

Anna Wieczorkiewicz

anna.wieczorkiewicz@uw.edu.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4497-8452>

University of Warsaw

Faculty of Culture and Arts

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Ruxandra Ana

ruxandra.ana@filhist.uni.lodz.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6069-584X>

University of Łódź

Faculty of Philosophy and History

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Between “not yet” and “no longer”. Framing and regulating the female body

*Pomiędzy „jeszcze nie” a „już nie”.
Kulturowe ramy i regulowanie kobiecego ciała*

Introduction

[Ruxandra]: When my pregnancy was confirmed early in 2025, doctors referred to it as a “geriatric pregnancy”. Taken aback by the medical label, I took some comfort in the fact that in academia, being a postdoctoral researcher, I was still described as a “young scholar”. No longer young enough to be deemed risk-free by doctors, not yet experienced enough to fit elsewhere in academic hierarchies. In the meantime, everyday life offered its own suggestions on how to manage my changing body. This kind of advice insinuated itself in my Instagram feed, pushing forward the “mom-fluencers”. Various procedures and products they promoted targeted specific body parts that needed adjustments, modifications and transformations, all aiming to erase the traces of pregnancy and postpartum fatigue. Even before my pregnancy

became visible, I was already receiving advice on how to “get back into shape” once it was over. Despite my academic training, which predisposed me to treat such content as an object of critical reflection, momfluencer narratives drew me into their world.

[Anna]: Twenty-two years ago, I was of the same age as Ruxandra now, and I worked at a research institute. Whenever I showed up for work, the portress told me, “The Professor took the key”. This meant my (male) colleague had already arrived in our shared office space. If I happened to arrive earlier, the message which the same colleague heard from the portress was: “The Blonde took the key”. The “Professor” was a man only a few years older than me who had recently obtained his habilitation.¹ I held the same academic degree, but because of my delicate figure and blond hair, and because I would often show up for work in jeans, I was often taken for a PhD student. Still, the glass seemed half full: I concluded that academia offered women an ideal professional trajectory – the older one looks, the more convincing one appears as a scholar.

Unfortunately, everyday life gradually emptied the glass. I was less and less likely to hear sentences beginning with “so young and already a professor”, but whenever I turned on my computer, content appeared suggesting that, being a woman in her forties, fifties, and then sixties, I should take care of my ageing body. I used the computer for work and was keen to adopt new digital tools, but I resisted having social media accounts. Yet I did not need to post anything to be drawn into the circulation of images and narratives about the ageing of the female body.

The above episodes from our biographies show that the balance of benefits rarely tips in favor of women: looking “too young” is not a positive thing, but then neither is looking “too old”. No matter where women show up, and in what capacity, it is very likely they will always be “too much” or “too little”. What lies behind is a paradox: a woman is supposed to be both young and old, successful in various areas of her personal and professional life while always subjected to double standards (Sontag 1972) and conflicting norms regarding age, physicality and social judgment.

Independently of each other, we experienced the phenomenon we analyse here: the female body is never “just right”, but it exists in a constant state of either “not yet” or “no longer”. This observation led us to formulate both an analytical and a methodological objective: first, to examine the cultural mechanisms that organize the meanings attributed to the female body, and second, to reflect on the methodological conditions that make such an analysis possible. In what follows, we discuss our analytical and methodological perspectives and then turn to two individual case studies, following the convention of the dual voice that opens this article.

¹ In Poland, *habilitacja* is an academic degree which opens the path to professorship, allowing a scholar to become an “unsupervised scholarly worker”.

Analytical and methodological goals. Regulating pre/post bodies

Central to the experiences described above is the female body, subjected to simultaneously incompatible requirements in terms of youth/old age, beauty/aesthetic neutrality, competence/intellectual immaturity, seriousness/frivolity and visibility/invisibility. These dichotomies become more pronounced as the female body undergoes various physiological processes and changes over time. Therefore, we employ the lens of bodily practices commonly associated with “care”² in order to analyse two transitional periods in women’s lives, both laden with visible bodily transformations: pregnancy/postpartum and perimenopause/postmenopause. Our analysis focuses on how these practices of care anticipate, frame and regulate these transitions, mobilizing “corrective” measures, oftentimes before any change is visible at all.

