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Mumba Mumba & Margaret M. Quinlan

To cite this article: Mumba Mumba & Margaret M. Quinlan (2016) Combat Breasts and Intimate Citizenship: Media Coverage of Breastfeeding Women in the U.S. Air Force, *Women's Reproductive Health*, 3:3, 178-197, DOI: [10.1080/23293691.2016.1237722](https://doi.org/10.1080/23293691.2016.1237722)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23293691.2016.1237722>



Published online: 16 Nov 2016.



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Combat Breasts and Intimate Citizenship: Media Coverage of Breastfeeding Women in the U.S. Air Force

Mumba Mumba

Liberal Arts Division, Lewis & Clark Community College, Godfrey, Illinois, USA

Margaret M. Quinlan

Communication Studies, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

The photographs of two U.S. Air Force women breastfeeding in public while dressed in military uniform sparked online controversy in 2012. An analysis of media reaction to the photographs served as a representative anecdote, and public online perceptions of breastfeeding military women were evaluated. Using Plummer's (2003) *intimate citizenship* as the theoretical backdrop, contradictory perceptions about breastfeeding in the public and private spheres emerged. Tensions of intimate citizenship related to who is included or excluded in the public sphere were noted in the following themes: (1) tensions about public and private breastfeeding, (2) tensions about separating motherhood from military work, and (3) tensions about breastfeeding in the revered military uniform. The findings provide a snapshot of the online public's perceptions of women who breastfeed in military uniform and in hypermasculinized environments. The photographs of the breastfeeding Air Force women challenged the poised, masculine imagery of the military by symbolically coming "out of the closet" and publicizing military women's maternal embodied responsibilities in the public sphere. Further, the photographs served as a springboard for conversations on the discouraging nature of the sociocultural environment of breastfeeding women and their rights to the public sphere.

Keywords *breastfeeding, Air Force women, military, tensions, intimate citizenship*

On May 12, 2012, Mom2Mom, an organization that promotes and supports breastfeeding, stirred controversy when it posted photographs on its Facebook page of two U.S. Air Force mothers, Terran Echegoyen-McCabe and Christina Luna, breastfeeding their infants in military uniform (Alfonse, 2012). Crystal Scott, a military spouse at the Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, WA, initiated the Mom2Mom breastfeeding campaign. Multiple breastfeeding mothers were photographed for the campaign, but the photographs that were contentious were those of the two U.S. Air Force women. In one of the controversial photographs, Echegoyen-McCabe's breasts were exposed as she breastfed her infant twins, whereas in the same photograph, Luna's breasts were concealed by her breastfeeding toddler. The motivation for the photo shoot was to publicize

the need for both civilian and active-duty service women to breastfeed their children (*Today Show*, 2012). After the images appeared, U.S. Air Force spokesperson Captain Rose Richeson reported that the U.S. Air Force supports breastfeeding by providing time and designated breastfeeding areas in child development centers: however, there were no U.S. Air Force policies regarding breastfeeding in uniform at that time (Alphonse, 2012).

The photographs of the U.S. Air Force women provided an important opportunity to examine mediated cultural interpretations of breastfeeding by evaluating how breastfeeding women in a hypermasculinized military context were perceived and the tensions they had to navigate. In the present study we analyzed media discourses and debates that were generated by the two U.S. Air Force women who were breastfeeding their children while in military uniform. Using Plummer's (2001, 2003) *intimate citizenship* to explore the tensions about breastfeeding, this analysis theoretically situates breastfeeding as a practice that includes or excludes women in the public sphere.

The photographs and resulting media discourses about the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women served as a representative anecdote that called for an examination of the rhetoric of public breastfeeding in military uniform. A representative anecdote is a tool that aids in making sense of social reality and serves as a lens through which to interpret emerging discourses (Brummet, 1984; Burke, 1946/1969), to craft narratives that may have contradictory or blurred plot lines (Japp, 1991), or to codify disorganized discourses or narratives into coherent discourses (Crabbe, 2000). Here, we attempt to interpret the meaning of the photographs and media responses to them; the data were collected from disparate resources in an attempt to create a coherent narrative.

Breastfeeding Women and the Military Culture

Fitzgerald et al. (2013) reported that the 200,000 female military personnel comprise over 14% of U.S. active-duty military. When Reserve and National Guard personnel are included in the count, the number of female military personnel increases to an estimated 330,000 (Department of Defense Personnel & Procurement Statistics, 2011). Approximately 43% of enlisted female personnel are of childbearing age; in a recent survey, their children ranged in age from newborn to 5 years. Twenty-two percent of active-duty mothers have children who are 2 years old and younger (Department of Defense, 2009a).

Breastfeeding military women face unique experiences, given that their bodies operate in a masculine hegemonic social context (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the unquestioned gender dynamics that promote patriarchy because men are often in dominant positions, whereas women are in subordinate ones (Connell, 1995). Masculine traits and values of competition, aggression, power, and control are always visible. Military women function within a largely bureaucratic and highly masculinized environment (Zeigler & Gunderson, 2005), as military bureaucracies sustain order and minimize change given their business of war. With this in mind, military leadership maintains a status quo that perpetuates strong influences of hegemonic forms of masculinity as their military values (Higate & Hopton, 2005). The military institution coexists in harmony with masculinity in a mutually affirming way (Connell, 2000; Sasson-Levy, 2003). Traditional masculine characteristics (e.g., bravery, autonomy, respect, controlled temperament, responsibility, poise) are the main constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Heineken, 2001).

Militarized masculinity is characterized by the stereotypical practices that are acquired through military “service and action” as well as war (Eichler, 2014, p. 81). Eichler encouraged the questioning of privileged militarized masculinities to change or reframe them because women in the military would be better served if there were a “demilitarized masculinity” (p. 90). Although the idea of demilitarized masculinities is controversial, changes could come about through military training and public sensitization that reimagine a military that also embraces women’s femininities (Eichler, 2014).

