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Breastfeeding, Child Health and Child Spacing: Cross-Cultural Perspectives by Valerie Hull; Mayling Simpson; Infant Care and Feeding in the South Pacific by Leslie B. Marshall; The Infant-Feeding Triad: Infant, Mother, and Household by Barry M. Popkin; Tamar Lasky; Judith Litvin; Deborah Spicer; Monica E. Yamamoto; Only Mothers Know: Patterns of Infant Feeding in Traditional Cultures by Dana Raphael; Flora Davis

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BOOK REVIEWS

Breastfeeding, Child Health and Child Spacing: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Valerie Hull and Mayling Simpson, eds. Dover, NH: Croom Helm, 1985. 216 pp. \$26.00 (cloth).

Infant Care and Feeding in the South Pacific. Leslie B. Marshall. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1985. xxii + 355 pp. \$58.00 (cloth).

The Infant-Feeding Triad: Infant, Mother, and Household. Barry M. Popkin, Tamar Lasky, Judith Litvin, Deborah Spicer, and Monica E. Yamamoto. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1986. xvi + 247 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), \$24.00 (paper).

Only Mothers Know: Patterns of Infant Feeding in Traditional Cultures. Dana Raphael and Flora Davis. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. xvii + 159 pp. \$25.00 (cloth).

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Research on infant feeding has increased dramatically in the last decade. This is at least partly the result of the international health focus on maternal and infant health, and mounting concern that Westernization, including the international marketing of infant formula, has led to a decline in breastfeeding worldwide, with adverse consequences for infant health, particularly in Third World countries. The purpose of this essay is to review four recent publications that address various aspects of infant-feeding research.

Infant-feeding research can be divided into three areas of inquiry. First, *what are the actual infant-feeding practices of any particular society?* How do women breast-feed or formula-feed? How do they supple-

ment liquid-based diets with solid foods? How are children weaned? How do actual practices differ from stated cultural norms or ideals? Second, *what are the determinants of the actual infant-feeding practices?* These may include cultural beliefs, economic constraints, time constraints, and environmental and socio-demographic factors. Third, *what are the effects of the infant-feeding practices?* These include effects on infant growth and development, on morbidity and mortality, on maternal nutritional status, health, and fertility, and on wider social groupings such as the household.

Only Mothers Know represents the edited results of a series of ethnographic studies on infant feeding, directed by Dana Raphael during the summer of 1976 and funded by USAID through the Human Lactation Center. Raphael and Davis have taken the field notes of a number of ethnographers and presented their findings in an easy-to-read, narrative style that focuses on women in five field settings: the Philippines, India, Sardinia, St. Kitts, and the United States. Through anecdotes and case studies, Raphael and Davis describe actual patterns of infant feeding and focus on the determinants of those patterns—why mothers make the choices they do. On the basis of these rather unsystematic data, they report that early mixed feeding (breast and/or bottle and solid foods) is widespread, and that breastfeeding is on the decline, both in percentages of women ever breastfeeding and in duration of breastfeeding. Infant formula marketing practices and changing cultural beliefs about infant feeding are deemphasized as explanations of these patterns. Economic and temporal constraints, operating at the household level, are cited as the primary determinants of infant-feeding

choices.

Some researchers in the field feel that *Only Mothers Know* represents a "sell-out" to the infant formula industry, because it condones the choice of infant formula or other breast milk substitutes, as well as the early introduction of solids. I cannot agree with this assessment completely. Raphael and Davis convincingly document the difficulties faced by poor women, who may not be able to afford the "luxury" of breastfeeding, which has its own opportunity costs. They also point out the implicit ethnocentrism to be found in those studies that imply that Third World mothers who do not breastfeed are selfish, ignorant, or stupid. Again, Raphael and Davis note that many of these women have no other choice.

