



Virtual Lactivism: Breastfeeding Selfies and the Performance of Motherhood

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Figure 1. Tea for Two (Boucher, 2014a).
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"I posted an picture of my body that 'no one wanted to see' and if the urge strikes, so should you" (Boucher, 2014c, para. 14). So ends a comment by Sky Boucher, whose tandem breastfeeding selfie "Tea for Two" (Figure 1) went viral in early 2014. Boucher's comments, which emerged in response to the barrage of both criticism and acclaim elicited by this selfie, suggest that breastfeeding selfies occupy a liminal space and, as such, are not easily integrated into the conventions of selfie culture. Nevertheless, they are also understood by their creators as powerful sites of self-making and community building.

In this essay, we examine the politics and production of breastfeeding selfies. We argue that the breastfeeding selfie's political potential resides at the juncture between sexuality and motherhood. More specifically, it forces mothers (as photographers, subjects, and audience members) and viewers to confront a thorny question: How can one articulate a virtuous maternal self through the lens of what has been broadly understood, within the mainstream media, as a profoundly narcissistic genre? And further, how might breastfeeding—that iconic, embodied practice of motherhood—trouble the very idea of the selfie?

To ask these questions, we draw on the notions of socially mediated publicness (Baym & boyd, 2012), microcelebrity (Marwick & boyd, 2011), and networked publics (boyd, 2011). Socially mediated publicness has fundamentally reshaped the contours of the public-private divide. Breastfeeding selfies, situated between the private maternal sphere and the public or "quasi-public" (Baym & boyd, 2012, p. 322) spheres, are an example of this. Like other selfies, breastfeeding selfies offer individuals the possibility of microcelebrity, the opportunity to present carefully manufactured and managed online selves across a range of social media platforms, with the "audience" imagined as fans (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 140). Furthermore, their socially mediated presence enables the possibility of virality, offering a wide audience for those who might otherwise not have access to a public in an unmediated space.

If, as Alice Marwick (2013) has argued, participation in social media is modeled on corporate branding strategies, particularly active self-promotion and status-seeking behavior, then the selfie may be the most obvious example of the self as brand commodity. Certainly breastfeeding selfies can be read as instances of self-branding. When they mimic the traditional form and stance of the breastfeeding mother ubiquitous in classical art, they can cash in on the social capital that celebrates the maternal; that is, capital rooted in the visual representation of breastfeeding. Thus, while breastfeeding selfies may be decidedly—and often determinedly—unprofessional self-portraits, they are still highly constructed sites of self-making; that is, their informality belies their staged nature. Such selfies' potential virality, their role in creating branded social media selves, and their reliance on convergent media all signal what danah boyd has referred to as "networked publics" (2011, p. 39), publics shaped by the network technologies in which they exist.

Yet breastfeeding selfies, whether they adhere to traditional artistic tropes or not, are also risky because they may expose nursing mothers to criticism, online harassment, or the co-opting of images for unsavory purposes (e.g., porn sites). "Alternative" breastfeeding selfies (e.g., those that feature toddlers, tandem breastfeeding, transgender breastfeeding, supplemental breastfeeding devices) implicitly push at the boundaries of maternal roles. They also challenge the often taken-for-granted sexualization of the breast. In these ways, breastfeeding selfies disrupt the conventions of social media spaces. In their

content and approach, they butt up against the established architecture of networked publics; that is, they challenge the constitutive aspects of the online environments that shape individual participation (boyd, 2011). They do so by shifting the parameters of agency as represented in more conventional selfies: The presence of active, maternal breasts and nursing children destabilizes the subject as closed, complete, and singular. In both conventional and edgy forms, breastfeeding selfies can produce resistant communities within mainstream social media spaces; grouped together, they are politically charged visual texts that subtly undermine the presumed stability of the self.

