

Overview of BFIC 2018 Conference Theme

The Dance of Nurture in a Complex World: How biology, gender, and social context shape how we nourish our children

Our everyday infant and child feeding, and nurturing activities are shaped by gender, customs, the sociopolitical environment, and by the ways lactation, the body, and culture relate. The interaction of all these factors leads to different ways of nourishing, and nurturing across cultures, communities and populations. Breastfeeding, chestfeeding, pumping, and human milk expression, use, donation, sharing, and selling are all activities that expand the diversity of infant feeding practices that we see in the world today. These different practices carry multiple meanings in different contexts and entail different types of negotiations, compromises and trade-offs. Some of us are challenged by the pain, pleasures, and difficulties of using their body to care for another. Some are challenged by trying to breastfeed in a context shaped by systems of gender inequality that ignore the complexity of embodied, gendered nurture. Some experience challenges related to negotiating feeding and nurturing in a context of systemic racism, homophobia, classism, ableism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Our invited speakers were selected to address different aspects of this theme. Penny Van Esterik, a truly ground breaking mother in our field, continues to impress even though she is a retired professor. She wrote what was probably the first article entitled “Breastfeeding and Feminism”, in 1994, and she just released a new book on “the dance of nurture” –which gave rise to our conference theme. We have two special panels this year to explore how breastfeeding, race, and racism continue to interact—we very much appreciate the contributions by the National Association of Professional and Peer Lactation Supporters of Color and SisterSong to our program to help us all examine this important subject. We are also pleased to welcome Trevor MacDonald, whose experiences giving birth and chestfeeding two children as a transgender man, position him to help us all learn more about nursing in a context that is both biologically and socially challenging and to examine the experiences of LGBTQ+ parents through a social justice lens. Dixie Weber, Administrator for Women’s and Urology, St. Luke’s Medical Center in Boise, Idaho, will share with us her experiences developing health care services that are welcoming for diverse families and patients. Jennifer Yourkavitch, with IFC International, and Aunchalee Palmquist, Assistant Professor with the Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute, will help us examine the nurturing practices of pumping and human milk sharing—and their associated challenges and pleasures. We are also delighted to offer two other special panels that will stimulate our thinking on important topics of our time: conflicts of interest in funding for research (Penny Van Esterik, Joan Dodgson and Kimberly Seals Allers), and combatting misleading narratives around breastfeeding (Adrianna Logalbo and Kimberly Seals Allers). These folks will be joined by photographer Elizabeth Ubbe, and filmmaker Elizabeth Bayne (Chocolate Milk), and film producers Chantal Molnar and Jennifer Davidson (The Milky Way)—these artists can perhaps help us see with a different side of our brain.

In addition, we will have conversations related to a variety of topics that over 60 of you bring to the table: water insecurity; disaster response; women’s lived experiences; addressing inequities in communities; law and policy; clinical/health care responses; workplace innovations; medical reimbursement of lactation services; breastfeeding pain; and social media. Finally, we are very happy to have contributors speaking about breastfeeding and practices in many different regions, territories, and countries including Appalachia, Australia, Canada, Ghana, Indonesia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom; and other parts of the United States.

We look forward to stimulating conversation and interactions as we explore together the diversity of infant feeding practices and identifying exciting approaches to supporting all those who feed and nurture infants and young children.