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A FEMINIST ETHIC THAT BINDS US TO MOTHER EARTH

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The scholarly literature is replete with theories and philosophical perspectives on feminist ethics, including feminist ethics founded in ecology or environmentalism. This essay contributes to the ongoing discussion about what constitutes a feminist ethic. My purpose in this paper is to endorse the position that any feminist ethic is necessarily an ecofeminist ethic, one that is tied to the sustainability of the planet. Feminist scholars and philosophers have paid heed to the need for ethics and practices that tie humanity to the Earth, not as separate beings, but as part of the Earth community. Nel Noddings' proposed *ethic of caring* is a central theme in this discussion. Noddings' ideas about a caring ethic are tied to the projects of feminist philosophers and activists who endorse the perspectives known as *ecological feminism* and *ecofeminism*, weaving the perspectives into a feminist ethic of care that binds humanity to Mother Earth.

What we call natural and what we call human
are inseparable. We live one life.
—Stewart Brand (2009)

Why is Earth supposedly a mother? Cuomo (1998, 7) suggested a historic association with the connection of woman and Earth as "providers of life, sustenance, and creativity." Norgaard (1999, 202) wrote that there is a "connection between women's fertility and the fertility of the land." Women are oriented toward relationships and interdependence whereas men approach problems with principles, reasoning, and judgments (199).

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Are these generalizations? Undoubtedly, yes. Yet it is sometimes helpful to start with the general and then fuse new meanings and perspectives from such traditional beliefs.

I believe the way forward begins with embracing the energies of the feminine and the masculine—designations rooted in human biology, irrespective of how gender manifests. This perspective is an underlying assumption I make, recognizing the gender spectrum[1] and that gender inequity is problematic; but we inhabit a society dominant in the male–female binary. The assumption is not "body-based," as Archambault cautioned against (1993, 19); it is based on an affirmation of the female as life-giving, and on the recognition that none of us is here but for the life granted us by a female, by a woman. It is an assumption of celebration for the life-giving capacity of women as foundational to the ethic I am proposing, and an assumption that recognizes and celebrates gender as a diverse spectrum of lived realities that extend beyond the dualism of man and woman.

I am a woman. I am a Métis person; middle-class, middle-aged. My position is that a shared ethic, based on ecofeminism and caring, can unite humanity in the preservation of Mother Earth. In this essay, my focus is on the possibilities of an ecofeminist ethic of caring that is practiced beyond constraints of gender, real or perceived. Further, I argue that leadership practiced on a foundation of an ecofeminist ethic of care ensures the sustainability of Mother Earth, and possibly of humanity. I intend to invigorate the ecofeminist scholarship, making the ecofeminist–caring ethic connection clear.

Using Noddings' ethic of care, I consider the paradigm of ecofeminism through the writing of feminist scholars and then develop their notions of ecofeminist practice into an ethical stance, an ethic of care that binds us to Mother Earth in holistic and responsible ways. Unlike Biehl, who, in a very broad stroke, dismissed ecofeminism as "so blatantly contradictory as to be incoherent" (Biehl 1991, 3), I find compatibility between ecofeminism and an ethic of care. Challenged by Biehl, I immersed myself in ecofeminist literature: the ideas, the rebuttals, and the comebacks. I encountered opinions about the absolute necessity of vegetarianism and then on the privilege of vegetarianism. Some authors celebrated woman/nature; others rejected it outright, fearful that such an association would keep us women in our place. Archambault offered a unifying principle of the ecofeminist perspective, which was that "ecofeminists seem to

agree that female traits such as caring and nurturing should be part of an ecofeminist environmental ethics" (1993, 20).

Warren embraced the ecofeminist philosophy and endorsed an "inclusivist, integrative framework" for mediating dualistic frameworks, one where gender is unifying rather than divisive (2000, 165). Warren's framework validates the feminine and the masculine and celebrates, rather than refutes, the reference of Earth as incarnate female. It is important to emphasize that a binary of gender that is expressed as feminine or masculine is limited (though dominant) given that gender is a spectrum along which identity is located. Butler stated that "gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place" (2004, 42). Stets and Burk described femininity and masculinity as "rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological (one's sex)," and added that "societal members decide what being male or female means" (2000, 1). *Feminine* is used in this paper in the way that Noddings used the term: as a signpost directing attention to "centuries of experience more typical of women than men" (Noddings 2003, xvi). *Feminine* also refers to women's ways once honoured in matrilineal systems (Native Women's Association of Canada 2007, 2). This is not a reductionist view, not a gynocentric view, not a dualistic view. It arises from the life-giving, life-affirming legends of the First Nations people of British Columbia, where the lesson taught through legend is "the value of respect for our relatives, including Mother Earth who feeds us in the circle of life. This shows that all beings are interconnected" (First Nations Health Authority 2013, 2). There is recognition that extends beyond dualism—to the inclusion of all, as in the closure of traditional First Nations prayers with "*all my relations,*" the acknowledgement of all things living: animals, plants and food, and humans; all imbued with, or inhabited by spirits, great and small. There is recognition of Earth as the giver of all life, the Mother. Regrettably, the view of oneness with Earth has been severed from or lost in mainstream society. The parts now are greater than the whole, with some parts greater than others; the consequence of which is separation, myriad dysfunctional dualistic interfaces, subjugation, and breakdown. Can the energy of the feminine be called upon to restore wholeness?