We focus on two collections of breastfeeding selfies, both of which contribute to public conversations about breastfeeding and the maternal body in contemporary North American society. These two collections—one a quasi-public global community, and the other a Tumblr of a single woman's engagement with the politics of the breastfeeding selfie—were chosen because of their popularity and global reach. Their respective approaches also stand in stark contrast to each other and therefore offer useful points of comparison. First, we analyze a series of breastfeeding selfies posted to an online forum hosted by BabyCenter, which positions itself as "the #1 parenting and pregnancy digital resource [reaching] more than 40 million moms globally each month in 11 different languages" ("Company Overview," 2014, para. 1). Then, we examine a series of alternative breastfeeding selfies posted by Sky Boucher on her Tumblr, "Milo & Eloise." The resonance and dissonance between these two collections speak not only to the nature of these platforms themselves but, more intriguingly, to the meanings attached to contemporary motherhood, breastfeeding practice, and maternal subjectivity.

Breastfeeding and Maternal Subjectivity

Breastfeeding has been the focus of considerable feminist scholarly attention. This research ranges from works on the ideological and political implications of breastfeeding (Bartlett, 2005; Blum, 1999; Hausman, 2003; Stearns, 1999) to the lived experiences of breastfeeding parents (Epp Buller, 2013; Giles, 2003), the relationships between feminism and breastfeeding (Carter, 1995; Hausman, 2004), and the theoretical and conceptual potential of lactation and its capacity to destabilize Western understandings of the subject (Bartlett, 2002, 2005; Gatens, 1995; Giles, 2002; Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 2001; Shaw, 2003; Shildrick, 1997; Young, 2005).

Of particular relevance to this essay is the conceptual work that considers the unruliness of breasts broadly speaking and of lactation more specifically. According to Iris Marion Young (2005), breasts are inherently subversive. Troubling the boundaries between motherhood and sexuality, breasts disrupt conventional understandings of public and private, self and other, subject and object. Maternal nursing, as a bodily practice located at the breast, further challenges Western notions of the rational, autonomous individual. Lactational embodiment fits conceptually within the frameworks proposed by Grosz, who argued that "women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage" (1994, p. 203). The maternal subject, Kristeva reminds us, is "the place of a splitting" (2000, p. 177; see also Young, 2005)—simultaneously the self and not the self—and the act of breastfeeding materializes this conceptual framing. In this light, the breastfeeding selfie can be understood as a site of both rupture and bridging, an evocation of a simultaneously split and dual subject. The breastfeeding self, as articulated within the

selfie, is not only "this sex which is not one" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 23) but also the self which *refuses to be* one.

Performing the Lactating Self in Corporate Spaces

BabyCenter (babycenter.com), a Johnson & Johnson company, is a global virtual community designed for pregnant women and mothers. In addition to offering pregnancy and parenting information, it plays host to an extensive network of online forums through which women can come together to chart their journeys through pregnancy, breastfeeding, and parenthood. The "Breastfeeding Support and Help" public forum has more than 90,000 members ("Breastfeeding Support and Help," 2008). Members are free to post on any topic related to breastfeeding as long as they adhere to community guidelines, which include "No XXX" ("Breastfeeding Support and Help," 2014, para. 3). Such communities might be productively understood as quasi-public spaces; that is, they facilitate the public presence of mothers and motherhood while also sheltering participants with their use of selective and specific content.

On December 15, 2013, dancewacko5 posted a call for a Breastfeeding Selfie Photo Challenge:

Recently a friend of mine posted a selfie of her breastfeeding her twins. It was a neat angle from above. I thought it might be fun to take one, but I'm sort of boobie shy. Hers had some nip showing. I don't want to be inappropriate. So here's my challenge: CAN YOU TAKE A MODEST, TASTEFUL BREASTFEEDING SELFIE? Post your pics! ("Breastfeeding Selfie," 2013, para. 1)

By December 18, 2013, the date of the last posting, the call had received 42 responses, 36 of which included selfies. All contributors identified themselves as breastfeeding mothers, and all but three of the posted selfies appear to have been taken by the mothers themselves. Interestingly, those who did not include selfies in their responses nevertheless referenced their private breastfeeding-selfie practice. For example, mandak78 observes that she is uncomfortable posting photos online but has "tons of selfies on [her] phone though."

