Bioethics and Disability provides tools for understanding the concerns, fears, and biases that have convinced some people with disabilities that the health care setting is a dangerous place and some bioethicists that disability activists have nothing to offer bioethics. It wrestles with the charge that bioethics as a discipline devalues the lives of persons with disabilities, arguing that reconciling the competing concerns of the disability community and the autonomy-based approach of mainstream bioethics is not only possible, but essential for a bioethics committed to facilitating good medical decision making and promoting respect for all persons, regardless of ability.

Through in-depth case studies involving newborns, children, and adults with disabilities, Bioethics and Disability proposes a new model for medical decision making that is mindful of and knowledgeable about the fact of disability in medical cases. Disability-conscious bioethics will bring together disability experts and bioethicists to identify and mitigate disability bias in our health care systems.

Alicia Ouellette is a Professor of Law at Albany Law School and a Professor of Bioethics in the Union Graduate College/Mt. Sinai School of Medicine Bioethics Program. Her recent publications include Shaping Parental Authority over Children’s Bodies and Growth Attenuation, Parents’ Choices, and the Rights of Disabled Children. She is also a coeditor (with Laurence McCullough and Robert Baker) of the Cambridge Dictionary of Bioethics (2011).

Before joining the law faculty, she served as an Assistant Solicitor General for the State of New York. As ASG, she briefed and argued more than 100 appeals on issues ranging from termination of treatment for the terminally ill to the responsibility of gun manufacturers for injuries caused by handguns. She continues her advocacy work in select cases and was lead counsel on the law professors’ brief submitted in support of same-sex couples who sought the right to marry in New York State.
Disability Law and Policy Series

The Disability Law and Policy series examines these topics in interdisciplinary and comparative terms. The books in the series reflect the diversity of definitions, causes, and consequences of discrimination against persons with disabilities, while illuminating fundamental themes that unite countries in their pursuit of human rights laws and policies to improve the social and economic status of persons with disabilities. The series contains historical, contemporary, and comparative scholarship crucial to identifying individual, organizational, cultural, attitudinal, and legal themes necessary for the advancement of disability law and policy.

The book topics covered in the series also are reflective of the new moral and political commitment by countries throughout the world toward equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in such areas as employment, housing, transportation, rehabilitation, and individual human rights. The series will thus play a significant role in informing policy makers, researchers, and citizens of issues central to disability rights and disability antidiscrimination policies. The series grounds the future of disability law and policy as a vehicle for ensuring that those living with disabilities participate as equal citizens of the world.

Books in the series
Ruth Colker, When Is Separate Unequal? A Disability Perspective, 2009
Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck, Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: Veterans and Benefits in Post–Civil War America, 2010
Lisa Vanhala, Making Rights a Reality? Disability Rights Activists and Legal Mobilization, 2010
Alicia Ouellette, Bioethics and Disability: Toward a Disability-Conscious Bioethics, 2011
Eilionoir Flynn, From Rhetoric to Action: Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2011
To Jacob, Molly, and Sam. You give me reason to believe.
## Contents

*Preface*  
Introduction  

1. The Struggle: Disability Rights versus Bioethics  
   I. An Introduction to and Short History of the Disability-Rights Community  
   II. Introduction to and a Brief History of Bioethics

2. Clashing Perspectives and a Call for Reconciliation  
   I. Perspectives and Teachings in Bioethics  
   II. Perspectives and Teachings from the Disability-Rights Community  
   III. Points of Friction  
   IV. A Call for Peace

3. Infancy  
   I. The Case of Sydney Miller  
      A. Views from the Disability Community  
      B. Views from Bioethics  
   II. The Case of Emilio Gonzalez  
      A. Views from the Disability Community  
      B. Views from Bioethics  
   III. Observations  

---

*Preface*  
Introduction  

1. The Struggle: Disability Rights versus Bioethics  
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   I. Perspectives and Teachings in Bioethics  
   II. Perspectives and Teachings from the Disability-Rights Community  
   III. Points of Friction  
   IV. A Call for Peace

3. Infancy  
   I. The Case of Sydney Miller  
      A. Views from the Disability Community  
      B. Views from Bioethics  
   II. The Case of Emilio Gonzalez  
      A. Views from the Disability Community  
      B. Views from Bioethics  
   III. Observations
## Contents

4. Childhood
   I. Lee Larson’s Boys
      A. Views from the Deaf and Disability Communities
      B. Views from Bioethics
   II. The Case of Ashley X
      A. Views from the Disability Community
      B. Views from Bioethics
   III. Observations

