National Security Criminal Investigations Program

YOUTH ONLINE AND AT RISK:

Radicalization Facilitated by the Internet

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INTRODUCTION

More than ever, the lives of young Canadians are lived online. The World Wide Web is used by children, pre-teens, and teens for research, learning, entertainment, social networking, and to just pass the time. The widespread use of the web is facilitated by the fact that computers are readily accessible in classrooms, libraries, and bedrooms of youth while web-enabled cell phones— fast becoming the norm— provide access everywhere in between. In fact, a comprehensive Canadian study on the online habits of youth found that internet "access is almost universal."[1] However, just because young people have near constant access to the web, it cannot be assumed that they are fully aware of the risks posed by being online.

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[1] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Key Findings." www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/key_findings.cfm.

While the internet provides access to rich educational experiences, great entertainment, and the chance to connect with friends around the clock, it also creates a number of risks that young people, parents, and guardians need to be aware of. There are the commonly known concerns of identity theft, online predators, and cyber-bullying but there is another issue that we need to collectively work to address— Radicalization to violence. This informational resource strives to increase the awareness of how the internet is being used to radicalize and recruit youth in North America.

Radicalization to Violence

Radicalization is the process by which individuals "are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs toward extreme views."[2] Radical thinking—even when accompanied by disturbing ideologies— is not problematic. In fact, radical thoughts have contributed to many great advancements. However, when radical thoughts lead to violence and other criminal behaviour, society can be put at risk by the actions of individuals and groups. Before this occurs, authorities need to take lawful steps to target the illegal behaviour.

Canada has not been immune from extremist violence in the past and our vulnerability continues. The FLQ crisis, bombings by the Squamish 5 in the 1980s, the Air India tragedy, pipeline bombings in western Canada, and disrupted plot by a terror cell in Toronto dubbed "Toronto 18" all demonstrate the domestic threat Canadians have faced and continue to face. Collectively, Canadians must work to counter extremist violence, and preventing the radicalization of young people is a natural place to start.

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[2] Angus Smith, *Radicalization- A Guide for the Perplexed, June 2009*, www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/nsci-ecrsn/ radical-eng.htm.

WHAT CAN RADICALIZATION MEAN?

The radicalization of youth is not a new phenomenon. Radicalization to violence has not been—and will not be—limited to a single group, religion, culture, ethnicity or worldview. Extremist groups from the entire political spectrum as well as those with a different outlook have long sought to foment adolescents by exploiting existing cultural, moral, or societal grievances and capitalizing on the natural desire for adventure that many young people have.

Regardless of a person's background and upbringing, radicalization can result in a change in the beliefs held, the feelings one has on or toward an issue, and one's behaviour. These changes can result in devoting additional time and financial resources, taking additional risks, and perpetrating violence to support a cause.[3] It can happen to individuals and groups of like-minded people in many ways. Often the seed that starts the process is the perceived victimization of oneself or a group the individual identifies with. This can drive a desire to retaliate or generate change.

With a perceived injustice, radicalization of individuals can occur. If an individual, a close relative, or friend has been the victim, thoughts of revenge can push that individual toward violence. This is perhaps best seen in the Chechen widows who strike against Russia in reprisal for their experiences.[4]

Recently, we have seen a number of youth radicalized not because of a direct experience but because of trends and events that sometimes occur in distant regions. Overwhelming guilt or a grievance that comes to a head can lead an individual to act violently domestically. A common refrain among militant Muslims in the West is the sense of moral outrage at conflicts in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, and Afghanistan.[5] South of the Canadian border, similar reasoning was seen in the cases of Ted Kaczynski and Timothy McVeigh. Motivated by a desire to alter trends in technological development, Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, sent letter bombs to affect change.[6] Timothy McVeigh, held beliefs that the U.S. federal

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[3] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Volume 20, Number 3, July 2008) p. 416.

[4] Ibid, p. 418.

[5] Marc Sageman, "On the battle for young Muslims' hearts and minds and the future of the leaderless jihad," *National Post,* July 7, 2008.