At the same time, Raphael and Davis tend to romanticize Third World women, casting them in the image of the "noble mother." They state, for example: "Each mother does the very best for her baby. . . . Even if she couldn't read the label, she knew how the milk should be made up. . . . How unreasonable for anyone to have thought she didn't know what she was doing" (p. 19). They assume that all women have equal access to information about the consequences of their infant-feeding decisions, and the same set of priorities based on placing the infant first. These assumptions remain to be proven. Finally, it is difficult not to be somewhat suspicious about the conclusions in any book on infant feeding, the publication of which was partly underwritten by a company that produces infant formula.

Breastfeeding, Child Health and Child Spacing is an edited volume, with contributions from eight ethnographic field studies in Papua New Guinea, Kenya, Mexico, Java, Iran, Thailand, Australia, and Canada. The various authors have focused on different aspects of infant feeding, but all are concerned with documenting actual practices as well as cultural norms. Data on the frequency, timing, and intracultural

variation in infant-feeding practices are presented. Jenkins and Heywood (Papua New Guinea) and Van Esterik (Thailand) particularly stress the importance of cultural beliefs as determinants of infant feeding patterns. As the editors point out, "Several [contributors] have themselves been nursing mothers, obtaining a perspective on its problems and rewards that research alone does not provide" (p. 3).

All of the researchers assess the consequences of infant-feeding practices for infant health, and several provide growth data on infants. The contraceptive effect of breastfeeding and its impact on child spacing and maternal fertility are a major orientation of this particular volume, and the authors document the effects of bottle use and early supplementation with solids on child spacing for these populations. However, little mention is made of the role of postpartum sex taboos in spacing births. A reduction of the duration of sexual abstinence often accompanies the "modernization/Westernization" that also brings bottle use, but the relative importance of these two influences is not assessed. Indeed, Hull's contribution ("Breastfeeding, Birth Spacing, and Social Change in Rural Java") contains data suggesting that many children are weaned onto formula and/or solids early because their mothers have become pregnant again. Finally, most of the authors assume that parents, like health professionals, uniformly want to increase the length of time between births. This common assumption of medical and demographic anthropologists has not been adequately documented.

The contributions in *Breastfeeding, Child Health and Child Spacing* are uniformly well written, and the introduction by the editors ties together common themes. The chapters on women in Australia (by Lenore Manderson) and Canada (by the late Melissa Knauer) are a welcome addition, helping to unite studies of infant feeding in urban industrialized societies with those in

“traditional cultures.”

Infant Care and Feeding in the South Pacific is Volume 3 of the Gordon and Breach Science Publishers series, *Food and Nutrition in History and Anthropology*. Edited by Leslie Marshall, it includes 15 contributions from field studies in the South Pacific, some of which were previously published in *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*. Four additional chapters of commentary, one at the beginning and three at the end, help tie together the wide-ranging and sometimes uneven individual studies. Many of the contributions focus almost exclusively on cultural beliefs about infant feeding, and documentation of actual practices, when undertaken, is not as rigorous as in the Hull and Simpson volume. The final chapter, by Van Esterik, provides an insightful summary of the main findings and suggestions for future research. Despite the geographic limitation to the South Pacific, this volume raises many important questions not only about the relationship between infant-feeding practices and cultural beliefs about a variety of matters, including children in general, maternal kinship, dangers to infants outside the household and village, the relative importance of women as mothers and laborers, but also about the possible adaptive significance of culturally determined patterns of infant feeding. The volume also highlights the value of an anthropological perspective for fully understanding the determinants of infant-feeding practices worldwide.

The Infant-Feeding Triad: Infant, Mother, and Household is Volume 5 of the Gordon and Breach series. It is quite different in scope and style from the other volumes reviewed here. Popkin et al. take infant-feeding practices (breastfeeding, infant formula, and other infant foods) as the independent variable, and look at their effects on infant growth, on morbidity and mortality, on maternal nutrition and fertility, and on household money and time allocation. The volume does not present new

research findings but is intended instead to be a critical review of the literature. As the authors claim in the introduction, “We are particularly concerned with evaluating studies with respect to their design, choice of study populations, analytical techniques, and how they handle issues of confounding variables. These discussions of methodological issues lead to suggestions for further research, improvements in research design, and the formation of hypotheses which need further testing” (p. 8).