The call from dancewacko5 is worth considering in greater detail. In it, she gestures simultaneously toward the creative potential of the breastfeeding selfie—"a neat angle"—and to the moral imperatives inherent in normative constructions of femininity: Not wanting to seem "inappropriate," she asks for "modest" and "tasteful" images that show no hint of a nipple. But she also situates the challenge within a pedagogical, community-building context, asking others to post images that—as a group—might allow her to overcome her own shyness within the contours of normative, morally sound, proper maternal femininity. Correspondingly, the selfies in this collection appear to conform to the discourses of normative maternal femininity introduced by the original poster. As such, they offer no direct challenge to the dictates of idealized motherhood or to the conventions of the breastfeeding selfie. However, we assert that these selfies, by positioning the camera lens at a different angle to the female body (and to the breasts in particular) than conventional non-breastfeeding selfies, offer a subtle challenge to patriarchal discourses of sexualized femininity and the visual representations that accompany such discourses. As such, while

this collection of selfies may not overtly subvert dominant discourses, they nevertheless serve to complicate understandings of motherhood, feminine embodiment, and visual display.

As a whole, this collection of selfies and their commentary reflect the concerns and attitudes of normatively privileged social groups, demonstrative of the larger flavor of BabyCenter, a networked public that “configure[s] the environment in a way that shapes participants’ engagement” (boyd, 2011, p. 39). For instance, the majority of BabyCenter’s fixed and advertising images portray white, heterosexual couples and white babies. Additionally, the site’s “2014 Best Overall Baby and Toddler Products” guide (2014)—amassed by “real moms”—features high-end products priced at or above \$300. These “real moms” both shape and are shaped by the larger BabyCenter structure; the architecture of this networked public influences who participates in and feels a part of the community.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the vast majority of breastfeeding selfies posted to the selfie challenge feature white mothers and children and reference cisgender, heterosexual family structures. While most images do not include the full body, the bodies that are shown appear to align with standard body ideals; for example, there are no visibly fat bodies included. Finally, the commentary reflects conventional assessments of maternal breastfeeding. As one mother comments: “I’m so proud that I nurse” (AndreaNYShorty). These selfies, then, would appear to conform to accepted maternal ideals, their public presentation offering proof of good motherhood (Blum, 1999; Stearns, 1999). Nevertheless, these selfies—and their accompanying commentary—offer a much more complex reading of the space of normative motherhood than this overview might suggest. We focus on four aspects of the breastfeeding selfie in particular: the breastfeeding selfie as pedagogical performance, its subversion to patriarchal norms, its bodily resistance, and its dual subjectivity.

Pedagogically, the breastfeeding selfie offers new mothers the possibility of making material an otherwise mystifying practice; after all, breastfeeding is experienced at a bodily level but is difficult to see. Many new mothers learn about breastfeeding from manuals and guides, which offer photographs or drawings of breastfeeding best practices from a viewer’s perspective. Breastfeeding selfies, however, break these rules. Not only do they reveal a diversity of nursing experience, but they show it from the visual perspective of the nursing mother. Thus, while the BabyCenter collection includes several images that would fit the ideal of nursing, it also includes numerous images that challenge that ideal. One such selfie features a toddler reading a book while nursing (MrsSnorlax), which draws attention to the child as a cognitive, active agent. In other selfies, children’s hands clutch at and knead their mothers’ breasts (jeweledkissez; Kkt78). Yet another features a mother nursing in a side-lying position. The clothing and camera angle—a melon-colored halter dress photographed from above—recall the sultry poses of 1950s pinup girls (dinahprz). Such images contribute to breastfeeding education, but they can also destabilize the notion of nursing as a neat, contained activity. These images remind viewers that there is no single way to build a nursing relationship with a child. Rather, breasts and babies fit together in complex—and often humorous—ways.

