

#TradWives: A Qualitative Meaning-Making Study of Gendered Norms, Moral Appropriation, and Feminism

Pip Heldoorn, Joël Hendrix , Lisa Vandeberg , and Serena Daalmans 

Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University, The Netherlands

Correspondence: Serena Daalmans (serena.daalmans@ru.nl)

Submitted: 9 January 2026 **Accepted:** 15 April 2026 **Published:** 14 May 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Gender Politics and Moral Norms Across Media” edited by Tonny Krijnen (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Zhen Ye (Meiji University), and Qian Huang (University of Groningen), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i505>

Abstract

Dressed in lavish, floral dresses, tightly knotted aprons, bold red lips, and armed with a wooden rolling pin, tradwives are increasingly appearing on the social media timelines of many. Tradwives, also called traditional women, are a relatively new and popular social media phenomenon. These women live according to traditional norms and values and advocate them through social media posts and blogs. As such, they cultivate a carefully curated traditional view of women as homemakers and mothers, and men as providers. In the media, this trend is often framed as a backlash against feminism. Even though there is some research into what motivates tradwives themselves, what remains lacking is how women give meaning to tradwives as a social media phenomenon. Based on 16 interviews with women of various backgrounds, this qualitative study reveals that women engage in a complex process of meaning-making to form evaluations of tradwives and the content they make. The participants carefully balance their opinions about one’s right to choose, as a form of choice feminism, against deeply felt gendered norms and personal moral judgments regarding this particular choice. Additionally, women view the trend as both a lifestyle choice and a form of resistance to progressive developments worldwide.

Keywords

feminism; online content; social media; tradwife culture

1. Introduction

In her article “The Allure of the Domestic Goddess,” Kitty Lloyd explores the appeal of tradwife content, particularly the content made by Nara Smith (which often shows her calmly preparing elaborate, from-scratch meals, in soft lighting, flowing dresses, surrounded by a luxury-branded environment), and its effect on her. She reveals:

I myself find Nara's content aspirational as I've begun to crave this mirage of a simple, slow life—regardless of my progressive views, expensive university education, and unmarried status. In a world that's bombarded me with the slogan, "Women can do anything!" since birth, the irony of this newfound calling isn't lost on me. (Lloyd, 2024)

This personal exploration of meaning-making by Lloyd perfectly captures the friction between a *Zeitgeist* in which women have been told they can do and be anything (as long as they work for it), and the rise in popularity of online tradwife content, which harks back to more traditional perspectives on the role of men and women in the family and society as a whole. Tradwife culture fits into larger online movements that focus on domesticity, wellness, and promote slow, natural, and simple living (e.g., #slowliving, #countryliving, #cottagelife), and moves away from a modern, high-paced, consumerist, performance-oriented capitalist culture in a world that has been fundamentally changed by the Covid pandemic.

A lexical blend of the words "traditional" and "wife," the concept of the tradwife is not new; however, in its contemporary form, we can trace its origins back to British tradwife Alena Pettitt describing her lifestyle in a BBC interview in 2020 as "submitting to and spoiling my husband like it's 1959" ("#TradWife: 'Submitting to my husband,'" 2020). Although their popularity is evident across much of the English-speaking world, the exact number of active tradwives is unknown, but there is also evidence that this number is still increasing (Sykes & Hopner, 2024). Tradwives express their views through blogs and social media posts, focusing on promoting traditional gender roles and family life (Proctor, 2022). They emphasize men's role as protectors of the family, while women should focus on childbearing and meeting the family's needs. Tradwives view men as strong leaders and patriarchs, while they see themselves as submissive and supportive partners to these men (Mattheis, 2021). They perform this gender role by presenting themselves as conspicuously hyper-feminine and emphasizing the benefits of submission to men as the financial provider and "head of the household" (Mattheis, 2021). In addition, tradwives strive for a lifestyle in which they enjoy a simple life, doing household chores and educating their children at home, free from institutional systems. They cherish a low-tech way of life and often refer to the nostalgic atmosphere of the 1950s.

Ironically, however, tradwives do not emulate the historical reality of the 1950s housewife but rather a nostalgic and mediated ideal constructed through culture, ideology, and selective readings of history (Coontz, 1993; Spigel, 2001). As Spigel (2001) argues, postwar television helped craft the image of the cheerful, impeccably groomed homemaker whose domestic labor appeared effortless and fulfilling, thereby masking the isolation and dissatisfaction many women experienced. Tradwife aesthetics, which entail vintage dresses, elaborate home-cooked, unprocessed meals, and visibly joyful submission, closely evoke this mediated fantasy rather than the complexities of real women's lives. At the same time, the movement revives the ideal of "true womanhood," particularly its emphasis on domesticity and submissiveness, presenting these traits as timeless and natural rather than historically and socially constructed (Welter, 1966). Further complicating this fantasy of 1950s contented housewifery is the fact that the stable male-breadwinner family of the 1950s was a brief, economically specific anomaly that excluded many American families and concealed significant social tensions. In this sense, tradwives are *performing*, in a Goffmanian sense (Goffman, 1959), a curated myth: one shaped by media representation, moral ideology, and nostalgia for a social order that never fully existed as imagined. Finally, in this projected fantasy, of "from-scratch living," that rejects industrial modernity and favors pre-technological domesticity, in which they promote ideals of frugality, home-madness, and anti-consumerism, "many tradwife influencers

simultaneously profit from their participation in platform capitalism driven by stylistic preference over frugality or convenience, wherein they transform necessary forms of domestic labour into monetized content” (Richards et al., 2026, p. 105).

