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One Is Not Born a Homemaker: A Feminist
Anthropological Netnographic Study of
Homemaker Culture Online

By

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“Do you know what they used to call a ‘tradwife’? WIFE” (@simplybiblicalwoman, 26 November 2025)

The tradwife trend is often traced to COVID-19 lockdown boredom of 2020, when sourdough starters and vintage 1950s aesthetics flooded social media feeds. But as Emily Matchar documented in her 2013 book *Homeward Bound*, a re-embrace of domesticity she termed “New Domesticity” was already visible in mommy blogs and domestic lifestyle spaces nearly a decade prior to the pandemic (Matchar, 2013). The tradwife movement was not the origin, nor was it the most significant expression of this cultural group. It was a brief, highly visible, and politically charged trend within a much larger and more durable homemaker culture that had been building since at least the early 2010s, largely unexamined by recent scholarship.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not create this movement, but rather, it mainstreamed it, pushing it onto algorithmic platforms and providing a new aesthetic vocabulary. What began as cottagecore aesthetics and sourdough bread tutorials during the 2020 lockdowns evolved into a booming ecosystem of tradwife content: women publicly embracing subservient behavior and attitudes toward their husbands, domestic labor as a labor of love, and traditional gender roles as expressions of natural femininity (Allen et al., 2026, p. 1). Matchar had identified the same cluster of anxieties driving women toward home and hearth over a decade earlier: distrust of government, discontent with modern work culture, environmental concern, and a longing for hands-on authenticity in an increasingly tech-driven world (Matchar, 2013, p. 14-15). The tradwife label was one fleeting, visible, and ultimately politically toxic expression of this much larger cultural group. The tradwife trend was a pinpoint in a much larger pool of homemakers.

This paper examines that larger pool, and what it reveals about the persistence of patriarchal domestic ideology in American digital culture through a netnographic feminist anthropological study, following Kozinets netnographic analysis guide (Kozinets, 2019).

When research for this analysis began in late 2025, I originally aimed to study the tradwife community on Instagram and TikTok. What I found instead was a near-absence of tradwife content. The hashtag #tradwife accumulated to only 122K posts total on Instagram by March 2026, most of them from 2020-2024. What the data revealed was not a decline but a disproportion that had likely always existed: #homemaker held 938K posts, #homestead 4.9 million, #simpleliving 2.5 million. The tradwife label was never the dominant identity. It was a trend, briefly visible and heavily covered, that obscured the much larger and more ideologically significant homemaker culture operating underneath it. Two of the most prominent tradwives, Alena Pettitt and Estee C. Williams, had left the online movement because they no longer identified with its political nature. Pettitt, in an article with the New Yorker, called the online movement "hijacked by extremists and grifters" (Elmhirst, 2024, p. 4). The search for authentic domesticity was always bigger than any single trend label. The tradwife was a pinpoint in a much larger pool of homemakers, and this research redirected its inquiry accordingly.

This thesis identifies and analyzes four themes emergent from the data: the relationship between the tradwife trend and the homemaker culture as distinct but ideologically connected identities; an anti-modern contradiction embedded within the homemaker aesthetic that connects anti-technology behavior and anti-government sentiment through a shared logic of opting out; an anti-feminist discourse that functions as misplaced anti-capitalism; and a wellness-to-conservatism pipeline that recruits women into traditional domesticity through the language of health, purity, and maternal protection. The existing scholarship has begun to examine the anti-

feminist and political dimensions of tradwife culture from 2020-2025, but has largely missed the significance and scale of the homemaker community that predates, surrounds, and outlasts it. Hopner and Sykes (2026) have recently begun to analyze the rejection of the trad-label occurring online, with content pulled from January to June 2025. My netnographic analysis, drawing on posts from October 2025 through April 2026, offers an original contribution to the scholarship on domestic ideology online by reframing homemaker culture as the larger and more enduring ideological formation within which the tradwife trend briefly emerged and eventually retreated. Beyond its temporal scope, this paper's distinctive analytical contribution is the four-theme framework, which maps how the relationship between the tradwife trend and homemaker community, the anti-modern contradiction, misplaced anti-capitalism, and the wellness pipeline operate not as separate phenomena but as a mutually reinforcing ideological system. While each theme operates independently, together they reveal how American homemaker communities on Instagram and TikTok in 2025-2026 reconstitute, commodify, and circulate patriarchal domestic ideology in ways that make it more durable and more difficult to critique than the tradwife trend it contains.

The primary research question guiding this study is: What does the relationship between the tradwife trend and homemaker community reveal about how patriarchal domestic ideology survives, reproduces, and expands in American digital culture from 2025-2026? This question generates two subsidiary inquiries. First, in a post-pandemic moment defined by corporate burnout (Tebaldi, 2021), feminist fatigue (Pilyarchuk & Graf, 2026), and widespread distrust of public institutions visible in the data collected for this study, how does homemaker culture position itself as refuge, and what does it reveal about the failures of neoliberal feminism and capitalism? Second, how does the moral scaffolding of homemaker ideology, rooted in purity,

maternal protection, and wellness, sustain its alluring power even when its inconsistencies are visible?

While studying this community online, I sustained reflexivity about my own position in relation to the data. As a White, cisgender woman in my twenties, a digital media user, and a researcher trained in feminist theory and anthropology, I occupy a double-position: I am in some ways the target audience for this content, and also its critic. I noticed early in the data collection that the homemaker aesthetic appealed to me too. There is something genuinely alluring about this content that these women are selling: the slowness, idyllic nature, the sense of purpose and control. The burnout they are running away from is real, and dissatisfaction with corporate America is legitimate. What pulled me back to my reality were the inconsistencies I was noting down in my reflexive log, modeled on Weber's (2017) framework for tracking researcher positionality in digital ethnography. My commitment throughout this research is to women's equality and choice, which means taking seriously both the structural critique embedded in homemaker thought, and the structural inequalities, paradoxes, and internal inconsistencies it obscures, contradictions I will detail in the analysis that follows.

This paper proceeds as follows. Following a review of the relevant literature across feminist theory, biopolitics, digital platform studies, and moral psychology, the methods section details the netnographic approach and data collection strategy employed across Instagram and TikTok, following Kozinets' (2019) framework for qualitative social media research.. The findings are then presented across four thematic sections, moving through the tradwife trend versus homemaker community distinction, the anti-modern contradiction, the misplaced anti-capitalist critique, and the wellness-to-conservatism pipeline. A discussion section synthesizes

these themes as an interconnected ideological system before the conclusion considers the broader implications for feminist digital media studies and future research.

Literature Review

Gender Performance and the Construction of Womanhood

Feminist theory provides the foundational framework for understanding how homemaker culture online is not simply a lifestyle choice, but a set of performed, socially regulated gender norms reproduced through digital platform algorithms. To understand how and why the homemaker aesthetic is so compelling and morally charged, one must first understand how gender itself is constructed, performed, and enforced.

Repeated social performances that, over time, produce an appearance of an inherent femininity within homemaker culture are best understood as gender performativity. Rather than reflecting an inherent biological essence, behaviors associated with femininity emerge through socially regulated acts, gestures, and norms that are reproduced over time (Butler, 1990, p. 173-177). Through repetition, these performances create the illusion that gender roles are natural destiny, even though they are socially constructed (Butler, 1990, p. 179). On Instagram and TikTok, these gender performances are representative of aprons, sourdough loaves, flowy sundresses, and picture-perfect photos of kitchens which are not expressions of natural femininity. They are its carefully crafted production. Tradwife and homemaker content can be understood as a specific set of gender performances that reinforce traditional ideals of femininity through repeated visual and behavioral scripts. By repeatedly depicting domestic and submissive narratives as authentic depictions of womanhood, homemaker discourse contributes to the reproduction of traditional gender hierarchies.

Furthermore, social performance does not only operate at the level of individual acts. It also operates, spatially, through the management of what is shown and what is concealed. In homemaker content, the distinction between frontstage and backstage (Goffman, 1959) performance adds another dimension that is useful for analyzing social media content in particular. Homemaker influencers curate a frontstage of effortless domesticity, spotless kitchens, beautifully baked goods, and a joyful marriage, while the backstage labor, financial power imbalance, and hours of content editing remain invisible to the public eye. The performance is not incidental to its ideology. It is the forefront mechanism of which the ideology reproduces itself across platforms and across generations, too.

