

# MOVEMENT INTERSECTIONALITY

## *The Case of Race, Gender, Disability, and Genetic Technologies*

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### **Abstract**

Intersectional analysis need not focus solely on differences within or between identity-based groups. Using intersectionality for cross movement mobilization reveals that, contrary to criticism for being divisive, attention to intersecting identities has the potential to create solidarity and cohesion. In this article, we elaborate this argument with a case study of the intersection of race, gender, and disability in genetic technologies as well as in organizing to promote a social justice approach to the use of these technologies. We show how organizing based on an intersectional analysis can help forge alliances between reproductive justice, racial justice, women's rights, and disability rights activists to develop strategies to address reproductive genetic technologies. We use the work of Generations Ahead to illuminate how intersectionality applied at the movement-building level can identify genuine common ground, create authentic alliances, and more effectively advocate for shared policy priorities.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality, Social Movements, Race, Gender, Disability, Genetic Testing

### **INTRODUCTION**

Intersectional analysis does not apply only to the ways identity categories or systems of power intersect in individuals' lives. Nor must an intersectional approach focus solely on differences within or between identity-based groups. It can also be a powerful tool to build more effective alliances between movements to make them more effective at organizing for social change. Using intersectionality for cross movement mobilization reveals that, contrary to criticism for being divisive, attention to intersecting identities has the potential to create solidarity and cohesion. In this article, we elaborate this argument with a case study of the intersection of race, gender, and disability in genetic technologies as well as in organizing to promote a social justice approach to the use of these technologies. We show how organizing

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based on an intersectional analysis can help forge alliances between reproductive justice, racial justice, women's rights, and disability rights activists to develop strategies to address reproductive genetic technologies. We use the work of Generations Ahead to illuminate how intersectionality applied at the movement-building level can identify genuine common ground, create authentic alliances, and more effectively advocate for shared priorities.

Founded in 2008, Generations Ahead is a social justice organization that brings diverse communities together to expand the public debate on genetic technologies and promote policies that protect human rights and affirm a shared humanity. Dorothy Roberts is one of the founding board members of Generations Ahead, and Sujatha Jesudason is the Executive Director.

Since its inception, Generations Ahead has utilized an intersectional analysis approach to its social justice organizing on reproductive genetics. Throughout 2008–2010, the organization conducted a series of meetings among reproductive justice, women's rights, and disability rights advocates to develop a shared analysis of genetic technologies across movements with the goals of creating common ground and advancing coordinated solutions and strategies. This cross-movement relationship- and analysis-building effort laid the foundation for successfully resisting historical divisions between reproductive rights, racial justice, and disability rights issues in several important campaigns. In examining the ways in which the theory and practice of intersectionality are used here we hope to demonstrate the kinds of new alliances that now become possible—alliances that can be both more inclusive and effective in the long term.

## FROM DIFFERENCE TO RADICAL RELATEDNESS

In her classic article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) focused on Black women to show that the “single-axis” framework of discrimination analysis not only ignores the way in which identities intersect in people's lives, but also erases the experiences of some people. As a result, she argued, “[b]lack women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (p. 140). The intersectional framework revealed that Black women suffer the combined effects of racism and sexism and therefore have experiences that are different from those of both White women and Black men, experiences which were neglected by dominant antidiscrimination doctrine (Crenshaw 1989). Extending from the example of Black women, an intersectional perspective enables us to analyze how structures of privilege and disadvantage, such as gender, race, and class, interact in the lives of all people, depending on their particular identities and social positions.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, intersectionality analyzes the ways in which these structures of power inextricably connect with and shape each other to create a system of interlocking oppressions, which Patricia Hill Collins (2000) termed a “matrix of domination” (p. 18).

The value of intersectional analysis, however, is not confined to understanding individual experiences or the ways systems of power intersect in individuals' lives. Over the last two decades, feminist scholars have discussed and debated the potential applications of intersectionality. As a “framework of analysis” or “analytic paradigm,” intersectionality has been applied to theory, empirical research, and political activism; it provides a lens to criticize dominant legal discourse as well as being “inte-