[6] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, p. 419.

government was conspiring to remove individual liberties and sought revenge for government raids on militant groups.[7]

Individuals that become part of a radical group are susceptible to the "slippery slope" and the development of group cohesion can push them toward increasingly radical behaviour. Seeking to belong to a larger movement, groups can start by viewing extremist material online and radicalize from there. One militant described his slide to radicalization as "a step-by-step evolution" where there was never "a choice made... such as I will become a terrorist."[9]

In conversing with peers and developing strong relationships, sliding down the slope toward radicalization becomes easier when the group shares common goals or is under threat. Research has shown that group solidarity proves to be a powerful bond. A violent radical from Ireland shared in one study "There's times I've said to myself, 'why?' You're mad in the head… but I just can't turn my back on it."[10]

As seen in Canada, there have been a number of individuals that have radicalized together over time and plotted attacks as a group. Like an individual who radicalizes because a group is under threat, a collection of like-minded individuals form strong relationships when under pressure. Sharing sentiments of frustration, unaddressed grievances, and anger only intensifies the bonds of a group and can result in "mutual encouragement and escalation."[11] Group cohesion only grows as the group becomes radicalized as there are fewer people to trust and confide in.[12]

Capitalizing on a desire of young people to take action or misleading sometimes naïve youth, extremist groups are purposely "manipulating the grievances" of youth to drive their agenda forward. By "cynically exploiting" the grievances held by the targeted disaffected youth, these groups seek to undermine traditional authority.[13]

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[7] International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center. "Timothy James McVeigh." *Background Information Summaries* [serial online]. January 2, 2005;:27. Available from: International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Ipswich, MA. Accessed November 24, 2010.

[8] Marc Sageman, "On the battle for young Muslims' hearts and minds and the future of the leaderless jihad."

[9] McCauley and Moskalenko, p. 419.

[10] Ibid," p. 422.

[11] Marc Sageman, "On the battle for young Muslims' hearts and minds and the future of the leaderless jihad,"

[12] McCauley and Moskalenko, p. 422-23.

[13] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2007*, p. 11.

Aiding in the radicalization of youth—whether as an individual or a group—is when the messages come from a role model figure. Messages will resonate more if the source is perceived to be a family member, close friend, spiritual leader, or someone respected for their role within a group.[14] This may have been a factor in the pace of the radicalization found in the suspects that sought to use liquid bombs to destroy intercontinental flights in 2006. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police observed that the suspects went "from what would appear to be ordinary lives in a matter of some weeks and months, not years" to be willing to launch a suicide attack that would have killed hundreds, if not thousands.[15]

More and more, messages are being shared and social bonding between young people is happening online. As such, it is no surprise that the internet is playing a role in the radicalization of youth. Benjamin Smith, a white supremacist who killed two and injured 9 on a racially motivated shooting spree in 1999, confirmed this when he stated "It wasn't really 'til I got on the Internet, read some literature… that it really all came together." [16]

The Limits of Radicalization through the Internet

In many ways, the internet is a reflection of the diversity of society. Websites for any interest can be found online and people—both young and old—surf the web choosing what content to view based on existing assumptions, emotions, and preferences.[17]

With this in mind, it is important to not just focus on the internet as the root of radicalization but to view it as a means through which radical ideas can easily be spread to vulnerable people. While recognizing the role that individual choice has in the matter, we must also collectively be concerned for, and provide guidance to, young people who are developing their own critical thinking, independence, and perspective on major events and issues.

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[14] Angus Smith, *Radicalization: A Guide for the Perplexed*.

[15] Frank Cilluffo et al, *NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy* (Washington, DC: Homeland Security Policy Institute, 2007), p. 5.

[16] International Network Against Cyber Hate, Hate on the Net: Virtual Nursery for In Real Life Crime- 2004, p. 41.

[17] Bill Durodié and Ng Sue Chia, Is Internet Radicalization Possible? (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2008), http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS1222008.pdf.

■ More Connected than Ever

The seminal study of the online habits of young Canadians completed in 2005 by the Media Awareness Network found that young Canadians typically do not differentiate between the virtual and real worlds. It is not a "distinct environment" but simply another medium to engage friends, follow interests, and grow up in today's age.[18] If this was a finding in 2005, the continued proliferation of computers and web-enabled cell phones has surely solidified this belief.

The study further identified the pervasiveness of the net in the lives of youth. More than 86 per cent of students between the fourth and eleventh grade have their own email accounts and 94 per cent reported having internet access at home. Young people with their own personal computers connected to the internet reaches 51 per cent for eleventh grade students. And all students with their own computers reported spending close to double the average time for those with a shared family computer.

Time online was found to be spent playing games, accessing multimedia files, and socializing. Playing online games was a favourite activity of nearly 90 per cent of fourth graders while 86 per cent of students in eleventh grade use instant messaging daily. Eighty per cent of all youth covered in the study reported listen to music and use instant messaging programs on a daily basis. [19]

The study found that a primary attraction to the web is not the ability to connect with friends but the ability to access content that is normally reserved for an older age group. Nearly 60 per cent of youth have pretended to be someone else online with falsifying their age to appear older as a leading response.[20] One teen was quoted in another study "people are different online because they want to be. Why continue to be yourself when you can turn yourself into somebody you would rather be?... We don't have to be ourselves online; we have the freedom to be who we want."[21] Not surprisingly, this does not align with the views of adults as

[18] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Trends and Recommendations." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/upload/YCWWII_trends_recomm.pdf. p. 4

[19] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Key Findings." www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/key_findings.cfm.