In a historical sense, these performances do not emerge out of nowhere. Over the past two centuries in the United States dominant culture has idealized a version of womanhood confined to the home and centered on femininity, domesticity, and caregiving, an ideal that, as Stephanie Coontz (1992) has shown, never fully mapped onto the lived reality of most women, even at its peak. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) grounds this analysis within temporal continuity. Beauvoir's notorious quote, "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman," is a key sentiment when analyzing homemaker culture online (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 316). One is not born a homemaker either, but rather becomes one through the same historical, temporal, and societal forces Beauvoir identified as combining to create the passive, dependent role known as the "Other" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 187). While homemaker creators vary in how explicitly they frame domesticity as destiny, a recurring pattern across the data is the naturalization of the homemaker role as an expression of authentic womanhood rather than a social or historical construction. The framing of domesticity as a woman's "true nature" or "biological destiny" situates homemaker discourse as prior to and above the structural forces that shaped these

expectations in the first place. What Beauvoir called the ideological mystification of women's equality is now aestheticized, filtered, and commodified. What is particularly striking about homemaker culture is that it appears to have absorbed the feminist critique of gender performance and inverted it: rather than using reflexivity to resist naturalized femininity as Butler and Beauvoir urged, homemaker creators deploy aestheticization and performance knowingly, leaning into the very scripts feminist theory sought to denaturalize and presenting that lean as an act of authentic choice.

Lastly, communities that present themselves as spaces of authentic choice and personal fulfillment simultaneously operate systems of social punishment for women who deviate from their norms. Kate Manne's framework of misogyny as an enforcement system rather than simply a prejudice sharpens this analysis further (Manne, 2017, p. 47). Manne's framework fits into the tradwife and homemaker discourse through her explanation that deviation from gender norms is punished: socially, institutionally, and emotionally (Manne, 2017, p. 59). This is perhaps one of the more counterintuitive insights this analysis will develop: homemaker communities operate on an enforcement logic that rewards conformity with inclusion, belonging, validation, and algorithmic amplification, while treating women who remain in the workforce as cautionary tales of feminist fatigue and motherly failure. The rhetoric is one of freedom. The structure is one of discipline. This tension between the language of choice and the reality of social enforcement is one of the central contradictions this paper traces across the four themes that follow.

The Sexual Division of Labor and Domestic Capitalism

Online homemaker culture is a niche expression of 21st century digital reality and yet appears structured around the very contradictions that 20th century feminist theory identified in

mass society. The nuclear family, the unwaged domestic labor, the romanticization of caregiving as natural feminine destiny: these are not new phenomena that Instagram created. They are longstanding structural conditions that homemaker culture has not only absorbed but repackaged as aspirational content. If Butler, Goffman, and Beauvoir explain the ideological surface of homemaker culture, Shulamith Firestone and Silvia Federici explain the material foundation beneath it.

The structure of the nuclear family and the sexual division of labor it produces have long been understood as foundational mechanisms of women's economic dependence. Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) argues that the roots of women's oppression lie not in economics but in the biological organization of reproduction itself. Drawing on Marx and Engels, Firestone reinterprets historical materialism by suggesting that sex class conflict predates economic class conflict, with the first division of labor emerging from the biological differences between those who bear children and those who do not (Firestone, 1970, p. 5-9). According to Firestone, this reproductive division created a system in which women became structurally dependent on men, forming the basis for later political and economic inequalities (Firestone, 1970, p. 10-12). What is striking about homemaker culture in this light is not that it is unaware of this analysis, but that it appears to invert it: the nuclear family structure that Firestone identified as the root of women's economic dependence is embraced by homemaker communities not as a problem to be solved but as a value to be celebrated. One might ask whether this represents a knowing rejection of Firestone's critique, a sense that the bonds of family codependency are a worthwhile trade for the economic vulnerability they produce, or whether the structural inequality is simply rendered invisible beneath the aesthetic of fulfillment and purpose.

The invisibility of domestic labor as labor is the central problem Silvia Federici identified in her 1975 pamphlet *Wages Against Housework*. Federici argued that housework has historically been treated not as labor but as an expression of a woman's natural destiny within the family, which mirrors homemaker ideology directly. She writes, "They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work" (Federici, 1975, p. 1). Domestic labor being turned into a labor of love effectively obscures the economic value of caregiving, emotional support, and maintaining a household. Federici argues that housework has been imposed on women and transformed into "femininity," rather than actual labor (Federici, 1975, p. 2). This process has been completed through extensive socialization, in which women are trained early on to see caregiving, domestic labor, and self-sacrifice as natural destiny, a sentiment echoed by Beauvoir and remastered by homemaker influencers today. The romanticization of domesticity within homemaker ideology reflects the continued capitalistic and patriarchal power of the cultural narratives and social structures Federici sought to challenge and uproot. These influencers consistently romanticize domestic labor, good motherhood, and economic dependence as integral to womanhood, while these ideals closely mirror the very same structures that Firestone and Federici identify as central to women's oppression. What makes this iteration of the ideology distinct is that the labor of love is now also content, filmed, filtered, and monetized for a digital audience of hundreds of thousands.

Biopower, Purity, and the Moral Body

In homemaker culture, wellness is not separate from politics. It is politics, expressed through the body. Raw milk consumption, unmedicated birth, vaccine skepticism, red light therapy, and low-tox living are not simply personal health choices circulating online. When

packaged as content and distributed algorithmically to hundreds of thousands of followers, these practices function as ethical imperatives that reinforce maternal and domestic responsibilities, inviting viewers to calibrate their own behavior against the standard being modeled. The body becomes the site where ideology is performed, measured, and enforced.

Modern governance has long operated through the body as a mechanism of social control, shaping what counts as healthy, natural, and morally acceptable. Foucault's (1978) concept of biopower helps explain how online wellness cultures extend this logic into the domestic sphere. When a mother films herself making food from scratch and uses the trending phrase "taking our kitchens back," she is not simply sharing a recipe. She is producing a norm of disciplinary wellness for a public audience, one that implicitly invites viewers to measure their own practices, their own bodies, and their own maternal choices against what they are watching. The content does not simply document a moral project. It recruits for one.

Moreover, symbolic boundaries between the pure and the polluted carry significant moral weight in any cultural system, organizing conformity and maintaining hierarchies in ways that feel natural rather than constructed (Douglas, 1966). In homemaker culture, these boundaries map directly onto the clean versus contaminated binary that structures the entire wellness aesthetic. Processed food is pollution. Government education is contamination. Vaccines are intrusion. The homemaker body, one free of pollutants, naturally fed, and low-tox, is purity made extremely visible. Douglas' analysis helps explain why the wellness aesthetic and the homemaker ideology are not just adjacent to each other, but deeply ideologically intertwined, sharing the same symbolic scaffolding.

This purity logic, once activated around food and bodies, does not stay contained there. Jennifer Reich's (2016) analysis of parents who refuse vaccines on moral grounds demonstrates

how the natural vs artificial distinction becomes a full ethical framework, transforming everyday health decisions into statements of bodily virtue (Reich, 2016). This is the logic underneath the wellness-to-conservatism pipeline identified in this study. One day you might be questioning what really goes into the snacks you consume, and then you are homeschooling your children and distrusting the government. The pipeline is not a simple bump in the road. It is the logical endpoint of a purity-based moral framework already set in motion, it is the road under your feet.

Historical Erasure and the Nostalgia Machine

Historians have long observed that marginalized groups are often maintained in positions of ideological subordination through the very telling of history. Sometimes, this process involves erasing past narratives from the historical record entirely. Other times, it involves retaining a selective and partial account, foregrounding continuity while obscuring the conditions that made that continuity possible, or the inequalities it depended upon. Homemaker culture's relationship with the past operates through exactly this kind of selective historical memory, constructing a vision of domestic femininity that appears timeless and natural precisely because the evidence of its construction has been edited and filtered out.

First, the idealized homemaker of the mid-twentieth century baby boom is a case in point. As Stephanie Coontz (1992) demonstrates in *The Way We Never Were*, the image of the contented housewife devoted entirely to home and hearth was held up during the 1950s and 1960s as the natural and normative way to be a woman, even as most women did not and for economic reasons could not conform to it. The ideal was not a description of reality. Coontz (1992) documents that the 1950s homemaker ideal was itself a manufactured cultural project, one so artificial that merchandisers deliberately added unnecessary steps to cake mix instructions

to give housewives a sense of purpose and necessity in the kitchen. The modern homemaker influencer selling a \$56 kitchen bundle to recreate that same sense of purpose is not a return to tradition. It is a digital iteration of the same manufactured meaning.

