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Sexy vs. Breastfeeding: A Counterpublic Analysis

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Abstract
In his eye-opening social experiments, Joey Salads highlights a double standard of breast exposure imposed by dominant Western authority. Through these experiments, a breastfeeding woman is placed in various public spaces, causing onlookers to elicit feelings of disgust. In my research, I examined Salads' social experiments through a counterpublic analysis. Counterpublics provide a space necessary to formulate discourses that represent the identities, interests, and needs of the marginalized. Typically, male leaders and male law enforcers dominate public spaces. Therefore, a woman's presence/voice is often unwarranted. Society has deemed it permissible for physically attractive women to show a certain degree of cleavage, but it is not socially acceptable for breastfeeding mothers to expose their breasts when feeding a child in public. Through this continuing pattern, breastfeeding mothers are excluded to the margins of society because breastfeeding is still not normalized in Western culture within the wider public sphere.

Breastfeeding is a physical connection that is entirely natural because it demonstrates a bonding experience between a mother and a child. A variety of mothers from different cultures and nationalities are likely to suggest that breastfeeding demonstrates a sign of love and affection as well as nourishment for their children. Breastfeeding is essential to ensure a healthy lifestyle for a child. An interpersonal relationship is said to rise from providing the breast to a child because it embodies familiarity and trust between mother and child. Ages one through four are essentially the prime years for a child to understand the concepts of comfort and security, and breastfeeding includes both of those ideas.

In recent decades, however, there are those who assert that breastfeeding in public is provocative and even disgusting, because dominant Western society has normalized breastfeeding as a domestic behavior that should be kept away from the view of the public. Through a counterpublic analysis, I examine Joey Salads' social experiment videos that draw from the rhetorical discourse that surrounds the breastfeeding community.

Counterpublics are marginalized people who unite their efforts in order to seek inclusion in dominant decision making in the wider public, better known as the public sphere (Asen, 2002). Through the employment of oppositional discourses, counterpublics emerge whenever individuals from certain communities are excluded from the dominant group and excluded from the culture at large (Asen, 2002). For this reason, social experiments harbor the capacity to make such exclusions noticeable and are infamous for producing rhetorical interventions that challenge sanctioned worldviews. This creates social change. Social experiments often emerge from critical concern, and ultimately function as the catalyst for achieving equality and inclusion.

On January 2016, online personality Joey Salads released a video entitled *Sexy vs BreastFeeding in Public (Social Experiment)* to show the shaming that is directed at breastfeeding mothers. In this particular experiment, Emily, a mother breastfeeding her child, was constantly shamed in public places. Those who confronted Emily referred to her breast as "that" or "it," which is dehumanizing and oppressive because her breasts are being objectified as things rather than functions of a woman's body. Furthermore, the experiment revealed people hurling discriminatory messages, such as "Can you please put that away?" "That's disgusting!" and "You shouldn't be doing that in public!" These offensive remarks, in turn, exclude breastfeeding mothers from public spaces. According to Hungerford (2015), "women often attempt to hide and/or disappear when they feel that others are viewing them in such ways" (p. 362). In the case of Salads' experiment, breastfeeding disrupts people's social norms, which prompts those disturbed by the feeding to inflict oppression. When such exclusion and oppression occurs, a counterpublic emerges in order to create inclusion for the marginalized. Therefore, Salads seeks to contribute to a breastfeeding counterpublic and promote inclusion for breastfeeding mothers through the means of social experiments.

This social experiment is particularly startling because Salads incorporated a professional female model (an attractive young woman) with large breasts wearing a low-cut shirt, interposing her presence in a public setting. Although she is not breastfeeding a child in public, her cleavage is still revealing. Yet she does not receive any shaming. Arguably, this experiment highlights an underlying societal fallacy. Both women in Salads' social experiment similarly displayed a lot of cleavage, but the breastfeeding mother is not treated with the same amount of fairness and civil liberty as the non-breastfeeding woman with large breasts. Within the dominant discourse of the public sphere, Western culture can easily disregard such a fallacy since it engenders a collective notion of acceptance for

breastfeeding, premised on a claim that a baby's head pressed against a breast is indecent. Through the socialization of the female body and the social construction of breasts, there are those who would argue that breastfeeding, regardless of how much of the breast is exposed, still constitutes as an inappropriate form of expression.

