Where Are They Now?: The Costs and Benefits of Doxxing Far-Right Extremists

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Abstract

Research on far-right extremism has grown substantially over the last decade, owing to the rise of Trump, attacks such as the one in Christchurch and Buffalo, as well as the mainstreaming of hate speech and polarization. In addition to research, there have been antifascist activists who have been engaged in doxxing members of the far right who are part of our schools, our militaries, and governments. Releasing the private information of members of far-right movements to the public has created interesting policy and law enforcement dilemmas. With respect to law enforcement, can doxxing be used as a tool to force individuals to disengage from groups? For social media companies, doxxing violates their terms of service, but should an exception be made in these instances since it purportedly serves a public interest? For this paper, we interviewed 10 former members of the far right who have experienced doxxing over the last several years. The paper explores what happened, the immediate and long-term effects of doxxing on their lives, and ongoing challenges of being exposed against their will. We conclude with some policy recommendations related to the costs and benefits of doxxing on these individuals but also society at large.

Introduction

Research on far-right extremism has grown substantially over the last decade, driven by significant political and social events. The election of Donald Trump, and attacks such as those in Christchurch and Buffalo, have highlighted the increasing threat of far right ideologies (Veilleux-Lepage et al 2020; Amarasingam et al 2022). This period has also witnessed the mainstreaming of hate speech and polarization, facilitated in large part by social media platforms. Alongside these events, a dedicated group of antifascist activists has emerged. While they engage in many activities, one of their more controversial tactics has been the practice of doxxing members of the far right.

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Doxxing, the act of releasing private information about individuals to the public, has been used as a tactic against those embedded in far-right movements within our schools, militaries, and governments (Amarasingam et al 2024). This practice has sparked significant policy and law enforcement dilemmas. Can doxxing be a legitimate tool for law enforcement to force individuals to disengage from extremist groups? If so, law enforcement could, at times, strategically release information to journalists and activists anticipating that the consequences might benefit society. Should social media companies make exceptions to their terms of service in cases where doxxing purportedly serves a public interest? Such activities would generally be against the terms of service (TOCs) of these companies, but should exceptions be made?

The complexities surrounding doxxing extend beyond these questions. Doxxing challenges fundamental principles of privacy and raises ethical concerns about the potential for harm. While some argue that doxxing can expose dangerous individuals and serve a greater good, others contend that it can lead to harassment, loss of employment, and even physical harm. This duality makes doxxing a contentious issue in both legal and social contexts. These are the questions we set out to explore in this paper, with a particular focus on how doxxing far-right extremists has impacted their lives.

For this paper, we interviewed ten members of the far right who have experienced doxxing over the last several years. Through these interviews, we aim to explore what happened to these individuals, the immediate and long-term effects of doxxing on their lives, and the ongoing challenges they face from being exposed against their will. By examining their experiences, we seek to provide a nuanced understanding of the costs and benefits of doxxing, not only on these individuals but also on society at large. As will be shown below, our findings suggest that while doxxing can disrupt harmful activities, it also has significant personal and social repercussions that must be carefully considered. In the conclusion, we offer policy recommendations that balance the need for public safety with the protection of individual privacy.

What is Doxxing?

Doxxing is defined by Briony Anderson and Mark A. Wood as the "practice of publishing private, proprietary or personally identifying information on the internet usually with malicious intent," (Anderson and Wood 2021, 205). They argue doxxing falls under the broader category of technologically facilitated violence (TFV). However, Anne Cheung argues that doxxing does not always have malicious intent associated with it as doxxers may believe that the doxxing is moral in that it is exposing people that are threats to social welfare. Thus, the doxxer may have a positive intent to improve the safety of their communities (Cheung 2021, 577). This disagreement over the definition of doxxing demonstrates how the topic of doxxing is fraught with debate.

While there are debates around doxxing, scholars have developed largely agreed-upon explanations for the process of doxxing and its motivations. Roney Simon Matthews, Shaun Aghili, and Dae Lindskog highlight the stages of doxxing in their paper, which are find, verify, link, agglomerate/accumulate and publish. They explain that at the end a dossier is published that includes all the accumulated information about the person being doxxed (Matthews et al. 2014, 2). Anderson and Wood found through their research that there are four categories of loss that a victim of doxxing may experience: (1) deanonymizing doxxing; (2) targeting doxxing; (3) delegitimizing doxxing; (4) Loss of competitive advantage (Anderson and Wood 2021, 206). The first three were originally developed by D. Douglas in his 2016 article "Doxxing: a conceptual analysis", while the fourth was developed by Anderson and Wood, and specifically refers to the loss of economic standing usually due to the doxxing of proprietary information (Anderson and Wood 2021, 206).

