

Abstract

- Titel:** The condition of the breastfeeding practice. An interview study of a group of women's conceptions, expectations and experience of the practice of breast-feeding.
- Language:** Swedish
- Keywords:** Breastfeeding, pedagogy, feminism, motherhood, naturalness, policy
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Breast-feeding is often regarded as something natural, which takes place in the woman's body independent of her own conscious will. The starting-point of this thesis is that breast-feeding cannot only be perceived as something natural in the sense that the practice of breast-feeding is biologically given and thus historically, socially and culturally immutable. Another starting-point is that breast-feeding should be regarded as work, which, like all forms of work, requires time, knowledge and practice. The development of breast-feeding competence takes place in a learning process. The study's theoretical perspectives are based on the production of breast milk being perceived as a means of raising infants while breast-feeding is a method of giving the infant breast milk. The practice of breast-feeding is seen both as a biological function and as an act jointly carried out by the mother and the infant. It is in this act that breast-feeding competence is developed. The importance of official breast-feeding policy in relation to the gender order in society is discussed, drawing on the support of feminist theory. The learning of breast-feeding competence is related to the pedagogical process between mother, infant and the surrounding world.

The aim of this study has been to describe and analyse the conditions of the practice of breast-feeding with the help of a group of women's conceptions of and preparations for breast-feeding prior to childbirth as well as the experience and knowledge they have acquired during the practice of breast-feeding. The empirical study consists of an interview study with eight women. The sample is made up of women with a professional career who are expecting, give birth to and breast-feed their children at the beginning of the 21st century. The study is qualitatively inspired by feminist research tradition. Each woman was interviewed on three separate occasions, which, in this study, were considered to be "critical points in time" in terms of breast-feeding. These points in time were just before childbirth, when mother and child returned home from the maternity ward and six months after childbirth.

Analyses and interpretations of data show that the women in the study had to base their relationship to the world around them on different forms of "contracts"; work contracts, parent contracts and maternal contracts. These contracts gave the women limited opportunities to negotiate on their own and their child's everyday life. They were regarded as a framework that set limits to how the practice of breast-feeding was shaped. The contracts were based partly on the prevailing breast-feeding discourse and partly on official breast-feeding policy. When the women in the study were to begin breast-feeding, it emerged that they initially conceived of breast-feeding as uncomplicated, while in reality it posed a number of different problems. The shorter time spent in the maternity ward by women and infants following a normal childbirth meant, for example, that several of the women were unable to participate in the learning process leading to breast-feeding competence. However, the women who remained more than three days in the hospital, regarded the maternity ward as a "common meeting-place". It emerged that breast-feeding was largely regarded as the woman's individual responsibility and her social duty. This was used against the women when they demanded better social conditions in their everyday life.