoid unwanted pregnancies, to enhance the potential for planned pregnancies, to survive the birthing process, and to produce healthy infants. It also includes the right to refuse medication and technology (e.g., unnecessary cesarian sections and fetal monitoring, sterilization, virginity tests), to access prenatal and antenatal care, to breastfeed one’s infant, to have workplace accommodations that promote healthy children (e.g., parental leave; clean, private places for breastfeeding or breast pumping), and to be free from employment discrimination against pregnant women and against

65. Id.
68. Braun, supra note 67, at 43.
69. Id. at 33–34, 43.
71. See Lake, supra note 64; Karen Hardee et al., Family Planning and Women’s Lives in Rural China, 30 INT’L FAM. PLAN. PERSP. 68, 71 (2004).
mothers (known as “the maternal wall”) so that they will be able to support their families.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals include improvement of maternal health and reduction of the maternal mortality rate. The goals were intended to be achieved by 2015, and some progress has certainly been made. Approximately one half of childbirth-related deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa, and almost all of them in developing nations. However, readers may recall the recent death of a woman in Ireland, who was denied a life-saving abortion when she was miscarrying a planned pregnancy. The maternal mortality rate doubled in Nicaragua after an absolute ban on abortion was enacted; as a result of that law, women have sought unsafe abortions outside of clinics, and physicians fear arrest if they intervene in medical emergencies (e.g., ectopic pregnancies) unless they can prove the fetus is dead. One of the most common causes of maternal mortality is severe postpartum hemorrhage (PPH), which, if not treated properly, can result in the woman’s death within hours of birthing her infant. PPH is most often caused when the uterus does not properly contract, or assume its proper muscle tone, after the birth, and it occurs most often in women who underwent a prolonged labor and who have previously given birth to a number of children. In both developed and developing nations, reproductive justice includes safe birthing options with skilled and empathetic attendants, who give the laboring woman as much control over the process as is possible.

Infant mortality is an important component of reproductive justice. All pregnant women experience discomfort, and labor is painful, sometimes extremely so. Many women risk their lives and health to produce children. Thus, to say that stillbirth or infant mortality is

74. Joan Williams, Beyond the Maternal Wall: Relief for Family Caregivers Who are Discriminated Against on the Job, 26 HARV. WOMEN’S L.J. 77, 78 (2003).
76. Johnston-Robledo & Murray, supra note 63, at 270.
79. Id. at 14.
80. Marian Knight et al., Trends in Postpartum Hemorrhage in High Resource Countries: A Review and Recommendations from the International Hemorrhage Collaborative Group, 9 BMC WOMEN’S HEALTH 55, 56 (2009).
81. Id. at 60.
82. Sayaka Machizawa & Kayoko Hayashi, Birthing Across Cultures: Toward the Humanization of Childbirth, in REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: A GLOBAL CONCERN 244, 246 (Joan Chrisler ed., 2012).
disappointing is an understatement. In developed countries, where the infant mortality rate is much lower than in developing countries, it is often said that there is nothing more heartbreaking than the loss of a child. The most common causes of infant mortality are malnutrition, diarrhea, and respiratory infections, and children who are not breastfed are six times more likely than those who are to die of these causes.83 The World Health Organization has estimated that breastfeeding (with appropriate complementary feeding) could save the lives of 1.5 million children under age five each year, yet only about thirty-five percent of infants are breastfed exclusively for the recommended first six months of life.84 Breastfeeding is also good for women’s health. It helps those without access to other forms of contraception to space pregnancies by delaying the resumption of regular menstrual cycles.85 In the United States, about seventy-five percent of women breastfeed their newborns, but only about fifty percent continue to do so for six months.86 European and Australian women are much more likely than women in North America to persist with breastfeeding for the recommended duration (only fourteen percent of Mexican women do so).87 The most common reason given by women in developed countries for not breastfeeding (or persisting with it) is employment-related barriers.88 Prenatal and antenatal care for mother and fetus/infant, childbirth education, mother’s health and nutrition, and appropriate medical intervention for high-risk pregnancies and births are all obviously crucial to healthy children. Although most pregnant women in the United States are healthy, certain conditions (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, lupus, substance abuse) can increase the risk of maternal and infant mortality, and the frequency of those conditions is associated with low income and high stress.89 Thus, universal health care and

83. Johnston-Robledo & Murray, supra note 63, at 275.
social support from friends and family are important for the health of mothers and their babies, even in developed countries.

