

Keep on Smiling Ladies!

A Case Study of Gender and Failed Parody of the #Tradwife Instagram Community

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Abstract

The prominence of tradwives (a shortening for “traditional wife”) on social media has lately risen. This group is characterised by their embodiment of the Christian conservative ideal of femininity and their successful use of the multimodal affordances of social media. For this reason, tradwives have attracted the attention of scholars from linguistics and gender studies (e.g., Allen et al. 2025; Tebaldi 2023). However, a largely unexplored area is the humorous representation of this community and attempts at counteracting their anti-genderist ideas. This article delves into an example of this phenomenon: the Pleasant Woman (@pleasantville_lady), a parodic Instagram account which failed at becoming viral. Following the proposal of positioning analysis in its adaptation for social media content (Georgakopoulou 2024; Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou 2018), all the posts and comments of @pleasantville_lady have been manually examined to analyse the role that gender and femininity play in the fictional characterisation of the Pleasant Woman and her relationship with her audience, as well as in the overall parodic goal of the account. Results show that despite its parodic nature, the fictional Pleasant Woman presents most of the linguistic and discursive traits of tradwives, whom she talks to in her captions and compels in her hashtags. Results also show that digital humorous interactions are not only taking place on social media but also mediated by the affordances of the platform on which communication unfolds.

1. Introduction

With a growing online presence (Sitler-Elbel 2021, 1), tradwives have consolidated themselves as a community of “digital traditionalist women” who “advocate[s] a ‘traditional’ lifestyle of submission to male authority, homemaking, homeschooling” (Tebaldi 2023, 15). In spite of their sociodemographic differences, all tradwives share: (i) a rejection of feminism, (ii) the adherence to Christian principles, and (iii) a display of social/political conservatism (Sitler-Elbel 2021). Although not traditionally included as part of the manosphere, i.e., “online communities that have increasingly promoted narrow and aggressive definitions of what it means to be a man and

the false narrative that feminism and gender equality have come at the cost of men's rights" (UNWomen 2025), tradwives are also considered an anti-feminist and anti-genderist social movement (Borba 2022).

Numerous women using the #tradwife hashtag support men's rights and embrace a desire to come back to traditional power roles and domination. Some studies have found ties between tradwives and the alt-right (Mattheis 2021), as well as a direct association with white nationalism (Tebaldi 2023; Ebner 2021). What distinguishes tradwives from other housewives is their focus on serving their husbands and publicising their lifestyle via social media. On the Internet, #tradwife influencers disseminate their ideology by appealing to "an audience who feels unheard, left behind, or like their lifestyle is under threat" (Sitler-Elbel 2021, 67).

These core values are reflected in a particular online register and specific discursive strategies (Tebaldi 2023). Among them, we can find a recontextualisation of populist language in which elites are sex-driven, with the metaphors of inverted fascism and sodomy being the most frequent, along with a reinterpretation of the re-belle that presents traditional femininity as subversive. The metonyms of the womb for mother/womanhood and the metaphor of mothers as vessels are also common. Alliteration in nominals and predicates and the use of the passive voice to convey victimisation are salient features in a narrative that is tightly linked to white male supremacy and far-right politics.

While tradwives' discourse and sociopolitical behaviour have been widely studied (Tebaldi 2023; Ebner 2021; Sitler-Elbel 2021; Mattheis 2021), seldom has research focused on counterdiscourses around this group. Whether in favour or against tradwives, this community prompts conversations on (white, middle or upper class) gender roles and stereotypes (Tebaldi 2023). Thus, this paper explores an attempt at the humorous reconfiguration of the gender identity of tradwives and discusses its effectiveness in the mediated context of social media. To do this, we will analyse a single parody account on Instagram – the Pleasant Woman (@pleasantville_lady). We aim at identifying how gender is discursively (re)constructed by relying on social media affordances and on the humorous adoption of a specific online format which resembles tradwives' discourse on Instagram. Since identity on social media is discursively constructed partly through representations of the referential world, which other users may validate and render meaningful via interactive engagement (Angouri 2016), we will answer the following research questions: (i.) How does @pleasantville_lady, a parodic account, reconfigure tradwives' gender representations via a fictional character – the Pleasant Woman, (ii.) How does @pleasantville_lady gender and repurpose the interaction with her imagined audience, and (iii.) How can the intersection between the representational world and interactive engagement explain the (lack of) success of @pleasantville_lady as a parodic account?

With this in mind, the article is organised as follows. In Section 2, we review previous studies on humour on the Internet, with a particular focus on the characteristics of parody accounts. It also includes a summary of previous studies on the discursive creation of identity on Instagram. In Section 3, we describe the data for the analysis and explain the methodological procedure. In Section 4, we systematise the results of our analysis along the three dimensions which guide the research questions: the creation of a fictional character (representational world), the interaction with the audience (engagement), and the use of specific markers of humour. Some conclusions are offered in Section 5.

2. Humour and social media

2.1 *Parody and humour*

Previous studies on creativity in online discourse have emphasised the importance of humour in the digital realm (Vásquez 2019; Yus 2018; Shifman 2014). These studies stress that, on the Internet, humour may function as a ‘connective device.’ Therefore, understanding humorous interactions may work as a marker of membership to an (online) group by appealing to shared knowledge.

