THE WELL-TEMPERED BREAST: FOSTERING FLUIDITY IN BREASTLY MEANING AND FUNCTION

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This article looks at the phenomena of induced lactation and adult nursing. While maternity is understood to perform a certain kind of body modification, it is little known that lactation can also work independently of the pregnant body, or even of the female sex to modify the breast and its function. Induced lactation allows for a splitting away of breastfeeding from maternity, opening up possibilities for elaborating on the cultural meanings and uses of breastmilk as a substance, breastfeeding as a practice, and lactation as a process. Finally, by introducing lactation into sexual play, it offers the opportunity for a mutual confluence of bodily flows which may help to disassemble the binaries of sexual difference.

“… how are we to prevent the very unconscious (of the) ‘subject’ from being … diminished in its interpretation, by a systematics that re-marks a historical ‘inattention’ to fluids? In other words: what structuration of (the) language does not maintain a complicity of long standing between rationality and a mechanics of solids alone?
Luce Irigaray, “The Mechanics of Fluids” in This Sex Which is Not One

“Breastfeeding is a partial expression of female sexuality and yet there is no awareness or understanding of it today, no culture attached to it and not even an inkling of its rank as a sexual potentiality … even the history of the female species formulated by women themselves, however fragmentary, maintains a seldom-interrupted silence over this special sexual experience.”
Barbara Sichtermann, “The Lost Eroticism of the Breasts”

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1Translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. New York: Cornell UP, 1985, p.107

“Would you like to try some?”
“Thank you.” She swallows her last bit of cake. “I would.”
So we go through the process again. This time when I have bared my breasts I lean over and put the nipple between her lips. After a few tugs from her mouth, surprisingly strong, I have to put my hand on the wall to brace myself. She seems to pull clear through me.
“You are flushed,” she says when she comes away.
“You are fleshed,” I reply.

Susann Cokal, Mirabilis

Introduction

The human breast, both male and female, is an exemplar of our built-in capacity for body modification, changing not only the body’s outline, but also its function and meaning. Just as the pregnant body morphs itself, so do the breasts. Yet it is little known that they can do this independently of pregnancy, or gender, and for whatever reasons we might wish.

This essay considers how the act of inducing lactation independently from pregnancy and childbirth, or voluntarily continuing lactation after weaning a child, may be an option for breast enhancement for any individual, or for experimenting with body boundaries and relations between sexual partners. The essay puts forward two main categories of motivation for induced lactation, though these are theoretically only two among many, which may increase as more becomes known about the subject. The first motivation relates to health benefits, and the practical advantages lactation offers to adopting parents; the second relates to exploring deeper levels of intimacy or sexual pleasure through adult nursing, where an adult is suckled by his or her adult partner in an exclusive and intimate, if not overtly sexual context. By exploring the phenomena of induced lactation and adult nursing, the essay considers both political and theoretical effects, such as its potential to break down the distinction between sex and maternity; to complicate expectations to do with gender and breastfeeding—and other aspects of embodied parental care; and to disassemble gender hierarchies based on sexual difference. Induced lactation has the potential to alter relationships between adults and infants,

3Sydney: Hodder Headline, pp.78–9
between friends and lovers, and between inside and outside the body; in short between proper and improper bodily conduct.

I’d like to begin by asking in what way does lactation modify the body; and to what extent can the celebrated and shifting shape of the female breast be linked to the marginalization of breastfeeding and lactation in Western culture in the past 50 years? That is, what is the meaning of our focus on the breast when its potential to produce milk has been repressed within the popular consciousness? I’d like then to consider how induced lactation—when split off from maternity, or when integrated into a maternal sexuality that is inclusive of a broad range of adult sexual behavior—modifies or opens up relations between the sexes, and potentially washes away encrusted power differentials. I’ll do this firstly by speculating on different ways of imagining induced lactation and its meanings for both men and women; and by looking at feminist theorists on the significance of bodily fluids in sexual relations and subjectivity.

Secondly, I’ll look at alternative discourses around, and representations of breastfeeding, focusing on two marginalized, little-explored areas: lactation pornography; and internet-based, adult nursing communities. In beginning to analyze these cultural forms, I’d like to suggest how these approaches to breastfeeding might open the way for a radical rethinking of the human capacity for lactation—as sexual, aesthetic, intimate, nutritional, medicinal, spiritual, perhaps even athletic, or something we might do simply for the hell of it.

Until recently, human lactation has predominantly been represented in Western culture by the breastfeeding Madonna, and other images which mimic the iconography of these Maria Lactans paintings, highlighting the asexual, dutiful mother who confers virtue and sanctity through her breastmilk. With the rise of breastfeeding advocacy literature supported by the work of public health and medical professionals of the late 20th century, the meaning of this still popular iconography has been tweaked slightly so that the dutiful, well-informed breastfeeding mother now confers the secular virtues of optimal health and immunity.4

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4For a more detailed history of breastfeeding images and iconography in Western culture, see Fiona Giles, Fresh Milk: Re-Imagining Lactation. Unpublished Plenary Presentation to the International Lactation Consultants’ Association Annual Conference, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 3 August 2003.
This essay asks what other meanings and uses might lactation and breastfeeding possibly carry?