Notions of what masculine and feminine are have been shaped throughout time, becoming somewhat fixed, somewhat archetypal, and, at times, caricatures. Without entering into the history behind the binary attribution of gender, I will use *feminine* as described by Nod-

dings—"rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness" (2003, 2). In taking a celebratory stance on traits associated with the female, I have to ask *why not?* Noddings described feminine as a "mode of experience" (xvi) rather than as an essential characteristic. Noddings believed women may be better suited to her proposed ethic of care partly as "a result of the construction of psychological deep structures in the mother–child relationship" (97). It is the space between mother/parent and child that holds the potential power of caring. That energy is a powerful thing.

The capacity of women to give birth, to be a mother, perpetuates the circle of life. That is not to say that the potential for childbearing is some invisible ordinance, an expectation that all women want to, can, or will bear children. It is not to suggest that motherhood equates to self-actualization, or to the fulfillment of life. Reverence is accorded to motherhood as a powerful thing in alignment with the reverence shown for life-giving and with Mother Earth as the encompassing Mother by First Nations peoples for centuries. Rather than a refutation of the feminine, the recognition is a tribute to the capacity of women as life-givers. Noddings' ethic of care, in part, emanates from the potential caring bond between a mother and child. The possibility inherent in motherhood can be a powerful thing.

Kheel acknowledged times when "nature [was] viewed as a nurturing Mother who freely offered her beauty to humans" (2009, 45–50). Although Kheel (1993, 243) claimed that "many ecofeminists…have consciously sought to reclaim" images of Mother Earth, the Earth-as-mother metaphor has not had universal endorsement. Biehl, a strong critic of ecofeminism, asserted that "such associations were created by patriarchal and patricentric cultures to debase women" (1991, 13). Still, the metaphor of Mother Earth persists, and the roles of nurturer and caretaker manifest in our views of Earth and of women. First Nations cultures revered Mother Earth, considering themselves part of the whole. In some First Nations cultures, generations followed matrilineal lines: Women were keepers of wealth, medicine, and power, caring for their families and communities (Native Women's Association of Canada 2007, 2). We are led to believe that women, like Mother Earth, are caretakers.

Plumwood linked the domination of women to the domination of nature, where "nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature" (1994b, 4). Exclusion and control are exercised in the form of racism, colonialism, and sexism, drawing their

"conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial, and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture" (4). The manifestation of exclusion and control is dualism, where woman/nature/race is under the dominion of a dominant, patriarchal society. The *feminine,* Plumwood says, is devalued. The way forward, according to Plumwood, is to amend deep-rooted dualistic thinking: "The master culture must now make its long-overdue homecoming to the earth. This is no longer simply a matter of justice, but now also a matter of survival" (6). Plumwood recounts stereotypical attributes associated with women and suggests they are merely romantic notions. Her advice to ecofeminists generally is to discard the entrenched dualisms and embark on a "third way [in which] both men and women are part of both nature and culture" (36). Plumwood urged the adoption of a *critical* ecofeminism, anti-dualistic in its views and practices; an "integrative project," mindful of all liberation struggles (36). To include the *feminine* need not be construed as dualistic, nor reductionist. Rather, the use of *feminine* is to emphasize one prism in a multifaceted lens on the world, where the potential of women is realized, nullifying a dualistic male–female split. Embracing the feminine, rather than rejecting it, may serve a better future.

Noddings used the notion of caring to propose an extensive ethic of care. Noddings (2003, 9) asked, "What does it mean to care?" Her stance was that caring emerges from a feminine origin but is not the domain of women only: "An ethic built on caring is…characteristically and essentially feminine—which is not to say, of course, that it cannot be shared by men" (8). Noddings embraces the *feminine,* and then she celebrates femininity in both women and men, laying a foundation of hopeful possibilities for ethical caring. In this discussion, I will merge Noddings' ethic with ecofeminism, and speak to all others, inclusively.

