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How To Cook Like a Tradwife

Multimodal Representations of Femininity in Instagram Cooking Videos

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This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has ever cooked for me.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The figure of the “tradwife”, short for “traditional wife”, has become a striking cultural presence in recent years, particularly in the digital sphere. Tradwives present themselves, or are labelled by others, as women who embrace mid-20th-century gender roles: married, committed to homemaking, and positioned within a heteronormative family model in which the husband is the provider and the wife the nurturer. Although the term itself entered public discourse most prominently in the late 2010s, the phenomenon has gained significant traction online since the Covid-19 pandemic, when domesticity, lifestyle blogging, and social media consumption all intensified (Kaur; Khanum). On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, women identifying as tradwives, or identified as such by their audiences or the media, share curated depictions of family life, homemaking practices, and, crucially, cooking. Their content typically combines aesthetics of calm, order, and vintage femininity with explicit or implicit claims about gender, morality, and tradition.

For the purposes of this thesis, a tradwife is defined as a married woman who publicly embraces and performs mid-20th-century gender roles through social media, particularly emphasizing homemaking, cooking, and support for her husband and children. Similar definitions have also been used in recent dictionary entries in the Cambridge Dictionary as well as in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, although the Cambridge Dictionary also included taking care of children as a key characteristic of a tradwife (Cambridge University Press & Assessment; Merriam-Webster). The tradwife is therefore conceptualized not as a single, uniform identity but as a constellation of practices, discourses, and performances that frame femininity in specific ways. In this thesis, femininity is understood as a specific form of gender identity, a gendered mode of being and appearing, that is constructed through specific practices. This framing emphasizes femininity not as an innate essence but as a performed identity, enacted through social norms, repetition, and recognition.

Cooking holds a particularly central position within this cultural formation. While food preparation is one of the most widely represented practices on social media, cooking in tradwife content is not merely a matter of nourishment or practical skill. Instead, it is framed as an emotional, aesthetic, and moral performance, an act of care, service, heritage, or competence through which femininity is made visible

The importance of studying the phenomenon of tradwives is largely due to their striking visibility and the popularity of their content. Some tradwife creators attract millions of views per video, and their aesthetic circulates widely, both in earnest and through parody. The phenomenon sparks polarizing reactions. Some audiences find comfort, inspiration, and empowerment in these performances, while others view them as regressive, reactionary, or complicit in antifeminist and even extremist politics. Regardless of where one stands, it is evident that tradwife content is a cultural site where domesticity, gender ideology, and digital performance intersect with significant intensity.

This thesis investigates how cooking videos produced by tradwives on Instagram convey and reproduce norms of femininity. Rather than treating cooking as a neutral skill, the analysis conceptualizes it as a gendered performance. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is understood here as something done. This includes repeated acts, gestures, and discourses that constitute identities within social and ideological frameworks. Cooking in tradwife videos thus functions as a stylized repetition that naturalizes femininity as care, devotion, and tradition.

The remainder of this thesis is organized into ten chapters that together develop the theoretical framework, contextual background, and empirical analysis necessary to examine how tradwife cooking videos convey and reproduce norms of femininity. Chapter 2 lays the conceptual foundations by outlining the theoretical framework. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, scholarship on social norms and algorithmic amplification, and research on digital domesticity and feminized labor, this chapter provides the key concepts and analytical tools that guide the subsequent analysis. Chapter 3 situates the tradwife phenomenon within wider cultural and political debates. It traces the historical emergence of the tradwife figure, explores its ideological entanglements with reactionary and racialized politics and considers the aesthetic strategies that enable its visibility on social media platforms. Chapter 4 turns to cooking as a gendered practice and reviews existing literature on foodwork. It identifies four central normative frames, care and selflessness, duty and morality, tradition and heritage, and competence and authority, that structure both historical and contemporary understandings of women's culinary labor and provide the thematic scaffolding for the empirical chapters. Chapter 5 introduces the concept of interpellation and discusses how audiovisual strategies on social media hail viewers

into specific ideological positions, thereby informing the analysis of viewer interpellation in the later chapters.

Chapter 6 presents the research design, data, and methodology. It explains the qualitative and multimodal approach adopted in this study, describes the sampling of Instagram videos and creators, and details the coding and analytical procedures used to examine the selected material. Chapters 7 to 10 contain the core empirical analysis. Each chapter addresses one of the four normative frames identified in the literature review, showing how tradwife creators express these norms through their cooking videos and how viewers are interpellated by the audiovisual and discursive strategies employed. Chapter 7 investigates cooking as care and selflessness. Chapter 8 examines cooking as duty and morality. Chapter 9 explores cooking as tradition and heritage and Chapter 10 analyses cooking as competence and authority. Each of these chapters combines a thematic analysis of the full dataset with a focused case study of a single video to illustrate the link between ideology, aesthetics, and audience address.

Finally, Chapter 11 offers the conclusion. It synthesizes the key findings of the thesis, reflects on their theoretical and political implications, and considers avenues for future research on gender, domesticity, and digital media. Together, these chapters move from conceptual framing and contextual grounding to detailed empirical investigation, enabling a cumulative understanding of how tradwife cooking videos circulate and naturalize gendered norms in contemporary digital culture.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 GENDER AS PERFORMATIVITY

The study of gender performance has been a central concern in feminist and media studies, offering a lens to understand how gender identities are constructed, embodied, and circulated. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, first articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), destabilized the notion of gender as a fixed essence, instead proposing that gender is constituted through performative iterations that replicate and evoke societal norms. These repetitions, Butler argues, create the illusion of a stable gender identity, though in fact gender is "constituting the identity it is purported to be" (33). Importantly, Butler emphasizes that these acts are not freely chosen but occur within a "highly rigid regulatory frame" that constrains what forms of femininity and masculinity are intelligible or desirable (33).

I use Butler's performativity as the organizing theoretical frame for the remainder of the thesis. Butler's argument that identity is constituted through repeated, regulated acts connects directly to norm theory, platform studies, and interpellation. Thus, when I analyse tradwife videos and cooking sequences I will read visual routines, recipe-practices and domestic aesthetics as performative iterations that both reproduce and occasionally contest broader gender norms.

Earlier scholars also emphasized the performative and normative dimensions of gender. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory of identity in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* described social life as a series of performances staged for audiences, while Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman's "Doing Gender" theorized gender as a routine accomplishment produced through everyday practices. These accounts emphasize that gender is not innate but enacted and evaluated within social contexts.

2.2 NORMS, ALGORITHMS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A particularly useful framework for understanding this process is provided with the analysis of social norms by psychologists. Cialdini et al. distinguish between *descriptive* norms, meaning what people actually do, and *injunctive* norms, characterized as "the perception of what most people approve or disapprove (or the norms of ought)" (203). Both forms of norms guide behavior implicitly, through individuals' internalized desires for belonging, and explicitly, through sanctions and rewards (McDonald and Crandal 148-149). They note that norm conformity is especially powerful when behaviors are observable, such as public acts of eating or performing gender roles (149-150). Furthermore, norm change can occur when high-status individuals model alternative practices, shifting group expectations (150-51). Crucially, individuals often underestimate how much their choices reflect norms rather than personal preference, making conformity appear voluntary when it is socially driven (151). This framework highlights how deeply norms structure practices around food, family roles, and gender expectations, which are all practices that are increasingly mediated by digital platforms.

Bucher's concept of algorithmic power explains how platform algorithms determine which performances gain visibility. I will draw on this to highlight how tradwife videos are not only personal expressions but also products shaped by recommendation systems that privilege certain aesthetics and narratives.

Social media increasingly mediates visible performances of gender, particularly for platform users on Instagram and TikTok in the Global North, but these digital performances interact with long-standing everyday practices rather than replace them. In my analysis I treat social media as an amplifier and archive. It heightens visibility, encourages aesthetic labor, and archives enactments of femininity that can be repurposed, circulated, and normatively enforced.

Gender norms are now performed and communicated primarily through social media. Danah boyd conceptualizes social media as “networked publics” where identity is managed in contexts of heightened visibility and audience surveillance (31-33). In these environments, gender performance becomes inseparable from digital affordances such as images, hashtags, and algorithmic amplification.

For women, online platforms intensify pressures to enact normative femininity. Katrin Tiidenberg’s study of selfies shows that these images are simultaneously acts of agency and conformity, empowering in their self-expression while also reproducing narrow beauty standards (64-68). Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad’s analyses of postfeminist media culture (see Evans 2-5) highlight how femininity online often appears as a bodily property, measured through visibility, self-surveillance, and desirability. Evans stresses this as a “postfeminist sensibility” shaped by neoliberal ideals of choice and self-regulation and producing cycles of constant monitoring and self-adjustment (12-14).

Algorithmic structures further shape what kinds of femininity gain traction. As Taina Bucher argues, platforms incentivize content that is aesthetically pleasing, emotionally resonant, and morally legible, while suppressing content that falls outside these parameters (40-62).

2.3 DIGITAL DOMESTICITY AND FEMINIZED LABOUR

Performance on social media is always also connected to labor. The intersection of gender performance and digital labor is especially evident in the articulation of domesticity online. Karen Petersson McIntyre introduces the concept of the “digital Mrs. Consumer,” a persona that transforms domestic labor into aspirational, brandable content (6). In this model, cooking, cleaning, and homemaking are reframed not merely as chores but as stylized performances of femininity that can be monetized through influencer culture. Yet McIntyre cautions that these performances often reproduce

narrow ideals. The platform algorithms favor white, middle-class, heterosexual representations, limiting the diversity of women who succeed as digital domestic figures (7). Thus, while domestic labor becomes visible and lucrative, it remains tightly scripted within hegemonic femininity.

Similar dynamics appear in the figure of the “Mumpreneur.” Nel, Maritz, and Thongprovati describe how mothers in feminized sectors such as food, wellness, and childcare combine caregiving with entrepreneurship, motivated by desires for flexibility and self-fulfillment (7). While Mumpreneurship allows women to inhabit dual roles, it often reproduces structural inequalities. Lacking institutional support, these women depend on unpaid family labor which reinforces the devaluation of care work (14). Like McIntyre’s influencers, Mumpreneurs transform domestic and maternal practices into commerce but rarely disrupt the systemic marginalization of feminized labor.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity offers a critical framework for analyzing these dynamics. Because gender identity is established through repeated acts within regulatory frames, digital performances of femininity, whether through selfies, influencer branding, or Mumpreneurship, are reiterations of normative ideals. Butler emphasizes what appears to be voluntary expression is often a reiteration of norms embedded in culture and reinforced through audience recognition (33).

Lockford extends Butler’s insights within performance studies, showing how femininity is enacted through bodily gestures, dress, and settings (5-7). This framework is especially relevant for analyzing visual performances on Instagram, where carefully curated domestic spaces and embodied practices communicate coherent ideals of womanhood (28-29).

In sum, this chapter demonstrates how gender is not a fixed identity but a performative process shaped by social norms, digital infrastructures, and economic incentives. Drawing on Butler’s theory of performativity, it shows that gendered identities are sustained through repeated, regulated acts that gain meaning only within cultural and technological frames. Social norms and algorithmic systems work together to reward particular performances, making conformity appear voluntary while quietly enforcing ideals of femininity tied to beauty, discipline, and choice. At the same time, the monetization of domestic practices, through influencer culture or “Mumpreneur” models, turns everyday care and homemaking into visible, branded labor, while privileging white, middle-class representations. Across these contexts, digital platforms

operate as amplifiers and regulators, ensuring that acts of self-expression remain bound to the very norms they might seem to transcend.

3 THE TRADWIFE PHENOMENON

The figure of the tradwife embodies these tensions. The tradwife, short for “traditional wife”, has emerged as a complex, polarizing symbol of contemporary debates over gender roles, femininity, and power in digital culture. Often characterized by a visual aesthetic that evokes the 1950s housewife, the tradwife movement invites women to embrace homemaking, submission to male partners, and a return to ‘traditional’ values. But beneath its seemingly domestic surface exists a complex network of political, racial, and emotional forces that scholars are only starting to explore. This chapter synthesizes current scholarship on tradwives.

While the term tradwife entered broader public discourse in 2020 and spiked in search interest by 2024, definitions remain inconsistent across media and academia (Stotzer and Nelson 1). Sabrina Simpson describes tradwives as “female digital influencers [...] branding their identities around homemaking, modesty, Christian faith, and heteronormative family life,” but also notes that individual expressions vary widely (10). Eviane Leidig, in her examination of social media influencers associated with the far right, defines tradwives as part of a broader constellation of women participating in digital radicalization by deploying gendered tropes to rebrand reactionary ideology (83).

Scholars caution against treating tradwives as a fixed or uniform category, instead situating them within a constellation of overlapping identities, including stay-at-home mothers, Christian homemakers, and homesteaders, distinguished by ideological framing, aesthetic performance, and online visibility as well as shared beliefs, including modesty, anti-feminism, religious traditionalism, and anti-modern sentiment (Sykes and Hopner). As Rebecca L. Stotzer and Ashley Nelson put it, “definitions of tradwife vary [...] and important distinctions are often obscured” (2). Some women identify explicitly as tradwives, while others, like influencer Hannah Neeleman, are ascribed the label due to their aesthetic and values despite rejecting the term themselves (Stotzer and Nelson 3). This definitional fluidity highlights the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches.

3.1 TRADWIVES AND IDEOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

While not all tradwives are affiliated with extremist ideologies, multiple scholars document strong intersections between tradwife culture and right-wing, white nationalist, and fascist movements. Leidig situates the tradwife within a wider ecosystem of digital far-right influencers, emphasizing how femininity is used to soften and legitimize radical views. Influencers like Ayla Stewart, known as Wife with a Purpose, use their identity as homemakers to shield racial and religious extremism from critique (Leidig 88-91).

Ashley A. Mattheis offers one of the most forceful analyses of this dynamic, arguing that tradwife culture "launders" white supremacist and neo-fascist ideologies through gendered discourse. She shows how the seemingly benign promotion of homemaking, submission, and family values "acts as a bridge between normative, extreme white supremacist, and neo-fascist cultures" (Mattheis 92). This is particularly evident in online spaces such as Reddit's #TradWife and Red Pill forums, where domestic femininity becomes a tool for rehabilitating white patriarchal dominance under the guise of empowerment (Mattheis 94).

However, scholars like Devin Proctor caution against painting all tradwives with the same ideological brush. She emphasizes the affective and aspirational dimensions of the movement, arguing that the tradwife persona performs "radicalized domesticity" by blending aesthetics, motherhood, and nationalism (Proctor 9-11). Tradwives, in this sense, do not always promote overt hate but can nonetheless become part of the "soft infrastructure" of far-right radicalization (Leidig 93).

Central to tradwife ideology is the promotion of gender complementarity with men providing and women nurturing. This ethos is underpinned by essentialist ideas of femininity and masculinity as biologically and psychologically predetermined. Mattheis describes how tradwives frame gender roles as "natural," "universal," and divinely ordained, reinforcing white, heterosexual, and patriarchal values (Mattheis 93-95).

While tradwife content on Instagram often idealizes 1950s domesticity as a golden age of gender clarity and marital harmony, historical critiques from that very era challenge the romanticized narrative. Betty Friedan's seminal work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) interrogates what she famously termed "the problem that has no name". She analyzed the widespread dissatisfaction of midcentury American housewives trapped

in roles of domestic servitude and emotional confinement. Far from being the site of feminine fulfillment, the suburban home became, for many women, a space of quiet desperation. As Friedan writes, “It is easy to see the concrete details that trap the suburban housewife, but difficult to grasp the immensity of her problem. It is not an individual problem but a social one rooted in the institutions and cultural patterns of society” (Friedan 31).

Friedan’s analysis undermines the tradwife fantasy of a universally content 1950s womanhood by documenting the psychological and emotional toll of enforced domesticity. The “feminine mystique”, i.e. the idea that women could find complete identity and meaning only through marriage, motherhood, and homemaking, was, she argues, a cultural construction designed to maintain patriarchal stability. Friedan’s account reveals that this ideal was never universally experienced as liberating or joyful, but was, for many women, deeply alienating.

In this light, the performative return to 1950s norms on Instagram becomes less a revival of a lost utopia than a re-enactment of a myth, a gendered fantasy that masks the historical reality of dissatisfaction, constraint, and the systemic devaluation of women’s autonomy.

Importantly, many tradwives claim to embrace these roles by choice, not coercion. This emphasis on agency reflects what Gill has called “postfeminist sensibility,” wherein traditional roles are reframed as empowering lifestyle choices. Simpson’s interviews confirm this narrative, with many participants describing their adoption of tradlife as a “liberation” from modern pressures (Simpson 47). Similarly, Stotzer and Nelson found that many women named exhaustion with career and domestic obligations as their reason for turning to the tradwife lifestyle (Stotzer and Nelson 2).

Yet this “freedom to submit” is contested. Jilly Kay critiques femosphere communities, the online, female-centric communities which mirror those of the manosphere and which include tradwives, for promoting “reactionary feminism”, which is essentially a worldview that re-signifies submission and patriarchy as protective rather than oppressive. Tradwives, in this view, “disavow collective action” in favor of individualized solutions that reinforce, rather than challenge, structural inequality (Kay 14-15).

Although some tradwives are women of color, the dominant tradwife aesthetic and ideological frame is undeniably racialized. As Mattheis argues, the cultural script of the

tradwife is "epistemologically white," built on historical tropes of white female virtue, fragility, and domesticity (Mattheis 91). Even when Black or Latina women adopt the tradwife label, they often align themselves with notions of "Biblical womanhood" that are implicitly coded as white (Stotzer and Nelson 7).

Mattheis traces this racialized ideal back to 19th-century maternalist policies and eugenics programs that promoted white women as cultural reproducers of the nation. Contemporary tradwife culture draws on this legacy to frame the home as a site of moral and racial purity (Mattheis 95-97). Influencers often elevate white-coded aesthetics, such as vintage or cottagecore-style dresses, light/farmhouse kitchens, pastoral interiors, and blond figures, as aspirational and universal ideals and thereby subtly reinforcing white normativity (Sobande; Mercado).

Lane and Vaughan add that even the soft-filtered, pastel-colored imagery of tradwife TikToks reflects an "aesthetic politics of whiteness" that excludes other forms of femininity (Lane and Vaughan 36-40). Although race is rarely discussed explicitly, it is visually and structurally central to the construction of the tradwife as an aspirational subject.

Researching tradwives is not merely a matter of cataloging influencers or online trends. As literature shows, tradwives represent a connection of contemporary anxieties over gender equality, white identity, neoliberal exhaustion, and the fracturing of feminist consensus. Stotzer and Nelson argue that tradwives are not simply regressive but reactive by seeking safety, simplicity, and stability in a chaotic world (13-14). This lifestyle seems to offer a retreat.

Yet this retreat often involves romanticizing systems, in particular patriarchy, whiteness, and nationalism, that generate inequality and risk. As Kay warns, the femosphere's "fatalistic" worldview offers no hope for collective transformation, only individualized coping mechanisms (Kay 14). Studying tradwives thus offers insights into how reactionary politics adapt to a postfeminist, digital age.

Moreover, as Simpson notes, the 2024 U.S. election cycle has already politicized tradwife discourse, drawing these influencers into broader culture war narratives (Simpson 60). Tradwives do not merely reflect ideological shifts, but rather they participate in shaping them.

Roxana Muenster and Margaret Foster provide a critical look at the “tradwife” phenomenon. Based on text and audiovisual analyses of social media content, they reveal that many tradwives conceal their entrepreneurial labor, instead emphasizing religiosity, submission, and homemaking (3). However, these same women often profit from sponsorships and merchandise sales, effectively becoming the economic providers they claim to reject.

Nevertheless, the tradwife model stands in stark contrast to Mumpreneurs, who openly integrate business with caregiving. While both groups commercialize femininity, tradwives shroud their labor in nostalgia and spiritual duty, creating a veneer of apolitical domesticity. Muenster and Foster suggest this is a strategic maneuver to maintain brand palatability and avoid alienating conservative audiences (3-4).

3.2 DIGITAL AESTHETICS AND PLATFORM VISIBILITY

While Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling do not focus specifically on social media platforms, their insights on the imaginative geographies of home can be extended to the visual cultures of Instagram. The domestic home in tradwife content is not only lived but curated, edited, and crafted through a careful interplay of lighting, camera angles, soundscapes, and editing rhythms. This aligns with their assertion that “home is always mediated,” shaped by both material arrangements and imaginative forms of self-representation (Blunt and Dowling 10).

Instagram videos use a range of aesthetic and technical strategies, such as slow-motion shots of simmering pots, voiceovers rich in affective tone, soft vintage filters, to interpellate viewers into a gendered, affect-laden world of tradition and comfort (Sykes). Hashtags such as #homemaking, #tradwife, or #wifeduties function as ideological anchors, connecting individual performances to a broader cultural narrative (Sykes and Hopner). These techniques stress how home is not just represented but performed and marketed.

