

Aestheticised Subordination: ‘Trad-Wife’ Influencers and the Gendered Violence of Far-Right Radicalisation

Níamh Burns & Kathryn Zacharek, University of Brighton

Abstract:

This paper explores the growing phenomenon of the “trad-wife” influencer, understood here as women promoting hyper-traditional gender roles on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, as a case study in the gendered dynamics of far-right radicalisation. These influencers serve as integral sources of propaganda for the far-right (Leidig, 2023), legitimised through digital aesthetics and far-right ideological frames, that normalise and aestheticise women’s subordination. Against this backdrop, critical questions are raised: Why do women join the movements that openly advocate for the restriction of their autonomy, reproductive and political rights?

The role these influencers enact reflects a paradoxical position, one which challenges the binary of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ and reveals a complex web of tension in this context, stemming from both the inequality and violence these women face, and their active participation as spokeswomen in movements that endorse ideologies which oppress them and other women. This poses a question for feminist activists, to what extent can their status as victims of misogyny be a rallying point to support these women (if) they decide to leave the movement? After all, would anyone want to fund a refuge for women Nazi’s? (Shearing, 2024).

Building on Lois Shearing’s (2024) comparison between the radicalisation of women into far-right movements and the coercive tactics used in human trafficking, this paper explores the complex positioning of these influencers as both subjects of patriarchal control and active agents of far-right propaganda.

Focusing on US based content creators who align themselves with Christian Nationalism and neo-Nazi ideologies, we argue that “trad-wife” content has become a vehicle for aestheticising and legitimising women’s subordination within extremist politics. Within this, we situate the “trad-wife” as a rebranding of patriarchal coercion as empowerment, and drawing on feminist theory, we argue that it sits within a broader continuum of gendered violence (Kelly, 1987).

Introduction

The re-election of Donald Trump in the 2024 US presidential election was underpinned by support from far-right groups, such as the Proud Boys (Roston, 2024) and Christian Nationalists (Allam, 2024), raising renewed concerns surrounding the political and social rights of women. These concerns are not without foundation, for in the wake of Trump's victory, when the right-wing political pundit Nick Fuentes posted on X (formerly Twitter) the phrase 'your body, my choice', after the 5th November 2024, the use of the phrase went from 'fewer than 20 mentions a day to nearly 2000' (Gooding, 2024). Trump's presidency has long been associated with misogynistic rhetoric and behaviour, from grabbing women 'by the pussy' (Revesz, 2016) to burying his ex-wife, Ivana Trump, on his New Jersey golf course (Waters, 2022) such actions testify to the low regard Trump has for women. Yet in 2024, 53 percent of white women voted for Trump (Cousens, 2024), he also made notable gains among younger women when compared to the 2020 election (Sherman, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the role of women within far-right movements, and more specifically, the role of 'traditional housewife' ('trad-wife') influencers who have gained notoriety in recent years on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Analysed through an intersectional feminist lens, with a specific focus on the role of race and religion in contemporary American politics; and drawing on Shearing's trafficking metaphor (Shearing, 2024), we seek to unpack the extent to which women such as Lauren Southern and Estee Williams (to name only a couple) complicate our understanding of the complicity of women within structures of patriarchal violence that are glorified as 'ideal domesticity' within far-right movements.

It should be noted, the reason why we have opted for the usage of the term 'patriarchal violence' is that it best describes the 'interconnected system of institutions, practices, policies, beliefs and behaviours that harm, undervalues, and terrorises girls, women, femme, intersex, gender non-conforming, LGBTQ, and other gender oppressed people' as well as being a 'widespread [normalized] epidemic based on the domination, control, and

colonizing of bodies, genders and sexualities' (Bates, 2021). This definition can help us explore the precarious bargain women make when they become members of hate groups. On the one hand, they promote a racist, self-serving ideology (as they understand their race as superseding their gender) while simultaneously forfeiting their safety from misogyny and gender based violence. As this paper will show, while women in these movements are victims of a multitude of violences such as physical and sexual abuse, coercive control, isolation and their 'value' being rooted solely in their reproductive capacities, these women are also complicit in the perpetration of such violences as they are an integral function in the recruitment process by being the 'friendly face of the far-right' (Shearing, 2024).

This article is structured into four key sections. The first provides a cultural and ideological mapping of the 'trad-wife,' whereby we survey the key pieces of literature that have already surveyed this topic. The second then interrogates the framing of submission as empowerment, challenging the narratives of choice presented within the trad-wife framework. Following this, Shearing's metaphor of trafficking is used to unpack the patterns of coercion and gendered violence embedded within trad-wife relationships. The contribution this article seeks to make, in doing an in-depth analysis on the case of Lauren Southern in the final section of this paper, is to tease out the contradictions and complexities of the position of women within contemporary far-right movements. By building on the work of Shearing (2024) we aim to unpack not only the problematic binary between "victims" and "perpetrators" of patriarchal violence, but also to further the conversation on how best to pinpoint where women such as Southern are positioned on the continuum of patriarchal violence. This matter is growing ever more pertinent, as with the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok, trends are no longer confined to the acquisition of material goods (for example Labubu's) but entire lifestyles and their underpinning philosophies should be considered within this scope.