To further test the validity of this experiment, the breastfeeding mother was positioned next to the model on a busy sidewalk. The purpose of this staging was to test the societal fallacy to which breastfeeding mothers are continuously subjected. While these two women were sitting close together on a bench, hostile comments were directed at the mother and not at the attractive woman revealing excessive cleavage. Audiences disgusted by public breastfeeding were rather distracted and appalled with the imagery that Emily displayed, creating a visual barrier over elements of the social context that signals this discrepancy. Such barriers possess the capability to limit individuals' logic, distorting their way of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting.

As a mediator, Salads questioned the disgusted onlookers by asking them why they were justified in saying that breastfeeding is disgusting and indecent, and for the mother to show a certain degree of her breast but not the attractive non-breastfeeding model. Given that breastfeeding in public is not against the law, a societal fallacy is committed in such a way that it creates a double standard between breastfeeding mothers and non-breastfeeding women with large exposed breasts. Interestingly, this double standard is not discussed in current rhetorical debates about breastfeeding in public. Since double standards often draw from fallacious arguments, this particular breastfeeding situation contains elements that easily oppress and consign breastfeeding mothers to the margins of the public sphere.

When examining media portrayals of breastfeeding in public, Foss (2013) explains that very few television shows have displayed breastfeeding uncovered. The few shows include *Family Guy*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Sex in the City, The O.C., Gilmore Girls,* and *Friends* (Foss, 2013). Through the depictions in these shows, it was found that characters who witnessed the breastfeeding in public felt deeply uncomfortable (Foss, 2013). From the media representations of breastfeeding, it is evident that breastfeeding in public is still not normalized. To further broaden people's perception of this unjust narrative, Salads conducted other social experiment videos, bringing such oppressive actions to the forefront.

To further address this issue of critical concern, I have supplemented my analysis with another one of Salads' social experiment videos, *BreastFeeding in Public (Social Experiment)*. Salads used the same mother, Emily, in various public

settings to test public reaction to breastfeeding. Although there was no model to serve as a variable, the public response was still the same. Female and male onlookers were quick to show signs of disapproval, disgust, and other hateful mannerisms. There have been proposed solutions to move breastfeeding to more isolated locations, including rooms tailored strictly for breastfeeding (Boyer, 2012). Arguably, this solution is problematic, as it has vast potential to condition people to accept that breasts should never be publicly displayed. In both of Salads' social experiments, those who were supportive of breastfeeding were all female. Thus, the discourse framed in this line of communication calls attention to the existence of a counterpublic, comprised of marginalized voices that are capable of correcting imperfections, enabling them to attempt to achieve equality within the public sphere.

At the forefront of the breastfeeding controversy, the people drawn to this rhetorical composition include public health advocates (Foss, 2013), mothers, and people opposed to breastfeeding in public. There are a large number of males opposed to the notion of public breastfeeding, as demonstrated in Salads' social experiment. Certain men gravitate toward this rhetorical framework and are compelled to dehumanize public breastfeeding because their understanding of breasts has largely been distorted by media portrayals. A significant number of men accept and validate that breasts are performative and not functional. According to Foss (2013), breastfeeding dramatically reduces health disorders. Since men do not possess the functions of a female body, it can be inferred that certain men do not realize how crucial it is to breastfeed children early in their youth.

This paper explores the portrayals expressed in Salads' social experiment videos: *Sexy vs BreastFeeding in Public (Social Experiment)* and *BreastFeeding in Public (Social Experiment).* These videos create awareness that women who wear physically revealing clothing are not scrutinized as much as women that breastfeed in public. This creates a double standard among the majority of people in the public sphere. Although existing literature in the communication studies discipline does explore breastfeeding, there is a paucity of scholarship that examines debates between breastfeeding in public and women with large breasts wearing low cut shirts. Through the theoretical perspectives of societal inequities, conducting a counterpublic analysis of Salads' social experiments contributes to the field of rhetoric, increasing understanding of how the discourse on public breastfeeding frames our perceptions of breastfeeding, attractiveness, women, and breasts. Specifically, in what follows I ask: What sort of discourse is implemented when comparing women who breastfeed in public to

non-breastfeeding women with large exposed breasts? How do social experiments revolving around public breastfeeding alter perceptions of women and breastfeeding?