**Fluid Meanings**

As an effect of pregnancy, lactation begins prior to childbirth in many women, who begin producing, and in some cases leaking colostrum from the second or third trimester. Mothers then begin producing breastmilk from the third day postpartum. Enlarged, tender breasts are one of the first signs of conception, often coming before symptoms such as nausea, or scientific verification such as urine tests, so that the breasts are a highly sensitive and visually obvious barometer of hormonal change.

It is well-known that breasts grow larger as a result of the contraceptive pill, and premenstrually. That mature humans are the only mammals whose breasts remain enlarged whether or not they are in use for breastfeeding purposes, invites speculation as to their ancillary functions; and invites our interpretation of them as objects of play. But even the erotic function of the breast is tied to both physiological and cultural influences which vary markedly.\(^5\) The richly complex cultural meanings with which breasts have historically been invested also testify to their symbolic flexibility, co-opted to causes as diverse as nationalism under Hitler and second-wave feminism.\(^6\) This is not to mention their frequent sartorial, cosmetic, or surgical refashioning throughout history, depending on the technology available, and including the mythic Amazons’ strategic amputation.

The fact that the female breast is both biologically and culturally associated with flux (even while it has often been used to represent constancy) is perhaps one reason why it is one of the most popular body parts to be electively modified.\(^7\) Females’ sexual anxieties about breast size and shape might only be part of the story, since it could be argued that the very idea of breasts

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\(^7\)Figures for 1999 show that after liposuction, breast enhancement is the most commonly performed cosmetic surgery for women. http://www.umm.edu/plas surg/stats.htm
contains within it the idea of plasticity, and change. That the breast ebbs and flows is common knowledge, at least among women. And the engorged, tidal body is what pregnancy is all about, even if many women are encouraged to see the process in more romantic terms. It is during pregnancy, when an infant is fashioned from its mother’s body, together with its father sperm, that the mother herself becomes a shape-shifter. Here we find the apotheosis of body modification—the mother of all body modifications. (Having two young sons, it’s interesting to see their obsession with toy transformers. These are male fighting figures that incorporate different shapes, which are articulated by plastic joints or metal screws, so they can “transform” from monstrous animal or human into outlandish, mechanistic fighting vehicle, and back again—or from integrated Action Man to inside-out exploding head, and then back to Action Man. Yet is it the maternal body that achieves a kind of transformation routinely, spewing out babies, exploding in size and shape, and reforming seamlessly. It seems at times that the cyborgian fantasies of little boys are merely elaborating on the mysteries of a body from which they themselves have recently emerged, and which they intuitively feel they don’t share. That there is no equivalent line in toys for girls, suggests they have less use for these Protean fantasies. While the boys are busy exploding their toy bodies and turning them inside out, the girls are busy dressing, decorating, and covering over the bodies of their female toys, insisting on their streamlined containment.

Even though the pregnant body is accepted, at least conditionally, as engorged and leaking, and given to transformation, womanhood in general cultivates the opposite image, idealizing the slender, dry, hermetically sealed, and ever-youthful body. Although it may be curvy and soft, it is also valued as androgynous and self-contained, and resisting changes of any kind, whether

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8Since conducting research on male lactation for my book *Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003 and the film Milk Men: Can We Deliver?” directed by Peter Templeman for AFTRS, Sydney, 2003. I have also been told by some men of their own breast changes, including discharge of milk-like substance from glands around the nipple, and size changes.

9Juvenile cross-gender homage appears to be mutual: the girls paying homage to the sleek unchanging body that boys inherit, and the boys to the more complex female body-in-flux.
long-lasting ones wrought by aging, or transitory ones associated with reproductive function. Any alterations to the nonmaternal female body, from Botox injections to labia trims and liposuction, usually entail smoothing and reduction—with the one important exception of breast enhancement, where this caricature of reproductive femininity is allowed full reign. It is here that the contradiction of the celebrated nubile female form reaches its height, since the surgically or cosmetically enhanced breast resembles nothing so much as the maternally engorged one, just when the milk has come in. It is hard, hot and jutting. Where all else on the female form is tightened and diminished, in line with prepregnancy, the breasts are called on to explode, in line with maternity. But in general this explosion is required to remain symbolic, since the lactating breast is strictly confined to the more private aspects of infant care, and within the conceptual limits of public health discourse.

It has been hypothesized that the sexual allure of the slender waisted, nubile form is based on reassuring any prospective partner that the female is fertile but not yet taken, since pregnancy, or the signs of pregnancy, would indicate that she has already acquired a partner and children. But the relatively recent fetishization of large breasts seems to undermine this scenario, since they are associated with pregnancy and lactation, as well as youthfulness. With the momentary exception of the natural breast outline of the early 1970s, the ideal breast has continued to increase in size in the popular imagination. Drawing on the militaristic breastplates of Britannia, the exaggerated breasts of superheroes such as Xena Warrior Princess and Lara Croft, as well as Madonna’s famous Gaultier cone breasts of the 1980s, have shown an accommodation of heroine as action woman. The toughness that forms part of Pamela Lee’s public persona is also carried in her famously dominating breasts—a dominance not only over her own body through surgery, but over other women through size. Here we see an elaboration on ideals of womanhood to incorporate a more assertive version of the protective capacity traditionally assigned to men, so that maternity is associated with strength rather than vulnerability, and female sexuality with voraciousness instead of passivity. If there is a vestigial cultural memory of breasts’ capacity to sustain other humans through the production of milk, this can only add to their sym-
bolic link to power, even while lactation is being repressed in practice.

