

#ExposeTheAltRight?

In August 2017, the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, turned violent and sparked a national controversy over the white nationalist, alt-right, KKK, and neo-Nazi ideologies that many demonstrators espoused. On social media, photographs of the demonstrations were widely circulated, especially images of the now infamous tiki-torch march during which demonstrators chanted white supremacist slogans. Notably, Twitter user @YesYoureRacist began to gather and release the names of right-wing demonstrators photographed in Charlottesville, using the hashtag #ExposeTheAltRight. Their photographs, with identifying details (names and hometowns), were retweeted tens of thousands of times and the demonstrators faced real-life consequences. One was publicly disowned by his family; another was fired from his job.¹

Logan Smith, the man behind @YesYoureRacist, explained the motivation for his viral tweets: “[Demonstrators] are out and proud. I think if they are so proud of their beliefs and proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with neo-Nazis and KKK members and white supremacists of all stripes, then I think their communities need to know who they are.”² Smith’s actions were praised on social media, and others used their platform for similar tactics. Actress Jennifer Lawrence posted images of the demonstrations with the caption: “These are the faces of hate. Look closely and post anyone you find. You can’t hide with the internet you pathetic cowards!”³ Proponents of these tactics contend that they are only giving exposure to people who chose to endorse an objectionable ideology in public and therefore forfeited a right to anonymity.

Critics, however, have called this practice “doxing,” a catch-all term for the internet tactic of exposing personal details as a form of shaming, intimidation, or vigilantism.⁴ They worry that retweeting people’s images with their names is an undemocratic form of mob justice. They also point out that people who take justice into their own hands will harass, threaten, or even assault not only a target, but also his or her family.⁵ Some also raise a worry about the possibility of misidentification, which could expose uninvolved people to harm, such as harassment or defamation. In the wake of Charlottesville, some people were initially misidentified as having been at the rally. Though these misidentifications have since been corrected, harms may linger.⁶

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What, if any, right to privacy does someone who attends a public event have?
2. To what extent are people who publicize a demonstrator’s identity responsible for the negative consequences that the demonstrator faces?
3. Doxing currently takes place related to many different issues and events and from various groups. Under what conditions, if any, is it morally permissible? When is it not permissible?

¹ <https://www.wired.com/story/doxing-charlottesville/>

² <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article167142317.html>

³ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jennifer-lawrence-charlottesville-march-white-supremacists_us_5991e436e4b09071f69ba084

⁴ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2017/08/18/the-dangers-of-doxing-and-the-implications-for-media-regulation/>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/08/15/543566757/twitter-account-names-and-shames-far-right-activists-at-charlottesville>

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/14/543418271/on-the-internet-everyone-knows-you-re-a-racist-twitter-account-ids-marchers>