On social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, self-proclaimed tradwives enthusiastically share their experiences of embracing a more traditional lifestyle. Videos with the hashtag #trad now receive millions of views. This popularity seems in direct opposition to many feminist ideals of the past 50 years, such as the right to work, financial independence, and bodily autonomy (Proctor, 2022). However, as becomes clear in the work by Banet-Weiser and Reinis (2026) on the mirror worlds of feminists and tradwives, while many tradwives speak out very explicitly against feminism, which they feel forces women to pursue a career at the expense of their natural role as caretakers of family and home, it is also very interesting that many of them openly state that they were once “girl bosses” and outspoken feminists. They see societal performance pressure—to have a successful career and be a perfect mother, always look picture perfect, have a thriving social life, and radiate femininity—as their reason to become tradwives. Interestingly, in embracing a more traditional low-tech life with a man as the breadwinner and head of the household, tradwives seem to gloss over two rather contradictory facts. The first is that they produce online content through many highly edited, aestheticized videos, using modern technology to its full potential. The second is that, by creating content that makes their private lives public, they can earn substantial amounts of money, for example, by selling and promoting brands, making it questionable whether (for some) their husbands remain the actual breadwinners in their families (Giolo, 2025; Sykes & Hopner, 2024).

Nevertheless, it seems that sometimes tradwives and feminists have more in common than they initially suspect; both denouncing the high-performance pressure of Western society, its all-encompassing and unrealistic beauty ideals, and the unattainable pseudo-feminist myth that “women can have it all.” Nevertheless, they choose very different ways to address these inequalities and pressures. Banet-Weiser and Reinis (2026, p.54) address this as follows in their work: “The tradwife movement locates itself as an idyllic respite from a broken world; feminists position their politics and practices as a way to fix this broken world.” That means feminists focus their grievances and fury even “at the ways in which the broken system discriminates against women as a group and calls for collective struggles to this inequity” (Banet-Weiser & Reinis, 2026, p. 54). At the same time, tradwives magnify “their individual experiences with the broken system and encourage individual retreat rather than collective change” and “they blame feminists—rather than the patriarchy—for numerous breakdowns in society” (Banet-Weiser & Reinis, 2026, p. 54).

Furthermore, some tradwives also choose to defend their life choices as tradwives in a more direct manner. For example, British tradwife Laura Lightbody argues that true feminism is about freedom of choice, and for her, that choice is the traditional housewife’s existence (Nicholas, 2020). Lightbody refers to the concept of *choice feminism* here. This idea states that every choice a woman makes is intrinsically feminist because it is made by a woman. In an increasingly equal world, women should have the freedom to work or not, to marry or not, and to have children or not. Here, tradwife culture performs what Gill (2016) calls a *postfeminist sensibility*, reframing domestic submission and traditional gender roles as freely chosen, empowering lifestyle options. In tradwife culture, the home becomes both a site of romantic fulfillment and a stage for curated self-branding—where hyper-femininity, aesthetic labor, and domestic perfection signal success. In doing so, they mask structural inequality behind the language of choice, self-optimization, and personal fulfillment (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009). As Proctor (2022) also points out, this “choice” is not available to

all: Due to factors such as wealth, race, geography, and culture, many women are unable to choose whether to work (or not), even if they want to.

While many of the discussions in popular media and scholarly articles center on tradwives vs. feminists, the complexity of tradwife culture extends beyond issues related to feminism and the promotion of stereotypical gender roles. For example, it is often thought to be connected to misogyny—tradwives in all forms seek validation from heterosexual men and define female success through patriarchal standards—and the spread of ideologies such as the alt-right and radical white supremacism—which are often characterized through hyper masculinity, misogyny, and anti-feminism (Giolo, 2025; Love, 2020; Mattheis, 2021; Stotzer & Nelson, 2025). Mattheis (2021) has explored how white supremacism appears to be gaining traction globally, partly through its entanglement and affiliation with #trad culture, which uses traditional notions of both femininity and masculinity to promote an ideal of perfect whiteness. She argues that although participants in #trad culture are not necessarily affiliated with extremist, white supremacist, or neo-fascist ideologies, adherents of these ideologies nevertheless enter #trad culture because they see it as a useful breeding ground or pipeline for their ideology, given its conservative slant (i.e., traditional ideas of schooling, food, medicine; Mattheis, 2021).

However, tradwife culture is not a monolithic entity on social media (Sherman, 2024; Stotzer & Nelson, 2025), and some of the most popular tradwives, labeled as such online, never articulate their political positions or perspectives on gender roles. For example, Hannah Neeleman (@Ballerinafarm on Instagram; 9 million followers) was dubbed the queen of the tradwives online and lives on a Utah farm with her eight children and her husband, who has considerable family wealth. She confessed in an interview with *The New York Times* that she had never heard of the term tradwife before they contacted her (Malone Kircher, 2024). This shows that the way audiences interact with and label content integrates tradwives into filter bubbles that contain conservative perspectives on gender, family, and politics, while some content creators might not actually endorse these perspectives, and others actively choose to remain ambiguous about their commitment to them (Sherman, 2024).

Most of what is known about online tradwife culture is based on general journalistic reflections and popular press articles, and fundamental empirical research is scarce. Recent empirical research focused on the topic has devoted its attention mostly to analyzing the content, through, for example, critical cultural analyses of the affective economy and the romanticizing of retreat from a broken system by tradwives (Banet-Weiser & Reinis, 2026), analyzing tradwife subculture as an ecosystem (Sykes & Hopner, 2024), and analyzing how TikTok content by tradwives normalizes far-right, anti-feminist ideologies (Scott & Day, 2025). While these studies provide perspectives on the content, context, and creators of the trend through a critical and scholarly lens, we know relatively little about how female audiences themselves interpret these popular, contested content types. Are these more conservative gender norms normalized for audiences? And what role does the highly aesthetic quality of these videos have in this process? Centering audience studies and the potential of a large variety of meaning-making processes, as captured neatly in Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding model from 1980, is what this study sets out to do (Hall, 2019; Hermes, 2013). Focusing on female audiences, rather than content or creators, it seeks to understand how women perceive the online trend of tradwives and how they interpret its content. Are the concerns about this trend as a catalyst for misogyny and breeding ground for extremism justified? Do audiences integrate feminist thought into their interpretation of tradwife content? What makes this content popular, i.e., what motivates viewing the content and following creators, and what

needs does it meet? The aim of this research is to shift the analytic lens towards audience interpretations and address a significant empirical gap in the literature by gaining an understanding of how women make sense of the online trend of tradwives and to answer the question:

In what way(s) do women give meaning to the tradwife trend and online content created by tradwives?