The inclusion of women in the military highlights the importance of negotiating issues related to sexuality, family planning, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and family care in relation to combat responsibilities (Fitzgerald et al., 2013). Structural factors influence how long and with what methods female soldiers will feed their infants. For instance, the U.S. military offers only 42 days of paid maternity leave, which is the shortest leave available to women in the militaries of other Western countries (Fitzgerald et al., 2013). For example, the Australian and Canadian militaries offer 52 weeks of maternity leave (Australian Government Department of Defence, 2012; National Defence and the Canadian Forces, 2012). In addition, there are no comprehensive Department of Defense guidelines about breastfeeding for deployed women (Department of Defense, 2009b). After childbirth, U.S. military women, depending on their military branch, can postpone deployment for 6 to 12 months. In the U.S. Air Force and Army, women can be deployed 6 months after childbirth, irrespective of whether they are breastfeeding (Sleutel, 2012). The Navy and the Marine Corps are the only branches of the U.S. military whose policy of postponing deployment for 12 months aligns with evidence-based expectations of breastfeeding (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012; World Health Organization [WHO], 2007). The Navy provides breastfeeding guidelines that are part of the management of pregnant military women (U.S. Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1989). Within these guidelines, breastfeeding women are allowed to take breaks and meal times for breastfeeding in sanitary environments rather than in restrooms or other unclean environments. Furthermore, the Navy educates breastfeeding women about potential workplace hazards that could affect the quality of breast milk and, subsequently, the safety of infants. The inclusion of women in the military comes with unique opportunities and challenges related to how family life, reproduction, and work–life balance are negotiated. The disparate policies concerning breastfeeding within the U.S. military offer some insights into which branches are more supportive of women who breastfeed, which highlight the need to do more in less supportive military branches.

Breastfeeding in public is constitutionally supported in 49 states in the United States (National Conference of Legislatures, 2015), but only 29 states do not categorize it as public indecency. Regardless of the legal protections with the goal of minimizing potential social and legal barriers, negative sociocultural values concerning real-life breastfeeding women remain (Acker, 2009).

Public Health and Feminist Discourses About Breastfeeding

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC; 2014), in 2011, 79% of infants were breastfed at birth. However, breastfeeding persistence lags; only 49% of infants are still nursing at 6 months and 27% at 12 months (CDC, 2014). The U.S. Surgeon General (2011) recognized the benefits of breastfeeding for both maternal and child health. Widely accepted advantages to the mother include protective benefits for reduced incidents of breast and ovarian cancer, plus

reduction of risk for other disorders, such as hypertension and Type 2 diabetes (Ip et al., 2007). Breastfeeding offers infants positive health outcomes, such as healthy cognitive development and reduced obesity risk in adulthood (Dietz & Hunter, 2009; Gartner et al., 2005; Harder, Bergmann, Kallischnigg, & Plagemann, 2005).

Some feminist scholars in public health have written about the benefits of breastfeeding and the barriers to it. For example, Wolf (2006) argued for the importance of discussing the functional nature of breasts rather than just considering them “decorative appendages” (p. 416). Muers (2010) pointed to the political nature of the breastfeeding debate, which pressures women to uphold individual responsibility and guilt about their infant feeding choices. She further contended that breastfeeding ought to be viewed as a relational process that is interlinked to a wider network of personal and political relationships. Similarly, Hausman (2007) embraced a biocultural and biosocial perspective of the breastfeeding experience in that both of these factors are important influences on women’s breastfeeding decisions.

There are calls for communication studies researchers to explore breastfeeding discourses (Foss, 2013; Gray, 2013; Rose, 2012). For instance, Gray (2013) examined online discussion boards about breastfeeding and found that, whereas 80% of the women requested informational support, only about 60% of them received this type of support. Women in these online forums also sought emotional support related to the complexities of how to handle criticism for their infant feeding choices and tangible support pertaining to how to increase milk supply. Given the inadequate informational support received and the complexities of providing emotional support in online forums, Gray (2013) recommended additional examination of online messages and better breastfeeding interventions that could utilize breastfeeding social support communication. Rose (2012) studied the blurring of private and public boundaries based on the location of a university’s lactation room. Based on a rhetorical analysis of her personal experiences, observations of the lactation room, media coverage, and journal entries, Rose observed that the location of the lactation room communicated that breastfeeding needed to be tucked away in private, regardless of legal and public support for it.

Our goal was to extend research related the female reproductive and maternal/lactating body in highly masculine occupations such as the military. Our hope is that understanding this case (images of breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women) could yield insights into other organizational contexts in which masculinity is dominant (e.g., universities, corporations).

Media Representations of Breastfeeding

Scholars have increasingly studied the representation or impact of breastfeeding (or formula feeding) in the media (Bridges, 2007; Brown & Peuchaud, 2008; Henderson, Kitzinger, & Green, 2000; Knaak, 2005; Van Esterik, 2004). Mass media have the potential to influence public perceptions of breastfeeding and thus women’s decision to breastfeed or not (Bentley, Dee, & Jensen, 2003; Foss & Southwell, 2006). Media information about breastfeeding and formula-feeding barriers, benefits, and solutions was evident in 615 issues of U.S. parenting magazines between 1997 and 2003 (Frerichs, Andsager, Campo, Aquilino, & Dyer, 2006). During this period, more information was reported on breastfeeding than formula feeding; however, missing from consideration were the social and environmental influences that impact women’s decisions to breastfeed or not. In a similar study, Foss (2010) compared media articles from 1930 to

2007 and observed an upward trend in coverage of breastfeeding over bottle-feeding. The articles featured the voices of health care providers offering scientific or expert advice. However, practical advice from women themselves was absent. This journalistic approach leaves the impression that breastfeeding is a naturally occurring practice without everyday obstacles.