Breastfeeding selfies also actively critique patriarchal norms. Several mothers note that their partners do not understand their compulsion to take them (prplrose33, princessjanice1990, mrs_a.mc, SerenitysMommy91). One mother comments on her partner’s discomfiture: “It’s funny he wants me to BF

our son but he doesn't want me to do it if I'm not covered in public or he doesn't like me taking pictures" (princessjanice1990). Taking the photo, then, appears to speak to an intimate relationship developed outside the bonds of heterosexual love, to an exclusive relationship between mother and child. One selfie features a baby actively holding the breast from which she is suckling. As her mother, isabellamarie_2010, writes: "she loves guarding it. if daddy puts his hand to close to the one shes using she will pick his hand up and move it to the other one." This framework both overtly challenges the patriarchal social order and simultaneously troubles conventional public representations of female breastedness, which emphasize tropes of heterosexual fantasy and desire (Nash, 2014). The decision to publish the already illicit breastfeeding selfie thus speaks to a desire to claim maternal authority, to assert the lactating self in public, even in the face of paternal resistance.

Related to this, these selfies speak to questions of female embodiment. The female body in Western society is controlled and contained, even as it is simultaneously displayed (Bordo, 1993). But lactation pushes at gestures of containment and control (Cixous, 2000). And the lactating body, too, resists normative body discourses of sexualized femininity. Breasts ache, swell, and spurt. Milk leaks. Sometimes, it erupts. The lactating body is, in many ways, a delightfully subversive body that defies containment. Notions of excess are difficult to capture in public forums, particularly those with explicit interdictions against nudity. Nevertheless, they can emerge in other ways, such as in the foregrounding, in some selfies, of the substantiveness of the lactating breast. Taken from above, these images offer a perspective from which the breast is writ large: A looming orb of maternal beneficence and generosity, the lactating breast almost overwhelms the infant (SAHM_RN). As one mother states: "I just love how a big of boob looks with a tiny little baby attached! Is that weird?" (mandak_78). Her comments are reflected in numerous selfies in which the lactating breast dominates over the delicate fragility of the infant's head. This largeness, we postulate, serves at least two purposes. At a basic level, it functions as shorthand for maternal generosity (Hird, 2007); that is, its presence confirms the mother's complete maternal investment in her child's health and well-being (rachelf94). But a resistant reading situates the immensity of the lactating breast as a site of maternal power and authority, disrupting cultural imperatives that insist on women's corporeal containment (Bordo, 1993; Millsted & Frith, 2003). In a few selfies, the breast takes on the proportions and contours of the belly (hnash1986; SAHM_RN); it is massive in its corporeal presence, such that the viewer is momentarily confused.

Finally, the centrality of the breast in this particular subset of breastfeeding selfies moves subjectivity—and with it, agency—from the face to the ripe, fecund breast. The presumed agency of the selfie's creator is no longer located in her facial features, the cant of her head, her makeup, her eyes, or her facial expressions, but in the act of breastfeeding itself. More evocatively still, it is located at the point at which mother and child meet: the invisible—and inappropriate—nipple that marks their embodied connection. Indeed, the invisible nipple is often the focus of the image. It is this dual agency—that embodied relationship between mother and child—that is perhaps most evocative in this group of images. Not only is it made visible through the active intervention of the child in the photo, but it also commented upon by the mothers (f3rgette, mrs_a.mc, JuneLittleLady, Inspellman, Kkt78). This dual agency, by its very nature, disrupts traditional philosophical understandings of the autonomous subject (Campo, 2010; Hausman, 2004).

This collection of selfies, although relatively conventional in style, form, and approach when compared with other breastfeeding selfies, nonetheless speaks to a more complex reading of breastfeeding subjectivity. That is, as articulations of breastfeeding subjectivity, these selfies are more nuanced than such a normative framing might suggest. The selfies demonstrate a conscious engagement with, and challenge to, traditional understandings of public and private. By posting breastfeeding selfies, participating mothers make the intimacy (and privacy) of maternal practice overtly visible and public. Given their conventionality, however, the question that remains is this: Can this form of 'gentle' resistance be understood by viewers, or does it collapse into a further reification of the maternal ideal?