As such, audiovisual strategies are not neutral. They are essential to how domestic femininity is rendered intelligible and desirable to viewers. These performances resonate with Blunt and Dowling’s idea of home as a “multi-scalar” concept, simultaneously intimate and public, lived and idealized (11). In this way, Instagram’s visual economy becomes a site where the politics of home are actively remade.

The rise of the tradwife is inseparable from digital media. Across Instagram, YouTube, and especially TikTok, tradwife content circulates through a highly aestheticized, algorithmically curated ecosystem. Lane and Vaughan describe this as "soft power", meaning a strategy in which submission, homemaking, and gender essentialism are made palatable and shareable through attractive, calming visuals (Lane and Vaughan 14).

This aesthetic sensibility often overlaps with other visual subcultures like cottagecore, clean girl, or slow living. Simpson shows that algorithmic amplification allows tradwife content to reach audiences beyond its initial niche, fostering parasocial bonds between viewers and creators (Simpson 43-45). This affective intimacy plays a crucial role in normalizing the messages of tradwives.

Furthermore, digital platforms reward engagement, which incentivizes tradwives to produce frequent, emotionally resonant content. Leidig highlights how influencers strategically modulate their messages by using motherhood and homemaking to mask their alignment with far-right ideology (Leidig 86). This platform logic blurs the line between lifestyle branding and ideological recruitment.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the tradwife phenomenon is far more than a nostalgic revival of mid-20th-century domestic ideals. It is a multifaceted cultural formation situated at the intersection of gender, race, ideology, and digital media. While tradwives frame their practices as freely chosen embodiments of femininity, homemaking, and submission, scholarship reveals that these performances often function as affective and aesthetic vehicles for rearticulating patriarchal, nationalist, and racialized ideologies in ways that appear benign or even empowering. Importantly, there is a need to approach tradwives not as a fixed category but as a constellation of overlapping identities, discourses, and practices shaped by digital infrastructures. Moreover, the apparent retreat into tradition masks contradictions, such as the entrepreneurial labor that sustains many tradwife influencers and the racialized exclusions embedded within their visual and ideological frameworks. Ultimately, the tradwife movement must be understood as both symptomatic of contemporary anxieties about gender, modernity, and social change, and as an active site where reactionary politics are adapted, aestheticized, and circulated in the digital age. This complexity makes the tradwife a crucial object of study for feminist, cultural, and media scholarship.

4 COOKING AS GENDERED PRACTICE

At the center of tradwife performances often lies the practice of cooking, long recognized as a key site of gendered labor, cultural reproduction, and identity formation. Studies such as Marjorie DeVault's *Feeding the Family*, Carole Counihan's *The Anthropology of Food and the Body*, and Joanne Hollows' work on domestic expertise (2003) establish cooking as a crucial lens for examining how femininity is enacted and idealized. This following section situates tradwife cooking content within broader conversations on gendered domestic labor. It highlights four central categories connected to women and cooking. Those are care and selflessness, duty and morality, tradition and heritage, and competence and authority.

4.1 COOKING AS CARE AND SELFLESSNESS

Cooking, as both a practice and symbol, has long been interwoven with cultural understandings of women's roles in the family and society. Scholarship in sociology, feminist theory, and food studies demonstrates that preparing food is not merely a material task but also constitutes relational and emotional labor that sustains social bonds. In contemporary discourse, especially within online tradwife communities, cooking emerges as an emblem of women's devotion, framed explicitly as care and selflessness. This section reviews the literature on cooking as emotional and relational labor, explores feminist critiques of gendered foodwork, and situates these debates within the growing phenomenon of tradwife narratives that romanticize cooking as a form of nurturing service.

Marjorie DeVault's *Feeding the Family* remains foundational to understanding cooking as care labor. DeVault emphasizes that women's foodwork involves "invisible" planning, anticipating preferences, and mediating between family members' needs—what she terms "thought work" (46). Feeding is not simply providing calories but ensuring that meals satisfy tastes, schedules, and health concerns. This transforms cooking into a relational practice: women's labor constructs family cohesion through attentiveness and care. Yet DeVault also stresses the tensions involved, noting that this work often goes unrecognized and, if withdrawn, may result in women being perceived as uncaring (DeVault 59-62).

Subsequent research extends DeVault's insights. Parsons et al. reframe cooking as "foodcare," emphasizing its character as "love laboring," where women channel affect

and self-sacrifice into meal preparation (Parsons et al. 948). Similarly, Fielding-Singh situates foodwork within the sociology of diet disparities, arguing that women's disproportionate responsibility for feeding underscores systemic inequities (Fielding-Singh 9). These perspectives underscore that cooking has always functioned as an emotionally charged, relationally binding practice.

The concept of emotional labor, developed by Arlie Hochschild, has been applied to foodwork to show how women's efforts in the kitchen are not only physical but affective. DeVault anticipates this by describing the "comfort and struggle" women experience in their kitchens (DeVault, "Comfort" 58). Eva Illouz, in *Cold Intimacies*, elaborates on the broader "emotional economies" that shape intimacy in modern life, demonstrating how acts of care are entangled with power relations and societal expectations (9). Within this framework, cooking can be understood as a performative act of love that reproduces emotional economies in which women are positioned as caregivers.

Feminist food studies scholars further illuminate these dynamics. Arlene Avakian and Barbara Haber analyzed how cooking has historically been framed as women's labor of love. They argue that the "myth of women's selfless devotion" is repeatedly reinforced through cookbooks, media, and cultural scripts (12). Yet they also note the ambivalence of cooking: while often oppressive, it can also offer women a space for creativity and self-expression (22). The tension between obligation and agency characterizes much of the scholarship on foodwork.

Media representations continue to frame women's cooking as care and devotion. Popular cookbooks, for instance, often present recipes not only as instructions but as scripts for relational femininity. As noted by Natalie Jovanovski in *Digesting Femininities*, celebrity cookbooks intertwine motherhood, hedonism, and body discipline, constructing "food femininities" that idealize women as nurturing providers (91). Similarly, lifestyle media depict the kitchen as women's natural domain, where serving others is central to feminine identity. These portrayals reinforce a normative association between cooking and women's selflessness, naturalizing the idea that care through food is a moral expectation.

The growing tradwife movement offers contemporary examples of how cooking is framed as care and selflessness. Alena Kate Pettitt, founder of *The Darling Academy* and well-known tradwife figure, repeatedly describes cooking and meal planning in relational and sacrificial terms. In a 2019 essay, she explained: "Why wouldn't I want

to spoil him? It's time that women faced the fact that it doesn't require being successful, or sexy to win and keep a (happy) man who wants to cherish and provide for you and your babies without complaint - it requires care-taking of him!" (Pettitt). Here, feeding the husband is depicted not as duty but as loving "caretaking." In another guide, Pettitt advises wives to "cook comfort food that will not only heal, but bring smiles to their faces" (Pettitt, "Five Steps to Becoming a Better Housewife"). The act of cooking becomes both restorative and emotionally reparative, echoing DeVault's analysis of foodwork as relationally attentive.

Pettitt also links meal planning directly to the heart of domestic life, declaring, "the kitchen is the heartbeat of the home" (Pettitt, "How to Start Meal Planning: A Housewife's Guide"). Such statements position the kitchen as the symbolic and affective center of family life. Similarly, she describes homemaking as "the never-ending cycle of cooking, cleaning and caring for loved ones" (Pettitt 2025), linking food preparation with unceasing self-giving. Other tradwife voices echo this ethos. Influencer Estee Williams, in a widely cited interview, stated simply: "I serve my husband" (Brown 2024). Her content, like Pettitt's, revolves around preparing from-scratch meals as acts of service and devotion.

Scholarly analyses of the tradwife phenomenon affirm this framing. Proctor notes that Pettitt promotes traditional housewives as "happy to submit to, keep house, and spoil their husbands" (Proctor 71). The language of spoiling and submission condenses the ideal of selfless domesticity, where cooking is recast as both pleasure and proof of love. These discourses illustrate how tradwife narratives revive historical narratives of women's devotion, but in a contemporary register that emphasizes choice, authenticity, and moral fulfillment.

In summary, across feminist scholarship and tradwife discourse alike, cooking emerges as a practice imbued with care, service, and selflessness. DeVault's conceptualization of foodwork as relational labor provides a lens through which both academic and popular narratives can be read. Illouz's theory of emotional economies illuminates the structural dimensions of this care, showing how affect and power intertwine in acts of devotion. Avakian and Haber highlight that representations of cooking often reinforce the myth of women's selfless labor while simultaneously allowing room for agency. The tradwife movement's explicit embrace of cooking as service underscores the persistence and rearticulation of these themes in the digital

age. Cooking thus remains a central, contested site where women's care and selflessness are performed, idealized, and problematized.

4.2 COOKING AS DUTY AND MORALITY

This section examines how cooking is framed explicitly as a moral duty, meaning a normative obligation that carries ethical weight. Building on the previous chapter's analysis of cooking as care and selflessness, the literature discussed here treats duty and moral judgement as the central values through which food practices are evaluated.

Kate Cairns, Josée Johnston, and Norah MacKendrick's ethnographic study of the "organic child" shows how discourse about food purity converts ordinary shopping and meal decisions into moral duties for mothers. Their participants repeatedly described ethical food choices as obligations that extended beyond nutrition to include protecting a child's purity and future (99). In the authors' terms, the "organic child ideal" operates ideologically to produce mothers as individually responsible agents whose purchases and cooking choices are read as moral acts (99-100). Importantly for the duty frame, Cairns et al. demonstrate that mothers do not simply prefer organic foods but rather many experience compulsions and mandates, internalized requirements, to seek out particular foods because failing to do so risks moral censure or self-reproach (111). Where structural constraints, such as time, money, and access, prevent full compliance, mothers report feelings of guilt and anxiety that are explicitly moral in tone. The inability to provide "the right" food is interpreted as failing an ethical responsibility (139, 151-152).

Cairns et al.'s analysis therefore reframes food provisioning as moral labour. It is work that produces ethical meaning and by which women are morally measured. The authors further locate this phenomenon within neoliberal logics that individualize responsibility by turning collective food system problems into private moral obligations that women, especially mothers, are expected to shoulder (169-170). The result is a widespread moral binary. Certain foods and feeding practices become representations for being a morally responsible parent, while other practices mark moral failure.

Other consumption studies substantiate this duty framing. Research on "clean eating" and healthy diets demonstrates that dietary norms often function as moral prescriptions, where self-control, purity, and conscientious shopping are cast as virtues (Bisogni et al.). Collectively, these findings show that cooking and meal provision are

routinely reworked into moral duties, specifically obligations that demand ethical deliberation, sacrifice, and vigilance.

Recent studies of the tradwife movement show how tradwives use ideas about duty and morality to make home cooking increase in value again. Proctor's study of prominent online tradwives maps how the tradwife persona uses public performance to present homemaking as morally salutary and normatively required (7-11). Proctor shows that tradwife content tends to frame domestic acts, for instance preparing daily meals, tending to household routines, and staging domestic aesthetics, as outward expressions of a moral code. These public performances are not merely nostalgic aesthetics. They are claims about what is right and proper for women to do in service of family and social order (Proctor 8-12).

Alena Kate Pettitt's own texts and guides make the duty rhetoric explicit. Meal planning, domestic routines, and from-scratch cooking are represented as obligations that sustain the household and manifest the wife's moral commitments (Pettitt, "How to Start Meal Planning: A Housewife's Guide"). Although proponents often couch these practices as voluntary choices or sources of personal fulfilment, discursive analysis reveals consistent moral vocabulary. Terms such as "duty," "sacrifice," and "devotion" recur across persona statements and community endorsements (Proctor 11-13). Where Cairns et al. document how neoliberal ethical consumption individualizes responsibility, tradwife discourse recasts domestic duty in moral and sometimes quasi-religious terms. Cooking is not simply responsible consumerism but an ethical enactment that upholds a particular moral order.

Proctor also observes that tradwife performances frequently deploy public visibility, through photographs, recipes, and routines presented on blogs and social platforms, as a way of broadcasting moral alignment (Proctor 20-22). This visibility matters. Staged cooking and meal displays function as moral testimony, readable by followers and critics as evidence of adherence to the movement's values. In short, cooking becomes both duty fulfilled and proof of moral character within tradwife networks.

Another common point in research is that social pressure plays an important role in enforcing cooking responsibilities. Cairns et al. document how social expectations create a moral environment in which mothers anticipate judgement and internalize standards for ethical feeding (152-156). In a similar way, tradwife communities create both explicit and subtle rules that impose certain moral expectations about domestic

cooking. Members and influencers reward visible conformity through praise, likes, and affirmation, and implicitly censure deviation, which functions as social policing of moral duty (Proctor 14-16).

This dynamic produces two effects. Firstly, it intensifies the subjective sense of obligation. Individuals feel morally compelled to conform even when they might personally reject the underlying ideology. Secondly, it increases moral anxiety. Public exposure of domestic practices increases the stakes of every food choice, turning ordinary cooking into a site of moral risk. Where Cairns et al. observed guilt when economic constraints prevented idealized feeding (151-156), tradwife publics can intensify such guilt by converting domestic deviations into signifiers of moral decline or inauthenticity (Proctor 15-17).

In conclusion, research on ethical food discourse and on tradwife publics together show that cooking operates in the contemporary moral imagination as more than an act of provision. It is an enforceable duty and a moral performance. Cairns et al. detail how neoliberalized ethical consumption places an individualized moral burden on mothers (99-100, 169-170), while Proctor and empirical analyses of tradwife content demonstrate how those burdens can be rearticulated into normative moral projects that valorize domestic cooking as ethical obligation (Proctor 7-13). Both make clear that food practices are central terrains for the public negotiation of moral norms about gender and family life.

4.3 COOKING AS TRADITION AND HERITAGE

Cooking has long been implicated in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage. Food is not only sustenance but also memory, identity, and social continuity, carried across generations through women's domestic labor. This chapter reviews scholarship that situates culinary practice within broader frameworks of tradition and heritage. It examines how women have historically been cast as guardians of cultural continuity through food, and how intergenerational transmission and nostalgia reinforce this role. Finally, the chapter considers how these ideas reappear in contemporary tradwife aesthetics, where cooking as heritage is mobilized to affirm women's roles as cultural and moral anchors.

Anthropological and sociological scholarship consistently identifies women as primary transmitters of culinary knowledge. Carole Counihan's *The Anthropology of Food and*

Body demonstrates how food preparation structures kinship relations and situates women as key custodians of cultural practice. Counihan argues that “women are responsible for the continuity of culture by cooking the same dishes in the same way” (Counihan 51). This emphasis on reproduction of culinary knowledge positions foodwork as a form of heritage-making, in which women’s labor ensures cultural persistence across generations.

Psycho-social research reinforces this idea by showing that recipes, techniques, and food rituals serve as mechanisms of intergenerational transmission. Janet Theophano’s *Eat My Words* traces how women’s handwritten cookbooks act as repositories of family history and identity, rendering cooking a form of embodied archive. The cookbook, often passed from mother to daughter, becomes both practical guide and symbolic inheritance. In this sense, cooking functions not merely as nourishment but as a heritage practice, whereby women enact cultural continuity through embodied skills.

Scholars have highlighted the role of nostalgia in attaching meaning to cooking as heritage. Williams-Forson, in *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*, examines how African American women’s cooking traditions operate as cultural memory, preserving histories of oppression, resilience, and community. Food preparation, in this account, materializes the past in the present, transforming everyday labor into a site of memory work. Similarly, David Sutton emphasizes how food is central to mnemonic practices by declaring that “food is one of the most tangible ways in which the past is incorporated into the present” (23).

This nostalgic dimension is often gendered, as women are positioned as stewards of “authentic” tradition. Research on immigrant communities underscores how women’s kitchens serve as spaces of cultural preservation, where inherited recipes mark continuity with a homeland (Avakian and Haber 65). The labor of cooking thus acquires symbolic weight, transforming routine domestic tasks into acts of cultural endurance. Yet nostalgia also risks idealizing women’s unpaid labor, obscuring the inequalities underpinning heritage transmission.

Eric Hobsbawm’s theory of “invented tradition” is crucial for understanding how culinary heritage is often less a faithful transmission of the past than a performative construction of continuity. Invented traditions, according to Hobsbawm, are practices that claim antiquity but are, in fact, relatively recent fabrications designed to reinforce social

norms (Hobsbawm 1). Food studies scholars have applied this concept to examine how dishes presented as “traditional” are frequently modern codifications (Trubek 43).

In gendered contexts, this invention is frequently assigned to women. Their cooking is imagined as timeless, natural, and continuous, even when practices are adapted or newly created. For example, paratextual materials in cookbooks often construct recipes as heirlooms, attributing authenticity to the female cook while masking the historical contingencies of the dish (Neuhaus 117). The very act of “passing down recipes” becomes a performative heritage practice, where women are framed as conduits of authenticity, whether such continuity exists in practice or not.

The tradwife movement provides a striking contemporary case where cooking is explicitly framed as heritage. Alena Kate Pettitt explicitly casts cooking as cultural transmission. In her guides, she emphasizes “traditional meals” and “family recipes” as ways of preserving heritage, while simultaneously positioning these practices as proof of feminine devotion (Pettitt, “How to Start Meal Planning: A Housewife’s Guide”). This conflation of heritage and care aligns with Counihan’s earlier observation that women are seen as transmitters of culture through food.

Tradwife discourse also foregrounds the performative nature of heritage. Influencers curate domestic aesthetics, through floral aprons, heirloom cookware, and farmhouse kitchens, that signal authenticity and tradition. These performances echo Hobsbawm’s notion of invented tradition. What is presented as timeless heritage is, in practice, a carefully constructed aesthetic designed for digital circulation. Yet, within tradwife communities, such performances are framed as authentic continuities, naturalizing women’s responsibility for cultural preservation through cooking.

In sum, across these literatures, a recurring theme is the identity-forming function of culinary heritage. Cooking does not merely preserve tradition but it also positions women as bearers of cultural continuity. As scholars in feminist food studies note, this role can be both empowering and constraining. On one hand, the act of preserving recipes and rituals can provide women with a sense of agency and belonging. On the other, it reinforces gendered divisions of labor by naturalizing women’s association with domestic and cultural reproduction (Avakian and Haber 18).

The literature reviewed here demonstrates that cooking as tradition and heritage is a deeply gendered practice. From Counihan’s ethnographies of women as cultural

transmitters to Williams-Forsion's analysis of food as memory, scholars consistently highlight how culinary labor sustains cultural continuity. Nostalgia and intergenerational transmission instill symbolic meaning in cooking, while Hobsbawm's concept of invented tradition reveals how these continuities are often performatively constructed.

Tradwife communities exemplify how these themes converge in contemporary culture. Women are positioned as guardians of heritage, their cooking framed as both authentic tradition and proof of devotion. In such contexts, culinary heritage functions as a performative practice of identity formation, binding women to roles of cultural preservation while simultaneously offering them recognition and community. Cooking as tradition and heritage, therefore, is not only about what is eaten but about who women are imagined to be in relation to culture and the family.

4.4 COOKING AS COMPETENCE AND AUTHORITY

Cooking has historically been framed as not only a task of care or duty, but also a performance of competence that conveys authority. In feminist food studies, competence in domestic cooking encompasses technical proficiency, efficiency, and the ability to instruct others. Authority, in turn, is relational and symbolic. It is constructed through the capacity to manage domestic life, to teach culinary skills, and to curate aesthetic presentations of food that command recognition. This chapter reviews scholarship on domestic expertise, pedagogy, and visual media to show how competence and authority are interwoven in cultural representations of women's cooking. This section focuses on skill and instructional authority, showing how they underpin women's positions in both family and public culture. Tradwife discourses, where culinary expertise is central to women's influence, exemplify the continuing entanglement of competence and authority in domestic life.

The conceptualization of cooking as a site of competence has been shaped by feminist analyses of domestic expertise. Joanne Hollows emphasizes that cooking, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, was constructed as a gendered skill that women were expected to master (182). This expertise was never neutral. Instead, women's culinary knowledge was presented as both naturalized and necessary, embedding authority within the gendered division of labor. Hollows shows how women's magazines, cookbooks, and television programs framed "good cooking" as a marker of feminine capability, thereby producing a domestic authority that was simultaneously valorized and constrained.

This framing resonates with Marjorie DeVault's analysis of "thought work" in *Feeding the Family*, where she argues that women's authority derives from their capacity to anticipate, plan, and provide for the household (DeVault 46). Here, competence exceeds the notion of practical skill and includes the relational expertise of managing preferences, negotiating constraints, and ensuring the family's satisfaction. DeVault highlights that this expertise, while often unacknowledged, grants women a form of domestic authority that can be wielded subtly within family life (62). The overlap of skill and relational competence demonstrates that authority in cooking is both technical and social.

Scholars of pedagogy also underline this dynamic. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's work on consumption notes that domestic practices require knowledge transmission, often from mother to daughter, whereby authority is reproduced intergenerationally (85). Instruction in cooking becomes a pedagogical act, embedding women's authority in the capacity to teach and discipline through foodwork. Competence here is not only about mastery but also about sustaining authority across generations.