Sourdough and Fascism

Megan L. Zahay defines trad-wives as women who forward a "traditionalist [understanding] of womanhood in which mothering and nurturing are

their primary role” (2022: 172). Yet, the justification for this varies across political and religious spheres. For example, Estee Williams promotes a “50s escapist fantasy” (Love, 2020:2) of ‘biblical submission’ (featuring milk-maid dresses and home cooking) where the hierarchy of authority goes from Christ at the top, followed by the husband, then the wife, and lastly children (Williams, 2024a). She contends that women do not have ‘less value’ in the home by being biblically submissive to their husbands, but she argues that ‘it should be a priority for women to take care of their family and home’ (Williams, 2024b) as this is more in line with their ‘natural femininity’ (Zahay, 2017).

Many ‘trad-wife’ influencers draw upon religious texts to justify their adherence to traditional gender roles. Proverbs 31, for example, a Biblical passage that praises the ‘virtuous woman’ who takes care of her home and family is commonly cited within ‘trad-wife’ ideology. These moralistic framings create a moral high ground, one which positions traditional gender roles as not only desirable but an inherently ‘good’ choice (Chowdhury, 2024). Moreover, Estee Williams actively distances herself from white supremacist movements that promote the ‘trad-wife lifestyle’, stating on her TikTok page that the conflation between white supremacy and traditional families is unwarranted (Williams, 2024b).¹ Yet, what Estee Williams fails to acknowledge in her statement is that religion (more specifically Christian denominations in this instance) and the far-right are not mutually exclusive groups, Ayla Stewart (a.k.a Wife with a Purpose) is an example of a crossover as she identifies as Mormon but also promotes white supremacist ideologies. Nevertheless, far-right, white supremacist content creators are some of the most ardent promoters of the trad-wife lifestyle.

Lauren Southern offers a compelling case study in this context. While she did not make ‘trad-wife’ content when she was married, before her marriage and after her divorce, she promoted the ‘traditional’ lifestyle for women as the ideal and continues to be one of the most prominent female figures of the

far-right. In an interview with Alex Clark (2024), Lauren Southern detailed how her upbringing in Canada led her to ‘embrace’ right-wing ideology. Raised in a middle-class, conservative Christian home (Harrington, 2024) she claims that mass migration was ‘so bad’ that her ‘culture was being eroded’ (Clark, 2024). Yet, it was mass migration, compounded by the fact that she was being ‘forced the ideology of white privilege at school’ which subsequently led to her being ‘red-pilled’ (Clark, 2024).²

During her time as a documentary filmmaker and internet personality, Lauren Southern argued for the Great Replacement Theory (Right Response Team, 2018), and this gets to the heart of the distinction between creators such as Estee Williams and Lauren Southern. Though both women advocate for the nuclear family and designated gender roles, Eviane Leidig notes that ‘the far-right has an explicit political message: to preserve and uphold Western civilisation’ (2023:100). Far-right women not only embrace traditional gender roles, but they do so with the explicit purpose to circumvent the ‘declining white birth rate’ by having as many children as possible. Ayla Stewart once encouraged her followers to take part in a ‘White Baby Challenge’ (Minna-Stern, 2019) in a bid to ‘restore’ Western civilisation. The core belief that the reproductive freedom of women is a threat to ‘Western civilisation’ is the foundation upon which the role of women within far-right movements is constructed. As Tracey Llanera states, ‘white women are needed for the continuation of the white race, and the realities of mixed-race partnerships, the sexual freedom of women and the fear that non-whites are procreating at a far higher rate than whites today are treated by racist extremists as being pressing global issues’ (2023: 159-160). Therefore, the sexuality of white women needs to be controlled, as women’s autonomy diminishes the accessibility of white men to their bodies and thus impedes procreation. But this begs the question: if these movements promote submission and control, how is it that these women frame their lifestyle as a form of empowerment?

¹ It should be noted that though Estee Williams focuses on ‘biblical submission’ in her content, her family do have links to far-right political organisations, in particular Turning Point USA (Taylor, 2025). Though the group says that it rejects white supremacist ideologies, it continues to attract racists to its meetings (Anti-Defamation League, 2019).

² This is a term used by far-right individuals to refer to the process of having their perspective radically transformed and finally seeing the ‘true nature’ of a particular situation. The term derives from the 1999 film *The Matrix* where the protagonist, Neo, is offered a blue pill (i.e., Comfort and security) or a red-pill (i.e., truth and awakening). The irony of far-right actors utilising these terms when the *Matrix* movies were directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, two transgender women, seems somewhat lost on them.

Trad-wife ideology: Empowerment or External Influence?

At the heart of the 'trad-wife' ideology lies the belief that submission to male partners is the cornerstone of femininity and fulfilment (Beamish 2024). Estee Williams' TikTok serves as an example of this, with content that delves into conservative beliefs, sporting titles such as "Independence doesn't equal fulfilment" (Beamish 2024). Trad-wife influencers often frame this submission as a conscious and empowering choice (Raza, 2024), reframing traditional gender roles as aspirational. This mirrors previous far-right sentiments, seen for example when women who were engaged in the British Union of Fascists during the 1930's described their engagement as empowering and emancipating (Gottlieb 2002).

