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BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC: THE INTERSECTION OF BIOLOGY AND SEXUALITY

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Abstract
Breastfeeding is an infant feeding method recommended by health practitioners. Many women see it as an advantageous infant feeding method. Moreover, they perceive it as their right to provide the best for their children, and it has been legally protected. Unfortunately, not everybody looks at breastfeeding in public in a positive light. The United States of America is the bastion of individual rights. Ironically women who exercise their right to breastfeed in public often experiment objections from others. Those who protest against breastfeeding in public argue that the act is inappropriate as it involves breasts. Indeed, breasts have two functions: biological and sexual, but breasts' sexual function often overshadows their biological function. The objection to breastfeeding in public puts women in an uncomfortable position that is fraught with disagreements. According to the theory of intimate citizenship, multiple voices regarding breastfeeding in public breed conflict. There is a tension between personal concerns of breastfeeding mothers and the discomfort of some elements of the public. In addition, there is a silent agreement that breastfeeding mothers are expected to resolve these competing needs.

Keywords: breastfeeding, intimate citizenship, public

Introduction
In the United States of America, individualism is an important part of the social landscape. Individualism refers to the concept of individual sovereignty, which gives utmost importance to an individual's will, bound by other individuals' rights (Illievski, 2015). It implies that while individual rights are important, others' rights are equally prominent and should be respected. Individual freedom is one of the key characteristics of a society that adopts individualism as an ideology (Ali, Krishnan & Camp, 2005).

Breastfeeding is encouraged by health practitioners and organizations (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018). However, it is a suggestion, not a mandatory policy for parents. Therefore, breastfeeding is an individual choice. Ideally, other people should respect the decision of mothers to exercise their freedom to choose.

The country legalizes and supports breastfeeding as breastfeeding in public is legal in all states of the United States of America (Haller, 2018), but certain quarters of the society reject it. The fundamental reason for different opinions related to breastfeeding in public is rooted in how different social groups regarding human sexuality. The quarters of the society that rejects breastfeeding in public believe that breastfeeding in public is inappropriate as it might show some parts of the mother's breasts—considered taboo to be seen in public. In relation to this concern, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publishes an annual survey on public acceptance of breastfeeding in public. A recent survey shows that 10.53% of the respondents say that mothers should have no right to breastfeed in public, while 21.45% neither agree nor disagree (SummerStyle, 2019). This percentage is relatively low, but the objection to breastfeeding in public persists from one year to the other. This opinion is the root of the persistent rejection of breastfeeding in public.

Numerous researches about breastfeeding in public explain why it has become controversial. The rejection of breastfeeding in public is concerning diverse social values in the United States. The rejection ranges from denoting breastfeeding as sexual to giving disapproving gestures (Mathews, 2019). A part of the American society believes that breastfeeding in public is inappropriate even though it is legal. This is because breast milk is a bodily fluid, which according to the Western cultural belief, should be 'contained' and the breast is considered sexual (Dowling et al. 2012; Hurst, 2012; Carathers, 2017; Mathews, 2019; Sheehan et al., 2019; Woolard, 2019). These researches discuss breastfeeding within the context of conflicting social norms. In essence, the controversy of breastfeeding in public is a representation of the conflict between two different individual choices in a public place. Some people have a tacit understanding that breastfeeding is a personal act, and thus it has to be kept private. This article will draw a connection between personal and public domains by employing Plummer's (2001) theory of intimate citizenship. In reference to the notion of the public place, previous research refers to it as one kind. However, there are many types of public places, and people perceive breastfeeding in public differently depending on the public places they are located in. This article will also analyze different types of objections to breastfeeding in diverse public places.