Literature Review

Although there is extant scholarship on public breastfeeding, it has yet to be explored through rhetorical criticism. Marking this absence, this literature review explores attitudes regarding breastfeeding, physical attractiveness, and the ways in which women have been oppressed in various social situations. Contributions to the scholarship of public breastfeeding have yet to identify the implications that oppression has on breastfeeding mothers. Because large exposed breasts are legitimized as a norm, women who wear revealing clothing and expose the same amount of breast as breastfeeding mothers do not endure shaming. Moreover, there is a lack of literature that explores this particular double standard that currently exists in the Western culture.

Attitudes Regarding Breastfeeding in Public

Evidently, breastfeeding practices have the ability to elicit social repercussions such as shaming and discrimination, which can potentially lead to oppression. Jones (2004) states that a great deal of women find their breasts to be desirable to men. Since a substantial amount of men perceive breasts sexually, an abundance of stares can provoke certain women to not breastfeed. Mothers simply need to feed their children; it is not the intention of breastfeeding mothers to make anyone who witnesses the breastfeeding feel uncomfortable. But when interpretations of breasts are diverse, it becomes problematic; it forces women to question whether or not they should breastfeed in public. For certain men, witnessing breastfeeding in public causes their perception of breasts to evolve into a physical feature that is undesirable and disgusting. When a social norm is violated, certain men begin to develop hatred, which propels them to direct shaming behavior towards the women who are breastfeeding.

In a survey conducted by Mulready-Ward and Hackett (2014), the authors discovered that of 2075 New York City residents, 50.4 percent of respondents were not supportive of breastfeeding in public. Similarly, a survey administered to 1477 participants through various internet and social networking sites revealed that there was significantly higher endorsement for the statement, “I think breastfeeding in some public settings should be against the law” (Lippitt et al., 2014, p. 362). From this statistic, it can be postulated that breastfeeding is largely legitimatized as a feminist expression that needs to remain hidden. Breastfeeding

violates the social norms of many people; thus, the Western culture only accepts certain forms of femininity.

In a survey administered to 5496 people in Australia from 1995 and 2009, 70 percent of the population perceived public breastfeeding to be acceptable, whereas a survey conducted in the U.S. between 1991 and 2001 revealed that "only 37 percent to 59 percent of adults believed that women should have the right to breastfeed in public" (Meng et al., 2013, p. 187). Interestingly, there is lack of scholarship that examines people in favor of women presenting their large breasts through physically revealing clothing. As illustrated in Salads' experiment, the woman with the low-cut shirt did not endure shaming, but rather garnered stares of approval and also looks of sexual arousal from men. Western culture has largely conformed to accepting women of large breasts and acceptance of excessive cleavage. There are mainstream discourses arguing that it is healthy for men to look at breasts. These mainstream discourses repeatedly claim that large populations of men stare at breasts because it stimulates them intellectually and sexually. However, when a baby's head is placed against a mother's breast, it can be argued that men's sexual senses evaporate fairly rapidly.

Media has continuously portrayed men to have a strong fetish towards women with large breasts (Swami & Tovée, 2013). These fetishes have the capacity to compel men to quickly dismiss women who do not possess large breasts and to perceive them as unattractive. This in turn can potentially create an oppressive environment because those deemed unattractive are less likely to receive favorability, are less likely to be hired, and are limited to various other opportunities that only attractive people are likely to acquire (Buggio et al., 2012). Similarly, displaying breasts in public merely for the function to breastfeed is not received favorably because breastfeeding distorts men's sexual imagery of a woman's chest. Put simply, breastfeeding violates some of the normative conventions certain people hold dear. Our society accepts and validates that breasts are performative in the sexual sense (Swami & Tovée, 2013).

In a study conducted by Bobadilla, Metze, and Taylor, they found that unattractiveness is related to unprovoked aggression (2013). It is in this light that breastfeeding has the capacity to prompt aggression because it is largely perceived by mainstream society as unattractive. When exploring the perception of "ugly is bad," Dermer and Thiel (1975) and Bobadilla et al. (2013) produced similar findings in which they revealed that, among the male population, low attractiveness was related to physical aggression. These findings suggest that (un)attractiveness may place individuals at greater risk for environmental factors linked to aggression such as physical abuse among men, or pressure to maintain

beauty related social status among women (Bobadilla et al., 2013). Although there is a relationship between low attractiveness and aggression, there is a lack of scholarly literature showing the relationship between breastfeeding in public and aggression. Should a relationship exist, there is a strong indication that negative perceptions of breastfeeding can gradually evolve from public shaming to a level of ample aggression. As is apparent from the portrayals of Salads' experiments, breastfeeding mothers are suffering from oppression. The following section explores outside the realm of breastfeeding to examine the ways in which women have been and still are oppressed in various social settings. Women's oppression can take shape in many forms. Therefore, the various types of oppression I call attention to further advances the rationale that shaming women for public breastfeeding is indeed a type of oppression that deserves considerable attention.