grated into mainstream social science ways of conducting research and building knowledge” (Dhamoon 2011, p. 230).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to supporting these differing methodologies, intersectionality can be marshaled to achieve varying goals. Many legal scholars have used an intersectional analysis to reveal the weaknesses in dominant legal approaches that confine discrimination to a single axis of race or gender or class, thereby ignoring people who are harmed by a combination of inequities (Crenshaw 1989). Social scientists have conducted multi-group studies to analyze and compare the complexities of advantage and disadvantage experienced by various intersecting categories, such as wage inequality by gender, race, and class (McCall 2005). Should intersectionality “be deployed primarily for uncovering vulnerabilities or exclusions or should we be examining it as a resource, a source of empowerment?” asks Kathy Davis (2008, p. 75). The answer is both, because uncovering how dominant discourses and systems marginalize certain groups in intersecting ways and at specific sites can be a basis for solidarity, and action. An intersectional framework can be used in a positive way to reveal and create commonalities among people who are affected by the same matrix of domination. Although she focused on the erasure of Black women from dominant discourses, Crenshaw concluded that, by categorizing struggles as singular issues, the single-axis framework “undermine[s] potential collective action.” Intersectionality, in turn, allows us to develop tools not only to critique the dominant view of discrimination but also to forge “some basis for unifying activity” (1989, p. 167).

By highlighting the differences in experiences among women, it might seem that an intersectional approach would make coalition building harder. Some scholars have criticized its attention to identity categories for hindering both intra- and cross-movement mobilization by splintering groups, such as women, into smaller categories, and accentuating the significance of separate identities (Brown 1997). As Andrea Canaan (1983) observed in *This Bridge Called My Back*, the singular focus on identity can lead us to “close off avenues of communication and vision so that individual and communal trust, responsibility, loving and knowing are impossible” (p. 236).

Yet intersectionality presents an exciting paradox: attending to categorical differences *enhances* the potential to build coalitions between movements and makes them more effective at organizing for social change.

How can illuminating differences build solidarity? First, it is only by acknowledging the lived experiences and power differentials that keep us apart that we can effectively grapple with the “matrix of domination” and develop strategies to eliminate power inequities. This is not a matter of *transcending* differences. To the contrary, activists interested in coalition building must confront their differences openly and honestly. “Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them,” writes Gloria Anzaldua and AnaLouise Keaton (2002, p. 3). Intersectionality avoids the trap of downplaying differences to reach a false universalism and superficial consensus—a ploy that always benefits the most privileged within the group and erases the needs, interests, and perspectives of others. An intersectional approach should not create “homogenous ‘safe spaces’” where we are cordoned off from others according to our separate identities (Cole 2008, p. 443). Rather, it can force us into a risky place of radical self-reflection, willingness to relinquish privilege, engagement with others, and movement toward change.

Second, once differences are acknowledged, an intersectional framework enables discussion among groups that illuminates their similarities and common values. In her chapter celebrating *The Bridge Called My Back*, AnaLouise Keating (2009) explores the methodology the anthology’s contributors used to build a radical vision for transforming feminist theorizing. Their tool of “making connections through differences,” used

the honest, self-exposing exploration of differences among women to “forge commonalities without assuming that their experiences, histories, ideas, or traits are *identical* with those of the others” (p. 85). Commonality is not the same thing as sameness. Searching for and creating commonalities among people with differing identities through active engagement with each other is one of intersectionality’s most important methodologies not only for feminist theorizing but also for political activism.

Third, analysis of our commonalities reveals ways in which structures of oppression are related and therefore highlights the notion that our struggles are linked. Despite our distinct social positions, we discover that “we are all in the same boat” (Morales 1983, p. 93). Not only does intersectionality apply to everyone in the sense that all human beings live within the matrix of power inequities, but also that the specific intersections of multiple oppressions affect each and every one of us.

Of course, these intersecting systems affect individuals differently, depending on the specific context and their specific political positions. This is why engagement between groups with differing perspectives is critical to understanding the dynamics of inequality and to organizing for social change. Rather than erasing our identities for the sake of coalition, we learn from each other’s perspective to understand how systems of privilege and disadvantage operate together and, therefore, to be better equipped to dismantle them. An intersectional approach is particularly effective because, as Ann Russo (2009) observed in her epilogue to *The Intersectional Approach*, alliances and coalitions forged from such an analysis “do not require anyone to choose one’s oppression over another nor to sacrifice some needs over others” (pp. 309, 315). Rabab Abdulhadi similarly recognized the challenge to build alliances based on shared oppressions, values, and vision “while always acknowledging the specificity of each group . . . and the context in which particular forms come up, without thinking that one form should dominate another” (quoted in Cole 2008, p. 447).