[20] Media Awareness Network, *Young Canadians in a Wired World Phase II- Student Survey* (Ottawa: Media Awareness Network, 2005), p. 50.

[21] Rafi Santo et al, *Meeting of Minds: Cross-Generational Dialogue on the Ethics of Digital Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2009), p. 8.

many believe people should be themselves in both the real and digital world. Exploring new roles is a natural part of growing up. However, the young Canadians surveyed believed that the internet was a safe place to do so with "relatively few consequences." [22]

Creating an online persona leads to additional challenges for youth trying to gauge the credibility of information. Even small fibs or exaggerations among young people can have an impact. The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario has noted that "Youth often see their peers as more credible sources of information."[23] Coupled with this is the natural tendency for many adolescent youth to rebel against adults and adhere to messages from friends and their chosen role models.

This is the dilemma of websites—virtually anyone can voice an opinion, share experiences, and impart knowledge. Knowing how to gauge the credibility and authority of individuals online can be a difficult challenge but is a necessity. By not being judicious and ensuring an information source is credible, youth may be easily misled.

Coupled with the difficulty of judging credibility is the fact that many Canadian youth are not aware of the commercialization of many internet sites.[24] Close to 94 per cent of the top 50 websites youth most frequently visit contain marketing material.[25] Nearly 70 per cent of young Canadians surveyed by the Media Awareness Network did not "critically question" commercial branding online.

Considering peers as credible sources and not recognizing the full intent of online messages can be a dangerous mix. Without adequate guidance on what is appropriate and acceptable, some youth may be susceptible to messaging from extremist groups that seek to perpetuate violence.

[22] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Trends and Recommendations." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/upload/YCWWII_trends_recomm.pdf. p. 10.

[23] Ann Cavoukian, Online Privacy: Make Youth Awareness and Education a Priority (Toronto: Information and Privacy Commission/ Ontario, 2009), p. 5.

[24] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Trends and Recommendations." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/upload/YCWWII_trends_recomm.pdf. p. 16.

[25] Media Awareness Network, "Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II: Key Findings." www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/key_findings.cfm.

■ Spreading and Sharing Ideas

For many groups, the internet serves as an ideal tool to connect with like-minded individuals or those with shared interests on the other side of the world. It enables people to connect and form relationships that otherwise would not happen.[26] This is no different for groups that share an interest in a sports team or seek to change political processes, promote a cause, or perpetuate violence.

The internet—and the advent of online tools such as Twitter—enables the effective dissemination of content in near real-time. In many cases, messages go from the original author on one side of the world to the consumer on the other without being filtered. While this is beneficial for benign content, it also means that offensive or provocative material can be distributed without passing through the filter of traditional media or normal standards based on a society's accepted mores.[27]

The speed and nature of the internet also means that individuals who are fortunate enough to read and speak multiple languages have access to insights and opinions from a broader range of sources. While this can be of great benefit it can also open oneself to increased numbers of extremist and violent ideologies.

Capitalizing on this characteristic are many individuals and groups that seek a controlled space to distort and manipulate reality to put forth only one message or view of current events. Traditionally, groups had to use pamphlets that could be intercepted by adults or caught up with other messages.[28] Without alternative view points on the website and associated discussion groups, the internet can be used to "spread misinformation and false rumours" in the hopes of reaching "disaffected youth, and to enlist sympathizers and financial supporters."[29]

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[26] Cilluffo et al, NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy, p. 2.

[27] Eban Kaplan, "Terrorists and the Internet," Council on Foreign Relations. www.cfr.org/publication/10005/terrorists_and_the_internet.html. See also: Bruce Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet by Islamic Extremists," Testimony presented to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence held at Washington, D.C., May 4, 2006. p. 2.

[28] Media Awareness Network, "Tactics for Recruiting Young People." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/tactic_recruit_young.cfm.

[29] Marie Wright, "Technology and Terrorism: How the Internet Facilitates Radicalization," The Forensic Examiner, Winter 2008. www.theforensicexaminer.com/archive/winter08/7/.

WHAT'S BEING SHARED?

