Double Bind Tying Breastfeeding Women to a Liminal Position

-Discourses about Public Breastfeeding in the Swedish Media Debate

1980-2016

International Breastfeeding Symbol (Daigle 2006)

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Abstract

This thesis investigates cultural associations and values connected to women in Swedish society, with regard to action space, autonomy and social position. This is done through a discourse analysis of the media debate about public breastfeeding between the years 1980-2016, especially putting focus on the female body, motherhood, and women's access to public space. Main theories are Sara Ahmed’s various works on feelings and public comfort, as well as theories about taboo, mainly *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas. In line with early feminist anthropology on women’s subordinated position, this study finds liminality between opposing binaries to be important for the discourse, placing breastfeeding women in a position of taboo and inconvenience. In the discourses I studied, the two most important binaries are the nature-culture dichotomy, and the separation between private and public space. The discourses concerning public breastfeeding are also connected to notions of Swedish Exceptionalism and gender equality, mostly in contrast to beliefs about prudish influences from the U.S. In the thesis is discussed how the media debate about public breastfeeding seems to have intensified from the 1990s onwards, which correlates with increased neoliberalization of the Swedish welfare system, causing changes in women’s life circumstances. In the concluding chapter is brought forth how public breastfeeding is a focal point for several contradictory expectations on breastfeeding women, placing them in a double bind and making women responsible for everyone else’s comfort. It is also illuminated how the binary oppositions mainly contribute to disadvantaging categorizations of women, as well as how neoliberal reforms seem to have a damaging effect on gender equality in Sweden.

**Keywords:** Public Breastfeeding, Gender Equality, Swedishness, Neoliberalization, Taboo, Female Bodies, Binary Oppositions, Inappropriate Women, Prudishness.
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1. Introduction

"I have followed the debate about breastfeeding in public spaces and I feel both sad and upset about the way people connect everything about uncovered body parts with something inappropriate and dangerous. When my six months old son is hungry and wants food, I don’t have time nor the conscience to stress around town to find a secluded place to be able to breastfeed. No, it happens in the place I’m at. I think breastfeeding should be seen as something positive and associated with the little life, who is completely helpless and can only get all the needed nutrition through its mother. Beauty pageants with girls in bikinis on TV are supposedly all right, but signs in cafés about forbidding breastfeeding are increasing and many want us who breastfeed to step aside, because it is considered offensive to give your child food in public space. I don’t know how those found disturbing are breastfeeding, but when I breastfeed, just an insignificant part of my breast is visible. I will continue to breastfeed in public and wish to see more breastfeeding mothers in town in the future. Breastfeeding is natural since the beginning, but now some people are of another opinion. Don’t let their fixation with breastfeeding as if it were only a naked breast, stop us from giving our children this complete intimacy and their necessary meal. It is also a way to show our love for our children. Breastfeeding mother (Örebro)."

This letter from a reader could be read in Swedish local newspaper Nerkes Allehanda on October 26, year 2000. I found it in a media archive during fieldwork, but it summarizes many of the initial thoughts that led me into this field in the first place. Sweden is often described as one of the most gender equal countries in the world, including both gender neutrality to the law and explicit political work targeting women’s empowerment. Still there seems to be a paradox concerning the female body, as pointed out in the letter above: uncovered body parts in the context of breastfeeding is seen as inappropriate, when simultaneously television is full of exposed women for the purpose of entertainment or seduction.

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1 "Jag har följt debatten om amning på offentlig plats och blir både ledsen och upprörd över folks sätt att förknippa allt som har med bara kroppsdelar att göra som något olämpligt och farligt. När min son på sex månader blir hungrig och vill ha mat har jag inte tid eller samvete till att jaga runt på stan efter en plats i skymundan för att kunna amma, utan det sker på platsen jag befinner mig på. Jag tycker att amning borde ses som något positivt och förknippas med det lilla livet som är helt hjälplöst och endast kan få all behövd näring genom sin mamma. Skönhetstävlingar med tjejer i bikini i teve är tydligen helt okej, men skyltar om förbjuden amning på cafés runt om ökar och många vill att vi som ammar ska gå undan, då det anses stötande att på offentlig plats ge sitt barn mat. Jag vet inte hur de ammar som ni retar er på, men när jag ammar så är det en obetydlig del av mitt bröst som syns. Jag kommer att fortsätta amma offentligt och önskar se fler ammande kvinnor på stan i fortsättningen. Amning är naturligt sen begynnelsen, men nu finns det några som är av en annan uppfattning. Lät inte deras fixerade tankar på amningen som endast ett naket bröst stoppa oss från att ge våra barn denna totala närhet och deras nödvändiga måltid. Det är ju även ett sätt att visa vår kärlek till våra barn Ammande mamman (Örebro)"

2 In the theory chapter, I will explain what is meant by women’s bodies.
Media researcher Anja Hirdman writes that:

"Throughout history, ideas about women’s bodies have either challenged or confirmed power relations between the sexes. It is around women’s bodies, both physically and symbolically, that questions about democracy, freedom and oppression, take place and are inscribed. It is a body that should either be covered, exposed or constantly displayed, and who's breasts and body hair, depending on context, can have political meaning. It is also a body that is made a symbol of everything from abstract ideas like justice, law, nationalism, to picture quality and vacation experiences. In a paradoxical way, the feminine body is completely determined by its corporeality (form, looks, display) simultaneously as it is ascribed meaning way beyond its own materiality." (Hirdman 2015: 57). [My translation]

What makes breastfeeding an interesting case in the matter of the role of the female body in society, is that the paradox between covering and exposing, also is combined with highly gendered expectations about maternity and women’s attentive care for children. Historically, this has been used as arguments for excluding women from citizenship and the labor market, and hence political power (Ortner 1974: 75). In Sweden, that is no longer the case and official equality has been achieved through highly conscious and targeted social reforms, aiming to get women into paid employment, no matter marital status or motherhood (Berggren 2006: 67). Even when the idea of working and equal women was established, and up until today, women are forced to balance their citizenship and motherhood in a social appropriate mix (Elvin-Nowak 2001). Also in Sweden, where reforms concerning day care and paternity leave have eased that balance act, it still seems to be a sensitive topic.

In her dissertation called "Breastfeeding and Existence" [Amning och existens], Lina Palmér writes that:

"Reflections about breastfeeding as a corporeal relationship and what that means, raise thoughts about breastfeeding as societal and public phenomenon. Though breastfeeding is connected with health, from a societal perspective among the Swedish public, there are diverse views on breastfeeding. On and off, debates are sparked about breastfeeding in public spaces and breastfeeding of older children. It seems as if breastfeeding is affecting many people, and many have personal opinions about breastfeeding that are given much room in the public debates. Since research on the public view on breastfeeding is limited, it is interesting to reflect on. What is it that makes breastfeeding spark so strong emotions in people in general?" (Palmér 2015: 54) [My translation].
Public breastfeeding seems to be a question that affects many; diverse and passionate voices can be found on the topic. As seen in the reader’s letter in the beginning, the question concerns a range of topics, like nudity, motherhood, appropriate manners, beauty, rights and prohibitions, as well as distinctions between private and public, and nature and culture. In that sense, public breastfeeding can be seen as a focal point, where several discourses come together, and become disclosed and renegotiated. I will use that focal point as a route into underlying understandings of the cultural views on the female body, motherhood and women’s access to public spaces in contemporary Sweden.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to illuminate what cultural associations and values the category women are connected to in Sweden, and how this effects their action space, autonomy and social position. This is done through a discourse analysis of the media debate about public breastfeeding in Sweden, between the years 1980-2016. Special focus will be put on the female body, motherhood, and women's access to public space.

In the practice of breastfeeding, the social organization of gender, parenting, bodies and space intersect. This makes breastfeeding a question of anthropological interest, since it renders visible important aspects of the social structure and what role gender plays in contemporary Swedish society. The study of this debate will also examine how access to public space, objectification of bodies, and norms about good parenting are gendered and what effect this has on power relations. Further, this study sets out to depict and give an understanding of the prevailing morals regarding motherhood and the control of the female body in contemporary Sweden.

One aspect that I focus on is the reproduction of gendered inequality. Sweden is formally considered one of the most equal countries in the world. Still social research keeps highlighting persisting cultural patterns that are limiting women’s access to power and integrity (cf. Martinsson et al. 2016). Understanding how these cultural behaviors are reproduced is an important step towards changing them. I set out to make visible the historical and cultural situatedness of binaries and other concepts that are part of how gender is understood. I am also interested in the emergence of new cultural patterns. Culture is never static, and it is impossible to understand a specific part of
culture in isolation from the whole. Therefore, I look at the debate about public breastfeeding, in relation to some political and social changes within the same time frame as my study.

1.3. Research questions

In order to conduct this study, I have had the following research questions to guide my work:

a) What are the discourses about public breastfeeding in Swedish media?
b) What cultural meaning is breastfeeding assigned?
c) What moral values concerning motherhood and female bodies are articulated in the debate about public breastfeeding and how are they connected to other social factors?
d) How can the cultural position of the category women be understood, according to the discourse(s) about public breastfeeding and how does that position affect material and symbolic relations of power?

The following section will describe how the study was conducted, as well as methodological considerations.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Anthropology at Home

This thesis is situated in the paradigm in anthropology, which since the 1980s increasingly has reoriented research away from distant countries or deviant subcultures and increasingly focused on Western societies and mainstream culture (Aull Davies 2007: 40). The last decades the discipline’s emphasis on locally situated, long term fieldwork, has also been complemented with approaches to globalization, mobility and fluidity (Robben 2012: 368). In line with this, this thesis is not based on fieldwork in the traditional sense, but a multi-sited investigation, mainly using media as my source of material. Multi-sited fieldwork is a method that allows the ethnographer to investigate topics that are not bound to particular places, seasons, communities or people (ibid. 371).

My thesis concerns Sweden, which is my nation of origin, which in many regards situated me as ”at home” during fieldwork. To be sure, I never had any problem with fitting in during fieldwork. Possibly it has been harder for me to detect cultural patterns specific for Sweden, since they
constitute my own habitus. Like Aull Davies points out, though, nationality is not the only aspect of belonging in the field (Aull Davies 2007: 42). I am neither medically trained, nor do I have personal experiences of breastfeeding or being a parent. A sensitive subject as it seems to be, I could enter the field fairly unbiased when it comes to own opinions and emotions connected to breastfeeding. With that said I am not claiming neutrality (Aull Davies 2007: 53). As an ethnographer I have taken part in creating the object of study (ibid. 15). Like in any study, my material and analysis are only partial (ibid. 256).

In 1995 George Marcus wrote the article *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography*, stressing the fluent boundaries of culture and how to approach them in a more flexible way. One method Marcus suggests is to ”Follow the Field”; to be guided by the content rather than the geography or locality of the field. This is a method I have applied to my fieldwork, mainly using the modes of following the plot, and following the conflict (Marcus 1995: 109-110). Following the plot refers to talk of, or writing about, breastfeeding in public, and since this plot is most often framed as a dispute about its appropriateness, it relates to the mode of following the conflict. I have also followed the people. My fieldwork can be separated into two main parts: the collection of media material and interviewing. I chose people to interview by reading about them in media or through other informants.

1.4.2. Media

This thesis is mainly an analysis of material derived from Swedish printed and digital media. That media of different kinds have a profound effect on culture and society is something that anthropologists have acknowledge for a long time, not the least regarding the rapid increase in social media use all over the world (Helle-Valle 2015). Norwegian anthropologist Jo Helle-Valle argues that anthropological knowledge is increasingly demanded within media studies and that anthropologists can embrace this field of study, without calling themselves ”media-anthropologists” (ibid. 59). What is interesting is not the media itself, but the purpose it fulfills, what is called ”non-media-centric media studies” (ibid).3 Helle-Valle emphasizes that traditional massmedia is still as relevant, even after the introduction of socialmedia. TV, newspapers, radio, books and magazines still have a huge impact on our everyday sociality, and to study people’s lives should include the investigation of such media. Also, traditional mass media is increasingly interacting with its

3 Non-media-centric media studies is a concept developed by David Morley (2009).
audience, giving them the opportunity to leave comments etc., which makes the divide between media producer and consumer less distinct (ibid. 73).

Media researcher Anja Hirdman writes that a defining character of modern mass media is that it constructs different audiences through the adaption of text to the intended receiver (Hirdman 2001: 12, 47). A description of my material is about to follow, but here I want to note that the intended audiences for the articles I have collected are very diverse. Most of the articles are from newspapers, both with local and national scope. These newspapers have a wide ranged audience concerning gender, age and socioeconomic situation. The material used also consists of magazines, with much clearer target groups: women’s fashion magazines, parenting magazines, medical magazines and online news where anyone can publish debate articles. Also, in the more traditional media, voices of the audience are frequently published, through online commentary and surveys, published letters from readers and pages open for debate articles. In this way my material, to a high degree, reflects what Helle-Valle (2015) writes about increasing interaction between media producer and consumer.

In line with Hirdman, I consider media to both represent cultural ideas about the reality, as well as taking part in the construction of that reality, as producers of meaning (Hirdman 2001: 14). Through the use of media, I have been able to collect narratives from all over Sweden within a time range from the 1700s to 2016. The media material consists of what sociologist Christine Hine calls ”found data” (Hine 2015: 159). One problematic aspect with working with found data, is that the material is always mediated through someone else (ibid. 161), in my case journalists and editors who have produced the articles, interviews and reportages. One of the benefits with the method is, according to Hine, that ”ethnographic treatment of found data can permit a focus on what common forms of expression and structures of meaning are found within a population /…/.” (ibid. 162), which is why it is a good compliment for the method I use to analyze my material, namely discourse analysis.

1.4.3. Discourse

The fact that language is an important component in culture production is a dominant perspective within anthropology and other social sciences. Language is an instrument used to express cultural beliefs and practices. Patterns in language use can be analyzed in order to gain information about other aspects of culture. This is what discourse analysts are occupied with (Cameron 2001: 7).
Discourse can be defined and used in different ways. The use in this thesis will cohere with the Foucauldian tradition where discourses (in plurals) are seen as not only expressions of culture, but also co-constructers of it (Cameron 2001: 15).

Foucault states this by saying that discourses not only are instruments for power, they are power (Foucault 1993 [1971]: 8). Every discourse has frames for what is intelligible and possible to say, including errors or wrongs. If a statement is not made in line with the discourse, one is not only understood as wrong, but as a monster or freak, completely incomprehensible to others (ibid. 24-25). Further, Foucault claims that statements are always done in relation to group belonging, such as nationality, social class, or affiliation with political or activist movements. Through doctrines, people and discourses are connected and distinguished (ibid. 30-31).

In line with this, Professor of Languages Deborah Cameron writes that within a community there is a finite range of things conventional or intelligible to say about a given concern, which can be phrased as a certain number of social voices available (ibid.). To conduct a discourse analysis is to look at the various ways a concern is discussed, in order to extract a network of concepts and beliefs. That network defines what we perceive as reality on that specific topic (ibid. 16). The concern I am analyzing is here the practice of breastfeeding in public space.

Critical Discourse Analysis is a specific way of dealing with discourse analysis, often used to analyze ideological patterns in discourses in media (Cameron 2001: 121). Discourses are formed by particular interests, embedding social arrangements in the language and thus influencing how things seem possible to describe and think about. This is not necessarily done through deliberate decisions or conspiracy, but it should be noted that dominant groups usually have disproportionately large influence over discourses, giving them the power to turn their common-sense beliefs into the generally available background beliefs and values. Cameron points out that this is especially important to acknowledge when dealing with topics like e.g. racism and sexism (ibid. 124-126). When investigating the ideological significance in a text, not only does one have to consider what is there, but one also has to regard "what is not said, what is hinted and what is presupposed as obvious."( ibid. 128).
1.4.4. Material

Two large old buildings have been of importance to my research: the Carolina Library in Uppsala and the National Library in Stockholm. Both these libraries are entitled to copies of everything printed in Sweden, and the archive of the National Library goes as far back as year 1661. My field work started out with introductory meetings with librarians at the two institutes to learn the mysteries of finding archived materials from the past.

Articles from newspapers and magazines have been archived in different systems over the years. The newest, ranging back about 20 years, are easily accessed through the online catalog Mediearkivet, where digital copies of the articles are available to search for and read. Articles from before the range of Mediearkivet can be found in the catalog Artikelsök, which started in year 1979. Artikelsök is an online search program, with some articles available to read and save digitally. Newspaper articles that are not digitalized must be retrieved in the archive of microfilms in Carolina or the National Library. The material for this study consists of in total 340 articles, about 300 comes from Mediearkivet and the rest from Artikelsök. All articles have been selected from search results found through the search words:

"offentlig amning" ["public breastfeeding"]
"amning" ["breastfeeding" (noun)]
"amma", ["breastfeeding" (verb)]
[My translations].

To do a systematic analysis, one needs to look for repetition of patterns in different instances and on different occasions. Isolated examples cannot explain how certain views of reality are naturalized (Cameron, 2001, 129). During fieldwork I read articles from as far back as the 1700s. But even though there are some articles related to the topic before 1980s, I will not include them in my analysis, because they are too few and scattered over time to form the foundation of a reliable analysis. Because of this I have chosen to focus my thesis on an analysis of articles about breastfeeding in public from the years 1980 to 2016. With this time span of 36 years, I will also be able to study social changes, that will be reflected in and caused by the discourses (ibid. 137).

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4 Found in the search system tidningar.kb.se.
After the collecting of articles, the analytical process started with extensive organizing of the material. First, I summarized each article or comment and arranged them into a chronological timeline. In that way it was easier to get an overview when I moved on to search for patterns of concepts, statements and specific words. That lead to again splitting up the timeline and rearranging the articles into the most recurring general themes, which were also divided into additional sub themes. We can look at this letter from a reader published in newspaper Göteborgs-Posten (2013-10-17) for an example of how the articles were categorized with the help of a color scheme:

"It is possible to breastfeed and not be provocative. Amningshjälpen experience the society to be more hostile towards breastfeeding (from an article in Göteborgs-Posten about public breastfeeding 2013-10-10). I myself, am convinced that the hostile attitude neither has to do with the breastfeeding in itself nor that children are unwelcome. [text colored black]

I think it is about that some people have a hard time accepting and showing consideration for a common opinion that naked breasts are private parts of the body, just like the bum and genitals. Maybe nothing you want to lay eyes on when you have coffee or eat your lunch. [text colored red]

I am positive to breastfeeding, have myself breastfed all three children of mine.

I tried to do it discreetly when I was in town. Both for my own sake and for other’s. It was easy to put a scarf over my shoulder or to wear comfortable shirts. It worked well and there were never any stupid comments or angry looks. This so-called breastfeeding-hostility in society is probably not about lack of neither gender equality nor egalitarianism. [text colored green]

I think that it is about some people (in this case breastfeeding women) who feel the need to be seen and heard and use breastfeeding and the baby as tools to get attention. [text colored yellow]

To accept and respect that we think differently, is the responsibility of every human, as well as to show consideration of everyone’s comfort in public space. Then no stickers or special cafés would be needed. [text colored green]

Sonja Karlsson”

This example shows how different themes can be found within one article, and how I have color coded them for my analysis: red for statements about connections to sexuality, green for statements about showing consideration to others in public space by being discrete, and yellow for beliefs about attention seeking. These three topics are all elaborated on in chapter 4. But for example the first statements in the beginning of the letter is part of the discussion of whether the intolerance
towards public breastfeeding has increased, which I write about in chapter 3. This shows that there can be multiple social voices simultaneously in the articles. The main discourses are these:

1) Breastfeeding and Swedishness (166 articles)
2) Notions of private and public space (114 articles)
3) Notions about nature and culture (45 articles)

Some of the articles that touch upon several topics have been counted for in both categories, and other articles have not really fitted into any of these specific topics and are therefore not represented in the numbers above. I want to stress that I am not doing a quantitative study and that these numbers should be seen as approximate, since I have not drawn strict lines between the categories.

Each of these topics have an analytical chapter to be discussed and further analyzed, followed by a joint conclusion. I also have a forth analytical chapter about Breastfeeding and Social Change. The theme of this chapter is not as clearly based on the public discourses aired in media, but is rather an analysis made in dialog between social voices about changing morals since the 1990s and literature concerning social changes relating to that period.

1.4.5. Interviews
As mentioned above I also applied the mode of following the people during fieldwork. When going through my media material, the most frequently appearing stakeholder was the NGO *Amningshjälpen* [The Breastfeeding Help], who's members counsel breastfeeding mothers on a voluntary basis. I contacted some of their local groups to ask for focus groups on the topic. The request resulted in two focus groups in two different medium sized Swedish towns. The first one was in one of the informant’s home. Due to some last-minute cancellations by some of the members, there were only two people there, but we had a long and interesting discussion over dinner. The other focus group was with another local group of *Amningshjälpen*. We met at a café and there were two members of Amningshjälpen, as well as the mother of one of them. On both occasions the informants also brought their children, varying in the ages of approximately 0-6 years. In one of the focus groups Anouk Jolin participated. She has worked as a project leader for *Amningshjälpen* breastfeeding courses and often speaks up in media on behalf of the organization.

The number of people engaged in organized breastfeeding activities and information in Sweden, is not very high. Through a combination of following people who occurred in media and people
mentioned in interviews, I conducted three individual interviews. They were all with people who were professionally engaged in breastfeeding in different ways. I interviewed Elisabeth Kylberg, the coordinator of the Uppsala Amningshjälpen group, who was one of the founders of the organization back in the 70’s and who is also an Associate Professor of Public Health Science, at the College in Skövde and has done research on breastfeeding in Sweden.

Another person that appeared in the material was nutritionist Åsa Brugård Konde, who is the Head of the National Committee for Breastfeeding. I was able to get an interview with her at her office at the National Food Administration in Uppsala. In one of the interviews, I was suggested to contact Eva-Lotta Funkquist who is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Women's and Children's Health at Uppsala University, and who educates midwives and children’s nurses in breastfeeding. She agreed to do an interview at her office at the Uppsala University Hospital.

Through the interviews different angles of the topic were covered: personal, activist, academic, clinical, and political. All of the informants shared both personal and professional perspectives on the topic. Not only did they make time to meet me and share their thoughts, but they were very generous when it came to materials like books, brochures and magazines, that they gave me or let me lend. Clearly, they all have a passion for breastfeeding, but also provided varying perspectives on the topic. All the interviews were semi structured, and I gave the informants the possibility to, to a large extent, wheel the interview in the direction they wanted (Aull Davies 2008: 106). The interviews lasted from 40 minutes up to almost 3 hours, including small talk and coffee or food. With consent from the informants, I recorded the interviews and later transcribed them. Both interviews and the media material are originally in Swedish, and all quotes presented in this thesis are translated into English by me. The original text of the articles can be found in footnotes.

