

Feminist Ethics: Its Effect on Society

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Abstract

This paper discusses the approach of feminist ethics toward different issues affecting society. Feminist ethics is an approach toward ethical behavior that considers feminine positions, in contrast to the traditional study of ethics which is considered by many to be male-centric.

Keywords

Traditional Ethics, Feminist Ethics, Applied Ethics, Moral Theories

1. Introduction

Feminist ethics is an aspect of ethics that arose from displeasure with traditional moral philosophies, which feminists view as male-centric and problematic due to the minimization of values traditionally associated with women or feminine positions (Ben-Jacob & Glazerman, 2022). This paper will address the effect of feminist ethics to applied ethics, i.e., to specific aspects of society.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that governs how a person or a society should act in different situations. It is a branch of philosophy that is traditionally divided into three basic areas: *metaethics*, *normative ethics* and *applied ethics*. *Metaethics* is concerned with the origins of ethical principles and their implications. *Normative ethics* is concerned with the guidelines of right and wrong that stipulate what people ought to do. *Applied ethics* is concerned with specific situations (Ben-Jacob & Glazerman, 2022) upon some of which this paper will focus.

2. Discussion

The first issue we will consider is the ethics of governance based on feminist ideals, such as care and empathy. They prove to be an issue as they label women as being “the other” to men as opposed to be leaders in their own right with their own moral views. That is to say that women need to be considered and evaluated in their own rights as opposed to being analyzed in comparison to men.

The sociology of the origins of traditional or male-based ethics dictate that one should act according to rational and structured behavior. Feminist ethics incorporates caring and emotion into the decisions that are made. Unfortunately, society all too often considers the latter as exhibition of weakness in leadership. Women in political situations are all too often considered weaker and subordinate than their male counterparts; this is because of their support of feminist ethics in addition to the male centric ethics that has been accepted for so long. Feminist ethics supports a non-subordinate feminine as opposed to as subordinate status as leaders.

Studies indicate the leadership increases angst among women as their ethical approaches to situations needs to incorporate both male-centric and feminist approaches. If they cannot manage this, they will be criticized from some group no matter how strong their leadership abilities are (Bishop, 2022).

Respecting the ethical values of feminism as well as those of traditional values, will provide us with stronger political leadership. This is evidenced by two recent feminine politicians. In New York State, Governor Kathy Hochul is fighting to maintaining the reproductive rights of women despite the national movement to alter them. Her plans include amending the state constitution to allow for safe abortions independent of the ruling of the Federal Supreme Court., which appears to be on a move to pass anti-abortion laws. Governor Hochul is a staunch supporter of reproductive rights, and she has instructed state agencies to develop public information to inform New Yorkers about their rights and protection under the law (Governor Hochul's Priorities, 2022).

In 2019 Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, acted with an ethical approach that encompasses the feminist viewpoint as well as the traditional values. 51 people died in Christchurch shootings in New Zealand. She took action to tighten gun laws and did not name the terrorist by name. She did add to the Islamophobic feelings that followed form the attacks. She was pictured showing empathy and by showing her emotion and sorrow (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021).

Feminist ethics has had a strong influence on the health care of women, and thankfully so. Medical education and practice have been dominated by traditional ethics for centuries. Too many times, the issues suffered by women were dismissed and not even understood by male doctors. Male doctors have often filled knowledge gaps with hysteria narratives (Young et al., 2018). This was prevalent when the male health care professionals could not diagnose the illness of their female patients. It has been recognized for quite some time that a terrible disservice has been done to women on a psychological basis. The issues include the acceptance of the use of antidepressants and addiction (Chesler, 2018). These unjust actions have been countered against women for centuries and are still ongoing. In *Women and Madness*, first published in 1972, Phyllis Chesler exposes the double standard in the treatment of women and mental health, including such issues as eating disorders, postpartum depressions, and social acceptance of antidepressants. She addresses the fact that too often psychiatry de-

fers to the masculine mind and opinion; as a result, women were not able to and, in many cases, still are not able to get the help they needed (Chesler, 2018).

“Rather than acknowledge the limitations of medical knowledge, medicine expected women to take control (with their minds) of their disease (in their body) by accepting their illness, making ‘lifestyle’ changes, and conforming to their gendered social roles of wife and mother. Moralizing discourses surround those who rebel; they are represented as irrational and irresponsible, the safety net for medicine when it cannot fulfil its claim to control the body” (Young et al., 2018). Feminist ethics have brought to light the necessity of women’s health centers, which have been established all over the country.

The need for a feminist ethics approach to social media has been brought to light by Frances Haugen, an engineer, scientist, product manager and whistleblower (Harris, 2022). She has written 20,000 pages on how social media companies have denied and muddied the truth and turned them over to the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Wall Street Journal in 2021. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have valued their profits at the expense of the physical and emotional health of its users worldwide. She strongly promotes greater humane technology (Harris, 2022).

Sophie Zang is another strong proponent for changing the ethical approach to social media. She is a data analyst and whistleblower as well. She is a former employee of Facebook who risked everything in her career to expose the truth. She exposed Facebook’s sloppy overseeing of online political influences (Wong, 2021).

Studies show that more women than men are willing to blow the whistle in difficult situations. One can infer that women care more about the welfare of others in general other than men. This is true in the corporate and industrial world. Women are more concerned with the company and its employees. Men, on the other hand might be more concerned about themselves and their jobs as opposed to suffering the repercussions of whistleblowing (Ben-Jacob & Glazerman, 2022).

When it comes to employment issues, surveys support the fact that women are still not paid comparative wages as men for the same work. Nor are they promoted up the corporate ladder as often (Bishop, 2022). Feminist ethics contends as well that when a person is fired from a job, considerations other than what is in the best interest of the company are necessary. Necessary deliberations include how will the termination affect the image of the company, how will this employee now support her family, the possibility of an alternate position within the establishment (Ben-Jacob & Glazerman, 2022).

Feminist ethics deals with concepts of equal opportunities, socialization, sex roles and discrimination. Strategies involve altering socialization and practices and improving attitudes. Mathematics has been considered a major for men, mostly. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) and published in 2019, women earned 57%, 60%, and 52% of all Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees respectively in the U.S. in 2013-2014

(Glazer, 2019). Women earned only 43%, 41% and 29% of the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees, respectively in mathematics and statistics in the same year (Glazer, 2019). More recent statistics are not stronger. In 2020, according to the National Science Foundation, women made up 57.3% of bachelor's degree recipients but only 42.4% of undergraduate degrees in mathematics and statistics (Glazer, 2019). Strategies for encouraging all students, regardless of gender or orientation to pursue mathematics are needed (Glazer, 2019).

Supporters of feminist ethics believe that the education system is patriarchal and dominated by men, just like the work force is. Feminists argue that the education system is just a primary preparation for leading into the future work force. They believe there are still gender differences in subject choice in schools. Fewer women study mathematics, let alone major in the discipline. We need to provide encouragement for all students majoring in all fields (Wang & Degol, 2013).

3. Conclusion

For a truly ethical approach to society, feminist ethics must be integrated into the traditional male sense of integrity. Not considering the different aspects of appropriate behavior results in negative repercussions in society from many aspects and does not benefit any group.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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