The discussion concludes with the assertion that in an ecofeminist ethic of care lies the hope for this planet, our Mother Earth (as a gesture of reverence for the literal and metaphoric Mother Earth, I will refer to Earth using the uppercase "E" throughout my paper). In subtle but powerful ways, all life on Earth is bound in one continuous homeostatic relationship, in interdependent ways. Sustaining life and sustaining the Earth is a tremendous responsibility for humanity. Leaders play a role in how the homeostasis is to be maintained. For leaders, there is much hope and guidance in an ecofeminist ethic of care.

TERMS: ETHICS, ECOLOGICAL FEMINISM, AND ECOFEMINISM

Ethics, according to Deigh (1999, 284), concerns the "philosophical study of morality." Further, ethics considers "the general study of goodness…of right action, applied ethics, metaethics, moral psychology, and the metaphysics of moral responsibility" (284). My quest is to pursue an ethical position that is based in goodness, right action, and moral responsibility. I attempt to create a very clear definition of *feminist* ethics, seeking input from scholars and weaving in my beliefs about what makes an ethic feminist and why such an ethic is necessarily inclusive of all genders.

The Cambridge Dictionary offers a definition of *feminist philosophy,* a philosophy that "refuses to identify the human experience with the male experience" (Audi 1999, 305). This rather emphatic statement does not align with the feminist worldview as I understand it, one in which the female–male binary is embraced and expanded upon, not divisive. I do not believe that, as Audi suggests, it is useful to refute the male experience. Instead, a definition of feminist philosophy or feminist ethics must recognize gender inclusively, and then promote harmony and cooperation in creating a better world.

Tong and Williams offered a broader and more articulate definition of feminist ethics, explained as "an attempt to revise, reformulate, or rethink traditional ethics to the extent it depreciates or devalues women's moral experience" (2009, para. 1). The definition offered by Tong and Williams does not espouse gender as *the problem,* but suggests the inequity women bear while inviting a reconceptualization of women's experiences. These authors elaborated further and specifically identified "proponents of feminist care ethics, including Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings [who] stress that traditional moral theories, principles, practices, and policies are deficient to the degree they lack, ignore, trivialize, or demean values and virtues culturally associated with women" (para. 1). Noddings' ethic of care is an ethic "that valorizes the virtues and values traditionally linked to women…[with an insistence] that men can and should be carers" (Tong and Williams 2009, para. 1) as much as women can be and are. Noddings, according to Tong and Williams, broadened the definition of feminist ethics to be inclusive of both women and men. With Noddings' invitation for inclusion of both genders, and extending the invitation to all, consideration now turns to her ethic of care and the link to ecofeminist theory or ecological feminism.

Ecological feminism, according to Warren (1994, 1), is an "umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections *within* social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions." Under the umbrella of ecological feminism is a more explicit analysis of "so-called 'women-nature connections'—historical, empirical, conceptual, religious, literary, political, ethical, epistemological, methodological and theoretical connections on how one treats women and the earth" (1). According to Brammer (1998), the term *ecofeminism* was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who called upon women to lead an ecological movement. The merging of ecological concerns with feminism became known as *ecofeminism*. Mann defined ecofeminism as "the diverse range of women's efforts to save the Earth, as well as…the transformations in feminist thought that have resulted in new conceptualizations of the relationship between women and nature" (2011, 1). The terms *ecological feminism* and *ecofeminism* have been used interchangeably, the latter term evolving from the former two-word concept.

Warren authored the core assumptions of ecofeminism (1996). Warren noted that first, "nothing can become part of a feminist ethic…that promotes social domination," because this position is "anti-naturist" (30). Additionally, ecofeminism "is a *contextualist* ethic…which sees ethical discourse and practice as emerging from the voices of people located in different historical circumstances" (Warren 1996, 30). Thus, ecofeminism is not based on "rights, or rules…[but on] what makes them relevant or important" (32). From Warren's initial positions on ecofeminist philosophy, perspectives emerge. The ecofeminist ethic promotes equality between groups of people, between genders, and between humanity and nature. Ecofeminism recognizes and values innate differences, the *context* to which Warren referred. Following the principles of equity and context, Warren asserted that no one group's needs trump another's via the oft-heralded "rights" proclamation. Warren suggested that a rights-based stance is questionable; instead, she seemed to imply that "it depends." In these initial core assumptions of ecofeminist practice, context is a significant informant.

Further, Warren asserted that a feminist ethic "must be structurally pluralistic rather than unitary or reductionist," recognizing that there are variations in the expression and exercise of feminist ethics (1996, 31).

