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Popular Blogging Site Restricts Use of Breastfeeding Photos

LiveJournal cites breastfeeding images as 'inappropriate' and sends mothers to the virtual restroom

Women on the popular blog site LiveJournal are calling foul at the company's decision to brand images of breastfeeding as 'inappropriate.' Many users of the site have joined together to urge LiveJournal's parent company SixApart to address their concerns and reevaluate the policy.

Small "userpics" of no more than 100 by 100 pixels represent LiveJournal members throughout the site. Users can define one of these icons as "default icon" which plugs it into the user's public profile. These default icons were originally not permitted to be 'sexually explicit or graphically violent.' Recently, icons which depicted breastfeeding were cited as being 'inappropriate' by the LiveJournal abuse team, a group of volunteers who monitor complaints on the site. After clarification was requested, LiveJournal changed their FAQ to reflect a no nudity rule and is claiming that icons with visible areola or nipple are not permitted. Whether or not areola is visible in a photograph is dependent on a number of factors, including skin tone of the mother and physical changes during pregnancy.

Claimed Live Journal Abuse Staffer 'Erin' in a post on the site, "That's really a matter for the FCC to decide. LiveJournal's policies on this mirror what would be allowed on primetime TV or in a PG-13 movie." However, this is not true. The FCC does not consider the act of breastfeeding on television to fall under the definitions of indecency or obscenity.

Breastfeeding is exempt from nudity laws throughout the United States as well as countries such as Canada. Advocates are urging LiveJournal to adopt the same criteria. "It is regrettable that LiveJournal has chosen to target breastfeeding mothers instead of standing up for the protection provided them by law," says Carrie Patterson, executive director of ProMom.org, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing public awareness and public acceptance of breastfeeding. Advocates state that the feeling that breastfeeding should be hidden only fosters the idea that the natural act of nourishing a child is scandalous.

Breastfeeding bloggers who have refused to change their default icon have been suspended from the site. These users, as well as others questioning the policy, have been treated poorly by the site's volunteer abuse team, something that is not unusual according to other site users.

More than 1,000 LiveJournal users complained, and SixApart issued an apology to the group. However, the company refuses to consider modifying their policy and continues to suspend users whose default icons are deemed inappropriate. Although LiveJournal stated a clarified rule, mothers are still reporting major inconsistencies in its application.

The breastfeeding debacle is only the most recent in a long line of incidents that have people wondering if the abuse procedures as a whole should be reviewed for fairness and propriety. Complaints have been raised about users' privacy, inconsistent enforcement of the Terms of Service, conflicting information and responses from abuse team members, and discourteous replies to users seeking clarification on the rules.

Activists are now working together to get this policy changed and to clarify the policies and

procedures of the LiveJournal abuse team. While some are refusing to continue paying for the service, others have moved to different journaling websites to protest what they feel is a violation of their rights. For more information, contact Carrie Patterson at 678-513-6329 or carrie@promom.org or visit http://www.promom.org/bf_info/mp.html.

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