

FINRRAGE (Australia)

*Feminist International Network of Resistance
to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering.*

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The debate about embryo experimentation in Australia has focused largely on the moral status and disposition of the embryo. This discussion which centres on the embryo itself as a separate entity has masked a central aspect. Embryo experimentation is only possible because eggs are taken from women's bodies during an experimental and rarely "successful" procedure called *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). To obtain these eggs, women are superovulated, using drugs and hormones to produce large numbers of eggs (Instead of the normal one or two per cycle). Adverse effects of superovulation reported in some women are hyperstimulation of the ovaries, ovarian cysts, and sometimes even cancers. A new superovulatory drug now being tried in Australian IVF programmes, called buserelin is claimed to increase pregnancy rates in IVF procedures, and produce even larger numbers of eggs. Production of more eggs and therefore embryos will be in the interests of IVF teams pursuing embryo research. The use of buserelin may also lead to hyperstimulation of the ovaries and ovarian cysts.

Amendments were made to the Victorian Infertility (Medical Procedures) Act in 1987 to include provisions for experiments on human embryos created specifically for the purposes of experimentation, up to 22 hours in age. In January of this year, the Standing Review and Advisory Committee on Infertility approved further requests by the IVF team at Monash Medical Centre to test two day old embryos for genetic abnormalities using a technique called embryo biopsy. The concern which arises from this is that it will be possible to genetically screen and select which embryos are implanted back into women in the IVF procedure - this in future may apply to screening for specific genetic diseases, or the sex of the embryo. Such a test for determining the sex of early human embryos has already been developed in Britain.

The Minister for Health in Victoria, Caroline Hogg, has asked for a moratorium on the embryo biopsy experiments, and the Standing Review and Advisory Committee has called for submissions from the public and interested groups on this matter. This is a welcomed decision, as at least now the community at large can participate in the debate and express opinions regarding embryo experimentation.

Christine Ewing, spokesperson for *FINRRAGE* (Australia) will speak on IVF in Australia, and the implications of this technology on the health, well-being and social position of women. She will also discuss the eugenic nature of the screening and selection of embryos, based on their genetic quality.

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