Infertility has been estimated to affect 80 million of the world’s population, as many as 1 in 10 couples.\(^9\) Unlike family planning and maternal and infant mortality, infertility is not generally seen as a public health issue, despite the fact that it causes psychological distress in those who want to have children and reduces women’s social standing and quality of life in societies where the roles of mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother are the sources of women’s power and status. Failure to conceive in some cultures can result in divorce, abandonment, or the husband marrying an additional wife.\(^9\) Although one can argue that no one has the right to become pregnant, given that luck and medical conditions play roles in conception, the development of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) has provided hope for many infertile individuals and couples.\(^9\) Those technologies, however, are very expensive, not available everywhere, and not often covered by health insurance.\(^9\) Some techniques require multiple attempts (success rates vary between twenty and fifty percent), which raise the cost considerably and move it beyond most people’s financial means.\(^9\) Furthermore, most clinics that offer ARTs are private, and the clinics’ owners and medical personnel have been free to make their own decisions about whom to treat (i.e., they can refuse lesbians, single women, women they determine to be “too old,” etc.).\(^9\) This is not the place to cover all of the ethical issues associated with ARTs, but reproductive justice activists make several important points. If these technologies are available, why are they not accessible to all who want them? Why are they least accessible to the women who, one could argue, most need them (i.e., women whose life circumstances are most affected by infertility)? If family planning is covered by health insurance, why not ARTs? Finally, given the motherhood mandate\(^9\) in most

health/publications/infertility/9241590300/en/.
\(^9\) Id. at 67.
\(^9\) Id. at xii.
\(^9\) Id. at 182; Sandrine Chamayou & Antonino Guglielmino, Effectiveness of Assisted Reproduction Techniques as an Answer to Male Infertility, Male Infertility 107, 121 (2012).
\(^9\) Rubin & Philips, supra note 93, at 184.
\(^9\) The motherhood mandate refers to the belief that women should have children and that all normal women want to become mothers. See Nancy Felipe Russo, The Motherhood Mandate, 32 J. Soc. Issues 143, 143, 148 (1976).
cultures, are women who can afford ARTs really able to make a decision not to use them? Some women have exhausted all of their savings in multiple attempts to become pregnant because they believe that if anything can be done, it should be done, regardless of the physical discomfort and financial and personal sacrifices required. 97

II. WHY REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE

The psychosocial factors that form barriers to reproductive justice are broad and interwoven, but perhaps it is fair to say that the combination of politics, poverty, and culture is the most potent. In this section, this author will provide a few examples of how these factors can affect women’s reproductive rights and their health care in various ways.

Historical events, such as civil wars, the Cold War, and other international conflicts “can severely restrict women’s access to reproductive health care.” 98 For example, during the Cold War, modern contraceptive methods that were manufactured in the West were unavailable to women in the Soviet Union, where abortion was the primary method of birth control until the late-1980s. 99 Rates of unsafe abortion and maternal mortality rise during armed conflict, and reproductive health care is not usually a priority in refugee camps. 100 Violence against women tends to increase during armed conflicts, and, in recent years, rape has been widespread and used deliberately as a way to terrify civilians and reduce ethnic solidarity (e.g., Bosnia, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo). 101 During the Second Intifada there were reports of women giving birth, and even dying during labor, at military checkpoints, and Palestinian women have been under intense pressure to bear as many children as possible as their contribution to the cause. 102 Political events can also lead to increases in women’s access to reproductive health care. For example, as a result of a policy that is also linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israeli women have state-funded access to ARTs; marital status and sexual

97. Vayena et al., supra note 90, at 69.
98. Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 130.
orientation are no barrier to access.  