Queering the Breastfeeding Selfie

A now viral breastfeeding selfie produced by Sky Boucher, author of the Tumblr "Milo & Eloise," stands in stark contrast to the BabyCenter images. Posted on March 19, 2014, "Tea for Two" (Figure 1) includes Boucher's bare breasts and abdomen flanked by her twins, bare above the waist but wearing matching denim pants. The children appear to be relatively relaxed and still, despite their active feeding. What sets "Tea for Two" apart from the BabyCenter selfies—a collection admittedly shaped by the "modest" and "tasteful" imperatives of the original request—is the hypervisibility of Boucher's maternally marked body: Centered in and central to the frame are the deep etchings of stretch marks across Boucher's fat abdomen.

Almost immediately, Boucher received criticism. In response to one viewer's critique, "I don't think anyone wanted to see this" (likejustwhy), Boucher attached the following text to her selfie:

art isnt always about whats aesthetically pleasing. Sometimes you need to show people reality. This is real shit. This is what life is after partying and being a wild thin teen and reading bullshit books about werewolves. It isn't clear skin and skinny bodies and free time forever.

Its stretch marks, wrinkles, shitty baby diapers and laying in weird ass positions to keep your children happy because you love them more than your comfort or your smooth pert body. Its being overweight and having sex, wrinkly fat sweaty real shit adult parent long term relationship sex and then trying to slip in half an hour of sleep before your kid flips shit at 1am. And its poetic and awesome. Fuck your skinny smooth boring ass ideal of what life should be that you ripped out of some dumb ass teen cosmo. My life is goddamn beautiful even if my belly is a wreck. (2014a, para. 1)

The selfie and commentary clearly touched a nerve: By January 2015, Boucher's Tumblr entry had more than 17,000 notes and had spread widely across other social media platforms. Shared on "The Other Side of Mom" Facebook Community page, for example, it has generated more than 20,000 comments and 121 thousand likes ("The Other Side," 2014).

On her Tumblr, Boucher identifies as queer, feminist, cis, autistic, poor, and polyamorous. She often mentions her struggles with mental illness. She also has a history of employment in the porn

industry. Thus, she positions herself as a transgressive figure, distancing herself from traditional or idealized images of motherhood. In this context of self-identified Other, Boucher's selfie, "Tea for Two," challenges the tidy, soft-focused "modest and tasteful" breastfeeding selfies more prevalent in online spaces such as BabyCenter that may work in the service of heteronormative maternal stereotypes. Boucher's selfie politicizes breastfeeding by making public a typically private practice, but also by pushing at the boundaries of the imaginable maternal subject. In the text that accompanies the selfie, she demands that her body, despite its "wreck[ed]" belly, be recognized as a sexual body *and* a maternal body.

Yet Boucher is quick to call out commenters who sexualize the act of breastfeeding in her photo. To a note that simply read "Sexy" (sexynakedblackguy), Boucher responded by demanding that the author refrain from trying to "reclaim breasts for [his] sexual consumption as a male" (2014b). She has responded to the conundrum of a visible breast as a nonsexual object several times since "Tea for Two" went viral, exposing the misogyny inherent in the co-opting and sexualizing of her image in order to make sense of the active, maternal breast. Her insistence on the nonsexual nature of the breast while breastfeeding engages with patriarchal norms of female sexual availability, but also with norms of female beauty: Boucher points out that people are more comfortable insulting her and "misgender[ing]" her as a "cisgendered man" than in accepting and making space for an ugly, visible female body (2014b, para. 1).

