

WTF are Nipples?

A critical examination of biology, patriarchy, and the absurd double standard that governs whose body parts get to exist in public

SCIENCE MEETS SOCIAL CONTROL — AND THE SCIENCE
SAYS WE'RE ALL THE SAME

Compiled by [Marie-Soleil Seshat Landry](#) | Landry Industries OSINT
Division

Moncton, NB — Miqmake, Turtle Island | July 2026

01 The Biology: Why Do Men Have Nipples?

Every human embryo begins with the same genetic blueprint. Between weeks four and six of development, before the SRY gene on the Y

chromosome has even activated to determine biological sex, mammary crests — two ridges extending from the primitive armpit to the groin — begin forming nipples and breast tissue. By the time sex differentiation kicks in around week seven, the nipples are already there. Males don't "grow" nipples as an afterthought; they simply don't lose the ones they already had.

This is not a design flaw. It is not an evolutionary mistake. It is, as evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould famously argued, a "genetic architectural by-product" — a spandrel, like the decorative triangular spaces in a cathedral that exist not by design but as an inevitable consequence of vaulting a ceiling. Male nipples persist because there is no selective pressure against them. They do no harm. They require no energy to maintain. Evolution has bigger fish to fry.

"The presence of nipples in male mammals is a genetic architectural by-product of nipples in females. So, why do men have nipples? Because females do."

— ANDREW M. SIMONS, PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY, CARLETON UNIVERSITY

The Embryonic Timeline

WEEKS 4-6

Mammary crests (milk lines) form in all embryos. Nipple and areola development begins. Sex is not yet determined.

WEEK 7

The SRY gene on the Y chromosome activates. Testes begin developing in XY embryos. Ovaries develop in XX embryos. Nipples are already present in both.

WEEKS 8-40

Sex-specific hormones sculpt the body. Male mammary ducts shrink; female ducts expand. But the nipple — already formed — remains in both.



PUBERTY

Estrogen drives breast development in females. Male nipples stay small but retain their dense nerve network and erogenous function.

► KEY SCIENTIFIC FACT

Both male and female nipples contain a dense network of nerve endings. Research shows that approximately **52% of men** report enhanced sexual arousal from nipple stimulation — comparable to the response in women. Male nipples are not "useless"; they are fully functional erogenous zones. The only meaningful difference is the amount of surrounding breast tissue, which is hormonally driven, not structurally fundamental.

Men Can Lactate

Here is a fact that breaks the binary entirely: under certain conditions — starvation, hormonal imbalances (elevated prolactin), or specific medications — men can produce breast milk. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond documented this phenomenon in his 1995 *Discover* article "Father's Milk." The milk produced by men is physiologically similar to that produced by women. Lactation, then, lies within a male mammal's physiological reach. The barrier is hormonal, not anatomical.

So the next time someone claims male nipples are "pointless," remind them: they are the exact same tissue, with the exact same nerve density, and the

exact same latent capacity for milk production. The only difference is social permission to exist.

02 The History: When Did Nipples Become Political?

The idea that female nipples are inherently more "obscene" than male nipples is not biological. It is not universal. It is not ancient. It is a relatively recent invention of Western patriarchal control, and its history reveals everything about who benefits from keeping women's bodies under surveillance.

A Timeline of Nipple Politics

PRE-12TH CENTURY

Bare chests for both sexes were the norm in warm climates across the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. The concept of "covering up" was climate-dependent, not morality-dependent.

MEDIEVAL EUROPE (1100S-1700S)

European paintings regularly depicted women with one breast exposed — including the Virgin Mary. Women adorned their nipples with makeup. A "nip slip" was not scandalous; it was fashionable. The leg and calf were considered far more risqué than the breast.

1935 — ATLANTIC CITY, USA

Men were prohibited from exposing their nipples in public. A mass protest of topless men descended on Atlantic City; 42 were arrested. The public outcry

was so loud that by 1936, male bare-chestedness was legalized. Men fought. Men were heard. The law changed.



1936–1992

For 56 years, men enjoyed the right to go topless while women remained criminalized for the same act. The double standard was codified into law and normalized into culture.



