Motherhood, diet culture and intergenerational conflict in the #almondmom archetype on TikTok

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Abstract

The #almondmom trend on TikTok offers a sharp critique of diet culture and the complex intergenerational dynamics surrounding food and health. Sparked by a viral clip of Yolanda Hadid advising her daughter Gigi to 'chew a couple of almonds', this trend gave rise to a new maternal archetype: the 'almond mom'. 'Almond moms' are defined by strict dieting behaviours and the imposition of health practices on their families, reflecting societal pressures on women's health and bodies. Through satirical skits and impressions, TikTok users examine and challenge these dynamics, exposing intergenerational tensions around food and health. This article situates the #almondmom trend within two scholarly frameworks: (1) motherhood, memes and cultural archetypes, and (2) foodwork, the 'third shift' and maternal responsibilisation. Employing multimodal discourse analysis of 80 popular TikToks under the hashtag, the study identifies four dominant digital templates driving this trend's narrative. These templates illuminate the 'almond mom' as both a critique of gendered subjectivities and a reflection of shifting generational attitudes towards health.

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The #almondmom trend first gained momentum on TikTok during late 2022 as a reaction to a scene from *The Real Housewives of Beverley Hills* (Arifi, 2023; Latifi, 2023; Sinay, 2022; Stevenson, 2023). In the scene, former model and real housewife Yolanda Hadid lays in hospital having just undergone surgery to have her breast implants removed. She makes a phone call to her daughter, supermodel Gigi Hadid (aged 17 at the time), who complains that she is 'feeling really weak' because she had only eaten 'half an almond' that day. Over the phone, Yolanda replies to her daughter, 'Ok. Have a couple of almonds, chew them really well'.

In 2022, this scene, less than 1 minute long, seemingly triggered something in the collective memory of many millennial and Gen-Z women. What resulted was an outpouring of social media content and the subsequent creation of an archetype: the 'almond mom'. An 'almond mom' is a mother who is well-versed in weight loss and dieting tips, who has wholeheartedly adopted mantras like 'a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips', who only keeps 'healthy' snacks (nuts, dried fruits, dark chocolate) in the house, is militant about getting her daily steps in and is stringent about portion sizes. Perhaps most importantly, as a woman and a mother living in patriarchal societal conditions, an 'almond mom' is not only the gatekeeper of her own health but the health of her family (Cairns et al., 2010). Therefore, not only do 'almond moms' monitor and carefully control their own health behaviours, they also police the choices and behaviours of their family members, particularly their daughters.

Using the #almondmom hashtag, TikTok users share content relating to their experiences with mothers who engage in diet culture and its associated food and exercise practices. Much of this content involves daughters doing skits and impressions, depicting interactions with mothers who comment on their weight or food consumption and recommend dieting strategies. This article explores this content type, as well as the broader cultural significance of the #almondmom trend on TikTok, which this article conceives of as a contemporary cultural representation of familial conflict around food/exercise values and practices, and can therefore provide rich insights into women's various generational understandings of what it means to live a healthy life.

Furthermore, as a TikTok trend, the 'almond mom' archetype offers a productive counterpoint to scholarship that positions participatory media as a democratising space in which mothers can resist negative stereotypes and assert control over their self-representation (Ding et al., 2025; Zappavigna and Zhoa, 2017). In contrast, the 'almond mom' trend reflects dynamics more commonly associated with traditional media, where mothers are portrayed through reductive caricature, often without their consent or awareness. This tension is explored in relation to the ethical complexities of conducting social media research on visual trends where anonymisation is both necessary and challenging.

In what follows, two bodies of literature are introduced which provide background to this trend and its socio-cultural significance – these bodies of work are broadly categorised as (1) motherhood, memes and cultural archetypes, and (2) foodwork, the 'third shift' and maternal responsibilisation. Following this, the methodological approach is outlined. This exploratory project engaged with multimodal discourse analysis to analyse a sample of n = 80 'top' TikToks in this trend. Our findings focus on four digital templates that represent the 'top' TikToks under this hashtag.

Motherhood, memes and cultural archetypes

The identity of 'mother' is plagued by archetypes, many of which have negative connotations. Mothers can be overbearing and pushy (Tiger moms), absent and neglectful, too close ('helicopter' parents) or too far. Contemporary culture has also produced a growing taxonomy of maternal types, including soccer moms, granola or 'crunchy' moms, yummy mummies, trad wives, momfluencer or 'mompreneur', wine moms and free-range moms, each reflecting particular values, anxieties or political ideologies (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Littler, 2013; Orgad, 2019; Petersen, 2023). There are infinite ways to critique how women choose to care for their children and, as feminist scholars have long contended, fathers do not face the same level of scrutiny and surveillance in their parenting practices (Grant et al., 2018; Henderson et al., 2010). The almond mom therefore emerges as a new iteration of this genre of archetypes: a mother who is seen to be overinvested in 'health' and adherence to normative female body ideals. However, its construction is not 'new' in the sense that caricatures that seek to critique and categorise styles of mothering are by no means novel (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Littler, 2013). Rather, the almond mom is a contemporary expression of long-standing cultural impulses to police maternal behaviour, particularly as it intersects with femininity, discipline and the body.

