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Update on NCR suspending comments

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

I am preparing a longer response to reactions I have received since *NCR* suspended the commenting feature of our website yesterday. I have a newspaper to get to the printer before I can do that, so for now, let me offer this for your reflection. It addresses well the quandary we face.

First, let me correct two things that some people are misreporting:

1) We have suspended the comments, not closed them down completely. I wrote yesterday: "NCR editors will explore options that will allow commenting to return in a way that respects our writers, the subjects of our stories, and our readers." Yes, I did write the suspension is "indefinite," because we don't know how long the evaluation will take.

2) We are not reacting to "irreverent comments." The words I used to describe the comments were "malicious," "abusive" and "vile." An *NCR* contributor called me and asked me to read some of the comments over the phone to him, and I declined. That's how vile they were.

To get an idea of what we are struggling with, read Amanda Hess' piece at *Pacific+Standard*, "Why Women Aren't Welcome on the Internet," and Conor Friedersdorf's reaction to Hess on *The Atlantic* site, "When Misogynist Trolls Make Journalism Miserable for Women." They may give you some idea of what we are struggling with.

Hess writes:

"Ignore the barrage of violent threats and harassing messages that confront you online

every day.? That?s what women are told. But these relentless messages are an assault on women?s careers, their psychological bandwidth, and their freedom to live online. We have been thinking about Internet harassment all wrong.

Friedersdorfs adds his experience:

? when my duties included reading email sent to Andrew Sullivan at The Daily Dish, I discovered that gay men, too, are subject to this sort of comment that was previously invisible to me: not just over-the-top invective, but intensely personal missives of hyper-sexualized hate. That's the best I can do to sum them up, but it's an inadequate description. And an excerpt wouldn't much help, because to really understand how it feels to read these missives (to the extent that someone other than the intended recipient can even begin to understand), it's necessary to experience their regularity. Instead of a lone jerk heckling you as you walk down a major street, imagine dozens of different people channeling the same hyper-aggressive hatefulness, popping up repeatedly on random blocks for hours on end. That's what some bloggers had to endure over the course of years to make it.

The invective isn't directed at me personally, but to our writers and the people they write about, and toward other commenters. And it is relentless. That?s the kind of stuff we?ve been dealing with.

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