**Friday, December 13, 2024 / Trad wife takeover**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

SCORING IN

NOEL: If you are a woman on God’s green earth, on Al Gore’s Internet then your algorithm has at some point served you Nara Smith - the soft-spoken model who loves to cook for her husband and kids.

*<C*[*LIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@naraazizasmith/video/7422773182249192747)*> Nara Smith: My toddlers were playing in the backyard they asked me for a Capri-Sun. Since I had all the fruit at home to make some I asked them to give me a minute.*

NOEL: Nara’s Capri Sun doesn’t have any added sugar or citric acid or those sus “natural flavors” that are in the store-bought one - it’s all from scratch.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@naraazizasmith/video/7422773182249192747)*> Nara Smith: I also add in some cold grapes and it was time to start juicing all of my fruit.*

NOEL: But then she DOES put it in the little plastic pouch with a straw just it’s like a real Capri-Sun which is incredibly kyoot, and now, somehow you’ve lost ten minutes and there are hundreds more of these videos and really you need to get offline and go do something with yourself but you can’t look away, what is happening to you?

NOEL: You have entered the world of trad wives - they are coming up on Today, Explained.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@naraazizasmith/video/7422773182249192747)*> Right as I was done cleaning up they wanted a second one.*

**[THEME]**

NOEL: Sarah Peterson, author of *Momfluenced* and the Substack *In Pursuit of Clean Countertops*, what is a trad wife?

SARA: So I would define a trad wife… my definition has kind of changed in the last couple years, but as somebody who adheres to traditional gender norms and does so in a public facing way. First of all, you should be a mother. If you're a woman, you should be a mother and you should glory in all things domestic. So not only should you take care of the house, clean the house, cook the meals, raise the children. Ideally, you're doing these things in a really esthetically pleasing way, often they homeschool their children. They're often making food from scratch. So they're doing all things, you know, mothering labor and domestic labor, but they're turning it up to 100.

<[CLIP](https://www.tiktok.com/@esteecwilliams/video/7193858884636020014)> Estee Williams: *I submit, and I serve my husband. The bible has the man as the household, not the woman.*

<[CLIP](https://www.tiktok.com/@lex.delarosa)>Lex Delarosa: *This morning, my toddlers wanted to color but we were all out of paper so I decided to make my own.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@thatjoyfilledhome/video/7338504103401655583)*> thatjoyfilledhome: We’re blue collar wives, I’m gonna have a hot meal ready for him when he comes home*

SARA: There's a lot of disillusionment, rightly so, with the sort of, you know, the narratives of mainstream feminism that have been parceled out in you know, the past 20 years.

<cello>

*Today Explained Producer: LEAN IN*

So there's a real rejection of Girlboss feminism at the heart of many of these accounts. There's a lot of exhaustion with the idea of having to work a full time job in addition to raising a family without getting burnt out.

SCORING IN Robert Schumann, Of Foreign Lands and Peoples (Scenes from Childhood)

SARA: You know there's a lot of women who I wouldn't necessarily put in the trad wife bucket who are also sort of united in this rejection of the version of feminism that they've been fed… there's soft girls who are living soft lives…

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@sophie.marck/video/7390259859435851014?q=soft%20life&t=1733854283429)*> TIKTOK:*

*Sophie Marck: Spend a day with me as a girl that prefers to live a softer life.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@allthingsamaro/video/7166763694691634478?q=soft%20life&t=1733854283429)*> TIKTOK:*

*Allthingsamaro: Strong black woman narrative? It doesn’t apply to me. I live a soft life.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@amourasceo/video/7294782968671898922?q=soft%20life&t=1733854283429)*> TIKTOK:*

*Amourasceo: I just want a soft life. Very soft. As soft as it can get.*

SARA: And then I'm thinking of the stay at home girlfriend phenomenon. And these women really prioritize keeping their homes immaculate, keeping their bodies immaculate. A lot of focus on physical appearance, maintaining beauty standards and body standards. And I'm thinking of one Kendall Kay on TikTok..

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZvaQZ2hjGo)*> YOUTUBE:*

*Kendall Kay: Day in my life as a stay at home girlfriend. I first did my skincare routine, then I did some ice rolling and some journaling, and I made the bed.*

SARA: It's really simple content usually, um, but I think the appeal is that it feels simple and it feels sort of separate from the messiness of life that most of us are experiencing? So…yeah.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: So is the word trad wife, is it something that this group of women embraces? Like, is it offensive if I call a woman a trad wife?