The fluid outline of the female body, its softness and capacity for change, has perhaps allowed breasts to become a talisman of both sexual availability and an already developed capacity for maternal behavior, which is both caring and powerful. Large breasts might present a secondary form of reassurance to prospective partners, indicating that the woman is bounteous in her feelings and her capacity for care, and can combine these qualities with however her prepregnant sexuality might be imagined. On the one hand, this allows for the concept of erotic kindness to be established outside of the purely maternal relationship, where it is normally confined to the mother-infant dyad. On the other hand, it has become a tease, since the historical period in which the idea of “bigger is better” was applied to breasts, coincides almost precisely with the historical period which saw the gradual disappearance of breastfeeding, a process of decline which bottomed out in the early 1970s, and now, though partly revived,\textsuperscript{10} is strictly regarded as a nutritional component of baby care. Or perhaps, rather than a tease, enlarged breasts are an attempt at compensation. Whatever the reasoning behind the process, contemporary Western female breasts are not unlike St Agathe’s, ordered to be cut off by the Romans. Whereas Agathe’s breasts were served back to her on a platter, ours are served back to us through a process of symbolic disembodiment which fetishizes their form, while repressing their function.

However mundane or melodramatic their meanings might be, it is fair to say that there is a tension within our culture concerning the female breast as currently constructed—between the appeal of the nubile, androgynous female body and her maternal and seemingly engorged, though unforthcoming breasts. So what might happen if we allowed the idea of lactation to drift loose from the idea of maternity, and to enter into the physiological repertoire of the prepregnant or post-maternal body? What

\textsuperscript{10}2003 figures show Australia has one of the highest breastfeeding rates in the industrialized world, with 87 per cent of Australian mothers initiating breastfeeding at birth; but less than 48 per cent are still breastfeeding at six months. Figures for England are 69 per cent breastfeeding from birth, with 21 per cent still feeding at 4–6 months; and the U.S. figures show 70 per cent at birth, and 33 per cent at 4–6 months. Carol Huotari, Center for Breastfeeding Information, http://www.lalecheleague.org/cbi/bfstats03.html
might happen if we allowed the potential of those teasing, or conso-
latory breasts to be fully realized in a variety of contexts, either
intermittently or throughout a woman’s various and changing
sexual and developmental history?

**Fluid Uses**

It’s little known that lactation need not be tied to pregnancy, let
alone to the female sex. Since it is the pituitary gland that insti-
gates letdown by releasing prolactin, and both sexes possess this
gland as well as mammary glands, milk ducts, and nipples, it is
merely an evolutionary preference, rather than a dictate, that
only women feed their young from the breast, and that only
women lactate.11 Men can choose to lactate too, if they’re pre-
pared to put in the required amount of nipple stimulation. Or
they might lactate involuntarily as a side-effect of chemotherapy,
surgery, or other medication.12 Subjects undergoing sex change
surgery and using the progestogen Provera to increase their
breast size sometimes discover that this drug can also have the
side effect of producing milk.13

It is also an evolutionary option rather than a dictate, that
women who have not borne children, don’t lactate. They too can
produce milk through nipple stimulation; and at different times
in history have used their milk as a commodity to earn a living
through wet-nursing and milk bank donations.14 In non-Western
cultures nubile siblings, together with grandmothers and other
relatives, have been known to take over breastfeeding the chil-
dren of mothers who have died or are unable to breastfeed due to
exile or illness.15 In Laura Esquivel’s novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*,

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12ibid. See also Laura Shanley, "Milkmens: Fathers Who Breastfeed," http://
www.suite101.com/article.cfm/gay_parenting_families/77542
13http://www.twoheartsonesoul.com/lactation.htm, Posting from 27 September,
2003.
14Golden, Janet. "From Commodity to Gift: Gender, Class and the Meaning of Breast
15Baumslag, Naomi and Dia L. Michels. *Milk, Money and Madness: The Culture and Pol-
itics of Breastfeeding*. Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1995, pp. 52-3. See also Slome,
550-552.
the heroine Tita takes over the breastfeeding of her nephew after her sister fails to produce milk. What has been read by Western critics as an example of magical realism when she begins to lactate, is merely understood within many cultures as a plausible means of support. It should also be noted that there are precedents for adult nursing in Western culture as well, especially within the Christian Apocrypha which includes several narrative examples of Saints being nursed, of Christ nursing, and of the remarkable Christina Mirabilis, who reputedly kept an entire village alive through her breastmilk. Caravaggio’s painting Seven Acts of Mercy, depicting the heroic daughter breastfeeding her imprisoned and starving father, prefigures the scene in John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath, when a starving man is breastfed by Rose of Sharon at the end of the book.

Women who adopt children in the West are increasingly turning to induced lactation as a means of enhancing the maternal bond and optimizing their child’s uptake of nutrients. It is now considered a fairly routine procedure for an adopting mother to make use of a professional lactation consultant’s advice, together with an electric breast pump and some dietary supplements, to begin stimulating her milk supply in preparation for her baby’s arrival. Some adopting gay parents are also trying this; and in many of the instructional articles on the internet, they are directed to the more mainstream sources of information, such as La Leche League’s and the International Lactation Consultants’ websites, which include detailed instructions for adopting parents wishing to induce lactation. In most cases frequent, regular breast pumping results in at least enough milk to make breastfeeding worthwhile, although supplementation with formula might be needed. Where supply is low, the drug Dom Peridone can also be prescribed, since it is a proven milk booster—a medication also used for boosting the supply of biological mothers’ milk.

