

Maternal sexuality and breastfeeding

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In this paper I consider the ways in which lactation has been discussed as a form of maternal sexuality, and the implications this carries for our understanding of breastfeeding practices and sexuality. Drawing on knowledge constructed in the western world during the last half of the twentieth century, the paper identifies a shift between the radical ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s and the newer moral conservatism of the 1990s. The emergence of lactation porn and erotica in the 1990s has meant that the sexuality of breastfeeding has been contained in a subculture outside of dominant cultural values, and so maternal sexuality has become a muted discourse, sometimes bordering on the immoral and illegal. My project in this paper, however, is to argue that breastfeeding pleasure is physiologically ‘normal’ and should be productively rather than illicitly incorporated into the meanings we make of sexuality and of breastfeeding.

Writing in an Australian weekend newspaper amid debates about breastfeeding in public, Jane Freeman mocks the Western preoccupation with breasts by suggesting that they are an arbitrary part of the body used to mark sexual desire; if only we can forget them and select another erogenous zone to take their place, women would be freed of the many cultural constraints placed on breastfeeding. She suggests we take up the nape of the neck as erotically charged:

Pamela Anderson Lee could shift her implants around to the back of her neck, so men could gawp and slaver over her voluptuously curving nape. The fashion industry could come up with erotic garments which flatter or even push up the nape (although there could be some problems here with head mobility). I can even foresee the day when women would be forced to cover up their nape for the sake of decency. (Freeman, 1998, p.8)

Freeman employs comedy, but is also suggesting (like Judith Butler and others) that sexuality is socially constructed and subject to change over time and place. Breasts have extensive layers of history which aggregate their focus as sexual (see Yalom, 1998) until, that is, they are used for feeding babies. Rather than deny the sexual aspect of breastfeeding, as much common rhetoric does, I want to delve into it more

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closely. While the representation of pregnancy in the 1990s became something chic and fashionable for celebrities (see Matthews & Wexler, 2000), the same attention has not attended breastfeeding. Annie Liebovitz's controversial portrait of Jerry Hall breastfeeding (1999) is exceptional in its emphasis on sexual semiotics (see Bartlett, 2000), and makes us ask why lactating breasts are sequestered from cultural discourses of sexuality.

In this paper, I discuss some of the issues around sexuality and maternity that silently undergird many of the anxieties attending debates around breastfeeding, especially when it is performed in public. Specifically, I argue for breastfeeding being accepted as a potentially erotic or sexual experience, rather than being quarantined into the realms of nutritional value and medical benefits. This argument is consistent with understanding breastfeeding as an embodied experience which involves intense physical exchanges: skin touching, hands stroking, holding and playing, bodies sharing, hormones pulsing, as well as an emotional relation of intimacy, care and often passionate engagement—what Noelle Oxenhandler calls 'the eros of parenthood' (2001). To argue this, however, involves a reconsideration of what we understand as sexual.

For many women, the postpartum period is understood to be a time of abstinence. In Tardy's interviews with mothers, sex (meaning sex with a male partner) was only referred to jokingly or critically, devoid of any sense that a new mother actually enjoys or seeks it (Tardy, 2000, p. 463). This cultural norm also acts more generally to limit the range of sexual contact through which women gain visceral and emotional satisfaction. Iris Young suggests that this is a result of sexuality being male-centred and male-defined: 'Active sexuality is the erect penis ... Intercourse is the true sex act, and nonphallic pleasures are either deviant or preparatory. Touching and kissing the breasts is 'foreplay,' a pleasant prelude after which the couple goes on to the Real Thing' (Young, 1998, p. 194). In an effort to denaturalize this model of sexuality, Young suggests we 'Imagine constructing the model of sexual power in breasts rather than penises. Men's nipples would have to be constructed as puny copies, just as men have constructed women's clitorides as puny copies of the penis' (p. 194). She agrees with French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray who claims that a 'woman has sex organs more or less everywhere' (Irigaray, 1985, p. 28). But for Young, breasts are particularly potent as they disrupt the borders between maternity and sexuality (p. 190).

