

Breastfeeding "in public": A personal and political memoir

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“... lactating breasts when they are taken outside the home are capable of disrupting the borders of morality, discretion, taste and politics ...” Alison Bartlett

Introduction

In her wonderfully erudite book *A History of the Breast* Marilyn Yalom walks us through the changing meaning of breasts from prehistoric veneration through to contemporary objectification (1997). We are invited to reflect on the changing meaning of breasts and their heavenly fluid—the milk of human kindness—that is both nourishing and abject; we traverse the alternately erotic and maternal meaning of breasts and the ongoing failure to integrate the two in our psyches. For Yalom there is a strange disconnect between our being nourished at the breast and, in a patriarchally defined culture, of breasts as a profitable and pornified source of visual titillation. For the owner, of course, breasts are *both* erotic and nurturing; however, if we look at our bodies through the lens of the dominant culture the polarization of these positions is total: eros is on a collision course with the maternal producing strong cultural tensions at the site of breasts and breastfeeding (Dettwyler, 1995; Young, 1998; Stearns, 1999; Giles, 2002; Guluppo and Ayres, 2002; Hausman, 2003; Bartlett, 2003; Hausman, 2004; Campo, 2010; Bartlett and Shaw, 2010).

To this already fraught dichotomy we can add the discourses of science and medicine informing us of the nutritional and immunological superiority of breast milk (Smith, 2004; AAP, 2005; ABA, 2014a, WHO, 2002). Encapsulated in the “breast is best” ethos pervading most public and maternal health campaigns is the implicit assumption that good mothers breastfeed (Stearns, 2009; Beasley, 2010; Copelton et al., 2010). Now that we know breastfeeding is superior for babies, any mother who doesn't breastfeed (by choice) risks public and private censure. On the other hand there is an equally pervasive belief system that breastfeeding should be undertaken with “discretion”—a point made by social commentators and the lay public alike (Stearns, 1999; Bartlett, 2002; Hausman, 2004; Campo, 2010; Epp Buller, 2013). Discretion, in this view, translates to away from the public eye, in private and/or under some kind of veil—interestingly, this is the only instance in which western women veil themselves and are actively encouraged to do so by the wider culture. While exhorting mothers to breastfeed, then, it seems we just can't get past viewing breasts as alternately erotic and abject.

Few outside feminist circles have ventured to ask about the cultural and symbolic contradictions within which women conduct their breastfeeding. What does it mean to feel overtly or covertly pushed out of public space while feeding when, in the words of performance poet Holly McNish, we live in a world of “billboards covered in ‘tits’” ? (McNish, 2013). What does it mean that the pornified “dry” breast is everywhere—but the lactating breast and its fluids are consigned to symbolic oblivion or worse, disgust and contempt? Breastfeeding is sequestered to the domestic interior or sanctioned in appropriate “private public spaces”, such as baby change-rooms and toilets, by those who assume themselves to be arbiters of “good taste” and “discretion”. This means, that “breast is best” but *only if it is invisible*. In

effect, women must find ways of recreating their domestic sequestration *within* the public sphere if they are to avoid judgments and condemnation.

This chapter will offer a reflective autobiographical account of my own recent experience of being assigned to the abject when I was told not to breastfeed in a local pool ostensibly for "hygiene" reasons and ultimately—for the organisation changed their story—for "safety" reasons. I will explore the scholarly literature on breasts and breastfeeding especially as it relates to the public/private distinction on which the controversy implicitly rests making the case that it is our collective inability to symbolically place breasts—are they sexy or are they maternal? Are they natural or are they medicinal?—that renders “public” breastfeeding so challenging. I make two further arguments: first, that breastfeeding controversies are increasingly defined by what the sociologists Michael Bittman and Judith Pixley call “pseudomutuality” (1997, p. 81), or, by a pretence of mutuality, such that discriminatory individuals and organisations routinely claim to be “pro-breastfeeding” and; second, that claiming our right to feed in public is part of a broader maternal politics of embodied citizenship shifting extant norms premised on the ideal of the unencumbered, autonomous subject. Reconfiguring the image of the ideal-typical citizen as one who may also be pregnant with, birthing and/or nurturing another is part of this politics. In this view, breastfeeding “in public” is literally a transformative “coming out” redefining public space.