Resembling other derisory terms like the 'Karen'[1] (Brady et al., 2023; Negra and Leyda, 2021; Williams, 2020), the 'almond mom' has emerged in recent years fueled by media virality, gendered archetypes and generational conflict. While the 'Karen' archetype does not relate specifically to motherhood, what this term shares with the 'almond mom' in the cultural consciousness is a disdain for a perceived set of generational values and attitudes to the world. Indeed, both play into an implicit moral critique of the generation associated with the mid-20th century baby boom, that is, 'Boomers' (Bristow, 2016; Stahl and Literat, 2023; Zeng and Abidin, 2021). In many ways, the 'Karen' and the 'almond mom' are women of a similar generation, who are characterised by a sense of being 'left behind' and failing to occupy a morally and socially accepted female subjectivity. Whereas for Karens this manifests in a failure to recognise their entitlement as well as their weaponisation of whiteness, for almond moms this can be theorised as a lack of engagement with contemporary postfeminist sensibilities, whereby women are required to 'love their bodies' and reject diet culture in favour of a more agentic and 'liberated' subject position (Gill and Orgad, 2018; Orgad and Gill, 2021).

We might think of the 'almond mom' as a mother who has failed to successfully 'deprogramme' and resist the generationally specific cultural messaging she will have grown up with, whereby thinness is equated with happiness and success, and adhering to strict dietary and exercise regimes represents good citizenship. There is a sense in which, part of the gendered labour of being a woman in the current moment involves distancing oneself from gendered pressures (to be thin, eat perfectly healthily, etc.) while simultaneously complying with them enough to reap the associated social rewards (Elias et al., 2017; Orgad and Gill, 2021). In this sense, mothers should be slim and have a healthful glow, while avoiding the appearance of working 'too hard' to attain this aesthetic state. In practice, this means navigating a balance between health and indulgence. Cairns and Johnston (2015) call this balancing act the 'do-diet'. They write,

the 'ideal woman' must balance a complex constellation of factors. She should know what foods make her fat, but also avoid the appearance of dieting. The model female consumer is well versed on the latest research regarding health-promoting foods, and she has the skills to make nutritious food taste delicious. Perhaps most importantly, she understands how to control her body but she also knows when to indulge. (Cairns and Johnston, 2015: 154)

Through the lens of the 'do-diet', 'almond moms' can be understood as mothers who have failed to successfully negotiate these two competing social demands and instead are seen to be *oversubscribing* to feminine norms around thinness and 'perfect' healthful eating/exercising.

This maternal archetype is therefore the latest in cultural discourses that seek to conceptualise and critique gendered subjectivity in age-aware terms (Bristow, 2016; White, 2013). It reflects broader trends in which age and generational identity function as organising principles for understanding experience, identity and sociopolitical positioning (Stahl and Literat, 2023; Winch et al., 2016; Zeng and Abidin, 2021). In this case, the 'almond mom' is a memeified piece of generational commentary that finds the 'baby boomer' generation culpable for promoting and sustaining cultural demands on women to surveil their bodies and consumptive habits in pursuit of thinness. It is worth noting that, in popular discourse, 'almond moms' are seldom portrayed as *victims* of patriarchal standards that pressure women to conform to strict health and body norms but are instead found responsible for their perpetuation.

Foodwork, the 'third shift' and maternal responsibilisation

When viewed through a socio-cultural lens, becoming an 'almond mom' can be considered a rational and even inevitable consequence of being a mother in a socio-cultural landscape that requires women to acquire almost 'expert knowledge' in nutrition and health (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Women and mothers are continuously positioned as gatekeepers to their family's health (Cairns et al., 2010; O'Brien et al., 2014; Warin et al., 2012), which is, as Cairns et al. (2010) contend, 'rationalized through implicit gendered assumptions, such as women's apparently natural proclivity for maintaining family health' (p. 593). In the context of food and eating, scholarship refers to this gendered labour as 'foodwork', which captures not only the act of cooking and preparing food, but making decisions around food based on the nutritional information available (Clifford Astbury, 2020; Wright et al., 2015). Foodwork also captures the interpersonal labour associated with feeding family members – taking into account various tastes, preferences and diets and providing food that is both appealing and nourishing (Wright et al., 2015).

Crucially, foodwork, as a gendered form of labour, is underpinned by childhood obesity prevention discourses which place a sense of moral responsibility on mothers (Warin et al., 2012). Indeed, research demonstrates that women in particular are subject to these pressures from a multitude of directions, including media (Maher et al., 2010), health providers (Jackson and Mannix, 2004) and public health campaigns (MacKay, 2021). Moreover, the demands on women to make the best possible health and consumer choices are ever increasing. Food must be fresh, nutrient rich and balanced, ideally prepared at

home (Clifford Astbury et al., 2018) as well as ethically sourced, organic and sustainable (Cairns et al., 2013). Given these pressures and the sense of moral responsibility placed upon mothers, it is unsurprising that at least some display an (over)investment in their own health and the health of their families.