Moreover, the 19th century homestead aesthetic that has increasingly revealed itself as more prevalent than the 1950s aesthetic in modern homemaker content carries its own set of historical erasures. Linda Kerber's (1980) foundational work on republican motherhood in *Women of the Republic* demonstrates that the ideal of the domestically devoted mother was itself an invention of the early American republic, one that had to be actively naturalized because it contradicted the working reality of most colonial women. As Mary Beth Norton (1980) documents in *Liberty's Daughters*, colonial goodwives were essential precisely because of the productive labor and economic contributions they provided to the household, not their withdrawal from labor and the economy. The 19th century homestead that modern creators romanticize erases the poverty, racial exclusion, legal subordination, and lack of bodily autonomy that defined most women's domestic experiences in that era. It also erases, as Jan Lewis (1987) notes in her analysis of the republican wife ideal, that this vision of domestic femininity was always more aspirational than actual, a class-specific fantasy projected backward onto a past that never universally existed.

Lastly, historical silencing names the mechanism underlying all these erasures: dominant narratives are produced through selective memory and strategic forgetting, foregrounding continuity while obscuring the inequalities and inconsistencies beneath (Trouillot, 1995). When homemakers post about domestic traditions passed down for generations and sum up their lifestyles as "just being a woman" (@ivyoutwest, 28 February 2026), there is performative historical erasure happening for a wide public audience. Joan Scott's (2001) concept of the

"fantasy echo" captures the temporal logic of this nostalgia precisely: collective identities are constructed through imagined historical continuity rather than historical fidelity. These communities are not returning to the past. They are constructing a fantasy of it, one that legitimizes present-day patriarchal norms by making them appear ancient, inevitable, and natural. What is particularly significant is that this fantasy, as Coontz and Kerber together demonstrate, was never true even when it was first being invented. The homemaker ideal has always required immense privilege to acquire, a reality that modern homemaker culture reproduces and obscures in equal measure.

Digital Platforms, Commodification, and the Algorithmic Circulation of Ideology

Understanding how homemaker ideology circulates online requires attention not just to the content, but also a recognition of the platform infrastructure that amplifies, rewards, and shapes it. Hashtags are not simply organizational tools on these platforms. They are the primary mechanism through which homemaker influencers foreground their ideology, signal inclusionary language, and recruit new members. The disproportion between #tradwife at 122K posts and #homemaker at 938K reveals how a community self-organizes linguistically online, choosing terms and labels that signal authenticity and lifestyle over extreme wording that showcases politics and controversy. Following a hashtag led to a community, a community that led to an aesthetic, and an aesthetic that led to a set of values and morals, often a subconscious effort for mindless scrolling online, but the algorithm had done all the ideological work.

Sykes and Hopner (2024) show that tradwife influencers commodify right-wing ideologies through visual and performative displays of domesticity and femininity, producing a neoliberalized form of patriarchal moralization. Curated imagery, color palettes, interior design,

and clothing render moral principles tangible and emotionally compelling, encouraging behaviors associated with virtuous womanhood. They are the form through which moral principles become legible, shareable, and algorithmically amplifiable. Their concept of "globalizing anti-globalism and modernizing the anti-modern" (Sykes & Hopner, 2024, p. 475) names the specific paradox of digital homemaker culture: the platform rewards the performance of disconnection from the platform. The contradiction is not incidental. It is structurally produced by an attention economy that profits from engagement regardless of the content of that engagement.

Scott and Day (2025) show that TikTok is a particularly potent space for promoting traditional gender norms, with female content creators actively circulating anti-feminist ideals. Their analysis of the #Tradwife movement demonstrates how TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system does not simply reflect existing preferences but shapes them, creating feedback loops in which engagement with one piece of homemaker content, or clicking 'I want to see more of this content', generates recommendations for more, gradually constructing an entire worldview. The presence of creators like @thatcrunchygirlannika, approximately eighteen years old and already circulating homemaker ideology on TikTok, is evidence of algorithmic recruitment as well as generational reproduction.

Allen et al.'s (2026) tracing of the cottagecore-to-tradwife pipeline on Tumblr provides important precedent for the aesthetic-to-ideology pathway this study identifies on Instagram and TikTok. Their finding that aesthetic communities function as ideological on-ramps, where visual style precedes and enables political content, maps directly onto the wellness-to-conservatism pipeline identified in this study's fourth theme. What the platform affords is precisely this: an entry point through beauty and lifestyle that does not announce its political destination. It is a

‘slippery slope’ into conservatism, the algorithm quietly doing the work by showing more and more content from a single hashtag consumption.

Stotzer and Nelson (2025) and Simmons (2025) have further examined the antifeminist and politically extreme dimensions of tradwife culture, with Simmons identifying tradwife communities as active participants in organizing women for male supremacy in her book, *CTRL HATE DELETE*. Simmons (2025) specifically frames these communities as organized efforts to recruit women into male supremacist ideology through the aesthetic language of domesticity and feminine virtue, which maps directly onto the four-theme system this paper identifies. Pilyarchuk and Graf (2026) contribute a discourse analysis of tradwife identity performance in Instagram Reels specifically, demonstrating how creators move from domestic self-identification into explicitly antifeminist rhetoric through the affordances of the platform itself. Their analysis of how Instagram Reels structures and rewards tradwife identity performance is directly relevant to understanding how the homemaker culture studied in this paper uses the same platform logic to circulate its own rebranded version of those ideals. Andronowitz (2025) extends this further in an undergraduate thesis by examining how homemaker influencer content depoliticizes women's gender roles through the language of lifestyle and personal choice, obscuring the ideological work being done beneath the aesthetic surface.

What existing scholarship has not yet fully examined is how these forces operate simultaneously as an intertwined system in the 2025-2026 homemaker sphere specifically. The tradwife trend versus homemaker culture distinction, anti-modern contradiction, anti-feminist rhetoric functioning as misplaced anti-capitalism, and the wellness-to-conservatism pipeline are not discrete phenomena. They are a coherent ideological system, and this paper maps it.

Method

This research employed a digital ethnography, or netnography, a method Kozinets (2019) describes as the application of ethnographic principles to the study of online communities and digital cultures. Netnography treats online spaces as legitimate field sites and the content produced within them as cultural data worthy of sustained interpretive attention. In this study, the field itself redirected the inquiry: rather than finding the tradwife community I originally set out to study, I found its near-absence, and that absence became the first and most significant finding. Data collection was ongoing and adaptive; as new hashtags and accounts emerged, they informed subsequent searches, allowing the sample to expand organically through the community's own language and self-categorizations.

Before proceeding, it is important to define the terms this study uses. For the purposes of this research, a tradwife is understood as a woman who publicly identifies with the tradwife label through explicit self-identification or consistent use of hashtags such as #tradwife or #traditionalwife, and who has advocated for female submission within heterosexual marriage and the rejection of feminist ideals of career and financial independence. A homemaker is understood more broadly: a woman who publicly identifies with domestic life, stay-at-home motherhood, homeschooling children, and traditional gender roles through self-identifying rhetoric or the consistent use of hashtags such as #homemaker and #simpleliving. It is integral to note that not all homemakers identify as tradwives in this study, central to the paper's findings.

The data in this study surrounds US American self-identifying cisgender, heterosexual women, mostly White, most married, and most mothers of multiple children. One outlier, @thatcrunchygirlannika, approximately eighteen years old, was included due to the importance of the younger generation's engagement with homemaker lifestyles online. Netnography allowed

a specialized view into these women's everyday lives. They curate their lives in such a way that it functions like a window into their homes, their kitchens, and their way of life, even when that curation is performative and audience-directed.

Instagram and TikTok were identified as the two primary platforms for data collection. Instagram's text-in-photos formatting and TikTok's video formatting offered complementary data types. As the research progressed, Instagram emerged as the primary data source for close analysis, with the sheer volume of available content making it the more productive platform. TikTok became the secondary source, utilized to fill gaps in the Instagram data and to note differences in how content circulates across platforms.

Data sourcing followed a snowball sampling method via hashtags on both platforms. The search began with #tradwife and #tradelife, using the hashtags subjects posted on their own profiles to source further hashtags. The hashtag #homemaker emerged quickly during the pilot data search, opening up a new landscape of content. From there, hashtags like #simpleliving, #lowtoxliving, and #femininenotfeminist emerged in the beginning stages of data collection, with the algorithm slowly feeding more focused homemaker content with continued use over time. To confirm whether accounts endorsed the tradwife or homemaker lifestyle, I sought self-identifying rhetoric or the use of specific hashtags like #tradwife or #homemaker, and confirmed that accounts had more than 1,000 followers on Instagram or TikTok to identify them as at least nano-influencers. Importantly, I did not follow any accounts during data collection, a decision confirmed as appropriate by the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board, which categorized this work as not human subjects research. Only public content was utilized, with no direct contact such as liking, commenting, or private messaging. The data collected ranged from October 2025 to April 2026, a six month period of analysis.

