



TSAS
canadian network for research on
terrorism, security and society

Working Paper Series

No. 18-05

Summer 2018

'Trajectories of Radicalized Females in Montreal'

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Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION	3
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	6
3. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM.....	7
4. THE QUEBEC CONTEXT	8
5. METHODOLOGY	9
5.1. Participants	10
5.2. Challenges to empirical research on radicalization.....	12
6. DATA AND ANALYSIS	13
6.1. Negative educational experiences among Muslim youth in Greater Montreal.....	15
6.2. Strained relationships between and with parents	24
6.3. Negative media narratives more important than the use of social media itself.....	29
7. IMPLICATIONS	32
8. CONCLUSION.....	34
9. REFERENCES	36



1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2016, it was reported that 10-12 young females – from varied religious and secular families – who lived in Canada and had been educated in Canadian schools had left for Syria. Of these, at least five Canadian women had conceived children in ISIS territory (Cain 2016, Hopper 2016) and were thus contributing to raising “a generation of Western ISIS babies” (Tiflati in CBC News 2016). Among the 10 Canadian females, up to seven were estimated to be from Quebec (*Conseil du statut de la femme* and the *Centre de prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence*, 2016).

In order to better understand the circumstances that make some females vulnerable to ISIS propaganda in the Francophone context in Montreal this study, from spring 2016 to winter 2017, explored the trajectories of radicalized females who either had left Greater Montreal to join ISIS or had attempted to do so. As such, this study contributes to the research on women in terrorism (Sjoberg 2013, 2014; Gentry 2015; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Bloom 2007, 2011; Katherine 2011, 2014; Davis 2006, 2013), and to the “Women and violent radicalization” report (2016), co-authored by the *Quebec Conseil du statut de la femme* and the *Centre de prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence*(CPRMV) in particular. While the aforementioned report focused on gender and agency among female jihadists from Quebec, this report discusses the social context and its influence on two specific radicalized females, as seen by their peers, family, and community members in Montreal.

We had hoped to speak with the radicalized females directly as we had heard that they talk to their mothers occasionally, but it was difficult to contact them abroad. So, we talked to three focus groups with parents, peer groups and friends, and Muslim community leaders



familiar with the two radicalized females who had left for Syria. Based on narrative

methodology, three sets of sub-questions guided our discussion:

1. What are the females' educational experiences?

For example, were they interested in, and excelling in their studies? Who were their closest friends at school? Did they express any emotions of hostility towards Western countries (us vs. them mentality, calling non-Muslims infidels, etc.)?

2. What were the females' relationships with their peer group/family members?

For example, did family and friends observe a shift in their personality? Were the females teased, marginalized, or bullied for being Muslim? How/when did they decide to leave for Syria? Were there any signs of a change of heart?

3. How did the females use social media and the internet?

For example, how often were the young women on-line via the computer/phone? What were their main sources of information about ISIS?

Our focus on the school, family, and peer group relationships, and social media and the internet revolved around the need to understand the social-ecological circumstances that may have influenced the females towards radicalization in Montreal, especially as the home and school are the most influential locales of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Our findings did not show a clear understanding of the concept of extremism among females. Nor were there any exceptional experiences based on their gender, except perhaps for public reaction to their *hijab* (if they wore them) or restrictions to their movements by their families. In general, females experienced the same concerns as male extremists regarding education and social (peer) issues. For Female #1, for example, although she became pregnant shortly after her trip to Syria, it cannot be assumed that she perceived a mothering role as part of her duty to ISIS, as she herself did not clarify this point to her mother with whom she had spoken from Syria, or the research participants who knew her. Thus, while we were able to gather primary accounts about Females #1 and #2, we were not able to get an idea of their contacts, which enabled them to flee Montreal or their expectations regarding their roles in ISIS. So, the role of gender as an contributing factor towards extremism continues to be an area of exploration.



However, our study raised several perspectives that echo the current experiences of Muslims in Quebec (*Centre de prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence* 2016) with respect to one's social-ecology. In particular, it was clear that educational experiences are generally negative among Muslims in Greater Montreal, especially for veiled women. In the home space, the two females in our study did have strained relationships with at least one parent, where tension existed between parents as well. In the larger community, Islamophobia in the media was of greater concern to our participants than recruiting material in social media overall. We were not able to find out what kind of websites these females had looked at or what their interactions online had been. The females would go off on their own, and their family members and friends did not seem to know where and when they went. Participants discussed specific social, cultural, political, and economic barriers in society and the school environment that may render some individuals more vulnerable towards ISIS propaganda. We offer three overarching recommendations from these findings.

However, it must be pointed out that this study does not enable comparisons. This report is drawn from discussions with a few people close to a handful of youths who left for Syria from Quebec and their idea of who is seen as Quebecois/e. Also, we cannot compare the feelings of marginalization and societal responses to a female in a *chador/hijab* (Female #1) in Quebec with responses in other Canadian provinces. Instances of racism and Islamophobia have been reported in all parts of Canada and there is no attempt in this study to make any comparisons with other provinces. Furthermore, our study participants were from the Francophone sector and there is no attempt at comparison with the Anglophone sector, simply because we have no known cases of radicalization among Anglophone youth in Montreal.



2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory postulates that human development is influenced by biological, psychological, social, and institutional factors in one's social-ecological environment. According to this theory, his social-ecological framework positions individuals at the centre of scaffolding systems as illustrated in Figure 1. Firstly, individuals experience the *microsystem* that contains one's immediate settings, like the school or the home, which exists within a *mesosystem*, where aspects of the microsystem interact, such as one's community. These are encompassed by the *exosystem*, an extended aspect of one's context that one does not directly interact with but maintains influence over one's immediate community, such as the media. The interrelationship between these three systems exists within a *macrosystem* that encompasses the ideology, structure, and culture that dictates the functioning of the systems. In consideration of this theoretical framework, and that events in the micro-level are the most influential to an individual, our study raised questions about the specific environmental factors that may have led the females towards radicalization. Thus, our questions pertained to the school and home relationships in the microsystem (in questions #1 and #2), the relationships in the mesosystem (in question #2), and the effects the exosystem of social media and the internet (in question #3).