Moreover, by referring to her selfie as "art," Boucher rejects the accusation that selfies are inherently narcissistic and tasteless. Doing so forces the image into a different category for interpretation and encourages viewers to reconsider what a selfie can accomplish as an aesthetic practice. Arguing that her selfie is valuable because it demonstrates a real body scarred by childbearing, Boucher links the grotesque with the authentic as beauty, in the process contributing to what Amy Dobson, in a study about young women's grotesque self-representation on MySpace, referred to as the "demystification of the feminine" (2010, p. 28). The grotesque body in Boucher's image is an "open, protruding, extended, secreting body" (Russo, 1997, p. 325); indeed, as the milk flows from her maternal body into those of her two children, it is borderless. Boucher actively manages this grotesque. For example, she admits to photoshopping "Tea for Two" to highlight the stretch marks on her abdomen to make them more visible (2014d). Her body not only fills up the space of the selfie but also claims a space online (Tumblr) and is active through the creation of the selfie itself; that is, through the physical work of taking a selfie while tandem breastfeeding.

Furthermore, Boucher expands her corporeal boundaries by putting forward her own textual interpretation of her selfie. In so doing, she reappropriates the power of the viewer/voyeur in defining the maternal subject. In response to a commenter who argued that Boucher's selfie did not qualify as art because it, together with having children and breastfeeding, did not demonstrate artistic skill (bettyxo), Boucher defended herself by both identifying as an artist and arguing that art defies stable categorization (2014e). She concluded: "Anyway, you try tandem breastfeeding two mobile children and operate a professional quality dslr and tell me its not a skill" (2014e, para. 1). Thus, the image, its text, and Boucher's ongoing engagement with commenters reproduce a discourse of maternal self-sacrifice while simultaneously destabilizing the normative frameworks that shape women as mothers.

After posting this selfie—and in response to continuing critiques of her maternal practices—Boucher posted other breastfeeding selfies, each pushing further at the boundaries of normative motherhood. On May 2, 2014, Boucher responded to one critic—a reader who challenged her choice to breast-feed children who are “old enough to eat toast”—by posting a selfie in which she is facing the camera while breastfeeding her twins, her face and middle fingers clearly stating: “Fuck You” (2014f). This selfie is meant to engage a much wider audience as a political act of defiance and community rallying. The maternal performance here is overt, as is the subversive maternal subject. These selfies function as forms of social commentary, insisting on women’s rights to mother on their own terms.

In an article for the online magazine xoJane.com, Boucher explained why she felt compelled to create and then share “Tea for Two”:

I wanted people who were expecting or had already delivered, who didn’t know what to expect or hated their bodies, to see what it really looked like—but in an intimate way that showed maternal love, not just a “Here is my body, I hate it, it’s gross, I’m working on it.” I wanted them to see it in action, and I wanted it to be realistic. (2014c, para. 6)

The purposeful staging of Boucher’s body in the selfie, her use of Photoshop to enhance her stretch marks, and her inclusion of her children in the photo are carefully managed in order to produce a particular interpretive framework. This constructed image of the maternal self uses visual tropes of the good mother figure to politicize body diversity, making maternal sacrifice the backdrop for larger issues.

Interestingly, Boucher admits to experiencing social anxiety that prevents her from participating in many everyday offline activities (2014g). Her Tumblr thus exemplifies the potential for socially mediated publicness to heighten and extend one’s public engagement in ways that may, for some, be otherwise impossible in unmediated environments (Baym & boyd, 2012). Boucher’s Tumblr has become her platform for feminist commentary on, among others, queer parenting, breastfeeding, gender, and poverty, topics that she acknowledges she would find impossible to engage with publicly offline.

This is not to suggest that online environments necessarily allow individuals to escape social anxiety. Quite the contrary. Online, Boucher has had to juggle the complexities and inconsistencies of socially mediated publicness with the pros and cons that come with her microcelebrity. While the quasi-public nature of the BabyCenter forum appears to have insulated those mothers from critique, the rough-and-tumble Tumblr environment has forced Boucher not only to police the use of her images by role-play bloggers but also to respond to readers who offer negative commentary on her body, her parenting, and her mental health.

