



# Commodification of the Breast

**O**ur globalized economy is based on marketing icons. From the Nike swoosh to the golden arches, we have created international product symbols that are immediately associated with a desirable lifestyle or image. These symbols unite our economies and our cultures while selling tens of billions of dollars worth of product to the global consumer.

Perhaps one of the most effective of these marketing tools is the female breast. What was designed as an efficient vehicle for feeding our young has become an icon of youth, beauty and sexuality. Breasts have been bared by the media and the multinationals to sell everything from cars, beer and bubble gum to videos and vacations. In effect, the female breast has become a commodity.

## Beauty at any cost

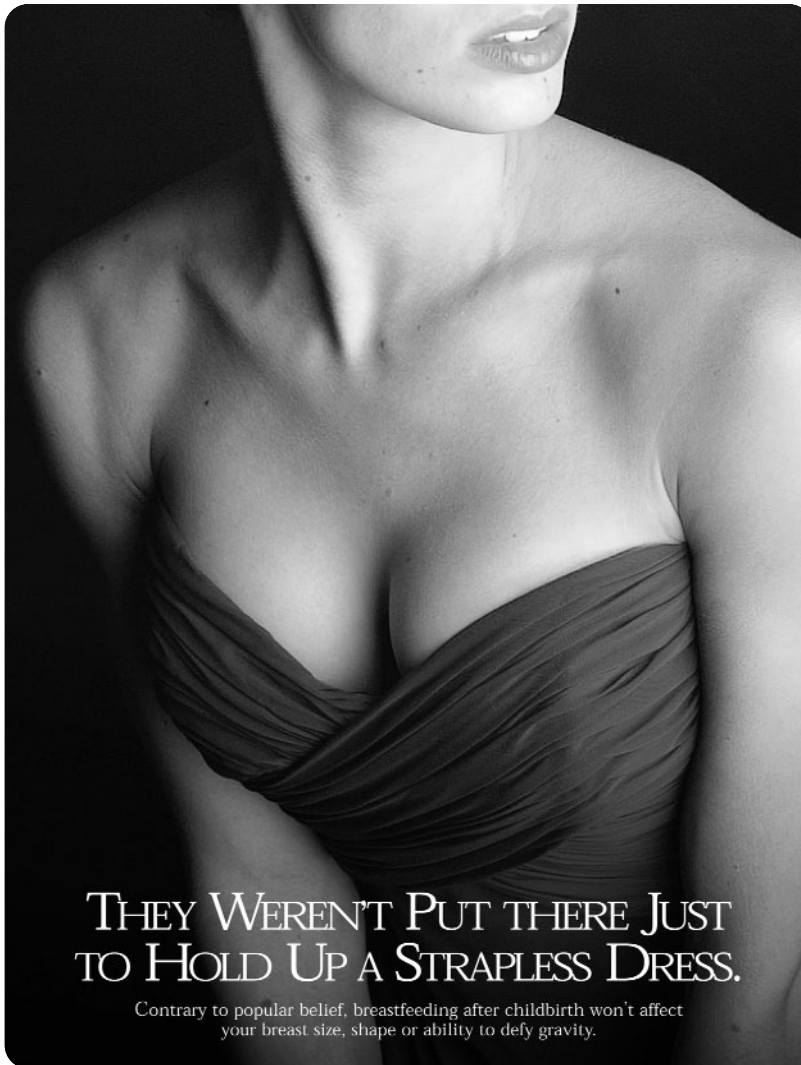
Breasts are not only an effective marketing tool, but perfecting the human breast has become a multi-billion dollar growth industry. In 2002, 236,888 women in the United States alone received breast implants for augmentation -- an all time high, and more than twice as many as in 1997. The number of teens undergoing augmentation with implants has also more than doubled in recent years. Breast implants were first sold in the 1960s, and by 1990

almost one million women in the U.S. had received breast implants. By the turn of the century, that figure had more than doubled.

In addition to the direct financial costs, breast augmentation also takes its toll on human health. One study found that women with breast implants are more likely to die

from brain tumors, lung cancer, other respiratory diseases, and suicide compared to other plastic surgery patients. Women with implants have a 21 percent overall increased risk of cancer compared to women of the same age in the general population. Breast surgery (whether for breast implants or to reduce the size of breasts) may also be associated with an increased risk of neurological or autoimmune disease.

According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), women with any kind of breast surgery, including breast implant surgery, are at least three times more likely to have an inadequate milk supply for breastfeeding. Concerns about the safety of breastfeeding after breast surgery have also been raised.



INFACT Canada

Source: The National Center for Policy Research (CPR) for Women & Families <http://www.cpr4womenandfamilies.org/implantfacts.html>

## Breast augmentation costs in the U.S.

(Source: American Society of Plastic Surgeons [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org))

Year	number of surgeries	Av. Cost/surgery (U.S. \$)	Total (U.S. \$)
2002	236,888	3,436	\$ 814,011,604
2001	219,883	3,043	\$ 668,997,098
2000	212,500	3,116	\$ 662,217,455

## Barriers to breastfeeding

"How ironic that the sight of a mother breastfeeding her baby is unnerving to many of the same people who like to see - or to show - some cleavage in a dinner dress. In a curious reversal, the suckling infant actually becomes the embarrassing stand-in for the adult male lover... Nipples and lactation appear to be a problem - yet nipples and milk ducts are really what breasts are all about."

Susan Brownmiller, "Femininity"

**T**he process begins early. From the time women are handed their first baby doll and toy bottle as little girls, they are given the message that nurturing their child isn't done at the breast. By the time they are ready to have their own babies, the natural maternal instinct to breastfeed has been overwhelmed by the constant marketing pressure to consume. Added to this pressure is the embarrassment that our society still has regarding breastfeeding in public. As ridiculous as it sounds, women are still being discriminated against for simply feeding their babies.

## Breasts or bombs??

In April 2002, Canadian Deborah Wolfe was traveling from Houston to Vancouver with her five-month old son. A male passenger on the Continental Airlines flight was offended by Ms. Wolfe breastfeeding and she was asked to nurse her child either at the back of the plane or in the washroom. She continued to exercise her right to nurse, and the passenger complained again. When she continued to nurse her son, the male passenger confronted her in her seat. The end result was that Ms. Wolfe was warned that she could face detainment, RCMP involvement and legal charges for terrorist action against a U.S. citizen while on an American flight during a time of war. When the flight landed in Vancouver, the RCMP officers agreed not

to charge her in return for her signing an affidavit in which she agreed to avoid contact with U.S. citizens on all future flights.

While it would be nice to think this is a bizarre isolated incident, last March, Kirstie Marshall, a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly in Australia, was expelled from the floor of the House after she brought in her 11-day-old daughter and began to breast-feed.

Then there's the recent experience of the new mother in Barrie, Ontario. Her husband contacted the INFACT office after his wife had been asked to stop breastfeeding the couple's infant in the women's locker room of their local YMCA.

## What you can do:

Breastfeeding is a fundamental Human Right. If your rights - or the rights of any breastfeeding mother - are violated, contact your local branch of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and file a complaint. For a complete list of the Canadian Human Rights Commission's regional offices go to [www.chrc-ccdp.ca/](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/). Also, please keep INFACT Canada informed.