The moments we focus on are not only physiological transitions but also periods of intensified cultural interpretation, as the female body becomes an object of particularly dense cultural narration, regulation and evaluation. Models of how the female body should look, feel and behave in these periods are produced and circulated in specific sites of cultural production. These dynamics are nowadays rendered visible especially in celebrity culture and social media, framed by consumer culture, which provides both the contexts and the tools for the realization of these norms (Dabiri 2023). Influencers, celebrities and lifestyle media do not merely reflect social expectations but actively participate in producing and normalizing models of embodied life (Conlin 2014). The body in late modernity becomes a project, something to be constantly monitored, worked on, and ultimately improved, operating under the moralizing assumptions of self-management (Pussetti 2021). Transitional periods make these projects particularly visible and urgent, marked by cultural expectations around management, correction or redefinition.

The temporal markers “not yet” and “no longer” referenced in the title do not describe successive stages of life, but rather they coexist, positioning women in a recurring state of in-betweenness in relation to a vaguely defined and perpetually changing norm. During biologically and culturally liminal periods, such as the ones we discuss in this article, the body is not only in between, but also it becomes an object of particularly intensive meaning-making. The temporal dimension framed by “not yet” and “no longer” is of particular importance from a biographical perspective, since age is one of the key principles in structuring social life: it determines an individual’s status, shapes experience, and influences the ways in which it is interpreted and evaluated. Unlike other categories such as gender or race, age continuously reclassifies individuals

2 When Audre Lorde wrote about self-care in her 1988 essay *A Burst of Light*, the term was coined as an “act of political warfare” focused on the collective instead of the individual. Our use of the term “care” in what follows derives from the ways it is employed across social media platforms to refer to capitalistically driven practices of pampering/correcting/adjusting the body.

over time. Under neoliberal capitalism, individuals are made responsible for managing processes related to health, appearance, fitness and ability (Elias, Gill, Scharff 2017). Within consumer culture, the market targets individuals in different age groups with goods and services aimed at controlling bodily appearance and, implicitly, the course of their own biographies, since the body constitutes the space in which biography becomes visible (Featherstone 1982). The market thus offers tools for regulating the visibility of the signs of age and physiological change, while simultaneously imposing norms of what an age-appropriate body should look like.

Our analysis of the above-mentioned dynamics takes as a starting point the two autoethnographic examples in the introductory vignettes, which are also central to the methodology we propose. We put forward the concept of "temporal hinge", understood as a situation in which two embodied researchers, sharing the same calendar time but occupying different biographical and historical positions, engage the same research problem from distinct experiential perspectives. We therefore complement multisitedness (Marcus 1995) with multitemporality – a critical, simultaneous reflection on the same issues from different biographical standpoints.

The broader conditions of our positionalities are similar – we come from post-socialist Europe and are institutionally based at Polish universities, while also participating in international academic mobility and transnational circuits of knowledge production. We hold degrees in anthropology and literary studies, with academic training shaped largely by Polish and Romanian academic traditions, which in the post-socialist period became increasingly integrated into Western academic circulation through institutional transformation and academic mobility. We draw on analytical tools developed within these disciplines, treating them as complementary. However, our personal histories intersect differently with the history of the media and the development of communicative communities.

In convergence culture, old and new media coexist and content circulates across multiple platforms. Images and narratives no longer belong to a single medium; on the contrary, they circulate across magazines, television, social media and user-generated content, where they are continuously reinterpreted in different contexts (Jenkins 2006). At the same time, media constitute an important factor in the formation of social environments, regulating communication and organizing interpersonal relations (van Dijck 2013).

Generational differences therefore imply differences in how competencies and habits related to cultural participation are acquired. The differences between our everyday media practices and the different types of cultural material we consume can be understood as a manifestation of the broader shift from a culture of conversation and continuous narratives to a culture of short forms, images and fragmented narratives. This difference is not treated as an obstacle but as a methodological tool, as it allows us to observe how the same cultural mechanisms operate simultaneously across different media environments and biographical moments.

Analysis conducted from two temporal vantage points allows us to capture a cultural mechanism that is not tied to a single medium or a single moment in life but rather organizes the meanings of female corporeality at a more fundamental level. If the same interpretive pattern appears across different types of material, media environments and moments in life, then it is not a feature of a particular case but a property of a broader cultural order.

