

Vol. 4, No. 1: IJFAB Special Issue: Feminist Perspectives on Ethics in Psychiatry
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In the last 10-12 years, bioethicists and scholars working in the intersection of philosophy and psychiatry have turned their attention to the unique ethical questions that emerge out of the practice of psychiatry. A brief perusal of bioethics journals yields quite a number of essays dedicated to applied ethics questions in psychiatry, grappling with the unique problems of patient competency, informed consent, and paternalism that arise when dealing with psychotic or dementia patients.

Research has focused on “gendered” diagnostic categories as well, and on prevalence rates showing gender patterns. From clinical portraits of personality traits such as borderline and multiple personality disorder or anti-social behavior, other theorists have reasoned that we need to radically rethink our intuitions about personhood. Finally, the explosion of activity in neuroscience has precipitated with it the new field of ‘neuroethics,’ wherein ethicists contemplate the social and ethical consequences of technological innovations such as brain imaging and psychotropic drugs.

Central to the focus of this issue is the question: how do feminist psychiatric ethics differ from mainstream psychiatric ethics? Part of the answer to this question involves making explicit the commitments and challenges that feminist analyses pose to mainstream psychiatric practice. For example, what sort of power differentials play out in the doctor-patient relationship?; what sexist (classist and racist) assumptions play out in psychiatric diagnoses as well as more fundamentally in psychiatric nosology?; how equal is access among women of color and of working class women to mental health services?; and how do ethnocentric assumptions underpin the medical model and thereby fail many non-Western communities?: The primary concern of feminist analyses also fundamentally implicates the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in the access to and delivery of mental health services.

Possible topics for this volume include:

- The degree that classification and conceptualization of mental illnesses in psychiatry challenge or reaffirm pervasive gender binaries, (e.g., the characterization of Gender Identity Disorder as involving discordant sexual and gender traits)
- Historical and cultural tropes and associations that align women and the feminine with disorder and deficiency
- How oppressive conditions, including social roles and expectations, shape explanations of certain disorders such as depression
- Sexual exploitation by male practitioners of female patients

- Postmodernist challenges to gender informing feminist therapeutic treatment for disorders such as Borderline Personality Disorder
- Possible social correlates, such as the rise in single mother managed households with the rise in the medicalization of children
- Explorations about why unequal access to mental health care disproportionately affects women of color and immigrant communities
- Analyses of why evidence suggests middle class and upper middle class women are over diagnosed, while working class women and women of color are under treated
- The social consequences of failing to take account of the gendered and racialized aspects of mental illness

Deadline for Submission: March 1, 2010