Plummer (2001) writes that public places are the meeting point of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. It is only logical that sometimes these differences do not align with one another. These incompatible viewpoints can even end up in a collision course. Plummer (2003) suggests that there is a relation between the personal and the political. The term 'political' refers to power contestation in a public sphere. In connection with Plummer's (2003) theory, Warming and Fahnøe (2017) add that the most private decision that a person makes could have a strong public implication. Personal belief plays a very important role in women's decision on whether to breastfeed in public. The different elements of the public will either accept or reject that personal decision

Personal belief is nurtured through a series of lifetime socialization processes. Social experiences, activities, and interaction with others shape someone's beliefs, which later influences one's individual attitude and behavior (Mead, 1972; Macionis, 2017). In the socialization process, family, schools, peers, and the media play pivotal roles in introducing societal norms and values to the

younger generation. The way people perceive the appropriateness, or the inappropriateness, of breastfeeding in public is one of the results of the socialization process.

The discussion of breastfeeding in public must include the debate on what constitutes the public sphere. According to Smyth (2018), a space is not merely a place. Each space has embedded meaning, namely the meaning that results from a process. The process includes the initial purpose of building a public space. This objective is then strengthened by the repeated activity conducted in that space. There is a widespread unspoken expectation that breastfeeding is done discreetly in a private space. As a consequence, the social construction of breastfeeding in public is that of a challenge to the widely accepted norms (Domosh & Seager, 2001).

Method

The purpose of this article is to understand women's experiences with regard to breastfeeding in public. The research used a qualitative approach to see the perception of those who reject breastfeeding in public about the practice. This article uses women's stories about their experiences when challenged when breastfeeding in public. These stories are published by USA Today (2019), an online news website with a high readership. The stories are collected and selected to meet this article's main criteria: breastfeeding in public and must describe women's experience of being rejected when breastfeeding in public. The articles are coded numerically according to the sequence of publication. They are then coded under categories: *place*, *objector*, *objecting reason*, and *reaction*. The *place* shows where the breastfeeding in public is challenged, *objector* shows who demonstrate the objection, *objection reason* highlights why the objector shows their objection to breastfeeding in public, and *reaction* describes how the objection makes the breastfeeding women feel. After being coded, it would be easier to see why a part of society disregards breastfeeding in public and this article would draw a clear link between the personal and the public.

Finding and Discussion

Choosing to breastfeed and performing it wherever and whenever necessary is an individual right that is guaranteed by all states in the United States of America. Ideally, women should face no problem exercising this right, but reality proves different. A part of society still believes that breastfeeding in various public spaces is unacceptable, especially in church during a service, in restaurants, stores, public transit, park, plane, and public bathroom. Ballard (2019) publishes a survey on how the respondents think about breastfeeding in public. According to his survey, more people believe that breastfeeding in public is either somewhat or completely unacceptable.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who have negative responses to breastfeeding in public (adopted from Ballard, 2019)

Public Places	Somewhat Unacceptable (%)	Completely Unacceptable (%)
Public bathroom	6	7
Plane	9	9
Park	11	11

Public Transit	13	14
Store	15	15
Restaurant	15	17
Church Service	14	19

From Table 1, we can see that people place a different level of inappropriateness of breastfeeding according to the type of the public place. This finding is in line with Smyth's (2018) argument that each place has a perceived and conceived meaning.

Indeed, this percentage is relatively low compared to the majority that has a positive response to breastfeeding in public. However, this relatively low percentage is enough for us to indicate that there is a problem within society. Those who experience unjust treatment when performing breastfeeding in public deserve a friendlier environment that could appreciate breastfeeding women's freedom of choice. Therefore, to complement the survey above, it is necessary to capture women's personal experiences when breastfeeding in public. Their stories have been documented by USA Today as follows:

Table 2. Identity of articles portraying the stories of breastfeeding in public

Code	Title of Article
Article 1	Mom fights back after being asked to breastfeed in private space at elementary school (Longhi, 2019)
Article 2	Video shows breastfeeding mom confront woman who tells her: 'That's disgusting' (Longhi, 2019)
Article 3	Nursing mom gets booted from water park; officer says she can't sit with both breasts out (Haller, 2019)
Article 4	Breastfeeding mom asked to 'cover up' at pizzeria. She 'politely declined their offer' (Ruland, 2019)
Article 5	Dutch airline says breastfeeding policy is to 'keep the peace' after mom asked to cover up (Ali, 2019)
Article 6	Mom settles breastfeeding lawsuit with church that said she could 'cause men to lust' (Daugherty, 2019)

