



Bottled Up: How the Way We Feed Babies Has Come to Define Motherhood, and Why It Shouldn't

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As the subject of a popular web reality series, Suzanne Barston and her husband Steve became a romantic, ethereal model for new parenthood. Called "A Parent is Born," the program's tagline was "The journey to parenthood . . . from pregnancy to delivery and beyond." Barston valiantly surmounted the problems of pregnancy and delivery. It was the "beyond" that threw her for a loop when she found that, despite every effort, she couldn't breastfeed her son, Leo. This difficult encounter with nursing—combined with the overwhelming public attitude that breast is not only best, it is the yardstick by which parenting prowess is measured—drove Barston to explore the silenced, minority position that breastfeeding is not always the right choice for every mother and every child.

Part memoir, part popular science, and part social commentary, *Bottled Up* probes breastfeeding politics through the lens of Barston's own experiences as well as those of the women she has met through her popular blog, *The Fearless Formula Feeder*. Incorporating expert opinions, medical literature, and popular media into a pithy, often wry narrative, Barston offers a corrective to our infatuation with the breast. Impassioned, well-reasoned, and thoroughly researched, *Bottled Up* asks us to think with more nuance and compassion about whether breastfeeding should remain the holy grail of good parenthood.

Bottled Up: How the Way We Feed Babies Has Come to Define Motherhood, and Why It Shouldn't Details

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From Reader Review *Bottled Up: How the Way We Feed Babies Has Come to Define Motherhood, and Why It Shouldn't* for online ebook

Sarah says

This book is LIFE CHANGING! I was struggling with my choice to formula feed. I was depressed, moody, and so alone. Everywhere you look there is support for breastfeeding but there isn't support for us formula feeders. Thank you for this late night google search! I am a fearless formula feeder now!!

Jason Koivu says

Strident yet understanding and always smart, *Bottled Up* is a thoughtful argument for chillaxing on the women that formula-feed their babies as opposed to breastfeeding them.

As the "Fearless Formula Feeders" blog master, *Los Angeles Family Magazine* Editor-in-Chief Suzanne Barston stands as a sort of champion for reluctant-but-proud bottle feeders and those women who wanted to breastfeed, but for whatever reason, can not. In *Bottled Up* she fights back - not against breastfeeding, but against the nonsense flung upon mothers who nourish their infants on formula, a product much maligned recently.

With Barston's own sad-but-humorously-relayed tale and those of others woven into the argument, the book is highly entertaining and more importantly, informative. In fact, the notes, reference and further reading section takes up nearly a fifth of this thoroughly researched book. The real life stories are suspenseful, hair-raising and even occasionally blood-chilling. In some instances, this hot topic has affected life and death situations. It's not all doom and gloom, however, as Barston interjects welcome wit and mood-lightening humor just enough to keep things from becoming too depressing.

As a baby-less, non-breastfeeding man, I can't say that I was too aware of the apparently vicious battle going on between the two camps. Certainly I knew that breastfeeding was considered the healthier choice, but having come from a time when pretty much all people my age (including myself I believe) were bottle-fed formula as infants, I didn't think it was such a big deal. IT IS! Holy Moses, there are some mean-ass ladies out there casting down condemnation and fiery vitriol upon women who would DARE feed their babies formula this day and age. Barston does a hell of a job countering their arguments with very valid reasons for why, in some circumstances, the correct choice is formula. I welcomed this informative look into a sub-world war, if you will, that someone in my position would normally not be privy to.

