**The Breastfeeding Dilemma Virtual Workshop**

**Overview of Talks**

Hello again from The Breastfeeding Dilemma Virtual Workshop. For anyone who is just joining us, I’m Fiona Woollard, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton.

In this section, I’ll give a brief overview of the original workshop and what materials are available from each talk for the virtual workshop.

The original workshop consisted of four talks.

Gill Thomson, Senior Research Fellow at the School of Community Health and Midwifery at the University of Central Lancaster gave a fascinating presentation on Shame Associated with Infant Feeding. Gill’s research shows that both breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers experience shame and guilt about infant feeding. As Gill says: “negative reactions and responses to women’s bodies, abilities and infant feeding methods can lead to breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers feeling inadequate, defective and isolated.”

Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, we don’t have a recording of Gill’s talk from the workshop. You can read an abstract of Gill’s talk on this Virtual Workshop page. There is also a link to Gill’s wonderful published paper, which describes the underlying research. Unfortunately, this paper isn’t open access, so you’ll need the appropriate subscriptions to get hold of it.

Next came my own paper, ““Breastfeeding and Duty: Philosophical Mistakes about Motherhood in discussion of Infant Feeding Decisions.” I argue that the guilt and shame associated with decisions not to breastfeed is a symptom of a widespread mistake in discussion of maternal behaviour. This is the mistaken assumption that new mothers pregnant women have a *defeasible duty* to perform any action that might benefit their child. When you have a defeasible duty to do something, you are morally required to do it unless something outweighs the duty. So if you don’t do it, you need some kind of justification – and if you can’t point to something weighty enough to outweigh the duty, you’re liable for guilt and blame. But, I suggest, even if breastfeeding is beneficial, this benefit doesn’t mean the mother has a duty to breastfeed. Such benefits give rise to reasons not duties: they make it good to breastfeed (worth the effort!) without implying that women who do not breastfeed should be required to defend their decisions or suffer guilt and blame.

Again, we don’t have a recording of my talk from the original workshop. However, I have recorded an audio summary. This talk has now developed into a paper, coauthored with Lindsey Porter, which we hope to publish in a bioethics journal. You can download a draft of the paper from the Virtual Workshop Webpage.

The next talk was by Elselijn Kingma (also an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Southampton). Elselijn notes that *both* women who breastfeed, *and* women who don’t breastfeed feel criticised, pressured and unsupported. She suggests that at least some of the problem is created by the social and linguistic context in which utterances get meaning. Because of social and linguistic context, the force of an utterance may not be just its literal meaning or what the speaker intends to convey. The peculiar context of parenting decisions ensures that descriptive statements become loaded with considerable normative force. “Breastfeeding has some benefits” becomes “you must breastfeed”. “I found it much easier to bottle-feed” becomes “you are a fool if you breastfeed”.  Elselijn suggests this not only provides part of the explanation for why everyone feels criticised and why healthcare providers (and other people) may find this territory so difficult to navigate, this means speech relevant to maternal choice surrounding pregnancy and early motherhood is perniciously, and systematically, silenced.

A recording of Elselijn’s talk is available on the Virtual Workshop Webpage.

Our final talk was from, Heather Trickey, Research Associate in Complex public health intervention, research and evaluation and a Senior Researcher at the NCT. Heather argues that much of the debate on infant feeding mistakenly focuses on either the mother in isolation or on public health policy. Instead, she argues, we need an *ecological perspective*: looking at whether, why and how multiple factors relating to the wider physical, legal, commercial, economic and social environments within which women reside are (or are not) integrated with infant feeding policy. Heather explores how a perspective that is explicitly mother-centred (rather than focused on the baby’s ‘health’) and which is ecologically-focused (rather than focused on providing messages for individual mothers) fits within the wider discourse on infant feeding, and how such a perspective might help us to depolarise the current debate.

A recording of Heather’s talk is available on the Virtual Workshop Webpage.

Again, remember you should feel free to look at as much, or as little, of this material as you wish before joining us for discussion.