The diversity of views is meant to encompass multiple viewpoints, which she claimed must be "respectfully acknowledged" (33). From the core assumption that diversity must be respected, Warren granted that generalizations may be made about feminist ethics but suggested that consistent patterns would emerge in time.

What troubled Warren, Plumwood, and other feminist scholars is how dualistic thinking became entrenched in ways that served misogynistic and capitalist agendas. Warren discussed the "logic of domination," which stems from oppressive frameworks, that "justifies domination and subordination" (2000, 47) —her recognition of the aberrant logic of making "some more equal than others" (Orwell, 1945, 112). Explaining the ecofeminist philosophy she argued for, Warren offered that her hope was for "a version of ecofeminist philosophy that provides both critical analyses of and creative solutions to the intersecting practices, policies and structures of unjustified ('isms'of) domination" (2002, 40). My hope is similar to Warren's in that I recognize the intersecting patterns of oppression and yearn to articulate an ecofeminist stance that elevates the *feminine* from the mire of dualistic thinking that has resulted in a selective logic of domination, privileging some, quashing others.

Warren advocated for inclusion as the basis for ensuring that all "the felt experiences and perspectives of oppressed persons" are acknowledged (1996, 31). Following the principle of inclusion, Warren's sixth core assumption is that a feminist ethic "is a social ecology [that] cannot be objective…or unbiased" because in the face of bias, the ethical position of inclusion ensures multiple, diverse perspectives (31). Warren's assumptions lead to the idea that every voice is important and needs to be heard, even in the face of subjective beliefs or historic belief systems. Belief systems may be biased, but they will be recognized on equal footing with all others. This position aligns with Warren's first assumption, which rejects social domination.

Warren's seventh assertion is that a feminist ethic is a place for underrepresented values, such as "values of care" (1996). Like Noddings, Warren placed value on caring and on relationships. Echoing Noddings, Warren wrote that "relationships are not something extrinsic to who we are; they play an essential role in shaping what it is to be human" (33). Reviewing Warren's core assumptions of ecofeminism foreshadows Noddings' standpoint, one that conveyed acceptance of human/societal con-

ditions and realities, including the essential nature of much of what is, embracing a prism of lived humanity; each prism unique and valid in its own right, its individual essence. Neither author insisted on a dualistic, either/or perspective on humankind. Neither author insisted that the way forward is to diminish what is female. Both seemed to be setting their sights on the way forward, given what is. From both authors, I gleaned acceptance of the feminine, as well as encouragement for women to continue to be change agents and leaders of change.

From Warren's perspective, "feminists *must* embrace ecological feminism" (1996, 34). Tong asked whether the ethics of ecofeminism are "a new philosophy or ancient wisdom" (1998, 251). Griffin wrote:

> We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature. (1978, 226)

Griffin bound humanity to Earth, in physical and psychological ways, claiming we are one with nature. Warren urged the adoption of ecofeminist practice as a social justice construct or a means to resist oppression; both perspectives help to convey what is meant by ecofeminist ethics.

THE ETHIC OF CARING

Noddings (2003, 1) introduced her view on caring as a departure from contemporary models of philosophy, which she said were typically "guided by…the masculine spirit." She located her view on caring "in practical ethics from the feminine view [and from] the very wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response" (3). Noddings stated that "relation will be taken as ontologically basic and the caring relation as ethically basic" (3). The claim Noddings rested her case on was that female moral reasoning differs from that of men (McLaren 2001, 102). Noddings explained the rationale for focusing on caring, as well as the reciprocity she suggested is inherent in caring. Noddings described the essence of caring: from the perspective of the one caring, to the perspective of the one receiving care, and then what emanates in the caring relationship. She maintained that "the freedom, creativity and spontaneous disclosure of the cared-for that manifest themselves under the nurture of the one-caring complete the relation [and this is] genuine reciprocity" (Noddings 2003, 44). In other words, both caregiver and the one cared for

benefit and flourish in their interaction. Noddings detailed the ideal caring relationship and the possibility of joy in the caring relationship.

Noddings did not make an overt declaration of an ecological or ecofeminist stance. Instead, she suggested that humans' ethical behavior toward plants and animals is "only through them and not toward them" (2003, 162). Noddings asserted that "there is no absolute source of life, meaning and morality that separates the species neatly according to some preordained value hierarchy" (148). An ethic of caring includes a domain that "reaches beyond our relations with human beings to those we may establish with animals" (149). Noddings' rationale was: "[I]f I care for human beings, I must not defoliate their forests, poison their soils, or destroy their crops" (160). Unfortunately, Noddings' "nod" toward an ecofeminist lens is limited. Having made the claims cited here, she seemed to take a step back when she concluded that "there is no true ethical relation between humans and plants because the relation is logically one-sided" (170). Her view of the environment seemed to reside in its worth only in relation to human need, and not to value nature in and of itself. In this way, Noddings' compatibility with an ecofeminist view is only partial.

