

A vegan ecofeminist exploration of infertility treatments

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Land acknowledgement

Kitchener-Waterloo is on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral peoples. It is on the Haldimand Tract, land granted to the Haudenosaunee of the Six-Nations.

For more on interconnections between animal and human reproduction in Haudenosaunee territory (specifically, the Akwesasne Mohawk community) see Cook in SisterSong 2007 and LaDuke 1999.



The Grand River cuts through the middle of the tract, which includes cities like Kitchener, Waterloo and Brantford. It was granted to the Haudenosaunee in the 18th century. Photo: APTN

Indian Residential School Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

Motivations

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.animalaid.org.uk/the-issues/our-campaigns/animal-experiments/covid-19-vaccines-and-veganism>. The page features a navigation menu with items like 'Home', 'The Issues', 'Our Campaigns', 'Animal Experiments', and 'COVID-19 Vaccines and Veganism'. A sidebar on the left lists 'The Issues' with categories such as 'Animal Experiments', 'Mice Matter', '10 steps to help end animal experiments', 'Animal experiments - Your most common questions answered', 'Cosmetics testing', and 'COVID-19 Vaccines and Veganism'. The main content area has the title 'COVID-19 Vaccines and Veganism' and the text: 'As the vaccine roll-out program continues, we've had enquiries from our supporters asking what is in the vaccine, whether you can still have the vaccine if you are an ethical vegan and whether the vaccine will have been tested on animals. Here are some of the most common questions:'. Below the text is a photograph of several glass vials with blue caps.

The advertisement is for the United States Surgical Corporation (USSC). At the top, it reads 'Weicker stance on disclosure passed' and 'State refocuses attention on ethics filings'. The main headline is 'Humans And Animals Would Still Be Dying From Rabies If Pasteur Hadn't Experimented With Dogs.' Below this, there are several columns of text. On the right side, there is a logo for 'USSC' and the text 'United States Surgical Corporation, All Other Rights Reserved, 1991'.

Figure 4
A large advertisement published in the 13 May 1991 edition of *The Hour* (p. 9), and part of a campaign in defense of animal research, sponsored by the United States Surgical Corporation. While the value of Pasteur's work is undeniable, there is, however, no scientific grounding for the claim that only by experimenting on dogs would a vaccine for rabies have been developed, or that other animal models or even non-animal methods could not have been used to achieve this in over a century. These dramatic and biased portraits of animal research are now more anomalous, as an increasing number of scientists acknowledge the need to be more candid and open to objective discussion over the possibilities and limitations of animal research, and of the scientific process altogether.

Question: How do vegan commitments interact with a feminist analysis of infertility treatments?

Outline

- Veganism and vegan ecofeminism
- Vegan ecofeminism applied to infertility treatments
- Ethical questions
 - Avoid infertility treatments? (no)
 - Reconcile vegan ecofeminism with infertility treatments? (not without a moral residue)
 - Strategies for addressing tensions? (contextual moral veganism)
- Lingering concerns

Image: A Sprague Dawley multipurpose breed albino rat is one of the most common rats used in medical research and testing. Credit: Roger Kingbird / We Animals Media (2022)





Definitions

- Veganism is “an ethical commitment to live, as far as possible, without commodifying or otherwise instrumentalising other animals for our own human ends” (C. Lou Hamilton 2019, 9-10).
- “Vegetarian [i.e., vegan] ecofeminism puts into action the feminist insight that ‘the personal is political’ and examines the political contexts of dietary choices as well as strategic and operational choices in science and economics” (Greta Gaard 2002, 117).
- Relational, contextual, intersectional

Image: Gwenna Hunter packs fresh local produce into bags at a vegan aid program in Los Angeles with Vegan Outreach. Credit: Nikki Ritcher / #unboundproject / We Animals Media (2021)



Gaard (2010) on vegan ecofeminism + reproductive justice

- ‘Choice’ discourse in relation to infertility treatments is “implicitly antifeminist” and “anthropocentric.”
- Reproductive justice situates reproduction in relation to power and inequities.
- BUT it only narrowly engages with environmental justice, usually around how environmental toxins impact fertility and parenting.

Image: A newborn calf is wheeled away from her mother to the veal crates. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / Animal Equality / We Animals Media (2010)

Vegan ecofeminism + reproductive justice

- Gaard: Need an interspecies reproductive justice
 - Profit drives the control and commodification of reproductive capacities and mothering activity (for humans and for animals).
- Me: Relevance of/connections with animal experimentation?
 - Reproductive technologies “are themselves technologies developed within animal breeding for the meat industry” (Erika Cudworth 2005, 143).