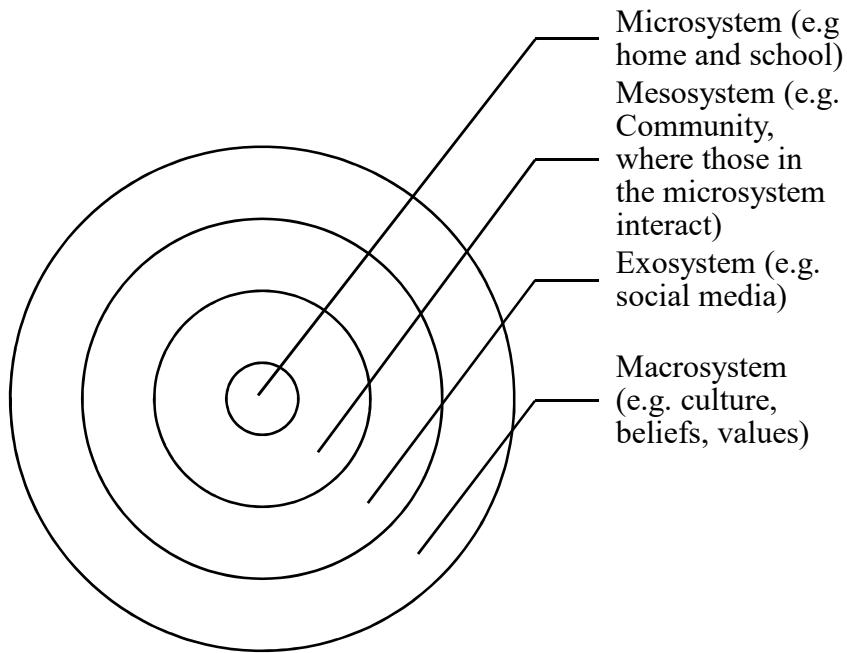


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Framework (1979)

3. EDUCATION IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Despite a huge growth in publications on terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism, not much attention has been paid to the role of education or schooling within this literature (Davies 2008). Initial research into extremism did not pay much attention to education in countering violent extremism (CVE), although, many extremist groups have focused on education and social media as a means to promote their worldview from the very beginning (Brown 2013; Carvalho 2016; Davies 2016; Ghosh et al. 2016; Pels and de Ruyter 2012). Some researchers (Davies 2008; Ghosh et al. 2017) have strongly asserted that more emphasis should be placed on education for CVE, because education can be a “soft power” to prevent radicalization among young people.

This study focused on understanding the curriculum and messages that were conveyed in the varying forms of education that exist in the micro-, meso-, and exosystems for Female #1 and



Female #2 in Montreal, seeing them as push and pull factors towards radicalization (Ghosh et al. 2017).

Following Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological framework, formal education (the form of education offered in traditional educational settings, such as schools and universities), non-formal education (the form of education offered in organized programs outside the formal system, such as those in the community and online), and informal education (the form of education absorbed informally, such as that at home) are part of the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems. In each system, education is an important component of an individual's development, and a means to impart the socio-cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes from the macrosystem; and thus, education requires considerable attention alongside a discussion of social, cultural, political, and economic factors in the home and community that can lead one towards violent radicalization. The simultaneous influence of these systems in Montreal contributed to the struggles experienced by our participants and the radicalized females in our study.

4.THE QUEBEC CONTEXT

In 2011, Montreal's population of 3.9 million comprised 2.7 million Christians (69% of the population), 83,000 Jewish people (2%), 221,040 Muslims (5%), and 560,650 who have no religious affiliation (14%) (Statistics Canada, 2011). From 2011 to 2016, Montreal experienced a 4.2% population growth and reached 4.09 million residents.

Between 2013 and 2014, religious-based hate crimes in Quebec rose from 48 to 93 incidents overall. This marked a 190% increase in crimes towards the Jewish population (from 12 to 23 incidents), 175% increase towards the Muslim population (from 20 to 35), and a 400% increase towards religions that were not identified (from 7 to 28), (*Ministère de la sécurité*



publique 2016). In 2015, 47% of hate crimes across the province (130 of 272 incidents) were

based on religion (*Ministère de la sécurité publique* 2017). There have been no recent government publications but police officers have reported that religious-based hate crimes have increased approximately 200% in Montreal and Quebec City from 2016 to 2017 (Duval 2018, Loewen 2017).

As our two case studies were from the Muslim community and our participants were as well, the social-ecology of Muslims in Quebec are important points to consider. Moreover, while academic and government publications from 2016 to 2018 are not yet available, the January 2017 terrorist shooting of six Muslim men in Sainte-Foy, Quebec and the increasing anti-immigrant and Islamophobic displays (Page 2018, Tasker2017) can be indicative of unreported micro-aggressions and discrimination towards minorities, especially Muslims in Quebec. Additionally, as female Muslims who choose to wear the veil are visibly different from other Muslims, our study explores the experience of females in particular within this context.

5. METHODOLOGY

Our aim was to get data that would give us rich information on the trajectories of the two females who left for Syria. So, we wanted to ask questions and discuss issues with people who claimed to be close to the females. The primary method for collecting data for this study was focus group interviews with families, loved ones, and leaders who worked closely with Quebecois females who had left Montreal to join ISIS. Recruitment was done through personal connections and snowball sampling. To gather information, it was difficult to gain the trust of people who have been repeatedly questioned by police and the media. We had the exceptional opportunity to involve a researcher who was already connected with the desired participants through other studies he had conducted with some members of the groups.



A total of three focus groups were conducted, the first with Muslim leaders, the second with close friends, and the third with families. Recruitment for the first group strived to get leaders who work closely with the families and friends of the radicalized females. We knew about these leaders from previous projects that members of our team had conducted. Similarly, recruitment for the second and third group attempted to get families and close friends of these females.

5.1. Participants

Participant	Description
Focus group I: Three male community leaders	
Participant S	Male; social worker
Participant I	Male; Imam
Participant P	Male; Researcher
Focus group II: Three female friends	
Participant A	Female; 19-years-old
Participant F	Female; 19-years-old
Participant K	Female; 20-years-old
Focus groups III: With two individuals	
Mother	Mother of radicalized Female #1
Participant B	Brother (non-biological but of same community) of radicalized Female #2

The advantage of focusing on a small number of participants lies in the detail and the richness of the data gathered. Although the small sample size may limit the representativeness and generalization of the results, our findings are consistent with those related to our field of study (see Dawson and Amarasingam 2017). Each focus group lasted from one to three hours, over a time span that extended from August 2016 to August 2017. Interviews took place in community centres and participants' homes. Interviewed leaders were asked open-ended questions about their views on radicalization, their perceptions of Muslim youths' lives in Canada, and on their experiences coaching Muslim youth and their families in Montreal. Interviews with friends and families focused on schooling, identity, citizenship, and integration in Quebec and Canada. They were also



engaged in discussions about motives and root causes of violent radicalization. Open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on the lives of their friends and relatives. All participants were reassured about their anonymity and hence gave their consent to be interviewed. The research study adopts a narrative-based methodology by employing Jackson's interpretive approach (2011) that privileges participants' worldviews in explaining and interpreting their points of view. Jackson's interpretive approach is a pedagogy proposed for diverse student groups and promotes an analysis of representation, interpretation, and self-reflection of beliefs among students and teachers (Jackson, 2015). This approach enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of participants perspectives on lived experiences of Muslim youth in Montreal.