1.5. Disposition

In chapter 1 you have been provided with information about the topic and purpose of the thesis, as well as what material is the foundation for the analysis. In chapter 2 a brief overview of relevant theories and analytical concepts will be given, together with some historical background to clarify the political context in Sweden, and patterns of breastfeeding. Chapter 3 is the first analytical chapter, focusing on how the debate about public breastfeeding is understood in relation to notions about Swedishness, including Swedish gender equality in particular, but also touching upon ideals
of motherhood and health. In chapter 4 expectations on women in public space is looked into deeper, showing that there are presumptions that women should be discrete, respectable and caring in public. That women, and especially breastfeeding women, sometimes are labeled inappropriate in public space, is connected to associations about the nature-culture divide, which is scrutinized in chapter 5. The last analytical chapter is chapter 6, looking at how changes in attitudes towards public breastfeeding can be connected to other social changes, focusing on the welfare cutbacks in the 1990s in Sweden. After this comes, chapter 7, which is a concluding discussion about the findings in this study.
2. Theory and Background

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented, providing some historical background and clarification on how I use certain concepts. Especially binaries of opposition are described at length. The two last subchapters present some contextualization of the Swedish political setting and breastfeeding patterns in Sweden.

2.1. Early Feminist Anthropology

In 1974 the anthropologists Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere published the book *Women, Culture and Society*, highlighting the need for theorization concerning women's lives and subordination (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974: 2-3). They pinpointed lactation as a universal factor that ties women to the home and prevents them from participation in the dangerous but more prestigious work of men (ibid. 14).

In the same book Sherry Ortner contributed with the now classic article *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?*, arguing that a universal association of women to nature and men to culture creates an omnipresent subordination of women (Ortner 1974: 73). Drawing on the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Ortner states that:

"woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, in contrast, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings.” (ibid. 75).

Also, Ortner points out lactation as a primary reason for why women are appointed to take care of infants and children, thus confining her to the home. Her association with nature is an effect of her close relationship with children, who are not yet socialized into culture, and with the domestic work often understood to convert natural raw material into cultural products, like childrearing and cooking, placing women in a liminal position between nature and culture (ibid. 78, 86).

Feminist anthropology has now moved away from these essentialist and universal approaches from the 1970s, to focus on power and social change in another way, through productivity of gender and the cultural construct of sexuality (Lamphere 2006: x). Binary dichotomies like men-women,
culture-nature, public-private, were central arguments to Rosaldo and Ortner, but are by contemporary feminist anthropologists often considered reductionist, ahistorical and Eurocentric concepts (Geller & Sockett 2006: 7). However, Geller and Sockett points out that dualisms continue to have an influence on how the surrounding world is perceived, which will also be clear throughout this thesis. Instead of rejecting the use of them altogether, the dualisms should be historically and culturally deconstructed (ibid. 6). Geller and Sockett state that some of the most enduring dichotomies of western culture are:

- man-woman
- culture-nature
- public-private
- mind-body
- gender-sex
- civilized-primitive
- active-passive

As indicated by Ortner and Rosaldo, the first three binary oppositions will be of most importance to this thesis, though they are all intertwined in the same cultural web of meaning. In this theory chapter, a theoretical and historic framework to deconstruct these concepts will be laid out, and later applied to my fieldwork material. But before scrutinizing the binaries, I will introduce Mary Douglas’ work on taboos, to illuminate why the liminality Ortner describes women to live in, is such a precarious position.

**2.2 Liminality and Taboo**

In *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas elaborates the theory that dirt is “matter out of place”, which appears as a consequence of categorizations that constitute the social order (Douglas 1984 [1966]: 4). Humans tend to make classification systems, exaggerating the difference between opposing categories, to make the inherently chaotic experience of life seem more controllable. Transgressions pose a threat to the whole system, and are therefore controlled by regulations and punishments (ibid. 4-5). This also applies to people who have liminal or unclear positions in the system, who are often seen as threatening or dangerous (ibid. 95). According to Julia Kristeva, transgressions of boundaries in the social system can be detected through the feelings of abjection that they provoke (Kristeva 1982: 5).
Douglas describes how the cultural management of the body can be seen as a symbol for the social structure of a culture. She writes that:

"The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.” (Douglas 1984 [1966]: 115)

Especially the bodily functions of digestion and procreation have a deep symbolic meaning to social relations (ibid. 125), which is interesting for the topic of my thesis, since I see breastfeeding as connected both to procreation and digestion, in some sense.

Also, social anthropologist Edmund Leach has elaborated on the theory that boundaries between categories are surrounded by taboos, so also the boundaries between the own body and the external world. Body fluids are liminal between self and not self, and are therefore included in the taboo (Leach, 1976, 35, 62). In line with this, e.g. Norwegian anthropologist H.C. Sörhaug has noticed that the preparing of food for others is associated with sexuality, since both sex and cooking can be seen as giving something of yourself to the other. Both food and sexuality, hence are regulated by rituals in all cultures. Sörhaug also writes that breastfeeding is literally to give of yourself, and the mother and baby cross each other’s bodily boundaries (Sörhaug, 1994, 67).

This theory of upholding social structure, through keeping categories separated, and avoiding transgressions and liminality, is applicable to the dichotomies man-woman, private-public and nature-culture. Keeping the understanding in mind, that taboo and danger are circumscribing liminality and transgressions of categories, we will now move on to scrutinize the fundamental dichotomies that have crystallized earlier in this chapter.

2.3. Men and Women

This dualism is crucial to the thesis and needs extended explanation. There is no academic nor feminist consensus regarding to what extent these categories are cultural or biological, or how to approach them epistemologically. The understanding of the concepts men and women in this thesis is based on queer theorist Judith Butler’s writings. She describes sex not as a static condition of the body, but a process of coercive norms, that cause ”a process of materialization that stabilizes over
time” (Butler 1993: 9). There is no pre-discursive subject that constructs gender. Instead the subject itself is created through the very doing of gender, which Butler calls performance, meaning that femininity and masculinity are enacted according to culturally acquired roles, imitations of an abstract idea without an original (Butler 2005: 77-79, 109). Crucial in the gender performance is the heterosexual matrix; that the performed gender correlates to the expected body and is engaged in heterosexual desires (Butler 1999: 68-70, 180).

Butler does not mean that everything is discursively constructed; the body is material, but the way it materializes is an effect of power (Butler 1993: 2-9). This disqualifies the division of gender and sex, often described as the cultural and the biological differences between men and women (Butler 2005: 46-47). In this thesis, sex and gender will hence be used as synonyms.

Butler will not be an explicit part of the analysis. But throughout the thesis, whenever I use the categories men and women, male and female, they should be interpreted as laid out above, as social identities performed according to cultural ideals, without any essential original as guide. I am aware of the problem that by using the categories I am reproducing a binary gender discourse, and I fully acknowledge that not all breastfeeding persons identify as women or mothers. Just like the other binaries figuring in the thesis, men and women should be read as emic terms, put under analytic scrutiny.

2.4. Nature and Culture

To think in terms of nature and culture as a dichotomy, is in modernist thinking believed to be a defining character, separating modern civilization from all other cultures, who have been described as incapable of separating the two categories from each other (Latour 1993: 99-100). Latour claims that this separation is in fact not made in modern society either; the representation of nature is always predetermined to be intertwined with the cultural beliefs about it, hence the title of his book We have never been modern (ibid. 102). Though not necessarily applied, the idea of a division between nature and culture has its roots in the anthropocentric worldview that is the very foundation for Western civilization, and connected to several power relations (Rossini 2014: 114). In the greatly hierarchal society of ancient Greece, where slaves and women were at the bottom of the social ladder, Aristotle wrote a zoological series of books where he described the belief in all organism’s internal finality, but at the same time he considered all other animals to exist for the sake
of humans (Clutton-Brock 1995: 424-426). This hierarchal way of thinking has persisted throughout European history of ideas and is still influential today (ibid. 434).

The separation of humans and non-human animals is a basic condition for the Enlightenment-humanist ideology (Rossini 2014: 114). But not all humans are guaranteed to be on the top of the chain of being. This humanist tradition is not only anthropocentric, but also essentially intertwined with sexism and racism. The male European is and always was considered the norm, and women and people of other ethnicities, are discursively constructed as ”other” to that norm (Rossini 2014: 18). Sometimes even to the extent that they were barely seen as humans at all, as were the case when European 18th century male scientists placed African men as closer to apes in the Great Chain of Being or when Aristotle categorized women as an error of nature (Schiebinger 1993: 145-147).

At the same time there is a counter discourse intrinsic in the modern thought of domination of nature. To understand the current cultural perception of nature in Sweden and other western cultures, it is helpful to go back to the industrialization in the 19th century. In the growing classes of the bourgeoisie and proletariat at that time, people did not have nature present in their everyday life (Frykman 1979: 52). The urban areas were polluted and unsanitary, characterized by poverty and misery. The proletarians were stuck in dirty, dangerous work in the factories, but the bourgeoisie families left the cities to stay in rural summerhouses if they had the opportunity. There, an associative chain around nature, summer, leisure, reproduction, privacy, and women was formed (ibid. 66). The hard conditions of peasant life, including starvation, sickness and filth, were either forgotten or disregarded, leading to a new cult around the nostalgia of peasant life, and mystification of nature (ibid. 57, 133). Frykman and Löfgren write that at this time ”the nature becomes natural”, considered authentic and untouched in contrast to the commercial, artificial urban areas (ibid. 53, 56). The view of nature as something positive and primary can also be seen in discussions where nature is described as a moral compass for desired behavior, as seen in Myra Hird’s article ”Animal Transex” (2006). This is an idea which I will elaborate on in the analysis.

In the analysis I will also use Swedish literature scholar Nina Björk’s books Sireners sång (1999) and Under det rosa täcket (1996) to theorize notions of gender and modernity, as well as ethnological studies of motherhood as a protest to modernity, by Helene Brembeck (1998) and Magnus Bergquist (1994).
2.5. Private and Public

To understand contemporary perceptions of the private and public spheres, we will go back to the time of the industrial revolution for which I use ethnologists Frykman and Löfgren’s book *Den kultiverade människan* (1979). They describe how the organizing of life in a private and a public sphere was a result of the changing conditions for agriculture during the 19th century when the farming style among peasants was turning increasingly into small businesses managed according to capitalist market values, (Frykman 1979: 27-29). This required the peasants to internalize a new time discipline, that together with demands for production and the introduction to the bourgeoisie worldview also created a specific life sphere associating work, production, stress, and the public. In contrast to that, the non-productive or reproductive leisure time was spent in the private sphere, often the home (ibid. 27, 56). This divide was prominent in the bourgeoisie culture, but it was a long and slow process to establish this among the peasantry (ibid. 168). Since the bourgeoisie women often were not part of public paid labor, they were seen as part of the private sphere. Hence a cultural cluster was formed around the private world, interconnecting the cultural view on the home, women and nature as recreational opportunities for the hard working, paid, publicly productive men (ibid. 56-66).

As mentioned in the section about taboos, it has been important to define exudations of the body as something separate from the self. Among the Swedish bourgeoisie in the Victorian Era, one even felt revulsion towards having a body at all, since that was associated with lower classes and animals (ibid. 187). The female body was particularly taboo, because it could arouse the sinful sexual desire of men, and everything connected to the body was privatized, leading to the introduction of e.g. bedrooms and bathrooms (ibid. 167). The private spaces contributed with a protected place with less etiquette and taboos, where the need to constantly control the body was less protruding (ibid. 143).

Sociologist Beverly Skeggs has written about how women are still expected to take responsibility for feelings of desire they may provoke in men and are taught to guard their respectability. Space is socially controlled in terms of sex, sexuality and race (Skeggs 1999: 216). That makes it possible to recognize who is being in or out of place based on visible appearances (ibid. 220). This will be further discussed in relation to the material in the analysis.
2.6. Gender and Space

The feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed’s works concern aspects of embodiment and space, orientation and emotions. Through her works, it is possible to combine the gendered and spatial dimensions of public breastfeeding. According to her, body and space cannot be separated, our embodiment effects how we orient ourselves to things and how we inhabit space with others. Ahmed calls this “the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling” (Ahmed, 2006, 5). I understand this to mean that places are experienced differently depending on who one is and who else is there. Ahmed gives the example that to be at home is to expand one’s body into space and becoming part of it. The most privileged body, a white and masculine body, is at home as such, regardless of location (Ahmed 2000: 53).

I want to highlight especially two of Ahmed’s arguments, having an illuminating effect on the debate about public breastfeeding. The first is how she describes how feelings can get stuck to certain bodies (Ahmed 2010a: 39), causing the mere presence of them to work as reminders of disturbing histories, which makes people attribute them as origins of bad feeling (Ahmed 2010b: 582-584). These bodies are perceived to fail the social pressure to maintain signs of getting along, and are therefore, in a case of false reasoning, believed to cause unhappiness, when really, they are revealing causes of unhappiness (ibid. 591). In the coming chapters I will come back to what feelings are stuck to female bodies and what histories they are reminders of.

The other line of argument I want to emphasize is how women are expected to adhere to conditional happiness. Ahmed writes that when someone is entering a new space; when a baby is born into a family, when someone is a guest at someone else’s house, or when one is immigrating to a new society, the newcomers are expected to adhere to the happiness of those who are already in place there; the parents, the hosts, the citizens (ibid. 578). In line with Ahmed’s theory I argue that equally, when women are gaining access to the public sphere, they are expected to prioritize the happiness and comfort of men, who historically have been more associated with the public, as was explained above. Women’s work to maintain public comfort will be further elaborated in the analysis together with Carol Gillian’s (1982) theory about how women often are guided by an Ethics of Care.
One more feminist theory about the power dynamics between men and women I would like to introduce is the five Master Suppression Techniques, identified by Norwegian social psychologist Berit Ås (2004: 79). They are:

1. making invisible
2. ridiculing
3. withholding information
4. damned if you do, damned if you don’t, also called the double bind.
5. heaping blame and putting to shame

They are used by men against women, to internalize patriarchal ideas about the lower status of women (ibid. 80). By labeling and naming these techniques, they become identifiable and more open for critique (ibid. 81). Apart from the original five techniques, Ås has later added two more: objectification and physical violence and the threat of using it (ibid. 80). As will be evident throughout the thesis, several of these Master Suppression Techniques are present in the discourses on public breastfeeding.

Many of the theorists mentioned above are writing about a Western cultural contexts, and not about Sweden per se. To compliment this general theorization, I will now provide a brief contextualization of the political context in Sweden that is of relevance for this study, as well as some background about the national breastfeeding situation.

2.7. Swedish Political Context

Historians Berggren and Trädgårdh describe Sweden as an extraordinarily modern and individualized society. This is due to the building of a strong welfare state, with the purpose of liberating individuals from dependency on fellow humans (Berggren 2006: 10). The Swedish welfare state is often mistaken for being built on collectivist values, when really the focus lies on individuality, equality and mutual independence. The idea is that the alliance between state and individual provides autonomy, seen as the only assurance of true love and equality (ibid. 51, 59). The family has a precarious position within the state-individualism, because of the intrinsic inequality and dependency on family relations, as well as the risk of loyalty to the family growing stronger than the loyalty to the nation enabling corruption and nepotism (ibid. 232). On the other hand, the family is important since it is the producer of new citizens. This was especially
highlighted at the turn of 19th and 20th century when Sweden was suffering a demographic decrease, resulting in the state’s progressing interest in the family and childcare (Berggren 2006: 229-232). The solution was called *Folkhemmet* [The People’s Home].

*Folkhemmet* was a vision about institutionalizing all basic functions of the family in the welfare state, including education, medical care, as well as other forms of institutionalized care for children and seniors. That is how the Social Democrat Party wanted to emancipate children and women from the unequal relationships of dependence within the family (ibid. 233, 235). Historian Yvonne Hirdman (1989) describes how modernity had a segregating and stratifying effect on women's status as the homes shrunk, the activities they used to perform were decreasing and the cultural and political way of thinking was increasingly dichotomizing men and women, production and reproduction, the public and the private sphere, where men were the norm and women deviators (ibid. 13-14). In order to integrate women into modernity, the focus fell onto the everyday practices in the private sphere that constitute the frames of reproduction and the gendered division of labor (ibid. 30). However, as the question was neglected by male members of the party, no major liberation of women came about (ibid. 76). Women continued to be allocated to the private sphere, which was improved by the state, but did not change the gender hierarchy (ibid. 92-97).

In the 1960s and 70s, under pressure of feminists like Eva Moberg, the social politics of Sweden was increasingly individualized to liberate women from traditional expectations of submitting themselves to the greater good of the family (Berggren 2006: 264). The reforms included individual taxation of married couples and access to day care centers (ibid. 294). The only benefit that was not individual, but instead accrued to the family as a unit, was the paid parental leave. From a gender equality perspective, this proved to be a faulty decision, since fathers made use of their parental leave in devastatingly low numbers, and even later alterations of the conditions turned out to be inefficient (ibid. 317-319).

The persistent expectation on the mother to be the one taking most responsibility for the children and household, combined with the growing expectations on women to prioritize a career within paid labor, resulted in a difficult time puzzle for many women, often resulting in decreased time spent on careers in order to have more time to fulfill the needs of the children, which has resulted in a still persisting gender segregated labor market in Sweden, where women are paid less and less trusted with high positions. The reason why Sweden score high in gender equality statistics is because
women are offered access to male dominated arenas, though they rarely have been able to exert influence over the prevailing patriarchal norms (Berggren 2006: 322-324).

Since the welfare state has been the main responsible for gender equality, through redistribution of resources and social benefits, the welfare cut backs in the neoliberalizing reforms in the 1990s, had consequences for gender relations (Mulinari 2016: 139). Except for consequences in the personal economy, it also had effect because women predominantly are employed within the public sector, which makes the state, instead of unions like in other types of businesses, the main responsible for the work for gender equality in working life (de los Reyes 2016: 29). Now Sweden is the OECD country with the most rapidly increasing social inequalities, even if from a low starting point (Mulinari 2016: 154).

The ideal of gender equality, and the fact that it is not achieved, is affecting how motherhood is constructed. In a discourse analysis of mothers’ own ideas about motherhood in Sweden, three sometimes contradicting, themes were dominating: the importance of a mother’s unrestricted accessibility to the child, that the mothers themselves need to be happy and content in order to be able to transmit those feelings to the child, and last, the expectation on mothers to take part in paid work, but simultaneously organize life according to the needs of the child and the rest of the family (Elvin-Nowak 2001: 414-418). This ambivalence between full focus on the child, and prioritization of self-realizing activities and work, is a frequent guilt-trigger for many mothers (ibid. 418, 421) creating an act of balance between two stigmatized poles: if the mother engages too much in her child, e.g. through giving up her career or hobbies, she is seen as subordinated and old-fashioned, unfit for modern femininity and gender equality. On the other hand, a mother who does not prioritize her child above her own needs and interests, is placed outside of normative femininity (ibid. 425).

2.8. Breastfeeding in Sweden

In the peasant culture in the 1800s it was mostly considered both practical and healthy to breastfeed. It was believed to have a contraceptive effect, which was considered convenient, and was therefore carried out for an extended time (Frykman 1979: 172). Breastmilk was also conceived as profitable for the children, and was used for multiple purposes, including treatment of sickness and small injuries (ibid). Since neither exposure of breasts nor body fluids were taboo in the peasant society, those aspects did not pose practical obstacles (ibid.).
In the higher classes the situation was very different. There the ability to dominate one’s inner nature and instincts was seen as important, since nature was connected to the traditional past, and incompatible with rationality and reason (Björk, 1999, 21). The transition from past to modernity was depicted as a battle against the own urges and only after winning that battle through control of one’s nature, one could be a true modern subject (ibid. 22). This left traces in the prescribed breastfeeding routines. In the 1700s, child care was increasingly seen as a matter of public concern and eventually got its own scientific discipline: pediatrics, which was mainly concerned with controlling the bodily functions of the child. In an attempt to battle infectious diseases, hygiene increasingly was considered both a matter of science and morals, and the guiding words were order, structure, cleanliness and regularity. The control was intended to improve both the physical and mental health of the population, putting an end to poverty and criminality, through disciplining people into obedience and hard work. Patience and humility was also taught, e.g. through restricting infants access to contact and attention from the parents in general, and breastfeeding in particular. Through scheduling contact between baby and mother, the child would not be spoiled (Nordgren 1998: 19-20).

In line with this, breastfeeding was a precarious activity among the Swedish bourgeoisie in the 1800s. The body was strictly tabooed and was to be concealed even for small children (ibid. 195). Breastfeeding was done only for a few months, and was kept completely private, involving only infant and mother, or sometimes wet nurses (Frykman 1979: 194). There was a health aspect to the short period of breastfeeding as well. To let the children live out their oral desires at the nipple too excessively, was believed to inhibit their sense of self-control (ibid.). To give children too much physical contact was believed to give them a taste for sensualism which could turn them into masturbators (ibid. 94). Masturbation was believed to be incomparably harmful to both body and soul. It was described to cause several diseases, deformations and cognitive problems (ibid.). The masturbator was also considered a person without discipline, indulging in the animalistic behavior sexuality was seen as, hence posing a threat to the entire civilization (ibid. 204).

That it would be better for the baby to not be spoiled with attention and physical contact has been a persistent idea in breastfeeding practices. When births were increasingly medicalized in Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s, modernist ideas about regularity and measurability were applied to breastfeeding, providing mothers with a schedule to breastfeed every fourth hour regardless of when
the baby was hungry or crying (Palmér 2015: 5). This was believed to be good for the baby’s
development of discipline as well as for the appetite and stomach (ibid.).

The scheduling provided great difficulties in producing enough milk, due to the rear nursing
occasions (Nordgren 1998: 21-22). The breastfeeding frequency was steadily decreasing between
the 1940s and the 1970s, when it reached an all-time low (ibid. 24). The old trust in authorities was
changing and mothers independently found ways to organize and learn more about how
breastfeeding could be done ”naturally” (ibid. 24-26). Eventually the breastfeeding schedule
stopped being prescribed, and together with other new routines in the delivery ward, breastfeeding
increased (Palmér 2015: 6). Between the years 1995-2004, 72% of six months old babies were
breastfed. The numbers have decreased a little since then, but were between the years 2010-2015
stable on 63% (Socialstyrelsen, 2017).

As far as I am aware, attitudes towards public breastfeeding in Swedish society has never been
subjected to academic qualitative study before. This is also suggested by Palmér (2015: 54). Similar
studies to this one has been conducted in other countries, often with overlapping outcomes. For
example geographer Kate Boyer’s article ”Affect, corporeality and the limits of belonging:
Breastfeeding in public in the contemporary UK” (2012) was the inspiration for me to use Ahmed’s
theories when analyzing my material (cf. for Canada: Spurls & Babineau 2011; for Australia:
Barlett 2002).

