Framing Breastfeeding: Why the Health Message Isn’t Enough

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Breastfeeding Controversy

Framing Breastfeeding

- What are frames and why do they matter?
- What frames appear in news on breastfeeding?
- If we don’t like those frames, what can we do about it?
Frame Definition

Frames are mental structures that help people understand the world.

Just a few cues...

PBASTEEFING
...might surprise you

PBFASTEFFDJNC

Methods: Discourse Analysis

- Documents published 2006-2009
- Academic literature
- Cognitive analysis
- California news coverage of the Baby-Friendly hospitals initiative being carried out by state and local advocates
- Selected high-profile news coverage
Frames in the Background

- Food
- The Good Mother
- Health (Disease Prevention)
- Modernity (Expert)
- Nature (Non-expert)

Modernity

Formula companies:
Formulas “have been clinically shown to help reduce common feeding problems…”

Breastfeeding advocates:
“Research shows that breast milk is the best food for your newborn…”
Nature

Formula marketers:
“all natural, no artificial ingredients”
“nutrients naturally found in breast milk”

Breastfeeding advocates:
“Most babies will make their way to the breast on their own within the first hour after birth. It’s a natural process.”

The Good Mother

“Vivovich is still breastfeeding her child and plans to continue as long as she can. ‘It’s really hard,’ Vivovich said. ‘As busy as I am, I make it the #1 priority of my day because it’s going to provide her with all the defenses of the immune systems for the rest of her life.’”
The Good Mother

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The Good Mother & Health

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Implications for Breastfeeding

Will higher rates of breastfeeding come about primarily as a result of:

- individuals getting more knowledge about health benefits and how to do it?
- or
- removing the barriers in hospitals, workplaces, and other areas of society?

Who decides?
The Need to Reframe

Tasks for Reframing Breastfeeding

- Offer policy solutions.
- Make the landscape as vivid as the portrait.
- State the values and connect them.
- Don’t just talk, act.
Reports Available Online

http://www.bmsg.org/proj-food-breastfeeding.php