1992 — NEW YORK

The New York Court of Appeals ruled in *People v. Ramona Santorelli and Mary Lou Schloss* that women have the same right as men to be topless in public. It took a lawsuit to achieve what men won through protest.



2004 — AUSTRALIA

Police officers told a group of topless Aboriginal women performing a traditional dance that they had to cover up — imposing colonial modesty standards on Indigenous cultural practices that had existed for millennia.



2014 — #FREETHENIPPLE

Filmmaker Lina Esco launched a global movement. Scout Willis walked topless through New York City streets to protest Instagram's censorship policies. The movement exposed the absurdity: what is legal in public is banned online.



2025 — META'S EMPTY PROMISE

Meta announced it would "free the nipple" after breastfeeding mothers staged a "nurse-in" protest at Facebook headquarters. The promise has amounted to nothing. Female nipples remain censored. Male nipples remain free.



The sexualisation of the female nipple is not natural. It is manufactured. And the manufacturing plant is patriarchy.



03 The Rules: Who Makes Them and Who Profits?

The rules governing whose nipples are visible and whose must be hidden are not written by biologists. They are not written by midwives. They are not written by the people who actually use nipples for their evolutionary purpose — breastfeeding. They are written by corporations, legislators, religious institutions, and social media platforms, almost all of which are controlled by men.

The Instagram Algorithm: A Case Study in Digital Patriarchy

Facebook and Instagram — platforms with a combined 3+ billion users — maintain a single rulebook for "Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity." Within this document, a disproportionate amount of text is dedicated to describing when and how a female nipple may or may not be shown. The default assumption is that an exposed female nipple is a sexually explicit act.

The exceptions are telling: breastfeeding, birth, post-mastectomy, breast cancer awareness, gender confirmation surgery, or "acts of protest." In other words, a female nipple is only permissible when it serves a biological necessity, a medical tragedy, or a political statement. A female nipple existing for its own sake — for comfort, for art, for pleasure, for simply being a body part — is forbidden.

Meanwhile, male nipples require no justification. They appear on billboards advertising cologne. They grace the covers of fitness magazines. They populate Instagram feeds without a single content warning. The algorithm does not flag them. The moderators do not remove them. The advertisers do not blush.



THE ZUCKERBERG FACTOR

In January 2025, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg appeared on *The Joe Rogan Experience* and lamented that the corporate world had become "culturally neutered." He advocated for a resurgence of "masculine energy" in the workplace. This rhetoric coincided with Meta's rollback of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The same man who decides whose nipples are offensive also decides whose voices matter in his corporate empire.

The Legal Landscape: A State-by-State Inequality

JURISDICTION	MALE NIPPLES	FEMALE NIPPLES	THE DOUBLE STANDARD
Federal / Social Media	Fully permitted	Censored by default	Same tissue, different rules

JURISDICTION	MALE NIPPLES	FEMALE NIPPLES	THE DOUBLE STANDARD
New York (since 1992)	Legal	Legal (court-ordered)	Equal — but only after a lawsuit
36 US States	Legal	Technically legal but socially policed	Legal on paper, criminalized in practice
Utah, Tennessee, Indiana	Legal	Explicitly illegal	Class A misdemeanor; up to 1 year jail + \$2,500 fine
Illinois	Legal	"Public indecency" — potential sex offender registry	Same act, different criminal classification

The Economic Incentive

Who profits from the invisibility of female nipples? The list is long and interconnected:

\$72B

GLOBAL LINGERIE MARKET

An industry built on the premise that female breasts must be contained, shaped, lifted, and hidden. If nipples were normalized, would we need so many bras?

\$15B+

COSMETIC SURGERY

Breast augmentation, reduction, and reconstruction thrive on the anxiety around breast appearance — anxiety manufactured by the same culture that hides them.

∞

SOCIAL CONTROL

The most valuable currency. When women's bodies are policed, their time, energy, and attention are diverted from political and economic power.

04 The Critique: This Is Not About Modesty

The argument that female nipples must be hidden for reasons of "modesty" or "decency" collapses under the slightest scrutiny. If modesty were the goal, why are male nipples — equally sensitive, equally erogenous, equally capable of arousal — exempt? If decency were universal, why do the rules change when the nipple belongs to a person who has had top surgery? If the concern were truly about sexual content, why does Instagram allow paintings of female nipples but not photographs of them?