Table 3. The reasons for objection of breastfeeding in various public places

Code	Place	Objector	Objecting Reason	Reaction
Article 1	Education facility (elementary school)	Schoolteacher and principal	The schoolteacher and principal asked the breastfeeding mother to move to a more private space because they want to "protect" other students so that the students do not need to see a breastfeeding scene as it is not all age-appropriate. Moreover, the principal questioned whether breastfeeding is allowed to be done in public	The breastfeeding mother refused to move to a private area as it is not in line with the law The breastfeeding mother felt offended, then posted her disappointment through a video on Facebook

Article 2	Store (Shopping center)	Another female shopper/ passer-by	A passerby shouted to a breastfeeding mother, “that’s [breastfeeding] disgusting,” She also added that “the men over there are looking at you” and “my child is allowed to play without seeing that”	The breastfeeding mother responded to the passer-by, “it doesn’t matter what they [men] think". Then, she added “I am allowed to be here”
Article 3	Public leisure/health facility (swimming pool)	Pool’s lifeguard and manager, then called out a police officer	The pool’s lifeguard accompanied by a police officer rudely asked the breastfeeding mother to cover up. If not, they would ask her to leave the swimming pool area as it is mentioned that it is the rule of the pool	The mother said that "I’m completely appalled and heartbroken at the comment the officer made to the manager,"
Article 4	Restaurant	Another patron and the manager	A patron complained about a mother who was breastfeeding in the restaurant. Then, to settle this situation, the manager offered the breastfeeding mother a blanket to cover-up	The breastfeeding mother declined the offer. Later, she also posted what she experienced on her Facebook. In her online post, she claimed that the restaurant owner referred to her as selfish, but the restaurant owner denied her accusation.
Article 5	Public transportation	A flight attendant, supported by the flight management	The flight attendant wanted to maintain the comfort of other passengers from a possibly uncomfortable situation caused by breastfeeding. Should the event occur, the flight attendant would have to deal with it The flight management stated that breastfeeding is allowed, but the other passengers’ comfort must	The breastfeeding mother wrote a complaint online and felt embarrassed as asked to cover up when breastfeeding

			be respected too. Therefore, the mother was expected to cover her breast when breastfeeding	
Article 6	Worship Place (church)	The Naz – Brighton Nazarene Church (Pastor and church staff)	Previously, the church applied a lawsuit against a mother who breastfed in the church area. It is because the pastor and church staff believe that her action of breastfeeding her child in public was immodest and it could sexually arouse men in the church.	The breastfeeding mother and family felt compelled to leave the Church to avoid future embarrassment and shame. The breastfeeding mother finally settled the lawsuit. The church apologized and updated the breastfeeding policy in the church

The stories above show that objections to breastfeeding in public can occur in a variety of places. The reasons for the grievance vary depending on the public place. Similarly, there are different ways to convey the complaints, from asking the mothers to move to a more discreet area or room, asking the mothers to cover up so that their breastfeeding activity would be less visible to verbal confrontation by using an offensive remark. However, those stories share similar features: (1) Most of the objectors are acquaintances or perfect strangers; (2) It is always the mother who is asked to fit the 'rules' for the others; (3) The reasons for objections reveal a contestation on personal belief about breastfeeding in public; Furthermore, all objectors have more power than that of the breastfeeding mother. They are the school principal, church pastor and staff, pool manager and police officer, and flight managerial and restaurant crew who have the authority to run their business as they deem fit. Even the passer-by, whose identity is unknown, verbally humiliates the breastfeeding mother. This reveals that she—the passer-by—feels that she has the right to judge, monitor, and govern the breastfeeding woman, ignoring the fact that they are complete strangers.