Important to this discussion is Noddings' (2003) own caveat regarding her philosophy. Her suggestions for an ethic of care "are not intended as fully developed plans for action.... They are an invitation to dialogue and not a challenge to enter battle" (6). Additionally, she declared, "[I]t should be clear that my description of an ethic of caring as a feminine ethic does not imply a claim to speak for all women nor to exclude men" (97). These statements are inclusive, promoting a worldview that embraces all humanity and one that is consistent with the ecofeminist paradigm I propose. The tone or attitude conveyed by Noddings could be called matter-of-fact; she neither embraced nor refuted a dualistic argument pitting women over men as superior somehow, nor did she bemoan the tragedies of patriarchal culture. This is where Noddings' ethic of care ties in with an integrative ecofeminist perspective, recommended by Plumwood, who argued for an alternative: an integrative project in which "both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" (Plumwood 1994, 36). Similarly, Noddings' approach is a third way, where she lays gender aside and fo-

cuses her attention on the space between people: the relationship, which is the wellspring of her ethic of caring.

TIES THAT BIND: CARING AND RESPONSIBILITY

It is possible to conceive of an intersection between an ethic of care and ecofeminist ethics based on a common assertion of relatedness. According to Tong, ecofeminist scholars have made some very specific observations about human interactions with nature (1998). Tong explained her understanding of the ecofeminist viewpoint in terms of human relationships with the non-human, and said that in the ecofeminist worldview, it is possible to "overcome the nature–culture split" and form genuine relationships with the non-human, whether mountain or animal" (266). Tong's explanation is akin to what Noddings described as *reciprocity.* There is, by Tong's account, an interaction and an interdependence between human and nature. This emphasis on relatedness or relationship is a clear intersection of an ethic of caring and the ethics of ecofeminist thought. Noddings' ethic includes a celebration of the feminine.

For Noddings and Warren, there is strength to be found in acknowledging and validating the female aspect of womankind. Noddings introduced her philosophy thus: "[T]he view to be expressed here is a feminine view…. It is feminine in the deep classical sense—rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness" (2003, 2). Noddings validated the *feminine* overtly, whereas Warren's validation was implied when she said that one of the tasks of the ecofeminist movement was to "take seriously the voices of women" in the construction of ethics (1996, 35). Again, the symmetry between their projects is evident. Both value the relational aspect of ethics; by both scholars' accounts, relationship is the essence of the ethical standpoints and, further, the *feminine* presence is important.

The feminine qualities endorsed by Noddings and Warren as essential are not endorsed by other feminist scholars. Critics of the *feminine* in feminist scholarship argue that ongoing constructs that divide or maintain dualistic thinking are themselves oppressive. Hassan rejected Noddings' endorsement of typical female qualities and said that woman is "caught in the role of a subservient person, caring for others but not for herself [and therefore is at risk] of not becoming fully morally developed" (2008, 161). Casting woman as natural and earthy, and abundant in typified female qualities, has the ironic capacity to maintain the misogynistic

mindset that prevails. Li asserted that such a view props up a hierarchical social structure that "is rooted in dualistic ideology…which stresses separation, polarization, and detachment between sexes, classes, and human and nonhuman beings" (2007, 353). Li summarized three categories of feminist essentialism. The first type of feminist essentialism attributes women's psychological and social experiences to fixed, unchanging traits resident in women's physiology. Universalism, the second type of essentialism, takes the patterns visible in one's time and place to be accurate for all. The third type of essentialism is the constitution of unified categories, which entails any unified set of attributes or descriptors regarding the terms *woman* and *man* (355). Used as a category, gender can become a gross overgeneralization, or a fixed trait, that is limiting for those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, queer, transgendered, female or male.

Li objected to simplistic reductions, and instead endorsed "cultural pluralism" as a lens for ecofeminism, which she argued would enhance an understanding that people and nature are neither fixed nor unchangeable (2007, 355). Li argued that women cannot be reduced to a static set of characteristics and cannot be described in universal terms, and that gender cannot be neatly split into female/male. Cultural pluralism, according to Li, permits variation and accounts for the wide range of diversity in people and in nature. She found further agreement in Plumwood, who urged feminists to abandon dualistic paradigms. Plumwood also challenged the view that "privileged humans over animals" (2000, 293). Instead, the perspective Plumwood endorsed was one in which all humanity should be "subject to the conditions and narratives of ecological life…in a chain of reciprocity" (294). Cultural pluralism offers recognition of differences, and at the same time it permits celebration of the relationships that bind people with one another and with nature. Through the lens of cultural pluralism, ecofeminism is understood as a practice for everyone, again, support for an ecofeminist philosophy that is inclusivist. Cultural pluralism was not explicit in Noddings' apparent worldview, as she espoused an ethic from women's point of view over men's; however, she did claim a "fundamental universality" (2003, 5), on which I broaden her argument to be applicable to all, not to just a dialectic definition of gender.