2. Method

To explore how women give meaning to the tradwife trend in general and tradwife content on social media in particular, we conducted qualitative, in-depth interviews with a sample of 16 women (age range 21–76 years old, see Table 1). Through these interviews, we aimed to produce contextual insights into how women give meaning to tradwife content on social media and to explore how they feel this content might affect its viewers (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

Code	Age	Familiar with #tradwife content before the interview
G01	73 years old	No
G02	24 years old	Yes
G03	23 years old	Yes
G04	27 years old	No
G05	61 years old	No
G06	21 years old	No
G07	57 years old	Yes
G08	61 years old	No
G09	34 years old	No
G10	76 years old	Yes
G11	64 years old	No
G12	37 years old	No
G13	26 years old	No
G14	54 years old	No
G15	23 years old	Yes
G16	60 years old	Yes

This procedure was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Radboud University. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2024 in the Netherlands. Participants were recruited through the first author’s personal contacts (though they were not direct contacts of the researcher), and the first author conducted all interviews. The interviews lasted about one hour and took place in the participants’ familiar surroundings (i.e., in their home or a quiet place they preferred). When the participants were recruited and again at the start of the interview, they were informed about the procedure, including recording, transcription, anonymity, and confidentiality, and asked to complete an informed consent form. All participants, both those familiar and those unfamiliar with the tradwife trend, were asked to watch the first episode of the online documentary series *Girls of Tradition* (NPO, 2023) in preparation for

the interview. The aim was to give all participants insight into the tradwife trend, so that the questions would be more concrete and participants could offer well-founded opinions. The decision to sample both those familiar with the trend and those relatively unfamiliar with it was intended to capture the widest possible range of perspectives on the topic, from unfamiliar to familiar.

The study used a semi-structured interview guide comprising five open-ended initial questions, along with potential probing and follow-up questions. The full interview guide in Dutch, its translation, and an overview of all the stimulus materials used can be found on OSF: https://osf.io/2xqyf/overview?view_only=5fb0ba77466a42aa81af68201a4efb8f. The interview guide and the order of questions were not strictly enforced to facilitate the natural flow of conversation and avoid limiting the interviewees' responses and elaboration. With each initial question, probing questions were used to elicit elaboration on participants' answers and choices. One of the questions used visual stimuli that either featured tradwives or captured the variety of responses to tradwife content online. The use of the stimuli varied by participant; some materials were shown to all, while others were matched to the interview content. The stimuli were used to parse out, contextualize, and contrast participants' answers by having them respond to stimuli that featured different aspects of traditional content and different tones in discussing the content.

The interviews were held in Dutch, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The analysis was conducted following the tenets of reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). The research stages of data collection and analysis were entwined in a cyclical process in which data gathering (i.e., conducting the interviews) and analysis (i.e., analyzing the interviews) were alternated, and were guided by continuous reflection and interpretation. The first author conducted, transcribed, read, and re-read all the interviews to become familiar with the data. All the interviews were coded line-by-line, using open codes that represented what participants said on topics relevant to the research question. Through iterative, inductive coding, the data were used to create non-overlapping themes and subthemes. For example, the variation codes "Person" and "Rules" were grouped under the subtheme "Associations With Tradwife Culture," and the variation codes "Origin," "Contemporary," and "Future" were grouped under the subtheme "Positioning Tradwives in Time." In turn, both subthemes would form different aspects of the theme "Interpretations of Tradwife Culture." As a quality measure, the research team discussed the wording and content of themes and the structuring of variations, subthemes, and themes to ensure that they were internally consistent and distinctive.

Several other methodological techniques were used to ensure the study's validity and reliability. Both reliability and validity were secured by constant discussion among the researchers, enabling peer debriefing (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2021). Although the first author conducted all interviews, the study's design also enabled researcher triangulation in the analysis. The validity was secured through participant validation: Throughout the interview, the researcher provided summaries or interpretations of what the participant had said to prompt a (critical) response and to check whether their answers would be expanded upon or adapted if probed in greater depth. Thick description, in which the raw empirical material is made visible in the results section, was also used as a quality measure that strengthened the research's validity. Finally, the primary researcher's thought process and discussions with other researchers were documented in MAXQDA memos as a detailed audit trail.

3. Results

Based on the analysis, we identified four ways (captured in four constructed themes) in which participants attributed meaning to the phenomenon of tradwives and to tradwife content on social media in particular (Figure 1). The first theme captures how respondents interpret the tradwife trend; the second captures feelings evoked by tradwife content; the third articulates participants' evaluations of the tradwife content; and the fourth and final theme articulates participants' thoughts about tradwives as a form of choice feminism.

