

Negative Social Preferencing, ICE Edition

On June 19, New York based artist, programmer, and activist Sam Lavigne published a list of 1,595 Immigration and Customs Enforcement employees and publicly available information about them (remember those two words: “publicly available”).

Lavigne provided a public service that in anything resembling a free society would be completely uncontroversial. Instead, moral panic ensued.

Github deleted the information from its repository. Twitter suspended accounts calling attention to it. It eventually found a home at WikiLeaks.

On June 24, the US Department of Homeland Security (of which ICE is a subsidiary) claimed “heightened threats” versus its employees and reiterated recommendations (per CBS News) “including not displaying work badges in public, being careful with public conversations and using caution on all social networks.”

Donald Trump’s Internet base — which loved WikiLeaks when it released emails exposing corruption in the Democratic National Committee — exploded with rage, calling for a raid on Ecuador’s UK embassy to drag Julian Assange to America for “justice” (he’s been held incommunicado for months and presumably had nothing to do with this project) and for charging Lavigne as an accomplice in any attacks on ICE employees.

To see what a tempest in a teapot this is, remember the “publicly available” angle.

The sources for Lavigne’s database are the ICE employees’ own public LinkedIn profiles, on which they openly state who they work for. Their reasons probably run to networking with others in similar jobs, and seeking other employment, but once you put something on a public-facing web space, the public gets to notice.

Lavigne didn’t hack into an ICE computer. He just took information that anyone with a web browser could have found any time they cared to look, and organized it into a more convenient format.

But let’s just suppose that Lavigne had instead built his database from, say, a leaked ICE personnel list. If so, so what? These people receive their salaries from taxpayers and claim to work for “the public.” On what grounds can they claim a right to have their employers not know who they are?

As far as “threats” are concerned, the real but largely unspoken one is well-deserved negative social preferencing.

If decent people know that the guy next door abducts people at gunpoint for a living (or conspires with others to facilitate such kidnappings), they probably won't invite that guy to their next backyard barbecue. Especially if some of the other guests may speak Spanish.

Until ICE is abolished, which can't happen soon enough, the next best thing is to make it an unattractive employment option.

If you work for ICE, you should be denied service at restaurants, denied communion at churches, and have to explain to your kids why they aren't invited to other kids' birthday parties or play activities. And thanks to Sam Lavigne, we know who you are.

If you work for ICE, give your two weeks notice, find a job in the productive sector, and work hard to redeem yourself and live down your sordid past. This is an opportunity. Seize it.