Breastfeeding at the Bathhouse

In November 2013 I decided to head down to my local pool the Hepburn Bathhouse with my pre-schooler and baby for a swim. I should let the reader know this is no ordinary pool; it is an exquisite ultra modern facility made of rusted steel and timber beams housing a majestic pool and spa heated to 30 degrees with huge floor to ceiling windows and a suite of massage and beauty therapists at hand. At the entrance there are clear skinned youthful receptionists donning smart faintly scientific attire reminiscent of beauty counter assistants in large department stores with their "lab coats" and high heels. There are essential oils burning, soothing meditation music fills the air and numerous brochures advertising the expensive wonders of “chocolate champagne body wraps” and “aroma stone massages” abound. People walk around in white bathrobes with purple wrist bands between private massage rooms, the pool, sauna and spa and well equipped change rooms.

Part of the historic Hepburn mineral springs reserve, the Bathhouse was essentially set up to capitalise on the large tourist trade that frequents the Daylesford area I call home. While they have a "locals card", the Bathhouse is, as everyone knows, "for the tourists". I have never minded because I figure we get access to a world class facility at discount (if still expensive) rates when all the tourists are out of town. I ignore the aroma stones and chocolate pastes, the 50 gram \$30 dollar organic herbal teas and simply enjoy the beautiful and soothing space of the pool. It's one of the few spaces where both my developmentally disparate kids are happy and so I go (or used to go) fairly regularly.

My daughter Sophia loves the entrance into the pool, which consists of a long ramp that seamlessly merges with the water. Stretching 25 metres it flanks the left (front) side of the pool and doubles as a runway and toddler pool for us since it is differentiated from the main pool by hand rails, steps and, about a metre across, by a ledge seat. This ledge is like a shoal on which I bask seal-like with my baby; it's on the ledge that I sit and allow Tom his first suckle while

Sophia bounces about in front of us. Sophia has been a long-term feeder so, ironically, I'm always trying to be "discreet" with feeding Tom when I'm with the two of them so she doesn't get upset and jealous and want "boozy" herself. At any rate, by the time Tom latches on, she's preoccupied with splashing and crashing and chattering. Tom feeds strongly and I'm relieved—for all those reasons all of us have internalised (even "liberated" feminist types such as myself)—that he doesn't pull off constantly and look at his sister thereby exposing my breast and nipple to other patrons. Tom feeds in that fulsome way I've noticed all attachment parented, long-term breastfed children do: it includes engaging in the world around him, undertaking gymnastics, "talking", laughing and swiping at random objects that catch his attention. He has not cordoned off suckling from life and so our capacity for conventional decorum is limited at best. Some days he can feed with a leg in the air while pulling out my earring and alternately laughing at his sister and swiping at the cat. We don't feed in that sedate socially sanctioned way you see in breastfeeding advocacy literature. I've taken to using my sling a lot so that he can come on and off the breast without me feeling too exposed. I wish I didn't care but I do.

I'm feeding him, but I'm in a bikini so how discreet can I really be? He likes to hold the "other boob" while he feeds - another of those indiscreet facts about infant Homo sapiens who are so-called "demand feeders"—i.e., given unregulated access to the breast and body of the mother. From about 6 months of age such babies routinely twiddle and play with the other breast—or, let's be more specific, with the nipple - so as to elicit a "let-down" response (Dettwyler, 1995; Nagle, 2013). Twiddling is a smart evolutionary adaptation as it gets milk flowing in the other breast too - useful when you're an older infant and want to fill up on the milk from both "boozies", but more problematic if you're a modern western mother trying to breastfeed your baby "discreetly". I've seen long term feeders who are discouraged from holding the other breast twiddle their mother's moles, shirt buttons, bag handles and earrings. In either case we are evolved to twiddle with this second little idle hand and if we can't, like a frustrated smoker, we'll find a substitute. It is said that suckling is the only instinct we humans are born with, the only vestige of our primordial mammalian heritage, but we forget that this suckling comes with a suite of behaviours - suckling, holding, gazing, twiddling, cuddling and the "demand fed" baby if left to his or her own devices will employ all of these strategies when "feeding". Of course it is more than just feeding when a baby suckles at the breast, it is also about attachment, comfort and love.

So let's recap the image because it's a good one: one under-slept mother in a bikini with a thirteen month old baby fulsomely breastfeeding while she supervises her four year old splashing and crashing. I am well aware that many people believe such a scene is "offensive" and should be "out of sight". So, I find a little niche at one end of the pool where there are no other swimmers or, heaven forbid, people who are relaxing. I sit on the ledge that flanks the far end of the entrance ramp and watch Sophia play at my feet.