Data types included publicly available image posts, videos, captions, and cross-platform reposts. A range of data types was necessary because subjects used multiple formats to circulate their ideologies online, and relying on only one type would have produced an incomplete picture of the community's self-presentation.

Because digital algorithms shape the content presented during data collection, I maintained a reflexive log to track how my feed changed as I passively observed and searched content through hashtags. Following Weber's (2017) framework for tracking researcher positionality in digital ethnography, this log served as part of the ethnographic record, since Instagram and TikTok's respective algorithms influenced which posts became visible and which did not. Kozinets (2019) emphasizes that the researcher's presence within a digital field, even as a passive observer, shapes the data environment, and this log was the primary tool for accounting for that dynamic throughout the study.

Analysis proceeded through three stages of qualitative coding. In the first stage, I used open coding to identify recurring language, hashtags, and images in the research log. In the second stage, focused coding organized the most recurrent hashtags and themes into broader analytic categories: the tradwife trend versus homemaker culture distinction, anti-modern contradiction, anti-feminist rhetoric functioning as misplaced anti-capitalism, and the wellness-to-conservatism pipeline. In the final stage, I assembled findings to examine how these categories merge to shape the central puzzle of this study, the relationships between the themes, and the ideological work performed by homemaker content online.

As a White, cisgender female researcher utilizing feminist frameworks to study tradwife and homemaker women online, I remained cognizant of my positionality and the possibility for

implicit bias toward the women I was studying due to holding differing political views. To manage and reduce this bias, the reflexive log tracked my position in relation to the data throughout the research process. The aim throughout was to provide an anthropological interpretation of their content and to address the contradictions in the ideologies presenting themselves publicly. This work is driven by a commitment to women's equality and women's choice.

| Theme | Representative Post | Platforms |
|--|--|------------------|
| Tradwife Trend Vs Homemaker Culture | “Do you know what they used to call a tradwife? WIFE” @simplybiblicalwoman 11/26/25 on Instagram | Instagram/TikTok |
| The Anti-Modern Contradiction | “Turn off the TV. Find joy.” @gubbahomestead 2/23/26 on Instagram | Instagram/TikTok |
| Anti-Feminism Rhetoric as Misplaced Anti- Capitalism | “They used feminism to get women into the workforce so they could tax both parents” @crunchygirlannika 10/6/25 on TikTok | Instagram/TikTok |
| The Wellness-to- Conservative Pipeline | “One day you are wondering if you can give birth without meds, and the next thing you know...questioning vaccines” @intothebook on Instagram | Instagram/TikTok |

Fig. 1. Four Themes and Representative Posts

Findings

Theme 1: The Tradwife Trend and Homemaker Culture

Was it the Homemakers All Along?

When I began this research in late 2025, I searched for tradwife content on Instagram and TikTok and found surprisingly little. The hashtag #tradwife had accumulated only 122K posts on Instagram by March 2026, most of them from 2020 to 2024 (see Fig. 2). Meanwhile, #homemaker held 938K posts, #homestead 4.9 million, and #simpleliving 2.5 million. The tradwife label was not disappearing. It had never been the center of gravity it appeared to be from the outside. Scholarship, media coverage, and public discourse had fixed their attention on a trend while the much larger, more durable, and more ideologically significant homemaker community operated quietly underneath it. The tradwife was a needle in a haystack that everyone mistook for the haystack itself.

To be a homemaker carries a different ideological weight than to be a tradwife. The homemaker label signals a job, an identity, a naturalized role in the household. In contrast, the tradwife label is associated with performance, politics, and extremist ideas. As Alena Pettitt, the British self-proclaimed early tradwife, told the *New Yorker* in March 2024, “its become an aesthetic, and then its become politicized...and then its become its own monster” (Elmhirst, 2024, p.4). Pettitt goes on to say that the movement had become not only a monster, but also a fetishized farce and shifted into something she no longer recognized (Elmhirst, 2024, p.14). The tradwife label had overreached, been co-opted by extremism, and retreated back into the more ideologically durable homemaker identity that has been there since the 2010s. The haystack has always been bigger than the needle.

A particularly significant notion about this shift is that many women who identify as homemakers do not associate as a tradwife or part of the tradwife trend. The homemaker community is not made up exclusively of former tradwives who rebranded. It includes women who started this prior to the tradwife trend, coming from wellness spaces, conservative communities, homeschooling networks, and lifestyle aesthetics like simple-living. These women have existed more than a decade prior to the tradwife trend, and will likely continue long past it as well. This distinction matters because it reveals that the homemaker community is not a rebranding of tradwife culture. It is the original formation, one that the tradwife trend briefly made hypervisible before it retreated back into the larger and less scrutinized homemaker identity.

One is not born a homemaker, but homemaker culture works consistently to persuade others to become one. This is perhaps the most important dimension of what this study observed: the homemaker community does not simply model a lifestyle for passive viewers. It actively recruits through likes, comments, reposts, algorithmic amplification, affiliate links, stories, and a steady stream of confessional posts from women who describe themselves as having been transformed by homemaking. For example, @simplybiblicalwoman on November 26, 2025 illustrates this recruitment logic directly in her post, “Do you know what they used to call a tradwife? WIFE,” which is not simply a statement of identity. It also acts as an invitation. The caption, “being a traditional wife is just being a wife the way it was always meant for us to be,” addresses an imagined audience of women through the language of inclusion, “us”, and positions the post as a revelation, one others must make as well (@simplybiblicalwoman, 26 November 2025). Three days later on November 29th, she posted a 19-photo carousel with the first photo’s text saying, “I’m a traditional woman,” detailing the way she upholds this identity through not

engaging in “feminist propaganda”, caring for the home, homeschooling, and being submissive to her husband (@simplybiblicalwoman, 29 November 2025). This carousel functions as a step-by-step guide for the audience she is recruiting online. Homemaking, something understood to be natural but also a choice by its members, is subsequently operating under constant acts of persuasion through aestheticization online. This tension between naturalization and performative recruitment is a central contradiction this paper traces.

It should be noted that the temporal dimension of the homemaker aesthetic is also worth examining carefully, because not all homemaker nostalgia is pointing toward the same past. The shift from the 1950s aesthetic that characterizes the early tradwife content to the 19th century homestead aesthetic that dominates homemaker culture is not only a visual stylistic change. It is a change in ideological reference point. The 1950s baby boom aesthetic invokes a specific mid-20th century modernity, breadwinner-homemaker nuclear family households, and a very particular image of femininity that is, as Coontz (1992) demonstrates, also the era of the second wave feminist movement and the beginning of its unraveling. The 19th century homestead aesthetic functions as an attempt to disengage with those political tensions entirely. By reaching further back in the past to a time of self-sufficiency, working the land, and familial self-reliance, it effectively blurs the poverty, racial exclusion, and lack of bodily autonomy that defined most women’s 19th century domestic experience (Coontz, 1992). The curated imagery of garden harvests and farm animals functions as a fantasy echo (Scott, 2001) that constructs a collective identity through an imagined historical past.

On February 28, 2026, @ivyoutwest on TikTok posted a video of her getting dressed in a corset top and white skirt, brushing her long hair, with overlaid text saying, “Tradwife isn’t a new trend, its just new slang. My mom did this. My grandmothers did this. It used to be called

just being a woman.” Her caption continues, “prioritizing family will never go out of style” (@ivyoutwest, 28 February 2026). The caption takes a direct jab at the tradwife movement for being a trend, when traditional values and traditional women will never be a trend in homemaker eyes because it is just being a woman to them. This is gender performativity (Butler, 1990) in action: by repeatedly depicting domestic and submissive narratives as timeless and authentic depictions of womanhood, the homemaker label naturalizes what is in reality a historically constructed gender performance. The aesthetic here has shifted from the hypervisible 1950s apron to the 19th century homestead simple-living. The 1950s aesthetic, which invokes a period of political tensions, moving back toward the 19th century homestead, toward a vision of manifest destiny and frontier self-sufficiency, is invoking something much older, and even more ideologically heavier. The further back the aesthetic reaches, the less politically contested it appears, and the harder it becomes to critique.