Furthermore, the media send mixed messages about breastfeeding that either encourage it or portray it as a challenge for mothers (Brown & Peuchaud, 2008). In some cases, media representations frame breastfeeding as a danger to infants, especially for mothers of color, because of the fear of insufficient milk and the constraining responsibilities of breastfeeding (Hausman, 2003). Research has suggested that there are culturally driven negative reactions to breastfeeding because breasts are viewed as erotic rather than functional; therefore, it is difficult to shift public portrayals (Brown & Peuchaud, 2008; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). Henderson, Kitzinger, and Green (2000) have claimed that bottle-feeding is symbolic of babyhood itself and that many women are embarrassed to breastfeed in front of others.

In contrast, the CDC's (2014) *Report Card*, a resource that provides breastfeeding data to states and health practitioners, featured breastfeeding support indicators that suggest that breastfeeding rates will increase in the near future. The report used case studies to show that breastfeeding support in daycare centers, hospital-based programs, or other positive environments that encourage skin-to-skin infant contact with the mother immediately after birth predicts breastfeeding intent and persistence. Other breastfeeding support programs, such as those facilitated by the Le Leche League, offer mother-to-mother support meetings, online help, or telephone assistance in overcoming challenges.

There is continued evidence to support breastfeeding's health and social impact (Shannon, O'Donnell, & Skinner, 2007), and showing images of breastfeeding may be central in changing negative public perceptions (Frerichs et al., 2006). For example, in a study (Li, Fridinger, & Grummer-Strawn, 2002) of 2,350 breastfeeding mothers, 45% acknowledged that breastfeeding curbs much of the mother's lifestyle. Further, 31% of respondents indicated that children needed to be introduced to solid foods at 3 months, whereas another 31% reported that children needed to be weaned at 1 year. Such misinformation could be cleared up by accurate media reports.

Theorizing Breastfeeding Through Contested Intimate Citizenship

This analysis of mediated coverage of breastfeeding is situated in Plummer's (2001, 2003) intimate citizenship because it reveals some of the challenges that emerge from intimate life in social and cultural locations. Intimate citizenship is a process "that recognizes intimacy groups and identities along with their rights, responsibilities and need for recognition in emerging zones of conflict" that bridges the personal and the public spheres (Plummer, 2003, p. 66). Intimate citizenship is an expanded concept of citizenship beyond geographical borders, ethnicity, and religious boundaries that includes intimate or personal circles. Intimate citizenship takes into account spheres that pertain to sexuality, family-life contexts, gendered aspects, reproduction, and personal concerns that are not privy to the public; Plummer (2003) noted that breastfeeding is a contested site of intimate citizenship because it is an embodied act that raises multiple questions. Breastfeeding evokes gendered expectations regarding who is permitted and entitled to nurse in both public and private spheres (Fenster, 2005). First, managing and negotiating breastfeeding occupy a woman's private sphere (Stearns, 1999). Second, intimate citizenship explores who has

the right to belong to a collective space and further interrogates the implications of belonging or not belonging there (Fenster, 2005). Use of social spaces in terms of who is included or excluded is based on the proactive interactions of the actors involved (Lefebvre, 1991). The two photographs of the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women instigated tensions among both supporters and nonsupporters of breastfeeding; Plummer's intimate citizenship is an appropriate theoretical framework for the present study because it exposes tensions that emerged in the media among both civilians and military personnel.

The interpretations of the photographs of the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women and media responses open up opportunities to analyze the public's perceptions and embodied values about the breastfeeding military women. These explicit tensions reflect the perceptions of women who breastfeed in hypermasculinized organizations such as the military. We argue that the objections to breastfeeding in a military uniform may be informed by societal expectations of a military image that is firmly situated in a hegemonic masculine culture. The following research question was addressed: How was intimate citizenship about the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women displayed in media discourses?

METHOD

The present study is a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) of media discourses collected from online news articles and websites with comment posts related to the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women's photographs. The aim of qualitative content analysis is to offer a detailed account of the phenomena under study (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

Materials and Procedure

A Google search using the terms "breastfeeding Air Force women" was conducted using a timeframe from May 12, 2012 when the photos were first released to June 30, 2012. These dates were selected because they represented the peak of the controversy. There were 482,000 results from the general Google search, which were then restricted to the above dates for a narrower search (Google does not give search results in numbers with restricted dates).

A convenience sample of 50 online news articles and websites was selected. The inclusion criteria were that the online news articles and websites were about the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women and had comments posted by the public. Initially, we read all the comments on the 50 online articles and websites and sought common patterns. Saturation was observed when no new details emerged. Saturation was determined by the richness (quality) and thickness (quantity) of the data (Dibley, 2011). After a closer reading, 11 online articles and websites with comments that fit within the identified categories were selected. In total, 195 comment posts from those online news articles and popular-culture websites were analyzed.

The comments were requested by the authors of the online news articles and websites. In particular, the comments were collected from various media sources such as the *Huffington Post*, Thinkprogress.com, Thestircafemom.com, MotherJones.com, and NPR.org. A complete listing of the sources of the online news articles and websites from which the comments were drawn is shown in Table 1. The table also provides the number of comments that were analyzed

TABLE 1
A Listing of the Online News Articles and Websites from Which the Comments Were Collected