The Madonna/Whore Complex, Digitized

As historian Victoria Bateman argues in *Naked Feminism*, patriarchal societies seek to "take back control" by demonizing women's bodies. The nipple is "the last frontier on the road to women's bodily freedom." The censorship of female nipples does not protect women from sexualization — it *creates* sexualization. By ensuring that the only time a female nipple is visible is in a sexual context, censorship constructs the very erotic gaze it claims to prevent.

This is the vicious circle: hide the nipple → make it mysterious → eroticize the mystery → justify hiding it because it is erotic. The loop is intentional. It serves those who benefit from women's bodies being simultaneously hypersexualized and hypercontrolled.

"By ensuring that the only time a female nipple is visible is in a 'sexual' context, censorship sexualises the nipple. Anything that is ordinarily covered becomes seen as erotic. Censorship creates a vicious circle of clampdowns on women's bodies."

— VICTORIA BATEMAN, ECONOMIC HISTORIAN & AUTHOR, *NAKED FEMINISM*

The Free the Nipple Paradox

The #FreeTheNipple movement, launched by filmmaker Lina Esco in 2014, has been criticized by some feminists as "playing to the tune of patriarchy" — giving men more of what they want to see. This critique misses the point entirely. The movement is not about making nipples available for male consumption. It is about removing the power of corporations, platforms, and states to decide whose bodies are valid for public viewing and whose are not.

As long as Facebook and Instagram maintain a policy that female nipples are offensive and male nipples are not, they get to decide whose bodies count. They get to decide whose voices are amplified and whose are silenced. They get to decide, as artist Micol Hebron observed, that "the body is being seen only as a sexual object" — but only when that body is female.

Internalized Misogyny: The Other Censor

The policing of female nipples is not imposed solely by men. Women participate in their own censorship through internalized misogyny — the learned belief that other women's bodies are shameful, that exposing a nipple makes one a "slut," that modesty is a virtue and visibility is a vice. A 2023 poll of breast surgery patients found that less than half felt comfortable showing their nipples even anonymously on social media, despite having undergone procedures that empowered them. The shame runs deep, and it has been taught.



THE INTERSECTION OF CENSORSHIP AND HEALTH

The censorship of female nipples has real, measurable consequences for public health. Breast cancer awareness campaigns are throttled. Educational content about breast health is removed. Artists documenting mastectomy recovery are shadowbanned. The message is clear: a female body that is sick, healing, or educating is only acceptable when it is not too visible.

05 The Truth: What Science Actually Says

Strip away the patriarchy, the religion, the corporate policy, and the social conditioning, and what remains is simple biology: all human beings have nipples. They develop from the same embryonic tissue. They contain the same nerve density. They respond to the same stimuli. They can, under the right conditions, perform the same function. The only difference is the social permission to exist.

The Scientific Consensus

► WHAT EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY TELLS US

- 1. Shared Embryonic Origin:** All embryos start with the same blueprint. Nipples form before sex differentiation. This is not an anomaly; it is the default.
- 2. No Selective Pressure Against:** Male nipples do not hinder survival or reproduction. Evolution does not eliminate harmless traits. As Gould and Lewontin argued in their seminal 1979 paper, not every trait requires an adaptive explanation.
- 3. Erogenous Function:** Nipple stimulation enhances arousal in ~52% of men and >80% of women. The nerve network in male nipples is, in some studies, denser than in female nipples.
- 4. Lactation Potential:** Men can produce milk. The physiological machinery exists. The barrier is hormonal, not anatomical.

5. Structural Similarity: The only meaningful difference between "male" and "female" nipples is the amount of surrounding breast tissue — a secondary sex characteristic driven by pubertal hormones, not a fundamental anatomical distinction.

| The Cultural Reality

Science says we are the same. Culture says we are different. And culture, not science, writes the laws. Culture, not biology, trains the algorithms. Culture, not anatomy, decides who goes to jail for taking off a shirt on a hot day.