SARA: It depends which I know is an obnoxious answer but I'm thinking of one who, like proudly wears the term. Aria Lewis. She's Mrs. Aria Lewis on Instagram, and she is constantly defining what it means to be a trad wife. Owning the term trad wife.

*<CLIP> Mrsarialewis: Being traditional is not a 1950s cosplay cult or a Little House on the prairie cosplay cult. Being traditional is having a set of values that you make your life decisions from.*

SARA: But then you have people like Hannah Neeleman, who was interviewed by the London Times and said she didn't really identify with the term. I think a lot of the time these women are saying they're just living their lives and, you know, we're the ones that are obsessed with labeling it and sort of pathologizing it, but they're just doing what feels right to them.

NOEL: Hannah Neeleman is fascinating. Tell us about her.

SARA: I started following Hannah Neeleman in 2019 or 2020. I wrote a piece for Harper's Bazaar, and at that point, she had under 200,000 followers on Instagram, which is absolutely wild considering she now has roughly 22 million followers across all platforms. She has just absolutely exploded in fame and just visibility. She is a mother of eight. She's Mormon. She lives on a ranch in Utah with her husband, Daniel Neeleman, who is one of the children of David Neeleman, who founded JetBlue, so there's certainly generational wealth at play. Yeah, they are hugely controversial, mostly because Hannah's Instagram makes her life look really serene, I would say, she just leans into motherhood and domesticity in a way that feels absolutely, absolutely impossible unless you have a ton of money and a ton of other privileges. I think a hallmark Hannah Neeleman reel is her cooking some sort of elaborate scratch meal.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.instagram.com/ballerinafarm/reel/C-rZFv9OQxY/?hl=en)*> Instagram:*

*Ballerinafarm: Getting started on my meat. So I put tons of herbs, breadcrumbs, some spices, and then I put it in a loaf pan and baked that. And while I was baking, I rolled out my sourdough pita. And pita is literally so easy to make.*

SARA: And she's got a she's either wearing a baby or has a toddler on her hip. Children are coming in and out of frame and her voice, it never really changes in pitch or tone. It's like always calm.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d39Nbsx8DW0)*> Instagram:*

*Ballerinafarm: I wake up, nurse Flora Jo. Then we get the kids fed and ready for school, which is in a little schoolhouse we have here on the farm.*

SARA: And I think if you were to ask most people like, do you follow any trad wives, the one they would reference the most is Hanna Neeleman.

NOEL: Producer Victoria Chamberlin, notably not a trad wife. She buys French salt from Ballerina Farm, and then she posts images on our work slack. She loves the content. She watches it on Instagram. I do, too. I don't want to be a trad wife. Why do I want to watch it so much? Why do we want to buy the salt? Like, what is the allure here?

SARA: It's really beautiful content a lot of the time, you know, there's all these rolling hills, you know, open plains. The kitchen is rustic in this very, like, you know, yesteryear type of way. And I think there's something so intoxicating about the idea of devoting oneself to just to one thing or to go all in on one aspect of your identity. Again, when it's I think that's especially salient for moms who, you know, we can't find affordable child care. We're constantly torn in two directions. And so to see somebody who isn't torn in two directions and who seems really happy and is living this beautiful life, yeah, I think we all just want more, more simplicity. And I think we're also longing for the certainty that she seems to have in her lifestyle.

NOEL: You said she was controversial. What makes her controversial?

SARA: Really that she's adhering to super specific standards of femininity and motherhood. She's very thin. She's conventionally attractive. She even you know, she participates in beauty pageants, which is just, you know, an explicit, like best domestic goddess contest. And I think mothers across this country are mad. We're exhausted, we're underresourced. We're not supported by our government. And so to see somebody constantly selling this idyllic romanticized version of motherhood that is wildly impossible for the vast majority of people feels sort of like a form of gaslighting.

NOEL: I think a defender of Hannah Neeleman might say… ‘But she's not doing anything bad.’ She and other women like her are just living their best lives, however, realistically on Instagram. And that's not a real problem. And if that's a real problem than anybody who pretends their life is better than it is on social media is a problem.

SARA: I don't even care…I'm not even particularly interested in whether or not, you know, all of this comes as easily to her as she makes it seem. I do think Hannah Neeleman has… her responsibility in the Trad Wife sort of phenomenon is hard to parse. I think what's more important is what politicians do with trad wives and how they, you know, explicitly or not weaponized them in the culture wars? While, she has said that she aims to be apolitical for most of her public facing years, she recently did a cover shoot with Evie magazine, it looks a lot like Glamor or Elle. But they're publishing articles about, you know, the toxicity of birth control and the importance of the nuclear family and how to be your best feminine self. And they were really big supporters of Donald Trump. So I don't think she can claim an apolitical stance anymore.