The role of the stranger in breastfeeding in public

Often in the experience of women who breastfeed in public, we could find that their breastfeeding is objected to by someone they barely know. The woman in Article 1 might know both the principal and the schoolteacher mentioned. In Article 2, the breastfeeding mother encounters a stranger she has never met before. However, her objection is the most *hostile* compared to those experienced by the other mothers in the other articles.

Based on these data, we could infer that *stranger* has a role in governing breastfeeding in public. Stranger's negative reaction toward breastfeeding women in public could disrupt breastfeeding continuity. Boyer (2018) claims that strangers' negative reactions to breastfeeding women in public contribute to a mother's reluctance to continue breastfeeding. They eventually stop breastfeeding. Breastfeeding mothers think a lot about how people react to them in public. Even though breastfeeding is their right and is legally protected, breastfeeding mothers need assurance from the general public that what they are doing is acceptable. The negative feeling generated from strangers' disapproval makes breastfeeding women feel uncomfortable or even embarrassed. The hostility towards breastfeeding mothers can also affect other mothers who are thinking about breastfeeding their babies. They may opt not to breastfeed their babies since they are unwilling to stand the wrath of strangers.

The emotion of being disapproved in a public place is important to be pointed out because "emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside, and that this separation takes place through the very movement engendered by responding to others and objects" (Ahmed, 2004, p: 28). The aversion to mothers who breastfeed in public conveys a silent but strong message that they do not belong to a place where they happen to be in. Breastfeeding mothers in public are accused of disrupting the comfort of others by *failing* their duty to breastfeed only in a prescribed space (Boyer, 2012). Those breastfeeding mothers are indirectly classified as the others who are not part of the place where they are. Moreover, in many cases, this othering of breastfeeding mothers in public generates the impression that they are the ones trespassing the code of conduct in public places. Legally speaking, it is the right of breastfeeding women that is violated.

Expectations to the mothers

When a conflict occurs, the one who is expected to resolve the problem is the breastfeeding mother. They are perceived as the *source* of the conflict, as portrayed in Article 1 to Article 6 above. The perception that breastfeeding women cause conflict in public places is attributable to the exposure of their breasts. Therefore, breastfeeding in schools, churches, stores, and other public places is considered inappropriate. The main reason for this way of thinking is that women's breast has paradoxical ambiguity (Gripsrud et al., 2019).

The ambiguity of breasts could be observed in popular culture (as in popular narratives, films, fashions, and advertisements of popular products) and in everyday life. Women's breast is adored, and their beauty is acknowledged, even used as an attraction to gain more audience. However, the breast in everyday life is censored as it might cause mischief because the breast is regarded as a sexual symbol in most Western societies. Eventually, there is a belief that women are perceived as seductive temptresses to the male transgressor (Stepien, 2014). Woolard (2019) states that the cultural belief causes surveillance directed at women's bodies as women's sexual body is regarded as potentially deviant. Indeed, this is an unfair judgment directed towards women, but it shows that women are often less advantaged in society. As a result, society tends to monitor women more than it does to men. Webb et al., (2019) argue that surveillance of breastfeeding women includes how much breast is visible in various social

situations. It somehow implies that the problem lies within women's bodies. People would expect women to dress with a certain dress code in certain places, like in a school, worship house, or office. It implies that women should behave in a certain manner to be considered appropriate.

A similar situation happens in the case of breastfeeding in public. The ones who are often asked to behave considerately are the women, instead of those who object to breastfeeding in public. Szymanski et al. (2011) believe that the negative attitude directed toward breastfeeding is caused by the objectification of women in the entertainment industry. It limits the perception of society on the breasts as women's body parts that have a sexual function. Society neglects the fact that women's breasts also have a biological function as a source of mother's milk which is much needed by babies. As a result, when there is a conflict involving *breasts*, as in the breastfeeding in public, it is usually the mother who is expected to resolve the problem, for example by moving to a more discreet place or covering her breast and her baby when breastfeeding.