Authority in cooking is further constructed through pedagogical practices, whether in the home or mediated through print and digital culture. Instructional forms such as cookbooks, television shows, and online tutorials position the female cook as an expert figure whose authority rests on her ability to communicate competence. As Jessamyn Neuhaus demonstrates in her history of American cookbooks, these texts frequently cast women as both learners and teachers, embodying a dual role in which acquiring competence grants authority over others (117). Cookbooks, therefore, serve as technologies of instruction that reinforce the association between femininity and authoritative domestic expertise.

The pedagogical authority of cooking is not limited to written forms. Television cooking programs, as Hollows notes, reframe women's domestic expertise for public consumption, with figures like Delia Smith embodying an authoritative style that is simultaneously approachable and instructional (Hollows 185). The viewer's authority is intensified by making them both expert and companion, thereby inviting viewers into a pedagogical relationship based on trust and recognition. This instructional and affective authority illustrates how competence in cooking translates into cultural authority.

Digital culture has expanded these dynamics. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube transform competence into visible performance, where step-by-step tutorials, recipe demonstrations, and carefully staged food photography serve as pedagogical tools. Authority is not merely claimed but continually affirmed through audience engagement, likes, and shares.

Competence in cooking has often been measured not only by technical skill but also by efficiency and presentation. The postwar ideal of the “efficient housewife,” as analyzed by Ruth Schwartz Cowan, linked authority to the mastery of time-saving practices and rationalized household management (197). Efficiency became a benchmark of competence, with women’s authority contingent on their ability to manage domestic labor productively. This rationalization framed cooking as both technical and managerial work, where authority derived from demonstrating order and control.

At the same time, aesthetic presentation has been central to the construction of feminine authority. Aestheticized domesticity functions as proof of competence, reinforcing the idea that authority requires not only skill but also beauty and style. In this sense, authority is both performative and visual as it is achieved through the successful staging of domestic expertise for an audience.

Scholars of media have noted that such aesthetic authority is historically rooted. Neuhaus shows how cookbooks often framed recipes within idealized images of meals, presenting not only instructions but also aspirational models of domestic achievement (122). These images encoded authority by suggesting that women who could replicate such meals embodied competence and, by extension, domestic authority. Aestheticized domesticity, whether in mid-century cookbooks or 21st-century Instagram posts, remains a key mode through which competence is made authoritative.

The contemporary tradwife movement illustrates how competence in cooking is mobilized as a source of authority within domestic life and online culture. Tradwife influencers, such as Alena Kate Pettitt, explicitly frame culinary expertise as central to women’s domestic authority. Pettitt’s guides on meal planning and homemaking emphasize not only care and devotion but also efficiency, planning, and skill, positioning the tradwife as an expert household manager (Pettitt, “How to Start Meal Planning: A Housewife’s Guide”). Her discourse repeatedly stresses that competence

in cooking enables a woman to maintain order, provide nourishment, and guide her family, thereby granting her authority within the home.

Proctor's analysis of tradwife communities highlights this dynamic, showing how online performances of domesticity hinge on the visible display of competence (10). Influencers' recipes, routines, and curated kitchens become public demonstrations of authority, staging expertise for followers who seek instruction and inspiration. Competence, in this context, is inseparable from authority. The skilled tradwife gains legitimacy by modeling practices that others can mimic. This pedagogical authority echoes Neuhaus's observation about cookbooks but is amplified in digital spaces through interactive visibility.

The tradwife discourse also illustrates how aesthetic presentation reinforces competence. Pettitt and other influencers often frame their cooking in terms of beauty and tradition, staging meals in ways that connote authenticity and elegance. Authority here is aesthetic as much as practical. The tradwife's competence is validated by her ability to produce food that is both nourishing and visually appealing.

In summary, scholarship on domestic expertise, pedagogy, and media demonstrates that competence and authority are deeply entangled in cultural constructions of women's cooking. It is clear that women's authority in cooking derives not only from relational care but also from technical skill, efficiency, and the capacity to instruct others. DeVault's notion of relational authority complements this by showing how competence is exercised within family dynamics, while pedagogical forms such as cookbooks and tutorials extend that authority into public culture. Tradwife discourse illustrates the persistence of these dynamics since women's authority is asserted through competence in planning, efficiency, and aesthetic presentation, while visibility on digital platforms transforms domestic expertise into public authority. Cooking thus remains a site where feminine competence is both cultivated and displayed, with authority emerging not only from care but also from mastery and instruction.

5 INTERPELLATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The third research question of this project focuses on how viewers are interpellated by the audiovisual strategies of tradwife videos. Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, introduced in his 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," describes how individuals are "hailed" by ideology and thereby

positioned as subjects within social structures (Althusser 174). This “hail” functions as a form of direct address that calls individuals to recognize themselves in specific roles or identities, such as “mother,” “consumer,” or “citizen.” Althusser’s theory provides a foundational framework for analyzing how media texts use language and imagery to position audiences within ideological frameworks.

Building on Althusser, Stuart Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding” model elaborates on how media messages encode particular ideological meanings designed to hail audiences into preferred subject positions, while allowing for varied audience responses (137-138). Similarly, John Fiske highlights how visual and narrative conventions in media, such as television, actively interpellate viewers by inviting identification with certain roles and values, making ideological positioning both visible and affective (46-48). These perspectives underscore that language and visuals are not neutral but work together to enact ideological “calls” that shape subjectivity.

Feminist and postcolonial theorists extend these ideas by emphasizing the differential and contested nature of interpellation. Judith Butler reconceives interpellation as a performative process, where subjects are not passively hailed but continuously enact and negotiate identity categories (30-32). Bell hooks critiques dominant interpellations by revealing how race, gender, and class influence how subjects are hailed or excluded by media representations (54-56). Homi Bhabha further complicates interpellation by showing how colonial discourse produces ambivalent subject positions that can be subverted or reinterpreted (67-69). These critiques stress that language and images do not call all viewers uniformly, but rather position them in complex, sometimes conflicting ways.

In the context of social media, scholars argue that platforms and content create new modes of interpellation that blend language, affect, and algorithmic mediation. Christian Fuchs describes social media as ideological apparatuses where users are hailed into consumer-subject roles through participatory culture and targeted content (89-91). Zizi Papacharissi introduces the concept of “affective publics,” arguing that social media hails users emotionally by shaping identities through shared sentiments and networked interaction (48-50). Taina Bucher’s “algorithmic imaginary” explains how platform algorithms anticipate users’ desires, reinforcing subject positions by delivering content that aligns with their identity and preferences (112-115). Together,

these studies reveal that interpellation on social media is multimodal, combining language, visuals, emotion, and interaction to form and sustain identities.

Finally, research on influencer culture by Alice E. Marwick and Crystal Abidin highlights how direct calls-to-action and personalized storytelling serve as explicit interpellation strategies. Marwick shows how influencers craft aspirational identities that hail followers into specific lifestyle communities, inviting them to participate both ideologically and socially (79-81). Abidin focuses on parasocial relationships, where followers recognize themselves in influencer personas and enact identity work through fan interaction, further deepening interpellation (95-97). These insights underscore the role of interactive language, such as commenting requests, in converting passive viewers into active, ideologically aligned subjects.

In sum, this chapter demonstrates that language and visuals in social media posts do more than communicate information. They function as strategic interpellative devices that position viewers within particular ideological identities, often through a combination of direct address, affective engagement, visual symbolism, and interactive participation. This framework provides the tools necessary to analyze how Instagram posts hail viewers as subjects aligned with specific cultural values and community memberships.

6 RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA, AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design, data collection, and analytical strategies used to explore how Instagram content producers identifying or identified as tradwives convey gendered ideals through cooking videos. It employs a multimodal discourse analytical framework grounded in feminist media theory to investigate the aesthetic, discursive, and performative strategies these creators use to communicate traditional norms of femininity and domesticity. The cooking videos are understood as complex cultural texts through which meanings regarding gender, care, and identity are actively produced and circulated.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the implicit norms and ideals of femininity and gender identity conveyed by content producers identifying and identified as tradwives in Instagram videos about cooking?

2. What are the concrete audio-visual strategies used to perform these norms and ideals to viewers, e.g. in the interplay of text and image, the use of hashtags and editing techniques?
3. How are viewers interpellated by these strategies?

Research Design

This project adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design that combines multimodal discourse analysis with theoretical insights from feminist media studies and visual semiotics. Central to this approach is Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which conceptualizes gender as a repeated, stylized practice, and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's framework for visual grammar, which enables close analysis of image composition and meaning-making.

Instagram, as a platform grounded in visual storytelling and algorithmic visibility, provides a fertile site to examine how traditional gender roles are not only represented but aesthetically enhanced and emotionally charged through digital media. Cooking videos are selected for their relevance to discourses of care, affective labor, and maternal domesticity, which are domains that have long served as symbols of idealized femininity.

Data Collection and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to assemble a dataset of Instagram cooking videos associated with the tradwife aesthetic. Initial sampling was conducted using Instagram's hashtag search with the tags #tradwife, #traditionalwife, #tradwives, #homemaker, and #sahm, which means stay-at-home mom/mother. These hashtags index a broad constellation of content creators and discourses centered on traditional femininity, maternal care, and domestic life.

In addition to hashtag sampling, Instagram's Explore page was monitored over several weeks to capture algorithmically prioritized content. This ensured that the sample included not only self-selected creators but also creators whose content was actively circulated to broader audiences via algorithmic curation.

To narrow the selection down, accounts have been selected based on the following criteria. The creators must be mothers whose primary residence and center of life was the United States during the chosen timeframe. Their content should predominantly focus on cooking, with cooking videos actively posted within the specified period. Each

account must have a minimum of 400,000 followers. Additionally, the creators should either self-identify as tradwives with evidence being the use of hashtags such as #tradwife, #traditionalwife, #homemaker, and #homemaking and/or not reject the tradwife label¹.

As a result, the dataset consists of Instagram videos from these four tradwives:

- Alexia Delarosa (@lex.delarosa)
- Gretchen Adler (@gretchy)
- Hannah Neeleman (@ballerinafarm)
- Nara Smith (@naraaziza)

The video selection for this study consists of content posted in the timeframe between November 5, 2024, the day Donald Trump was re-elected as President of the United States, and January 20, 2025, the date of his second inauguration. This period was marked by heightened political discourse, including conversations around Trump's potential influence on American society and the controversial Project 2025 policy initiative. Additionally, this timeframe encompasses major U.S. holidays, namely Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. These occasions are traditionally associated with increased home cooking and related online content. During this period, a total of 68 cooking videos, which form the corpus for this present study, were posted by the selected creators: Alexia Delarosa (25), Gretchen Adler (18), Hannah Neeleman (10), and Nara Smith (15).

In the following paragraphs each woman is introduced shortly starting with their Instagram profile picture. It should be noted here that all content analyzed in this study is publicly accessible and produced by creators operating in the public domain and only personal information that is relevant for this study and publicly available is included.

¹ For each creators' stance on the tradwife label see:

Alexia Delarosa: <https://www.instagram.com/lex.delarosa/reel/C5WuW2Er3Dv/?hl=de> (published 5 April 2024)

Gretchen Adler: <https://nypost.com/2024/09/07/us-news/im-a-trad-wife-heres-why-a-lot-of-women-just-want-to-take-back-their-homes/> (published 7 Sept. 2024)

Hannah Neeleman: <https://www.thetimes.com/magazines/the-sunday-times-magazine/article/meet-the-queen-of-the-trad-wives-and-her-eight-children-plfr50cgk> (published July 20, 2024).

Nara Smith: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a61867224/nara-aziza-smith-tiktok-cooking-motherhood-interview-2024/> (published 22 Aug. 2024)



Alexia Delarosa is a 32-year-old digital content creator and stay-at-home mother based in San Diego, California. She gained prominence by sharing her domestic lifestyle, motherhood journey, and baking content on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where she has amassed over 600,000 followers. Previously a professional baker running a made-to-order bakery, Delarosa transitioned to full-time content creation, producing videos that feature home-cooked meals, child-rearing routines, and glimpses into her family life with her two sons as well as their pets (Delarosa, “About”). Her aesthetic, which is marked by serene, vintage-inspired visuals and a softly spoken, almost theatrical homemaker persona, has drawn both admiration and critique, with some online discussions questioning whether her presentation is earnest or a satirical commentary on traditional femininity (Madigan).



Gretchen Adler is a 38-year-old social media influencer and modern homemaking advocate, often described as a “tradwife 2.0,” who blends traditional domestic roles with contemporary empowerment and education (Papadatos). Based in Southern California and raised on an Ohio farm, Adler holds an entrepreneurship degree from Babson College and began sharing her journey toward wholesome, from-scratch cooking after having children, focusing on optimal family nutrition. Her content, which features viral recipes like homemade Goldfish crackers and ancestral-diet techniques, has garnered more than 500,000 followers across TikTok and Instagram (Court). She monetizes her expertise through masterclasses and subscriber-only recipes, while receiving mainstream attention, including a parody on *Saturday Night Live*, which she has embraced as a humorous nod to her influence (Byrne).



Hannah Neeleman is a 35-year-old former Juilliard-trained ballerina turned social-media entrepreneur based in Utah. She and her husband, Daniel Neeleman, manage Ballerina Farm, a 328-acre homestead where they raise eight children and operate an online business selling meat, baked goods, and artisanal home products (Clark; Ballerinafarm). With over 17 million followers across Instagram and TikTok, her content centers on traditional homemaking practices, including homemade meals, milking cows, and vintage farm aesthetics. A viral July 2024 *Sunday Times* profile raised concerns over the toll of her exhausting routine, including full-time homemaking and homeschooling without hired childcare, prompting debate about the romanticization of her lifestyle (Brown; Garfinkle). In response to misrepresentation, Neeleman launched a Substack newsletter, *The Goose Gazette*, featuring farm reflections and recipes, signaling a shift from curated image to personal narrative control (Vanderhoof).



Nara Smith is a 23-year-old South African-German former model and social media influencer based in the United States. After launching her modeling career at age 14 and signing with IMG Models (McCall), she transitioned to content creation, focusing on homemade cooking videos presented in a glamorous, softly narrated ASMR style, often filmed alongside her husband, Lucky Blue Smith, and their young children (Jones). With millions of followers across TikTok and Instagram, Smith is frequently associated with the tradwife aesthetic. After experiencing severe eczema and a lupus diagnosis following her second pregnancy, Smith adopted a scratch-made, whole-foods cooking approach that became central to her content (Aizin). In 2025, she was ranked #50 on Forbes' "Top Creators" list for her blend of entrepreneurial influence, vintage domesticity, and high-end brand partnerships (Hasan and York). She and her family have visited Ballerina Farm, i.e. Hannah Neeleman and her family, twice. Both

visits have been shared online and underscore her growing cultural presence within the wave of digitally mediated homemaking and maternal identity narratives (Lyttle).

From each account, the four most-viewed videos in this timeframe have been selected for in-depth analysis, resulting in a focused sample of 16 videos. The numbers of views have been chosen as the selection criteria since these numbers are accessible, with some content creators opting out of having likes seen by others, and because they are not as susceptible to online trolling as comments might be.

The chosen videos were then collected and saved manually via Instagram's internal bookmarking tools and subsequently downloaded to preserve data integrity. Each video is accompanied by systematic documentation of metadata using an Excel spreadsheet. Metadata fields include:

- Creator
- Date of posting
- Length of video
- Thematic categorization of video content
- Setting
- Audio
- Participants
- Number of views (as of 8th July 2025)
- Caption
- On-screen text

Analytical Method

To analyze the selected videos, I first carried out a thematic coding of narrations, captions, and on-screen texts to identify recurrent patterns of meaning. Second, the visual material was examined through Kress and van Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar (2006). Third, these strands were synthesized intermodally and refined in dialogue with existing literature. This procedure resulted in four analytical categories that structure both part of the literature review and the empirical analysis.

Thematic Analysis

All verbal components of the videos, including spoken text, captions, hashtags, and on-screen annotations, were transcribed and coded thematically. MAXQDA software was used to facilitate detailed coding of transcripts. Transcripts were coded in

MAXQDA by the author. The analysis focused on recurring themes such as motherhood, caregiving, nostalgic aesthetics, personal values, and emotional labor. Captions and hashtags were examined for how they influence and guide audience interpretation.

Code system

The final code system was developed through a combination of inductive thematic coding and literature deductions. The system consists of six overarching categories, each containing subcodes that capture distinct but related patterns in the dataset. The categories were designed to account for both the ideological framing of femininity and domesticity, as well as the practical, affective, and community-oriented aspects of cooking content.

The first category, Domestic Femininity as Identity, examines the ways traditional femininity is constructed as inseparable from domestic labor and caregiving roles. Subcodes here identify (1) Joy or Fulfillment in Domestic Labor, where creators express personal satisfaction, pleasure, or pride in homemaking activities; (2) Nurturing Role as Core to Womanhood, which captures the portrayal of care and nurturing, often in relation to children or family members, as essential to a woman's identity; and (3) Homemaking as Gendered Duty, in which domestic work is framed as a moral responsibility or socially expected obligation tied specifically to women. These codes collectively address how gendered identity is reinforced through the affective and ethical framing of domestic work.

The second category, Traditional Gender Roles and Hierarchies, reflects content that reinforces binary and often hierarchical understandings of gender. Two subcodes are used: (1) Clear Gender Division of Labor, where domestic and culinary work is presented as inherently women's responsibility, sometimes contrasted with men's involvement in physically demanding or marginal kitchen tasks; and (2) Femininity through Service, where feminine identity is primarily expressed through acts of providing for and serving others. This category helps to identify how domesticity is tied to enduring cultural scripts about "appropriate" roles for women and men.

The third category, Values-Oriented Cooking Practices, addresses how cooking is represented not merely as a functional act but as an expression of broader ethical, emotional, or lifestyle values. Subcodes here include (1) From-Scratch or Natural

Cooking as Ideal, which marks the preference for homemade, minimally processed, or home-sourced foods; (2) Cooking as Emotional Expression, where food preparation is depicted as an act of love, care, nostalgia, or relational bonding; and (3) Healthy or Clean Eating, which focuses on the use of health-oriented discourse and the selection of ingredients framed as nutritionally beneficial or “clean.” Together, these subcodes highlight the moral and affective weight attached to cooking practices in the dataset.

Cooking Processes and Discourses of Competence, the fourth category, captures how creators frame themselves as capable, skilled, and knowledgeable within the domestic sphere. The first subcode, Efficient or Organized Cooking, documents emphasis on time management, planning, multitasking, and other strategies for streamlining cooking. The second, Skillful or Knowledgeable Homemaking, identifies demonstrations of culinary expertise, use of technical terminology, or presentation of complex techniques. This category reflects the performance of competence as an integral part of the domestic identity being presented.

The fifth category, Stereotypes and Tradition, focuses on the interplay between traditional domestic ideals and their rhetorical presentation. Using Stereotypes captures both sincere and playful deployment of gendered tropes associated with homemakers, while Promoting Tradition identifies content that explicitly frames adherence to traditional domestic roles as a positive or empowered choice. This category is particularly important for understanding how such roles are defended, celebrated, or reinterpreted by content creators.

The final category, Community and Instructional Voice, examines how creators engage their audiences and position themselves within broader ideological or lifestyle networks. Subcodes include Hashtags as Identity Markers, which document the use of identity-affirming hashtags (e.g. #tradwife, #homemaker) to signal belonging, and Instructive or Guiding Tone, which codes for direct advice, tutorials, or step-by-step demonstrations intended to model behavior for viewers.

By structuring the coding system in this way, it was possible to capture both the ideological narratives that underpin the portrayal of domestic femininity and the concrete practices, values, and communicative strategies through which these narratives were enacted. The categories are not mutually exclusive. In fact, many excerpts were double-coded across thematic areas. This reflects the overlapping ways

in which domesticity is constructed as an identity, a set of skilled practices, a moral framework, and a means of participating in a like-minded community.

Multimodal Semiotic Analysis

Visual and auditory features were examined using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework, attending to aspects such as setting, framing, costume, color, lighting, music, and rhythm of editing. These features were analyzed for their representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, particularly in relation to how domestic environments and feminine labor are idealized.

The representational metafunction is concerned with how the world is visually depicted. It distinguishes between narrative representations, which show actions, events, and processes through vectors such as gestures or eyelines, and conceptual representations, which depict participants in static, symbolic, or classificatory relationships. In the context of tradwife videos, this analysis reveals how normative gender roles are illustrated through sequences of domestic activity or symbolic visual cues (Kress and van Leeuwen 40-79).

The interactive metafunction addresses how images position viewers in relation to the content. Variables include gaze, distance, and angle, all of which shape the nature of viewer engagement. For example, a direct gaze into the camera may invite identification, whereas a profile view may frame the subject as an object of contemplation. These choices contribute to the interpellation of the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 114-135).

The compositional metafunction analyzes how visual elements are arranged to produce coherent meaning. Key elements include information value, salience, and framing. Understanding these design principles helps to explain how visual hierarchies and focal points convey ideologies of femininity and domesticity (Kress and van Leeuwen 181-226).