2.9. Chapter Summary

Feminist anthropologists like Ortner and Rosaldo (1974) suggested in the 1970s that lactation has a
profound impact on the social status of women, due to humans tendency to think in binaries. That
dichotomous thinking is universal has since then been rejected, but as will show in this thesis, it is
still very much present in Swedish culture. Therefore I have provided a historic and theoretical
overview over the binaries men-women, nature-culture and private-public. Like in any system of
categorization, transgression or liminality in the binaries provoke feelings of danger and are mostly
circumscribed by taboos. According to Mary Douglas (1984 [1966]) this is especially common in
relation to the boundaries of the body.
I have also given account to Sara Ahmed’s theoretical framework about public space and gender, which will be used as a tool to understand reactions to public breastfeeding. Further a background to the Swedish context has been provided, in regard to family politics, gender equality and ideals about motherhood, as well as information about the situation concerning breastfeeding. This will be further elaborated on in the first analytical chapter, which is about to follow now.
3. Breastfeeding and Swedishness

I will in this chapter investigate what different notions about Swedishness are articulated in, and co-
constitute, the debate about public breastfeeding. A specific understanding of gender equality is
important for the discussion, but also notions of autonomy and health, which all have implications
for mothering in general and public breastfeeding in particular. Especially de los Reyes (2016) and
Dahl (2005) will be used to analyze the national discourse on gender equality, Ahmed (2010) on
how women are expected to adhere to conditional happiness in public space, and Åsard (2016) for
the symbolic role of the United States in the discussions.

3.1. Who is Intolerant?

When local public service radio station P4 Sörmland (2016-03-18) discussed the case of a woman
who had been declined to breastfeed her baby in the local library, these two comments from
listeners could be found on the radio station’s webpage:

"In the 70s and 80s there was never anyone telling you to not breastfeed in
public, at least not in Katrineholm [the town this happened in]. Sometimes I
wonder if people are getting odd, it is the most natural way of feeding your
little child.”

"This is a discussion coming from the number one country of double
standards, the US…. The country where a breastfeeding mother (the most
natural thing in the world) is an abomination, when at the same time it is
considered completely normal to basically any grown up to be armed to the
teeth, with everything from carrying a hidden gun to owning military
weapons… Like already said, it’s a no-brainer! If the kid is hungry, feed it
for God's sake! But maybe step aside a little, not because it is ugly or
disturbing, but to give some peace to the mother and the child during the
meal.”

Like in the first comment, approximately every tenth article expresses the belief that intolerance
towards breastfeeding in public is a new phenomenon in Sweden. The second comment suggests a
place of origin: the US. This is a common opinion among journalists and commenters in my

5 "På 70o80 talet var det aldrig någon sa till att man inte fick amma på offentliga platser ,i alla fall inte i
Katrineholm,Ibland undrar jag om folk börjar bli konstiga,det är det naturligaste sättet att ge sitt lilla barn
mat."

6 "Det här är en diskussion som kommit över från dubbelmoralens land nummer ett USA... Landet där en
ammande mor (det mest naturliga i världen) är en styggelse medan det är fullt normalt att i princip vilken
vuxen som helst kan beväpna sig till tänderna med allt från att bära dold pistol till att äga militära vapen... Som sagt en ickefråga! Är barnet hungrigt amma för Guds skull! Men kanske gå åt sidan inte för att det på
något vist är fult eller störande utan för att mor och barn ska få en lugnare matstund…"
material, often referring to prudishness and American ideals as synonymous, like in this chronicle from *Aftonbladet* (2007-05-07):

"The latest trend is the big breastfeeding backlash. Sure, moms still breastfeed. But not as publicly as in 2002, when I had our daughter. /…/ They are tired of being told off or to get irritated looks. Five years ago, I saluted the nursing shirts from Boobs [a brand], that makes it easy to breastfeed discreetly. Now a nursing shirt is not enough. The big news of the year is the nursing chaperon. Really, it is more like a huge bib. When I was in Mexico, that was how they marketed it, as 'the mother bib’. We had a good laugh about the shapeless bib and the prudish Mexicans (me and my husband immediately started to speculate about a 'nursing burka’). The laughter got stuck in my throat when I realized that the chaperon is sold in Sweden under the slogan 'You should feel comfortable breastfeeding you child’. To bring forth a huge piece of cloth, wrap it around your neck and then manage to get the baby behind it does not sound comfortable. It sounds like a hassle and very much like American prudishness. /…/.”

These quotes are examples of how intolerance towards public breastfeeding is framed as something external to "the Swedish approach” to breastfeeding or even to "Swedishness” in itself. The conflict of whether or not one should be allowed to breastfeed in public is understood as an imported problem.

In one very direct way many of the articles can be said to be "imported". 60 out of the 340 articles, approximately every fifth article, are indeed about events from abroad. The United States is the most common country to refer to (35 articles) as well as other Anglo-Saxon countries like Australia, Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom (together 14 articles). They are either reports based on Anglo-Saxon news about mothers (often celebrities) being criticized for breastfeeding in public or articles about Swedes living or visiting Anglo-Saxon countries reflecting on public breastfeeding, or Americans living in Sweden, giving their perspective on breastfeeding. There are also seven articles about Denmark. Interestingly there are no articles about the other Scandinavian countries, though there is one article mentioning that Norway has a higher prevalence of breastfeeding than Sweden.

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In May 2015, two Swedish magazines (Amelia and Elle) and one newspaper (Expressen) wrote about how Australian Elle had a breastfeeding model on the cover. Of all articles published in Sweden in 2012 about public breastfeeding, two out of six concerned the U.S. For example Dagens Nyheter published an article on May 11th, 2012 under the headline ”Breastfeeding mother sparks debate in the U.S.”:

"The magazine Time’s latest cover has sparked big debates in the US. The cover depicts a 26-year-old woman, breastfeeding her soon to be four-year-old son. /…/ -It is really a picture that makes you pause. It should make people aware of an important subject. Judging from the reactions on Twitter this morning some think it is amazing, and others were disturbed by it. And that’s what we want. We want people to talk. Do I expect some people to be offended? Of course, says Rick Stengel, editor-in-chief at the Time to Washington Post.” 8, 9

One week later, the local paper Nerikes Allehanda published a chronicle about a road trip in the US, ending on a rather ironic note (2012-05-20):

"Without any thoughts about if it would be offensive to someone, I breastfed my little one. This was some years before the debate started in Sweden. Were the Americans forced to legislate a mother’s right to feed her children away from home? What would be the next step? A law where the rights for adults to eat out of the home was established? Or would the Texans go in the other direction, and prohibit breastfeeding women with children to leave their home? How absurd! Now the madness has spread to Sweden. People seriously debate if it is right or wrong to breastfeed where others can see. I mean, you must really feel safe to be able to call the police when a mother is breastfeeding in a café.” 10

Some of the above quotes make an explicit connection between American and Swedish trends in breastfeeding, however it may seem peculiar why these foreign events are categorized as having

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9 Here it is not clarified if it is the breastfeeding or the age of the child that sparks debate.

news-value in Sweden. In order to understand that, one needs to look deeper into the relationship Sweden has to American culture and what symbolic meaning the country is given.

3.2. Swedish Perspectives on American Culture

It is far from a new phenomenon that Swedish media is keen to focus on North American happenings and people (Åsard 2016a: 14). Even before the United States (hereafter the U.S.) was established as an influential superpower, Sweden and the U.S. had an established contact due to a 1600s Swedish colony in North America, an early trade agreement in the 1700s and the vast migration of Swedes to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s (ibid. 13). According to professor emeritus in North American Studies Erik Åsard, this has formed Sweden’s perspective on the U.S. to be a long relationship of hate-love (Åsard, 2016a, 15) and the intensity of that relationship can only find equivalences in the relationship Sweden has to its closest neighbors in Scandinavia (ibid. 8).

Throughout the 20th and 21st Century, the U.S. has been a dominating inspiration to Swedish media-and film industry (Björk 2016: 166). Though immensely popular and successful, American pop culture has also often been criticized for being immoral and violent or accused of being shallow and naive, posing a threat to the quality of European, traditional high culture (Agrell, 2016: 172). Also U.S.-American politics has been a matter of concern for Sweden. The wars on Vietnam and Iraq were heavily condemned in Sweden (Blanck 2016: 81). Also social conditions within the U.S. are emphasized within Sweden as negative aspects of the American culture, such as high levels of individualism, great social stratification and too liberal gun laws (Åsard 2016a: 31). Though the concept of Americanism is constantly changing, and fluctuating in popularity, Åsard points out that at the moment the U.S. tends to be used as more of a negative example in Sweden (Åsard 2016b: 280).

Åsard concludes that the constant fascination, comparison with, and attention to the U.S., can be understood as a means to create an image of the Swedish self (Åsard 2016b: 280). The preoccupation with American culture is really a search for, what is felt to be, an eschewing Swedish culture, and through focusing on what is happening in the U.S., we try to understand what is going on in Sweden (Åsard 2016a: 38). So when the U.S. is being blamed for being hypocritical and misogynistic like in the articles quoted in the beginning of the chapter, I use Åsard’s theory to suggest that the intention is to depict Sweden in the opposite way, as righteous and gender equal.
3.3. Swedish Discourses on Gender Equality

In all kinds of international rankings and lists, Sweden scores top positions when it comes to gender equality. Gender equality has been institutionalized in Sweden, as an internal part of the former social-democratic welfare system and is considered consensus to the extent that rather than being an ongoing political project, gender equality is being described as a national characteristic (de los Reyes 2016: 25). According to this discourse, to be a Swede is per definition to be gender equal, creating an idea of Swedish Exceptionalism (ibid.).

In the introduction to the anthology *Challenging the Myth of Gender Equality in Sweden* the editors point out that this discourse has some problematic aspects, e.g. what does gender equality mean and among who is it consensus? Another aspect is that this rhetoric is connected to nationalism and the notion of *us* as modern and equal, which makes others (e.g. immigrants) perceived as less developed, less modern and less gender equal (Martinsson et al. 2016: 4-5). These aspects also have implications for the discourse of public breastfeeding, which I will show in the following.

Feminist Anthropologist Ulrika Dahl has analyzed the Swedish discourse on gender equality, which she describes as upheld by the government, academia and the women’s movement, being the primary means of organizing and understanding gender in Sweden (Dahl 2005: 65). Dahl describes gender equality as a late-modern Swedish saga; simultaneously a goal, ideal and norm (ibid. 49). The discourse primarily represents gender within the heterosexual matrix, where men and women are seen as essentially different, and romantically involved with each other (ibid. 49, 66). Heterosexuality is described as *natural* but problematic, since the gender roles connected to heterosexuality are disadvantaging women (ibid. 49). The disadvantage is in the form of unfair division of domestic work, men’s violence against women and sexualization of public space (ibid. 65).

Dahl is of the opinion that due to the heterosexual, complementary understanding of gender, gender equality politics get stuck within its own logic: that men should be masculine and women feminine, otherwise the heteronormative structure will collapse (ibid, 50, 67). Instead of dealing with that

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11 Media scholar Ylva Habel describes Swedish Exceptionalism as the internal understanding of Sweden as a country morally above colonial and postcolonial responsibilities, and as an international model country when it comes to welfare politics, gender equality, solidarity and democracy. This self understanding as politically innocent and pure is an obstacle for dealing with Swedens colonial past, and contemporary everyday racism (Habel, 2012, 67-68).
structure and the social relations it creates, the gender equality discourse is reduced to a question of quantitative rights (ibid. 65).

The Swedish discourse on gender equality describes Sweden as exceptionally gender equal, but simultaneously recognizes that Sweden still has much to work on in achieving equality (Martinsson et. al. 2016: 5):

"The two often merge into one story, suggesting that even if Sweden is one of the most gender-equal countries, it struggles for more gender equality. The underlying assumptions is that 'women and men have been really unequal before, it is better now, but still not good, but in the future it will be even better.'” (ibid. 6).

This could explain why breastfeeding in public is a recurring topic in media. It fits well in the gender equality discourse of complimentary gender, where breastfeeding is clearly defined as a feminine activity, easily understandable within the heterosexual matrix. It is also about the quantitative right of men and women to have equal access to public space. The discourse on the problem does not threaten fundamental understandings of gender, nor suggest any radical reformation of the power relations between men and women. It can therefore be considered a ”safe” question of social justice/gender equality to bring up. Women are seen as mothers and it is their specific duty (instinct) to breastfeed the child. The gender hierarchy is not threatened, on the contrary the discourse concerning breastfeeding in public reinforces gender norms concerning heterosexuality and altruistic and self-sacrificing mothers.

Those who deny breastfeeding women access to public space are in that way depicted as too influenced by American culture, which per definition is seen as reactionary and less gender equal than Swedish culture. To defend women’s rights to breastfeed in public could then be used as a way to confirm ones national belonging and inclusion in Swedish exceptionalism, which I will describe below.

Martinsson et al use Benedict Andersson’s concept of imagined community, referring to the visualized unity and affinity within a nation (Andersson 2006: 6), when describing that gender equality is often used as a means of defining Sweden as an imagined community (Martinsson et al. 2016: 4). It is seen as a defining character of Sweden as a nation and of the inhabitants, i.e. Swedes (ibid. and de los Reyes 2016: 28). But then again, not all people living in Sweden are believed to be gender equal.
Sweden was long known for being a model multicultural welfare state (Mulinari 2016: 138). This is however increasingly changing. Since the late 1980s Sweden has had an increased neo-Nazi activity, and populist anti-migration politics are gaining popularity, especially the value-conservative party the Sweden Democrats (ibid. 137). This has changed the national discourse concerning migration into an increased focus on assimilation (ibid. 138).

Demands for assimilation are connected to a nationalist rhetoric characterizing ”Swedish culture” as consensus concerning a neoliberal, rational, modern, developed and gender equal identity (Giritli et al. 2016: 54, and Martinsson et al, 2016: 6). How Swedish culture is described, becomes the frame for how immigrants from other cultures are understood to not be. This is especially the discourse around migrants with Muslim background, who are described as requiring help from Swedes to develop into modern and gender equal individuals (Mulinari 2016: 138 and Martinsson et al, 2016: 6).

Though American influences on Swedish persons is the most common narrative of why breastfeeding in public is debated in Sweden, another way of framing the discussion outside of Swedishness is to express concern for what people ”from other cultures” will think about it. This came up in two of the interviews I conducted. The first example is from the interview with the midwife and lecturer Eva-Lotta Funkquist, at her office in a hospital:

Eva-Lotta: -Do you know what I heard the other day?! Or I received a letter, every week I get a newsletter because I work clinically at the maternity ward. And [in the letter I read that] someone has told a breastfeeding mother in the dayroom at the maternity ward that she can’t breastfeed there because there are foreign women who can be offended. And I think this is a common argument; that foreign women can be offended. And my guess is that these are people who normally don’t think foreign women should be shown so much consideration. But it comes up exactly in this question [about public breastfeeding]. So there was an angry letter from the boss, who wrote that no one is allowed to say that. It does not apply here.

This narrative is about a woman being asked to stop breastfeeding because there are non-Swedes, ”foreign women”, who can take offense. It correlates to the earlier quotes in the chapter, about how people in other countries, e.g. the U.S. and Mexico, are believed to be more uncomfortable with public or open breastfeeding. In that way, the example from the interview could be interpreted as an act of consideration and an attempt to make social space conflict-free, at the expense of the breastfeeding person. This can be understood through Ahmed’s (2010) theory that women are
expected to adhere to conditional happiness, that they should feel happy about giving other’s happiness. This discussion is further developed in the next chapter.

However, Eva-Lotta interprets the incident more in line with Mulinari’s observation of demands for assimilation of immigrants, and therefore suggests it is unlikely that the comment was made with the interest of ”foreign women” in mind. If to be a Swede means to be gender equal, then the narrative above can be seen as a way of critiquing publicly breastfeeding mothers, without compromising one’s own status of Swedishness, that is, to still perform a subject that is being ”one of us” modern and progressive people.

The other time it was brought up is also worth mentioning, though the narrative is harder to interpret. It was in the interview with project leader at Amningshjälpen Anouk Jolin. She told me that once when she was breastfeeding her two year old child at an airport in Canada, her father had commented that there were men from ”other cultures” there who might be offended by the breastfeeding. The same analysis of this incident as the one that Eva-Lotta described is possible. However, it is unclear if it was specifically the age of the child that was disturbing to the father, rather than the public breastfeeding per se. And as Anouk’s state of origin is Canada, it is also hard to know what is meant by ”men from other cultures”. It could mean ”other cultures than Canada”, the country they were in, or ”other cultures than Sweden”, the country Anouk lives in. At the time of the interview I did not think of narratives about nationalism as important, and hence unfortunately did not follow up on the unclarity.

Anouk: -I was breastfeeding my second child for a little longer, then… I noticed that my father was a little insecure. So that insecurity was not from me, because I had already been comfortably breastfeeding for two years and.. two and a half years. Then my father was a bit uncomfortable and thought that it might be a bit strange, and I remember commenting that he was the first one to tell me not to breastfeed somewhere. And was a bit huffy about that.

Jennie: -What did your mom say about that?

Anouk: -Yeah, no I guess she supported me. We were at the airport in Canada, I remember. My dad thought that there were men from other cultures there and I thought ’no one else has ever made such a clear comment before, is that really coming from you!?’ I think he had something of an eye-opener there. But that was about his own insecurity, not mine. And it was probably out of care, that he wanted to protect me, right? Yes… So that is also interesting to think about, those who are against it [public
breastfeeding], is it out of care or that they are afraid to see something? Or what is happening in people that makes them so incredibly provoked?

Anouk also suggests that one can interpret his comment as an act of care, because he wanted to protect her from a possible conflict with those men. Also here, what Ahmed (2010) writes about conditional happiness, as well as attempts to maintain signs of getting along can be applied. Interesting to note is that arguments about concern for immigrants’ understandings of breastfeeding is not at all mentioned in the media material except for one lifestyle coverage in local paper Östgöta Correspondenten (2011-09-28) about an American woman who lives in Sweden and her view on public breastfeeding. Reasons for this discrepancy is something I can only speculate in. Perhaps is it not a very common approach to the debate, or media does not want to represent those arguments in fear of being criticized for being prejudice or racist.

3.4. Swedish Autonomy & Parenting

In an issue of parenting magazine Allt om barn from 2008 one can read:

"My mom was home with me for 10 months in the 70’s, says Karin. No, today most mothers would not consider only the little life to be enough. On the contrary, more and more are talking about the importance of getting out for a while, and talk to others in the same situation. To meet other adults even though you breastfeed 20 out of 24 hours. But apparently that annoys the surroundings. If you listen to the spokespeople of the mother-bashers it sounds like moms have to be taught their place, or they will soon take over every café and bench in town, with their SUV-strollers, diaper-bags from Gucci and milk satiated breasts. To be seen but not heard, is what used to be said about children in the past. For moms today, it is apparently neither to be seen nor heard, give birth to children and stay at home with them until they turn twelve and do not disturb anyone any longer. But moms also need space. Meeting points, sounding boards, support and company. This is not about some monstrous need for shopping and espresso with milk, it is rather about being allowed to be a completely normal person. AND a mom. With or without latte.”

As described in the background chapter, autonomy is an important value in Swedish society, seen as the foundation for a life in dignity (Berggren 2006: 297). Hence much of Swedish social politics has been focused on asserting also women’s and children’s rights to form their own circumstances of life (ibid. 264) and giving women access to many arenas that have traditionally been male dominated (ibid. 324), including public space. In the light of that, the quote above can be understood as an observation of exactly that. The person writing wants to be a "completely normal person", even though she is a breastfeeding mother, and therefore granted equal access to outdoor environments and cafés in town. In contrast to "mother-bashers", who want mothers to hide or be discrete with their mothering practices, the author of this article argues for mothers’ needs for social contact and to move around freely, just like any other person is allowed.

If breastfeeding is not accepted in public space, it severely circumscribes the freedom of movement for breastfeeding persons. In 20 of the articles (5%) this is framed explicitly as a violation of women’s rights, not only to public space but to be full civic humans. E.g. in an article from 2014 in the parenting magazine *Mama* two different moms are quoted like this:

"This attitude some people have against breastfeeding restrains women. It relocates women to the home and it circumscribes women’s rights”.

"Just because you are a mom does not mean that you have to stay at home and are forced to stop living?!”

Ethnologist Helene Brembeck, has compared young mothers’ approaches to motherhood in the 1970s and 1990s in Sweden, and the results of her study show an increasing expectation to continue the social life and activities one used to have before the child, making motherhood only one of several subject positions the mothers identified with (Brembeck 1998: 41). If the trend has continued since the 1990s, it fits well in with the statements above and elsewhere in the material. I will come back to Brembeck’s study in chapter 6.

This desire to prioritize your own activities and interests are by a few people in the material perceived as egoism of the mothers. Here are three examples from different newspapers, with almost 7 years between each:

*Borås Tidning* (2013-05-14). Letter from a reader:

"To have a child is a big change in life and you can usually not continue the same free lifestyle that you have been used to. It seems as if young mothers
today have difficulties in adapting to a more calm life at home and that the
baby just has to come along to make the mother happy. Of course you
shouldn’t be trapped at home, but my opinion about public breastfeeding
stands strong. A café or other eating place should not be a place for
breastfeeding, because also we are there, who want to drink our coffee and
eat our food without having to look away. So get it together young mothers
and learn how to behave and use the nursing rooms that are available, then
everyone will be happy.”

Expressen (2007-01-10) Letter from a reader:

"To breastfeed or not to breastfeed in public, that is the question. A baby
normally eats every third, fourth hour. I understand that they can get hungry
when you are out, if you didn’t plan to breastfeed at home before you left.
Maybe it is not offending to see a breastfeeding mother, but you don’t have
to be out all day and sit at a café and drink caffe latte. Or do you?"

Göteborgs-Posten (2000-10-04) Letters from readers:

"The debate about public breastfeeding, that sparked off with a letter
from a reader, continues. /…/

- I think the café you visited did the right thing. Isn’t breastfeeding supposed
to be a moment of peace and quiet for the baby. That is hardly the case out
in a café, where it is smoky and messy. Do like us older moms did, stay at
home and breastfeed your babies in the calm space of your home the short
time they are breastfed.

- Invite your friends over for coffee instead of running around in town. A
baby needs peace and quiet. You can go into a separate room when it is
time to breastfeed. Grandmother”

13 ”När man får barn blir det en omställning i livet och man kan oftast inte fortsätta att leva det fria liv man
var van vid. Det verkar som dagens unga mammor har svårt att anpassa sig till ett lugnare hemliv och
bebisen får bara hänga med för att mamma ska vara nöjd. Så klart att man inte ska bli fången hemma men
min uppfattning om att amma offentligt står fast. Ett kafé eller annat matställe ska inte var en amningsplats för
där finns också vi som vill dricka vårt kaffe och äta vår mat utan att behöva titta bort. Skärp er unga mammor
och lär er lite hyfs och använd de skötrum som finns så blir alla nöjda.”

14 “Att amma eller inte amma offentligt är frågan. En baby åter normalt var tredje, fjärde timma. Jag
förstår att de kan bli hungriga när du är ute, om du inte planerar in att amma hemma innan du går ut. Det är
kanske inte stötande att se en ammande kvinna, men man behöver inte vara ute hela dagen och sitta på ett
café och dricka kaffe latte. Eller?”