Personal beliefs as the source of conflict in breastfeeding in public

The clash of personal beliefs is the real cause of controversy related to breastfeeding in public. Plummer (2001) suggests that multiple voices representing people's personal life in the public are not in sync, hence the conflict. Article 2 above clearly portrays how two personal belief collides with one another. In a public place like a store, the objector said that breastfeeding in public is *disgusting,* as the men who happen to be in the vicinity may see the exposed breast. *O*ther objectors would only allow their child to play without seeing such *disgusting* public breastfeeding on display (Longhi, 2019). Therefore, it could be inferred that the objectors believe that breastfeeding should not be visible to the public eyes. Their perception of breastfeeding in public is related to how they are exposed to beliefs related to breastfeeding.

The more someone is exposed to the positive image of breastfeeding, the greater the likelihood that the person will have a positive attitude towards breastfeeding. Asiodu et al. (2017) state that early breastfeeding experience as a child—either being breastfed by their mother or witnessing relative breastfeeding—affects their current belief and preference in the feeding method. They will be more likely to choose to breastfeed. This is because engaging in breastfeeding or being familiar with breastfeeding is a social experience that could shape one's identity. Indeed, as Macionis (2017) suggests that social experience is a lifetime process. This is because they are a wide variety of agents of socialization from whom someone learns about different societal values. The agents of socialization include family, schools, peers, and media. If a child is exposed to breastfeeding in the family and beyond then learns that breastfeeding brings more benefits for both parent and child, s/he would likely prefer breastfeeding to another infant feeding method. S/he would also give a positive response when witnessing women who are breastfeeding in public. On the other hand, if someone is exposed to a negative image or attitude toward breastfeeding, s/he would be more likely to choose an infant feeding method other than breastfeeding. Moreover, that person would feel uneasy toward women who breastfeed in public, possibly believing that breastfeeding is inappropriate as it uses sexual breasts.

The objector in Article 2 is not the only one to make her personal beliefs public. A patron requesting the restaurant manager to ask the breastfeeding mother to cover up in article 4 and the flight attendant in article 5 shows that their different actors who contest the appropriateness of breastfeeding in public. Unfortunately, all of them directly ask the breastfeeding mothers to do something about the discomfort of others, rather than request those who are bothered by breastfeeding in public to move to a different spot

Breastfeeding in church areas is considered inappropriate. Smyth (2008) states that a place is not merely a place. Every place has meaning attained to it through a conceived and perceived process. A church is a sacred public place where the main activities conducted in church constitute of praying, singing gospel, religious preaching, and other religious activities. These activities shape people's idea that the visitors must conduct themselves properly. Breastfeeding in this area would be considered problematic because it involves breasts which are culturally associated with the sexual body parts. Breasts are in contrast with the perceived meaning of church. Consequently, in article 6, the pastor and church staff addressed the breastfeeding mother as immodest and can sexually arouse men.

Conclusion

Intimate citizenship emphasizes the connection between the personal and the political. Personal beliefs contribute to people's attitudes towards breastfeeding in public. This is because one's personal background shapes one's perspectives, including how they perceive breastfeeding in public. This article highlights the objections directed at breastfeeding in public, mostly done by strangers, who believe that such action is too vulgar. The objectors also believe that they have the *power* over the breastfeeding women, so subsequently, they *correct* the conduct of the breastfeeding women. Therefore, breastfeeding women would behave in accordance with society's standard of appropriateness. This attitude is fueled by the two functions of breasts, biological and sexual. The objectors tend to focus on the sexuality of the breast and fail to see their biological function. This tendency is attributable to the perception of breasts as a sexual symbol in most Western cultures, including the United States of America. The sexualization engenders the governance of women who breastfeed in public

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