

Listening to Prevent Educational Displacement: A Case Study

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Abstract: Analysis of a case of radicalization and its subsequent deradicalization makes clear three lessons: 1) a connection-first approach to preventing Educational Displacement preserves the bond between a radicalizing person and their non-radical community of origin; 2) through its thoughtful practice, listening — a protective and preventive practice both within and outside K-12 schools — builds, sustains, and preserves interpersonal connections; and 3) listening, as a practice that supports cultivation of our common humanity, builds collective resilience to radicalization, extremist ideologies, and the narratives of hate that seek to divide us. Listening is a unifying practice that strengthens resilience against radicalization through connection, not correction.

In *Wickedness*, Mary Midgley (1984/2003) spotlights a persistent concern regarding the “very existence of wickedness” (p. 16) as she recognizes that many thinkers treat the question of studying wickedness, hatred, resentment, and cruelty as attending to complex states in human nature that are imagined, not real. But she cautions against neglecting the study of such states since “disowning them can conceal their presence in us” (p. 134). As a method to study a concept like wickedness, Midgley asserts that one ought to find cases that illustrate the complex state under scrutiny and “concentrate” on them (p. 47). Researchers who study radicalization are aligned with Midgley’s methodological insight because the use of case studies of a radicalized individual enables the field to refine the application and understanding of learning theory to processes of radicalization. (Wilner & Dubouluz, 2011). One facet of Midgley’s theory of wickedness, namely, negligence — a fundamental failure to attend to oneself — focuses almost entirely on examination of individual expressions of human nature and personal motives behind wickedness. However, Midgley herself recognizes that insufficient attention is paid to social causes of wickedness (Joshi, 2025c). Following Midgley’s lead, we develop a case study of radicalization to discern both individual and social factors contributing to the process. Giving equi-importance to three facets of radicalization: 1) the individual on the path of radicalization, 2) the environment in which this process occurs, and 3) environmental influences that may accelerate radicalization, we share with you the story of Lauren Manning as an opportunity to determine social causes of and interpersonal protective factors against radicalization.

A compelling feature of Lauren Manning’s story is her choice to have it told from two, different points of view. Structured as a series of fragments told from the viewpoints of both Lauren and her mother, Jeanette, *Walking Away from Hate: Our Journey through Extremism* (Manning & Manning, 2021) presents a narrative of radicalization from the perspective of the person who radicalized (Lauren) and the perspective of the recently widowed, single parent witnessing her daughter’s gradual radicalization (Jeanette). One of the fundamental drivers of Lauren’s radicalization was that she did not feel listened to by anyone in her life. The absence of a listening ear engendered isolation, alienation, and ultimately the search for an alternative space of belonging outside of the home, the school, and the neighborhood in which Lauren grew up (Sabic-El-Rayess, Joshi & Hruschka, 2023c). Lauren and Jeanette’s co-authored book is sub-textually an account of mother and daughter learning again how to listen to one another. It was Jeanette’s commitment to maintaining a connection to her daughter that eventually brought Lauren home. Therefore, Lauren’s story necessitates recognition of the preventive power of listening as developed in Megan Laverty’s (2011) conception of ‘listening education’ where it is

through “the act of listening that humans fulfill, or fail to fulfill, the imperative that we seek to understand others” (p. 155).

Lauren and Jeanette Manning: From Invisibility to Radicalization

During her mid- to late teens, Lauren radicalized into the Neo-Nazi movement in Canada following experiences of Educational Displacement (i.e., a sense of invisibility) in school and at home. As Lauren recounts, her descent into a radicalized, Neo-Nazi community included adoption of a narrative of hate. But that was not how things had always been with Lauren. As we learn at the beginning of the story, Lauren was an ordinary kid who was, in fact, in early elementary school a supportive presence for a bullied peer in her class, Aaron. The awkward, sensitive, and slightly goofy boy — as described by Lauren — was the victim of frequent bullying and found it very difficult to build friendships. When Aaron’s mother and Jeanette began scheduling playdates for Lauren and Aaron, the two children grew closer. At this point in the story, Lauren reflects that “it felt good to have his friendship, to know I could give him a sense of belonging” (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 20). By befriending Aaron, Lauren, exemplified a meaningful protective factor against radicalization in schools and universities — peer acceptance. Unfortunately, Aaron transferred out of the school, and Lauren’s life journey took a turn for the worse.