Noddings (2003, 44) asked some provocative gender-focused questions, such as, "Why do men so often lay out their own clear paths to tragedy?" She asked the question in response to an ancient story in which a duty-bound father planned to execute his son because that penalty was

law. Noddings seemed to be pointing toward the relevance of context and the need to think carefully and be flexible through the walks of life. Noddings posited that "history, legend, and biography might profitably be reinterpreted in light of feminine experience. Both men and women may participate in the 'feminine' as I am developing it," which is an interesting position for Noddings to take, given her allegiance to "an ethic built on caring [that is] characteristically and essentially feminine" (44). I focus on the former statement rather than the latter to propose an ecofeminist ethic of care in which pluralism plays a central role.

AN ECOFEMINIST ETHIC OF CARE: WHAT IS IT?

Necessarily, an ecofeminist ethic of care is inclusive. That is, the framework moves beyond the dualistic and un-serving female–male paradigm. This is not to ungender language as suggested by Weedon (1997); it is to move past a divisive binary where the possibility of caring for this Earth is left up to, or best tended to, by women-as-leaders. Cuomo stated that "a central position grounding ecofeminism is the belief that values, notions of reality, and social practices are related, and that forms of oppression and domination, however historically and culturally distinct, are interlocked and enmeshed" (1998, 1). Lykke aptly identified the "non-innocent intersections" of feminism and ecological/environmental issues, acknowledging "the ways in which power differentials…mutually interact," as well as the "profound consequences for political agendas and priorities" (2009, 36). Lykke and Cuomo, among many others, recognize that oppression exists in several, interrelated ways, and that addressing situations of oppression and domination must often be an exertion of simultaneous efforts. The complexity of intersectionality, domination, and my tenuous hope for solutions reinforces my perspective that gender has simultaneously divided and bound female with male, humanity with nature, but in multifaceted, not dualistic ways. Paradoxically, the relationships have been and continue to be dysfunctional at times, but linked in inextricable ways.

Pronouns shift in response to the enmeshment Cuomo recognized. If oppression and patriarchy have diminished humanity, it is time to cooperatively address the issues that entangle female/male in unhealthy ways. No longer does *she* bear responsibility for fixing the Earth-damage of *him*. It becomes *our* responsibility; it is up to *us; we* all have to take responsibility from here on. D'Souza did not overtly reject dualistic thinking, but

posited "an integration of the masculine and feminine, with a reminder that rationality and intuition are two modes of perception, two ways of knowing that are not independent of each other, not oppositional, but two points of a single whole" (1989, 38). Other women, other scholars look beyond the female/male binary to a shared responsibility for addressing ecological issues.

With respect to male roles and responsibilities, Norgaard termed males' nurturing behaviours as "life affirming relational masculinity" (1999, 208). In Norgaard's descriptive term, masculinity is valued, and there is recognition that men/males, like women/females, have relational ties to the Earth. Male-female is understood as the continuum of gender expression and realities; the *basket* that contains all humanity's presence. Male-female is the honored, encompassing term for every lived expression of personhood. Joining the triad of male/female/nature vis-à-vis an ecofeminist ethic of caring has many implications for living whole and for leadership, where interdependence, relationship, and caring are central tenets.

Viewpoints about what constitutes a feminist ethic abound and include definitive ideas about the definitions of both *feminist* and *ethics*. What does it mean to be a woman? A man? A transgender person? A queer? What does it mean to be/act/do feminism? What is ecofeminism? These questions all arise when considering the viewpoints of ecofeminist writers. For some feminist scholars, the way forward includes a refutation of current definitions of gender along with the separation of feminist scholarship from ecological scholarship. I position myself more practically, in alignment with Noddings and Warren: *Everyone* is welcome to the challenge of preserving this Earth, and salvation of the Earth equates to the salvation of humanity, in all our disparate and desperate forms. Gruen and Weil added that "feminists have been working to bridge gaps between reason/emotion, human/animal, man/woman, and self-other in part by challenging the legitimacy of the binaries" (2012, 479). The ethical framework I propose is focused on the future of humanity. An ecofeminist ethic of care transcends gender at the same time that it acknowledges and celebrates gender. Simply, an ecofeminist ethic of care is about the mutual interdependence of all life on Earth. An ecofeminist ethic of care is necessary for leaders: The sustainability of the planet is reliant on their stewardship.