<i>Online News Source</i>	<i>Title of Article Used for Analysis with Comments</i>	<i>Types of Media</i>	<i>Number of Analyzed Comments</i>
<i>Huffington Post</i>	Breastfeeding photos of Terran Echegoyen McCabe and Christina Luna, military moms in uniform, spark controversy	General public news article	26
<i>Thinkprogress.com</i>	Controversy erupts over military women breastfeeding	Liberal online news outlet	12
<i>thestir.cafemom.com</i>	Military mom breastfeeds in uniform and the world freaks out	Website for mothers	25
<i>Motherjones.com</i>	Mother of all wars: The battle to breastfeed in uniform	Public online news outlet	8
<i>NPR.org</i>	Breastfeeding your child brazen or brave	Public news outlet	11
<i>vhlinks.com</i>	Photo of breastfeeding military women creating stir	Popular culture website	10
<i>Shine.yahoo.com</i>	Military moms breastfeeding in uniform stir controversy	Online news outlet for women	23
<i>Breastfeeding in combatboots.com</i>	It's all about the support, baby	Website for breastfeeding military women	23
<i>Theblaze.com</i>	'Disheartening and saddening': Woman behind military breast-feeding photos reportedly fired	Independent news and entertainment outlet for the public	13
<i>Thedailyemail.co.uk</i>	Mothers at war: Proud military wife defends photograph of her comrades breastfeeding in uniform	Online public newspaper that covers US sports, entertainment, health, and science news	34
<i>USAToday.com</i>	Breast-feeding photos of military moms stir debate	Public online news outlet	10
Total comments analyzed			195

from each online article and website. Data from a variety of media sources provides diverse perspectives or perceptions of the breastfeeding images of the U.S. Air Force women. Most of the online articles and websites targeted the general public, except for *thestircafemom.com* and *Shine.yahoo.com*, whose target audience is mothers and women in general. The website *breastfeedingincombatbreasts.com* serves breastfeeding military women and is managed by a retired U.S. Air Force woman.

The comments were categorized using an inductive approach to analysis (Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The initial analysis involved reading through and seeking patterns by using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method. When common patterns emerged, the comments were assigned to categories. In this analysis, select comments fell within three main categories or themes. The categories and themes were developed by "subjective interpretation of the content . . . through the systematic classification process" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The categories that are described in this article are not the only themes that could have emerged

from the comment posts on the select online articles and websites. Multiple interpretations of the comments are possible based on the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of an author (Vanderford, 1999).

Ethical considerations were reflected on as these data were collected. Fleitas (1998) rationalized that comments that are posted on open public websites belong to the public domain and do not have consent requirements. Similarly, the comments that were used for this article were posted on public websites. As a result, the authors of the comments did not give consent for our analysis. However, pseudonyms are used to minimize the connection of the comments to their authors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tensions of intimate citizenship were apparent based on who was included and excluded in public discourses. The identified themes include (1) tensions about public and private breastfeeding, (2) tensions about separating motherhood from military work, and (3) tensions about breastfeeding in the revered military uniform. Overwhelming evidence from the discourses collected suggests that tensions between public and private breastfeeding dominate the public's perceptions of military women who breastfeed.

Tensions About Public and Private Breastfeeding

Most prevalent were discussions that centered on whether it was right for the U.S. Air Force women to breastfeed in public. In response to an article titled "Military Moms Breastfeeding in Uniform Stirs Controversy (What Happened to This Country?)" (Alphonse, 2012), Julie explained, "the woman feeding twins should have covered the breasts with a small cloth or look[ed] for a private place. She is too exposed. The other woman looks quite covered." There was discomfort associated with breast exposure, and prescriptive suggestions to conceal the breast were offered. In contrast, Mariah indicated that breastfeeding is a natural act that needs to be encouraged. She offered privacy guidelines by using herself as an example: "it's completely natural to breastfeed your baby . . . I personally would use a light cover up, but that doesn't make what they are doing, wrong!! Go Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy!!! USA." Although she supported privacy, Mariah did not find breastfeeding in public offensive; her suggestion seemed to be a personal preference versus what she expected the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women to do. Public spaces are often viewed as places that encourage rational thinking because they are environments where politics and commerce occur and where private actions (such as breastfeeding) are viewed as messy and inappropriate (Longhurst, 2001). As a result, it is not surprising that there is discomfort associated with public displays of breastfeeding.

A reader responding to an article titled "Photo of Breastfeeding Women Creating Stir" (Van Halen, 2012) provides additional insights about breastfeeding in public. Taylor questioned what would fall within the category of "natural" and what would be allowed in the public and private realms: "technically, they're mothers posing for the camera with a 'look at me, I'm breastfeeding my kids' pose. I have to pee every once in a while—it's a natural bodily function. Still, I'm not about to do it out in public and I'm not about to let anybody photograph it. But that's just me,

I guess.” Taylor viewed the photographs as a deliberate showcasing of a private act that transgressed the public sphere. On the contrary, José’s post on MotherJones.com seems repulsed by likening breastfeeding to urination and defecation. He stated: “But some people are talking about breastfeeding like it’s as disgusting as urinating and defecating. There’s something wrong with that.” The connection of breastfeeding to urination and defecation denotes significant uneasiness with public breastfeeding. Taylor’s comment proposes that breastfeeding is a public nuisance that is unsanitary and unsightly when conducted in public; therefore, it should be relegated to the private sphere. The comparison reified that breastfeeding belongs to the private sphere and that crossing the boundary by “posing for the camera” infringed on a cultural expectation because the “look at me” pose disrupts the expected privacy norm. Tim used a similar association in his comment on an article on Theblaze.com titled “Disheartening and Saddening: Woman Behind Military Breastfeeding Photos Reportedly Fired” (Ritz, 2012):

I personally am an advocate for breastfeeding. However, I’m tired of the “in-your-face” aspect of it. For example, a woman I know (not very well) just had twins. We’re at a dinner party and afterwards we all go into the living room to watch the game on TV. She sits down right next to me on the couch, pulls out her breast, and begins feeding the twins. Seriously, I’m all for breastfeeding, but please at least try to be more private! I don’t whip out my private part in front of others whenever I have to go!

By comparing breastfeeding to urination, defecation, or exposing the penis, this commenter reinforces breastfeeding as a hidden act that intrudes on others. The privacy expectation encourages women who breastfeed to absent themselves from public social spaces because it could be construed as a shameful public act. As Smyth (2008) contended, entitlements to social and physical space are factors that limit how long women continue to breastfeed.