15 ”Jag tycker att det kaféet som du var på gjorde alldeles rätt. Amningen skall väl
vara en stund av lugn och ro för barnet. Och det är det väl knappast ute på ett
kafé, där det är både rökt och stöktigt. Göra som vi lite äldre mammor gjorde,
stanna hemma och amma era små spådbarn i hemmets lugna vrå den korta tid som de ammas.
Bjud hem några väninnor på fika i stället för att springa på stan. En baby behöver både lugn och ro. Ni kan ju
gå in i ett annat rum och amma när det är så dags.
Mormor och Farmor ”
There are indications that these comments all come from older people. One is signed by "Grandmother", two clearly distance themselves from the "young mothers today" and the comment in *Expressen* refers to a breastfeeding pattern used until the 1980s, with a four hour schedule. It could be that these comments connecting public breastfeeding to failure of maternal duties are due to a generational difference, similar to the one described in the quote from *Allt om barn*. A couple of more examples show up in the material, but in total they do not make up any substantial number. If it is correct that this view is mostly held by older people it indicates that intolerance to public breastfeeding is not new in Sweden, but instead articulated by different population segments, possibly with different arguments.

This rather blunt way of stating that mother and babies belong in the home, is rarely articulated in the material, though there are some examples of when the essence of the argument is rearticulated in the terminology of health, which next section will look into.

### 3.5. Health

In local paper *Borås Tidning*, a reader sent a letter to the newspaper that was published in 2013, stating that:

"It seems as if the little child has turned into a symbol of status, that has to be showed off every so often, in all sorts of situations, including when they are breastfed. Of course breastfeeding should be done at home in peace and quiet, not in noise and mess among loads of bacteria and germs. But maybe you think your breasts have turned out so good-looking that you gladly show them. Because there is always someone in the room who is looking. If it is that boring to breastfeed at home where no one can see you, go to the library and get help by a good librarian to borrow a good book."\(^{16}\)

In this letter, there is a juxtaposition made between the "peace and quiet" at home, versus "noise, mess, bacteria and germs" in the public sphere, clearly showing which place the writer finds more suitable for breastfeeding. Furthermore the writer only suggests one reason why parents would breastfeed in public; because they want to show off their breasts and the baby. The way it is written, brings to mind the Master Suppression Technique *ridicule* (Ås 2004: 79).

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\(^{16}\) "Det lilla barnet verkar ha blivit en statussymbol, som måste visas upp titt som tätt i alla upptänkliga miljöer och situationer, där-ibland vid amningsdags. Självklart bör amning ske hemma i lugn och ro, och inte i stoj och stök bland massor av bakterier och ’baskelusker.’ Men du tycker kanske du fått så snygga bröst, att du gärna vill visa upp dem. För alltid finns det väl någon i lokalen som tittar. Om det är så tråkigt attamma hemma där ingen ser dig, gå till biblioteket och få hjälp av duktiga bibliotekarier att låna en bra bok.”
Also etiquette expert Magdalena Ribbing stresses the dangers of breastfeeding publicly in parenting magazine *Allt om barn* in 2008:

"In the summers, women sit in open-air cafés and breastfeed among passersby and especially with all that traffic close by. That cannot be good for the baby."

As seen in the above quotes, an effective way of shaming mothers who breastfeed in public are with arguments about health. To breastfeed outside the home, is described as to expose the child to health risks or denying it the peace and quiet it needs, as seen in the quotes in the previous section. But the health of the child is also one of the most dominant arguments for breastfeeding. This discussion hence also connects both to the Master Suppression Technique *putting to shame and damned if you do, damned if you don’t* (ibid.)

In 2013, a local radio station in Dalarna (2013-10-09, *SR Dalarna*) reported on the campaign ”You can breastfeed here” [Du kan amma här], allowing restaurants and cafés to market themselves as allowing breastfeeding. The project leader Anouk Jolin explains the project with the words:

"We think it is natural. Breastfeeding is incredibly important, it is a matter of public health. We want mothers to feel comfortable breastfeeding among others.”

In a published letter to the paper *Expressen* (2007-01-08) someone writes:

"To breastfeed ones child is to give it the nutrition it needs, a good immun system, protection against virus and infections, as well as a feeling of security, love and intimacy. Do you really think I would deny my kid this, just because I am out among people? Shame on you narrow minded people who want to withhold our infants all of this!”

The argument in these statements is that breastfeeding should be allowed, because it is healthy for babies. This correlates to another vivid discussion concerning breastfeeding: whether mothers have the right to choose not to breastfeed, even if breastmilk is considered the healthiest nutrition for babies.

17 “På somrarna sitter kvinnor på uteserveringarna och ammar mitt bland alla förbigående människor och framförallt med all trafik precis intill. Det kan inte vara bra för bebin.”

18 “Vi tycker det är naturligt. --Amning är otroligt viktigt, det är en folkhälsofråga. Vi vill att mammor ska känna sig bekväma att amma bland andra.”

19 “Att amma sitt barn är att ge det den näring det behöver, ett gott immunförsvar, skydd mot virus och infektioner samt trygghet, kärlek och närhet. Tror ni verkligen att jag skulle neka mitt barn det på grund av att jag befinner mig ute bland folk? Fy skäms på er inskränkta människor som vill förvägra våra spädbarn allt detta!”
Arguments about health has a long tradition of facilitating cultural norms and political ideas (Frykmam 1979: 213). In the 19th century, medical advancement provided new knowledge about hygiene and how diseases spread which coincided with the increased need to define ones position in the changing social hierarchy (ibid. 148). An example is the housekeeping courses that were offered to proletarian women, explicitly teaching them the importance of purity and sleekness, but implicitly internalizing the bourgeoise ideals about privacy, domesticity and femininity (ibid. 125). Through this transfer of bourgeoise culture to poor working class families, without providing the economic means to keep up the ideals, the proletariat was domesticated into self-control and conformity (ibid. 184).

There are other examples that go way back to the renaissance, when hygiene was an important tool for spreading civilization (ibid. 212). The convincing force of hygiene is the idea that deviations from the norms strikes back at yourself, posing a threat to your own health and life (ibid. 212-213). This efficiently internalizes the norms and makes people discipline themselves in the name of health (ibid. 213-214). Pedagogics scholar Ulf Olsson writes about how ideals about health in Sweden, historically have been intertwined with notions of Swedishness. The development of public health was part of the Swedish nation building, with the aim to provide the nation with a strong work force, now and again on the verge (or actually tipping over) of eugenics (Olsson 1999: 39-45).

What health is, though, has varied a lot in time and place. This is visible in the very different synchronic views on breast feeding among peasantry and bourgeoisie in the 1800s mentioned in the background chapter, or how the four hour breastfeeding schedule has now been rejected by the medical profession in favor of on demand breastfeeding. Robert Crawford’s theory about Healthism, is describing an important contemporary approach to health in the U.S. (Cheek 2008: 974; Crawford 2006: 411). Crawford first created the concept in 1980 to suggest that notions about health are not neutral or purely scientific, but reflects cultural and political ideas (Crawford 1980: 367). The individualism of neoliberal politics, he argues, is contributing to a depoliticization of the understanding of health, making it a question of individual choice to resist bad habits instead of a matter of socioeconomic circumstances and civil rights (Crawford 1980: 368). Similar trends have also been described in Sweden by e.g. Eva Palmblad (1995: 84-93).

Arguments about health should therefore not be seen as neutral or scientific statements without cultural meaning. This becomes evident when children’s health is used as an argument both by
people pro and against public breastfeeding, as seen above. On the contrary, those arguments are connected to beliefs about how and where motherhood should be performed and it shows how health is a strong incitement to regulate and moralize people’s decisions (cf. Hallmark Lindgren 2006 for an investigation of pregnancy and health risks).

In the interview with Eva-Lotta, she expressed a concern about the lack of knowledge about the health benefits connected to breastfeeding, especially the benefits for the breastfeeding person:

Eva-Lotta: -Breastfeeding protects against a long, long, long list of diseases that are… epidemic in the Western world. The best example is maybe breast cancer. You can almost not read about it even at the webpage of the Breast Cancer Foundation [Bröstcancerfonden]. With every child you breastfeed, the risk [to get breast cancer] decreases with, I don’t remember how much… 6% or something like that, there is a risk that I remember it wrongly. So if you have several children and breastfeed them for several years, that is a huge decrease of risk. And this is something women do not know. It is not public knowledge.

There is a decreased risk of ovarian cancer, cancer in the uterus that is, decreased risk of high blood pressure, decreased risk of obesity when you are older, decreased risk of rheumatism for the mother, when you breastfeed. For the baby it is… those really serious diseases, such as leukemia the risk is decreased, diabetes the risk is decreased, child obesity, ear infections, diarrhea, which means to need hospital care for dehydration, which is a really big group of children under the age of 2. If the breastfeeding frequency up to 2 years would be high in Sweden, this would mean incredibly many [saved] days at the hospital. Respiratory syncytial virus, we have all of these difficult viruses. Respiratory infections, pneumonia, sepsis would be less prevalent. These are the diseases that occur in a child population, become less prevalent. In rich countries. And there has been calculations on how many lives it would save. But this is also something that… it is not possible to get it out to peoples’ awareness. I’m thinking, a heavily reduced risk of breast cancer, that is something everyone would like to know, isn’t it?

Indeed, the health benefits for the baby is mentioned 11 times in the media material, and in four of the five interviews, but the health of the mother only mentioned once in the media. Though there is not much to build an analysis on, a possible interpretation is that the plead for the health of the baby is a more efficient disciplining tool, given the moral cluster of care and self-sacrifice surrounding motherhood, than to ask mothers to consider their own health.
3.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have investigated how notions of Swedishness are manifested in the debate about public breastfeeding. Some suggest that it would be a new and imported discussion in Sweden, and indeed, many of the articles are concerning events or discussions going on elsewhere than in Sweden, especially in the US and other Anglo-Saxon countries. I use Åsard (2016) to draw the conclusion that when the US is blamed for being misogynist and prudish, the reversed statement is simultaneously intended to be made about Sweden.

This correlates to the national discourse of Sweden as being exceptionally gender equal. Gender equality is simultaneously a goal, ideal and norm, upheld by a Swedish state-feminism. This hegemonic gender equality can be said to be stuck in its own logic, since it does not deal with powers structures and social relations, but reproduces the heterosexual matrix and reduces gender equality to quantitative rights. The right to freely move around, have access to public space and to have a rich social life also as a breastfeeding parent, is one such right that can be seen as part of that gender equality discourse.

To be able to disagree with that opinion without compromising ones status as Swedish, gender equal and progressive, it can be framed as a concern for foreign people or immigrants who are suggested to be uncomfortable with public breastfeeding. There are also, probably older, people who associate public breastfeeding with egoism, since the mother does not stay at home, devoting all her time to the baby.

There are examples of when such concerns of public breastfeeding are framed as health risks for the baby, or the baby’s need of peace and quiet, connecting the discourse to an old tradition of proliferating social norms through the promise of health. Simultaneously, the health benefits of breastfeeding are by others used as an argument for letting mothers breastfeed when and where ever they want, since they do something caring and salubrious to their children.
4. Public and Private

In the previous chapter I discussed how arguments about the baby’s need for peace and quiet at home, were used as an argument against public breastfeeding. In this chapter I will look into more understandings of the practice, connected to expectations on women’s bodies and behaviors in relation to public and private locations. Conditional happiness by Ahmed (2010), Ethics of Care by Gilligan (1982), Madonna-Whore dichotomy by Tumanov (2011) and respectable femininity by Skeggs (2000) will be the main theories for this chapter, together forming a framework of norms and ideals women need to relate to when being in the public sphere.

4.1. Magdalena Ribbing

In the previous chapter I introduced the informant Eva-Lotta Funkquist, whom I met for an interview at the ward for women’s and children’s health at the University Hospital in Uppsala. After the first phrases of politeness about my thesis topic and how it was going, she noted that she could not believe how some people react to public breastfeeding and without waiting for my response continued:

Eva-Lotta: A fun person to bring up is this Magdalena Ribbing.

Jennie: Yes, that’s right. She pops up.

Eva-Lotta: Yes, she pops up. I have noticed that my children [who are in their 20s], who are extremely breastfeeding friendly, as I experience it… very relaxed. They think she is good! [with emphasis] I don’t know what it is she appeals to young people. And she has expressed very negative attitudes to breastfeeding. The youth likes etiquettes all of a sudden… it came as a surprise to me when I understood that they find these opinions exciting, even though they [her children] are not at all like that. So that is also something I haven't kept up with.

The expert of Etiquette Magdalena Ribbing is part of 7 articles, as well as 2 interviews in my fieldwork material. She was a national celebrity in Sweden, famous for writing an advice column about etiquette and manners in one of the biggest newspapers, Dagens Nyheter, until her sudden death from an accident in her home in 2017. Noted by Eva-Lotta in the above quote, Ribbing is a person who is consulted in the matter of public breastfeeding. As can be seen also for example in this letter from a reader to Södermanlands Nyheter (2016-04-08) signed by Mother of two:
"Of course babies can and should be breastfed when they need to, even when away from the home and in public. Now also WHO, the World Health Organization, has come up with research data: The benefit of breastfeeding is good for the health of both the mother and the child. In the breastfeeding debate, only the lack of consideration is discussed. I think the wise Magdalena Ribbing would completely agree with us who has called out for consideration both for the child and the surroundings. I’m sure she would have said that the mother should handle the precious moment with the child in an environment as calm as possible.""20

So what does Magdalena Ribbing’s say about public breastfeeding? Aftonbladet (2013-04-25) relates what Magdalena Ribbing said about public breastfeeding in a national radio show:

"Her [Magdalena Ribbing] opinion is that you should be discrete when breastfeeding in places where it is not expected, like at formal restaurants, fancier parties, weddings and funerals. Reactions were not slow. /…/ - We live in a society where people like to expose themselves. Maybe that is why breastfeeding is experienced as so free. I think you should protect your privacy, she says. Magdalen Ribbing considers the question as a matter of respect and that it doesn’t have to be so problematic. - There are often discrete places, so it is possible to relocate when it is time for breastfeeding. Out of respect for those around and for the baby who needs peace and quiet, it is not suitable to breastfeed in a lively restaurant, she says and continues: - Public breastfeeding is not a problem as long as you are not provocative about it. The fact that you have a child does not give you the right to do whatever, says Magdalena Ribbing."

From the article we can read that some words Magdalena Ribbing uses when discussing public breastfeeding are: discrete, expose, protect privacy, respect, provocative, all of which will be further scrutinized in this chapter.


And in 2011, Magdalena Ribbing discussed the same topic in local paper *Västmanlands Läns Tidning* (2011-09-23):

"In the online forum familjeliv.se [Family Life] there are lively and many discussions about how to behave with and raise your children. How are you for example supposed to handle breastfeeding in town? Is it ok to breastfeed in cafés? On familjeliv.se, most people think breastfeeding is something natural that you don’t have to hide to do. - I breastfed when my kids signaled that they needed it, regardless of where we were. I think it looks pretty when a mother breastfeeds her kid and I don’t have any problems with public breastfeeding at all, the user Malin states. So what does the expert of manners say about this? - In a café or restaurant where you are close together with other people, you should avoid breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is not an expected act in eating-places, and other people have the right to drink their coffee in peace and quiet, says Magdalena Ribbing. If what you do, does not bother anyone else, you can do almost anything, she states. Because it is a big difference between the home and the public sphere. In your own home you can do whatever you want, as long as it does not harm anyone else, claims Magdalena Ribbing."  

Magdalena Ribbing says that it is a big difference between the public and the private sphere, and that in public there are certain codes of conduct that need to be applied in order to keep the peace and quiet. The historic background to the two concepts can be found in the background chapter.

Now it is time to see what the contemporary situation looks like in Sweden.

### 4.2. The Public Sphere

As discussed before, the discourse about gender equality is strong in Sweden. Though women and men today formally have equal access to public space, the history has implications for the contemporary. The cultural tie between women and the private/domestic (described in the background chapter) is still present today. In comparison with men, women are more present in the private sphere e.g. through taking more parental leave and do more domestic work, and are more
absent in the public sphere, e.g. less likely to be employed full time, and are less represented in high
public positions, like CEOs or politicians.

Just like Magdalena Ribbing, there are many who think that breastfeeding is something that does
not belong in public. The importance of being discrete and show respect, is coming back in about
65 of the articles, every fifth article.

One example is Göteborgs-Posten (2000-10-03):

"Do you think babies should be breastfed everywhere? was the question we
asked yesterday, due to Susanne W:s letter about how she was rejected from
a café when she was breastfeeding.

[one of the answers]

-I think breastfeeding is completely natural too, but in my opinion it does
not really belong in a restaurant or café. There are many things that are
natural, but do not belong everywhere. To have sex, burp, fart and sleep is
also natural but does not belong in public premises where people
socialize over food. Erik, 25 years old.”

Another example is a letter from a reader to Kvällsposten (2002-11-12):

"It seems to be popular nowadays to breastfeed babies in public premises.
Cafés and restaurants seem to be appreciated sites for breastfeeding. It is
hard to believe that the other guests are pleased with the “serving”. For
example at the restaurant Hansacompagniet in Malmö, you can ever so
often see milk satiated breasts publicly exhibited. Not so very appetizing for
those who are forced to watch. It is not like it is possible to close your eyes.
On top of that, the mothers are not particularly discrete. You would think
that they could have breastfed the babies at home before they visit the
restaurant. If the restaurants do not want to ban breastfeeding, a suggestion
is to install a breastfeeding spot, somewhere discrete in the premises. This
would surely be appreciated, at least by the guests who want to relax and eat

23 Tycker du att babysar ska få ammas var som helst? frågade vi i går med anledning av att Susanne W:s
insändare om hon blivit bortkörd från ett kafé eftersom hon ammade.

-Jag tycker också att amning är helt naturligt, men anser inte att det riktigt
hör hemma på en restaurang eller kafé. Det finns många saker som är naturliga men inte passar överallt. Att
ha sex, rapa, fisa och sova är också naturligt men hör inte hemma i en offentlig lokal där folk umgås över en
bit mat.
Erik, 25 år”
undisturbed. It can be very cute with a baby at the bosom- if the mother’s blouse is buttoned. MP, Malmö.”

The last writer states that “milk satiated breasts, publicly exhibited” is not very appetizing. That breasts are better not openly exposed is almost a consensus, both among those who think public breastfeeding should not be allowed, and those who think it should. Then the argument is instead that it should be allowed, exactly because it is discrete and the breasts are hardly visible at all. Like in this chronicle in *Dagens Nyheter Stockholm* (2014-10-03):

"If you are sharp-eyed, and really concentrated, you can possibly see a little glimpse of a woman’s breast if you are at the same location as a breastfeeding mother and her baby. Exciting, huh?

But you need to be fast. It is a matter of seconds before the peckish baby grabs hold of the nipple. After that it is mostly the head of the baby and maybe some mother-skin that is visible. That some people are offended by "having to” watch breastfeeding women is really too tiering to even mention. Just look away! But now it is a matter of fact that women time after another get negative comments, are asked to cover themselves or to leave.”

Here is stated that almost nothing of the breast is visible, so there shouldn't be a problem. Likewise in this slightly ironically written editorial page in local paper *Lokaltidingen Stenungsund* (2015-01-03) the editor gives his opinion on the matter in relation to what the media personality called The Angry Carpenter has said earlier:

"I have both heard and read how a great number of people (men) loudly have protested against mothers who breastfeed their small ones publicly. I get it. Breasts are sensitive body parts and to have an unknown pair of them pushed in your face while eating in a restaurant can be experienced as bothering. But what kind of mother does that? Yes, ‘some do’, informs


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Sen syns mest barnets huvud och kanske lite mammahud. Att vissa personer tar anstöt av att ”behöva” se ammande kvinnor känns egentligen tröttamt att ens nämna. Titta bort, då! Men nu är det ju så att det gång på gång händer att ammande mammor får negativa kommentarer, blir omedda att skyla sig eller att avlägsna sig.
Anders Öfvergård, more known as The Angry Carpenter in TV, in the magazine *Mama*. -I think one should protect the breasts, not hang both out like some do to provoke, he tells us. This far, I have been spared those shameless breast-hangers. But if you are one of them, The Angry Carpenter has a solution.-You can cover up with a cardigan or you can borrow a linen napkin.”

From these examples it seems rather to be a question of how breastfeeding in public is done, rather than if it should be allowed or not.

Ahmed writes that when someone is entering a new space, the newcomer is expected to adhere to the happiness of those who are already in place there (Ahmed 2010b: 578). In line with her argument, I suggest that when women (and babies) are gaining access to the public sphere, they are expected to prioritize the comfort of men, who are already considered to belong in the public. With this I do not mean that only men are uncomfortable with public breastfeeding, but that public space historically has been associated with men. Since female activities, like mothering in general and breastfeeding in particular, traditionally have been allocated to the private sphere, they may seem inappropriate in public, and hence disturbing. It is not clarified by the writers above why breasts are an unwanted sight in public, but an educated guess is that it concerns the sexual associations attached to breasts, which I will come back to later in this chapter.

### 4.3. Public Comfort

Psychologist and ethicist Carol Gilligan (1982) described in the 1980s how American women’s everyday behavior to a large extent is shaped by the sustainment of relationships; with children, partner, friends and family, and the responsibilities that come along with those relationships (Gilligan 1982: 170). As part of a feminine ideal, women often define themselves based on the ability to care. Simultaneously, competing responsibilities and needs (both of others and of the self) constitutes a struggle since it is rather stigmatized for women to be perceived as selfish (ibid. 149). Gilligan calls this behavior Ethics of Care, in contrast to the Ethics of Justice that in ethics commonly have been perceived as the most rational guiding principle, focusing on a more abstract sense of fair treatment (ibid. 174).

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Kirsten Day has made a study showing what implications it has to be guided by the Ethics of Care, for the mobility of women in public space. According to inquiries, women’s pattern of behavior in public includes to smile, listen, self-disclose, be emotionally expressive, to move out of the way and to be approached by strangers. Women talk less and take up less space, than men do in public space (Day 2000: 116). Some of the stress and fears the constant prioritization of others can generate are to feel the need to be nice to strangers, to have the responsibilities for children in public space, to be subjected to others concerns of one's safety (e.g. to promise to don’t go out too late), and to prioritize other’s needs (ibid. 108).

Both Day and Gilligan write in an American context, but when looking at national statistics in Sweden, it is clearly the case that women are more worried for being subjected to violence in public space, and that many women actually do not leave the house late at night due to that worry (Brottsförebyggande Rådet 2016: 91). There is also literature on how women do majority of care work in families and relationships in Sweden (cf. Holmberg 1993).

All of this obviously has implications for a breastfeeding person who is responsible for a child in public. There are examples of when mothers feel trapped between the baby’s need to breastfeed, and the consideration towards others who do not want to see breastfeeding. This is a small article from Aftonbladet about nationally known blogger and entrepreneur Isabella Löwengrip, who as a blogger used to go under the name "Blondinbella" [Blondie-Bella] (2014-04-17):

"Isabella ’Blondinbella’ Löwengrip, 22 [years old], has changed her opinion about breastfeeding in public space, after she became a mother at the end of last year. ’Babies must be allowed to eat. There is nothing worse than when me and Gillis are out and he is hungry and starts crying. In one second I feel how I start to sweat and want to give him food immediately. Regardless of where we are’ she writes in her blog.

Before the son Gillis was born, Blondinbella claimed that she could not imagine to breastfeed publicly. ‘I’m never going to breastfeed publicly, since I find it disgusting’, she wrote at the time. Now the blogger has changed her mind. But she does not heave out her breasts anyhow, she says.
’I try to show my respect to others by covering as much as possible of the breast, with a shirt above that I pull up and in under or a light blanket.’ 