To show our engagement with participants, we refrained from taking extensive notes during the interviews, which were audio recorded. We documented most of our impressions and important points right after each interview. However, participants in the third group (families) were not at ease giving their consent to audio-record the interview; we did the interview agreeing that we would be taking extensive notes. Before transcribing the audio files, and in order to get a holistic idea of the various elements of the focus groups, we listened to them at least twice, then a third time following the transcription in order to compare participants' meanings with what we translated from French and/or Arabic into English. All data were analyzed in English.

For the analysis of our data, we depended heavily on the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software NVivo (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). NVivo supports qualitative and mixed methods research. It is very helpful in organizing, analyzing and creating insights and meaning from unstructured, and qualitative data such as interviews, surveys, social media, web contents, etc. as well as in creating, organizing, and understanding themes that emerged from our data.



Analysis of data was first done on individual themes, and then we moved on to work on all categories as a whole. In other words, we looked at and analyzed each focus group individually, and then we organized common themes and categories. NVivo was also helpful in counting “who said what,” “where,” “in which context,” and “within which theme”; this was useful in coding and relating themes to one another (Bazeley and Jackson 2013).

5.2. Challenges to empirical research on radicalization

Researching Muslims, who have in many ways taken on the status of a suspect community, is more complicated today than ever. All research involving Islam and Muslims in post-9/11 Western societies becomes political, and this made it difficult for researchers to overcome the distrust of that community while studying issues related to them. In general, Muslims tend to reject cooperation with outsiders including researchers, out of fear of being judged, stereotyped and labeled in a way that they think is likely to put them in danger.

Furthermore, there is a challenge for the academic researcher to gain access, trust, establish rapport, overcome suspicion, and negotiate with community gatekeepers. Research on Muslims in a post-ISIS and post 9/11 era falls within the category of sensitive research, which made our fieldwork a challenge. Participation in research may lead Muslims to fear being labelled, misunderstood or being sold out for the sake of sensationalization. They often fear being accused of terrorism and radicalization. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), sensitive research falls into three main areas: (1) intrusive threat; (2) studies of deviance and social control; and (3) political alignments, revealing the interests of powerful persons or institutions, or the exercise of domination (p. 166). This study falls largely in the first category, and the sensitivity felt by Muslims not only concerns the topic itself but, more importantly, also the relationship



between the topic and the social context or the specificity of the object under investigation (i.e. stigmatized communities, radicalization, etc.). However, all social research is sensitive; the question is one of degree and not of kind. The researcher has to be sensitive to the context, cultures, participants, and to the consequences of the research on participants. In conducting our research, we were cognizant of these issues in our relationship with the participants and the subject matter. Hence, we took careful precautions to minimize threat and discomfort to our participants in various ways, such as being sensitive to their request to not be audio-recorded.

These complications made it difficult to initiate this study, as it was a long procedure to obtain ethical approval given the sensitivity of the topic and security concerns. This was compounded by the challenging discussion of radicalization and extremism overall, as participants had negative connotations about the phenomenon but also different understandings of it as well. In our discussions, radicalization was always related to extremism but participants understood that it was not extremism. Yet the definitions of radicalization they shared included a description of extremism. Thus, while each focus group discussed radicalization, the conversations often revolved around a foundation of differing conceptions of radicalization as a phenomenon, especially as it was discussed that there is no corresponding term for radicalization in Arabic.

6. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Given the social-ecology framework, this exploratory study had three objectives: A) to understand the educational experiences of two radicalized females; B) to explore relationships they had with their peer group and family members; and, C) to find out about the extent of their use of social media and the internet. Three key findings became apparent in relation to these objectives:



1. Formal educational experiences are generally negative among Muslims in Greater Montreal, although negative comments about non-formal and informal education were also shared.
2. Both Females #1 and #2 who left for Syria had witnessed and experienced strained relationships at home, between and with parents.
3. Participants made no mention of ISIS propaganda on social media or the internet and were more concerned with narratives in local media on Islamophobia, whether online through social media or not. Participants said that local media, on the other hand, fostered fear among parents and misunderstanding about Muslims among some non-Muslims in society which acted as a push factor towards radicalization.

In the first and second focus groups, participants spoke more about the concerns of violent radicalization and extremism rather than details about the females who had left Quebec, while the third focus group offered reflections and thoughts on two specific females who had left, referenced as Female #1 and Female #2 in this study. Female #1 was born in Canada and had lived in the Greater Montreal area, but had left Quebec in November 2014 to go to Raqqa, where she married a German *jihadi*. In January 2015, Female #2, also from Greater Montreal, left for Syria with her boyfriend and they later married in Raqqa. In both cases, Participant K said that she had not realized that the Female #2 was radicalized: “*I would have never guessed. It's a girl who is like me*”, thereby indicating surprise that smart, well-connected people are radicalized too. Similarly, in Focus Group III, the mother of Female #1 said, “*I did not connect the dots then.*” So, although she knew that there was discrimination towards girls who wore the headscarf in schools and in the job market, and she knew about Quebecois youth leaving for Syria in 2014 and that her daughter had started behaving differently, she did not expect or assume that her daughter could be radicalized. The key findings from these conversations are elaborated upon in the following three sub-sections.



6.1. Negative educational experiences among Muslim youth in Greater Montreal

The initial questions from our study focused on formal education – the education in institutional school settings, and non-formal education – the education offered in organized programs and settings outside of schools. While all participants discussed these aspects of education, the young adult participants made more comments on informal education, narratives, and messages received through societal interactions. As the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication in informal educational settings led our participants to understand a specific perspective, our analysis categorizes such considerations as a hidden curriculum in the formal education system and societal discourse. That is, the implicit, non-structured messages that youth receive in or outside their educational institutions from individuals or structural systems in their lived environment that have a great impact on their behaviour and way of thinking. This hidden curriculum, a form of informal education, posed a stronger concern for young adults than formal and non-formal education. This analysis is presented by first discussing the experiences of Females #1 and #2, followed by a consideration of participant voices on these aspects of education.

6.1.1. *Formal education*

In discussing formal educational systems, three main concerns arose from the focus groups, namely negative attitudes from teachers and school administration, and the discriminatory norms that exist in some CEGEPs (in this case in the Francophone sector) in Greater Montreal (discussed below). These experiences were shared from the perspective of parents and young adults who reflected on their own lives as students.