Far from building walls around identity categories, then, intersectionality forces us to break through these categories to examine how they are related to each other and how they make certain identities invisible. This shift from seeing our differences to seeing our relatedness requires that we understand identity categories in terms of matrices of power that are connected rather than solely as features of individuals that separate us (Cole 2008; Dhamoon 2011).<sup>4</sup> “While analytically we must carefully examine the structures that differentiate us, politically we must fight the segmentation of oppression into categories such as ‘racial issues,’ ‘feminist issues,’ and ‘class issues,’” writes Bonnie Thornton Dill (1983, p. 148). Indeed, our radical *interrelatedness* is equally as important as our differences. To us, the radical potential for intersectionality lies in moving beyond its recognition of difference to build political coalitions based on the recognition of connections among systems of oppression as well as on a shared vision of social justice. The process of grappling with differences, discovering and creating commonalities, and revealing interactive mechanisms of oppression itself provides a model for alternative social relationships.

## **AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF RACE, GENDER, DISABILITY, AND REPRODUCTIVE GENETIC TECHNOLOGIES**

Our scholarly and activist work on reproductive justice illustrates the potential for an intersectional approach to forge radical connections between movements for social justice. Reproductive justice is a prime example of applying an intersectional framework to both political theorizing and political action. Women of color developed a reproductive justice theory and movement to challenge the barriers to their repro-

ductive freedom stemming from sex, race, and class inequalities (Nelson 2003; Roberts 1997, 2004; Silliman et al., 2004). Reproductive justice addresses the inadequacies of the dominant reproductive rights discourse espoused by organizations led by White women that was based on the concept of choice and on the experiences of the most privileged women. Thus, women of color contributed to the understanding of and advocacy for reproductive freedom by recognizing the intersection of race, class, and gender in the social control of women's bodies.

What if we complicated the matrix even more by including disability as an identity and political category in theorizing and organizing by women of color? Far from being a marginal social division because it affects fewer people, disability helps to shape reproductive and genetic technologies and policies that affect everyone.<sup>5</sup> Like intersectionality's central claim that "representations of gender that are 'race-less' are not by that fact alone more universal than those that are race-specific" (Crenshaw 2011, p. 224), representations of race and gender that neglect disability are no more universal than those that are based solely on able bodies.<sup>6</sup> It was only when we engaged with disability rights activists that we began to grapple with their perspectives on reproductive politics and changed our own perspectives in concrete ways.

Just as the dominant conception of discrimination imposed by courts erases Black women, organizing for social change along certain categories can obscure the importance of other perspectives and opportunities for building coalitions to achieve common social justice goals. Disability rights discourse largely has failed to encompass racism, and anti-racism discourse largely has failed to encompass disability. The disability rights and civil rights movements are often compared as two separate struggles that run parallel to each other, rather than struggles that have constituents and issues in common,<sup>7</sup> even as both people of color and people with disabilities share a similar experience of marginalization and "othering" and even though there are people of color with disabilities (Pokempner and Roberts, 2001).

Race, gender, and disability do not simply intersect in the identities of women of color with disabilities, however. Rather, racism, sexism, and ableism work together in reproductive politics to maintain a reproductive hierarchy and enlist support for policies that perpetuate it (Roberts 2009, 2011). In her past work, Roberts (1997) has contrasted policies that punish poor women of color for bearing children with advanced technologies that assist mainly middle- and upper-class White women not only to have genetically-related children, but to also have children with preferred genetic traits. While welfare reform laws aim to deter women receiving public assistance from having even one additional healthy baby, largely unregulated fertility clinics regularly implant privileged women with multiple embryos, knowing the high risk multiple births pose for premature delivery and low birth weight that requires a fortune in publicly-supported hospital care. Rather than place these policies in opposition, however, Roberts argued in "Privatization and Punishment in the New Age of Reprogenetics" (2005) and "Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies: A New Reproductive Dystopia?" (2009) that they are tied together. Policies supporting both population control programs and genetic selection technologies reinforce biological explanations for social problems and place reproductive duties on women that privatize remedies for illness and social inequities.

Advances in reproduction-assisting technologies that create embryos in a laboratory have converged with advances in genetic testing to produce increasingly sophisticated methods to select for preferred genetic traits, and de-select for disability. Liberal notions of reproductive choice obscure the potential for genetic selection technologies to intensify both discrimination against disabled people and the regulation of women's childbearing decisions. These technologies stem from a medical model that

attributes problems caused by the social inequities of disability to each individual's genetic make up and that holds individuals, rather than the public, responsible for fixing these inequities. Disability rights activists have pointed out that prenatal and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis reinforce the view that "disability itself, not societal discrimination against people with disabilities, is the problem to be solved" (Parens and Asch, 1999, p. s13). This medicalized approach to disability assumes that difficulties experienced by disabled people are caused by physiological limitations that prevent them from functioning normally in society, rather than the physical and social limitation enforced by society on individuals with disabilities (Saxton 2007). Although disabilities cause various degrees of impairment, the main hardship experienced by most people with disabilities stems from pervasive discrimination and the unwillingness to accept and embrace differing needs to function fully in society.

