



Genes, Women, Equality

Mary Briody Mahowald

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Genetics is not gender neutral in its impact. Mahowald cites a wide range of biological and psychosocial examples that reveal its different impact on men and women, especially with regard to reproduction and caregiving. She examines the extent to which these differences are associated with gender injustice, arguing for positions that reduce inequality between the sexes. The critical perspective Mahowald brings to this analysis is an egalitarian interpretation of feminism that demands attention to inequalities arising from racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, and classism as well as sexism.

Eschewing a notion of equality as sameness, Mahowald defines equality as attribution of the same value to different objects. Gender justice, she claims, imputes the same value to men and women, despite their differences. It can only be maximized by practical efforts to equalize the burdens and benefits associated with genetics.

The topics considered include participation in research, allocation of genetic services, cultural difference, sex selection, misattributed paternity, prenatal and preimplantation diagnosis, carrier testing, genetic interventions, genetic disabilities, preferences for genetic ties to offspring, genetic susceptibility to late onset disorders, behavioral genetics, genetic discrimination in employment and insurance, and human cloning. Cases, both real and concocted, are used to illustrate the questions addressed.

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