Oppressed Women

The history of women's oppression helps to account for the persistence of the objectification of breastfeeding. In the health field, Van Den Tillaart, Kurtz, and Cash (2009) argue that women feel marginalized in terms of how they communicate their health disorders with practitioners. More specifically, when under the care of a male doctor, women with health disorders feel they are not fully appreciated since male doctors are not able to relate to women because of biological gender differences (Van DenTillaart et al., 2009). Similarly, women with breast cancer have been victims of oppression mainly because they experienced challenges when speaking in support groups (Collie & Kante, 2011). Such challenges include not being comfortable to speak about their disorder or not being fluent in the dominant language used to communicate in their culture (2011). For women in poverty with HIV, their oppression stems from laws that limit their reproductive choices (Fried & Kelly, 2011). Moreover, they are prevented from access to starting a family, receiving decent work, and from receiving the highest level of health care (2011). Canadian women, however, are subjected to a particular kind of oppression; they fall below men in every aspect of socioeconomic status (Woolhouse, Brown, & Lent, 2004). Because of this, Canadian women are prone to health disorders and are less likely to articulate their health needs (2004). Evidently, there is an overwhelming amount of oppression targeted at women that has yet to desist.

Sloan (2011) contends that hijabs are perceived as symbols of oppression across many cultures, especially the Western culture. Drawing from Sloan's study, it can be inferred that mothers cover their children with blankets while

breastfeeding because breastfeeding has been normalized as a behavior that needs to remain hidden from the public eye. Existing scholarly literature implies that the blanket has become ingrained and internalized as a symbol of oppression, oppressive because of its action to make the visible breast invisible. Some mothers effectively oppress themselves to avoid shaming from onlookers.

When exploring the concept of inclusion, participants in Ponic and Frisby's (2010) study felt a sense of security whenever community health promoters used inclusive language. This prevented them from not feeling marginalized. Based on this significant finding from Ponic and Frisby's research, it can be inferred that breastfeeding mothers who are exposed to that same inclusive treatment from various people in public will feel secure and more willing to embrace their breasts when feeding their children. The following sections further suggest how breastfeeding mothers are suffering from oppression. As will be argued, it is significant to analyze the importance of counterpublics and the ways in which they can uplift marginalized voices to speak both to and within the dominant discourse.

Public Sphere and Counterpublics

According to Habermas et al. (1974), the public sphere is a space where "public opinion can be formed" (p. 49). Conceptually, Habermas contends that public people can dismantle problems by addressing their common affairs, considering things that need immediate attention (Fraser, 1997). Building on this criterion, Fraser (1997) advances that the public sphere is comprised of three elements: "the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse" (p. 70). Essentially, the public sphere is an arena where discourse can manifest and result in a formation of public opinion, which in turn leads to decision making (Fraser, 1997). Habermas et al. (1974) labels the original incarnation of this public arena as the *bourgeois public sphere*, which is a theory that revolves around principals of democracy and equality.

However, according to Fraser (1997), less privileged individuals are excluded from the public sphere. She contends that the bourgeois public sphere is not completely satisfactory, and cannot be considered a legitimized form of democracy. For Asen (2002), political legitimacy only arises from "inclusive public debates" (p. 345). Before determining what an ideal inclusive public sphere is, it is important to note that Habermas et al. (1974) does not offer alternative public spheres. Because of this, Fraser (1997) asserts that Habermas fails to recognize that there are competing publics as well. Such competing public spheres include counterpublics (Loehwing & Motter, 2009). Members of counterpublics seek to

address the societal inequality among excluded people from the dominant culture, also known as the dominant public. Counterpublics are comprised of people from subordinate societal groups, including women workers, people of color, gays, and lesbians (Fraser, 1997). The bourgeois public sphere is responsible for excluding a substantial amount of people from participating in public life, which creates subordination (Pezzullo, 2003). For this essay, my goal is not to support exclusion of breastfeeding mothers from public life and public discourses. Rather my aim is a critical one. I offer the rhetorical theory of a counterpublic as a tool that may inform critical awareness for breastfeeding mothers to understand how they may seek inclusion in the public sphere.

