|  |
| --- |
|  |
| Gender Roles & Morality |
| Applied Ethics |
| *Francy Rios* |
|  |
| **10/31/2013** |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

One of most discussed moral issues in society is the difference between gender roles. There are many ways in which men and women differentiate from each other, from biological to moral status. Larry May states that in many societies, the natural and statistical differences between men and women justify the differential treatment of the sexes. May goes on to explain that the differences are statistical not natural. In other words, men are known for having a stronger upper-body as opposed to women, yet there are some women whom have greater upper-body strength than most men. In his book *Applied Ethics*, Larry May addresses gender roles and morality as one of the most controversial moral issues. May uses six very influential essays written by authors whom are philosophical thinkers in order to construct awareness upon the issue.

Sally Haslanger, author of *Gender and Social Construction:* *Who? What? When? Where? How?*, discusses how there are different kinds of social constructions and that society itself makes categories for absolutely anything. Regardless of what is being analyzed whether it is a person, an object, a language, a game or even the Supreme Court of the U.S. it still depends on a complex social context. Haslanger states that “to say that something is socially constructed is to say that it is caused to be a certain way and the casual process involves social factors” (321) For example, social forces are responsible my coming to have the idea of an education, and social forces were largely responsible for there being colleges and universities. In her essay Sally Haslanger explains that gender, race, and nationality have also been constructed by society. Haslanger then goes on to explaining that if social conditions changed substantially there would be no difference between men, women, and people of different races. Haslanger proposes philosophical definitions of men and women without using the construction of what we know as “common sense”, instead she uses a definition that can help us understand what gender really is and how much of an impact gender has. One of Haslanger’s definitions stated that “G *is a gender* relative to context of C if and only if members of G are (all and only) those who are regularly observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of their reproductive capacities.” (323) In other words, G and C can be representatives of either the male or female gender yet still have the same definition. Sally Haslanger states that there are different senses in which gender and race has been socially constructed, whether it is by their shape, color, actions, or the functions of their bodies, yet she believes that there is a better way to construct new and different practices that are less judgmental and harsh.

In her essay, *Domestic Violence against Women and Autonomy*, Marilyn Friedman attacks one of the most controversial issues which is violence against women and women who don’t speak up against their oppressors. Friedman states that the women who decide to not testify against their husbands are making the job harder for prosecutors to seek justice and are also diminishing the autonomy of woman. There are many ways in which a woman can be battered by an intimate partner, whether it is physically, sexually, or verbally. “Autonomy, to reiterate, involves reflecting on one’s deeper values and concerns and acting in accordance with them.” (327) the men who abuse women are taking away the woman’s right to self-governance, especially the women who don’t testify against their partners. Freidman argues that instead of asking “why do women stay”, people should ask “why do men abuse women?” also that there should be a continuation of research addressing this important question. Freidman later discusses that woman who stay with their abusive partners have a good reason to do so, whether it is because money, children, or fear. Freidman believes that abused women shouldn’t stay quiet and should prosecute their abusers, also that even if a woman decides not press charges it can be justified for others to go against her word.

Joel Anderson’s essay *Is Equality Tearing Families Apart*, tackles the idea that genderless parenting can result in higher equality between men and women. Anderson goes on to differentiate what it is to father and what it is to be a mother; then he explains that a child must basically learn to balance the differences to ensure that the diversity isn’t eliminated. Anderson states that one of the many effects of gendered roles is the inequality that women receive in society. Joel Anderson strongly criticizes neotraditionalists and their approaches towards gender, “What neotraditionalists overlook are the posttraditional alternatives. Since industrial societies have been based on the assumption that only half of the potential work force would participate, it is not really all that surprising that fundamental changes are needed as part of the shift to genuinely full employment.” (344) this is a great example because Anderson is trying to enforce the idea that if women were given the equality that they deserve then industries would have the full employment that they need. Joel Anderson believes that women shouldn’t be treated inferior to men. The main point of this essay is that if equal power amongst men and women/father and mother is distributed and that if family stability is enforced then there will be an increase of freedom of opportunities in both genders.

In her essay, *Re-Thinking Civil Unions and Same-Sex Marriage*, Brook J. Sadler addresses a very controversial topic. Sadler discussed what “good marriage” is and what a states interest in marriage. Same-sex marriage is a very sore topic for many people; there are many opponents and proponents. Before getting into the topic of same-sex marriage Sadler discusses what marriage really is. “If some or all of the legal rights and benefits of marriage are genuine goods, it is difficult to see why such goods should be denied to non-married people who sustain relationships of financial, emotional, and practical support with others whom they are not married to.” (348) Sadler has demonstrated with her arguments that marriage can bring social good but that one does not need to be married to obtain the personal good which people hope to obtain through marriage. Therefore, is marriage really suitable for couples? Brook Sadler main argument is that civil marriage is not worth preserving for neither same-sex or heterosexual couples. Later on in her essay Sadler explains that the state nor the law have any interest in marriage because it gives no substantial content to marriage. Brook Sadler believes that civil marriage should be replaced by civil unions because she believes that civil unions can provide a more “flexible” and “individualized” form of marriage with less involvement from the government.