Here Löwengrip clearly navigates between different caring positions: the care for the people around her, through sparing them the ”disgusting” vision of breastfeeding, and the care for the baby Gillis who needs to be fed when he is hungry.

Another example is about someone who breastfed her baby in the restroom of a department store. Ebba Signert Widigs, from *Amningshjälpen*, is being interviewed about the incident and remarks that it is impossible to do it right, no matter where you sit down to breastfeed, someone will think you do it wrong. From public service radio station *SR Kalmar* (2013-09-05):

"Many have reacted to the letter from a reader, in the morning paper *Barometern*, where a woman reported an experience when she was breastfeeding her child at a toilet in a building supplies store for 15 minutes. The woman was several times interrupted and later got angry comments from employees and customers. After the letter from the woman, two parties have appeared. One party thinks the woman was way out of line to occupy the toilet, while others think one should be allowed to breastfeed when- and however one pleases. /…/"

"-We often hear about people feeling vulnerable when breastfeeding in the public sphere, says Ebba Signert Widings, from the non-profit organization *Amningshjälpen* in Kalmar.

In what way are one vulnerable? -It is everything from just angry looks, that people glower, or like in this case, that you are reprehended or told off to go somewhere else, answers Ebba Signert Widings.

What do you think about that? -It is pretty interesting that women are told off, regardless of where they choose to breastfeed. It is very common that women are told to go exactly to the toilet if they sit at a restaurant or a café. That is almost the most common thing we hear. So it is interesting that she, in this case, is told off when she chooses to do it at the toilet. I am thinking that it is not possible to do it right. No matter where you sit and breastfeed your child, someone will think that you do it wrong, and that is very tedious. I think that the problem really is that we see so little breastfeeding around. It

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27 Isabella ”Blondinbella” Löwengrip, 22, har bytt åsikt om amning på offentliga platser sedan hon blev mamma i slutet av förra året.
"Jag kommer aldrig att amma öppet eftersom jag tycker att det är äckligt" skrev hon då. Nu har bloggaren alltså ändrat sig. Men hon slänger inte fram bröstet hur som helst, berättar hon.
"Jag försöker visa min respekt för andra genom att dölja så mycket som möjligt av bröstet med en tröja ovanför som jag drar upp och inne under eller tunn filt."
is very rare to see a woman breastfeed her child, so it turns into a big thing, though it does not have be that. It is really a pretty uncomplicated thing.”

According to Ebba, ”you can never do it right” when breastfeeding, meaning that someone will always have opinions on how you do it. You are damned if you do, and likewise damned if you don’t (Ås 2004: 79). This is also stated by Natasha Blomberg, known as the blogger Lady Damher, in the magazine Amelia Baby (2012-05-21):

"I am a breastfeeding activist. I breastfeed simply when I want to, and especially, how I want to. I pull out my tits every so often, sometimes even when it is not necessary. Not so much to upset or provoke, but to normalize breastfeeding and claim my space. It is important to breastfeed in public, and without shame. And I refuse to be ashamed. When you discuss public breastfeeding it always sounds the same, where the conclusion is that you can breastfeed as long as you show consideration. That is, only if you live up to the demands from the surroundings-which change depending on who you ask. Someone thinks it is enough to not pull out both breasts, someone else is pleased as long as you cover up with a blanket. But a third person maybe wants you to go into a corner, and a forth thinks you should go home. Everybody has a different opinion on what consideration means, and it is impossible to satisfy every one. So I don’t give a shit. I neither can, nor want to be discrete, and I refuse to conform to an empathy-less and self-centered surrounding, that makes demands that exclude all women who can’t live up to them. Which in turn, make them feel uncomfortable to breastfeed freely, which circumscribes their rights. I put my kid first, if he wants the tit, he gets it. Breastfeeding is hard anyway, to fuss around with a blanket or condemn myself to a corner is out of the question. I am
breastfeeding, I am not pooping. If it’s not ok for you, put a napkin over your head.”

The arguments put forth by Blomberg here, are really going against the current in the rest of the material. There are others who reject the demands to be discrete, but to uncover the breasts when it is not necessary seems to be close to unthinkable to the vast majority. Like in the interview with Signert Widings, Blomberg explains that there are so many different opinions on how to breastfeed, that it would be impossible to satisfy them all simultaneously. But to quit breastfeeding is also not an appreciated option. Many witness that breastfeeding is a morally loaded practice described as crucial for the health of the baby and the relationship between mother and child, also seen in chapter 3. Åsa Brugård Konde is the chairperson of the National Breastfeeding Committee [Nationella Amningskommitten], which is appointed by the government to coordinate institutions and NGO’s concerned with breastfeeding in Sweden. When I met her for an interview at her office at the National Food Agency in Uppsala, she was concerned to nuance the women’s obligation to breastfeed:

Åsa: Most want to start breastfeeding, and do… But at the same time, the way I see it, it is the gap between those who want to breastfeed and those who… do [breastfeed], that is so many and they are often very frustrated and disappointed that it did not turn out the way they thought it would. And when they… and what we know for public health, I mean, for every child individually it is not a, I would say that it is not a disaster in Sweden to not breastfeed. We have good breastmilk substitutes, we have money and can afford to buy the formula, we have clean water. In poor countries with high risks for infections, there it is a question of life and death. There are lots of children who die because they do not get, they are not breastfed. So here, it is not like that, like a disaster. But if you look at the public health, that is, on the level of the population, then… then there are big differences anyway. That… the risk for infections is less if you are breastfed, eh.. the risk for obesity later in life, which has big impact on the health, so there is lots that..

that would make it beneficial for Sweden to increase [breastfeeding]… Plus, like I said, that everyone who want to breastfeed but does not get it right, the way I see it… I think that is so unfortunate and that is something that really is connected to culture, that… often, all the blame is put on the mother! [In a rather upset voice]. And there are so many who feel like a bad mom or you almost don’t dare to show that you give formula. There is so much of a performance! In that case I think that a mother who wants to breastfeed and it does not turn out like that, that is not her fault! Then she has not received the support she needed.

From Åsa we learn that there is a strong norm for mothers to breastfeed and equally strong stigma for mothers who fail in breastfeeding. Throughout the fieldwork material, there are no indications that anyone would be against breastfeeding per se. But when it is done in the public sphere, this seems to activate what can be called a fear of feminization of public space. Let us again look at the quote from Allt om barn from 2008:

” Listening to the spokespeople of the mother-bashers it sounds like moms should be taught their place, or they will soon take over every café and bench in town, with their SUV-strollers, diaper-bags from Gucci and milk satiated breasts. To be seen but not heard, is what used to be said about children in the past. For moms today, it is apparently neither to be seen nor heard, give birth to children and stay at home with them until they turn twelve and do not disturb anyone any longer.”

Fear of feminization of public space is a phenomenon described by social scientists Dworkin and Wachs, seen when men experience a loss of privilege in the public sphere, causing the anxiety that a visible domination of femininity threatens the existence of masculinity (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 97; cf. Faloudi 1991). The reaction to this fear can even be so aggressive as was the case when NGO Amningshjälpen in 2013 made a video with parents jokingly singing to the melody of ”Gangnam Style” that it is ok to breastfeed in public, which caused massive offending comments, including death threats to the parents and children participating in the film. Threats of violence is one of Ås’ Master Suppression Techniques (Ås 2004: 80).

Sara Ahmed writes that:

"To create awkwardness is to be read as being awkward. Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies "go along with it," to agree to where you are placed. To refuse to be placed would mean to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom. Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with.” (Ahmed 2010: 39).

To maintain public comfort is to follow the norms of those who were in place before you, in the case of public space, men possessed it before women. When women bring things associated with the private sphere with them to the public, they are perceived to change the framework of where things belong and thus challenge the male norm. A possible interpretation is that women have gained access to public space in spite of being women, through deselection of too feminine expressions. The status quo is maintained through the policing of those who break the norm, those who fail to maintain public comfort in Ahmed’s words. In a letter from a reader to Göteborgs-Posten (2013-10-17) we can read:

"I am positive to breastfeeding, have myself breastfed all three children of mine. I tried to do it discreetly when I was in town. Both for my own sake and for other’s. It was easy to put a scarf over my shoulder or to wear comfortable shirts. It worked well and there were never any stupid comments or angry looks. This so called breastfeeding-hostility in society is probably not about lack of neither gender equality nor egalitarianism. I think that it is about some people (in this case breastfeeding women) who feel the need to be seen and heard, and use breastfeeding and the baby as tools to get attention. To accept and respect that we think differently, is the responsibility of every human, as well as to show consideration of everyone’s comfort in public space. Then no stickers or special cafés would be needed. Sonja Karlsson.”

In this letter can be read that it is on the mothers to maintain public comfort, at the expense on their own comfort, and their babies’. If they just respect that no one wants to see visible breastfeeding, there is no problem. Those who do not respect that are depicted as seeking attention, in contrast to

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attending to the needs of their baby. This is recurring in 16 (5%) articles, eg, this interview in paper *Nordsverige* in 2014:

”A bit hopeless, Ellinor says that people seem to believe that there is nothing moms rather do than show their tits to everyone around. -Breastfeeding moms are actually completely indifferent to their audience, but they are affected by the negative attitude. To the extent that some consider skipping breastfeeding because it is a social handicap.”

It seems as if breastfeeding privately is considered to be fulfilling the needs of the baby, in the manner of a good mother. However, to breastfeed publicly is by some not believed to be done for the baby, but for the mother who wants attention for her body and/or mothering. This can be connected to the Master Suppression Technique *Damned if you do, damned if you don’t* (Ås 2004: 79). This also has resemblance with what is usually called the Madonna-Whore complex, which will be explained in the next section.

### 4.4. Notions of Female Sexuality

The Madonna-Whore dichotomy refers to contradictory feelings of despise and idolization of women. The Whore represents women as sexual temptress’, seducing and cuckolding men, and the Madonna is a symbol for the caring, sympathizing and asexual wife and mother. Together the binary provide a moral tool for men to control women’s sexuality and reproduction (Tumanov 2009: 10).

Though the desire to control female sexuality probably has been there longer, this specific terminology comes from Christianity and has formed the Christian view upon women since the first centuries of the religion (ibid. 2). The Whore is equal to the biblical figure Eve, who disobeys God in the Garden of Eden by eating the fruit of Knowledge and introduced sexuality to humans, and thus is associated with women’s sexual choice, threatening male control over women and lineage (ibid. 10). The Madonna, on the contrary, refers to the eternal virgin Mary, who even after conception through the Holy Spirit and giving birth to Jesus stays virginal, forming the perfect ideal of the asexual mother in Christian, sex negative, patriarchal world of ideas (ibid. 13). Leach describes this complex in relation to patrilineal exogamy like this:

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32 "En smula uppgivet konstaterar Ellinor att folk verkar tro att mammor inget hellre vill än visa tuttarna för omgivningen. -Ammande mammor är faktiskt helt ointresserade av åskådare men påverkas av den negativa attityden. Så till den grad att vissa överväger hoppa över anningen för att den blir ett socialt handicap.”
"Every married woman first joins the local group as an alien. She is intrinsically evil; a foreign object, a sexual object, dirty. But in due course she becomes the mother of new members of the lineage. In this second capacity, she is intrinsically good, the very criterion of virtue and cleanliness, the antithesis to a sexual object. The moral polarity thus involves the following equivalents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wife</th>
<th>sexual</th>
<th>dirty</th>
<th>sinful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>asexual</td>
<td>clean</td>
<td>sinless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Leach 1976: 74-75).

In this way, women are denied to be complex and multifaceted individuals, and have their sexuality always measured to the two poles, instead of as seen as a continuum (Tumanov 2009: 18). A contemporary example is a study from Norway about how women negotiate clothing choices. The study clearly shows how both adolescent and middle aged women need to balance their outfits between the two poles of modesty and sexuality to perform the right kind of desired femininity (Grimstad Klepp & Storm-Mathisen 2005: 328, 338).

For some of the individuals that are part of the material for this study, this mechanism is provoked by seeing public breastfeeding, simultaneously displaying the nurturing act of a caring mother (Madonna) and sexually seductive breasts of a woman (Whore). Then mothers are described to exhibit their breasts to get attention, like Sonja Karlsson’s statement above indicate. There are also examples of when the debate about public breastfeeding is described as exaggerated, and really just a way for women to seek attention, like in these Facebook comments on a radio show (2016-03-18, SR Sörmland):

"-It is not about if it is offensive or not, it is a no-brainer, don’t let it take up space. Be considerate if it is needed, if it is not, do as you please as long as no one is bothered. How hard can it be?

-Look at the child’s need for peace, quiet and ‘only mother and me’. Please feel free to breastfeed publicly, but not everywhere. I agree with many others… ‘storm in a teacup’ and a wish to be in center of attention.

-This has become ridiculously big, it is a ‘non thing’! Show consideration in both directions, don’t let these people make it into a big thing! They can have attention elsewhere if you are craving for personal attention… Nothing
Sonja Karlsson’s full letter also indicates that the discussion about public breastfeeding is connected to understandings of nudity:

"It is possible to breastfeed without provoking. Amningshjälpen experience the society to be more hostile towards breastfeeding (from an article in Göteborgs-Posten about public breastfeeding 2013-10-10). I myself, am convinced that the hostile attitude neither has to do with the breastfeeding in itself nor that children are unwelcome. I think it is about that some people have a hard time accepting and showing consideration for a common opinion that naked breasts are private parts of the body, just like the bum and genitals. Maybe nothing you want to lay eyes on when you have coffee or eat your lunch.”

Then it continues as already quoted above.

Similarly, there are those who expect parents who breastfeed to consider that others understand naked breasts as something sexual, and therefore should be careful in contributing to the sexualization of public space. This is brought up in approximately 30 of the articles (10%).

2000-10-03: Göteborgs-Posten:

"I must admit that I, like many I know, do not appreciate mothers who breastfeed their kids where others eat. I consider it offensive. Today breasts are very sexist [sic] and I personally don’t think it is particularly nice if you have dinner and a woman at the table next to yours rips her blouse open and..."

33 “-Handlar inte om stötande eller inte, det handlar om en icke fråga, låt det inte ta någon plats. Se till att ta hänsyn om det behövs, om inte gör som ni vill om ingen störs. Hur svårt kan det vara?

-Se på barnets behov av lugn. ro och "bara mor och jag" Amma gärna offentligt men inte överallt. Säger oxå som många andra ... "storm i vattenglas" och en önskan att stå i centrum.

-Det här har blivit löjligt stort, det är en "intesak"! Ta hänsyn åt båda håll, tillåt inte de här personerna att göra en sån storsak av det! De kan få uppmärksamhet på annat sätt om man är "sugen" på att få personlig uppmärksamhet.. Inget för medier att göra affär av. Sluta med att jämföra er med homosexuella m.fl. utsatthet!”

34 “Det går att amma utan att provocera. Amningshjälpen upplever att samhället blivit mer amningsfientligt (apropå GP:s artikel om Amningshjälpens nationella kampanj om offentlig amning 10/10.) Själv är jag övertygad om att den fientliga inställningen varken har att göra med själva amningen eller att barn inte är välkomna. Jag tror det handlar om att en del människor har svårt att acceptera och ta hänsyn till en allmän uppfattning att nakna bröst är en privat del av kroppen, precis som rumpan och könet. Kanske inget man vill ha ögonen på när man fikar eller äter lunch.”

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publicly show her breasts to breastfeed. I lose my appetite. Damon Bradley."\(^{35}\)

2011-07-24: *Expressen*: "Text of the day":

"Public breastfeeding is the same as flashing and should be prosecuted like that. Mike"\(^{36}\)

2013-02-19: *SR Dalarna*: Comments on Facebook about breastfeeding:

"Put them away! Nasty. Many men get aroused by it too. So away with public breastfeeding /Elena M Helsinghof"\(^{37}\)

These quotes can be seen as examples of how women’s bodies are being objectified (Ås 2004: 80). Though it is a bit unclear if breastfeeding in itself is considered sexual, at least the exposure of breasts are associated with sex, and considered unfit for public visibility. Historian Marilyn Yalom has written *A History of the Breast* in which she claims that women’s breasts predominantly have been associated with eroticism in Western Europe as far back as the 15th century (Yalom 1997: 5). This is a clear example of when feelings have been stuck to certain bodies, female bodies or breasts in this case, and the mere proximity causes unease, perceived as breaking the contract of what is appropriate to do in public.

In the paper *Matter out of place: visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces* sociologist Beverly Skeggs (1999) investigates the mechanisms behind women’s behavior patterns in social space. Skeggs suggests that respectability is an important concept to understand in relation to women and public space. Respectability is a feminine position that has been exclusive for white bourgeois women, associated with morality and dignity and is a way to receive social status and legitimacy (Skeggs 2000: 12-13). Women of lower classes are predetermined to be seen as over sexualized, but through bodily discipline and cover ups, and through rejecting sexuality, they can strive for a

\(^{35}\) "Jag måste erkänna att jag, liksom många andra jag känner inte uppskattar att mammor sitter och ammar sina barn på ställen där man sitter och äter. Jag anser det som stötande. Bröst är ju i dag väldigt sexistiskt och jag tycker personligen inte att det är speciellt trevligt om man sitter och äter middag och kvinnan vid bordet sliter upp blusen och visar brösten offentligt för att amma. Då tappar jag matlusten. Damon Bradley"

\(^{36}\) "Offentlig amning handlar om blottning och ska lag-föras därefter. Mike"

\(^{37}\) "Bort med dem!! Otrevligt. Många män blir upphetsade av det oxå. Så bort med offentlig amning/Elena M Helsinghof"
similar social position of respectability, building on self surveillance and shame (ibid. 198-199, 253). This ideal is present also in Sweden, where for example sociologist Catrin Lundström shows how young Swedish women need to navigate between expectations of a Swedish, gender equal and liberated sexuality, and simultaneous expectations of heterosexual marriage and maternity to fulfill a respectable femininity (Lundström 2009: 306).

Skeggs quotes social geographer Gill Valentine, stating that "women’s inhibited use of public space is a spatial expression of patriarchy.”. Based on the visual appearance of sex, sexuality and race, people become recognizable as being in or out of place (ibid. 216, 220). Women are to a large extent considered to be safer at home (which statistically is proved false, due to high rates of domestic violence) and therefore not belonging in public (ibid. 214). If a woman is assaulted by a man out in public, the tendency is to rather blame the woman for not keeping herself safe (and guarding her respectability), instead of putting the blame on the assaulting man. Women learn to perceive the ordinary as risky, as well as to learn from real experiences of violence, to deploy strategies to minimize threat, which often leads to self-exclusion from the public (ibid.). Both Skeggs and Day are stressing that it is important to keep in mind that in all times, regardless of norms concerning respectability and belonging, many women, of color and working class, have been forced to break the norm and occupy public space in order to survive (ibid. 222; Day 2000: 103).

In line with the theories above, I argue that the varying forms of sexualization of women’s bodies, and especially the breasts, are an important factor in why breastfeeding has such a precarious position in public. When the breast is exposed in public it can be seen as a violation of the boundaries of private and public, which both provokes and makes people uncomfortable. In this situation, the breastfeeding person is by some understood to fail to respect how “things should be done”, what Ahmed calls “fail the social pressure to maintain signs of getting along” (Ahmed 2010b: 591). This also activates ideas about right and wrong kinds of femininities. A woman who deliberately exposes her body, and does not show consideration for what others want her to do, can be connected to the sinful and seductive Whore, as well as failing in the role as a respectable woman, both leading to scorn and despire.
There are also scholars who have noted that, in spite of the reputation, Sweden has a rather sex-negative political culture, and one of the strictest sex-laws in Europe, which is framed not by moralism, but out of concern for individuals who need protection against exploitation and abuse (Kulick 2005: 76). Examples on this can be seen in studies of e.g. the so called ”sexualization of public space” (Nathorst-Böös 2006), Petersson’s (2005) study on protecting young men from homosexual seduction, and Kulick (2015) on sexuality and disability. These two letters from readers indicate a similar view on sexuality:

_Borås Tidning_ (2013-05-06):

"To breastfeed is between mother and child and should not be exposed publicly. Where there are breastfeeding rooms, they should be used for the comfort of everyone. If you want to breastfeed every hour, go ahead. I do not deny any baby to eat until it is satisfied, but I wonder what is up with the patience of mothers to do it long enough for the baby to get enough food. To breastfeed for 45-60 minutes with pause for burps was at least enough for my babies to sleep well for about four hours, until their next meal. There are options to breastfeeding if you want to be out among people, to prepare a bottle with expressed breastmilk or formula that can be warmed up under the tap. If you don’t understand what I mean with that you expose yourself, you are just as naive as the girls who do not think that internet can cause harm. So keep your breastfeeding sessions to yourself, that is safest and nicest for everyone.”

_Södermanlands nyheter_ (2016-03-27):

"Breastfeeding on demand does not have to be new in the history of humans, but it sparks intense reactions in the modern society. Sexuality and nudity usually does. The reactions have biological origin, therefore we usually have both written and unwritten rules when it comes to the 'natural' and biological needs. We call it civilization and style/alternatively style violations.

The reason why people react to nudity can also be a deeply rooted knowledge about how nudity can be connected to situations of helplessness and vulnerability, or contribute to those [situations]. Simultaneously, nudity can be an expression of the opposite, namely aggressiveness. Politicians,
now you’ve had my thoughts. The rest is your job. So, how do you move on with the conflict about breastfeeding on demand? Citizens with diverse perspectives and opinions need to feel that you care and create good solutions. Gunilla Lysell."

The first commenter writes about public breastfeeding in a way that can be understood to associate the exposure to be harming and unsafe for the one who breastfeeds. The second commenter makes the connection between breastfeeding and nudity and sexuality explicit, stating that it is associated with "situations of helplessness and vulnerability" but can also be used aggressively. In a paper comparing how sexuality and disability is handled in Sweden versus Denmark, Don Kulick describes how in Sweden, the notion of private is considered equal to secret or off limits, when in Denmark private is simply a matter of keeping something out of public view (Kulick 2015: 241, 245).

In the case of public breastfeeding, the comparison with Denmark is a bit faulty, since there are several articles in Sweden, making fun of how Denmark in other questions take pride in being much more relaxed and liberal than Sweden, but not when it comes to public breastfeeding. In spring 2013 a Danish tv program where men live commented naked women, stirred indignation in Sweden and caused a cultural debate between Swedish feminists and liberal Danes. A couple of weeks later, there was a protest action against intolerance to public breastfeeding in Denmark, that was reported on by several media in Sweden. In connection to this event, there was a chronicle published in Malmö’s Fria Tidning (2013-06-21) where we can read:

"At the same time, it was declared by the Danish Ligebehandlingsnævnet [Board of Equal Treatment] that it IS gender discriminating to dismiss breastfeeding women from privately owned cafés, but that it is still allowed to do it, with reference to that for other customers, it can be blufærdighedskrenkende with breastfeeding women in the premises. Blufærdighedskrenkende, that is, offensive to decency, a concept we barely even have in Swedish, even if we apparently are so incredibly prude and breast-obsessed. It is also a concept, of what’s meaning is lively being discussed in our neighboring country, and on Monday, hundreds of

breastfeeding women were protesting on public places in Denmark, against the now settled guidelines from the Board of Equal Treatment.”

