



**The new reproductive technologies and
female infertility:
liberal, radical and poststructuralist
feminist approaches**

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Declaration

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I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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ABSTRACT

In pronatalist Western culture motherhood is defined as the primary role and responsibility of women. In such a society female infertility is constructed through medical discourse and popular media as a problem - more specifically as a medical problem for which medical technology is the only answer. Such a view is supported by the discourse of reproductive liberalism which promotes the NRTs as liberating for women because they supposedly increase the options and choices available, therefore allowing women greater self-determination, autonomy and control. Radical feminists, particularly those associated with the FINRRAGE organisation, vehemently disagree with reproductive liberals arguing instead that because the NRTs are designed within a patriarchal system they are exploitative, not only of the women directly involved, but also of women worldwide. FINRRAGE writers and others argue the 'choices' offered by the NRTs are coercive and culturally forced and therefore reduce women's autonomy and self-determination. Through international networking and information sharing radical feminists aim to actively resist the increasing medicalisation of women's lives. The following literature review highlights the main issues associated with the liberal and radical arguments and attempts to go some way towards grasping how the two theoretical stances can arrive at such disparate conclusions about the NRTs. The section following this discusses some of the difficulties associated with the radical feminist perspective on the NRTs, especially the concept of 'patriarchy' and the essentialising tendencies of radical feminist theory. I then outline the benefits of poststructuralism in general, and then attempt to use a deconstructive approach in order to examine one of the more interesting aspects of infertility. That is, the popular construction of 'infertility-as-crisis' and the 'desperation' for a baby which results from this. I conclude by briefly suggesting how poststructuralist theory when used in relation to debate on the new reproductive technologies can be useful for feminist politics.