Shan says

Suzanne Barston's blog, *The Fearless Formula Feeder*, is a godsend for any formula- or combo-feeding mom -- whether she's arrived there by chance or by choice. (Especially in Portland, Oregon, pulling out a bottle of formula and feeding your child with a bottle is liable to draw raised eyebrows. You can't help feeling that everyone around you is thinking that you might as well be feeding your child Diet Coke.) When I picked up this book, I expected a memoir of the heartache/guilt/self-loathing that can come when breastfeeding doesn't work out the way you think it's going to. I thought Barston would share her own story and those of others,

and that I'd be able to find solace in experiences like my own. But *Bottled Up* is even better -- located smack-dab at the intersection of science, feminism, and the politics of parenting in the 21st century. It does contain personal stories -- Barston's and others -- but it's also a compelling argument for logic and reason in the midst of a very heated debate, and a call for compassion and empathy for our fellow moms. Because the truth is that you need to love your baby, and you need to feed your baby. And it truly, truly doesn't matter how you do the latter, as long as you're doing the former.

Audrey says

If you have any problems or struggles when breastfeeding you should read this book. I'm glad someone shared their very honest experience and wrote this book.

Sarah says

Loved this. My take away: The world would be a better place if we didn't judge each other so unrighteously, and science doesn't know everything that the media sometimes makes it sound like it does.

Definitely a mind-enlarging book for me.

Andrea says

This is really a 3.5 star review, but I rounded up because it meant a lot to me to read a book that dealt so sympathetically with the struggle to breastfeed. The best parts of this book dealt with the history of breastfeeding activism and questioned some of the research in support of breastfeeding. Full disclosure: I've done my own research and come to the conclusion that there are benefits to breastfeeding, but that they are overstated. The benefits in no way justify the immense emphasis placed on the method of feeding a baby as the predominant factor in the child's health -- and the corresponding pressure on women. And oh, the guilt!! Towards the end the author seemed to cave, become conciliatory and lose the thread a bit. It's too bad that she ended writing what felt like a blog post on choice feminism because it ended up being vague and a little cliché. Still, the first chapters are great and I'm glad to have read this.

Kristina Wright says

I wish I'd had this book in my hands in December 2009 when my first baby was born and I was attempting to breastfeed. It would have saved me a lot of tears and heartache after having bought into the notion that being a "good" mother meant exclusively breastfeeding and being a "bad" mother meant formula feeding. Because when a doctor tells you that your baby has lost more than 10% of his birth weight and they recommend you supplement with formula, your first thought is not about breast milk or powdered formula, it's about what's best for your baby. And, as Suzanne Barston points out in *Bottled Up*, breast is not always best. In fact, sometimes breast isn't even a viable option.

This idea we have of what motherhood means is so driven by external issues that have nothing to do with loving and nurturing our babies. *Bottle Up* addresses not only the emotional component of breast vs. bottle,

Ms. Barston explores scientific evidence and medical research in comparison to a pop culture trend of attachment parenting (or helicopter parenting) that attempts to judge mothers based on their choices-- choices that have far more factors involved than what society's over-simplification would suggest. Infancy is such a short part of a child's life, yet it is the issues of infancy that continue to undermine women and their choices. This book, and Ms. Barston's blog *The Fearless Formula Feeder*, are must reads for expectant and new mothers who find themselves at a crossroads when it comes to breastfeeding. No woman should feel as if there is only one right choice in caring for her infant and Suzanne Barston's *Bottled Up* contributes to this important, ongoing dialogue.

Meg says

Must read for any mom who is feeling conflicted or guilty about deciding to bottle feed. Very well written, well researched and well thought out presentation of the other side of the über pro breast feeding movement. This book is NOT antibreastfeeding nor is it pro bottle feeding. It is simply pro choice when it comes to what is the "right" way to feed YOUR baby.

Elizabeth says

This is a very accessible, very readable book about how harmful the moralism surrounding breastfeeding promotion can be. I am not sure it is as thorough or conclusive or even as hard-lined as I wanted it to be, but this was exactly the book I needed to read right now. Lately, I've been having a lot of feelings resurface about my breastfeeding experience with my daughter, feelings of guilt and inadequacy and frustration that I thought I had laid to rest a long time ago. This book somehow made it feel ok to try and fail and reminded me that formula was really not a devil. Without it, my child would have died of dehydration or jaundice or starvation or something. And it's pretty absurd to still be beating myself up over something I really have no control over.

