



STRENGTHENING OUR RESILIENCE

TO AGENTS OF RADICALIZATION AND THEIR RHETORIC

HOW TO AVOID SUCCUMBING TO THEIR APPEAL



CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION
OF RADICALIZATION
LEADING TO VIOLENCE

Prevention first!



Prevention first.



WHAT IS RADICALIZATION **LEADING TO VIOLENCE?**

Radicalization leading to violence is a process in which people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—designed to promote an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation.



WHAT IS AN AGENT OF RADICALIZATION?

An agent of radicalization is a person who uses extremist rhetoric to attract individuals with different degrees of vulnerability and who may exhibit feelings of victimization or rejection, identity malaise, or certain personal or social vulnerabilities.

In response to the questions such individuals may have about their place in society, agents of radicalization offer a simplistic, black-and-white worldview that portrays certain beliefs as irreconcilable and diametrically opposed to one another. As a result, the agents' rhetoric encourages listeners to progressively adopt an extremist logic incompatible with the principles of

social togetherness, generating the sorts of rifts that lay the groundwork for the process of radicalization leading to violence.

Agents of radicalization, whether in the real or the virtual world (i.e. over the Internet), seek to manipulate the thoughts and legitimate perceptions of people in order to further a particular set of ideological concerns or a political agenda. Little by little, they get their audience to draw direct connections between tragedies or personal situations and broader social, economic, cultural or identity issues.



N.B.

It is important to note that agents of radicalization do not necessarily incite their audience to engage in violent action. However, through their rhetoric they help create an insurmountable gulf between certain individuals and the rest of society which may, under certain conditions, lead to violent radicalization.





WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE ARE **AGENTS OF RADICALIZATION?**

It should be noted that there is no standard profile for agents of radicalization. Indeed, a multitude of ideological agendas may be promoted by agents of radicalization.

However, we can identify certain characteristics frequently observed in agents of radicalization. These characteristics concern (1) the agent's status, (2) the agent's rhetoric, and (3) the intended audience.



SOME CHARACTERISTICS REGARDING STATUS:

- Agents of radicalization are often charismatic. They give the impression they possess the truth, and pass for people who are humble, marginal or rejected by the bulk of society.
- While they may be extremely active in the real or virtual world, agents may not necessarily be formally affiliated with a specific extremist network. However, they often share the same vision and ideological motives as a particular network.
- They exercise influence (even domination) over a number of individuals, which may sometimes extend to thought control or mental destabilization.
- They use popularly-themed social and cultural activities or musical and artistic events to identify potential new recruits and win them over to their extremist worldviews.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS REGARDING RHETORIC:

- Agents of radicalization offer an alternative, provocative, marginal rhetoric that is not otherwise heard much in the public arena.
- This rhetoric fosters the sense of injustice experienced by some people, drawing on individual and collective grievances to mobilize them around an extremist ideological agenda.
- The rhetoric provides an overly simplistic, black-and-white analysis of social realities, and tends to lay responsibility for social or historical situations considered bad at the feet of designated ‘bogeymen’.
- The rhetoric uses facts and anecdotes to confirm the worldview it puts forward, and systematically dissimulates any competing facts or alternative interpretations of social realities.

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- It encourages a conspiracy-based view of the world and of national or international events, which are systematically interpreted as part of a plot to marginalize a specific group of individuals with which the agent's audience identifies.
- It cites scientific, political or religious texts and historical or cultural situations that seem to agree with it—usually taking them out of context or twisting their meaning—to legitimize it.
- Agents of radicalization always have a double rhetoric: public and private. The more radical aspects of their rhetoric are only shared privately with a small circle of insiders, in order to publicly display a reassuring façade that does not pose any implicit threat.
- The rhetoric explicitly rejects democratic collective rules and the principles of social togetherness—which it portrays as corrupt or perverse as compared to the worldview it proposes. This doctrinal position fosters extreme distrust of public institutions, the media or certain social groups.



