HOW THE NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES COULD BE USED TO APPLY THE BROTHEL MODEL OF SOCIAL CONTROL OVER WOMEN*

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Synopsis—Andrea Dworkin has described the brothel model for the social control of women under which women are collected together, held, and sold as interchangeable sexual commodities. With such new reproductive technologies as in-vitro fertilization, embryo transfer, sex predetermination and artificial insemination, Dworkin writes, men will be able to apply the brothel model to reproduction. Women can sell eggs, ovaries and wombs as they can now sell vaginas, breasts and buttocks. This paper suggests how specific technologies might be used in a reproductive brothel. It shows that a model for this institution already exists: many animals on factory farms live in reproductive brothels today.

Newspapers assure us that such new reproductive technologies as embryo transfer, in-vitro fertilization and artificial insemination of breeder women (usually known as ‘surrogate mothers’) are merely ‘therapies’ kindly physicians provide for infertile women. Of course there is more to it than that. Through the years, with widespread use of technologies, social institutions will be restructured to reflect a new reality—tightened male control over female reproductive processes. We do not know exactly how this new reality will be expressed, but as sociologist Jaina Hanmer has observed, ‘we do know that in a system characterized by power imbalance, the greater the asymmetry, the greater the potential abuse of the less powerful group.’ (Hanmer. 1984: 444-445).

Andrea Dworkin has described one possible expression of the new reality: the reproductive brothel (Dworkin. 1983). Current male control over woman’s reproduction, she points out, is sloppy. It is the farming model applied to motherhood. This is, according to Dworkin, one of two models which describes how women are socially controlled and sexually used. Under the farming model, men plant women with their seed and then harvest the crop of babies. This is inefficient. There are too many uncontrollable elements: the woman might be infertile; she might produce a bad crop one year—a defective child; there is room for her to exert her will against the man’s—to secretly insert a diaphragm to avoid a pregnancy or, if she wants a child, to ‘forget’ her pill; she can find some time to organize with other women and foment rebellion: each woman lives with an individual man providing her with some room for a personal relationship. Women are not all penned together, controlled, used as reproduction commodities and nothing more.

Under the second, brothel model, women are collected together and held, unable to come and go freely. Sold as sexual commodities to men, the women are interchangeable. They are not seen as human beings with individuality and spiritual worth. The women, Dworkin writes, sell parts of their bodies ‘and they also sell acts—what they say and what they do.’ (p.177). This brothel model, which reduces a woman to what she sells, is efficient. The women do not get out. They are controlled with force, degradation, drugs. (For documentation, see Barry. 1979.)

With the new reproductive technologies, Dworkin observes, men will be able to apply the brothel model to reproduction: ‘Women can sell reproductive capacities the same way old-time prostitutes sold sexual ones . . . ’ (p.182). While sexual prostitutes sell vagina, rectum and mouth, reproductive-prostitutes will sell other body parts: Wombs. Ovaries. Eggs.

Of course social institutions might be restructured in a less horrifying way. But the fact that women are hated in a male-supremacist culture makes it foolish to dismiss Dworkin’s vision as unthinkable.

A model for the institution Dworkin envisions

* An extended discussion of this topic—in the broad context of reproductive technology—is to be found in the forthcoming book by Genoveffa Corea, entitled The Mother Machine. Harper and Row. New York.
already exists. Many farm animals live in what are essentially reproductive brothels. On such a farm, the animal is seen as having no individuality, no spiritual worth. She is penned in under prison-like conditions. Reproductive engineers use parts of her body. They can artificially inseminate a ‘superior’ cow with the sperm of a ‘superior’ bull, remove the embryos from her body and transfer them into ‘inferior’ cows who will gestate the calves. Through this procedure, they can transform so-called valuable cows ‘from once-a-year calf producers to machines that can produce embryos every two months . . . ’ (Brotman, 1983: 108). They can even transfer embryos of one species into female ‘hatcheries’ of another species. For example, in 1981, a Holstein dairy cow at the Bronx Zoo in New York gave birth to a gaur, a member of a wild endangered species.

Reproductive engineers have these techniques available to them in applying the brothel model to animal reproduction.

Artificial insemination: The fresh or frozen sperm of a ‘superior’ male animal can be placed into a ‘gun’, the gun inserted into a rod and the rod inserted into a female animal for insemination.