It's in this context that the infamous pool supervisor, whom another mother has nicknamed "Napoleon" for her staunch marching and incessant reprimands, approaches me. I prise the second hand loose (how does one manage to defend one's self with a let-down in both breasts? I don't want to spray her in the eye!). She says with the certainty of a parking inspector issuing a ticket, "You cannot feed in the pool". Tom has pulled off and is fascinated by the pool inspector; he stares at her in amazement while I quickly cover up. My daughter does not pause for breath. "Mumsie look at me. Do you like this jump?" She's oblivious to the sound of the law breaking around her. I haven't had much sleep and I'm not in a great mood. I glare at the pool supervisor and state my rights; but inside I feel very self-

conscious: I wish I'd worn the one-piece not the bikini; I wish I'd come with one kid not two; I wish I wasn't here; but I meet her gaze and say calmly, "I can feed anywhere". She is stunned and pauses, not used to her authority being questioned and certainly not by one of the tired, harried mothers she has made a sport of bullying at the pool (I have witnessed this before and it was repeatedly revealed in the complaints posted on Facebook afterwards). After the pause, she backtracks and says "it's not about the breastfeeding, it's about hygiene." It wasn't clear if she was referring to the milk from my breast or Tom vomiting, but she clarified it was about the latter. At this point, I felt on shaky ground. Is there some caveat in the law that breastfeeding infants might vomit and so can't be breastfed in or around pools? It was only later I wondered about the urine, faeces, sweat, blood, hair, saliva and more that are routinely found in pools. There is also the matter that Tom does not (ever) vomit after feeds and is as much at risk of doing so as I am. I am uncertain and so look at "Napoleon" indignant but nonetheless nod; a belligerent concession to her point.

From here the dynamic gets truly bizarre. She proceeds to interrogate me about when Tom will next feed. I'm not sure why she feels entitled to ask me this very personal question - it's akin to asking when my period is next due though I can see she doesn't realise that. I answer in my increasing fragility. This is perhaps the only thing I regret about the exchange; I mean dignifying her intrusive and inappropriate question with an answer. "When he feels like it" I say holding her gaze. "Well" she continues, "when he does you will have to move to those chairs over there and you have to take her [Sophia] with you. She can't stay in the pool alone". She instructs me to leave the pool and sit on the chairs at the periphery to feed. I say "OK". I now feel undermined and patronised. How is it that people can be so sure of themselves as they discriminate against others? She was breaking the law yet saw fit to ensure our "safety"!

When we leave, I request the name of the pool supervisor and make a verbal complaint stating that I will be following up with a letter.

Breastfeeding "in public": the personal and the political

Breasts have changed in their cultural meaning along with the values and norms of society. The pendulum has swung from the complete acceptance of "nursing" - prior to the invention of formula milk there was no other way (although wet nurses often performed this work for elite women), to the near ubiquity of the "scientifically superior" bottle of the mid twentieth century, to the more recent return to breastfeeding as a nutritionally superior yet socially and politically fraught activity (Fildes, 1986; Apple, 1987, Dettwyler, 1995; Blum 1999). Nominally breastfeeding is supported by "everyone" and, at the very least the majority of people know the familiar truism that "breast is best". As a consequence of this turn many mothers who don't wish to breastfeed now feel pressured and even coerced by the medical establishment and those who struggle to breastfeed or can't often feel like "failures" (Stearns, 2009; Copelton et al. 2010). Indeed, recent research on women who choose to bottle feed shows that they are well-versed in the (popular) literature on breastfeeding and frame their choices within "the same cultural logic that breast is best" (Copelton, 2010, p. 36) engaging in "ideological work" to make their own decisions consistent with this ethos (Copelton, 2010, p. 25; Beasley, 2010).

There is high cultural currency associated with breastfeeding; a renewed acceptance of its benefits for both mother and child and therefore to society as a whole. The research is as clear as it is broad: breastfeeding is better for the infant

and young child's nutrition, immunity, brain development, cognitive development, attachment, teeth and jaw development, speech as well as general health (ABA, 2014a). These benefits are so significant that one economist has said we need to issue public health warnings, akin to those on cigarette packets, to warn of the dangers of *not* breastfeeding! (Smith, 2004, pp. 371-2). The World Health Organisation recommends breastfeeding for at least two years (WHO 2002) while most national paediatric societies recommend a minimum of one year and thereafter for as long as mother and child are happy to do so (RACP, 2000; AAP, 2012).