Anderson and Wood also found that there are seven forms of motivation for the act of doxxing. None of these motivations are mutually exclusive to any other. These seven forms of motivation are: (1) extortion doxxing; (2) silencing doxxing; (5) retribution doxxing; (4) controlling doxxing; (5) reputation-building doxxing; (6) unintentional doxxing; (7) public interest doxxing. (Anderson and Wood 2021, 208). Extortion doxxing is done to extort money or other compensation from the victim. It may be done through the threat or actual act of doxxing (Anderson and Wood 2021, 208). Silencing doxxing is specifically used to push a

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person off an online forum, and it is usually in the form of a threat rather than the actual release of information (Anderson and Wood 2021, 209).

Retribution doxxing is done to punish a person for a (perceived) indiscretion. This form of doxxing also encompasses doxxing motivated by political interests, in the sense that the individual being doxxed or threatened with doxxing may have controversial or opposite views. It further encompasses people who were victimized by the doxxee but did not receive an adequate resolution through the formal justice system (Anderson and Wood 2021, 209). For example, if a sexual harasser was not adequately held accountable by the criminal justice system, their victim may publish their information to warn others about this individual. Controlling doxxing essentially describes a motivation that is directly opposite to retribution doxxing; it describes the use of doxxing for coercive control, usually by an intimate partner, as a part of a larger practice of violence/abuse. Reputation-building doxxing tends to be specific to online communities, like hacker groups, wherein doxxing is used to demonstrate the individual doxxing can obtain said information and is thus worthy of a place in the group (Anderson and Wood 2021, 209).

Unintentional doxxing has no negative intent associated with it and occurs due to negligence. Anderson and Wood use the example of a journalist accidentally, implicitly revealing the identity of a source (Anderson et al. 2021, 209). Finally, public interest doxxing refers to doxxing related to political transparency and accountability, as well as dangerous people, such as sexual harassers. Importantly, this example demonstrates how motivations can overlap: a person could have both retribution and public interest as coupled motivations (Anderson et al. 2021, 209).

Social and Psychological Effects of Doxxing

While the intent of doxxers and the act of doxxing itself has been explored by many scholars, the experiences of doxxees have been largely left unexplored (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 2). In his 2016 article, Douglas explains the importance of anonymity and obscurity to a person's identity. He writes that, "Doxxing undermines what Ruth Gavison calls, 'our concern over our accessibility to others: the extent to which we are known to others, the extent to which others

have physical access to us, the extent to which we are the subject of others attention'" (Douglas 2016, 202). Control over one's identity is important to social, intimate, and work relationships. Douglas explains that anonymity and obscurity are essential to personal security in all spheres of a person's life (Douglas 2016, 202). Qiqi Chen, Ko Ling Chan and Ann Shann Yue Cheung also explore the impact of doxxing on doxxees. The authors focus on teenagers and the use of doxxing largely as a form of cyberbullying. Through their study, they found that doxxing cause negative feelings in doxxees. Doxxees were found to have varying levels of depression, anxiety and/or stress, themes that also emerge in our own findings discussed below (Chen et al. 2018, 7).

Anjuli Franz and Jason Thatcher also explore the effect of doxxing based on information from 14 doxxees. In their study, Franz and Thatcher developed four categories to understand doxxees' experiences: (1) mental health; (2) social; (3) professional; (4) political/societal (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 10). They found that doxxees' mental health declined after being doxxed. They felt paranoid, anxious, suicidal, and depressed. In their social lives, doxxees found that they now have trouble trusting people, have withdrawn from social spheres and even have damaged reputations (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 10). In their professional spheres, doxxees have faced unemployment, bankruptcy, difficulty being hired, and a lack of support from professional social networks. Finally, in their political and societal spheres, the doxxees have become more cautious about what opinions they share and have even radicalized against law enforcement and opposing groups (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 10).

Franz and Thatcher also categorized doxxees' specific responses to their doxxers. There are three main categories: (1) approach; (2) avoidance; (3) a combination of approach and avoidance (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 11). There are several activities within each of these categories. Doxxees who fall under the approach category confronted the doxxer online and through legal methods (i.e., reporting doxxing to police), became more vocal about the root issues that were the reason for the doxxing, armed themselves in preparation for a physical attack, started psychotherapy, spread awareness about doxxing and actively started to rebuild their online presence (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 11). The avoidance techniques included withdrawal from society and physical spaces (i.e., moving house), deleting online accounts,

and developing numbness to the doxxing experience. The category of a combination of approach and avoidance is characterized by two major acts: taking physical and online privacy protection steps to ensure personal safety (physical and mental) (Franz and Thatcher 2023, 11). Thus, while there is a lack of literature on the social and psychological effects of doxxing, enough has been done to demonstrate that doxxing directly correlates to poor mental health as well as a decline in social, political, and physical security and success.