During a focus group discussion, the mother of Female #1 spoke positively about her daughter's demeanour and exceptional achievement in formal education in Canada and Morocco at length.

She was a very sweet girl. ... She was my first child and she was easy and calm. ..She was competent; she was good at school. She was able to read and write at a very early age. She was really an exceptional student. Like all girls, she was a joyful girl. In secondary school ... She was living her life like all her friends in her age. She didn't live in a conservative environment...I didn't have any issues with her... When I used to meet with her teachers, she always had good grades. Her teachers were happy with her as a student. Regarding her behaviour, no one never complained about something she did... She was really an ideal student. She did very, very well, even in high school. She was never worried about passing or about getting good grades. I was very happy with her grades. She wasn't especially conservative. I never observed anything. She used to go to the movies with her friends, to restaurants, she wore what she wanted ... she was really, really normal... I can't say she was extremist. She was like any other girl, any other adolescent. There was nothing... during her first year in CEGEP, the same thing as well. - Mother of Female #1, Focus Group III

The mother went on to explain that her daughter had befriended and had been exposed to a variety of people as the family included both Muslims and Christians and that, "Even during high school she never had Arabic or Muslim friends, they were from Cambodia, Hispanic, etc... She had a real mix of friends. She never got a visit at home from an Arab or a Muslim friend. They were (from) all nationalities." However, Female #1 faced a drastic change in her first year of secondary school as the family moved back to Morocco for one year for the father's occupational duties. While there, Female #1 could not maintain the expected level of Arabic because she was not a native speaker. What deepened her struggle was that the teachers referred to her as "the Canadian" and never by name. In response to the problems they faced, her family decided to move back to Canada.

She used to cry a lot because of it. She told me they don't use my first or last name, they refer to me as "the Canadian". This was one of the things that impacted her identity in the sense that, is she Moroccan or Canadian? It's true, she is Canadian, but



they had no respect for her. You shouldn't say that to a child. She felt lost...She was more comfortable in Canada than in Morocco. – Mother, Focus Group III

In this circumstance, the teacher's behaviour in Morocco created a detrimental educational experience and learning environment. Yet, despite the difficulty in completing assignments in French and Arabic, this student continued to do well in school (Mother, Focus Group III); highlighting the importance of the learning environment and the need for teachers to be cognizant and wary of promoting discriminatory social norms or biases – a self-reflective practice that is engendered in teacher training and continuous professional development programs. While this example occurred in Morocco, comments in the focus groups also highlight the need for this degree of cautiousness and training in the Quebec context as teachers in Montreal have alienated students in class discussions as well. For example, in Focus Group II, Participant F and Participant I shared that a secondary teacher aimed to reinforce a divisiveness and misconception about the Muslim population at large.

Participant F: When an adult comes to see you and tells you, oh, you are Muslim, you Shiite and you Sunni? Don't you hate each other? I did not even know the difference.

Participant I: Someone told you that? A Quebecer? A Muslim?

Participant F: Yea, a teacher. Not Muslim. I did not even know the difference, I was so young. I was like, oh, there must be some difference. It's like Orthodox Christians and Protestants. There must be some difference. Then he was like, no, you should hate each other, there are conflicts between you two. I was like, well it's my friend. At 13, you do not know what to say to that. It's only after that, other places there are conflicts.

From this anecdote, we can see that the formal school space fostered by a teacher can be an exclusionary environment for a student; problematic as a part of the microsystem that influences human development the most. Similar sentiments are shared from a parent's perspective in the first focus group. There, Participant P raised similar concerns about his daughter's teacher in Montreal who labeled students as either being a native Quebecois (meaning a *Quebecois de souche*) or an



immigrant. Although his daughter self-identified as a Quebecoise, the teacher re-labeled her as an immigrant. In sharing this experience, Participant P suggested that such categorization by a teacher could incite radicalization.

To elaborate this concern, Participant P shared that his daughter was given a letter from her secondary school on the Eve of Ramadan asking students not to say “Allahu Akbar” because some students were using it as a death threat. Participant P explained this incident: “It stated that they forbade [the saying of] “Allahu Akbar” as a form of death threat but in this letter the school administration could have wished a happy Ramadan and find a way to say it without Muslim students feeling pointed at and attacked.”

Despite his desire for a shift in attitude in the school administration, Participant P concluded that the hope for a teacher to link the course content with real-world application was wishful thinking and rarely observed: “...even sometimes teachers have not reached this level. They will discriminate (against) youth without exposing it for sure. Prefer others and youth will sense it. [They will] feel more rejected and feel less integrated even if he wants to [feel included and integrated], even if his dad brought him here. The youth is stuck.” This raises the concern over teacher and school attitudes and the implications such exclusionary behaviours pose for students within formal education in particular. For some participants, these sentiments and experiences continued in CEGEP (Grades 12 and 13).

Students in Focus Group II shared many frustrations over a number of CEGEPs they attended in the Francophone sector. Participant K said that her experience in two CEGEPs were frustrating as she was declined a prayer room because rooms were already occupied and she felt that the minority status of the Muslim population created a disadvantage for her and other Muslims, compared to another CEGEP where Muslims were able to acquire a prayer room due to their larger



population. To accommodate students of other traditions, Participant A and K requested a spiritual room in their respective CEGEPs instead. In Participant A's experience, there was a debate over competing rights of all students: "I remember that during the vote [for the meditation room], a woman stood up [at a general assembly meeting] and said, but yea if my spirituality is to scream then Abdel, who represents us, well one's liberty stops where another ends. If your spirituality is to scream, ours is to pray." In an attempt to pre-emptively address this concern of competing rights, Participant K noted that she aimed to create a welcoming meditation and prayer space for everyone before the vote.

Participant K: I created a document and all, a page. A summary of my project and it was a space for all. I remember when I spoke to the woman [in charge] and all and she said, yea but with what happened at Richelieu, remember what happened there? Then I told her, what's the link? Why do you associate me with what happened? At the end, we never got [the prayer room]. I presented it to the Student Association too. No one took too seriously my project but the LGBT group did it [and was given a meeting space] and if I wanted to make a Muslim group at the CEGEP...

Participant F: ...As soon as it's about religion, it disturbs.

Participant K: ...it scares them...

Participant F: Especially if it is Islam.

Here, Participant K attempted to create a space that welcomed all peoples, but the proposal was declined, in her mind due to Islamophobia. However, the discrimination our participants felt was not solely on a religious basis. They also felt that the exclusion they had felt in their CEGEP was based on ethnicity and race.

Participant F: At the beginning, I thought that [CEGEP x] is open-minded and cool. But no, you should look Quebecer and white.

Participant A: Francophone CEGEPs are a catastrophe.