In addition to food and eating, researchers have also identified exercise and body work as a moral imperative for mothers living in patriarchal neoliberal societies (Dworkin and Wachs, 2004; Littler, 2013; Maddox et al., 2020). Dworkin and Wachs (2004, p. 616) call this the 'third shift' whereby the goal for women is to 'erase the physical evidence of motherhood so as to "resemble" the "pre-pregnancy self"'. Pressures to 'bounce back' and occupy a socially desirable body are particularly prevalent within the 'yummy mummy' discourse that plagues white middle-class femininity in the current cultural moment (Gill and Orgad, 2018; Littler, 2013; Malatzky, 2017). While there is overall less literature on maternal responsibilisation in the exercise context when compared to food and eating, it is clear that mothers are also responsibilised for ensuring the family is sufficiently active (Connolly and Thorpe, 2024; Solomon-Moore et al., 2018).

These expectations are not distributed equally across all mothers. Marginalised mothers, particularly those who are racialised or working-class, often face greater scrutiny around raising 'healthy' children (Boero, 2010; Wright et al., 2015), while being excluded from aspirational ideals like the 'yummy mummy' (Littler, 2013; Malatzky, 2017). Viewed through an intersectional lens, the 'almond mom' reflects how race, class and body politics shape who is framed as 'overinvested' versus simply failing at motherhood.

While health and safeguarding against obesity is often positioned as the primary motivator for mothers who seek to manage the eating and exercise behaviours of their family members, a somewhat less researched but equally significant motivator are appearance pressures and daughters' induction into gendered aesthetic labour (Elias et al., 2017). In patriarchal societies, where much of women's value is connected to how she looks, mothers may consider it an act of love to prevent their daughter(s) from suffering the negative social consequences associated with being a higher weight (Bronstein and Steiner, 2015; Tanner et al., 2013). In this sense, we might think about the 'almond mom' trend as mothers' attempts to produce not only healthy children but daughters whose bodies maintain and reproduce dominant feminine appearance ideals (Bronstein and Steiner, 2015).

In a related vein, scholarship on eating disorders has long examined the role of maternal influence in the development of disordered eating, often framing the mother as either the source of intergenerational body surveillance or as a figure to be resisted (Bronstein and Steiner, 2015; Mikhaylova, 2023). The mother has thus historically been cast in multiple and often contradictory ways; as the overbearing figure from whom the anorexic must separate, as the disciplinarian of the body or as the transmitter of patriarchal beauty ideals within the family unit (Arroyo et al., 2017; Kluck, 2008; Mikhaylova, 2023).

In this sense, the 'almond mom' is not a wholly novel figure but part of a longer genealogy of maternal archetypes that pathologise mothering practices. What is arguably new, however, is the way this archetype is articulated, circulated and consumed via social

media platforms like TikTok – where short-form, often humorous content allows for the rapid transmission and memeification of complex familial dynamics.

Methods

The research for this article was conducted using multimodal discourse analysis to analyse the algorithmically 'top' 80 TikToks under the #almondmom hashtag. This multimodal approach is underpinned by semiotics, which is an approach suited to understanding processes of meaning-making in cultural texts (Hautea et al., 2021). Multimodal discourse analysis is where analysis is extended to capture modalities other than language, such as sound, image and other digital grammars (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020). This methodological approach is suited to the analysis of digital objects like TikTok videos, which contain multiple layers of meaning inscribed through the juxtaposition of video, text, sound (sometimes music or narration) and other observable signifiers such as hashtags, emojis etc. These various multilayered modalities work together to form a syntax, which creates the message or impression of the TikTok. This analytical approach was particularly useful for capturing the tonal ambivalence within this content type. For example, the ways in which sound and text are used to convey humour, despite the topic at hand (disordered eating/family dysfunction) being serious and emotionally charged.

A sample of 80 TikToks were selected to ensure a diverse range of representations of this trend were included in analysis. This sample size mirrors other qualitative research that analyses TikTok trends (Avdeeff, 2021; Eriksson Krutrök and Åkerlund, 2022; Han and Kuipers, 2021; Li et al., 2022). Selecting the 'top' 80 TikToks ensured content with a high degree of engagement were included in the sample, therefore capturing mainstream and popular representations of this trend. In this regard, the sample reflects the most visible and algorithmically privileged forms of content associated with the trend – participation that, as will be discussed later, is predominantly white, middle-class and North American. This could also be considered a limitation of the study, as minoritised and niche participation in the trend were likely not captured in data collection.

The 'top' 80 TikToks under the #almondmom hashtag were captured manually and stored at a single time point (over the course of a day) in February 2023. The sample included TikToks that fit the following inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
TikToks must contain reference to the #almondmom trend	TikToks featuring individuals who are minors
TikToks must be between 15 seconds and 1 minute in length	TikToks that reference severe mental illness
Both stitched and non-stitched TikToks can be included in the sample	

As some users had created multiple TikToks that made it into the top 80, only one TikTok per user was included in the sample. This ensured a diversity of representations

of this trend were included. While it was not possible to ascertain the exact age of content creators, efforts were made to exclude TikToks made by creators who were visibly minors. Although this rarely presented an issue as, from informal observation of this trend, TikToks were typically created by individuals who were ostensibly in their 20s/30s (i.e. at University or embarking on careers and living independently).