Image: A device used during the semen collection process on a goat farm in Czechia. Credit Lukas Vincour / Zvířata Nejíme / We Animals Media (2020)



Vegan ecofeminism + reproductive justice

IVF has enabled farmers to improve efficiencies by using genetic material from “**desirable female donors**” and, with embryo transfer, “**allowed for genetically inferior females to be utilized for their birthing capacities**” (Schook et al 2015, 5).

Table 1.3 Important milestones in the history of artificial insemination (AI)

Year	Discoverer	Main finding
1677	Antoni von Leeuwenhoek	First picture of sperm cells
1780	Lazzaro Spallanzani	First insemination (in a dog)
1790	John Hunter	First vaginal insemination in human
1900	Ilya Ivanov	Development of semen extenders
1939	Gregory Pincus	First conception (rabbit) by AI
1949	Christopher Polge et al.	Discovery of cryoprotective functions of glycerol
1950	Robert Foote and R. Bratton	Addition of antibiotics to semen extenders
1953	Jerome Shumann	First pregnancy after AI with frozen sperm (human)
1978	Robert Edwards and P. Steptoe	First IVF baby (Baby Louise)
Since 1970s		Broad application of AI in farm animals, mostly cattle and pigs

Modified from Ombelet and van Robays (2015)

Table from Niemann & Seamark 2018, p. 9.

Questions

1. Does a vegan ecofeminist approach recommend avoiding the use of fertility treatments? (Short answer: No)
2. Can a vegan ecofeminist approach be aligned with using infertility treatments? (Short answer: There will be a moral residue)
3. What strategies might a vegan ecofeminist approach recommend for acknowledging and addressing the tensions between the desire to use infertility treatments, their reliance on animal experimentation, and its relationship to agriculture? (Short answer: Perhaps a queer politics of mourning and contextual veganism)

Questions

1. **Does a vegan ecofeminist approach recommend avoiding the use of fertility treatments?**
 - **Short answer: No**
 - Resist universal claims, yet importance of critical scrutiny
 - Value pluralism and justifiable reasons for pursuing infertility treatments

REPRODUCTIVE
TECHNOLOGY, OR
REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE?

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

GRETA GAARD

Questions

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Helpful? Animal rights theory and medication

- Are vegans hypocritical when they use medication developed through animal testing?
- Tom Regan's (2012) answer: No, the hypocrisy charge confuses chronology with justification.
- Does this work for vegan ecofeminism?
 - No, infertility treatments and pharmaceuticals seem disanalogous for historical reasons relating to connections with animal agriculture.

Image: A mother and child at a macaque breeding facility. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media (2011)

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VEGANISM
SEX AND
POLITICS

*tales of danger
and pleasure*

C. LOU HAMILTON

Queer mourning as political responsibility?

- Leather binds queer communities together.
- “While I reject the idea that veganism is a sacrifice, I began to see that in some cases giving up animal products might involve a dual process of mourning: for the animals who have died for our convenience *and* for the kinds of attachments their dead bodies have allowed us to form with other people” (Hamilton 2019, 108).

Towards an interspecies reproductive justice

- My contributions
 - Animal experimentation as one dimension
 - Links between reproductive and animal biotechnologies
- Unexplored directions
 - Biotechnology and protecting endangered species and/or de-extinction

Image: Overhead view of sows in farrowing crates with their young several days after birth.
Credit: Andrew Skowron / We Animals Media (2017)



Concern 1:

Is reproductive justice too broad a framework?

- Answer: Possibly not.
- White supremacy employs a concept of animality (Ko 2019).
- Animal breeding supports false ideas about the inheritability of race in eugenics (Russell 2022).

RACISM AS ZOOLOGICAL WITCHCRAFT

A GUIDE TO GETTING OUT



APH KO

Illustrations by Alise and Jack Eastgate
Foreword by Claire Jean Kim

Concern 2: Do you need a vegan commitment to find this argument forceful?

- Answer: Commitment to veganism comes in degrees.
- Also need critical scrutiny about reproductive desires.

Image: A sign reads “The future must be vegan” in front of a tent at the 2019 Extinction Rebellion action in London, UK. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media (2019)



Thank you!

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Image description: Food entrepreneur Miyoko Schinner (Miyoko's Creamery) smiles as a rescued sheep noses his way into a bag of produce in the barn at the sanctuary Rancho Compasión. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals (2021)



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