In addition to the three core metafunctions, this study also considers two further concepts introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen. Firstly, modality refers to the perceived truth-value or realism of a visual representation. Choices such as color saturation, brightness, and detail levels affect how authentic or idealized the scene appear (Kress and van Leeuwen 154-180). Secondly, materiality, including texture, motion, and editing, is vital in video contexts where haptic and affective registers, for

instance soft lighting and food textures, contribute to the performance of care and femininity (Kress and van Leeuwen 215-226).

Intermodal Synthesis

Insights from the previous stages were synthesized to understand how multimodal elements function together to stage coherent gendered performances. Attention was paid to the role of aesthetic registers, e.g., soft focus, pastel palettes, ambient soundscapes, in constructing emotional atmospheres of calmness, piety, and intimacy. This stage also examined how viewer interpellation occurs.

Based on these procedures, these four categories of analysis were determined:

- Cooking as Care and Selflessness
- Cooking as Duty and Morality
- Cooking as Tradition and Heritage
- Cooking as Competence and Authority

7 COOKING AS CARE AND SELFLESSNESS IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

This chapter investigates how the norm of cooking as care and selflessness is expressed in the sample of tradwife cooking videos. Drawing on feminist scholarship, cooking is theorized as a form of gendered emotional labor and relational work through which women embody selflessness. The analysis demonstrates that femininity is performed through nurturing roles, prioritization of others' needs, and the emotional framing of cooking as both joy and sacrifice. The first section presents the findings from across all sample videos, focusing on linguistic, auditory, and visual dimensions, including camera strategies, and editing and how they contribute to the expression of the norm of cooking as care and selflessness. The second section analyzes how viewers are interpellated through these strategies. The third section highlights the strategies used in one specific video of Alexia Delarosa that represents the expression of cooking as care and selflessness and how viewers are interpellated. At the end of the chapter, implications are discussed and a chapter summary is provided.

7.1 EXPRESSIONS OF COOKING AS CARE AND SELFLESSNESS IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

The linguistic framing of cooking in the videos strongly emphasizes responsiveness to others' needs. Across the sample, creators consistently describe their cooking in relation to husbands and children. For instance, Delarosa repeatedly introduces recipes with statements such as "my kids requested [...]" (Delarosa, "Apple Jacks"). The phrase itself foregrounds her children's desires as the organizing principle of her labor.

These linguistic patterns resonate with DeVault's (1991) account of foodwork as "feeding the family". It is an activity defined less by individual choice than by attentiveness to others. The woman's labor is not represented as personal indulgence or self-expression but as a duty to anticipate and meet the expectations of family members. This orientation illustrates the gendered norm of self-sacrifice, where a woman's identity is tied to her capacity to prioritize others.

In addition to highlighting responsiveness, the creators' captions and narrations frequently convey joy and fulfillment in caregiving. Neeleman and Delarosa, for example, often interject exclamations such as "that's so good!" or "the best part is we have leftovers for tomorrow." (Neeleman, "Sourdough Grilled Cheese and Beet Soup"; Delarosa, "Apple Jacks"). These moments of enthusiasm function rhetorically to recast caregiving as pleasurable. Here, caregiving is not imposed but embraced, a practice that brings happiness precisely because it serves others.

Language also frames cooking as emotional expression. Food is explicitly described as love, bonding, or nostalgia. Recipes are tied to childhood memories or framed as ways of creating family moments. In one of Adler's videos, for instance, her children help her make cookies for dessert (Adler, "Everything I made today"). In another video Adler prepares a pumpkin pie for her husband in response to his request during a phone call from work (Adler, "Pumpkin Pie"). Similarly, Smith made rice crispy treats for her husband because he was craving something sweet and she wanted to make them for him and not have him buy something (Smith, "Rice Crispy Treats"). This aligns with Avakian and Haber's (2005) notion of the "myth of selfless devotion," where women's labor is valorized as love, while concealing its unequal distribution between genders.

The linguistic evidence demonstrates that caregiving is both naturalized and celebrated. By framing cooking as joy, sacrifice, and emotional expression, tradwife creators reaffirm the norm that femininity is constituted through devotion to others.

Audio strategies reinforce the norm of selfless care. Voice-over narrations are consistently soft, calm, and composed, even when describing mundane or labor-intensive tasks. Smith, Delarosa, and Adler employ scripted but natural-sounding narrations that convey serenity. This tonal choice masks the physical and emotional effort involved, presenting caregiving as effortless and steady.

Background music further contributes to this atmosphere. Classical piano, light jazz, and nostalgic instrumental tracks provide a soundscape of warmth and timelessness. These choices are not incidental. They align caregiving with comfort and suggest that cooking is an emotionally enriching activity. The music functions affectively by producing a mood that naturalizes domestic labor as pleasurable and nurturing.

Neeleman, in contrast, relies heavily on live audio. Her videos frequently capture the voices of children, the clatter of dishes or the bubbling of liquid boiling in pots. These sounds situate caregiving within the embodied context of daily family life. Rather than concealing the ongoing presence of others, the inclusion of the ambient sound strongly supports the performance of the act of cooking as a relational activity. The audio is a sign that caregiving is continuous and oriented towards family members.

Taken together, the auditory dimension frames caregiving as both serene and relational. Calm voice-overs convey steadiness, background music creates warmth, and live sounds emphasize embeddedness in family life. These strategies reinforce the association of femininity with calm, attentiveness, and selflessness.

The *mise-en-scène* of the videos situates the kitchen as the symbolic stage of caregiving. Each creator's aesthetic conveys a slightly different version of femininity, yet all affirm the kitchen as the heart of the home.

Smith's modern minimalist style, characterized by spotless counters and sleek surfaces, communicates control and efficiency (see Figure 1). Delarosa's ornate seasonal décor emphasizes ritual and celebration, positioning caregiving within cycles of festivity and family tradition (see Figure 2). Adler's more colorful maximalism creates an atmosphere of abundance and joy (see Figure 3), while Neeleman's rustic, less-polished farmhouse kitchen emphasizes authenticity and lived-in care (see Figure 4).

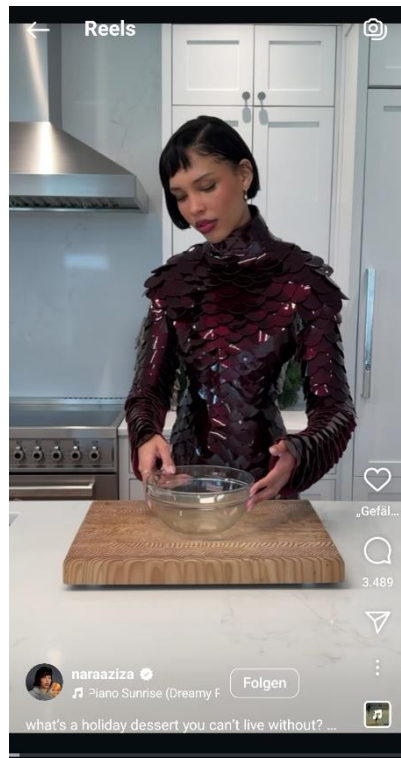


Figure 1: Nara Smith in her kitchen (Source: Smith, "Panna Cotta")



Figure 2: Alexia Delarosa in her kitchen (Source: Delarosa, "Egg Cracking Compilation")

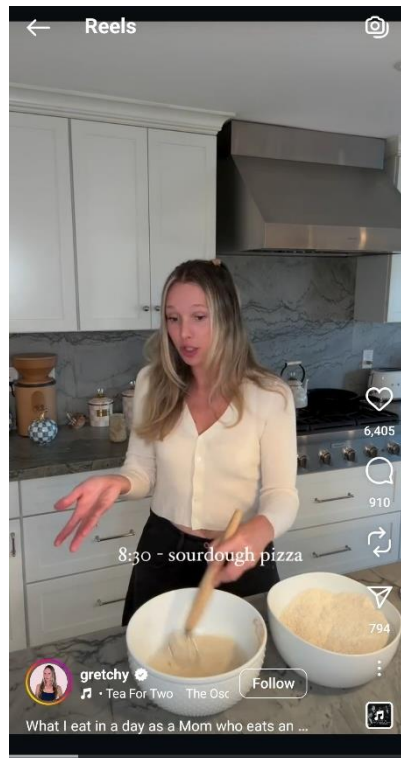


Figure 3: Gretchen Adler in her kitchen (Source: Adler, "What I eat in a day")



Figure 4: Hannah Neeleman in her kitchen (Source: Neeleman, "Sourdough Grilled Cheese and Beet Soup")

Even though their kitchens look different, the central message is consistent. The kitchen is the site where selfless femininity is enacted. The effort invested in

cleanliness, decoration, and order conveys devotion to others' comfort. As Butler (1990) would suggest, these stylized acts of presentation, such as the arranging of décor and cleaning counters, performatively constitute femininity as care.

The women's appearances also reinforce these ideals. Adler's dresses and styled hair are more reminiscent of mid-century housewife aesthetics (see Figure 5), whereas Delarosa and Smith adopt a style more closely associated with modern femininity (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). Neeleman emphasizes modest clothing in natural tones and thereby aligning herself with artisanal authenticity (see Figure 4). Across these variations, femininity is consistently aestheticized in relation to caregiving. Caring also includes presenting oneself in a particular way. The body itself becomes part of the *mise-en-scène*. It is clothed, styled, and positioned as the visible marker of selfless devotion. It seems as if taking care of oneself and presenting oneself in a particular way also reflects how well the home and family is taken care of.

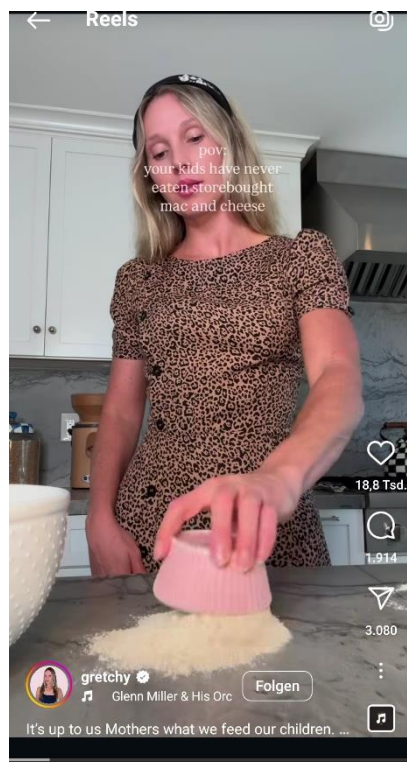


Figure 5: Gretchen Adler's style (Source: Adler, "Macaroni and Cheese")



Figure 6: Alexia Delarosa's style (Source: Delarosa, "Egg Cracking Compilation")



Figure 7: Nara Smith's style (Source: Smith, "Thanksgiving Spread")

Another visual marker for cooking as care and selflessness is the heart motif. The heart, as the symbol of love and devotion, appears frequently in the cooking videos. Adler, for example, draws hearts and smileys on cling film when covering dough in a bowl (see Figure 8) and uses heart-shaped measuring spoons (see Figure 9). Delarosa

uses a glass with winged hearts in another video (see Figure 10) and Smith often uses heart emojis in her captions.

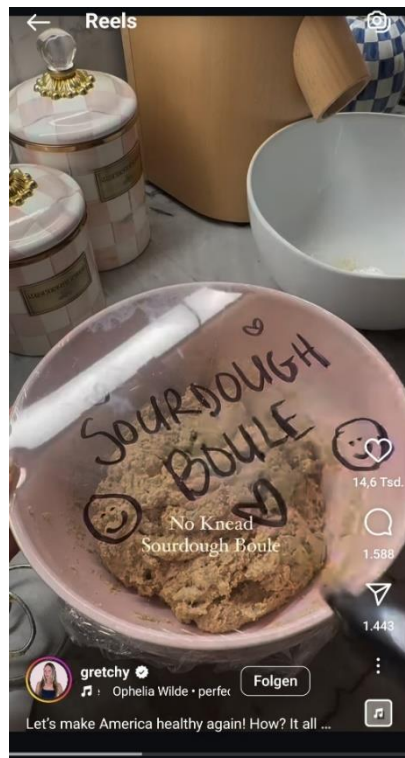


Figure 8: hearts and smiley drawings (Source: Adler, "Everything I made today")



Figure 9: heart-shaped spoon (Source: Adler, "What I eat in a day")

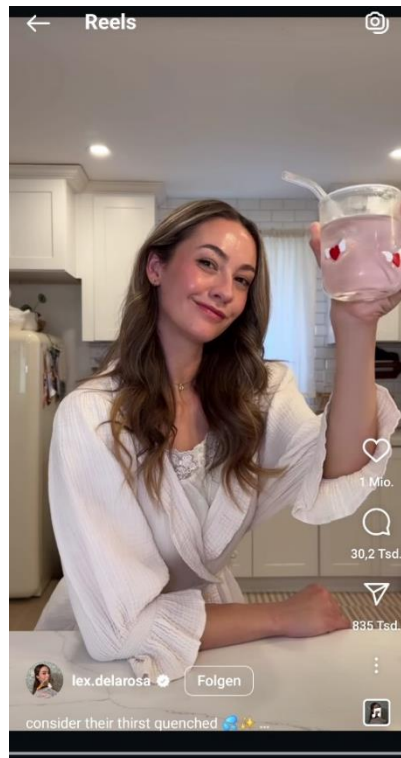


Figure 10: glass with hearts (Source: Delarosa, "Water")

Camera framing and editing strategies contribute to the framing of caregiving as graceful and seamless. High-angle shots of chopping and stirring, Point-of-View (POV) shots from the cook's perspective, and close-ups of plated meals emphasize detail and attentiveness. Delarosa and Adler often linger longer on close-ups of ingredients, aestheticizing even mundane gestures as loving attentiveness. Neeleman, by contrast, frequently uses wide shots that situate her whole body within the kitchen and emphasizes her integration into the domestic space.

Editing further reinforces this aestheticization. The use of quick cuts, short sequences, and rhythmic pacing transforms repetitive tasks into visually pleasing montages. Chopping, stirring, and kneading are repeated as stylized gestures and naturalize the labor as smooth and joyful. This rhythmic editing masks the chore of daily work, aligning instead with Butler's notion of performativity through the repeated stylized acts that produce the illusion of naturalized identity.

Through camera and editing, caregiving is reframed as effortless artistry. Labor disappears into seamless performance, reinforcing the idea that women's devotion is natural and graceful rather than burdensome.

In addition to these observations, a multimodal semiotic analysis helps clarify how care and selflessness are not only spoken or shown but felt and experienced through the

way the videos are made. Looking at representational choices, we see caregiving depicted in both actions and symbols. Scenes of stirring, chopping, and plating highlight the continuous nature of domestic work, while the visual arrangement of spotless kitchens and seasonal decorations turns these spaces into signs of devotion. For instance, Delarosa's elaborate Christmas displays do more than signal festivity, they situate her labor as an act of love and self-sacrifice for family.

The interaction with viewers is also important. When Adler or Delarosa look directly into the camera, they invite their viewers into their kitchens, encouraging a sense of identification with their roles as caregivers. Neeleman, by contrast, often films from a distance, so we watch her whole body at work in the kitchen. This places her in the position of a figure to be admired rather than directly spoken to, underscoring her authenticity and artisanal authority. Camera angles, such as the frequent overhead shots of bowls and cutting boards, create the effect that viewers are standing right next to the cook, sharing in the process of preparation. These strategies work together to draw audiences into the rhythm of domestic care.

The compositional choices also reinforce the centrality of care. Attention is directed toward plated meals and in one video of Neeleman also the family sitting around the table (Neeleman, "Breakfast Spread"), giving salience to outcomes that demonstrate devotion. Close ups of a child's bowl or a tray of cookies frame food as the physical evidence of emotional labor. Editing rhythms matter here too. When a long process like bread making is condensed into a smooth sequence of short clips (e.g. Neeleman, "Sourdough Grilled Cheese and Beet Soup"), the result is a visual narrative that makes hard work appear effortless and joyful. This editing style transforms the monotony of daily cooking into graceful gestures that stabilize the image of selfless femininity.

Finally, choices of lighting, texture, and sound increase the sense of authenticity. Warm light across Delarosa's pristine counters, the shine of Adler's McKenzie-Childs cookware, or the soft piano music accompanying Smith's narration combine to make caregiving feel natural and emotionally rewarding. These sensory touches mask the fatigue and messiness that often accompany real family meals. Instead, they produce an affective environment where caregiving appears as both genuine and aspirational. In this way, the videos interpellate viewers into seeing selflessness not as sacrifice alone but as a beautiful, pleasurable practice tied to feminine identity.

7.2 INTERPELLATING THE VIEWER INTO THE NORM OF CARE AND SELFLESSNESS

A key dimension of the tradwife performance of cooking as care and selflessness is not only how creators present themselves but also how they hail or interpellate viewers into specific subject positions. Drawing from Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation (1971), we can see that these videos do not simply show domestic labor, but rather they invite audiences to recognize themselves within the roles depicted and thereby reproduce the norm as common sense.

Linguistically, interpellation operates through direct forms of address that position viewers within the moral framework of caregiving. Collective phrases such as "it's up to us mothers" explicitly hail women as responsible subjects, inviting them to recognize themselves in the role of selfless caregiver. The inclusive pronoun "us" works ideologically to collapse the distance between creator and audience, producing a shared identity premised on responsiveness to others. Similarly, when creators narrate recipes in terms of children's or husbands' desires, they not only describe their own practice but also invite viewers to imagine themselves as women whose value is measured by such attentiveness. Instructional captions further strengthen this effect: by prompting viewers to comment or follow along, they convert the audience into participants in the moral labor of caregiving rather than detached observers. In these ways, language functions not merely as description but as a performative hailing that draws women into recognizing caregiving as the natural and virtuous expression of feminine identity.

The calm narrations and nostalgic background music generate affective environments that encourage viewers to inhabit the subject position of the cared-for or the caregiver. Soft piano instrumentals and children's voices evoke intimacy and nostalgia, prompting viewers to recall their own family histories and to desire participation in similar domestic worlds. Here, audio hails the audience not through rational argument but through emotional atmosphere.

Camera techniques also hail viewers into relational positions. POV shots simulate the perspective of children or dependents, as if the viewer is being cared for by the motherly hand on screen. High-angle shots into mixing bowls allow audiences to experience food preparation as though it is being done for them. Long shots showing creators with their children interpellate the audience as witnesses of idealized family

life, encouraging aspirational identification. The immaculately curated kitchens, free of mess, invite viewers to internalize a vision of domestic perfection as attainable and desirable.

Interpellation also occurs through platform affordances. Hashtags such as #tradwife, #sahm, and #homemakerlife hail viewers into digital communities of like-minded individuals. As Taina Bucher notes, algorithms amplify emotionally resonant, aesthetically clear content (332). This amplification means that viewers are repeatedly exposed to such portrayals, normalizing the association between womanhood and selfless caregiving. Engagement mechanisms, such as likes, shares, and comments, further reinforce interpellation. Participating in them means affirming the ideological script.

Through these strategies, viewers are invited to see themselves as either subjects who should embody these caregiving norms (for women) or as beneficiaries who are entitled to this care (for men and children). In both cases, interpellation secures the ideological function of the content. As Butler reminds us, gender norms gain power through citation and recognition (33). The tradwife videos rely on viewers to recognize the caregiving role as natural, desirable, and beautiful and in doing so, the viewers themselves help reproduce the norm.

7.3 CASE STUDY: LUCKY CHARMS VIDEO BY ALEXIA DELAROSA

The video chosen for a detailed examination of the expression of the norm of care and selflessness by tradwives in cooking videos as well as the interpellation strategies used was posted by Alexia Delarosa. In this one-minute-and-ten-second-long video she shows how she made her homemade version of the cereal lucky charms for her children. The cereal consists of oat cereal mixed with marshmallows. As of the 8th of July 2025, the video was viewed 2.2 million times on Instagram (Delarosa, “Lucky Charms”).

In the video, the core norm of femininity as expressed through nurturing and emotional labor is evident through both language and visual cues. The statement “these turned out absolutely delicious” highlights the joy and fulfillment derived from domestic labor, framing cooking as a source of pride and personal satisfaction. Meanwhile, the narration, “This morning my kids requested Lucky Charms for breakfast, so I stumbled out of bed and got started right away,” along with the on-screen text, “pov: your kids

requested lucky charms for breakfast,” reinforces the idea that a woman’s primary role is to anticipate and fulfill the needs of her children. Cooking is portrayed not just as a practical task, but as an act of service and emotional devotion, where the mother’s satisfaction comes from the enjoyment of others rather than her own desires. This linguistic framing upholds the cultural message that caregiving and self-sacrifice are central to womanhood, emphasizing that good femininity is measured by attentiveness and devotion to family needs. While Alexia Delarosa’s content straddles satirical commentary and highly skilled culinary work, the language in this clip subtly reproduces traditional expectations of feminine labor.