Humour on the Internet is the outcome of written-audiovisual culture. This implies that humour is mediated and that interaction may be either synchronous, asynchronous, or both (Attardo 2023). Such mediation – frequently related to the affordances of social media – influences the mode of presentation of the humorous text and reactions to it. As such, humour often appears in the form of multimedia texts, resulting from the interaction of several semiotic modes, including text, visuals, emoji, or hashtags, for example.

Amongst the multiple types of humour-related microgenres that populate the Internet, novelty accounts are of particular interest for this article (Attardo 2023, 21; Vásquez 2019; Highfield 2016). Novelty, or parody, accounts are fake accounts which impersonate a fictional (or celebrity) character through “sustained performances of imagined identities over extended periods of time” (Vásquez 2019, 35). While originally analysed on Twitter by Highfield (2016) and Vásquez (2019), some of the parodic elements of these accounts can be extrapolated to other platforms. Parody accounts have been described as a one-way type of communication with very little self-promotion whose authors are highly aware of Internet culture and its connections (Attardo 2023; Highfield 2016).

Several types of parody accounts can be identified, amongst which character-figure specific ones are of special relevance. These depart from the creation of a fictional character whose traits, actions, and intentions are used as a means for creating new content (Highfield 2016). In these accounts the voice of the fictional character as reflected in their posts relies on a particular

frame of reference and on a very limited set of tropes. Vásquez's (2019) notion of "double-voicing" is of use for explaining how the voice of the original (often unknown) author and the one of the fictional characters are blended. This double voice allows the real authors to implicitly distance themselves from the embodied fictional persona (Vásquez 2019, 26). As noted by Highfield (2016), parody accounts can be considered "meta-memes" of ongoing discussions on social media which could function as frames of reference upon which humour is built. Humour in these accounts results from the confluence of character-specific references, and elements based on knowledge about the enacted collective voice (i.e., tradwives).

The multimodal nature of parody accounts has been widely acknowledged (Vásquez 2019; Highfield 2016). Multimodality, in our view, is inextricably related to two core areas in the study of humour on the Internet: markers of humour and the role of affordances. As such, previous studies on Internet memes have shown that humour results from the juxtaposition of textual and visual components (Vásquez and Aslan 2021). Interestingly, however, systematic and detailed taxonomies of markers of humour arguably entail linguistic strategies, including wordplay, lexical/phonetic combinations, nicknames, or intertextual references (Vásquez and Aslan 2021; Baym 1995). Multimodal (visual) strategies seem to be rather related to textual markers involving capitalisation, manipulation of punctuation marks, or the activation of particular visual referents which signal the existence of incongruity, i.e., the invocation of elements which apparently do not belong together (Yus 2023, Vásquez and Aslan 2021; Baym 1995). All these markers of humour seemingly have an interactional function: making the audience aware of the humorous intention. However, humour does not lie in the discourse itself, but in the contextualisation and inference of discursive practices (Yus 2023, 3). As Attardo (2023, 61) notes, analysing online humour shall concern not only the identification of semiotic cues, but also the examination of social and interactional aspects. All these dimensions will feature prominently in the analysis section.

2.2 Instagram and gender representations

In the past years, Instagram has become the third most popular social media platform in the world (DataReportal 2025). Its reach and impact in the configuration, reproduction and challenge of phenomena such as identity and community only grow by the day, attracting the attention of a wide-array of scholars, including linguists. Particularly, the intersection of gender studies, sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis has found in Instagram a fruitful source of information on the enactment, (re)appropriation, or resistance to gendered representations such as femininity (Sousa 2024; Döring, et al. 2016).

Authenticity is the axis which traverses and guides the construal and perception of identities on Instagram (Georgakopoulou 2024; Duffy, et al. 2022). As Duffy and Hund (2019, 4993)

discuss, the “gendered authenticity bind” does not necessarily entail complete honesty or candour from the user but rather involves a balance between too much and too little content so that the illusion of a cohesive and coherent self will not shatter. Thus, authenticity and relatability on Instagram and other platforms fall on the interaction with the audience (Abidin 2015).

However, this may trouble the process of parody on Instagram. On the explore page, users usually interact with individual posts, rather than a complete account, which offers them a limited picture of the user. Therefore, users are likely to contextualise the post in relation to other accompanying posts on the explore page. The topic of the post, often marked by hashtags, determines this display and the judgement of the viewer, who assumes the post to be a condensation of the content of the account and the user behind it due to the authenticity bind (Duffy and Hund 2019). This algorithmic arrangement may result in users’ missing the double voicing of parody (Vásquez 2019) because they only focus on the frame of the parodied voice (the post) rather than the parodying voice (the account). Furthermore, if the audience believes that the author of the post is not a man, their demands of authenticity increase as they further constrain the existence of the user to their posts and assumptions arising from it (Duffy, et al. 2022).

Users might attempt to shape the impression of their imagined audience (boyd 2008) through the use of hashtags, which categorise the content as well as the people they intend to address while positioning the user in relation with the groups the hashtags allude (Baker and Walsh 2018). Users may display different self-representations on their accounts, yet they usually avoid any clash between these images for fear of backlash or abuse (Duffy and Hund 2019). This often leads users to turn to easily recognisable, normative or stereotypical characterisations (Georgakopoulou 2024; Duffy and Hund 2019).