Social and Legal Debates Surrounding Doxxing

The social and legal debates around the merits of doxxing are deeply intertwined. This is because each individual state must decide which path among the three to take. They may decide the intent of doxxing is always malicious and thus potentially criminal or worthy of some type of reparation. They may decide that the intent behind doxxing can be variable and potentially good (and thus punishment becomes unnecessary in certain cases). Finally, they may decide that as a state they do not wish to address doxxing with any legal recourse despite it being considered morally wrong.

Anderson and Wood found the current differing legal opinions by various scholars based on different countries. They found that doxxing could fall under harassment within the South Australian Criminal Code (Anderson and Wood 2021, 220). They also found that the United States criminal law is focused on the effect of the doxxing rather than the act of doxxing itself; for example, people could be charged for doxxing if it helped in the act of stalking. However, the First Amendment has been preventing the prosecution of doxxing offenses, as it can be argued that doxxing falls under free speech protections. Anderson and Wood explain that "bizarrely, the Supreme Court held that the 'true threat' exception only exists if the doxxer 'subjectively views their actions as threatening,' with no regard for victim perspectives" (Anderson and Wood 2021, 221). In opposition, Anderson, and Wood highlight that the United Kingdom and the *European Convention of Human Rights* have expanded understandings of information privacy within the right to not be spied upon/surveilled in one's private space. They do so while also balancing a person's right to expression. Anderson and Wood argue using N.A. Moreham's 2014 article "Beyond Information: Physical Privacy in

English Law" that an "expansion of legal language to include the 'right to be free from unjustifiable surveillance, search and recording', would clarify modern privacy problems by treating online profiles as defensibly private, or at least a sphere of limited access" (Anderson and Wood 2021, 222). Clearly, based on Anderson and Wood's research, there is much work to be done in each state to legally reconcile issues of free speech, privacy, public welfare, and rights to personal safety (Anderson and Wood 2021, 222). The moral debates reviewed in the following paragraphs shed light on how various scholars believe this should be done.

Anne Cheung also addresses the debate about whether doxxing can be justified. Cheung focuses on Hong Kong, where doxxing of public figures has become common. She argues that this increase in doxxing signifies "a loss of confidence in the ruling authority and a yearning for an alternative form of justice" (Cheung 2021, 577). She argues that concern for public welfare can be used as a legal defense if the doxxee is a public figure. However, she makes clear that the doxxing should only reveal the information relevant to the political or social issue at hand. She argues that anything further is unnecessarily harmful. She argues that doxxing is a "tactic of political action and resistance" connecting to the previously discussed term tactical technical communication (Cheung 2021, 578).

In his 2016 article Douglas argues that sometimes doxxing is justifiable. He writes, "I will argue that deanonymizing doxxing may be acceptable depending on their rationale for anonymity and if there is a compelling public interest justification for revealing someone's identity. I also claim that delegitimizing doxxing may be permissible if it exposes evidence of actual wrongdoing of public interests, and that the information revealed must only be sufficient to establish that such wrongdoing has occurred" (Douglas 2016, 206). However, Douglas draws a line at targeted doxxing as it can lead to physical and mental harm. He founds this argument on public interest which he views as being restricted to the welfare of the public. Therefore, Douglas bases the justifiability of doxxing on the intentions behind it rather than the act itself. However, he does provide the opposing side of the debate to his argument (Douglas 2016, 208). One is that doxxing has the potential to mutate into vigilantism, which is not conducive to maintaining a controlled and safe law enforcement environment (Douglas 2016, 208).

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A Reddit moderator using the name 'Violentacrez' was doxxed and revealed to be Michael Brutsch. Brutsch was a member of the subreddits 'creepshots' and 'jailbait' which Douglas explains respectively "featured voyeuristic photographs of unsuspecting women" and "photographs of girls under the age of consent" (Douglas 2016, 204). Brutsch was fired following his doxxing. Douglas uses Brutsch's case to demonstrate the debate surrounding doxxing. On the one hand, many of his posts were in line with hate speech definitions and thus there is a public interest in preventing further posts. This is Douglas's argument. However, he does provide the opposing side of the debate: that doxxing has the potential to mutate into vigilantism, which is not conducive to maintaining a controlled and safe law enforcement environment. Another opposing argument in the debate is that the harm to the individual doxxed may exceed the harm to society (Douglas 2016, 209). Finally, Douglas also argues that the person doing the doxxing should not be anonymous as they should be held responsible for their actions in both social and legal spaces (Douglas 2016, 208).