Ironically, China’s one-child policy (which has relaxed a bit, as some couples may be approved for a second child), widely viewed as a cruel restriction of reproductive rights, also led to greater access to a wider variety of contraceptive methods.

Political events in one country can impact reproductive justice in other countries. For example, in 1984 U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s administration adopted a policy that became known as the “global gag rule.” The policy requires any developing country that accepts economic aid from the United States to fund health care not to provide abortion services in state-funded clinics, refer patients to services, or counsel patients about reproductive options. President Bill Clinton repealed the rule, President George W. Bush reinstated it, and President Barack Obama repealed it again. The global gag rule had serious implications for women in at least twenty countries; it led to the disruption of contraception services, left many women to seek unsafe abortions, and resulted in an increase in maternal mortality. Such erratic policy making not only interferes with the practice of medicine, counseling, and health education, but it makes it very difficult for public health officials to plan effective service delivery for their citizens.

Cultural (especially religious) traditions affect women’s ability to achieve reproductive justice. Sexism is embedded in most of the world’s cultures, and gender stereotypes about the proper roles of women and men are at the heart of many attempts to control women’s bodies and fertility, or prevent women themselves from doing so. For example, the motherhood mandate and maranismo support the belief that motherhood is a woman’s most important role. Contraception and abortion, which subvert that role, are often positioned as evil and

104. See Karen Hardie et al., Family Planning and Women’s Lives in Rural China, 30 FAM. PLANNING PERSP. 68, 75 (2003).
106. Id.
107. Id.
109. Id.
110. Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 132.
111. Marianismo is based on Catholicism’s idealization of the Virgin Mary and encourages women to emulate Mary by displaying characteristics associated with her, such as virginity, virtue, self-sacrifice, and self-abnegation. GERTRUDE M. YEAGER, CONFRONTING CHANGE, CHALLENGING TRADITION: WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY 3 (Scholarly Resources 1994).
unnatural, as are women who choose to be sexually active but not to have children. Pronatal views often take the form of elevating the importance of children above that of the women who bear and rear them, and can result in draconian anti-abortion laws that do not provide exceptions even to save a woman’s life; the frequently debated “personhood amendment,” which grants rights to the fetus that trump those of the woman, is another illustration of this extreme pronatalism. In the United States, where the majority of citizens favor use of contraceptives and abortions (at least in the first trimester and/or in cases of rape, incest, and women’s health), public figures have recently spoken against the use of contraception, pledged to defund Planned Parenthood, denied that abortion is ever necessary for the life or health of the mother, claimed that fetuses feel pain and can masturbate early in the second trimester, insisted that women cannot get pregnant from rape, and mocked as a “slut” a young woman who favored health insurance coverage for contraception. Male dominance may be the most important barrier to reproductive justice; countries with lower gender equality also have the highest birth rates.

115. Irin Carmon, Rick Santorum is Coming for Your Birth Control, SALON (Jan. 4, 2012), http://www.salon.com/2012/01/04/rick_santorum_is_coming_for_your_birth_control/.
120. Emily Bazelon, Sluts Unite: By Standing up to Rush Limbaugh’s Slur, Sandra Fluke Shows How Sex Positivity is Recharging Feminism, SLATE (Mar. 5, 2012), http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/03/rush_limbaugh_calls_sandra_fluke_a_slut_how_sex_positivity_has_recharged_the_feminist_movement_.html.
Female genital cutting is an example of a cultural tradition that is widespread in Africa, despite the fact that at least sixteen African countries have passed laws to ban it. It is practiced most often in predominantly Muslim countries, and its practitioners believe it to be an Islamic tradition, however, it is not mentioned in the Koran. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimate that 125–140 million girls and women have been subjected to this practice, with its negative effects on women’s health. Some consider genital cutting necessary to preserve girls’ chastity and prevent women’s infidelity; it is an attempt to restrict women’s sexual and reproductive rights and, for those who resist, a violation of bodily integrity. Indigenous women’s groups have been working to convince mothers not to subject their daughters to genital cutting, and a recent report from UNICEF has documented a “gradual but significant decline in many countries.” UNFPA suggested that the most effective strategy is to provide alternative rights of passage and create new cultural traditions. This example is an important one because it reminds us that the fact that a belief or practice is a tradition does not mean that it cannot be changed. Although some cultural changes occur quickly (e.g., clothing and technology fads), others occur slowly and require patience, persistence, and creative thinking and planning.