Multimodal discourse analysis

In the initial stages of the multimodal discourse analysis, the researcher analysed TikToks in the sample by watching and re-watching these videos and noting down informal observations and patterns. For example, it was immediately apparent that a high proportion of the sample were themed around holiday periods like Christmas and Thanksgiving. Some basic data about the videos were also recorded, such as the video length, number of likes/comments/shares and hashtags. Whether TikToks were stitched or duetted was also noted.[2]

In the second phase of analysis, the researcher closely examined the various modes (visual, audio, text) present in the TikToks, as well as the interactions between these modalities. In this sense, do the different modes reinforce each other tonally, or are there moments of dissonance that created layers of meaning? At this stage, the digital templates, sounds and memes employed in the TikToks were also contextualised within broader online discourses, as many creators employed existing trends to create linkages with the 'almond mom' discourse. This second phase resulted in four digital templates that were common to the trend; fridge/pantry tours, impersonating 'almond moms', what I eat in a day as an 'almond mom' and critical analysis and explainers. After analysing the various modes and their intertextuality, the researcher considered how the different modes work together to communicate the intended message or emotion. In this final phase, TikToks were analysed according to their discursive functions, that is, to challenge norms, support identity construction or engage in social critique.

Ethical considerations

This project was particularly ethically complex for a few key reasons. Perhaps the most salient reason being that the subject of these TikToks ('almond moms') were not the individuals producing the content. In this sense, this trend focussed on a particular point of view – typically the daughters' – and the 'almond moms' themselves were not typically afforded the opportunity to 'talk back' to this trend. Indeed, in TikToks under this trend 'almond moms' are sometimes filmed eating, exercising or preparing meals, ostensibly without their knowledge. This leads to a distinct power imbalance in how this research is being conducted and presented, which was carefully considered in the design of this project.

As a feminist researcher, the lead author considered it their ethical responsibility to contextualise this trend within the wider cultural and systemic power dynamics at play when it comes to gender, motherhood and responsibility for health. In this sense, rather than individualising 'almond moms' and any potentially disordered or pathological approaches to eating and exercising they might display, it is important to consider the

pressures all women, but particularly mothers, face with regards to gatekeeping not only their own health but also the health of the family. This context is essential to providing a compassionate framing of the health discourses espoused by the women who are the subject of this content.

Furthermore, the decision was made to take additional measures to protect the identity of the mothers connected to this trend. Obtaining informed consent from the women/mothers themselves would not only be impractical but possibly triggering and emotionally injurious to these women, who may not have previously been aware this content was created about them. By default, this meant anonymising the account holders participating in this trend. In the findings, no specific accounts are mentioned and specific TikToks are not referred to. Instead, the findings describe reoccurring templates and interpretations of the trend, rather than specific and identifiable content.

Anonymisation also had implications for the representation of visual data in this trend, as screenshots of the TikToks themselves do not appear in the findings below. However, to remove this visual data entirely and defer exclusively to written description would be a significant loss in outputs produced about this profoundly visual phenomenon. To simultaneously protect anonymity and include some illustrative visual material, it therefore became important to turn towards more creative modes of representation. Inspired by Irwin-Rogers (2019) who employed a graphic artist to create images of illicit-drug markets on social media, the lead researcher commissioned a graphic artist (Dami Fawehinmi-Ayodele @SunnysArtStudio) to illustrate the social media 'templates' in the dataset. These drawings do not replicate any specific TikTok, but rather seek to capture recurring scenes in a non-specific manner, to give readers a sense of how these videos play out on screen. Illustrating image-based data in this way is a visual equivalent to Markham's (2012) 'fabrication' of text-based data, which borrows ideas from remix culture to provide a non-identical and untraceable account of social media data.

POV[3] you have an 'almond mom'

The TikToks collected under the #almondmom hashtag represent a spectrum of ideas, experiences and analyses of the 'almond mom' archetype. A general observation that became apparent during the initial phase of the multimodal discourse analysis of this trend was that many of the TikToks in the sample cohere around specific times of year, often corresponding with holidays and celebrations where family tend to congregate. For example, many of the TikToks sampled were themed around generational encounters that took place during the Christmas holidays and Thanksgiving – times of year when messaging around overconsumption is rife and is typically followed by a swing back towards dieting in the spirit of New Year's resolutions and managing 'holiday weight'. For content creators who may live outside of the family home, visiting parents and siblings on Thanksgiving and Christmas was observed to result in terse dinner table conversations and unwelcome comments around the body.

It is, therefore, also important to acknowledge the racial, geographical and cultural orientation of the data set being analysed. The majority of content creators featured under the #almondmom hashtag in this sample appear to be white, North American and implicitly or explicitly aligned with Christian cultural norms, as evidenced by the prominence

of holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas in their narratives. This is likely reflective of broader platform demographics as well as the visibility and algorithmic privileging of certain creators over others. As such, the 'almond mom' archetype, as it circulates within this specific corner of TikTok, primarily reflects white, Western, middle-class anxieties about femininity, consumption and bodily discipline. It is unclear from this sample to what extent the 'almond mom' archetype exists across other cultural, ethnic or religious contexts.