Throughout this argument I use the word sexual, but also intersperse it with other terms like erotic, sensual, pleasure, passion and desire. These terms are not equivalent, but refer to the expanse of experience and the language we have available to name it. One person's understanding of what is sensual will not coincide with another's, and what some understand as sensual they will not want to be termed sexual. As an ethicist, Cristina Traina has assessed the term 'maternal sexuality' and found that contemporary meanings of the words sex, sexual and sexuality are all concerned with erotic *pleasure* (Traina, 2000, p. 381). While this has not always been the case historically or universally, the current 'literature on orgasm, sensate focus, phone sex, and masturbation', all seem to regard 'good sex' as 'erotic stimulation

that feels good, physically or emotionally, regardless of the physical structure or relational context' (p. 381) and so, she concludes, it is 'perfectly appropriate in this culture' to speak of maternal sexuality (p. 382). By doing so, however, I do not wish to circumscribe all women's experience of lactation as sexual. Breastfeeding is understood and experienced—made meaningful—through a number of intersecting discourses which are filtered through each woman's embodiment as it is lived and subjectivity as it forms her ongoing sense of self.

Breastfeeding and pleasure

Writing in the late 1990s in response to a rush of Australian media coverage around breastfeeding in public, Amy Forrest provocatively suggested that 'breastfeeding in public remains an issue because it is a sensuous activity' (Forrest, 1998). Responding to suggestions that breastfeeding women are either discreet or exhibitionist (see Bartlett, 2002a), she asks herself where the difference lies, and declares that breastfeeding involves 'voyeurism, pleasure, desire. We cannot insist there is nothing sensuous about it'. This blatant statement that breastfeeding is sensual, that I like doing it, shifts the ground of the usual debate which often focuses on benefits, rights and nature. Forrest even admits that she likes watching it: 'I have to acknowledge a voyeuristic interest in the sight of naked breasts, their softness and plenitude, and the baby's frank guzzling delight'. What difference does it make if women like to watch breastfeeding as well as do it? Not only does this disrupt the border between sexuality and motherhood, as Young claims, it also asks us to acknowledge the often silent sexual/sensual pleasures women experience with their breasts and infants, as well as the difference a maternal gaze might make to our construction of sexuality.

In the late 1980s Barbara Sichtermann was arguing that we have lost an understanding of the ways in which breasts are erotic:

Since today it is no longer a problem to rear babies on artificial food, we can quite happily forget the 'duty' which breastfeeding was always made out to be for women ... I say breastfeeding means satisfying the child's need (and the mother's) to become one again with another body in a 'physical act of love'. (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 62)

Her reference to the 'physical act of love' is a phrase employed by the French obstetrician, Frederic Leboyer, whose book *Birth without violence* presented in 1974 a radical new narrative on childbirth imagined from the child's perspective. He speaks of the new-born and the mother as new lovers—as 'true lovers'—who should not be disturbed but left to 'speak the language of love' through touch, silence, close heartbeats and ecstasy. Sichtermann takes up this aspect of LeBoyer's narrative (while rejecting other parts) to imagine its implications:

Subsequent acts of love (for the child is not satisfied with just one such act postpartum) during the next days, weeks and months, would be the feeding-times—mingling of bodies and bodily fluids, a sexual activity which generates by sustaining life and which gives pleasure, the kind of pleasure we are all familiar with (or would like to be) from coitus. Hardly anyone expects the care given to children by women under the headings

of 'reproduction' and 'maternal duties' to include this kind of pleasure. (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 60)

This source of pleasure is a motivating force for the mother as well as the child in this dyad which displaces the father as the usual source of sexual pleasure. Sichtermann regards breastfeeding eroticism as a 'natural instinct' which has been lost, but also argues that it is something that needs to be actively cultivated rather than just passively recovered. Many ancient cultures, she argues, developed an *ars amandi*, an art of love, which provided tuition about how to gain the greatest pleasures from lovemaking. Sexuality was thus acknowledged as a cultural practice to be taught, and was practised as such rather than as a solely reproductive act. For Sichtermann, breastfeeding could have developed similarly, as an act of sexual pleasure. The fact that babies derive food and nutrition from breastfeeding is peripheral for Sichtermann (p. 62), and can be regarded as only one of many discourses through which breastfeeding can be made meaningful. She prefers to use the word 'sate', which can simultaneously encompass the sexual, emotional, nutritional and psychological dimensions of breastfeeding, so that mothers can 'sate ("feed") themselves on their children' (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 68). Fathers also, she asserts, can perform a similar function by allowing a newborn to suck from his nipples or nose once a baby has finished feeding but still wants to suck, and men can gain pleasure from such an exchange as women do (p. 66). While heterosexuality is assumed in Sichtermann's and most other texts on breastfeeding, such intimacies would also apply for gay and lesbian couples. Sichtermann argues that we need a language to begin to talk about such practices, as without a body of knowledge and practice, 'sex always hovers between pleasure and disgust and succumbs to the latter if there is no cultivation, no form of refinement, rite, or language to ratify and organize it' (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 65). She begins the project of articulating the erotics of breastfeeding by describing it in language analogous to conventional heterosexuality:

The parallel between breastfeeding in particular and the heterosexual sex act is superficially more obvious than the actual similarities in sensation and arousal would suggest. The tip of the breast, a highly sensitive, erectile organ pushes its way into the baby's warm and moist oral cavity. While the lips, jaws and gums close around the organ, massaging it in a rhythmic sucking motion, it discharges its special juice into the child's deeper oesophageal region. (Sichtermann, 1986, p. 64)

Few women in practice would speak of breastfeeding in such sexual terms; most are likely to use metaphors relating to machines or cows or milkbars, all of which are much more common in our collective memory than images of women breastfeeding (see Bartlett, 2002b).

Sichtermann is not the only one to draw on pleasure as an alternative discourse of breastfeeding. Long-time breastfeeding activist Sheila Kitzinger has described breastfeeding as 'a way of loving', 'a psychosexual process' which 'involves a flow of sexual energy through her whole body' (1979, p. 12; 1984, p. 45). The best preparation for breastfeeding, according to Kitzinger, is 'love-making' which involves breast stimulation and makes a woman feel her body is cherished (1984,

p. 47). Long before Young, she also argued that sex education is ‘grossly lop-sided [with] the whole emphasis on intercourse as the one valid experience’ (p. 47), and she begins her book, *The experience of breastfeeding* (1979) by saying that some women experience orgasm while breastfeeding but most do not, and that orgasm is not the only form of sexual satisfaction (1979, p. 12). These writers all provide us with a language through which we can begin to talk about the sexual aspects of breastfeeding, even though their comparisons are restricted to heterosexual practices. As Young points out earlier, heterosexuality still constitutes our dominant understanding of sexuality. There is also a scientific basis for these comparisons, notwithstanding the heterosexual assumptions of scientific enterprise.

Oxytocin—the love hormone

While Masters and Johnson’s landmark study of sexuality in 1966 reported that ‘women often become sexually aroused during nursing; some women even have orgasms in this fashion’ (Masters *et al.*, 1985, p. 136), Niles Newton’s work from the 1950s onward is often cited as the earliest of studies to notice the physiological similarities between orgasm, childbirth and lactation in women. Some of the physiological similarities Newton identified included uterine contractions, nipple erection, skin changes, and a rise in temperature as well as an increase in caretaking behaviour (Newton, 1973, p. 82). Newton contends that childbirth and lactation are ‘voluntary acts of reproduction’ and so they would have to entail some element of satisfaction in order to survive in an evolutionary context. She considers that contemporary social patterns of separating mother and child and regulatory breastfeeding regimes ‘inhibit the psychophysical reciprocity of lactation’: ‘we would cause coital frigidity if we prescribed the [sexual] act only at scheduled times and laid down rules concerning the exact number of minutes intromission should last. Mother–baby interactions can be similarly disturbed’ (p. 84). The physiological factor in common with all of these sexual acts is a hormone called oxytocin, which Newton dubbed ‘the hormone of love’ (in Odent, 1999, p. 10) due to what she calls its care-taking properties: ‘Coitus, labor, and lactation ... are interpersonal, psychophysical acts that are psychologically intertwined with affectionate partnership formation and caretaking behavior’ (Newton, 1973, p. 91). Without the caretaking behaviours which Newton attributes to oxytocin, successful reproduction cannot be secured. This hormonal impact represents ‘operant conditioning’ for Newton, in which pleasure and caretaking become a condition of the other. Most of Newton’s evidence was drawn from studies of mice, but still enable her to conclude that because of the neuro-hormonal commonalities of orgasm, birth and lactation, ‘women have a more varied heritage of sexual enjoyment than men’ (p. 95).