In his essay, *Is it Wrong to Discriminate on the Bass of Homosexuality?* Jeff Jordan makes the bold statement that there are some situations in which discrimination against homosexuals can be justified. Along his essay Jordan compares the Parity thesis and the “Difference thesis.” The Parity thesis is a claims that homosexuality has the same moral status as heterosexuality. On the other hand, the Difference thesis claims that there are moral differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality which justifies discrimination against homosexuals. An argument that cosines with the Difference thesis claims that “no just government can coerce a citizen into violating a deeply held moral belief or religious belief.” (361) If the state was to sanction same-sex marriages it would turn into a big dilemma because people of strong religious beliefs and moral objections will find themselves violating what they advocate. Jordan makes his argument clear, in the end stating that “the discrimination is a way of resolving a public policy dilemma that accommodates, to an extent, each side of the impasse and, further, protects the religious and moral integrity of a good number of people.” (362) What Jeff Jordan is trying to say is that in the end it is morally permissible to discriminate homosexuality because of the public policy ramifications of gay marriage. Jeff Jordan is fair thorough his essay by discussing the Parity and Difference thesis and giving both sides of the argument, yet even though he may not personally agree he made the conclusion that in some situations discrimination against homosexuals can be justified.

Sarah Song, writer of Justice*, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism* brings up another strong moral issue which takes a big part in gender roles. Song discusses Polygamous relationships and its acceptance into society. Later on Song also explains that there should be an intervention by the law if there is a sign of any abuse toward the women and girls of that society. “If Mormon women maintain that they have feely chosen to remain in polygamous marriage in accordance with the religious convictions, the state should respect their choices but on the condition that they are free to exit.” (365) Song claims that given the diversity of our country, Polygamous relationships should be given the same rights as any other religion. In that sense, their rules and regulations should be respected by society and the law, which is unless a woman or girl in that society is in harm’s way. Song argues that the government should be as aware concerning sexual abuse in polygamous relationships as in non-polygamous relationships. Sarah Song clearly believes in equality of respect amongst all religion, and believes that Polygamy deserve just as much acceptance and respect as any other religion.

John Stuart Mills had many beliefs which tied back to the greatest principle of happiness. Mills believed that a person has the liberty to do as they please as long as they don’t harm others. Mills also believed that a person may set a bad example for others by their actions and in that way do harms to others. One of the most discussed issues within the moral issue of gender roles is the great inequality between men and women, religions, and heterosexuals and homosexuals. Equality and moral understanding are the two factors that can lead to the greatest principle of happiness. For example, if people stray from harming others and feeling the urge to discriminate others then that person can do as they please. Also, people can be influential to one another in a positive way, thus resulting in happiness. The reason why gender roles and morality is a big moral is because people are negatively influencing one another. For example how gendered rolls in parenting have eventually caused inequality between men and women. Mills believed that actions are in right portion as they tend to promote happiness and wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.

Socrates and Plato are two rationalist philosophers whom believed that the moral life is what brings happiness. Both philosophical thinkers believed that a good act is not a good act because God says that it is, but because it is useful to us in our efforts to be better and happier people. In today’s society this belief would be viewed slightly different but with the same concept. A good act is not a good act because it’s what a person is “supposed” to do, but because it can be beneficial to not only that person but the people that surround them. Socrates and Plato both believed that women were as equal to men, which ties back to the moral issue in gender roles. Given that they were moral thinkers, both Socrates and Plato would have found a way of addressing this moral issue with possible solutions.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant believes that morality is derived from rationality. Kant states that the moral law is a categorical imperative, which means that a person only does something because it is the right thing to do. It is from categorical imperative that all moral obligations are generated. Kant believed that an action is good not by the ends achieved or on the basis of its consequences but solely by the will that determines the action. Equality amongst male and females is the right thing to do, as well as allowing same-sex marriage and equal parenting is the right thing to do because it can result in greater good. Kant believed in universality which meant that a person should do something only if they think that it is okay for everybody to do it as well. When dealing with such moral issued in gender roles the use of universality can be very useful because if people positively influence each other and work together there is a possibility that the issue can improve.

I believe that gender role is a big moral issue that has an effect on many people’s daily lives and it shouldn’t keep going unattended. Gender roles breaks down to many other issues and controversial dilemmas such as the ones discussed in the six essays. It is fascinating to see that people are looking into these problems and studying them to make a better understanding for the public. But who is reading? Today people are aware of the moral issues that are happening every day, yet very little is done to help improve the cause. Issues such as parenting, religion, sexuality, discrimination, and etc. all play a big role on gender roles as a moral issue. If we, the people of this land, come together and rationally and morally think of a way to better these problems there will be progress.