Counterpublics and the Breastfeeding Community

In this section, I address the inequities that Salads reveals in his social experiments. When there is subordination, it can potentially result in oppression. The subordinated group in Salads' experiments is breastfeeding mothers, and the existing discourse that is being challenged is the moral standards of public breastfeeding, and connecting such discourse with non-breastfeeding women who expose a lot of cleavage. Physically attractive (non-breastfeeding) women are not called into the dominant patriarchal rhetoric of breastfeeding. The existing discourse has already established that breastfeeding in public can be considered either provocative or normal. However, the missing argument the breastfeeding counterpublic seeks to include is that physically attractive non-breastfeeding mothers are not perceived the same way in the wider public sphere even though some women display the same level of breast exposure.

As the notion implies, counterpublics focus on bringing people together to create a public sphere (or multiple public spheres) in which equality and inclusion is achieved so marginalized people may eventually be bearers of public opinion. Interestingly, a significant number of counterpublics have emerged from social networking sites (Renninger, 2015). In a recent study, Jin et al. (2015) examined the comments from a pro-breastfeeding community Facebook page, finding evidence that strongly suggests that health campaigns enacted through social media are powerful mechanisms for creating profound awareness. Since social media garners the capacity to bring communities together, Salads shares his social experiment videos through the media outlet YouTube as a vehicle to bring them into the discourse surrounding public breastfeeding. Jin et al. (2015) reveals that success stories of breastfeeding experiences create social support between online friends. For this reason, it is logical to deduce that successful social experiments hold the same potential of bringing online friends together.

Social experiment videos like those of Salads' are capable of shaping people's perceptions of breasts and the symbolism they create. Given that breastfeeding in public is illegal in five states (Sprouse, 2015), Salads seeks to normalize breasts in the public sphere. He also seeks to adjust the symbolic sexual representations of breasts as they are largely unacknowledged for their natural and functional usages. With particular regulations regarding breast exposure, such as the Ohio revised code labeling breasts as "nudity" (Gibbs, 2015), Salads' social experiments are influential in creating social justice and equality for women who publicly breastfeed. For this reason, he seeks to deconstruct the double standard of breast exposure in public spaces.

While full exposure of breasts is considered normal in some other countries, there are particular areas of the world where breasts are still labeled solely as a female feature that needs to remain hidden (Reeder, 2015). Gender equality has achieved some significant success since more women than men are being hired in the workplace (Reeder, 2015). However, equality has still not been achieved, since there remains a wide consensus among women that men perceive breasts solely as sexual objects (Reeder, 2015). Salads' videos thus provide a means for shedding light on the ideology that confines breastfeeding mothers. In the following sections, the discourse from Salads and non-supporters of breastfeeding in public is taken into account through a counterpublic analysis.

Objectifying Breastfeeding as "It" and "That"

In the context Salads created, onlookers opposed to breastfeeding labeled Emily's breast as "it" and "that." These particular pronouns portray a sense of dehumanizing symbols, making the act of breastfeeding appear unnatural. This comparison of words is oppressive because such words relate to objects rather than humans. Limiting breastfeeding to such terms construes a sense of mockery, outcasting, and belittling. The following messages were directed at Emily: "Seriously ma'am, do you have to do *that* here, *it's* disgusting." "*That's* disgusting ma'am, I don't appreciate your tit being out like that." By demonstrating acts of objectification, Salads aims to contribute to the breastfeeding counterpublic, reiterating and recentering the oppression that breastfeeding mothers endure in public spaces such as parks, malls, restaurants, etc. When objectifying terms such as "it" and "that" are directed at mothers who publicly breastfeed, and not female models, there is a serious framing issue that is brutally shaping the wider public's perception of breasts and breastfeeding.

Another derogatory remark directed at Emily included, "You know, there's private places where you can actually do this. You shouldn't be doing *that* in

public places." Considering that both men and women participated in shaming Emily in public spaces, breastfeeding mothers are the disadvantaged group of the wider public sphere. The breastfeeding counterpublic, Salads, and advocates of breastfeeding would assert that these oppressive terms are not accurate representations of women who publicly breastfeed. This type of shaming is unfair to be limited to mothers whose only intention is to breastfeed, not to exhibit indecency. The existing discourse surrounding breastfeeding in public draws attention away from a double standard that is not included in dominant rhetoric, that is, that it is permissible and even normative to employ labels such as "it" and "that" to describe the breasts of mothers who feed their children in public but not to the women with excessive cleavage, who are instead deemed physically attractive.