However, much like the criticisms of 'Choice Feminism,' this perspective oversimplifies the complexities surrounding women's choices, overlooking the broader structural influences at play, raising critical questions about the nature of choice and empowerment in this context. While these women assert their autonomy in their choice to occupy these trad-wife roles, and have every right to do so, it is essential to recognise that choices are rarely made in vacuum, as Raza (2024) rightly points out, "these choices exist within the narrow framework of privilege, wealth and traditional gender roles." Thwaites (2016) similarly cautions that autonomy in such contexts must be understood in light of structures that constrain or direct choice. In addition, Mackinnon's (2003) discussions around how subordination can sometimes appear to be power when it is the only form of visibility or agency available are relevant. Connections are easy to make here, as tradwife roles are often framed as choices, yet unpicking this reveals that this perceived choice and agency are constructed within a framework that limits options, reinforcing patriarchal structures. As feminists have long argued, the line between consent and coercion is often complicated (Featherstone et al, 2023). This lens reflects a broader and more nuanced understanding of the women involved in trad-wife content making.

Far-right ideologies often reinforce controlling structures by promoting practices like homeschooling to prevent exposure to liberal values, a strategy explicitly endorsed by Lauren Southern who has stated she would homeschool her children to avoid 'left-wing indoctrination' (Leidig, 2023:99). This complexity is illuminated by theories of gender socialisation. Research suggests that individuals develop ideas about gender through their interactions with 'socialising agents (e.g., parents, siblings, and peers) and exposure to socialising channels (e.g., schools and media)' (Perales et al, 2021: 2). For women raised in conservative or religious environments, traditional gender norms may be internalised, creating a deep-seated belief in submission and subordination. This then, may be further emphasised and reinforced by religious teachings, cultural narratives and social expectations within their communities. Even aside from any 'extreme' manifestation of this, it is clear that women and girls are relentlessly exposed to the systematic gender inequality that runs through every vein of society.

Bates' (2015) *Everyday Sexism*, for example, explores how young girls encounter sexism and gender roles from infancy, with segregated toys, and media that focuses on beauty and domesticity rather than the wide variety of interests and activities that their male counterparts are surrounded by. Bates (2015) also discusses how young girls receive messaging to stay silent and to distrust themselves, and importantly connects this to sexual assault and the focus on women to behave 'properly.' She importantly quotes, 'the impact of learning such 'truths' from the people you trust the most can cause them to become deeply ingrained, making it much harder for women to realize that what is happening to them is wrong, or to speak up about it later on,' (Bates 2015, p.30-31). The internalisation of the traditional gender roles that women are constantly bombarded with can limit personal agency and perpetuate gender inequalities by reinforcing the idea that women's primary and only value lies in their roles as wives and mothers.

Religious institutions can also play a harmful role in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Internet commentator FunkyFrogBait's (2024) analysis of the Mormon Church, for example, highlights

how gender roles are integral to Mormon religious messaging, and every aspect of a woman's life is influenced by the mandates of the church. The consequences of actions that deviate from the 'acceptable norm' can be extreme in some cases. When women get married in the Mormon temple, they become bound to their husbands for eternity. If a woman were to leave her husband in one life, she would still be bound to him in the afterlife, but she would lose access to her children for eternity. By presenting traditional gender roles as morally superior, individuals may come to accept deviations from these roles as morally inferior or wrong. Within closed systems like these, women may appear empowered, but their agency exists within a structure that rewards compliance and punishes deviation.

What can also be seen in the 'trad-wife' discourse, is the rejection of feminism, and indeed on some level, capitalism, as stated by Hu (2023, p.25), "What unites tradwives is their rejection of both capitalism and feminism, which are conflated in the gloomy figure of the working woman." Particularly relevant in this context is the view of the unhappy, overworked absent mother that the trad-wife supposedly provides a better alternative for. However, what this argument fails to account for is that this ideology is not an outright rejection of capitalism, but is in fact a recall to outdated and gendered capitalist relations where women are relegated to the supporting role of their husbands, in which their primary function is to keep the male worker happy.

The working woman is seen as a slave, and the aspiration of a successful career could never compete with the happiness gained from being a successful/submissive homemaker (Stotzer & Nelson 2025). Feminism has been critiqued within the trad-wife movement for 'harming women,' forcing them to work, whilst also bearing primary childcare and domestic responsibilities (Stotzer & Nelson 2025). Rather than placing the blame on the patriarchal systems that lead to this dynamic, we instead see a vilification of feminism for adding more pressure and labour for women, which has been reinforced by the bombardment of narratives that frame women's roles as within the home, and as a 'better and safer option' for women. A common theme that is situated within

this, is how "submitting to one husband is better than submitting to ten bosses" (Tebaldi 2023, p.73). The rejection of modern day feminism and working outside of the home echoes Mackinnon's (2003) previously discussed sentiment, subordination in this context, against a backdrop of unequal domestic labour and capitalist demands, may appear to be power when it is perceived to be the only form of agency available.

