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Breasts are for feeding, *NOT* Sexualizing!

A popstar climbs on stage, anxious to perform her next song which will lead to showstopper. As her song builds to climax she makes a costume change while hidden behind her dancers, unveiling a rather revealing jumpsuit underneath. The next day, headlines praise her magnificent style, men drool over her exposed breasts and teens wish they could be like that popstar. In a park near the magazine stand, a baby cries. A mother picks him up, cooing lovingly and exposes her breast as discreetly as possible. She then covers the child's head with a blanket. An elderly woman glares at her as she passes the bench the woman is sitting on. A workman eating his sandwich yards away tells the woman she is disgusting for doing that in a public place. Society has deemed breasts as being sexual tools which should only be exposed within the bedroom. Citizens have lost sight of what nutrients a woman's body has to offer a child. Breastfeeding is a natural form of passing nutrients into a growing child and should not be sexualized by society nor deemed inappropriate as it is required to assist in the physical maturation of a human being.

While some see breastfeeding as being completely natural and necessary, most of society shies away from the exposed breast during the actual process and some people even discriminate against the action itself. In the *International Breastfeeding Journal*, the writer demonstrates this concept in their second paragraph, "Many cultures consider the female breast primarily as a sexual organ and therefore a private part of the body, which needs to be invisible in the public arena (yet they have no similar objection to breasts and cleavages being displayed for other purposes)," (Amir). However, the public seems to lose sight of the purpose of breastfeeding. Believe it or not, some of the natural milk's genetic make-up helps a child's health. Is that not

amazing? A source known as *Environmental Health Perspectives* informs their readers: “The health benefits to the infant of breastfeeding have been amply documented; numerous studies strongly indicate significantly decreased risks of infection, allergy, asthma, arthritis, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and various cancers in both childhood and adulthood,” (Containments in human milk . . ., 2008). So, if breastfeeding helps in so many ways, why are there people arguing against it? Even more importantly, why are some mothers *listening*?

Well, the *International Breastfeeding Journal* has one theory as to why some women may be taking the public’s advice, “Discomfort,” the author states, “with the idea of breastfeeding in public has been cited as a reason for some women choosing not to initiate breastfeeding or planning a shorter duration of breastfeeding,” (Amir). Now, reader, I would like for you to imagine having not eaten all day. You are given a steaming plateful of food; your mouth is watering. You begin eating, and after five minutes, the plate is snatched away. Imagine how hungry a breastfeeding child must be when something similar occurs to him. Yet, more and more women do it every day simply to appease the public around her. However, it is understandable if she does so due to discomfort, because she does not want to be seen in a sexual manner.

The fact that a woman should fear being seen in a sexual manner, however, has been a great concern for many years. Today’s media has had a great part in shaping the views of women as playthings. An individual has only to turn on his television to see this. A woman wearing only a small amount of leather gazes at the camera alluringly as she washes a truck in between bites of a huge hamburger and is later joined by another attractive woman wearing very little clothing. In a movie on TV, women dance on tables and pour alcohol on themselves to get money. A reality show follows the sex lives of a preacher’s daughters. The reason for all of this is simple. Sex

sells. A source identified as *Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in Media* claims, “If sex sold on its own accord, there would be symmetry in how frequently men and women are presented as sexy objects alongside products. Instead, the sexual objectification of women is by far the most prevalent picture. To be sexually objectified is to be presented to the viewer as an object of desire without a discernible subjective desire of one’s own,” (Ross, Lester). It is understood that women in typical commercials or movies often wear short skirts, tight jeans, heels and dresses or tops with plunging necklines. So, in comparison to the burger commercial discussed before, a male-oriented commercial should also be examined. In a razor commercial, one man is having trouble acquiring a razor and asks for assistance from a man who looks to be an officer. The officer asks him for a photo ID and fingerprint identification. The other man voices his requirement to get into the razor case once more. When he gets frustrated, he is tasered. The men in this commercial are average looking, everyday men. They are not being sexy, because they are not expected to be sexy! They are *men* in a commercial trying to reach *male* audiences.

Yet, when a woman is in a commercial or movie, one thing is almost guaranteed: Her breasts will be somewhat exposed.

Of course under these circumstances a woman would feel uncomfortable feeding publicly. Also understandable is the way some people would feel about any form of breast exposure. Children are in public and the last thing a mother or grandmother would want their seven year old little girl to see is a woman exposing herself, even if it is for a child. That seven year old could be taught that exposing her chest in public is okay. Yet, something that society fails to understand is that unless we the people change the way women are portrayed in media, unless we go back to the old days of women not being allowed to show even their ankles and

unless they intend to take every picture in the world and burn it, then little girls will learn the wrong lesson anyway, that being seen as an object of pleasure is alright and normal. At least when she sees a mother feeding her child, she sees that breasts can be used for more than taking daring pictures. Any child can see that the mother is caring for the infant, that the infant cannot eat as a more mature child could. The essential question, therefore is: If girls are going to learn about what breasts are for, should she learn it from the media or the woman in the park feeding her baby? Women, though, are attempting to abide by the rules set by society by taking every advantage possible.

More and more women are using formulas or breast-pumps. Formulas provide nutrients for a child's development, however it is not as effective as breastmilk is because it cannot help prevent against the illnesses provided earlier in this essay. Breast-pumps allow women to transfer breastmilk to a bottle. However, it is extremely time consuming and can affect the mother's schedule. A mother could stay up well after her family has gone to bed to pump out some milk and because she stayed up so late, she is tired at work. What women do not know, however is that the amount they are able to provide is directly linked to how much is demanded. According to Jacqueline H. Wolf, "...Thus feeding schedules, usually characterized by long intervals between feedings, quickly diminish mothers' milk supplies," (Don't Kill Your Baby, 2001). So, women cannot expose themselves in public, women cannot take advantage of breast-pumps without simultaneously embracing the idea that they may not be able to offer the proper amount of milk twenty-four hours a day. So, a woman has to embrace other options.

One option is to enter a feeding room. In churches, child care facilities or other child friendly public domains, women are allowed to breastfeed freely without the fear of judgment

hanging over their heads in a private room. They can sit and converse with one another and relax as their child takes in what is needed for growth.

Another option would be breathable blankets. Placing a small, thin rag or blanket over a child's head during feeding would help the mother stay discreet and covered throughout the process of feeding. However, one thing a mother must understand is that even with blankets, others may still judge her because they know what she is doing. A mother must keep her head held high and let the words and glares of others not affect her.

Breastfeeding is natural and should not be seen as anything less. Just because women are seen as sexual objects does not mean a mother should allow her child go without the proper nutrients that are vital to their health. Society should realize this and abandon their views of sex and breasts going together. Sexualizing breasts could actually do more harm than it can good.

Works Cited

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