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## Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, I outline the narrative frameworks that Far/Alt-Right women use to negotiate their place within extremist ideologies. My analysis focuses on videos made by Lana Lokteff, who has been called the most prominent woman in the Alt-Right. Lokteff produces propaganda spanning the European and US contexts through her marriage and media partnership with Henrik Palmgren via their online outlets 3Fourteen Radio and Red Ice TV. Lokteff has produced hundreds of media products, many with hundreds of thousands of views. As such, her claims and arguments represent current strands of discourse used by women to support and participate in Far/Alt-Right ideology and groups as well as to recruit other women. In her talks and shows, Lokteff must simultaneously articulate women's proper role – their unsuitability as “leaders” – and her call for women to rise in support of Far/Alt-Right defenses of White culture. To navigate between these two dictates, she returns to the figure of the Viking shieldmaiden to interconnect discursive strands that include: 1) women's power rooted in gendered complementarity; 2) women's roles as “life givers” of the Euro/White future, what I refer to as “alt-maternalism”; and 3) white men's ultimate romantic gesture to white women, the building and defense of Western Civilization. I show how this set of women's narratives connects to non-extremist women's movements online to suggest sources of recruitment, to highlight populations available for radicalization, and to show how extremist ideologies using gendered stereotypes can be normalized into more mainstream cultures.

### **Article History**

Received Nov 21, 2018

Accepted Dec 8, 2018

Published Dec 28, 2018

**Keywords:** Alt/Far Right, Gender, Recruitment, Extremism, Discourse

### **Introduction**

On February 25, 2017, in Stockholm, Sweden, a young, fair skinned woman with long blonde hair stands at a podium and begins to give a speech. She starts by talking about “the power of

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a woman” (Lokteff 0:49-0:50). What might seem like a feminist or progressive start quickly and clearly pivots with her next line: “women are the key to the future of European countries not only as life giver but as the force that inspires men” (0:55-0:58). This may be a pro-woman speech, but not one that is of a progressive or feminist variety. In the next line, her speech turns to the problem of the press, specifically the media’s denial that women exist in Far/Alt-Right movements in “great number” (1:04-1:07). To push back against this idea and highlight the power of “women,” she ends this first paragraph saying, “but they [the press/media] know when women get involved, a movement becomes a serious threat. Remember it was women that got Trump elected and, I guess to be really edgy, it was also women that got Hitler elected” (1:58-2:11).

The woman giving this speech is Lana Lokteff, who has been called the most prominent woman in the Alt-Right. Lokteff gave this speech at the ninth Identitarian Ideas conference, where international Far/Alt-Right figures come together to discuss issues and topics of interest to their movements. Lokteff was the only female speaker listed on the preliminary conference schedule; having Lokteff act as a featured speaker may have been because she and her husband help run and fund the conference, or perhaps because having a woman publicly support the movement assists in portraying a softer image. Black feminist scholars such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins among others have argued that white women are not only fundamental to the spread of white supremacy, hate, and domestic terrorism but are also active supporters and proponents of white social, political, and economic power.<sup>2</sup> Often, however, popular and media notions about women’s importance to extremist movements portray women’s participation as passive – as wombs for the cause or caretakers of men – or, if women are seen as more active, it is believed that they are duped or coerced by men into participating. Research about women’s participation in extremism actually shows that women’s interactions with extremism are much more complex (Blee

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<sup>2</sup>See Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (reprint 2007), Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (1989), Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class* (1983), bell hooks in *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2014), and for an overview of the history of black women’s thinking and writing on related topics see Beverly Guy Sheftall in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Women’s Feminist Thought* (1995)

*Racism* 5-7, Bloom IX-XII). It is therefore important to distinguish the ways that white women are useful to forming, shaping, and spreading Far/Alt-Right movements and ideology.

The longstanding idea of women's passive participation has led to a focus on white women's utility as objects of propaganda for men's radicalization. Here, Far/Alt Right propagandists use the idea of (good) white women being "raped" by non-white men or (bad) women (i.e., feminists and multiculturalists) participating in miscegenation as a basis for their arguments for white genocide and as a rallying call to unite and fight back. However, white women are active proponents of the ideologies and practices of white supremacy and racial hatred (Lorde 111-13, hooks 185-88, McRae 43). Racialized divisions between women have historically been a significant tactic of sustaining white supremacist structures since the time of slavery in the US context (hooks 185, Lorde 111-13). Today, Lana Lokteff and other outspoken white women supporting Far/Alt-Right movements offer bald proof of these longstanding black feminist arguments.

Taking black feminist scholars' arguments and Lokteff seriously means recognizing that white women are not only used as a specific and ubiquitous form of radicalizing propaganda to agitate white men, or to mobilize white fear about the desecration of the white race through the bodies of white women (Blee "Similarities" 196, Belew 155-65). It means seriously researching how they support, participate in, and promote white supremacy, hate, and racialized violence (Blee *Racism* 5-10, hooks 185, Lorde 111-13). Importantly, women's uses of extremist rhetoric, like Lokteff's speech, are framed differently because of the strictly gendered schema undergirding right-wing extremist ideology. Thus, analyzing women's rhetoric about extremism, including its strategic interlinkages with broader gendered discourses, can help us better understand the mechanisms through which violent ideologies leverage mainstream stereotypes and discourses to become sensible to targets of radicalization and within mainstream social and political frameworks.

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### Survey of the Research<sup>3</sup>

Previous writing on white women and right-wing extremism in US contexts includes the seminal text, *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* by Kathleen M. Blee (2002). Blee's work focuses on understanding "organized racism" through ethnographic interviews with individual women members of white supremacist extremist groups (5-7). This work highlights the importance of studying individual 'regular' members within hate movements to better understand their reasoning for radicalization and participation. Importantly, Blee's work explores the wide range of women engaging in such movements along with the plurality of roles women choose to take up. Crucially, Blee's ethnography shows that women's participation in organized racism and hate movements is an active, personal choice they make and not forced through coercion by the men in their lives. Thus, researching women's reasons for participation in and support of organized racism is an essential aspect of countering violent extremism.

Along with Blee's work directly focused on extremist group members, there are historiographic texts that explicate conservative women's movements that bridge extremism and mainstream politics. These include *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers Movement and World War II* by Glen Jeansonne (1996) and *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* by Elizabeth Gillespie McRae (2018). Jeansonne's research focuses on the nearly six million right-wing women who protested World War II via maternalist claims of love and care for their sons (1). This work is important in understanding how maternalist framings can motivate women to participate in conservative and even extremist movements. Similarly, McRae's research focuses on women engaged in the period of massive resistance to integration and civil rights. It provides a historical analysis of segregationist women's role in promoting white supremacy after the *Brown v. Board of*

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<sup>3</sup> In this survey of literature, I focus on research approaching gender and far right extremism. There is also a current vein of theorizing, analyzing, and researching gender in relation to other forms of violent extremism. A particularly important work in this area that has a similar focus on the complexity of women's participation and agency is Mia Bloom's *Bombshell: Women in Terrorism*. In this work, Bloom focuses on women's roles, choices, and participation in Jihadist movements globally.

Education ruling by the Supreme Court. McRae elucidates the practices of ‘everyday’ women in co-creating “the endurance and shape-shifting capabilities of white resistance” (9). McRae argues that women were the crucial workforce of massive resistance and white supremacy, an important framework from which to view women’s participation in Far/Alt-Right movements today. Both texts seek to add complexity to our understanding of women’s choices regarding political activism particularly the via the use of their identity as mothers and provide insight into the mainstreaming of hate and extremist thought.

Much of the most recent academic work on focuses more broadly on gender and right-wing extremism, although work on women still makes up the bulk of gender research. This work also focuses primarily on contemporary non-US contexts such as Canada, Great Britain and various European countries. Cynthia Miller-Idriss’ standout book, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany* (2018) shows how radicalization is intertwined with youth consumer culture and the development of radical right masculinities in relation to coded symbols in the German context. Importantly, Miller-Idriss’ research shows culture, identity, and gender to be fundamental aspects of radicalization and extremism.

In addition, edited volumes and special journal issues focus on bringing together works across national contexts; exemplars include *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, edited by Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (2016) and “Gender and the Radical and Extreme Right: Mechanisms of Transmission and the Role of Educational Interventions,” in the journal of *Gender and Education* (2017). These compendiums include analyses of gender in relation to far-right movements in multiple European nations. Bringing together multiple contexts and variations of Far/Alt Right practice is a crucial element of contemporary anti-radicalization research.

Of primary importance to this paper is the Katherine M. Blee’s chapter in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, “Similarities/Differences in Gender and Far- Right Politics in Europe and the USA,” and Hilary Pilkington’s article, “‘EDL angels stand beside their men...not behind them’: the politics of gender and sexuality in an anti-Islam(ist) movement,”

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in the *Journal of Education*. Blee presents a comparative analysis of current US far-right groups in relation to the book's twelve national analyses. Blee notes that in the US and European context, a current trend is tension over the roles of women participants in far-right movements as contemporary female recruits' expectations of full membership leads them to challenge gendered subordination ("Similarities" 195-96). However, the political participation of far-right groups differs between the US and EU contexts leading to women far-right members of EU groups to be more useful in public facing roles to soften and normalize the image of various groups (Blee "Similarities" 197-98). Similarly, Pilkington's research evaluating the ways contemporary gender politics and practice in the English Defense League (EDL) promote the participation of women and LGBT activists is important to understanding how contemporary gender politics within groups are deviating from past group formations. Importantly, these changes are a response to the exigencies of the current historical and material context of anti-Islamism (253-54). Both Blee's articulation of the challenges posed by women members to intragroup organization and Pilkington's assessment that the anti-Islamic stance of the EDL precipitates increased 'minority' participation (253-54) have interesting implications if thought alongside this paper's arguments about the importance of the contemporary post-feminist sensibility as a framework of women's radicalization.<sup>4</sup>

In the US context, very little scholarly work is yet published on current right-wing extremism with gender as a main focus. Recent examples such as "Understanding Hate Speech" by Michael Waltman and Ashley Mattheis (2017) and *Bringing the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* by Kathleen Belew (2018), include discussions of gendered ideologies within larger discussions of hate and extremism. Waltman and Mattheis focus on the shared gendered ideologies underpinning both misogynist and racial hate groups in the US context in contemporary online media (16-19). Belew's primary discussion of the role of gender ideology in her analysis is embedded within chapter seven, "Race War and White Women," where she notes the twofold nature of women's utility as

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<sup>4</sup> The other readings in this edited volume and special issue are highly valuable contributions to the study of gender and women in far-right extremism. For this survey of research, specific articles have been selected particular to highlight their overlaps and connections to primary arguments.

both participants in violent extremism and propaganda to motivate men (155-165). Belew's historical analysis lays a contextual basis for this paper's discussion of gendered complementarity as women's base of extremist praxis and the romanticism used to narrate hate as a function of white men's care for white women. Given these limitations, credible journalism and news reporting makes up a good portion of the up to the moment literature currently used in US contexts.

This paper takes a different approach from ethnographic, historiographic, or computational qualitative frameworks of analysis by blending rhetorical and cultural criticism to analyze the sets of discourses used by women to recruit other women into Far/Alt-Right ideology and participation. This type of analysis is needed to lay a base for studying the local variations of persuasive discourse-based strategies moving globally online. Here, I follow Kathleen M. Blee's assertion in "Afterword: Next steps in the study of gender and education in the radical right":

There are other questions of education and gender that might prove fruitful for scholars of the far-right. One is whether women and men recruits to radical right parties and movements are educated in a similar manner and toward the same ideological ends. Are there limits to the information provided by radical rightists to their women recruits compared to men? Are the beliefs that radical rightists broadcast to outsiders tailored differently to reach women and men? (278-79)

This research takes up a similar concern to Blee's question by seeking to understand how Far/Alt-Right women are tailoring messages to recruit for the movement. Specifically, it addresses the question of how Far/Alt-Right women's recruiting rhetoric uses discourse to persuade other women to join the movement. To answer these questions, I focus on developing "discursive composites" out of narratives used by ideologues within Far/Alt-Right movements in an effort to understand their rhetorical processes and persuasive capacities.

This research is needed to begin to successfully develop anti-radicalization narratives and strategies.

## Method

Developing discursive composites starts with identifying the multiple strands of discourse synthesized into a whole within the ideological claims forwarded to recruit individuals, especially women into Far/Alt-Right movements. Following this, each strand is analyzed to determine its points of interconnection within the composite and to broader historical and cultural narratives through which such discourses can be manipulated and spread back through the mainstream into varying socio-political contexts. This is increasingly important with the ubiquity of the movement of online socio-political discourses – particularly hate-driven, extremist discourses. Ultimately, the goal of this work is to use these discursive composites to track how such narratives work rhetorically, move globally, and to distinguish which strands are leveraged in local contexts – all urgently needed analyses as Far/Alt-Right groups attempt to strengthen their global network.

To develop the discursive composite in this analysis, I focus on the discourses used by Lana Lokteff to tease apart and analyze the narrative strands that women use to engage other women in Far/Alt-Right extremist ideologies. Lokteff is heavily involved in fundraising and talent pooling for Far/Alt-Right media. She produces propaganda spanning the European and US contexts through her marriage and media partnership with Henrik Palmgren via their online outlets *3Fourteen Radio* and *Red Ice TV*. Lokteff speaks regularly at conservative conferences and broadcasts via podcast and video to European and US audiences. She has produced hundreds of media products, many with hundreds of thousands of views. As such, her claims and arguments show the current strands of discourse used by women to recruit other women into Far/Alt-Right ideology and groups.

This paper unfolds in two parts. The first explicates the discursive composite developed from Lokteff's speech in order to analyze the discursive strands she uses in her

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recruiting practices. This section includes a hybrid rhetorical-cultural framework to assess 1) Lokteff's use of three specific discursive strands which ground the composite; 2) her framing of women's engagement with Far/Alt-Right movements and ideology; and 3) the historical use of, and culturally associated meanings linked to, the discursive strands in the composite. These linkages indicate topical points of transfer where extremist ideology is more likely to resonate with mainstream audiences. The second part discusses "tradwife" culture online as a virtual community susceptible to the themes of the discursive composite derived from Lokteff's speech. Importantly, Lokteff regularly engages with women who identify as "tradwives" in her media productions, marking this culture as a prime source for potential recruitment into Far/Alt-Right extremist ideology. This discussion of the susceptibility of women within "tradwife" culture is rooted in my interpretation of the impact of what Angela McRobbie has termed a "post-feminist" sensibility – through which traditional gender roles are entwined with feminist frameworks of gender quality in culture and media – on the persuasive capacity of the discursive strands making up the composite (11-12).

### Women Recruiting Women into Extremist Ideologies: A Discursive Composite

The identification of this discursive composite and its subsequent analysis are drawn from an international speech given by Lokteff on February 25, 2017, at an Alt-Right conference, "Identitarian Ideas IX: Rising from the Ruins," in Stockholm, Sweden. This speech was recorded and loaded onto *YouTube.com* under the *Red Ice* banner. Importantly, the *YouTube* video is titled "How the Left is Betraying Women," indicating its framing as a tool for both recruiting and in-group virtue signaling. Lokteff was the only female speaker noted on the conference's *KickStarter.com* page.<sup>5</sup> As such, Lokteff's speech needed to address US *and*

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<sup>5</sup>List of speakers at Identitarian Ideas IX: Rising from the Ruins

(<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/motpol/identarian-ideas-ix-rising-from-the-ruins>):

"**Lana Lokteff** – Lana was born of Russian American ancestry. She is the host of Radio 3Fourteen and contributes political/social commentary in the form of articles and videos.

Matthew Forney – Author, journalist, radio host and regular Right On contributor.

**RamZPaul** – YouTube phenomenon, speaker, and one of the most popular video bloggers of the real right.

European sensibilities, appeal to men *and* women in the room, participants – mostly women according to Lokteff – live streaming the event from home, *and* potential future viewers.

*Women Navigating Submission and Action: Addressing the Rhetorical Situation*

In her recruiting, Lokteff must navigate between women's submission to men in the movement and women's action on behalf of the movement by simultaneously articulating women's proper role (their unsuitability as "leaders") and her call for women to rise in defense of white culture. This negotiation of gender roles in Far/Alt-Right communities is difficult, especially for women who have grown up relating to post "second wave" culture where feminist ideas of women's empowerment have dominated the mainstream. How does one act as a warrior of the movement and a bastion for the white race without emasculating men? This, for women of the Far/Alt-Right, is a serious problem, particularly in a world

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**Greg Johnson** – Editor of Counter-Currents and author of several books.

**Ruuben Kaalep** – Leader of Blue Awakening, youth movement of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia.

**Dan Eriksson** – Chairman of the EU-funded foundation Europa Terra Nostra, and radio host of the popular Swedish podcast Motgift.

**Constantin von Hoffmeister** – Writer, poet and pan-European visionary.

**Jonas De Geer** – Author, former editor of the Swedish conservative magazine "Samtidsmagasinet SALT" and radio host of the podcasts Motgift as well as Right On Radio.

**Jason Reza Jorjani** – Iranian-American PhD in philosophy, Editor-in-Chief of Arktos, and author of the award-winning Prometheus and Atlas.

**Isac Boman** – Author of the newly released book Money Power. Economist, writer and lecturer. Born in the Åland Islands in the middle of the Baltic Sea, he has a broad background ranging from the banking sector, media, politics and NGOs.

**Daniel Friberg** – CEO and co-founder of Arktos and Editor of Motpol.nu and RightOn.net, as well as author of the bestselling book The Real Right Returns which has so far been published in over ten languages.

**Alexander "@alexstrongmann" Syding** – Artist, Engineering Physicist, Musician, Programmer, Metapolitician, Legionnaire Extraordinaire – is an Uppsala-based veteran identitarian currently involved with the Legio Gloria metapolitical project.

**John B. Morgan** – Director, co-founder, and editor of Arktos, and editor at Counter-Currents, as well as long-time adherent to the New Right and Indo-European traditionalism.

**Fredrik Hagberg** – Chairman of the Swedish Identitarian activist movement Nordic Youth and popular international speaker.

**Magnus Söderman** – Popular Swedish speaker, author and radio host of the podcast Motgift.

**Henrik Palmgren** – Henrik Palmgren was born in Götaland, Sweden, the land of the Goths. He is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of Red Ice, founded in 2003. Henrik is most known as the host of Red Ice Radio and produces all the video content on Red Ice.

**"Conrad" / Daniel Frändelöv** – Host to the popular Swedish nationalist podcast "Ingrid & Conrad", and one of Sweden's most famous alternative media profiles.

**Arla Gryning** – The popular Swedish neofolk project will provide us with live music during the evening."

where many must work outside the home generally but more so if they want to enable their families to live the “traditional” lifestyles they desire in white enclaves away from the “Other.”

Far/Alt-Right women also want their participation in these movements to be recognized as an actively made choice and a pointed rejection of feminism. Thus, they seek to be understood as “modern” women who have overcome what they see as the “false-consciousness” of leftist movements such as feminism, multiculturalism, and anti-racism. They see themselves as women who are “wounded by the lie of equality, but not broken by it. Rising from the shattered promises of feminism, [Alt-Right women] have awoken to stand beside their brothers, partners, husbands, and children, to reclaim their destiny as women” (Davenport). Thus, these women must also negotiate between their role as supporter and helpmeet and their need not to be seen as regressive, dominated women, abused into support of the ideology.

To navigate the narrow path between submission and action in her speech, Lokteff blends three primary discursive strands: 1) rooting women’s power in a framework of gendered complementarity; 2) women’s roles as homemakers and “life givers” of the Euro/white future, what I refer to as “alt-maternalism”; and 3) white men’s ultimate romantic gesture to white women, the building and defense of Western Civilization. The composite generated by the synthesis of these three strands offers a third way – the route – between submission and action. The route Lokteff constructs through her rhetoric is characterized by the image of the reluctant shield maiden protecting her hearth and family.<sup>6</sup>

Although posed as a connection to a mythic white past, the image also rests on a recent phenomenon (since 2004) of women articulating their subjectivity as mothers through fierce imagery. Here, we get figures such as Sarah Palin’s “Mama Grizzlies,” Amy Chua’s

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<sup>6</sup>This depiction eschews any anthropological or historically agreed upon facts. According to anthropologists Kathleen O’Neal and Michael Gear, early histories, often written by Christian monks, viewed shield maidens negatively and as hostile to men and marriage. The records in the sagas may or may not be based in history and could be more representative of mythologizing Viking culture during Christian invasion and conversion (<https://www.tor.com/2015/06/08/viking-warrior-women-did-shieldmaidens-like-lagertha-really-exist/>).

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“Tiger Mother,” and Michelle Malkin’s “Security Mom.”<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon, which I refer to as “fierce mothering,” shares other discursive and cultural resonances with Lokteff’s construction, particularly the expression of maternalism.<sup>8</sup> This shared cultural resonance provides a linkage between Lokteff’s assertions of extremist ideology and mainstream culture, making her arguments more sensible within the current political context. To better understand this resonance as well as the rhetorical and persuasive mechanisms of women’s recruitment into extremist ideologies, what follows is an in-depth rhetorical-cultural analysis of Lokteff’s use of the strands of discourse that make up this discursive composite.

### *Gendered Complementarity as Women’s Power*

In the first discursive strand, Lokteff articulates two “correct” roles for European (white) women in society: “Women are *the key to the future* of European countries not only *as life giver* but as the *force that inspires men*” (Lokteff 0:48-59). These roles are a function of “natural” (biological), gendered complementarity: “for ages Europeans [had] the *perfect union of the sexes* based on what was *natural in order to survive; based on the reality of how men and women were designed by mother nature*. And, we especially up here in the Norse [sic] of Norse mythology. We honored both gods and goddesses. It *wasn’t a competition but each a piece of the whole that worked together* to ensure our survival” (Lokteff 9:10-9:35). However, rooting women’s power within a framework of gendered complementarity involves ensuring that every call for women’s action is paired with a marker or reminder of women’s “true” place. This is where Norse mythology becomes an essential factor in her arguments, particularly the figure of the shield maiden (emphasis added):

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<sup>7</sup>Fierce mothering subjectivities include articulations of “fierceness” either using explicit animal images or through implicit frameworks that describe women as warriors “fighting for our children.” These expressions are associated with both right and left leaning political frameworks. Identities have developed since 2004 including: Security Moms (2004), Mom’s Rising (2006), Angel Moms – anti immigrant focused (2008), Mama Grizzlies (2010), Tiger Mothers (2011), Eco Moms (2012), Anti-Vaxxer Moms (2013), Mothers of the Movement (2015), Trump Moms (2016), and Dragon Moms (2017).

<sup>8</sup>“Fierce mothering” is the cultural phenomenon that comprises the object of analysis of my dissertation research and the subject of my dissertation (in progress) titled, “Fierce Mamas: New Maternalism, Social Surveillance, and the Politics of Solidarity.”

It's not like they sat around and said, "You know we need enough women on the battlefield and we need-want more women hunting and more men basket weaving." *It was survival.* Like then, women honored Beauty. Let's not forget about Freya, the archetypal beauty. That's, that's what women want and that's healthy and we should have that. But they also honor family and home *but occasionally we have to pick up a sword and fight in emergency situations.* The *shield maiden*, the Vikings right, *like today women of the right would love to simply tend the home and make their surroundings beautiful - and I wish that's all we have to do.* And, I know our ancestors worked to the bone in order for us to be able to have that luxury, *but many women such as myself are realizing that this is an emergency situation. Our countries are being destroyed by leftists and anti-Whites. And, the future for our children is looking gloom[y]. Although, I think women are too emotional for leading roles and politics, this is the time for female nationalists to be loud* (Lokteff 9:36-10:37)

Note that Lokteff pairs her call to arms with a general refusal of women's desire to lead or fight. Women fight for the cause during an emergency of epic proportions – nothing less than the destruction of whiteness itself. However, women must also use special weapons because of their physical traits: "A soft woman, saying hard things can create repercussions throughout society. Since *we aren't physically intimidating*, we can get away with saying big things. And, let me tell you, *the women that I have met in this movement can be lionesses and shield maidens and Valkyries but also soft and sensual as silk*" (Lokteff 11:25-44).

Gendered complementarity in Lokteff's framing is essential to marking the appropriate place of women within Far/Alt-Right movements. Her use of mythical and animal imagery – lionesses, shield maidens, and Valkyries – positions women's action as protective and instinctual rather than as power seeking. Here, action on behalf of the movement is made relatable as an extension of the women's sphere of child rearing and care work. Moreover,

Lokteff sandwiches these active images between a repeated image of women's soft natures ("soft as silk") to ensure that audiences will not misconstrue her call to action as rising against the "natural" gendered order. This, paired with her assertions of the rightness of women's desire for beauty – personified in the image of Freya – and the basis of women's action as survival, emergency, and crisis, rhetorically positions women's action on behalf of the movement as coerced by outside enemies – leftists and anti-whites – and events such as the so-called immigration and refugee crises. Thus, women of the Far/Alt-Right will act if they must to *protect* the white race and their families, but their ultimate desire and wish is to simply create and tend to a beautiful home – to be the helpmeet of their men and to maintain their role, duty, and place as women.

Importantly, the choice of Freya as *the* feminine archetype is not arbitrary as Freya – like other figures from the Viking pantheon – is embedded in Far/Alt-Right mythic imaginings as part of the Aryan "sacred origin myth" and used to connect with their specific notion of white identity and culture (Miller-Idriss 102-103). Thus, she symbolically encompasses and signals a transhistorical white female heritage and potentially offers a model for Lokteff's middle path for women as Freya is often also considered the leader of the Valkyries and provided for her selected host of slain warriors in the afterlife as well as the fair skinned personification of beauty, sexuality, and fertility; an aspect of Freya's nature left unvoiced by Lokteff indicating again through her articulated focus the imperative that 'real' women lack the desire for power within the movement ("Freyja").

Another crucially important rhetorical feature of this discursive strand is that it works implicitly to promote the heteronormative and binary gendered world view of extreme right groups. It also works to implicitly exclude certain groups of people from the scope of the movement, i.e., those who do not fit within such a world view. Thus, the only "real" men and women who exist, exist within the movement. This view becomes clear in other statements Lokteff makes in her speech. She lays out the exclusionary framework of Far/Alt-Right gendered ideology saying, "[t]he left is losing women to us. Why? Compare. The left offers feminized males in skinny jeans.... They push ugly, fat positive feminists. They push fat, ugly

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positive feminists as the beauty ideal. And, they tell us it's natural if our husband wants to dress like a woman here and there or have sex with a man occasionally to prove he's not homophobic" (5:49-6:16). Thus, Lokteff rhetorically positions LGBTQ people, feminists, and other "social justice warriors" of the "left" as irrational, unnatural, and as sub-human, linking them to other populations viewed as sub-human within Far/Alt-Right ideology, including Jewish people, mixed race people, and people of color.

Lokteff also explicitly supports the anti-feminist views espoused by Far/Alt-Right adherents, particularly men, online. Her assertion that women are small, soft, and sensual, but that they use this stature to project their interior strength in support of their men, is a direct push against both feminist ideas and the stereotypes of feminists embedded in feminist backlash (e.g. all feminists are man-hating lesbians). Moreover, she is careful to embed within her framing very traditional stereotypes about women and femininity. One of these traditional stereotypes is women's "emotional nature," making them unsuitable to masculine pursuits. Lokteff uses this traditional stereotype as she asserts that "women are too emotional for leading roles and politics" (10:28-10:32). This particular notion tracks back historically at least to ancient Greece, including the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. The term hysteria was first used by Hippocrates in the 5<sup>th</sup> century to describe what he believed to be the cause of the supposed emotional instability of women: the movement of their wombs internally (Tasca et al 110-11).

Within modern US history, this assertion ties directly to turn of the century debates over women's nature and the vote in the US where "the most frequent argument against woman suffrage was that women were politically incompetent; dominated by heart rather than mind, they would 'consider personalities above principles' and govern by impulse, intuition, and [be] hysterical" (Marshall 333). This argument, as Susan Marshall also notes, stemmed from antisuffragist's – particularly women antisuffragist's – assertions about gendered complementarity "as a fundamental law of nature" (333). In this way, Lokteff embeds into her discourse a stereotype that has become common sense to many, enabling listeners in her audience and watchers of the video to "feel" the truth of her claims.

This notion of gendered complementarity also runs through other highly regularized discourses in the mainstream such as medicine, psychology, labor, and economics. This includes binary gender frameworks in medical studies about topics like the biology of the male versus female brain, or similar psychological models as explanations for “gendered differences” in behavior, or even the popular feminist framing of the gendered wage gap in labor and economics. All of these types of “scientific” discourses forward a comparative, gendered framework within the context of a supposedly “gender equal society,” making the notion that men and women are different but equally important (gendered complementarity) easily digestible as a “natural” Truth.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Alt-Maternalism and the Special Role of Mothers in Extremist Ideology*

Building from the notion of gendered complementarity, the second discursive strand Lokteff uses to articulate women’s role in support of Far/Alt-Right movements is women’s special role as mothers. Maternalism figures prominently and is broadly defined as an ideology that “implies a kind of empowered motherhood or public expression of those domestic values associated in some way with motherhood” (Weiner 96). I have termed Lokteff’s, and other Alt-Right women’s, usage as “alt-maternalism,” given their use of new maternalist logics paired with anti-multiculturalism, white entho-nationalism, and hate frameworks, thus marking white culture as the primary issue to which white-Euro “mother-power” must attend (Belew 164-65). This use of alt-maternalism parallels a concurrent rise in the use of maternalist arguments from women across the mainstream political spectrum over the last decade.

Lokteff begins her assertion of alt-maternalism by rooting women’s specialized role as mothers in their natural desires as women. She says, “[t]here are three important things for a woman and they are ingrained into our psyche. And, no matter how hard you try, they will never be removed. Beauty. Family. Home” (6:38-6:50). Using the framing of psyche here

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<sup>9</sup>This paper does not address the gendered complementarity foundational to Christian ideology which undergirds many discursive norms in the US. However, Christian religious belief and narratives often ubiquitous in US culture even if implicitly used, make beliefs in gendered complementarity more likely.

indicates the naturalness of women's interests in domesticity. She continues, "[w]omen want to be beautiful, attract the best mate possible and be protected and provided for until death. Any woman who says differently is lying to herself or will learn when it's too late" (6:50-7:03).

Moving between the first discursive strand – her arguments about women's gendered role in the movement – and this second discursive strand – women's specialized role as mothers – Lokteff embeds long standing notions of the supposed naturalness of the gendered division of reproductive labor. Thus, Lokteff's usage of alt-maternalism marks having babies and taking care of husbands as an essential part that white women not only must play but, more importantly, want to play in the movement (emphasis added):

European nationalists and the alt-right in America are a very attractive, *very sexy bunch* – which is also [in] our favors (sic) – women are loving it if they can have their pick of the best and they are. I hear from women all the time. You say "*I want a husband. I'm 29, I need to have kids.*" I say – come to a right-wing conference. / And, the good news is, I've been seeing *matches made left and right, left and right, of the most beautiful, intelligent couples. So, it's eugenic. It's a huge eugenic process that we find ourselves here right? right/. You've managed to jump through the correct [hoops] and now you will procreate* (Lokteff 8:25-9:09)

Lokteff begins by suggesting that women's literal sexual desires govern their "proper" role as potential wives and mothers in their choice to engage with Far/Alt-Right ideology. Sexual desire is only an indicator of women's "real" desire for marriage and children. She also poses women's participation in the movement as a natural function of their competition with other women to win the best mate, and these are mainstays of why women come to be part of the Far/Alt-Right movement. This rhetorical construction blends notions from evolutionary "science," which suggest that sexual desire is tied to the natural instinct for the "survival of

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the fittest” with white women’s choice to participate in the movement. The implication is that for intelligent white women, the only sensible choice is to become part of the Far/Alt-Right.

Crucially in this section, Far/Alt-Right women’s innate desire for home and family are racialized and ethnicized through Lokteff’s linkage of a desire for marriage and family with the notion of eugenics. Eugenics was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century pseudo-science derived from Malthusian theories of blood born degeneracy (Schoen 20-25). Eugenics policies and practices aimed to eradicate poverty, crime, and low-intelligence, by restricting people identified as having such characteristics from procreating. Such policies existed throughout the West at this time, were highly racialized, ethnicized, and classed, and were used broadly to control social organization. Such policies and beliefs contributed to human rights atrocities from forced sterilizations in the US, used particularly in the Jim Crow South, through to the “final solution” (engineered genocide) of the Holocaust in Hitler’s Germany (Schoen 20-25, McRae 43). Contemporary white supremacist extremists relate Malthusian theories and eugenic beliefs to their framing of the “natural” development of “tribalism” and the appropriateness of the separation of the races. And, as Lokteff asserts, women’s participation in this eugenic process culminates in procreation – and thus survival – for the white race (8:55 – 9:09).

Maternalist arguments are another way that Lokteff “normalizes” her claims for women’s participation in Far/Alt-Right movements. In the US, maternalist arguments have been a foundational part of arguments on behalf of women’s participation in society since the founding of the nation. Maternalisms (there are many varieties) are also used in both progressive and conservative contexts. These arguments are so normative in US discourses that they have come to seem like claims rooted in a natural order. What makes alt-maternalism particularly persuasive for grounding Lokteff’s claims that white women should support white socio-political power is US maternalism’s history in maintaining racial and class structures. As Sonya Michael notes in “Maternalism and Beyond,” within US socio-economic and political frameworks:

maternalism in practice was an ideology or political strategy most frequently deployed by middle-class women (white women, it is important to note in the American context, though race and ethnicity are often no less significant elsewhere) to justify their own political participation as well as the establishment of institutions, policies or legislation directed at poor or working-class women and children. This was often achieved at the expense of pathologizing, infantilizing, racializing or otherwise denigrating the poor, who were usually barred from representing themselves in public arenas. Maternalists effaced the culture of racial, ethnic and/or socio-economic ‘others’, silencing them as they (the maternalists) specified their needs through the lens of (white) middle-class values and romanticized visions of family life (24)

Thus, what has historically been embedded implicitly in mainstream notions of mothering and motherhood in US socio-economic and political contexts can be manipulated by the Far/Alt-Right as a substrate for their ideology (Belew 162-65).

The racialization of maternalist arguments, historically seen as a particular facet of US discourse, is now emerging in European contexts. These include incursions in the discourses from American Far/Alt-Right narratives like those used by Lokteff, but importantly are also connecting to mainstream political discourses in the contemporary moment as EU governments are shifting because of radicalizing right political tides. The linkage in the contemporary moment however is not tied to white/black racialized relations. In this political moment, this racialization of maternalism is tied to the supposed global refugee and immigration “crisis,” which is seen as negatively impacting EU countries, which are explicitly argued as white. Here, racialized maternalism is a substrate for anti-Muslim and anti-immigration arguments that mainly focus on non-white peoples, whether they are actually Muslims or not (e.g. Syrian Christian refugees). Specifically, in countries such as Russia, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Ukraine, and parts of South Eastern Germany (less visibly in

England, Sweden, and France), racialized maternalisms that are often rooted in a supposed return to “Christian culture” are on the rise socially and politically (“Europe”, Holleran, Sierakowski, Tartar). Alt-maternalism, then, works as a primary buttress for supporting more generalized arguments about the “futuraity” of the white race – such as the colloquial 14 words – and as a focus for the prevention of “white genocide” linking Lokteff’s claims to the broader claims of the Far/Alt-Right movements.<sup>10</sup>

### *Civilization as White Men’s Ultimate Romantic Gesture*

The third discursive strand Lokteff uses is the argument that white men’s ultimate romantic gesture to white women is the gift of civilization. Here, she argues that white men “developed” Western society including its architecture, culture, and technological advances specifically for white women and their families. The basis for this romantic gesture is women’s other “proper role” as white men’s inspiration. Lokteff says:

women have *a special power to inspire and motivate men* to give them a reason to fight. The woman makes the man. Contrary to what feminists say the *reason why European men built society is for their women and children*. ...what really drives men most is women and let's be honest – sex with women – to get that all the time (10:38-11:05)

Thus, men value sex, but women value “[b]eauty, family, and home” (Lokteff 7:13-15). So, “European men built civilization and facilitated beauty in all its forms. It's *the ultimate romantic gesture to European women*. They built our civilization to enable the home and the family and to protect women” (Lokteff 7:21-26). And this romantic gesture, white civilization, must be guarded at all costs.

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<sup>10</sup>“14 Words” is a reference to the most popular white supremacist slogan in the world: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” The slogan was coined by David Lane, a member of the white supremacist terrorist group known as The Order (Lane died in prison in 2007). The term reflects the primary white supremacist worldview in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: that unless immediate action is taken, the white race is doomed to extinction by an alleged “rising tide of color” purportedly controlled and manipulated by Jews” (Hate Symbols Database – Anti Defamation League Website).

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Lokteff connects her first and second narrative strands to a third strand by continuing her theme of literal desires; here, it is men's desire for sex and women's desire for marriage and family that leads to the development of Western civilization. Lokteff entangles these three discursive strands to create a specifically white eschatological trajectory tied to gendered biological arguments. Her figurations, beginning with that of the ancient "white" (Viking) culture throughout the rise of Western civilization, pose white nationalist goals of "white states for white people" as the "natural" outcome of history (Miller-Idriss 166-70). Indeed, it is the penultimate (white) human achievement that white women must help bring into being. The stakes of failure are posed through her figuration of two specific catastrophic dangers facing white women at this moment.

The two dangers are crucially important narrative frames that Lokteff leverages as support for her claims about the rightness of white extremist thought. The first is the problem of multiculturalism and the lack of white cohesion in Western/European countries. The second is the problem of racialized sex posed in two ways: 1) white men's potential miscegenation; and 2) the rape of white women by non-white men. These narrative frames have a long historical base in racialized US politics.

Lokteff frames the problem of multiculturalism as "unrealistic fantasies of global utopia where we are all mixed peoples" (Lokteff TIME). This framing grounds her entire discussion of "civilization" as a gift to white women. Importantly, it is a narrative that slips easily from "civilization" to the notion of the nation: "A nation is your extended family, your tribe, your support system. The comfort of your home and way of life remains uncertain *without your people* as your neighbors" (Lokteff 7:27-44). This slippage between civilization and nation is crucial to link her discourse to historical frameworks that figure the nation state on a model of the nuclear family where the nation is the mother, the government is the father, and the people are the children. This is an explicitly paternalist figuration which balances Lokteff's maternalist claims and reasserts the "natural" gendered order of the movement. Moreover, her usage now mobilizes both the paternalist historical narrative as well as

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contemporary post-9/11 narratives of safety and security while simultaneously providing implicit figurations of white-only enclaves.

The second is a mobilization of white fears and anxieties about the virtue of white women and miscegenation by white men. The virtue of white womanhood is imperiled because of the “rape” of white women by non-white men (Blee “Similarities” 196, Belew 158-66). Lokteff spends nearly two paragraphs discussing the “denial” of such racialized, sexual violence supposedly enacted against white women “by invading migrants” (11:54-12:02). This mobilization relies on a racialized historical trope, particularly salient in US racial history as a logic for lynching (the extra-judicial killing of) black men (Wells 70-76, hooks 227-28). This narrative remains effective today because of discussions centered around global migrations and refugee populations which figure migrant and refugee men as “uncivilized” and desirous of sexual congress with white women by any means necessary. In contrast, fear around the miscegenation of white men is posed as the theft of civilization by female immigrants and refugees who are “risk[ing] their lives trying to come to the countries our men built for us” (Lokteff 13:13-16). This rhetorically situates white men’s miscegenation as a function of women’s competition and beyond the control of white men who are either duped by non-white women, incapable of denying their sexual impulses, or so fed-up with the “modern” white women of the West, tainted by feminist ideology, that they are drawn in by the submissiveness of non-white women from less progressive cultures.<sup>11</sup> This transfer of anxiety about white men’s miscegenation into the nefarious designs of non-white women – a particularly female argument – also dovetails neatly with narratives about women’s responsibility for men’s sexual violence providing an additional linkage to gendered discourses common in mainstream cultural understanding.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Here the notion of competition between women draws on the racialized stereotype of the “Jezebel” in relation to the hypersexualization of black women under slavery and Jim Crow as a way to mitigate their rape by white men as a practice of white supremacy. For more information on this see Patricia Hill Collins’ book *Black Feminist Thought*, specifically her chapter “Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images.”

<sup>12</sup> In men’s rhetoric about miscegenation, the notion of black and brown male desire of white women and rape is much more prominent and white men’s participation in miscegenation is downplayed (Belew 158-59). Typical of US social and political narratives, (white) women’s bodies become the locus of control over contested social, political, and economic topics while men’s bodies and behaviors are mystified. For other interpretations of this

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Critically important to the discourses of Far/Alt-Right adherents, these paired dangers – multiculturalism as the lack of white cohesion and the depravity of mixed-race sex, both as miscegenation and sexual violence – are a primary substrate for violence as they must be eliminated in Western/euro countries. Lokteff poses the Far/Alt-Right solution saying: “Here in Sweden we have to ask but on[e] question ‘has mass immigration by non-Europeans made Sweden a better place for safer streets and more opportunity?’ The answer is so obvious – [it] is a big fat ‘NO’. Sweden is the perfect example of what not to do. So, with all the cries of ‘white supremeists’ [sic] and racism, we offer the simple solution: European countries for European people” (13:33-14:05). And women have a distinct role to play: “In these times, us women must multi-task and rise to new heights as the enemy strikes on every level. *We have to be lovers, mothers, friends, teachers, and now, shield maidens ready to go to battle*” (Lokteff 13:17-32). Note the reappearance of the figure of the shield maiden as Lokteff asserts women must act in response to these catastrophic horrors for the white race. Lokteff clearly lists every possible feminized role prior to this overt call to battle to again balance her claim within the “natural” gendered order.