Boucher responded in three main ways: by producing ever more images of breastfeeding and her postpartum belly, by calling out the sexist and body-shaming followers who respond to her selfies, and by becoming increasingly vocal in her support for breastfeeding mothers more generally. Clearly, Boucher possesses the skills necessary for managing her visibility within networked publics (Baym & boyd, 2012). While her original “Tea for Two” selfie received a higher level of online visibility than she had originally intended or even expected (2014c), Boucher’s persistent and consistent tone, which reflects a level of

sophistication in relation to the shifting parameters of socially mediated publicness, has added a richness to the context around her best-known selfie. Sadly, in February 2015, after 18 months of producing selfies, engaging in critical commentary, and responding to both voyeurs and critics, Boucher shut down her Tumblr site.

Erasures

While the selfies we have explored offer intriguing insights into the nature of maternal identity and lactational subjectivity, we must also consider the silences and erasures, particularly in relation to questions of race and gender identity, in which this new culture participates. These erasures ask us to consider the extent to which the selfie—as genre—relies on the privileged position of the Western autonomous subject, and the extent to which the public spaces claimed by those who take breastfeeding selfies are already so deeply embedded in histories of imperialism and colonialism that they profoundly limit the possibilities for public performances of resistance. We might recall the intense critique of feminists of color in relation to SlutWalk (Crunktastic, 2011; Peterson, 2011): Is reclamation possible for those who already exist on the margins of a profoundly racist society? It may also be that such communities have not been as accessible to the public at large. The *raison d'être* of the Facebook page “Black Women Do Breastfeed,” founded in 2010, would appear to bear this out: It is dedicated to “making the community of black breastfeeding moms visible” (“Black Women Do,” 2014, para. 1). If, as we suggest, BabyCenter is a networked public that shapes participation in ways that are exclusive to predominantly White, heterosexual, middle-class mothers, then it is not surprising that there was little diversity in the response to the call on BabyCenter for breastfeeding selfies and that public sites for Black breastfeeding mothers exist outside of its parameters.

Moreover, because breastfeeding selfies celebrate and, in some cases, venerate the normatively feminine, they contribute to the silencing of more complex gender identities that may operate on the margins of—or completely outside—these conventional frameworks. While we note here the two-year struggle faced by Trevor MacDonald, a transgender breastfeeding man who applied to be a coach with La Leche League Canada (MacDonald, 2012; Tapper, 2014), this issue concerns all breastfeeding parents — including cisgender and queer Sky Boucher—who operate outside the narrow confines of normative femininity.

Conclusion

Situated between lactivism and narcissism, the breastfeeding selfie must, as the selfies we have explored suggest, be understood as both a personal gesture and a political act. The two tangle into one another in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. However productive the breastfeeding selfie might be as a space for self-realization and lactivist engagement, it is an inherently ambiguous space. The corpus of images we surveyed on BabyCenter, while intriguing, nevertheless appears to reinforce—rather than undermine—the status quo. In the absence of accompanying textual commentary, the breastfeeding selfie, with its allusions to the *Madonna Lactans*, can easily reinscribe cisgender and heteronormative frameworks. Tumblrs such as “Milo & Eloise” actively challenge this status quo, thus providing important

counter-voices, but this resistance is wholly dependent on Boucher's explicitly political self-positioning and her ability to manage the vitriol directed toward her.

Within networked publics, the channels of access and the imagined audience (though ultimately unknowable) shape participation in those spaces. On BabyCenter.com, self-regulation, anonymity based on pseudonymous profiles, and a perception of safe space all frame the way that content emerged in the "Breastfeeding Selfie Photo Challenge." By contrast, Boucher's selfie relies on visibility, personal identification, and a direct response to a hostile public, gaining ground in what boyd refers to as an "attention economy" (2011, p. 53). Both the BabyCenter participants and Boucher are strategic in their participation as breastfeeding parents within networked publics, but in different ways. The BabyCenter participants are strategically modest, and Boucher is strategically inflammatory. The value of our comparison lies in what these two approaches reveal about maternal agency, lactational regulation, and the selfie. Ultimately, these images and their commentaries make clear that maternal performance is a carefully negotiated act and that mothers are fully aware of the power of the image to create reality and shape truth.

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