Locating the problem inside the disabled body rather than in the social oppression of disabled people leads to the elimination of these bodies becoming the chief solution to impairment. By selecting out disabling traits, these technologies can divert attention away from social arrangements, government policies, and cultural norms that help to define disability and make having disabled children undesirable (Wendell 1996). Genetic selection is also discriminatory in that it reduces individual children to certain genetic traits that by themselves are deemed sufficient reasons to terminate an otherwise wanted pregnancy or discard an embryo that might otherwise have been implanted (Asch 2007).

The expectation of genetic self-regulation may fall especially harshly on Black and Latina women, who are stereotypically defined as hyperfertile and lacking the capacity for self-control (Gutierrez 2008; Roberts 1997). In an ironic twist, it may be poor women of color, not affluent White women, who are most compelled to use prenatal genetic screening technologies. This paradox is revealed only by a political analysis that examines the interlocking systems of inequity based on gender, race, and disability that work together to support policies that rely on women's management of genetic risk rather than social change. This intersectional analysis also reveals that reproductive justice, women's rights, and disability rights activists share a common interest in challenging unjust reproductives policies and in forging an alternative vision of social welfare.

## **THE DYNAMICS OF INTER- AND INTRA-MOVEMENT MOBILIZATION ROOTED IN AN INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

Sociologists, social psychologists, and historians have extensively investigated solidarity within political organizations and collaborations within movements where political organizations with similar causes come together for collective action, including the women's, labor, civil rights, and environmental movements (Beamish and Luebbbers, 2009; Greenwood 2008). Surprisingly, scholars have devoted relatively little attention to coalitions *across* movements where political organizations focused on different causes, often rooted in differing identity categories, engage in collective action to achieve shared goals (Beamish and Luebbbers, 2009). Sociologists Thomas D. Beamish and Amy J. Luebbbers contend that cross-movement alliances "pose special problems for collaboration that cannot be sufficiently addressed through within-movement studies," because they must "reconcile distinctive, sometimes competing explanations as well as remedies for the social problems they jointly seek to stem" (p. 648).

An intersectional approach provides a method for overcoming these barriers to collaboration and even using differences between identity categories and causes as a

tool for more effective strategizing and action. As Bonnie Thornton Dill (1983) contends, “Through joint work on specific issues, we may come to a better understanding of one another’s needs and perceptions and begin to overcome some of the suspicions and mistrust that continue to haunt us” (p. 146). Engaged in this intersectional praxis, movements organized around separate identity categories can reach a more effective level of political struggle “where the differences between us ENRICH our political and social action rather than divide it” (p. 148).

In the last several years, as scholars and activists, working with the staff and board of Generations Ahead, we have used an intersectional framework as an integral part of our organizing work. Intersectionality has been an essential tool in shaping the mission, vision, and work of the organization, in deepening our understanding of the social and ethical implications of genetic technologies, and in building unlikely partners to advance a social justice agenda. Through a series of meetings and one major convening, Generations Ahead developed a model for outreach and collaboration that integrated intersectionality in all aspects of the work. This model, described in more detail in Jesudason’s article, “In the Hot Tub: The Praxis of Building New Alliances in Reprogenetics” (2009), includes cross-movement relationship-building, developing issue frames that resonate in different movements, creating safe spaces for difficult conversations, and ensuring the necessary resources to build new alliances.

At the heart of Generations Ahead’s method of cross-movement alliance-building are three main elements: honestly and openly discussing in face-to-face conversations key areas of conflict among movements; articulating common values upon which bridging frameworks could be constructed; and cultivating a shared advocacy agenda, followed by joint strategizing and collective action, to address specific issues. These elements put in practice the key theoretical insight of an intersectional analysis discussed above—that uncovering how dominant discourses and systems marginalize certain groups in intersecting ways and at specific sites can be a basis for solidarity. By acknowledging differences, not transcending them, activists can more effectively grapple with the “matrix of domination” because an intersectional analysis ultimately reveals how structures of oppression are related and therefore our struggles are linked. To be successful, this process required building trust by learning about each other’s movements and concretely demonstrating solidarity for each other’s issues, for example, by co-sponsoring and attending each other’s events (Generations Ahead 2009).

Based on this model, Generations Ahead organized a series of meetings among reproductive rights and justice, women of color and Indigenous women, and disability rights advocates to dig deeper into the areas of tension between movements and to develop a shared analysis of genetic technologies across movements, with the goals of creating common ground and advancing coordinated solutions and strategies.