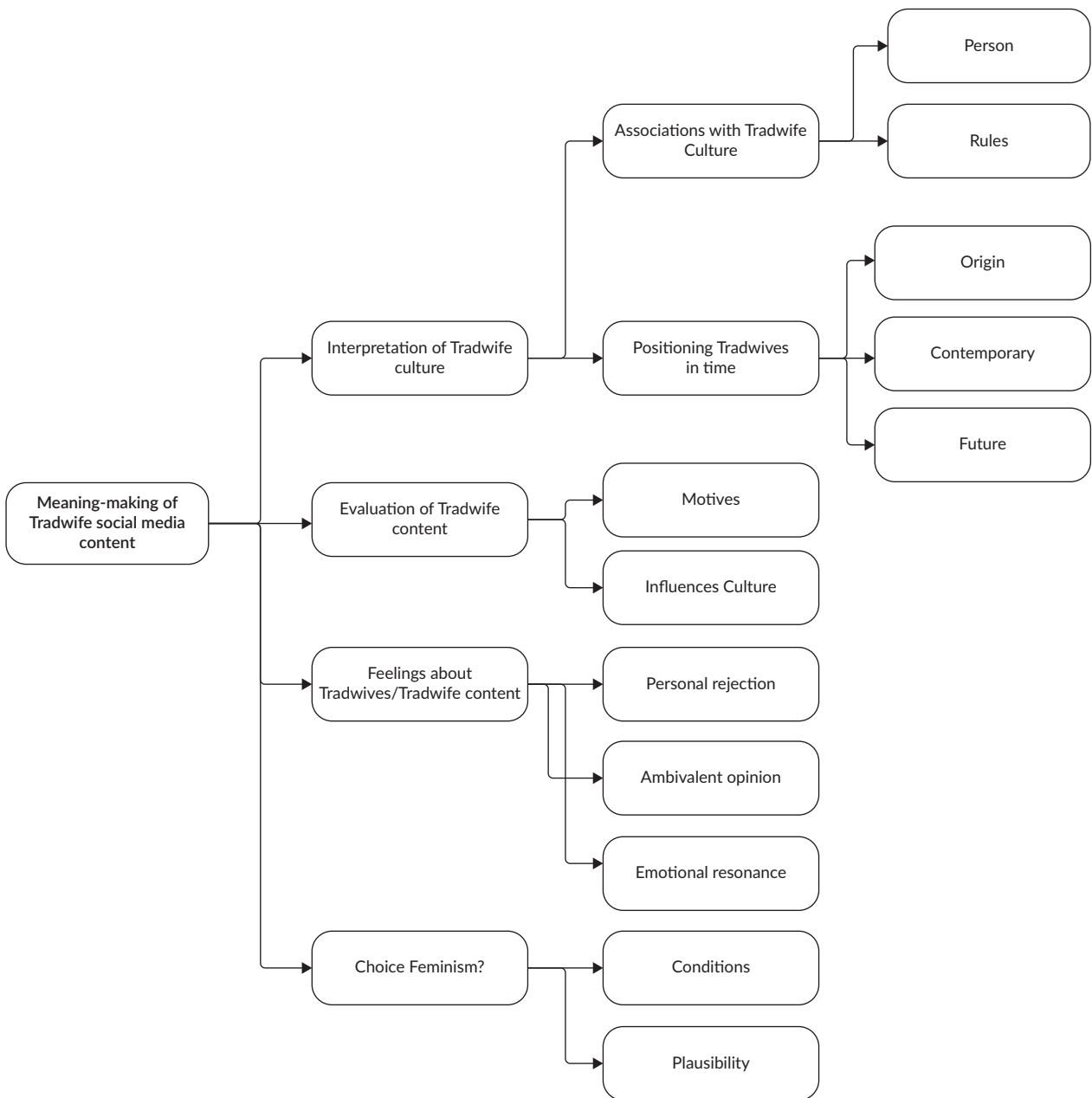


Figure 1. Thematic map.

3.1. Interpretation of Tradwife Culture

The interpretation of the tradwife culture theme encompasses the various associations participants had with tradwives and how they conceptualize the phenomenon in time. Here, participants articulated opinions about the appearance and personality traits of a tradwife and the associated guiding lifestyle principles of the tradwife movement. In addition, this main theme contains participants' perceptions of the origin of this trend, how it currently functions, and expected developments for its future.

3.1.1. Associations With Tradwife Culture

The participants shared associations about the tradwife culture. These associations fall into two categories: those about the person and those about the (perceived) rules. Many participants associated tradwives with young women who look well-groomed and go through daily life according to traditional norms and values. One participant indicated that she thought that tradwives are mainly White women. The participants believed that a tradwife is satisfied with her life and is not eager to work outside the confines of her home. In addition, one respondent indicated that the tradwife is powerful because she consciously deviates from the norm:

But at first, when I heard what tradwife meant, I had to think for a moment: Yes, of course, you sometimes have people who think: "Oh yes, nice, I'll go clean my home, change the baby's diapers, and cook a bit. I don't need more." They would rather be lazy than tired. (G05, 61 years old)

Participants focused on gender-specific rules of life that they associated with the tradwife lifestyle. They discussed the biological differences between men and women and the traditional roles that accompany them, such as the woman who stays home to care for children and does not work outside the home:

So the man takes care of the woman or provides for the woman financially, and the woman takes care of the family, the children, and the man. (G12, 37 years old)

Some participants suggested that this lifestyle need not be exclusive to women and that men could also adopt a tradwife role, reflecting a potentially more modern interpretation of the lifestyle. The tradwife lifestyle was also compared to other lifestyles. Participants noted that this lifestyle is simply a specific way of living, comparable to other lifestyle choices such as veganism:

And in that sense....You can also replace it [tradwife culture] with gardening. You can also replace it with whatever lifestyle you dedicate yourself to. (G09, 34 years old)

3.1.2. Positioning Tradwives in Time

Participants revealed flexibility in positioning tradwives as a phenomenon that develops over time, reflecting on past, present, and future causes and manifestations. Participants believed that the contemporary tradwife trend has partly emerged from existing conservative ideas. Participants discussed becoming a tradwife, considering cultural precepts such as beliefs and traditions. It was also suggested that the growth of progressive ideas in society has provoked a backlash, creating a more conservative counter-narrative. Many participants noted that the trend spread from the United States and suggested that the popularity of

contemporary conservative figures, such as Trump, contributed to the movement's growth. Some participants were more critical, stating that tradwife content is the new form of online marketing for an existing traditional lifestyle:

I don't think it's some new movement, that women suddenly think, "Oh, I don't want to work anymore." There's always been a group of people, like religious people, who were already doing this anyway. Others are now just selling it online. (G15, 23 years old)

When describing tradwife culture in the present day, participants pointed to the considerable emancipation that society has undergone, with much progress already made. However, they emphasized that there is still a battle to be fought for issues such as closing the gender pay gap. Participants noted that modern tradwives experience a degree of luxury, as they now have the choice to adopt this lifestyle, whereas in the past, this was a given. Participants stated that the tradwife lifestyle used to make more sense than it does now, as the development of household appliances in the present day makes housework easier:

In the 50s/60s, a woman would simply sweep, wash, and cook all day long. Well, you name it. The whole household. But now that is peanuts. So what are these women going to do? That is what I wonder. (G08, 61 years old)

Participants also indicated that it is financially more difficult to be a tradwife, as in the modern economy, two incomes are often needed to make ends meet. Additionally, they articulated that, therefore, only women from certain socioeconomic contexts can make this choice.