As mentioned above, on Instagram authenticity is gendered, and any user who is not deemed a white, cisheterosexual man will meet harsher criticism and judgement due to their perceived superficiality and fakery (Duffy, et al. 2022). This constrains gender representation on Instagram, favouring some while backgrounding others. Behind most successful Instagram profiles of women lie traditionally white notions of femininity and the current post-feminist individualism and consumerism (Lukan and Appleton 2024). This may explain the recent rise to notoriety of the #tradwife community, among other far-right, reactionary movements (Sousa 2024).

3. Data and methodology

3.1 Data compilation

The choice of account may seem surprising as @pleasantville_lady is not a particularly successful nor prolific user. However, it was brought to our attention during the development of a wider study, which involved a corpus of Instagram posts from genuine tradwives. This corpus gathered posts as they appeared after searching for hashtags commonly associated with the #tradwife community, such as #tradwife or #biblicalwife. Posts from @pleasantville_lady featured among the accounts selected in this initial search.

Upon a closer inspection of the data, we noticed that @pleasantville_lady was unlike the accounts from other tradwives due to her declared parodic nature. However, her posts, emerging alongside the content from authentic tradwives, rendered this account useful for researching the interaction between gender and parody, and the possibilities and constraints of counterdiscourses to tradwives. With this purpose in mind, we compiled all the posts from this account, from April 2022 to April 2024. Our data consists of fifty-six Instagram posts – a sufficient amount for the specific focus of this study (Mautner 2016), which is the account itself. This choice also aligns with previous studies on the nature of parody accounts (Vásquez 2019; Highfield 2016).

An Excel sheet registered all the posts' metadata. This includes the date of publication and extraction, the number of comments, the caption, the hashtags, a description and transcription of the images, and the links to each post. The textual component, i.e., caption and hashtags, was copied and pasted in a txt file. *Export Comments* (n.d.) extracted all the comments and responses to these posts and stored them in separate Excel files, one document per post. The highly textual tendencies of @pleasantville_lady leak into the visual content, as text often appears in the visuals. The transcripts of the textual component of the pictures were manually recorded in separate txt files. Metadata will be stored within the first author's university repository. The complete dataset is also available for further research upon request to the corresponding author.

3.2 Methodological considerations

Instead of dividing the posts of @pleasantville_lady into its two main components – i.e., caption and images – the analysis will consider each post as a single unit of meaning. This decision is inspired by the notion of juxtaposition as explained in previous studies of parody accounts (Aslan and Vásquez 2021) and the structure of the posts from @pleasantville_lady: over half of the posts (n=28) introduce text in their visual content, further complemented by the caption.

This study follows the tenets of positioning analysis as developed for the format of small stories by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) and Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou (2018). The

content users upload on their social media accounts best epitomise the essence of small stories (Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou 2018): Fragmented accounts from everyday life which go well beyond the time of their narration and do not conform with the traditional narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end. For the purpose of this study, small stories take the form of one post on Instagram (understood as a narrative unit), and they refer to multimodal, discursive pieces which contribute to the local conversation unfolding in one account, and to the general discussion on the platform usually gathered around hashtags. In this manner, each post by @pleasantville_lady arguably contributes to two narratives: her own life, as materialised in the posts of her profile; and the tradwives' movement, since the Pleasant Woman inserts her content in the wider discussion surrounding this community via an array of hashtags. The very nature of social media – its immediacy, interactiveness, and polyphony (Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou 2018) – fragments both narratives and renders them small stories. This is justified because the posts of an account do not necessarily appear as a single and complete collection on the audience's screen. Instead, they are combined with posts from other users on the main page or the 'explore' ones. Likewise, not all the posts under one hashtag necessarily talk about the same topic or feature the voice of a single user. Therefore, positioning analysis in small stories seemingly constitutes a fit approach for the examination of the Pleasant Woman.

Positioning analysis contemplates three different dimensions, which allow for a study of the dynamics at play on social media. It does not only deal with the fictional character, but also with the user as the narrator behind the posts, the audience, and the off-line context. This thorough procedure arguably renders positioning analysis a fine approach for the study of identity – in this case, gender – on social media (Georgakopoulou 2024). The proposal delves into the representational, interactive, and contextual nature of identity, while also involving the three pillars of its construal: self-expression, other-interpretation, and the sociocultural circumstances constraining the participants (Motschenbacher 2009).

Each post from @pleasantville_lady was manually examined so as to determine the presence or absence of strategies which build the three levels of small stories (Georgakopoulou 2024, 28):

1. The representational dimension of the story: The construction of the character of the Pleasant Woman through her actions, evaluative comments, relationships and locations. Other components such as the type and topic of the posts, their aesthetic, and the appearance of emojis also belong to this first level.
2. The interactive engagement with the audience: The construction of the fictional character through her interaction with the audience, and her rejection of the one she does not wish to reach (i.e., the anti-audience), including comments.