In September 2008, Generations Ahead hosted its first national convening of women of color and Indigenous women to talk about reproductive and genetic technologies. With the support of seven reproductive rights and justice organizations, Generation Ahead convened twenty-one women of color and Indigenous women leaders from across the United States for two days to discuss specific concerns about the relationships between genetic technologies and different racialized communities (Generations Ahead 2008). Because disability and LGBTQ rights were deemed to be central intersecting identities for this group, the convening was also designed to include these identities, in addition to race and gender.

In order to openly and honestly identify the distinctive ways in which reproductive and genetic technologies affected different constituencies, the participants were

asked to divide themselves up into self-identified constituency groups. It was clearly acknowledged that participants were not being asked to privilege or prioritize any one identity over others, but rather that they were being asked to share the unique and distinguishing perspectives of different constituencies. The twenty-one participants divided up into the following groups: Indigenous women, Asian women, women of African descent, women (of color) with disabilities, and Latinas living in the United States. Queer identified people agreed to raise their specific concerns within all of the other groups. Each group's members then spent time identifying the particular benefits and concerns genetic technologies raised for their group, and the values that they wanted to see integrated into any advocacy on this issue.

Rather than starting the discussion about the benefits and risks of genetic technologies based on a universal and generic human being, these constituency groups were able to do several interesting things simultaneously. First, when asked to consider these technologies from the standpoint of their identity-specific perspective, these issues became more relevant for all participants. None of the participants were users of these technologies, and, up until that moment, most felt that they were not relevant to their lives and social justice advocacy. But once they were able to connect what felt like an abstract, futuristic, and privileged issue to their lives and communities, their investment in the issue shifted. Most participants were now able to reflect on and attach genetic technologies to issues that they deeply cared about: sex selection and son preference for Asian women; genetic determinism and eugenics for women of African descent; prenatal disability de-selection for women with disabilities; blood quantum and tribal identity for Indigenous women; and family formation and fertility for Latinas. By the end of the discussion, all participants were able to understand the issues raised by genetic technologies as an extension of their existing social justice commitments and concerns (Generations Ahead 2008).

Second, the participants were able to make these linkages as a part of a larger, shared "matrix of domination," rather than as a hierarchical analysis of oppression. Because everybody was able to speak to the intersections with their lived experiences, and since all identities were equally valued, the discussion quickly and easily transitioned to shared struggles and solidarity, rather than a debate over who was more or less oppressed or privileged in the development and use of genetic technologies. Shared concerns were quickly visible in the similar histories of reproductive oppression and genetic determinism, and the ways in which biology, bodies, and reproduction have been historically categorized, regulated, stigmatized, and controlled for some groups.

In addition, participants in each group discussed other intersecting identities that clearly cut across all groups, such as immigration status, class, sexual orientation, gender identities, and age. Acknowledging these other intersections prevented any one individual or one group to claim the "most oppressed" or "most victimized" identity. It meant that everyone in the room enjoyed privilege in at least one, if not more, of their identities. Since no one in the room could be either pure victim or pure oppressor, participants were more willing and comfortable acknowledging their own privilege and less attached to any presumed victim status. This led to, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) noted, more thorough self-reflection and openness to learning from and engaging with others. Everybody felt like they belonged together because of, not in spite of, their differences.

And finally, owing to the sense of "we are all in this together" and newly recognized links between genetic technologies and their existing social justice commitments, the whole group was able to identify and articulate a shared set of values and perspectives that they wanted to promote in any analysis of the social implica-

tions of genetic technologies. They pinpointed values that they felt were important to help guide work in this area, values such as: start with an intersectional analysis of power and inequities at the center of any analysis of benefits and risks, include community in identifying solutions, and make sure to address the underlying factors that cause unequal outcomes and don't just blame it on the technology per se (Generations Ahead 2008).

Participants then worked together to develop a condensed list of shared values that everyone could take back to their organizations and continue to use to inform any shared or individual advocacy in this area. The group collectively affirmed values such as: put human welfare, not profit, at the center of the use of these technologies; recognize that individuals, families, and communities are socially, culturally, and politically determined, not solely biologically or genetically; include those most impacted by these technologies to be a part of the decision-making about their use; and acknowledge the intersectionality of diverse lived experiences and advocate for long-term, holistic solutions (Generations Ahead 2008).

