Bioethics and Women
Mary Briody Mahowald

This book deals with bioethical issues relevant to women across the life span. “Gender justice” is the starting point and the end point of the author’s approach to the issues addressed. The first section offers an overview of bioethics, critiques prevalent approaches to bioethics and models of the physician-patient relationship, and sketches distinguishing aspects of women’s health care. Classical pragmatists and feminist standpoint theorists are enlisted in support of “an egalitarian perspective”, and positions on the moral status of fetuses and those already born are examined. The second section identifies topics that are directly or indirectly related to women’s health; these include prenatal testing, childbirth and newborn decisions, treatment of minors and the elderly, assisted reproduction, abortion, eating disorders, domestic violence, breast and gynecological cancer, end of life care, and research on women. Brief cases illustrate variables related to each topic. Empirical and theoretical considerations follow each set of cases; these are intended to precipitate more expansive and critical examination of the questions raised. The book concludes with discussion of an egalitarian ideal to be pursued through an ethic of virtue or supererogation rather than obligation. By embracing this ideal, according to the author, moral agents support a more demanding level of morality than guidelines or laws require.

Virtue and Gender Justice in Health Care
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan
After recapitulating the egalitarian perspective of the book, this chapter explains how this is necessarily directed toward an ideal of justice. The ideal is best approximated through an ethic of virtue rather than an ethic of obligation. An egalitarian ethic of virtue promotes the flourishing of all individuals throughout the life span by attending to their different needs, preferences, and capabilities, and by minimizing the inequities that are often associated with these differences. An ethic of obligation requires minimal efforts to reduce these inequities, whereas an ethic of virtue calls for maximal efforts to reduce them. In the context of women’s health care, gender justice demands attention to gender differences as both obligatory and virtuous.

Distinguishing Features of Women's Health Care
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Sex and gender differences in women’s health care are delineated. Models of the physician-patient relationship and casuistic and principlist methods of moral reasoning are critiqued on grounds of their lack of conformity with an egalitarian approach to bioethical issues. The question of “who is the patient” in health care of pregnant women is discussed. Ethically relevant similarities and differences between professional guidelines and regulatory statutes regarding health care are also examined.

Preconception and Prenatal Decisions
Mary Briody Mahowald

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to women’s decisions about preconception counseling, preimplantation diagnosis, prenatal testing, misattributed paternity, and sex selection are presented. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”, i.e., those whose input tends to be neglected.
Implications of different positions about moral status of fetuses are also considered.

**Nonreproductive Health Issues**

Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables that arise in the health care of women who are HIV positive or have AIDS, women with breast or gynecological cancer, and the use of hormone replacement therapy for treatment of menopausal symptoms are presented. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of women as patients.

**Preventing Pregnancy and Birth**

Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to women’s choices about contraception, sterilization, and abortion are presented. With regard to abortion, these include duration of gestation, condition of the fetus, methods of termination, availability and cost of the procedure, medical risks to the woman or potential child, capacity for parenting, responsibilities based on relationships to others, and different positions about the moral status of the fetus. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an egalitarian perspective that privileges women’s standpoint vis-à-vis men’s not only on grounds of nondominance but also on grounds that women, not men, are directly affected by pregnancy.
Research Issues
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating the exclusion of women in biomedical research, experimental treatment and maternal fetal surgery, human reproductive cloning, and embryonic stem cell research are presented. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”. Implications of different positions about moral status of embryos and fetuses, and about people born with disabilities are also considered.

Noncompliance during Pregnancy
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to pregnant women’s noncompliance with medical recommendations intended to benefit the fetus or potential child are presented. These involve refusal of hospitalization, refusal to comply with dietary recommendations, and refusal of cesarean section delivery. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors relevant to the cases are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”. Implications of different positions about the moral status of the fetus are also considered.

Treatment of Minors
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to decisions involving teenage pregnancy and motherhood, confidentiality, female genital surgery, and eating disorders are presented. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors relevant to the cases are discussed from an egalitarian perspective that addresses the nondominance of minors as well as their capacity for moral agency. A conception of parentalism as an antidote to paternalism and maternalism is proposed.

Violence and Discrimination toward Women and Children
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan
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Cases illustrating variables relevant to violence toward children, pregnant women, and the elderly, as well as gender discrimination and sexual harassment are presented, stressing the impact of these situations on women’s health. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”, i.e., women as patients. With regard to pregnant women, implications of different positions about moral status of fetuses are also considered.

Care of the Elderly and End-of-Life Care
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan
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Cases illustrating variables that arise in the health care of elderly women and their caregivers, and care of the dying are presented. These include questions about ageism, competence to perform ordinary functions such as driving, possible loss of capacity for moral agency, advance directives, and decisions about forgoing or terminating life-support. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of women.
Medically Assisted Reproduction
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to the following topics are presented: criteria for patient selection, egg “donation” and “surrogacy”, multiple gestations, and disposition of in vitro embryos after infertility treatment. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors relevant to the cases are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”. Implications of different positions about the moral status of gametes and embryos are also considered.

Decisions at Parturition and Birth
Mary Briody Mahowald

in Bioethics and Women: Across the Lifespan

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Cases illustrating variables relevant to the decisions of pregnant women about methods of childbirth, elective cesarean delivery, impaired newborns, and sex assignment at birth are presented. For each topic, empirical and theoretical factors relevant to the cases are discussed from an “egalitarian perspective” that imputes privileged status to the standpoint of those who are “nondominant”. Implications of different positions about moral status of fetuses and newborns are also considered.