Unfortunately, the volume does not succeed in this effort. Perhaps because of the time-lag between manuscript preparation (1981–82) and publication (1986), many recent references are not included. Yet many important earlier studies are also ignored. For example, the authors cite only seven studies examining the relationship between infant-feeding practices and physical growth of infants in low-income populations, none later than 1980. They also claim that the results of these studies are inconclusive regarding the relative growth of breastfed and bottle-fed infants. In fact, even limiting ourselves to their selective data base, three of the studies they cite show better growth in breastfed infants, three are inconclusive, and one shows that mixed-fed babies are heavier than exclusively breastfed babies, with no information given about the age of the infants for any of the studies. Most researchers in the field agree with the majority of studies, which find that in low-income populations breastfed infants who are appropriately supplemented grow much better than bottle-fed infants in the same population. One has to wonder whether the financial support of the Nestlé Coordinating Center for Nutrition Research played a role in the selective and limited choice of studies for review. While the volume does provide a general overview of the nutritional/epidemiological research, it cannot be considered an improvement over Jelliffe and Jelliffe’s classic *Human Milk in the Modern World* (Mosby 1979).

More critically, and less understandably, one searches Popkin et al. in vain for references to the anthropological research on infant feeding. The authors seem unaware of the existence of the participant-observation research methodology or of the substantial literature on infant feeding in anthropology. One also searches in vain for evidence of a guiding editorial hand in this volume. The five authors (a cell biologist, two nutritionists, and two epidemiologists) wrote separate chapters or, in some cases, parts of chapters, and their writing styles are very different. Some parts are written clearly, some are superficial and oversimplified, and still others are highly technical and grammatically convoluted. It is clear the researchers have little firsthand knowledge of breastfeeding, either personally or through direct research. It is difficult to specify an appropriate audience for this book.

If one substituted Jelliffe and Jelliffe for Popkin et al., then these four books, taken together, would provide a thorough and wide-ranging introduction to the topic. The field research should be of interest not only to cultural and physical anthropologists but also to pediatricians, nutritionists, public health officials, and others involved in improving infant and maternal health worldwide. The only conclusions that can be drawn from the research done to date are that infant feeding practices are as culture- and time-specific as any other human phenomena, and that no simple generalizations about cause and effect can be drawn. Infant feeding practices, themselves so varied, have multiple determinants and multiple effects, and only through continued interdisciplinary research and cooperation can we hope to understand them.

Breasts, Bottles, and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding. *Valerie Fildes.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987. 462 pp. \$30.00 (cloth).

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Valerie Fildes has produced an impressive work exhaustively documenting infant feeding from 1500 to 1800 in western Europe. It is valuable both for its insights into the background of current attitudes toward infant feeding and for pointing to disturbing similarities between preindustrial Europe and Third World countries today. As Fildes's study reveals, in both settings all types of feeding practices except regular breastfeeding are associated with increased risk of infant mortality; and in both, up to 70% of infants die before their second birthday.

The major contribution of this work is that it produces a detailed picture of infant-feeding practices at a discrete time period in one particular geographical and cultural context, which, as European domination spread, went on to influence much of the world. Fildes is also able to highlight changes in feeding practices, as well as intracultural and intercultural variations. Her data sources include pediatric, midwifery, medical, and theological texts; child-rearing advice books; and notes, letters, and diaries from the period. Sufficient evidence is presented in the text to support her arguments; additional data are relegated to appendices of statistical tables. This format makes for a surprisingly readable book.

Fildes demonstrates that infant-feeding practices underwent several significant changes between 1500 and 1800. Influenced by new medical recommendations, mothers initiated breastfeeding earlier and thus provided babies more colostrum, with a noticeable decline in neonatal mortality. However, other practices virtually negated these benefits by placing the infant at risk at later ages. For example, wet nursing, a well-established practice of the aristocracy, spread to those with modest incomes. While wet nursing might have conveyed many of the benefits of breastfeeding to the child, Fildes suggests that the immune protection provided probably failed to match the environmental pathogens the child experienced. Moreover, by the end of the 18th