Lauren’s mother shared that Lauren’s positive relationship with school began to sour after an incident in the 2nd grade (Joshi, 2022). Whenever Lauren attempted to offer a response during class discussion, the classroom teacher neglected to call on her. But, at a moment when Lauren was finally called upon, she was not only ridiculed in class for what she said but also felt that the teacher did not listen (Sabic-El-Rayess, Joshi & Li, 2026). Jeanette sees this incident as the onset of Lauren’s Educational Displacement. Educational Displacement is a sense of invisibility experienced by a person in a learning environment such as a K-12 or university classroom. Lauren being ignored by her teacher could charitably be interpreted as difficulties in distributing speaking time in the classroom. This was frustrating, but it did not immediately push Lauren away from school. It was, as Jeanette explained, the sense of displacement from the class felt when the teacher called upon Lauren only, it would seem, intentionally to disregard, demean, and distort what Lauren said (Manning & Manning, 2021).

Minor weight gain in her early teens prompted Lauren to feel “ugly and fat and I just wanted to hide,” (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 22). At the same time, the rapid deterioration of her academic performance in school deepened Lauren’s Educational Displacement. Nor did homelife offer support for Lauren. Jeanette shared that Lauren’s maternal grandfather, Poppa, shamed Lauren for “carrying a bit more weight” and criticized her for being unable to get a boyfriend. Further, Lauren observed that Poppa “disliked all visible minorities, Jews and gays” which made her keep secretly to herself that she was confused about her own sexuality (p. 29). Corroborating these observations, Jeanette acknowledged Lauren’s grandfather “peppered us with his opinions and prejudices ...intense dislike for Blacks, “Pakis,” and immigrants... I had learned at an early age to keep my opinions to myself...I didn’t challenge him out of respect” (p. 29). So, just as Lauren was experiencing Educational Displacement at the hands of teachers and classmates, we learn her home life mirrored the neglect and ridicule she felt at school. In a categorical statement

that defined her adolescence, Lauren writes: “I had no voice” (p. 24).³⁸ The pattern of displacement that spread throughout her life was what initiated Lauren’s search for an alternative space of belonging. In this way, she took her first steps upon the pathway to radicalization.

Her search for an alternative space of belonging (aside from school and home) led Lauren to discover the punk rock and heavy metal scene. While the intensity and aggression that typify such music is no cause for alarm in and of itself, Lauren began searching for bands online and found the genre of NSBM — National Socialist Black Metal. While the lyrics were less important to her when she began listening to songs, she noticed that several songs “spoke of taking back the land that is rightfully ours” (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 22). As she continued to listen to NSBM, Lauren began adopting fashion choices that signaled a growing engagement with the “lifestyle” of the punk community. To wit: She bought combat boots. While this may seem an unimportant or even amusing detail, sociologist Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2018), describes the process of normalization of extremist narratives through commercialization of radicalized clothing. Extremist-approved clothing creates an “aesthetic” that signifies a person’s degree of commitment to a radicalized community. For example, Miller-Idriss describes the apparel aesthetic of the racist skinhead in the United Kingdom in the 1980s as the “uniform” of a bomber jacket, combat boots, and — as the name suggests — a shaved head that exposed the skin on the scalp. In Germany, multiple sub-cultures have evolved beyond use of non-descript clothing items (e.g., a particular style of jacket or boot) to use of specific brands or labels that “code” hate-fueled messages on the products themselves. The average consumer, for instance, likely has no concerns about t-shirts with the word “Wustenfuchs” printed or written on them. However, Miller-Idriss explains how “Wustenfuchs” works as Neo-Nazi code by connecting “Wustenfuchs” to Nazi Germany. “Wustenfuchs” in English is “Desert Fox.” “Desert Fox” is the nickname given by Adolf Hitler to Erwin Rommel upon Rommel’s promotion to Field Marshall after Rommel lead Nazi troops to early, but ultimately unsustainable, victories against the Allies in North Africa’s Sahara Desert. Thus, “Wustenfuchs” becomes a private secret, publicly shared among radicalized community members. Commercialization of extremist aesthetic messaging has also seen the rise of brands like “Thor Steinar,” adopted by German Neo-Nazis as a brand expressive of loyalty to Hitler’s Germany. This brand has opened several flagship stores across Europe with wooden flooring and glass entryways to create a veneer of commercial legitimacy. The façade deflects questions about Steinar’s propagation of Neo-Nazi messaging via brand logos resembling Nazi military insignia.

Lauren’s initial foray into the punk scene resulted in her adoption of the aesthetic of the Neo-Nazi movement without any ideological conversion to Neo-Nazism. However, her interest in the aesthetic caught the eye of Donny, a recruiter for the radicalized community, who gave her “the pitch.” Lauren was reading about Nokturnal Mortum — a heavy metal band — when she stumbled into the radicalized community on Facebook. She received a message from someone named “Donny” that said: “I was wondering if you’re NS or just listening to NSBM (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 7). Lauren thought that these were both genres of music and said “no.” After sharing lists of bands and songs, Donny noted that several of Lauren’s choices “leaned towards racism.” Donny then sent a message with the following speculation: “With all of this you must lean on the NS side of things.” Lauren reflected on that early exchange and explained: “Not

³⁸ The Educational Displacement Model of Radicalization considers the home environment (i.e., the environment in which a person grows up) to be a learning environment. Emphasis on K-12 schools and universities (Joshi & Sabic-El-Rayess, 2023) does not negate the educational significance of a person’s home environment.

wanting to sound stupid, I didn't ask what NS [National Socialist] meant. I just enjoyed having someone to talk to," So, their initial conversation then grew into messaging every day. Donny shared stories of his White friends being beaten up by Black people and complained that Black people "always get away with this shit" (p. 47). Lauren, who was simply trying to fit in and felt like Donny was listening to her thoughts and views, said that these must have just been preppy school kids who caused the violence. Donny, who by this point had learned that Lauren had unaddressed grievances owing to the behavior of her classroom teachers and peers at school, validated Lauren's thoughts. He suggested that they meet.

As the dialogues between Lauren and Donny continued, he projected the blame for her unaddressed grievances onto a range of marginalized communities including Jews. Lauren acknowledged that she had "never known anyone Jewish but reasoned that he [Donny] knew more about people than I did. After all, he was twenty-six and lived in the city" (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 48). Soon enough, Donny began referring to the National Socialism movement and shared that he was part of this resistance against the minorities who were seeking to oppress white populations. Donny introduced Lauren to Stormfront, the white-supremacist, anti-Semitic, and Neo-Nazi digital hub, and she created an account. Lauren reflected on the "education" she received through this platform and the sense of empowerment she felt: "Donny referred to everyone outside the movement as 'sheep,' telling me it was good to be different, so this new knowledge made me feel better than they were. I kept reading so I could throw the movement's rhetoric at anyone who challenged me...I was learning to fear and resent anyone whose skin wasn't white...Whenever we talked, Donny would use whatever I said to lead the conversation into his own narrative about the victimization of the white race. I began thinking I was learning more from him than any of my teachers at school" (pp. 48-49).

It is noteworthy that even after several dialogues and in-person meetings with Donny, Lauren had not immediately adopted the prejudicial beliefs characterizing Neo-Nazi ideology. Reflecting on the reasons why she continued to speak with and meet Donny, Lauren said: "I like the way he spoke to me...He told me, 'You're smarter than everyone around you. There need to be more girls in the world like you.' He made me feel like I mattered" (Manning & Manning, p. 48). Lauren felt listened to, empowered, and valued by the recruiter who radicalized her. Following this, Lauren began skipping school and was introduced to Donny's crew of Neo-Nazis who called themselves "SD" — "from the German word *Sicherheitsdienst*, the intelligence and security division of the SS [*Schutzstaffel* — "Protection Squad"] and the Nazi party" (p. 50). After taking several trips to diverse neighborhoods across the city, Lauren began believing in the notion of white genocide. "We're being wiped out...What happened to you in the past is nothing compared to what a non-white will do with you," (p. 51) said Donny. This is a clear example of the scaling up of Lauren's personal grievances to the general grievances at the heart of Neo-Nazi ideology. Lauren, whose radicalization was deepening with each day spent in the company of her newfound friends, stopped interacting with non-white people and let her few friendships at school perish. Lauren's educators, peers, and school community didn't listen to her, and so she was recruited by a hate-fueled group that did listen to her. Lauren had radicalized. She labeled herself in interactions as a "white power skinhead" (p. 51), and began posting online that she had found the truth. Everyone else was misguided, but Lauren had found in the Neo-Nazi movement the answer to her search for belonging.