The ideal of the 'trad-wife' often then presents an image of economic stability and security rooted in a single-income household, women don't have to work, they can choose to stay at home and be the 'perfect' mother and wife. Alongside the anti-capitalist language that is deployed against working women while elevating white working men, there is a common, recurring motif of the husband as a heroic figure, a 'modern-day Prince Charming,' a narrative that positions the tradwife's femininity as flourishing under the protection and leadership of a strong, male partner (Tebaldi 2023). The husband is supposed to work, to provide, to save a woman from the 'harms' of working, of feminism and of economic and social challenges. It is crucial however, to point out that for a woman to fulfill this role, she requires financial support from her husband, underscoring the socioeconomic privilege embedded within single-income households (Beamish, 2024). This is not an arrangement accessible to everyone. YouTube commentator Shanspeare (2024) notes how historically black and brown women were never given the choice to stay at home or be in the workplace, they had to be at work. The trad-wife lifestyle promoted by content creators has racialised underpinnings as it is the promotion of a nostalgia for the experiences of white, middle class women, which has come to be idolised by many.

Tradwife influencers promote 'single-income households' (something that is not viable for many families under current economic circumstances, where the prices of everyday essentials continue to rise faster than wages), but there are two key caveats to this. The first is that multiple popular tradwives are married to men who are already well off, for example Hannah Neeleman³ (aka Ballerina Farm) married the JetBlue heir Daniel Neeleman and had a net worth estimated to be in the region

³ It should be noted that Neeleman rejects the label of trad wife but her lifestyle has been embraced by many as the ideal

of \$400 million when you factor in generational wealth (Kester, 2024). Further, it is also important to challenge the notion that these women do not engage in work; their domestic roles constitute significant labour and, ironically, tradwives make money through their online content. It should also be noted, however, that just because tradwives contribute to the financial assets of their family via their content, does not mean that they are financially independent and there is no way of proving that the money they make goes directly back to them. In the case of Ballerina Farm, Hannah Neeleman is the face of their agricultural business brand, but the LLC is in her husband's name, making him the owner of the company (Dun & Brandstreet Business Directory). Although Neelman may have some protective legal interest in this company for numerous reasons, it is relatively symbolic that despite being the face of the business, she does not technically own it. She has also stated in a TikTok video that her husband has the final say on their finances (Champion & Ingram, 2023).

The dynamic of this financial dependence also presents significant risks for abuse, and control within these relationships, as women are rendered economically vulnerable. Due to the prevailing beliefs about the differing roles of men and women, an apparent perpetuating cycle of denial and dismissal emerges, one that from every point of view, works to further solidify their belief system. We see an example of this in Stotzer & Nelson's study, as they find sentiments such as 'many women scoffed at concerns expressed...they were convinced that their man was a "good man" and would always provide and never harm them' (2025:9) The women in this study argued that 'women were in part forced into the boss babe lifestyle because men were not being taught to be masculine enough, to be providers, but that they were the exception and had found the "right" kind of man' (Stotzer & Nelson 2025:9). According to Stotzer & Nelson, few of these women recognised how choosing the "right" kind of man was in fact a privilege that enabled them to choose their traditional lifestyle, and emphasise that even those that did recognise the privilege still blamed women for choosing the "wrong" man (2025:9).

on the displaying of the feminine self, that feeds into 'the cult of natural femininity,' which has stemmed from attempts to characterise 'natural beauty' as an idealised type of femininity (McCann, 2022: 18). For example, there are numerous videos and blog posts acting as 'guides' for how to dress in traditional, feminine and modest styles, and in particular, the Darling Academy underwent a three-month challenge, exclusively wearing dresses to feel more authentically feminine (Pettit, 2021). But, as Laura Jane Bower (2024) rightly points out, such notions of 'womanhood' that underpin these discourses, while constructed as being 'natural' are white-centric and have historically been denied to black women. Trad wives, particularly those situated at the intersection of Christian traditional values and opposition to feminism, embody a foundational principle of rejecting feminism (Bower, 2024). In fact, it is clear that some tradwives view feminist women as rebelling against their natural feminine identity, and use terms like "going feminist" as one might use "letting myself go" to refer to weight gain' (Tebaldi 2024:100). There is an apparent association of femininity with conformity to heteronormative social orders, with 'prettiness' and 'femininity' being indicative of conforming to gendered notions of softness, submissiveness and beauty standards (Tebaldi, 2024). We see tradwife influencers such as Brittany Pettibone describe feminists as iconically ugly and 'deliberate inversion[s] of feminine beauty' as they had rebelled against innate female nature" (Tebaldi, 2024: 100). Lack of conformity to this gendered order is therefore expressed through a moral lens, showing feminism as "unnatural" (Tebaldi, 2024).