As for the book itself, the first 4 chapters had me glued to the page and nodding continuously. Sometimes breastfeeding is more dangerous to the mother/child than formula and it is ridiculous and uncompassionate to suggest that every individual mother can/wants/should breastfeed. Barston also points out how our society isn't really the same as it was when breastfeeding was last in vogue. Many more mothers work outside the home and pumping is difficult even in the best of situations (I had a very supportive work environment, but pumping was the worst, it was so isolating and provided a constant visual reminder of how little I was pumping, especially when my bottles sat in the fridge next to other users of the lactation room).

The last two chapters were a little more scattered. Barston claims that of course breastfeeding is better, but her chapter on statistics doesn't do much to show this. I remember coming across an article (which I cannot find right now) that analyzed breastfeeding studies in much more depth with a much sharper conclusion: breastfeeding only conclusively can be linked to prevention of a couple instances of diarrhea in infants. I expected a similar summary here, but got a much more lukewarm one. As in, she points out that most of these studies are impossible to really take seriously because of all the complicating factors at stake (i.e. you can't control for who breastfeeds vs. who doesn't and some of these differences may come down to class differences or parental involvement, etc.), but doesn't bother to draw a larger conclusion that we don't have many reliable studies, free of bias, to base claims of "breast is best" on. She just kinda goes with that as the inevitable conclusion, making the same mistake most of the researchers she faults do.

In the last chapter, Barston casts her net wider to encompass breastfeeding as an unrealistic choice not for medical, psychological, or health reasons, but for socioeconomic ones. This is a particularly important point, yes, but felt like too much for this little book. That, and Barston's winding discussion about breastfeeding in the developing world, really draw her away from what made the first chapters so striking-- her personal experiences and feelings and the white middle class angst about formula. I know she was trying to bring this around to a discussion of choice rather than a discussion of well, if you tried and failed, then it's ok to use formula, but I left this book with a little less satisfaction than I felt after the first four chapters.

If you had trouble breastfeeding and felt terribly judged and terribly guilty about having to/choosing to use formula, this book is definitely for you. There is something about realizing I am not alone in this experience, something about realizing that the hyped up talk about breastfeeding is, in fact, mostly talk, and something about remembering that feeding an infant is a deeply personal choice and experience that has helped me let go of some of my guilt. I am no further in knowing how I want to proceed with future child(ren), but I have some more food for thought. I have some validation for putting my mental health at the forefront in making that decision. And maybe, just maybe, I can make that tough decision with far less guilt and tears than I did the last time around.

Janine says

I'm SO glad that I read this book while pregnant and I feel very fortunate that a good friend recommended it to me. When I received the book in the mail and saw the cover, I somewhat expected it to be a personal, humorous reflection on the subject of bottle feeding. What I learned, rather quickly I might add, is that this book is a well-researched, jarring expose about the notions of motherhood as they pertain to how we choose to feed our children. Barston does share her own experiences with attempting to breast feed her son and her subsequent feelings of anxiety, depression, and ultimate feeling of failure as a mother because she wasn't able to breast feed. These feelings of inadequacy are perpetuated in our society and Barston explores why the "breast is best" mentality is sometimes more harmful than beneficial.

Barston's expose reads similarly to Pollan's and Schlosser's works on the food industry: she cites copious studies and medical journals alongside mothers' personal anecdotes. Similarly, there are clear (sometimes stated, sometimes unstated) connections to other parenting hot topics: vaccinations, attachment parenting, working vs. staying at home. Mostly, Barston discusses feeding in terms of contemporary culture and trends. She explores feeding from its primitive roots to its contemporary ubiquity. Feeding has become an obsession for new moms mostly because it's become a trendy topic of conversation. At times, I found some of the research to be quite biased (is there really a group of pediatricians in L.A. who refuse to see patients whose mothers aren't breast feeding?), but overall I thought this work explored the stigma associated with choosing to bottle feed, a stigma that's (in my opinion) totally unwarranted. No matter which side of the newborn feeding debate you're on, I think that his book is a worthwhile read.