Participant F: But students are fine but I was shocked to see that teachers, you see that to the limit they hate you.

Interviewer: For Maisonneuve, you think that the life of youth at Maisonneuve pushed them to leave?

Participant K: At Maisonneuve they had a place to pray.



Clearly, the CEGEPs' lack of recognition of the value of prayer to Muslims, as one of the five pillars of Islam, remained a consistent area of contention for these participants. Additionally, the participants continued to share that their concern lay with the teachers and school administrators, who created an environment of animosity, not the student population. One CEGEP, described to have a student body consisting predominantly of immigrants, was the least open with respect to integration and Islam (Participant A, Focus Group II). To this, our research team member asked: "So, tensions inside the CEGEPs did not, in your opinion, push students to leave, at Maisonneuve?" and Participant K, responded, "No, it isn't the students. I already went and people are quite open-minded."

These findings and ideas about the exclusionary attitudes in secondary schools and CEGEPs raised questions among participants in general. Explicitly, Participant I wondered if it was the discriminatory nature of Francophone schools and Francophone countries that led schools to positively or negatively lead youth to extremism. However, while the lack of an inclusive school environment resonated with younger participants, they did not understand how it could propel their peers to leave for Syria.

Researcher: Did she feel she belonged here? Being Canadian or Quebecer?

Participant B: No. But in my mind, since she grew up in a public school, when we heard that she left, we were really surprised. This girl is like me. And if I were her, I wouldn't leave Canada. That's why many of us can't understand why they leave.

In reflecting upon these experiences, Participants S and P were doubtful that the formal educational space could do anything to prevent extremism (Focus Group I). From their observations, schools have done nothing in the past ten years to address Islamophobia. Although public schools across Canada discussed it and its harmfulness to youth, "the majority said it did not exist" (Participant P). To Participant P, the school atmosphere was as guilty of radicalizing youth as the public spaces,



parks, and family. He observed that teachers and parents struggled with the constraints of time and resources – “No one can talk with you, everyone has his own problems (wage issues...) they can’t shape their kids” (Participant P). During Focus Group I, both Participant I and P remained uncertain about whether it was a public or Islamic school that would be better for students or make a difference, since both participants believed that the political, social, and economic atmosphere that students live in impact them more. So, to make changes in schools, Participant P suggested that teachers be honest in discussing the real questions with respect to the lived experiences of students in society. In concert with the need to foster critical thinking and a political consciousness among youth, he remarked that:

Yes, it is true, you can do it, you can explain to the youth, but with one condition: be credible in the eyes of the youth. In my opinion, you cannot be credible if you don't discuss with the youth about the injustices that are striking Muslim societies and the Muslims here. You cannot be credible because we must not underestimate the people that recruit, they speak concretely.

Thus, from all perspectives, it appeared that the attitudes, discussions, and responses students received and experienced in the formal educational space in one’s microsystem was most impactful to Female #1 and other participants. Participants who knew Female #2 did not discuss her formal educational experience and no participants spoke about the curriculum they studied. The peers, teachers, and the school administration the participants encountered at school and their ideas impacted participants the most.

6.1.2. Non-formal education

In addition to formal educational spaces, participants also mentioned concerns about non-formal educational spaces, albeit briefly. Non-formal education refers here to organized classes outside the formal school system. For the youth participants, non-formal educational spaces were



not of concern. Unexpectedly, their parents and some adults were most concerned because they were unsure about the content being taught in *halaqa* – a meeting or gathering to learn about Islam or the Quran – and their children’s ability to interpret the content.

Participant K: Sometimes it’s not even controversial, it’s just whatever *halaqa*, especially after the youth left, our parents were scared. They didn’t have faith in us anymore.

Researcher: And you talk about that with your parents?

Participant K: Yes, for sure, right now with my parents, they aren’t like that anymore, but at the time they would ask me: what are you learning in this *halaqa*?

This questioning among parents suggested a previously non-existent degree of skepticism towards the credibility of leaders who were hosting the *halaqa* and their children’s level of thinking, all influenced by current events that had arisen in society. For participants, the implicit messages in society and the hidden curriculum in the school served as the source of informal education that impacted the formal and non-formal educational systems overall.

6.1.3. Informal education (hidden curriculum in school and messages in society)

The key messages that participants said they received from school and society were that one needed to be white and ethnically French or Quebecois/e to belong in Quebec society; illustrating the impact of the beliefs, values, and attitudes in the macrosystem that influence the interactions in one’s micro-, meso-, and exo- systems. This politicization of the perceived identity of a native Quebecer girded the experiences of youth in formal and non-formal educational spaces, as two participants highlighted the nuances of identity politics:

We must define what Quebecers are. There are a lot of different people that think differently about this. There are native-born Quebecers, and I do not like using this term, I always say it. I am Quebecer and you are too. Native Quebecer, so what? I am here Quebecer and so are you, we are both Quebecer. When we talk about Quebecers, we talk about whites and those who are here since forever. We need to change the narrative. - Participant K, Focus Group II



...if your family name is Tremblay, you have more chances to get called for interview. Want it or not, it is there. But legally in Canada is it not allowed. It is that sort of discrimination in Canada that as soon as you look a bit different or not Quebecer, you face a sort of discrimination. - Participant F, Focus Group II

These sentiments of a racial and ethnic basis of a Native Quebecer communicate an in-group and out-group distinction that has social and economic ramifications for individuals in the out-group. This socialized marginalization of individuals from political and social recognition and participation in economic opportunities are in direct relation to the push and pull factors that lead some individuals to violent extremism. For Participants P and S, the school curriculum is not responsible for radicalization, nor can it be. Rather, they believe that it is the tension between teachers and students, the lack of response to Islamophobia at school, and the existence of racism that creates a school climate that can lead individuals towards radicalization.

Do educational programs radicalize youth? I don't think so. Does their program prevent and counter radicalization? Like a vaccine? No, there is no proof but I don't think they are doing their job. Some might think that we must work on the religious aspect, my position is nuanced. But I don't think actual curricula radicalize. –
Participant S

To these participants, school curricula do not radicalize in Quebec and other Western contexts, but individuals in the schools and its climate push youth towards radicalization. For Participant I, this hidden curriculum extends beyond the school environment into the political realm:

It is my contention and till now, I am still convinced that it is the politics that is primarily responsible for radicalization and violence, the presence of the jihadi option. To not assume this responsibility, they question if schools radicalize and if this mosque radicalizes. Yes, in a certain way, but they cannot do it if the jihadi option is absent.

The personal *jihad* to conquer the struggles in one's life emphasized by Participant I was also understood by Participant P (Focus Group I), who agreed: "Western societies work to reduce drug consumption in youth. There are a lot of studies, programs on this topic to sensitize youth. For



radicalization, it takes a wider place in the political agendas because it is a consequence of the politics of states. Politics they are not willing to question.” This political agenda, whether in relation to educational spaces or other public spaces, raised great angst among all our participants.

Overall, with respect to the particular females who had left Quebec for Syria, our focus group discussions and analysis highlighted that Female #1 excelled in her studies, both females cared for the well-being of humanity, and they both had a network of close friends consisting of individuals who were both from a similar ethnic and religious background and those who were not. They did not appear to identify with a particular global or political Islam and although they appeared to self-identify as “Muslim” in general, and thus did not display the promotion of an in-group out-group division. Yet, the need to identify as a Muslim (particularly with the Female who wore the hijab) created borders (in appearance at least). Likewise, individual research participants also reflected similar sentiments toward others in society. Markedly, these participants did highlight the social and cultural struggles exhibited by peers, teachers, and administrators in their Quebec elementary, secondary, and CEGEP experiences in Francophone formal educational institutions, and informal educational spaces in society. To review other experiences faced by the radicalized females, the following section considers the social relationships of Females #1, #2, as well as the social relationships of the study participants.

6.2. Strained relationships between and with parents

To understand the relationships Females #1 and #2 had in their micro- and meso-systems, our study explored the state of peer and familial relationships the radicalized females may have had and if any drastic circumstances or relationships had arisen in their past to provoke or entice them to extremism. To begin with, we found that although Females #1 and #2 appeared to have



had a strong network of friends and cared for others in the larger society, they both experienced occasions of strained relationships with family members in their microsystem. For Female #1, her parents divorced after their return to Canada from Morocco, during her secondary school years.

To this, her mother remarked:

Everything was negative for her, there was no positive (which means even the one or two weeks that they spent with [the father])...He was too aggressive with her, especially with her, and she pushed back. Sometimes, well one time he said something like the divorce was her fault. She was the reason I came back to Canada. I would say that her relationship with her father had really deteriorated. I mean there was no more contact between her and her father.

Despite the disdain her daughter felt towards her father, the mother shared that Female #1 was affectionate and sociable. Female #1 loved children and wanted to open an orphanage after seeing images of suffering children in Afghanistan and Syria. She was patient with elderly people when she worked at a senior's shoe store, and she desired to address injustice overall. In society, the mother was aware of discrimination towards people who were veiled. Since Female #1 wore the *chador*, a veil that covers more than the hijab, the mother knew it would be even harder for her daughter to get a job. The mother felt that perhaps it was this form of discrimination that impacted her daughter as she had a kind heart and did not wish to be a passive observer of injustices.

In considering her daughter's departure from Canada, the mother realized that there were tell-tale signs of her daughter's abnormal behaviour that she only recognized upon reflection. For example, Female #1 stopped watching TV with the rest of the family, spent most of her time in her room, and, to save money, began to stop paying for small or large items, such as coffee, although she did so before. Also, two weeks before her daughter left for Syria, unbeknownst to the mother at first, her daughter had an anxiety attack and had to call 9-1-1 as she was shaking, crying,



and felt ill. The doctors detected no problem with her physical health, so the mother was less concerned when she found out that her daughter was not ill.

The night before her departure, she was sitting on the edge of her bed. She looked anxious. She said: "Mom, tomorrow I'm going to meet my friends." I knew she had an exam but she spent the whole night going through her things. And I did not connect the dots then. She tried on all her dresses. She would show them to me and she would say, "Mom, do you remember this dress? Mom, look!" I didn't think it was goodbye by putting on her dresses... she even tried the traditional Moroccan dresses. She told me that she wanted to spend the night with her friends. As she wanted to stay so badly. It was agreed that she would spend the night at her friend's. I phoned her many times but her phone was off. The following day, at the afternoon, I got her message saying: "Sorry mama I've left Canada. I've immigrated (for God's sake)." She said she'd left Canada so I called the police.

In an effort to rationalize these changes, the researcher asked the mother if she felt that the divorce had affected her daughter, but she said no and that she was against profiling individuals who were raised in single-parent families, akin to profiling that arises towards orphans. Alternately, in discussing peer and family relationships of Female #2, a friend of Female #2, was unsure of why Female #2 may have left for Syria, but felt that it may have resulted from family conflicts. Other peers, however, felt that she left to be with her boyfriend:

Yeah. I think she is from a religious family. We saw each other at a friend gathering. Since we are Algerians, we meet as friends. One day, she came with her father to the party. She told me that her mother and father had a dispute, so I felt that maybe she had problems with her parents. Maybe this affected her as well but I don't know. It was the first thing that came to my mind when I heard about her departure. The climate at home is very important. When youth have problems at home, they want to leave far away to feel better. I think it comes from a: "I want to be free and want my life back" mentality. – Participant B, Focus Group 3.

Female #2 was described as a kind individual who tutored at her school, and volunteered in Montreal food drives and environmental initiatives, approximately 20 kilometres away and 30-60 minute commute by public transit from where she lived (Participant B, Focus Group III). From Participant B's perspective, everyone knew that Female #2 was kind and that she committed



herself to studying the Quran and hadith at the mosque. Participant B, a friend of Female #2, really could not understand her rationale for leaving Quebec and related his concerns to the tensions in the larger society in Greater Montreal and Quebec.

Researcher: Have you ever heard her complain? Islamophobia, etc.

Participant B: I think she had negative experiences at school. But she never told me about them. I didn't spend a lot of time with her lately. Maybe she also experienced stuff in her community, people not from the same religion. Maybe in her school, it was a white majority school and not a multicultural school. I don't know.

From speculating circumstantial details specific to Female #2, Participant B extrapolated his observations and aligned them with the social struggles he perceived for Muslims on a daily basis in Quebec.

Participant B: I feel that there is always a fear to practice our religion. We do not feel, for example in a park if I want to pray, I'm scared to pray in public. People will judge you and take pictures of you and put them on the Internet. I fear that people will judge me as an extremist because I am Muslim. I feel that's the difference.

...

Researcher: Do you think the Charter of Values affected those youth who left?

Participant B: When you see that you have to defend who you are all the time, and you want people to accept you and your religion, that is not normal. People are always questioning who you are. When you start this reflection about the Charter, it breaks something in you. Muslims were asking themselves why they (Quebecers) do not like us.