According to Proctor (2022), these women often perceive feminism as an attack on femininity, eradicating men from the family structure and posing a threat to Christian religious values. Lilian Sediles of 'Postmodern Mom' for example, described contemporary feminism as a 'trojan horse' which has negative effects on society, as it is distancing men and women from their biologically determined roles (Sediles 2019). Others, like Solie Osorio, have described the motivations behind their online presence as a 'safe haven for those who are searching for identity and grappling with what it means to be a feminine woman' (Osorio, 2020) and Caitlin Huber of Mrs Midwest, who describes her blog as 'a haven

Across trad-wife content, there is a strong emphasis of this lifestyle.

for traditionally feminine women' (Huber, 2019). This concept is embedded within the radicalisation of 'feminism' apparent in many Christian denominations and works to distort women's liberation, often positioning it as anti-Christian and anti-Biblical, and therefore not aligning with and even challenging the conceptualisation of traditional 'femininity' (Beamish, 2024). Consequently, exposure to teachings that reinforce these narratives may act as constraints, influencing religious women's political attitudes and their rejection of feminism, with beliefs about gender becoming ingrained in their belief systems (Beamish, 2024).

In a stark contrast to these perceptions of the 'ugliness' of feminism, trad-wife content presents itself as offering an aesthetically appealing visual that aligns with the high-esteemed values of femininity, family and faith. The content of trad-wives centres around aesthetically pleasing content that makes their lifestyle seem like a break from modern stresses. This is 'tailor made' for young women according to Piazza (2022). We see this beautiful and idealised package that directly contrasts with the corporate world that is hostile to women. Trad-wives are painting pretty pictures of happiness and fulfillment and therefore offer a perceived sense of security in an increasingly insecure world, providing guidelines on how to dress and behave, and a sense of direction and purpose (Deem, 2023). Trad-wife content often portrays an idyllic family life, with well-behaved children and harmonious relationships which can be particularly appealing to those seeking to cultivate similar environments in their own lives. What this does however, is provide a "soft face for saying quite extreme things, quite dangerous things; things that are quite divisive and that demonise parts of our own society" (Campion, as cited in Kelsey-Sugg & Marin, 2021).

The Trafficking Metaphor: Abuse by Another Name?

Shearing's statement that being a tradwife is 'like being trafficked' is not a dismissal of women's domestic choices, but instead represents a structural and political critique of how the tradwife model facilitates environments that mirror the power dynamics of coercive control (Shearing, 2025). While Shearing's analogy of trafficking does not

suggest that women are quite literally abducted into the far right, it offers an important metaphor for further understanding the structural influences and manipulations involved in far-right recruitment by highlighting the gendered and racialized mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation that often underscore this process. Shearing is not the first to have made a comparison like this, as at the centre of coercive control theory lies a similar reasoning, one that has compared coercive control to 'capture' crimes like kidnapping or hostage taking (Stark, 2007). Domestic violence is widely understood as constituting not just physical violence, but patterns of coercive control, involving systematic attempts to dominate a partner through isolation, emotional manipulation, economic dependence, and the restriction of autonomy (Stark 2007). The concept of a continuum of gendered violence, developed by scholars such as Liz Kelly (1987), challenges narrow understandings of gendered violence and instead, frames it as a spectrum of behaviours, ideologies and social structures that sustain patriarchy. Within this framework, the tradwife phenomenon can be situated as part of the ideological and structural end of the continuum, a site where women are socialised, encouraged, or pressured into conforming to roles that reinforce patriarchal dominance and restrict female autonomy. Using this understanding, we can see that the recruitment of women into the far right often reflects patterns of affective manipulation, gendered socialisation, and psychological grooming that align closely with the dynamics of coercive control and gender-based violence.

According to Shearing, grooming and abuse is rife within far-right communities, beginning at a young age (Shearing, 2025). Corinna Olsen, previously a member of the neo-Nazi group National Socialist Movement recounts how the spectre of racial patriarchy when turned towards her two daughters caused (part of) her disillusionment with the far-right. When working as a secretary for Harold Covington, founder of the white separatist movement Northwest Front (NWF) insisted that she 'bring her daughters to the NWF's Washington office, so that he could put his eyes on two Aryan girls' and the idea of an aging man eyeing up her daughters made her 'sick to her stomach' (Llanera, 2021:168). For some, like Olsen, misogyny can convince them of the harmful nature of the far right, but for many white women, the benefit of being celebrated for

their whiteness outweighs the negatives of sexism. The form of grooming present within the far right mirrors the dynamics seen in abusive relationships and coercive environments, where control is not just physically exerted but imposed through charm, validation and isolation (Duron et al, 2021).

Tradwife culture presents as an idealised vision of femininity that is carefully curated through aesthetics that centre on baking and homemaking, appealing to those who may feel alienated by modern feminism. Similarly to grooming practices, this process is gradual, women are not initially recruited with explicit political messaging but are instead drawn into an aesthetic culture that celebrates family values, this acts as a form of grooming into patriarchy. Worryingly websites have emerged online writing about how to groom a female partner, which quote statements like “Mold Your Wife into the Glorious Wife You Want Her to Be” (Biblical Gender Roles, 2025). Similarly to that of coercively controlling relationships, this process is compounded by isolation from counter-narratives, the tradwife movement encourages skepticism and hostility towards feminism and liberal media, mirroring how abusers often isolate victims from support networks (Stark, 2007; Lloyd, 2024). The emphasis on aesthetic appeal and ideological grooming reflects a form of structural violence that is deeply gendered but easily obscured because it operates through seduction rather than force (Lloyd, 2024). This grooming does not always present through one singular actor but through patriarchal norms, online communities, political and religious ideologies and media that act to recruit and retain women within a framework of structural subordination (Leidig, 2021). It has “let a disguised conservatism take root, repackaging volatile gender roles in the language of fad trends like slow living and divine femininity” (Lloyd, 2024).

