

@YesYoureRacist Crowdsources Social Preferencing

The Twitter account @YesYoureRacist went up in 2012, but jumped from about 65,000 followers to more than 350,000 in the days following Virginia's "Battle of Charlottesville." After an army of white nationalists rioted to "Unite the Right," murdering one and injuring dozens, @YesYoureRacist admin Logan Smith swung into action to identify, then "name and shame," the attendees.

He's getting lots of help. As photos of the thugs go up, the leads come in. At least one of the Charlottesville marchers is looking for a new job after his employer learned what he was doing on his time off. At least one family has disowned an outed "white nationalist." There will likely be more of both.

@YesYoureRacist is a crowdsourced, social media powered implementation of "Social Preferencing" — the name given by Paul and Kitty Antonik Wakfer of The Self-Sovereign Individual Project (selfsip.org) for a process of "effectively extending market preferencing to all aspects of human interaction."

There's nothing new about Social Preferencing as such. Simply put, it amounts to rewarding people by befriending and trading with them or punishing people with personal and economic ostracism. Human implementations of the practice precede recorded history. It's a natural behavior.

But the Wakfers' use of it presciently — they developed their framework before social media as we know it was born — comes in the context of a "Natural Social Contract" requiring "full openness concerning one's Societal InterPersonal Relationships and the strong Social Preferencing that will be enabled and promoted by such accessible Personal disclosure." Enter Twitter.

Projects like @YesYoureRacist make the information needed for rational Social Preferencing decisions more widely available and more easily accessed. Ostracism (and its opposite) need no longer be handled retail, by word of mouth at the barber shop and on the phone. We're all just a click away from being, if not famous, at least easily known in some detail to anyone who has reason to care and to look.

Are there likely pitfalls to a society in which social media boosts our ability to engage in informed Social Preferencing? Yes, there are. There are going to be mistaken identities. There are going to be false claims. But then, there are mistaken identities and false claims now, aren't there? Presumably, massive crowdsourcing will minimize such things by bringing multiple sources to bear.

The main objection to @YesYoureRacist doesn't cut much ice with me. The project is not an

“invasion of privacy” or a “violation of rights.” The Charlottesville marchers engaged in public action with the explicit purpose of attracting attention. Mission accomplished. They got noticed. Now they want the rest of us to forget what we saw, or at least refrain from acting based on what we saw. That’s not going to happen.