In addressing a shared problem concerning female corporeality, we were guided by the assumption that the analysis of popular culture provides access to key sites where norms, imaginaries and models of embodied life are produced and circulated. At the same time, by making use of our different embeddedness in distinct configurations of hybrid³ space, we incorporated it into the methodological framework of this study. Within the “temporal hinge” methodology, we function as receivers of cultural messages: depending on our point of situatedness, different fragments of culture appear to each of us as more saturated with meaning and with greater possibilities for interpretation.

The analysis we propose aims to capture not as much individual representations as the mechanisms that organize meaning when they become visible across different media, narrative forms and moments of life, particularly in relation to female bodies in transitional periods. In what follows, we look at two case studies which reveal “density of meaning”, resulting from our own embeddedness in different media and cultural material.

Case 1. “Feeling Like Myself Again”: desirable digital bodies

One of the most common metaphors used by influencers who share their postpartum experiences online is that of “getting one’s pink back”. The phrase was made viral by Instagram and TikTok influencer Lindsey Gurk, who describes herself as a “mama, wife, and lifestyle entrepreneur”. It refers to a phenomenon observed among flamingo mothers, who expend so much energy caring for their chicks that they often lose their distinctive pink coloration; but as the chicks grow older, female flamingos regain their color. Applied to human mothers, the metaphor circulates on social media as a reminder that postpartum “trenches” are temporary and most women eventually do go back to “feeling like themselves again”. In a 2023 TikTok video that promotes her clothing line – loungewear, sweaters and hoodies with the caption “get your pink back” and a flamingo logo – she explains:

3 By hybrid space we mean a social reality in which experience is shaped simultaneously by direct relations and by media and digital technologies, that is, one in which the orders of online and offline, local and global, private and public intersect and overlap (see de Souza e Silva, Campbell, Ling 2025).

It's all about just finding yourself again as a mom. So if you're not feeling quite like yourself, maybe you're feeling a little bit drained, just keep in mind you're doing it all for your chicks, you're doing it for your children and just like the flamingo is able to balance on one leg, which should actually be impossible considering the size of their legs and the size of their body, you will not crumble under the weight of it all. You're not alone and we will get our pink back.

Thousands of comments under the video express gratitude and joy at finally feeling seen, heard, and less alone in the struggles associated with early motherhood: "Why did this make me cry?", "I really needed this today"; "I watch your videos and think: that's how I used to be... and that's how I want to be again! I don't know how yet, but you inspire me"; "My husband got me a GYPB sweatshirt for Christmas, and when explaining it to my 7-year-old daughter, it made me cry because I felt so seen".

The video is not merely an ad for the clothing line but a collage of TikTok users unwrapping their GYPB packages, trying on the t-shirts, crying, hugging their friends (who also wear the t-shirts) in a demonstration of solidarity, sisterhood and shared vulnerability. While aimed at "supporting" and "empowering" women, such accounts increasingly blur the lines between feminism and female-centered neoliberal capitalism, as ideas about women's choices are overwhelmingly reduced to consumer choices.

Unsurprisingly, under the operating logic of hypervisual capitalism (Dabiri 2023), feeling is equated with looking, and the shortest way towards achieving this goal is through consumer choices, ranging from clothing through pilates-at-home equipment to cosmetic procedures aimed at restoring "the glow" or surgical procedures that target body parts which go through major transformations during pregnancy.

In an interview for "Women's Health UK", influencer and body positivity advocate Danae Mercer explained: "Once this baby has been safely delivered and my body has recovered from both the birth and the pregnancy, I intend to change my body. I'll recruit the help of a PT and I'll train and fuel with purpose in a bid to find the version of my body that feels like 'me' again".

Notions of safety, health and wellness meet aesthetic ideals, expressed online with a blend of gratitude for a body that went through substantial changes and the desire to eliminate most, if not all, of the traces of change. As pointed out by feminist scholars (Lorde 1981, Ahmed 2010), women's emotional and affective states have long been under scrutiny, with physical appearance being a common element of concern, requiring continuous, arduous labour.

Social media participate in the process of translating traditional forms of discipline into the realm of soft, affectively saturated practices of self-care. The discourse of momfluencers reveals a fragment of this work in a particularly vivid and analytically graspable form. Aesthetic demands become internalized and are presented as practices of caring for oneself, while at the same time inscribing individual biographies

into a broader order of expectations concerning the body, age and femininity. What previously operated as external normative pressure is rewritten in the language of care, authenticity and self-love. As a result, aesthetic pressure proves especially effective: it no longer functions as coercion but as an internally motivated labour of self-transformation justified by the desire to reclaim one’s “true self”. Notions of self-acceptance and self-love, often manifested through conspicuous consumption, intersect with “authenticity” manifested through communicative intimacies (Abidin 2015) with their followers, allowing for the creation of imagined safe spaces where negative emotions, frustrations or regret can be expressed.