The audio in the video reinforces the core norm of femininity as nurturing and selfless. Alexia Delarosa’s calm, soft-spoken voice, with its melodic cadence and slightly higher pitch, frames domestic labor as gentle, enjoyable, and even soothing, while the scripted yet informal narration conveys a sense of competence and ease in fulfilling others’ needs. The inclusion of “Gymnopédie No. 1” by Erik Satie, with its slow, gentle piano melody, as the background music further softens the labor depicted, evoking a sense of relaxation and comfort.. This serene atmosphere makes it seem as if the work is relaxing and not tolling. It contrasts sharply with the reality that meeting such demands, namely cooking cereal in response to children’s requests immediately upon waking, is simply unattainable for most mothers. Yet, through the combination of soft voice, fluid narration, and tranquil music, the video presents caregiving and the selfless prioritization of children’s needs as manageable, even pleasurable, reinforcing the cultural message that good femininity is measured through devoted service, calm attentiveness, and joyful fulfillment in domestic labor.

The calm and nurturing atmosphere in the video is reinforced through carefully curated visual elements. The scene takes place in a seasonally decorated kitchen, appropriate for fall, featuring warm, aesthetically pleasing details such as leaf garlands, fairy lights shaped like candles, a SMEG fridge and coffee machine, a white KitchenAid mixer, ceramic bowls, and decorative accents like a small white swan and dried grass. Delarosa herself is presented in soft, luxurious textures, namely a set of green satin pajamas with ruffled sleeves, gold jewelry, loose curled hair, and subtle makeup. The video begins with shots of her smiling softly, visually reinforcing the satisfaction and joy derived from serving her children (see Figure 11). She projects both elegance and domestic ease. Every gesture and action is deliberate and unhurried, with no hectic motions detectable, emphasizing calm attentiveness. Close-ups of her hands, the

cereal, and the finished bowls frame cooking as a careful, almost ritualistic act of care (see Figure 12). Together, these visual choices position caregiving and domestic labor as central to feminine identity, presenting the selfless prioritization of others' needs as serene, desirable, and aspirational.

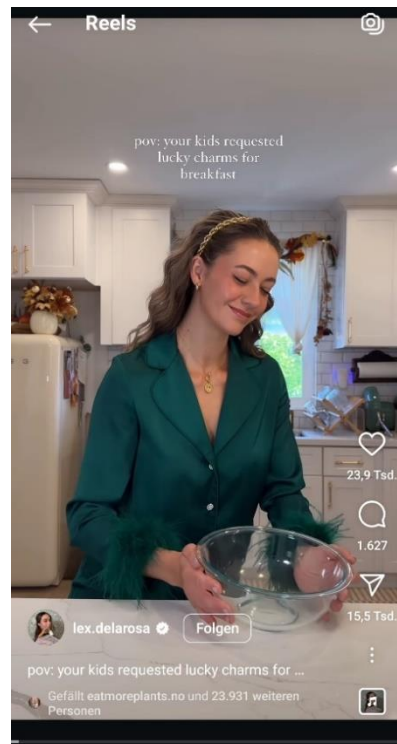


Figure 11: expression of joy (Source: Delarosa, "Lucky Charms")



Figure 12: close up of hand working (Source: Delarosa, "Lucky Charms")

The camera framing and editing in the video further reinforce the norm of femininity as nurturing, while also shaping the perception of domestic labor as effortless and aesthetically controlled. The video uses a variety of shot types, including medium shots, POV shots, high-angle shots, and a close-up of a single heart-shaped marshmallow (see Figure 13), to highlight both the process and the emotional significance of her cooking. Fast-paced sequencing, frequent hard cuts, and jump cuts condense the cooking process, making it appear far quicker and simpler than it would be in real time, while still maintaining a minimalistic editing style that avoids visual clutter. The use of electrical lighting, rather than natural light, creates a polished, consistent aesthetic that emphasizes the clarity and calmness of the environment. Together, these framing and editing choices not only draw attention to Delarosa's attentiveness and care in performing domestic tasks but also present caregiving and culinary labor as seamless, manageable, and aspirational, reinforcing cultural expectations that women should derive satisfaction from selflessly prioritizing the needs of others.

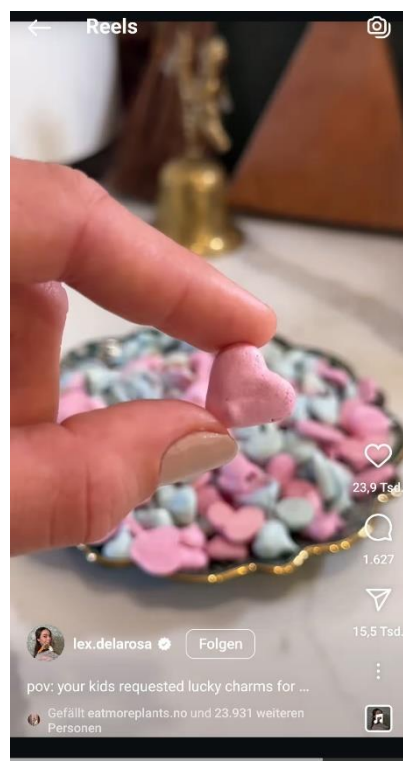


Figure 13: close up of heart-shaped marshmallow (Source: Delarosa, "Lucky Charms")

The multimodal strategies employed in Alexia Delarosa's Lucky Charms video operate as powerful mechanisms of interpellation that position viewers within specific ideological frameworks of femininity, domesticity, and care. As outlined in the literature review, Althusser's concept of interpellation highlights how ideology "hails" individuals

into social roles, and this clip exemplifies how audiences are positioned to recognize themselves in the subject position of the nurturing, selfless mother (Althusser 174). The narration, visuals, and editing do not simply depict cooking as an activity but encode it as a pleasurable action closely intertwined with feminine identity.

This encoding process can be understood, following Hall, as an attempt to produce a preferred reading in which the maternal role appears both aspirational and naturalized (137-138). As discussed in the literature review, Fiske emphasizes that such audiovisual conventions are never neutral but invite viewers into particular ideological identifications (46-48). The video's soothing narration, tranquil music, and carefully staged *mise-en-scène* thus work together to encourage viewers to identify with domestic selflessness, while rendering the labor involved invisible.

From the feminist and postcolonial perspectives introduced earlier, the performativity of such interpellation is evident. As Butler notes, subject positions are enacted through repetition, and Delarosa's portrayal of morning routines frames caregiving as a repeated performance of femininity (30-32). At the same time, hooks' critique of race and class exclusions in interpellation resonates with the highly curated, upper-middle-class domestic setting on display (54-56). Bhabha's notion of ambivalence further helps to account for the slightly ironic tone of Delarosa's persona, which complicates but does not overturn the traditional maternal role being performed (67-69).

When viewed in the context of social media, the strategies of interpellation extend beyond audiovisual cues. As established earlier, Fuchs argues that platforms hail users into consumer roles, a process reinforced here by the prominence of branded appliances and aspirational interiors (89-91). Papacharissi's concept of "affective publics" also applies. The calm voiceover and soft piano soundtrack hail audiences affectively, shaping identity through shared emotional registers (48-50). Moreover, as Bucher's discussion of the "algorithmic imaginary" suggests, Instagram's circulation of such videos ensures that users already receptive to maternal or domestic content are further reinforced in those subject positions (112-115).

Finally, influencer culture adds another dimension to these dynamics. As noted by Marwick, influencers invite audiences to participate in lifestyle communities through aspirational self-presentation (79-81), a strategy clearly at play in Delarosa's blending of elegance with domestic labor. Abidin's work on parasocial intimacy further clarifies the interactive address of captions such as "pov: your kids requested lucky charms for

breakfast,” which invites viewers to imagine themselves as inhabiting similar roles (95-97).

7.4 IMPLICATIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The norm of “Cooking as Care and Selflessness” has significant ideological implications. It naturalizes gendered labor divisions by presenting caregiving as the essence of womanhood. This reinforces what McRobbie terms the postfeminist “new sexual contract,” where women are encouraged to embrace domesticity as personal choice, even as it reproduces patriarchal structures (McRobbie 60).

The norm also idealizes self-sacrifice. By representing care as joyful and effortless, it obscures the physical, temporal, and emotional burdens of domestic labor. Susan Bordo has critiqued theories that underemphasize the materiality of the body and the exhaustion of care work (165-166). Tradwife videos exemplify this erasure by presenting caregiving as seamless rather than taxing.

Furthermore, the polished aesthetics of these videos foster unrealistic standards. Rapid editing removes the messiness of real domestic work, presenting instead a stylized image of control and grace. This aligns with platform logics: as Bucher argues, algorithmic curation privileges visually pleasing, emotionally resonant content (332). Thus, the very structure of Instagram amplifies normative images of women as selfless caregivers, rewarding those who perform this ideal most convincingly.

Altogether, the norm functions to exclude. Women who do not conform, whether unmarried, childfree, queer, working-class, or racially marginalized, are absent from these portrayals. By reiterating the feminine mystique in a digital, branded form, tradwife content reproduces a narrow vision of womanhood that marginalizes alternative identities and reinforces white, middle-class domestic ideals (Leidig 83).

In summary, the norm of cooking as care and selflessness was analyzed in this chapter according to how it is reproduced and aestheticized in tradwife cooking videos through multimodal strategies. Drawing on feminist theories of emotional labor, relational work, and performativity, the analysis demonstrated how cooking is framed as both joy and sacrifice, where women’s value is tied to their selfless orientation toward others. Linguistic cues foreground responsiveness and devotion, audio choices create atmospheres of serenity and intimacy, and visual techniques position the kitchen as the symbolic center of feminine identity. Camera angles and editing further aestheticize

labor, masking its difficulty while presenting caregiving as effortless artistry. Crucially, these videos not only depict but also interpellate viewers into gendered subject positions, naturalizing unequal divisions of labor while packaging them as aspirational and pleasurable. Taken together, the findings underscore how digital domestic performances preserve longstanding patriarchal ideals of femininity, now rebranded through aesthetic curation and platformed visibility as desirable, authentic, and freely chosen. While the following chapter on cooking as duty and morality emphasizes the fulfillment of external societal expectations, the analysis in this chapter shows that women's care and selflessness should, according to the tradwife content, stem from internal motivation.

8 COOKING AS DUTY AND MORALITY IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

This chapter explores how the norm of cooking as duty and morality is performed in tradwife cooking videos. Feminist scholars have shown that domestic foodwork has historically been framed as a moral obligation and a marker of proper womanhood. Cooking is not only practical labor but also a symbolic act that signals respectability, discipline, and adherence to gender roles. In contrast to the previous chapter, where care and selflessness were primarily portrayed as originating from the women themselves, this chapter turns its attention more towards societal expectations placed on women in relation to cooking. The first section presents the findings from the sample tradwife videos, analyzing linguistic, audio, and visual dimensions, including camera work and editing. The second section analyzes how viewers are interpellated by these audio-visual strategies. The third section is a close analysis of one of Gretchen Adler's core videos, where the purpose of cooking as duty and morality and its interpellation of viewers is highlighted. The last section discusses the implications of this norm and provides a chapter summary.

8.1 EXPRESSIONS OF COOKING AS DUTY AND MORALITY IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

Language plays a central role in articulating cooking as duty. Captions and narrations frequently emphasize responsibility through phrases such as "served dinner to my family" (Adler, "Everything I made today"). This linguistic framing naturalizes women's obligation to provide meals, presenting it not as optional but as expected.

Delarosa's captions, for instance, highlight children's requests, which she also frames as responsibilities to fulfill in instances such as "my kids requested Lucky Charms for breakfast, so I stumbled out of bed and got started right away" (Delarosa, "Lucky Charms"). Such phrasing suggests responsiveness not just as a choice but as moral duty.

Moral discourses of health are also present in language. Adler emphasizes fresh, organic, or home-prepared foods, aligning her cooking with discourses of purity and discipline. In one video Adler prepares pecan pie from scratch and contrasts her recipe with storebought pie by writing in her caption that "we don't do desserts w ingredients that harm us" (Adler, "Pecan Pie"). This resonates with Cairns et al. (2010), who note that food choices are moralized as indicators of virtue. Here, women are positioned as responsible for protecting family health through proper practices.

The language of diligence and respectability is also evident in hashtags such as #homemaker, #tradwife and #fromscratch, which situate the creators within a moralized community. These linguistic markers frame cooking as part of a broader ethical commitment, a role through which women demonstrate virtue and discipline.

At times, linguistic strategies overlap with the above chapter's framing of cooking as care and selflessness. For example, phrases that express joy in serving also suggest duty fulfilled. However, the emphasis here is less on emotional warmth than on responsibility and propriety. This overlap highlights how caregiving and duty are intertwined but not identical. Care emphasizes selfless devotion, while duty emphasizes moral responsibility.

Audio strategies reinforce the framing of cooking as disciplined duty. Voice-over narrations are calm, steady, and measured, even when describing labor-intensive routines. This vocal style communicates composure, suggesting that fulfilling domestic responsibilities is undertaken with diligence and without complaint. The tonal quality thus conveys discipline as a moral standard.

Background music often reinforces this atmosphere of order and respectability. Classical or instrumental tracks are used to create a sense of refinement, while in Neeleman's case, ambient kitchen sounds highlight the continuous rhythm of responsibility. The bubbling of pots, the clatter of utensils, and children's voices emphasize ongoing obligation, suggesting that duty is ever-present.

These auditory choices align with Hochschild and Machung's notion of the "second shift," where women are expected to fulfill duties consistently and without visible strain (265). The calm narration and ordered soundscape aestheticize responsibility, masking potential fatigue and presenting discipline as natural.

The mise-en-scène of the kitchens underscores duty and morality through order, cleanliness, and clear gendered roles. Smith's minimalist kitchen, with spotless counters and absence of clutter, visually communicates diligence and responsibility. Adler's colorful but carefully arranged décor similarly conveys attentiveness, while Delarosa's seasonal decorations highlight ritualized responsibility tied to family and cultural rhythms.

The presence of specific props also reinforces morality. Fresh produce, from-scratch ingredients or vintage tableware signify authenticity and diligence (see Figure 14). These objects are not merely functional but symbolic markers of proper homemaking, linking women's responsibility to discourses of purity and respectability.



Figure 14: fresh produce (Source: Neeleman, "Breakfast Spread")

Gendered divisions of labor are made visible in visual choices. Men are rarely present except as consumers. Neeleman's husband appears at the end of the videos to be served and taste the food she made (see Figure 15). Women, by contrast, are consistently shown laboring in the kitchen, highlighting their role as responsible

providers of domestic order. This asymmetry underscores the moral expectation that women serve while men receive.



Figure 15: serving husband (Source: Neeleman, "Eggnog and Sourdough Wreath")

At times, these visual strategies overlap with tradition and heritage in the next chapter. For example, Delarosa's seasonal décor signals both responsibility and cultural continuity. Yet in this chapter, the emphasis is on the woman's diligence and moral commitment to maintain order, rather than heritage preservation.

Camera work and editing aestheticize duty as ritualized labor. High-angle shots of chopping and mixing emphasize precision, while close-ups of orderly plated meals showcase diligence. Medium shots frame women alongside spotless kitchens, visually linking their femininity to domestic responsibility.

Editing rhythms reinforce duty as methodical and continuous. Short, efficient cuts portray labor as streamlined, naturalizing responsibility as effortless. Repetitive gestures, such as kneading and mixing, transformed into visual cycles that ritualize obligation.

The act of serving is particularly emphasized through camera angles. Shots of women placing meals in front of husbands or children dramatize duty as service (see Figure

16). This repetition constitutes what Butler (1990) calls the performativity of gender. Through each act of serving women are constituted as dutiful, moral homemakers.

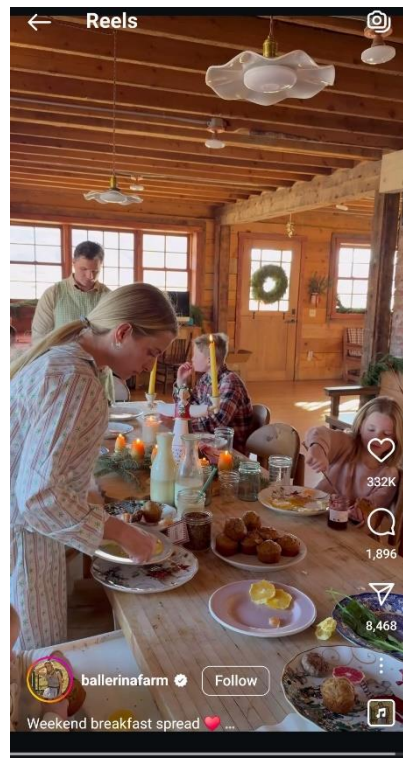


Figure 16: serving family (Source: Neeleman, "Breakfast Spread")

Editing thus conceals the labor behind the obligation, aestheticizing it as graceful and inevitable. Duty becomes a visual ritual, repeated daily and presented as the essence of femininity.

The moral framing of foodwork also becomes clearer when we apply a multimodal perspective. What the language of duty expresses, the videos reinforce through images and sounds. Representationally, many clips show cooking as a process of discipline and responsibility. Adler's careful presentation of fresh, organic ingredients, and her insistence on bread made only of flour, salt, and water, transform recipes into moral lessons about purity and diligence (Adler, "Things I don't buy"). These symbolic cues classify homemaking as not just practical work but the proper and correct way to sustain a family.

Viewers are also positioned as participants in this moral framework. The measured and steady narration used by Smith and Delarosa carries the tone of guidance. Medium shots that show the women calmly preparing meals create the impression of instruction and example, as though the audience is expected to adopt similar routines in their own homes. On-screen text in Adler and Delarosa's videos further strengthens this effect

by giving explicit cues about ingredients or steps, making the moral dimension of choice even more visible.

Compositionally, moral authority comes through in what the videos highlight. The salience of ‘healthy’ ingredients such as raw milk or freshly milled flour directs the viewer’s attention to what is presented as right and responsible. The repeated serving scenes, where husbands or children are shown receiving plates, give order and framing to the moralized act of service. Through repetition, this becomes a ritual that associates good womanhood with reliable provision.

These scenes gain credibility through modality and materiality. Clear close ups of food textures, spotless counters, and calm narration raise the truth value of what is being shown. Quick edits and efficient sequencing reinforce the message that duty is not only constant but can be accomplished with discipline and grace. Together these semiotic choices convert cooking into an everyday moral practice, one that evaluates women’s value and respectability through visible domestic performance.

8.2 INTERPELLATING THE VIEWER INTO THE NORM OF DUTY AND MORALITY

Tradwife videos do not simply depict domestic responsibility; they actively hail viewers into moralized subject positions, inviting them to recognize themselves as participants in the ethical order of homemaking. Through linguistic, auditory, visual, and platform-based strategies, these videos position women as dutiful caregivers and moral guardians of the household, while men and children are implicitly hailed as the recipients of women’s labor. In this sense, foodwork is framed not only as practical necessity but as a moral vocation, with audiences recruited into its ideological framework.

Viewers are hailed into the norm of cooking as duty and morality through language that frames meal preparation as an ethical obligation. Captions such as “served dinner to my family” or Delarosa’s accounts of fulfilling her children’s breakfast requests cast responsiveness as moral responsibility rather than personal choice. Adler’s emphasis on organic ingredients and rejection of “desserts w ingredients that harm us” further moralizes foodwork as a duty to protect family health. Hashtags like #homemaker, #tradwife, and #fromscratch reinforce this discourse by linking creators to a community where diligence and self-sacrifice are celebrated. Through these strategies, viewers

are positioned to see proper womanhood as inseparable from morally charged domestic labor.

The use of nostalgic background music, often invoking classical or folk traditions, evokes an emotional pull toward an idealized past of family-centered domesticity. Children's voices, audible in the background of several clips, act as affective cues that hail viewers into the role of caregiver, prompting identification with either the dutiful mother or the dependent child. Calm and measured voiceovers reinforce the sense of composure and discipline expected of women, aestheticizing duty as a moral standard that must be embodied without visible strain.

POV shots directed into mixing bowls or pans simulate the perspective of either a learner or a dependent child, positioning the viewer as someone who must be guided, instructed, or provided for. Long shots of women such as Neeleman kneading dough not only highlight diligence but invite aspirational emulation, suggesting that viewers should admire and internalize such practices as models of virtuous womanhood. Repeated serving scenes, where men or children receive plates of food, visually dramatize duty as service, reinforcing the asymmetrical moral order in which women are providers and men the entitled beneficiaries.

Hashtags such as #tradwife and #homemaker situate these videos within moralized digital communities, offering recognition and belonging to those who embrace domesticity as ethical vocation. Belonging is framed as conditional: only women who commit themselves to the duties of homemaking can participate in these networks of respectability. In this way, platform affordances act as ideological apparatuses, reinforcing gendered expectations through mechanisms of visibility, community, and reward.