With the advantages of quick dissemination and little-to-no filtering, it is no surprise that the internet is being used to target young people with radical and violent ideologies. Because of the advantages the internet has, chat rooms, YouTube channels, and interactive websites with images, videos, and games that aim to put forward a radical and violent agenda are proliferating quickly. A statistic often cited is that extremist website exponentially grew from just a dozen in 1998 to well over 4,500 in 2006.[30] While the increase of videos, pictures, and chat rooms may not be a surprise, the content and how it is displayed may shock both adults and youth.

Narrowcasting: A Growing Trend

We are all familiar with broadcasting—sending a generic message in the hopes of appealing to as many individuals and groups as possible. However, a strategy to target smaller, select groups developed in the corporate marketing world is now being employed by groups putting forth a violent ideology.

Called "narrowcasting" because a small group is targeted with specific messages, this technique is being employed on the web by a number of groups to attract specific segments of the population. Because of the targeted messaging, narrowcasting can also give a consumer of the messages a sense of importance and an "illusion" that he or she is important.[31] For example, al-Qaeda's online magazine has included articles written specifically to appeal to women and glorify the martyrdom of other females. This change in content has been viewed as a signal that al-Qaeda is now looking to add females to its ranks— and thereby increase the its pool of potential recruits.[32]

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[30] INTERPOL, "Preventing Internet radicalization of youth requires global police work, INTERPOL Chief tells police summit," news release. September 21, 2010.

[31] YaleGlobal, "Online Terrorists Prey on the Vulnerable" Yale Global Online 2008. http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=10453.

[32] Gabriel Weimann, "Narrowcasting: The trend in online terrorism," The Gazette (vol. 70, No. 3, 2008), p. 23. http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/gazette/vol70n3/vol70n3-eng.pdf.

■ The New Look of Websites

The look and feel of many websites has greatly improved over recent years—colours, ease of navigation, use of interactive applications, etc. have all changed for the better. This is also the case with sites aimed at radicalizing youth. Taking pointers from popular mainstream websites, a number of extremist groups have developed an internet presence that appeals "to a computer savvy, media-saturated, video game addicted generation."[33] Using bright colours and in some cases, illustrations stylized after children's cartoons that seem inspired by Disney and other leading companies, the websites are visually appealing and in contrast to the malicious content they contain.

In addition to their appearance, numerous websites feature interactive content which many experts agree serves to strengthen the relationship, develop stronger levels of engagement, and reinforces the shared ideas in the minds of the participants. By actively participating in the online discourse in real-time, convincing but baseless rumours can be echoed back to become recognized and accepted facts. In turn, this creates a "sense of community and belonging"—something that many disaffected people of all ages are in search of.[34]

■ The Content

As noted, the content available on many websites is geared to radicalize specific segments of the population to the point where violence may be perpetrated. The messaging on these sites seeks to create a consistent voice to block out any alternative views. This is done in many ways such as having commentary on recent events, newsletters, editorials that fit with the aims of the group, multimedia files, and in some cases, even a section with jokes and cartoons.

Extremist groups provide content online that capitalizes on the paranoia, naiveté, and ignorance of people who visit their sites. "Theories"—often supported by "evidence" that includes references to a higher power— are developed to blame an identifiable group for perceived injustices and wrongs in the world. Supposed "dangers" of inaction are put forth to create an atmosphere where one cannot sit idle and support through taking action or contributing resources is encouraged.[35]

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[33] Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet by Islamic Extremists," p. 5.

[34] Frank Cilluffo et al, NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy, p. 6.

[35] Media Awareness Network, "Deconstructing Hate." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/deconst_online_hate.cfm.

Garnering the support of individuals is further encouraged by alluding that the mainstream views are contributing to the demise of the cause and only the radical perspectives put forth will attain the end state. This "with us or them" attitude seeks to divide as there is only one proper course of action. This is most prevalent in the content of Wahhabi and Salafi-Jihadist groups purporting the "Saved Sect" view. The "Saved Sect" refers to only one interpretation of Islam is true and only followers of it will be saved. This view is then used by extremist groups to justify attacks on not just non-Muslims but also Muslims that appear to not be following the "right" interpretation.[36]
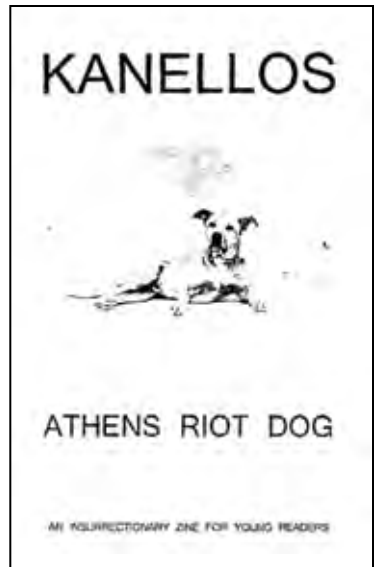
Commentary on recent events and reports from the field are often uploaded during major events or conflicts. For example, during major international meetings such as the G8 and G20 held in Ontario, anti-globalization and anarchist groups tweeted updates and posted their own version of events online. By providing an alternative view to the mainstream media that distorted police action and justified the vandalism of protestors, others may have been spurned into action. While not specifically targeted at Canada's young people, these commentaries can replace other sources of news and play on susceptible teens looking to make a difference.