The above comment is averse to public breastfeeding, but others are supportive. Shannon’s comment on the Van Halen website displays her displeasure at relegating breastfeeding to the private sphere:

Nothing aggravates me more than hearing people scorn women for using their breasts as nature intended—and in public, if they so wish. I don’t believe it is in any way “immodest” to feed your baby with what amounts to nothing more than skin covered milk ducts. Society is at fault for sexualizing the breast to the point where women feel ashamed for doing what is, in fact, entirely natural.

Shannon’s remark directs the blame away from the breastfeeding women to more macro factors, such as societal perceptions of breastfeeding in American culture. In particular, societal sexualization of the breast was blamed for the need to maintain privacy. Shannon’s frustrations align with those of Stearns (1999), who observed that society is comfortable with the sexualized breast but uncomfortable with the nurturing breast. Therefore, it is likely that when the breast is sexualized, the public breastfeeding woman is viewed as a bad or deviant woman. Although Shannon’s views are affirming, the tensions that are created by the exposed breast challenge women’s participation in the public space.

Additional empowering comments that resisted privacy were posted in response to a daily-mail.co.uk article titled “Mothers at War: Proud Mother Defends Photograph of Her Comrades Breastfeeding in Uniform” (Boyle, 2012). For example, Kelly complained:

I and many of my family and friends have breast fed in the past only to be made to feel like we are doing something repulsive. The World Health Organization is desperately trying to increase the numbers of breastfeeding women because numbers are dropping. Guess why? Because no woman wants to spend the first 6 months to 12 months of her baby’s life locked away. I say, well done to these

beautiful, strong women for doing the most natural and healthy thing in public. The more women who stand up for themselves the better!

Kelly resisted the idea of avoiding public space by asserting WHO's breastfeeding recommendation. In the United States, the emphasis on privacy seems to be at odds with some legal protections for breastfeeding (Carter & McCutcheon, 2013). For instance, some states have explicit protections that prevent breast exposure during breastfeeding from being categorized as "public indecency" (Wyoming), "public nudity" (Michigan), or a "lewd" or "grossly lewd act" (Utah; Carter & McCutcheon, 2013, p. 424). In addition, in 33 states women were permitted to breastfeed because of laws that decriminalize breastfeeding; for example, Colorado explicitly affirmed that "A mother may breast-feed in any place she has a right to be" (Carter & McCutcheon, p. 424). The comments that insist on breastfeeding privacy reflect some incongruities between what is culturally unacceptable in public and the legal protections that protect breastfeeding women, thereby echoing Plummer's (2003) intimate citizenship. On the one hand, certain legal protections assert women's right to breastfeed in public; however, cultural norms that inhibit public breastfeeding remain pervasive. Not all state laws are supportive of public breastfeeding; exceptions can be found in Missouri and North Dakota laws that police women's bodies. In Missouri, the law states, "A mother may, *with as much discretion as possible*, breast-feed her child," and North Dakota law states that "*if the woman acts in a discreet and modest manner*, a woman may breastfeed" (emphasis added; Carter & McCutcheon, 2013, p. 431). In some cases, discrepancies in the protective abilities of the breastfeeding laws might represent the general inconsistencies that are aired in the media.

There is no doubt that tensions of intimate citizenship with regard to breastfeeding were evident as the U.S. Air Force women performed what is often considered a private act in public. These women were reclaiming a stake of the public space and asserting their right, albeit in an unintentional manner.

Tensions About Separating Motherhood from Military Work

The second theme explores the tensions about separating motherhood from military work. The first few quotations come from Roche-Paull, who as a former member of the U.S. Navy, is a retired nurse and an activist for breastfeeding by active-duty military women. Roche-Paull maintains a blog to advance her goals. She provides her own opinions but requests public reactions to her articles. She posted an article titled "Breastfeeding in Combat Boots" in the wake of the photo controversy and asked: "What are your thoughts on breastfeeding in uniform? Is it ever OK to do so or does it cross an invisible military boundary?" The rhetorical context generated opposing views regarding breastfeeding by military women that reflect the tension-filled responsibilities of motherhood and work. Kelly answered:

It goes to the very heart of women in the workplace. If expressing femininity is seen as unprofessional, THAT'S the problem, not how that femininity is expressed. Pregnancy and breastfeeding are intimately female acts. If I must divest myself of an essential element of my nature to be a good service member, then the military is guilty of false advertising. Femininity cannot be untied.

Kelly countered that mothering responsibilities cannot be separated from working women. In particular, she problematized the idea of separating female biology from the workplace—an

impossible expectation. She perceived that the military sends unfair and conflicting expectations to women whose “natural” feminine traits cannot be untangled from their identity.

On the contrary, others, such as Genie, thought that the distinction between motherhood and military work could be made. Genie explained that a breastfeeding mother in the military must make sacrifices:

Active duty women who feel they must breastfeed should get out of the military!!! If the job requires them to be on duty, they cannot leave to breastfeed. Sometimes the children **MUST** come second. Any other attitude reflects badly on all military women.

Genie’s stance assumes that breastfeeding women must choose one role or the other by promoting an “either/or” position that does not give breastfeeding military women the option for both. In Genie’s opinion, mothering and children are relegated to a secondary position in the military. Motherhood and breastfeeding are a choice, and the strongly masculine military culture leaves little space for women who might want to experience both a military career and motherhood. In connection to Plummer’s (2003) tensions, women who want to experience both may find an unsupportive environment (perceived or real) that promotes masculine norms, thereby discouraging motherhood. Consequently, breastfeeding military women are unable to exercise full intimate citizenship. In the end, public disapproval of breastfeeding constrains women from breastfeeding and may lead to supplementing with formula or avoiding it altogether (Earle, 2002; Forster & McLachlan, 2010). Disapproval of breastfeeding is generally more pronounced among certain demographic groups, such as African Americans, individuals with low socioeconomic status, and individuals under age 30 and over age 65 (Li et al., 2008; Li, Fridinger, & Grummer-Strawn, 2002). In our analysis, minority status and age of the individuals who posted comments were not available.

