

EPISODE 1592

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FT: So Money episode 1592, exploring the tradwife controversy with journalist and author, Jo Piazza.

*“**JP:** A tradwife is more this kind of fake 1950s nostalgia Betty Draper from Mad Men idea, and they often dress in like 1950s garb and 1950s makeup, and glorify everything domestic, and say that women should be dependent on the men. Women should not be going to college. Women should not be making their own money.”*

[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. Wow, this episode today, it might go viral. You might love it. You might hate it. You will share it. You will think about it forever. We're exploring the traditional wife trend on So Money today or tradwife, as it's become popular on social media.

You may have seen some of these viral TikToks. It's a woman with perfect hair, a pinup dress, cooking some sort of extravagant meal, catering to her husband. They consider themselves rebels against modern-day feminism. Some of them are just parody accounts, but some of these women are for real.

My guest today, Jo Piazza, has been exploring, observing, and interviewing tradwives for the past year. She's kind of become a tradwife expert, even though she is an entrepreneur, author, writer, mom of three, very much a feminist, and does not prescribe to some of the hardcore beliefs and philosophies within the tradwife community. But I am so curious. Aren't you?

We get into it today. Who are these tradwives? What does it mean to be a tradwife? Why are so many women intrigued by this? This is, by the way, a growing movement if you're just counting

social media numbers. Are there any benefits to this? What is really at risk; your financial wellness, your sense of autonomy? You won't be surprised to hear what I think about all this. But, also, maybe you will be.

Our guest, Jo Piazza, is more than just a tradwife expert. She is an accomplished journalist and writer. You may have already read some of her books, including *We Are Not Like Them, You Were Always Mine*, *Charlotte Walsh Likes to Win*, *The Knockoff*, and *How to Be Married*. Her next book, *The Sicilian Inheritance*, oh, that's going to be a good one. That comes out next spring. She talks about a little bit on the show.

Jo is also the host of the Under the Influence podcast and the Over the Influence Substack. I was actually on her podcast this week. So you can listen to me and Jo talk about fear on her Under the Influence podcast. But today on So Money, we're getting into tradwives. You don't want to miss this. Here's Jo Piazza.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Jo Piazza, welcome to So Money. Oh, the tradwife controversy, here we come.

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JP: Oh, my God. We have so much to unpack today. I could talk about tradwives pretty much forever, to be honest with you.

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FT: I mean, you kind of have been talking about them for a while. You're very invested in this movement. I want to bring this to my listeners' attention. So I think it – when you talk about the tradwife movement, you are talking inevitably about things like financial freedom, what it means to be a feminist, what it means to pursue a relationship equitably. These are themes that we cover a lot in the show. The tradwife, it's like all-i-none. It's an all-in-one conversation.

First, though, I'm going to let you tell us a little bit about what this is. First of all, I kept reading the word, and I'm like, "Trade wife."

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JP: I know. I know. One of my girlfriends, I went over to a friend's house for like kid pizza party the other night, and she's like, "I just kept seeing like trade wife," and then it took me days. Then I was in the shower, and it clicked, and I was like, "Oh, traditional wife. That's what this is. Yes."

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FT: Traditional wife or tradwife. This is essentially a play on the 1950s housewife. This has been taking over the Internet, in particular TikTok, these women influencers, tradwife influencers, who are depicting their day-to-day. Tell us how you're seeing this really play out.

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JP: Totally. Okay. So I first stumbled upon a rabbit hole of tradwife influencers about a year ago, and they weren't on my radar until I was interviewed for a story for Katie Couric about them. That's when I like started boning up and doing my research because they're a particular brand of influencer on Instagram and TikTok.

Tradwife stands for traditional wife. Like everything on social media, there is a wide spectrum of traditional wives, and the very stereotypical tradwife is a woman who is very politically conservative. She works inside of the home. They often have many children. But then there are these rules that come along with it namely around submission to the husband, to asking the husband's permission before doing things, to having the husband be the only one who earns any income outside of the home. Tradwives don't believe that they should be making any income outside the home and that they should be financially dependent on their husbands.

I like to say upfront that this is different than a stay-at-home mother. I truly believe that all women are working, that mothers who work inside of the home are the CEOs of their family. It's

a hard freaking job. A tradwife is more this kind of fake 1950s nostalgia Betty Draper from Mad Men idea. They often dress in like 1950s garb and 1950s makeup, and glorify everything domestic, and say that women should be dependent on the man. Women should not be going to college. Women should not be making their own money.