3. The contextual and situated emergence of meaning: The position of the account within a wider sociocultural context – i.e., the reproduction or challenging of tradwives' discourse, and the humorous strategies @pleasantville_lady relies on.

As Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou (2018) explain, the third level emerges from the interaction of the first and second levels. Parody, both offline and online, arises from the clash between the parodying and parodied voices, resulting from the confluence of local discourse and broad, encyclopaedic knowledge (Vásquez 2019; Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997). Therefore, the third level seems the most appropriate to explore the so-called parody in the portrayal of the Pleasant Woman, for the third level deals with “how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or master narratives” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 385) – i.e., the place @pleasantville_lady occupies in relation with content from genuine tradwives. Positioning analysis in small stories has already proved to be fruitful in the study of Internet humour, as illustrated by Georgakopoulou and Giaxoglou (2018) in their paper about satirical Internet posts and their construal of the identity of Varoufakis, the former Greek Minister of Finance. Because @pleasantville_lady claims in her bio that “all posts are parody,” her content has been treated as humorous, regardless of our perception as researchers.¹ Since parody involves a certain humoristic component (Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997), the strategies of early Internet fora to indicate humorous intent, as explained by Baym (1995), have been initially annotated as markers of humour. Among these strategies stand nicknames, hyphenated summaries, intertextual references, exclamation marks, quoted speech, random and unnecessary capitalisation, comments in between brackets, extension of letters (e.g., yaaaaay), repetition of phrases, rhetorical questions and acronyms. The highly textual nature of @pleasantville_lady renders Baym's (1995) taxonomy a fit tool for the analysis.

4. Results and discussion

Following Georgakopoulou's (2024) proposal, the first subsection uncovers the gendered characterisation of the Pleasant Woman through linguistic strategies such as nominals alluding to her relationships and location, adjectives and adverbs showcasing her evaluation and opinions, and predicates depicting the processes and events she engages in. It also illustrates how Instagram affordances such as the layout and topic of the posts, their colour palette and background images, and emojis contribute to the portrayal of the Pleasant Woman as a feminine

¹ Our ideological positioning aligns with different branches within feminism, which may have influenced our interpretation of data. Acknowledging this positionality responds to calls for self-reflexivity in Critical Discourse Studies (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 4).

actor. The second subsection delves into the gendered dynamics between the Pleasant Woman and her imagined audience, as well as her imagined anti-audience and the real audience following her account. The final section explores how the gendered discourse of tradwives functions as a frame of reference which is creatively exploited with the aim of being parodic. Each subsection is directly linked to one of the levels of the creation of small stories: representational, interactive and the situated emergence of meaning.

4.1 The Pleasant Woman: the character

Besides the icon of an illustration of a white woman wearing a red dress and a white apron with a tray on her hand, the Pleasant Woman remains anonymous. While one may assume she is a woman, neither the header nor the content of the account specifies this further. Unlike most tradwives who rely on visuals to offer a glimpse of their idealised domestic lives (Tebaldi 2023), the Pleasant Woman turns to other Instagram affordances to project her identity.

Half of the posts (n=28) introduce text in the space where audiovisual content would be expected. The caption serves as context or further comment of the main textual piece. The abundance of text allows the person behind the account to develop the character of the Pleasant Woman without providing her with a recognisable face. Leaning on the stereotype of traditional femininity as sensitive and emotional (Koller 2008), the ubiquitous use of emojis adds a sense of emotion and facial expressivity of which text is often stripped. Emojis related to the topic of the post open and close the captions, which are peppered with other emojis, often involving feelings such as embarrassment, anger, or bliss. Furthermore, this type of posts encapsulates the aesthetic of the Pleasant Woman: the paragraphs of the main text appear in a white font within pink and orange boxes; photographs of landscapes in warm pink palettes feature in the background, as in figure 1. As a tradwife concerned with the defence of traditional femininity, the Pleasant Woman predictably chooses the colour pink and its conventional associations with femininity (Koller 2008) to establish her feminine aesthetic presence on Instagram.

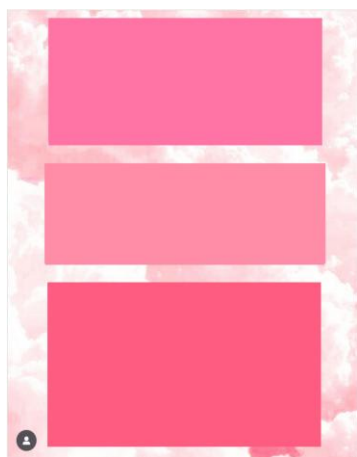


Fig.1: Common layout of most textual posts from @pleasantville_lady

The topics the Pleasant Woman deals with in her posts also demonstrate the usual conservative worries of tradwives (Allen, et al. 2025; Tebaldi 2023). Forty-seven posts discuss manifestations of traditional gender roles, mostly marriage (n=26) or femininity (n=13). In her anecdotes, the Pleasant Woman stays home or occasionally goes to church, following the reduction of femininity to the private spheres of conservative, nationalist ideologies (Sousa 2024; Tebaldi 2023). On the rare occasions she mentions other countries, such as Germany (in 1), the Pleasant Woman negatively compares its inhabitants to the exemplary behaviour and customs of ‘the Home Counties of Britain,’ further locating her in a specific geographic and ideological context: British nationalism.