Newsletters and "zines"—independent magazines of limited publication—have been developed specifically for children. One particular magazine highlighted the story of Kanellos, a dog that was often seen at violent protests in Athens, Greece. It portrays the dog as part of a struggle against law enforcement and the establishment. In the end, the lesson put forward by this anarchist material is that anyone can rise up. This "zine" has prompted positive online feedback from a supposed nine-year old that stated "This zine tells us that…cops just randomly kill people... I liked this zine because it had animals in it and it was a true story."

In extreme cases where the group condones suicide bombings, the final wills of young attackers have been posted online after their attack is carried out. Developed specifically to disseminate online, these documents and videos glorify violence and seek to encourage others to violence on the

name of the cause. One final will posted on a Hamas-linked website after an attack at a nightclub concluded "There is nothing greater than killing oneself on the land of Palestine, for the sake of Allah." [37]

■ Chat Rooms and Forums

As noted, interaction with peers online is a leading reason Canadian youth spend time on a computer. Extremist websites have long been known to have chat rooms and message boards that enable such interaction and the creation of a virtual community that seeks to radicalize youth.

Real-time chat rooms are particularly a useful tool for extremist groups. Messages—and messengers such as radical preachers Anwar al-Awlaki or Abdullah al-Faisal—pushed from mainstream mosques find their way to online forums.[38] Here, extremist messages can "be shared, take root, be reaffirmed, and spread exponentially."[39]

Postings on al-Fallūja, an al-Qaeda affiliated forum that recently ceased operation after its administrators deemed it to be compromised, often invoked religious texts, preyed on any underlying guilt, and threatened readers. For example, one post read "It is apparent that all those who take a different path to this group do not believe in what the righteous predecessors believed, and those who do not take the path of jihād are deviant people who will fail."[40] This forums demise does not mean an end of the manipulative postings. There are numerous other forums have cropped up to take its place.

Message boards also serve as a conduit to pass operational knowledge on to newly inspired youth. Requests such as "I need some instructions to build a pipe bomb" are answered with links to documents that contain such information.[41]

Online message boards are also used to spread less hateful but equally supportive messages. For example, anarchist groups have organized fundraising "fun run" events across North American and advertised the details on forums.

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[36] Mohammed Ali Musawi, Cheering for Osama: How Jihadists use Internet Discussion Forums (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2010), pp. 30-33.

[37] Gabriel Weimann, "Online Terrorists Prey on the Vulnerable."

[38] Frank J. Cilluffo et al. *Foreign Fighters: Trends, Trajectories & Conflict Zones* (Washington, DC: Homeland Security Policy Institute, 2010) p. 22.

[39] Frank J. Cilluffo et al. *NETworked Radicalization : A Counter-Strategy*, p. 2.

[40] Mohammed Ali Musawi, *Cheering for Osama: How Jihadists use Internet Discussion Forums*, p. 31.

[41] International Network Against Cyber Hate, Hate on the Net: Virtual Nursery for In Real Life Crime, p. 15.

■ The Games

Interactive chat rooms and bulletin boards are just the beginning for how extremist organizations are attracting young people. A number of larger groups have created violent online games with inappropriate plots that seek to glorify violence.

Violent and controversial videogames are nothing new. However, for many games bought in stores, there are ratings to denote content is inappropriate for young children and stores restrict who can purchase them to adults. However, what is shared, distributed, and played online can be a different story.
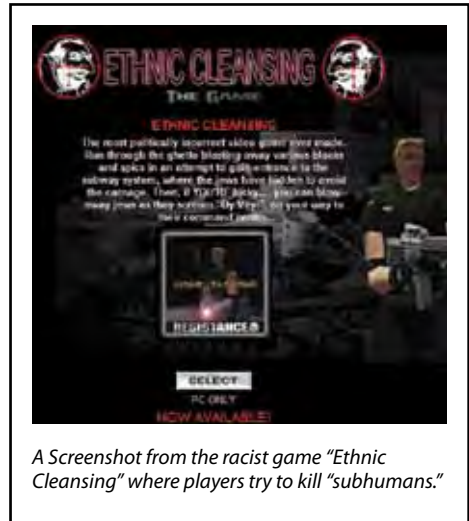
A Screenshot from the racist game "Ethnic Cleansing" where players try to kill "subhumans."