Personal branding activities make momfluencers increasingly popular in online marketing, mainly due to the wide reach of their published content, cost efficiency, and high levels of trust among users (Güzel 2023). The short-lived body diversity/body positivity movements appear to be a distant memory, as the 2020s have seen the return (with a vengeance) of skinniness, whiteness, and idea(l)s of perfection associated with intergenerational wealth as an aspiration and with notions of “quiet luxury”. But this lexicon of newly emerging aesthetic canons is tamed and reproduced by many Instagram moms under the pretext of care for the self and the others as a project, thus justifying intense body work.

Danae Mercer captions an Instagram reel that shows her working out in a gym and playing outdoors with her children as following: “My why. Because when my little girl asks me to carry her, or my baby boy asks me to spin him around, or they ask to cycle up the mountain or run down the street, I want to be able to. I want to feel strong. And healthy. And spend as much of this fast little life we’ve got savoring every second, savoring every runjumpspin mommywillyouwillyouwillyou will you play with me. Savoring every future memory with them”. Another post shows her together with her daughter near a swimming pool. The caption reads: “She doesn’t see the cellulite. She doesn’t notice the way your thighs jiggle, or how your swimsuit digs just a little. To her, you’re not too much. You’re not flawed. You’re not ‘getting older’ or ‘not like you used to be’. The swimsuit? She won’t remember it. But she’ll remember that you were there”.

As seen in Mercer’s interview for “Women’s Health”, messages about the desire to change the postpartum body coexist with messages framed as empowerment and a paradoxical acceptance – one that confines acceptance to bodies deemed desirable and adhering to certain canons. But notions of beauty are seldom expressed in a direct way. Instead, at the core of this intensely promoted approach are notions of morality of body projects and a certain altruistic selfishness: what legitimizes body projects are notions of health, fitness, and maintaining a good shape for the sake of others (usually children and grandchildren, in order to be able to provide adequate care, without burdening them with care work later in life, as the body ages).

The social and moral imperative to care for health and well-being takes precedence over seemingly frivolous notions of beauty. As pointed out by Sandra Lee Bartky (1990), femininity is not a natural dimension but a political construction, an ideology that needs to be embodied, surveyed, and reproduced through the internalization of daily disciplining practices.

Beauty routines, procedures and interventions that transform the body are often promoted as empowering acts of self-love; but in many instances, they are, in fact, rituals that derive from obligation, aimed at standardizing bodies, conveying a desire to be seen and valued, as well as a desire to (re)gain a sense of control in an increasingly uncertain and polarized world. Notions of a “good body” which is the result of individual control and responsibility are not a novelty – they emerged “out of a wider personal health movement burgeoning since around the 1980s in the United States and Western Europe and a broader societal mandate to work on the individual self as project” (Lamb 2025: 11). Social media and the ever-perfectable digital bodies only came to reinforce ideas that health and ageing, but also looks, are within one’s control and beyond physiological processes, which are no longer perceived as natural or inevitable but as a problem to be fixed.

The idea of “bouncing back” is inscribed in broader discourses and contemporary trends that not only target specific body parts, but also aim at “cancelling” the effects of previously dominating notions of beauty. The past few years have seen the rise of the “natural” once again, as celebrities, influencers and, as a consequence, ordinary women as well, started dissolving their lip fillers, reversing or reshaping BBL (Brazilian Butt Lifts).

But the quest for “authenticity” is not a return to a previous, unaltered state of the body. Momfluencers ultimately perpetuate dominant aesthetic canons, revealing a desire to adhere to them manifested through obsessive focus on different body parts in need of enhancement, pursuing visual and social recognition. Procedures and products are pushed in order to improve self-esteem, as the transactional takes centre stage in a world where everyone is upgradeable and no version of the self is ever truly satisfying.