Together, these multimodal strategies enact a process of interpellation in Althusser's sense. They call upon viewers to recognize themselves within the ideological scripts of duty and morality. Women are hailed as virtuous only insofar as they internalize the role of responsible homemaker, while men and children are hailed as entitled dependents of women's diligence. The repetition of these frames across language, sound, imagery, and platform features consolidates cooking as a ritualized moral practice, one through which good womanhood is both performed and judged.

8.3 CASE STUDY: MACARONI AND CHEESE BY GRETCHEN ADLER

The video chosen for the close analysis of the expression of cooking as duty and morality was posted by Gretchen Adler. In this video, which is one minute and one second long, she cooks her version of macaroni and cheese from scratch for her children as an after-school snack. As of 8th of July 2025, the video was viewed 1.6 million times on Instagram (Adler, “Macaroni and Cheese”).

Adler summarizes the norm of cooking as duty and morality very pointedly in her opening sentence of the caption for the video. It reads “It’s up to us Mothers what we feed our children.” This makes it explicitly clear that the nourishment of children is the sole responsibility of mothers. In addition, she uses the hashtag #maha, which is the abbreviation for Make America Healthy Again. MAHA is a health policy and political agenda, spearheaded by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in his role as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Donald Trump’s second administration (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services). The MAHA Commission’s specific strategy is phrased “Make Our Children Healthy Again” (The White House). By using this hashtag in her cooking content, Adler not only shows her identification with the agenda but also places the duty of carrying out and/or supporting the agenda on herself as well as other mothers. According to her video, the only morally good option is to cook macaroni and cheese from scratch since it is the only healthy option.

Adler’s stylistic choices reinforce the moralized, gendered norms of cooking as a form of respectable womanhood. Her voice-over narration, delivered in a soft-spoken yet fast and monotone pace, conveys discipline, efficiency, and restraint. These are all qualities that can be aligned with the idea of cooking as duty rather than leisure. This is further supported by her comments in the narration that “[b]etween business calls and meetings, I only had a brief period of time to make the pasta” and afterwards she “run[s] out to pick my kids up from school”.

The nostalgic big-band soundtrack “Falling Leaves” by Glenn Miller & His Orchestra, which Adler uses as background music in her video, evokes mid-20th century ideals of domestic femininity, situating the act of cooking within a framework of tradition and moral respectability. Meanwhile, the integration of high-quality live kitchen sounds, such as mixing, kneading, boiling, and pouring, renders the repetitive labor of cooking both immersive and virtuous, naturalizing it as a feminine responsibility. The subtle inclusion of a child speaking in the background further ties food preparation to

caregiving and maternal obligation. Together, these formal elements aestheticize domestic labor while upholding the cultural construction of cooking as a moral and gendered duty.

In the video, Adler is the only figure visible in the kitchen, positioning her as solely responsible for preparing food and, by extension, for feeding her children. This reinforces the gendered expectation of cooking as a woman's duty. The final shot, where she carefully presents a bowl of macaroni and cheese, places her in the role of service, exemplifying femininity through the act of offering food to others. Early in the video, Adler transfers Einkorn from its store-bought packaging into a glass container, aestheticizing the ingredients and signaling diligence and care. Although the cooking process leaves her work surfaces temporarily messy, the wider kitchen remains spotless, well-lit, and orderly, which serves as a visual metaphor for purity, discipline, and moral respectability. The emphasis on fresh ingredients, such as shredding cheese by hand rather than using pre-packaged options, further aligns cooking with ideals of authenticity and virtue. Even Adler's pristine clothing, untouched by the labor of cooking, underscores the moralized performance of domestic femininity: order, cleanliness, and service to family.

The camera framing and editing choices in Adler's video work to highlight both the labor and moral responsibility associated with cooking. The video is fast-paced, with numerous hard cuts and jump cuts, yet maintains a minimalistic editing style that mirrors efficiency and discipline in the kitchen. These qualities are tied to the moralized ideal of domestic duty. Eye-level and medium shots place viewers at a familiar, human perspective, aligning them with Adler's careful, responsible role in the kitchen. POV shots and close-ups, such as boiling sauce or pasta cooking, draw attention to the technical skill and attention required, emphasizing diligence as a moral and gendered obligation. The combination of rapid cuts and intimate framing conveys both the intensity of the work and the precision needed to uphold standards of cleanliness, order, and femininity. Overall, the camera and editing aesthetic reinforce the idea that cooking is not merely labor but a disciplined, morally significant practice performed by women to uphold family and societal values.

Overall, she positions her cooking as the best option for cooking macaroni and cheese for children. This implies that other recipes, or even store-bought options, are not

suitable alternatives for feeding children macaroni and cheese, if the health of the children is important.

The multimodal strategies in Gretchen Adler's macaroni and cheese video reveal how cooking is framed as both maternal duty and moral obligation, positioning viewers within gendered and ideological expectations of care. As established in the literature review, Althusser's notion of interpellation explains how individuals are "hailed" into social roles (174). Adler's caption "It's up to us Mothers what we feed our children" functions as a direct hail, explicitly positioning mothers as the primary guardians of children's health. The inclusion of #maha further extends this interpellation into a political register, situating the maternal subject within a broader ideological project of national health. Here, cooking is not simply a practical task but a moral imperative, with maternal responsibility framed as both personal and civic duty.

From the perspective of media encoding, the video encodes a preferred reading in which maternal responsibility is synonymous with moral virtue, inviting viewers to accept this conflation as natural (Hall 137-38). As discussed in the literature review, Fiske reminds us that audiovisual strategies are never neutral but work to invite ideological identification (46-48). Adler's linguistic framing, her focus on efficiency, and the invocation of discipline all encourage recognition with a normative subject position: the selfless, dutiful mother whose respectability is performed through food.

Feminist and postcolonial perspectives, also outlined earlier, help unpack the complexities of this interpellation. Butler's theorization of interpellation as performative underscores how Adler's portrayal enacts motherhood through repeated acts of nourishment (30-32). Hooks' critique of exclusions in interpellation resonates with the whiteness and middle-class affluence coded into Adler's pristine kitchen and artisanal ingredients (54-56). At the same time, Bhabha's concept of ambivalence is evident in the tension between Adler's professional identity, which she references in her voice-over about business calls, and her simultaneous embrace of domestic duty (67-69).

On social media, these interpellative strategies are reinforced and extended. As Fuchs argues, platforms hail users into consumer-subject positions (89-91), which in this case is visible in the valorization of artisanal ingredients, glass containers, and a carefully ordered kitchen as signs of virtue. Papacharissi's notion of "affective publics" is also relevant: the nostalgic big-band soundtrack and inclusion of children's voices emotionally hail viewers into a community built around maternal responsibility (48-50).

In addition, Bucher's "algorithmic imaginary" suggests that Instagram's circulation of Adler's video ensures its reinforcement among audiences already receptive to health-conscious, family-oriented values (112-115).

Finally, as noted in the literature review, influencer culture adds another dimension to this process. Marwick highlights how influencers construct aspirational identities that hail followers into lifestyle communities (79-81). Adler's video achieves this by presenting maternal duty as a virtuous and aspirational mode of being. Abidin's concept of parasocial intimacy further clarifies how Adler's calm narration and direct address foster recognition, encouraging mothers to see themselves as equally responsible for fulfilling these moral expectations (95-97).

Taken together, Adler's macaroni and cheese video illustrates how interpellation works across language, sound, visuals, and editing to equate cooking with morality, discipline, and maternal duty. As outlined in the literature review, interpellation on social media is multimodal, combining ideological hails with affective engagement, consumerist cues, and algorithmic circulation. Here, these strategies converge to position viewers within a subject position of respectable womanhood, where caregiving is not simply labor but a moral responsibility and a marker of feminine virtue.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The norm of cooking as duty and morality in tradwife videos constructs domestic labor as a moral and gendered obligation, valorizing women's care while naturalizing their responsibility for family wellbeing. As illustrated in Adler's video, maternal labor is framed not as choice but as ethical imperative, with deviations coded as morally deficient. Visual, auditory, and linguistic strategies, including spotless kitchens, careful presentation of ingredients, calm voiceovers, and nostalgic music, reinforce discipline, diligence, and composure as intrinsic feminine virtues.

This norm reinforces asymmetrical gender roles. Women perform labor and are positioned as moral actors, while men appear primarily as recipients of care. By aestheticizing labor and presenting certain practices as morally superior, the videos obscure effort and inequality, restricting women's autonomy and narrowing definitions of "good" motherhood. The interpellative strategies also recruit viewers into this moral framework, shaping aspirational subject positions that are classed and racialized

through cues of middle-class whiteness, artisanal ingredients, and curated domestic spaces.

Overall, while these videos celebrate diligence and care, they simultaneously constrain gender roles, equate moral virtue with domestic performance, and normalize the ideological expectation that women's labor is both constant and ethically essential.

This chapter has demonstrated how tradwife cooking videos frame domestic foodwork as a moralized performance of femininity, where respectability and virtue are measured through discipline, purity, and service. By interpellating viewers into maternal subject positions, the videos position women as individually responsible not only for family health but, in cases such as Adler's #maha reference, for the health of the nation. Such framings elevate homemaking into a civic duty while obscuring the wider social, political, and economic structures that actually shape public health. Moreover, the emphasis on artisanal ingredients such as Einkorn flour or raw milk reveals the classed dimensions of this discourse: access to specialized foods, spotless kitchens, and ample time for ritualized cooking is presented as universal moral responsibility, even though it reflects white, affluent domestic ideals. These omissions mask the unequal distribution of domestic labor and the structural barriers that prevent many women from enacting such ideals. In aestheticizing duty as effortless and virtuous, tradwife content reproduces gendered hierarchies while naturalizing privilege, ultimately reinforcing a narrow vision of womanhood tied to moralized domestic performance.

9 COOKING AS TRADITION AND HERITAGE IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

This chapter examines the norm of cooking as tradition and heritage as it appears in tradwife cooking videos. The focus is on how femininity is linked to cultural continuity and the preservation of "traditional" ways of life. Drawing on scholarship on food, gender, and cultural memory, this chapter shows how domestic cooking is framed as both a practical task and a symbolic act of heritage preservation. In the first section the findings from the sample videos, examining how linguistic, audio, and visual strategies including camera work and editing, construct tradition as a feminine duty are presented. The second section explains how viewers are interpellated by these strategies and the third section presents one specific video posted by Hannah Neeleman that is closely analyzed for the norm of cooking as tradition and heritage. At

the end of the chapter, implications of this norm are discussed and a chapter summary is provided.

9.1 EXPRESSIONS OF COOKING AS TRADITION AND HERITAGE IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

Language is the most direct means by which tradition and heritage are invoked, and the textual findings reveal several recurrent strategies. First, creators use explicit linguistic markers of intergenerational continuity. For example, Nara Smith shared a cooking video of her making Milchreis, which is a dish that her grandmother used to make for her often (Smith, “Milchreis”). This is, however, not a singular occurrence. In a video that is not part of the sample video cohort, Gretchen Adler presents an apple crisp recipe from her grandmother (Adler, “Apple Crisp”). Other instances of tradition being part of cooking occurred around Thanksgiving. The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving was carried on by Nara Smith, who did not grow up in the US but did share a video where she cooked a Thanksgiving inspired meal for her family while clearly expressing that she has no strong connection to the holiday (Smith, “Thanksgiving Spread”). Gretchen Adler also shared a video where she presented side dishes she would make for Thanksgiving. In this video she mentioned that one criteria for selecting side dishes was tradition (Adler, “Thanksgiving Side Dishes”). Such statements position food preparation as a medium for transmitting cultural values, memories, and affective bonds across generations. Heritage is embodied in the recurring cycle of meals that recall the past while sustaining the present.

Finally, linguistic play and humor, particularly in Alexia Delarosa’s exaggerated references to “icicles saved from 1857” or “ice harvested while summiting Everest” (Delarosa, “Water”), also reinforce tradition by satirizing the intensity of maternal devotion. Such hyperbole relies on cultural familiarity with stereotypes of homemaking excess, ironically reaffirming their enduring resonance. Language thus sustains heritage through seriousness, affect, and play, each mode anchoring cooking in a larger cultural narrative.

Audio strategies further embed cooking within frameworks of heritage. Creators such as Nara Smith and Alexia Delarosa use scripted voice-overs with calm, soft-spoken delivery to cultivate an atmosphere of composure, continuity, and control. Their reliance on piano-based instrumental tracks, such as Satie’s “Gymnopédie No. 1” or TWO LANES’ “November”, evokes cultural associations with timelessness, elegance,

and nostalgia. These selections frame cooking as an almost meditative ritual, positioning it as a heritage practice imbued with calm reflection. The avoidance of disfluencies and the precise, measured tone of narration reinforce an image of cultivated tradition, where heritage is controlled, scripted, and refined.

In contrast, Gretchen Adler and Hannah Neeleman integrate live domestic soundscapes. The inclusion of children's voices, background chatter, and the audible clatter of pots and pans situates cooking within the sensory world of lived family life. This strategy conveys authenticity and immersion, allowing audiences to experience domestic heritage as embodied and ongoing. In Neeleman's case, the presence of spontaneous commentary and unscripted noise creates an acoustic environment that mirrors the messiness of real domestic traditions, counterbalancing the polish of more curated formats.

Background music choices also carry symbolic weight. Adler's use of Glenn Miller's "Falling Leaves" or The Oscar Peterson Trio's "Tea for Two" recalls mid-20th-century domestic soundscapes, implicitly linking her videos to an era often idealized in tradwife discourse. These selections signal heritage not only through genre, particularly jazz, big band, and piano, but also through cultural memory of the midcentury home, thus reinforcing nostalgic ideals of femininity and domesticity.

Overall, audio functions as a dual strategy. Refined narration and instrumental music present heritage as orderly and idealized, while live sounds anchor it in lived practice, embedding cooking in the rhythms of family life and the sensory continuity of tradition.

Kitchen aesthetics function as curated symbols of tradition. Nara Smith's minimalistic grey-and-white kitchen with high-end appliances, from brands such as LeCreuset and KitchenAid, conveys heritage through a modernized luxury lineage, suggesting continuity reimagined for contemporary consumption. In contrast, Alexia Delarosa's ornate, seasonally decorated kitchen invokes a cyclical domestic calendar, positioning cooking as embedded in traditions of festivity and ritual. Adler's colorful maximalism, replete with McKenzie-Childs ceramics and seasonal motifs, performs heritage through decorative excess that aligns with nostalgic imaginaries of mid-century domesticity. Hannah Neeleman's rustic, rural kitchen, anchored by a heritage AGA stove and wooden dining table, emphasizes pastoral authenticity and continuity with agrarian traditions. These different settings show how heritage is expressed through visual elements, such as brand, décor, and orderliness, each placing cooking within unique

but overlapping cultural traditions. One example of an ancient cultural tradition that is prominently and frequently shared by Gretchen Adler is milling flour (see Figure 17).

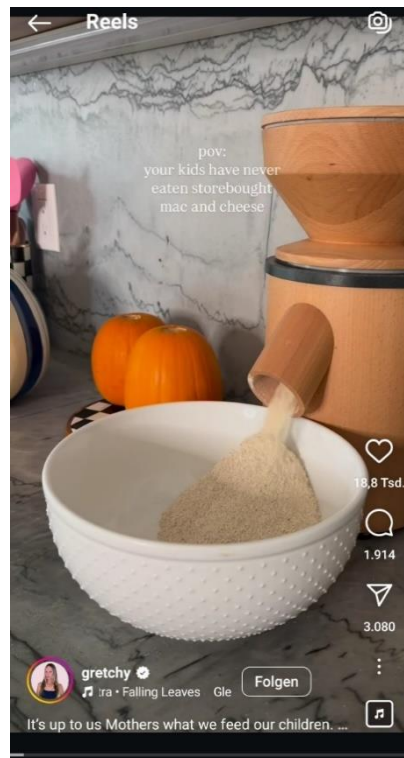


Figure 17: milling flour (Source: Adler, "Macaroni and Cheese")

The appearance and behavior of the creators themselves further reinforce heritage narratives. Adler's floral dresses and styled hair recall mid-20th-century femininity, while Neeleman's earth-toned garments and unglamorous hair styling evoke rural authenticity. Delarosa and Smith emphasize elegance, polish, and composure, presenting heritage less through domestic labor and more through continuity of feminine poise. In all cases, the female body becomes a visual site for expressing the inheritance of tradition, whether through nostalgic archetypes, artisanal authenticity, or timeless refinement.

Camera angles further encode heritage. Across creators, POV and high-angle shots into bowls and onto cutting boards dominate, foregrounding the materiality of food preparation. Such angles place viewers in the position of the cook, emphasizing skill transmission and didactic engagement, which are hallmarks of heritage practices. Adler's frequent close-ups of boiling sauces or kneading dough intensify this instructional focus, while Neeleman's repeated use of long shots that include family members situates cooking within the broader context of household life. In both cases, the camera affirms cooking as a relational, heritage-rich activity.

Editing practices in these videos further shape the presentation of cooking as heritage. All creators employ minimalistic editing, avoiding filters, transitions, or heavy text overlays. This simplicity suggests authenticity and aligns with an aesthetic of tradition, where the focus remains on the food and the domestic process rather than digital embellishment. Minimalism thus functions as a formal analogue for heritage: it signals restraint, timelessness, and continuity with pre-digital domestic practices.

At the same time, creators use rapid sequencing and frequent jump cuts to maintain viewer engagement within the constraints of Instagram's short-form video format. While this accelerates the pace, the chronological narrative structure, showing events step by step from preparation to completion, reinforces clarity and comprehension. Heritage here is encoded through linear temporality: cooking is shown as a sequence of steps that can be followed, learned, and repeated. The process of transmission is thereby embedded in the very structure of the edit.

The restrained use of text also aligns with this emphasis on clarity and tradition. Smith and Neeleman avoid text altogether, relying on visuals and audio to carry the narrative, while Delarosa and Adler employ minimal annotations in Instagram's standard fonts. The uniformity of this approach highlights an implicit ideology: heritage is best preserved not through textual intervention but through embodied demonstration and audiovisual immersion.

Finally, the color palettes, dominated by earth tones, neutrals, and natural lighting, convey organic simplicity, reinforcing associations between cooking, nature, and continuity. Where accent colors appear, they are seasonal, embedding domesticity within cyclical cultural rhythms. Editing, therefore, serves not merely as a technical practice but as a symbolic one, structuring temporality, clarity, and affect in ways that render cooking as a heritage-bearing activity.

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework clarifies how tradwife videos construct cooking as a medium of heritage. In representational terms, narrative sequences of domestic labor highlight the continuity of culinary practices across generations. For instance, Adler's repeated milling of grains, captured in close-ups of the stone mill turning wheat into flour, signals a direct connection to ancient foodways. This process not only emphasizes technical skill but situates her cooking within a lineage that predates modern appliances, evoking the historical depth of domestic practice. Similarly, Neeleman's kneading, Smith's stirring, and Delarosa's meticulous

plating all depict care as an ongoing, embodied labor, framing contemporary cooking as an extension of inherited tradition. Conceptual representations further anchor heritage symbolically: the AGA stove in Neeleman's kitchen references agrarian domestic continuity, while Delarosa's ornate seasonal décor visualizes ritualized family practices that cycle annually. Such imagery presents cooking as a repository of collective memory and cultural values, where objects, gestures, and spaces signify the persistence of tradition.

The interactive metafunction reveals how creators position viewers within this heritage framework. Close-up and overhead shots of bowls, cutting boards, or hands at work simulate co-presence, inviting audiences to participate in the transmission of culinary knowledge. In these moments, viewers occupy the position of apprentice or family member, observing and internalizing inherited skills. Direct gaze into the camera, as seen in some of Adler's and Delarosa's videos, encourages identification with the maternal figure as custodian of tradition, while mid- or long-distance shots of Neeleman foreground her as exemplar of artisanal heritage, emphasizing authenticity and mastery over direct interaction. Camera angles thus choreograph relationships between viewer and cook in ways that reinforce the cultural authority of domestic labor as a vessel of heritage.

Compositional choices further emphasize cooking as tradition. Salience is consistently granted to food and its preparation, such as the steaming pot, the kneaded dough, the plated side dishes become visual proofs of continuity. Background elements, such as holiday decorations or heritage cookware, support these focal points, embedding the act of cooking within a broader temporal and cultural context. For example, Delarosa's Christmas displays and Adler's vintage ceramics do more than signal festivity: they locate contemporary domestic labor within cycles of inherited practices. Color palettes, dominated by warm neutrals and seasonal accents, and the strategic use of natural lighting, reinforce associations with timelessness, nurturing, and authenticity. Editing rhythms, including the condensation of long processes into smooth sequences, convey the effort of heritage work as both achievable and aesthetically satisfying.

Materiality and modality contribute further to the representation of cooking as heritage. The tactile quality of ingredients, as the sheen of butter, the texture of dough, the visual rhythm of milling, communicates skill and care, linking physical labor to the maintenance of cultural memory. Sound, whether live kitchen ambiance or softly

layered instrumental music, imbues preparation with affective resonance: it transforms domestic labor into a sensory experience of continuity and tradition. Choices that enhance perceived realism, such as soft lighting or unpolished textures, anchor the practice in authenticity, while curated aesthetics present it as aspirational yet rooted in heritage.

