



# **A Visual Ethnography of Normative Censorship of Gender and Sexual Expression in Online Content Moderation**

**Corinna Canali**

University of the Arts Berlin/Weizenbaum Institut Berlin

## **Abstract**

On 18 January 2023, Meta's (aka Facebook Inc.) independent Oversight Board publicly acknowledged the biased nature of Facebook and Instagram moderation of female nudity. The board condemned Meta's policy as a violation of users' right to expression and judged it an impediment to the equal treatment of women, transgender, intersex, and non-binary users, advising the social network giant to get rid of it. Mainstream media praised the news as a step towards (a materially vague) more equitable personal expression, especially for identities socially typified as minoritarian—a hierarchical classification comprising all those gendered bodies that, being what the white, male, heterosexual standard has historically othered and discriminated against, fall inside the *feminine* category. Despite its favourable propositions, the Oversight Board's conclusion comes through as a pure abstraction when juxtaposed to digital spaces where feminine nudity has been systematically censored but never repressed, reinforcing through its regulation its own sexual objectification. The presented research investigates the obscenification of feminine bodies within and outside the digital. Ultimately, exploring the display of intimacy as a performative and withstanding site, it intends to expose the unseen convoluted network of authoritative interconnections prompting platforms' policies while refuting existing epistemologies surrounding "objectionable" nudity and its regulation. This project, through visual ethnographic and anarchival (Zaayman, 2019<sup>1</sup>) methods of inquiry informed by genealogical analyses of normative obscenification of bodies and their hierarchically accumulated social stratification, seeks to counter algorithmic naturalisations of Western moralised

---

<sup>1</sup> Zaayman, C. (2019). *Seeing what is not there: figuring the anarchival* [Faculty of Humanities, Michaelis School of Fine Art].

 <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/31019>



International Conference on  
**Gender Studies  
and Sexuality**

17 - 19 March 2023

Berlin, Germany

# 3rd International Conference on Gender Studies and Sexuality

epistemological systems allowing heteronormativity to infiltrate community standards and the automated apparatuses designed to apply them.

**Keywords:** Commercial Content Moderation (CCM), community standards, nudity