



The boob diaries:

Negotiating 'breast' versus 'bottle' in an online community of Exclusive Pumpers

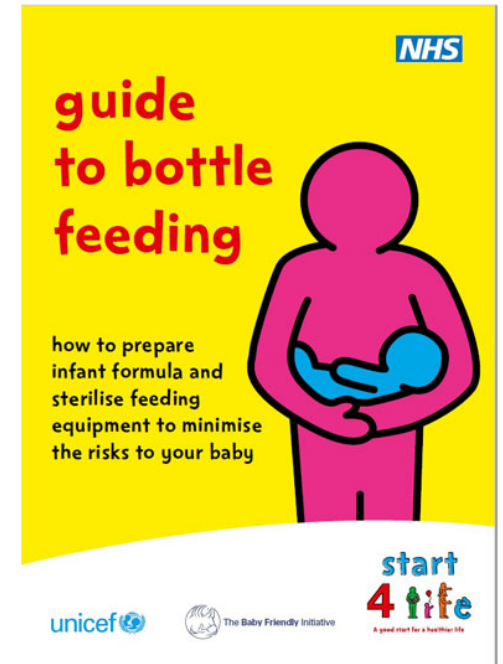
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Some background: breastfeeding in the UK

- WHO recommends 'exclusive breastfeeding' as "the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development" (who.int, accessed February 2019).
- While 81% of mothers initiate breastfeeding in the UK, 34% are still breastfeeding at 6 months (2010 UK infant Feeding Survey)
- Research shows many women face problems with breastfeeding, which can lead to post-partum depression (see Dennis and McQueen 2009)
- Despite acknowledging these difficulties, there is little public health guidance on the expression of maternal milk (EMM)

Exclusive pumping and the problem of 'breast versus bottle'

- Majority of research on infant feeding takes a medical perspective, aiming to improve healthcare providers' promotion of breastfeeding
- Wealth of research critiquing the damaging effect of the dominant discourse that 'breast is best' (Murphy 1999; Wolf 2011, Brookes et al 2016; Hunt 2017)
- However, little acknowledgement of the potentially negative impact of the 'breast versus bottle' binary e.g. Public health England Start4Life pamphlets:



Exclusive Pumping: breastfeeding without nursing

- Expressing breastmilk exclusively to feed an infant without feeding directly from the breast (Casemore 2013)
- EPers therefore breastfeed without nursing, where nursing = feeding directly at the breast (Eidelman 2017)

“There are occasions that arise which may prevent a mom from being able to nurse her baby. A mother who has a baby who cannot or will not latch, for whatever reason, may assume there is no choice but for her to use infant formula. There is another option however, and **one that doesn't seem to get the support or acknowledgment it deserves** – exclusively pumping, also known as ‘EPing’.” (*Kellymom.com*, accessed February 2019)

The boob diaries: exclusive pumping blogs

- Google search terms 'exclusive pumping' and 'exclusive pumping blogs'
- Websites 'about' breastfeeding/EPing as well as posts on pumping from parenting lifestyle blogs:
 - [Exclusive Pumping](http://exclusivepumping.com) (exclusivepumping.com)
 - The Pumping Mommy (thepumpingmommy.com)
 - [The Badass Breastfeeder](http://thebadassbreastfeeder.com) (thebadassbreastfeeder.com)
 - Pumpspotting (pumpspotting.com)
 - The Global Big Latch On (biglatchon.org)
 - KellyMom (kellymom.com)
 - [Happy Home Fairy](http://happyhomefairy.com) (happyhomefairy.com)
 - Scary Mommy (scarymommy.com)
 - Motherly (mother.ly)
 - Kindred Bravely (kindredbravely.com/blogs/bravely)

Analytical framework: evaluation and stance-taking

- 'Evaluation' refers to:

“the broad cover term for the expression of a speaker’s or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that [they are] talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any number of other sets of values.”