- (1) The German ladies are rather feminist over there, it’s quite concerning 🙄 [...] When he’s working on his own turf, here in the Home Counties of Britain, he can hire the most feminine ladies and traditional men who all know their role! (PV_40)²

The Pleasant Woman sometimes seems to take to an extreme the domestic mandate, as (2) exemplifies. This fragment marks the beginning of a story in which her church group perchance listened to pop and rap music, which caused a huge commotion. With this wording, the Pleasant Woman simultaneously displays the expected distaste towards modernity of other tradwives and the submission to the authority of her husband (Tebaldi 2023).

- (2) This is one of the reasons why I don’t venture out much these days, after this event my husband thought it best I stay away from the outside world! (IT_PV_19)

Her marriage is the relationship which the Pleasant Woman most frequently mentions (n=31) and, consequently, which characterises her most. The variety of nicknames she employs to refer to Mr. Pleasant – e.g., ‘hubby’ (PV_12, PV_26), ‘hubs’ (PV_31) or ‘hubstar’ (PV_40, PV_49), among others – could arguably reflect a great degree of affection for the only constant presence in her life. While the Pleasant Woman acknowledges her family and her family-in-law, with the former starring in some posts such as her brothers Jiminy-Bob (PV_43) and Job (PV_42), or her niece Rachael (PV_09), she does not have a family of her own. Thus, the Pleasant Woman has

² For simplification purposes, each post received a code as follows: “PV” (from the surname Pleasantville) plus its place in the account timeline. Thus, PV_40 is the fortieth post from @pleasantville_lady. Image transcriptions were assigned the code of their post preceded by the acronym “IT” (“image transcription”). Comments also shared the code of their post, which came before “C” and the number indicating the ordinal position of the cited comment.

not yet reached the venerated status of mother, which constitutes an essential pillar in the feminine identity of tradwives (Tebaldi 2023).

From her anecdotes, the audience may initially assume that the Pleasant Woman attempts to compensate for her lack of motherhood through an obsessive focus on her husband. Seemingly recalling the aesthetic of Lacey Lynn from Tebaldi (2023), the Pleasant Woman appears as the subject of some actions related to house chores, particularly pie baking (n=4). However, she mostly comes and goes in her house. In fact, some posts lack any mention of her everyday life, for she either talks about the routine of her husband or advises her followers without any allusion to her own concrete experiences. This explains why many posts (n= 47) contain verbs related to mental processes such as believe, think, or know. These do not only show the inner world of the fictional character but present her as abiding by the principle of judging and guiding others towards the white Christian truth (Tebaldi 2023). When she deems women are not following her conservative ideology, the Pleasant Woman demonstrates general distaste towards them. This attitude remains even when her friends are mentioned (n=12), as her harsh words towards ‘Sherry’ in (3) show.

- (3) My friend Sherry (not her real name) came over to see me last week while I was meal prepping, and she seemed rather put out by the fact that [...] her entire life revolves around catering to her hubs & their 9 children. Well what does she expect?! This is the life of a submissive wife, Sherry! (PV_37)

The Pleasant Woman reserves the opposite attitude for men, particularly her ‘poor’ husband. Besides Lari (PV_45, PV_50) – her Titus 2 woman³, the only woman whom the Pleasant Woman usually treats with respect is herself, as she does not hesitate to display self-aggrandising appraisal of her own ideas, which she often labels as ‘golden rules’ (e.g., in PV_09, PV_12, or PV_34). As such this fictional character seems to result from impersonating the collective voice of tradwives on social media.

4.2 @pleasantville_lady: the user and her audience

The character and authorial voice of the Pleasant Woman blend in the text of her posts. For instance, in (4), ‘my’ in ‘my dear friends’ depicts the inner circle of the Pleasant Woman as a character, but ‘I’ in ‘I’m here to tell you ladies’ explicitly recognises the position of the Pleasant

³ According to some readings of the Bible, a Titus 2 woman is an older woman who acts as a spiritual guide promoting the biblical ideals of femininity and marriage to younger women (InstaEncouragements 2020).

Woman as the user of the account addressing her imagined audience (boyd 2008): ‘ladies’ whom the Pleasant Woman assumes to be wives and mothers, as well as her friends.

- (4) It happened to more than one of my dear friends. I’ve heard them say that it’s his choice, that’s [sic] he’s responsible for being faithful, [...]. I’m here to tell you ladies that you CAN make a difference, there are lots of shortcuts to keeping his attention on you alone. (PV_10)

This example best demonstrates the tone the Pleasant Woman employs to talk to her audience. She rises as a guide to her followers in a majority of the posts (n=37) in which she instructs them on the most adequate expressions of femininity and on the best manner to approach marriage between a man and a woman through lists of ‘golden rules.’ In the same fashion as she introduces Lari as her Titus 2, she claims her own role as a Titus 2 of those who follow her by explicitly exploiting Instagram affordances in the use of the hashtag #titus2woman (PV_36, PV_41).