9.2 INTERPELLATING THE VIEWER INTO THE NORM OF TRADITION AND HERITAGE

The preceding section demonstrated how linguistic, auditory, visual, and editorial strategies embed cooking practices in narratives of tradition, lineage, and cultural continuity. Yet these strategies do more than represent heritage: they actively interpellate viewers into subject positions that align domestic foodwork with the preservation of culture and identity. Building on Althusser's (1970) concept of interpellation as the ideological "hail" through which individuals recognize themselves as subjects, this section examines how tradwife videos recruit audiences into roles as custodians of tradition. Following Hall's (1980) argument that media messages encode preferred subject positions, and Fiske's reminder that audiovisual conventions invite identification with specific values, it becomes clear that these videos do not merely display heritage but actively call upon viewers to embody it.

Language provides a primary site of ideological hailing, positioning audiences as bearers and transmitters of tradition. References to family lineage, such as "my German grandmother would make this for me all the time", invite viewers to identify with an intergenerational chain in which cooking is the medium of continuity. Similarly, references to children's requests frame domestic practice as a ritual of inheritance: what children consume today becomes the memory and tradition of tomorrow. These linguistic strategies hail women as responsible for sustaining cultural identity across generations, not as an optional task but as an ethical role bound up with womanhood. The use of artisanal terminology—"bulk ferment," "einkorn," "compound butter"—hails audiences into positions of expertise, suggesting that preserving tradition requires not only care but also mastery of craft. Even humorous exaggerations, such as Delarosa's ironic mentions of "icicles saved from 1857," work interpellatively: they rely on cultural familiarity with stereotypes of homemaking devotion, positioning viewers as insiders who recognize and affirm the endurance of such tropes. Linguistic interpellation thus

positions the audience as both inheritors and active participants in transmitting heritage through domestic labor.

Sound further embeds viewers into heritage-bearing subjectivities by hailing them affectively. Calm, scripted voice-overs accompanied by piano-based instrumentals create a meditative atmosphere of timelessness, interpellating viewers into an image of heritage as orderly and refined. These soundscapes suggest that to take up the mantle of tradition is to embrace composure and ritualized calm. In contrast, the integration of live domestic noises, for instance children's chatter, clattering pots, and spontaneous commentary, positions viewers within the embodied rhythms of family life, hailing them as participants in the ongoing, messy reproduction of tradition. Background music such as mid-century jazz or big-band selections further intensifies nostalgic identification, hailing viewers into a temporal frame where domestic femininity is tied to a culturally idealized past. As Butler (1990) reminds us, interpellation is not only about recognition but about repetition through performance. By reproducing these auditory scripts in their own kitchens, viewers are positioned to enact tradition as lived continuity.

The *mise-en-scène* of tradwife kitchens visually hails audiences into heritage-centered subjectivities. Smith's minimalist luxury kitchen interpellates viewers into a lineage of modernized continuity, where tradition is reimagined through affluence and refinement. Delarosa's seasonal decorations hail audiences into cyclical cultural rhythms, emphasizing festivity as a recurring anchor of tradition. Adler's maximalist, mid-century aesthetic interpellates viewers into nostalgic imaginaries of domestic heritage, while Neeleman's rustic rural kitchen situates heritage in pastoral authenticity. In each case, the visual space calls upon the viewer to recognize themselves in culturally resonant genealogies of domesticity. Women's bodies also function as sites of interpellation: Adler's floral dresses hail audiences into retro femininity, Neeleman's earth tones into agrarian authenticity, and Smith and Delarosa's polished styling into timeless elegance. Camera work reinforces this process: POV shots into bowls simulate apprenticeship, hailing viewers as learners of tradition, while family-inclusive long shots position them within the relational framework of domestic heritage. Editing techniques, commonly minimalist, linear, and restrained, hail viewers into an ideology of continuity by presenting cooking as a sequence of clear, repeatable steps that can be learned and reproduced. In this sense, visual interpellation encodes heritage not only as an aesthetic but as a reproducible practice.

Finally, platform affordances extend these interpellations into communal and algorithmic spaces. Hashtags such as #fromscratch, #homemakerlife, and #tradwife hail users into digital collectivities where belonging is contingent upon embracing heritage as moral vocation. As Fuchs (2014) and Papacharissi (2015) argue, social media hails users not only ideologically but also affectively, inviting participation in “affective publics” bound by shared sentiments and practices. Calls to action, such as Adler’s prompts to comment for sources, explicitly interpellate viewers as active participants in sustaining heritage, transforming passive spectatorship into communal labor. In this way, platforms themselves function as ideological apparatuses, amplifying and sustaining the cultural script that equates womanhood with custodianship of tradition.

Taken together, these multimodal hails show that tradwife videos do not merely depict heritage but actively conscript viewers into its reproduction. Through language, sound, visuals, and platform dynamics, audiences are invited to recognize themselves as subjects responsible for carrying tradition forward, enacting continuity through everyday domestic practice. This interpellative structure distinguishes the discourse of tradition from the previous chapter on duty and morality: while duty frames domesticity as moral obligation, heritage frames it as cultural continuity. Yet in both cases, women are hailed as the central agents of reproduction, of morality in one, of tradition in the other, demonstrating how the ideological weight of domesticity shifts registers while retaining its gendered core.

9.3 CASE STUDY: EGGNOG AND SOURDOUGH WREATH BY HANNAH NEELEMAN

The video chosen for the norm of cooking as tradition and heritage is a video posted by Hannah Neeleman. The video is one minute and 18 seconds long and in it she shows how to make eggnog and a sourdough wreath with melted brie. As of the 8th of July 2025 the video was viewed 23 million times (Neeleman, “Eggnog and Sourdough Wreath”).

The video relies minimally on language, prioritizing visual storytelling over verbal explanation. Textual elements appear only sparingly, such as the caption “Homemade eggnog with a sourdough wreath and melted brie ✨🌲 [...] Merry Christmas!” which employs emojis to reinforce the festive, domestic mood. This sparse language underscores the notion that the act of cooking itself communicates tradition and

heritage more effectively than words. The phrasing emphasizes authenticity, home-prepared foods, and seasonal celebration, subtly aligning the creator with ideals of femininity tied to cultural continuity. Even the few linguistic cues present, like holiday greetings and descriptive captions, frame the content as nurturing, communal, and rooted in domestic ritual.

The audio environment situates viewers squarely within a home kitchen, where the layering of sounds contributes to a sense of authenticity and domestic intimacy. Cooking noises, such as cutting, kneading, stirring, and frying, dominate, establishing the material labor of homemade food as a core element of tradition. Background sounds, including children's babbling and fragments of the husband's speech, further anchor the scene in family life and intergenerational participation, even if the children are mostly spectators. Spontaneous verbal reactions by the creator, such as "So good," emphasize personal satisfaction and enjoyment, reinforcing the idea that these culinary practices are not only traditional but emotionally resonant. Overall, the audio conveys a lived, familial environment, positioning women as active guardians of culinary heritage and domestic care.

The video visually emphasizes a rustic, agrarian aesthetic that evokes authenticity, heritage, and the domestic labor historically associated with women. The dark green AGA stove, wooden tables, enamel dishware, big bowls and pots, and glass containers collectively signal a traditional, handcrafted approach to cooking, while the use of their own farm-produced ingredients (organic flour and salt from Ballerina Farm) underscores a connection to agrarian values and self-sufficiency. Bread, as a central motif, functions as a powerful symbol of domestic tradition: making bread from scratch is a centuries-old practice, evoking historical homemaking skills and ancestral knowledge. The sourdough wreath, in particular, combines symbolic meaning with festive ritual. Its circular shape represents continuity, family cycles, and enduring domestic labor, while its association with Christmas conveys hope, celebration, and shared heritage. The act of shaping the wreath with her daughter visually communicates the intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge, positioning women as educators and guardians of tradition. Eggnog, another featured food, visually reinforces holiday ritual and communal celebration and serving it in a homemade context links contemporary family gatherings to centuries-old European and colonial American practices. The video captures moments of interaction, such as passing the eggnog to her husband and children, which emphasizes not only the

enjoyment of these foods but also the literal and symbolic passing down of culinary heritage. Additional visual cues, such as framed photographs of the creator as a young ballerina and of a figure in a field, subtly link the present domestic space to personal and ancestral identity, situating cooking as a medium through which family memory, tradition, and cultural continuity are enacted and celebrated. Even small imperfections, like spilled water from cooking beets, reinforce the authenticity of the domestic space and the labor-intensive nature of traditional cooking, highlighting women as active participants in sustaining heritage through hands-on practice.

The video employs a fast-paced editing style with hard cuts and jump cuts, which creates an energetic, engaging viewing experience while highlighting discrete moments of culinary preparation. Natural and earthy colors dominate, with occasional accent tones like red and blue to signal festivity and warmth, while natural lighting reinforces the intimate, homey environment. The camera focuses on both the food and the participants, moving between wide shots of the kitchen space and close-ups of hands shaping dough or pouring eggnog. This approach emphasizes both the craft of cooking and the relational aspects of heritage, showing women as the visual and narrative center of domestic tradition. The combination of pacing, color palette, and framing conveys nostalgia and care, aligning with the ideal of cooking as a feminine practice tied to cultural continuity and ritual preservation.

The multimodal strategies in Hannah Neeleman's eggnog and sourdough wreath video exemplify how cooking is framed as a practice of tradition and heritage, positioning women as guardians of cultural continuity. As outlined in the literature review, Althusser's concept of interpellation shows how ideology hails individuals into specific subject positions (174). Here, the sparse language of the caption "Homemade eggnog with a sourdough wreath and melted brie ✨ 🎄 [...] Merry Christmas!" hails viewers not only into a festive community but also into a maternal subjectivity rooted in heritage and ritual. The minimal reliance on text underscores that tradition is communicated primarily through practice, gesture, and symbolism, rather than explanation.

From the perspective of media encoding, the video presents a preferred reading in which cooking appears as an act of cultural preservation, inviting viewers to identify with domestic traditions as both authentic and morally resonant (Hall 137-38). As noted in the literature review, Fiske reminds us that audiovisual choices are not neutral but actively hail viewers into ideological positions (46-48). The nostalgic tone of the visuals,

the evocation of family togetherness, and the intergenerational involvement of children collectively invite viewers to see themselves as part of a tradition-bearing maternal lineage.

Feminist and postcolonial perspectives further enrich this analysis. Butler's framing of interpellation as performative is evident in the ritualized acts of kneading dough, shaping the sourdough wreath, and serving eggnog, which materialize femininity as repetitive performances of care and tradition (30-32). Hooks' critique of exclusions in interpellation resonates here as well: the rustic aesthetic, access to agrarian resources, and association with whiteness and middle-class stability foreground a particular, privileged version of heritage (54-56). At the same time, Bhabha's notion of ambivalence highlights the duality of the performance: while grounded in a nostalgic, rural aesthetic, the video also showcases luxury commodities and curated branding (e.g., Ballerina Farm products), blending modern consumerism with claims to authenticity (67-69).

In the social media context, these strategies are intensified by platform logics. As Fuchs argues, social media functions as an ideological apparatus that hails users into consumer-subject positions (89-91). Neeleman's use of branded farm products, alongside artisanal domestic practices, positions viewers as both cultural inheritors and consumers of authenticity. Papacharissi's concept of "affective publics" is also instructive: the sounds of children, the festive ambiance, and the warmth of the visual palette hail audiences affectively into a community centered on heritage, tradition, and family ritual (48-50). Meanwhile, Bucher's "algorithmic imaginary" helps explain how Instagram amplifies such content to audiences already engaged with domesticity, homesteading, or family-oriented values, reinforcing the subject position of the traditional homemaker (112-15).

Finally, as highlighted in the literature review, influencer culture further deepens interpellative dynamics. Marwick emphasizes how influencers construct aspirational identities that hail audiences into lifestyle communities (79-81). Neeleman's video achieves this by presenting heritage-based homemaking as not only desirable but also as a marker of cultural authenticity and moral virtue. Abidin's work on parasocial intimacy underscores how the inclusion of children, the husband, and spontaneous reactions fosters a sense of recognition and belonging, encouraging viewers to imagine themselves as enacting similar intergenerational rituals (95-97).

Taken together, Neeleman's video demonstrates how interpellation functions across language, sound, visuals, and editing to align cooking with cultural continuity, ritual, and heritage. As outlined in the literature review, interpellation on social media is multimodal, combining ideological hails with affective engagement, consumerist logics, and algorithmic circulation. Here, these strategies converge to position viewers as custodians of tradition, where femininity is materialized through the preservation and transmission of domestic rituals across generations.

9.4 IMPLICATIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The norm of cooking as tradition and heritage in tradwife videos positions women as central custodians of cultural continuity, linking domestic labor to intergenerational and communal identity. As demonstrated in Hannah Neeleman's eggnog and sourdough wreath video, even minimal linguistic cues frame cooking as an ethical and cultural act, while visual, auditory, and editorial strategies convey authenticity, ritual, and familial continuity. Through *mise-en-scène*, seasonal décor, rustic kitchens, and careful curation of objects, women are represented as bearers of heritage, with their bodies and labor enacting and signaling continuity with idealized domestic pasts.

However, this norm is ideologically restrictive. It naturalizes the expectation that women maintain tradition, conflating cultural preservation with moral and gendered obligation. The emphasis on artisanal skills, curated aesthetics, and access to resources codes heritage as classed and often racially specific, marginalizing those who cannot participate in these forms of domestic reproduction (9.2-9.3). Interpellation through audiovisual and platform strategies recruits viewers into performing heritage, embedding responsibility for cultural continuity into everyday domestic labor. Consequently, while these videos celebrate skill, care, and continuity, they also reinforce gendered hierarchies, idealize nostalgia, and situate moral and cultural value in women's domestic performance.

In sum, this chapter has shown how tradwife cooking videos construct domestic foodwork as an act of cultural preservation, positioning women as custodians of both family memory and national heritage. Through nostalgic aesthetics, seasonal rituals, and embodied gestures, cooking is framed as a site where authenticity and continuity are materialized. Yet this framing is highly selective: it privileges a white, middle-class, agrarian imaginary while obscuring other cultural traditions and the broader structural conditions that shape who can perform such practices. By centering women as the

primary transmitters of heritage, the videos reinforce gendered divisions of labor and naturalize the expectation that mothers alone safeguard cultural continuity. Moreover, the integration of branded products reveals how “authentic tradition” is commodified into a lifestyle, marketed as both moral virtue and aspirational consumption. In aestheticizing heritage in this way, tradwife content transforms domestic cooking into an ideological project that reaffirms privilege while masking the exclusions and inequities embedded in its nostalgic vision of tradition.

10 COOKING AS COMPETENCE AND AUTHORITY IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

This chapter explores how the norm of cooking as competence and authority is expressed in tradwife cooking videos. Unlike the earlier chapters, which emphasize care, duty, or tradition, the focus here is on how femininity is validated through mastery, efficiency, and instructional authority. Cooking becomes not just service but expertise and not just devotion but competence. The first section presents the findings from the video sample, analyzing how linguistic, audio, visual, camera and editing choices frame women as competent domestic authorities. The second section analyzes how viewers are interpellated through these audio-visual strategies. The third section highlights the strategies used in one video of Nara Smith that represents the expression of cooking as competence and authority and how viewers are interpellated in this specific video. The last section discusses the implications of this norm and provides a chapter summary.

10.1 EXPRESSIONS OF COOKING AS COMPETENCE AND AUTHORITY IN TRADWIFE VIDEOS

Language is a central means by which competence and authority are constructed. Across the sample, creators use confident, directive phrasing to describe their actions. Gretchen Adler, for example, narrates her cooking with phrases like “first you’ll want to...” or “make sure to whisk thoroughly,” adopting the tone of a tutorial. This instructive language positions her as an authority figure, guiding both her family and her audience.

Nara Smith also adopts directive language, though in a more subtle form. She often frames her process as efficient steps, such as “I let that rise for about two hours while I prep a simple fall salad”, emphasizing time management (Smith, “Fall Dinner”). These

linguistic choices highlight competence as the ability to multitask and maximize efficiency.

Delarosa's captions sometimes emphasize planning and organization, such as noting that leftovers will be used for future meals (Delarosa, "Apple Jacks"). This forward-looking language frames her as a domestic strategist, someone who not only cooks but manages resources effectively.

In all cases, linguistic choices frame women as experts in domestic labor. The authority here is not overtly hierarchical but pedagogical and relational: women instruct by example, guiding others toward competence.

Audio choices reinforce the construction of competence. Voice-overs are often confident and directive, reflecting authority. Adler's clear, precise narrations function like mini-lessons, while Smith's calm but purposeful tone conveys efficiency. The absence of hesitation or uncertainty in their voices reinforces their expertise.

Background music also contributes to this framing. Upbeat but unobtrusive tracks often accompany cooking sequences, creating a rhythm that mirrors efficiency and organization. The tempo of the music matches the pacing of the labor, reinforcing the sense of productivity.

Neeleman's inclusion of live kitchen sounds emphasizes authenticity and artisanal competence. The hum of a grain mill or the stretching of dough creates a soundscape of skilled labor. These sounds function as auditory evidence of her authority: the labor is not only described but audibly present.

Audio strategies thus communicate both confidence and authenticity, positioning women as skilled practitioners and instructors.

The *mise-en-scène* of the videos consistently frames competence through order and aesthetic control. Smith's minimalist kitchen, with spotless counters and neatly arranged tools, signals efficiency and discipline. Her space functions as a visual metaphor for her organizational competence.

Adler's maximalist kitchen, though visually busy, is carefully curated. Every decoration and prop is arranged deliberately, demonstrating her aesthetic control. Her authority emerges not from minimalism but from her ability to manage abundance without chaos.

Delarosa's seasonal *mise-en-scène* emphasizes her competence as a cultural organizer. By aligning her cooking with holidays and rituals, she frames herself as the orchestrator of family traditions. Her kitchen becomes a stage where competence is expressed through coordination and planning.

Neeleman's rustic *mise-en-scène* highlights artisanal competence. Wooden counters, natural lighting, and visible ingredients frame her as a practitioner of authentic, skilled cooking. Her modest appearance reinforces this authority. She embodies artisanal knowledge through simplicity.

Across these variations, *mise-en-scène* aestheticizes competence. Cleanliness, order, or curated abundance all signal authority, positioning women as masters of domestic space.

Camera and editing strategies further reinforce competence. High-angle shots of chopping or mixing emphasize precision, while close-ups highlight skill in detail. POV shots situate the audience in the learner's position, with the creator's hands guiding them step by step. These visual strategies transform women into instructors, demonstrating expertise through carefully framed gestures.

Editing rhythms also emphasize efficiency. Quick cuts between tasks suggest seamless multitasking: boiling pasta while chopping vegetables, setting the table while bread bakes. This editing aestheticizes competence, portraying domestic work as streamlined and controlled.

In Neeleman's videos, longer shots emphasize the authenticity of labor. Watching dough rise in real time or hearing a grain mill operate highlights her artisanal authority. The slower pacing reinforces patience and mastery, suggesting that true competence requires time and dedication.

Together, camera and editing strategies ritualize competence as performance. They transform everyday labor into a demonstration of authority, validating femininity through skill and efficiency.

Representationally, the videos highlight skilled actions and tools. Close ups of Adler's detailed techniques, Delarosa's efficient multitasking, or Neeleman's artisanal bread making present cooking as expertise. Displays of branded mixers or specialized bakeware function as visual evidence that the women possess both knowledge and the right equipment to do things properly.

These choices are supported by how the creators interact with their audiences. Direct looks into the camera or instructional voice overs establish a teaching relationship. Adler's step by step narration or Smith's efficient sequencing encourage viewers to trust their authority. POV shots of chopping or kneading make the audience feel as though they are being guided by the creator's own hands. This relational positioning strengthens the sense that competence is not just demonstrated but shared.

Compositional strategies give further weight to expertise. Saliency is placed on technical details and orderly kitchens, so attention is drawn to the process of doing things well. Editing rhythms, which accelerate during routine preparation but linger during key demonstrations, ensure that important skills receive focus. The framing of tools and outcomes such as the orderly counter or a perfectly plated dish gives visual coherence to competence as both practice and performance.

Finally, modality and materiality enhance the believability of authority. High quality lighting, sharp textures of food, and clear sound of mixing or chopping provide sensory confirmation of expertise. These elements work together so that skill feels real and convincing. In effect, the videos transform everyday cooking into a form of domestic mastery, where feminine authority is communicated through confidence, precision, and aesthetic polish.

10.2 INTERPELLATING THE VIEWER INTO THE NORM OF COMPETENCE AND AUTHORITY

Linguistically, competence is performed through the deployment of specialized vocabulary and technical precision. References to processes such as "bulk ferment," or ingredients such as "einkorn" and "compound butter" function as markers of expertise, hailing viewers into a pedagogical relationship in which the creator embodies authority and the viewer is positioned as learner. This discursive strategy transforms domestic cooking into a field of specialized knowledge rather than routine labor, interpellating audiences into valuing precision, mastery, and attention to technical detail as defining features of competent femininity.