SCORING IN Now its a mystery

I think if we weren't living in this really broken, you know, country where women's rights are just this like, you know, constant object of debate, I don't think she would be quite the lightning rod she is.

NOEL: Sarah Peterson. *Momfluenced* is the book and *In Pursuit of Clean Countertops* is the Substack. Coming up: Evie Magazine - Cosmo for … conservatives? What’s the sex column like!? We’re gonna get into it.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

EJ: My name is EJ Dixon and I am a senior writer at New York magazine's The Cut.

NOEL: Tell me about Evie magazine.

EJ: Evie magazine is a magazine that was started by a model named Brittany Martinez that was sort of branded as like the Gen Z right wing version of Cosmo. And the mission was basically stemming from her frustration with the fact that most women's magazines are left leaning, you know, they're too permissive about premarital sex…

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gW23TPSbHo&t=1205s)*> TRISH REGAN SHOW:*

*Brittany Martinez: For years women have been sold this lie by progressive media sources.. Oh, sleep around, do hookup culture, don’t worry about family and kids and now women are more miserable than ever.*

EJ: And she wanted to come up with an alternative for conservative women aged 18 to 35, approximately.

*Martinez: We’re never gonna encourage orgies or cheating on your spouse or whatever that women's magazines have talked about for decades so we are counter culture in that way.*

EJ: She wrote an op ed for this…I would categorize it as a right leaning website, Quillette, and she sort of said that the “mission was to, quote, empower, educate and entertain young women with content that celebrates femininity, encourages virtue, and offers a more honest perspective than they get elsewhere. She's classier than Cosmo, sexier than Refinery29 and smarter than Bustle.”

NOEL: And I immediately know what that means.

EJ: Like, at first glance, it really looks like a lot of content that you would find geared toward Gen Z. Women like the main story on the home page right now is an SEO story about how much money Mariah Carey makes every year from All I Want for Christmas Is You and like I bet I bet it's doing good traffic because like people have probably searching not this time of year.

<CLIP> All I Want for Christmas (5 notes)

EJ: Ten romantic Christmas holiday ideas, best accessories, new feminine fragrances to try. And so it's all like none of that really seems conservative outright, but it's really when you scroll down that you kind of see these articles that are really buried that are more insidious, like it's a very obvious pro-Trump conservative slant, but it's sort of buried amongst the more innocuous, like apolitical pieces that that you find on there.

NOEL: Can I tell you about one that I found fascinating?

EJ: Sure!

NOEL: So it was a first person article. It was titled ‘We Had Sex in a Car with Strangers Zooming By. And it was the most thrilling quickie of my life. Did you read that one?

EJ: I did not.

<<waves crashing>>

NOEL: Okay, so this woman is newly married. She's on her honeymoon. She's wearing a bikini…

<TAPE> TODAY EXPLAINED PRODUCER: *Hubby was shirtless, aviators on, and the humidity had his skin glistening…*

*<<mustang>>*

NOEL: So she’s totally into him.

*Suddenly, he hit the hazard lights and pulled over. My heart instantly raced. I knew exactly what was coming.*

<<mustang revving>>

NOEL: And then they proceed to have sex in the car. But here's the thing. After the first paragraph where you're hooked, you're like, hmm I'm going to hear this wild tale of this sexy time. There is a disclaimer that says:

*this is educational material for married women only.*

NOEL: It made me think, what exactly are you trying to do with this disclaimer? First of all, is Evie magazine serious? Am I really supposed to avert my eyes from the sexy tale because I'm an unmarried woman? Like, what do you think that's trying to say there? And who is it for?

EJ: Yeah. You know, when you were initially describing the angle to me, I was like, that doesn't sound like something that they would run. But then when you mentioned that the woman had just gotten married and she was, this was on her honeymoon, I was like, okay, that makes sense. So yeah, it makes perfect sense that they would run that disclaimer. They are very, and they have been basically since their genesis, very aggressively anti premarital sex. They sort of adhere to this very old fashioned line of thinking that like sex is for after marriage. Sex is for someone you love. And if you have sex before marriage that you're, you know, somehow spoiled or tainted in some way. And men –and it's always men …then men will find you won't be interested in you anymore. And I think they're serious. It's a heart attack, honestly.