(Thompson and Hunston 2000: 5)

- Analysis of stance-taking is important – bloggers take up positions in relation to different ways of feeding, revealing underlying value systems at play

Models of evaluation and stance

Parameters of evaluation
(Thompson and Huntson 2000;
Bednarek 2006):



Attitudinal
stance:

- aesthetic, emotional, and moral judgements

Epistemic
stance:

- degree of certainty/uncertainty attached to a proposition

Style
stance:

- indication of *how* something is said

(Biber and Finegan 1989;
Myers 2010)

Taking stances on exclusive pumping

- **EPing is equivalent to breastfeeding:** Bloggers are often concerned with defining EPing as synonymous with 'breastfeeding', but different from 'nursing'
- **EPing is challenging:** EPing is constructed as hard work, a journey, or a challenge to be overcome
- **EPing as facilitating 'breast is best':** Bloggers often justify their decision to EP based on the nutritional benefits of breast milk, thereby facilitating 'breast is best'

EPing is equivalent to breastfeeding

- Exclusively pumping is breastfeeding! Is your baby drinking breast milk? Yes! They are breastfed. Some moms struggle with how to describe that their child is breast fed by EP. My go to reply has always been “She drinks breast milk from a bottle.” Even though your baby is not direct nursing, they are getting that immune boosting, comforting, liquid gold, perfectly designed mommy’s milk. (‘A Tips and Tricks Guide to Exclusively Pumping’, *The Global Latch On*)
- “A mother who has a baby who cannot or will not latch, for whatever reason, may assume there is no choice but for her to use infant formula. There is another option however, and one that doesn’t seem to get the support or acknowledgment it deserves – exclusively pumping, also known as “**EPing**”.”
- “First, exclusive pumping IS breastfeeding – it’s just not nursing. When you pump and feed your baby the milk you pumped, you are feeding from your breasts – just not directly. However, when people are asking this question, they often say “breastfeeding” when they mean “nursing.” ”(‘Exclusively Pumping Breast Milk: Why Do It, and How to Get Started’, exclusivepumping.com)

EPing is challenging

- In most cases, a mother who has made the decision to exclusively pump has not done so “lightly”. She is aware of the irreplaceable benefits of her milk, and she wants her baby to have the best, so the most logical conclusion for her is to pump and provide her milk to baby by bottle. Sadly, many (including health care providers) will tell mom that this is crazy idea, and “it’ll never work”; “you’ll run out of milk”; or will say “you simply will not be able to keep up”. Without the support and information she needs, a mom may simply give up.” (*exclusivepumping.com*)
- Exclusive pumping is not an easy journey. There are a lot of sleepless nights, times that you do not want to pump, and times you hate being tied to a machine. But I look at my son and it is all worth it. (*The Badass Breastfeeder*)
- “It’s insanely hard in the beginning but you need to pump every 2 to 3 hours around the clock.” (*Kellymom.com*)
- “Breastfeeding and pumping takes dedication but it doesn’t have to be as hard or foreign as some make it out to be. This site is dedicated to any Mom who pumps or breastfeeds in some form or another. ” (*The Pumping Mommy*)

EPing as facilitating 'breast is best'

- After my failed natural birth , all I wanted to do was hold my son in my arms and breastfeed him. I wanted to be my son's sole nutritional provider. I wanted to feel the inseparable bond that breastfeeding mothers talked about. I wanted my heart to warm as my son gave me a milky smile . I wanted my son and I to have the health benefits of breast milk. Breast milk is easier to digest, and lowers the risk of respiratory infections, asthma, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and skin diseases. It also lowers the mother's risk of ovarian and breast cancer (both of which I have a high risk of getting). While I was pregnant, I watched breastfeeding videos and went to Le Leche League meetings. In my mind, there was no way breastfeeding was not going to work out for me. ('My Exclusive Pumping Journey', *The badass Breastfeeder*)
- "Once I realized that pumping is breastfeeding, I had a huge shift in how I viewed exclusive pumping, and found myself much more positive and invested in the entire thing. ('Noah's Exclusive Pumping Story'", *exclusivepumping.com*)
- "When those moments creep up that make you feel like you've failed your breastfeeding journey because it looks different than you thought it would and because it is not what you expected." (*Motherly.com*)

“Your worth as a mother is not measured in ounces”: initial conclusions and implications

- Positive stances towards EPing reframe EMM as a form of breastfeeding
- Negative evaluations emphasise the challenge and commitment of EPing, related to hard work, lack of information and support
- EPers are therefore not exempt from the ‘dread spectre’ of breastfeeding, which is tied closely to notions of ‘good mothering’:
 - EPers challenge the ‘maternal deviancy’ (Murphy 1999) of breastfeeding without nursing

“There is no room or need for guilt here – the mother who has done all she can to bf “normally” isn’t a failure – she is just doing the best she can in the situation she is in. Mothers who choose to exclusively pump are very dedicated mothers – determined to do the best they can for their precious babies, and they deserve respect and support.” (kellymom.com)

- Language use is important: EPers’ discourse subvert ‘breast vs bottle’