On Instagram, the functions of hashtags are twofold (Baker and Walsh 2018). First, they categorise the content of the post so as to reach the imagined target audience. Second, they indicate community membership – i.e., they categorise the user. While the Pleasant Woman does not describe herself as a tradwife in her bio, all her posts contain a variation of the hashtags collected in (5). As these show, she is not only appealing to submissive, Christian wives with fundamentalist and misogynistic views; she is positioning herself among them too. This use of hashtags, together with the first-person plural ‘we’ in the caption of posts, results in an apparently shared identity and moral stance for both the Pleasant Woman and her imagined audience. Through camera angles and frames, tradwives frequently deploy a similar strategy to place their audience in their ideological position (Tebaldi 2023).

- (5) #submissivewomen #submissives #submissivewoman #submissivewife #masculinity #patriarchy #patriarchal #antifeminism #nofeminism #marriagetips #godlywife #traditionalwife #traditionalmarriage #husbandandwife #lifehacks #marriageadvice #wifelife (PV_02)

In hashtags, the Pleasant Woman also defines her identity by opposition: #antifeminism and #nofeminism. This is a recurrent pattern (n=43) which seems to point at the group whom the Pleasant Woman attacks in her posts, i.e., her unintended audience. For instance, #stumblingblock (PV_20) alludes to women whom the Pleasant Woman deems sexually provocative and immoral and, consequently, a distraction for men. Occasionally (n=5) the user

behind the Pleasant Woman makes explicit their critical attitude against tradwives and other related groups with #fundiesnark; however, in comparison with the aforementioned #antifeminism or #nofeminism, this hashtag did not feature much in the account and only emerged towards the last posts. Beyond hashtags, in the captions the Pleasant Woman also addresses her audience, whom she calls ‘ladies’ most times; and her (fictional) anti-audience, who includes a wide range of groups from androgynous women – ‘Masculine Mindy’ in (6) – to career-oriented women, as well as modern science. In a similar fashion as other tradwives, anyone who deviates from her standard of traditional, Christian gender roles becomes her enemy (Tebaldi 2023).

- (6) With my handy guide to No-Swear words, you can say “No thank you, I’m fine” in a terribly polite way, [...] and I promise it won’t turn you into a Masculine Mindy 🤖
(PV_05)

However, one must not forget that the Pleasant Woman claims to be a parody account. In other words, the portrayal of the Pleasant Woman as a character (section 4.1) and as a user with an audience (section 4.2) aims at evoking two frames: the image of a tradwife whose voice is impersonated, and which is parodically represented by inferentially activating the existence of an (unknown) authorial voice (Bakhtin 1981; Rose 1979; both as cited in Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997). The correct interpretation of such parodic nature largely depends on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer, who must “reconstruct the original act, hold it up next to the parodying version, and work out the parodist’s commentary on the original” (Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997, 728). Still, the speaker must ensure that their parody is not too similar nor too different to its target, so that the hearer may correctly decodify it (Rossen-Knill and Henry 1997, 734).

As will be shown in 4.3, the success of the Pleasant Woman as a parody is rather dubious. The gendered authenticity bind may explain this outcome, influenced by the choice of hashtags and accounts the Pleasant Woman follows, all of which seem to characterise her as a tradwife, rather than a parody of. Even though there are no comments in over a quarter of her posts (n=15), most reactions reflect the diverse background of the audience. Some comments do indeed understand the parodic representation; however, others question the purpose of the account or genuinely engage with the post as if it came from a tradwife’s account. For instance, PV_10 offers advice ‘for making your husband feel like No. 1 in your life’ with tips such as ‘agree with everything he says’ or ‘dress the way he requests.’ With over 100 comments and 72 likes, most users articulate a sense of confusion over the purpose behind the post, such as (7) or (8).

(7) Is this a joke? 😏 (PV_10_C050)

(8) This is a joke right (PV_10_C073)

A different case would be the comments to PV_21, a post in which the Pleasant Woman proposes actions to submit to ‘your Headship Hubby.’ Examples (9) and (10) were found among the scarce comments to the post, all of which came from profiles who, at the very least, were following the ideas of traditional marriage as defended by tradwives and other alt-right groups.

(9) Wives submitting to biblical domestic discipline is also a good way to celebrate husband’s headship! (PV_21_C03)

(10) I love this hyper satirical portray of my life ❤️ God bless (PV_21_C05)

The mixed reactions to the Pleasant Woman seem to hint at a parodic failure which may come from an unsuccessful use of Instagram affordances and an ineffective counterdiscourse to the gender representations from tradwives.

4.3 @pleasantville_lady and the wider narrative

As seen in the previous subsection, the gender representations of the Pleasant Woman, which draw on those from genuine tradwives, arguably underlie the communicative failure of the account. However, a close analysis of the textual markers of humour and the exploitation of Instagram affordances can provide a deeper understanding of the lack of success of this parody account. The abrupt end of the account after the steady upload of posts throughout two years – as of October 2025, the last post is from May 1st, 2024 – and the progressive decrease in its engagement arguably point to its failure.

Several formal textual cues seem to function as markers of humour in @pleasantville_lady: random capitalisation, references to pop culture, emojis, puns, and intentional typos. First, the unconventional use of capital letters (n=39) serves as an evaluative element that brings readers closer to the story (Baym 1995) by drawing their attention. This either emphasises a likely humorous interpretation of particular utterances (in 11 and 12) or presents a playful frame of reference (in 13).