That is the extreme of the tradwife movement, and it's only growing. I mean, since I really dug into it a year ago, there have been so many more of these women who really seem to be adopting this lifestyle. Or at least they're adopting this lifestyle to make money on Instagram.

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FT: Right. I mean, there is that, too. I mean, they're not – they are profiting from this, and so it gets very layered. As you mentioned, there's a spectrum of tradwives. There's the extremes. On the other end of that, who is the tradwife on the opposite end of the of the spectrum, who's not necessarily submitting or doesn't think she should make any money because that's not what God wants or what the world order wants.

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JP: Yes. I mean, there's something also, I would say, kind of called tradwife light, where the submission aspect is a little bit less. But they are still very financially dependent on their husbands. They see their sphere as taking care of the home and taking care of the children and their husband's job to provide for the family. There's a lot of homesteaders in this sphere on Instagram.

My biggest beef with homesteaders on Instagram is that I'm convinced you have to be independently wealthy because running a farm is backbreaking expensive work. It is so hard to do. Any real farmers that I talk to and I show them these Instagram accounts, they're just like, "That is BS." But a lot of the tradwives, the biggest one really is Ballerina Farm. They are a homesteading family, but they are also independently wealthy because her husband is the son of one of the founders of JetBlue.

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FT: Ah, okay. Well, there you go.

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JP: There you go.

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FT: The financials is really where I think you and I can agree that this is where it gets problematic for us and, frankly, for all women that the way that this is being portrayed online as this idyllic and better way of womaning and mothering and wifing.

Look, everything else aside, I think let's focus on the money piece because that's what gives me the most concern when this sort of thing and then, as you mentioned, it's growing, and people are more curious about this. It seems to be growing a real following that when – and you have interviewed a number of tradwives for your podcast and for your Substack, Over the Influence. I love it, which I'm on. By the way, I was on your podcast this week. Everybody, check out me and Jo.

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JP: You were. You were. Yes. You were on. So the podcast is Under the Influence, and the Substack –

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FT: Sorry. Under the Influence.

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JP: Under the Influence. Then the Substack is Over the Influence. You were on both this week, which was so, so much fun.

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FT: Thank you.

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JP: I've got to tell you, like this is crazy. The podcast and the Substack, we have so many loyal followers. But the downloads for the tradwife episodes on Under the Influence are crazy because people are obsessed with this topic. We have had, actually, several women that consider themselves more traditional wives on the show. That episode, frankly, is very enlightening because I think it is incredibly important to hear other people's points of view that aren't similar to yours, even if you don't agree with it. It shook me up. It got me and a lot of my listeners outside of my comfort zone.

Then we've had some critics of tradwives who say this is bad for feminism, and it's not just bad for feminism. Tradwives are bad for humanity in general because we can't just have 50% of humans on the planet checking out of the workforce and saying, "It's okay. I'll just be dependent on the other half of humanity."

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FT: Yes. I think that it also gives the systemic problems that we have an ability to kind of be ignored, right? It's like, well, if everybody just agrees that women should be the ones at the forefront of parenting, then we don't need things like equal rights, to be honest. We don't need to encourage women's female financial independence.

So when you spoke with tradwives and you inevitably, I'm sure, talked about money with them, were there – did they express any concerns or recognize the risks of what they were doing and so far as how it was impacting their financial independence?

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JP: No. That's the thing that gets to me almost every time I have spoken to some of these more traditional women. They often tend to be fairly religious. So the answer that I get is you just have to keep faith. My concern with that is that we have no idea what the heck is going to happen in life.

All women, whether they're currently working outside the home right now or not, need to have, one, a means to support themselves, and two, some kind of fund. I like to call it a fuck it fund. If everything goes south and you have to just say, "Fuck it. How am I going to do this? How am I going to support myself?" These women seem to not be nearly as worried about that as I think that they should be.

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FT: Why aren't they worried?

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JP: Maybe they do have faith and that – I have to say – as a person, as an agnostic –

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FT: They don't have a healthy state of panic.

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JP: They don't have –

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FT: Faith is not a financial plan.

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JP: No. Well, and a man is not a financial plan, frankly.

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FT: Certainly not.

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JP: I just say that all the time. A man is not the plan. I say this to young women a lot, too. I'm hearing from a lot more young women, and we had a whole episode on another genre. It's what I call the gateway drug to tradwives, which is soft girls, which is young women checking out of the workforce and saying they're just going to have their boyfriends take care of them because they're sick of working, which, God bless their little souls, and they're –

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FT: Yes. I'm sick of working, too, Jo. But like –

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JP: Same, same, same. I'm tired. I'm also tired. I'd like to do Pilates all day. Sure.