Salads' contribution to the breastfeeding counterpublic is to publicize their oppression and to promote a rhetorical reframing of breastfeeding in public. Breasts are symbols that are continually reframed in ways that are erotic and sexual. When certain words like "it" and "that" are employed continuously, they become embedded in our symbolic meaning making process. As a result, the original meaning of a word such as breastfeeding gradually morphs into a new meaning. When words are taken out of context, there are many who begin adapting to the new connotations of the words and incorporate them into their own dialect. By contributing to the breastfeeding counterpublic, Salads' social experiments aim to prevent the meaning of breastfeeding from morphing into a more prevalent and oppressive meaning. Words have the power to not only empower, but also to deprive a woman of her agency in a public space.

Lacking Awareness of Breastfeeding's Health Functions

There appears to be a limited understanding of the health functions of breastfeeding among people who exploit public breastfeeding. In bell hooks' book *Feminist theory: From margin to center*, she argues that "men are socialized to avoid assuming responsibility for childrearing" (1984, p. 139). When childrearing is omitted from a man's gender role, men are prevented from understanding the full scope of women's performative role of lactating. By sharing this cultural code of appropriate gender roles, we become socialized into creating an atmosphere where we need to police gender when it is not performed correctly. hooks (1984) states that "being oppressed means the absence of choices… Under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms" (p. 5). In Salads' video, when Emily was questioned by another disgusted male onlooker, it was evident that he addressed

Emily in order to prevent her from performing her role as a mother. However, Salads countered by offering a rhetorical perspective regarding the appalled individual, using both Emily and the female model who were sitting next to each other:

> **Salads:** "So that's ok because it's hot, but this is not ok because this is something natural and you think it's disgusting."
>
> **Civilian:** "Yea."

From the position of the breastfeeding counterpublic, since large populations of men do not experience the hardships that come with being a mother, any man who shames a woman for this act can be construed by the breastfeeding culture as someone who is telling a mother she is not performing her gender properly. In Salads' experiments, women also shamed Emily. Large populations of women within dominant culture are aware of the psychological and physical benefits that breastfeeding provides for a child, but some women still choose to shame mothers and want to exclude them from public spaces. One particular female onlooker told Emily that her breastfeeding was indecent, after which Emily responded with the following question: "So what I'm doing is not decent, did you not breastfeed as a little girl?" Amir (2014) contends that women lose interpersonal connection with their babies when they hide their infants under a blanket. More importantly, lack of eye contact and awkward positioning during breastfeeding increases the possibility for women to develop mastitis (2014). Similarly, it is likely that the women and men portrayed in Salads' experiments are unfamiliar with this disorder and with the immense affection that breastfeeding provides for babies. When exclusion occurs, oppression manifests. Currently, shared identification among breastfeeding mothers is gradually decreasing, and they are struggling for meaning in the wider public sphere.

Salads' performance experiment is a valuable rhetorical tool, as it enables the oppressed to unite and deconstruct the public breastfeeding ideology by cultivating a counterpublic that has the capacity to foster cultural and political change. False assumptions and negative stereotypes of breastfeeding increase the likelihood of breastfeeding mothers to endure oppression. In response to the dominant public's perception of breastfeeding, Salads offers an alternative worldview of breastfeeding. For Fine (1987), performance is the equivalent of culture. Drawing from Fine's idea, Salads is reclaiming public space to preserve the culture of public breastfeeding by going back into that public realm and using the performance of a social experiment to create cultural awareness. There are at present many people who are ill informed about breastfeeding's capacity to

prevent serious diseases such as diabetes, obesity, pneumonia, leukemia, and SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). When people assume that Emily's breastfeeding expression is disgusting, they are perpetuating that misinformation, depriving her and other women of agency in public space. Instead of acknowledging or celebrating her agency, they attack her conduct, her lifestyle, her morals, and the breastfeeding culture. In actuality, Emily's expression is a reclamation of her body and her sexual and reproductive health, both for her and her baby.