With this general observation in mind, in what follows, we examine the 'almond mom' trend according to four digital templates or content types that emerged from the analysis and offer different insights on this meme's cultural resonance and virality. The four most popular of these templates are explored below in terms of key themes and messages, as well as their multimodal use of music/imagery/text to communicate a specific tone and framing of the 'almond mom' archetype. These include (1) fridge and pantry tours, (2) impersonations, (3) what my almond mom eats in a day, and (4) critical analysis and explainers. Each template is detailed in turn before moving on to the discussion, which teases out the cultural significance of the 'almond mom' trend and the insights it provides into women's various generational understandings of what it means to live a healthy life.

Fridge/pantry tours

Among the most common digital templates associated with this trend are fridge and pantry tours (see Figure 1), where content creators show viewers the kinds of food available in their 'almond mom's' home. In these TikToks, the camera pans to showcase a range of foods typically associated with promoting good health – salad, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and jars of condiments. Some fridges are relatively empty save for a few items. In pantries, content creators highlight bags of nuts, dried fruit, rice cakes (an 'almond mom' staple) and supplements. The text overlaid commonly reads 'POV - you live with an almond mom'. In the background the music is upbeat and the tone is light and joking.

In captions or in the text overlays of the fridge and pantry tours, content creators talk about living in an 'ingredients household'. Living in an ingredients household means not having access to ready-to-eat snacks or convenience food and only having access to the ingredients to make food from scratch, meaning some labour is involved in terms of preparation. In the context of the 'almond mom' trend, the inference is that snacks and convenience foods are typically viewed as nutritionally inferior to meals prepared from scratch, which is reflective of current public health messaging (Clifford Astbury et al., 2018; Jackson and Viehoff, 2016).[4] Not having snacks in the house could also be interpreted as a dieting strategy to remove the 'temptation' for snacking by only buying foods that would require further time and effort to consume. Some content creators allude to this in their TikToks, showing signs pinned to their fridges that espouse diet culture messaging. One TikTok shows a sign reading 'Oh no, snack attack!' with instructions on how to avoid eating by going for a walk, drinking water or finding another distraction.

In this digital template, 'almond moms' are seen to adhere to health discourses fueled by public health messaging and somewhat regressive conservative values which promote
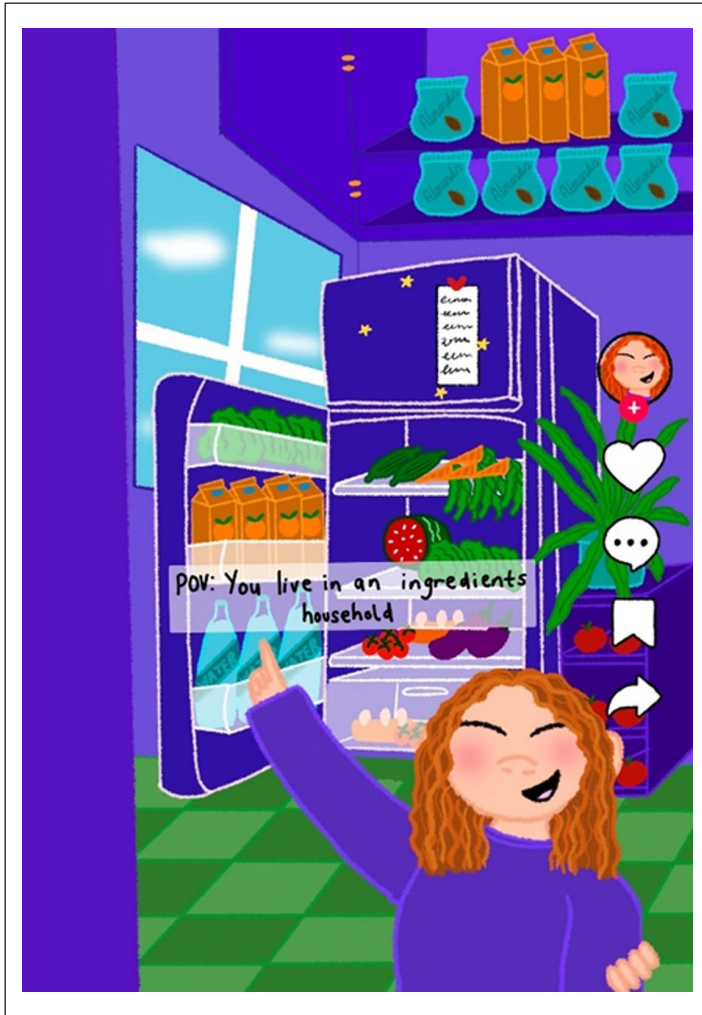
Figure 1. Fridge/pantry tours.

home cooking above all else (Moisio et al., 2004). While research increasingly challenges the equitability of this health discourse due to the disproportionate effect on women who are tasked with the majority of foodwork (Clifford Astbury, 2020; Lewis, 2016), its hold on our understanding of good and responsible health management endures. Yet, fridge/pantry tours signify that 'almond moms' have gone 'too far' in their pursuit of only providing home-cooked meals and have not successfully balanced 'health' with indulgence (Cairns and Johnston, 2015).