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FT: I love how your approach to this as a feminist, as someone who has a full-time career and has three children, you keep a really open mind when you're covering this topic. You recognize that part of what is driving the curiosity at least and then the movement at best is that shit's broken and –

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JP: Shit's broken. Yes. Shit's real broken and I –

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FT: So let's – can you talk about that and like how – honestly, there is something to admire in some ways to like not have to get up every day, and then go to work, and be discriminated against, and paid less as your male counterparts, and then have to come home, and then be at the forefront of all of the responsibilities because our culture has yet to abandon from expectations around like gender roles and marriages. It's like lose, lose, lose, lose, lose everywhere you turn as a woman. It feels like that some days.

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JP: Lose, lose, lose, lose, lose. Frankly, maybe the radical idea that I put out there is do tradwives feel like they're losing a little bit less, right? Because I will say so many of my friends who work outside the home who are professional women, who are partners in law firms and professors and teachers, they're burnt out as hell because they're working at their job.

Then they're coming home, and they're still doing more labor than their husbands. They're trying to find fulfillment from a profession that most of the time doesn't respect them and doesn't respect mothers. They're told that they should keep climbing this corporate ladder and also be a perfect mother, and also be a perfect wife, and never mind a good friend. They feel like they're failing at all of these things. Tradwives, for everything that we can say, “Oh, my God. I can't imagine that being my life,” can take that professional stress off the table.

One of the women I spoke to who says that she is definitely not submissive to her husband, but he does earn money, and she is the one who takes care of the home and the children, she used to be a teacher. She said something that broke my heart. She said, “I'd rather clean toilets than go back to being in the classroom because I get treated so badly there.” I firmly believe all teachers should be paid massive six-figure salaries because I volunteer in my son's classroom for about two hours, and I just – I want to die because it is the hardest job in the world.

But because we're not treating our teachers with respect, we're not teaching our nurses with respect, we're not teaching or treating any women in the workplace with respect, then I think this is causing a lot more women to say, “Screw it. I'm just going to take care of my kids.” Because,

also, here's the other rub, child care is so expensive and also so inaccessible for so many women that I think they're like, "It's cheaper for me to be the one to care for my children, instead of finding someone to care for my children, and I hate my work. I actually hate it."

When I was interviewing some of these women, I just kept thinking about how privileged I am to have a job that pays me good money for now because all jobs can fall off a cliff tomorrow. But for now that I love, that I feel fulfilled by, that gives me a purpose. But a lot of people do not have that. So a lot of these women are also saying, "I do feel fulfilled by motherhood. I do believe that is my purpose, and I'm not getting that from the workforce because the workforce treats me like crap."

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FT: Have you thought about interviewing tradhusbands?

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JP: Oh, my God. Yes. I haven't gotten any of them to come on the show yet.

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FT: Wow.

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JP: I know. No. I'm working on it. I'm working on it. I mean, I would love to.

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FT: Because what I would love to talk to them about is have you ever thought about maybe one day not wanting to be married anymore. Look, we're – you're portraying this 1950s ideal, but we live in 2024. Divorce rates are much higher. We have other options. What if you even just die?

Like what's – have you thought about taking care of your partner and your children in the event of a worst-case scenario?

I just did an episode on prenups. I just – I get it. Like we're all tired, and maybe we're looking for purpose, and not everybody sources their sense of identity and self-worth from their careers. Fine. But money, for me, is like a non-negotiable. It's a limited resource. Whether you have a traditional marriage or a non-traditional marriage, like the money is the money is the money. The money doesn't care who, what role you're playing in the marriage. It's going to – it is a necessity, and both of you need it at some point or sometime separately. I just feel like we are talking a lot about what these women want, and I would love to hear from the men, too.

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JP: Same, same. Sadly –

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FT: Tradhusbands, if you're out there.

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JP: Tradhusbands.

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FT: I have a huge audience of tradhusbands, I'm sure, who listen.

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JP: You know what? What if you did have like a secret group of tradhusbands who were just listening to you?

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FT: I don't know.

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JP: What if they all email me right now, and they're like, "Me, me, me." That's not going to happen. But that would be amazing and interesting part of this performance on Instagram, right?

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FT: Performance?

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JP: Well, I think that most of Instagram feels like a performance. It's not – it's your life but it's the version that you're performing for other people most of the time, right? So here's the thing about this. A lot of these women are making some money off of this. I'm not saying they're making gazillions of dollars because I think we overestimate what influencers can make a lot of the time, and that's a lot of what we dissect on Under the Influence. It's how are influencers making their money, how are we consuming what they're producing. But they're making some money.

