

[Read free] At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States

## At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States

Linda M. Blum

DOC | \*audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#6378541 in Books Beacon Press 1999-04-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 .0 x .0 x .0l, #File Name: 0807021407272 pages | File size: 61.Mb

**Linda M. Blum : At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States:

25 of 28 people found the following review helpful. A few nuggets in an otherwise sorry treatment of the subjectBy CustomerI bought this book prepared to be fascinated. I was not disappointed. The author addresses some truly

fascinating topics of how we view motherhood and breastfeeding in the United States. She makes some good points. There were, however, so many problems with this book that it really overshadowed what the author did well. An interesting contrast is shown between the African American mothers and Caucasian American mothers that she interviewed for this book. One group feeling guilty about not breastfeeding and using public assistance, the other group apparently feeling no guilt about not breastfeeding and expressing a sense of entitlement to public assistance programs. Rather than expounding upon this fascinating subject of differing emotional perspectives on breastfeeding, the author serves up her thinly veiled personal political views. Worse, she openly expresses disrespect for one of the mothers that she interviewed, denoting in the book how she "kept the upper hand" in the interview. While one could argue that an interviewer "needs" to stay in control of the interview, there is absolutely no reason to show such public rudeness to someone who freely gave of their time to help the author with her research. The author makes a conversation about the medical community pushing mothers into guilt about not breastfeeding, based upon ONE interview. Without even going into the lack of coverage of varying medical attitudes about breastfeeding in different regions of the United States, it has to be stated that making any such statement based upon just one statement is not only poor judgement, but simply ridiculous. Again the author takes a large issue and over-simplifies it for the convenience of her book. Ms. Blum's contradictory treatment of the importance of breastfeeding is infuriating. With one hand she states her belief in the benefits of breastfeeding, with the other she marginalizes its importance, as if the decision were no more important than whether to wear blue jeans or khakis. If you want a very slim beginning to this subject go ahead and read the book. Please, though, borrow it rather than buy it and reward the author for such a poor job. 14 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Great book for feminist perspective By D Pfeuffer This book brought out so many emotions from me. Not only am I a breastfeeding mom, in August 2000 I will be receiving a BA in Women's Studies. I used this book as part of an independent research project that I did with one of my professors in the department. The research entailed looking at breastfeeding from a feminist perspective. Blum does have some really great key points that I had not considered when critically analyzing infant feeding decisions. Race and class are definitely issues that can affect breastfeeding initiative. She also seems to show that health professionals actively promote breastfeeding. However, I am also doing an internship at a major hospital which does over 6500 births a year, and I can tell you that the health professionals are definitely lacking in the promotion of breastfeeding. Grassroots efforts are being done by the Lactation Consultants on staff and others involved in this area however the resistance is still very high from Dr's and nurses. I realize some who read this book may not understand why she reiterated all the negative reasons why women continue not to breastfeed, however this is reality. Our society is NOT as breastfeeding friendly as we think we are. I agree, as a breastfeeding mom, that she did not really address the breastfeeding experience as well as she could have. But overall, I think this is a great book to get a good synopsis of feminist issues in relation to breastfeeding. \*\*sidenote\*\* As a result of this independent research my professor is using this as part of the required reading for her Body Politics graduate level class in the Women's Studies Department. 59 of 68 people found the following review helpful. Not "sociology at its best" By J. Berry I found this book fascinating ... and maddening. Blum makes some interesting, on-target observations, yet -- despite her awareness that "absences are presences" -- she shapes her research by what she fails to look at. In particular, I was shocked to realize she'd spoken to ONE health care practitioner, even though she speaks authoritatively about "the medical community" pressuring women to breastfeed. This is NOT happening in the real world, where women are discouraged from breastfeeding or given subversive advice based on opinions, not medical research. She "systematically read the various pronouncements of the AAP" and other pieces, then supplemented this with ONE measly interview. Thus she misses learning that the pronouncements of the AAP don't have a thing to do with real doctors and nurses in the real world ... this despite the fact that her own interviews turn up scores of examples of women who got inane advice from doctors and hospital personnel -- advice that destroyed their breastfeeding relationships. Why is this? Because medical schools don't deem breastfeeding important enough to teach. Because breastfeeding is not deemed any HCP's responsibility, and it slips through the cracks. Because HCPs, like everyone, want others to make the decisions they've made. Because HCPs get gifts, free formula, and misinformation from the ubiquitous formula representatives. Blum should read the March 1999 Pediatrics article describing a survey of Fellows of the AAP. This is by no means groundbreaking; past studies have shown similar ignorance in the medical community. These doctors know as much as the average Joe or Jane on the street about breastfeeding, yet they feel confident giving advice -- advice that limits women's choices and robs them of their power. THIS is a feminist issue. This is, to use Robert Mendelsohn's term, Male Practice. How on earth could Blum have missed this point when the evidence is everywhere -- and she herself turned up so much of it? There's a lot of misinformation in this book that could easily have been remedied by research (including Blum's pronouncements on La Leche League, a worldwide organization, based on one geographical area), and I'm disappointed that Blum didn't know better (or perhaps she did, but was too eager to prove her theories and justify her admitted ambivalence about breastfeeding). I'm especially disappointed because this work had so much potential and still contains so many excellent points. And I'm disappointed because, as Katie Allison Granju points out in a previous review, Blum has somehow managed to miss many of the feminist issues tied up in breastfeeding. Blum has let her work be limited by her own experiences -- and she seems too smart for this. :-)