Case 2. The No-Makeup Gesture: the order of appearances and the order of self

Pamela Anderson stuns while makeup-free at Paris fashion week (Herz 2023)

Pamela Anderson went to Paris Fashion Week without makeup (Mallone 2023)

Pamela Anderson's makeup-free look draws praise from Jamie Lee Curtis (Respers France 2023)

Such headlines enabled the circulation of a “sensational” event in the media: a gesture particularly striking due to the ingrained image of the model and actress.

"She's a bare-faced bombshell" (Herz 2023) wrote the "New York Post"; meanwhile, "Harper's Bazaar" referred to her television role, quoting the actress: "The Baywatch star says that going without makeup has been 'freeing, and fun, and a little rebellious too'" (McCrea-Hedley 2023).

Pamela Anderson appeared in Paris carrying the symbolic capital once attached to her. Now in her fifties, she has been reworking her biography and public image. Being a "Playboy" cover girl, she became one of the most recognizable icons of sexualized femininity in the visual culture of the 1990s. In the media discourse of that period, she embodied "too much": an exaggerated, excessive sexuality that violated the norms of controlled female visibility (Bartky 1990). In post-socialist Poland of the 1990s, which I take here as a site of observation, her image circulated through television and the popular press during a time when consumer culture and new regimes of bodily visibility were still taking shape. It functioned not only as the image of a sexually attractive woman, but also as a reference point for Western models of popular culture.

Since then, Pamela Anderson has published several books and taken on more serious film roles. She moves swiftly in the field of tension where visual regimes of visibility operate, while attempting to reclaim the right to narrate her own life. Over the course of her career, the mechanisms of media circulation and forms of cultural participation have changed. Whereas previously her image circulated mainly through television, the popular press, and later also through VHS tapes and home video circulation, today it circulates within the wider framework of convergence culture – which also includes social media – and becomes part of a broader visual environment in which women continuously negotiate the visibility of their own bodies over time. Interpretations of globally circulating images are locally produced across diverse contexts, resulting in a cultural product that is neither entirely global nor entirely local; post-socialist countries are not outside this process. This is also characteristic of women's glossies, which regularly publish articles on female celebrities and participate in the production of discourse on the female body by promoting specific models of bodily care, dress and lifestyle. Articles from these magazines are available online both in their original versions and in Polish-language versions.

In what follows, I employ Pamela Anderson's public appearance without makeup as a lens through which we can discern the key tensions that organize cultural meanings around the female body. Media reactions show that it activated interpretive mechanisms related to mature femininity, while at the same time being understood as a biographical and image-related gesture through which Anderson responds to and renegotiates the ways in which her career and biography have been mediated and framed. This framing is clearly visible in the way "Vogue" described Pamela Anderson's entrée at the Paris event: "Her minimalist red carpet get-up is a million miles from the eclectic fashion looks she was known for back in the day, from the risqué

black latex corset she wore to Cannes Film Festival in 1995 to the pink fluffy hat she wore to the MTV Video Music Awards in 1999" (Chan 2023).

The contrast between flamboyant visual excess and aesthetic clarity functions as a visual shorthand for biography, while simultaneously serving as a means of evaluating distinct stages of life. A shift from provocation and audience-oriented attention to self-reflection is articulated and affirmed in the actress's therapeutic language, with visual transformation preparing the ground for a narrative of inner change and lending it a moral dimension: "But it's clear that the actor is now entering a new era and feeling more confident in her own skin than ever. 'I think it's a self-acceptance time of my life; just peeling back the layers—it's almost like a fresh slate,' she said. 'I thought I was retired, but it hasn't ended up that way. This is a whole new chapter'".

Appearance does not function here as a surface but as a carrier of meaning: it is expected to testify to a particular form of self and to a specific stage of life. This reveals a cultural mechanism which can be described as the interaction of two interconnected orders: the order of appearances and the order of the self. The former operates at the level of visibility and concerns the body in its visible form; the latter operates at the level of inner experience and self-perception, that is, at the level of how a person understands herself, her life, her age, and her life situation.

Through the order of appearances, the narrative of Pamela Anderson's self-acceptance, a new stage of life and a psychological "fresh slate" gains credibility. Within this rhetoric, aesthetic change turns into visual testimony to a psychological transformation. Here, the bare face operates as a performance of authenticity, its meaning and credibility emerging through specific modes of framing, as shown by the following example.

