

Tradwives': the new trend for submissive women has a dark heart and history

A certain kind of housewife has found social media and is airing the details of their fight with feminism. But maybe they should tone it down a notch

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[Hadley Freeman](#), Mon 27 Jan 2020, The Guardian.

What exciting trends are happening in the matrimonial sector?

A thrilling new trend has emerged, and it's as seismic as the New Look was in 40s fashion, or the emergence of Mediterranean cooking in 90s Britain: it's called being a housewife.

10 Now you might think: "Ummm, that doesn't sound THAT new to me." But all fashion trends are rehashes, and "tradwife", as this one is dubbed, is housewife with a social media spin. It's like bringing back 90s style, but swapping that brown eyeliner for contouring makeup. It's just so much more zeitgeist, you see?

15 So a "tradwife" is a woman who doesn't work so as to look after their children, their husband, their home and then talk non-stop about how great this is on social media. Who knew being so traditional was also so modern? And so busy! Last week alone, there were interviews with tradwives [in the Daily Mail](#), [the Times](#) and on the BBC, This Morning, Victoria Derbyshire and, for all I know, piped 24/7 across all channels. I'm afraid that – being both non-trad and a non-wife – I am less plugged in than these women.

20 But I was especially taken with one trad wife. Her name is Alena Kate Pettitt, and in between showing TV crews how she lovingly [irons her husband's shirt and shops for onions](#), Pettitt runs something called the Darling Academy, which is a newsletter and YouTube channel that "celebrates British etiquette". Initially, I assumed this meant reviving all that mad Nancy Mitford U and non-U stuff,¹ and, let me tell you, as an American wannabe snob, I am VERY down with that. But no,
25 Pettitt is "harnessing the best of what made Britain great, during that time when you could leave your front door open and know that you were safe, and you knew your strangers in the street."

Mmm, isn't it funny how whenever people evoke a specific time when Britain was great, the time they invariably evoke is their own childhood before they were aware of the pressures and anxieties of adulthood? And I'll be honest, every times Pettitt talks about her husband "taking care" of her,
30 and that is pretty much her No 1 subject, she sounds more like she's talking about her father than her husband.

The tradwives have been keenly giving interviews about how they are the true feminists [in choosing not to work](#), to which anyone with a modicum of knowledge about feminism would say: "We gave women the choice – that's the point! Bake banana bread until the sun comes up, if it makes you
35 happy!" Whether they are still the true feminists in suggesting that "husbands must always come first if you want a happy marriage", as Pettitt has tweeted, feels more debatable. Also unacknowledged is that, as much as the tradwives think they are being renegade rebels by not

¹ Terms and languages used to distinguish classes. U=upper class, non-U: middle and lower classes. Upperclass English author, Nancy Midford, debated this in the 1950s

working, their rebellion is based on their husband earning enough to support a whole household. Whoa there, little rebels!

5 But this isn't actually about fighting the system: this is about women fighting against their own insecurities about their lives. And because of these insecurities, they then insist they are the oppressed ones, the brave speakers of truth. In other words, it's another pointless culture war to chuck on the teetering pile in between Spiked Online and Laurence Fox.

10 And it's also about something else. Rather awkwardly for the British tradwives – who like to suggest their movement is just about dressing in Cath Kidston and letting their husband choose where they are going on holiday – [in the US and elsewhere](#) it is very much part of the “alt-right”² movement. It is especially popular among white supremacists, who are extremely down with the message that white women should submit to their husband and focus on making as many white babies as possible. British tradwives insist this has nothing to do with them: “Someone even said, this type of housewife was promoted by the Third Reich. And it's like: ‘Really?! I didn't even know that!’” Pettitt told the BBC, sitting underneath her union jack bunting, musing about how “we don't
15 even know the identity of our country right now”.

Now look, clearly being a happy housewife does not mean you are a Nazi. But also, maybe it's time to dial down a notch, tradwives, for your own sake? After all, if you're constantly posting videos to YouTube about how to press your husband's clothes, and talking to Phillip and Holly about how you love to flirt with your husband, how do you have time to do any tradwife-ing?

20 <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/jan/27/tradwives-new-trend-submissive-women-dark-heart-history>

BBC video on tradwife influencer: Elena Kate Pettitt:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-51113371>

² Alt-right: alternative right (very right-wing and conservative)