While there are moral, social, and legal debates around doxxing, and thus no agreed-upon ethical framework, Jared S. Colton and colleagues propose the use of care ethics (Colton et al 2017). To understand this proposal, it is necessary to understand how doxxing falls within the category of 'tactical technical communication', coined by Miles A. Kimball, in his 2017 article of the same name. Kimball relies on de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics, wherein "strategies are the actions of institutions whereas tactics are the operations of individuals. Strategies are best understood as attempts to control individual agency through systems of rules, conventions, and expectations" (Kimball 2017, 3). Kimball expands on this to explain that "individuals engage in tactics that recognize institutional strategies and try to find ways to avoid or manipulate the strategies for personal ends," (Kimball 2017, 3).

Based on this, Colton and colleagues argue that, "because tactics are an art of the weak meant to appropriate, subvert, and resist the strategies of (in some cases, oppressive) institutions, we believe that a technical communicator who is interested in issues of social justice may be drawn toward applying tactics to his or her political cause" (Colton et al. 2017, 73). Colton and colleagues argue that an ethical framework is necessary to regulate tactical technical communication, specifically using care ethics, using Adriana Cavarero's concept of

vulnerability. They explain that Cavarero argues that vulnerability is an innate human experience and that there are two opposing responses or reactions to vulnerability in inter-human relationships: caring and wounding (Colton et al. 2017, 60). They argue that no inter-human relationship is neutral. Thus, any tactic can be categorized within an understanding of care ethics and the more specific ideas of caring and wounding, which are in no way mutually exclusive within each use of a tactic. In fact, care ethics used in this way are helpful because they are not black and white in that doxxing is not declared as being solely caring or wounding, but instead each act of doxxing will have its own unique mixture of the two (Colton et al. 2017, 60).

Method and Sample

For this paper, we interviewed ten former members of the far-right movement who had also experienced doxxing, either while in the movement or after leaving it. Ethics approval was obtained from Queen's University's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) for the project. Before starting the interviews, we prepared fifteen open-ended questions to gather information on four broad categories of the respondents' experiences: how they joined the far-right movement, the doxxing experience, the immediate impacts of being doxxed, and the long-term impacts of being doxxed. Participants completed the interviews via video calls, which were then converted to audio recordings and transcribed. As much as possible, identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and while quoting their thoughts below, we took measures to protect their identities. A Thematic Analysis approach was adopted for the project and steps outlined by Naeem and colleagues (2023) were implemented. First, one of the researchers and a research assistant separately immersed themselves in the transcribed data to identify initial themes and relevant quotes. Next, core ideas were identified in the data and used to develop codes (Naeem et al. 2023, 4). Codes were checked for quality to ensure they accurately represent segments of the data they apply to, and to ensure that they help in providing an interpretive lens for the broader research questions. The codes were then grouped together "in meaningful ways to represent the data" (Naeem et al 2023, 10).

Both authors have been researching and working with extremists and former extremists for many years. Potential participants were identifying through existing networks. Even still, recruiting participants was challenging. Many formers were hesitant to participate due to concerns about being identified or reliving traumatic events. Since one of these traumatic events was the doxxing experience, some were concerned that another round of media attention might follow if they spoke with us. The sample size is indeed small, but this is largely because participants (1) had to be a current or former member of the far right and (2) had to have been doxxed either while in the movement or after leaving it. Add to this the reluctance some formers feel in sharing their story, and we are left with a naturally limited participant pool. Despite these challenges, we interviewed ten former members of the RWE movement who had also experienced doxxing.

An important additional caveat about the sample: our sample includes individuals who were doxxed while still active in neo-Nazi movements, as well as those who were doxxed after they had left these movements. However, due to the small sample size, we do not engage in comparative analysis of how the timing of their doxxing impacted their deradicalization processes. This could indeed be a valuable area for future research.

Doxxing Far-Right Extremists

In this section, we examine some of the main themes from our interview data, exploring the immediate and long-term impacts, at times both positive and negative, of the doxxing experience. The data reveals a multifaceted and profound array of consequences. These impacts can be categorized into immediate and long-term effects on employment, family relationships, social relationships, mental health, and safety.

