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Women's rights are human rights



Nurse-in on Bribie Island*

Well the double standard is alive and well on social media today. Outrage - outrage - at women staging a 'nurse in' outside the Sunrise studios. The tenor of this outrage on Twitter seems to be somehow that [David Koch, in calling for women to be discreet and classy in their breastfeeding habits](#), is simply expressing opinion and that this is not deserving of protest.

Let's be clear here: breastfeeding *anywhere* is [protected by law in Australia](#). Calls for women to breastfeed in a 'low traffic area', or to 'be discreet' are nothing more than calls for women to leave public places to breastfeed. Validation of these attitudes on national television does nothing to assist nursing mothers stake their rightful place in public spaces and to the extent that it calls for removal from public spaces - sorry, 'high traffic areas' - it represents a disregard for the law.

The publicly declared disdain for nursing mothers who choose to protest in support of their rights to feed in public represents a long-standing disdain for women and women's issues.

Some on Twitter who have criticised the nurse-in speak out in favour of all sorts of human rights. So it's OK to align oneself with the Occupy movement for example - apparently a valid expression of protest for human rights - but it's ludicrous for nursing mothers to protest against a 'difference of opinion'.

Part of the argument used to invalidate these women protesting, is that 'you don't hear people speaking out about [other types of] discrimination'. I hardly think that this is an argument against anyone speaking out against any other kind of discrimination. The nursing mothers who are protesting, or their supporters, are free to protest whatever they like.

This represents I think a devaluing of women's experience. That breastfeeding is identified so strongly with the 'private' that it fails to register on the scale of anything that is important in the public sphere. Instead, what is privileged and is apparently the preferred focus of protest, are more ostensibly public rights like freedom of speech, or due process. The thing is, that these are incredibly important too. There need not be a hierarchy of rights to which we subscribe. And not every person is required to fight on every front.

What is so frustrating about this backlash is that women's rights are being devalued, that people who diminish the activities of these nursing mothers are diminishing human rights without seeing it. This is a further example of the very attitudes expressed by David Koch in the first place.

Women's rights are human rights. To the extent that we deny their expression, all of us are diminished.

*Photo from Sunshine Coast Daily <http://www.sunshinecoastdaily.com.au/news/breastfeeding-mums-take-stance-bribie-pool/1723752/>

Posted by Kate Galloway at 08:51

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I lecture in land law at James Cook University and I write and think about the nature of property and its representations in the law; about issues affecting women; about justice generally; and about legal education.

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