- It encourages a highly intolerant or hateful attitude toward a community of people based on nationality, religion, ethnicity, political tendencies or other characteristics.
- At its most extreme, such rhetoric includes direct, veiled or indirect calls for violence against specific individuals or groups, or even society as a whole.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS REGARDING THE INTENDED AUDIENCE:

- The intended audience is comprised of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable individuals in search of direction and looking for an easier means of interpreting the social world and events around them.
- The intended audience includes individuals searching for a sense of belonging, a social or cultural identity, and a rhetoric capable of soothing some of their individual and collective anxieties.

- It also consists of individuals who have a strong objective or subjective sense of injustice, or who see themselves as socially, economically, culturally or religiously marginalized.
- Members of the intended audience are seeking a welcoming and friendly network or environment that is like a big family and provides them with recognition, where they can make strong bonds and emotional ties rapidly.

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WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS OF AN AGENT OF RADICALIZATION'S ACTIVITIES?

An agent of radicalization's actions may have numerous consequences for their victims or witnesses to them. Agents operate on various levels, transforming and molding individuals in different ways using a variety of approaches:

- Causing individuals to do something they would not normally do spontaneously or even after reflection.
- Increasing an individual's vulnerability by weaving a web around them exposing them to the agent's polarizing doctrinal worldview.
- Pushing individuals to abandon their personality, moral identity, and critical judgment to avoid having the rhetoric called into question.
- Fostering and maintaining a sort of isolation by causing individuals to break with their environment (family, community, co-workers, etc.) and reduce their involvement in society at large.
- Encouraging the adoption of distancing extremist rhetoric in the public sphere to reinforce and manipulate the individual's feelings of marginalization and exclusion.
- Legitimizing the use of increasingly extremist forms of action (including violence) by providing a narrative that validates the use of such means as a moral imperative.

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WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE MAY BE INFLUENCED BY **AGENTS OF RADICALIZATION?**

Everyone has the potential to be exploited by an agent of radicalization. People can be susceptible to an agent's influence for all sorts of reasons: they may be trying to build a greater sense of identity, they may be curious, they may not be doing very well, someone they trust may rope them into it, etc.



HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM AGENTS OF RADICALIZATION?

If you encounter someone who fits the profile of an agent of radicalization described above, be extremely careful and keep your guard up. Here are some pointers to follow:

- Use your critical judgment and beware of simplistic, black-and-white rhetoric (that views everything as either good or bad) regarding social issues and complex international events.
- Does something about this person's actions shock or surprise you? Take a step back so you can get some clarity.
- Don't let someone else dictate your beliefs or force you to adopt a particular interpretation of the world. Don't be afraid to pull away from any rhetoric that feels biased to you or leaves you too few options.
- Don't isolate yourself. Talk openly with those around you to get other people's opinions on the reputation, behaviour, actions and rhetoric of the individual in question.
- **Report the person's behaviours to the CPRLV. You can do this anonymously if you wish.**

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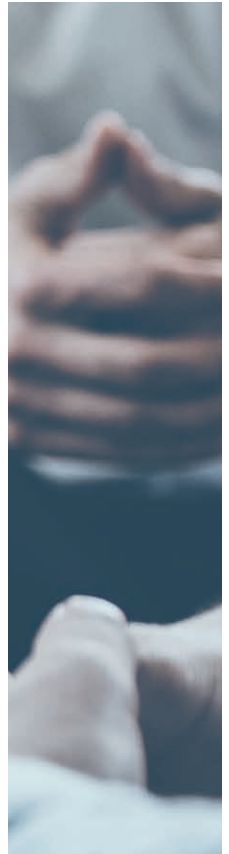




WHY SHOULD I **CONTACT THE CPRLV?**

To benefit from the support of our professionals: **specialized support and psychosocial counselling.**

To learn about available resources and obtain a referral, if you wish, to appropriate services recognized for their expertise with the specific issue affecting you.





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24/7 HELPLINE

It's confidential!

Montréal area: 514 687-7141

Elsewhere in Quebec: 1 877 687-7141

info-radical.org

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