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Breast or Bottle?: Contemporary Controversies in Infant-Feeding Policy and Practice (Studies in Rhetoric/Communication)

Amy Koerber

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Breast or Bottle? is the first scholarly examination of the shift in breastfeeding recommendations occurring over the last half century. Through a close analysis of scientific and medical controversies and a critical examination of the ways in which medical beliefs are communicated to the public, Amy Koerber exposes layers of shifting arguments and meaning that inform contemporary infant-feeding advocacy and policy.

Whereas the phrase "breast or bottle" might once have implied a choice between two relative equals, human milk is now believed to possess unique health-promoting qualities. Although it is tempting to view this revision in medical thinking as solely the result of scientific progress, Koerber argues that a progress-based interpretation is incomplete. Epidemiologic evidence demonstrating the health benefits of human milk has grown in recent years, but the story of why these forms of evidence have dramatically increased in recent decades, Koerber reveals, is a tale of the dedicated individuals, coalitions, and organizations engaged in relentless rhetorical efforts to improve our scientific explanations and cultural appreciation of human milk, lactation, and breastfeeding in the context of a historical tendency to devalue these distinctly female aspects of the human body. Koerber demonstrates that the rhetoric used to promote breastfeeding at a given time and cultural moment not only reflects a preexisting reality but also shapes the infant-feeding experience for new mothers.

Koerber's claims are grounded in extensive rhetorical research including textual analysis, archival research, and interviews with key stakeholders in the breastfeeding controversy. Her approach offers a vital counterpoint to other feminist analyses of the shift toward probreastfeeding scientific discourse and presents a revealing rhetorical case study in the complex relationship between scientific data and its impact on medical policy and practices. The resulting interdisciplinary study will be of keen interest to scholars and students of rhetoric, communication, women's studies, medical humanities, and public health as well as medical practitioners and policymakers.

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