As a consequence of two decades of public health campaigns, we have become collectively "pro breastfeeding". But it remains evident that breastfeeding itself - the act of feeding an infant, a toddler or ("worse"!) a young child—remains fraught given the pervasive sexualisation of breasts and our collective inability to place women's procreative "leaking" bodies in public space (Dettwyler, 1995b; Stearns, 1999; Bartlett, 2002; Hausman, 2004, Campo, 2010; Balsam, 2012). The attempt to superimpose the discourse of science—i.e. the evidence concerning the nutritional and medicinal benefits of breast milk - hasn't really helped to offset this problem. In fact, as Bernice Hausman insightfully points out, medicalisation has *undermined* breastfeeding in contemporary western societies because it has undermined women's confidence in their own bodies and promoted a new reliance on experts (2004, pp.275-6). Similarly, the push to accept breastfeeding mothers in the workplace has mostly supported "pumping" or the extraction of mother's milk into bottles. This maintains a bodily and emotional separation between maternal and infant bodies thereby ensuring women approximate rather than transform the "ideal worker" norm (Blum, 1999; Stephens, 2010). It means workplace norms are not changing to accommodate maternal and infant needs, which may very well be better served by allowing breastfeeding breaks and/or working from home.

We remain ambivalent both consciously and unconsciously about the meaning of breasts. We can't decide—and apparently we must - if they are nurturing or sexy and we can't decide if milk is medicinal or abject and, because of this, the matter of "breastfeeding in public"—a strange term that already presupposes that there is another kind of breastfeeding: the "in private" sort - remains defined by cultural contestation and conflict. While breastfeeding "in public" is protected by law in Australia (the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984)—it is "a right not a privilege" as the Australian Breastfeeding Association state (ABA, 2014b) - the culture hasn't caught up. Women in Australia, like the US, the UK and other Western countries, are routinely asked not to breastfeed "in public" or to do so more "discretely". In one high profile Australian case in January 2013, a woman Liana Webster was asked to "cover up or get out" of the Bribie Island pool in Brisbane where she was breastfeeding her eleven month old daughter (Christian, 2013; Vonow, 2013).¹ The well-known commercial television host David Koch publically stated "I think it's fair enough to ask her to move ... [to ask her] could you be a bit discreeter [sic], go up on the grass?" He stated that the ledge of a pool, incidentally where the mother was also supervising her other children, "is a high traffic area" and therefore inappropriate for breastfeeding. This led to a spate of media articles and an avalanche of letters both for and against. There was a nurse-in protest organised at the Sunrise studios where Koch's morning television show is filmed with organisers saying their message was to "normalise" public breastfeeding and that women shouldn't be made to feel marginalised, unwelcome or embarrassed (Pell, 2013). Koch inflamed the debate by insisting that women "should be allowed" to breastfeed in public but should be "classy" about it (Franklin, 2013). Aside from the extraordinary entitlement implied in statements defining what women should and should not be "allowed" to do with their bodies, Koch betrays the peculiar logic of contemporary discrimination: it is apparently both for and against breastfeeding. [Insert fig 1.1 and 1.2 here]

In a point I will take up in more detail later in the paper, it is becoming increasingly clear that when individuals or organisations discriminate against breastfeeding women—and, incidentally, their children - by telling them they should be more “discreet” or to move to a private area (recreating on a smaller scale women’s historic relegation to the private sphere), such people invariably qualify that they are themselves resolutely “pro-breastfeeding”. This contradictory stance says: “Sure, breastfeed anywhere, including in public, just don’t be seen doing it. Be polite. Be mindful of others. Be discreet. Be ‘classy’.” This is an insidious development that creates confusion; indeed, it discombobulates breastfeeders and protestors alike since the very people who are discriminating simultaneously claim to be supportive of breastfeeding. The kind of comment that David Koch made pretends to be on the same side (or falsely believes itself to be) while actually undermining women and recreating patriarchal distinctions of public and private that presuppose women’s procreative bodies are offensive and should be out of sight. The politics of breastfeeding in public needs to be mindful of this false or “pseudomutual” stance now pervasive in contemporary rhetoric.

