



A qualitative analysis of maternal feeding beliefs and behaviors in food blogs focused on feeding young children

Allison Doub, BS, Meg Small, PhD *Pennsylvania State University* & Leann Birch, PhD *University of Georgia*



Background

Parents play a critical role in early obesity prevention

- Compared to controlling feeding practices, responsive feeding practices promote healthier child eating and weight outcomes¹

Social support partially determines parenting practices

- Social support for purchasing fruits and vegetables has been associated with increased home availability²

Blogs are a new context for social influence

- Over 75% of young mothers read blogs³

Parent-authored food blogs focus on “family-friendly” recipes and child feeding topics

- Bloggers own feeding beliefs and behaviors may or may not align with obesity prevention guidance

Qualitative research on blog content is needed

- Prior to investigating whether bloggers influence reader behavior, descriptive information is needed on what feeding practices are promoted on blogs

Research Questions

- What are the maternal feeding beliefs and behaviors discussed on food blogs focused on feeding young children?
- Do bloggers’ feeding beliefs and behaviors support or differ from obesity prevention guidance to promote *healthy, diverse diets and responsive feeding practices*⁴?

References
 1. Black & Aboud (2011) *Nutrition*, 141
 2. Baranowski et al. (2008) *ADA*, 108(7)
 3. McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes (2012) *Matern Child Health*, 16
 4. IOM (2011) *Early childhood obesity prevention policies*. National Academies
 5. Schreier (2012) *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE
 6. Musher-Eizenman & Holub (2007) *Pediatric Psychology* 32(8)
 7. Sherry et al. (2004) *JADA*, 104

Method

Qualitative content analysis⁵

Purposive sampling: Blogs

Inclusion criteria

- Blogger was a parent of at least one 2-5 year old child
- Blog title and description indicated that blog focused on child and/or family feeding relevant topics

24 blogs identified from:

- Babble’s Top 100 Mom Food Blogs of 2013 (16 blogs)
- Snowball sampling from blog rolls (8 blogs)

Purposive sampling: Posts

- All posts from 03/2013 - 02/2014 (N = 2345) were coded for relevance to child/family feeding (Y/N)
- 13 blogs mentioned child/family feeding in ≥ 25% of posts
- 20% of relevant posts from these 13 blogs were coded for maternal feeding beliefs and behaviors (n = 153 posts)

Reductive coding & analysis

- Maternal feeding beliefs and behaviors coding schemes were developed from existing qualitative and quantitative measures^{3,6,7} and emergent coding
- The frequency and co-occurrence of codes were analyzed to identify the most prevalent beliefs and behaviors
- Codes present in <10% of posts grouped as low-occurring

Table 1. Maternal feeding beliefs code definitions

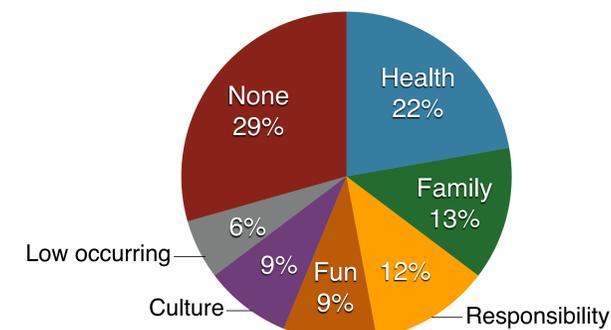
Health values	Nutrition and health framed as important aspects of child feeding
Food and family	Food framed as a tool for creating family ties, memories, traditions
Responsibility	Child feeding (e.g., food quality, portion size) framed as a parental responsibility
Food as fun (emergent)	Eating or cooking framed as “fun” for children
Food and culture	Food framed as a way to promote/share culture (e.g., holidays, heritage)

Table 2. Maternal feeding behaviors code definitions

Child involvement	Child is engaged in food selection or preparation; Promotes food literacy
Encourages balance and variety	Provides an array of foods to promote healthy nutrition and taste preferences
Responsiveness	Endorses responding to children’s hunger and satiety cues and taste preferences in a developmentally appropriate way

Results

Figure 1. % of posts including maternal feeding beliefs



Maternal feeding beliefs results

- ~30% of posts did not include any coded feeding beliefs
- Bloggers endorsed beliefs that parents are responsible for feeding children nutritious diets

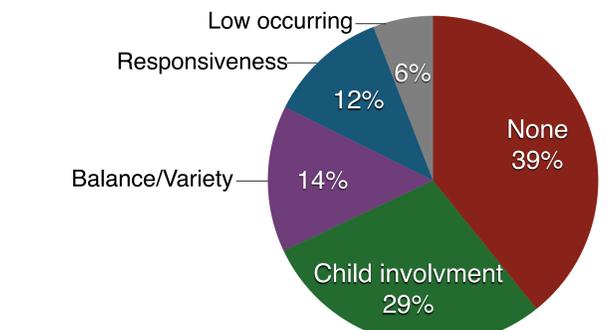
“Now that I’m a mom, I try my best to feed my family nutritious food and serve them all kinds of veggies.”

- Nearly 1/3 of posts promoted beliefs that food was a way to have “fun,” transmit cultural values, or build family ties

Beliefs & behaviors supporting obesity prevention guidance

- Bloggers commonly endorsed child involvement as a strategy to promote consumption of healthy foods
- Bloggers rarely endorsed pressuring or restriction

Figure 2. % of posts including maternal feeding behaviors



Maternal feeding behaviors results

- ~40% of posts did not include any coded feeding behaviors
- Bloggers promoted hands-on experience for children during the planning and preparation of meals and snacks

“Little ones can easily help make these...they get to touch, smell and feel gorgeous in-season produce.”

- Children’s taste preferences influenced what meals and snacks mothers prepared, but balance was a priority, too

Beliefs & behaviors differing from obesity prevention guidance

- Bloggers suggested cooking/eating to fill time, which may encourage feeding for reasons other than hunger

Conclusions & Future Directions

- A substantial proportion of posts did not mention child feeding, even though blog descriptions implied this was a focus
- Aside from child involvement, bloggers rarely discussed *how* to feed children and focused more on *what* to feed; thus, future research should also examine the nutritional quality of recipes included in blog posts
- Bloggers who already include content at the intersection of health value beliefs and child involvement behaviors may be interesting targets of intervention to strengthen and explicitly promote evidence-based content about obesity prevention

Strengths & Limitations

- Examining maternal feeding practices on new media is an important research area given the high visibility of this content
- Replication is necessary as purposive sampling is non-probabilistic and may not produce a representative sample
- Photos, videos, recipes, comments, and advertisements were excluded from analyses and may contain relevant data