Superovulation: Normally animals release (ovulate) only one egg a month. Reproductive engineers want many eggs ‘for efficient operation.’ (Murray, 1978: 292). Increased efficiency is possible because of the 1927 discovery that hormones produced by the pituitary gland affect the ovaries. It occurred to men that they could inject such hormones into a female and force the growth and ovulation of eggs from an abnormally large number of follicles—the small sacs which enclose the eggs. This is superovulation. Hormones can and experimentally have been used to force the immature ovaries of even newborn animals to produce eggs. Superovulation of very young and very old females can extend the period of their egg-production and hence, of their usefulness to brothel-management.

Estrus synchronisation: In order to transfer embryos, the reproductive cycles of ‘donor’ and recipient cows must be in accord so that when the donor ovulates and her uterus prepares itself for the implantation of a fertilized egg, the uterus of the recipient cow is also prepared to receive an egg. This can be done naturally or hormonally.

Ova recovery: After superovulating and inseminating the females, the fertilized eggs must be retrieved. Early collection techniques involved killing the females and cutting into their oviducts. ‘Slaughter of donor animals augments the consistency of egg recovery,’ researchers reported (Avery and Graham, 1982: 220). Later, they tried to recover the eggs surgically but frequently the females were left ‘problem breeders’. or even sterile due to surgical damage (Elsden, 1978). So men moved on to non-surgical methods. Using a two-way flow catheter, they flushed fluids into her uterus and collected those fluids, along with the eggs, in a receptacle. This is the method frequently used today.

Embryo evaluation: After recovery, men inspect the embryos under dissection microscopy, eliminating those considered unfit for transfer and ranking the acceptable ones according to quality.

Twining: Dr S. M. Willadsen has devised a method for dividing the embryo in half, producing identical twins—two animals from just one fertilized egg. An official of the International Embryo Transfer Society told me that the advantage of twinning is ‘that you double—relatively, easily, fast, cheaply—the number of embryos a valuable donor produces.’ Three sets of females can be used to produce the twins: the egg donors; the primary recipients in whose bodies the divided embryos are cultured; and the secondary recipients in whose bodies the embryos come to term. The animals need not be of the same species. Cows, pigs and sheep were used in various phases of one experiment on twinning (Willadsen, 1981).

Embryo transfer: Sometimes reproductive engineers transfer the embryo from the donor recipient non-surgically, inserting a catheter through the cervix to deposit the embryo in the uterus. More often, they transfer surgically because the resulting pregnancy rates (50 to 70 per cent) are better.

Cesarean section: When the pregnant cows approach full-term, veterinarians often perform cesarean sections on them ‘since the calves are usually large and the recipients are generally heifers of smaller breeds.’ (Seidel, 1975).

One pioneer in reproductive technology estimates that techniques for maturing and fertilizing eggs in the laboratory (in-vitro fertilization), twinning embryos and determining their sex will have commercial application before 1986 (Seidel, 1981: 324).

How does a female live on such a brothel-farm? The words of L. J. Taylor, export development manager for The Wall’s Meat Company Ltd, give some indication: ‘The breeding sow should be thought of, and treated as, a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine.’ Peter Singer and Jim Mason (Singer, 1975; Mason and Singer, 1980: 35), who quote these words, have described the life of the sow-machine on a factory farm. It consists of pregnancy, birth, watching her babies taken from her to be fattened for market, and then, endlessly, a repetition of the cycle: pregnancy, birth, loss of babies, insemination.

The sow is almost continually pregnant or nursing throughout her adult life. For at least ten months of every year, she is unable to walk around. After weaning, she has at most only a few days of comparative freedom before she is placed in a pen to
be, once again, serviced by a boar. When she is pregnant, she is placed in a 'gestation' building. Her stall is often little bigger than she is herself—two feet wide and six feet long. She may also be tethered by a collar around her neck. She is able to stand up and lie down but does not have enough room to turn around or to exercise at all. Except at feeding time, she lives in darkness. The lights are turned off to reduce the stress and excitement in the confinement system.

About a week before the birth, farmers move her to the 'farrowing' building where she may also be closely confined in order 'to keep her in position only to eat, drink, and keep her teats exposed to the young pigs.' (Mason and Singer, 1980: 11). In Britain and in other countries, she may be placed in the 'iron maiden,' a frame which prevents free movement.