It is not far-fetched to believe that explicit gendered violence also occurs within these tradwife dynamics, as feminist scholars have argued that husband gender traditionalism is one of the root causes of spousal violence against women (Ka-Lok Cheung & Yuk-Ping Choi, 2016). Traditional gender ideologies that uphold male dominance and traditional gender arrangements have been considered among

the most prominent causes of husband to wife violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The gender attitude of women in marital relationships has also been considered to play a role in husband-to-wife violence, as ‘a husband who holds traditional gender attitudes may interpret a non-traditional gender attitude in his wife as a challenge to the traditional gender arrangement; this can provoke such men to seek to put their wives “in line” (Ka-Lok Cheung & Yuk-Ping Choi, 2016). In addition, domestic violence has also been considered a consequence of cultural values and norms that emphasise ‘proper’ masculinity through a lens of domination and control over a female partner (Dery, 2019; Bassey and Bubu, 2019). When applied to the tradwife framework, these insights are deeply concerning, the tradwife ethos emphasises male authority and female submission, conditions in which domestic violence thrives. Violence may be employed to ‘restore order’ in these relationships. Women socialised to accept this subservience may internalise blame for abuse, or even refuse recognition as abuse, or sanitize it as love, in these environments, divorce may also be discouraged or forbidden, trapping women in abusive relationships. In some far right ideology we also see the idea that women must ‘earn’ male protection through obedience, placing further blame on victims and reinforcing a coercive model of safety (Beatty, 2024). Women are also encouraged to forgo careers, surrendering decision making to their male partners, leading to a dynamic of financial and social dependency, with women isolated from feminist support networks. While not every tradwife relationship is violent, the movement propagates an ideology that increases the risk factors of abuse, naturalising male dominance, and idealising female submission and control.

Shearing’s trafficking analogy also opens up an avenue for us to think about reproductive coercion as a form of gender-based violence embedded in traditionalist ideologies. Reproductive control is increasingly evident within the tradwife framework. In a basic sense, reproductive coercion can be understood as ‘anything that may impact reproductive choices and autonomy’ (Graham, et al 2023: 5), this includes coercing a woman to become pregnant. Coercive behaviours in this regard are often thought to be typically perpetrated by male intimate partners, with expansive definitions also including wider influences, like ‘socio-cultural norms and practices, service

provision and access, policies, law, and legislation that restrict reproductive autonomy' (Graham, et al 2023: 5). It is also thought to be a form of violence against women, and is often part of a broader pattern of coercive control (Tarzia & McKenzie, 2024). Within the tradwife ethos, motherhood is positioned as a woman's highest calling, with procreation as a moral obligation and a fulfilment of natural gender roles (Champion & Ingram 2023). In addition, the tradwife ethos projects a range of harmful ideas that centre around birth control and procreation, often opposing contraception (Jenkins, 2024). Although it is unfair and reductive to say that all women who identify as tradwives are subjected to reproductive coercion, the movement operates within broader cultural and religious structures that uphold patriarchy and normalises reproductive subservience. In this context, fertility is a socially constructed imperative that is reinforced through shame, moral rhetoric and romanticised domesticity. These discourses frequently idolise large families and women's 'biological destiny' as caregivers and homemakers, while rejecting reproductive autonomy, framing modern feminism and reproductive autonomy as harmful or 'anti-woman' (Champion & Ingram 2023). Public figures in the broader far right have reinforced this framing, with Lauren Southern for example, claiming that feminism taught women to "to work 9–5 and drink wine every night until their ovaries dry up." (Norris, 2023). Framing feminism in this way presents the liberated woman as unfulfilled and sterile, justifying a return to traditional gender roles. The language of empowerment and choice used by the movement masks the coercive aspects that glorify reproductive labour and are embedded in a religious and cultural system that denies women bodily autonomy. This ethos of structural reproductive control not only infringes upon women's rights but also perpetuates a cycle of dependency and subjugation.

Beyond its gendered implications, the tradwife movement is also implicated in racialised ideologies of reproductive control, particularly through its alignment with white nationalist and ethno-nationalist politics. The tradwife movement is embedded within structures that aim to uphold white supremacy, with the idealisation of women's roles often intersecting with Nationalist ideologies that frame women's reproduction as central

to national and racial identity (Bower, 2024). Within this framework, white women's bodies are weaponised in the service of racial preservation. While not all tradwives outwardly identify with nationalist beliefs, the aesthetic and ideological overlaps between tradwife culture and far-right pronatalism are significant (Proctor, 2023). The celebration of Western traditionalism, the rejection of multiculturalism, and the emphasis on heterosexual, monogamous family structures all contribute to a vision of femininity and motherhood that is implicitly, and often explicitly, racialised (Proctor, 2023). What this demonstrates, is how the tradwife lifestyle is centred on components of the fascist ideology that governs the far right, white supremacy and patriarchy. The influence of these ideologies are becoming increasingly worrying, with the global far right pushing to overturn laws protecting women from gender based violence and limiting reproductive rights, gaining significant support from right wing political parties.

