Affect, embodiment and the limits of belonging: breastfeeding outside the home in the contemporary UK

Kate Boyer, PhD
Lecturer, School of Planning and Geography
Cardiff University
Outline for today’s talk

• Background
• Introduction to study and empirical base
• Findings
• Themes and analysis
• Conclusion
Background


6 month breastfeeding duration rates: the UK in international perspective

Experiences of breastfeeding in the UK
Study: empirical base

- Participant observation (breastfeeding support group; breastfeeding picnics (Southampton and London), sure-start children’s centre (London)
  - Survey (N:46)
  - 180 postings on mumsnet
  - 15 interviews with breastfeeding women
  - 12 months participant obs w/ mums group
Findings

• Range of experiences, some positive.
• But 49% reporting some kind of negative experience breastfeeding in public.
Findings

“(I recall) an experience of a mother and daughter glaring at me when I was breastfeeding in McDonalds” (survey respondent)

“there was one lady (who was) completely disgusted with what I was doing, giving me filthy looks, evils” (Terry, breastfed 3 months).
“The people who see you doing it feel... awkward”
(Rhiannon, breastfeed 8 ½ months)”

“you could just tell that everyone was really embarrassed and that made it really difficult...it was just a feeling” (Emma, breastfeed 3 ½ months).

“I don’t think others are comfortable with it, which made me uncomfortable” (survey)

I wish I could (have gone on longer) without any negative feedback, that was part of the reason I gave up breastfeeding at three weeks (on-line post, June 2012)
‘I thought I’d be absolutely fine. ..I thought I’d just get on with it and it would be easy ...(but) people were really shocked by the fact that you’re breastfeeding in public. I kind of felt like I didn’t care, but I did care a lot, and it was really difficult... I just found it really stressful, really embarrassing, really horrible.’ (Emma, breastfeed 3 ½ months).
Themes and Analysis

Attunement
Intersubjectivity
Affect
Themes and Analysis

**Affect**: the active discharge of emotion (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.400)

referring to the intersubjective work emotions do.
Themes and Analysis

Affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009)
Public comfort (Ahmed, 2010)
Conclusions
Thank you!