Recent midwifery textbook writers describe oxytocin as being produced by the posterior pituitary gland and released in response to suckling, causing the milk-ejection reflex which can be felt as the ‘let-down’ (Riordan & Auerbach, 1999, p. 103). Oxytocin levels rise within one minute of suckling commencing and fall again six minutes after cessation, for the duration of a mother’s lactational period of

life (p. 103) and if the mother exclusively breastfeeds the levels of oxytocin will continue to rise over time. Its role in milk production is not really clear: while levels of the hormone soar during breastfeeding, without the presence of prolactin no milk will be produced (Whitworth in Riordan & Auerbach, 1999, p. 103). Due to the action of oxytocin, however, afferent pathways are so well established that a child's cry or a mother's memory of her child can trigger milk-ejection (p. 103). Odent claims that a woman's beta-endorphin levels peak after twenty minutes of breastfeeding and, as they are present in breastmilk, this accounts for a baby's sated look of bliss after feeding. These hormones are the 'reward system' for our altruism, and can be found repeated in adult patterns, for example, 'when we share a meal with other people, we increase our levels of the "Love hormone"' (Odent, 1999, p. 10).

Oxytocin is also responsible for uterine contractions while breastfeeding, a rise in temperature and increased thirst. The uterine contractions are important post-partum to control bleeding and reduce the size of the uterus, but continue past this functional period. Indeed, the let-down reflex and uterine contractions can continue long after weaning. Riordan and Auerbach note that 'these rhythmical pulsations may be a source of pleasure to the mother' (1999, p. 103). Oxytocin also soars in both men and women during orgasm, when uterine contractions aid the passage of the sperm towards the egg (Odent, 1999, p. 35). Levels also heighten in women during birth, and Newton has hypothesized that oxytocin causes a foetus-ejection reflex at birth which parallels the milk-ejection reflex in lactation (Newton, 1973, p. 91). Odent also suggests that the foetus can release its own oxytocin, which could contribute to the onset of labour (1999, p. 35). Oxytocin, however, can only be partially explained through its biomedical function, partly because it frequently acts in excess of those explanations, in ways which have no apparent explanation.

'Let your husband play'

During the 1970s sexuality was a topic gaining in respectability as it emerged from the radical ideologies of the sixties. Some parenting manuals of the time took up the discourse of oxytocin as 'love hormone' in quite enthusiastic ways. Doctors Penny and Andrew Stanway in their 1978 book, *Breast is best*, devote a whole chapter to 'breastfeeding and sex', including a social history regretting the turn of women wanting to live their lives as men (like, expecting an education and to work for at least part of their lives), rather than accepting a life ruled by hormones which is as nature intended (Stanways, 1983, p. 218). Despite or perhaps because of this turn of events, the Doctors emphasize the erotic potential of breastfeeding enabled by oxytocin, especially as it can contribute to the father's enjoyment:

... her husband may not enjoy the baby's relationship with his wife. Until now he hasn't had to share his wife's breasts and he may resent the little intruder ... but he shouldn't be blamed. So many things make him think of her breasts as erotic that it's hardly surprising that he'll feel bad about somebody usurping his place ... The thing is to be positive. Show your husband you still love and want him ... Let your husband play with

your breasts as he did before. He can even drink your milk if he wants to: he won't be robbing the baby of anything. Should you feel sexually aroused by breastfeeding, this can be pleasant for your partner too. (Stanways, 1983, p. 220)

While the Stanways locate these practices in a quaintly chauvenistic model, their promotion of the sexual potential of breastfeeding is surprisingly liberal by today's standards. Their normalizing of maternal sexuality in an era of sexual liberation, however, quickly means that women who experience difficulties with breastfeeding are deemed to have 'sexual hang-ups' (p. 221). Davies' 1982 *The breastfeeding book* takes a similar direction when it advises that 'Lactation and breastfeeding are part of women's sexual functioning and this association is probably the reason why some people see breastfeeding as lovely and sensuous while others think it distasteful' (p. 94). An earlier 1963 parenting manual written by an honorary paediatrician to Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital similarly relates failure to breastfeed with failure of 'sexual adjustment in marriage' (Isbister, 1963, p. 75), maintaining that breastfeeding 'is partly an erotic pleasure and, like sexual intercourse, it is a relationship that has many difficulties and needs time, care, and love to develop to its full maturity' (Isbister, pp. 74–75). Sexuality is only ever conceived of within marriage in these manuals, and this understanding places additional 'relationship' burdens and limits on a sexual understanding of breastfeeding which don't necessarily apply.