Lastly, @rewilding.zeldajane’s January 24, 2026 7-photo carousel, begins each slide with “tradwife? No,” followed by different reasons: “I’m just not participating in modern nonsense”; “I wanted a slower life, healthier kids, and a home that actually feels lived in”; “I value family more than titles, peace more than praise (and presence more than promotions) (@rewilding.zeldajane 24 Jan 2026). This post performs the distancing in action of advocating for peace, a slow life, and valuing family, calling forward the 19th century homestead aesthetic. On February 13, 2026, she posted another 7-photo carousel with the caption, “Let’s stop pretending this is normal (modern motherhood is a scam)...cook dinner like a tradwife, work like a boss babe, still get judged either way (choose your backlash)” and the caption continues, “Now I’m home. Present. Unrushed” (@rewilding.zeldajane, 13 February 2026). This post positions both the tradwife trend and boss babe ideal as media constructions that reduce women

to a label, and then places homemaking above both of them as the moral good. The tradwife is a performance. The boss babe is a never-ending grind. The homemaker is simply present. Her framing is doing significant recruitment work: it distances homemaker culture from the political toxicity of the tradwife label while rejecting the feminist career ideal, positioning domestic life as the more meaningful and authentic choice. Her caption is an invitation to be like her, unrushed and present in her household.

| Hashtag | Posts | Associated Theme |
|----------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| #tradwife | 122K | Homemaker Culture |
| #traditionalwife | 23.8K | Homemaker Culture |
| #homemaker | 938K | Homemaker Culture |
| #homestead | 4.9M | Homemaker Culture |
| #femininenotfeminist | 19.5K | Anti-Feminism Rhetoric |
| #lowtoxliving | 470K | Anti-Modern/Wellness Pipeline |
| #simpleliving | 2.5M | Anti-Modern/Wellness Pipeline |
| #crunchymom | 526K | Anti-Modern/Wellness Pipeline |
| #crunchymama | 665K | Anti-Modern/Wellness Pipeline |
| #naturalmama | 394K | Wellness Pipeline |
| #maha | 571K | Wellness Pipeline |
| #rawmilk | 262K | Wellness Pipeline |

Fig. 2. Total Instagram Hashtag Data as of March 2026

Theme 2: The Anti-Modern Contradiction

In the online realm, homemaker culture selectively profits off of its rejection of modernity, utilizing deeply contradictory statements and highly stylized content to circulate an ideology of self-sufficiency through the platforms, algorithms, and affiliate links that make self-sufficiency deeply contradictory. Across Instagram and TikTok, homemaker influencers advocate for opting out: out of government dependence, out of public education, out of corporate food systems, out of mainstream medicine, and out of technology itself. Yet, they do so through the very infrastructure they are rejecting, their content monetized for thousands of followers to engage with. Sykes and Hopner (2024) aptly describe this as “globalizing anti-globalism and modernizing the anti-modern” (p. 475), by which they mean that the rejection of globalized modernity is itself being distributed through the global, modern infrastructure of social media. Their anti-modern messages require modern innovations to travel. This contradiction is what makes homemaker ideology shareable and profitable. The irony is in the product. Platform capitalism rewards the performance of disconnection with the engagement metrics that keep the disconnection content circulating. What appears as an inconsistency in the logic is also the logic working exactly as the attention economy requires.

The Anti-Technology Behavioral Paradox

The most visible contradiction in homemaker culture is also the most straightforward: homemaker influencers are using Instagram and TikTok, algorithm-based platforms built on modern technology, to advocate for disconnecting from modern technology.

For example, @motherhenshomestead, with 724K followers on Instagram, posted on February 22, 2026, an image with old recipe cards, letters, and mixtapes, with the text, “Please stop making everything digital. I want ticket stubs, passed-down recipe cards, old photos, handwritten notes...” (@motherhenshomestead, 22 February 2026). Simultaneously, her profile bio contains affiliate links for red light therapy, a kids ebook, and outfit recommendations. The frontstage (Goffman, 1959) is the unplugged, simple life performed for her followers. The backstage is a content business built entirely on the digital infrastructure she publicly rejects and privately depends upon.

Following, on January 2, 2026, @gubbahomestead posted a video of herself setting up an old TV with a built-in VHS and DVD player, listing reasons such as, “you can control the propaganda,” and, “no subscription services linked to a digital ID”, with the caption, “I don’t sit around watching TV. I’m fully aware it’s a tell-a-vision and a tool” (@gubbahomestead, 2 January 2026). The irony is substantial: a mobile device connected to the internet 24 hours a day could be labeled the same thing, but she has built a career off that tool, so it can not be devalued. Biopower is relevant here (Foucault, 1978): the surveillance she claims to reject from government and technology is replicated through her own platform, where followers are invited to monitor their media consumption, their food, their children’s education, and their bodies through the moral lens she provides. The content does not simply document a rejection of modernity. It recruits for one, using the tools of the very modernity being rejected.

This behavioral paradox is a structural ideology to homemaker culture.

@thewanderandwonderco on March 13, 2026, posted a video of herself rolling cookie dough with the text, “POV you stopped using screens as a babysitter and started parenting your 4 boys like it’s 1994 and these are the 5 things you’ll never let them do,” with the caption reading off:

cell phones, traveling sports, tablets, fake tools, and overly prepped activity bins, noting that a stick and a rock work just fine (@thewanderandwonderco, 13 March 2026). She is provoking a reference to 1994 while using the infrastructure of 2026 to romanticize the absence of that very infrastructure. The platform makes the opt-out appear possible and is profitable at the same time.

The Anti-Government Ideological Stance

The anti-government sentiment running through homemaker culture is distinct from the anti-technology behavioral paradox. Is distrusting the government while posting on TikTok actually a contradiction? Not on its own. What makes it contradictory is the deeper logic connecting the two together: both are expressions of the same opt-out from institutional dependence notion, and both are being circulated through and profited from by the very institutions being rejected. Homemaker influencers position the home and nuclear family as the only trustworthy unit in a corrupt and untrustworthy world.

For example, @motherhenshomestead's political posts illustrate this stance directly. On March 19, 2026, she posted a video of herself drinking electrolytes with the text, "In case you need a reason to unfollow me: I'm not left or right. They're all full of shit and I'm not here to play along," and on March 22, "My political affiliation? Disgust. If you're still defending either side, don't call me" (@motherhenshomestead, 19 and 22 March 2026). This is anti-governance communicated to a wider audience. It is a rejection of political institutional alignment altogether, an opting-out of civic duties, and a positioning of the homemaker role as above and outside the corrupt political system. The home becomes the morally right alternative, the one space where values, children, and family are all under the homemaker's control rather than the government's.

This opt-out logic is best understood as a form of libertarian domestic politics rooted in the same frontier self-sufficiency and manifest destiny imaginary that the 19th century homestead aesthetic invokes (Matchar, 2013). Growing your own food, homeschooling your children, distrusting vaccines, and rejecting the government are not discrete political stances. They are direct expressions of anti-governance: the family can and should provide everything the government claims to do.

Moreover, the uptick in explicitly anti-government posts in February and March 2026 coincided with the Trump Administration releasing more of the Epstein Files and President Trump signing an executive order on February 18, 2026, to increase the supply of glyphosate-based herbicides, classified as a probable human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer in 2015. Following, @rosehillonspencer on March 25, 2026, posted a video of herself feeding goats, baking, and canning jam with the text, "Homeschooling your kids, growing your own food, and not trusting the government doesn't seem so crazy anymore, does it" (@rosehillonspencer, 25 March 2026). @wildhomeschool on February 27, 2026, posted simply, "This and not trusting the government" (@wildhomeschool, 27 February 2026). @motherhenshomestead on February 20, 2026, collected vegetables from her garden with the text, "This, a hot husband, and not trusting the government" (@motherhenshomestead, 20 February 2026). The anti-government sentiment is being fueled by real, specific political events that validate the homemaker community's existing distrust, and the homestead aesthetic provides the community for opting-out as a simpler, non-polluted way of life.

Furthermore, the Erika Kirk and AI teacher controversies of March 2026 illustrate the internal tensions within this anti-government stance. To illustrate, @thehomemadefam posted a 5-photo carousel of images of Melania Trump with the new AI robot Figure 03, with text overlay

saying, "For decades homeschool parents were ridiculed and mocked whenever they noted the benefits of homeschooling and a stay at home parent. But when our first lady rolls out a new teacher AI robot, noting the same benefits homeschool parents have, it's applauded" (@thehomemadefam, 25 March 2026). This post details some inconsistencies within the homemaker community's political alignment: the conservative administration once supported is now endorsing a technological replacement of the maternal role they have built a lifestyle, job, and identity around. Regarding Erika Kirk leading TurningPoint USA, @a.homemakers.manifesto on March 28, 2026, pointed out, "the sad apparent hypocrisy between saying women should prioritize motherhood over careers while she tries to balance both" (@a.homemakers.manifesto, 28 March 2026). She has since turned commenting off on the post, which speaks to the backlash received from within the homemaking community. What makes this post particularly interesting is not that it is a feminist critique. It is an internal enforcement of the community's own standards, illustrating what Manne (2017) identifies as the misogynistic enforcement logic that operates even within spaces that present themselves as communities of free choice. Women perceived as deviating from full domestic commitment face social punishment regardless of their ideological alignment, even from within their own community.