Preventing Educational Displacement through Listening

Lauren's story of radicalization makes three things clear: a) the process of radicalization involves learning; b) the learning occurs outside a formal learning environment; and c) the sense of empowerment felt by aggrieved, alienated youths enable the creation of a sense of belonging to the radicalized community not felt in other social contexts. This is how "thinking" becomes radicalized. Gemma Corradi Fiumara (2013) proposed the aim of a philosophy of listening is to "recover the neglected and perhaps deeper roots of what we call thinking" (p. 13). Western thought from the time of the ancient Greeks focused on *logos*. *Logos* can be translated as relating to 'word' and/or to 'reason'. If we think of the actions related to *logos* in these two semantic pathways, we have the act of speaking and the act of thinking. But, the tradition of *logos* has neglected the role, power, and importance of listening, especially as it relates to the experience of education. (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2003). We may extend this concern about neglecting to listen to include experiences in communities. Dewey's conception of democracy depends deeply on listening to others (Dewey, 1916/2011). However, the insight that mutually satisfying community life requires listening preceded Dewey by more than a century and a half, as detailed in Megan Laverty's (2011) work on the educational idea of listening in Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education*. (1762/1979).³⁹

Laverty (2011) begins by underscoring the importance of speaking and listening as a twinned activity that supports the cultivation of our common humanity. As Rousseau helps us understand, the relation asserted between two people by the activities of speaking and listening illustrates that connection precedes comprehension. While one can certainly maintain that the content of one's speech, upon listening, may change the nature of the implied relation between speaker and listener, the very fact that a relation was asserted creates an opportunity. Rousseau, Laverty points out, asserts that human wisdom can be understood through the development of "a sense of the true relations of man" (Rousseau, 1762/1979, p. 219). As persons who speak with and listen to others throughout the course of our everyday lives, Rousseau is attuning our sensibilities to the powerful realization that listening is connective. Rousseau recognized an insight about the act of listening: *Listening is characterized by attending to the speaker's sentiments* (Laverty, p. 160). Sentiments, which emerge from within, are shared by all human beings and enable the cultivation of our common humanity. As Laverty's rendering of Rousseau's conception of listening elucidates, humane communication is "premised on an inclusive outlook that sees all individuals, without exception, as participating in a condition that is shared or common" (p. 156). This is not, as Laverty helps us see, merely the absence of the experience of speaking but, more importantly, the absence of listening ears in the learning environment (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2021). While this universal insight about the importance of

³⁹ In addition, the significance of digital spaces where young people are venturing into uncharted waters without the mediating influence of a trusted parent, adult, mentor, or educator accelerated Lauren's process of radicalization as Donny became the mentor she had been missing as she turned 17 years old. As Jonathan Haidt (2024) has argued, it is the "underprotection [of children] in the virtual world" (p. 14) that has allowed children to explore dangerous online spaces without sufficient guardrails or protections. The United States, through the enactment of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in 1998, effectively set the standard for protecting children online. COPPA required children under 13 to obtain parental consent before they could sign a contract with a company to open an account, thereby accepting the release of their data and certain rights to use, for example on social media. On the negative side, however, COPPA seems to have arbitrarily "set the effective age of "internet adulthood" at 13, for reasons that had little to do with children's safety or mental health" (p. 4). As Lauren's story spotlights, the harms to children and even older adolescents in terms of the risk of radicalization were not adequately considered when legislating on the issue of youth engagement on the internet.

listening to the achievement of learning transcends the space of the classroom to include all learning environments, listening nonetheless suggests a connection-first approach in the classroom that helps prevent Educational Displacement caused by untoward experiences had by students in school.

Commonly, when educators enter the classroom, they hold the expectation that they will be the primary speaker. Just as typically from their perspective, students enter the classroom with the expectation that they will be listening for the majority of instructional time. The educator will be the principal speaker and students a collective of listeners. It is a puzzling instructional paradox to consider the extensive practice in listening that students engage in, while many educators forego a similarly extensive practice in a capacity that is crucial to the educational process. But paradox dissolves if we take a connection-first approach to pedagogy. Especially in light of preventing Educational Displacement, we ought to recognize that: “We regularly under-value and underestimate the power and significance of establishing our care prior to our credibility. Students are already led to believe that the teacher is an epistemic authority by virtue of their role in the life of the classroom. On the contrary, students are not always conditioned to presume that their educators care about them. So, a connection-first approach equips educators, practitioners, and well-minded citizens to practice a method wherein connection between an epistemic authority and a learner is prior to or at least parallel with the epistemic bond built between these two agents.” (Joshi, 2024b, p. 42)