Another recent case demonstrates the same duplicity. In January, 2014 a woman, Larissa Bakewell was asked to move to the toilet in Sake, a restaurant and bar in Sydney, because patrons found her breastfeeding her 18 month old daughter “offensive” (Ison, 2014). Together with *Nurture – Natural Parenting Magazine* Bakewell organised a nurse-in protest via Facebook. She was given a prompt apology by the director of Sake, though others on her page sensed the potential duplicity. Lauren Hudson posted the following astute comment on Bakewell’s Facebook nurse-in page (Monday, Jan 6, 2014):

It’s nice he apologised but it’s just words...if they follow through on their actions that’s great for them but only time will tell ...it seems they only apologised when the nurse in was already organised, was this to make themselves look good/feel better? I think stand strong apology or not [.] I am so sick and tired of this happening he should have educated his staff from the start especially since he is a family man, I don’t trust these people it’s really too late for an apology I think because if it was another women with less confidence it would have gone unheard and the damage would have been far worse...Don’t let the apology deflate the mission... Sorry don’t want to sound too negative but I think it’s a cop out...he has prob[ably] seen the result of these actions against other restaurants on TV and doesn’t want the same to happen...I think it’s good that these restaurants are fearful of these actions putting them in the spotlight for discrimination maybe they will try harder to train their staff prior?

Hudson captures two critical points here: first, that such incidents are not individual and random, although they are routinely treated as such, rather they betray an underlying cultural logic that is pervasive; second, an apology after the fact that simultaneously claims that the organisation is “pro-breastfeeding” is a contradiction in terms. At the time of the event, the organisation in question was not pro-breastfeeding but rather discriminatory. As Victoria Brookman from Lactivists Australia said at the Sake nurse-in, “This is about saying to women, you can exist in society when you’re a mother” (cited in Ison, 2014). [Insert Fig 1.3 here]

Another high profile case from a decade earlier involved then Victorian State Labour MP Kirstie Marshall who was removed from Parliament for breastfeeding her 11 day old baby who was identified as "a stranger in the house". As Rhonda Shaw points out,

While Marshall was present in the parliamentary chamber as an elected political representative and not as a mother ... there is no doubt that Marshall's maternal body in this case exposes the limits of traditional identity construction as autonomous and unitary. According to the law governing relations between actors in parliament and the model of sociality to which it corresponds, these subjects are not selves who exist in relation to other selves, nor are they individuals whose identities are formed on the basis of their intersubjectivity. Rather, the bodies of these individuals form quintessential liberal political subjects and, as such, are required to be individuated, bounded and closed (Shaw, 2004, p. 287).

The conception of the subject that undergirds modern rights (the very same ones we draw on to assert our right to feed "in public" paradoxically) configures the human being as an "individual" ignoring the corporeal interdependence of maternal and infant bodies and indeed the profound dependence of all our bodies on the generative capacities of the female body. The foundation myth of "the individual" within contemporary liberal-democratic societies renders maternal bodies and infant bodies, perhaps especially in relation with each other, as deviant and disrupting.

The distinction between the realm of political and civil society and the home is a creation of liberal modernity that presupposes a social contract of self-governing autonomous citizens who have no relations of dependence and pursue their own interests with few corporeal constraints. What is missing, as the political philosopher Carole Pateman so astutely observed, is an understanding of the "sexual contract" that underscores and makes possible the social one (Pateman, 1988; Pateman, 1989). This is the realm of "nature"—the production of bodies through sex (and these days numerous other means), pregnancy, childbirth and lactation—that was smuggled in and sequestered to the "private-domestic sphere". Here relations of care rather than self-interest prevail; people are organised in terms of affinity and blood rather than competition and contract and the sexual, emotional and reproductive needs of citizens (historically men) that would otherwise disrupt the smooth operations of civil society are both satisfied and contained. All disembodied public relations between ostensibly free and equal citizens presuppose private ones and indeed rely on their existence.

Since the advent of liberal modernity women's sequestration to the home has posed a problem, and has been contested by feminist and civil rights activists drawing attention to the contradiction of a society based on freedom and equality that excludes (at least) half its members. And while women have fought for suffrage and then for inclusion in civil society, including paid work, we have only been in the public sphere *en masse* for the last 50 or so years. That's less than one century and, at the cultural level, only constitutes two generations (at best), so it is hardly surprising we are struggling to come to terms with women's procreative bodies in public spaces—certainly very young women's sexual bodies (symbolically corralled from reproduction despite the obvious connections) are now ubiquitous. In only a few short decades the "billboard covered in tits" has risen to troubling cultural hegemony. It's as if we are, in the present historical moment, comfortable with *the promise of fertility* (as symbolised in nubility) but not with its actual manifestation. It seems there is only one kind of female body allowed in public space and this is the sexually objectified, slender, youthful (pre-maternal) body tailored to the male gaze, but the mother's body remains both abject and perverse – disruptive, indiscreet and lacking class. Mothers are required to "get back in shape" which means assume the musculature and weight of their pre-pregnant selves and anything less is deemed a failure (Nash, 2012). There is, in effect, a symbolic erasure of the mother and the story her body tells.