I most enjoyed Barston's third chapter where she explores the mother's psychological post partum state and it's impacts on feeding. Is it worth it to risk the mother's mental health, and subsequent refusal of antidepressants, just so she can breast feed? Are women really refusing treatment for post partum depression because they don't want to be viewed as failures? The hard and fast answer is yes; women are forgoing personal treatment because they're obsessed with making sure they're exclusively breast feeding. Women are being told, by obstetricians, by pediatricians, by "lactivists", by other women that breast feeding is the best thing you can do for your child. Some of these sources contend that not breast feeding is akin to child abuse. This is absurd. Shouldn't the mother's mental health be tantamount? These sources say "no", that motherhood means sacrificing everything, including a woman's own mental and psychological health for the sake of breast feeding. This is something I cannot get on board with. At times, I wanted to reach into the book and

shake some of these contributing sources and scream "how do you know what's right for every woman?"

The problem is that there is a litany of research citing that breast feeding is "best for everyone" and very few people responding with "is it really best for EVERYONE?" We're taught not to overly generalize, not to make sweeping generalizations about things, yet that's exactly what's being done. New mothers are being indoctrinated with the mantra that "breast is best" and regurgitating it as swiftly as the characters in 1984 repeat the Orwellian notion that "2+2=5" because we fear being stigmatized and shunned. Shouldn't encouragement, rather than guilt, be the guiding light with this issue? Do new moms really have to fear being pressured and attacked by lactation consultants in the hospital in their hormonal state? Unfortunately, a lot of mothers are because of the new "Baby Friendly" movement. The movement is more coercion than informed decision making.

Ultimately, each woman has the right to be as informed as possible and should be making the best possible decision (physical, psychological, mental, emotional) for her and her baby. Women should read literature, on both sides of the issue, and consider their own feelings and lifestyles, not be pressured into making a decision that someone else has already made for her. No woman should fear being told she's a bad mother because she chose to formula feed instead of breast feed. The most beneficial quote I took away from this book was that "when you go to the hospital you should be able to say 'here's what I plan to do' (regarding feeding) and you should be given support accordingly. It's quite simple at the end of the day—good breast feeding support respects the woman's right to think and choose for herself within the bounds of basic safety while bad breast feeding support assumes she needs to be rescued from herself or her own possibly sub-optimal choice."

Lauren Shaffer says

I first heard about Suzanne Barston's blog, The Fearless Formula Feeder (<http://www.fearlessformulafeeder.com/>), after I had difficulties nursing my son earlier this year. I had taken the prepared childbirth classes and a breastfeeding class to be ready for the responsibilities that came with our new arrival.

In the hospital, nursing seemed to go well, but my son only had to nurse for short amounts of time while we were there. When we came home, I tried many times to successfully nurse him, but had several struggles. He wasn't able to latch correctly, which caused me pain to the point of tears. Eventually, nursing became something I dreaded. I didn't feel the bond that I heard about in my breastfeeding class. I met with a lactation consultant, who tried to help me get him latched correctly, but came home having incredible pain. I still tried to nurse, but also started pumping in the hopes that even if we couldn't get the latch down, he would still be getting my milk. Being attached to a pump, however, didn't allow me the time I wanted to be spending with my son. I was in constant worry that I wasn't pumping enough milk even though I was pumping every few hours and so sad that I was attached to this machine while other people held and rocked my son.

With the support of my husband, I decided after a month of pumping to switch to formula. For me it came down to the fact that I was stressing out over pumping all the time and not getting that quality time with him.