As I have mentioned, many animals in a reproductive brothel, considered genetically unworthy, serve as breeders for the embryos of superior animals. This distinction between the genetically worthy and unworthy is likely to increase. Writing of one scheme to obtain large-scale genetic improvement in a herd, Dr Peter Eidsen of the Animal Reproduction Laboratory at Colorado State University noted that the top 10-20 per cent of the herd could be superovulated and used to produce many embryos while the bottom 90-80 per cent of the cows could be used as recipients for those embryos. 'Therefore, the lower two-thirds of the herd is being culled in regard to their own progeny, while the top one-third of the herd is producing four times as many progeny as normal since the average number of calves per superovulation treatment is four,' he wrote.

It is easy to dismiss the fate of animals as one entirely different from that of women. However, I do not believe women and animals inhabit such vastly different categories in a male supremacist world. Over centuries in many patriarchal lands, women and animals shared a common legal status. We were chattel, or moveable, animate property. Men owned slaves, cattle, concubines, beasts of burden, wives—all chattel. To this date, some laws in the United States retain common law concepts about ownership, possession and control of marital property which reflect the notion that women are economic chattel. Woman's status as sex and reproductive chattel remains in law and in practice today in the United States, as Dworkin observes. Even now, a man's 'marital right' to rape his wife is recognized in at least 37 states (Shulman, 1980).

Farmers now use female animals as breeders; numerous male commentators have discussed or predicted the creation of a class of professional women breeders (Davis, 1937; Westoff, 1978; Scott, 1981; Scott, 1981; Francoeur, 1970; Kieffer, 1979; Packard, 1979). This would be unthinkable were women acknowledged to have the same right to bodily integrity enjoyed by men.

With the development of the surrogate motherhood industry beginning in 1977, references to professional breeders are on the increase. (The surrogate industry is one which rents women's bodies for reproductive purposes. The woman is inseminated with the customer's sperm. She then gestates the resulting baby, births it, and, for a modest fee, turns it over to the customer.) Lawyers, physicians, legislators and ethicists write of 'institutionalising' surrogate motherhood. of the state regulating the women. of some agency certifying and licensing the mothers (Francoeur, 1970: 106; Keane and Breo, 1981: 233-267). Professional breeding could become commonplace. attorney Russell Scott writes, if 'healthy young host mothers' were offered not only a payment, but social security, educational facilities and other signs of public approval as well (Scott, 1981: 218). 'There are certainly enough women available to form a caste of childbearers, especially if the pay was right,' observes one bioethicist. He refers to an unemployed nurse who offered to bear a child for a California couple so she could take herself and her young daughter off welfare (Kieffer, 1979: 73).

Social commentator Vance Packard suggests that surrogacy would provide young women with an undemanding career. 'It would help if the hired mother was of an easygoing nature and enjoyed pregnancy and TV-watching,' he wrote. The women would no doubt be free to take on a physically undemanding extra job. (He suggests ticket selling at a movie theater.) If the 'mercy mother' were to gestate an embryo conceived with another woman's egg, the job should not require much of the surrogate 'in the way of education, family background, good looks, or even skin color. If the woman is simply to be an incubator. the price would certainly be lower than if she contributed half the baby's heredity.' In south Texas, he wrote, 'pleasant, conscientious Mexican-American girls' might leap at a fee of $5000 for bearing a child and girls (sic) south of the border might leap at half that fee. 'If lawyers can arrange Mexican divorces for Americans,' wrote Packard, 'they surely can arrange Mexican gestations.' (Packard, 1979: 268-269).

Fees paid to 'host mothers' would probably vary with the country. as several commentators have suggested. Mexican women would do it for less. When it becomes possible to transfer human embryos routinely from one woman to another (and it has already been done experimentally), then the way opens up to use Third World women to gestate babies for wealthier Westerners.

The president of a U.S. foundation which helps arrange surrogate pregnancies told me: 'If we could cross international lines, then $1000 is a significant sum of money, whereas here (in the U.S.), it's just a
week or a month's wages.' Asked what countries he had in mind, he replied: 'Central America would be fine.' It is 'inevitable' that the United States go to other parts of the world and 'rely on their support' in providing surrogate mothers, he thinks. Comparing the United States to the city and Central America to the country, he pointed out that 'the cities are always supported by the country.'