Strangely, given the violent content of Lokteff’s assertions using this discursive strand, its use allows her to romanticize hate, racial and religious discrimination, and even hate-based violence up to and including genocide and war in a framework that appeals to women. In this romanticized view, a man commits violent, hate-filled speech and action because he loves a woman – as proof of *how much* he loves his woman. This romanticization also generates a framework for normalizing racial, ethnic, and religious hate specifically through gender-based rhetoric that positions violence as a masculine modality of care and love (Belew 155-65). This is precisely because this idea links to broad cultural, gendered narratives of men’s violence as a misguided modality of men’s expressions of emotions. This cultural narrative is used to explain men’s violence from childhood bullying, to mitigating language around sexual assault and rape (boys will be boys), and to instances of intimate partner/domestic violence. This romanticization of men’s violence as a protective function of

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phenomenon in the recent political context (1990s – current) in mainstream US culture see “The Purity Myth,” by Jessica Valenti.

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masculinity also links specifically with conservative and evangelical Christian narratives about men's God-given responsibility to discipline women and children in order to protect their souls (Robinson, Burton, Solomon, Slick, Jackson).<sup>13,14</sup> Thus, this specific discursive strand has multiple sites of purchase within mainstream socio-political and popular consciousness.

Lokteff's arguments in this discursive composite ultimately instruct women about how to navigate the twinned poles of submission and action needed to participate in the gendered milieu of Far/Alt-Right extremism. Her rhetorical use of the "shield maiden" and the linkages to the broader "non-feminized" concerns of Far/Alt-Right ideology allows Lokteff to "perform" – to show rather than tell – how to be a proper woman in the movement. Performance is a very important capacity which may be a hallmark of Far/Alt-Right women's rhetorical strategies for using speech as action while simultaneously being properly submissive women. Moreover, the other salient themes Lokteff uses in the speech – large numbers of women in the movement, building white "sisterhood," anti-feminism, and framing women's participation in Far/Alt-Right movements through notions of "empowerment" and "choice" – supplement the primary discursive strands as she markets the benefits of Far/Alt-Right ideology and participation for potential recruits and in-group members alike.

### **Harnessing the Backlash: Mainstreaming Extremist Ideology in Post-Feminist Culture**

In December 2017, two women known as Alt-Right personalities online, began talking publicly about the sexism and misogyny they were experiencing from the male members of the Alt-Right. Lauren Southern, an Alt-Right vlogger from Canada, released a video

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<sup>13</sup>See the text from, "1 Corinthians 11 King James Version (KJV)," as the basis for male authority over women. Here male authority and female submission are defined as part of the divine order of being. Moreover, women's respect for this order is linked to salvation throughout the chapter by the author's connection of male authority and appropriate practices of communion (an essential aspect of salvation). Evangelical Christian authors, sects, and movements (such as CDD) have taken this up as a passage indicating the importance of husbands' and fathers' discipline over wives and children as an essential aspect of protecting their loved ones' souls.

<sup>14</sup>Larry Solomon is the pen name of the author of the *Biblical Gender Roles* blog. See information here: <https://biblicalgenderroles.com/about/>

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discussing her anti-feminist views and why white women should marry and have white children. She was quickly attacked by Alt-Right men because she herself, at twenty-two years old, is unmarried and childless. Tara McCarthy, an Alt-Right media personality from the UK (London, England), also tweeted a thread about sexist online trolling by male members of the Alt-Right and the sexism she experiences. Multiple online media outlets including *Salon*, *The Root*, and *AV Club*, wrote about these women's complaints, noting the irony of their assertions given the inherent sexism (paired with racism and anti-Semitism) within Alt-Right ideology. While the irony may seem obvious, these women's claims point to a pressing issue for women supporting Far/Alt-Right extremist ideologies predicated on patriarchal structural beliefs.

The conundrum that the polar dictates of submission and action poses for women in the Far/Alt-Right represents an extreme version of what Angela McRobbie calls the "post-feminist," a subsumption of narratives of women's liberation, capacity, and choice which ultimately reinscribes the notion of women's lost femininity and points to marriage and family as necessary goals for women to regain themselves (11-12). This tension can be seen in Rachel Leah's discussion of McCarthy and Southern as she writes about their critiques of misogyny in the Alt-Right. She says: "While McCarthy would like to see racism without the sexism in the white supremacist movement – and Southern would appreciate it if anti-feminist women were given the ability to choose for themselves what kind of life they want to lead – it's worth wondering if these women are liberal" (Leah "Upset"). It can also be seen in Seyward Darby's response in an *NPR* interview about her *Harper's* article, "The Rise of the Valkyries," as she discusses the "feminist language" used by Alt-Right women – including Lokteff – to recruit women into the movement. Darby says, "[t]hey do sort of occupy an almost feminist-seeming space in the movement -- or some of them do, I should say. The ones who are more outspoken, the ones who are trying to bring more people into the movement" (Bowman and Stewart). This post-feminist sensibility makes up the basis of the rhetorical situation described above from which Far/Alt-Right gendered discourses stem, specifically those articulated by women for women within and outside of the Far/Alt-Right.

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Lokteff succeeds rhetorically where McCarthy and Southern fail primarily because she is married. Her marriage to Henrik Palmgren, also a prominent member of the Alt-Right, gives her claims more rhetorical and persuasive weight. This is not to say that Lokteff has not experienced misogynist trolling; she certainly has experienced this facet of gendered online interaction. Unlike McCarthy and Southern, however, Lokteff does not decry this modality of men's speech but rather frames such trolling as behavior directed from outside the movement either by enemy women posing as men or by men from hate groups with a less explicitly white nationalist framework, including Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs). (Darby 2-3).

Women maintaining both feminized roles and working actively to support their cause is a gendered power negotiation that can also be seen among conservative, mainstream articulations by women such as those in the "tradwife" movement. "Tradwife" is a compound web-based term standing for "traditional wife." Social media and contemporary online platforms, including blogging, online radio, and vlogging, allow women to connect in virtual public space while they remain in the private sphere at home. The usefulness of this affordance for women's organizing and as a platform for recruitment can be seen in its broadening uptake. Annie Kelley notes: "Over the past few years, dozens of *YouTube* and social media accounts have sprung up showcasing soft-spoken young white women who extol the virtues of staying at home, submitting to male leadership and bearing lots of children" ("Housewives"). Moreover, although "tradwives still constitute a niche digital subculture [t]here's a clear market for their message – the biggest tradwife accounts usually surge to about 10,000 YouTube subscribers in just a year of posting" ("Housewives").

Importantly, online platforms have enabled "tradwife" and Far/Alt-Right discourses to move globally, particularly in English language and "white" countries and cultures. Moreover, Lokteff sees "tradwife" culture as a pipeline for recruitment as she has interviewed multiple "tradwives" on her *3Fourteen* radio show. "Tradwife" online culture is a site that sheds light on how women come to identify with Far/Alt-Right ideologies in ways that vary in presentation but align neatly with the dominant discursive strands (themes) within Lokteff's

own media. Lokteff, other female Far/Alt-Right personalities, and “tradwives” romanticize a women’s sphere of homemaking and child rearing as “(white) women’s power.”

This framing of “tradwife” public speech online, rooted in mothering, entangles with a broader, contemporary spread of what legal scholars Naomi Mezey and Cornelia Pillard have termed “new maternalist” logics (240-243). Such logics root women’s social, economic, and political claims in their role as mothers. This is a primary site where alt-maternalism embedded in Lokteff’s discourse overlaps and becomes sensible within the logics of “tradwife” culture. Moreover, new maternalist logics reassert notions of gendered complementarity in showcasing women’s “specialized role” as mothers. Here again, Lokteff’s claims of gendered complementarity, especially her references to anti-feminism, become sensible within the “tradwife” worldview. The primary locus of difference between Lokteff’s arguments and the broad framework of “tradwife” culture is the issue of explicit white supremacy. Although “tradwife” culture is predominated by young, white and often conservative women, there is a leap that must be made between mainstream racialized world views and white supremacist hate. Crossing the gap, according to Lokteff herself in her interview with Darby, requires using fear as a motivational tool (Darby 8).

This is where the discursive strand – civilization as white men’s ultimate romantic gesture – becomes a lynch pin for women recruiting other women into the movement. This discursive strand focuses on and amplifies white women’s fears about rape and sexual assault. Darby quotes Lokteff regarding her intentional stoking of this particular fear in the *Harper’s* article: “Another thing that’s attracting normies” – people not in the movement – “is rape. Women are scared of rape” (8). This fear-based argument, as noted above, is intentionally racialized – the true threat to white women’s safety is black and brown men, leveraging the cultural mythology of the “black male rapist” created during slavery, perfected in the Jim Crow era, and prevalent throughout the turn of the century (Belew 159, Wells 70-76, Davis 185-88). Embedding this fear-stoking, racist narrative within the frame of white men’s romantic veneration of white women (building civilization for them) positions the Alt-Right as a locus of white women’s comfort, safety, and protection in a dangerous world.

These, however, are not the only fears Lokteff stokes through her use of the three discourses which make up the composite. Using McRobbie's notion of post-feminism as a contemporary sensibility, we can see that Lokteff also stokes white women's fears about marriage and family. These fears include anxieties over finding a husband, aging out of having children for unmarried women, and aging out for women who do not have children but desire to become mothers. And, for women who are already married or divorced, these discourses invoke fear of loss of husbands or a framing for why a marriage failed. For example, Ayla Stewart, a Lokteff acolyte and tradwife blogger of "A Wife with Purpose," believes her marriage failed because she did not honor the "natural" gendered roles Lokteff asserts (Darby 4). Moreover, for women with children, especially mothers of sons, these narratives stoke their fears about their sons' unfair treatment, such as false rape accusations in a society that wrongly favors women because of feminism run amok. This, in particular, links to other current discursive frameworks from opposition to the #MeToo movement to the rhetoric of online misogynist groups, including Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Pick Up Artists (PUA). It is these fears derived from a post-feminist sensibility that ease the way for mainstreaming and making sensible the more explicitly racist, xenophobic, antisemitic, and hate-based ideology.

*Bridging the Gender Gap: Connecting Women's Concerns back to Movement Rhetoric*

A unique facet of Lokteff's rhetorical construction of the discursive composite is how she manages the exigency of the rhetorical situation that grounds her speech: the simultaneous need for women's submission and action. To ensure that her discursive construction of femininity hangs together in the face of misogyny within the Far/Alt-Right, Lokteff articulates her claims with anti-feminism and a mythic figuration of white womanhood – the shield maiden – to navigate between women's "naturally" submissive role and the need for women's active participation during this moment of "crisis." Framing women's role within the broader socio-political context is made sensible because Lokteff embeds the gendered discursive composition within longstanding framings of the nation as representative of the paternalist

family. This, in particular, links the gendered discursive composite – women’s proper roles – to common discourses about patriotism and “Western values,” which are mainstays of conservative and right leaning mainstream political and cultural concerns.

To perfect this linkage, Lokteff intentionally leverages narratives of women’s defilement by non-white men to mobilize conservative, white female anxiety about safety, connecting specifically “feminized” white concerns to more general Far/Alt-Right claims about the “crisis” of white genocide and the destruction of Western civilization. Her rhetorical use of the “shield maiden” and the linkages to the broader “non-feminized” concerns of Far/Alt-Right ideology shows women how to behave, as both properly submissive women and active members of the movement, offering instruction for in-group members and points of entry for those seeking to join. Further research is needed to identify how many women use similar rhetorical strategies, as well as how they use the discursive composite and strands for recruiting. Importantly, variances in the use of the discursive composite, such as manipulating the composite by excluding or highlighting individual strands, may indicate differences in socio-cultural and political exigencies that are important in specific local contexts of radicalization.

### **Concluding Discussion**

This paper has argued the importance of studying women’s use of right-wing extremist rhetoric in order to better understand their participation in recruiting, and how their rhetoric is persuasive to susceptible populations. The importance of such study is shown through the explication of a discursive composite of Far/Alt-Right women’s rhetoric drawn from a speech given by Lana Lokteff at the Indentitarian Ideas conference on February 25, 2017, in Stockholm, Sweden. This discursive composite has three primary discursive strands: 1) gendered complementarity; 2) “alt-maternalism”; and 3) Western civilization as white men’s ultimate romantic gesture to white women. A critical analysis, using a hybrid rhetorical-cultural method, uncovers the historically embedded cultural meanings and linkages between

these discursive strands in the composite and broader gendered discourses to suggest sites of susceptibility to such rhetoric.

The second part of the paper discusses “tradwife” culture online as a virtual community susceptible to the themes of this discursive composite. Tradwife susceptibility to radicalization is analyzed by mapping the relationship between the discursive composite and tradwife culture using the notion of post-feminism as a lens for interpretation. The discursive composite activates women’s fears, including anxieties about marriage, family, and appropriate femininity. Ultimately, as this analysis suggests, what makes this set of discourses useful for recruiting women into Far/Alt-Right ideologies is linking nostalgic arguments about women’s special role in the movement – as a function of gendered complementarity and (Alt) maternalism – with a romanticized vision of white supremacy characterized as a protective, white masculinity. This blending of discursive strands is particularly persuasive within the contemporary context because of the cultural sensibility of post-feminism that permeates mediated representations of women and femininity.

To begin to utilize the findings of this research for the development of practical strategies and narratives for anti-radicalization efforts, more work must be done on the impact of each of the narrative strands in the discursive composite developed from Lokteff’s speech. Researchers, as Blee argues, must focus on general similarities while attending to specific local contexts in order to effectively approach the importance and effects of gender in the ongoing development and entrenchment of far-right ideologies and practices (“Similarities” 191-92). This means that ongoing research must be both broad to approach how these narratives strands are moving globally and simultaneously must also attend to which strands in the composite are most effective in local contexts. In addition, working with underutilized theoretical, analytical, and historical resources such as those available in the broad corpus of black feminist scholarship can offer new understandings of the complexity of gender in relation to violent extremism and potential frameworks for developing alternative strategies to counter radicalization narratives and develop deradicalizing practices.

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ISSN: 2363-9849

Editor in Chief: Daniel Koehler