



I am Guilty. I am Woman.

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I'll just get my coat on I think and then I'll pop off down the local police station and hand myself in. I may as well really. Because the crimes I've amassed as a woman are mounting.

I did not breastfeed. I had breasts with milk in them and I willfully chose to stick a bottle of formula in my child's mouth. In the UAE women are to be forced by law to breastfeed their children for 2 years. Husbands can take them to court for refusing.

Worse than that officer, I drank beer and wine whilst pregnant. I had a huge great baby-making womb in my possession and I visited a pub, armed, (with a foetus), and dangerous. Throw away the key.

Because a report in The Sunday Times and Sunday Telegraph shows that a test case is being pushed again against a woman by a council in the North West which, if successful, will make drinking alcohol whilst pregnant a criminal act.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/10612818/Drinking-alcohol-during-pregnancy-could-be-ruled-a-crime.html>

The Times reports that a six year old girl has suffered brain damage as a result of her mother's alcohol intake whilst pregnant. This was thrown out originally by Lord Justice Levenson. Apparently she was "warned of the risks" by social workers and nurses that her drinking would lead to damage. Therefore Neil Sugarman of GLP Solicitors in Manchester is pushing it again and lining up other cases in readiness. Well. He would be wouldn't he?

Now before I get my shoes on and pack a few sandwiches in case I get peckish during my "confession" I think we need to look at this a bit more.

The picture in both Times and Telegraph show a similar pregnant woman. She has flawless skin, a neat "attractive" bump, shiny ponytail, classy glass of Chablis in her perfectly manicured grasp. She's very Boden. She's not Waynetta Slob.

Because, come on, we have a woman in the test case who drank "grossly excessive amounts" of alcohol but we may as well extend that throughout the ranks of any woman who took a quick sniff of a wine gum when buying her bread in Tesco. Lets get those women Neil, those blatantly wine-guzzling , selfish females. Council cash is available and frankly I'm sure you feel all noble pursuing these women and the accompanying bag of gold. Not for the gold of course. You are "doing it for the kids" aren't you?

Let's go back to the woman in question. I'll call her JH because I want to stand in solidarity. She could easily have been me. Or you. She is accused of having "criminally poisoned" her unborn child because she was warned to stop drinking and didn't. We have no specifics here of



anything regarding quantity of alcohol, type of warning given, counselling, mental/physical health of poor woman, intelligence and ability to understand warnings given, economic/financial circumstances, her support network or lack of, her level of alcohol dependency and whether she was helped with this. I of course feel a sympathy with the damaged children but there does need to be some perspective regarding every woman's right to the autonomy of her own body and the choices she makes with it.

When I became pregnant I didn't rush out and buy a cashmere pyjama set and some cocoa butter balm and start playing Mozart at my groin. I swore. A lot. I had a new job, very tough one, a difficult man, and a load of debt.

If you are a woman who goes to the pub for 3 pints and a bag of Scampi Fries or takes refuge from a hostile world at the kitchen table with a bottle of Sauvignon and a Facebook whinge, then you won't suddenly piss on a stick one afternoon and turn into Gwynnie Paltrow.

I didn't. For one it takes time to sink in. That time can be spent hurling chunks or it can be spent going "F*ck. I am stuffed now. Get me a gin." For me it was the latter. I panicked. It is hard to suddenly see yourself as "lesser" in the relationship with the "thing" in your nether regions. That may not sound brilliant, nurturing and swishy pony-tailed maternal, but quite a lot of women away from the magazines actually feel a bit "invaded" when they become pregnant. Whilst they don't actually wish any harm to the collection of cells growing, they do struggle to see it as even "real" for a while. I'll tell you when it got real for me. When my child stretched out fully at 8 months and stuck a heel out just below my ribs. An actual heel! I could see it and rub it and I felt a bit sick. When did I love my child first? Honestly? Not until I saw her face. Then, oh my God I was a mess. And I have been ever since. She is the only thing in my entire life that has ever made any sense at all.

So, when I continued to go to the pub to see friends, and I had a glass of lager, sometimes two, and once after a traumatic incident where the father went on a violent bender, 5 bottles of beer and a couple of whiskies, I can't honestly feel too bad about it. I got through a brand new situation with the best tools I had and sometimes that tool was 5% alcohol.

Babies steal from you. They actually take the calcium from your teeth until your fillings fall out. Did you know that? I found it quite a shock. A funny shock and you kind of gently shake your head at the bump, but still you are very much aware that what was once your only totally "you" space, your body, is no longer just yours.

However, what that space certainly is not, (whilst you find some way to negotiate a way of co-existing with your foetus), is a space for some male lawyer, an intrusive judgemental local authority, or a couple of Mainstream newspapers.

I'm guessing this young woman needed support. A lot of it. I'm guessing she still does. Meanwhile this case is handing a stick to an awful lot of abusive male partners to further pressure the women who they seek to control at a time when they are more vulnerable than ever and even less likely to seek help.

Now, what else might I do with my own body today that the world may need to stop me doing? I



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really hope I don't accidentally refuse to stack the dishwasher thereby undermining the entire global economic recovery and ensuring the closure of my local library because y'know - I'm a woman and I could just do with another law to make this clear for me!

Lets keep an eye on this creeping legislation that encroaches on a woman's bodily autonomy cos frankly I'm getting a little scared.