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17 For a recent retelling of this story, see Cokal, Susann, Mirabilis: A Novel. Sydney: Hodder Headline, 2001.
19 See, for example, Jennifer Newton Reents, "Breastfeeding...for Dads?" AndBaby-Magazine, May/June 2003, pp. 59-62.
when necessary. Although the biological mother has a chemical advantage through the release from her placenta of the hormone lactogen at the time of delivery, the nonbiological mother, even one who has undergone radical hysterectomy, or is postmenopausal, is still capable of establishing a supply. In some cases of birthing surrogacy it has become a condition of the hand-over of the child: the mother who does not experience pregnancy will undertake to breastfeed, allowing for a level of embodied maternity that would otherwise remain beyond her reach.

In addition to opening out our assumptions about parenting, both for fathers and same sex couples, and providing opportunities for sharing the embodied care of infants and young children, induced lactation can also provide a form of self-care. While writing her book, *Having Faith: An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood*, Sandra Steingraber inadvertently came across this function of lactation through her research on the environmental toxins that are carried in breastmilk. Her work, for the Cornell Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors, was to point out the danger of toxins being stored in women’s reserves of body fat which may then be drawn upon during the production of milk, and can be transported into the bodies of their breastfeeding children. A secondary conclusion of her research was to show how lactation is the only means women have to rid their bodies of these toxins. She writes, “The problem with dioxins, and other fat-soluble persistent contaminants, is that you can’t easily metabolise and pee them out. Lactation, which does remove fat from a woman’s body, is the only effective way to purge dioxin from the body.”

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23. This is one reason why breastfeeding women are advised not to diet to lose weight since they would then be drawing on older, more polluted reserves of body fat, rather than the new fat acquired during pregnancy.

24. LACNET discussion group posting, 10 June 2001, with permission.
breastfed her twins for three years “dropped her body burden of dioxins by 69 per cent.”25

With her interest in ecology, breastfeeding, and women’s health, Steingraber’s work does not deliberately transgress the established public health discourse on breastfeeding which promotes the activity as beneficial for women and children primarily in nutritional terms. In her work, she conceives of lactation as being tied to mother-infant breastfeeding; and her aim is to reassure women that environmentally polluted breastmilk is still superior to, and safer than formula. However, the secondary effect of her research is to suggest that lactation might be a therapeutic activity conducted purely for the long-term health of a woman’s body.

The significance of Steingraber’s findings has since been bolstered by research showing that the longer a woman breastfeeds, the greater her protection from breast cancer. A 10-year study by Cancer Research UK, whose results were published in *Lancet* in August 2002, concluded that the relative risk of breast cancer was decreased by 4.3 percent for every 12 months of breastfeeding, in addition to a decrease of 7 percent for each birth.26

Understanding the extent to which lactation can be induced by nonpregnant women opens out the exclusive mother-infant dyad, so that breastfeeding can be performed by nonmaternal adopting, or egg donor mothers; by siblings and other relatives; by amenable babysitters (in a consensual relationship known as cross-nursing); and even by fathers or same sex adopting parents. It also acknowledges the health potential of lactation for individuals who might wish to use this as a technique for relieving their body burden of environmental toxins, either before the arrival of their baby, or for their own sake; and for reducing their risk of breast cancer. In terms of its health benefits, it has long been established that breastfeeding is good for mothers’ bodies by helping the uterus to return to its normal size following childbirth, aiding in weight loss for the mother following pregnancy, and through the production of prolactin and oxytocin, inducing a state of loving contentment beneficial to both mother and

25ibid.
child. The extra calories required for the production of milk might be construed as one of its physical costs;\textsuperscript{27} but Western women with abundant food supplies are more likely to welcome lactation as an opportunity to lose weight without dieting. Despite the high level of commitment needed to induce lactation without a baby nearby to kick-start the process, it is clear that it can form an important part of a woman’s repertoire of self-care, adding to its traditional characterization as the epitome of care for others.

\textbf{Fluid Subjectivities I}

In addition to its practical applications, induced lactation offers transformative possibilities, both cosmetic and psychological. It potentially works as a form of body modification that is tantalizingly impermanent and fluctuating, and which depends on the enactment of interdependency for its success. Although a breast pump and chemical prolactin booster are helpful in initiating supply, a frequently nursing partner is crucial to the success of lactation in the longer term. The practical requirement of frequent feeding on a regular basis creates the need for a particularly close relationship where a couple can meet privately throughout the day, as well as at nighttime. The fact that adult nursing is a little-known practice that could be regarded as socially taboo, also lends itself to secrecy, and the heightened levels of intimacy and trust this entails.

A breastfeeding relationship between adults also portends to the intersubjectivity of a sexual relationship in a context which may or may not be sexual.\textsuperscript{28} An intriguing example of the intersubjective and affective significance of adult nursing relationships—for both donor and recipient—comes from this entry to a sexuality discussion group:

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\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{27}There are also social and economic costs if a mother is unable to work during this time, as well as significant long-term public health savings, as measured in the work of economist Julie Smith. However, these aspects are beyond the scope of this essay.