I did ask one woman. Her name is Lex Delarosa. I mean, she really goes for it with the tradwife account. If you Google her, she's been interviewed as a tradwife on a lot of outlets. She's also kind of funny, and you wonder if it's a satire, but it's not. It's absolutely not. This is her life. I asked her what she was doing with the money, and she said she asked her husband if she could pay some bills, and he said no. She's just kind of squirreling it away.

I said, "Great for you. Invest it. Invest it in your fund that maybe you'll never need to use because maybe you will stay together forever. Maybe you will not outlive your husband. Who knows? But just keep taking that money that you are making from this performance on Instagram and invest, invest, invest." I felt really good giving her that advice. It's the advice that I get from you.

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FT: What did she say? What did she say?

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JP: That's what she's doing. She's put – yes, you know. I think that that is also what a lot of these women are doing. So as much as they say, “My husband makes all of the money,” the ability for them to put this lifestyle out there is then giving them the ability to have their own money in a lot of cases. That’s almost subversive, right? I don't know. I don't know.

The whole world is so fascinating. But the younger women, those are the ones that get me even more than some of the women my age because a lot of the women my age that I've talked to that have become “tradwives,” like I said, they did have these careers, and the careers did really treated them like crap. They're like, “All right, this is the better option for me.” But young women aren't even trying. There's a lot of young women out there who are like, “I'm not even going to enter the workforce because I'm looking at you hustle culture boss girls, and it did not work out for you.”

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FT: Maybe they're looking at the wrong women.

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JP: I think some of them are looking at the wrong women.

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FT: Not everybody – and that's kind of your point, which I really appreciated, too, in reading your Substack and everything is that we're all assuming that there's one definition of happiness when there is not, when there is absolutely not. But, again, your financial well-being is important, and it is tied to happiness, and it is tied to optionality, which leads to more happiness.

I think that these women who are not concerned about money, what a privilege to not have to be like, “Oh, I don't have to worry about what-ifs.” It's sort of like what I talk about in my book, *A Healthy State of Panic*. It's like if you don't have fear, that is an absolute privilege. Because who can afford to not think about risk and the what-ifs in life that will directly impact their ability to have any semblance of what they're experiencing today and to have everything that you have be dominated or managed and decided by somebody else? That's called being a child.

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JP: That's called being a child. That's the thing. It really is, right? To have that privilege of not worrying about anything about the future, about just being taken care of. That's not an adult stance to take. I don't think it is a healthy stance to take. Again, I think that there are many different versions out there of happiness and fulfillment and also professional success. I'm not saying everyone should go out there and be a CEO, one, because it is hard. It's very hard for women. Two, not everyone would be happy doing that.

But when I talk about money, I talk about agency and autonomy. This would also be very different if we lived in a country with a very robust social safety net, right? That if you and your husband, if your marriage went south tomorrow, you would be taken care of by the government, right? We don't live in that country. We live in a country where life for a single woman who has not gotten an education, who does not have marketable skills is very, very hard. You will not have healthcare. You will not be able to pay for groceries. This is difficult.

Therefore, just being able to be financially independent from your husband, regardless of what your relationship looks like. If you could still be submissive to your husband, sure. If that's your jam, cool. But you need your own money. You just need your own money is my biggest argument when it comes to tradwives. All women need their own money. We all need the ability to make money and then also a fund to help us get back on our feet if we ever need it.

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FT: Yet this is a controversial opinion. What you just said is not a widely accepted opinion. You got some backlash. Tell us about that and the tension post-airing of these interviews and your analyses.

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JP: Yes. I got so much tension, and one of them – the biggest pushback I got was from stay-at-home moms who felt attacked. Again, I preface this by saying tradwives are a whole different genre than just a stay-at-home mom. There are lots of different versions of a stay-at-home mom. But stay-at-home moms did feel like I was attacking them, and a lot of them wrote to me and said, “I don't make my own money. I can't work because I don't – we can't afford child care. My job wasn't enough to pay for child care, so I did stop working, and why are you bashing my choice,” which felt like an impossible choice.

That did make me check some of my privilege, right? I have a job that can support full-time child care. I'm very open about the fact that I have full-time child care with my three kids. My two bigger kids are in school now, and my baby has a caregiver from nine to two and nine to four on most days.

But what – and I engaged – I talked to almost every woman that wrote to me, and I said, okay, you might not be making your own money right now. You might want to do that when your kids are in school longer term. But what agreement do you have with your husband then that half of his income is definitively yours? Because you're the reason he gets to work. So do you have a prenup that says that? Does he put money into an account for you every month that is your fund if he's not there one day?