A Third World surrogate mother would not even need to be healthy. 'The mother could have a health problem which could be quite serious,' he said. 'However if her diet is good and other aspects of her life are o.k., she could become a viable mother for genuine embryo transfer.'

His foundation issues a quarterly directory containing pictures of North American women willing to serve as breeders. One photograph displays Number 36, 'Gabriel,' an attractive woman wearing a blouse with a low neckline. An entry describing each available women appears in the Spring 1982 Directory. An example:


Sometimes the reproductive prostitute is or was a sexual prostitute as well. In Britain a childless couple hired a 19-year-old prostitute for $5500 to bear a baby for them conceived through artificial insemination with the husband's sperm. The couple entered London's Bow Street Magistrate's Court. Sometimes the reproductive prostitute is or was a sexual prostitute as well. In Britain a childless couple hired a 19-year-old prostitute for $5500 to bear a baby for them conceived through artificial insemination with the husband's sperm. The couple entered London's Bow Street Magistrate's Court.

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GETTING EGGS

There are a number of ways engineers might recover or, as they term it, 'capture' eggs from women. They could flush them out of women using the technique developed by Drs Richard and Randolph Seed with the medical team at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. (The Seed brothers worked on egg flushing and embryo transfer for six years in cows before moving on to women. They had their first human success in 1983 when they established pregnancies through embryo transfer in two women in Torrance, California.) However, the Seeds' flushing procedure would probably not yield the necessary quantity of eggs. It is also unlikely that engineers would use two techniques employed experimentally in animals: placing tubular instruments inside the women's reproductive tracts and keeping them there permanently so eggs would pass into the instruments and out of the bodies; and relocating women's ovaries to make it easier to get at the eggs. These techniques had been 'found wanting' in animals and abandoned (Betteridge, 1981: 8).

Eggs are far more likely to be obtained by extracting them directly from the ovaries, a procedure which requires control over the female cycle. In Farm Journal in 1976, Earl Ainsworth, identifying the factor which prevented farmers from treating sows totally as machines, wrote: 'Estrus control will open the doors to factory hog production. Control of female cycles is the missing
link to the assembly-line approach.' (Mason and Singer, 1980: 19). The ‘missing link’ to the assembly-line, brothel approach to human reproduction is being forged in in-vitro fertilization clinics around the world where teams are working intensely to control the cycles of women.

In the brothel, on the appropriate days of their cycles, women would line up for Pergonal shots which will stimulate their ovaries. Engineers would superovulate only the top 10-20 per cent of the female population in the brothel. Then, after following the development of the eggs through ultrasound and blood tests, they would operate on the women to extract the eggs. Perhaps they would allow the women to heal from the operation every other month so that women would only be subjected to surgery six times per year.

To obtain eggs, engineers could also do what they now do with certain cows. When the championship cow Sabine 2A died in 1982 during a cesarean section, embryologists from the firm Genetic Engineering Inc. removed her ovaries, obtained 36 eggs from them, and froze the eggs. During her lifetime, Sabine's embryo's had been fetching $10,000 or more on the embryo transfer market and when the eggs from the dead Sabine are thawed and fertilized in in-vitro, they may fetch the same (Brotman, 1983). In the reproductive brothel, as a valuable woman dies, engineers could operate on her, remove her ovaries and salvage eggs from those ovaries, perhaps by using enzymes to eat away the connective tissue and release hundreds of thousands of eggs. They could then freeze the eggs for future in-vitro fertilization and transfer into a ‘non-valuable’ female. A woman could be used for reproduction long after she is dead.

Not only could dead women be used in reproductive brothels. So could women who were never born. A female embryo could be developed just to the point where an ovary emerges and then the ovary could be cultured so that engineers could get eggs from it. The full woman would never be allowed to develop. Just her ovary.

Partial ectogenesis—culturing organ rudiments from their earliest appearance to a mature state—is already well established as a technique used in certain biological studies. If various fragmented procedures reported by different scientists could be brought together and, in combination, used in one species, mature organs might soon be produced externally from a fertilized egg. Embryologist Dr Clifford Grobstein has predicted. One of the organs men have extensively investigated is the ovary. By maturing the ovary externally, Grobstein wrote, a supply of eggs for in-vitro fertilization could be provided without surgical intervention in a woman's body (Grobstein, 1981: 48).