Pamela Anderson's no-makeup appearance is read as an element of a composition operating within a particular aesthetic convention and shaped by specific framing. A representative example appears in an "Elle" article on her appearance: "Grace Kelly-esque composure and icy blonde beauty with flashes of slightly wicked humour, natural shyness with moments of flamboyance. And her sense of style is equally compelling. At our Fashion Week dinner, she appeared wearing a statuesque Khaite gown – high Hepburn-esque neckline, hair pushed back with a sweet headband" (Felleney 2025).

This passage situates Anderson among female style icons, thereby defining the interpretive field of performance. She is thus symbolically "clothed" in language of cinematic classicism and elegance, while her body – long associated with excess, eroticism and exposure – moves into a domain of aesthetic harmony and refined taste. The no-makeup face becomes part of an aesthetic whole. This can be described through the classical distinction between the naked and the nude, where the nude denotes the body clothed in art (Clark 1972:3). Thus, Anderson's nude face becomes associated

with elegance, restraint and control. In effect, her gesture does not move outside the order of appearances; it operates through form, framing, and aesthetic control.

The no-makeup gesture may be so readily recognizable precisely because it is firmly embedded in an established order of meaning. Its association with authenticity can be situated within a broader framework, as key theoretical accounts show that authenticity has become a central category of the contemporary cultural order (Trilling 2009; Taylor 1992; Pickett 2017). In this case, it is linked to the imperative of revealing or reclaiming the "true" self. The case under analysis shows that this aspiration is pursued through attempts to loosen the hold of normative regimes of appearance so that they may also encompass women who are losing their youth, and with it, the attributes of attractiveness and beauty as commonly understood. At the same time, however, it tests and reveals the persistence of the order of visibility itself and its normative frameworks – it is within this order that the work of redefining one's own biography becomes legible and meaningful.

The comments under the online version of the articles about the Paris' event, praised the actress not only for her courage to appear this way, but also for the values she was seen to express through this choice, namely, "authenticity", "naturalness" and the "freedom" to simply be herself. This interpretive framework becomes particularly visible in an article published in the "Los Angeles Times", in which the author reflects on Pamela Anderson's decision to appear without makeup from the perspective of her own life, presenting herself as a woman in her forties (Mallone 2023). The narrative is structured around the process through which a media image moves from the sphere of spectacle into the sphere of everyday life and personal experience. From the very opening, the article situates the event within the logic of content circulation as a viral, affective, and collectively experienced phenomenon: "When Pamela Anderson attended the latest Paris Fashion Week completely makeup-free, the 56-year-old created an online frenzy. I first saw a photo of the makeup-less actress on X (formerly Twitter)". The characteristic process of visibility here spans several domains: the professional sphere of producing appearance norms (Paris Fashion Week), social media (Instagram, X), and subsequently the sphere of everyday practices (conversations between friends and private decisions concerning care for one's own body). This last element is developed further in the text: "Just a few weeks ago I had floated the idea that I might start wearing less makeup, possibly no makeup, to my best friend. She was supportive and loving, but I still heard a murmur of worry for me in her response. As a woman in my 40s, apparently the act of leaving the house without makeup is somewhat revolutionary". The friend's reaction reveals a broader social ambivalence toward female corporeality without makeup. At this point, the article ceases to be merely a description of Pamela Anderson's appearance with no makeup and becomes an analysis of the conditions of its social reception. A crucial role in the text is played by

social media, which function as a space of social validation and sanctioning of norms. Even when positive reactions dominate, a few negative comments are enough for the initial affect of exhilaration to give way to anxiety: "After I saw the photo of Anderson, I made the mistake of skimming through thousands of comments on social media posts of her. With every scroll, I felt my exhilaration seep out of me. The majority of the comments were positive and encouraging, but the ones that weren't were brutal". In the later part of the text, the Pamela Anderson's public appearance wearing no makeup is shifted from the register of image to the ethical and psychological register: "I believe Anderson's decision was more than self-acceptance; it was an incredible act of self-love". Within the article, Pamela Anderson's decision to appear without makeup is framed as an assertion of a woman's right to be perceived on her own terms, which redefines a woman's relationship to her own image, age and visibility.

The article can be read as an illustration of the encounter between the order of appearances and the order of the self in individual experience. Pamela Anderson's appearance without make-up belongs to the order of appearances: it becomes a circulating image, an element of visual culture and the spectacle of visibility. Its reception occurs through the relation between the order of appearances and the order of the self: as a culturally legible message, it is readily recognized and translated into reflection on the reader's own position. Its consequences, however, unfold in the order of the self: in the author's emotions, reflections on her own age, conversations with her friend, decisions concerning her body, and everyday practices of self-presentation.