This convening laid the groundwork for future, more challenging conversations and collaborations between reproductive justice and disability rights leaders. The lessons and praxis of using an intersectional approach were then applied to a series of five roundtable conversations between two groups that have a long history of tension, mistrust, and aversion to working together—reproductive rights and disability rights advocates. These roundtable discussions started with the most difficult area of disagreement between these two movements—their differing approaches to genetic testing technologies and abortion:

While reproductive rights advocates have supported the idea of “fetal anomalies” as an argument for abortion rights, disability rights advocates have argued that this reinforces negative views of disability. And while the reproductive rights movement is fighting to restrict the legal definition of personhood to protect abortion, the disability rights movement is fighting to expand a perceptual definition of personhood to increase the social inclusion of people with disabilities (Generations Ahead 2009, p. 1).

These discussions were started with an open acknowledgment of this third rail of disagreement, and recognition that there was a mutual history of hurt and fear, where each movement felt that the other did not appreciate its perspective or deep concerns about the other movement's perspective. Generations Ahead used an intersectional framework to begin the discussion with storytelling that highlighted the other identities of all fifteen participants, such as race, sexual orientation, class, and immigration. This ensured that, even though this was a conversation between women about reproductive rights and disability, any one person or group could not cling to a victim-oppressor binary (Generations Ahead 2009). This created much more emotional and political space to candidly discuss the apparently oppositional positions and find a way toward better understanding of the difference, if not necessarily come to agreement.

For example, when White women with disabilities charged the reproductive rights and justice advocates without disabilities with not truly understanding what it was like to live with disability in this society, women of color were able to respond, “And that is ok, because you can't truly understand what is like to live as a person of color in this society.” So instead of participants feeling guilty and immobilized around their privilege, everybody was able to create connection around shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege. This created the possibility

of then identifying common values and mutual areas of advocacy interest. In addition, the women of color with disabilities who participated in the conversations embodied the intersection of race and disability and reinforced the impossibility of privileging one identity over another. As members of both groups, they spoke directly to their multiple experiences of racism amongst White people with disabilities, and ableism amongst people of color, all mixed in with classism, homophobia, and xenophobia—two of them were raised poor, one was an immigrant, and another identified as Queer. They reminded the whole group throughout the conversations that neither race nor disability was the sole meaningful axis of oppression.

Once the participants established everyone shared multiple and intersecting interests in genetic technologies and abortion, they worked to discover and develop a set of common values, including the recognition and support of people's right to independent decision making, resources that allow them to control their own lives, and respectful and dignified treatment. Their discussion of shared values enabled them to identify bridging frameworks that linked their movements. They found commonality between the social model of disability ("the notion that it is the negative social attitudes toward disability rather than the disability itself that are the source of oppression for those with disabilities") and the reproductive justice framework ("the understanding that multiple, intersecting structural factors influence both women's ability to not have, but also to have children and parent them with dignity") (Generations Ahead 2009, p. 2). As a result of their engagement over conflicts and common values, the advocates were able to agree on a shared alternative paradigm for addressing genetic technologies based on "long-term, comprehensive, intersectional policies that create structural changes in social inequality" (Generations Ahead 2009, p. 6).

Instead of these two groups being at loggerheads over whether to regulate abortion and prenatal screening to prevent the de-selection of people with disabilities or allow unfettered reproductive freedom that could lead to the eugenic elimination of disability, participants were able to define a set of shared values. These include:

- Reproductive autonomy should include support for people making the choice to have children, including children with disabilities, and support to raise their children with dignity.
- All women who choose to parent should be valued as parents and all children should be valued as human beings, including children with disabilities.
- Policy advocacy should focus on providing social and material supports to women, families, and communities, not on when life begins, whose life is more valued, or who can be a parent.
- Both movements should broaden their agendas to fight to improve the social, political, physical, and economic contexts within which women and people with disabilities make decisions about their lives. The focus should be on changing society, not on individual decision-making (Generations Ahead 2009, p. 2).

Through these shared values all participants were able to affirm women's self-determination and the value of people with disabilities, so that one was not pitted against the other. And they were able to include an analysis that encompassed concerns about race, class, immigration, and sexual orientation. Their values were about all women, all parents, and all children, not just the White, middle-class, able-bodied, and heteronormative U.S. citizen. In working together in an intersectional

framework, they were able to define shared values that made each movement both more inclusive and focused. Highlighting the multiple axes of differences in the room, rather than splintering the group, then became a resource for radical relatedness and unifying action.