Addendum: National Association for the Deaf Position Statement on Cochlear Implants

5. The Reproductive Years
   I. The Case of Valerie N.
      A. Views from Bioethics and the Disability Community
   II. The Case of Bob and Julie Egan
      A. Views from Bioethics and the Disability Community
   III. Observations

6. The Adult Years
   I. Mary’s Case
      A. Views from the Disability Community
      B. Views from Bioethics
   II. The Case of Larry McAfee
      A. Views from the Disability Community
      B. Views from Bioethics
   III. The Case of Scott Matthews
      A. Views from the Disability Community
      B. Views from Bioethics
   IV. Observations
## Contents

7. The End of Life 271  
   I. The Case of Theresa Schiavo 273  
   II. The Case of Sheila Pouliot 281  
   III. Views from the Disability Community 289  
   IV. Views from Bioethics 295  
   V. Observations 298  
      A. Constitutional Implications 300  
      B. Discrimination 305  

8. Toward a Disability-Conscious Bioethics 315  
   I. Working toward Reconciliation 317  
      A. Listening and Understanding 318  
      B. Acknowledging Fears, Biases, and Alliances 327  
      C. Unearthing Common Ground 329  
   II. Taking Action: Developing Disability-Consciousness in Bioethics 331  
      A. Principles 333  
      B. Protecting Against Abuse: The Role of Process 342  
   III. Disability-Conscious Bioethics in Action 344  
      A. Disability in Infancy: Sydney Miller and Emilio Gonzalez 345  
      B. Disability in Childhood: Lee Larson’s Boys, Ashley X 350  
      C. The Reproductive Years: William Peace, Valerie, and the Egans 356  
      D. The Adult Years: Mary, Larry McAfee, and Scott Matthews 357  
      E. End-of-Life Decisions: Sheila Pouliot and Terri Schiavo 361  
   IV. Conclusion – and a Call to Action 362  

Index 367
Much has changed during the years in which I have been working on this book. For one thing, disability is no longer a shadow issue in bioethics. When I first started my work, I rarely heard the phrase “disability perspective” in discussions with bioethicists. A three-day conference might include a single sparsely attended session on disability issues. Disability is now part of the conversation. More and more often, articles by disability experts appear in bioethics journals and texts. In the past year alone, I have participated in several national bioethics conferences devoted exclusively to disability issues. These developments give me hope that the field is ripe for change. Nonetheless, the transformative change I’d like to see – a movement toward a bioethics that incorporates disability as a central issue and engages disability experts in the enterprise – will take more than a series of conferences and articles. The real work will take place on the ground floor – in medical education, in hospitals, in the courtroom, in law schools, in government – wherever the work of bioethics is done. This book is my contribution to that work.

In the end, this is a book about collaboration, which is especially fitting given the teamwork that went into its creation. Although the mistakes and omissions are mine alone, I share credit for the worthwhile sections with many people. I am enormously grateful to my colleagues at Albany Law School, especially Dede Hill and Christine Chung who provided invaluable feedback and support in every possible form.
Preface

and at all times of day and night. I am also grateful to Dale Moore and Kathy Katz for convincing me I had something worthwhile to say; to James Gathii for being my constant sounding board; and to Tim Lytton, who always asks the hardest questions. From outside the law school, I owe special thanks to Bob Baker, who took a chance in giving me my first position in bioethics, to William Peace, whose challenging feedback shaped my arguments, and to Kathy Cerminara, Elizabeth Pendo, Jane Greenlaw, Jennifer Bard, Amy Campbell, Sean Philpott, and all the others who have commented on drafts, pushed my ideas forward, or simply disagreed with me. This project would have been impossible without the incredible efforts of Fredd Brewer and Laurie Dayter who kept me on task through the years. A special thanks to Fredd for refusing to let me sweat the small stuff during the last, final push. I have been fortunate to have the help of many capable student research assistants over the years. Jessie Cardinale, Alaina Bergerstock, and Ashley Torre deserve special note for their enormous contributions to this book.

Sadly, two of the people who taught me most of what I know about life with disability, Harriet McBryde Johnson and Paul Longmore, died while I was writing the manuscript. This would not have been the same book, and I would not be the same person, had I not been lucky enough to have crossed their paths. Their written contributions and life examples will continue to educate and inspire generations to come, but I mourn their early deaths and will forever regret that they did not live long enough to see how far I’ve come, and to explain the ways I still don’t get it.

Finally, I thank my family. You gave me the space and strength to carry on. You are my everything. I hope I’ve done you proud.