Lauren Southern: the embodiment of the 'misogyny paradox'.

The reason why we wished to focus on the curious case of Lauren Southern is that what she has experienced these last ten years- transitioning from documentary filmmaker, to tradwife, and back to being an internet personality after her divorce - showcases the multifaceted, and context dependent, nature of the 'misogyny paradox' of far-right groups. As Llanera argues, 'the better alt-right women propagandists promote hate, the greater hostility they experience from their fellow racists and critics; the more submissive women alt-right members become, the harsher the impact of misogyny' (2023:159). In a video titled 'Why I'm Not Married' (2018), Southern details her reasoning for remaining unmarried at twenty-two. These include wanting to marry for love, and that while she does desire to live a traditional lifestyle, she argues that her demographic is struggling to navigate looking for a compatible partner in a world inundated with 'Marxist propaganda', as this has inhibited their understanding of how relationships work 'properly'.

But the reason why Lauren Southern made this video in the first place is that her previous videos critiquing liberal feminist understandings of relationships

resulted in her being inundated with comments questioning why she was not married herself. The comments she received and directly quoted in the video are illuminating. These include “Hey Lauren, why aren’t you making videos with your five kids and your husband?” and “How dare you say this as a woman without kids and a traditional marriage” (Lauren Southern, 2018). The comment section of this video is also revealing, as while many call out the hypocrisy of Southern’s reasoning (i.e., a woman even having the choice to wait to get married at a time that suits her is a result of feminist activism), others commend her rationale. But there is also a stream of misogyny in the comments section of her video. A few examples include from @insomniacresurrected with ‘it is your biological duty to pop out white children, what is the problem with that, why are you making excuses?’, from @anthonygloria5177 came ‘Lauren Southern is contributing to White Genocide by not having white babies every year’, and @AlbionTarkhan implored ‘For God’s sake. Please please. Get married and have lots of well-adjusted children. It’s the weakest link in Western societies all over the world. We aren’t having kids while our governments are importing third world morons. It’s like we are all ok with committing cultural and demographic suicide’.

Comments such as these get to the heart of the Misogyny Paradox (Llanera, 2021) and the tension inherent in the position that white supremacist propagandists such as Southern occupy. Within these movements, the dominant image of white femininity is associated with passivity, subservience and service, either to their white husband or the white children they are expected to produce and raise. Yet, Southern’s lifestyle as a documentary filmmaker, travelling the world and building a successful public platform to spread conspiracy theories, clashes with this ideal as she performs more ‘masculine traits’ such as power and prestige in the public sphere due to her political activism. As Llanbera succinctly puts it ‘Women in the alt-right are thus being judged in their capacity to meet their main role as service workers to white men and the white cause. Their racial activism is a secondary feature of their identity, undertaken out of necessity, and embraced an idealised white community only if these ‘women are simultaneously performing their gendered service work adequately’ (2021:165). This ‘neglect’ of their primary function provokes immense hostility against them. Still, the

paradox is that the more successful women, such as Southern, are at promoting hate for the far-right, the more intra-group punishment they get in return (Llanera, 2021).

Southern stepped away from public life quite suddenly at the height of her fame, after getting married. Yet, in her interview with Alex Clark for Turning Point USA (2024) she outlines how very soon into the marriage the coercion, and eventually abuse started. Southern details to Alex Clark how she became isolated from her friends and family, and even went so far as to take a job in Australia without consulting Southern a while after she had given birth (though he agreed before being married to Southern that they would stay in Canada so she could be with her family) and threatened her with divorce if she did not agree with the decision. Once she was thousands of miles away from home, Southern reports becoming ‘the closest thing to a modern-day Western slave’ she had to do everything ‘the laws, the house, the cooking, the baby care, his university homework. And I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t have any support. There was no help changing diapers, there was no help waking up in the night with the baby. I’d [Southern] still had to wake up, to make breakfast before work. I’d be shaking and nervous, for fear I’m going to get yelled at’ (Harrington, 2024). The abuse was not just verbal, beside being called pathetic and berated for not earning money, Southern states that her ex-husband would sometimes lock her out of the house, resulting in her having to knock on the neighbours door on rainy nights (Harrington, 2024). This story alludes to another paradox of misogyny within far-right organisations. Even when you are fulfilling the proscribed role as a wife and mother, this does not protect you from patriarchal violence. Rather than being trolled online by anonymous commentators, Southern was abused by the person who was supposed to ‘protect’ her white womanhood. The trad-wife lifestyle leaves women vulnerable to several forms of abuse. Financial as women become dependent upon the income of their husbands; sexual as women are expected to always be available for their husbands desire; reproductive as women are expected to give birth to as many white children as possible to prevent the ‘decline of Western civilisation’ and physical abuse.

