

Social media no place for a rational conversation

You can't have a healthy debate with trolls, writes Rachel Lauren Clark



RACHEL CLARK
Column

I just had one of the best days I think I have had in a long time.

I had just finished my office holiday party and was looking forward to spending the holiday with my family.

It is always a hectic time for everyone, and for me, I was nearly done and could relax.

I sat down and ordered a latte at the local coffee shop, pulled out a book that I needed to read for my class and sank into the plush sofa.

Suddenly my phone made an obnoxious buzz. I glanced at it. It was a Twitter notification.

I felt anxiety push down into my stomach.

As I write and do more justice-based work, I am often challenged on social media and through my email. I don't mind hearing alternate opinions, if they are respectful.

The disrespectful ones, and there are unfortunately many, I often delete or ignore.

Nevertheless, I would be lying if I said that it didn't bother me sometimes, and I think it would bother any human with emotion.

The comment was from a yet another anonymous person with an axe to grind.

Their comment was especially over the top, however.

Violent and filled with hate, advocating physical harm to me. "OK," I said, "just breathe." I pressed the 'report' button on Twitter and sent it.

It wasn't very long that Twitter responded and said that the violent speech did not violate their rules.

In fact, they said my options were to go to the police, ignore, or block the offender.

Blocking is a temporary solution because it isn't foolproof.

Also, I wasn't going to report an anonymous threat to the police. What were the police going to do when it is anonymous, and Twitter is complicit in promoting it?

ESPN senior writer Wright Thompson left Twitter and vows to never go back.

He says, "I don't understand why anyone in the world gets to [swear] at me and I have to read it on my phone?"

Indeed, I wonder the same and believe that Twitter is a garden that sows the seeds of division in our community - not inviting discourse, but rather giving power to violent

behaviour while silencing those voices who need to be heard the most.

Freedom of expression, even anonymous speech, is one of the most important rights we have as Canadians.

However, nobody deserves to be bullied on social media.

Speaking from the anonymous bully pulpit exceeds the candour of free expression and delves into harassment.

In the old days, you had recourse when someone was harassing you, but now your only choice is to hear it and then try to ignore it.

Back before social media, you at least knew the offender and they were tangible.

Is it any wonder now why our children feel more stressed than ever, and even choosing suicide in response?

According to the Huffington Post, posts bullying others on Twitter are shared a whopping 100,000 times per week. When is enough, enough?

As for me, this column will be posted to my Twitter feed and be the last I ever make on that platform.

It is sad in a way, because I had high hopes for it.

What comes out of the experience is that I really want to start having more face-to-face conversations with those who disagree with me, and if you are one of those, let's have coffee and talk like human beings.

- To reach Rachel, email rachel.lauren.clark@gmail.com.

LOOKING BACK



Heritage Halton Hills photo

Christmas is over and it's been a long journey around the world for the man in the red suit, so who would blame him for wanting to take some well-deserved time off? In this 1992 photo, Santa closes up shop, and breaks out the clubs for a golf vacation in some secret locale. Happy New Year to all from Heritage Halton Hills.

OPINION

Keep taxes high on smokes says reader

I believe the solution is not reducing the taxes on cigarettes and here is why. It is a known fact that cigarettes cause cancer as well as being annoying for those who do not smoke.

If cigarettes were cheaper it would only encourage more youth to start smoking.

Through taking environmental studies in university I am concerned with people's health. First and foremost we should not encourage the young to smoke.

If high taxes are increasing illegal sales, there may be no way out of it. But

should we sell them in the first place? I believe the stores should not sell or make any money on cigarettes altogether because for most smokers it is a death sentence.

That would be the ideal. And if we stop our youth now it would eliminate tobacco entirely and save lives in the long run.

It is unlikely to ban cigarettes, but having high taxes might encourage some smokers to quit, as well as to detour others from starting.

Brad Hogg

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