

The Opinion Pages | LETTERS

Issues Raised by the Lawsuits Against Gawker

JUNE 13, 2016

To the Editor:

Gawker Media is seeking bankruptcy protection after the \$140 million judgment against it in the Hulk Hogan lawsuit (nytimes.com, June 10). This is the next step in the legal process of individuals pursuing redress for harm caused by Gawker's destructive publications, including my own \$35 million suit for defamation. But beyond the legal narrative, I hope we will now see a repudiation of Gawker and its ilk by large numbers of readers, and also by anyone seeking a career in journalism.

The financial success of Gawker and its affiliated sites did not depend on insight or inspiration in the content. It depended on the number of visitors to the sites and other metrics, which translate into higher ad revenues and increased valuation.

In order to get the maximum number of visitors and click-throughs, a site like Gawker can rely on a simple calculation. First, what is the most sensationalist, defamatory, exploitative content we can come up with? Let's call that the upside. The downside is the possibility that someone harmed by that content will sue the website publisher. But there seemed to be little or no worry about legal action, which would be expensive and embarrassing for the plaintiff.

But a funny thing happened in Gawker's race to the bank. Some of the people who were getting run over — like Hulk Hogan and me — called in the law.

If any good has come from this situation, it's the fact that the victims themselves initiated the counterattack against Gawker, rather than an outside law enforcement or regulatory agency. It's great to hit a bully with my own hands, and to hit him in the wallet, where it hurts the most.

SHIVA AYYADURAI

Cambridge, Mass.

The writer, chief executive of CytoSolve, has sued Gawker for calling him a "liar" and a "fraud" for his claim to the invention of email.

To the Editor:

Re "I Stand With Gawker" (Op-Ed, May 31):

Stephen Marche writes of the Hulk Hogan sex tape: "No one could possibly object if that were the tape of a congressman." I could. And to answer my objection you would have to demonstrate to me the relevance of the congressman's sexual activity to his oath of office.

Mr. Marche's underlying view — that "Gawker predicted and took up arms against" the "asymmetry of celebrity power" — is a specious passing of the buck. Celebrity is not a quality inherent to a celebrity. It is conferred by the attention of others, attention that is only enhanced by every salacious Gawker post.

Mr. Marche writes of "the celebrity culture we all inhabit." I do not. I watch no reality television, have no Facebook page, tweet no tweets. Reality TV has debased our entertainment; social media have made our interactions shallower; and journalism's abandonment of the editorial function has made the truth that much more elusive, and erased the distinction between what is vital and what is trivial. Gawker is no scapegoat — it is the enemy.

DAVID BERMAN

New York

To the Editor: