'Everyday Extremism' and the Mainstreaming of Conspiracy Narratives: Insights from Sweden

Swedish lives matter, Don't touch my country, Sweden for the Swedes, Remigration is love, Swedes are white, Helg Seger, White Sharia, See you in Valhalla, Free helicopter rides, Finspång remembers!, Swedish, white and proud.

These are some of the slogans that adorn a range of consumer products, from t-shirts, fanny packs, and caps, to coffee mugs, computer accessories, and jewelry, currently sold on social e-commerce platforms and Swedish web shops. In this talk, I propose that these items fruitfully be understood as artefacts of everyday extremism and the material-cultural manifestations of years of strategic mainstreaming of far-right ideology and conspiratorial narratives in Sweden.

Dovetailing with the OppAttune project (2023-2026) – a Horizon project that tracks the evolution of oppositional extreme ideologies, I propose the notion of everyday extremism as a way of reflecting on the increasing presence of extremist discourse, conspiracy narratives and disinformation in the everyday lives of citizens across Europe. Drawing on insights from different empirical studies on far-right extremism in Sweden, this talk explores how extremist narratives are making their way into public discourse and mainstream online spaces by travelling under the guise of irony and 'edgy' jokes in memes and other online ephemera, or as messages laced onto seemingly innocuous and mundane cultural artefacts.

Understanding mainstreaming as a meta process that is increasingly visible across overlapping areas of society, including discursive, structural and (sub)cultural levels (Rothut et al. 2024), I explore the processes by which 'the extreme' is rendered normal, and violence banal across three domains: 1) anti-immigration narratives and the 'great replacement theory' 2) conspiratorial anti-elitism and 3) conspiratorial anti-feminism and violent misogyny.

This talk raises questions such as: how does everyday extremism emerge around a range of contentious topics that have come to epitomize the current moment of political division in Sweden and Europe more broadly? What are some of the (material-cultural) expressions of the increasing penetration of exclusionary, stigmatizing and violent discourse into everyday online spaces and conversations? In closing, I suggest a set of more general questions and conceptual concerns for developing an 'everyday approach' to studying online extremism.
Tina Askanius Biography

Tina Askanius is professor in media and communication studies at the School of Arts and Communication, Malmö university, Sweden. Her work on far-right extremism and online media sits at the intersection of media and cultural studies and social movement studies. As part of her ongoing participation in a series of international research projects, including the OppAttune project (Countering Oppositional Political Extremism Through Attuned Dialogue: Track, Attune, Limit - Horizon Europe 2023-2025), she works on questions related to the circulation and normalization of extremist discourses and conspiracy narratives in digital environments.