Once I went to formula, I tried to find formula feeding moms support groups. I thought since there are plenty of breastfeeding support groups and organizations, there has to be formula feeding groups. However, I was disappointed to find out there wasn't much out there but didn't stumble across Barston's blog. I picked up this book at the library and was so relieved to read that many people had experienced what I had. Barston describes what scientific studies really show (correlation vs. causation) and combines that information with personal experiences—both her own and others—to show how the focus of "breast is best" leads many of us

to feel like failures as mothers if we can't breastfeed babies. She outlines the challenges of pumping when women return to work and how we should instead be offering more information and resources to women instead of assuming all women will be able to breastfeed. I really could relate to her point that many women don't know about properly preparing formula and this isn't taught to them by the nurses in the hospital or in much of the literature women read prior to their delivery.

I think Barston sums the purpose of this book quite nicely in her introduction of the book:

"Mostly, though, this book is for the woman who is in tears, with cracked nipples and a screaming baby whom she can't mother because she is constantly hooked up to a pump, who wants so badly to quit breastfeeding and finds nothing but fear-and-guilt-inducing literature everywhere she turns."

This is one of the most helpful books I have read both pre- and post-pregnancy and I encourage other women facing difficulties breastfeeding to pick up a copy. My only regret is not reading this sooner!

Alia says

As someone who had this experience I appreciated hearing a story of motherhood that is often not told.

Yasmine says

Where was this book when I was deep in the depths of "why am I failing at breastfeeding?!" despair?? Definitely recommend to anyone interested in feminism and parenting issues. As well as anyone who has faced or is facing that formula supplementing/feeding guilt.

Melinda says

Obviously I bring my own formula-feeding baggage to the table here, but I thought this was an interesting, if brief, take on the infant feeding issue. The stats chapter was particularly resonant for me, in its framing of formula-feeding "risks" within a comparative context of other risk-taking behaviors as well as its discussion of the relative weakness of the research often used to support the formula-fed babies = fat & stupid babies equation. Feminists seem to be across the board on this topic, and it's hard not to view the conversation as combative. Admittedly, I feel combative when I think about it too much. I thought Barston did a fine job of staying balanced, albeit with a healthy dose of the formula-feeder's requisite self-flagellation.

Meredith says

This book is part of the highly charged backlash against the shift in public health policy aimed at increasing the rate of breastfeeding. The quote by Dr. Jack Newman given on page 40 perfectly describes the anguish driving this book, "Who does feel guilty about [not] breastfeeding? Not the women who make an informed choice to bottle feed. It is the woman who wanted to breastfeed, who tried, but was unable to breastfeed who feels guilt." Hell hath no fury like a woman unable to breastfeed.

The subtitle is misleading; the book is not about how breastfeeding became a badge of honor in "The Mommy Wars" and why it shouldn't be a mark of superior motherhood. It is not a balanced look at motherhood and the role of breastfeeding therein. It is an attack on the push to get all mothers to attempt to breastfeed, and the tone is very very personal. The author, after telling her own story about her failed attempts to breastfeed her own child, takes pains to attempt to discredit the idea that "breast is best." For very personal reasons, the author and others on this end of the breastfeeding spectrum interpret the increased visibility of breastfeeding resources, availability of breastfeeding support, and discussion of breastfeeding in addition to the attempt to normalize breastfeeding in the mainstream public as attempts to guilt, shame, and judge them for not breastfeeding. Dissemination of information can be merely that. If a woman is not interested in breastfeeding, doesn't need the information or support, and doesn't want to talk about it, then she is free to disregard it. There are many other women who do need resources, information, and support and who want to talk about it. The needs and wishes of one group do not represent a slam on those of the other.