Religious beliefs and traditions are important parts of any culture. Although members of most congregations report a variety of views on matters related to reproductive justice, theology and the opinions of religious leaders serve to support or inhibit reproductive justice. For example, the Roman Catholic Church advocates the use of natural family planning and opposes all artificial contraceptive methods. In the United States, Catholic leaders and organizations have partnered with their peers in evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant

125. Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 133.
127. Wakabi, supra note 122, at 1069.
congregations to preach and lobby against abortion. The Catholic Church (which runs schools, universities, hospitals, adoption agencies, and charitable services of other kinds) is a major employer, and it recently succeeded in obtaining a religious exemption to the Affordable Care Act requirement that employer health plans include contraception coverage. Health care costs and economic decline, especially in cities, has led in recent years to considerable downsizing and combining of services; in some cases, Catholic and secular hospitals have merged. Catholic hospitals follow guidelines that prohibit certain medical procedures (e.g., abortion, vasectomy, tubal ligation, emergency contraception, ARTs) and counseling (e.g., about condom and other contraceptive use, about ARTs); continued use of these guidelines is usually a requirement for merger. As a result of these mergers, low-income women in inner cities (regardless of their own religious beliefs) have lost access to reproductive education and aspects of health care. Although abortion is legal in most of the European Union, access is restricted in significant ways (e.g., available only very early in pregnancy, only for the life of the mother) in countries where Catholicism is the official religion (e.g., Ireland, Portugal, Italy).

Beliefs about reproductive rights and health care options vary by sect among Protestantism, Islam, and Judaism. Mainline Protestant churches and Jewish congregations tend to have liberal attitudes toward contraception and abortion. Family planning is allowed in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa, but abortion tends to be limited to very early in the pregnancy or in medical emergencies where the woman’s life is endangered. Mainline Protestant churches generally support all forms of ARTs, but some Evangelical churches do not support any forms. Some rabbis do not

129. The Catholic Church vs. ‘ObamaCare,’ supra note 128.
130. Id.
132. Id. at 209, 211.
136. Id.
support ARTs that involve donor sperm or ova. Islam generally encourages fertility treatment as long as the members of the couple are the only people involved; use cannot be made of donor sperm, ova, or surrogacy.

Other important barriers to reproductive justice include socio-economic and social identity factors. For example, a study in Africa and South Asia showed that income level predicts the likelihood that a woman will have access to a skilled birth attendant. Poor women, incarcerated women, disabled women, and chronically ill women often have their reproductive health care and options curtailed, even in developed countries. For example, women with disabilities often do not receive counseling about family planning because authorities and medical personnel do not think of them as sexual beings. Thus, even when they are considered incapable of raising children, and even though disabled women are at a higher rate of sexual assault than able-bodied women, contraceptive education may not be provided. Poor and disabled women have been victims of sterilization without consent in some countries (e.g., Peru, United States) as part of a eugenics campaign or by “well-meaning” authorities who thought the women would not be “good” mothers. As noted earlier, single women, lesbians, older women, and disabled women may be denied ARTs, even when they have the ability to pay for services.

III. WHY REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IS IMPORTANT

Decisions about whether and when to become pregnant are important and have long-term consequences for women’s lives. Women cannot make those decisions unless they are able to control their own bodies and exercise their reproductive rights. Bodily integrity is a key aspect of human rights, and women should not have to surrender their reproductive rights without their consent.
that right in one regard in order to exercise it in another. For example, recent anti-abortion legislation in some states requires women to undergo medically unnecessary procedures (e.g., ultrasound).\textsuperscript{146} Feminists have noted that the infamous vaginal probe ultrasound requirement meets the legal definition of rape when women are coerced into accepting it.\textsuperscript{147} Governments and courts must enforce laws and treaties that guarantee women’s rights\textsuperscript{148} or women will never achieve reproductive justice. International courts have been used to require countries to enforce their laws or compensate their victims,\textsuperscript{149} and organizations, such as the Guttmacher Institute and Human Rights Watch, collect data about violations of women’s reproductive rights, which can be used to embarrass governments and their leaders.\textsuperscript{150}

