

# [***I Survived Christian Patriarchy—the Tradwife Trend Is Hauntingly Familiar***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BXD-GT81-DY68-13JH-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

April 30, 2024 Tuesday 4:30 AM EST

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**Length:** 1474 words

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**Highlight:** I thought I'd left that oppressive world behind, but now I see the #tradwife trend on social media, and it's bringing everything back.

**Body**

In 2013, I rented my first apartment, wrote my first resume, and eventually started my first (minimum-wage) job. I was 25 years old, inexperienced, and completely uneducated in how to be an independent woman.

I had just left the Christian patriarchy movement, where I had been a stay-at-home daughter, living the Quiverfull lifestyle exhibited by the Duggar family.

Since I hadn't been allowed to have a job outside the home, the only way I could make money was by teaching piano lessons, mostly to other homeschool families. And since I wasn't allowed to go to college, I studied piano pedagogy textbooks on my own to learn how to be a better teacher.

I became resourceful despite my restrictions, and that's how I eventually escaped and started my life over, as I've written about in my new book, *Rift: A Memoir of Breaking Away from Christian Patriarchy*.

I thought I had left that oppressive world behind, but now, more than a decade later, I see the #tradwife trend on social media, and it's bringing everything back—the glorification of traditional gender roles that were never as shiny as they appear with photo filters and curated vintage clothing.

Scrolling through [*TikTok*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tiktok?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), I see videos of women in long floral dresses. Their hair is perfectly curled, and they are cooking or gardening or creating crafts for their children. One thing is a constant: They are always at home.

These videos use the hashtag #tradwife, "trad" standing for "traditional." And while this nickname is new, the content is not. In fact, it's deeply familiar to me as someone who was raised to become a traditional wife.

But the stay-at-home life is not as glamorous as it looks on TikTok and [*Instagram*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/instagram?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, when I was being homeschooled and taught the beliefs of "biblical patriarchy," we didn't have the term "tradwife," and I likely wouldn't have been allowed to watch TikTok videos anyway.

"Traditional marriage," "biblical womanhood," and "Quiverfull" were the terms we most often used to describe our lifestyle, which was founded on Christian fundamentalism.

Christian or biblical patriarchy is an ideology and religious movement centered around the idea that God is masculine, the ultimate patriarch, which is why men were "created" to be leaders in the home, church, and government.

Women were called to be homemakers, submitting to their fathers until they married, when they would then submit to their husbands. Men and women had to conform to strictly distinct gender roles.

As a homeschooled kid, I was taught many typical subjects, or at least given books about them, but my focus was to grow up and become a stay-at-home wife and mother. I became proficient in cooking, sewing, and cleaning.

Anything I was taught was framed as something I could use to benefit my future family. Learning math was so that I could help my future husband do his taxes. Learning to play piano was so I could accompany hymn singing.

I was allowed to skip science one year because it wasn't "necessary."

When I turned 18, I didn't go to college or get a job. I was called a "stay-at-home daughter" because I was in training to be a wife. My father told me that I didn't need an education or a career because it wouldn't help me in my calling and would tempt me away from God's righteous path.

Homemaking was glorified as the ideal calling for women. Instead of video-sharing apps, we had Vision Forum catalogs where gender-specific toys were sold and glossy photographs of girls in frilly dresses and boys in Colonial hunting garb were shown to create an aesthetic of "the good old days" when men and women had separate gender roles. Books like *So Much More* and *The Excellent Wife* and magazines like *Above Rubies* and *Patriarch* extolled this lifestyle as one of beauty and divine purpose.

So watching #tradwife content is hauntingly familiar to me. These are not new ideas. It is the same old patriarchy wearing a different dress.

Just like some of these creators say in their videos, I was also told this lifestyle was a choice, that I wasn't being forced into it. At the same time, I was restricted from outside information, prohibited from going to college, and not allowed to have a job outside the home.

Theoretically, I could have moved out and chosen my own path, but as someone with limited life skills and insufficient finances, I had no idea how to actually do that when I turned 18.