Moreover, the assertion of rights by women using their procreative bodies is also rendered suspect. The breastfeeding mothers who are idealised are the sort who fit nicely in a Kleenex tissue advertisement; they are slender, white, young,

married and middle class, their breasts are never seen and the infant they are feeding is always under 6 months. We are comfortable with this image because it contains, constrains and cauterizes the procreative power of women's bodies. As Hausman says, placing breastfeeding mothers in nighties and dressing gowns in adverts to new mothers does a disservice to the recognition of breastfeeding as part of the repertoire of "maternal practice" (2004, p. 278) that is inevitably *political* precisely because breastfeeding *anywhere but the home* constitutes an affront to conventional sensibilities. Such depictions return mothers to the domestic enclave even, paradoxically, as the same groups who promulgate these images (LaLeache Leage, the ABA etc.) develop elaborate and politicised defences of breastfeeding (2004, p. 281).

Linking the maternal and the political Hausman asserts that women are "cultural mammals" necessarily encumbered and defined by motherhood (2004, p.275). For Hausman, and I agree, we need to eschew the trope of naturalism in our defence of breastfeeding - specifically, we need to resist defining breastfeeding, and by extension mothering, as natural (and therefore seemingly outside of politics); rather it is drawing our bodies into a political conversation and redefining the norms of civil society to *include* women's procreative bodies that constitutes the central task ahead. For Hausman, this means linking maternalism and feminism in productive and insightful ways—neither being silenced by the critique of essentialism nor capitulating to the ideal of the disembodied self.

Pseudomutuality: the new rhetorical terrain

After posting about my experience on Facebook and having a strong reaction from many friends and, in the viral world of social media, friends of friends of friends of friends, I decided to organise a "feed in" at the Hepburn Bathhouse on November 28, 2013. Like the Sunrise/Kochi protest before and the Sake protest after, our goal was to challenge both the establishment and the cultural norms that render breastfeeding unacceptable in public. Nurse-ins or feed-ins are an embodied protest that have become increasingly visible in contemporary western societies (for an engaging and brilliant analysis of earlier Australian nurse in's see Bartlett, 2002). Social media is an excellent means of publicising such events and provides a forum for organisation and discussion before, during and after the event.

The protest went extremely well for a small scale regional event organised with only one week's notice. In all 42 people said they were coming on Facebook and approximately 20 came; however, close to 200 people liked and commented on the page. We made placards and signs for display and one of the protestors brought his guitar and played music. Most of the protestors were breastfeeding mothers, there was a father and a grandfather (taking photos), a few residents who opposed the price structure and prioritisation of tourists over locals, the local media, and several managers from the Bathhouse. We were photographed and I was interviewed both by our local newspaper *The Advocate* and an independent newspaper *The Local* who also made a YouTube video of the protest (Kelly, 2013). [Bathhouse feed in, Daylesford, Australia, November 28, 2013. Insert images 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6]

Although the protest was peaceable and even fun—notwithstanding the newspaper photographer's explicit request that we simulate outrage so they could "get a good shot"—it quickly became evident that the Bathhouse themselves were engaging in Orwellian double-speak. They were smiling and affirming their "support for breastfeeding", undertaking

interviews and drawing attention to their pregnant manager as evidence of their “breastfeeding friendly” culture. They claimed to support breastfeeding and that their only concern was about “safety”. On their Facebook page that day they made the following remark:

...We value and welcome all mothers and breastfeeding mothers within our Spa. We actively encourage breastfeeding within our work environment and provide support for all breastfeeding mothers. We are well aware of the sensitivities and are pleased the issue has been rectified [sic]. Again we apologise for this incident and can assure you that we welcome breastfeeding Mums and bubs.

Clearly, the Bathhouse are as steeped in the dominant ideology as the rest of us—breast *is* best, and they did not want to be seen to be going against this. In an effective public relations move, they claimed to be completely pro-breastfeeding and somehow denied there was ever a problem. This sat contradictorily with assertions that the employee in question would be given follow-up training and I would be given an apology. At the time of the protest—some 10 days after my complaint letter had been sent, an apology was still not forthcoming (neither had it been issued at the time of the above post). Thus, rather than admit what had happened, apologise for it and move forward, the Bathhouse elected to move into “pseudomutuality”. As Bittman and Pixley point out, “[p]seudomutuality arises when the participants in a non-mutual situation engage in actions which conceal this fact and instead portray the situation as mutual” (1997, p. 81).