That's my concern. That's financial independence. I'm not saying every woman has to work outside the home. I'm saying then what conversations have you had with your husband about how you will be supported in the future.

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FT: That's why we got to get the guys on the show because this is a two-way conversation.

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JP: I know. We need the guys on the show.

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FT: I think that if this tradwife is of the philosophy that I'm going to be submissive to my husband, how is she supposed to have these conversations with him? It sort of goes against the philosophy.

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JP: It does go against the philosophy. I think for a lot of women, it does go against the philosophy that they're – in a lot of these marriages, these #tradmarriages, the women don't think about the money. They don't talk about the money. They're given money to spend. They're given money to be supported. But they are not supposed to be involved in any financial decision-making.

My mom did work, but my parents had a very “traditional marriage” in that she did not know what was happening with their finances to the extent that when my dad died, he had taken out a second mortgage on their house. She had no equity in their house that she thought had been long ago paid off. So my mother in her late 60s now is still paying off a mortgage because my dad made all of these decisions and because she just wasn't privy to how much money was in their bank accounts.

At the time, I don't think she cared. Now, of course, she cares very deeply. But that is a more common story than I think a lot of women care to admit. When I tell that story to other women all the time, they're like, “Yes, me, too. Me, too. That same thing happened to my mom.” So it happens. Like a man is not the plan. He's not going to take care of you forever.

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FT: Right. The fifties, last I checked, wasn't all hunk-dory. Like it was –

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JP: No, no. I think – yes. It's a false nostalgia. It really is because we have this idea of what the fifties were like from sitcoms and from movies. But it was a very, very privileged few who actually lived that kind of lifestyle.

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FT: Well, I want people to go and listen to your episodes on Under the Influence podcast and –

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JP: Okay. That sounds great.

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FT: Tell us a little bit more about what your intention is with your show and your Substack. Also, you have a big book coming out next spring, *The Sicilian Inheritance*, which you'll have to come back on because that has a lot to do with money. It's fiction. Well, sort of. It's fiction-adjacent. It's kind of inspired by your Italian roots.

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JP: It is. It is. Yes. Yes. *The Sicilian Inheritance*, it comes out in April. You can pre-order it now. Farnoosh is the one who tells me to promote myself all the time, so I'm doing it. Pre-order it now. Then it'll come. It's like a nice surprise in April. But, yes, *The Sicilian Inheritance* is based on my own great, great-grandmother's murder in Sicily. When she was left behind in Sicily to raise her kids, her husband moved to America to make his fortune in the US.

It was a really interesting time in Sicilian history when a lot of men left, and women took over their jobs, and they were able to work and to learn to read and write for the first time. It was this

weirdly feminist time in Sicilian history. We have that as the basis of a plot. But then we have just a saucy fun murder mystery filled with food and wine and Sicily, so.

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FT: I love that.

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JP: Yes. With strong feminist undertones. That is *The Sicilian Inheritance*. If you can link together one theme in all of my work, and I don't always write in the same genre, which drives my agents crazy, but it's about women and agency and independence. The *Over the Influence* Substack and *Under the Influence*, the podcast, which has been going for four years, is about how social media undermines those things, how it undermines our agency, and how it messes with our brains, and the things that we can do to fight back against that, which I think is incredibly important because I think that social media is one of the biggest influences on women and young women today, and it's not reported on nearly enough.

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FT: Right. It's a performance. It's just a slice, and that slice isn't always very true. So we appreciate the work that you do with your magnifying and your truth-seeking. You started out as a journalist. We were both in the trenches at Yahoo once upon a time.

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JP: I know. I know. Yahoo. Yahoo was the best and worst financial decision I ever made, going to Yahoo, because I was like, "I know you're not going to be around forever." But I was the Editor of Yahoo Travel, and I'm like, "I'm going to go to 32 countries and meet my husband," and I did it.

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FT: You did it and you wrote a book.

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JP: Yes. I wrote a book about that.

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FT: About marriage. I will link to all of your incredible work, Jo Piazza. Thank you so much for coming on and opening our eyes to this corner of the interweb. It's quite fascinating and more to come.

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JP: Thanks so much for having me. Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: Thanks so much to Jo Piazza for joining us. Links to her new forthcoming book, *The Sicilian Inheritance*, in our show notes, as well as her work following the tradwives movement. You can subscribe to her podcast, *Under the Influence*, and her Substack, *Over the Influence*. Follow the links in our show notes. I'll see you back here on Friday. Until then, I hope your day is So Money.

[END]