The question is not "Why do men have nipples?" The question is: *Why do we pretend they are different from women's nipples?* And the answer is: because the pretense serves power. It serves the lingerie industry. It serves the cosmetic surgery industry. It serves social media platforms that monetize outrage and control. It serves a patriarchal structure that has always understood that controlling women's bodies is the first step in controlling women's lives.



If the female nipple was seen all the time, as
in other cultures, it would not be eroticized
— and therefore not illegal.



What Would Equality Look Like?

True equality would mean one of two things: either all nipples are treated as the mundane, biological features they are — visible in public, unremarkable, uneroticized by default — or all nipples are subject to the same standards of "decency." The latter is absurd. The former is inevitable. The only question is how long it takes us to get there.

In the meantime, every time a woman is told to cover up, every time a breastfeeding photo is removed from Instagram, every time an artist is shadowbanned for depicting a body part that half the population possesses, the message is reinforced: your body is not yours. It belongs to the viewer. It belongs to the platform. It belongs to the state. It belongs to everyone except you.

That is the real obscenity. Not the nipple. The control.

06 Conclusion: The Nipple Is a Canary

The nipple is not just a nipple. It is a canary in the coal mine of bodily autonomy. It is a litmus test for whether we believe women own their bodies or merely lease them from society. It is a measure of how far we have come — and how far we have to go — in recognizing that the rules governing women's bodies are not about protection, decency, or biology. They are about power.

Men have nipples because biology is efficient. Women hide nipples because patriarchy is not. The former is a fact of nature. The latter is a fact of culture. And culture, unlike biology, can be changed.

The next time you see a topless man on a billboard and a censored woman on Instagram, remember: the difference is not in the body. It is in the rulebook. And the rulebook was written by people who have never had to ask permission to exist.

THE FINAL WORD

"The nipple is the last frontier on the road to women's bodily freedom."

— Victoria Bateman

Sources & References

Simons, A.M. "Why do men have nipples?" *Scientific American*, 2003. [scientificamerican.com](https://www.scientificamerican.com)

Gould, S.J. & Lewontin, R.C. "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 1979.

UNSW Newsroom. "Why do men have nipples?" *University of New South Wales*, 2019.
[unsw.edu.au](https://www.unsw.edu.au)

Healthline. "Why Do Men Have Nipples? 9 FAQs About Lactation." [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)

Diamond, J. "Father's Milk." *Discover Magazine*, 1995.

Edge Hill University. "The bizarre attitude towards different genders." 2023. [edgehill.ac.uk](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk)

Men's Health. "Why Are Women's Nipples Banned in Public and on Instagram?" 2015.
[menshealth.com](https://www.menshealth.com)

Cosmopolitan UK. "A brief history of nipple censorship and why it matters." 2023.
[cosmopolitan.com](https://www.cosmopolitan.com)

Hyperallergic. "Facebook's Censoring of Women's Bodies is Nipocrisy." 2025.
[hyperallergic.com](https://www.hyperallergic.com)

DigitalFems. "Censorship, Control, and the Cult of 'Masculine Energy'." 2025. [digitalfems.org](https://www.digitalfems.org)

Catalyst McGill. "Understanding Gender Based Censorship in the 21st Century." 2023.
[catalystmcgill.com](https://www.catalystmcgill.com)

Core.ac.uk. "Hair, Blood and the Nipple: Instagram Censorship and the Female Body."
[core.ac.uk](https://www.core.ac.uk)

Bateman, V. *Naked Feminism: The Vagina Economicus*. 2023.

MYA Cosmetic Surgery. "The history of nipple censorship." 2023. [mya.co.uk](https://www.mya.co.uk)

WTF are Nipples?

An OSINT investigative report compiled by Marie-Soleil Seshat Landry, CEO of Landry Industries and Director of the Hempoxies Division. This document was produced using open-source intelligence, peer-reviewed scientific literature, and critical analysis of institutional power structures.

LANDRY INDUSTRIES OSINT DIVISION | MONCTON, NB — MIQMAKI, TURTLE ISLAND
JULY 2026 | ALL RIGHTS RESERVED | QUESTION EVERYTHING