- (11) Modern Women™ will try to convince you that this is all fine, that your husband won't mind at all, and that you are still extremely feminine if you take a trip to Curse County. They're WRONG! 🙌 (PV_05)
- (12) If you can't follow them all, just remember this: HUSBAND IS KING, YOU JUST WOMMAN. That should help you figure things out 😊 (PV_24)

Humorous interpretations are implicitly signalled in the discursive configuration of social groups. As such, in (11) conservative and modern women are discursively opposed. While parodic, this opposition echoes tradwives' discourse and their defence of traditional femininity from feminism and social decline (Tebaldi 2023). Example (12) recalls how tradwives' identity is constructed through their relationship with men. Two linguistic mechanisms help in establishing such a relation: the lexical opposition between 'husband' and 'womman,' and the use of a relational verb to indicate the characteristics of the husband (who 'is king') against the lack of adjectives for women, marked also by the adverb 'just.' In both examples, the use of capital letters formally points towards the existence of a humoristic mechanism: Flouting Grice's maxim of quality (Attardo 1993) and explicitly saying the contrary of what the speaker seems to believe. Capital letters thus indicate the paradoxical relation between the two voices that are impersonated in the parody account and serve as a formal marker of humour. However, the parodic humour brought to the fore by a thorough analysis disappears in the cursory glance of the average user, who finds these posts amongst content from genuine tradwives, outside the context of the account. This renders the distinction between the parodied and parodying voice difficult.

Intertextuality has been identified in the literature as a marker of humour via quotation or implicit cultural references (Baym 1995). In (13) the capital letters highlight the frame of reference – Samantha Jones in *Sex and the City* – upon which tradwives' beliefs are evaluated. Such use of capital letters tends to appear at the beginning of some posts between two emojis with a similar function. In this example, the discursive opposition between two groups reflects another feature of the register of tradwives: moral purity as exemplified by sexual behaviour and the protection of the pure female body (Tebaldi 2023). Such values clearly contrast with characterisations of Samantha Jones, who epitomises postfeminists' strive for a better body and who is not afraid to find her own sexual pleasure (Adriaens and Van Bauwel 2014).

- (13) 🏹 SAMANTHA 🏹 This is an appeal for opinion ladies! Have any of you fine conservatives out there heard of a TV character called Samantha Jones? Apparently, she's an inspiration for Godly folk like us! 😊 (PV_50)

As seen in the reference to 'Modern Women™' in (11), nicknames humorously characterise prototypes of women and men and refer to regular characters in the account, such as 'Mr Pleasant,' 'husby,' or 'hubstar' as the husband, and 'Jezebel' as a hyperonym for non-tradwives. Similarly criticised members of the alleged outgroup include, for example, 'Science Overlords' (PV_25), 'Woke World' (PV_32), 'The Original Feminists' (PV_39), 'InstaThots' or 'Only Fans-havers' (PV_54). Nicknames are also employed to address the audience, as seen in 'my fellow Housewifians' (PV_35), or 'gentledladies' (PV_48). In line with the features of the register of tradwives, the account employs alliteration in phrases (Tebaldi 2023) to create a tone that sounds more playful and engaging. For instance, 'Tarty Tanyas' (14) are attractive women who wear leggings.

- (14) My hubs has spent hours studying this phenomenon by looking at many many many (x100) photos of **Tarty Tanyas** showing off their every crevice, just so he can analyse how disgusting it is! (PV_47)

Nevertheless, the aforementioned linguistic and discursive features shared with actual tradwives, and the gender identity of the Pleasant Woman as a character may lead some users to believe that there is a woman behind the account too, conditioning how they interact with the posts. On social media, any user who is not deemed a man endures the gendered authenticity bind (Duffy and Hund 2019), by which their audience expects a higher degree of congruency between the content they post online and their offline lives. Thus, users may conclude that the character the Pleasant Woman and the user @pleasantville_lady are the same person or, at least, share some attributes, as seen in this genuine, affiliative response to (14): 'My husband likes me in them at home, but outside it's dresses all the way for me.' (PV_47_C06). Furthermore, as exemplified in this subsection, the humorous component of @pleasantville_lady may, upon analysis, come across as too obvious or lacking subtlety. These two attributes are often penalised when women do humour on issues affecting them, as they might be read as complaining or whining, which forces women to consciously steer clear of some humorous manifestations (Kanai 2015). As a case in point, most comments to (14) miss the point and believe it to be the account of a tradwife venting her frustrations, compelling @pleasantville_lady to explicitly remind her audience of her parodic intent: '(If it's not leggings then please just know this whole account is satire)' (PV_47_C07).

Emojis serve a wide array of functions in the account. As formal cues in combination with capital letters (as explained above), they highlight the frame of reference, as in (13). In those cases, emojis open and close the post by repeating the same symbol. Emojis as humorous devices come from double entendre. In (15), a journey to Germany becomes the perfect excuse to play with the image of the sausage as a penis, which also arises in other posts as an eggplant. Such an explicit but simultaneously naïve choice of emojis helps define the humorous discourse adopted by the Pleasant Woman. Similarly, her innocence is also reinforced through emojis conveying emotions, usually of shocking surprise caused by the world she lives in, as in (16).