The author of an article on theStir.cafemom.com titled “Moms Breastfeed and World Freaks Out” (Sager, 2012) criticized the photograph by noting that she valued military work over motherhood:

Lactating military moms may pump while they’re on the job to bring the milk back home, but if they’re on duty, they do not bring their babies along with them. They’re at work, and the military workspace is not one that is conducive to bringing your kids to work. In that sense, it’s like many jobs in America.

The author upheld the distinctions between workplace expectations of the military and typical breastfeeding realities of many American workplaces. She offered regulatory advice that excludes children from the workplace as a norm that extends from mainstream American work culture to the military. Further, her statement advises that breastfeeding does not have a space in the American workplace, including the military. These findings and interpretations confirm Plummer’s tensions that breastfeeding women are faced with clear demarcations of what roles occur in the home and workplace.

An article on Yahoo! Shine titled “Military Moms Breastfeeding in Uniform Stir Controversy” (Alphonse, 2012) generated significant comments. In her response to this article, Jenny argued against the demarcated tasks of military work expectations and motherhood by asserting the tension between motherhood and being in the military: “I think a lot of people think that you can’t be a mom and be a soldier, [that] this is not something that’s out of norm for them. They breastfeed in uniform all the time—it’s just not something that’s usually captured on film.” Jenny

pointed to predominant perceptions of motherhood and the military and dispelled the assumption that military women do not breastfeed because they do not publicize their breastfeeding. Instead, Jenny proposed that military women should be allowed to embrace both motherhood and military work, thus dismissing the tension.

This theme highlights the tensions about women's identities related to who is considered a *good mother* or a *good worker*: the "good" working mother as the one who is in control of child care and fully able to attend to work (Buzzanell & Lui, 2005). Other explanations of the "good" mother point to women who are involved in intensive mothering and caregiving roles (Hayes, 1999). Based on the identified tensions, the breastfeeding soldier could be viewed as a *good mother* only when she is not in the military and as a *good soldier* only when she is not breastfeeding. To participate in both violates the identities of *good mother* and *good soldier*; subsequently, such tensions challenge women's participation in intimate citizenship.

Tensions Over Breastfeeding in the Revered Military Uniform

This theme reveals tensions about breastfeeding in the revered military uniform, which reflects the strong sentiments against breastfeeding in a military uniform that provoked contested meanings of intimate citizenship among breastfeeding women in a hypermasculinized context. In her comment on the Breastfeeding in Combat Boots website, Vivian frowned on public breastfeeding by any military women and offered permissible steps on how breastfeeding could be conducted:

Kudos to these women for breastfeeding, but seriously show some decorum you are representing our country in that uniform. The last thing I would ever deem appropriate is a US Military woman showing her boobs to the world as the blond [*sic*] is. No one can say she isn't because the way she is set up the MINUTE one of those babies pops off everyone will see full on boob. Obviously if someone could bring the girls to visit her someone could pick up the milk too. I pumped while going to school fulltime and just had ice packs to keep it cold while I finished my classes for the day. I planned it out and had no more than 3 classes a day. I would take two classes and pump then go back to class. Time span was 5–6 hours gone. I fed right before I left, pumped and fed as soon as I picked up my son.

Vivian's comment reflects the symbolic importance that is often assigned to the U.S. military uniform and its disconnect with breastfeeding. In her view, public breastfeeding is equated with bad etiquette. She harshly judged the U.S. Air Force woman breastfeeding twins. Even though her areolae were not visible, Vivian anticipated their exposure. She offered specific steps for breastfeeding by offering her personal way of managing it in a different context. Moreover, Vivian assumed that her personal experience is a universal prescription. Vivian's comment illuminates her personal motivation to pump and preserve breast milk for her son. Although pumping and conserving breast milk may work for women such as Vivian, not all women are in a position to do this for a variety of reasons; some have conflicting schedules, negative experiences with pumping, or lack of support systems to pump at work. Furthermore, future research needs to clarify if there is a distinction between maternal health benefits when a mother expresses milk or breastfeeds exclusively from the breast. For example, a mother who pumps breast milk may not have the same maternal health benefits (such as reduction in risk for hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes and minimized risk for breast and ovarian cancer) as women who exclusively breastfeed (Ip et al., 2009).

Complaints about breastfeeding in uniform were further noted on the same blog by Hannah, who used her military status for credibility:

As a former Marine, Active Duty, I am appalled by the notion that any service woman would feel it is appropriate to breastfeed a child while in uniform. I believe it is an utter disgrace to all women before us who made many sacrifices for the roles we have today. I believe it is an honor to be a woman, a mother, and a Marine. I believe those who [choose] to breastfeed in uniform are only making a joke of the hard work and dedication of service women in the past.

Like Vivian's, Hannah's perspective reflects some of the negative perceptions women share related to breastfeeding in a military uniform. The act of breastfeeding is associated with disgrace and dishonor because it is viewed as an act that discounts the historic gains that women in the military have achieved. In both of these comments, the tensions of intimate citizenship are evident in the feminine act of breastfeeding that clashed with a traditionally highly masculine symbol, the U.S. Air Force uniform, because breastfeeding disrupts military poise, power, and orderliness. In our data, we found many instances of women disciplining each other.