\textsuperscript{28}Frequent entries in The Society for Nursing Couples state that the pleasure of adult nursing is intimate but not sexual. Others seeking nursing partners on the internet usually don’t specify if the lactating partner, or nursing partner they are seeking will be willing to also engage in sex, which implies that they too, are not viewing this as an adjunct to sexual relations, though some clearly do eroticize their adult nursing relationships, as various erotic breastfeeding short stories sites indicate. See, for example, http://www.literotica.com/stories/showstory.php?id=48340
\end{footnotesize}
I have a question for those of you who are unable to nurse on a regular basis. Do you notice that the act of suckling on your partner’s breast acts as a sort of natural anti-depressant that elevates your whole frame of mind, and likewise, do you notice that if you skip a session, you start to feel anxious, chemically depressed, or sullen…that if you don’t get to nurse, you suddenly crave a cigarette or sugar, or a drink? I’m wondering also if the women who nurse (whether or not they have milk) feel an emotional need to nurse which corresponds with their partner’s desire whether or not he is present… I am curious to know if the partner-bond is similar to some mother-child bonds in which the mother senses the child’s distress or need even if she is separated from that child, and the baby becomes depressed if it is not nursed on schedule. I notice this with myself to a HUGE extent.29

Most entries to adult nursing discussion groups30 concern practical issues such as access to chemical boosters, and their interaction with other drugs; or how to broach the desire to begin adult nursing with a partner. For most it acts as a support group, and therefore contains many affirmative statements as to the value of adult nursing in their lives, and how much it has enhanced their relationships. But as this example quoted above indicates, there is occasionally a contribution seeking to analyze the meaning of adult nursing and its affective states. In this case, the reference to mothers and babies allows for an overview of its physiology, and the way in which the prolactin and oxytocin may have mildly narcotic effects. Additionally, it points to the way in which the chemistry of desire links to the chemistry of supply, and offers a new understanding of partnering and reciprocity that goes beyond the linguistic into a level of somatic communication. As any nursing mother can tell you, the most subtle reminder of her absent baby can trigger letdown. Equally, she may then learn from her babysitter how her letdown coincided with the baby’s actual moment of crying. In the case of adult nursing (as well as the mother-infant dyad), this is partly to do with the way bodies remember their nursing routine and the hormonal responses that result from skin-to-skin contact.

In addition to such intertwining of touch and hormones, breastfeeding involves the ingestion of a loved-one’s milk, the

30For example, the Society of Nursing Couples, which boasts nearly 3,000 active members.
incorporation of one person’s bodily fluid into the cells of another, entailing a level of incorporation perhaps only equalled by the moment of conception.\(^{31}\) One man who has explored his enjoyment of nursing describes the combined sensations of “mouth-filling richness” and emotional fulfilment:

The first time it was warm, surprisingly sweet, and slightly musky. As you suckle, the milk changes in texture and body, beginning light and thin, then increasing in richness. It is difficult to describe or to be objective about the taste, or to separate it from the act itself, because it is all part of the total, somewhat overwhelming experience. It is a highly intimate and emotional experience, as well as physical.\(^{32}\)

In *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities*, Elspeth Probyn notes that the relationship between eating and subjectivity is a powerful one which, like Proust’s madeleine, invites us to recall affective states, many of which are prelinguistic. She writes:

It is my hope that the analysis of eating, its qualities and affects, helps us to focus on those precious moments of preconsciousness, when we are turned inside out: when something tastes of memories, and activates aspirations, gratitude, desire or recognition.\(^{33}\)

As the discussion group entry also suggests, there is in some cases a longing for the recovery of these preconscious states; and breastfeeding offers both the oral gratification of eating, and its sensual rewards, together with those moments of being “turned inside out” through proximity to the body of another, in a way which also returns us, at the imaginary level, to the inside. Oral sex provides a similar fantasy of blended subjectivities through oral gratification. Where milk (a real, rather than imagined or symbolic food) is also part of the exchange, the effect of boundaries lost and found is even more compelling. This breaking

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\(^{31}\)It should also be noted that as the medicinal properties of breastmilk and colostrum become better known, this incorporation will become more critical to adult nursing relationships. One estimate has it (from a neonatologist in Australia) that for at least one milk banking operation in the U.S. 70 per cent of its supply goes to the non-premature baby market, that is, to sick children and adults.

\(^{32}\)Quoted in *Fresh Milk*, Op. Cit., p. 98.

down of boundaries between inside and outside is also enacted through birthing, and sex, but it is only while breastfeeding that it takes the form of eating. Through suckling on lactating breasts we take in more than just the traces of the many bodily fluids present during sex: here there is the literal ingestion of a sustaining nutrient from the loved one’s body.

From the adult nursing groups, it is clear that splitting lactation from maternity strongly increases intimacy in adult relationships by allowing for definitions of both intimacy and maternity to be reshaped. Induced lactation for the purposes of adult nursing makes for a reconsideration of the distinction between the mother-infant dyad and adult heterosexual relationships, where it is compulsory that the former is nonsexual for either party, and the latter predominantly sexual for both parties. In practice both slip in and out of these categories. In other words, induced lactation invites us to interrogate the basis of in some ways the arbitrary social insistence on sealed body boundaries, as well as behavioral and social categories, including the very definition of what constitutes sex.