Breasts Perceived as Sexual Objects

Salads' experiment in *Sexy vs. BreastFeeding* showed that there was no shaming directed at the visually compelling female model with the low-cut shirt. Rather, her physical appearance garnered looks of arousal and acceptance. This implies that she was rewarded for performing her gender properly. For hooks (1984), "sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men" (p. 47), therefore the woman in the low shirt is policed as femininity performed properly. This is the proper performance of femininity according to male dominators. Since breastfeeding in public places is widely held as improper, it is policed with negative comments and shaming. From these portrayals, large breasts supplemented with low cut shirts are acceptable in public spaces within the wider public sphere.

Men tend to claim ownership over women's breasts (Spencer & Khaki, 2015), which is essentially the reason why they feel that staring at breasts is normal, that it is their right. For male dominators, the duty of a man is to be a surveyor of women's bodies and police them, policing women's bodies according to the ideal of the dominant discourse. Since men believe they have this sort of ownership, they maintain that control by telling women to hide their breasts when feeding a baby, because it falls outside the idealized performative, and because a man cannot sexualize a baby. In other words, breastfeeding impedes the male's "right" to sexualize mothers.

In the same way that race is a social construction, breasts are socially constructed as a sexual performative. One male onlooker, who was sitting next to the female model, told Emily that he did not appreciate Emily exposing her breast. Salads intervened and commented: "If you have a problem with her boob being out, you should have a problem with that [other] boob being out too." Salads is pointing to the social construct that has been placed on breasts in the current situation, that is, breasts predominantly constructed as sexual objects rather than a functionality for feeding children. Salads is also drawing attention to the breastfeeding counterpublic perspective, which seeks to address the

double standard that is brought to light in his social experiments. Another appalled male onlooker shamed Emily, but Salads intervened by incorporating the female model into the argument. Salads asked why it is only acceptable for one of the women to expose their breast, and the man responded with, "That's hot, and that's just disgusting." Because such individuals did not elaborate as to why breastfeeding is disgusting, these arguments beg the question, why is breastfeeding disgusting? My guiding assumption is that within the public sphere, a wide range of men and women are enforcing an imperative they have been taught repetitively, that is, policing breasts in public spaces only if breasts are being used to breastfeed. Such a claim begs more research and evidence, but it is likely that given the extensive research involving the relationship between women and discrimination, the same conclusion will be drawn.

From the dialogue that manifested in the social experiment, a hostile citizen offered an insufficient and unsupported argument because it begs the question: What is the difference between breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding in a public space? I propose a viewpoint of what appears to be surfacing in this line of oppressive rhetoric. Bridging social construction and male privilege, it seems logical that men impose their superiority and therefore have perpetuated the idea that they can control women regarding how they need to perform their gender. I offer another viewpoint: it can be assumed that men who are insulted by breastfeeding are enacting a public service by helping women like Emily understand the social disruption they are creating. As such, the role of the breastfeeding counterpublic is to reframe the normative male privilege and systems of power that such privilege continues to impose.

Because Salads' videos advocate for women's rights, it is important at this point to call attention to a well-known female activist, Hillary Clinton. Hillary Clinton addressed male dominance in her speech at the Women in the World summit on March 12, 2012. She highlighted women's marginalization and extremists' motives by stating,

> It doesn't matter what country they're in or what religion they claim. They all want to control women, they want to control how we dress, they want to control how we act, they even want to control the decisions we make about our own health and our own bodies.

The hostility and discrimination demonstrated in the social experiments indicates that male privilege continues to perpetuate the idea that a man's sexual pleasure and needs precedes a woman's functional needs (such as lactating). Future research, and particularly qualitative research, is needed to expand

understanding of this oppressor-oppressed dynamic in the breastfeeding community.

The female model who did not undergo any shaming was protected by the physical attractiveness paradigm, which is also labeled as the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype (Buggio et al., 2012, p. 753). This paradigm falls under the aegis of a dominant culture, creating favorability among women with large breasts in low cut shirts. Essentially, men omit breastfeeding mothers from this paradigm because previous scholarly work suggests that breastfeeding in Western culture is largely established as being unattractive. Feminist Iris Marion Young argues that men have categorized breasts to be either for sexual arousal or for nurturing, while also asserting that they both cannot happen simultaneously (Spencer & Khaki, 2015). Such categorizations provide negative connotations that promote the idea that breasts are only meant for certain functions. Although breastfeeding is becoming more common in television (Foss, 2013), Salads' social experiments reveal that there remains a substantial amount of men who see breasts as sexy only when they are not publicly displayed for breastfeeding.