Additional contested reactions emerged when individuals responded to whether military mothers should breastfeed in uniform. For instance, Charles countered the argument that breastfeeding in uniform disrespects the uniform by raising policy weaknesses in the military. In his response to an article titled "We're Seriously Debating Whether It's Okay for Military Moms to Breastfeed in Uniform" (Ryan, 2012) on jezebel.com, Charles stated:

But there is no regulation about breastfeeding that we know about. As far as we know, these women have not been critiqued by the military establishment or by their COs. So a bunch of armchair warriors are upset? Big freaking deal. Let them get upset about how it dishonors the uniform when men rape women, or when they "improperly" wear the uniform while pissing on enemy corpses.

Charles questioned the legitimacy of those who complained about breastfeeding in uniform given the larger improprieties in the military related to rape and disrespect of enemy corpses. Public breastfeeding appeared to him to be a minimal transgression compared to the ethical, legal, and serious sexual abuse violations and unprofessional conduct recently made public about the military. Charles's comment raises tensions regarding the ethical and moral questions that deserve more attention and debate in the public sphere, given that, to date, there are no specific regulations in the U.S. Air Force about breastfeeding in uniform. Indeed, the implicit comparison Charles is making is not gender neutral but is specifically male-bodied and male-enacted.

Another respondent on the same blog offered similarly strong recommendations against breastfeeding in uniform by illuminating the hierarchies between those who have served and those who have not. In protest, Ben posited:

I don't give a shit about breastfeeding in public. It's natural. I am a veteran and I will say **YOU DO NOT FUCKING DO THIS IN UNIFORM**. For those who have served and disagree, I respect your opinions because you have earned the right. For those who have not, well sorry but pound salt. While in uniform, a soldier has to conform to certain rules [of] conduct. It's part of the whole conformity lifestyle a soldier has to lead . . . The vast majority of people in the military are in support roles for those who actually put their lives on the line. Believe me the last thing people on the front line care about is exposing their breasts in public.

Ben asserted that the institutionalized expectations of the military need to be upheld by individuals in the U.S. Air Force, and breastfeeding is not included. He distinguished between

the behaviors of military personnel on the front lines and those who are assigned supportive roles. This discrepancy may be misconstrued as equating the breastfeeding women in the photographs with having less valuable supportive roles.

Sentiments against breastfeeding in uniform were occasionally at odds with those that promoted breastfeeding in uniform. Charlotte asserted her supportive position on breastfeeding in combat boots.com:

Bravo for bringing this issue to light. As the wife of a retired career officer, I had the freedom to breastfeed. It's high time that breastfeeding is brought out of the closet and seen as a normal part of everyday life and nothing to raise an eyebrow about. I find it reprehensible that in the today [USA Today] article some compared it to urinating in public! There is nothing unprofessional about nursing in uniform. For women in the service, it's just a part of service life. What is best for baby is best for everyone!

Given the general squeamishness and strong objections that linger, the photograph was important to military women. By using the word *closet*, Charlotte equated public breastfeeding to the “coming out” process commonly associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals, because it may be associated with shame in our culture. By equating breastfeeding in uniform to “coming out of the closet,” Charlotte was arguing for visibility as well as staking out breastfeeding women’s right to participate in public, thereby attaining intimate citizenship.

In a similar way, Charmaine used her professional experiences with breastfeeding in a hyper-masculinized environment to advocate for breastfeeding:

When I had my daughter I was a major. I breastfed her at the table at an evening event (normal duty uniform) sitting with the Superintendent of West Point, a three-star general. He didn't say word one to me about nursing in uniform. If a three-star general has no issue with it, and especially since there are no regulations that prevent nursing in uniform, then everyone else can just get over it. As a mom and a woman in the military, I think it is important that the American people, as well as other soldiers, see women in uniform with their kids—especially in leadership positions.

Charmaine wanted to normalize breastfeeding and mothering in the military by making it more visible. Visibility is key to challenging societal norms that encourage discretion. Concealing breastfeeding, especially among military women, perpetuates the masculinization of a “sterile” environment in which feminine acts are absent, thereby projecting an inaccurate picture of women’s embodied experiences in the military.

In the same vein, Matt protested the argument about the revered military uniform. In his response to the article titled “Breast-Feeding Photos of Military Moms Stir Debate” (Roth, 2012) on USAtoday.com, he indicated:

Two smiling healthy women feeding their beautiful healthy babies makes me smile. Their uniforms make my smile wider. Sometimes I see a man or woman in uniform embracing a child with such joy and intensity that I look away as I smile, so as not to intrude on their public moment of intimacy. I don't know anything about being in the military or being in combat but I hope that whenever men and women in uniform have a mental image of a comrade holding a child in their arms, that image strengthens their resolve to get everyone back home safely. Powerful mental images can be used to advantage. May breastfeeding women in uniform be one of them!

Matt's sentiments clearly support the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women and the intimate private moments that find their way in the public sphere. He viewed these public photographs as a way to humanize women and mothers in the military who protect both their country and their children. Another photograph of breastfeeding military women in uniform was recently posted on Facebook and other social media sites with the goal of normalizing women who breastfed while serving in the military (Grinberg, 2015). Again, the same message surfaced with the hope of shifting perceptions of breastfeeding military women by arguing that they need not choose between motherhood and the military, but that institutions can form a community where it is possible to do both.

Conclusions

The tensions of intimate citizenship showcased who is included or excluded from the public sphere as noted by Plummer (2003). The results reflect the online public's contradictory views of breastfeeding military women. Images of breastfeeding in uniform were a site of contradictions that represent "domination and transgression" (Davidson & Langan, 2006, p. 443). The tensions about public and private breastfeeding are in line with Acker (2009), who reported that the public affirms its support for women to breastfeed, but the sight of a breastfeeding woman makes the public uncomfortable. Furthermore, our analysis confirms Acker's observations of the strong negative associations that are linked to breastfeeding. Other studies have shown breastfeeding comparisons to urination and defecation and described it as a practice in which animals engage (Cox et al., 2007). In the present study, the breastfeeding women were not entitled to full citizenship because the act of breastfeeding was compared to urination and defecation. Such comments point to the larger discourses that resent, exclude, and push breastfeeding out of the public sphere. These negative views confirm research that documented the public breast as demeaned, "nasty, offensive, rude, and distasteful" (Marchant, 2005, p. 67). For example, Foss (2013) reported that breastfeeding was linked to urination in her media analysis. She illustrated that Al on the show *Married With Children* retorted to a group of nursing women, "So's peeing, but you don't see me doing that in public" (p. 335). The public's support for privacy and discretion furthers the notion that the breast is sexualized and needs to be hidden from view because its exposure is deemed immoral and stands in sharp contrast to the "desexed" image of motherhood (Callaghan & Lizard, 2012).