Given the confusing nature of such a strategy it took me some time to comprehend what was going on amid the smiles and seeming agreement. We were all on the same side, which was very nice except for the fact that an injustice had occurred and had not been apologised for; it was rather being covered over in an ingenious public relations move which placed us all on the same team. According to the Bathhouse, as stated to a fellow protestor at the event, I had not been asked *not* to breastfeed, I only been asked to move because I was “not within arm’s length” of my older child. The implication was that I was somehow failing in my duty of care. The problem with this was *I was* within arm’s length of my daughter; the distance between the ledge where I was sitting and the ramp into the pool where she was playing was such that this was inevitable.

What became increasingly clear was the Bathhouse were not going to properly acknowledge that the incident occurred. While the manager said to me privately (at the protest and later on the phone) that she believed my account and that her employee had behaved unacceptably and would receive “professional development”—on the public record, including in their formal apology, they apologised *not* for asking me not to breastfeed, interrogating me about when I would next feed and requesting that I move but rather for “the distress that one of our lifeguards comments caused you”. Their apology letter continues, “As a result of the feedback that you have so very kindly provided we have discussed with our staff *the policies and communication around safety specifically relating to breastfeeding within the facility*” (my emphasis, Whitehouse, 2013).

The problem with this apology is that it is not an apology. I didn't need an apology for my “distress” or only secondarily, and I didn't need them to follow up on “safety”, what was required was an apology for asking me to leave the pool and for interrogating me regarding when I would next feed. Moreover, the whole argument about safety was spurious and set up by both the pool supervisor and the Bathhouse as a ruse to avoid the real issue, which was telling me not to breastfeed in the pool and using bogus arguments about “hygiene” and “safety” to justify it. The second

sentence is deliberately vague—it doesn't specify that employees will be trained in the *rights* of breastfeeding women but rather in "safety specifically relating to breastfeeding". I asked them in a follow up reply "what specifically the issue with safety was" and received no clear answer only a reiteration of what had already been said. As manager Kim Whitehouse stated to me in private correspondence,

Please understand that my discussions with the staff member involved confirm that the primary concern was one of safety both for the child that you were feeding and that of the child that you were actively supervising thus the staff member asked that you move to what she perceived to be a safer feeding location ...

What is interesting in this Orwellian twist in which the establishment that told me not to breastfeed is somehow miraculously "breastfeeding friendly" is that it wipes away the injustice and renders me suspect all at once—surely an effective strategy for those wanting to avoid wrongdoing! Not only is there a failure to directly apologise for instructing me not to breastfeed, it implies—or, at the very least, potentially implies - that I was somehow acting "unsafely". The suggestion was that I was not supervising my older child properly.

The cost of being on the ideological opposition was simply too great for the Bathhouse and so they adopted a disingenuous pseudomutual stance, interspersed with belated recognition of wrongdoing. Together with the other examples², this indicates that new battles over women's rights to breastfeed—and this may be extended to reproductive rights more generally—may very well be waged in a new ideological terrain of pseudomutuality—a kind of ideological verisimilitude where all are apparently "on the same side" while enacting very different political strategies. It is clearly *not* "pro-breastfeeding" to instruct a mother to move from her spot because her breastfeeding is "unhygienic" or "unsafe". Certainly with the Bathhouse, they maintained a "we are breastfeeding friendly" stance through-out the entire protest, on Facebook, in the YouTube clip that was made by local media as well as in their formal apology. This would have been fine if the original injustice had have been acknowledged: that in fact they were *not breastfeeding friendly at the time I was asked to move*, but it was not and so a false mutuality emerged.

We see this with the David Koch incident and again with Sake where the apology came together with an assertion that the organisation is "breastfeeding friendly". Koch insists he "supports women's right to feed in public"—his truck is with visibility in "high traffic areas" whatever that means. In point of fact, none of these organisations or individuals is breastfeeding friendly given how they treat breastfeeding mother/infant pairs both in their facilities and in their commentary. To avoid the difficulty of acknowledging that their beliefs and actions were prejudiced and discriminatory, false mutuality emerged in its place. Clearly the ideological hegemony of breastfeeding is such that *everyone* is on the side of breastfeeding, even those who violate mothers' legal rights to feed anywhere.