**Fluid Subjectivities II**

I’d like now to consider how the inclusion of breastmilk in sexual relations might also affect both the symbology of those relationships and the way sexual difference is defined, further complicating assumptions concerning hierarchical power relations. That is, if women’s bodily fluids are also included in sexual play, in a literal expansion of the sexual menu, how does this broaden definitions of sexual intercourse and the politics that have so often been ascribed to them? If we were to allow nonmaternal female sexuality to celebrate body morphing and leakage, rather than to repress it, how would this potentially modify not only the shape of the female form, but the shape of sexual relations with men?

If men were to consider lactating, there would be profound changes in their relationships with women and children, together with massive social and political upheaval, as paternity leave, as well work-based crèches and nursing rooms became commonplace. On a domestic, and more attainable plain, if men were to consider nursing from their lactating partner’s breast on a regular basis, how might this change the intersubjectivity of the pair?
Theoretically, a man could also be breastfeeding a female partner, and two same sex partners could—and sometimes do—engage in this practice. But for the purposes of this essay, I’d like to concentrate on the heteronormative dynamic, locked as it often is into the active/passive binary that traditionally revolves around the male supply of semen to the woman’s body during sexual intercourse. If the breast is viewed as a more equal partner—as an active body part beyond the erectile tissue of the nipple—and one that supplies a fluid that can benefit both parties, just as semen does, then this binary might be disassembled.

I’d like to begin exploring these questions by a reading of two theorists who have considered both bodily fluids and the configuration of heterosexual pairing in relation to power and sexuality. Firstly, Elizabeth Grosz writes in Volatile Bodies (1995): “Women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage,” referring here not to breastmilk but to menses and the fluids around birthing, and implying that since aligned to femininity, seepage is a negative quality. Grosz goes on to consider how the “Bodily fluids affront a subject’s aspirations toward autonomy and self-identity.” She then concludes, in a more hopeful vein, that men might be able “to meet women halfway in the transformation of the sexually binarized body,” by allowing for some mutuality and interdependence in relation to body fluids. Grosz writes: “It is after all not flow in itself which certain phallicized masculinity abhors but the idea that flow moves or can move in two-way or indeterminable direction that elicits horror, the possibility of being not only an active agent in the transmission of flow but also a passive receptacle.” Although cunnilingus allows for some degree of oral receptivity for men, as does kissing, nursing from lactating breasts allows for the clearest enactment of the physical reciprocity of body flows.

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35 I’m not here insisting that the insertion of a lactating breast into a mouth is an equivalent experience to the insertion of an ejaculating penis into a vagina, merely hoping to show how the former might increase possibilities for males to take pleasure in receptivity.


37 ibid.
In her essay, “Destruction: Boundary Erotics and the Reconfigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body” Catherine Waldby (1995) echoes Grosz’s position, as well as questioning the primacy of the inserted, ejaculating phallus as the symbol for male sexual dominance. She argues that it is necessary for heterosexual men to learn from women the pleasures of the dissolution of selves; or, as she puts it, “the ecstatic confusions wrought upon the everyday sense of self by sexual pleasure.” Waldb continues: “Perhaps what is needed are strategies to elaborate the erotic attractions and possibilities of a sexually receptive masculinity in the domain of public culture. While, at the moment, images of the phallic woman have quite a presence in this domain the correlative masculine desire is only ever implied, never represented.” waldb goes on to suggest that feminism needs to develop a “pornographic imagination” and concludes: “Maybe what theoretical feminism needs now is a strap on”.

Co-opting the pornographic imagination might allow for the celebration of female bodily domination, and a trip to the sex shop might help to clarify the shift. But it’s already possible to achieve this through the potential of women to thrust their breasts into their lover’s mouth, and deposit fluid there, in an act that could be interpreted as pushy, devotional, or both at once.

In response to Waldy’s recommendation it could also be argued that she is merely replacing one phallus with another, and opting for a pale imitation of dominance in an ongoing war of the sexes that can never be decided. At the same time, I don’t wish to invest too much meaning in the metaphors of domination and submission provided by male and female bodies in the act of sex, as I believe that the embodiment of the sexual drama (whether heteronormative or otherwise) is infinitely open to interpretation; and the nuances of loving interplay can be intriguingly subtle, complex, and shifting. But as an alternative to traditional interpretations of the phallus acting upon the receptive (or resisting) vagina, that is, as a refiguring of the choreography of coitus, the lactating breast offers reciprocation on a more level

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39 ibid., p. 274.
40 ibid., p. 275.
playing field—an answering call. Nor does the lactating breast simply invert hierarchies, but instead scatters them by confounding the boundaries between sex, maternity, and gender. For both sexes, though especially women, it is a potentiality ripe for exploration. If the metaphors for power relations provided by our bodies are compelling—either within the bedroom or outside of it—then we need to make sure they are comprehensive, and that the capacities of our bodies are fully acknowledged.