While Females #1 and #2 did not necessarily consider an us-versus-them dichotomy, and the focus group participants may not have as well, the description of Quebecers and the animosity sensed or perceived by Participant B and other study participants show that they experience an otherization even if they do not express it. Whether the otherization is a result of political issues, such as the Charter of Values which had been proposed in 2013, or a catalyst for political movements is unclear, but the marginalization of participants due to their Muslim identity is clear both in the comments from Participant B, and in the prior discussion on educational experiences. Participant B's comment regarding a reflection that "breaks something in you" beckons attention to the discrepancies in the hopeful and actual level of inclusiveness in Quebec society.



As a social-worker, Participant P also shared that certain socio-cultural aspects of Muslim culture raise struggles for youth due to the cultural conflicts between home and school. For example, in his experience, youth struggle to understand that having self-esteem does not equate to being prideful and that the notion of self-esteem taught in a public school does not conflict with that taught in an Islamic school, although some fathers are reluctant to accept public school teachings as readily. As a result of this tension between varying conceptions of what self-esteem may include, Participant P believes that the youth can become more fragile. This presents a source of tension that may arise from one's relationship in the family. Likewise, he noted that another source of tension is the cultural stigma for Muslims in certain communities to declare that they are struggling and to ask for help:

Particularly for psychological problems, the person will say if I ask a social worker to help me balance my life and correct myself, everyone will say I am crazy. So, this idea keeps the destabilization going on and this state of fragility to continue indefinitely. Meanwhile, someone will enter in the life of this youth and find him ready to be recruited easily. – Participant S

As a result of this lack of discussion, there is an inability for individuals to be informed about the local support systems that are available in Islamic or public schools, or other parts of one's mesosystem in Greater Montreal.

Findings in relation to the final research question also pose concerns about the reality of inclusiveness in the larger society and points to media sources as a means to communicate the exclusionary perspectives that exist in some circles within the non-virtual environment.



6.3. Negative media narratives more important than the use of social media itself

We aimed to explore the frequency of internet use by Females #1 and #2 on the phone and computer and their main sources of information on ISIS, but neither of these details was mentioned implicitly or explicitly by any of the research participants. Participants who described their observations and experiences with the females focused mostly on the life experiences, family dynamics, and social struggles of the females instead, presenting another focused concern on the social-ecology systems of individuals. Hence, there was no data to suggest the main source of radicalization for either female. Rather, the media was always mentioned in a broad sense, with minimal concern about social media. Facebook was the only social media platform that was mentioned, and it was referenced simply as a platform for information.

Participant F: It really is bad, just look at the comment sections in TVA Nouvelle, it really is horrible. My friends took away my phone because they didn't want me to go because I was subscribed to their page but it doesn't work.

Researcher: On Facebook?

Participant F: Yea, but I took it away because every time you go in the comment section, sometimes it is unrelated subjects but they still bring it around to Islam and Muslims. It really is stressful. Maybe I'm more sensitive than others but it really creates anxiety. I would lie if I say I wasn't scared once. Now, media portray this image of radical Muslims, now Quebecers, in quotation marks, but you know I said we're all Quebecers, they say we fear Muslims, they hate us. Each side fears the other, the media make us hate each other for stupid reasons. When there isn't communication, it really is because of that.

As such, social media and the internet were discussed as a source of information for participants in this research for whom these media sources mostly contained negative images of Muslims. This negative perception and Islamophobia in media outlets extended to damage participants' families as well.

Our parents had this image from the media and asked us to stop being involved. They started doubting, if we go to certain *halaqas* or courses, they ask us what we learned there. That isn't even the source of the problem. They touch on subjects that, to the contrary, that's what I want to learn, about my religion. Learn what my religion is and really find out what is my place in society. We are not interested in going to

Syria and put bombs. We are interested to change ourselves. – Participant F, Focus Group II

From this excerpt and focus group discussions, media sources appeared to raise parental concerns towards their children's vulnerability and susceptibility to extremist views. For young adult participants, the media was discussed negatively as the source of misconceptions about social relationships within Muslim communities and about Islam, echoing the thoughts of Participant K: "There are things that aren't necessarily correct, not the Islam that we follow. Like I wanted to say, it really is the media that made it that way." As a medium of information for many sides of society, media sources are described as an avenue to publicize ideas in society, what Participant F referred to as "an invisible hand that manipulates"; illustrating the effect of attitudes in the macrosystem that are manifested in the ecosystem. In the case of Participant K, the media's portrayal of Muslims led her mother to fear attack and reprisal from other members of society, so much so that she feared going outside alone.

Compared to online communication, face-to-face communication, exposure, and engagement seemed most important and negatively impacted on the young adult participants in our study, especially in relation to discussions on identity and violent extremism. This was illustrated by the discussion Participant F had with a CEGEP classmate.

Participant F: I spoke to a guy in my class and he was like 20 years old, he said, "Oh but you Muslims." Then I was like, oh my god, we are in CEGEP and we are supposed to be open-minded. Then he told me, "You do not let your women drive." I pulled out my driver's license and I told him, "What are you even talking about?" Then he said, "No, no, no, I saw it on TV. A group of people they were Muslims and they said that." Then I told him, but, "Yea that is only a group. Do you know how much we are in the world?" He told me, "No I do not know." "We are 1.5 billion." He said, "Oh my god." Then he really was..., it took him, 1 hour of discussion instead of doing the class. I was with him and I told him it is not like that.



Despite the public focus on the influential nature of online narratives and the use of social media and the internet to entice potential extremist recruits, our study found that for the research participants, media was seen as mostly influencing parental conceptions and shaping the perceptions of non-Muslims in society. Among young adult participants, media and online narratives were perceived as a negative source of information for themselves and fueled misunderstandings among non-Muslims. To dispel stereotypes, the young adults felt that the day-to-day in-person encounters were most impactful.

However, while young adult participants discussed the negative narratives about the Muslim community in local media, some adults discussed the dangers of these narratives in conjunction with violence abroad.

You can't change the world so no one will get radicalized. The reality of youth is the reality of the youth, but there are fundamental variables like violence that is found in society abroad, the Islamophobia atmosphere that has a link. That's why I said Islamophobia is a program against non-violent activist mobilization.
(Participant S, Focus Group I)

Violence against Syria, Iraq...it is important for the youth because they feel it. At home, they see parents looking at the news without trying to indoctrinate the youth. They live it; they feel the tensions of what they consider to be an injustice. What were schools doing during the reasonable accommodations debate to protect their student against Islamophobic discourse and feelings? We radicalize by participating in the general atmosphere and by creating the tensions that youth live and feel, not through the (school) curriculum. (Participant P, Focus Group I)

In both these circumstances, Participants S and P highlighted the impact of social discourse on events abroad in connection to what is discussed locally through media and implicit messages, an influential association that the youth perhaps did not notice or may not have considered.

To conclude this section, although our study aimed to learn about the specific experiences of radicalized females who left Greater Montreal, it was very difficult to obtain the participation of willing participants who were intimately associated with the females.