LEADERSHIP INFORMED BY AN ECOFEMINIST ETHIC OF CARE

Leadership that focuses on the future and that ties humanity to the Earth has practical implications. Leadership that maintains such a focus is well informed by an ecofeminist ethic of care, binding Noddings' ethic of caring with the ecofeminist paradigm. Leadership can be practiced within the ecofeminist ethic of care in many ways. With intentional persistence, leadership practice that is imbued with an ethic of care can be responsive to all forms of oppressive dualisms, the intersectionality of injustices. The traits that inform such a leadership style are inclusion, leadership that is distributed formally and informally, a future orientation, mutuality, spirituality, and activism.

The underlying premise of leadership practice based on a foundation of an ecofeminist ethic of care is that all are equally able and equally responsible for caring and for ecological concerns. Imagining such a world, and through the now-merged lens of *ecofeminist caring,* humanity, Earth resources, and sociopolitical forces are seen as interdependent, with care being implicit in thoughts and actions. Implicit in this ethic is caring for children and for future generations. Based on the principle of inclusion, gender is understood in all its diversity: lesbian, bi, gay, queer, transgender, female, and male. Representation in leadership is deliberately equitable. No one has dominion over others, and responsibility is shared as cooperative efforts to preserve the planet emerge. Norgaard (1999, 208) claimed that "all people need to view themselves as holding the potential" to tackle ecological issues. Norgaard was emphatic in her position that dualistic viewpoints maintained gender relations in "us versus them" dichotomies that serve only an unproductive status quo. Progress and hope for the future are reliant on leadership's becoming a shared social enterprise.

The orientation toward the future has implications for leadership practice. Future-oriented leaders are stewards of organizations, of land, of development, and of the Earth. This perspective aligns with traditional First Nation views. McGregor explained that

> The relationship with Creation and its beings was meant to be maintained and enhanced, and the knowledge required for this to occur was passed on for generations and over thousands of years. The responsibilities that one assumed were part of ensuring the continuation of Creation—what academics, scientists, and environmentalists might today call sustainability. (2006, 4)

Thus, leaders who uphold sustainability must be oriented to three spheres of time: the past, the present, and perhaps most importantly, the future. Leaders, as stewards of organizations, consider what they leave—what their contribution, and thus their legacy, will be. Leaders, as stewards of communities, must help protect the environment for the present generation and for the generations to come. Kouzes and Posner (1996, 99–100) averred that the "legacy you leave…[is] both individually and collectively, for the fate of a community." Sustainability, as a goal of leadership, fosters new institutions or social movements that continue "to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone" (Burns 1978, 454). Sustainability becomes a necessary aim from an ecofeminist leadership stance.

Leadership, practiced through an ecofeminist ethic of caring, consciously enacts the concentric "circles and chains" described by Noddings (2003, 46). Thoughts and actions may start with a leader but then radiate outward toward others, through the organization, to the community, the country, and then the planet in ever-extending and interconnected rings. This style of leadership goes beyond the immediate and considers the ramifications outside the presenting problem, as well as what benefits or costs are embedded in solutions. Wheatley referred to this aspect of leadership as "living our interconnectedness" (2007, 204). The ecofeminist, caring leader must consider every action and its potential impact on the organization, on the environment, and on other people.

Spirituality, described briefly by Noddings as "feeling with the other [and] responsiveness," is another aspect of leadership (2003, 185). Spirituality may manifest in many ways, such as respecting diverse beliefs, not imposing one's own belief system on others, and understanding that spirituality and religion are two different things. Such understandings inform workplaces, communities, and interactions with others and their lands.

Another aspect of leading that must be included is activism. Leadership grounded in an ecofeminist ethic of caring cannot be benign; it must include intentional, sometimes public action that is aimed at improving environmental conditions and achieving social justice. Burns wrote that often the goal of leadership is "comprehensive social change" (1978, 418). Activism may include advocating for recycling programs, embracing recycling as a personal mission, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, protecting human rights, joining organizations that protect sacred land or

