Title: Cheering on the Jihad: An Exploration of Women's Participation in Online Pro-Jihadist Networks

Author(s): Laura Huey, Sociology, University of Western Ontario
Hillary Peladeau, Sociology, University of Western Ontario

Contact: lhuey@uwo.ca

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Research Questions:

1. Can identifiable patterns of engagement by female posters be discerned based on content of posts?
2. Does the type of the jihadist group studied have any appreciable effect on female members' posting content?

Importance:

This paper presents the findings of two separate, but inter-related, studies of the posting activities of women belonging to pro-jihadist online groups. To date, women's online participation within pro-jihadist networks has generated few empirical studies. Thus, little has been known of the extent of women's involvement in generating or otherwise supporting processes of radicalization. Drawing on analysis of women's Twitter content, this paper provides needed insights into the role of women within pro-jihadist forms of 'online radical milieux.'

Research Findings:

The data presented in this study shows that women within and across two different pro-jihadist networks (from both Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliated groups) use social media largely in a supportive capacity – that is, to support network members both emotionally and ideologically, principally in the forms of applauding male violence; propaganda sharing; and educating others on the prescribed behaviour, dress, values, ideals and codes of their groups. With the exception of those few women observed who are permitted to participate in recruitment on behalf of IS, women within both groups remained largely absent from more direct forms of group support and action.

Implications:

Our analysis suggests that while women within the networks studied are not overtly a threat—in large part, because of the extent to which pro-jihadist groups circumscribe women's online and offline activities—their activities on Twitter, and their active participation in distributing pro-jihadist content, helps to create and sustain a radicalizing environment within which individuals experience ideological and emotional solidarity.