Authority is also reinforced sonically. In contrast to the more relational tones associated with care, audio in these videos projects control and confidence. The absence of disfluencies in scripted narration and the calm delivery of instructions establish an auditory environment where competence is conveyed as stable and reliable. Live

sounds, such as the clatter of utensils or the rhythm of kneading, further authenticate the cook's skill, functioning as audible proof of technical proficiency. These audio strategies collectively hail viewers into acknowledging domestic expertise as both demonstrable and authoritative.

Visually, competence and authority are emphasized through camera work that foregrounds the process of cooking as a craft. POV and high-angle shots into bowls and onto cutting boards place the viewer in the role of apprentice, directly observing the cook's skilled hands. Close-ups on techniques, such as kneading or stirring, intensify the instructional aspect, positioning the creator as an authority whose competence is visible and replicable. At the same time, the *mise-en-scène* of orderly kitchens, coupled with the creators' composed appearances, visually aligns authority with discipline and control. These framings interpellate the audience into recognizing competence as a central axis of domestic subjectivity.

On the platform level, competence is sustained through minimalistic editing and restrained use of text. The avoidance of elaborate filters or overlays hails viewers into perceiving the videos as transparent demonstrations of skill rather than embellished performances. Chronological sequencing of preparation and completion further encodes authority, presenting cooking as a linear, replicable process that can be mastered through attention and repetition. Platform affordances thus extend the interpellation of competence by structuring how authority is displayed and received, reinforcing the normative expectation that mastery of domestic techniques is both visible and learnable.

10.3 CASE STUDY: FALL DINNER BY NARA SMITH

The video chosen to represent the norm of cooking as competence and authority was posted by Nara Smith and is one minute and 29 seconds long. In this video Nara Smith presents a fall dinner she prepares for her family. The dinner consists of a butternut soup, beef roast, bread rolls, a salad, and a deconstructed caramel apple dessert. As of 8th of July 2025, the video was viewed 12.2 million times (Smith, "Fall Dinner").

The language used in the video conveys both competence and authority in the kitchen. The speaker narrates her cooking process with precision and confidence, using terms such as "sear off my roast" and "deglaze with wine," which signal technical knowledge and culinary expertise. She demonstrates time management and multitasking skills by

describing the overlapping preparation of multiple dishes, such as letting the roast cook for hours while simultaneously prepping vegetables, rolling dough, and assembling a salad. Her description of making dough and timing its rise, alongside the careful assembly of a deconstructed caramel apple dessert, emphasizes her skill in both cooking and baking. Additionally, the narrative structure, including providing tips such as waiting to dress the salad until the last moment, positions her as an authoritative guide who imparts practical knowledge, reinforcing her role as a competent domestic figure.

The video's audio complements the linguistic display of authority by creating a calm, instructive atmosphere. The speaker's soft, lower-pitched voice and clear pronunciation establish a sense of control and composure, while her steady, slightly monotone delivery reinforces a perception of expertise. Although the speech is largely scripted, lacking filler words or hesitations, the use of informal, conversational phrasing maintains a natural and approachable tone. The soft piano background music, November by TWO LANES, supports the domestic and cozy mood of the video, underscoring the speaker's calm authority and reinforcing the idea that competence in the kitchen can be exercised with grace and composure. The absence of live audio, such as kitchen sounds, keeps the focus on her narration and subtly amplifies her instructional authority.

Visually, the video emphasizes domestic competence and aestheticized femininity. The kitchen is minimalistic yet high-end, featuring white and grey tones, wooden cutting boards and bowls, enamel dishware, and recognizable luxury brands such as Le Creuset, SMEG, and KitchenAid. These choices signal both taste and skill, positioning the speaker as someone who is knowledgeable and capable in a refined domestic space. Her own appearance, a cozy red sweater, golden earrings, and subtle makeup, balances approachability with polished presentation. Visual attention to handiwork, such as chopping vegetables and plating dishes, emphasizes meticulousness and technique, while opening and closing shots of the full array of prepared foods reinforce the breadth of her competence and authority over the entire meal.

The camera work and editing further reinforce her authority and instructional role. A combination of POV shots, high-angle shots into bowls and pots, and medium shots highlight her hands-on techniques while providing viewers with a clear instructional perspective. POV shots, in particular, mimic the style of professional cooking tutorials,

giving the audience the sense of learning directly from an expert. Editing emphasizes multitasking and organization, with smooth transitions between different cooking stages and dishes, visually modeling efficient domestic practice. The video's composition aligns with the tradwife norm: mastery, efficiency, and relational authority in the kitchen are communicated through organized visuals, careful framing of skills, and an instructive tone that guides viewers in both technique and aesthetic domestic presentation.

Nara Smith's fall dinner video exemplifies how cooking is framed as a norm of competence and authority, hailing viewers into positions of admiration and aspiration. As outlined in the literature review, Althusser's concept of interpellation highlights how ideology addresses individuals and situates them in subject positions (174). The use of precise culinary terminology, such as "sear off my roast" and "deglaze with wine", functions as a linguistic hail, positioning Smith as an authoritative guide while simultaneously inviting viewers to identify with domestic mastery as an idealized feminine role. The narrative structure, which includes multitasking and practical tips, interpellates audiences not merely as passive observers but as potential practitioners, hailing them into a subject position where competence itself becomes a form of domestic virtue.

Hall's encoding/decoding model helps illuminate how the video encodes a preferred reading of competence as both attainable and aspirational (137-38). As noted in the literature review, Fiske underscores that such media conventions are never neutral but work ideologically (46-48). The calm narration, structured multitasking, and polished delivery invite audiences to decode the performance as effortless expertise. In doing so, the video positions Smith not only as a homemaker but as a cultural authority whose competence validates her domestic role.

Feminist and postcolonial perspectives further complicate this reading. Butler's framing of interpellation as performative is useful for understanding how Smith's gestures, tone, and repeated culinary practices materialize authority through repetition (30-32). Hooks' critique of exclusion in interpellation also resonates here: the high-end brands (Le Creuset, SMEG, KitchenAid), minimalist aesthetic, and curated domestic space present a vision of competence that is class-specific and implicitly racialized, foregrounding privilege as the backdrop against which authority is recognized (54-56). Bhabha's notion of ambivalence reveals another tension: while Smith's authority is

grounded in domestic tradition, it is simultaneously reframed through consumerist modernity, where luxury commodities and curated aesthetics legitimate competence (67-69).

In the context of social media, these dynamics are intensified by the logics of platform capitalism. As the literature review outlines, Fuchs argues that social media hails users into consumer-subject positions (89-91). Smith's integration of recognizable brands functions as an interpellative mechanism, aligning culinary authority with consumer choice. Papacharissi's notion of "affective publics" further explains how the video's mood, reinforced by soft piano music and calm narration, hails audiences into a community that values aestheticized competence and composure in domestic labor (48-50). At the same time, Bucher's "algorithmic imaginary" shows how Instagram amplifies such representations, targeting audiences already drawn to polished, aspirational domesticity, and thereby reinforcing authority as a tradwife norm (112-15).

Finally, as emphasized in the literature review, influencer dynamics deepen these interpellative processes. Marwick's analysis of aspirational lifestyles shows how influencers position themselves as models for audiences to emulate (79-81). Smith's polished authority functions precisely in this way, setting a standard of competence that followers are encouraged to identify with and aspire to. Abidin's work on parasocial intimacy also applies: while Smith's delivery is more scripted than spontaneous, the calm, conversational phrasing invites audiences into a relationship of trust, framing her authority as both approachable and exemplary (95-97).

Taken together, Smith's video demonstrates how interpellation operates through language, sound, visuals, and editing to position cooking as a site of competence and authority. As outlined in the literature review, interpellation on social media is multimodal, blending ideological hails with affective engagement, consumerist logics, and algorithmic reinforcement. In this case, these strategies converge to position viewers within a framework where feminine authority is materialized through mastery of domestic skills, refined aesthetics, and the careful balancing of instruction with aspirational presentation.

10.4 IMPLICATIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The video frames femininity and authority primarily within the domestic sphere, validating women's value through their efficiency, skill, and beauty in the kitchen. While

it celebrates competence, it risks reproducing the idea that women's power is best or only expressed through homemaking, which can reinforce traditional gender roles that limit women's authority to the private/domestic realm rather than professional, public, or political domains.

The curated visuals (minimalist, spotless kitchen, luxury cookware, cozy-yet-polished appearance) mask the real messiness and labor-intensive nature of cooking. The authority is built not only on cooking skill but on the ability to make domestic work look effortless and beautiful. This can be problematic because it glamorizes unpaid domestic labor, hiding the exhaustion that often accompanies it, and sets unrealistic standards for what "successful" homemaking should look like.

The use of luxury kitchen brands, such as LeCreuset, SMEG, KitchenAid, and McKenzie-Childs, and high-quality ingredients constructs authority through consumerism. Competence here is partly measured by access to expensive tools and spaces, which excludes viewers who cannot afford these items. This ties femininity and authority in the kitchen to class privilege, suggesting that domestic mastery is not only about skill but also about having the right materials and aesthetics.

While the video gives the woman authority, it is a limited, relational authority within the family context: planning meals, managing time, and guiding domestic practices. This kind of authority is celebrated as power, but it is still constrained to the household and framed as service to others. It risks reinforcing the idea that women's expertise is valuable primarily insofar as it benefits the family, rather than being seen as an independent skill set or professional expertise.

In summary, this chapter has shown how tradwife cooking videos present women as competent and authoritative figures within the home. Through clear instructions, polished kitchens, and carefully edited tutorials, creators position themselves as teachers and role models for domestic life. At the same time, this authority is limited to the household and remains tied to traditional gender roles. What looks like empowerment is framed through consumer choices and aesthetic displays, which often depend on class privilege and access to time and resources. By making domestic expertise appear effortless and desirable, these videos glamorize unpaid household work and reinforce the idea that women's value lies primarily in their skill and dedication to the private sphere.

11 CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore how norms of femininity are articulated and reproduced in Instagram cooking videos produced by women who identify, or are identified, as tradwives. By analyzing a corpus of videos through multimodal discourse analysis, the project has shown how cooking, far from being a neutral or purely practical activity, functions as a gendered performance that communicates and reinforces ideals of care, morality, heritage, and competence. Each of these categories emerged not as isolated meanings but as overlapping dimensions of femininity that are aesthetically and affectively staged for digital audiences.

The first research question asked: What are the implicit norms and ideals of femininity and gender identity conveyed in tradwife cooking videos? The analysis demonstrated that femininity is framed as a specific form of gender identity anchored in domesticity. Across the dataset, women's roles were consistently tied to selflessness, devotion, and service to others. Cooking was repeatedly framed as an expression of emotional care, as a moral duty, as a vehicle for preserving tradition, and as evidence of competence. These norms were rarely presented explicitly as ideological arguments. Instead, they were naturalized through repetition, aestheticization, and the association of domestic labor with love, virtue, and fulfillment.

The second research question asked: What are the audio-visual strategies used to perform these norms? Here, the analysis identified a range of multimodal techniques. Linguistic choices emphasized relationality and care, moral duty, cultural continuity, and competent foodwork. Visual strategies foregrounded idealized kitchens, vintage aesthetics, and the affective warmth of domestic space. Auditory elements, such as calm voiceovers, nostalgic background music, or the ambient noise of family life, reinforced the framing of cooking as serene, caring, and relational. Editing styles favored soft lighting, close-ups of food, and narrative pacing that foregrounded order and harmony. These strategies worked together to make domestic labor appear effortless, joyful, and inherently feminine.

The third research question concerned interpellation: How are viewers positioned by these strategies? The analysis showed that audiences are hailed into particular subject positions through direct address, parasocial intimacy, and the circulation of hashtags and aesthetic codes. Viewers are invited to identify with the tradwife, to admire her devotion, and to imagine themselves as potential participants in this lifestyle.

Interpellation operates not only through explicit appeals but also through affective atmospheres, where the calm voiceover or nostalgic *mise-en-scène* implicitly calls on viewers to recognize themselves in the role of devoted homemaker. Platform logics further intensify this effect, as algorithmic amplification extends the reach of this content beyond niche communities, exposing broader audiences to its normative imaginaries.

The findings underscore the continued relevance of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. Tradwife cooking videos illustrate how gender identity is constituted through repeated acts, gestures, and discourses that naturalize femininity as domestic and selfless. At the same time, the analysis complicates Butler's framework by highlighting the role of digital media infrastructures. Gendered performances do not unfold in isolation but are amplified, aestheticized, and rewarded through platform algorithms, influencer economies, and networked publics.

The study also contributes to scholarship on food and gender by demonstrating that cooking remains a central site where femininity is constituted and contested. While earlier feminist critiques exposed the burdens of foodwork as invisible labor, tradwife content reframes these burdens as desirable and fulfilling. The videos perform what Arlene Avakian and Barbara Haber have described as the "myth of women's selfless devotion" (12) but in a digital, postfeminist register where devotion is branded as authenticity and marketed as lifestyle.

Finally, the analysis highlights the importance of interpellation in understanding social media. Louis Althusser's concept of the "hail" is particularly useful here, but the thesis has shown that interpellation in digital contexts is multimodal, affective, and algorithmically mediated. Viewers are not simply addressed linguistically but are enveloped in curated atmospheres of calmness, nostalgia, and care. In this way, tradwife videos function as ideological apparatuses that naturalize domestic femininity while masking its historical and political contradictions.

While the study has demonstrated how tradwife cooking videos reproduce gender norms, it is equally important to recognize the contradictions and limitations of these performances. A critical reflection on the findings highlights several tensions.

First, the tradwife aesthetic presents domesticity as effortless and apolitical, but this conceals the labor, planning, and entrepreneurial work required to sustain such

content. Many tradwife influencers monetize their persona through sponsorships, branded products, or subscription services, effectively becoming the economic providers they rhetorically reject. This contradiction undermines the apparent rejection of feminism or modernity, revealing how “tradition” is itself a carefully curated brand.

Second, the content frames domesticity as universally fulfilling, yet this ignores the diversity of women’s experiences and the structural inequalities that shape access to such lifestyles. The tradwife aesthetic is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and heterosexual, thereby excluding or marginalizing women of color, queer women, or those without economic resources.

Third, the postfeminist framing of submission as choice raises profound questions about agency. Many tradwives present their lifestyle as liberating, a rejection of the pressures of modern work or neoliberal self-optimization. Yet this narrative risks obscuring the structural conditions, for instance lack of childcare support, economic precarity, patriarchal ideologies, that constrain women’s choices in the first place. The freedom to submit may be experienced as authentic, but it simultaneously re-legitimizes systems of inequality that feminism has long sought to dismantle.

Fourth, the interpellation of viewers into tradwife imaginaries raises concerns about the normalization of reactionary politics. While not all tradwives are aligned with extremist ideologies, the circulation of tradwife content contributes to a soft infrastructure of antifeminism and retraditionalisation. By aestheticizing domesticity as calming, wholesome, and empowering, tradwife influencers render patriarchal norms appealing to young generations. In this sense, cooking videos are not politically neutral but participate in broader cultural struggles over gender, modernity, and social change.

Several limitations of this thesis must be acknowledged. First, the definition of “tradwife” remains fluid and contested. This study included both self-identified tradwives and women labelled as such by media or audiences, but this choice inevitably introduces ambiguity. Some creators may resist the label even as they embody its principles, and the boundaries between related identities (e.g. #stayathomegirlfriend, homesteader, Christian homemaker) are porous. Future research might engage more directly with how creators negotiate or reject these labels.

Second, the analysis focused on a relatively small sample of highly visible influencers during a specific timeframe. While this allowed for depth of analysis, it limits

generalizability. Other tradwife content, especially from smaller creators or from different cultural contexts, may yield different dynamics. Comparative studies across platforms or national contexts would provide a fuller picture.

Third, the thesis focused primarily on the producers' strategies and the textual construction of femininity. Audience reception was inferred through interpellation but not empirically studied. Viewers may interpret or resist tradwife content in diverse ways that this study could not capture. Future work incorporating audience research would enrich our understanding of how tradwife discourses are received, negotiated, or contested.

Building on these limitations, future research could pursue several directions. Comparative studies could examine tradwife content across platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or Pinterest, where algorithms and affordances differ. Cross-cultural studies could explore how similar ideals manifest in non-Western contexts, or how global tradwife aesthetics intersect with local traditions. Reception studies could investigate how audiences engage with, resist, or parody tradwife content, illuminating the dynamics of meaning-making beyond the level of production.

This thesis has argued that tradwife cooking videos on Instagram constitute powerful sites of gendered performance where femininity is framed through care, morality, heritage, and competence. These videos not only aestheticize domestic labor but also interpellate viewers into normative imaginaries of tradition and femininity, rendering patriarchal gender roles desirable in the digital age. At the same time, the performances are marked by contradictions. They monetize labor while disavowing work, frame submission as choice while masking structural inequalities, and aestheticize whiteness while presenting it as universal.

The significance of studying tradwife content lies not in cataloguing a niche subculture but in recognizing how digital media serve as arenas where gender norms are rearticulated, contested, and circulated. Tradwife cooking videos may appear benign, even quaint, but they are in fact deeply political, participating in contemporary struggles over gender, tradition, and power. As such, they demand critical scholarly attention.

By analyzing these multimodal performances, this thesis has sought to contribute to feminist media studies by showing how digital domesticity functions as both lifestyle branding and ideological work. The tradwife phenomenon reveals not a simple return

to the past but a re-invention of tradition for the present, one that merges nostalgia with platform capitalism, domesticity with entrepreneurialism, and submission with empowerment. It is in this very hybridity that the tradwife becomes a compelling and troubling figure. She represents a rejection of modern life while also embodying its very principles.

28 223 words

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13 APPENDIX

Abstract (English)

This thesis investigates how the “tradwife” phenomenon, a digital culture of married women who embrace mid-20th-century ideals of femininity and homemaking, constructs and circulates norms of gender through Instagram cooking videos. While cooking is often regarded as a practical or creative skill, in this context it functions as a gendered performance that frames femininity as care, morality, tradition, and competence.

Drawing on Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and employing a multimodal discourse analysis, the study examines a dataset of cooking videos posted between November 2024 and January 2025 by four prominent influencers: Alexia Delarosa, Gretchen Adler, Hannah Neeleman, and Nara Smith. The analysis focuses on linguistic, visual, auditory, and compositional strategies, as well as the ways viewers are interpellated by these videos.

The findings show that tradwife cooking videos tie cooking to norms of care and selflessness, duty and morality, tradition and heritage, as well as competence and authority. While these performances appear benign, they conceal the entrepreneurial labor that sustains influencer activity, reproduce heteronormative ideals, and reframe submission as empowerment. Tradwife content thus contributes to contemporary debates on postfeminism, digital domesticity, and the retraditionalisation of gender roles.

By analyzing cooking as a cultural text, this thesis demonstrates how digital media function as sites where femininity is rearticulated, commodified, and politicized.

Abstract (German)

Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie das „Tradwife“-Phänomen, eine digitale Kultur verheirateter Frauen, die weibliche Rollenbilder und Hausfrauenideale der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts befürworten, über Kochvideos auf Instagram Geschlechternormen konstruiert und zirkuliert. Während Kochen häufig als praktische oder kreative Fertigkeit betrachtet wird, fungiert es in diesem Kontext als geschlechtsspezifische Performance, die Weiblichkeit als Fürsorge, Moral, Tradition und Kompetenz inszeniert.

Aufbauend auf Judith Butlers Theorie der Performativität und unter Anwendung einer multimodalen Diskursanalyse untersucht die Studie ein Datenset von Kochvideos, die zwischen November 2024 und Januar 2025 von vier prominenten Influencerinnen, Alexia Delarosa, Gretchen Adler, Hannah Neeleman und Nara Smith, veröffentlicht wurden. Die Analyse konzentriert sich auf sprachliche, visuelle, auditive und kompositorische Strategien sowie darauf, wie Zuschauerinnen und Zuschauer durch diese Videos interpelliert werden.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Tradwife-Kochvideos das Kochen mit Normen der Fürsorge und Selbstlosigkeit, der Pflicht und Moral, der Tradition und Herkunft sowie der Kompetenz und Autorität verknüpfen. Obwohl diese Darstellungen harmlos erscheinen, verschleiern sie die unternehmerische Arbeit, die die Influencer-Tätigkeit trägt, reproduzieren heteronormative Ideale und stellen Unterordnung als Selbstermächtigung dar. Tradwife-Inhalte tragen somit zu aktuellen Debatten über Postfeminismus, digitale Häuslichkeit und die Retraditionalisierung von Geschlechterrollen bei.

Durch die Analyse des Kochens als kulturellen Text zeigt diese Arbeit, wie digitale Medien als Orte fungieren, an denen Weiblichkeit neu artikuliert, kommerzialisiert und politisiert wird.