With a connection-first classroom approach, listening plays an integral role in establishing care prior to establishing credibility.⁴⁰ When Vik, a co-author of this article, taught his first undergraduate course, he wished to emphasize instructional care for his students, and he stated intentions to care for each and every one of them during the educational experience. While he was met — as he had hoped — with some students who expressed appreciation for this disclosure, several other students did not simply accept spoken testimony at face-value. Vik remembers surveying the visages of students across the classroom. He saw looks of skepticism, curiosity, incredulity, and even amusement. Although it took time and practice to realize, moments of establishing care were strongly cemented when he was *not speaking*. Care occurred not only when he listened in the classroom, but — and to his great amazement — also when he read students’ writing and offered feedback, responded to emails with attentiveness and sensitivity, and during office hours with students who visited for dialogue.

When examining the importance of the concept of listening to Lauren Manning’s radicalization into the Neo-Nazi movement, it becomes clear that her experience of Educational Displacement in the classroom involved the repetitive failure of being listened to by educators, peers, and staff at school. By Lauren’s own admission, she had *no voice*. Even if it were the case that Lauren’s 2nd grade classroom teacher thought that the young child’s contribution to class discussion was deserving of correction, the response of ridicule and humiliation served to fundamentally harm Lauren’s *connective* possibilities *first* and her *epistemic* considerations *second*. Listening, considered as a practice in prevention of Educational Displacement, prioritizes a connection-first approach to pedagogy rather than a correction-first approach to training (Dillon et al., 2024). We would be remiss in failing to point out that radicalizing recruiters, like Donny, *listen* to educationally displaced youth, like Lauren. But Donny’s

⁴⁰ Nel Noddings’ (1984/2003) emphasis on grounding care work through epistemic and emotional responsiveness remains integral to understanding the educative power and significance of listening. For work that offers a framework for radical care in service of social justice education see Rivera-McCutchen (2021).

listening is merely a lure. It is instrumental only. It is listening devoid of a sense of reciprocity (Joshi, 2024a). In the radicalization process, the recruiter views recruits merely as means to an end, not as ends in and of themselves (Sabic-El-Rayess, Joshi & Hruschka, 2023a). Contrary to Donny's machinations, listening — in Rousseau's sense and within a connection-first approach to pedagogy — remains aware of the ends to which *both* speaker and listener are bound in this relation. Connection is at the heart of listening and it is this special feature of acts of listening that helps prevent Educational Displacement (Sabic-El-Rayess, Joshi & Hruschka, 2023b).

“Keep the Door Open”

We have seen that one social cause of Educational Displacement and, in turn, radicalization to commit hate-fueled violence — which Midgley (1984/2003) would undoubtedly confirm as an act of wickedness — is neglecting to listen (Hruschka, Sabic-El-Rayess & Joshi, 2025). Lauren's mother, Jeanette, herself noticed that her own negligence was part of Lauren's process of radicalization: “But when your last thought before going to sleep is “Will my daughter commit an act of violence against another human being?” you know you've missed something along the way” (Manning & Manning, 2021, p. 13). Reflecting today on her daughter's radicalization, Jeanette observed that co-authoring the story with her daughter afforded an important experience of listening to one another. The co-authoring process engendered the discovery for both Jeanette and Lauren about the experiences of Educational Displacement (i.e., the result of the absence of listening) that characterized Lauren's childhood (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2025). Growing up, Lauren was not met with a connection-first approach at home so the listening gap that characterized her her schooling interview prompted her search for an alternative site of belonging.

When speaking with Jeanette, we were able to ask: “What is one lesson that you can offer educators, parents, leaders, and community members about what supported Lauren's de-radicalization, her exit from the Neo-Nazi movement, and her return home?” (Joshi, 2022) Jeanette repeated a key insight that she includes in their co-authored story, “the most difficult lesson of all — how to keep the door open” (p. 15). She elaborated on the symbolic significance of “keeping the door open” as a metaphor for preserving a channel of communication between herself and her daughter. Her mother's extraordinary patience of waiting to listen, not to speak, is what brought Lauren home. Although Jeanette found abhorrent and worthy of severe moral reproach the views and beliefs that her own daughter began to espouse, she wisely and caringly prioritized connection over correction (Joshi, 2025b). Schools would be wise to employ a similar strategy. Silencing only ever estranges students. Listening always encourages students to learn.

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