In our ironical, "post-feminist" age, few things inspire passion. Breastfeeding is one of them. For advocates, breastfeeding is empowering, the only way to supply babies proper nutrition, and the "bond" that cements the mother/child relationship. It is also deemed "natural" in a world of genetically modified products and male-dominated corporate health-care. But is it a realistic option for all women? And can a well-intentioned insistence on the necessity of breastfeeding become just another way for some women to feel they have failed as mothers?

Nature and gender dynamics are often at cross-purposes, and it seems to be the fate of feminists in the last years of the 20th century to find themselves forever hostage in the uneasy negotiations between the two. University of New Hampshire sociologist Linda Blum's highly informative study of the cultural complexities behind the simple act of breast-feeding is yet another example of the many ways in which a contemporary woman's right to choose often finds itself in conflict with physiology's dictates. In her previous book, *Between Feminism and Labor*, Blum explored the intersection between the feminist movement and the rise of unions through a series of case studies. She uses that technique to good effect here as well, interviewing white, middle-class La Leche League enthusiasts; blue-collar white women; and black, working-class mothers about their attitudes towards breast-feeding. The health benefits of breast milk for infants are almost universally acknowledged--but how realistic is it for all working women to nurse? What about those mothers who have a hard time making the transition between viewing their breasts as erogenous zones and seeing them as baby's buffet? There is even controversy about what exactly constitutes breast-feeding: are sucklings weaned at six weeks or infants fed breast-pumped milk through a bottle truly "breast" babies? Blum's analysis of such issues is respectful of the social and psychological imperatives that inform a woman's decision on whether or not to breast-feed. --Patrizia DiLucchio  
From *Library Journal*  
Breastfeeding is usually considered a part of child rearing and a method of providing nutrition; this book by a sociologist examines it from a different perspective. By studying the history of breastfeeding in the United States in the 20th century and interviewing women in various racial and socioeconomic groups, Blum offers a glimpse of the contradictions surrounding a physiological function. Nursing a baby gives a mother a chance to bond with her child, but it also relinquishes some of her control over her body, interferes with equality in the workplace, and transmits diseases such as HIV to infants. While white middle-class women feel that breastfeeding is part of motherhood, women of color see it as a reminder of slavery and an obstacle to independence. This book treats a fascinating subject, but the jargon-filled text makes it more suitable for academic libraries and women's studies collections. Scholars will appreciate the extensive bibliography. Public libraries are better served by more practical books such as Pamela Wiggins's *Breastfeeding: A Mother's Gift* (LJ 10/1/98).  
A Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland P.L., CA  
Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
From *Kirkus*  
Relying on a descriptive, sociological approach, the author surveys attitudes toward breastfeeding across time periods (from the 18th to the end of the 20th centuries) and social groups, focusing in turn on white middle-class, white working-class, and black mothers. Although her analysis of biological phenomena as shaped by race, gender, and class superficially resembles various trendy works of contemporary academic discourse, Blum (*Sociology and Womens Studies/Univ. of New Hampshire; Between Feminism and Labor*, 19TK) eschews a militant ideological agenda and is reluctant to moralize or advocate any pattern of prescribed behavior. Using ample evidence gleaned from her field research interviewing women within each of the target groups, as well as authoritative sources (medical practitioners, psychiatrists, and psychologists), she discovers that in the contemporary world such an ancient and seemingly natural procedure as breastfeeding is embedded in a plethora of historical, political, racial, and economic contexts. For instance, prior to this century, wealthy white women were encouraged to employ wet nurses, usually women of color; this legacy that accounts to a large extent for the fact that nowadays black mothers often reject breastfeeding even though the modern medical establishment exhorts women to breastfeed. White middle-class women, on the other hand, opt for breastfeeding, which they equate with "moral motherhood." As for working white mothers, they breastfeed less due to such factors as lack of privacy, the need to earn a living, and health concerns but are frequently anguished by these impediments to the fulfillment of their "maternal duty." While most previous studies of this sort considered primarily the benefits to the infant of maternal milk, Blum emphasizes the mother's side. She concludes that breastfeeding is a complex issue, which can potentially lead either to self-realization or to self-sacrifice and stress. For the modern feminist, Blum concludes, the choice between the bottle or the breast should proceed from a careful assessment of the woman's own needs and desires. -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.