Impersonating almond moms

Another common content type depicts skits and impressions (see Figure 2), performed by content creators themselves, mimicking the kinds of diet culture norms and values that are espoused by almond moms in everyday family life. In these impersonations, content creators list off phrases commonly expressed by the almond mom archetype. Phrases like:

> Are you really hungry or are you just bored?

> Let's go for a walk this afternoon, we're going to need to work-off this big lunch!

> You want a snack? We have dinner in 6 hours so. . .

> Your brother can get away with eating those sugary foods, but us girls, we need to watch our figures.

Figure 2. Impersonating 'almond moms'.

Skits and impressions recreate specific moments of tension where mothers' understandings of health management and body norms conflict with their daughters'. This content type is often filmed in socio-material spaces (kitchens, restaurants, supermarkets) where food choices are made and where intergenerational relations become particularly fraught. In one TikTok under this hashtag, a content creator reenacts going out for lunch with an 'almond mom'. In the scene, the 'almond mom' is filmed putting down her knife and fork, having just finished eating, and says 'wow, I'm so full – I guess we won't be needing dinner now'. The 'we' is the operative word in this statement. The implication being that 'almond moms' characteristically extend nutritional decisions beyond just themselves and seek to police the food intake of those around them, namely, their daughter(s).

Despite the troubling and potentially distressing subject matter (diet culture and possible disordered eating), the 'almond mom' trend as a whole (and this content type in particular) is typically communicated in a light and humorous tone. In this regard, skits and impressions of the 'almond mom' archetype join an existing tradition of parodying motherhood on social media (García-Rapp and León, 2024; Han and Kuipers, 2021). The use of humour here is significant as it tells us about daughters' own relationship to the subject matter and serves to articulate ambiguous 'structures of feeling' (Han and Kuipers, 2021). As García-Rapp and León (2024) write, 'parodies can be used both to establish a critical distance or expressed as homage' (p. 15). In using humour, content creators draw attention to the discrepancy between their attitudes to health/bodies and the attitudes and beliefs held by their mothers. A comical tone serves to juxtapose these contradictory sets of generational values and communicate to the viewer that the diet culture messaging espoused by 'almond moms' is so out of touch that it is deserving of ridicule. It is noteworthy to add that using humour in this way is not exclusive to this particular template but resonates across the sample. This is likely due to the overarching platform vernacular in which humour and play are dominant modes of expression (see Matamoros-Fernández, 2023).

What I eat in a day as an almond mom

'What I eat in a day' is a digital template that can be found across a range of social media platforms and digital subcultures (Pfender et al., 2023; Topham and Smith, 2023). Typically, this content type is associated with documenting colourful plates of 'healthful' food and can be viewed as a form of public pedagogy surrounding how to achieve a balanced diet (Topham and Smith, 2023). Content creators take this well-known digital template and explore it in the context of 'almond moms' to comedic effect (see Figure 3). TikToks in this category are usually filmed at one mealtime, rather than across the course of the day, and show how 'almond moms' negotiate consumption in family life. It is noteworthy to add that these are possibly the most intrusive and ethically problematic TikToks in the trend, as they often covertly film mothers serving themselves food and eating.

In many of these TikToks there will be a buffet style dinner made for the family (for example, a big serving bowl of pasta, salad and garlic bread) and while other family members tuck into larger portions of all of the foods available, 'almond moms' are filmed
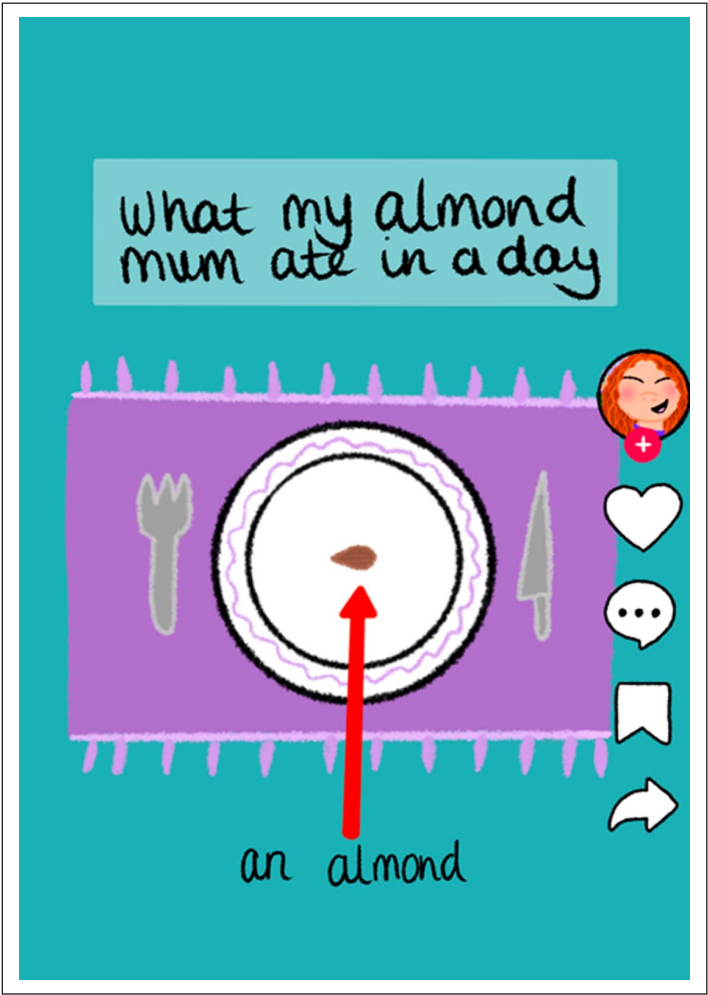
Figure 3. What I eat in a day as an almond mom.