Based on these discussions and relationships, the two movements then worked together on three different collaborative projects, projects that probably would not have been possible without having articulated these shared values to guide their advocacy. In October 2008, Congress worked to pass the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act, a bill that called for comprehensive information and support for women who receive a prenatal or postnatal diagnosis of Down syndrome or any other conditions. Initially Beltway reproductive rights groups and lobbyists were suspicious and dismissive of this legislation, in large part because it was authored by then Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kansas), an ardent anti-choice advocate.

Based on the cross-movement discussions facilitated by Generations Ahead, reproductive rights advocates reached out to disability rights advocates and vice versa. A collaboration of five organizations (World Institute on Disability, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, National Women's Health Network, Reproductive Health Technologies Project, and Generations Ahead) authored a joint statement, with each trusting its own movement to educate its members about how this legislation was good for both women and people with disability and had the support of both movements (The Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act Fact Sheet 2012). This collaboration then set the stage for disability rights advocates welcoming reproductive rights advocates to join in designing the implementation of the Act in such a way as to not demonize women and their reproductive decision-making. Additionally, reproductive rights advocates were able to use this as a moment to affirm their support for disability rights and highlight shared areas of interest. This joint statement was sent out to a board network of allies and advocates in both movements.

In the spring of 2010, anti-choice advocates enacted legislation in Nebraska making later abortion more difficult to obtain by replacing the twenty-four-week viability concept with one based on the fetus' ability to experience pain at twenty weeks. In the mad scramble to defeat the legislation, prochoice groups were increasingly using messaging and storytelling that relied on pre-natal disability diagnosis as a justification for access to late abortion. This political and rhetorical strategy that described any potential disability as a "painful tragedy" to be avoided at all costs was viewed by disability rights advocates as ignorant and disrespectful of the lives of people with disability, and experienced as ableist and discriminatory.

Advocates who had participated in the previous roundtable discussions quickly mobilized and brought a small, but respected group of reproductive justice and disability rights advocates together from across the country for a day-long strategy session. Together they developed five concrete recommendations for reproductive rights advocates to defend access to abortion without demonizing disability. The recommendations included a pivot away from a "pain" framework that asks policymakers to choose between the suffering of parents and the pain of the fetus, advocating instead for the government to provide the enabling conditions for families to make the best decisions for themselves, and increasing investment in the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act (Jesudason and Epstein, 2012). These recommendations were shared with all the major prochoice advocacy groups involved nationally and locally in the Nebraska legislative fight. In response, several organizations intentionally changed their messaging and language with regards to disability, although not completely eliminating it from their strategy.

In October of 2010 this network of disability and reproductive rights/justice advocates mobilized again in response to Dr. Robert Edwards winning the Nobel Prize. Edwards was recognized for his pioneering work in assisted reproductive technologies, but this group objected to his promotion of these technologies to prevent the birth of children with disabilities. At the same time, Virginia Ironside, a British columnist, in defense of abortion, was arguing that it was immoral, selfish, and cruel to knowingly give birth to a child with a disability (Fireandreamitchell.com 2010). Several of these advocates collectively issued a sign-on statement titled, “The Unnecessary Opposition of Rights,” in which they stated:

As people committed to both disability rights and reproductive rights, we believe that respecting women and families in their reproductive decisions requires simultaneously challenging discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities. We refuse to accept the bifurcation of women’s rights from disability rights, or the belief that protecting reproductive rights requires accepting ableist assumptions about the supposed tragedy of disability. On the contrary, we assert that reproductive rights includes attention to disability rights, and that disability rights requires attention to human rights, including reproductive rights (Generations Ahead 2010).

Within a few weeks of circulating this letter through advocacy networks, more than 150 individuals and organizations internationally had signed the statement in support of the values it expressed.

While these have not been major policy victories, they have been important and noteworthy steps toward building a cross-movement alliance where before there had been only mistrust and oppositional politics. Using intersectionality to analyze the interlocking systems of race, gender, and disability; discover and create shared values related to genetic technologies; and implement joint strategies in practice was critical to building this new alliance.

## CONCLUSION

As the work of Generations Ahead illustrates, the radical potential for intersectionality lies in moving beyond its acknowledgement of categorical differences to build political coalitions based on the recognition of connections among systems of oppression as well as on a shared vision of social justice. We used an analysis of the interlocking systems of race, gender, and disability in conjunction with a radical practice of coalition building between reproductive rights and justice, anti-racist, and disability rights activists to demonstrate the use of an intersectional paradigm as a positive tool for social change. In the process we have learned several important lessons for how to “do” intersectionality in organizing and advocacy.