A culture that excludes women from public breastfeeding is one factor that impacts breastfeeding rates. Wolf (2008) noted that when breastfeeding is excluded from the public because it is considered a repulsive activity, more women will avoid breastfeeding, discontinue it early, or be restricted in terms of where they breastfeed. This exclusion has negative maternal and child health consequences, which society will pay for in the long term (Wolf, 2008). Moreover, perceptions that encourage privacy of breastfeeding may have a bearing on the observational learning of other women who are considering breastfeeding because fewer women will have models of breastfeeding.

In the second theme—separation of motherhood from the military—the underlying premise reflects conspicuous challenges between militarism and femininity. Although there are significant gains in women's integration in the military since the U.S. Women's Armed Service Integration Act of 1948, there remain enormous challenges to full integration (Howard & Prividera, 2008).

Again, this separation demonstrates that there is support for women's accomplishments, but also an explicit call for the exclusion of breastfeeding women from the military. The negative comments that discouraged the embracing of both motherhood and military work legitimize women's subordinate roles in society in general and in the military in particular and implicitly elevate a militarized masculinity that marginalizes women's identities as mothers. These negative comments normalize a highly militarized masculine image in which breastfeeding women may appear to pose a threat to the military ideology (Howard & Prividera, 2008). In line with the marginalization of breastfeeding military women, Woodward (2000) contended that the military institutionalizes a two-way system that undermines women's combat roles and diminishes their worth, while upholding the values of the male warrior.

The final theme describes the tensions about breastfeeding in the revered military uniform and closely interconnects with the other themes. Comments that were opposed to the U.S. Air Force women breastfeeding in uniform represent a devaluation of women's reproductive roles as mothers while serving as soldiers (Blum, 1999). Comments that used expletives signified anger toward the breastfeeding military mothers because they were deemed to violate symbolically their devotion to the military. The images of breastfeeding align with Smith, Hawkinson, and Paull's (2010) observations about the breastfeeding mother who is often deemed incompetent professionally because mothering duties display warmth. Similarly, breastfeeding in the U.S. military uniform may stand in sharp contrast to the poised masculine image of the military. Therefore, images that display breastfeeding military mothers veer away from the traditional dominant masculine image.

Common tensions tie all three themes together, one of which relates to the biocultural space in which breastfeeding occurs. Hausman (2007) indicated that repetitive contradictory messages about breastfeeding create a political and prohibitive breastfeeding environment. Koerber's (2006) qualitative study showed that contradictory messages led women not to breastfeed correctly, which ultimately impacted continuation. Furthermore, women in Koerber's study complained that they saw few images of breastfeeding women and that the absence of these images made the women doubtful of their capability to breastfeed. As shown in the present study, there was resistance to the image of the breastfeeding U.S. Air Force women whose purpose was to encourage other women to breastfeed. Whereas the cultural environment resists images of nursing women, from a biological perspective, women's breastfeeding abilities position them as unique because of the embodied nature of the activity. More important, breastfeeding is a choice for many women, yet the sociocultural environment (either at work, in public, online, or in the community) largely resists breastfeeding. As argued by Wolf (2008), there are some short- and long-term benefits of breastfeeding to mothers and children, yet the cultural atmosphere of the public space ironically makes it impossible to continue breastfeeding and realize these benefits.

All in all, our data demonstrated that a contradictory representative anecdote exists based on the public's perceptions of the images of the U.S. Air Force women breastfeeding. Further, these images connote the U.S. Air Force women's resistance to the negative status quo by symbolically becoming full participants (Longhurst, 2001).

Limitations

We acknowledge some limitations related to the data used. For example, the data were retrieved from articles and websites that target the general public, except for one website that targets

breastfeeding military women (breastfeedingincombatboots.com). Our focus on data that emerged from the general public limits our understanding of military personnel's perceptions of breastfeeding women in uniform. Future researchers should examine military men and women's perceptions regarding breastfeeding. However, military families are not immune to the prevailing general discourses about breastfeeding in U.S. culture. Therefore, the results of this study could serve as a springboard for a qualitative study that focuses on military women's breastfeeding experiences.

Recommendations

Given our interest in improving reproductive health across the lifespan for all women, we argue that perceptions of women breastfeeding in public have implications for breastfeeding rates and maternal and child health outcomes. The image we analyzed impacts perceptions of women in the military not only in the United States but globally. The Department of Defense needs to work toward more supportive breastfeeding policies that are consistent across different branches of the military. Further, breastfeeding policies need to be clearly articulated and available to all women enlisted in the military. The media should capture more images of military women involved in caregiving roles so that they become part of the public consciousness. For instance, anecdotal images of military fathers hugging their children are more common than are those of military mothers hugging their children. Finally, repeated media exposure to the multilayered responsibilities of military women that include caregiving responsibilities could alter the public's negative breastfeeding expectations and perceptions. The adversarial reactions to the photographs draw on entrenched American cultural aversion and disgust for public breastfeeding and for women in the military. Instead, we need to continue conversations about American national identity that privileges hypermasculinity and traditional male bodies.

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Submission received: 5-23-14; Revision received: 9-21-15; Revision received: 1-17-16; Revision received: 4-6-16; Accepted: 5-18-16