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August 18, 2019: How Unfriendly Is the Internet?

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Title: How Unfriendly Is the Internet?

Date: 2019-08-18T17:29:00.000-04:00

8/18/2019—I don't usually have the experience of getting real pushback on twitter—mainly because no one much reads what I say. But I responded to an anti-gun control tweet last week, mildly pointing out that the column in question had failed to address universal background checks and large capacity clips. The point of the column had been that most gun control proposals would not actually accomplish very much. Well, you would have thought the roof had fallen in. I got so many responses that twitter asked me if I wanted to limit access to my responses to me—I have no idea what that would mean. And there were some angry people. And I did idly wonder if anyone would come by and shoot me. But, mostly it was people vigorously, and none too politely, disagreeing with me and suggesting that I don't know what I am talking about. This was fair game—if you'll pardon the expression—although I had not actually made the arguments people were attributing to me. Lots of people pointed out that "clips" is the wrong word—magazine is what we are talking about. And, indeed, I would not know one from the other. Other people pointed out that I had not read the original column closely enough to notice that the author was a woman and not a man, as my grammar suggested. They were right about that. I had paid no attention and my easy assumption that the author was a man was nothing but sexism. My point in this one, small, example is that although the comments were unpleasant, they were not false and they were not dangerous. I've read much worse actually addressed to me in anonymous letters. It's not the same as what others have experienced, of course. No one harassed my family. No one threatened to kill or rape me, etc. But it is a reminder that some of the vitriol on the Internet really is free speech.