only serving themselves a portion of the vegetable dense, low-carb dish (e.g. the salad) and taking just one small spoon of the pasta. In other TikToks, content creators film their 'almond mom' serving themself a portion of cake – the slither they take is so small that it often crumbles apart as the knife cuts through. In this content type, the music overlaid is humorous in tone, somewhat 'sending up' and making light of the 'almond mom's' commitment to 'health'. Comedy is found in the juxtaposition of the consumptive behaviours of 'almond moms' and those of other family members, whose habits are positioned as normative.

By taking a popular digital genre (the 'what I eat in a day' content type) and repurposing it, content creators draw attention to the transgressive and 'out of touch' nature of the

Figure 4. Critical analysis and explainers.

behaviour of 'almond moms'. This media framing could be interpreted as a way of distancing oneself and taking back control following disempowering experiences in the home with 'almond moms' who promote a vision of femininity and health management that favours restraint over indulgence.

Critical analysis and explainers

The final digital template in the sample can be categorised as 'critical analysis and explainers' (see Figure 4). 'Explainers' are a popular social media content type, designed to clarify, simplify or provide insights into a specific topic, issue or concept (see

Dumitrica and Hockin-Boyers, 2023). Under the 'almond mom' hashtag, critical analysis and 'explainers' are commonly created by health professionals from a range of practice areas including dieticians, nutritionists, fitness professionals, therapists and counsellors. In these TikToks, health professionals discuss the harms that diet culture can have on body image, self-esteem and developing healthy and sustainable relationships to food and the body.

Although not always explicitly stated, it can be inferred that the intended audience for this content are users whose wellbeing may be impacted by a parent who promotes diet culture in the home. Creators under this template often use the trend as an opening to, for example, 'coach' viewers through surviving the holidays with an 'almond mom' with tips on how to manage social situations where one's body or consumptive habits may receive unsolicited comments. This content type fits within a broader trend of health professionals using the affective flows of social media platforms to produce certain kinds of public pedagogy around mental health and wellbeing (Avella, 2023). Moreover, at times, professionals also consider the trend from a more socio-cultural lens, for example, critiquing the classed or racial dynamics at play in this form of content.

TikToks that fall into this category are often stitched or dueted with content created by other users about what it is like to live with an 'almond mom'. Within TikTok's platform vernacular, this creates the impression of engaging in critical debate with a given topic. This affordance also creates a sense of detached authority which conveys that the content creator has legitimate knowledge of the subject. This, combined with the professional status of the creators of these digital templates, often observable in usernames (e.g. Emma Jane MS, RD, Masters of Science, Registered Dietician), sets this digital template apart from the other three content types explored so far. While the previous digital templates draw on lived experience and use humour as a communicative device, critical analysis and explainers take a more serious approach to the themes explored in the almond mom trend. Rather than parodying the behaviour of almond moms, they seek to analyse, critique and uncover the underpinning dynamics that have given rise to this maternal archetype, as well as advocate for solutions to the resulting familial conflict.

Discussion

In this article, we have critically examined the 'almond mom' trend on TikTok as a cultural text that reveals a generational critique of how women (particularly those who belong to the 'baby boomer' generation) engage with harmful diet culture messaging and ideals. This article is also a case study of how differing generational visions of health and the body can lead to conflict and tension in the family home. In this final discussion, we consider the cultural resonance of this trend and, in particular, the use of humour to communicate a seemingly painful and fraught familial reality. In doing so, we examine in more detail the media landscape in which this trend has emerged and taken hold of the cultural imagination.

On social media humour is memetic (Han and Kuipers, 2021). When a parody or caricature is recognised by a wider audience it becomes memeified – a digital template that communicates complex and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning. The process of memeification is inherently relational and collective. Memes circulate as a part of a

cultural moment because they have resonance. As Galip (2024) writes of Internet memes and virality,

> People share memes, 'make them succeed', when they feel moved by a part of it: fear, anger, joy, laughter are motivators of memetic circulation . . . why some may organically become successful is challenging to fully understand but the emotional and evocative power of a fully embodied, audio-visual TikTok meme is hard to resist. (p. 15)

The 'almond mom' trend is successful due to the fact it has moved from the individual (I have a mother who holds a specific set of attitudes towards health and the body) and has become a shared vernacular for the collective (I have an 'almond mom').