Reproductive justice is crucial for women’s physical health. Contraception allows women to control the number of, and the spacing between, childbirths; spacing is important because it allows women’s bodies to recover fully from a previous pregnancy and birth before becoming pregnant again.\textsuperscript{151} Large numbers of children, especially when they are born close together in time, are hard on women’s bodies and can result in fatigue, chronic strain, and medical conditions.\textsuperscript{152} Millions of women die each year from pregnancy- and birth-related complications and unsafe abortions.\textsuperscript{153} Female genital cutting has no health benefits and a number of health hazards, such as hemorrhaging, infections, urinary tract problems, dysmenorrhea, and childbirth complications.\textsuperscript{154} Rape often results in physical injuries, and carries


\textsuperscript{147} Dahlia Lithwick, \textit{Virginia’s Proposed Ultrasound Law is an Abomination}, SLATE (Feb. 16, 2012), http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/02/virginia_ultrasound_law_women_who_want_an_abortion_will_be_forcibly_penetrated_for_no_medical_reason.html.

\textsuperscript{148} The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR-1949), the UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW-1979), the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD-1994), the African Union Protocol on Reproductive Rights (2003), and the United Nations Millennium Goals are all examples of treaties and conventions related to reproductive justice.

\textsuperscript{149} Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 141.

\textsuperscript{150} Id.

\textsuperscript{151} Chrisler, supra note 8, at 6.

\textsuperscript{152} Joellen Hawkins et al., \textit{Fertility Control, in Women’s Health Care: A Comprehensive Handbook} 281 (Catherine Ingram Fogel & Nancy Fugate Woods eds., 1995).


\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Fact Sheet on Female Genital Mutilation}, WORLD HEALTH ORG. (Feb. 2013), http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/.
with it the possibility of pregnancy and/or the transmission of STIs, which can result in infertility, urinary tract infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, cervical cancer, or even death.155

Reproductive justice is crucial for women’s mental health. People’s ability to exercise control over their bodies and their life circumstances has often been shown to be important to mental health and well-being.156 Rape, forced marriage, trafficking, unwanted pregnancy, and unwanted genital cutting are extreme examples of loss of control, and they often result in trauma, shame, anxiety, and depression.157 Shame is likely to be especially strong in cultures where women’s bodies are considered to belong to the family or community. Rape victims also frequently report low self-esteem, body image issues, fear of intimacy, and inability to trust; rates of eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicide are also higher among rape victims than among the general population.158 Unwanted pregnancy, miscarriage and stillbirth, and seeking abortion when family and friends do not support the woman’s decision are also associated with depression.159 Planned pregnancies can end in disappointment and depression when a woman’s wishes about how to give birth are ignored or overruled by medical personnel due to complications.160 The “baby blues,” or its more serious form, postpartum depression, is not uncommon after a first birth or a difficult birth, or when a woman has previously suffered from depression or lacks social support and childcare assistance as she recovers from birthing her infant.161 Reactions to infertility range from disappointment in not being able to achieve a goal to more serious reactions, such as stress, anxiety, depression, shame, low self-esteem, body image concerns, and marital discord.162

155. Stephens et al., supra note 61, at 118.
strongly pronatal, infertility is particularly damaging to women’s self-worth, mental health, and social standing.\textsuperscript{163}

Reproductive justice is crucial for children’s health and development. Infant mortality is lower in smaller families, and children spaced farther apart are generally healthier.\textsuperscript{164} Parents with fewer children can take better care of them and spend more time with each one. In low-income families, fewer children means more food, clothing, and room to play for each child; parents are also better able to pay for education, health care, and leisure activities for smaller families. Children of planned pregnancies are also more likely to feel loved and secure.\textsuperscript{165}