Lastly, @gubbahomestead posted on February 23, 2026, telling followers to stop reading the Epstein files which is the most revealing example of the opt-out logical inconsistencies. "Stop reading the files. Stop feeling hopeless. Stop living in fear. This is what they want. Turn off the TV. Find joy" (@gubbahomestead, 23 February 2026). This rhetoric is not straightforwardly anti-government, rather it is anti-knowing. It is an encouragement to disengage from information that might complicate the homemaker worldview, including information about

the political figures whose policies the community has largely supported. The opt-out is not just from modernity. It is from accountability as a whole.

Theme 3: Anti-Feminist Rhetoric as Misplaced Anti-Capitalism

The hashtag #femininenotfeminist has circulated among the homemaker community on Instagram and Tiktok for years, and it points to a deeply rooted ideological stance. Within homemaker culture, being a homemaker and being anti-feminist are frequently presented as inseparable identities. Sentiments like “*the feminist movement is anti-women*” and “*feminism is not for me, I like men*” appear consistently across the data. But before analyzing why feminism becomes the target, it is worth stating what these women are actually reacting to: the exhaustion of modern womanhood under capitalism, the double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic labor (Hochschild, 1989), the rising cost of living that makes single-income households increasingly difficult (Coontz, 1992), the sense that corporate work culture was never designed with mothers in mind (Tebaldi, 2021), and the feeling that the promise of having it all was in reality a promise of doing it all. These are real structural conditions. The question this theme examines is not whether the grievances are legitimate, but why feminism rather than capitalism becomes the target.

First, one of the major contributions of feminist theory has been to challenge the notion that there is any single, universal category of woman. But, due to this insight, homemaker creators strategically position modern feminism as anti-woman, anti-cis[White]woman, and anti-traditional values. There seems to be a consensus within homemaker and antifeminist content that modern feminism, by turning its attention to transfeminists and trans women, has abandoned cisgender, heterosexual, and traditionally-minded women. From within this community, being

pro-choice is framed as murdering babies, and centering trans women is framed as erasing biological womanhood. Whether this represents a genuine misreading of feminist politics or a strategic rhetorical move is worth holding as an open question. What is clear is that this framing circulates widely and is broadly accepted within the community, functionally redirecting grievances about capitalism onto feminism as the more socially acceptable target. As Coontz (1992) demonstrates, it was largely economic pressure and capitalist restructuring, not feminism, that drove women into the workplace in the 20th century. The growth of a materialist consumer mentality that placed financial aspiration above domestic life, Coontz (1992) argues, should not be confused with the rise of feminism, nor with women's increasing employment. Capitalism restructured the conditions of family life. Feminism named the inequalities within it. Despite this, feminism remains the easier target, in part because critiquing capitalism would mean critiquing the very economic system that makes the single-income White household possible, and by extension, critiquing the White men whose salaries fund the domestic life being celebrated.

For example, @rewilding.zeldajane on Instagram on October 15, 2025, posted a 6-photo carousel with text that says, "The real scam is shaming women for depending on men but celebrating them for depending on the government. The real scam is thinking you're free while you still ask permission for time off," captioned, "They [feminists] told us we were free. But freedom shouldn't feel like fatigue" (@rewilding.zeldajane, 15 October 2025). In a video post on February 7 2026, she is seen in the kitchen with text overlaid, saying, "Feminism pushed women into the workforce so both parents could be taxed and kids could be raised by the system." In a 7-photo carousel on April 2, 2026, she posted, "Imagine the propaganda it [feminism] took to convince women motherhood is limiting (but burnout is empowering)", followed by, "imagine

the propaganda it took to convince you two incomes are ‘necessary’” and “‘imagine the propaganda it took to normalize strangers raising your children” (@rewilding.zeldajane, 2 April 2026).

It is worth noting that @rewilding.zeldajane’s framing is that she is correctly identifying the double burden of modern womanhood: the exhaustion of working a full-time job while still bearing the majority of domestic and caregiving labor at home. This “second shift” documents how women in heterosexual households effectively work two full shifts, one in paid employment and one in unpaid domestic work, with no clock-out option for the second shift (Hochschild, 1989). Additionally, the structural roots of this condition is in the transformation of domestic labor into a labor of love rendered economically invisible and therefore endlessly extractable (Federici, 1975). In 2026, we are still seeing women living this condition, but the homemakers force the blame onto feminism for taking women out of the homes. This misdirection is also what makes this rhetoric effective for women in the community: it takes a legitimate structural critique, removes the economic underpinning, and replaces it with an emotionally relevant target in feminism.

In another example, @a.homemakers.manifesto posted a photo of her Substack note on March 17, 2026, saying, “The elephant in the room when it comes to ‘gender roles’ and ‘tradition’ is the death of the family-owned business and agrarian lifestyle. The return to ‘trad’ is, despite real concerns, overwhelmingly a rejection of modern industrialization and socialist states. Embrace it.” (@a.homemakers.manifesto, 17 March 2026). This post is perhaps the most self-aware in the dataset. She is naming industrialization and the state as the real sources of dissatisfaction, which is evocative of a materialist critique not unlike Firestone's (1970) analysis of the nuclear family under capitalism. The irony is that she arrives at the correct diagnosis and

then prescribes a return to the very domestic structure that Firestone identified as the mechanism of women's oppression.

Lastly, the anti-feminist rhetoric in this community is not confined to one generation. On TikTok, creators who are not yet mothers or wives are circulating the same ideological components. One creator, @thatcrunchygirlannika, approximately eighteen years old at the time of posting, made a video on October 6, 2025, nodding to the camera in a dress with the text, "btw, they used feminism to get women into the workforce so they could tax both parents and raise your kids" (@thatcrunchygirlannika, 6 October 2025). This is significant due to the fact that it demonstrates how algorithmic circulation of homemaker ideology effectively reaches women before they have entered the domestic sphere themselves. In a confirmation of this pattern, Scott and Day (2025) illustrate that content TikTok circulates traditional gender norms for younger audiences who may encounter anti-feminist homemaker content long before they encounter feminist theory. Even women who do not yet have children or a husband are adopting these values and lifestyles in preparation to be a good mother and homemaker, reproducing the ideology before they even entered the domestic sphere it promotes.

Theme 4: The Wellness-to-Conservative Pipeline

Notably, within homemaker culture on Instagram and TikTok, a significant overlap exists between domestic lifestyle content and wellness communities organized around hashtags like #crunchymom, #lowtoxliving, #naturalmama, and #rawmilk. A “crunchy mom” is a colloquial term for a mother who prioritizes natural, minimally invasive and processed approaches to parenting, who might avoid synthetic chemicals and hold skepticism toward vaccines. “Low-tox living” refers to a lifestyle that centers on reducing exposure to toxins in food, cleaning products,

and personal care items. On Instagram alone, #crunchymom holds 526K posts, #crunchymama 665K, #lowtoxliving 470K, and #rawmilk 262K (see Fig. 2). These hashtags are not simply search labels. They are the entry points through which women often first encounter homemaker ideology, frequently before they encounter its explicitly political dimensions. The wellness aesthetic, clean eating, unmedicated birth, vaccine skepticism, red light therapy, and low-tox living, functions as an ideological on-ramp, one that feels personal and health-oriented rather than political, until it does not.

For example, on March 16, 2026 @intothefieldbook posted a video of herself on Instagram kneading dough with the text, “one day you are wondering if you can give birth without meds, and the next thing you know you are homeschooling, making your own bread, cutting dyes, and questioning vaccines,” captioned, “It’s a slippery slope man! How have you evolved since having kids?” with the hashtag #crunchymom (@intothefieldbook, 16 March 2026). This post functions as both a self-aware account of a woman’s personal pipeline evolution, but also as a preemptive defense against critics who would argue that the women in this community are ideologically captured without self-realization. By naming this ‘slippery slope’ herself, this influencer effectively reframes the ideological journey as naturalized within her lifestyle. It also functions as performative recruitment for others following a similar process.