Yet, even after her experience of the trad-wife lifestyle, Southern continues to promote it, as she now claims that trad-wife relationships can only work if they have a 'solid biblical foundation' (Alex Clark, 2024). The case of Lauren Southern calls into question the binary between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' of patriarchal violence within far-right movements, as women are indispensable to the propaganda machine but they are also at risk of being on the receiving end of the worst excesses of the violence they promote.

Is Victimhood contingent on innocence?

The narrative of 'white victimhood' has long been a staple of white supremacy and particularly in 'white feminism' reflects a failure to hold white women accountable (Moon & Holling, 2020). This kind of feminism frames white women as victims of white patriarchy and in this narrative white men are constructed as solely responsible for both racism and sexism which ignores the allegiance of white women to the same harmful ideologies, (Moon & Holling, 2020). This is summarised by Moon & Holling, (2020: 1) 'By erasing women of colour, positioning women as victims of white male hegemony, and failing to hold white women accountable for the production and reproduction of white supremacy, (white) feminism manifests its allegiance to whiteness and in doing so commits "discursive violence." As Seyward Darby argues in her book *Sisters in Hate* (2020) women are socialised to be 'nice', 'good' and 'nurturing', resulting in a 'women-are-wonderful' effect. Not only does this produce the idea that women (and especially white women) are in need of protection, it also produces a disbelief about the complicity of women in some of the worst forms of bigotry throughout history. The growing fascination with the complicity of women within far-right movements is evident on the internet, with commentators producing an ever growing collection of video essays on the matter, but one film that confronts the tension between the supposed soft femininity of white women and gratuitous racial violence of the far right is the 2022 horror *Soft and Quiet*. At the start of the film, we see that the main character, a kindergarten teacher named Emily, has organised a get-together of like-minded (all white) women. She hugs and greets the attendees, exchanges pleasantries, and places her homemade cherry pie on the table. Lifting the foil

we see that she has carved a swastika into the top of the pie. As the film progresses, what begins as a meeting for women to discuss their concerns about the continuity of the white race and the importance of their roles as wives and mothers descends into a home invasion movie, and the directors hold no bars in showing the extent of violence white women in these movements are capable of. Emily emerges as a truly terrifying figure, who recruits other women to help her perform torture and violence towards people whose existence they consider as beneath theirs (in this instance two Asian-American sisters who had the bad luck of encountering these women at a shop).

At the heart of black feminist scholarship lies the concern that gender is bound to racialised constructions, and that gender tropes reinforce 'whiteness' as upholding a structural power (Bower, 2024). Gendered constructions of femininity for example have long been rooted within white-centric ideals, that in their design, intentionally exclude black women, as summarised by Deliovsky, (2008: 10), femininity is 'far from being race-neutral' but 'is always already raced as white.' There is no better demonstration of this than Sojourner Truth's 'Aren't I a woman?' speech, in which she articulates how whiteness is often the primary basis for the conceptualisation of a woman, and neglects black women from these gendered constructions (Bower, 2024). Tradition has also long served as a euphemism for 'whiteness' which has further reinforced the marginalisation of black women. The tradwife lifestyle, imbued with the historical, colonial-rooted connections of white supremacy reinforces and bolsters these constructions.

So despite the current framing of this analysis, we are absolutely not trying to condone or excuse the behaviour of these women. Any analysis in this context must acknowledge the agency and conscious political engagement of these women. Framing all women in these roles as victims of grooming risks oversimplifying the complex motivations within far-right spaces. Acknowledging the complexity of this discussion is therefore crucial to avoid assumptions that may further silence women's voices or limit the understanding of the ideological adherence or responsibility that these women have. While coercive dynamics are significant, we do also acknowledge the ways in which these women

actively participate and embrace tradwife identities on their own terms.

This is why the analogy Shearing (2024) posits of far-right influencers being akin to traffickers is so powerful. It allows us to account not only for the range of violences women are subjected to within far-right movements, but also how women who bring other women into the fold, knowing the harm that will be more than likely inflicted upon them, but also other marginalised communities, are complicit in racialised patriarchal violence. The fact that women are harmed in these movements does not diminish the harm they inflict. But what Shearing (2024) also highlights is that such influencers who recruit other women into hate movements may not be solely for ideological reasons, but as a way to deflect harassment away from themselves.

A Question for Feminists

In summation, this article has explored the proliferation of 'trad-wife' influencers, and how this burgeoning body of online content promotes an idealised lifestyle in line with a woman's 'natural femininity' and submission to one's husband. Yet, such narratives occlude the heightened vulnerability to financial, physical, sexual, emotional and mental abuse. For those in the far-right, the 'traditional lifestyle' is a means of not only 'protecting Western civilisation' by recruiting women to bear as many children as possible, but it makes evident the entitlement that men in these movements believe they should have in terms of access to a woman's body and labour. But, as we have elucidated, there is a thorny issue that feminists must confront when it comes to the complicity of women in these movements. They challenge the binary between 'victim' and 'perpetrator', as these women promote ideologies that actively harm marginalised communities such as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and fellow women. This begs the question as to how feminist activists and scholars can best respond to women who decided to leave the movement. With financial resources limited, as Shearing (2024) rightly points out, would anyone be open to the opening of a refuge for women Nazi's?

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