MANIPULATING EGGS

Once the eggs have been recovered, reproductive engineers along the assembly line could manipulate them in a number of ways:

- Twin the embryos, producing two humans out of one embryo.
- Use the eggs of ‘non-valuable’ women for clones, destroying the egg nuclei with lasers and injecting the nuclei of valuable men.
- Remove the female genetic component from the egg and inject two sperm into the egg, producing a child with two fathers and no mother.
- Genetically engineer the embryo for various qualities. If ever partial or total ectogenesis were applied to human, it would be ‘no more than a game for the “manfarming biologist” to change the subject’s sex, the colour of its eyes, the general proportions of body and limbs, and perhaps the facial features,’ wrote biologist Jean Rostand, over-confidently (Rostand, 1959: 84).
- Fertilize the eggs in the laboratory using a culture media concocted from bits and pieces of women. ‘We made our culture fluids resemble the female reproductive tract by adding very small pieces of human uterus or Fallopian tube...’ wrote in-vitro fertilization pioneers Patrick Steptoe and R. G. Edwards (Edwards and Steptoe, 1980: 54). Another reproductive engineer used ‘minced fragments of [women’s] fallopian tubal mucosa.’ (Shettles, 1955).
- Select the sex of the embryo by fertilizing the egg with either gynosperm (female-engineering) or androsperm (male-engendering). Researchers are hard at work now trying to separate these two types of sperm. Should they fail, there is another way to predetermine the child’s sex. Engineers could snip a few cells off the fertilized egg to check its gender. Most female embryos could simply be discarded. The brothel administration would decide how many would be needed.

TRANSFERRED EMBRYOS

Once the embryo has been manufactured, reproductive engineers would have several options. They could freeze the embryo in the bank for later use. Or they could immediately transfer the embryo into a woman in the lower 80-90 per cent of the female population. These would be the breeders. The women who had been called ‘surrogate mothers’ in the early stage of reproduction revolution when engineers had been conscious of the need for good public relations.

The transferred embryo might gestate in the breeder for the entire nine-month pregnancy. When delivery time approached, the breeder would find no easy ‘birthing rooms’ in the brothel but rather an
assembly line. The descriptions women gave of the obstetrical experiences in American hospitals in the 1950s are likely to be as apt for the brothel of the future: 'They give you drugs, whether you want them or not, strap you down like an animal.' (p.44). 'Women are herded like sheep through an obstetrical assembly line, are drugged and strapped on tables while their babies are forceps-delivered.' (p.45). 'I felt exactly like a trapped animal . . . ' (Shultz, 1958. 1959).

Alternatively, engineers could transfer the embryo into a breeder, allow it to gestate for a certain number of months, and then remove the fetus by cesarean section at whatever point at which their incubators could take over. (Today that point is 21 weeks gestation.) In the incubator, they would perform surgery on the fetus, inoculate it or undertake whatever alterations they deemed desirable.

The breeder into whom an embryo is placed need not be alive. This possibility is suggested by several recent cases in which the bodies of the brain dead pregnant women were kept functioning until the fetus had developed enough to be delivered. In one case, a 27 year-old woman suffered a fatal seizure when she was 22-weeks pregnant. Her husband and other family members wanted the woman's body kept in operation until the fetus became viable. Physicians put her on a life-support system. Their section on her more than two months after she had been declared dead. Extracted a healthy baby and then removed the life-support apparatus. She stopped breathing. Relatives reportedly expressed 'a great deal of pleasure' at the birth (Star-Ledger, 1983).

The experience left me with real confidence that this can be done without any great difficulties . . . . In the future, I'll suggest to family members that the option is there.' Dr Russell K. Laros Jr of the department of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco, said (OGN, 1983: 2).

(Immediately over the Newark Star-Ledger's account of the birth—Brain Dead Woman Gives Birth—appeared a photograph of smiling parents holding their infants, the nation's first test-tube twins.)

Perhaps in the distant future, few women, dead or alive, will be required. If reproductive engineers have developed an artificial womb, they might place the cultured embryo directly into The Mother Machine.

The reproductive brothel is one possible institution within which which men might control women, or various groups of women, in the future. Other scenarios involving use of the new technologies are also conceivable. Women need to grapple with this issue. Jalna Hanmer has urgently called for: (1) a series of meetings within feminist movements around the world on what action to take, (2) an international feminist network to monitor developments in these new reproductive technologies and (3) an International Tribunal on Medical Crimes Against Women. I add my voice, urgently, to hers.

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