Moreover, this post directly speaks to the wellness to conservative pipeline associated with becoming a homemaker. This is not accidental. It is a logical endpoint of a purity-based moral framework (Douglas, 1966), where clean vs polluted binary, once activated around food and bodies, extends outward to education, government, medicine, and gender roles. Furthering this, Natasha Zaretsky’s (2018) historical analysis of the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident, which led to “biotic nationalism”, a concept to describe nationalism focused on the

body and the impacts of the environment, crystallizes how efforts to reduce environmental toxins and bodily contamination is often spearheaded by White, middle-class women to utilize bodily purity as a vehicle for conservative politics from the 1980s and continuing into 2026. Once a woman has decided that processed food is pollution and that her body deserves protection from artificial intervention, the ideological infrastructure is already in place for the next step: vaccines are intrusion, public schools are contamination, and the home is the last clean space left to protect. These women are not just making personal health decisions. They are performing disciplinary wellness for an audience and building a community identity around the body as a site of political resistance.

Additionally, @barefoot.mimosas on March 13, 2026 posted a video of herself washing dishes on Instagram, with the text, “crazy how it was just supposed to be an unmedicated birth and now I constantly have a sink of dishes to do,” describing her pipeline from curiosity about unmedicated births to being a crunchy mom who cooks from scratch at home (@barefoot.mimosas, 13 March 2026). Her caption has #homestead and #lowtoxliving. Her entry into the wellness and natural living sphere landed her directly into homemaker territory, and she references it herself with self-aware humor. This wellness lifestyle looks like consuming raw milk, canning food, growing your own vegetables and fruits, and dabbling in red light therapy and aromatherapy oils. This gateway entrance into full-blown homemaker makes sense due to the conservative traditional values and beliefs most homemakers hold and express online. It also ties in with how tradwife TikToks started with sourdough bread making during the 2020 lockdowns, confirming Allen et al.’s (2026) finding that aesthetic communities function as ideological on-ramps.

In addition, @thankfulhomemaking on April 4, 2026 posted a video on Instagram of herself making different foods from scratch with the text, “Things I no longer buy from the store,” listing off foods like oreos, salsa, fruit roll-ups, snack bars, crackers, and tortillas. Her caption reads, “I’m just a mom who wanted better for her kids...I wasn’t trying to start a movement or become some kind of ‘clean eating’ person. I just stood in a grocery store aisle one day, flipped over a box of crackers, and felt that gut-punch moment...thirty-something ingredients...and the wild part? We’ve all just accepted it...We are taking our kitchens back, one real ingredient at a time” (@thankfulhomemaking, 4 April 2026). In her other videos of her making different foods from home, she usually ends the caption with her “ultimate Homemade Kitchen Bundle” kit that has recipes and meal planning guides, with the link in her profile bio for \$56, half off from \$122. This is a commodity dimension Sykes and Hopner (2024) identify: the labor of love becomes a monetized, globalized product. The moral conviction around clean food becomes a revenue stream. Federici (1975) wrote that domestic labor has been mystified as love rather than work. Here, that same labor is re-enchanting as empowerment, monetized as content, and sold back to the audience as a bundle, raising the question of whether this is a rejection of mystification or simply its most profitable form yet.

In another example, @thewildflourfarm posted a photo of vegetables and fruits with the text, “ ‘my kids only want junk food’, here’s an idea: stop buying the junk food. You are the gatekeeper of your home, what you allow becomes their normal” (@thewildflourfarm, 5 April 2026). This speaks to the motivation behind the wellness to conservatism pipeline. There is mom guilt and shame embedded in this content, directed at mothers who pick the easy, cheap processed option at the grocery store instead of spending hours hand-making everything their families consume. As moms, there is a sense of control attached to the food their kids eat, the

media they consume, and what is allowed into the home and the kitchen. This sense of control is not incidental. It is the driving moral logic of the entire pipeline. Reich (2016) identifies this same pattern in vaccine refusal: what appears to be a personal health decision is actually a claim to moral authority over the body and the family, made in direct opposition to institutional power. The wellness pipeline does not recruit women into conservatism through explicit political messaging. It recruits them through the feeling of control.

Lastly, it is worth noting that this lifestyle carries significant economic barriers that the content rarely acknowledges. Organic produce, raw milk, red light therapy devices, homemade kitchen recipe books, and the ability to stay home, homeschool, and cook everything from scratch requires a level of financial stability that is just not accessible to everyone. This community is predominantly White, cishet, and married to partners who have sufficient income to support a single-income household with multiple children. The wellness-to-conservatism pipeline is not an equal opportunity. Williams (2021) demonstrates how conservative motherhood scripts link virtue, domesticity, and whiteness to moral authority and political legitimacy. The homemaker community studied here reflects this pattern: the organic food, the red light therapy, the homestead aesthetic, and the moral authority of the stay-at-home mother are overwhelmingly performed by and for White women, and that racial specificity is not incidental to the ideology. It is central to it. The wellness-to-conservatism pipeline presents itself as a universal feminine moral calling. It is, at its core, a class and race specific fantasy of control.

Discussion

"I think it's time for a rebellion. And by rebellion, I mean homeschooling your kids, grow food in your backyard, cook real food, make home a priority, love and respect your husband"

(@ourfaithfilledhomestead, 8 April 2026)

On April 8 2026, @ourfaithfilledhomestead posted this quote on Instagram, captioning it, "We've been here a while, but those of you on the fence, it's time" (@ourfaithfilledhomestead, 8 April 2026). The word rebellion is doing significant ideological work here. A rebellion against what, exactly, is never named, but the recruitment to homemaking is unmistakable. Across the four themes examined in this study, the answer has been building: against the government, against public education, against processed food, against post-modern feminism, against modernity itself. This is the ideological system this paper has been mapping, condensed into a single post with #homemaker in the caption. The account name itself, @ourfaithfilledhomestead, activates what Haidt and Graham (2007) would identify as three moral foundations simultaneously: faith signals purity/sanctity, the communal "our" signals ingroup/loyalty, and homestead signals authority/respect through its invocation of traditional domestic order. Before a single word of the post is read, the ideological architecture is already in place.

These four themes, read separately, do not do justice to the complex, algorithmic world of the homemaker sphere. Read altogether as four interlocking ideological themes, they form the complete picture of homemaker culture in 2025-2026 America. The tradwife trend versus homemaker culture distinction establishes the foundation: the tradwife was always a needle in the larger haystack of homemaker culture, and understanding homemaker culture as the durable, pre-existing formation corrects a fundamental misunderstanding of the tradwife movement as the larger group in existing scholarship. The anti-modern contradiction lends credibility and allure to

the ideology, positioning the homemaker lifestyle as an opt-out escape from a corrupt system. The anti-feminist rhetoric functions as misplaced anti-capitalism, redirecting legitimate structural grievances toward a more emotionally and socially acceptable target. Finally, the wellness pipeline brings in the next generation of recruits, one unmedicated birth and sourdough starter at a time. Together, these four themes do not simply cohabit the same online sphere. They depend on one another for reproduction and circulation.

What provides the durability and logical consistency within homemaker culture can be prescribed to morality. To truly understand the homemakers, one must envelop themselves in a moralization of domesticity that acts as an ideological mechanism, transforming structural conditions into sites of personal virtue and spiritual fulfillment. Rather than presenting homemaking as one choice among many, homemaker influencers frame domesticity as the only choice that offers genuine authenticity and control: over the body, the kitchen, the children, and daily life. You can have the choice to opt out of the corporate grind and opt into the homemaker role. You can reject modernity *and* profit from it. You can rebel against it all, and still be a good wife and mother. The moral scaffolding of homemaker ideology does not demand sacrificing your autonomy. It reframes domesticity as the fullest expression of it. Through this reframing, the material conditions of women's economic dependence are obscured beneath milkmaid dresses and ruffled aprons, uplifting purity, purpose, and moral righteousness, inevitably reflecting what Beauvoir (1949) identified as the ideological mystification of women's equality. The structure is made personal, and the personal is made sacred.

To effectively analyze the moralization aspect, Haidt and Graham's (2007) moral foundations theory provides a powerful psychological framework for understanding why tradwife ideology is seductive in its own right. They argue that morality is organized around five

foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity, and that conservative moral frameworks draw upon all five simultaneously when making moral judgments (Haidt & Graham, 2007, p. 99-100). Homemaker ideology maps directly onto all five. Wifely submission activates authority/respect. Community identity through shared aesthetics and platform belonging activates ingroup/loyalty. The wellness obsession with clean living and toxin-free bodies activates purity/sanctity as well as harm/care against environmental and institutional harm. Lastly, fairness/reciprocity is activated through the anti-feminist rhetoric, where the homemaker community frames the second shift as a hoax perpetuated by feminism, a betrayal of the promise that working outside the home would be liberating rather than exhausting, invoking a sense of unfairness. By tapping into all five moral foundations simultaneously, homemaker discourse constructs domesticity not just as a lifestyle choice, but as a morally superior way of living. This is precisely what makes it so psychologically compelling and so difficult to critique from a feminist perspective. It is operating on a completely different moral register that feels internally coherent and emotionally satisfying to the women inside it. This leads into the study's subsidiary question on why homemaker ideology retains its allure despite contradictions and insight into its logic. The seduction holds true due to the five moral foundation activations that the homemakers reproduce constantly on social media. The ideology is not built upon logical consistency but rather structures itself upon moral feeling.