Concluding discussion

The episodes from our biographies mentioned in the opening of the article highlight a kind of aesthetic pressure, which is not confined to specific spaces but becomes an omnipresent element of everyday life. Their parallelism inspired us to design the "temporal hinge" method; the case studies set the method in motion, but the final effect becomes apparent through their confrontation, allowing us to grasp their mutual cognitive productivity.

The distinct nature of the material that resonated with each of us influenced the choices we made in terms of analytical approaches. The material drawn from a relatively homogenous communicative domain, the discourse of momfluencers, led us to analyze internal coherence and repetition. Recurring phrases (e.g., "feeling like myself again", "get your pink back") that justify personal decisions are rooted in experience and were used as emic concepts. They reveal the affective and moral dimension of body-related practices and show that the tension between acceptance and correction of the body is not perceived as a contradiction but as a logical and justified outcome. In contrast, the heterogeneous material concerning a media event

facilitated the search for dependencies and relationships functioning at various levels of social communication, for the creation of generalizations, and for the construction of categories in the etic mode. It allowed for the characterization of an internal logic termed as a relationship between the order of appearances and the order of the self, grounded in mutual legitimization.

The interpretive framework provided by the second case study, by means of the categories of "order of appearances" and "order of the self" sheds light on the practices of momfluencers described in the first case study: although formulated in the language of experience, care and authenticity, they follow a coherent logic in which appearance becomes visible evidence of self-improvement and management of one's biography.

Only by the juxtaposition of these two cases can we gain insight into how the same cultural order functions simultaneously as a structure of meaning and as a form of experience. By applying different analytical strategies to different material, we observed the same cultural mechanisms operating within different biographical and media configurations. What appeared in one area as experience and practice reappeared in another as image and narrative. This allowed us to grasp coherent media phenomena, patterns of discursivization of experience, and practices of everyday life.

Etic categories allowed to understand "the order of the self" not as an autonomous, internal sphere, but as one filtered through culturally available scripts for talking about oneself. When an influencer mentions "returning to oneself", she is not referring to some primal "self" but to a version of herself that is both visually recognizable (and thus consistent with the order of visibility) and morally justifiable (in terms of health, care, etc.). From this perspective, the analysis of momfluencers clarifies what is visible on a structural level in the second case study: the link of both orders in practice. This is particularly visible in situations where, for example, changes in appearance (like "bouncing back" after a pregnancy) are represented as a condition for regaining "one's true self" while at the same time "being oneself" justifies the need to work on one's body. These etic categories thus reveal the affective and moral economy of the process by showing that tensions between accepting and correcting the body are not perceived as contradictions but as logically and ethically justified practices. In this sense, etic categories reveal that Pamela Anderson's case is neither isolated nor exceptional in a structural sense; on the contrary, it is a privileged, media-visible intensification of the very mechanism that momfluencers carry out in a dispersed and normalized manner.

The case studies presented above demonstrate how difficult it is to transcend the order of appearance as a dominant regime that organizes the meanings attributed to female corporeality. Seemingly subversive gestures (such as "the no-makeup gesture") oftentimes function within the "order of appearance", and their effectiveness depends on the symbolic, economic and aesthetic capital a woman possesses, as well as on her ability to fit into recognizable visual frameworks.