(15) My Lord, they have big sausages over there! Have you ever tried a Bratwurst? 🍔 I could barely fit it in my mouth, but Hubby managed fine, he's a natural! 😲 (PV_40)

(16) Why isn't she at home running around after her hubs exhausting herself trying to be the perfect wife like the rest of us? 🤪 (PV_43)

This personality trait is highlighted by the presumed typos she drops in some posts (n=33). Three types of mistakes have been found in the analysis: punctuation mistakes, frequently exemplified by the use of commas as markers of end of sentence; capitalisation mistakes, such as the lack of capitalisation in words like 'bible' against the capital letters in adjectives such 'Godly' or 'Wordly Women' (PV_06); and typographical mistakes (as in 17 where 'Gluten' stands for 'Guten').

(17) Gluten Morgen to you my little honeypots! (PV_40)

These pseudo-mistakes pursue two goals: There is a first group which indexes the playful frame of reference, as is 'Instantgram' (PV_48), 'feminizst' (PV_53) or 'Proud month' (PV_24). There is a second group which relies on homophones, as is 'by' (for 'buy') (PV_21), or 'whoreific trousers' instead of 'horrific trousers' (PV_47). Such incorrect textual choices seem to stress the contradictory nature between the innocence that allegedly characterises tradwives (Tebaldi 2023) and their focus on heavy-handed topics, particularly dramatised in the Pleasant Woman.

In brief, despite some instances in which the parodying and parodied voices become distinct thanks to formal textual cues and intertextual references, the Pleasant Woman often lacks this clear-cut separation. The absence of hashtags in most posts indicating their purpose (e.g., #parody or #humor) reinforces the fusion of the two voices. This blend of voices makes it difficult to identify the authorial voice and their intention of counteracting tradwives' discourse. Humour

markers hardly function as a reconfiguration strategy, as is mostly enregistered within discourse from genuine tradwives. Because such humorous markers are not easily identified, the repurposing of such apparently ‘tradwives’ stories’ does not seem to succeed.

5. Conclusions

This study has delved into an example of an arguably failed parodic reconfiguration of gender representations from the #tradwife community—the account of the Pleasant Woman – due to the (mis)use of specific Instagram affordances and the characterisation of gendered actors.

Answering the first research question, the failure at the parody of tradwives begins at the representational level, i.e., the creation of the character of the Pleasant Woman. While she could initially be interpreted as attempting against some tenets of the gender ideology of tradwives (not being a mother nor enticing her audience with images and videos of an idealised family and home life), she shares many other linguistic and discursive features of tradwives on social media: the traditional, white hyperfeminine aesthetic and behaviour (e.g., her naïveté and emotionality), the glorification of a home life in contrast with pursuing a professional career, the extolment of Christian principles as the driving force in marriage, her self-proclaimed role as a leader to other women, and British nationalist ideas. Regarding interactive engagement (that is, our second research question), in the captions @pleasantville_lady seems to address an audience that feasibly faces the same circumstances as the Pleasant Woman – i.e., other tradwives. The choice of hashtags reinforces this idea, as @pleasantville_lady employs terms and phrases associated with tradwives – e.g., #submissivewomen or #titus2 - and labels her posts as #antifeminism or #nofeminism. The occasional hashtag indicating a different positioning does not diminish the cumulative effect of the previous categorisations. As a result, many users failed to recognise the parodic nature of the account and missed the parody. By using hashtags that only index the #tradwife community, the account is registered as belonging to it, which explains divergences in its interpretation by the audience in comments to the posts.

As for the third research question, despite the disclaimer in the bio and the presence of most textual markers of humour from Baym (1995) construing a hyperbolic representation of tradwives, the parodying voice is lost due to the functioning of Instagram as a platform. As such, (humorous) meaning is not situated within the account but rather in a broader platform-determined context. The selection of hashtags places the posts from @pleasantville_lady among content from genuine tradwives, thwarting its original parodic intent. Therefore, in the same way that humour is marked in visuals and captions, hashtags should indicate the parodic nature of the post too. If humour is mediated by social media, then platform affordances shall be considered when discursively constructing the two voices that are blended in a parody account.

Furthermore, gender identity and expression mediate the engagement from the audience and, consequently, the decodification of the parody. Stranded from the original context of the account, Instagram users may find in the posts from the Pleasant Woman another tradwife trying to break through in social media, without the visual appeal of her peers. The gendered authenticity bind (Duffy and Hund 2019) foregrounds this interpretation due to the bias imposed on (mostly) women on social media, demanding both a balance between too much and too little information and a continuity between their offline and online representations.

This study has raised further questions that warrant deeper analysis in the future. Among them, we can mention research on how the multimodal configuration of posts on social media determines and impacts the interpretation of humour, the correlation between the gender of the author of the posts and the reception of humour, and the need to further explore how different narratives function as counterdiscourses challenging dominant discourses. While initially devised as a case study delving into the humorous representations of gender on social media, the multilevel analysis of the Pleasant Woman shows that there is a fruitful avenue for research into the intersection of parody and the discursive construction of identities by different digital communities.

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