There are wider cultural appetites at play that have shaped the memeification of the 'almond mom'. As explored in the literature review, while the 'almond mom' is a new archetype, maternal caricatures designed to typify and shame mothers are not new. In this regard, the 'almond mom' can be seen as the latest archetype offered up to satisfy western culture's seemingly insatiable appetite for maternal parodies (García-Rapp and León, 2024; Han and Kuipers, 2021). As an explicitly generational critique, this archetype also feeds on the memeification of intergenerational politics, which frames so much of debate online in the current political moment (Stahl and Literat, 2023; Zeng and Abidin, 2021). However, as Winch et al. (2016) and others have pointed out, generational categories are often unstable and uneven, particularly online where terms like 'boomer' operate less as fixed age markers and more as critiques of outdated or conservative worldviews. In this sense, the 'almond mom' is less a reflection of chronological age and more a satirical shorthand for a specific gendered and ideological position – one that aligns with restrictive wellness culture, parental control and narrow ideals of femininity.

The use of humour in this trend is a particular point of interest. As this project developed, the author presented the 'almond mom' trend at conferences and often reflected on the stark contrast between how this digital genre is framed and communicated on TikTok and the manner in which these topics are typically handled in a research context. It was relatively common for audience members to ask whether the content creators feel any sympathy for their 'almond moms', as the trend often came across as harsh and derisive. However, this seemingly unsympathetic tone can be somewhat justified within the context of the platform creators are engaging with.

Within TikTok's specific platform vernacular, creators are accustomed to an irreverent form of humour that is unflinching in its treatment of some of the most dark and painful topics. In this regard, Vickery (2020) explores memeification and uses of humour in response to school shootings in the United States. Similarly, in their exploration of TikTok content on the war in Ukraine, Divon and Eriksson Krutrök (2024) call this use of humour 'playful trauma'. Although the 'almond mom' trend is not as violent or dark as these topics, familial conflict and troubling relationships to food, exercise and the body typically garner sympathy and concern from those engaging with these issues. However, in the 'almond mom' trend on TikTok, content creators use humour as a device to draw attention to the incongruity between their 'almond mom's' practices and their own generationally specific ways of eating/relating to food and exercise. The use of

humour distances the daughters' values around health from their mothers, who are positioned as taking things 'too far'.

Given the nature of these topics and the manner in which they are handled, this project demanded engagement with creative methods of representing visual social media data (for a thorough exploration of ethical-decision making regarding anonymisation, see Hockin-Boyers, 2025). By practicing a visual form of Markham's fabrication, which borrows concepts from remix culture, in this article, common frames were illustrated by a graphic artist, thus maintaining the anonymity of content creators and their mothers, who are the subjects of this content type. We encourage authors engaging with social media data to explore other modes of representation, whether that be through the use of graphic artists, illustrators or digital content creators, to ensure the richness of the visual medium is included within the presentation of the findings.

Finally, as a feminist researcher, it was essential to compassionately explore the subject position of the 'almond moms' themselves, particularly as the findings largely consider the perspective of the daughters engaging with and producing content around this trend. This article has done so, not by engaging with 'almond moms' themselves (though this could be an interesting avenue for future research), but by attempting to contextualise the behaviours of 'almond moms' within a patriarchal health landscape that positions mothers as gatekeepers for their family's consumptive and exercise habits. While in the content produced under this hashtag, empathy for the complex and difficult subject position of 'almond moms' might be hard to locate (with the exception of critical analysis/explainers), through a socio-cultural lens one might come to understand an 'almond mom's' subjectivity as a rational and even inevitable consequence of being a mother in a socio-cultural landscape that requires women acquire almost 'expert knowledge' in nutrition and health.

Acknowledgments

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Ethical approval

This project received ethical approval from the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences' ethics committee.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not obtained from TikTok users participating in the #almondmom trend. Instead, the creators taking part in this trend were all anonymised. In the findings, no specific accounts are mentioned and specific TikToks are not referenced to. As a result, the findings describe reoccurring templates and interpretations of the trend, rather than specific and identifiable content.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability statement

Due to restrictions related to participant confidentiality, the data underlying this study are not publicly available.

Notes

1. In literature, 'Karen' is often used to describe middle-aged white women who use their white privilege in order to get their way in society. However, when exploring how this term is operationalised, it is apparent that this term is often used more broadly as a pejorative term against any woman of any age who is expressing anger.
2. On TikTok, 'stitching' refers to the feature that allows users to clip and integrate up to 5 seconds of another user's video into their own, enabling them to respond, add commentary, or create new content that builds on the original video. 'Duetting' allows users to create a split-screen video where their new video plays alongside an existing one, enabling them to sing, dance, react or collaborate with the original video in real time.
3. POV is Internet slang and an acronym that stands for 'point of view'.
4. Despite the prevailing negative moral evaluation of convenience food, this food type is relatively contested in public health and nutrition spaces. See Jackson and Viehoff (2016) and Clifford Astbury et al. (2018) for a thorough exploration of these debates.

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