Many participants had similar expectations about the future of the tradwife culture. They thought that the group of tradwives will grow only to a limited extent. However, some participants expressed uncertainty about the group's future growth. They speculated that the trend could increase if the current wars (i.e., in Ukraine and Gaza) continue, due to a tendency toward conservative values and norms during wartime, but that it could decrease again once war is over.

3.2. Evaluation of Tradwife Content

In evaluating tradwife content, participants identified various motives consumers might have for consuming it and explored it within influencer culture. Within this theme, they outline their own motives, take a role-taking perspective to assess others' motives for watching the content, and ponder the trend from a more meta perspective in the world of online (influencer) content.

3.2.1. Motives

According to participants, there were several reasons for consuming tradwife content, for themselves and others. These viewing motives can be divided into two categories: those in which the viewer finds the phenomenon very interesting and is, therefore, very curious about it, and those in which the viewer sees the content mainly as easy entertainment.

A large portion of participants indicated they would like more information about the tradwife culture. They were particularly curious about the motives of tradwives and why these women chose this lifestyle, because they rarely encountered people in their own lives who think this way. For them, watching the content was a way to see a completely different kind of life. Furthermore, participants thought many people watch this content because the subject provokes a lot of discussion. Another suggested motive was that other people follow tradwife content because they personally identify with it. A few participants noted it was nice that these people have a platform to find each other. At the same time, many participants thought some viewers watch this content precisely because they disagree with it:

Why do they feel that way? What brought them to the point where they made that choice?...I find that very interesting. (G03, 23 years old)

Additionally, participants indicated that they watch the content for entertainment, with some reporting that it is so unusual that it becomes funny. A few participants noted they were initially interested but quickly became satiated, with one participant stating that after watching one video, the rest of the content offered little new insight. Many participants proposed that others watch this content because of their interest in cooking and baking, and because they may be looking for good recipes. A few participants also mentioned that they enjoy the videos for the sense of calm they convey and their aesthetic.

3.2.2. Influencer Culture

Participants reflected on the influencer culture that comes with tradwife content. The participants emphasized how this culture contributes to the popularity and spread of the tradwife ideals. They were convinced that the online expressions of tradwife influencers could influence viewers. In addition, the participants doubted the authenticity of tradwife influencers and the content itself. Participants often pointed to inconsistencies within tradwife influencer culture. They felt that many tradwives should be seen as influencers who earn money by posting about traditional homemaking and lifestyles and encouraging others to become tradwives themselves, without making the influencer/entrepreneurial existence they themselves enjoy very transparent or explicit:

They have their own business in which they create content with this traditional message, and in that message, they do not motivate other women to also enter into that entrepreneurship, for example. (G04, 27 years old)

3.3. Feelings About Tradwife Content

Participants experienced a variety of feelings in their meaning-making process of the tradwife social media trend. These feelings often result from friction among the ideals of plurality in gendered norms and values, personal histories, and personal beliefs. These feelings are often morally charged and fall into three meta-categories: personal rejection, ambivalent opinion, and emotional resonance.

3.3.1. Personal Rejection

A group of participants expressed great difficulty with tradwife content and experienced negative emotions when discussing it. Participants criticized the tradwife trend because they believed in the importance of

women investing in themselves, for example, by studying or working. They believed that this not only contributes to personal development but also ensures that women can remain independent if their lives take a different course. They believed that if a woman went to college and still chose the tradwife life, this is a waste of her qualities and education.

Many participants criticized the role of women who choose the tradwife life, especially in relation to their partners. They strongly disagreed that women should be subordinate to their partners and experienced strong resistance to this. They also criticized the gender distinction that is made, and they completely disagreed with the belief that men can do certain things better than women:

And when it [the documentary] says “submit to your husband” I think “my ass.” (G07, 57 years old)

3.3.2. Ambivalent Opinion

When discussing the tradwife trend, some participants experienced ambivalent acceptance. On the one hand, these participants accepted the tradwife community, but on the other hand, they also experienced mixed feelings about the tradwife movement. During the interviews, all participants emphasized the importance of individual freedom and the right to make their own choices in life. According to the participants, they should be able to live however they want:

Yes, I think everyone should live their lives the way they want to. The way that makes them happy. And if that can be done in a way that doesn't bother those around them. (G12, 37 years old)

Several participants indicated that they were happy for the tradwives, because these women found the lifestyle that suited them. They noted that if the tradwives are happy with their own choice, they are happy for them. Many participants experienced internal conflicts. Although they claimed to accept everyone's life choices, these comments were often made before or after a negative value judgment about tradwives. This creates the impression that these participants were constantly in an internal conflict between acceptance and resistance:

I will, perhaps in contrast to the beginning, I do not condemn it. It is not that I have a value judgment; I just find it creepy and scary. (G01, 73 years old)

3.3.3. Emotional Resonance

When discussing the tradwife trend, some participants experienced different forms of emotional resonance. Some felt connected to the values of tradwife culture, while others were very critical. Their responses were influenced by their own experiences, values, and beliefs. Because some participants had experienced multiple feminist waves themselves, they articulated that they experienced strong negative emotions when discussing tradwives and their lifestyle. They felt that the freedoms that feminists had fought so hard for were simply given up:

And when you see that women throw that away, you can get angry about that. (G07, 57 years old)

Occasionally, some participants showed more understanding of tradwives because they have had similar experiences in their own lives. For example, some participants did not work for a period to care for their children and do housework. In addition, other participants indicated that they had greater respect for tradwives because their own mothers stayed home to raise them, which increased their appreciation of this role:

For a number of years, when the children were small, I also did not work, and for a while, a bit on the sidelines, weekend shifts, and studying. But I found it a very lonely thing at the time. I felt very lonely because I was alone in the playground and walking in the woods with the children, and there were no other mothers. Yes, so I thought, if I were there now....That crossed my mind. So I thought, if a lot of mothers choose this, then it might be nice. Is it perhaps more fun than I thought at the time? (G08, 61 years old)

A few participants indicated they understood tradwives because they recognized the desire to be at home with their children and to give them “sufficient” attention, based on their own motherhood or their desire to have children. However, they emphasized that this can be achieved through part-time work, while simultaneously maintaining one’s own life and autonomy. However, some participants indicated that, while they understood the inclination to be home with their children, they were happy to return to work after their maternity leave because of the social contact and the challenge of work.

3.4. Choice Feminism?

Participants articulated conditions that needed to be met for tradwives to be considered women enacting a form of choice feminism. They emphasized that this concept is only valid when the woman herself has consciously chosen to become a tradwife. The participants stressed they see the tradwife life as often imposed by, for example, societal expectations. For the participants, it was therefore important that a tradwife explicitly indicate that she has made the conscious choice for this lifestyle:

But essentially, they’re saying, “You can’t tell me what I want, but I do want my husband to tell me what I want.” That’s about it. But yes, it’s a conscious choice on their part to want that. (G12, 37 years old)

Participants generally agreed with the concept of choice feminism regarding tradwives as a lifestyle choice. However, they emphasized it is important that tradwives show respect for and solidarity with women who pursue a different lifestyle. For participants, it was essential that tradwives not try to convince women with a different vision to also pursue the tradwife lifestyle:

And if that does happen...this is not feminism. We as women stand; if all is well, we stand up for each other, or at least we do not stand opposite each other; we are next to each other....So I want to respect you, but I also want you to respect me. (G03, 23 years old)

Nevertheless, there were participants for whom this was not a plausible option, because they felt tradwives were inherently unfeminist:

If you say I want to submit to my husband—that’s what tradwife is for me—then I think, you’re not a feminist. With all due respect, because of that....Hey, feminism stands for being able to stand up for

yourself. And if you consciously choose not to do that, that's simply not feminist by definition. (G07, 57 years old)

Some of the participants doubted the plausibility of choice in the tradwife lifestyle. They believed the choice is always (consciously or unconsciously) imposed by the partner, environment, or cultural background:

Because with this....I don't have the feeling that they really chose this themselves, but that it is just an imposed idea. (G04, 27 years old)

4. Discussion

This study attempted to gain insight into how women give meaning to tradwife culture and content. Our analysis shows that women assign different meanings to the tradwife culture. Women define the tradwife as a young woman who lives according to traditional values and norms. This means that the tradwife does not work and stays home to raise her children, while serving her husband. This aligns with Proctor's (2022) research, in which the man in a tradwife family is seen as the protector and breadwinner, while the woman focuses on having children and on fulfilling the family's needs. Simultaneously, the women in our study also highlighted the internal contradictions herein: While the lifestyle proposes that men are the head of the household and sole breadwinners, by making the tradwife content, these women become influencers who monetize the public-making of their private lives, and therefore become entrepreneurs and moneymakers in their household next to their husbands. The women in our study generally viewed the tradwife as a satisfied woman who is happy with her chosen lifestyle. In addition, it is interesting and runs counter to the actual trend, almost in line with Hall's (2019) proposed oppositional reading in his encoding and decoding model, that respondents also articulated that the tradwife role can be fulfilled by a man, with the woman as the family breadwinner. They think that there are also men who would like to take on the role of (somewhat paradoxical) "tradhusband" as a homemaker, and emphasize that the current gender distinction is unnecessary and can be reversed. The analysis shows that the interviewed women see the tradwife lifestyle as comparable to other lifestyles from which people derive their identity. This insight aligns with Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, which argues that individuals often form their self-image based on the social groups they identify with. Most of the women in this study showed some openness to discussing the tradwife lifestyle, but did not actively identify with it. As a result, they could be seen as identifying with the outgroup rather than as part of tradwife culture themselves.

Women in this study experience a range of emotions when discussing the tradwife trend. They value individual autonomy and the right to make their own life choices, regardless of their often negative personal views of the lifestyle. This mix of feelings leads to ambivalent acceptance of the tradwife choice; here, we saw respondents actively trying to avoid applying their own (more liberal and progressive) gendered norms on tradwives. Although women in the sample repeatedly stress that they want to respect other women's choices, they cannot help but be consistently outspoken about not (fully) agreeing with the tradwife lifestyle. They see it as a loss of self-fulfillment and have objections to the dynamics between the tradwife and her husband. This is also where they contemplated the possibility of tradwives enacting choice feminism. For the tradwife lifestyle to be considered feminist or to fit within the concept of choice feminism, several conditions were identified as important for the participants in this study. First, the choice for this lifestyle must be clear and conscious, free from external influences such as social and cultural environments. Second,