Immediate Impacts: Employment, Safety, Mental Health

For some of our participants, the doxxing episode resulted in immediate shame and embarrassment, with public ridicule and harassment. As one participant from the United States noted, he had been out of the white nationalist movement for two years by the time he

got doxxed, and it had immediate consequences on his ability to generate income as a social media influencer. As he (Participant A) states,

> During the pandemic I made TikTok videos about anime, and went up to 700,000 followers, 40,000 subs on YouTube, sponsorships and everything…I knew this whole thing about my past would eventually be a problem but I couldn't stop it, and eventually some people were able to put two and two together and find it out, and I was the main character on TikTok for a couple weeks…I left [the platform] after that.

For participants like this, the details of the doxxing were also not entirely accurate, which made matters worse with friends, family and employers. As he (Participant A) notes:

> There's some misinformation in my doxxing that muddles the dates. So you know I said I left [the movement] in October 2017 but the doxxing claims, because of some Facebook bio change, that I was still in it when they doxxed me. So basically, there was a racist quote on my Facebook that I didn't change because I didn't know it was there, because I don't even use Facebook… basically there are people who took that and ran with it.

At this point, the rise in his celebrity on TikTok had led to sponsors, who were his main source of income. All of that disappeared once the doxxing occurred. As he told us, "I was a spokesperson for one of the largest production companies…from a PR standpoint you can't have a former Nazi…and that's actually where the majority of my income was coming from."

This immediate impact on employment is one of the most significant consequences faced by those who have been doxxed. Another participant from the United States lost his job as a software engineer at Amazon almost instantly. He (Participant B) recounts the swift nature of this impact: "The immediate impact was that my job [software engineer at Amazon] was gone. So at this point the upside is that I know Jeff Bezos knows who I am. That's not much of a consolation prize I can assure you". Similarly, another interviewee (Participant C)

from Canada experienced repercussions in his employment with a pop-up non-profit COVID mutual aid organization. After a comment he made on Facebook was brought to the attention of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, he and the organizer mutually agreed to part ways. Another Canadian former extremist (Participant D) also faced suspension from his military job, highlighting the direct and immediate professional consequences of being doxxed.

Another consequence for many participants was impacts on their personal safety, especially for particularly high-profile members of the far right. As one interviewee noted, he was convinced that, based on his long-running belief that antifa was a violent organization, that he was going to be found and killed by antifascist mobs. As he (Participant E) told us,

> That was the biggest worry. I thought ANTIFA was going to kill me or kill my parents. I had a tomahawk, and I was [to his parents] like 'here put this in your office'. That wouldn't do anything because they weren't prepared to use a tomahawk to defend themselves, but I was worried about them…I've always been a licensed gun owner, so I didn't actually have much fear. The big thing was I started sleeping with a knife behind my bed which I never did before.

For another participant (Participant F), whose personal information was made public after his face was plastered all over the media, the everyday consequences were much more traumatic and unceasing, from being harassed at school and being spit at when recognized at restaurants.

> I was in every article, I was on every news story, I saw myself everywhere. I was recognized everywhere. I remember the university got so many threats against me and against the university. I met with their head of security, and I had an officer with me the entire time I was on campus – a police escort. It was my new normal, there was nothing I could do, it was always this deep concern of I don't know how this person is going to react. I don't know if the wrong person is going to see me and hurt me, and I don't know how to react. There was the time I was mobbed when I did my senior thesis presentation to my classmates. There was a big protest waiting for me. A lot of

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them yelled at my mother. My mother is five feet tall, and a cancer survivor – like, please don't yell at my mother. They were yelling things like 'why are you a Nazi shit'. They wanted me to get the fuck out but also made a wall so I couldn't leave. I had a police officer escort me to my car. That was the most extreme thing that happened at the university.

This participant, who had only been a member of the far right movement for a few short months when his face was shown all over the media, went through extended periods of anxiety and seclusion. He was afraid that he would be recognized, harassed, or even violently attacked if seen in public. People who knew him best tried to be supportive and help him get through it, but it still took a long time to build up the confidence to go outside. As he (Participant F) tells us,

I went numb, I wanted to be worried, but I was just lying on the bed just not doing anything. It eventually started evolving into a kind of freak out and not caring at the same time. It was this really bizarre mix because, on the one hand, I knew I was panicking and, on the other hand, people around me gave me the sense of confidence that everything was going to be ok. The people around me were friendly, they bought dinner, they laughed at everything. Kept going back between who cares and freaking out, changing by the second.