There seems to be at least some indication on how breastfeeding is connected to a discourse around sexuality as danger or vulnerability, but whether or not breastfeeding would be seen as secret because it is private is hard to find foundation for in the material.

4.5. Chapter Summary

In this chapter the division between public and private has been investigated, and what consequences the division has for the expectations on women. Clearly historical associations of the two spheres have implications on the contemporary, since women, to a higher extent than men in general, are more active in the homes, and less active in public contexts.

In public women are expected to be discrete with breastfeeding out of respect for others, especially that nipples and the breast should be covered as much as possible or even completely is almost consensus in the material. When someone does not bother to be discrete, it is seen as a provocation by some. In some sense, the discussions seem to be more about how public breastfeeding is done, than if it should be done or not.

Through Ahmed (2010) and Gilligan (1982) is made visible how women are expected (by others and themselves) to prioritize the needs of others in the first hand, that men should be shown respect in public space, since historically it has been a male dominated sphere. To alter the framework of what is considered appropriate in public seemed to activate, what Dworkin and Wachs (2009) have called, fear of feminization, sometimes violently exposed as in threats to breastfeeding activists.

The balance between breastfeeding, like is expected by a good mother, but not disturbing anyone by breastfeeding too publicly, can be captured in the concept of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. This is seen in the simultaneous praising of breastfeeding women for their good mothering, and blaming them for attention seeking when they expose the breastfeeding. This seems to be connected to how

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30 Men precis i samma veva deklarerade danska Ligebehandlingsnævnet att det visserligen ÄR könsdiskriminering att avvisa ammande kvinnor från privatägda kaféer, men att det ändå är tillåtet att göra just det med hänsyn till att det för andra kunder kan verka blufærdighedskrænkende med ammande kvinnor i lokalen. Blufærdighedskrænkende, alltså blyghetskrænkende, ett begrepp vi knappt ens har på svenska trots att vi tydligt är så oerhört pryda och bröstfixerade. Det är även ett begrepp vars innehåll nu diskuteras livligt i vårt grannland, och i måndags protesterade många hundra ammande kvinnor på offentliga platser i Danmark mot Likabehandlingsnämndens nu faststagna riktlinjer.
women’s breasts are stuck with associations about sexuality. This puts them within the Swedish framework of privacy, possible vulnerability and maybe even secrecy.
5. Nature and Culture

A frequently reoccurring statement is the naturalness of breastfeeding, which comes back in 43 articles (12%). In my material this is both used as a way to justify breastfeeding in any given situation, but it is likewise used to criticize overt breastfeeding, since it can be connected to defecation, copulation and other activities that are also seen as natural but inappropriate to do publicly. This is connected to the long tradition of Western philosophy dealing with nature-culture relationships, which in many ways can be connected to the woman-man relationship as well. I will use the taboo theory (Douglas 1984 [1966]; Grosz (1994)) to explain what happens when violations of these categorizations are experienced. This chapter analyses the concepts nature-culture connected to gendered relations of power, through using what Ahmed (2010a) describes as feelings that get stuck to bodies. The binary nature-culture is intertwined with notions of modernity, which will also be elaborated on in this chapter.

5.1. Is Nature Good or Bad?
The very notion of natural is causing contradicting reactions in the media material. To some it is used as an argument for breastfeeding to be important and accepted, like in these quotes:

In parenting magazine Mama (2014-09-30) one person notes:

"-I think one can oppose most injustices in the world, but some things must be pinpointed and explained that breastfeeding is something natural. People have so many opinions! Even people who do not even know how to make a baby butt in. Because everything is not natural, but this is natural. I think everyone should be able to breastfeed wherever they want."

And Göteborgs-Posten (2000-10-04):

"Imagine how far from nature we really have come when a mother is considered repulsing when she suckles her child. Coffee-drinking mother!"

As seen in these quotes, what is considered the nature-element in breastfeeding is per se seen as an argument, that does not need further explanation. If we follow the logic of the first quote, if people would just understand that breastfeeding is natural, there would not be a problem.
But that something is natural is not an effective argument to everyone. Many rather see what is natural as something that should be kept concealed. For example this letter from reader "Erik, 25 years old" that we already read in chapter 4 (Göteborgs-Posten, 2000-10-03):

"I think breastfeeding is completely natural too, but in my opinion it does not really belong in a restaurant or café. There are many things that are natural, but does not belong everywhere. To have sex, burp, fart and sleep is also natural but does not belong in public premises where people socialize over food. Erik, 25 years old."\(^{43}\)

A similar statement is made in the free daily newspaper Metro (2008-02-14):

"Is it that hard to understand that naked breasts actually can be more affective than food served in feeding bottles? Or am I hopelessly de-hippiefied and can’t see how natural it is to pop out this body part when the baby cries for food? There are plenty of other body parts that are also very natural (the one you give birth through, for example). That does not mean I want to see them parade around in town when I run my errands."

In these examples, natural breastfeeding is associated with other things that are also categorized as natural, but inappropriate to do publicly. In the last chapter we read a letter written by reader Gunilla Lysell, about the vulnerability and aggressiveness associated with nudity. Let's look at her full letter, that will point us in the direction of a possible clarification, in the matter of nature and inappropriateness. Södermanlands nyheter (2016-03-27):

"Politicians, how do you solve the conflict concerning breastfeeding on demand?
Nyköping [a town] has had both revolts and appeals, as well as a report to the national Equality Ombudsman, due to the new breastfeeding method, called breastfeeding on demand.

Institutions and citizens are caught unprepared for this new trend, where the suckling is stuck to the naked breast of the mother among complete strangers in urban environments. In contrast to traditional breastfeeding, with structure in time and space, which already as it is can cause reactions, breastfeeding on demand seems to be a process without delimitations. One activist in the Breastfeeding-appeal, has written off citizens as ignorant


\(^{44}\) Är det svårt att förstå att nakna bröst faktiskt kan vara mer känslomässande än mat som serveras i nappflaskor? Eller är det jag som är hopplopp av-hippiefierad och inte kan se hur Naturligt det är att slänga fram denna kroppsdel när barnet skriker efter mat? Det finns en massa andra kroppsdelar som också är väldigt Naturliga (den som man föder fram barn ur, till exempel). Det betyder inte att jag vill se dem på parad över hela stan när jag gör mina ärenden.
about breastfeeding. Someone else considers him/her self to have every right in the question, in contrast to other citizens who do not have any [rights] at all. Breastfeeding on demand does not have to be new in the history of humans, but it sparks intense reactions in the modern society. Sexuality and nudity usually does. The reactions have biological origin, therefore we usually have both written and unwritten rules when it comes to the 'natural' and biological needs. We call it civilization and style/ alternatively style violations.

The reason why people react to nudity can also be a deeply rooted knowledge about how nudity can be connected to situations of helplessness and vulnerability, or contribute to those [situations]. Simultaneously, nudity can be an expression of the opposite, namely aggressiveness.

Politicians, now you’ve had my thoughts. The rest is your job. So, how do you move on with the conflict about breastfeeding on demand? Citizens with diverse perspectives and opinions need to feel that you care and create good solutions. Gunilla Lysell.\textsuperscript{45}

Gunilla suggests that the concealment of breastmilk and nudity has something to do with modern society, civilization and style. This will be further explored in the following section.

5.2. Culture Beats Nature

In the theory chapter is explicated how there within modernist thinking is a hierarchal division between humans and non-human animals, in favor of the humans. An example to illustrate this from the media material is the linguistic debate between two readers of local paper Södermanlands nyheter, about the use of the Swedish generic word for animal babies, unge (pluralis: ungar), which is often used also about children, sometimes, but not necessarily, with a derogatory undertone.

\textsuperscript{45} Politiker, hur löser ni konflikten med friamning?
The debate started the 8th of April 2016, with the letter from signature Mother of two, who we already read parts of in Chapter 4, with the telling headline "Humans do not have ungar":

"Humans do not have ungar
Of course babies can and should be breastfed when they need to, even when away from home and in public. Now also WHO, the World Health Organization, has come up with research data: The benefit of breastfeeding is good for the health of both the mother and the child. In the breastfeeding debate, only the lack of consideration is discussed. I think the wise Magdalena Ribbing would completely agree with us who has called out for consideration both for the child and the surroundings. I'm sure she would have said that the mother should handle the precious moment with the child in an environment as calm as possible. I would like to come with a request when it comes to the tending and use of our beautiful language. Humans have children, animals have ungar. You often hear "our ungar". In my ears it sounds a bit degrading. Mother of two."46

The concern to Mother of Two is that by calling children by a word associated with animals, the categories get mixed, and since the two categories are not equally valued, it is perceived as degrading for humans to be referred to as animals (though children culturally have been categorized as closer to nature as we will see below).

Four days later, a response by the signature Ego was published, criticizing the definite divide between humans and animals:

*Södermanlands nyheter* (2016-04-12)

"'Ungar' as good. (Reply to Mother of Two)
I was a bit bothered by what could be read in the end of the letter: 'Humans have children, animals have ungar' and that it would be degrading to call children ungar. Dear Mother of Two, humans are also animals, mammals who give birth to live young. That we in everyday language do not say females and males or ungar but women, men and children is a purely linguistic matter. We are animals, highest in the food-chain and our closest relatives are found with the chimpanzees and gorillas. You cannot escape

46 Människor har inte ungar
Naturligtvis kan och får barn ammas vid behov även utanför hemmet och bland allmänheten.
these facts. So your wish will not come true. It is as good to say ungar as to say children. Ego.”

Obviously Ego is correct in the observation that humans are animals and mammals, but the separation of humans and non-human animals has been a basic condition of our worldview since the Enlightenment-humanist ideology was established (Rossini 2014: 114). When applying Douglas’ (1984 [1966]) theory of how ”matter out of place”, that is, not properly categorized, is threatening the whole social structure/worldview it is easy to understand Mother of Two’s concern for mixing the categories human and animal.

The power hierarchy between nature and culture is not only anthropocentric, it is also discursively connected with sexism and racism (Rossini 2014: 18). A contemporary example is how Widegren describes how the Swedish National Insurance Office [Försäkringskassan] for the first time depicted non-white people in one of their publications, in a pamphlet about the importance of paternity leave in 1996. The headline was ”Can we change the course of nature?” followed by a caricature picture of four brown skinned people: a man in loincloth dancing and holding a spear, next to a woman, also she bare-breasted, and two naked children, all standing under a palm tree (Widegren 2016: 83). In the text from the National Insurance Office is referred to anthropological studies of the division of labor between men and women in tribe cultures, creating a racist stereotype of un-civilized, brown-skinned people, in traditionalist societies closely connected to nature, in contrast to a modern, gender equal, scientific white gaze standing above nature (ibid. 83-84).

This is also reflected in my material, where some statements have been made about African countries, where women are described to not cover their breasts and have no problems with breastfeeding. In a coverage of a photo exhibition on breasts, breastfeeding and women, the photographer Elisabeth Ubbe is interviewed in local paper Nacka-Värmdö Posten (2014-09-23):

”-A mother must have help and support with her breastfeeding. There is no help to get if you never see anyone else breastfeed, she says. She gives the

47 "Ungar” är lika fint. (Svar till Tvåbarnsmor) Jag blev lite fundersam över det som stod i slutet av insändaren "Människan har barn, djur har ungar” och att det skulle vara nedlåtande att kalla barn för ungar. Kära tvåbarnsmor, människor är också djur, dägdjur som föder levande ungar. Att vi i dagligt tal inte säger honor och hanar eller ungar utan kvinnor, män och barn är en rent språklig grej. Vi är djur, högst upp i näringskedjan och våra närmaste släktingar finner vi hos schimpanser och gorillor. Dessa fakta kan du inte komma från. Så din önskan lär inte slå in. Ungar är lika fint att säga som att man säger barn. Ego
example of a trip she did to northern Zambia, a couple of years ago. - I have never seen so much breasts. The mothers breastfed completely freely and according to the midwives who worked there, there were no problems with breastfeeding. 

Also in the one of the focus groups one person told me:

Informant: -There are parts of Africa where people still live naked pretty openly. I was in West Africa in… the end of the 80s, or in the 90s and there were still many who were topless. And there I can’t imagine that anyone would react to seeing breastfeeding openly, because they are already so extremely used to seeing breasts and if the breasts are visible it is easier for the child to go to the breasts, of course. They don’t have to ask for it in the same way, it is just to go ahead and help yourself [laugh]. So… there are pretty big differences.

Here my point is not to verify if this picture is accurate. Styles of clothing and breastfeeding are of course varying in different cultural contexts, and there are multiple ways to interpret these quotes. One possible interpretation is that these statements about Africa and nudity, naked breasts and no problems with breastfeeding are connected to an old racist stereotype of Africans, and other non-white people, as being closer to nature and hence less civilized. In an interview with the assistant professor in Public Health Elisabeth Kylberg, who is specialized in breastfeeding, a more nuanced picture is given of the African continent, with pros and cons for breastfeeding:

Elisabeth: -It is very varying in the different African countries. In some countries people breastfeed exclusively the first six months and a little longer. Maybe too long, because then they are falling behind and don’t get other kinds of food. And in other places, you start from day one to give other things as well, together with the breastmilk so… eh… With the passing of years, WHO has had different strategies for HIV and breastfeeding. One was that they would only… that they should not combine breastmilk and formula. Either they should only breastfeed or they should only give formula. But in their culture you give both. So in their culture it was stigmatizing to just breastfeed or just give formula, then it was something. And… but so… now there are new guidelines, but anyway. It is not easy.

Through the examples above I want to show how the European history of thoughts has categorized people differently in relation to culture (superior) and nature (inferior), and how those notions are

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still present in our worldview. The nature-culture divide is also connected to the taboo concept and how it is applied to different people and situations.

5.3. Taboos and Nature

As has been laid out in the section above, women and people of color, are sometimes associated with nature, rather than culture. That women are defined by their reproductive capacities and denied the status of cultural beings is also brought forth by e.g. Sherry Ortner as described in the theory chapter, placing them in a liminal position between nature and culture. This is where the taboo concept comes in. What is liminal is posing a threat to the rigid categorization system that is the groundwork for the social structure (Douglas 1984[1966]: 35). Douglas also points out that bodily emissions are by definition seen as impure, since they transgress the border and categorization of the body (ibid. 34).

Professor in Gender Studies Elizabeth Grosz explains the precarious position of fluids in culture, with that they are not really material. They have no boundaries, cannot be controlled, and reject conformation to the ideal of cleanliness and properness (Grosz 1994: 194). According to Grosz this causes a fear of absorption, which can be translated into a horror of femininity (Grosz 1994: 194). That men also have body fluids is often ignored because of the assumption that men are the generic human. Women on the other hand are perceived as more corporeal, and the feminine body seen as formless and engulfing, in itself disorder and not delimited against others, and therefore threatening the social order around it (ibid. 198-203). Except from these extrovert effects of body fluids, they also have consequences reflecting back at the identity of the exuding body. The cycles of fluids connected to female adulthood are blood and milk. Because they cannot be controlled by the will, they are resistant to cultural overlays, which make them culturally perceived as self-soiling and leaking (ibid. 205-207). This is a possible explanation for the recurring comparison between breastfeeding and excrement, suggested in the following two comments.

Local public service radio station SR Dalarna (2013-02-19) interviews Sofia Bergström who has initiated the Titt-revolt [Tuttuproret]:

"-When one says that it is natural, some people say 'Yes but it is natural to pee and poop too and then you can do that on the restaurant floor as well.' Stupidity! says Sofia Bergström.
Who have opinions? -Mostly youth, both women and men. But I think it has to do with what is natural is disappearing more and more in general, and there is a lot of body obsession among the youth.

Why should one be allowed to breastfeed publicly? -One should have the right to be everywhere, both mother and baby, we should not be confined to the home all hours of the day just because we breastfeed. I think most people try to plan as good as possible, and I myself have never seen a breast, you are so discrete when you breastfeed, says Sofia Bergström."

The other example is from December 2006 when nationally known journalist and blogger Linda Skugge publicly criticized the fine dining restaurant Edsbacka for asking her to leave the dining room while breastfeeding. On the 30th of December the same year, newspaper Expressen published a chronicle by Skugge where she described the reactions and replies she received on her blog due to her critique:

"This is what one guy wrote: 'As a little comparison, we can think about how you would have liked to sit at a restaurant and look at men who relieved themselves in a urinal while you were eating. This is also the most natural thing in the world, but definitely not something you would want to see at a dinner, or what do you think?' Others tried to argue that it is the same as to 'see someone have intercourse publicly' or to have to watch 'spiders or disgusting bugs’ while you are eating. How can someone compare breastfeeding to pee and having sex?"

Grosz claims that the association with these self-soiling fluids, places women in a liminal position, at the border between infancy and adulthood, object and subject, irrational animal and rational being, nature and culture (Grosz 1994: 205). Women’s and the female body fluids’ liminality between categories make them socially dangerous (ibid. 207), in line with the taboo theories.

Taboo and discipline are tools for suppressing nature, and can be seen as the very foundation for culture (Frykman 1979: 204). The higher up in the cultural hierarchy, the greater the need to control

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50Så här skrev en kille: ‘Som en liten jämförelse kan vi ta hur du skulle tycka det var att sitta på en restaurant och titta på män som gjorde sina behov i en pissoar medan du åt. Detta är också det mest naturliga i världen men definitivt inte något man vill titta på under en middag, eller vad tycker du?’ Andra försökte argumentera om att det är som att se nån ha samlag offentligt eller att behöva titta på 'spindlar eller äckliga kryp’ medan man åter. Hur kan ni likna amning vid att kissa eller ha sex?
the raw nature within (ibid. 144, Douglas 1984 [1966]: 34). According to Ortner the liminal position women have between nature and culture is due to the role of converting nature into culture when raising children, cooking food etc. This, in combination with primarily being defined by their reproductive functions, which is classified as in the realm of nature, renders women a universally subordinated position (Ortner 1974: 80). Grosz’s discussion on the uncontrollability of female body fluids also explains why women are not seen as full cultural beings (Grosz 1994: 205).

Here we can use Ahmed to further understand why breastfeeding is uncomfortable for some to witness. Ahmed writes that feelings get stuck to certain bodies, and the presence of some bodies disturb the illusion of public comfort since they are reminders of uncomfortable histories (Ahmed 2010b: 582-591). When applying this theory to the above discussion, we find that female bodies, and breastmilk or breastfeeding per se, are reminders of humans natural essence, something which we go to great length to conceal, in order to keep up the public comfort.

But there are also many examples in the media material, where the naturalness of breastfeeding is seen as a strong argument in favor of the practice, like in some quotes displayed earlier in the chapter or this headline to an article about public breastfeeding in *Aftonbladet* (2000-10-06): "Unaesthetic and repulsive- or completely natural?"51

There are also examples of when newspapers or websites create polls when the topic public breastfeeding is discussed, and the question is then often posed like in these examples:

Local public service radio station *SR Jämtland* (2013-10-09):

"Webb-question: Is it ok to breastfeed in public?"

Of course, breastfeeding is natural 72%, 122 votes

No, those things should be handled in private 7% 12 votes

Yes, but don’t show the breasts 14% 23 votes

Well, find a toilet if possible 7% 12 votes"52

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51 Oestetiskt och motbjudande - eller helt naturligt?
52 Webbfrågan Är det okej att amma offentligt?
Självklart, amma är ju naturligt 72% 122 röster
Nej, sånt där sköter man privat 7% 12 röster
Ja, men visa inte brösten 14% 23 röster
Nja, sök upp en toalett om det finns 7% 12 röster
Or similarly in local paper *Västerbotten Kuriren* (2013-04-23):

"Is it okay to breastfeed in public?
Yes-nothing is more natural than that. (57%, 1191 votes)
Yes-but a little secluded. (27%, 569 votes)
No- it is disturbing (16%, 336 votes)
Total number of votes: 2096"

The options framed like "public breastfeeding is ok, because it is natural" has a phrasing that is somewhat misleading. As we have already seen in the chapter, the statement that something is natural is not a given for that it should be allowed in public, but can on the contrary be an argument for that it should be secluded. On the other hand, the self-evident approval of what is natural, comes from another strong discourse, that I will look into in the following.

### 5.4. The Moral Nature

Simultaneous with the strong modern urge to suppress and concur nature, there is a counter discourse intrinsic in the modern thought of domination of nature. Björk describes how modernity often has been depicted in terms of loss and nostalgia (Björk 1999: 50). People living through the rapid changes of the 19th and 20th century had the feeling that the new era resulted in an individualistic, alienated and egoistic iron cage and hence nurtured a dream about a more simple, organic past, closer to nature (ibid. 50-51).

This view on nature is still present. Kessler writes that what we today call natural, is that which is culturally indisputable, and the terms natural and normal are used as synonyms (Kessler 1998: 255). This can be seen in how breastfeeding is discussed in media, both that breastfeeding should be allowed because it is natural, meaning authentic and healthy, but also how natural is framed as an opinion about what is normal, as can be seen in these examples:

In local paper *Helsingborgs Dagblad* (2010-10-05) a net activist group says that:

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53 Är det okej att amma offentligt?
Ja - något mer naturligt finns inte. (57%, 1 191 röster)
Ja - men lite undanskymt. (27%, 569 röster)
Nej - det är störande. (16%, 336 röster)
Antal röster: 2 096
"Regardless of what people think, one wonders how it can be that it is not natural to breastfeed out in the community."

Another local paper, Nerikes Allehanda, published a letter from a reader (2000-10-26):

"I have followed the debate about breastfeeding in public places and I feel both sad and upset about the way people connect everything about uncovered body parts with something inappropriate and dangerous. /…/ Breastfeeding is natural since the beginning, but now some people are of another opinion."

In Expressen (1980-02-23) we can read in a letter from a reader:

"In other countries, it is completely natural to breastfeed, but in Sweden, which is so developed in many areas, it is suddenly unnatural."

In these quotes, natural is obviously used as interchangeable with the word normal, as it is described more as an opinion than an established category. Also the categories of normal and deviation are charged with ideological meaning and power, associated with values of e.g. average, normative, healthy and moral (Lock 2010: 29, 42). In cultural anthropologist Birgitta Hallmark Lindgren’s (2006) study on perspectives of risk, gender and medical technology on pregnancies in Sweden, she also found the natural birth as an ideal among medical staff and many expecting parents (Hellmark Lindgren 2006: 192). Hence women who requested to give birth through a planned caesarean section felt they were questioned and condescended, upon which they asked themselves why exactly childbearing and breastfeeding were supposed to be so natural, in a society where nothing else is (ibid. 185).