As Linda Blum points out, these sorts of discourses of sexuality accorded women agency as actively sexual beings, but this was rendered 'respectable, or well-adjusted, only if restricted within heterosexual marriage' (Blum, 1999, pp. 38–39). Pam Carter reads a similar quarantining of women's sexuality into normative grids in her analysis of breastfeeding and sexuality in popular baby-care literature: 'breast feeding may well be important for women, and for children, and therefore to leave it within its various normative frameworks is to miss opportunities for women to occasionally experience their bodies outside of dominant heterosexual frameworks' (Carter, 1996, pp. 114–115). Because of the insistent cloistering of maternal sexuality into heterosexual patterns, Carter suggests that lesbian ways of experiencing the body, particularly the breast, may offer subversive new thinking about meanings of breastfeeding (p. 116).

Censuring maternal sexuality

There may be reasons for keeping such pleasures silent, however, as Umansky and Stearns remind us in the sobering case of 'Karen Carter', who had her two year old daughter taken from her into protective custody for almost a year in the early 1990s after she rang a helpline about her feelings of mild arousal while breastfeeding (Umansky, 1998; Stearns, 1999). A series of administrative and governmental processes led to a number of court cases that centred around the mother's sexuality and psychiatric status and finally restricted her role as a mother while involving endless interrogations and physical investigations of her daughter for signs of abuse. Umansky attributes this debacle to the inadequacies of America's social service

systems and the uncertain terrain of child sexual abuse discourses (1998, p. 299). Cases like Carter's, however, are not uncommon, and she draws on a more general pattern of social values which censure sexual activity in the lives of mothers, especially single or divorced mothers (p. 299). Cindy Stearns interprets the case as indicative of the extent to which 'the construction of the good maternal body as being at all costs *not* sexual is taken very seriously by both the culture and the law' (1999, p. 309).

In her study of the ways in which women 'manage' breastfeeding and its performance publicly in the early 1990s, Stearns concludes that 'the major concern of women is that their breastfeeding is perceived as maternal and not sexual behaviour' (p. 321). Similarly, in a study in Turin, Italy, in the early eighties, Balsama and colleagues also find a muted discourse of breastfeeding pleasure amongst their cohort of interviewees, which is restrained by both a severe institutional regime of breastfeeding schedules and the symbolic power of the asexual mother, the Virgin Mary in Catholic communities (Balsamo *et al.*, 1992, p. 76).

Maternal sexual pleasure is therefore a volatile issue subject to close social regulation and covertly informing debates around breastfeeding in public. Balsama *et al.* argue that the potential eroticism of breastfeeding is purposefully discouraged because it threatens to disrupt the 'only erotic feeling allowed to the mother in a patriarchal society, that connected with the adult male' (1992, p. 76). Philosopher Marion Young would agree with this. Drawing on psychoanalytic theories, she argues that 'If motherhood is sexual, the mother and child can be a circuit of pleasure for the mother, then the man may lose her allegiance and attachment ... she may find him dispensable' (1990, p. 198). This situation threatens the satisfaction of men and masculinity. This is certainly evident in parenting manuals which invariably include discussions on 'resuming' heterosexual relations with the father, but can ignore the hormonally undifferentiated pleasures of breastfeeding the child. Noting women's positioning in Western logic as either virgin or whore, pure or impure, nurturer or seducer, asexual mother or sexualized beauty (pp. 196–197), Young notes that:

Patriarchy depends on this border between motherhood and sexuality. In our lives and desires it keeps women divided from ourselves, in having to identify with one or another image of womanly power—the nurturing, competent, selfless mother, always sacrificing, the soul of goodness; or the fiery, voluptuous vamp with the power of attraction, leading victims down the road of pleasure, sin, and danger. (1990, p. 197)

While there are clearly dangers in suggesting that breastfeeding can be an erotic sensation for women, especially keeping in mind the experience of 'Karen Carter' and the currently heightened social anxieties around child sexual abuse, Young talks about the need for a radical shattering of the borders currently installed between motherhood and sexuality:

What can this mean? Most concretely, it means pointing to and celebrating breastfeeding as a sexual interaction for both the mother and the infant. It means letting women speak in public about the pleasure that many report they derive from their

babies and about the fact that weaning is often a loss for them ... It means creating and affirming a kind of love in which a woman does not have to choose between pursuing her own selfish, insatiable desire and giving pleasure and sustenance to another close to her, a nurturance that gives and also takes for itself. (1990, p. 200)

This last suggestion applies to all women whether breastfeeding or not, Young argues, as women are all too often positioned as nurturing and self-sacrificing wherever they are.