Simple crossword games have been used by one neo-nazi group to target young children. Containing racist clues and answers, the purpose is to "help the young members of the white race understand our fight."[42]

Other games being offered visually depict the violent messages and encourage a player to carry out the goals of the group in a virtual world. For example, an online game posted by a right wing political party member in Austria has players try to stop the construction of minarets and mosques. The game, entitled "Bye Bye Mosque," was said to be "intended to raise awareness among youth… about the supposed problem of minarets and mosques."[43] A white supremacist music label distributed a game

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[42] Media Awareness Network, "Tactics for Recruiting Young People." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/tactic_recruit_young.cfm.

[43] Spiegel Online, "Austrian Anti-Muslim Video Game: 'We'd Rather Have Sarrazin than a Muezzin.'" http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,715278,00.html.

[44] Media Awareness Network, "Tactics for Recruiting Young People." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/tactic_recruit_young.cfm

[45] Eben Kaplan, "Terrorists and the Internet." See also: Gabriel Weimann, "'Narrowcasting: The trend in online terrorism," p. 22.

online entitled "Ethnic Cleansing" where the goal is to kill "subhumans," while dressed as a member of the Ku Klux Klan or a skinhead.[44] In games from other groups, the objectives are to hunt down former U.S. President George Bush and other senior leaders, kill U.S. soldiers, or act as a member of Hezbollah attacking Israel.[45]

Screenshots from Hezbollah's Special Force 2 game in which players re-enact the attacks against Israel.

■ Messaging through Multimedia: Images, Audio, and Videos

In addition to the written material, the websites of extremist groups incorporate images to illustrate the literature and further promote the causes. For example, if the cause is environmentalism or animal rights, the site will contain images that show severe degradation, animal abuse, or the perpetrators of such acts.

In some cases, the images would be considered graphic for a person of any age. For example, a site geared toward children included a graphic picture of a young female suicide bomber after an attack that killed two and wounded 17 in Jerusalem. The image, taken at the bombsite, showed the severed body of the young girl and was accompanied by a caption commending the attack and praising her actions. Continuing with the interactive theme, other sites with equally graphic images have included comment boards to share thoughts on the images and to rate them out of five stars.

Screenshots from the Al-Fateh website targeted at children. Run by Hamas, this site promises "pages discussing jihad, … the best stories not to be found elsewhere, and unequalled tales of heroism."[47]

As the Media Awareness Network study found and the success of online stores such as iTunes demonstrates, music and audio files is a big part of the online experience for many youth. Extremist groups have long used the internet as a means to disseminate music or lectures that encourage violence or support of radical ideas. For example, music from "white power" bands that promote violent and racist messages with lyrics such as "bombs, bombs, bombs on Israel" have been circulated online for years.[48] Despite steps taken by authorities and YouTube, speeches by radical clerics such as Anwar al-Awlaki are widely available. In his speeches, interviews, and blog postings, Awlaki has called civilian aircraft legitimate targets and praised the actions of those who have carried out terror attacks.

In many cases, the videos that are uploaded for viewing on extremist sites are just as graphic as the images and incorporate text or music related to the cause. Video from areas of conflict showing attacks using improvised explosive devices and be-headings can be found.

Larger videos are embedded into messages to allow near instant viewing without downloading the file. In a case where downloads were required, the videos were accompanied by a caption that poked fun at the carnage. It read "An invention by the mujāhidīn which makes the American Hummer fly in the air instead of driving on land" and "Hummers are hard to assemble and easy to disassemble at the hands of the mujāhidīn…"[49]

On an extremist animal rights group website, there is a page of seemingly harmless jokes and cartoons. However, when coupled with the other messages advocating violent action to support animal rights and the associated content that is in constant view, the innocence of the humour fades away.

American and al-Qaeda member Anwar al-Awlaki addressing his followers through an online video.

A screenshot from a graphic militant video of a beheading.

[46] Select "screen grabs" from the Hamas-run site www.al-fateh.net.

[47] Gabriel Weimann, "Online Terrorists Prey on the Vulnerable."

[48] International Network Against Cyber Hate, Hate on the Net: Virtual Nursery for In Real Life Crime, p. 15.