The view of nature as something positive and primary can also be seen in discussions where nature is described as a moral compass for desired behavior. Hird’s article ”Animal Transex” is on the topic of how science and cultural institutions are trying to justify or disclaim certain behaviors according to how natural they are, i.e. if the behavior can be seen among other species (Hird 2006: 35). This is often the case when it comes to sexuality, gender identity and gender roles. Then ”nature” is used to argue for a strict and essentialist binary view on gender, and reproduction-oriented heterosexual preference as the only normal sexuality (ibid. 39). Hird argues that it is also

54 Och oavsett vad folk tycker, så undrar man hur det kommer sig att det inte är naturligt att amma ute i samhället.

55 Jag har följt debatten om amning på offentlig plats och blir både ledsen och upprörd över folks sätt att förknippa allt som har med bara kroppsdelar att göra som något olämpligt och farligt. /…/ Amning är naturligt sen begynnelsen, men nu finns det några som är av en annan uppfattning.

56 I andra länder är det helt naturligt att amma, men i Sverige som är så utvecklat på många områden blir det plötsligt onaturligt.
possible to find examples on e.g. homosexuality and transex among animals, but raises a finger of awareness from using nature as a moral compass, since practices of infanticide and incest etc., also can be considered "natural" behavior (ibid).

This kind of circular reasoning of human and animal behavior is for example displayed in this chronicle in *Aftonbladet*, written in defense of someone who was told off for breastfeeding at a restaurant (2014-08-08):

"/…/ You can no longer turn a blind eye to the fact that it is extremely sexist to accept having breasts pushed in your face daily in all sorts of contexts as long as they are used in sexual, tempting, inviting, objectifying purposes. /…/ And simultaneously think it is ok to be disgusted and bothered by breasts when they are used in the purpose they were created for: feeding babies. We are mammals. Mammals suckle their young. Hell no that we would be disgusted by kittens suckling their mother. Puppies suckling the female dog. Fillies that sip. We swill milk from the udder of cows all day long. But human suckling is for some mysterious reason still taboo."

The power associations attached to the different understandings of nature has often been disadvantaging women as described throughout this chapter. In the following chapter, we will see how some feminists have tried to change that balance.

### 5.5. Chapter Summary

Nature is used both as a self-explaining argument pro public breastfeeding, but others use it against it, seemingly labelling what is natural as inappropriate. The nature-culture divide is part of modern beliefs but have a way longer history than that, going back to ancient Greek philosophers, and throughout Western history of ideas, not only placing nature under humans, but also categorizing some humans, e.g. people of color and women, as closer to nature, and thus inferior. Though ideas are changing over time, traces of those patterns seem to stuck since reflections about those ideas can be found in the media material.

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The division between nature-culture comes from a modernist worldview, in which the nature within, referring to emotions and desires, needed to be suppressed in order to be a rational and modern subject. In that way of thinking, women and especially female body fluids were seen as closer to nature, indeed even liminal between the two categories. Using the theory about taboo and purity, this explains why women’s bodies are more surrounded by taboos: to be liminal in a social structure is to pose danger to the whole system.

Through Ahmed (2010b), a possible understanding of the outrage public breastfeeding evokes in some people, is that the mere proximity of breastfeeding reminds of nature within us, which should be kept controlled or suppressed. To fail in that is to fail to keep up public comfort, and is hence offensive and not appropriate. Parallel to this, the opposite understanding of nature is coexisting. Through urbanization and industrialization of modernity, a nostalgic understanding of nature as authentic and good has developed, which can be seen in the arguments that breastfeeding should be allowed because it is natural.
6. Breastfeeding and Social Change

In the last analytical chapter I will investigate the overall increase of media discussions about public breastfeeding that started in the 1990s. Doing this, I will focus on the neoliberalization of Swedish politics and the following social changes, and what possible connections that has to the public breastfeeding debate. This is a continuation of the discussion in the previous chapter on ideas about nature and culture and will show how some women in the 1990s used ideas about nature as a protest against their marginalized position in modernity. It also touches upon values in the generation born in the 1990s, as well as how the taboo concept by Douglas (1984 [1966]) and Kristeva (1982) can be used to understand how moral values are connected to social changes.

As described in the introductory chapter, the material I work with consists of articles from year 1980 to 2016. Between the years 1980-1989, there were four articles published about public breastfeeding. The years 1990-1995, only one article was published. After that, the number of articles concerning public breastfeeding steadily increased in my material, as depicted in chart 1:

![Chart 1. Average number of articles about public breastfeeding per year in Swedish media.]

The extraordinary amount of articles in 2013 is due to a campaign called ”You can breastfeed here” [Du kan amma här] launched by Amningshjälpen. The purpose of the campaign was to normalize public breastfeeding, and provided stickers to cafés and restaurants, which wanted to signal that breastfeeding was allowed in their premises. As part of that campaign a local group of
Amningshjälpen made a humorous music video, where they sang about public breastfeeding to the melody of K-pop hit Gangnam Style. The fact that the video received very negative reactions and even death threats on YouTube, contributed to the elaborate media coverage of the campaign and seems to have provoked increased discussion on the topic. 37 (50%) of the articles from 2013 are about the campaign or the music video.

6.1. Neoliberalism and Gender Relations

In the previous chapter we could read about photographer Elisabeth Ubbe’s observations about breastfeeding in Zambia. If we continue to read the same article we find these statements (Nacka-Värmö Posten, 2014-09-23):

"-Young girls shower with their bras on because they don’t want to show their breasts to their classmates, she [Elisabeth] says. It was different 25-30 years ago; back then, bare breasts was a common sight at Swedish beaches. But then the 90s-crisis came, which also turned out to be a breast-crisis, and since then breasts and breastfeeding has been retreating from public space.-Ten years ago, for example, no one put a towel over the baby when they breastfed in public, says Elisabeth. Today there are breastfeeding shirts, scarfs fit to wrap around the baby when they eat from the breast, and malls build designated rooms for breastfeeding. Everything to prevent women from disturbing or offending other people with their breasts."

The 90s-crisis Ubbe refers to, was an economic crisis in Sweden due to growing unemployment, increasing state deficit, and deep recession. This contributed to political changes in Sweden in the 1990s, after half a century under mostly Social Democratic government. The poor economy made the Social Democratic hegemony diminish, in favor of the antisocialist, also called bourgeoise [borgerliga], parties who formed government in the periods 1991-1994 and 2006-2014 (Schall 2016: 123, 163).

Under their government (a coalition between Conservatives and Liberals called the Alliance [Alliansen]) the political trends turned to focus on marketization of the national economy, individual responsibility and freedom of choice (ibid. 163). These ideological changes are often referred to as

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58 This probably refers to the Swedish practice of having common, but gender separated, shower rooms after PE class in schools.

processes of neoliberalization, which is the concept I will use in the following. Also The Social Democrats have increasingly adapted their politics to this ideology (Schall 2016: 168).

As described in the theory and background chapter the welfare cutbacks had profound effects on gender equality, since the main means for the equality work had been through governmental redistributions of resources and social benefits (Mulinari, 2016: 139). Both Mulinari and Schall note that Sweden’s earlier reputation of social equality is getting increasingly hollow, due to rapidly growing income inequality (Mulinari 2016: 154; Schall 2016: 167). Sociologist Melinda Cooper describes that the social insecurity of a neoliberal society with low welfare benefits, makes the family the major institution of wealth-distribution through inheritance, which also requires a more strict regulation of sexuality in order to keep offspring legally and culturally legitimate (Cooper 2017: 23). In contrast to when economy is good, and people have the opportunity to pursue non-normative or unexpected lifestyles, a restrained economy building on credit-based homeownership and wealth-inheritance requires the approval of parents and other family-members, usually proliferating traditional life choices (ibid. 312). The increasing expectation of keeping sex only within stable relationships is something cultural anthropologist Don Kulick has noticed is also happening in Sweden (Kulick 2005: 92).

The new social conservatism in the U.S. has the nostalgic ideal of the Fordist Family, with a breadwinning husband and a stay at home wife, sentimentalizing women’s unpaid domestic work and their confinement to the semi-sacred space of kinship and economic dependance (Cooper 2017: 22-23). To be a stay at home wife has never been very common in Sweden. Even when the ideal of housewives peaked in the 1950s, still about 30% of the married women where working outside the home (Berggren 2006: 262). Generation and business scholar Anders Parment has noticed an increased interest in being a housewife among Swedish women born in the 90s, which he derives from the impact of an increased contact with this lifestyle through pop-culture and media (Parment 2016: 161). Possibly these trends are contributing to idealizing private mothering, kept in the domestic sphere. This is something I will come back to later in the chapter. But now we will more specifically look into some trends about mothering and femininity that could be observed in the 1990s.

6.2. Motherhood vs. Modernity
As mentioned in the theory and background chapter, literature and feminist scholar Nina Björk refers literary descriptions of modernity and gender in her book *Sireners sång* (1999). There she describes how the path to be a modern subject is to control the nature within, though self-discipline (Björk 1999: 22). There are several examples of this to be found in relation to breastfeeding, like how the contact between parents and babies was restricted to not spoil the child and turn it into an animalistic masturbator (Frykman 1979: 204).

This disciplining can also be found in the four hour breastfeeding schedule, that was adopted in the Swedish health care system in the beginning of the 20th century, which became increasingly hegemonic when births were hospitalized in the following decades. The schedule provided specific times and duration for when breastfeeding was to be undertaken, regardless of when the baby itself wanted to nurse. In that way, the baby would not be spoiled with too much attention or unlimited suckling. Scientific values about regularity and measurements were said to be the foundation for the schedule, and that it would benefit the development of the nervous system and digestive system to leave the baby to itself most of the time (Nordgren 1998: 19-20). Here we can again look at reader Gunilla Lysell’s letter published in the local news paper *Södermanlands Nyheter* (2016-03-27):

"Institutions and citizens are caught unprepared for this new trend, where the suckling is stuck to the naked breast of the mother among complete strangers in urban environments. In contrast to traditional breastfeeding, with structure in time and space, which already as it is can cause reactions, breastfeeding on demand seems to be a process without delimitations. /…/ Breastfeeding on demand does not have to be new in the history of humans, but it sparks intense reactions in the modern society. Sexuality and nudity usually does. The reactions have biological origin, therefore we usually have both written and unwritten rules when it comes to the 'natural' and biological needs. We call it civilization and style/alternatively style violation."  

Many of the historical issues described above can be retrieved in this quote. The writer is concerned about how breastfeeding on demand, not on schedule, seems to be without delimitations, lacking structure in time and space. She connects this to nudity and sexuality and writes that there are rules

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60 " Institutioner och medborgare står oförberedda inför det nya modet, där dibarnet hänger vid mammans nakna bröst bland främmande människor i stadsmiljö. Till skillnad från traditionell amning med struktur i tid och rum, som redan det kan leda till reaktioner, ser friamning ut att vara en process utan avgränsning. /…/ Friamning som metod behöver inte vara ny i mänsklighetens historia, men väcker starka reaktioner i det moderna samhället. Sexualitet och nakenhet brukar göra det. Det är reaktioner på biologisk grund och därför har vi ofta både skrivna och oskrivna regler när det gäller det "naturliga" och biologiska behov. Vi kallar det civilisation och stil/alternativt stilbrott."
concerning these natural and biological needs that keep up the civilization. A very similar association chain as among the 1800s bourgeoisie is described: how the regulation of body and physical contact is the very foundation for civilization.

However, in 2016 when the letter was published, the practice to breastfeed on demand was not really a new phenomenon. The rear nursing occasions in the four hour schedule were inhibiting the milk production resulting in great problems for many, and the breastfeeding frequency was steadily decreasing between the 1940s and the 1970s, when it reached an all time low (Nordgren 1998: 21-24). In the 70s, however, old patterns of trust in authorities was changing and mothers independently found ways to organize and learn more about how breastfeeding could be done ”naturally”, without schedules and measurements, usually called breastfeeding on demand, or free breastfeeding in Swedish [friamning] (ibid. 19-26), leading to increased rates of breastfeeding.

It is interesting to connect these changes in breastfeeding practices to other patterns in society. Björk has written about how an approach to feminism and gender roles focusing on biology and gender separatism grew strong in Sweden in the 90s. This kind of essentialist-feminism emphasized how women are different from men, and tried to increase the cultural value attached to the traits and activities that are considered female, especially the care women provide for their children, family and home (Björk 1996: 57-64).

This kind of feminism connects to a long tradition of thinking within the Western history of ideas, stemming from the Cartesian divide between body-mind, also connecting body to objectification and women (ibid. 130, 132, 177). In the feminism debate in the 90s, a discursive cluster was formed around the notion of woman connecting concepts like holiness, mysticism, godess, primeval power, biology, female and nature to a possible position to take on as a form of protest against a modern, masculine, capitalist culture (ibid. 123-128). Especially the role of being a mother was described as an important protest against modernity, connecting motherhood to positive images of femininity, care and the natural virtue of creating life (ibid. 62, 137). These associations are not new or isolated to essentialist-feminists, but rather reframe traditional, often repressing, thoughts about women into something empowering.

Practices concerning breastfeeding and child birth were also affected by these movements. In a breastfeeding guiding book from 1998, midwife Kristin Svensson writes that breastfeeding to her is
"a counter-force to technological and rationalized society" (Nordgren 1998: 14 [My translation]) and that the biological and emotional components of breastfeeding "can help us find a balance between nature and technology, keep us alive in the technology-society." (ibid.).

Also ethnologist Magnus Bergquist writes about these trends, from the perspective of the maternity ward. There femininity, motherhood and birth were increasingly framed within the concept of nature in the 1990’s, as a contrast to what was criticized to be a masculine, institutionalized and pathologizing obstetrics (Bergquist 1994: 96; also cf. Hellmark Lindgren 2006). The ideal became to "give birth naturally" (Bergquist, 1994, 111) and role models to delivering women were collected from an imagined past: highlighting the role of premodern midwives, witches and magic (ibid. 98-99). This was a way of letting women reclaim the control over their pregnancies and deliveries (ibid. 96) and was striving to make the experience cohesive "biologically, socially and psychologically" (ibid. 116). Just like Björk, Bergquist connects this to modernity and the awkward position women were allocated within the paradigm, being defined by their bodies, which simultaneously were deprived of any importance in the human experience (ibid. 116-117).

But in placing the control of the birth process on the woman, with more freedom of choice concerning anesthetics, home deliveries, and various educative and prophylactic courses, pregnancies also transformed from being biological destiny into a project that needed perfection (ibid.109-116). This can again be connected with Healthism as discussed in chapter 3 putting medical responsibility on the individual and making the possibility of performing the perfect pregnancy and child birth a matter of morality.

Björk states that science and norms do not exist in a vacuum, but are always connected to economic and material circumstances (Björk 1996: 103). When looking at the economic circumstances at the time of essentialist-feminism in the 1990’s, one determinant factor was that Sweden was in a relatively severe financial crisis, and was deconstructing the welfare system (ibid. 56), as discussed earlier. At this point in history, the state did no longer have the financial means to conduct the care work that traditionally was expected of women to do for free (day care centra, old peoples’ nursing homes etc.). According to Björk, the need to transit those responsibilities back to the unpaid realm of women’s domestic work, conveniently "coincided” with the glorification of women’s altruistic and self-sacrificing nature (ibid.).
Ethnologist Helene Brembeck (1998) has made a comparative study of young Swedish women’s approach to motherhood in the 1970s versus the 1990s. Also in this study is described how the women who became mothers in the 90s were (partly) using that new role as a way to protest modernity (ibid. 124), though Brembeck complicates the picture somewhat. Many of the mothers participating in the study in the 70s were part of the women’s liberation movement in the 60s and 70s, who ”wanted to have it all”, balancing a self-realizing career and at the same time fulfilling traditional expectations of being full time mothers and wives. Among some of the 90s mothers who, when growing up, had seen women around them being exhausted from the double workload of the ”liberated woman”, it created a backlash to traditional femininity focusing on motherhood and domesticity (ibid. 63). This was also encouraged by men who wanted to get rid of these ”new” career concurrents and by cultural influences from housewives in the U.S. (ibid.).

But Brembeck’s study also shows that the mothers in the 90s had a more disparate identity, and especially that many of them were stressing that they not only wanted to be mothers, but just wanted to ”be themselves” (ibid.41). Instead of retreating to a form of ”premodern” idea of the woman as mother, these women escaped modernity by becoming postmodern, by taking on diversified identities, constantly changing between social roles (ibid. 71, 194). This development stems from the notably different living conditions in the 90s, when the welfare was radically decreasing, where privileges like accessible housing, permanent jobs and a stable private economy were far more rare compared to in the 70s (ibid. 124). This situation created a rather pessimistic approach to the future and big projects, as well as skepticism towards authorities and experts (ibis. 71, 83, 194). Through this skepticism, old hegemonic ideals and norms concerning motherhood were increasingly contested, when the mothers payed less attention to institutionalized experts, and increasingly focused on finding a personal way of being a parent (not mother per se) through various sources of information and inspiration, including tv programs and friends (ibid. 70, 83).

This approach is also seen in later quotes in the media material, and connects to the discussion in chapter 1, about women expecting to have equal freedom of movement also when breastfeeding, and not wanting to put their lives on pause for anyone else. This is explicitly explained in the following quotes.

"When breastfeeding in cafés and restaurants is condemned, it is often stated that if breastfeeding is natural, then also pee, poop and sex is natural. But why compare breastfeeding to something that far-fetched, instead of an adult person’s eating at the table? Another argument to demand the mother to breastfeed secretly is a belief that no-one is then bothered. But it is reasonable to assume that it actually bothers the mother and the child to be forced to leave their company and sit at a toilet."61

This writer clearly suggests to ignore Ethics of Care and the prioritization of other’s comfort at expense of ones own (cf. Gilligan 1982). To breastfeed should not be more dramatic than when an adult eats at a table.

Similarly expressed in an interview with nationally known media personality Sanna Bråding in the parenting magazine Mama (2014-09-30):

"Now I am breastfeeding all the time, I’m breastfeeding when I’m out walking, I breastfeed in the supermarket, I breastfeed everywhere. I would never change diapers amongst people, but breastfeeding is clean. It doesn’t smell. It is very natural. It does not disturb. The only thing that can happen is that you maybe see a glimpse of a nipple, but breasts can be seen on every advertisement pillar and it is still breastfeeding they [the breasts] are made for. Just because you’re a mom doesn’t mean that you should stay at home and be forced to stop living?"62

Traditional expectations on moms to lead a quiet life in the homes are by Bråding and others, as also seen in chapter 3, seen as old-fashioned and a violation of ones right (cf. Elvin-Nowak 2001). A possible interpretation of the changes I have laid out above, is that the welfare cutbacks in the 1990s led to new economic and social circumstances that probably effected most parts of life, so also parenthood and breastfeeding. We have already seen how it created contradicting trends in mothering, to retreat to a traditional kind of motherhood, embracing essentialist ideas about femininity and nature, or to dismiss those ideals as unachievable and/or limiting.

In an interview with Brembeck in parenting magazine Mama (2013-04-23) we can read:

61När amning på kaféer och restauranger fördöms påstas det ofta att om det är Naturligt att amma, så är kiss, bajs och sex minsann också Naturligt. Men varför jämföra amning med något så långsökt, i stället för med vuxnas ätande vid matbordet? Ett annat argument för att kräva att mamman ammar i smyg är föreställningen om att ingen störs av det. Men det är rimligt att anta att det faktiskt är störande för mamman och barnet att vingas lämna sitt sällskap för att sitta ute på en toalett.

“Nowadays she is a natural part of urban life, the modern woman who self-evidently takes up space with her stroller, her children and her girlfriends on parental leave. When the magazine Mama was founded in 2003, it was not at all as obvious. Latte Mothers⁶³ was the result of a desire young women with children had had for a while. Even in the 1990s there was an expectation from the Child Welfare Centres that you should devote yourself to the child completely. That crashed with the women’s desire to continue to spend time with the girlfriends, do workout, and go shopping in town, says Helene Brembeck, professor in Ethnology at the University of Gothenburg. When the Latte Mothers showed up in cafes with their strollers it was absolutely an emancipation, a way to make use of public space.”⁶⁴

According to Brembeck, from the 1990s on, women started to take parenting out in public to a higher extent. It is also around this time, that media starts to write about the topic of public breastfeeding as seen in the chart earlier in the chapter. A possible interpretation is that opinions about public breastfeeding were increasingly polarized around this time due to changing mother ideals, which by Björk and Brembeck is suggested to have something to do with the social changes following the economic crisis at that time. Those social changes are not confined to the 90s but keep forming the contemporary, in the same way as the debate about public breastfeeding is also continuing in the 2000s and 2010s.

6.3. The Young Generation

American influences are often depicted as especially affecting young people, who in ten articles are described as adapting to more prudish ideals. In local newspaper Nerikes Allehanda (2014-02-03) art critic Stefan Nilsson analyzes a picture of a breastfeeding mother from 1917, and simultaneously contemplates contemporary society, in a chronicle:

“You can notice that the younger generations are starting to claim the same kind of prudish ideals as 100 years ago. They have contact phobia, and feel an increasing unease towards nudity, not to mention natural body hair. Did by the way anyone see a young woman sunbathe topless recently? No…?”

⁶³ Latte Mothers [Lattemammor] is in Swedish a jokingly or sometimes degrading way of referring to mothers with an urban lifestyle, who are depicted to spend their maternity leave in town, drinking caffé latte in cafés, gossiping with their girlfriends.

What is happening when the pendulum swings back so hard in the other direction? Who is disciplining our gaze this time and in what purpose? Why have the American Christian right's extreme values and moral codex suddenly appeared like a new-old ideal in our country?  

In 2013 Nya Ludvika Tidning made an interview with Marit Woxmark, who together with her partner started a Facebook group to support the right to breastfeed in public. There Marit expresses similar ideas about "the younger generation" when discussing why some are disturbed by public breastfeeding (2013-02-19):

"I think it is because the view on our bodies has become increasingly sexualized. Breasts are just about sex and because of that, people don’t think it is ok for someone to eat from them, she says. But it is above all the younger generation that is against breastfeeding in public places; the older people don’t understand why it would be strange, she continues."

The generation entering adulthood right now are those born in the 1990s. In different studies on generation behavior, the conclusion has been drawn that this generation is more focused on stability and family values than several previous generations (Parment 2016: 161). They are described to dream of the "small life", including a good house and work, as well as a stable relationship and children. To be a good parent and holding a relationship together for many years, are characteristics they respect. This is described as a reaction to the moderate state of crises they grew up in, both concerning the national economic crisis as well as bigger international events, like the so called war on terror (Lindgren 2016).  

Parment writes:

"Simultaneously as the development towards gender equality is making progress, there is an increasing interest for family values, that is, to spend a lot of time with family and friends, and to down-prioritize to work a lot. Pop culture with all the tv-shows about housewives have strongly contributed to..."
that women born in the 1990s find the housewife style appealing. This could counteract the progress that has been made in the area of gender equality.” (Parment 2016: 161-162). [My translation]

Parment’s description of this generation’s focus on family and stability seems to fit well with the earlier discussion about family relations in neoliberal society. Perhaps is it not only due to tv-shows from the U.S. that ideals are getting more similar, but that also the living conditions in Sweden, through privatizations and welfare cutbacks, to some extent are getting more similar to the U.S.’s. This is something Åsard also cautiously suggest (Åsard 2016: 262-264). But it can additionally be that the changes in social structure per se, are contributing to the increased conflict regarding public breastfeeding. Here it is also interesting to note that the earlier described idea that it is mostly older people who are offended by public breastfeeding is contradicted. The discussion doesn’t seem to be so easily categorized as one between generations, even if the arguments and reasons might vary with age.