treasured forests, or any number of actions that aim for sustainability and equity. An ecofeminist ethic of caring suggests that "we are all in this together" and that all humans share the responsibility for doing things differently. Leaders must activate others, agitate persistently, and aspire to be change agents. Leadership, in this lens, moves from the job and the office and becomes a way of being. Leadership becomes less positional and more prevalent as a shared human characteristic; thus, leadership and activism have the potential to infiltrate society when diligently aligned and practiced within an ecofeminist ethic of care. Gaard endorsed the premise of ecofeminism—one helpful to leaders in addressing "global gender justice; climate justice; sustainable agriculture; healthy and affordable housing; universal and reliable health care…food security…energy justice; diverse and inclusive educational curricula; religious freedom from fundamentalisms; indigenous rights; the production and disposal of hazardous wastes; and more" (2011, 44). Gaard found much utility in the ecofeminist project. Similarly, I find promise in ecofeminism for addressing the many intersecting problems that have arisen in oppressive, patriarchal, capitalist societies. The element of care must be highlighted in discussions of leadership, at every level.

CONCLUSIONS

With the discussion in this essay, I proposed a consolidation of two constructs—Noddings' ethic of care and ecological feminism—thereby forming an *ecofeminist ethic of caring*. Noddings reminded us, "[W]e in this century have seen sufficient horror induced in the name of obedience [that] we should unceasingly work toward…a thorough examination of laws and rules" (2003, 201). Noddings' ethic seemed to go beyond imposed constructs and to the core of what it is to be human. Thus, it is practical to acknowledge and celebrate the *feminine* both in traditional meanings and through a contemporary understanding of *feminine* as characteristics that are not the sole domain of women. That was the stance implied by Noddings.

Noddings urged consideration for her philosophy when she wrote that she wanted to discuss "the ethical ideal, that vision of best self, in some depth" (2003, 80). Noddings continued, "When we commit ourselves to obey the 'I must' even at its weakest and most fleeting, we are under the guidance of this ideal." Noddings' ethic of caring, therefore, is

a disposition one *must* adhere to as a moral code. She endorsed the view that "something must be done [over] I must do something" and in that position invited everyone to participate in an ethic of caring (81). This philosophy is not about rights; it is about responsibilities.

Ecofeminism, a complementary philosophy to a caring ethic, can be understood as feminists' efforts to emphasize the interconnections between humanity, oppression, and ecological practices, and as a feminist practice that foregrounds a reconceptualization, arguably not new, of humanity's oneness with Earth: old wisdom, contemporary lens (House and Bullis 1991, 143–74). The relevance of an ecofeminist ethic of care to global environmental issues cannot be discounted as headlines recount the myriad ways in which global warming affects the planet and its inhabitants. Johnson yearned for "a flourishing humanity on a thriving earth" (1993, 67). This is also my vision. In the combined view of an ecofeminist ethic of caring, new possibilities emerge in which all humanity is responsible and accountable. Perhaps the possibilities are not new; rather, an ecofeminist ethic of caring re-attaches our collective consciousness to the timeless wisdom of indigenous and First Nations peoples, who knew themselves to be bound inextricably with Mother Earth. Implications for leadership, based on a ecofeminist ethic of caring, include shared responsibility among all people (and therefore equitable representation in leadership), attention to time in three dimensions, spiritual awareness, the interrelatedness and influence-potential in all actions, commitment to refute and repair oppression in all spheres, and the need for leadership activism throughout communities and societies. Returning to the outset of this discussion, and reflecting on First Nations belief in reverence for all things living, and in our intimate interdependence with Mother Earth, I mourn what has been lost, and I fear for my grandchildren's future. In closing, I acknowledge a perspective shared by Warren, grateful for the inspiration:

> [F]or most…Aboriginal peoples the story really begins: 'If you are doing the right thing ecologically, the results will be social and spiritual as well as ecological. If you are doing the right spiritual things, there will be social and ecological results.' (Warren 2000, 213)

Every action we make touches another, or affects the environment, and we must never forget this nor shirk our responsibility to be aware and accountable. The ecofeminist ethic of care I propose is one that binds us to

one another, to nature, and to Mother Earth. Only in *caring* is there hope for humanity, and a healthy future on this planet.

AUTHOR'S BIO

Lori Swanson lives a quiet life on acreage in rural British Columbia, Canada. Her career has included work in hospitals, a women's collective, and as a mental health therapist. Currently, she is the clinical lead for adult guardianship in a large healthcare organization. Academically, Lori's interests have been diverse, starting with dietary technology, then clinical social work to the graduate level, followed by human resource management, and recently a doctoral degree in leadership studies with a focus on rural healthcare leadership. Concern for the environment has been a lifelong commitment, informing her work, and interface with life in all regards. E-mail: Lori.Swanson@interiorhealth.ca

NOTES

1 The Gender Spectrum website (www.genderspectrum.org) is representative of a broader understanding of gender beyond two static categories.

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