POSTNATAL REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY: PROMOTING RELATIONAL AUTONOMY AND SELF-TRUST IN NEW PARENTS


New parents suddenly come face to face with myriad issues that demand careful attention but appear in a context unlikely to provide opportunities for extended or clear-headed critical reflection, whether at home with a new baby or in the neonatal intensive care unit. As such, their capacity for autonomy may be compromised. Attending to new parental autonomy as an extension of reproductive autonomy, and as a complicated phenomenon in its own right rather than simply as a matter to be balanced against other autonomy rights, can help us to see how new parents might be aided in their quest for competency and good decision making. In this paper I show how a relational view of autonomy – attentive to the coercive effects of oppressive social norms and to the importance of developing autonomy competency, especially as related to self-trust – can improve our understanding of the situation of new parents and signal ways to cultivate and to better respect their autonomy.

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