One example of work that considers these forgotten potentials is by Barbara Sichtermann in her essay “The Lost Eroticism of The Breasts,” where she shows how the potential for equality of bodily flows opens up possibilities for both women in sexual relations and men in parenting relations. Sichtermann offers a memorable description of breastfeeding in phallic terms, having called for the refiguring of birthing in general as a “physical act of love.” She writes:

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 then goes on to show how the breastfeeding act needn’t be confined to mothers, but how the phallic nursing mother can be mirrored by the feminized nursing father, either separately in the mother’s absence, or within a ménage à trios provided by the baby:

This is where I see men playing a part in caring for babies at any rate. We women can and must put pressure on men, force them to take on some of the duties involved in looking after children. It is essential that these duties are shared if women are to win equality in any other field. But we can also win over the men by offering them a share in pleasure. Babies are looking for food and comfort from the breast—and they could get comfort just as well from the fine and sensitive breasts of men.

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41Sichtermann, Op. Cit., p. 58. The author takes this term from the French gynecologist Frederic Leboyer, and writes, "[He] is quite unabashed in his book Birth Without Violence when he says that a new-born child is looking for a lover." (italics in original)

42ibid., p. 64.

43ibid., p. 67.
The Pornographic Imaginary

These shifting roles can be further explored, and graphically demonstrated in the realm of lactation pornography, where it could be asked: is the breast a phallicized penis, or the penis a phallicized breast? Biologically, it could be argued that the function of the penis comes before the function of the breast, and this may to some degree justify the phallus’s fetishization as a symbol of dominance. However, such a claim might also be risking an undecidable chicken-and-egg argument; and there is a wealth of literature showing how matriarchal, multi-breasted fertility symbols predated patriarchal phallic ones. Less controversially, perhaps, it can be argued that developmentally it is the breast which dominates, as Lacan and others have painstakingly pointed out, suggesting that its role in the formation of subjectivity is paramount. It should also be remembered that the biological effectiveness of breastfeeding means that most babies can survive exclusively on their mother’s milk for at least the first six months of their lives. Like semen, breastmilk has been crucial to species survival, at least until the advent of artificial infant formula in the early 20th century, the safety of which is still subject to debate.

Before considering an example of lactation pornography, I’d like to quote from a section of Susan Faludi’s chapter in Stiffed (1999) called “Waiting for Wood,” which shows the prevalence of the belief in male ejaculation as an act of domination. Reporting on the plight of male actors in pornography, who are paid significantly less than their female costars, Faludi quotes Bill Margold, whom she describes as “a proponent of the in-the-toilet variety of porn.” Margold is arguing why, ultimately, the lower pay rates for men in porn don’t significantly undermine the male stars’

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44I am indebted to Petra Bueskens for the framing of this question. In conversation, Performing Motherhood Conference, La Trobe University, July 2002.
status. He tells her, “The one thing a woman cannot do is ejaculate in the face of her partner. We have that power.” But it is clear that Margold has not viewed any lactation pornography, since here the money shot is provided by women’s milk. Once it is observed how breastmilk sprays men’s faces in these videos, and the variety of expressions with which it’s received, it is easy to see how limited Margold’s assertion of phallic dominance really is.

Pornography that fetishizes urination also plays with these references, further diminishing the reach of phallic pre-eminence as linked to seminal ejaculation. In lactation pornography, however, there is a closer symbolic and visual resemblance between women’s milk and men’s semen, and a smoother physiological pathway between orgasm and these two fluids, since there is a well-documented correlation between breastfeeding and arousal, and female orgasm and spurring breastmilk. As one member of the Australian Breastfeeding Association explained to her lactation consultant:

> When we first realized that every time I experienced orgasm my breasts would spurt milk, it was a big source of satisfaction for both of us. There was no doubt in his mind that I had reached an orgasm, and I loved being able to show it in this way.

Many feminist critiques of pornography are based on an objection to the way in which the male body acts as a metaphor for male domination, as well as literally dominating in any number of images. Following from Andrea Dworkin, this is Catherine MacKinnon’s view in particular, using a physiological determinism to argue that the phallic relation to the female body is always already one of domination, invasion, and occupation, if not abuse. Bracketing out at this point the question of whether the

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48bid.
penis is a useful metaphor for oppression, it can be shown that in lactation pornography this dominant/submissive binary is no longer inevitable, and can fruitfully be turned on its head and played with in different contexts, including female domination, reciprocation and auto-eroticism (which may play on exhibitionism or indifference). Lactation pornography features scenes of sexual intercourse interspersed with scenes where women lactate for the camera, for themselves in front of a mirror, and for their partners of either sex. In a memorable scene from *Lactamania* (2000) produced by Laura Sterling (aka Ed Deroo), a woman lies on her back, hand expressing milk from both breasts, while a man straddling her torso masturbates to ejaculation. It becomes a kind of “battle of the hand jobs” until the man’s ejaculation ends while the woman’s continues unabated, and she laughs up at him. At one level, this is a playfully arousing sexual drama in its own right; at another level it offers an intertextual riposte of unusually far-reaching resonance throughout the many different pornography genres.