Doxxing also places a strain on family relationships, often causing significant stress and conflict. One participant, the former TikTok celebrity mentioned above, describes how he has kept his political activities hidden from his conservative Republican father to avoid upsetting him. He (Participant A) notes, "The only family member I'm close to is my dad and he's a conservative republican so I don't like bringing up politics. He doesn't know about any of this and he never will". Another interviewee's mother struggled to understand his involvement with white nationalism, while his father was astonished that his political views could lead to his dismissal from work. As he (Participant B) notes,

My mother had a very hard time with the consequences, she didn't know I was a white nationalist. She had a really hard time with the concept, even understanding what it was and all that. Oddly enough my father who I still consider slightly naïve on some subjects, he was kind of amazed I could be fired for a political position.

Another participant mentioned how his mother occasionally searches his name and discovers distressing information, which he tries to downplay. The participant who had his face plastered all over the media received some support from his family, though they found out about his doxxing later. As he (Participant F) noted:

My parents both said something along the lines of 'you're an idiot, but you're not a Nazi; you're not a racist. You're just really dumb, really stupid'. There wasn't condemnation. Yes, you really fucked up but we aren't going to abandon you right now. We are going to help you weather the storm. It was very nice having their support. They let me just relax and put it all away for a bit. They knew I was dealing with it outside, so there was an unspoken rule of just ignore it, let's just be normal [when inside the house]…At this point I'm also extremely alienated. I lost all my friends, all my social activities, any degree of normalcy was gone…it was extremely lonely and isolating. I wasn't talking to people online because I didn't want to be around people, so it was this really deep sense of isolation.

The doxxing of former white nationalists often leads to immediate and severe consequences, including public shame, harassment, and significant professional impacts. Overall, doxxing led to profound and multifaceted immediate impacts on the lives of those who had left far-right movements, affecting their employment, personal safety, mental health, and family dynamics.

Long-Term Consequences

The long-term impacts of doxxing on employment opportunities were profound for many individuals. For the former TikTok celebrity (Participant A), the consequences of being

doxxed became particularly significant after he graduated. Despite having a stellar academic record, including a 4.0 GPA, two published research papers, and leadership roles in multiple clubs, he received no interview offers. As he noted, "I graduated from my bachelor's degree in 2020, top of my class... zero interview offers." This was compounded by misinformation in his doxxing that muddled the dates of his involvement with far right groups, which affected his mental health and career decisions.

Another interviewee from Canada experienced immediate job loss following his doxxing. He (Participant D) recalled, "I was out of work starting when the article came out... then in April I started at a greenhouse." He highlighted that living in a rural area with less stringent background checks made it easier for him to find work, although it was not ideal. Another participant from the United States found it challenging to find work until he was able to convince antifascist activists to take down the dox from their website. As he (Participant B) told us,

> I made it a point to get in touch with most of the Antifa. Like, 'hey guys I get why you did this, I'm out of the movement now, can we talk about getting your work up on me taken off the internet?'. Because I'm sure most doxxing make someone very, very googleable. Antifa requested I get in touch with one of their approved antiracist activist people and I did, and that person sent them confirmation that I was indeed not involved in the movement by their assessment. And they agreed to take it down right at that point.

For another Canadian participant, finding work remained difficult due to the negative publicity from his doxxing. He (Participant C) noted, "I am definitely having trouble finding work because of what appears when you search my name." Despite participating in research studies and interviews to balance out the negative search results, the industry he wanted to enter still actively used online networking, making his job search challenging.

The long-term impacts of doxxing on social relationships varied among individuals, influencing their interactions with friends, partners, and broader social circles. One Canadian former's experience highlighted both resilience and adaptation in maintaining social

relationships post-doxxing. He (Participant D) shared, "I had one friend google me. I kinda explained what happened and they were like 'ok' I never had issues with the schools, with partners, I've had a few girlfriends since I was doxxed. I'm honest with them and no one has cared very much if at all." However, the doxxing incident did lead him to consider changing his surname to avoid future confrontations. He explained, "That issue with my friend googling was like a month ago, so it's ongoing. I plan on changing my name I think when I go back to Calgary. I've never been confronted about it in person, so that shook me up a bit." Potentially changing one's name to escape the attention brought on by the doxxing was expressed by a few participants, who struggled with wanting to keep the name their parents gave them, as well as to avoid the appearance of trying to erase their past, with the more practical consideration of moving on with their lives.

