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Book Review: Giving Breastmilk: Body Ethics and Contemporary Breastfeeding Practice

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emotionally manage which parts of their bodies are theirs, allows them to experience agency in a situation that could be viewed as controlling and constrained. Part Two, "Connecting," has two chapters focused on the intended mothers, including their relationships to the surrogates. Here we see how intended mothers claim both the pregnant and maternal identity, often with the assistance of the surrogates as well as medical personnel. Teman utilizes the concept of the "shifting body" to illuminate the way this is co-constructed by all parties. Part Three, "Separating," deals with the immediate aftermath of the birth. One chapter focuses on the roles of state and medical institutions in establishing a separation between surrogate and baby. The other chapter examines how gift giving becomes a crucial form of acknowledgement in order for the surrogate to feel satisfied with her experience. In both these chapters, we see how the surrogate's key relationship in this process is with the intended mother, not the baby she carried. Part Four, "Redefining," consists of two chapters that examine how surrogates tell their stories in which they emphasize themes of endurance and heroism. These narratives allow women to feel empowered despite the restrictive processes entailed throughout their experience. In the conclusion, Teman draws on her ethnographic evidence to show the gap between common assumptions about surrogacy and the actual experience of the process for most surrogates. She also draws on her empirical findings to evaluate different policy solutions.

Throughout the book, Teman clearly captures the agency of the women involved and dispels simplistic accounts of exploitation and alienation; at the same time, Teman thoughtfully acknowledges the problems that arise in this new reproductive practice. *Birth of a Mother* is an engagingly written and insightful account of the practice of surrogacy, and is an example of ethnography at its finest. This will be a valuable resource for scholars of reproduction, family, body, gender, and medical sociology/anthropology.

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Giving Breastmilk: Body Ethics and Contemporary Breastfeeding Practice. Edited by Rhonda Shaw and Alison Bartlett. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Demeter Press, 2010, 255 pp., \$34.95 (paper).

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Women's reproductive practices have long been a focus of feminist scholars, including breastfeeding, but this edited collection provides a welcome

collection of new and diverse perspectives on the production of breastmilk and the practice of breastfeeding. The notion of breastmilk as “gift exchange,” a fundamental feature of social life, is central to the book’s four sections: Making Milk, Sharing Milk, Milk Politics, and Milk Theory. The individual chapters examine how this exchange occurs, and the meanings given to it, in diverse settings (at work, in public, among other mothers, within criminal justice proceedings, in the neonatal intensive care unit [NICU], and in formal milk banks) and in diverse national contexts (the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, and the Sudan). The contradictions and controversies surrounding women’s breastfeeding and pumping experiences are examined from the perspective of bioethics, feminist theory, sociology, and psychoanalysis.

The relational and exchange nature of this practice is intriguingly revealed in the chapter by Gribble, who notes, “strictly speaking, women do not breastfeed at all, it is the children who suckle at the breast and who are doing the breastfeeding” (64). The cooperative and relational nature of the activity is highlighted in children’s accounts and perspectives, who see breastmilk as “better than ice cream,” as giving pleasure, comfort, calming, and demonstrations of their mothers’ availability and care. This insight struck me as a significant paradigm shift, similar to when ecologist Sandra Steingraber placed the breastfeeding baby at the top of the ecological food pyramid in her memoir and meditation on the connection between environmental contaminants and women’s reproductive bodies in *Having Faith: An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood* (2001).

What could be a strange mix is instead an intriguing, coherent look at a highly variable and socially constructed biological practice that is deeply embodied, culturally mandated, yet variously practiced. Moreover, the moral salience of breastfeeding to women’s identities as mothers, sexual beings, citizens, and criminals is profound and deeply central to the collection as a whole. Many of the authors acknowledge the competing and conflicting discourses around the value of breastmilk and show how women navigate and mediate the contradictory cultural messages to sustain a view of themselves as “good mothers.” Sociologist Cindy Stearns examines the role of the breast pump in this light, drawing on extensive interviews with new mothers. Carol Bartle explores the mixed messages New Zealand women receive from public health discourses that maintain “breast is best” yet whose babies in the NICU receive supplements as a routine matter, thus negating the larger cultural message, as well as the intense physical efforts of women to produce this hard-won “liquid gold” either from their own bodies or from willing donors. The gold standard of scientific evidence promoting human milk as

superior to formula has led to the development of milk banks and informal milk sharing in order to provide this substance for sick premature infants in the United States, Canada, and Ireland. Yet milk from mothers deemed “toxic,” whether from involvement in the criminal justice system (Reich) or because of their infections with HIV (Van Esterick) or the West Nile virus (Hausman) points to how cultural context determines and shapes the moral salience of feeding their babies.

With all that is in the collection, there is still room for more. Fathers, and their role in this gift exchange, are barely examined except for a brief mention in terms of paternal envy of women’s ability to breastfeed. Indeed, weaning, as experience and practice, is also overlooked. The experience and significance of the “first latch,” and how this may be connected to the birth experience, specifically, the interventions, on women’s and babies’ ability to breastfeed, is an emerging area of interest and could usefully be mined for important insights.

The strengths of this collection lie in its scope and breadth, and also the nuanced insights into women’s embodied experience, making it useful for classes in feminist theory as well as women’s health, for care providers and breastfeeding advocates, and for academics in sociology, anthropology, bioethics, and women’s studies.

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Pushing for Midwives: Homebirth Mothers and the Reproductive Rights Movement. By Christa Craven. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010, 208 pp., \$26.95 (paper), \$79.50 (cloth).

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Ask someone to describe homebirth mothers and the words “hippie” and “earthy crunchy” inevitably appear. It is this stereotype that Christa Craven seeks to deconstruct in her book *Pushing for Midwives: Homebirth Mothers and the Reproductive Rights Movement*. We misrepresent the reality, Craven argues, by portraying activists united in their fight for women’s health issues. The reality is that historically, women have been differentially affected by policies and laws relating to reproduction. Hence, it is no surprise that women of different socioeconomic statuses and racial groups adopt varying strategies and approaches in advocating for reproductive rights.