Sexual Objectification of the Female Body and Breastfeeding

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Introduction
In Western society the female body is hypersexualized, leading it to be sexually objectified. The sexual objectification of the female body affects a woman’s decision to breastfeed her child.
For this research we set out to establish a relationship between the sexualized body image of women in Western society with the reluctance women have to breastfeed and discuss the health issues caused by a lack of breastfeeding. During our research we found that in addition to body objectification, women faced many other obstacles when considering breastfeeding.

Methods
To assess the relationship between the sexual objectification of the female body and the reluctance to breastfeed, we reviewed literature from various scholarly sources using the databases JSTOR, Wiley Online and Elsevier. In addition to peer-reviewed articles we also reviewed a media text such as a documentary about the sexualization of breasts in Western society. We used the synthesized reviewed literature and notes from the documentary to form an overview of the challenges breastfeeding mothers face.

References

Conclusion
Sexual objectification makes women more reluctant to breastfeed in public, therefore reducing the frequency of feeding (Documentary 2004, Johnston-Robledo et al. 2007). While the sexual objectification of the female body hinders some mothers from breastfeeding their children, it is not the only reason why mothers are hesitant to breastfeed. Education and social support play a large role in a woman’s decision to initiate breastfeeding and its duration (Clifford and McIntyre 2008).
During our research we found women are often given misinformation by health professionals regarding breastfeeding because most medical professionals are not informed or trained about breastfeeding or supporting mothers (Clifford and McIntyre 2008). Women are more likely to stop breastfeeding if they do not receive support from their healthcare provider and/or family (Vogel et al. 1999).

Recommendations
It is important to recognize that breastfeeding is not just a somatic activity, it is a conscious, ethical, moral, and social decision (Shaw 2004). The sexual objectification of the female body in Western society is so pervasive that it would be difficult to change. Social programs can be used to combat the challenges women face when breastfeeding, including sexual objectification. We would recommend providing mothers and health professionals education about the benefits and techniques of breastfeeding. We also suggest additional access and more referrals to peer counseling for women and their families. To help create successful social programs we recommend further research of the institutions that influence a woman’s decision to breastfeed.

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