For another participant, the impact on social relationships was more profound, especially in terms of professional and personal identity. He (Participant E) discussed the challenges of disclosing his past, stating, "The challenges now are probably trying to bring it up to people in a way of saying that I'm a former, there's a lot of baggage there though." The discomfort extended to encounters with former associates, as he recounted, "I know neo-Nazi lawyers in Toronto, and I've cut myself off from that scene, and that's very uncomfortable to me because I saw them a few times since I've been back. They would introduce me as the most famous neo-Nazi in Canada." Despite advice to stay out of the public eye, he expressed ongoing concerns about potential revenge from within the movement. When asked if he planned to go public as a "former", he noted:

> No, I don't think I need to be more public. [Friends] even suggested I don't go public. You have too much riding, you're literally a lawyer in the States. I also plan on taking over my dad's law practice in the future when I get licensed. He's like, you do not want to go public, but I feel like I could be forced into a place to go public because these guys are very vindictive, some of them in the movement…that's a fear in my mind that there will be a revenge type thing happening.

The former who became famous in the media after his doxxing found a supportive community in his religious circles, which helped him navigate social reintegration. He (Participant F) explained, "Most of my friends that I socialized with were part of the religious community, Catholic, [and they said] 'you know the reason why we're so forgiving is that we're Christians, it's the fundamental thing we have to do so you know if you're making a genuine effort to be better, it's our responsibility to bring you in'." This sense of forgiveness and inclusion was crucial for providing a foundation for rebuilding his social life post-doxxing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To conclude, we examine the question of whether participants see their doxxing – and the doxxing of other members of the far right – as personally and societally beneficial in hindsight. Responses proved to be complex, blending regret, growth, and mixed outcomes.

As one American former noted, the potential positive effects of doxxing on both awareness and personal transformation depends on the individual. He (Participant A) explains, "I think there are some people who need the doxxing to, first, realize the danger of being a part of this and, second, there are some people who after being doxxed have changed because of it." For him, the doxxing event catalyzed his involvement with Life After Hate, a step he might not have taken otherwise: "While I have been trying to make amends since it happened, I've been doing more since it came back up on TikTok, I think. I would never have gotten involved with Life After Hate again, or the first time, had I not been doxxed, had I not come back up on TikTok." He felt the doxxing he experienced was necessary, but wished it had been conducted more accurately since, as noted above, the mistakes in the details of his doxx caused a lot of problems with his friends and family. He feels somewhat liberated by the experience, stating, "I feel a bit more free…had it not happened I probably would have been hiding all the time", yet he remains uncertain about its overall benefits, acknowledging, "It's really hard to say what would have been better". Ultimately, he concludes, "I don't quite know if it is good or bad, I think it really depends on the target".

A Canadian former's perspective is more critical. He (Participant D) insists his decision to leave the far right preceded the doxxing, stating, "I definitely wasn't involved in these groups, then doxxed, and had a sudden change of heart. It was like I made the decision on my own to leave because I kinda realized how shitty it was, so I think that's a big factor". He views the doxxing as overwhelmingly detrimental, recounting significant personal losses:

I don't think there's anything beneficial to it [being doxxed]. I think that was the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I don't benefit at all. I had major, major consequences. I lost two very well-paid jobs, 90 percent of my friend group didn't want to associate with me, now they're coming back a little bit, it's still tense, and I don't live in Calgary anymore. What else happened? I was supposed to do my master's overseas, and the story caused troubles with my visa which is the whole reason I'm in Ontario actually, I had visa issues.

Despite recognizing the potential security rationale behind doxxing, he questions its overall efficacy:

Let's say you're someone such as myself, you left years ago and you're doing a bit better and you get doxxed, you lose your employment. You might have a risk of recidivism. Thankfully that didn't happen to me. I have a good support system with my family and some of my friends, but I'm sure that there are many that don't have that at all, they could go back to associating with their past friends or groups, if you want there to be less far-right extremists it's not really conducive to that goal necessarily.

Another participant (Participant E) presents a nuanced view, expressing uncertainty about whether doxxing significantly influenced his exit from the far right: "I want to say, this might be strange, it may not have ended up any differently. It may have though. It's hard to say – I may have exited just in the same way. Actually, I may have not gone as hardcore, I may not have joined Patriot Front, possibly, possibly, I don't know one way or the other. But

I could see me maybe fading away earlier." He recalls his initial reaction to the attention from doxxing, admitting, "Because if I'm honest I loved it at the time, I was like this is my fifteen minutes of fame so to speak, like this is wonderful." The "fifteen minutes of fame" allowed him to travel to different parts of the country and skip the vetting process when joining other groups – since he was already well known due to the doxxing. The doxxing, then, allowed him to join darker and more violent groups because he brought some level of fame with him.