Furthermore, the rise of homemaker culture is entangled with feminist fatigue and a longing for safety and simplicity that neoliberal modernity has failed to provide women with. The aesthetic trends on social media such as cottagecore, a return to nature-inspired living, has formed a lineage to tradwife content (Allen et al., 2026). Accelerated by the COVID-19

lockdowns, which offered many women an image of bliss and opportunity of control. Much of this content started with baking sourdough, dressing-up into vintage-esque 1950's dresses, and then a return to living off the land with homemakers. Many of these homemaker influencers have similar stories on their public platforms: exhausted by their 9-5 careers and feeling cheated by the feminist call for working outside the home, they discovered happiness only through submission and homemaking. By presenting themselves as reformed former feminists, these influencers lend their ideology a confessional credibility that makes it persuasive to other women experiencing burnout.

Moreover, the “second shift”, coined by Hochschild in 1989, is just as real nearly four decades later. Women are fed up with working the 9-5, and then performing the unpaid labor that has no clock-out option. Research consistently documents that this unbalanced labor continues to fall disproportionately on mothers, with married mothers performing nearly twice the housework of married fathers as recently as 2009/10 (Bianchi et al., 2012). The promise of having it all became having one thing and sacrificing the rest, which is more exhausting than liberating. The real problem within homemaker culture is not the exhaustion itself, which is broadly felt within the data of this study. The problem is the target of that blame. As Coontz (1992) demonstrates, it was capitalism and economic restructuring, not feminism, that drove women into the workforce and restructured family life around two incomes. These creators are correctly identifying real structural failures. They are, as Federici (1975) predicted, directing their critique at feminism rather than at the capitalism that produced the conditions they are escaping.

There is an acknowledgement that must be made when discussing homemaker culture. The ideological system that has been described in this paper is not universally available. It requires a partner with sufficient income, economic stability to afford organic foods, animals,

and land to garden, as well as the racial and cultural positioning that makes the homestead aesthetic aspirational rather than fantastical. This is a predominantly White, cishet, upper-middle-class phenomenon presenting itself as a timeless, universal truth surrounding womanhood. Williams (2021) demonstrates how conservative motherhood scripts have long linked virtue, domesticity, and whiteness to moral authority and political legitimacy, and the homemaker community studied here is no exception. That gap between universality and the specific demographic reality is itself an ideological move worth naming. Curating this lifestyle as accessible, “*simple living*”, and natural destiny is far from the truth. It is instead a marketing tactic to sell their lifestyle that is, at its core, exclusive to those with the economic and racial privilege to inhabit it. When @ourfaithfilledhomestead calls for a rebellion, she is not calling on all women. She is calling on women who can *afford* to answer. Yet, for the women who cannot afford to participate, who must work multiple jobs and cannot stay home, the closest they may get to homemaker culture is consuming the content itself, reinforcing and recirculating the fantasy image that homemaker content creates. The privilege of the content creator, though, does not transfer onto the content consumer, and this asymmetry reinforces the class distinction at the core of this community. Precisely, the middle-class White woman profiting off of the aspirational desires of the very women whose burnout they are selling the escape from.

Returning to Sykes and Hopner’s (2024) neoliberalization framework, the contradictions within homemaker ideology are not bugs in the algorithm, but rather important features to selling the lifestyle. The anti-tech homemaker selling affiliate links in her bio, the anti-feminist creator monetizing domestic content, and the wellness influencer selling kitchen recipe bundles: the platform rewards the contradiction because contradiction generates engagement. The ideology and the business model are perfectly synchronized. This is Federici’s (1975) labor of love with

the software update for algorithmic attention economy. In 2025-2026, that same labor is mystified as love, monetized as content, and sold back to the audience as a bundle. The structure Federici identified has not changed. It has simply found a new platform.

What does the relationship between the tradwife trend and homemaker culture ultimately reveal about patriarchal domestic ideology in 2025-2026 America? It reveals that this ideology persists not despite critique but through its ability to evade it, and that the mechanism of evasion is moral, aesthetic, and deeply gendered. Homemaker culture was not born from the tradwife trend, nor from COVID-19 boredom. As Matchar (2013) documented, this community was already building in the early 2010s from the same distrust of government, discontent with corporate work culture, and longing for authenticity that 2025-2026 homemakers still recirculate. The homemaker aesthetic, rooted in 19th century homestead imaginary, reaches further back than the politically charged tradwife trend did, past living memory, into a vision of self-sufficiency and simplicity that feels too ancient and simple to be ideological. That aesthetic distance provides homemaker culture its inherent allure and power. Homemaker culture is harder to critique than the tradwife trend because the homestead, garden harvests, and toxin-free body has shed the explicit politics of the apron-clad 1950s housewife, and replaced it with an aesthetic that feels pre-political and natural. These are White women telling other White women that the home is where power and freedom live. The homemaker rebrand is not a retreat from politics. It is conservative politics made prettier, spoken in a woman's voice, anchored in a fantasy of the 19th century frontier, and hashtagged into the algorithm.

Conclusion

Circling back to where this research began, @simplybiblicalwoman's post captures the first and most significant finding of this study in a single line: "Do you know what they used to call a tradwife? WIFE" (@simplybiblicalwoman, 26 November 2025). The tradwife was the needle. The homemaker is the haystack. This post does not mark a transition from one to the other. It marks the haystack's assertion that it was never a needle at all, that the homemaker role is not a trend, a rebrand, or a political stance, but simply what a wife has always been. By shedding the tradwife label and replacing it with wife, the post naturalizes the domestic role, strips away its political history, and positions patriarchal domesticity as timeless womanhood. This naturalization, as this study has shown, is neither timeless, nor universal, nor true. It is a fantasy echo to a past that never existed, while homemaker culture has been building since at least the early 2010s, quietly and durably, in the haystack that scholarship has overlooked for years while fixated on the tradwife trend needle instead.

This study traced not the disappearance of the tradwife, but the rediscovery of the homemaker culture the tradwife trend had been obscuring. Four interlocking themes emerged from the data: the relationship between the tradwife trend and homemaker culture as distinct but connected identities; an anti-modern contradiction embedded within the homemaker aesthetic connecting anti-technology behavior and anti-government sentiment through a shared logic of opting out; an anti-feminist rhetoric functioning as misplaced anti-capitalism; and a wellness-to-conservatism pipeline recruiting women into traditional domesticity through the language of health, purity, and maternal protection. Together, these themes reveal how homemaker culture, not the tradwife trend, is the more durable, more commodified, and more difficult to critique formation of patriarchal domestic ideology in American digital culture.

One is not born a homemaker, but rather, becomes one through time, space, and the algorithm. Beauvoir (1949) argued that womanhood is socially constructed through historical and cultural forces. Butler (1990) demonstrated that gender is performed, not possessed. Federici (1975) showed that domestic labor is mystified as love rather than recognized as work. What this study adds is that in 2025-2026, those same processes are happening algorithmically, at scale, through platforms that reward the performance financially and distribute it across generational lines. The structure has not changed. The platform has.

This study focused on publicly available homemaker content on Instagram and TikTok from October 2025 to April 2026. Due to the netnographic approach and passive observation, this study did not engage directly with the women observed, and cannot make claims about their private lives, interior motivations, or whether their experiences feel coerced or freely chosen. The netnographic method captures the public performance but not the backstage, to use Goffman's (1959) language. Future research should include interviews with current and former homemaker creators to access that dimension and to understand the lived experience behind the curated content.

More research is needed to investigate the algorithm's importance in the creation and sustenance of homemaker culture. Additionally, research into women who have left the movement entirely and focusing on what that reveals about exclusivity. Research into international homemaker communities is required to understand the global motivations and contradictions behind homemaker culture and values.

These wives, mothers, influencers, and content creators work daily, acting as mommy, teacher, wife, maid, chef, gardener, and numerous other roles at once. Their labor is real, but their exclusivity is inexcusable. Returning to a romanticized 19th century homestead as an

escape from modern politics is a self-serving, self-preserving act that does not liberate women. It only “liberates” the women who were never trapped by the same walls to begin with.

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