[49] Mohammed Ali Musawi, Cheering for Osama: How Jihadists use Internet Discussion Forums, p. 22.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The internet poses a number of risks to young Canadians. The federal government and its partners are working to monitor websites that disseminate radical messages, encourage violence, and seek to recruit youth into the ranks of extremist organizations. However, monitoring and the disruption of internet sites by law enforcement agencies is only a temporary measure as the material is often duplicated elsewhere with the click of a mouse.

In light of this, there are a number of things that parents, teachers, and community leaders can do to lessen the risks and facilitate a safe internet experience younger generations. The radicalization to violence of youth ultimately originates within specific communities. Therefore, it is essential for adults within these communities to be aware of the risks and with youth and available partners to counter radicalization. Parents, teachers and caregivers want to provide guidance to keep young people safe in the real world and it should be no different when they venture online.

Help is a Click Away

Because online safety of youth has been a growing concern for many years, there are a number of helpful websites that offer tips on keeping children safe online and how to filter out inappropriate content.

www.bewebaware.ca: Building on the knowledge from their surveys, the Media Awareness Network launched this site to help parents assist youth in becoming "thoughtful cyber citizens." Included on the site is the "e-Parenting tutorial" aimed at building the confidence and knowledge of guardians. It also offers guidelines to engage youth toward establishing ground rules for internet use.

www.commonsensemedia.org: Providing reviews on the content of all types of media, this site run by a not-for-profit organization has a growing list of websites that have been rated for certain age groups. While not yet containing many (if any) of the types of sites discussed here, it does provide alternative sites to keep Canadian youth occupied.

www.cybertip.ca: While focused on the online sexual exploitation of children, cybertip.ca is closely aligned with other sites run by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. It raises awareness of some of the risks youth face online.

www.deal.org: Run by the Youth Engagement Section of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), deal.org contains a section specifically devoted to internet safety. Developed with input from youth across the country, the site also contains tips and guidance for other areas in the lives of Canadian youth.

www.getnetwise.org: Developed and run by a diverse partnership of corporate partners and organizations with specific expertise, getnetwise.org contains tools for general computer security and keeping youth safe as they surf the web. Particularly useful for many parents is the extensive glossary of terms to help navigate the web and the chance to receive updates on new tools and features.

www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/is-si/index-eng.htm: As the URL suggests, this site is part of the overall RCMP online presence. Providing links to information on and tips to avoid a number of online threats, there is good information that can be adapted by adults to aid in countering the internet's facilitation of radicalization. In addition, material that relates to national security or terrorism can be reported to the National Security Information Line at 1-800-420-5805 or nsin_risn@rcmp-grc.gc.ca.

www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca: Operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and supported by government and corporate partners, this site provides information for parents, teacher, and "everyone else" on the interests of different age groups and how to keep children safe while using the internet. If a guardian has specific questions that are not answered on the site, there is an "Ask an Expert."

www.staysafeonline.org: Operated by the U.S. National Cyber Security Alliance, this webpage takes a holistic view of computer security and online safety. Guidance is provided for the home, the classroom, and businesses on how to protect electronic devices, families, students, and employees from cyber threats.

■ It Starts with a Conversation

As with all dialogue, open and frank communication between youth and caregivers proves to be most fruitful. Having a two-way conversation that values the opinions of young people is important. In many cases, young Canadians can navigate the virtual world more efficiently than adults and recognizing this expertise can go a long way toward facilitating a friendly discussion.

Whether the conversation happens in the home, the classroom, a community centre, or religious facility, adults need to make youth aware of the radical views that can be found online. The discussion needs to cover how to determine if content is appropriate and the expected behaviour when something is found not to be.

Just as extremist groups target youth with specific messages, the conversation by parents or guardians must also be tailored—the conversation with an eight year old will be different from one with a teen. To help with this, there are websites such as **www.thedoorthatsnotlocked**.ca that have developed specific messages and topics for different age groups. Run by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, this site features tools for parents, teachers, and other adults to understand what typical youth are doing online at certain ages. For example, between the ages of 5 and 7 years, children are known to primarily use the internet to play games and search for interests where as 10-12 year olds are using chatrooms, social networking sites, webcams, watching videos, and beginning to access file sharing sites. This information can then be used to shape a conversation to the online interests of specific ages.

Where it is deemed appropriate, the brutality of violence should be confronted to remove any imagined glory that is put forward by violent extremists. The perpetrators of these acts must be reduced to the criminals they are and not the heroes of a global cause they purport to be.[50] When this happens, the allure of radical behaviour and extremist groups can be diminished. As one young adult who used the internet to share violent propaganda bragged "I [am] one of the most wanted terrorists on the Internet" when he was aware that both the U.S. and British intelligence were tracking him.[51] It must be made clear to susceptible youth that violent extremism does not bring glory and fame, but rather death, destruction, and human suffering.

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[50] Marc Sageman, "On the battle for young Muslims' hearts and minds and the future of the leaderless jihad,".

[51] Ibid.

■ Leverage Existing Programs

A number of the risks the internet poses to children and teenagers have been discussed for years. As such, there are many programs geared to keep kids safe from identity theft, cyber bullying, and online predators. Sites such as **www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca** and **www.cybertip.ca** (both run by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and a number of stakeholders), **www.getnetwise**.org, and **www.staysafeonline.org** offer tips to boost awareness of internet risks, discuss the typical online interests of youth, and how parents can keep young Canadians safe as they explore the web. These trusted sources can be leveraged to address concerns of the internet facilitating the radicalization of youth.

Tools already developed and readily available to keep children safe from the well known internet threats will prove to be valuable in countering the threat of radicalization through the internet. Many of the sites listed above offer tips on how to keep youth safe, including:

- *Use Software Controls*[52]—Often already included in the most web browsers, software controls can limit the content that is viewed online. By using keywords, blocking pre-identified web addresses, or restricting websites that have certain ratings. In addition, software that monitors online activities can also be employed. However, a balance between safety and the privacy of youth needs to be achieved.

- *Monitor Downloads*[53]— Software designed to monitor online behaviour may not cover programs that allow file sharing between computers. Because extremist groups have produced games, audio files, and videos, the files being shared may need to be reviewed for inappropriate content.

- *Keep it Open*[54]— By placing a computer in an open area where a parent or guardian is nearby, youth will be more likely to avoid inappropriate material.

- *Develop "What If" Scenarios*[55]— Having conversations with youth on what is appropriate can also include exploring possible scenarios and the expected appropriate response from youth. For example, discussing what to do if violent extremist material is found gives guidance for if it actually happens.

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[52] Media Awareness Network, "Protecting Children and Teens from Online Hate." http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/online_hate/protect_child_hate.cfm.

[53] Canadian Centre for Child Protection, "Peer-to-Peer and BitTorrent," http://www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca/app/en/parent/10-12/p2p_and_bittorrent_how_to_make_it_safer.

[54] Cybertip.ca, "Age-Specific Tips." http://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/age_spec_p2#anchor_menu.

[55] Canadian Centre for Child Protection, "Tools for Parents," www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca/app/en/.

- *Consult Website Reviews*— Organizations like **www.commonsensemedia. org** have reviews on many websites that may help filter out ones with inappropriate content. While there are few that can be accused of containing extremist content currently reviewed, more should be expected to be added as this issue becomes one of greater concern.

■ Reach out to Their Space

Moderate messages and alternative views are out there. However, without the attraction of being rebellious or taboo, youth may not seek them out to the same extent. This means that extra effort must go into reaching youth. Using existing social networking sites and developing content that appeals to youth by being interactive with multimedia content can aid in the dissemination of the of moderate or alternative messages, boost awareness of radicalization, and encourage dialogue.[56]

■ Report Material of Concern

In some cases, material online may be so offensive and disturbing that simply avoiding the source is not the only action necessary. Youth need to be encouraged and empowered to take steps to not just avoid inappropriate content but also take steps to alert others.

Contacting your Internet Service Provider (ISP) and the national ISP association is a good first step. Many ISPs have Acceptable Use Policies that limit content and the Canadian Association of Internet Provider's Code of Conduct states that members will not host illegal content.[57] Reports of extremist material can also be forwarded onto local law enforcement agencies as many now have computer crime units that understand the online world.

To better engage the general public on issues relating to criminal extremism and suspicious activities, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police has launched the National Security Information Network. By calling or emailing the Network, reports regarding national security, violent extremism, and terrorism concerns found online may prove to be valuable to protecting Canadians not just in the virtual world, but also in the real one.

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[56] Catherine Bott et al, *The Internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment & Radicalization of Youth* (Arlington, VA: Homeland Security Institute, 2009), p. 9. http://www.homelandsecurity.org/hsireports/Internet_ Radicalization.pdf.

[57] Media Awareness Network, "Responding to Online Hate," http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/ online_hate/respond_online_hate.cfm

See it. Hear it. **Report it.**

National Security Information Network

1-800-420-5805

www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/NationalSecurity

In an emergency, call 911 (local Police), then contact the RCMP.

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