The participant (Participant F) who had his face plastered all over the media describes his doxxing as a critical moment for self-reflection, recognizing it as the beginning of his departure from the far right: "It was probably the first real moment where I realized I was going down the wrong path. That was probably the first kernel of not regret but a desire to move on and it was very small, and it didn't really exist yet in a big way but ya that was when I was first like my parents are right you know I really am stupid for doing this and you shouldn't do this". He experienced a conflicted response, oscillating between defiance and a genuine desire to leave the movement: "on the one hand it was absolute defiance, dig your heels in, no I will not change its who I am, dig your heels in and defend yourself. But behind the scenes…I also told myself I'm not going to be associated with these people anymore. It wasn't for me." Despite the personal and professional setbacks resulting from doxxing, he acknowledges its role in his development. As he states:

> On the one hand I'm glad it happened because I think it was kind of a forceful correction but on the other hand it's frozen my dreams, I've been told directly that my path to my PhD is harder because of this. I've been rejected by schools repeatedly. Getting into one is an absolute miracle. It's put my career development on absolute hold even with me saying this happened because of this, I want to undo what I've done and a lot of them are just like, 'no'. It's this catch-22 you can't be trusted because you haven't done anything, and you haven't done anything because people don't trust you."

Nonetheless, he concludes on a positive note about his personal growth, "It has forced me to develop into a better person. I am happier with who I am today than I was in college.

I'm not angry anymore, I'm not disgusted anymore, I'm happier in my every day. My friends are better than the ones in college, even if I was more social before. It has forced me to become better."

Based on interviews conducted for this study, several policy and behavioral recommendations can be made for law enforcement, social media companies, and antifascist activists considering the practice of doxxing.

Recommendations

Law enforcement agencies contemplating the use of doxxing as a tool to force disengagement from extremist groups should tread cautiously. The immediate and long-term impacts on individuals who have been doxxed, as outlined in this study, highlight significant personal and social repercussions. Doxxing can lead to public shame, harassment, and severe professional consequences, which may further isolate individuals and push them back towards extremist groups rather than encourage disengagement (Gomez et al 2011; Pfundmair 2018). Therefore, law enforcement should consider alternative strategies that do not involve public exposure of personal information. Programs focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration, which offer support and counseling rather than public shaming, may be more effective and ethically sound.

Social media companies must uphold their terms of service, which typically prohibit doxxing. Allowing doxxing to remain online, even if it is perceived to serve a public interest, can result in significant harm, including harassment, loss of employment, and mental health issues. Companies should implement stringent policies to remove doxxing content promptly and ensure that mechanisms are in place for reporting and addressing such violations swiftly. Additionally, companies could collaborate with law enforcement and experts in extremism to develop more nuanced policies that protect user privacy while also addressing legitimate public safety concerns.

Antifascist activists considering doxxing as a tactic against far-right extremists should weigh the moral and ethical implications carefully. While the intent may be to protect the community and expose dangerous individuals, our research highlights that doxxing can have unintended negative consequences, including misinformation, public harassment, and long-

term professional and social isolation for those doxxed. Antifascist activists should continue to have lines of communication open for those who have been doxxed to reach out and have a dialogue, as occurred with several of our interview participants. As these individuals leave the movement, the personal information should be removed from online spaces so that it does not create ongoing obstacles for employment, education, and relationships. As some research has shown, the process of leaving itself is rife with post-exit stressors that should not be compounded (Meredith and Horgan 2024). If doxxing is deemed necessary, it should be carried out with meticulous attention to accuracy and the potential impacts on the individual's life (Clubb et al 2024).

It is essential to also clarify that our study focuses on individuals who have been involved in far-right extremist environments, including both those who have committed crimes and those who have not. We acknowledge that in many countries, including the United States, one can legally be a neo-Nazi without engaging in criminal activities. Our research does not imply that merely holding far-right views legitimizes doxxing; rather, it highlights the complex ethical landscape where doxxing is employed as a tactic against individuals perceived as threats due to their affiliations or actions within extremist environments.

It is true that the ethical implications of doxxing non-criminal individuals who hold extremist views warrant serious consideration, and should be discussed more in the field. This complexity is precisely why we refrain from endorsing or condemning doxxing as a blanket practice. Instead, we explore its varied impacts on individuals and communities, recognizing that doxxing can lead to significant personal and social repercussions regardless of the legal status of the individual's actions. Ultimately, if helping individuals leave hateful movements and getting them to reintegrate into society is the ultimate goal – and we argue that it should be – then some real thought needs to go into the role that doxxing plays in this process, when it may be harmful, when it may backfire, and when it may be necessary.

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