participants feel tradwives should contribute to society in other ways. Third, tradwives as choice feminists are expected to be open to the lifestyles of women with different views; here, they actively posit non-rigidity and non-superiority of one set of gendered norms and values over another. However, some participants fervently argued that the tradwife lifestyle could never be considered feminist or categorized as choice feminism, since they believe that the choice is an outcome of pressures in the social environments and that taking a subordinate position towards men is incompatible with any type of feminist norms and values. For the women in the sample who were actively involved in the feminist movement, understanding the tradwife lifestyle is even more challenging. They advocated for women's rights and see this lifestyle as a step backwards. Many women almost immediately have an opinion about the dynamics between men and women and the association with submissiveness that accompanies them. However, they do not associate this with misogynistic and white supremacist ideas. They see the rise of the tradwife trend as a reaction to recent progressive developments, and are convinced that this has led to a growing popularity of conservative values among people. This idea is supported by Giolo (2025) and Stotzer and Nelson (2025), who argue that the current return to traditional values and norms can be seen as a response to the #MeToo movement, the rise of fourth-wave feminism, and the slow leftward shift in social norms. Women also speculate that the pressure modern women face to pursue a successful career while being a devoted mother and partner may motivate some to choose the tradwife lifestyle, which they see as a relief from that pressure to perform. It seems that these women, who in the majority can be typed as feminist and progressive in their outlooks, linked the conservative choices made by tradwives to a growing backlash against progressive ideals in society, framed in postfeminist terms of individual choice. This fits into the greater overall picture articulated by Banet-Weiser and Reinis (2026), who point out that tradwives (like feminists) point to structural problems in the (capitalist, patriarchal) system: the draining girlboss/hustle culture, the devaluation of housework, the lack of reliable and affordable care systems, and the class politics of food. However, rather than supporting systemic, social, and community responses, tradwives, showcasing *postfeminist sensibilities* (Gill, 2016), propose individualistic conservative do-it-yourself solutions. However, the women in this study did not connect their meaning-making of tradwife culture in the larger societal context to concerns over the cultivation of misogyny and white supremacy, which is one of the more frequently outlined and concerning consequences that both scholarly and popular literature devote attention to (Love, 2020; Sykes & Hopner, 2024).

The women in this study also acknowledge the significant role of social media in the rise of this trend—aiding the spread of tradwife culture from the United States to other parts of the world. This idea is also supported by Munro's (2013) work, which highlights that the rise of the online universe has allowed such normative expressions to spread much faster to many more people. Here, it seems tradwives and their performance of conservative gender ideals become entrenched in platform capitalism. The algorithmic capitalist environment commodifies identities that capture attention: Tradwife influencers perform traditional gender roles in ways that are shaped, amplified, and rewarded by platform logics, turning gender itself into a monetizable performance (Richards et al., 2026). Despite the growing awareness and popularity of the tradwife trend, respondents believe that there is a significant counter-narrative from other women who disagree with this lifestyle. Women believe that those who do not conform to traditional norms and values will continue to fight for feminist ideals, as they believe that the fight for equality is not yet over. Therefore, women find it unlikely that the tradwife trend will prevail over more egalitarian, feminist thought in the long run. However, some women believe that a similar trend will always emerge in response to ideological conflicts and wars worldwide.

Women in the study also make sense of the trend from an economic perspective. As pointed out before, they very much point to the monetizing influencer aspect that is part of tradwife culture, while noting that the actual monetization of the lifestyle remains implicit in the content. Furthermore, they question how likely the tradwife lifestyle is for women without family money or a wealthy husband and how aware tradwives are of the impact of their choice on the labor market in general and on their financial self-reliance in particular. The lifestyle is considered selfish because it may reduce the labor force, even though tradwives were supported by the government and community as they completed their education, and now choose not to give anything back to that community. Through this, our participants echoed Proctor's (2022) observation that many women lack the privilege of choosing to be a tradwife due to factors such as race, geography, and culture, and effectively exclude "working-class families and globally less advantaged communities that rely on dual incomes from tradwife communities' utopian dream" (Richards et al., 2026, p. 104).

Furthermore, women point out that people may have various motives for viewing content from tradwife influencers, which aligns with the uses and gratifications theory. This theory states that an individual's media consumption is rooted in their needs and desires (Katz et al., 1973). The women in this study point out that people can experience different forms of gratification when watching tradwife content. For example, they indicate that they are interested in the subject because they do not understand the lifestyle, as they are part of the outgroup. In addition, they do believe that some other people could personally identify with the expressions. Women think these people watch the content because they are part of the ingroup and, therefore, live or aspire to live this lifestyle themselves. Women also report watching tradwife content purely for entertainment because it is such a sharp contrast with their own perspective or because they enjoy aesthetically pleasing videos.

As with all studies, the current study is not without limitations. The use of a convenience sample (Braun & Clarke, 2013) yielded 16 participants with a predominantly progressive view of society. This has likely influenced the answers given during the interviews, as progressive women may think differently about tradwife culture than conservative women do. Additionally, most respondents did not regularly consume tradwife content before participating in this study and watching the *Girls of Tradition* documentary. Future research should differentiate in sampling and analysis among viewers who are not familiar with tradwife content, viewers who incidentally or casually watch it, and those who are actual followers or fans of the trend. This would provide a broader perspective on the different uses, evaluations, and meaning-making processes and outcomes of tradwife content. Simultaneously, it is important to note that, in terms of researcher positionality, the team consisted of women who hold progressive and feminist views aligned with the tenor outlined by the participants in the sample. These perspectives were, however, not shared with participants during data collection, and care was taken, through group discussions and memo writing, to minimize their role in the data collection and analysis phases of the research. Therefore, future research might replicate this study with a more conservative or diverse sample to investigate differences in the meaning-making of tradwife content and simultaneously seek a more varied set of outlooks within the research team.

The research deliberately included women of all ages to get as broad a picture as possible of how women interpret the tradwife trend. However, it could be interesting for future research to sample by age or generation. In doing so, one could compare women who lived through the different waves of feminism with respondents who did not experience them. This would provide deeper insight into how historical context and generational differences shape women's perceptions of the tradwife trend.