First, a good process for radical relationship- and alliance-building requires forthrightly acknowledging the multiple intersecting lived experiences of all participants. Radical alliances can only be built on the basis of being honest about differences and disagreements. This honesty is what creates the potential for new solidarities based on shared but different experiences. Second, trust must be developed through the process. Alliance building is a progressive, developmental process where trust is built through repeated contact, connection, conversation, and collective action. Identifying multiple and intersecting interests is crucial to creating repeated opportunities for collaboration. The third lesson is related to a willingness on the part of all

participants to change their perspectives and politics. An intersectional framework is a critical tool for disrupting oppressed-oppressor binaries, and opening up the possibilities for discovering values and experiences in common. And the final lesson is to keep the focus on shared values. While scholars and advocates for social change might disagree on general strategy and tactics, they can more easily agree on shared values that can form the basis for a common vision, as well as for joint action on specific campaigns. Here again, an intersectional approach is useful in deconstructing disagreements and reconstructing similar experiences and hopes.

Using this approach can have interesting and unintended consequences. In this case of genetic technologies, Generations Ahead used intersectionality to create a cohort of women of color leaders on an issue that is traditionally presumed to be a White, mostly affluent women's issue. When Generations Ahead first began engaging women of color activists in conversations about reproductive genetic technologies there was a significant amount of pushback that this was not a priority issue since White women who could afford it were the primary users of these technologies. Issues of class and privilege were a constant implicit and explicit aspect of these conversations and actions. Without using an intersectional approach, it would have been impossible to engage activists who often argued that they did not have time for this discussion when there were other more pressing issues to focus on, such as access to basic reproductive health care. Now, through intersectionality, a cohort of women of color has emerged who speak and act authoritatively on these issues and make the connections between policies on genetic technologies and inequities based on race, gender, disability, and class, perspectives that are rarely acknowledged in mainstream discussions. While the actions the women organized seemed to focus on the intersection of gender and disability, race was an embedded and important element, as it was women of color who were visible leaders in the organizing. Through their presence and leadership they disrupted the assumptions that reproduction and disability are "White issues" and reminded others that there was more at stake for social justice. Through their activism they have started conversations that are critically important now and will only become more so in the future as the use of genetic technologies increases.

In acknowledging that all of us have multiple identities and by including all of those identities in the organizing process, intersectionality in practice can be a powerful tool for grappling with differences and uncovering shared values and bridging frameworks. This process provides a basis for collective action and a model for alternative social relationships rooted in our common humanity. Instead of separating groups, as some have argued, using an intersectional framework can create new and authentic alliances even among historically oppositional groups that can lead to more inclusive, focused, and effective efforts for social change. Intersectionality as a theory and practice for social change can, and should, be used as a critical tool in struggles for social justice that seek to include us all.

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## NOTES

1. I thank Alexius Cruz O'Malley for excellent research assistance and the Kirkland & Ellis Fund and the Dorothy Ann and Clarence L. Ver Steeg Distinguished Research Fellowship for generous research support.
2. See Thornton Dill (1983), "Just as the gender-class literature tends to omit race, the race-class literature gives little attention to women" (p. 137).

3. Delineating “a wide range of methodological approaches to the study of multiple, intersecting, and complex social relations” as anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical complexity (McCall 2005, pp. 1772–1773).
4. Dhamoon (2011) distinguishes among “*identities* of an individual or set of individuals or social group that are marked as different (e.g., a Muslim woman or Black women), the *categories of difference* (e.g., race and gender), the *processes of differentiation* (e.g., racialization and gendering), and the *systems of domination* (e.g., racism, colonialism, sexism, and patriarchy)” (p. 233, emphasis in original). Dhamoon further argues identities and categories of difference “are ideally examined by contextualizing the processes and systems that constitute, govern, and counter difference” (p. 234).
5. Comparing social divisions such as gender which “tend to shape most people’s lives in most social locations” to social divisions such as disability, which “tend to affect fewer people globally” (Yuval-Davis 2011, pp. 155, 160). Indeed, we have heard disability rights activists note that disability is the one identity that everyone will share if they live long enough. “The biggest difference between disability and the other stigmatized statuses we have considered here is that on the other cases the non-stigmatized have little fear of suddenly joining the ranks of the stigmatized” (Gordon and Rosenblum, 2005, p. 16).
6. Arguing that “disability as a category of analysis, an historical community, a set of material practices, a social identity, a political position, and a representational system” should be integrated in feminist theory (Garland-Thomson 2002, p. 28).
7. “We know something of how the history of disability rights activism owes something to the civil rights movements of Blacks in this and other countries, but we know only relatively little about how Whiteness and racism is played out in concrete terms on the bodies of people with disabilities as they struggle to move from the margins to the center” (Smith 2004, p. 21).

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