

# **The boob diaries: Negotiating ‘breast versus bottle’ in an online community of ‘exclusive pumpers’**

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This paper critically analyses a corpus of online blogposts from a community of ‘exclusive pumpers’ (EPers): women who express breastmilk as an alternative to breastfeeding. EPers who document their experiences via blogs can be usefully described as an online Community of Practice, as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger 1998): these mums are learning the practice of pumping partly via their interactions with readers and other bloggers. Blog posts can also serve primarily as forms of personal disclosure (‘My Exclusive Pumping Journey’, *The Badass Breastfeeder*) or advice-giving (‘Pumping 101’, *Exclusive Pumping*).

Using concepts and tools from stance analysis (e.g. Myers 2010) and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), I critically analyse how EPers negotiate overarching discourses such as ‘breast is best’ in their posts, which can be viewed as indexing broader narratives of being a ‘good’ mother, as well as the potentially damaging dichotomy of ‘breast’ versus ‘bottle’: in expressing breastmilk, exclusive pumpers sit outside the conventional breast/bottle binary, since it is typically assumed that ‘bottle’ feeding is synonymous with using formula. The prevalence of personal blogs and other forms of digital discourse on EPing (such as video tutorials and vlogs on Youtube) reflects a lack of official guidance from healthcare professionals such as midwives, GPs and health visitors. Analysing how EPers talk about their experiences in online contexts, where there is arguably greater potential for self-disclosure than in face-to-face interaction, is therefore important for gaining a greater understanding of the needs of parents who use alternative forms of infant feeding.

## **References**

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