In sum, women do not simply reject or accept tradwife content; they perform nuanced readings of the content, perspective-taking with creators, and internal discussions between their own gendered norms and values and the ideal of (respect for) pluriformity of (gendered) norms and values. While women see that some aspects of the tradwife lifestyle clash with progressive ideas and contemporary feminism, they also understand the desire to escape contemporary pressures by living a simpler life with more family time. Some women address the contradiction of earning money as a tradwife influencer marketing a traditional lifestyle while promoting a lifestyle in which the wife is not supposed to work and the husband is supposed to be the provider, making them question being a tradwife as an authentic form of choice feminism. Moreover, women move beyond the typical clash of tradwives vs. feminists in their meaning-making of tradwife content. While women may disagree with certain aspects of the tradwife lifestyle, they work toward accepting tradwives for who they are and how they live. These women are willing to accept the tradwife lifestyle as choice feminism under specific conditions, whereas other women reject this frame, worried about the external social pressures for women to present themselves as tradwives. Overall, women's interpretation of the tradwife trend and content reveals perceived tensions between (choice) feminism, external pressures and motivations, and their personal values, resulting in a range of (often ambivalent) thoughts and feelings rather than a clear-cut binary stance of acceptance or rejection.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Data Availability

The datasets presented in this article are not available online. Due to the ethically sensitive nature of the interview topics, the informed consent guaranteed full confidentiality of the interview transcripts for all participants. The researchers are available to answer specific questions regarding the data.

References

- Banet-Weiser, S., & Reinis, S. (2026). The rage of tradwives: Affective economies and romanticizing retreat. *Feminist Theory*, 27(1), 50–66.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners* (1st ed.). Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Coontz, S. (1993). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. Hachette.
- Gill, R. (2016). Post-postfeminism? New feminist visibilities in postfeminist times. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(4), 610–630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1193293>
- Giolo, G. (2025). Cultural transgressions and media contestation: A qualitative study of the tradwife trend in Dutch media. *Popular Communication*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2025.2560859>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday-Anchor.
- Hall, S. (2019). Encoding–decoding (1980). In C. Greers (Ed.), *Crime and media* (pp. 44–55). Routledge.
- Hermes, J. (2013). Rediscovering twentieth-century feminist audience research. In C. Carter, L. Steiner, & L. McLaughlin (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to media & gender* (pp. 61–70). Routledge.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
- Lloyd, K. (2024, March 16). The allure of the domestic goddess: Tradwives, Nara Smith and Gen Z. *Ensemble*. <https://www.ensemblemagazine.co.nz/articles/tradwives-nara-smith-and-gen-z>

- Love, N. S. (2020). Shield maidens, fashy femmes, and tradwives: Feminism, patriarchy, and right-wing populism. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 5, Article 619572.
- Malone Kircher, M. (2024, January 30). She gave birth two weeks ago. Now she's in a beauty pageant. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/30/style/ballerina-farm-mrs-world-hannah-neeleman.html>
- Mattheis, A. A. (2021). #TradCulture: Reproducing whiteness and neo-fascism through gendered discourse online. In S. Hunter & C. van der Westhuizen (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of critical studies in whiteness* (pp. 91–101). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429355769-7>
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. Sage.
- Munro, E. (2013). Feminism: A fourth wave? *Political Insight*, 4(2), 22–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-9066.12021>
- Negra, D. (2009). *What a girl wants? Fantasizing the reclamation of self in postfeminism*. Routledge.
- Nicholas, S. (2020, January 25). Darling, I'll do anything to make you happy! How the tradwives sacrifice their own careers to satisfy their husbands' every whim...and insist it's the secret of marital bliss. *Daily Mail*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-7926581/How-Tradwives-sacrifice-careers-satisfy-husbands-whim.html>
- NPO. (2023). *Deze meiden dromen van een leven achter het aanrecht: 'Iedereen heeft z'n rol.'* <https://npo.nl/npo3/brandpuntplus/traditioneel-tradwife-conservatief>
- Proctor, D. (2022). The #tradwife persona and the rise of radicalized white domesticity. *Persona Studies*, 8(2), 7–26. <https://doi.org/10.21153/psj2022vol8no2art1645>
- Richards, I., Jones, C., & Trott, V. (2026). Neoliberal capitalism and the political aesthetics of tradwife imagery. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 27(1), 102–117.
- Scott, K., & Day, L. (2025). TikTok tradwives: Femininity, reproduction, and social media. *Gender and Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2025.2546050>
- Sherman, C. (2024, July 24). Sundresses and rugged self-sufficiency: 'Tradwives' tout a conservative American past...that didn't exist. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/ng-interactive/2024/jul/24/tradwives-tiktok-women-gender-roles>
- Spigel, L. (2001). *Welcome to the dreamhouse: Popular media and postwar suburbs*. Duke University Press.
- Stotzer, R. L., & Nelson, A. (2025). The (anti) feminism of tradwives. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2025.2463588>
- Sykes, S., & Hopner, V. (2024). Tradwives: Right-wing social media influencers. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 53(4), 453–487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416241246273>
- Tajfel, H. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. Academic Press.
- Welter, B. (1966). The cult of true womanhood: 1820–1860. *American Quarterly*, 18(2), 151–174.
- #TradWife: 'Submitting to my husband like it's 1959.' (2020, January 17). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-51113371>

About the Authors



Pip Heldoorn (MSc, Radboud University, 2024) completed her master's degree in communication at Radboud University and is now employed as a marketer for the theatre company De Horde, which specializes in producing theatre on societally impactful topics for younger audiences.



Joël Hendrix (MSc, Radboud University, 2019) is a PhD student in communication at the Behavioural Science Institute at Radboud University. Her research focuses on mediated representations of underrepresented groups, the reception of these representations, and the underlying processes influencing this reception.



Lisa Vandenberg (PhD, Erasmus University, 2012) is an associate professor of communication science at the Behavioural Science Institute at Radboud University. Her research is devoted to three themes: (a) vaccination communication, (b) prosocial (health) communication, and (c) communication and cognition.



Serena Daalmans (PhD, Radboud University, 2016) is an associate professor of communication science at the Behavioural Science Institute at Radboud University. Her research focuses on the content of and responses to mediated representations of underrepresented groups.