# Twitter Thread by Daniella Mestyanek Young



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**Multiple friends have been reaching out lately, asking some version of "how did people get radicalized to such an extent?" and, more importantly, "why not us? why was I immune." As someone who's extremism in person, pretty much my whole life, here are some thoughts:**

These are EXACTLY the questions we should all be asking ourselves right now. Studies have shown that no 'type' of person is immune to radicalization or falling prey to cults or cult-think. There's no such thing as being "too smart" for that.

So, for starters, many of us were just in the right place and the right time, and didn't get radicalized. That is an important realization. It's important because as we begin to try to de-radicalize our friends, family and "good people" who fell prey to white supremacist thought

We need to start with compassion, or they will just shut down. Understanding deeply that it can happen to anyone is a big part of that. Now let's talk those who were primed for it, more likely to fall into conspiracy thinking and the Q cult.

In this case, those white people who see the movement towards equality for everyone as white people losing (which is true in a way, we have to give back much of the privilege we obtained from those who took it by force or manipulation) were much more susceptible to the rhetoric.

Similarly, the very religious (importantly, those who've never *questioned* their religion) were more susceptible. I had an aunt, a leader in the cult I grew up in (which was extremely anti-American, btw,) participate in the insurrection. ■■■■

For these people, AI & the algorithms we've all heard of, contributed an essential element of brainwashing--isolation. It's really, really hard to brainwash anyone if they are not isolated into that thought pattern (hint: that's something you can do to protect yourself).

Once people get far enough in that they are committed in ways that they feel they can't back out (ie, all of their friends & family know, they've burned bridges, etc.), and then they encounter two deeply held beliefs that conflict they literally cannot back out--mind gets to work

In states of cognitive dissonance, the mind can justify anything--literally. The cult I grew up in, for example, justified pedophelia as God's will. When I say the mind can justify anything, I do mean anything.

Nobody can break someone else's brainwashing, at least, I've never seen it or heard about it in ethical ways. The closest is deprogrammers (people like Ted Patrick, if you want a historical example) who usually engage in criminal activity, like kidnapping, for "greater good",

People have to take the first steps. If you have friends or family in this situation, you may have to accept that you might lose them for a while. You cannot argue someone out of brainwashing. They have to make the first crack in the ideology themselves.

So, how do we protect ourselves? How do we become the "lucky" ones that don't get radicalized? My favorite tips: read broadly & question everything. Literally, ask the question "why" all the time, no matter how much that upsets whoever you are talking to (imagine me as a 2LT ■).

Read books (preferably in print from reputable sources, less likely to be conspiracies) & read different things. Read fiction & fantasy, business books & leadership tomes, erotica & young adult novels. Oh, and read memoir. Especially cult-survivor memoir--you'll notice indicators

Know that *any* group is susceptible to group think (we all know people in the crossfit cult, yes?). A good clue is if all of your free time is being spent with one group of people, you are at risk. That means all gamers, all crossfit, all church, all veterans. DIVERSIFY!!!

Finally, (for now) never, never give your unquestioning obedience to anyone. In fact, be very wary of anyone who uses the terms "obedience" or "loyalty"--super risky. Good leaders should never, never demand your unquestioning obedience.

Surround yourself with different opinions. Don't be afraid to question everything you were taught growing up, or in the Army, or in a group, throw all that s**t together, stir it up, think about it, and question. Why, why, why?

And don't be afraid to walk away from BS. Not every idea deserves the same amount of attention or weight. There are not always "good people or ideas on both sides". Sometimes there is wrong & right, and once you've examined it just enough to know it's toxic, stop ingesting.

Thanks for hanging on for another thread. Always happy for comments, debate, concerns, emotional outbursts. (Misogyny, hatred, racism etc. are not welcome.