Reproductive justice is also necessary to secure equal rights for women, both at home and in society. As Michelle Goldberg wrote, “reproductive rights are intimately related to women’s economic freedom. Having smaller families allows women to work. When they bring financial resources into the family, their power tends to increase and their daughters’ welfare improves.”\textsuperscript{166} The ability to determine “whether and when” to have children enables women to make plans, achieve personal goals, attain higher education, and excel in a career or business.\textsuperscript{167} Fewer children, higher education, and greater financial resources also empower women to negotiate with their partners and to exert control over their own, and their children’s, future.

IV. WHAT WE CAN DO IN THE STRUGGLE FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

It can be depressing to think about the barriers to reproductive justice, the backlash against the gains of the women’s rights movements, the failure of governmental authorities to enforce laws that guarantee women’s rights, and the entrenched traditions and political views that encourage politicians to deny funding for women’s reproductive health and to enact laws designed to close clinics that provide necessary services. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that sixty percent of American women live in states with legislatures that are openly hostile toward women’s reproductive rights,\textsuperscript{168} and it sometimes seems that their hostility grows stronger every day.

\textsuperscript{165} Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 140.
\textsuperscript{166} Goldberg, supra note 78, at 11.
\textsuperscript{167} Chrisler & Garrett, supra note 5, at 140.
\textsuperscript{168} New Wave of Laws Seeks to Shut Down Abortion Providers, GUTTMACHER INST. (June 27, 2013), http://www.guttmacher.org/media/nr/2013/06/27/index.html.
It is important for each of us to remember that cultures and societies are dynamic; they can and do change. Politicians and political movements come and go. New religious groups arise, and old ones decline. Arts and technology can change the way that people think. Voters and protest movements cause change eventually. As the Civil Rights Movement slogan so aptly puts it, we must remember to keep our “eyes on the prize.” Yes, the barriers to reproductive justice are huge, but progress is being made in some places, even as it is walked back in others. “Sisterhood is global,”169 and we must all do our part to maintain forward movement.

We should all be aware of our reproductive rights, and we should not be afraid to exercise them. Everyone should know about the laws in their country or state, and we should find out what resources are available in our communities for sex education, reproductive health care, and family planning. It is important to educate ourselves and each other.

We should support candidates for political office who support women’s rights. We can support them with our votes, our volunteer labor, and/or our donations. Politicians at all levels (including school boards) make public policy that affects the health and well-being of girls and women whether in local communities, across the country, or internationally. We can run for office ourselves, or take volunteer or paid positions in government where we have the opportunity to develop and implement policy that advances reproductive justice. We can organize voter registration drives and help voters get to the polls on election day to support candidates who will support them.

We can participate in lobbying efforts to educate politicians and policy makers about reproductive justice, including the need for universal health care, anti-poverty programs, anti-trafficking measures, and gender equity in all spheres. We can all write letters to politicians and to editors of newspapers, sign and start petitions, attend marches and demonstrations, and use social media to encourage others to join us. Those of us with expertise can testify in court and before legislative committees, blog about reproductive justice, and do volunteer or paid work in one of the many national or international non-profit organizations that works on these issues. We can donate to organizations that fight for reproductive justice and those who provide low-cost health care, educational, and counseling services to women in need.

Law students can join Law Students for Reproductive Justice to find out more about ways they can use their expertise in partnership

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169. See Morgan, supra note 21.
with medical personnel\textsuperscript{170} and women’s health and human rights activists. This author hopes that some of the readers of this Article will become the attorneys who fight against laws that restrict women’s reproductive rights, judges who understand and empathize with women’s circumstances, and legislators and policy makers who respect women and care about women’s health and their rights. If we all do our part, reproductive justice will eventually be within the reach of most of the world’s women. This Special Issue of the \textit{William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law} is an excellent contribution to the cause.

\textsuperscript{170} Contact, for example, Medical Students for Choice. See MED. STUDENTS FOR CHOICE, http://www.ms4c.org (last visited Nov. 3, 2013).