Overall, the key findings for this study were threefold. 1) Education: in formal educational institutions, push factors such as derogatory experiences in the elementary, secondary, and CEGEP levels appeared most pronounced in interactions with teachers and school staff, while harmful experiences (such as family tensions and discriminatory behaviour towards girls as compared to boys) in non-formal situations were not mentioned. Informal education in society was discussed as a foundation for marginalization that students experienced in school environments. 2) Family: Females #1 and #2 did experience hardship with their family members at times, but none of the participants thought a shift in their demeanour was a result of this aspect of their life. Among peers, the two women seemed warm and engaging, but their peers and other participants did acknowledge the discrimination they experienced as Muslims in society, especially towards women who wore the hijab, and considered that these experiences may have affected Females #1 and #2 as well. 3) Media: although researchers commonly study the use of social media and the internet as a means of communication and data source for potential extremists, this perspective towards the media was not discussed by research participants. Rather, they considered the media as a damaging and incorrect source of information about Muslims overall. Young adult participants in particular focused on the influential power of in-person encounters and conversations to support those who may be enticed and to question persuasive narratives towards extremism, and as a way to dismantle misconceptions that the media perpetuated. From these major findings, we point to three implications.

7. IMPLICATIONS

We suggest three implications regarding the social ecology of radicalization in Quebec. First, researchers need to continue to consider multiple influential factors that simultaneously lead someone towards radicalization. Focus Groups I and II noted that a variety of factors lead



towards radicalization, not just one. They felt that one cannot just blame the government; everyone is responsible, including schools and families. Focus group I specifically mentioned factors like a dysfunctional family, violence and a discourse on violence, an atmosphere of Islamophobia, a connection to other Muslims and “violence in the Muslim world” (Participant S), “the need to respond to the killing of civilians” (Participant P), and a compelling narrative. This macro-level review was locally contextualized by Focus Group II participants who listed historical, social, and political events, like the Charter of Values and attacks on Muslims, that influenced the environment, personal struggles and perceived identity of young Muslims, and how these are aggravated by the media in Quebec.

Second, in relation to the need for a concerted review across the social-ecology, concrete efforts are needed to improve the integration of cultural communities into the social institutions of Quebec society. In each of our focus groups, the lack of inclusion and integration of non-“Quebecois/e” (assumed to be White/Christian /Francophone) was discussed with regard to peoples’ schools (microsystem), interactions in one’s home, school, and community (mesosystem), and in the media (exosystem). Although this form of discrimination was never stated explicitly in public discourse, except perhaps in the media, negative public attitudes and behaviours were described and experienced by all our participants in every facet of their lives. With a focus on youth in our study, the school was discussed most prominently as a place of exclusion, discrimination, and tension.

Third, our findings suggest that improvement in teacher education is urgent. Interactions and communications with school administration and teachers reinforced the exclusionary attitudes that youth and adult participants perceived outside of the school. To address this discrimination, participants asked that teachers consider and foster in their students more open-mindedness and



honest communication, develop political consciousness among students, and equip them with critical thinking skills (so that students can even critique the credibility of a religious leader). At present, teachers tend to avoid controversial topics, but participants thought they should be trained to discuss issues that confuse students. It follows, therefore, that teachers must be supported by the school administration so that they do not fear reprisals.

8. CONCLUSION

Despite the disassembling of ISIS territory in late 2017, and the announced defeat of ISIS by the Iraqi Prime Minister on 9th of December, 2017 (Levenson 2017), several scholars continue to be concerned about the reach and influence of ISIS extremists online and in their home countries to which some may return. Likewise, our team is not dismissive of the continuing and far-reaching impact of disbanded ISIS followers or ISIS-inspired groups worldwide, as evident in several recent incidents. As such, our study and its findings remain relevant to the understanding of violent radicalization today.

The study raised points of consideration that echo other studies, such as the importance of social, political, cultural, and economic factors that stigmatize or exclude individuals from participating in a society, and the role of the family. Although it is difficult to gather participants on this topic, it is apparent that we need further study in the perceptions of radicalization based on gender, and the conception of a Quebecer in Quebec schools and in the larger society. Additionally, the question remains that although many Muslim students may have these experiences only some were radicalized and attracted to leave. Hence, the role of moral disengagement, a very important aspect that was not discussed in this study, requires further research. For example, how is it that a student in our school system has no problem supporting violence (even when they are not themselves participating in it physically), and the killing of



hundreds of innocent lives? Our strong recommendation is that since the school socializes and teaches children during the developmental phases of a child, the push and pull factors towards radicalization can and should be dealt with in school, not only in cognitive terms, but also by developing the affective and moral domains, which involve emotions and feelings of empathy and care.

Moreover, as Focus Group II consisted of peers of the two females, it was evident that youth perspectives differed from adult perspectives in our discussions. Thus, as most research on radicalization and extremism today is completed from the perspectives of adult researchers, while it is youth who are mostly radicalized, there is a need to understand the discussion of radicalization from the perspective of youth, compared to that of adult researchers or adults in the community. As these findings need to be discussed at length, they will be addressed in a separate paper.

With respect to our initial question of “*What circumstances make girls vulnerable to ISIS propaganda?*” based on the narratives that were shared by our participants, we learned that in these particular cases the educational settings were experienced as negative and exclusionary environments in formal, non-formal, and informal educational experiences at the elementary, secondary, and CEGEP levels. These participants and students were from one linguistic school system and there is no way to know from this study if their views would be different in the other linguistic systems. However, it is clear that urgent attention should be paid to teacher education because teachers and school administrators have a significant influence on identity development, classroom culture, as well as the school environment, one of the most influential aspects in one’s microsystem.

In each setting, the curriculum did not appear to be as concerning to students and parents as the relationships and communication among students, and between students and educators.



Many of the attitudes and behaviours in these relationships are influenced by societal norms as well, which participants believe are affected by the media and political figures in society. Family relations are very important for giving youth a sense of security. Traditional restrictions in a daughter's microsystem may be a highly influential factor, as with Female #1 whose father was "too aggressive with her, especially with her" (p.39). However, due to the difficulty in gathering data on this topic generally, much more research is needed on the topic of radicalized females. With respect to female agency and identity formation in the context of Quebec, there is a need to understand the different trajectories of radicalized women as they are a heterogeneous group. While our study was conducted over two years, we encourage future studies to permit more time in order to collect additional details and perspectives. Given that ISIS and other violent extremist organizations have been targeting women, children, and youth recruits to fulfill certain roles in their organizations, it remains urgent for researchers to understand the factors that propel individuals towards the drastic turn to violent radicalization.

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