SCORING IN Vector Mode

EJ: You know, I think I think they're trying to make money. I think they're trying to capitalize on what they believe to be an on correctly, I think believe to be an untapped audience. But I also think they genuinely believe a lot of the stuff that they're writing. I mean, you look no further than like the people who you see contributing. Like I remember when I was trying to reach out to writers when I was reporting the piece out, there were all these names, like when I looked at people on LinkedIn, these were people with ties to Prager U, which is this conservative digital media behemoth. These were people who, you know, attended Hillsdale College, which was just this private Christian college in Michigan with strong ties to the Trump administration. Like these were like one of the contributors early on, was like the conservative influencer Abby Shapiro, who is the sister of The Daily Wire founder Ben Shapiro, except she was going by her married name, then Abby Roth. I mean, you really only need to look at like the people who have invested in Evie-adjacent enterprises, like like the Natural Family planning app that Britney Martinez launched to know that that that they're serious.

SCORING OUT

EJ: Britney Martinez is also the founder of this planning app called 28, which launched in August 2022. And it's basically this wellness app that encourages people to adopt natural family planning methods and offers like personalized fitness and nutrition recommendations based on where a user is in their cycle, which kind of sounds like innocuous and apolitical on the surface, but it's actually like a pretty like the anti birth control argument is like a pretty strong talking point on the right.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOhQ0H8oLwU)*> CLASSICALLY ABBY:*

*Abby Roth: I don’t think birth control is moral. I think that there are a lot of better healthier methods that are good for your body and don’t introduce hormones into your body*

actually when Evie you know in the first year or two that Evie was running, there were a lot of stories that were like very broadly skeptical of birth control in general. These are headlines like *the birth control pill could increase your risk for breast cancer*. *13 Reasons Why You Should Quit Hormonal Birth Control*. And it didn't disclose the relationship between Eve magazine and 28. So obviously there's sort of an inherent conflict of interest there and 28 had conservative backing. It had $3 million in backing from Peter Thiel, who's the right wing billionaire who served on Trump's transition committee. And she's she's denied that like he has any involvement with Evie in general. But it really like it does raise questions, especially since 28 was initially branded as like 28 by Evie and the URL for 28 initially redirected to Evie like it does raise questions about like what the agenda is here.

NOEL: I think in the past couple of years, there's definitely been a reckoning about the kinds of magazines that women were sold for many years. Things like Cosmo, right? And we're looking back and we're like, was Cosmo good for women? And I think the answers are mixed. Right? And so what I'm wondering about is like I was like I was like a Cosmo girl in like the early 2000s and whatnot. I was reading about how to, like, make an appletini and I do wonder, in 2024, we've got this magazine that is very popular that appeals to be growing, that is selling a very different story about what it means to be a woman. And I'll use one of their kind of lines that I read repeatedly, which is it's great to be feminine, it's not great to be feminist. And I'm just wondering if you think Evie magazine tells us something about the time that we're living in in the way that I think Cosmo really did tell us something about where we were 20 years ago?

EJ: I do! And this is sort of where my feelings about Evie magazine get a little bit more complicated because I think everything that you're saying is like totally spot on. Like, I do think, like I came of age in the early 2000s where I was being inundated with, you know, how to give a good blowjob listicles, but also told that I shouldn't dress too sexy and…

NOEL: and be very, very thin and yeah

EJ: Yeah, exactly. And like a really bad time in retrospect for for young women. And I do think that this idea that young women…these very conflicting messages that young women got about being sexual were really harmful and continued to do harm to this day. And I do think that there is a need for a corrective to that and there is a need for a conversation about how like, well, women were sold a false bill of goods to some extent. You know, we were told we could have it all. We were told we could have great sex lives and have these amazing careers and like have these families. And now as millennials are coming of age, we're sort of slowly realizing that, no, like that's that's this is actually not possible in this country. Like, it's really, really hard to have even one of those things, and we feel like we’ve been sold this false bill of goods.

SCORING IN Trying to be well worn

So I think they're really tapping into that. Whether or not I agree with it as a blanket statement, like obviously I don't. But, you know, I think I think the like I don't think it needs to be either or. You know, like I don't think it needs to be so black and white as to say, well, casual sex is good for women or casual sex is bad for women. I think the real the truth is somewhere in the middle. But I will say I do give them credit for sort of trying to carve out a space in the conversation.

SCORING BUMP

E.J. Dickson of New York Magazine’s The Cut. Victoria Chamberlin produced today’s show. Amina al-Sadi edited. Senior Researcher Laura Bullard has some questions for you Evie. Andrea Kristinsdottir and Rob Byers are our engineers. I’m Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**