

Program on Gender, Justice, and Human Genetics

The goal of the Program on Gender, Justice and Human Genetics is to build and deepen the interest and capacity of social justice and feminist constituencies to engage with the new human genetic and reproductive technologies. We work in collaboration with allied organizations at the state and national levels to safeguard and expand the human rights, equality and health of women, children, LGBTQs, people with disabilities, and communities of color in an age of human biotechnology.

Concerns

While some human biotechnologies are beneficial for health and family-building, others have the potential to exacerbate racism, sexism, economic injustice, homophobia, discrimination, and health disparities.

Selection techniques: Currently existing technologies allow the sex of a future child to be selected, and certain medical conditions and disabilities to be “de-selected.” Technologies now being developed may someday allow altering the genes passed on to children. It is important to guarantee that women can decide whether and when to have a child, while challenging the prospect of selecting the genes or characteristics of children through genetic modification.

Health disparities and genetic differences: A disturbing trend in medicine is an increased focus on genetic difference as a cause of disease, which often downplays socio-economic and environmental causes. Geneticizing

health disparities and health outcomes can exacerbate dangerous tendencies to emphasize technical fixes at the expense of improving social and environmental conditions, shifting public health responsibilities to individuals.

Emerging market in women’s eggs: Women are being recruited to provide eggs for fertility clinics and for “research cloning,” a controversial research technique in early stages of development. Women undergo an invasive technique that has potentially serious health consequences and unknown long-term health risks. Recruiting women to provide eggs has the potential to turn women’s reproductive material into commodities for sale and to exploit economically and socially vulnerable women.

Areas of focus

The Project on Race, Disability and Eugenics recognizes that new genetic and reproductive technologies have the potential to lead to new forms of inequality. Past attempts to use science to eradicate undesired populations or “breed” preferred types of humans suggest that the resurgence of this idea (known as “eugenics”) is likely to affect the same communities as it did before: racial and sexual minorities, women, and people with disabilities. The Project works to highlight these concerns and to organize communities against eugenic applications of human biotechnology.

The Project on Reproductive Health and Human Rights works to promote women’s health and reproductive rights as they relate to the new reproductive and genetic technologies, through education, capacity building, and policy advocacy. The polarized debate around abortion and the moral status of the embryo has obscured broader concerns around the use of these technologies. The Project works with women’s health and reproductive rights organizations to raise their awareness of these emerging technologies, build their capacity to engage with related issues, and promote policy that reflects a commitment to women’s health, reproductive rights, health equity, human rights, and social justice.

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