Conclusion

Alison Bartlett contends that "lactating breasts when they are taken out of the home are capable of disrupting the borders of morality, discretion, taste and politics ..." (Bartlett, 2002, p. 111).⁷ Part of the task of disrupting these borders is refusing to think or operate in or be reduced to the binaries that divide and silence female experience—this means acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings of breasts and refusing to settle on one. Breasts are not only for

nurturing, nor are they exclusively sexual, nor are they simply nutrition dispensers, rather breasts and their owners are all of these things. It means refusing to truncate the actual or symbolic place of breasts and women's bodies more generally. There remains a deep anxiety about the simultaneous erotic and nurturing qualities of breasts, though I am in agreement with Fiona Giles that it is a neutered version of the breast that contrasts with the offending "wet breast" (2002, p.11). It is precisely the undecidability of the lactating breast that causes confusion; it simply cannot be placed neatly into one symbolic category or another. The lactating breast is discursively promiscuous. Both the milk and the feeding relation disrupt extant separations between sexuality and maternity, public and private, self and other on which our liberal individualist culture is founded. The tendency for protesters to emphasise the "natural" or "nutritional" dimensions of breasts does not obviate this problem of reductionism, it merely displaces it to the other side of the binary.

For Bernice Hausman it is precisely the underlying conflation of woman with nature that necessitates women's political action; it is necessary we reclaim modes of citizenship that incorporate women's bodily capacities and difference—otherwise, she contends women are effectively only allowed in to public space as "female men" (2004, p. 281). Bringing our distinctly female bodies into public *not* (only) as man's erotic "Other", or as "female men" without (suckling) dependents, or as images of de-sexualised mothers in nighties—in Lisa Baraitser's evocative terms, as the "reliable cortisol manager[s]" (2009, p. 4), but as embodied subjects with corporeal needs that differ from the conventional or default masculine bodies on whom the liberal polity was founded. Critical to this is the recognition of what Hausman calls women's "reproductive burden" (2004, p.275) or what we could also call women's reproductive difference—that this difference should be neither romanticised, nor essentialised, nor suppressed, nor sequestered; *but simply allowed to be*. Women should be able to take their bodies – lactating or otherwise – into public space without stigma, sanction or opprobrium. They should not feel pushed indoors, into toilets or under veils.

This means, it is critical we establish our right to breastfeed and insist on transforming society to accept this right; it means not simply adopting a maternalism that accepts our position as romanticised feminine other who keeps all procreative activities deodorised and private, but taking our procreative bodies into the street, into workplaces and into leisure spaces like pools and parks, cafes and shops. How does accommodating rather than suppressing women's (together with infants') bodies alter the psycho-social and ideological landscape? How does it alter physical space, law, politics and culture? How might it transform our workplace policies and practices and our spaces of leisure? These are questions that remain unanswered in the modern west but are unfolding as the culture wars surrounding feeding "in public" are increasingly, even if complexly, won by women.

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¹ Webster and her supporters also organized a feed in at the Bribie Island Aquatic Centre to protest her treatment (Taylor, 2013).

² Liana Webster was given an almost identical explanation after being instructed to leave the pool while breastfeeding. In public statements the Moreton Bay Regional Council stated that “[t]he staff member was concerned about the comfort of the breastfeeding mum and offered her access to the centre’s mothers’ room or alternatively a chair for the convenience of both mum and baby” (cited in Christian, 2013). Again this is clearly a disingenuous position. In point of fact Ms Webster was comfortable where she was and was sitting on the ledge of the pool so that she could supervise her older children; it would not have been “convenient” to breastfeed anywhere else. After persistent harassment she left the pool in tears, which again demonstrates how little staff cared about her “comfort”.

I explore the scholarly literature on breasts and breastfeeding especially as it relates to the public/private distinction on which the controversy implicitly rests making the case that it is our collective inability to symbolically place breasts—•are they sexy or are they maternal? Are they natural or are they medicinal?—that renders “public” breastfeeding so challenging. I make two further arguments: first, that breastfeeding controversies are increasingly defined by what the sociologists Michael Bittman and Judith Pixley call “pseudomutuality” (1997, p. 81), or, by a pretence of mutuality, s The social attitude and legal status regarding the practice of breastfeeding babies in open view of the general public vary widely in cultures around the world. In many countries, both in the Global South and in a number of Western countries, breastfeeding in public is common and generally not regarded as an issue. In those countries, laws protect the nursing mother. In many parts of the world including Australia, some parts of the United States, and Europe, along with some countries in Asia, women