I agree 100% with the author that breastfeeding is not for everyone. The reasons can be medical or lifestyle-related. Woman needs to be at peace with breastfeeding or with not breastfeeding. (For examples of women with peace with never giving their infants a drop of breastmilk, see *Bringing Up B  b  : One American Mother Discovers the Wisdom of French Parenting*.) There is absolutely nothing wrong with formula feeding, but that doesn't mean that the scientific studies showing an increased benefit to breastfeed babies are invalid. Formula is a multi-billion dollar industry, and corporations aren't benevolently producing it for the sake of the consumers. Remember what William Blake said: "The shepherd doesn't keep the sheep for the sheeps' own sake." Every mother who exclusively breastfeeds is a lost sale for the companies that produce formula, so they are hardly a neutral source on this issue.

What I disagree with is the author's conclusion that providing information about the benefits of breastfeeding and strongly encouraging women to attempt to breastfeed is wrong and damaging to women's psyche because there is a chance that they will physically not be able to breastfeed or simply choose not to for whatever personal reason. If a woman has **nothing** in her medical history that may preclude breastfeeding, why not encourage her to give it a try and see if it is right for her? After all, women are perfectly free to say "no thank you." Each woman is the best judge of her own person situation. Moreover, the stance of placing the responsibility for learning about breastfeeding on mothers-to-be and new mothers allows health care providers to abdicate all responsibility to educate themselves about breastfeeding. This was the previous situation in which women who wished to breastfeed rather than formula feed were entirely on their own to find information, resources, and support. The new push to encourage breastfeeding was an attempt to rectify this.

Throughout the book, the author cites the most extreme examples of women who made their lives, the lives of their newborns, and/or the lives of their partners a living hell by unsuccessfully attempting to breastfeed. She also describes cases in which failed attempts to breastfeed endangered the lives of newborns. These anecdotes are extremely powerful, but they are merely anecdotes supporting one position. Someone writing a pro-breastfeeding book could easily find equally extreme examples where women were dissuaded from breastfeeding by a variety of misconceptions, cultural norms, and sexual taboos as well as apathetic medical care providers flush with free formula samples. The author quotes a litany of insensitive and hurtful comments made by pro-breastfeeding people. An equally long list of insensitive and hurtful comments made by people who find breastfeeding obscene, offensive, or unsuitable to do in public could be also quoted. This issue cuts both ways, and this book is a defense of a one position rather than a weighing of pros and cons.

While the author is enraged that any lactation consultant or doctor would not immediately take a woman's fear that she is unable to make enough milk seriously, primary lactation failure is actually a rare condition, so it is not going to be the first thing that medical providers look at when a mother has difficulty breastfeeding. That is a legitimate response. Other issues have to be first ruled out before arriving at this diagnosis. Falsely believing that one is not making enough milk is the most common reason that women abandon breastfeeding, which makes it extremely important not to jump to this conclusion.

What I found most extraordinary in this entire book is that, despite the author have disclosed her history of an eating disorder and antidepressant use, none of her healthcare providers told her that she was not a good candidate for breastfeeding success and suggested that she have a Plan B, such as formula feeding, exclusive pumping, or using donated milk, in the event she was unable to breastfeed. Much of her anguish could probably have been avoided if she had received better medical care, which is a real shame.

Part of providing good care is letting patients know that their plans may be unrealistic due to their personal situations. Many factors significantly decrease the chances of breastfeeding success such as a history of eating disorders and sexual abuse, breast enhancement or reduction surgeries, needing to return to work almost immediately after having a baby, and having inverted or flat nipples, all of which and more the author points out in this book as revelations. If the author had received better medical care, then she would have known prior to giving birth that breastfeeding might not be the best option for her own personal situation because of her multiple red flags. And if anyone had made the author aware of this possibility despite her initial wish to breastfeed, then she might have been able to prepare herself for it and would not have been scarred for life by her failed attempt.

Rather than making the case that formula feeding is just as good as breastfeeding by citing every possible study showing only a minimal to no significant benefit and fighting against the push to encourage mothers to give breastfeeding a try, it would be more helpful to advocate for better screening of mothers-to-be, so that those with very obvious red flags will be informed of their breastfeeding options, which would include the simple fact that breastfeeding or even pumping may simply not be right for them.