In many lactation porn scenes, the female becomes the agent of the sexual drama and drives the show, with a display of auto-erotic milking that exceeds the standard money shot of male ejaculation, and proves the female body’s potential to dominate in turn. Decisively refiguring the drama away from the mythic monster-mother with her potential for maternal domination of the baby, the lactating porn star becomes instead, in these videos, a superhero of the adult bedroom. But this is no simple inversion of master-slave relations. For at the same time, maternal caring behavior is not entirely banished as she remains in control though beneficent. One scene between a reputedly off-screen couple shows the female shooting milk into her male lover’s mouth, through hand expression; and on one occasion she accidentally hits him in the eye with her milk, so that he briefly recoils. The unfussed tenderness with which she wipes the milk from his face while he resumes feeding allows for a glimpse of another dynamic of care that nevertheless doesn’t undo the erotic charge of her agency.

In lactation erotica, the heterosexual male often becomes the kind of passive receptacle that Grosz and Waldby advocate. In some scenes he is a needy supplicant. In other scenes he is an equal or helping partner, where he expresses the woman’s milk
with his hands, and she is aroused by this. Or they might both express milk while he drinks it, mimicking the lapping of semen found in fallatio money shots that are choreographed to prove the scandal of a bodily fluid made visible. Again, the way these acts may be interpreted in terms of the dynamics of power is undecidable. This is especially true when we acknowledge that receiving breastmilk through suckling is not necessarily a passive activity, any more than fallatio is necessarily passive, since both require active, tiring, and persistent sucking together with a certain degree of know-how for their success. Once breastfeeding is viewed as a correlative of other kinds of oral sex, both categories can take on new meanings.

Lactation pornography makes use of and takes charge of women’s seepage, and celebrates it. It transforms what is a feared and hidden rupture of containment that merely underlines feminine disorder and permeability, or the cataclysmic morphing that is reproductive woman, into a choreographed, fountaining display. It transforms what might otherwise be viewed as disability or impairment—that is, negatively imagined, uncontrolled seepage—into a powerful, erotically charged, voluntary behavior. It also makes clear how difficult it is to be sure which body dominates at any given point in a sexual exchange, and what that domination represents. As Judith Butler (1997) argues:

Feminist arguments such as MacKinnon’s offer an analysis of sexual relations as structured by relations of coerced subordination and argue that acts of sexual domination constitute the social meaning of being a “man,” as the condition of coerced subordination constitutes the social meaning of being a “woman.”… But that deterministic account has come under continuous criticism from feminists not only for an untenable account of female sexuality as coerced subordination, but for the totalising view of heterosexuality as well—one in which all power relations are reduced to relations of domination—and for the failure to distinguish the presence of coerced domination in sexuality from pleasurable and wanted dynamics of power.52

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In addition to adding options for acting out “wanted dynamics of power,” the letting loose of interiorized bodily flows can also be seen as mutually engaging, a commingling that is metaphorically equal, and allows for give and take. Furthermore, lactation is an example of a form of power separate from domination: breasts’ provision of food elicits almost mystical levels of enthrallment, together with feelings of love, and the literal intoxication provided by oxytocin. And, as the work of Melanie Klein (1975) shows, the breast that gives, can also be the breast that withholds. Finally, the adult nursing drama may have little interest in power at all, as equal bodies in each other’s thrall anoint themselves.

Conclusion

When reconceptualized independently of the purely maternal function, induced and continued lactation operates to modify not only the shape of female (and sometimes male) breasts, but also the function of the body, as a source of sustenance and comfort to both babies and adults, as a form of self-care, and as a part of the loving repertoire of intimate relationships. By offering new ways of tracing body boundaries, induced lactation might also modify the foundation garments of our thinking about sexual difference, helping us to focus instead on similarity and reciprocity. Rather than imagining sex as a process of crashing through barriers of difference (or even gently insinuating past them), a drama which may of course hold exhilarating potential in its own right, we can also imagine sex as a process of confluence and commingling. Whether or not a woman chooses to lactate, knowledge of her potential to do so, with or without children, must add to her status, and to the complexity and richness of her body’s offerings. The very choice she is privileged to make in this instance, of whether or not to lactate, underlines the power she holds over what Grosz has characterized as uncontrolled seepage through the cracks in what is regarded as the body’s faulty engineering. Instead the female body might be envisaged in more positive oceanic terms, one whose tidal offerings are celebrated and encouraged, as much as they are patrolled.

In the process of allowing for the sexualization of lactation I do not wish to erase its maternal associations, but rather to extend our understanding of maternal behavior and its precincts. By playing with lactation and breastfeeding outside of immediate parenting functions, induced lactation opens up the subject of maternity as sexual, and pleasurable. Since men also have breasts, whether or not they attempt to lactate, the refiguring of meanings of the male breast would also serve to welcome men into the fold of parenting at the level of embodied care. Both the practical shifts in parenting partnerships and the opening out in meanings of heterosexual relationships, may help to balance power between the sexes where bodily relations are stuck in the binary of the active male who gives to the passive female who receives. Instead it can be shown how both male and female bodies can be perceived as equally open to the other.

At the same time as lactation can be split off from maternity, and sexualized as a phallic activity independent of procreation or even nurturing, sex also has the potential to be split off from statically constructed power difference, and allowed to celebrate the kindness entailed in relationships that are shadowed by maternal behavior in either gender. The spreading of sexual possibilities through role switching and role sharing works both ways. By suckling, as those engaged in adult nursing do, breastfeeding exposes the link between cocksucking and caritas. In doing so it reminds us of the power of erotic kindness to which both sexes have access: the fantasy of being sustained sheerly through the body of another.

Works Cited


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