Not to mention that going against these gender restrictions would have been "sinful" and "ungodly," marking me as an outsider to my family and church. So, even though I was "choosing" to be a stay-at-home daughter, I didn't really have any other option.

Today, when I hear content creators sharing about how they choose to stay home and then say they submit to their husbands in the same video, I understand the dynamics at play behind the scenes.

The very concept of submission is that you are giving up your decision-making to someone else. If you "choose" to be a stay-at-home wife and give up all financial independence, you are placing yourself in a position where you won't have any choice in the future.

These videos are known for their ultra-feminine clothing and cozy cooking tutorials, but underlying many of them is a more disturbing ideology: That a woman is fulfilling her God-given purpose if she is a traditional wife who stays home and submits to her husband.

Adding the promise of divine blessing to a lifestyle choice makes it more of a command than an act of true consent.

One #tradwife content creator named Estee recently shared a video of advice for high school girls who want to become traditional wives one day. "Stay home as long as you possibly can," she says.

She goes even further by saying: "If you want to be a traditional wife in the future, you don't need to go to college." In another video, Estee says women don't need prenups if they marry the right man because they can trust him not to betray the relationship. Instead, prayer is the best safeguard against divorce.

Another content creator named Jasmine Dinis says in one video that she is teaching her young daughter "it's perfectly acceptable to depend on a man...that serving her husband and bearing children will be her greatest joy." Another video of hers proclaims, "I used to be really into ***politics*** but now I just relax while my husband tells me what to think."

These words are so familiar that they trigger long-ago memories of being indoctrinated to believe that my only purpose was to be a wife and mother who didn't "need" a job or independent thoughts.

As I was in my twenties, unmarried and waiting for my father to help me find the perfect husband, I became deeply depressed and felt purposeless.

Serving men didn't bring me true happiness or fulfillment. I wanted to be my own person, but that would have gone directly against the mission to make me a submissive wife.

And I had witnessed many women getting married and having extremely difficult lives as homemakers. They struggled with poverty, impossible expectations, domestic abuse, lack of bodily autonomy, burnout, and shame.

Above all, their lack of choice and true agency kept them trapped in unhealthy marriages.

And while the #tradwife trend is fascinating to watch and even aesthetically pleasing for viewers who crave a slower lifestyle, it points to a deeper misogyny in our culture and a dangerous shift toward authoritarianism in American ***politics***, one where women are encouraged to stay home, men are made to be the sole providers, and girls grow up believing they will be better off not having any real decision-making power in their lives.

Girls like me.

But I know change is possible. I found a way to escape, and I will never willingly give up my agency for anyone.

I'm sharing my story to prevent this kind of suffering in others because while being a stay-at-home [fill in the blank] is a valid choice for many, giving up your agency to submit to a spouse can lead to devastating consequences.

When I tell girls they can be whoever they want, I'm really saying those words to myself, because after decades of being made to feel like I could only be a helpmate, I still need reminding that I have a voice.

*Cait West is a writer and editor based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is the author of* [*Rift: A Memoir of Breaking Away from Christian Patriarchy*](https://www.caitwest.com/book) *(Eerdmans). Her work has been published in The Revealer, Religion Dispatches, Fourth Genre and Hawai'i Pacific Review, among others.*

*As an advocate and a survivor of the Christian patriarchy movement, she serves on the editorial board for* [*Tears of Eden*](https://www.tearsofeden.org/)*, a nonprofit providing resources for survivors of spiritual abuse, and co-hosts the* [*Survivors Discuss*](https://survivorsdiscuss.com/) *podcast.*

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[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2383794/newsweek-illustration-cait-west-christian-patriarchy-movement.jpg)

**Graphic**

Newsweek illustration Cait West Christian Patriarchy Movement

Newsweek Illustration/Cait West

Newsweek illustration. Center, Cait West today. Inset, Cait as a girl while still living within the Christian patriarchy movement.

**Load-Date:** April 30, 2024

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