6.4. Social Change and Taboo

To get some clarification in this we might again go back to the theories about taboo, to know that the more unclear one’s position is in the social structure, the more taboos will circumscribe that person, and especially taboos concerning sexuality and the body (Douglas 1984 [1966]: 95, 115).

A historic example is the prudish epoch per excellence, the Victorian era. Industrialization, urbanization, and development of new technology caused rapid social change during the 1800s, and many people were relocated in the social hierarchy, both upwards and downwards (Frykman 1979: 27, 61). The bourgeoisie had a clear interest in separating one's own group from the peasantry "beneath" them (ibid. 218). In the Theory and Background chapter you can read about how the body was associated with animals and the lower classes, and therefore threatening to the higher social position of the bourgeoisie, leading to the extended concealment and seclusion of corporeality and bodily activities (ibid. 167, 187).

In the bourgeoisie in the victorian era, the female body was particularly taboo, because it could arouse the sinful sexual desire of men. Sexuality (male) was something animalistic and shameful, and it was women’s responsibility to physically and linguistically hide her body as far as possible in order to prevent this (Frykman 1979: 195, 201). In contrast to the possible temptress, women simultaneously had the role of the caring, domestic and sympathizing wife and mother (ibid.
100-102). As already noted, this is called the Madonna/Whore dichotomy (ibid. 85). Possibly, if the social insecurity of neoliberalism proliferates the ideal that sexuality should be kept controlled in monogamous longterm relationships, the tempting seduction of women is dangerous to men’s social position as well, strengthening the presence of a Madonna/Whore dichotomy. In 2013, newspaper *Sydsvenskan* interviewed sociologist and artist Elisabeth Apelmo about different trends and ideals regarding breasts (2013-10-08) and she connected this to exactly this double meaning of women’s roles:

"In the 20s they [the breasts] were supposed to be small, in the end of the 80s big, like Pamela Andersson’s. In the 70s and 80s you often saw women who walked around topless at the beach. You almost never see that nowadays. I experience the public tolerance to be less now, says Elisabeth Apelmo. Something happened in the 90s, she thinks, when the sexualization in society dramatically increased. We are spoon-fed with pictures of the young, idealized breasts and fashion is tight and revealing. At the same time we seem to cover up more, including in shower- and locker rooms. It is also more sensitive to breastfeed publicly. The contemporary woman lives with a double message, she thinks, just like they have done historically. The breasts are functional, there for the baby, and simultaneously heavily eroticized.”

Though not as extreme as during the industrial revolution, neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state, with the following social changes and increasing stratification, may also be connected to increasing taboos and prudishness, caused by the precarious position in the social structure. One interesting parallell is that around the turn of the millennia, several celebrity gossip magazines were established in Sweden, putting immense attention to the scrutinizing pictures of female celebrities’ bodies (Hirdman 2017: 365-366). In line with similar international media forms, the primary focus of the magazines is to not only to observe, but also evaluate and comment on women’s bodies, often putting the limelight on ”shocking” pictures of fat, wrinkles, cellulites or protruding bones (Hirdman 2015: 57-58). Hirdman writes that:

"The very practice of evaluating and scrutinizing the women in this way, makes femininity into a surface to evaluate and project feelings upon.” (ibid. 69) [My translation]
Through the constantly repeated despise for women’s bodies, Hirdman suggests that eventually, the feeling of abject gets permanently associated with the female body (Hirdman 2015: 70). If this is the case, it is understandable why women are more reluctant to expose their naked bodies, in fear of being scrutinized and scorned. One way abject is described by Julia Kristeva, is as something that does not respect borders or rules, but is ambiguous and thus disturbs the order (Kristeva 1982: 5) I therefore see it as filling the same function as taboo.

According to British sociologist Imogen Tyler, especially the pregnant or maternal young, female body is an abject in neoliberal society because of its association with welfare dependency and reluctance to work, hence seen as threatening the order or system, which builds on extensive work and equally extensive consumption (Tyler 2009: 22). This is nothing I can verify in my material, but it is interesting to note this article by (antisocialist) blogger Linda Skugge, who was denied to breastfeed in fine dining restaurant *Edsbacka Krog*, as has already been discussed elsewhere in the thesis. In newspaper Expressen, Skugge writes after the incident (2006-12-30):

"Ok, where should I and my baby be when I need to go into town because of business meetings (no it is not possible to have work meetings at McDonalds)? Sturehof has a breastfeeding ban. Grand [Hotel] and Operabaren are not even to think about. Neither is Sturegallerian nor NK [Nordiska Kompaniet]. Even if it would have been warm outdoors, I’m sure it would not have worked out to breastfeed in a park because it is so offensive to be forced to see a mother breastfeed. I have to come to town to work and have meetings, and if I would not work I would have to use my parental allowance [from the state], that means your tax money. Isn’t it better that a mother earns her own money, so she doesn't have to lift it from the taxpayer’s money, or what? So, it is ok to discriminate a breastfeeding mother at a restaurant. What is then the next step, what other groups aren’t allowed in fine dining? What other groups is it ok to put behind a big screen at a restaurant? No exactly; there are non! To force a breastfeeding mother to go behind a screen is an obvious case of pure discrimination."

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Skugge clearly expresses some concern with the maternal position as depending on the welfare state without contributing in paid labor. However, this is the only explicit example of such opinions I have found in my material. In some sense the blogger Blondinbella, who earlier has shown up in the material, also performs this kind of motherhood. Her blog www.isabellalowengrip.se, is divided into 8 topics: “At Home”, ”Beauty”, ”Business”, ”Food & Travel”, ”Life & Thoughts”, ”For You”, ”Looks” and ”Motherhood”. Covering discussions about her entrepreneurship, motherhood, home decoration and make up-products, with innumerable retouched and over exposed pictures of luxurious environments and items, Löwengrip is depicted as a cosmopolitan business person and domestic super woman in one. Maybe this can be seen as a way around this dilemma of maternity in neoliberalism, making the perfect motherhood into a career path.

Further, Tyler argues that maternity and neoliberalism are essentially incompatible but that since the 1990s a growing trend has been to create maternity as a consumer-oriented individual identity (Tyler, 2009, 30) striving for the always expected feminine traits of beauty and sexual availability (ibid. 27). I suggest that this can be seen as an indication for not only increased scrutiny of the female body in general, but that the pregnant body in particular received a new social position in media in the 1990s, which reasonably has been reflected on the breastfeeding debate. This could be connected to the beliefs that breastfeeding mothers are looking for attention, as seen in the earlier chapters and is illustrated in this letter from a reader in Borås Tidning that we read in chapter 3 (2013-05-26):

"It seems as if the little child has turned into a symbol of status, that has to be showed off ever so often, in all sorts of situations, including time for breastfeeding. Of coarse breastfeeding should be done at home in peace and quiet, not in noise and mess among loads of bacteria and germs. But maybe you think your breasts have turned out so good-looking that you gladly show them. Because there is always someone in the room who is looking. If it is that boring to breastfeed at home where no one can see you, go to the library and get help by a good librarian to borrow a good book."70

Statements like these clearly label breastfeeding as a sexually exhibitionist activity, and would perhaps not have been discursively possible before the 1990s, when pregnant and maternal bodies where predominantly seen as desexualized, private and even taboo (Tyler 2009: 23; 27).

70 “Det lilla barnet verkar ha blivit en statussymbol, som måste visas upp titt som tätt i alla upptäckta miljöer och situationer, där-ibland vid amningsdags. Självklart bör amning ske hemma i lugn och ro, och inte i stoj och stök bland massor av bakterier och ”baskelusker.” Men du tycker kanske du fått så snygga bröst, att du gärna vill visa upp dem. För alltid finns det väl någon i lokalen som tittar. Om det är så träkigt att amma hemma där ingen ser dig, gå till biblioteket och få hjälp av duktiga bibliotekarier att låna en bra bok.”
To go into any further length of what implications and mechanisms neoliberalism is connected to would be a too big project to be contained in the limits of this thesis. This chapter should rather be seen as intriguing for further investigation.

6.5. Chapter Summary

The discussion about public breastfeeding in media has increasingly intensified, starting from the 1990s. In this chapter, this has been analyzed in relation to a profound social change that happened at that moment: economic crisis, downsizing in the welfare state and increased neoliberalization of the Swedish society.

The restrained economy and cuts in welfare, brought back the expectation that women would attend to unpaid care work in the family, that had earlier been institutionalized. This was framed in an empowering discourse, reevaluating culturally assigned female traits concerning care, mother instincts and morality, Motherhood was seen as a protest against technological, patriarchal modernity and was expected to be performed selflessly. But there was another trend at the time, appealing to women, who due to the restrained economy, did not have the opportunity to establish any traditional family life, and who also did not desire to be absorbed into motherhood, but wanted to keep their autonomy and personal interests. These competing trends for mothers could form the foundation for a polarized discussion about whether or not mothering and breastfeeding could be done anywhere.

The economic and political changes in the 1990s, lead to decreased social security in Sweden. The weaker the welfare state is, the more responsibility is placed on the family, and genealogy becomes more important for economic transactions. This has been observed in generational studies, where people born in the 90s seem to be more concerned with family values and even housewife lifestyles. This could possibly further associate women to homes rather than to public space.

We can also use the taboo-concept to understand that social changes replace people in the social structure, thus causing disturbing cases of liminality and taboos, visible in the need to control or discipline the body. This was the case in the Victorian Era in the 19th century, where great measures were taken to conceal the body and breastfeeding was a precarious activity only done in strict privacy. The neoliberal social changes in Sweden since the 1990s, seem to have created an increased imperative of body discipline in the form of beauty and attractiveness of the female body.
in general, including the maternal body, seen in how these bodies are depicted in media, especially magazines.
7. Concluding Discussion

In this thesis I set out to investigate what the media discussions about public breastfeeding could reveal about the position of women in Sweden. Here I provide a short summary of the analytical chapters, followed by discussion of some of the findings. The discourses concerning public breastfeeding that I have focused on are connected to historical and cultural binaries such as men-women, private-public, nature-culture, as well as traditional-modern, self-other, us-them. It has become evident that these binaries are still very much alive, but not uncontested, in contemporary Sweden. Public breastfeeding can be described as existing on the border between the oppositions, occupying a position of liminality in many of the binaries: like nature-culture, private-public, traditional-modern and self-other. When using Douglas’ (1984 [1966]) classic theory about purity and danger, the position of liminality is explained to be dangerous, disturbing and surrounded by taboos, because of the threat it poses to the social structure (ibid. 94).

Both national and international descriptions of Sweden often focus on the high levels of equality concerning gender, race and class relations. Throughout the analysis it becomes clear that this is not always the case. In the chapter about Breastfeeding and Swedishness we see how gender equality is seen as something intrinsic in Swedishness itself, and part of an identity of Swedish Exceptionalism. The discussion about public breastfeeding fits well into that discourse, building on the notion that men and women are different, but have equal rights. Breastfeeding can be seen as a feminine virtue and is encouraged as such, and when breastfeeding persons are denied the right to be in public space, it is upsetting to many because it violates the notion of equal rights to public space. Because the discussion about public breastfeeding fits so well with the national discourse of exceptionalism, it can in many ways be seen as a discourse conforming to and supporting the social structure, rather than as a movement with radical or subversive potential.

When opinions of intolerance to public breastfeeding are discussed, they are often explained as a new phenomena to Sweden, due to immigrants or people who are influenced by American culture. However, there are many examples contradicting this in the public discussion. Voices in my material suggest that it is younger people, who are influenced by American culture, who are intolerant. Contrary to this opinion, Magdalena Ribbing, an elderly Swedish woman, is one of the most recurring profiles arguing against public breastfeeding, accompanied by other signatures calling themselves grandfather, grandmother, etc. Arguments and stances in the debate are possibly
varying according to age, but the debate as such does not seems to be possible to reduce to a matter of generation conflicts.

Breastfeeding has a double association to health: in one way it is considered very important for the health of the baby and the population, while others depict it as a health risk to breastfeed out of the home. Health risks seem to be a way to shame mothers who do not keep their mothering in private, suggesting that they egoistically prioritize their own needs over the needs of the baby, or that they breastfeed in public to get attention. I connect this to the persisting habit to constantly valuate women’s behavior against the two poles the Whore and the Madonna, meaning either entirely decadent and fatal, or completely nurturing and self-sacrificing. In this juxtaposition, women are reduced to simple stereotypes and denied the whole range of human behavior and emotions.

Though women and men are described as being equally entitled to public space, historic associations between men in public and women in the private sphere still seem to be active. Women are expected to maintain the public comfort by adjusting their behavior to norms about what is appropriate in public, putting mothering and the female body in a precarious position. Women who are seen as breaking the public comfort, for example by exposing their breasts, are blamed to do so to provoke, posing a threat to the structure of the public sphere and seen as bad or excessive women. This is connected to ideals about the respectable woman, who is moderate in her appearance and behavior, in a way succeeding to balance the roles of the seductive, indecent Whore and the honorable but uptight Madonna. The constant need to oscillate between different diminishing female positions, clearly impact the access women have to public space, and is as important to take into consideration as any formal regulation, when investigating admittance and use of public spaces.

The sexualization of breasts and women’s bodies that becomes visible in the discussion about the Madonna-Whore dichotomy and notions of respectability, is part of why breastfeeding is labeled inappropriate to do in public throughout the media material. The inappropriateness of women’s bodies and breastfeeding is to some extent also connected to the association with nature. When using Douglas’ (1984 [1966]) theory about taboo, it is understandable that nature is something that needs to be suppressed or concealed in order to sustain modern society and civilization. Especially body fluids, like breastmilk, occupy a liminal position in culture and are therefore surrounded by taboo in order to contain their subversive capacities, caused by their resistance to cultural overlays.
Simultaneously many voices use the naturalness of breastfeeding as an argument for why it should be allowed everywhere, building on a discourse about nature as authentic and morally righteous, because it is seen as not man-made and therefore indisputable.

The function of taboo is to handle liminality and insecurities in the social structure. When the structure goes through profound changes, the need for stabilization increases, and so do the taboos. The 1990s restructure of welfare politics in Sweden seems to have contributed to such an effect, raising expectations on women to discipline their bodies in line with ideals about beauty and sexual attractiveness. The decrease in welfare also increased the expectations on women perform traditional care work in the family, and generally encouraged nuclear family-oriented lifestyles, as described by Björk (1996). This has been framed by some, as a feminist embracing of traditional femininity, but others reject those ideals and instead try to form completely new ways to be mothers and women, for example by placing great value on an autonomous lifestyle not merely revolving around the baby and the home. These simultaneous but contradicting trends of one more private, and another more public kind of mothering, possibly lead to a polarization in how mothering was and was expected be conducted, thus forming a foundation for the debate about public breastfeeding.

7.1. Working of the Dichotomies

As has been evident throughout this thesis, binary thinking is highly present in Swedish culture, and could be seen as part of the social structure. That goes especially for the pair man-woman, which are categories which everyone, no matter the own gender identity, needs to relate to. To make the binaries visible and explicit is an important step to also expose what power dynamics are behind these categories. To do this, I use the theorists Butler and Latour, who both argue that the binaries are not nature-given, but part of the social system, and are means for categorizing people. Just like female sexuality is not reducible to either complete promiscuity or asexuality, gender or nature-culture should be seen rather as continuums. I want to argue that trying to understand the world through opposing binaries will always fail, since the world is more nuanced than binaries allow. This failure continues to produce cases of ambiguity and liminality, which are in turn handled through taboos.
Not only are these binaries reductionist and limiting, but they are intertwined with power structures; often putting one side of the pair in favor over the other. This is visible in the chapter about the nature-culture dichotomy, where associations about women and people of color place them within, or adjacent to, the category of nature, thus seen as uncivilized or inappropriate. Similarly Ortner (1974) describes how women are associated with the private sphere, and hence excluded from political power which is predominantly exerted in the public sphere.

Through the awareness of how certain associations are connected to structures of power and oppression, it becomes easier to work with the outcome of those disadvantaging structures. To display the dichotomies’ historical foundation and flexibility, is to make their temporality visible. This is what I have done in this thesis, with the hopes of possibly providing for new ways of thinking about women and female bodies. At the same time, in line with Mary Douglas (1984 [1966], 5), I believe that categorizing is essential for humans to understand the world around us. If the old ways of categorizing are thrown over, new categories will emerge, and with them, other power dynamics, which in turn will also need to be scrutinized and critically evaluated. Though the power dimension of categorization might be impossible to escape, the awareness of how the prevailing structure works can open up for efforts to counter traits of discrimination in that specific context. Throughout this thesis, the impact of binary oppositions on women’s access to public space has become visible.

7.2. Breastfeeding as a Field of Conflict

This has been a study about how public breastfeeding is discussed in media. It should be noted that media is often keen to focus on conflicts and polemics, hence media debates do not necessarily depict the general view on public breastfeeding in Sweden, as multifaceted as it might be. To study the matter from another perspective might have provided partly other results. But media is by no means an institution isolated from the rest of society, on the contrary it is an important factor in the formation of culture, and what is discussed in media also forms public opinion (Hirdman 2001: 14).

As can be read throughout the study, there are many statements about who is causing this debate: older people who are more used to mothering in private, younger people who have been influenced by American pop culture, immigrants who are offended by breastfeeding, attention seeking mothers, prude women, or threatened men.
In the discussions, the blame is placed on someone else, and in that sense the whole debate can be seen as being about yet another dichotomy: *us vs. them*, *self* as opposed to *other*. In these arguments we can read a constant identity formation, through the formula: "I am this (right) because I am not that (wrong).” This provides us with examples of some voices from the discourses, for example:

- I am Swedish, because I am not intolerant.
- I am a respectable woman, because I am not attention-seeking.
- I am entitled to this space, because I am not exhibiting too much.
- I am not exposing more than necessary, because I am not disrespectful to other’s comfort.

The discussion is not only about public breastfeeding, but is more about concerns of belonging, identity, and ultimately how (and according to who’s needs) social relations and space should be structured. As seen throughout the thesis, discussions about public breastfeeding is a focal point where cultural ideals, expectations and norms come together and form contradictions. The discussions concern norms about gender, bodies, parenthood, belonging, and space. This seems to form a cluster of norms that mainly disadvantages women, by judging them more harshly and making them responsible for other people’s comfort. As some voices in the media debate point out, women are bombarded with expectations and demands on how to behave as breastfeeding mothers and women in general. It would be nearly impossible to live up to all the (often contradicting) expectations simultaneously, and it can be questioned if it really is every woman’s responsibility to maintain the comfort of others at the expense of herself.

### 7.3. Position of Women in Swedish Society

As has been discussed in this thesis, gender equality, simultaneously as a prevailing condition and a goal, is a dominant discourse in Sweden. Men and women have equal rights and obligations, and it is illegal to discriminate according to sex. But these are not the only parameters to determine gender equality. It is necessary to not only work with equal rights, but more profound underlying assumptions about gender to reach gender equality. It is a matter of economic, material and political conditions, which need to be taken into consideration.

The political and economic changes in the 1990s have played an important role in this study. In the discussion about the increased neoliberalization, starting at that time, I argued that cutbacks in the
welfare system has an impact for family relations, including relations between men and women. It seems as if the welfare cutbacks and decreased social security, proliferates conformity to norms focusing on traditional femininity and the nuclear family, which is not beneficial for women’s access to power and influence. For women to be able to be liberated from traditional expectations, a certain degree of economic security seems to be needed. This can, for example, be through the unburdening of care work through the institutionalization of child care and redistribution of resources to make single parenthood possible.

Though harder to measure, another important factor for equality between men and women is the symbolic value associated with the sexes. With this I mean, for example, how women have historically been, and obviously still are, categorized as liminal in culture and public space, provoking reactions of insecurity and taboo, and therefore required to discipline their bodies. This discipline is simultaneously expected to be through modest concealment of the body or sexy accentuation, which seems to lead to a damned if you do, damned if you don’t situation.

Damned if you do, damned if you don’t, or the double bind, is one of the five Master Suppression Techniques, identified by social psychologist Berit Ås (2004), which are useful to understand the position of women as seen in discourses about public breastfeeding. A few double binds include:
- to not be prudish by concealing your breasts but not provocative by exposing them,
- to breastfeed because it is healthy and stimulating for the baby, but not breastfeed in public because there can be germs and noise that are dangerous to the baby,
- to be expected to be completely attentive to the baby’s needs, but accused of seeking attention from others when breastfeeding,
- to be told to go to the bathroom to breastfeed, but being reprimanded for occupying it if you do.

Other reoccurring master suppression techniques that are found within these discourses are ridicule, when people scorn about how special or sexy these publicly breastfeeding mother’s believe themselves to be and want attention for the act, and heaping blame and putting to shame as seen in the discussions about health risks or the baby’s need for peace and quiet. Objectification and threat of physical violence are also present in the material, in numeral voices objectifying women’s looks, and the death threats directed to the breastfeeding video by Amningshjälpen in 2013. In line with this, it is possible to see how some discourses about public breastfeeding contribute to the manifestation of subordination of women.
7.4. Perspectives for the Future

The gender equality Sweden has been known for was formed in relation to the welfare model *Folkhemmet*, striving for individual autonomy for all men and women through governmental redistribution of resources and the institutionalization of care work. When that form of regime was replaced by increased personal responsibility and privatization of institutions, the foundation for that gender equality was removed, and studies show that the overall equality in Sweden is decreasing (Mulinari 2016: 154; Schall 2016: 167).

In the study of the debate over public breastfeeding, trends have been found which reflect the emergence of more traditional gender roles, prudishness and an emphasis on the nuclear family as a guarantee for economic and social security. Some people in the media debate blame these trends on an increasing cultural influence from the U.S., but possibly they are rather due to the fact that neoliberalization and privatizations have made living conditions in Sweden increasingly resemble those of the U.S. Hence, how the debate about breastfeeding, and gender roles in general, will evolve partly depends on the future socioeconomic circumstances in Sweden.

7.5. Further Research Suggestions

As is the case with any study, this thesis only provides partial perspectives on the topic I set out to investigate. A range of people are absent in the analysis. The attitudes of fathers’, or other co-parents in case of same-sex couples, towards public breastfeeding are intriguing to know more about. The focus of this thesis has been on women’s positions, but it is important to clarify that not all breastfeeding persons are women. Based on the results of this study, it is likely that breastfeeding parents with non-binary gender identities, as well as other parents with transgender identities, are subjected to even more questioning and aggressiveness in public space. This is an important field to gain further knowledge about.

A finding of the study that I did not include in the thesis is the increased use and demand for designated breastfeeding rooms. How this relates to general opinions on public breastfeeding, as well as motivations to use breastfeeding rooms needs further study.

Due to the space and time limitations of this study, there are many interesting topics that are merely toughed upon. One of those topics is the possible connection between neoliberalization, family
values and prudishness. Extended studies are further required to establish if these trends are related to each other, which I suggest is possible. This could preferably be placed in relation to a range of other social phenomena, spanning from nudity policies on social media, to sentences concerning sexual crimes.
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