Lactation porn

While I argue that breastfeeding can shift the erotic dyad of male–female to female–child, Giles argues that breastfeeding can broaden the repertoire of male–female erotics in liberating ways. Inverting the usual mantra that breasts have been appropriated by men as sexual objects, Giles claims that it could also be that breasts have remained unrecognized by both men and women in their erotic potential: that they are ‘incompletely sexualized, that its intrinsic wetness has been repressed’ (2002, p. 11). Her positive critique of an American pornography magazine called *Juggs*, edited by a woman, is compelling:

Hanson [the editor] recognizes a growing market of male readers who want women’s breasts to ooze and spout milk and who are sexually aroused by such images. Hanson regularly includes photo spreads with headlines such as ‘Heather Hooters: Milk Her Heavy Jugs!’ or, in last December’s issue, ‘Harmony: Fresh Young Milk Squeezer’. One of her contributors ... submits short stories about wildly lactating busty babes. In *Revenge of the Cream Queens*, he has young women who unwittingly take a pill that causes them to lactate. A side effect is extreme horniness, so that they can’t get enough sex or spill enough milk, to the delight of their drenched and satisfied boyfriends. (Giles, 2001, p. 10)

Giles interprets such endeavours as producing ‘some of the most liberating images of lactating women’ (2001, p. 10), and she goes on to examine a series of pornographic videos known as *Lactomania* in which ‘women’s milking scenes drive the show, so that their expression of milk becomes auto-erotic and the male ejaculation becomes a mirror of a new, female kind, that lasts longer, spurts further and tastes better’ (2001, p. 11). Giles celebrates these versions of breastfeeding because they are playful, athletic and fecund, rather than drabbily shawled in cures for mastitis and nutritional benefits. They celebrate the overwhelming wetness and fluidity of lactating breasts, in an outpouring of miraculous bodily fluid which generally troubles western cultural logic.

Giles is aware of the dangerous ground she treads in suggesting that pornography and erotica might be a source of empowering images for lactating women. She notes the ‘fear that eroticizing motherhood could lead to incestuous relationships between mothers and their children’ (2001, p. 11), and cites examples in which these fears provoke cultural and legal restrictions on women breastfeeding in the West, including the Karen Carter case. But she advocates that this fear has taken on extreme proportions. Citing Noelle Oxenhandler’s book, *The eros of parenthood* (2001), Giles maintains that in:

the narrowing sexual definitions to account only for intercourse between adults, there is a loss of knowledge to understand, and vocabulary to describe, the many other sexual behaviours and urges of the human animal, including the child. Non-orgasmic, but nevertheless intensely sensual forms of embodied connection are at the heart of loving parent-child attachment, and part of the spectrum of affectionate exchange between individuals generally. (2001, p. 11)

Theologian and ethicist, Cristina Traina, would agree, arguing that if maternal sexuality contributes to human flourishing, meaning 'to thrive socially, physically, intellectually, and spiritually' (2000, p. 370), then it can be understood as serving a moral good and our conceptualizing of human sexuality must accommodate such experience. Further, Traina argues that a reconsideration of current meanings of maternity and sexuality might also 'furnish a language and a logic for dealing more adequately with the ethics of children's sexuality, of the erotic dimensions of adult-child relations, and of sensuality in general', as well as provide some insight into the wrongs of paedophilia (p. 371). To ignore the erotics of maternity renders our conceptualizing of sexuality limited and our capacity to understand it diminished.

Giles' book, *Fresh milk: the secret life of breasts* (2003) is an effort to increase the vocabulary and knowledge we can mobilize about breastfeeding and sexuality, and to begin representing the wet breast in ways which 'might free women to feel more at ease with their breastmilk, and to more confidently take pleasure in the processes of feeding and lactating' (2002, p. 17). In an electronic discussion group responding to Giles' ideas, a lactation consultant wrote that she was often—about three times a week—contacted by women wanting to induce lactation for their mate, or by the mate wanting to know how his woman can induce lactation, for sexual pleasure (LACTNET, May 2001). To re-introduce the pleasures of breastfeeding into common parlance would seem a positive and enabling step which makes new meanings of breastfeeding beneficial to all women, as Young observes. If the sexual aspects of maternity were normalized rather than denied, maybe women would be welcomed into public spaces to breastfeed, in the same way that it is now chic to wear a bare pregnant belly. Maybe we would begin wearing our maternity underwear on the outside of our clothes. Maybe we would see advertisements of breastmilk being sprayed over the new Galaxy road vehicle to symbolize its universal power, sexiness, and all-terrain flexibility. If lactating breasts were considered sexy, maybe the value of mothers would increase in our cultural economy. It's worth considering.

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