There is scant literature that demonstrates the relationship between men's perception of breastfeeding and attractiveness. It is likely that men shame women who publicly breastfeed because they find it unattractive. Across various domains, studies suggest that attractive persons are perceived more favorably than unattractive persons, leading early researchers to propose that there is a ''beautiful is good'' stereotype (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Notably, the same studies that reveal a ''beautiful is good'' effect also find that unattractiveness is related to a negative pattern of attitudes and behaviors from others. This leads some researchers to suggest that there is a form of ''beautyism'' (Cash, 1990, p. 56), or that ''ugly is bad'' (Dermer & Thiel, 1975, p. 1171; Griffin & Langlois, 2006, p. 187).

Because attractive people are more likely to win arguments, persuade others to change their opinions, and be offered assistance (Datta Gupta, Etcoff, & Jaeger, 2015), it is likely that the same social advantages are not granted to breastfeeding mothers. The attractive female model was validated with looks of appreciation because a large of group of men normalize this as a woman performing her gender properly. There is ample evidence that individuals such as Emily who do not conform to conventional beauty ideals experience stigma, negative treatment, and discrimination (Kwan & Trautner, 2011). Salads provided a clear distinction of what is currently happening in dominant culture; breasts are sexualized, but once the head of a baby links to a woman's breast, a change of

context emerges, usually in a direction and within a social environment that receives little favorability.

Conclusion

With his contribution to the breastfeeding counterpublic, Salads seeks to amplify voice, value, and agency in public spaces for breastfeeding mothers by pointing to the fallacies of the current policing that exist in the wider public sphere. Breastfeeding mothers are enduring a considerable degree of marginalization. I think it is highly productive to implement social experiment videos as a mode of rhetorical invention, as such videos have the capacity to influence and enlighten a significant number of people. When more marginalized issues are recognized, inclusion is sought and advocated for within the public sphere. Currently, breastfeeding mothers' voices are not being heard, and a societal fallacy of breast exposure still persists.

Counterpublics are largely similar to protest groups, in which both groups stage something publicly that is either outlandish, offensive, or involves a disruption of societal norms. Through such demonstrations, those in the margins are finding new ways not to remain silent. It is unjust to prevent mothers from publicly breastfeeding if other women (non-breastfeeding) are revealing a similar amount of cleavage. This is an argument that has the potential to rhetorically reframe perceptions of public breastfeeding. In addition, the same argument needs to reach dominant discourses that comprise the wider public sphere. Salads' experiments harbor the potential to foment a significant increase in the breastfeeding counterpublic. Given that there is a lack of awareness of the societal ostracism that breastfeeding mothers are subjected to, Salads offers strategic rhetorical resources for marginalized breastfeeding mothers. His social experiments have the potential to nurture political and cultural change, and deconstruct the negative perceptions and double standards of breast exposure. Activism starts with a recognition of the problem, and activism forms community.

One of the benefits of being in the counterculture is that the oppressed voices have the ability to generate new terms and incorporate them into the public sphere. When comparing attractive non-breastfeeding women with breastfeeding mothers, this particular discourse has the potential to formulate new ideas and definitions that deconstruct how the dominant public frames public breastfeeding. The benefit of the existence of counterpublics is that they enlighten and reshape our understanding of what is considered appropriate in public spaces. In order to accept new ideas, listening to counterpublic voices can

potentially create new ways of thinking and increase inclusion for those marginalized.

Above all, Salads leaves audiences thinking about how we are going to move forward with the breastfeeding counterpublic. Breasts invoke an empathetic emotion, which is why he talks to the dominators of the public sphere as well as the marginalized. Essentially, Salads seeks to promote the idea that there is another way to think about the space of breastfeeding in public: it can be a space in which to generate new meaning. Perhaps this space is a place of empowerment, and a place that women choose to go. Seeing the world from two different perspectives, Salads' strategy is to shed light on two different worlds, the worlds of the oppressor and the oppressed. Breastfeeding is a metaphorically significant action that mothers carry with them. It is crucial to understand that the idea of regarding breastfeeding as disgusting and indecent are human social constructions, and not associated with the natural act, or meaning, of breastfeeding.

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