Bibliography

- Abidin, C. (2015). Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 8.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392781>
- Bartky, S.L. (1990). *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York–London: Routledge.
- Chan, E. (2023, December 7). "It's self-acceptance": Pamela Anderson on her new minimalist, make-up free era at The Fashion Awards. *Vogue*. Acquired from: <https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/its-self-acceptance-pamela-anderson-on-her-new-minimalist-make-up-free-era-at-the-fashion-awards>
- Clark, K. (1972). *The nude: A study in ideal form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Conlin, L., Bissell, K. (2014). Beauty ideals in the checkout aisle: Health-related messages in women's fashion and fitness magazines. *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research*, 15(2), 1–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmm.2014.0004>
- Dabiri, E. (2023). *Disobedient bodies: Reclaim your unruly beauty*. London: Profile Books.
- de Souza e Silva, A., Campbell, S.W., Ling, R. (2025). Hybrid Space revisited: from concept toward theory. *Communication Theory*, 35(1), 14–24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtae023>
- Elias, A.S., Gill, R., Scharff, C. (eds.) (2017). *Aesthetic labour: Rethinking beauty politics in neoliberalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Featherstone, M. (1982). The body in consumer culture. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1(2), 18–33.
- Feneley, R. (2025, August 8). 'I'm so happy': Pamela Anderson on style, self love and success. *Elle*. Acquired from: <https://www.elle.com.au/fashion/pamela-anderson-interview-self-love-style/>
- Güzel, E. (2023). Beautiful, sexy, and happy celebrities: Perfect mothers or instamoms. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(3), 1–14.
- Herz, J. (2023, September). Pamela Anderson stuns while makeup-free at Paris fashion week. *New York Post*. Acquired from: <https://nypost.com/2023/09/28/pamela-anderson-stuns-makeup-free-at-paris-fashion-week/>
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York–London: New York University Press.
- Lamb, S. (2025). Successful ageing's global movement: Visions and dilemmas of ageing well. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 15(1), 8–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/734825>
- Lorde, A. (1981). The uses of anger. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 9(3), 7–10.
- Lorde, A. (1988). *A Burst of Light*. Ithaca–New York: Firebrand Books.
- Mallone, H. (2023, October 7). Pamela Anderson went to Paris Fashion Week without makeup. I'm in my 40s and nervous about following her example. *Los Angeles Times*. Acquired from: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2023-10-07/pamela-anderson-makeup-jamie-lee-curtis-natural-beauty>
- Marcus, G.E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the World System: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 95–117.
- McCrea-Hedley, O. (2023, October 5). Pamela Anderson reveals the real reason she stopped wearing makeup. *Harper's Bazaar*. Acquired from: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/makeup/a45455717/pamela-anderson-makeup-free/>

- Pickett, H. (2017). *Rethinking sincerity and authenticity: The ethics of theatricality in Kant, Kierkegaard, and Levinas*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Pussetti, C. (2021). Because you're worth it! The medicalization and moralization of aesthetics in aging women. *Societies*, 11, 97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11030097>
- Respers France, L. (2023, October 5). Pamela Anderson's makeup-free look draws praise from Jamie Lee Curtis. *CNN Entertainment*. Acquired from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/05/entertainment/pamela-anderson-makeup-free/index.html>
- Sontag, S. (1972). The double standard of aging. *Saturday Review*, 23, 29–38.
- Taylor, C. (1992). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Trilling, L. (2009). *Sincerity and authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001>

Summary

The article examines cultural mechanisms shaping the imaginaries of the female body during two transitional periods: pregnancy/postpartum and the perimenopausal period. It argues that the female body exists in a constant state of simultaneous "not yet" and "no longer", subjected to contradictory expectations concerning age, attractiveness and authenticity. Two case studies – one focused on the momfluencer discourse, the other on media reactions to the transformation of Pamela Anderson's image – demonstrate how practices of bodily care intertwine with the neoliberal imperative of self-acceptance and self-improvement. The authors introduce the innovative concept of the temporal hinge, which brings together the perspectives of two researchers coming from different generations and engaging with the convergence culture in differing ways.

Keywords: women's corporeality, body project, imaginaries, media, ageing, momfluencers

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje kulturowe mechanizmy kształtujące wyobrażenia o kobiecym ciele w dwóch okresach przejściowych: w ciąży/położu oraz w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. Dowodzi, że kobiece ciało funkcjonuje w stanie permanentnego, jednoczesnego „jeszcze nie” i „już nie”, poddawane sprzecznym normom dotyczącym wieku, atrakcyjności i autentyczności. Dwa studia przypadków – jeden dotyczący dyskursu momfluencerek, drugi – reakcji medialnej na publiczną zmianę wizerunku Pameli Anderson – pokazują, jak praktyki troski o ciało spletają się z neoliberalnym imperatywem samoakceptacji i samodoskonalenia. Autorki wprowadzają innowacyjną metodę zawiasu czasowego, pozwalającego odnieść do siebie perspektywy dwóch badaczek należących do różnych generacji i mających inne sposoby funkcjonowania w kulturze konwergencji.

Słowa kluczowe: cielesność kobieca, projekt ciała, wyobrażenia, media, starzenie się, momfluencerki

Translated by Authors